Continuity and Change in Urban Politics and Governance in Nigeria

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Urbanization, as a global phenomenon, has radically transformed modern societies. It has been accelerated by the growth of industrialism and capitalism with attendant consequences for governance and human survival. This paper examines the impact of urbanization on the dynamics of Nigerian politics and the consequences for governance. The assertion is that in the Nigerian context, urban growth has outstripped economic growth with grave implications for politics and politicking. It is suggested that the development of a good governance compact and the institutionalization of democracy remain the surest means of resolving the crisis of urban governance in Nigeria.

Key words: Urban governance, good governance, urban politics, corruption and democracy

Introduction

Urbanization is widely regarded as a global phenomenon especially with the rapid political, economic, and ideological penetration of Third World countries by metropolitan capital. This development has been further heightened by globalization, which has resulted in the disappearance of geographical limitations for economic activities, capital movement, technology, and goods. The spatial inequality, which it encouraged and the impact of global telecommunications technology, which has massively penetrated even the remotest village, in addition to the beauty, and unparalleled affluence of western culture, ably duplicated in urban centres, are testimonies to the massive impact of globalization.

The growth of industrialization and capitalism resulted in increased levels of urbanization with the attendant consequences for governance and human survival. This has not only emptied the rural communities of able-bodied manpower, it has drastically changed and challenged the peaceful, cooperative, collaborative, and communal sociopolitical interactions among the various settlements across the nation. People of varying cultural backgrounds, orientations, and psychological dispositions have all come to the urban melting-pot, struggling to eke out a living and to be able to send something back to those in the rural areas. Herein lies the paradox of the 'people of the city, yet not of the city'. This is the defining character of urban politics in Nigeria.

In the 1970s, Nigeria experimented with the Imports Substitution Industrialization (ISI) strategy in its search for development strategies. Although many Latin American countries such as Brazil, had earlier adopted this strategy, its fatal weaknesses had become manifest by the time Nigeria embraced it. Why did Nigeria embrace it despite the recorded failure in Latin America? Not only was the strategy limited with respect to the original goal of promoting fast growth and development, but it was incapable of fulfilling the goal of economic independence and may indeed be said to have increased dependence. (Uwujaren, 1983).

As it turned out, the type of industrialization which was encouraged through ISI, has been largely import-driven and externally oriented. This became necessarily so, because many of the industries so established were dominated either by foreign monopolies or by foreign entrepreneurs. What the policy achieved, at best, was the appeasement of the seemingly insatiable appetite of the Nigerian elite for foreign goods and ensuring a symbiotic partnership between the local elite and foreign capitalist in the mutual task of exploiting the Nigerian economy and people. The net effect of this was the progressive drain of the country’s scarce foreign exchange, a situation that sooner than later resulted in serious financial deficits and ultimately the debt overhang.

One of the greatest shortcomings of the pattern of industrialization that has been encouraged by the Nigerian ruling elite is the disconnection of the industrial sector from the manufacturing sector, resulting in the total absence of inter-sectoral linkages in the economy. The casualty of this distorted economic structure is the agricultural sector, which
suffered unbelievable neglect. As Ndukwe (2000) rightly observed: Agriculture was regarded as the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. At present, it employs about 70% of the country’s labour force and its contribution to the GDP, especially during the first decade of Nigeria’s independence, was substantial. This contribution was about 64 per cent in the 1960s declining to about 44.6% in the 1970s. For sometime now, its average contribution has remained at 25%. The share of agriculture in total export was 85% in 1960 and after 10 years, it declined to 30 per cent. The next 10 years (1980) brought its share to 2.4%. In the last four years, Nigeria has been importing most of the items she used to export (e.g., palm oil and cotton). Malaysia that visited Nigeria in the sixties to take our palm kernel for experimental planting is now the biggest exporter of palm oil, with Nigeria also importing from her. (FAO, 2002). Ironically, as the agricultural sector stagnated, the population grew at a geometric rate and this, coupled with the advent of petroleum, totally reconditioned the structure of the nation’s political economy. This restructuring created an accumulation process, which is urban-based and in which the majority of Nigerians living in the rural areas are systematically excluded. The increasing poverty and pauperization of the citizenry was a direct consequence of this. The imperative of survival by the rural population resulted in massive rural-urban migration.

As the urban cities began to witness population explosion, the crisis of urban governance and urban politics became manifest. The problems of inadequate housing, rising crime rates, unemployment, waste management, and electoral violence assumed greater dimensions. So also did the problem of meeting the basic needs of the people. These problems generated by urbanization are basically political, social, and economic in nature. This paper examines urban politics and governance in Nigeria as a product of a dependent capitalist development strategy and also critically analyses the implications of this strategy for the well-being of the people and the future consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

Understanding Urbanization, Urban Governance, and Politics

The urban space is fast becoming the dominant space of the global human architecture. Not only are Third World cities accelerating ahead of those of the developed countries, in the Third World over a billion of the population live in cities (Gugler, 1998). The phenomenon of urbanization is a dated part of human history. The origin of the development of the urban enterprise as a viable human settlement has been associated with the domestication of plants and animals, and the consequent possibility of living a sedentary life as against man’s previous nomadic and wandering existence. (Gugler, 1998; Ezedinma and Chukuezi, 1999; Hawley, 1971).

Defining urbanization has been highly problematic. Different scholars have used different parameters in their conceptualization of urbanization. The universe of definitions encompasses the structural, demographic, and even behavioural contexts. While scholars like Badru (2004) see urbanization as representing both the presence of people and the process of production around cities and towns, and the process through which people become urban dwellers, with all its social consequences, scholars like Adejugbe (2004) argue that what is germane about urbanization is the transformation of hamlets and villages into cities and their subsequent acquisition of metropolitan status. That is, ‘the rendering of rural areas more urban by adding the features characteristic of city life’.

Both definitions, given their circular and tautological implications, underscore the difficulty of conceptualizing urbanization. For instance, ‘the presence of people and the process of production around cities and towns’ according to Badru, and ‘the rendering of rural areas more urban by adding the features characteristic of city life’ according to Adejugbe assert what has to be proven. If we may ask, what are the processes of making the rural people city-like? What is the certainty or uncertainty of the success of such efforts? What are the agencies responsible for the civilization or urbanization of rural dwellers?

Given the parallel between the city and urban space as deployed by many scholars (Adejugbe, 2004; Hawley, 1971; Ezedinma and Chukuezi, 1999), the linkage of urbanization with industrialization is far from being organic. This is because many thriving and highly developed cities
existed in Africa, such as Ibadan, Oyo, Kano, Mali, Cairo, Accra, etc. before colonial capitalism was instituted. It was in this sense that Mabogunje (1962 quoted in Sada 1983) argued that whatever may be the parameters of measurement, Yoruba traditional cities qualify as cities despite the absence of modern industries and prevalence of agricultural activities. What cannot be argued, however, is the fact that modernization and industrialization have impacted tremendously on the process of urbanization in Nigeria.

There is a growing consensus on the issue of urbanization which can assist Nigeria in getting a better grasp of the concept. First, is the increased territorial scope engendered by urbanization. (Hawley, 1971). Second, is the demographic dimension of urbanization (Nwakeze, 2004; Akinboye, 2004). In the latter case it needs be noted that the population dimension of urbanization is far from being settled and makes comparative analysis problematic. While for Japan, a population of 50,000 or more could define an urban area, it is as low as 2500 in the United States of America. While the 1952/53 census in Nigeria classified areas with 5000 people and above as urban, the 1963, 1973, and 1991 census classification was a population of 20,000 or more (Nwakeze, 2004; Akinboye, 2004). Canada and Argentina respectively describe populations with 1000 and 2000 people as urban. (Akinboye, 2004).

A third consensus has to do with behavioural transformation engendered by urbanization. This transformation is total, affecting all spheres of personal and collective life. According to Hawley (1971), it affects the status of the individual, his opportunities for advancement; it alters the types of social units in which people group themselves; and it sorts people into new and shifting patterns of stratification. The distribution of power is altered; normal, social processes are reconstituted and the rules and norms by which behaviour is guided are redesigned.

The fourth consensus in the literature concerns the specialization of functions as a distinguishing attribute of urbanization. For Mabogunje (1968) and Hawley (1971), specialization of functions is the core defining parameter of urbanization. Urbanization all over the globe brings with it numerous problems. As Hawley (1971) noted, in the Western World, the city has been almost continually in crisis for the past 150 years or more. The recurring crises are symptomatic of the profound revolution in man’s way of living. The author further opined that cities are at the centre of the currents and undercurrents of broad-scale change which alter and reconstitute societies. It is to be expected, therefore, that the intermittent eruptions incidental to the uneven course of change should exert their violent effect on these centres.

Among the many problems engendered by urbanization are land allocation and utilization, the provision of basic infrastructure and amenities (such as healthcare, education, security, and recreational facilities), crime, pollution, food crisis, sewage control, inspecificity of citizenship and indigenization crisis, unemployment, underemployment and economic disempowerment, class stratification, slums, congestion etc. These situations are compounded by the rural-urban migration occasioned by the magnetic attraction of the urban space to the rural dweller who sees the urban area as the haven of ‘life more abundant’. The unfortunate implications of this are the depopulation of the rural area and the aggravation of the urban food crisis. The rapid and haphazard nature of Nigerian urbanization has led to a situation in which urbanization has outgrown the coping capacity. Herein lies the imperative of urban governance.

Akinboye (2004) aptly captured the crisis of urbanization and the challenges of urban governance when he noted that:

... any decisive and systematic efforts to transform the traditional societies into modern political systems must envisage the development of a modern urban system. At the same time, rapid urbanization can, in many ways, create economic, social and psychological tension and division which, viewed from the political realm, became potential sources of political instability and constraints for effective nation-building.

Urban governance, therefore, is the institutional framework for the management of the collective affairs of the urban space in a collective, participatory, open, accountable, and transparent way, such that good governance is engendered, popular empowerment is achieved, qualitative leadership is institutionalized and the values of human right, sustainable development and the overall development of the human person are upheld, valorized and promoted. Since the imperative of
urban governance outlined above entails democratic ethos, urban politics, as a partisan modality for seeking, holding and executing power on behalf of the people in the urban area, cannot be circumscribed.

Underdevelopment and the Crisis of Urban Governance

Professor Abdclbaki Ibrahim correctly asserted that, ‘Global solutions may not always offer the appropriate solution to the urbanization problem’ (Onibokun, 2000). This assertion is particularly relevant to the Nigerian situation, which evinces its own specificities and peculiarities.

Nigeria attained political independence in October 1960 as a typical neo-colony dominated by British capital. Nigeria of the colonial era was characterized by spatial inequalities, food dependence, technological backwardness, a low industrial base, political manipulation, regional and ethnic antagonisms, poverty, dependence on the exportation of a few cash crops to western markets for foreign exchange earnings, and foreign domination of the commanding heights of the economy (Onimode, 1982).

When the colonial administrators departed, Nigeria was to a large extent, an underdeveloped country. It had a largely unproductive and weak ruling class, a distorted economy, a poverty-stricken population, a political and economic system structured to respond to the dictates of international capitals. More importantly, the capitalist relations of production, were deliberately made underdeveloped, due to the archaic and retrogressive feudalist mode of production, which inhibits qualitative growth.

More than 40 years after independence, Nigeria has remained a classic case of an underdeveloped country, characterized by a totally distorted and disarticulated economy, low life expectancy (52 for females and 49 for males), a high maternal mortality ratio of 158:1000, a gradual drop in school enrolment, and an adult illiteracy level of 53% for females and 33% for males, one of the highest in the world (Onibokun, 2000).

While the impact of colonialism on the state and economy was disastrous, Nigeria’s successive post-colonial governments have not helped matters by privatizing the state, destroying basic infrastructure, and pulverizing the economy. Although ranked amongst the 48 richest countries in the world in 1979, by the 1990s, Nigeria had sunk into the cesspool of poverty and attained the rank of the 13th poorest nation on earth. At present, the nation is unenviably ranked the sixth most corrupt nation in the world, along with Côte d’Ivoire and Equatorial Guinea, in the estimation of Transparency International.

Nigeria’s per capita income stood at about US$1000 in 1980, but by 1999, the per capita income had plummeted to a miserable US$310. One of the negative consequences of the declining fortunes of the country is the decay of the urban centres, which hardly benefit from any programme of rehabilitation. Indeed, the problems of underdevelopment are starkly pronounced in urban centres like Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu, Port Harcourt, Kaduna, Kano, Calabar, Aba, Owerri, etc.

Tragically, Nigeria’s urban centres have experienced steady deterioration since the introduction of the structural adjustment programme (SAP) in 1986. The living conditions of the urban poor have declined precipitously because of the inflationary spiral and the reduction in real incomes that accompanied the devaluation of the naira. The continued neglect of the rural areas has only compounded the crisis of the urban political economy.

Urban poverty has witnessed a progressive increase, especially among women and children. Many families turn their children into street hawkers and domestic servants (euphemistically called house-helpers), in order to augment the family income. Such children are often unfortunate victims of ritual killings, kidnappings, and urban violence. An important development since the introduction of the SAP in the mid-1980s was the emergence of the lumpen-proletariat (a.k.a. area boys). Their disposition to criminal behaviour continues to pose a serious security threat to lives and property in urban areas.

Women often go about in search of domestic necessities like kerosene to keep the family going. In most cases, families depend on the women’s labour for existence. And in the worst cases, both father and mother depend on their children for survival. The pattern of industrialization alluded to earlier, and indeed the gradual de-industrialization process that has been the flip side of adjustment policies, have compounded the problem of unemployment in the urban centres.
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Some observers believe that the problems of poverty and unemployment provided fertile grounds for the breeding of hoodlums and social miscreants that have in the last decades put public safety in our urban centres in jeopardy. The recent phenomenal growth in the formation of ethnic militias across the nation has further compounded this ugly situation. Many even suggest that the proliferation of ethnic militias in our urban centres is a consequence of the high unemployment rate, which ensures that a large army of unemployed youths is usually on standby for recruitment by mischief-makers. It is no coincidence therefore, that all the known ethnic militias, like the Odua People’s Congress (OPC), the Arewa People’s Congress (APC), the Egbesu Boys of Africa, the Bakassi Boys, etc, operate mainly in urban settings.

It is clear from the foregoing that our urban centres are testimonies to serious political and economic crisis. Any attempt at proffering solutions to the myriads of problems of urban politics in Nigeria must necessarily focus on the past as a basis for illuminating the present, to be able to chart a purposeful course for the future. To this end, we shall in the following section undertake historical review of the patterns, changing context, and complexities of urban politics in the past and juxtapose it with the present situation.

Overview of Nigerian Politics

It is important to note that competitive politics was alien to Nigeria before the colonial rule. Opposition was hardly tolerated and never institutionalised in any of the traditional political formations in Nigeria’s pre-colonial period. The pattern of governance was mostly based on communal consensus amongst the elderly males in every community. The Clifford Constitution of 1922, allowed Nigerians in Lagos and Calabar the first experience of the novel elective principle. This subsequently spread to other parts of Nigeria as the country achieved gradual constitutional concessions from the colonial authorities.

The desire for independence, and the common interest on the part of the educated elites, who were at the forefront of the nationalist struggle as the ultimate beneficiaries of an independent Nigerian nation, ensured at the time, a common nationalist and Nigerianist front for confronting the colonial authority. This however fizzled out, as the reality of independence became obvious in the horizon.

One of the first in a series of conflicts was the Samuel Akinsanya and Ernest Okoli crisis, which rocked the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), the nation’s foremost nationalist platform. Sklar (1963) and Coleman (1986) provide extensive textual materials in this regard. Closely following this was the ideological polarization within the NCNC, which later led to the formation of the Zikist movement, without Zik their political mentor (Coleman, 1986).

Not to be forgotten in this regard was the formation of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa as a Yoruba irredentist movement (Sklar, 1963; Coleman, 1986) and that of Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa (Sklar, 1963; Coleman, 1986). The two movements later transformed into dominant parties in the Western and Northern regions, respectively. The NCNC taking a cue, instantly removed its nationalist costumes in favour of an ethnic toga and effectively became an Igbo political platform. The implication of this development is the ethnicization of politics from the outset. This evil, with time, has become more entrenched and pernicious in Nigerian politics.

Violence and political intolerance are both equally not new to Nigerian politics. There has always been the use of violence or the threat of violence within and between parties and candidates. The ultimate prize is the capture and retention of political power at all costs. The implication of this is that practice and nuances of democracy have never been allowed to germinate in the country. Some illustrative examples are germane at this point.

Samuel Cookey (1987), in a major documentation on the misuse of state power against opponents lamented as follows:

“In all the crises, all available state apparatus were employed by the power elite discriminately against their opponents…. Not only to win and retain power but to control the centre which, though politically weak, had all the dominant resources.”

The Kano riots of 1953 was, perhaps, the first massive political violence in the history of Nigeria. Many Igbos and Yorubas were killed following the disgrace of the northern representatives in the Federal House of Representatives, Lagos, for their failure to support the motion on self-government moved by Chief Anthony Enahoro. Since then, political violence has acquired a life of its own.
Nigerian politics now seems to be out of character if it is unaccompanied by violence.

Anifowose (1982), noted how the Native Authority police and the court system in the northern part of the country were used as oppressive instruments against the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) in the Tiv areas. The situation was so bad that it resulted in the congestion of Gboko prison. Another case of political intolerance and persecution was the deposition of the Alaafin of Oyo, Oba Adeniran Adeyemi - the father of the present Alaafin of Oyo in 1954, by the Western Region government under Chief Obafemi Awolowo. This action had all the hallmarks of a political vendetta.

During the electioneering campaigns in the north towards the 1959 elections, the Action Group (AG) was refused a permit to campaign in the northern parts of the country, even when an AG party leader in a village in Sokoto uprooted his groundnut farm for the campaign of the party. For his audacity in allowing the AG campaign on his farm, the AG party faithful was arrested and tied to a tree on the order of the village head (Awolowo, 1987). Another interesting case was the jailing of a Mr Azi Nyako, a contestant against the then incumbent Prime Minister, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, in Bauchi, ten days to the polling day for an offence alleged to have been committed by his driver six months earlier (Awolowo, 1987).

Beyond the above observations, politics in the country in the early years seems to have been much better and principled than it is presently. For instance, during the First and Second Republics, despite the fact that all the parties, except the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) and the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), were liberal parties, they had distinctive colouration. The Action Group (AG) and Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) laid claim to democratic socialism, though in fact they had only left-of-centre tendencies. This allowed the party to champion a welfarist and populist programme for which the party enjoyed immense popularity. On the other hand, the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) and National Party of Nigeria (NPN) were known for their ultra-conservative and feudalist positions; in the same way the NCNC and the Nigerian Peoples’ Party (NPP) were known for their liberal and republican dispositions in line with the traditional Igbo ideology.

It is a great credit to the politics of old that money had very little place. The selection of candidates and the decision to vote for particular candidates were never based on monetary considerations, rather, they were based on principles, programmes, party affiliation, personality, and other issues no matter how vaguely articulated. This has changed since the Babangida transition programme. Money has come to be the principal motivation for electoral choice and votes. Party primaries and the whole political process have become highly monetized. The situation within the parties now, is that only millionaires can pick the nomination forms for any elective office. A common requirement in all the parties is the presentation of bank statements by would-be candidates to determine their financial capability and viability for bankrolling the highly monetized electoral process.

The phenomenon of godfatherism has come to assume a dangerous dimension as a consequence of this monetization of politics. Not that godfatherism is new in Nigeria, far from it. The truth is that there have always been political godfathers in Nigerian history. At the initial stage of politicking in the country, the traditional rulers, Emirs, Obas, and Obis played the role of godfathers of some sort. It was practically unthinkable for a candidate to win elections without the support of the sitting royal fathers.

With political independence, and the privatization of national wealth by factions of the domestic ruling elites, especially those in the commercial, bureaucratic, military, and political factions, a new corps of modern godfathers replaced the traditional rulers in their domains. Such godfather figures include Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Ahmadu Bello, Michael Okpara, Aminu Kano, Ibrahim Waziri, Joseph Tarka, Adegoke Adelabu, Alfred Rewane, Gbadamosi Sonibare, Olusola Saraki, Shehu Musa Yar’Adua, Arthur Nzeribe, Sam Mbakwe, Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu, Solomon Lar, Lateef Jakande, Bola Ige, Jim Nwobodo, and Abubakar Rimi.

There was, however, was a distinctive and progressive character to the old godfather figures.
which when compared with the new godfathers that have emerged since the Babangida transition programme is absent. Unlike the old godfathers that acted based on principles, collective interest, and a belief in the representative abilities of the supported candidates, what exist now are 'sophisticated entrepreneurial godfathers', who see politics not in terms of service, principles, or collective interest, but rather as an investment expected to yield instant profits and thousand-fold returns from the public purse. It is of no concern to them if the state goes bankrupt in the process. The Chris Uba-Chris Ngige, Adedibu-Ladoja cases in Anambra and Oyo states respectively are good examples.

Need we ask whether party members are now more involved in party affairs than before? With the monetization of politics, the usual democratic participation, which necessarily characterized politics all over the world and which was the hallmark of the politics of the First Republic and partly of the Second Republic, has become history.

The party caucuses hardly function again. And where they exist, they merely act as ratificatory bodies to give official sanctions to private decisions of the money-bags within the parties. No wonder then that the nominations of party flag bearers has been the endemic problem of our political process in recent years. The democratic tradition of electing candidates, which was common during the First and Second Republic has been replaced by money, violence, and electoral rigging and manipulation. A fallout from the above is that party discipline becomes compromised. Party leaders, having soiled their hands in the nomination process, now lack the moral authority to provide leadership and control, and set the programmes for party representatives in public offices to follow. Not being subjected to the control of the party machinery, political officeholders become answerable only to themselves and their godfathers as against the electorate through the instrumentality of the party structure.

It is therefore not surprising that urban governance has come to be largely characterized by popular disaffection, apathy, and alienation. The people no longer believe that they can influence the political system while politicians are now seen as self-serving individuals. This decay in the political system coupled with the biting effects of the market reforms which started in 1986 under the SAP programme, and which received further impetus with the advent of the Obasanjo regime, has aggravated the problem of inflation, leading to a rising prices regime, which has caught up with rents, food prices, transportation, and the general cost of living; thus informing the reciprocal demands for monetary compensation by the electorate as a precondition for exercising their franchise. The institutionalization of corruption in the political process and other aspects of national life are understandably against this background.

The popular funding of political parties through enrollment and subscription fees; receipts from sales of emblems, literature, etc; levies on salaries of parliamentarians and members of government boards; donations from wealthy members and supporters; income from public lectures and social events (Sklar; 1963) which are shining legacies of past political practices which gave political party activities their democratic character, have been replaced by funding from money-bags and big-time contractors.

In the First and Second republics, politics was not a popular urban preoccupation. In fact, in some circles, the belief was that politics was for unserious people. You would rarely find serious professionals, except lawyers, involved in politics. Generally, university graduates would rather work in the civil service or banks and industries than be involved in politics. Starting from the Second Republic, however, the situation changed, as almost all governors of that period were university graduates.

With the failed market reform and the consequent economic depression, unemployment, and under-employment, a lot more people that were hitherto unconcerned about politics got involved. The primary reason was that politics became the only profitable and rewarding vocation, with minimum investment and maximum and painless yields. This situation assumed an alarming dimension in 1991 when about 414 governorship aspirants under the two registered political parties—the Social Democratic Party (SDP) 220 and the National Republican Convention (NRC) 194 jostled for 60 seats (Agbeke and Animi, 1997).

Beyond the high number of contestants for political office, the premium on political power increased. As Diamond et al. (1997) put it:

As the premium on state power became ever more enormous, the contest for control of it (by electoral and other means) become ever more intense, to the point where rules became meaningless and the country descend.
into pure praetorianism—an institutional vacuum in which politics is dominated by the use and pursuit of raw political power.

A final observation pertinent to our concern is the nature of civil society. Civil society, which expectedly should be a sphere for democratic freedom and nuances, has itself fallen victim of the endemic crisis of the political order. To this end, civil society is not only fragmented but also highly factionalized and corrupted.

What is to be Done?
The way to address the crisis of urban politics is to entrench good governance. While the political economic crisis alluded to in the foregoing paragraphs could be referred to as ‘bad governance’ this has to be done with caution. The transformation of the present state structure, rooted in dependent capitalist economic relations, must be top of the agenda.

One point that stands out clearly in the above explanations is the hard reality that in Nigeria, urban growth seems to have outstripped economic growth. Consequently, in many Nigerian cities, complex problems have emerged. Public services are no longer able to cope with rapid economic growth while many administrative agencies are becoming more inefficient and incapable of coping with the challenges of traffic congestion (as witnessed in Lagos), water shortages, power outage and collapsing infrastructure.

Paradoxically, the local government system has become a structure for mutually reinforcing corruption, among local governments officials on the one hand and state governments on the other hand. Within this structure, the resources of the local government which otherwise would have been deployed for development and improving the welfare of the masses, are diverted to private purses.

Urban politics has been largely reflective of bad governance and has indeed become part of the urban crisis. Political manipulation, electoral violence, and the winner-takes-all approach to politics have been signposts of urban politics. This is not unconnected with the deepening level of underdevelopment in urban centres.

It stands to reason therefore, that any solution to the crisis in our urban centres must be pivoted on good governance. Olowu and Akinola (1995), define governance as the art of governing, involving the making of rules in a society and such rules should be accepted as legitimate and should be in consonance with the values that are held by individuals and groups within a society.

There is however, a serious problem with this conceptualization. Defining good governance as the ‘art of governing’ is circular. Moreover, when defined in terms of ‘law making’, it becomes limited to an aspect of government which is not even the most dominant aspect. What happens when good laws are badly implemented, would that still amount to good governance? Equally erroneous, is the definition’s assumption that the society can hold static some common values pursued by individuals and groups within the society, which would only impose the tyranny of the majority.

Good governance has become so important in our contemporary world that the World Bank has in fact begun to include what it terms as ‘good governance’ as part of its conditionalities for providing soft loans and aid to Third World countries. The question we have to ask ourselves is: What informed this position?

In the words of Michel Camdessus (1997), IMF president:

*Good governance is important for countries at all stages of development...Our approach is to concentrate on those aspects of governance that are most closely related to our surveillance over macroeconomic policies - namely, the transparency of government accounts, the effectiveness of public resource management, and stability and transparency of the economic and regulatory environment for private sector activity.*

In the same vein, Boorman (1997), IMF director for Policy Development and Review, sees the IMF as contributing to promotion of good governance in member countries through different channels. First, in its policy advice, the IMF has assisted member countries in creating systems that limit the scope for ad hoc decision-making, rent seeking, and undesirable preferential treatment of individuals or organizations. To this end, the IMF has encouraged, among other things, liberalization of exchange, trade, and price systems, and the elimination of direct credit allocation.
What comes out from the above is a concocted conceptualization of good governance with serious prejudice to the ability of the government to deliver on the welfare and needs of the people, rather the enhancement of the profit of capital, both local and international. This is good governance that strengthens the market regime in favor of responsive and responsible government.

Also as George Soros (2000) aptly opined:

*Market values express only what one participant is willing to pay another in free exchange and do not give expression to their common interests.*

As a result, social values can be preserved only by social and political arrangements, even if they are less efficient than markets.

Olowu and Akinola (1995) provide some parameters for measuring good governance. These include managerial and organizational efficiency, accountability, legitimacy and responsiveness to the public, transparency in decision-making, and pluralism in policy options and choices. To the above we now add some other important parameters of good governance: popular participation, rule of law, consensus orientation, equity, and inclusiveness. Democracy however, is closely interconnected with good governance. Indeed, both of them are almost inseparable and mutually self-reinforcing.

Democracy is usually defined as a form of government with certain acceptable universal principles such as popular sovereignty, political equality, popular consultations, and periodic elections etc., all of which are attributes that facilitate good governance (Sambo, 1999). Good governance can only exist when there is accountability in governmental procedures, decentralization of power and decision-making, free-flow of information, respect for civil liberties etc.

There is a very strong possibility that a system of government, which exhibits these characteristics will promote development. Democracy becomes more desirable as a panacea for the failure of urban governance because it encourages decentralization of power and the involvement of the people in the determination of affairs that affect them. As Olowu and Akinola (1995) rightly observed, urban governance in Nigeria is highly centralized and remote from the mass of the people. To this end, there is an urgent need for the institutionalization of a participatory democracy, which will accommodate the input of the people in decision-making.

A major hindrance to the entrenchment of democracy in Nigeria is the post-colonial state, which as we noted earlier, is a colonial inheritance. This state has been largely antidemocratic, weak, hegemonic, and inefficient. To have good governance that can make us overcome our urban crises will require a radical transformation of the state from its present lethargic position into an efficient and strong institution that can fulfill the organic purpose of enhancing the welfare of the people. By this, we mean that the state should become more capable of delivering social services and performing its public functions with transparency. It is tragic that the failure of the state in Nigeria has constituted a major obstacle in the effort to forge a virile nationhood.

Because a large majority of the people hardly benefit from the Nigerian state, they have chosen to shift their support and loyalty to their ethnic and communal enclaves. Ake (1988) put the point more succinctly when he averred:

*The tenuous relationship between the Nigerian state and its subjects...is underscored by the indifference of the Nigerian state to social welfare. For the rural population, there is virtually nothing. More often than not, it is not only welfare schemes that are lacking but any visible sign of government presence besides the coercive personnel. Voluntary associations, religious groups, cooperatives, freemasonry have mushroomed in Nigeria filling the gap left by the state's indifference to social welfare.*

It should be emphasized that Nigeria’s successive governments, realizing that urbanization was costing too much in financial and social terms, adopted a decentralization policy which led to the creation of more states and local governments whose headquarters were meant to become centres of development.

From a 12-state structure in 1976, Nigeria has been transformed into a 36-state federation. Local governments have also increased in number from about 200 in 1976 to 774 in 1999. In spite of this obvious decentralization, there has been very little devolution of power from the federal center to the local communities. Local governments are overwhelmingly dependent on the central government.
for their resources. In order to develop the urban centres, more power ought to be devolved to local governments, which should also be provided with the resources required to cope with the challenges of urban governance.

It is disheartening to note that many of Nigeria's local governments are not accountable or efficient in their discharge of constitutional responsibilities. All over the country, public utilities put in place at colossal costs to taxpayers have collapsed. The nation's local governments have become havens for corrupt practices. While local government chairmen are building mansions, the public is left to suffer on the excuse that councils are getting 'zero allocation' from the federation account. There is a need therefore, for the electorate, in consonance with the Rousseanian concept of citizenship, to constantly monitor the activities of these local authorities and compel elected officials to deliver on their promises. The meddlersomeness of the state governors and the diversion of local government resources to serve the whims and caprices of the governors who see the local governments as their personal fiefdom, need to be seriously addressed.

The people can be made more vigilant if government can institute a programme of civic education for the people especially for urban dwellers. A more programmatic and focused agenda for social reorientation and socialization, unlike the present bureaucratic and armchair National Orientation Agency, has to be instituted, with a large dose of civil society participation in the conceptualization, operationalization, and ultimate implementation.

The capitalist mode of production encourages uneven development within social formations. This phenomenon is one factor that encourages rural-urban drift. There is an urgent need for the government to focus its development policies on backward communities especially the rural areas in order to stem the ever increasing tide of rural-urban migration. There appears to be too little faith in the ability of the government to change from its old and structurally determined role. There is the need to look towards other important social actors in the civil society—non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community development associations (CDAs), etc.

A democracy that is not backed by a virile economy is mortally endangered. As Hyden (1995) observed:

African countries attempt democracy in a situation of economic decline rather than economic growth.

The consequence of this, Hyden stated further:

“failure of democratic regimes to use the state to strengthen democracy”.

A sure way to address the problem of urban poverty and degradation is for government to promote investments which enhance the public good, promote acceptable working and employment conditions, and also invest in rural infrastructure, health facilities and education (Fadahunsi and Babawale, 1996). The present distortions in the economy ought to be corrected through the encouragement of peasant agricultural production and the effective linkage of the industrial sector with other sectors of the economy.

Specifically, there is a need to develop the country’s human resources and improve the welfare of the people. To this end, the brain drain, which has resulted from the economic downturn in the country and the globalization regime, must be consciously reversed. All levels of government should take security of lives and property more seriously. This is in order firstly, to encourage the nation’s quality manpower scattered all over the world to come back home, and secondly, to attract foreign investors to the country. In the words of Ake (1996):

If people are the end of development, then their well-being is the supreme law of development. But the well-being of the people will only be the supreme law of development if they have some decision-making power. But the only way to ensure that social transformation is not dissociated from the well-being of the people is to institute democracy.

Conclusion
This paper has examined urban politics and governance in Nigeria within the contexts of Nigeria’s colonial and post-colonial experiences. It has demonstrated that the crisis of urban governance, reflected in collapsed infrastructures, inadequate housing, chronic poverty, the rising crime wave, increased unemployment etc constitutes an integral part of the crisis of underdevelopment in which Nigeria is enmeshed. Any solution to the crisis of urban politics and governance must be such that will
comprehensively address the vexed issue of underdevelopment. Urban governance has been largely dissociated from the people resulting in the alienation of the people from the state. To this end, a synergy has to be established of the traditional systems of government that characterized the lives of Nigerians in their rural community settings, with the modern, imported democratic system of government. 

The institutionalization of democracy and good governance, as well as the promotion of economic development in which the centrality of the people is recognized, would facilitate the resolution of the crisis of urban governance.

References


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