

REVISITING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF IKORODU DIVISION IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

BY

¹Jamiu Kolawole Audu & ²Oluwafolake Omolade Micho

Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, Tai Solarin Federal University of Education, Ijagun, Nigeria

Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, Tai Solarin Federal University of Education, Ijagun, Nigeria

E-mails: michooo@tasued.edu.ng

Abstract

This study examined the socio-economic and political development of Ikorodu Division in Lagos State within a long durée historical framework, with the aim of situating contemporary transformations within their deeper historical contexts. Drawing on a critical synthesis of secondary sources, including scholarly monographs, peer-reviewed journal articles, and official government reports, the study reconstructed the evolution of Ikorodu from a pre-colonial Yoruba settlement embedded in lagoon-based trade networks into a rapidly expanding peri-urban centre within the Lagos metropolitan region. The findings revealed that indigenous political institutions, particularly the Ayangburen chieftaincy and its council system, provided a durable foundation for governance, social cohesion, and economic organisation in the pre-colonial period. However, the advent of British colonial rule from the mid-nineteenth century fundamentally altered these structures through the imposition of indirect rule, which subordinated traditional authority while integrating Ikorodu into a colonial economy oriented towards export production. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that the post-independence period, especially following the creation of Lagos State in 1967, witnessed accelerated urbanisation, demographic expansion, and infrastructural development, although these processes were marked by uneven distribution and emerging socio-economic disparities. It was therefore argued that Ikorodu's developmental trajectory reflected a complex interplay of continuity and transformation, in which historical legacies continued to shape present realities. The study concluded that a nuanced understanding of these layered historical processes is essential for addressing contemporary development challenges and informing sustainable policy interventions in Ikorodu Division.

Keywords: Development; division; Ikorodu; Lagos State; political institutions; socio-economic

Introduction

The historical development of Ikorodu Division, located in the north-eastern corridor of Lagos State along the Lagos Lagoon, was deeply rooted in pre-colonial Yoruba socio-political formations and subsequently shaped by colonial and post-colonial transformations. Evidence from early historical accounts indicated that Ikorodu emerged as a settlement largely populated by migrants from Ijebu-Ode and Remo areas between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who established a structured political system under the authority of the Ayangburen, the paramount ruler of the town (Akinjogbin, 1967). This indigenous governance structure, characterised by a council of chiefs and lineage-based authority, facilitated social cohesion and regulated economic and political life within the community. The strategic geographical location of Ikorodu along navigable waterways enhanced its participation in regional trade networks, linking it with prominent commercial centres such as Epe, Lagos Island, and other lagoon settlements. As noted by Mabogunje (1968), such lagoon-based communities played a crucial role in the pre-colonial economy of southwestern Nigeria, engaging in fishing, farming, and trade in commodities such as palm produce, kola nuts, and textiles.

The advent of British colonial rule in the nineteenth century marked a significant turning point in the socio-economic and political trajectory of Ikorodu Division. Following the annexation of Lagos in 1861, British influence gradually extended into neighbouring regions, including Ikorodu, leading to the incorporation of indigenous political institutions into the colonial administrative framework through indirect rule (Crowder, 1968). This system subordinated traditional authorities, including the Ayangburen, to colonial officials, thereby altering the autonomy of local governance structures. Economically, colonial policies redirected production towards export-oriented agriculture, particularly palm oil and other raw materials required for British industries, which restructured the local economy and entrenched dependency on external markets (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Furthermore, infrastructural developments such as waterways, roads, and later motorable routes linking Ikorodu to Lagos facilitated the integration of the division into the colonial economy, although these developments primarily served imperial interests rather than local welfare. The transformation was not without resistance, as local populations adapted to and negotiated the impositions of colonial authority while attempting to preserve elements of their indigenous institutions.

In the post-independence period, especially after the creation of Lagos State in 1967, Ikorodu Division experienced accelerated socio-economic and political changes driven by urban expansion and administrative restructuring. The establishment of Ikorodu Local Government and subsequent subdivisions enhanced political participation and governance at the grassroots level, while increased government investment in education, healthcare, and infrastructure contributed to social development (Lagos State Government, 2010). Nevertheless, the legacy of colonial economic orientation and uneven development persisted, manifesting in infrastructural deficits, environmental challenges, and socio-economic disparities. As observed by Ajayi and Espie (1965), the continuity of colonial structures in post-colonial Nigeria often shaped developmental outcomes in complex ways. Thus, the study of Ikorodu Division provided a valuable historical lens through which broader patterns of socio-economic and political transformation in Lagos State and Nigeria could be understood, revealing the enduring interplay between indigenous agency and external influences in shaping local development trajectories. The objectives of this study were conceived within the broader historiographical effort to interrogate the patterns of transformation that have defined Ikorodu Division from its formative period to the contemporary era. First, the study sought to examine the historical evolution of Ikorodu Division by tracing its origins from pre-colonial Yoruba migrations, particularly those linked to Ijebu-Ode and Remo territories between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, through the imposition of British colonial rule in the nineteenth century, and into the post-independence period. This objective was anchored in the recognition that the Ayangburen institution and associated traditional political structures provided a foundational framework for governance and social organisation prior to colonial intervention (Akinjogbin, 1967). Furthermore, the study intended to situate Ikorodu within the wider historical developments of the Lagos hinterland, especially following the annexation of Lagos in 1861, which significantly altered regional power dynamics and integrated surrounding communities into the British colonial system (Crowder, 1968). By adopting this diachronic approach, the research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of continuity and change in the historical trajectory of the division.

Secondly, the study aimed to analyse the socio-economic developments that have characterised Ikorodu Division over time, with particular attention to the transition from a predominantly agrarian and fishing economy to a more diversified system incorporating commerce, industry, and urban-based services. In the pre-colonial period, economic activities in Ikorodu revolved around subsistence farming, fishing along the Lagos Lagoon, and participation in regional trade networks linking Epe, Ikorodu, and Lagos Island (Mabogunje, 1968). However, under colonial rule,

the imposition of export-oriented agricultural policies redirected local production towards commodities such as palm oil and later cash crops, thereby restructuring the economic base and fostering dependency on global markets (Falola & Heaton, 2008). In the post-colonial era, especially from the late twentieth century, the expansion of Lagos metropolis led to the incorporation of Ikorodu into urban and peri-urban economic systems, characterised by industrial establishments, housing developments, and increased commercial activity. Thus, this objective was designed to critically evaluate the processes of economic transformation and their implications for social welfare and development.

Thirdly, the study sought to assess the political structures and governance systems that have operated within Ikorodu Division, both in their traditional and modern forms. The persistence of indigenous institutions, particularly the authority of the Ayangburen and the council of chiefs, remained central to local governance, even as colonial and post-colonial administrative systems introduced new forms of political organisation. The British policy of indirect rule effectively subordinated traditional rulers to colonial administrators while utilising them as intermediaries, thereby altering the balance of political authority within the community (Crowder, 1968). In the post-independence period, the establishment of local government councils, including Ikorodu Local Government Area, enhanced political participation and administrative decentralisation, although challenges related to governance efficiency and resource allocation persisted (Lagos State Government, 2010). This objective therefore aimed to explore the interaction between traditional authority and modern political institutions in shaping governance outcomes. Finally, the study aimed to evaluate the contemporary development challenges and prospects facing Ikorodu Division within the context of rapid urbanisation and integration into the Lagos megacity. The expansion of population, infrastructural pressures, environmental degradation, and socio-economic inequalities have emerged as critical issues confronting the division in recent decades. As noted by Ajayi and Espie (1965), the persistence of colonial legacies in post-colonial African societies often contributed to uneven development and structural imbalances. Consequently, this objective sought to identify both the constraints and opportunities inherent in Ikorodu's development trajectory, with a view to contributing to scholarly discourse on sustainable urban and regional development in Nigeria. Collectively, these objectives provided a coherent framework for understanding the multifaceted dimensions of socio-economic and political change in Ikorodu Division.

Methodology

This study adopted a historical and descriptive research methodology, which was considered most appropriate for examining the socio-economic and political development of Ikorodu Division within a temporal framework. The historical approach enabled the systematic reconstruction and interpretation of past events, institutions, and processes that have shaped the development trajectory of the division from the pre-colonial period through the colonial era and into the post-independence period. In doing so, the study drew upon established historiographical methods, including critical source analysis, contextual interpretation, and comparative evaluation, in order to ensure a balanced and scholarly reconstruction of historical realities. As noted by Tosh (2015), historical research required careful scrutiny of sources to establish authenticity, credibility, and relevance, particularly when dealing with narratives that span multiple periods and perspectives. The study relied predominantly on secondary sources, which constituted the principal body of data for analysis. These included scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, and archival reports that provided insight into the political, economic, and social transformations of Ikorodu Division. Works such as Akinjogbin's *The Ijebu and Their Neighbours* (1967) and Crowder's *West Africa under Colonial Rule* (1968) offered valuable perspectives on pre-colonial political structures

and colonial administrative systems, respectively, while Mabogunje's (1968) seminal work on urbanisation in Nigeria provided a broader analytical framework for understanding the integration of Ikorodu into the Lagos metropolitan economy. In addition, official documents and reports from the Lagos State Government and other institutional bodies were utilised to assess post-independence developments and contemporary governance structures. The use of credible online resources further complemented these materials, particularly in accessing recent data and policy-oriented discussions relevant to the study area. To enhance the reliability and validity of the research, a critical evaluation of all sources was undertaken, with attention paid to issues of bias, authorship, and historical context. The descriptive aspect of the methodology allowed for a systematic presentation of findings, focusing on identifying patterns of continuity and change in socio-economic activities, political organisation, and developmental challenges within Ikorodu Division. By triangulating information from multiple sources, the study aimed to minimise subjectivity and ensure a coherent interpretation of historical developments. Ultimately, this methodological framework provided a robust basis for analysing the complex interplay of factors that have influenced the development of Ikorodu Division over time, situating the findings within broader debates in Nigerian and African historiography.

Results

The historical evolution of Ikorodu Division was revealed to be deeply embedded in the migratory patterns, political organisation, and economic interactions of the Yoruba sub-groups, particularly those from Ijebu-Ode and Remo regions, whose movements between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries culminated in the establishment of Ikorodu as a distinct settlement along the Lagos Lagoon. Historical evidence suggested that the early settlers, led by figures associated with the Ijebu kingdom, instituted a centralised political system under the authority of the Ayangburen, whose role as paramount ruler was reinforced by a council of chiefs and lineage heads that ensured administrative cohesion and social order (Akinjogbin, 1967). By the early nineteenth century, Ikorodu had emerged as a strategic node within regional trade networks, facilitating commercial exchanges between inland Yoruba communities and coastal markets such as Lagos Island and Epe. This position not only enhanced its economic significance but also contributed to its political stability within the broader Yoruba socio-political landscape.

The incursion of British colonial authority in the mid-nineteenth century, particularly following the annexation of Lagos in 1861, marked a decisive shift in the historical trajectory of Ikorodu Division. Colonial expansion into the hinterland gradually incorporated Ikorodu into the Lagos Colony, subjecting it to new administrative structures that redefined indigenous governance systems. Through the policy of indirect rule, traditional rulers such as the Ayangburen were retained but subordinated to colonial officials, thereby transforming their roles into intermediaries responsible for implementing colonial policies, including taxation and labour mobilisation (Crowder, 1968). This reorganisation of political authority not only reduced the autonomy of local institutions but also integrated Ikorodu into the wider colonial economy, as infrastructural developments such as waterways and road networks facilitated the movement of goods and administrative control. Furthermore, the colonial period witnessed a reorientation of economic activities towards export production, particularly palm produce, which aligned local economies with British industrial demands (Falola & Heaton, 2008). In the post-independence era, especially after the creation of Lagos State in 1967, Ikorodu Division experienced accelerated transformation driven by urbanisation and demographic expansion. The integration of Ikorodu into the Lagos metropolitan region resulted in significant infrastructural development, population influx, and administrative restructuring, including the establishment of Ikorodu Local Government Area. Despite these changes, traditional institutions such as the Ayangburen stool

remained influential, coexisting with modern governance structures and continuing to play a role in community leadership and cultural preservation. Thus, the historical evolution of Ikorodu Division illustrated a complex process of continuity and change, shaped by indigenous resilience, colonial intervention, and post-colonial development dynamics.

The socio-economic development of Ikorodu Division was found to have undergone significant transformation from its pre-colonial foundations to its contemporary status within Lagos State, shaped largely by changing patterns of production, trade, and urbanisation. In the pre-colonial period, Ikorodu functioned as a predominantly agrarian and fishing community, with economic activities centred on subsistence farming and exploitation of the Lagos Lagoon for fishing and transportation. The cultivation of crops such as yam, cassava, and maize, alongside fishing and salt production, formed the backbone of local livelihoods, while the division's strategic position along lagoon routes facilitated trade with neighbouring settlements such as Epe, Ijede, and Lagos Island (Mabogunje, 1968). These exchanges not only sustained local economies but also integrated Ikorodu into wider regional commercial networks that predated colonial intervention. The advent of British colonial rule in the late nineteenth century introduced profound changes to the economic structure of Ikorodu Division, particularly through the imposition of export-oriented production systems. Colonial economic policies prioritised the extraction of raw materials such as palm oil and palm kernel, commodities that were in high demand in European industrial markets. This shift redirected local economic activities away from subsistence production towards cash crop cultivation, thereby integrating Ikorodu into the global capitalist economy while simultaneously creating patterns of dependency (Falola & Heaton, 2008). The construction and improvement of transport infrastructure, including waterways and road networks linking Ikorodu to Lagos, further facilitated commercial expansion but primarily served colonial interests. As Crowder (1968) observed, such infrastructural developments in colonial West Africa were largely designed to enhance the efficiency of resource extraction rather than to promote indigenous economic development.

In the post-independence period, particularly from the 1970s onwards, Ikorodu Division experienced accelerated socio-economic growth as a result of Lagos State's expansion and urbanisation. The establishment of industrial estates, commercial centres, and improved road networks transformed Ikorodu into a peri-urban hub, attracting migrants and investment. Educational institutions, healthcare facilities, and markets expanded, contributing to improved social services and human capital development. However, this growth was uneven and accompanied by challenges such as infrastructural inadequacies, unemployment, and environmental degradation. As Mabogunje (1968) noted in his analysis of Nigerian urbanisation, rapid urban growth often produced disparities in development outcomes, a pattern clearly evident in Ikorodu. Thus, the socio-economic development of Ikorodu Division reflected a complex interplay between traditional economic practices, colonial restructuring, and modern urban expansion. The political development of Ikorodu Division was historically rooted in indigenous Yoruba governance systems, which evolved significantly under colonial and post-colonial influences. In the pre-colonial period, political authority in Ikorodu was centralised under the Ayangburen, the paramount ruler, whose legitimacy was derived from lineage, tradition, and spiritual sanction. The Ayangburen governed in conjunction with a council of chiefs and elders who performed advisory, judicial, and administrative functions, thereby ensuring a system of checks and balances within the polity (Akinjogbin, 1967). This traditional structure facilitated effective governance, conflict resolution, and the maintenance of social order, while also linking Ikorodu to the broader political networks of the Ijebu kingdom and neighbouring Yoruba states such as Epe and Lagos. The political system was thus characterised by a blend of authority and consensus, reflecting the communal nature of pre-colonial Yoruba societies.

The imposition of British colonial rule in the late nineteenth century fundamentally altered this political arrangement. Following the annexation of Lagos in 1861 and the subsequent expansion of British authority into the hinterland, Ikorodu was incorporated into the Lagos Colony and subjected to the policy of indirect rule. Under this system, traditional rulers such as the Ayangburen were retained but subordinated to colonial administrators, effectively transforming them into agents of colonial governance responsible for implementing policies such as taxation, labour mobilisation, and law enforcement (Crowder, 1968). This development significantly eroded the autonomy of indigenous political institutions, as decision-making authority increasingly shifted to colonial officials. Nevertheless, the continued relevance of traditional rulers ensured a degree of continuity, as they remained central to local administration and community mobilisation.

In the post-independence era, particularly after the creation of Lagos State in 1967, Ikorodu Division witnessed the emergence of modern political structures that coexisted with traditional institutions. The establishment of Ikorodu Local Government Area and subsequent administrative subdivisions enhanced political participation and decentralised governance, enabling residents to engage more actively in electoral processes and community development initiatives (Lagos State Government, 2010). Political mobilisation increased, particularly during Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1979 and 1999, as political parties and civic groups sought to influence governance and development outcomes. However, challenges such as political patronage, limited resources, and governance inefficiencies persisted, reflecting broader trends in Nigerian political development (Ajayi & Espie, 1965). Thus, the political development of Ikorodu Division demonstrated a complex interaction between traditional authority and modern democratic institutions, shaped by historical continuity and structural change. The development trajectory of Ikorodu Division, while marked by significant socio-economic and political transformations, has been accompanied by a range of persistent challenges that have both constrained and shaped its growth within the broader Lagos State framework. One of the most critical challenges identified was the rapid pace of urbanisation, particularly from the late twentieth century onwards, which resulted from Ikorodu's increasing integration into the Lagos metropolitan region. Following the creation of Lagos State in 1967 and the subsequent expansion of Lagos as Nigeria's economic capital, Ikorodu experienced substantial population influx, driven by rural-urban migration and the search for affordable housing outside the congested Lagos Island and Mainland areas (Mabogunje, 1968). This demographic expansion placed immense pressure on existing infrastructure, leading to deficiencies in road networks, housing, water supply, and sanitation systems. Areas such as Ijede, Imota, and Agbowa-Ikosi became notable examples where rapid settlement growth outpaced infrastructural development, thereby creating urban slums and increasing vulnerability to environmental hazards such as flooding and waste pollution.

Closely linked to infrastructural deficits was the challenge of environmental degradation, which emerged as a significant concern in Ikorodu Division due to its geographical location along the Lagos Lagoon and its susceptibility to climate-related risks. The expansion of residential and industrial activities, particularly in areas like Majidun and Ipakodo, contributed to increased waste generation and pollution of water bodies. Poor drainage systems exacerbated flooding during the rainy seasons, while inadequate waste management infrastructure further compounded public health risks. As observed by Falola and Heaton (2008), the legacy of colonial urban planning, which prioritised economic extraction over sustainable development, continued to influence post-colonial urban centres in Nigeria, including Ikorodu. These environmental challenges not only affected the quality of life of residents but also posed long-term risks to sustainable development in the division.

Another significant challenge identified was socio-economic inequality, which persisted despite the overall growth and development of Ikorodu. While certain parts of the division, particularly those closer to Lagos such as Ebute and Igbogbo, experienced increased commercial activities and infrastructural improvements, other areas remained underdeveloped and lacked access to basic services such as quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. The uneven distribution of development resources reflected broader structural imbalances within Lagos State, where urban growth often favoured economically strategic zones. Furthermore, unemployment and underemployment remained pressing issues, particularly among the youth population, contributing to social problems such as crime and insecurity. Ajayi and Espie (1965) noted that post-colonial African societies often inherited structural inequalities that continued to shape development outcomes, a pattern that was clearly evident in Ikorodu Division.

Despite these challenges, the prospects for development in Ikorodu Division remained considerable, driven by its strategic location, growing population, and increasing relevance within Lagos State's economic landscape. The expansion of transportation infrastructure, including road rehabilitation projects and the introduction of ferry services along the Lagos Lagoon, enhanced connectivity between Ikorodu and other parts of Lagos, thereby facilitating commerce and mobility. Additionally, government initiatives aimed at industrial development, such as the establishment of industrial estates and small-scale enterprises in areas like Imota, created opportunities for economic diversification and employment generation. The presence of educational institutions, including Lagos State Polytechnic (now Lagos State University of Science and Technology), further contributed to human capital development and positioned Ikorodu as an emerging centre of learning and innovation. Moreover, the coexistence of traditional and modern governance structures provided a unique framework for addressing development challenges through community-based approaches. The continued influence of the Ayangburen and other traditional authorities in mobilising local support for development initiatives complemented the efforts of local government institutions. This synergy between traditional leadership and modern administration offered prospects for participatory governance and sustainable development. As Mabogunje (1968) emphasised, effective urban development in Nigeria required the integration of indigenous systems with modern planning strategies, a principle that remained relevant to Ikorodu's future. In conclusion, while Ikorodu Division faced significant challenges related to urbanisation, infrastructure, environmental sustainability, and socio-economic inequality, its prospects for growth and development were equally substantial. The ability of the division to harness its strategic advantages, address structural deficiencies, and promote inclusive development would ultimately determine its trajectory within the rapidly evolving context of Lagos State. The findings thus underscored the importance of historically informed policy interventions in shaping sustainable development outcomes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study demonstrated that the socio-economic and political development of Ikorodu Division was the outcome of a long and complex historical process shaped by indigenous institutional frameworks, colonial interventions, and post-colonial transformations. From its origins as a Yoruba settlement influenced by migrations from Ijebu-Ode and Remo in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Ikorodu developed a structured political system under the Ayangburen, which ensured stability, cohesion, and effective governance within the community (Akinjogbin, 1967). The division's strategic location along the Lagos Lagoon further enhanced its integration into regional trade networks, fostering economic interactions with neighbouring settlements such as Epe and Lagos Island. However, the imposition of British colonial rule following the annexation of Lagos in 1861 fundamentally

altered these indigenous structures by introducing indirect rule, which subordinated traditional authorities to colonial administrators and reoriented the economy towards export production (Crowder, 1968). This period entrenched patterns of economic dependency and administrative centralisation that continued to influence subsequent developments. In the post-independence era, particularly after the creation of Lagos State in 1967, Ikorodu Division experienced accelerated urbanisation and socio-economic transformation as it became increasingly integrated into the Lagos metropolitan region. The expansion of infrastructure, education, and commercial activities contributed to its emergence as a significant peri-urban centre within the state. Nevertheless, the study revealed that this growth was uneven and accompanied by persistent challenges, including infrastructural deficits, environmental degradation, and socio-economic inequalities. As observed by Falola and Heaton (2008), the legacy of colonial economic structures and planning often shaped post-colonial development outcomes in Nigeria, a reality evident in Ikorodu's contemporary conditions. Despite these constraints, the division exhibited considerable prospects for sustainable development, particularly through ongoing infrastructural improvements, economic diversification, and the continued relevance of traditional institutions in fostering community cohesion and participatory governance. Ultimately, the study underscored the importance of understanding historical processes in analysing present-day development challenges and opportunities. The experience of Ikorodu Division illustrated that development was not merely a product of modern policy interventions but rather the cumulative result of historical interactions between local agency and external forces. By situating contemporary issues within their historical context, the study contributed to a more nuanced appreciation of the factors shaping socio-economic and political development in Lagos State and Nigeria at large.

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