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Understanding Lagos' Dominance and the Future of Nigeria's Major Cities

By Chuka Odike

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Amid the trending Eastside-Westside rap discussions, one thing remains misunderstood: the role Lagos has played in the progress of the Yoruba people. Many Nigerians fail to grasp how Lagos has shaped popular culture and dominated the Nigerian narrative. Let me break it down.

Lagos, Nigeria's commercial hub, is the epicenter of almost every cultural trend in the country. From the asoebi fashion culture to chart-topping songs, Lagos sets the tone. But does this mean Lagos is inherently "the best"? Not exactly. Its dominance comes from being Nigeria's PR and media capital positions it earned as the nation's commercial and cultural hub. Whoever dominates Lagos inevitably dominates the narrative, but it doesn't mean they are unmatched in quality.

01

A Tale of Regional Dynamics and Lost Potential

This phenomenon isn't unique to Lagos; it's a global trend. The largest cities in every nation be it New York, Madrid, or Tokyo, naturally dominate commerce and culture. However, in Nigeria, the amalgamation and unification of the regions have skewed this balance. Historically, the old Eastern Region stood out for its cohesion among groups like the Igbo, Ibibio, Ekoi, and Ijaw. These groups shared



cultural and political ideologies that encouraged coexistence.

At the heart of this unity was the Aro Confederacy, a sophisticated network that spanned the old Eastern Region. The Aro system, built on classist hierarchies, relied on the Nsibidi script for communication and the Ekpe society for governance, an early form of Freemasonry. These institutions created a shared identity across the region, long before amalgamation forced a new, artificial identity on the Eastern, Western, and Northern Regions.

Unfortunately, regional disunity has weakened key Eastern cities. For example, Port Harcourt once had the potential to rival Lagos. However, divisions among the land-owning Igbo groups in the area, who distanced themselves from their hinterland kin, diluted the city's strength and influence. As a result, Port Harcourt's prominence has waned over the years, creating space for other cities to rise.

02

Lagos Today and Onitsha Tomorrow

The dominance of Lagos is inevitable. For 77 years, it served as Nigeria's capital and remains the commercial heartbeat of the country. This influence will persist, but regional competition is crucial for balance. Just as the U.S. has New York and California or Spain has Madrid and Barcelona, Nigeria needs counterweights to Lagos.

Onitsha, a thriving commercial hub in the East, is emerging as that counterbalance. With its strategic location, economic growth, and cultural significance, Onitsha is poised to take center stage in the coming decades. By 2040, Onitsha is projected to join Lagos, Kano, and Abuja as one of Nigeria's four dominant cities. Port Harcourt, once a contender, may fall behind in influence.



The Path Forward

The story of Lagos and its dominance teaches a valuable lesson: regional growth is key to national balance. For Onitsha, Kano, and others to rise, there must be investment, unity, and a clear vision. It's not just about matching Lagos—it's about creating cities that reflect the richness and diversity of Nigeria's regions.

By 2040, the narrative will shift. Lagos will remain dominant, but it will share the stage with Onitsha, Kano, and Abuja. The race is on, and the future of Nigeria's cities will redefine the nation's cultural and economic landscape.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuka Odiike

I'm a dedicated civil engineer with a passion for infrastructure development and community empowerment. With a strong background in engineering, my work focuses on creating sustainable solutions for urban and rural development projects. Outside of my professional career, I'm deeply interested in Igbo history and culture. I actively explore ways to impact society by using historical lessons to inspire and educate others about the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people, aiming to bridge tradition and modern development.



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