

Architectural Reflections of Society: Examining Socio-Economic and Demographic Influences on Rivers State Government House Designs

Kalagbor, C. C., Imaah, N.O., Daminabo, F.F., and Pepple, T.D.

Department of Architecture, Faculty of Environmental Sciences

Rivers State University, Rivers State. Nigeria

DOI: 10.56201/wjimt.v9.no3.2025.pg1.15

Abstract

Architecture has long been regarded as a powerful medium through which societies express their values, priorities, and historical narratives. This study examined the architectural design of the Rivers State Government House, exploring how socio-economic and demographic factors influence its structure and symbolism. The analysis revealed that Statehouse architecture in Nigeria is shaped by a blend of colonial legacies, modernist principles, regional diversity, and governance ideologies. While colonial and neoclassical elements remain dominant, indigenous architectural influences are often secondary, raising questions about the representation of Nigeria's cultural identity in government buildings. Regional variations introduce unique motifs, yet there is no unified national architectural style. Additionally, space management, restricted public access, and environmental considerations play key roles in shaping these structures. The study highlighted that despite their grandeur and functionality, Statehouses remain largely inaccessible to the public, limiting architectural awareness and appreciation. Ultimately, the Rivers State Government House serves as both a reflection of historical influences and a projection of governance ideals, emphasising the need for future designs to integrate more indigenous architectural philosophies to strengthen national identity and civic engagement.

Keywords: *Architectural Identity, Rives State Government, Colonial Influence, Statehouse Design, Socio-Economic Factors*

Introduction

Architecture has long been regarded as a powerful medium through which societies express their values, priorities, and historical narratives (Vale, 2014). Government buildings are more than just administrative centres; they symbolise authority, governance, and the socio-political climate of a given period. The Rivers State Government House stands as a significant example of this, encapsulating the socio-economic and demographic characteristics that define the region. Its architectural design is not merely a product of aesthetic considerations but a reflection of the broader socio-political and economic realities that shape its form and function. Understanding this relationship requires an exploration of how economic conditions, population dynamics, governance ideologies, and cultural heritage influence architectural choices and spatial organisation.

One of the most profound influences on government architecture is the economic status of a region (Adam, 2012; McIntyre, 2018). The availability of financial resources directly impacts

the scale, materials, and sophistication of a building's design (Nelms et al., 2005). In economically prosperous societies, government buildings tend to be grand, expansive, and constructed with high-quality materials, reflecting stability and confidence in governance. Conversely, regions experiencing economic challenges may adopt more functional, cost-effective designs that prioritise efficiency over grandeur. The Rivers State Government House, as a seat of governance, embodies the economic realities of its time, with its structure and design serving as indicators of financial investment and development priorities. The choice of construction materials, interior layout, and external aesthetics may reveal whether the government prioritises opulence to project power or embraces a more pragmatic approach that aligns with economic sustainability (Selim et al., 2024).

Beyond economic considerations, demographic factors play a crucial role in shaping architectural designs (Vale, 2014). Population growth, urbanisation, and the demographic composition of Rivers State influence how space is utilised within the Government House. A growing population and increasing administrative demands often necessitate larger and more complex governmental structures, ensuring adequate office spaces, meeting rooms, and public reception areas. Furthermore, the demographic profile, including ethnic diversity and cultural preferences, can impact architectural styles and design elements. A government building in a culturally diverse state like Rivers may incorporate architectural motifs that pay homage to the region's rich ethnic heritage, blending indigenous design elements with contemporary features. Such integrations serve not only aesthetic purposes but also function as symbolic gestures of inclusivity and cultural representation.

In addition to economic and demographic influences, governance ideologies and political aspirations significantly shape architectural decisions. The design of a government house often conveys messages about power, authority, and administrative philosophy. A government that seeks to project transparency and accessibility may opt for open, welcoming architectural designs with large windows, public spaces, and minimal barriers between officials and citizens. On the other hand, an administration that prioritises exclusivity and security might favour fortress-like structures with limited public access, high walls, and controlled entry points. The Rivers State Government House, as a centre of political activity, reflects these considerations in its layout and accessibility features, revealing insights into how governance ideals are translated into physical space. The interplay between openness and restriction in government architecture serves as a visual representation of the leadership's relationship with the populace.

Cultural heritage also plays a vital role in shaping government buildings, as architecture often serves as a repository of historical and traditional influences (Bond & Worthing, 2016; Eriksen, 2014). Nigeria, as a country with a rich and diverse cultural landscape, has seen various architectural styles emerge, blending colonial-era influences with indigenous traditions. The Rivers State Government House may incorporate elements inspired by local architectural heritage, such as motifs derived from traditional Nigerian designs, courtyard structures that reflect communal living, or decorative patterns that symbolise regional identity. Such incorporations not only preserve cultural heritage but also strengthen the connection between governance and the people it serves. Architecture, in this context, functions as a bridge between tradition and modernity, ensuring that contemporary governmental spaces remain rooted in historical and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, the functionality of a government building is closely tied to its architectural layout. The spatial arrangement of offices, conference halls, reception areas, and administrative wings reveals a great deal about governmental efficiency and bureaucratic organisation. A well-planned government house facilitates smooth administrative operations, effective communication, and a structured workflow. If a building's design lacks coherence or fails to accommodate the needs of government officials and the public, it can hinder the efficiency of governance. In this regard, the Rivers State Government House must balance symbolic architectural grandeur with practical functionality, ensuring that its layout supports the effective execution of governmental duties while also embodying the values of order and efficiency.

The relationship between architecture and societal values has been extensively explored over time, with scholars emphasising the power of architectural design to reflect and influence political, cultural, and socio-economic ideologies. Bolman and Deal (2000) highlights how symbolic architecture conveys corporate culture and values, a concept that extends to public structures, which can both impress and reinforce governmental authority. The design of government buildings, including offices and meeting spaces, serves not only functional purposes but also communicates authority, power, and governance ideals (Goodsell, 1977). Beyond their symbolic significance, public buildings also contribute to socio-political change, rehabilitate individuals, and promote public engagement (Bickford, 2000; Kohn, 2004; Putnam et al., 1992, 2004). These perspectives establish that architectural design extends beyond aesthetics, serving as a medium for social organisation, political messaging, and governance legitimacy.

Mayo (1996) provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the intersection of politics and architecture, identifying four key functions: propaganda, advocacy, utopias, and conventional politics. Architecture as propaganda serves political objectives by glorifying the past while simultaneously paving the way for increased governmental authority. A historical example is the U.S. government's use of public art and architecture during the New Deal, which strategically employed realism in iconography to shape national identity and governance structures (Robin, 2014). Similarly, architecture can function as advocacy, challenging existing political power distributions and proposing alternative governance models. Scientific studies, according to Mayo (1978, 1996), suggest that architectural design can redefine ideological priorities without directly opposing the dominant political order. This highlights the role of architecture in shaping not just governmental spaces but also the very fabric of political discourse and public engagement.

The utopian function of architecture underscores its potential to represent visionary societal ideals. Utopian architectural designs, such as the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, provided a temporary yet influential vision of America's future, demonstrating how built environments can either reinforce or provoke resistance against ideological goals (Mayo, 1996). Conventional political functions of architecture are also significant, as government buildings not only facilitate daily administrative operations but also serve as symbolic declarations of power. Structures like statehouses, city halls, and embassies provide tangible representations of political authority while simultaneously shaping civic interactions. In this regard, architecture operates as both a framework for governance and an instrument of social control, influencing public perception and reinforcing the legitimacy of political systems (Mayo, 1996).

The link between architecture and power is further explored by Lasswell and Fox (1979), who assert that architecture is a distinct tool of communication, deliberately designed to project symbols of authority. Their analysis underscores that architectural features such as accessibility, elevation, and spatial arrangement can elicit compliance or resistance from the populace. When government buildings are designed to reflect power-sharing through accessibility, they foster civic inclusion; conversely, when marked by inaccessibility or imposing height, they may provoke hostility or alienation. This suggests that architecture is not merely a reflection of authority but an active force in shaping political legitimacy and public attitudes. Additionally, Lasswell and Fox (1979) introduce the concepts of response modelling and response contrasting, illustrating how architecture can be used to shape political expectations and compliance behaviours.

In democratic settings, architecture tends to embody inclusivity, whereas autocratic regimes utilise architectural designs to reinforce hierarchical power structures. Lasswell and Fox (1979) categorise three architectural approaches corresponding to different governance styles: awe-inspiring structures in autocracies designed for isolation, fraternity-based designs in democracies fostering accessibility, and admiration-based designs in systems where power is tenuously maintained. The historical evolution of architectural patterns supports these distinctions, with despotic regimes favouring vertical segregation and democracies embracing open layouts. Through the analysis of cityscapes, the distribution of prominent structures provides insight into power dynamics within societies. Furthermore, government buildings, once established, continue to influence political processes and public opinion, reinforcing or challenging the power structures that led to their creation. An example is the British Parliament's floor plan, which structurally supports a two-party system, whereas semi-circular legislative designs facilitate coalition-building and collaborative governance (Lasswell & Fox, 1979).

The role of architecture in shaping political culture has been extensively analysed by Goodsell (1988a, 2001), who argues that political buildings are physical manifestations of political values. In his examination of parliamentary architecture across different countries, Goodsell (1988a) posits that government buildings communicate political attitudes, preserve cultural values over time, and actively shape political culture. This threefold function preservation, articulation, and formation demonstrates how architectural design both reflects and influences governance. Preservation refers to the way architectural structures conserve ideological and cultural values across generations, ensuring continuity in political identity. Articulation manifests through the ways in which government buildings represent contemporary political beliefs, reinforcing dominant ideologies through spatial organisation and aesthetic choices. Finally, formation denotes the ability of architecture to subtly influence political behaviour and civic engagement, shaping interactions between citizens and governing institutions.

Further supporting this perspective, Bonta (1979) emphasises that architecture serves as a historical record, capturing political transitions and societal changes through structural adaptations. Goodsell (1988a) extends this argument by illustrating how the evolution of parliamentary chamber designs from rigidly hierarchical to more open and participatory layouts mirrors shift toward democratic governance. Goodsell (1988a) argues that mid-century architectural styles embodied the most democratic ideals, while contemporary designs increasingly blur the distinction between rulers and citizens, reflecting evolving governance

structures. Goodsell (2001) also examines American statehouses as cultural symbols, political monuments, and legitimizing tools for government authority.

To analyse these architectural-political relationships, Goodsell (2001) employs three interpretative lenses: expressive, behavioural, and societal. The expressive lens examines how architectural designs symbolically convey political ideologies and values. The behavioural lens assesses how spatial arrangements influence interactions among politicians, bureaucrats, and the public. Lastly, the societal lens explores the broader implications of architectural decisions, considering their role in shaping civic engagement and political culture. By integrating these perspectives, Goodsell (2001) presents a comprehensive understanding of how architectural design functions as a tool for governance, social organization, and ideological representation.

In essence studies have highlighted that government buildings serve not only as physical spaces for administrative functions but also as symbolic representations of power, authority, and governance ideals. Architectural choices from grandeur and accessibility to spatial layout and stylistic elements are deeply intertwined with political messaging, public perception, and societal organization. By analysing the Rivers State Government House within this theoretical framework, this study seeks to uncover how architectural design reflects and reinforces socio-economic and demographic values, further contributing to the discourse on the intersection of architecture and governance.

Also, the architecture of the Rivers State Government House is more than just a physical structure; it is a testament to the interplay between national characteristics and societal values. It stands as a visual and functional representation of economic strength, demographic trends, governance ideologies, and cultural identity. By analysing its architectural elements, one gains deeper insights into the socio-economic and political conditions that have shaped its construction. In this way, architecture serves as both a reflection of the past and a projection of the future, offering a unique lens through which to understand the evolving relationship between government institutions and the society they serve.

Data and Methods

The Rivers State Government House, popularly known as the Brick House, is a significant architectural landmark and the official residence of the Chief Executive of Rivers State. It is located in the Old Government Reserved Area (GRA) within the Port Harcourt Municipality, the capital of Rivers State, Nigeria. Geographically, it is positioned at 4°46'36"N and 7°0'59"E, in the heart of the city (Figure 1). Beyond serving as the home of the governor and their family, the Brick House functions as the administrative headquarters of the state government, hosting high-profile meetings, official receptions, and government conferences (Mapcarta, 2023).

Port Harcourt, originally known as Igwe Ocha, was founded in 1912 by Lewis Viscount Harcourt, the then British Secretary of State for the Colonies. Traditionally inhabited by the Ikwerre and Ijaw ethnic groups, the city lies within the Niger Delta region, along the Bonny River, approximately 66 km upstream from the Gulf of Guinea (Uwadiae Oyegun et al., 2023). Over the years, Port Harcourt has expanded significantly, growing from 15.54 sq. km in 1914 to 106 sq. km in 2008 (Owei, Obinna & Ede, 2010). The city's rapid urbanisation has led to the entrapment of previously rural communities such as Choba, Rumuokoro, Elelenwo, Rukpokwu, and Woji within its metropolitan structure, often in an unregulated manner.

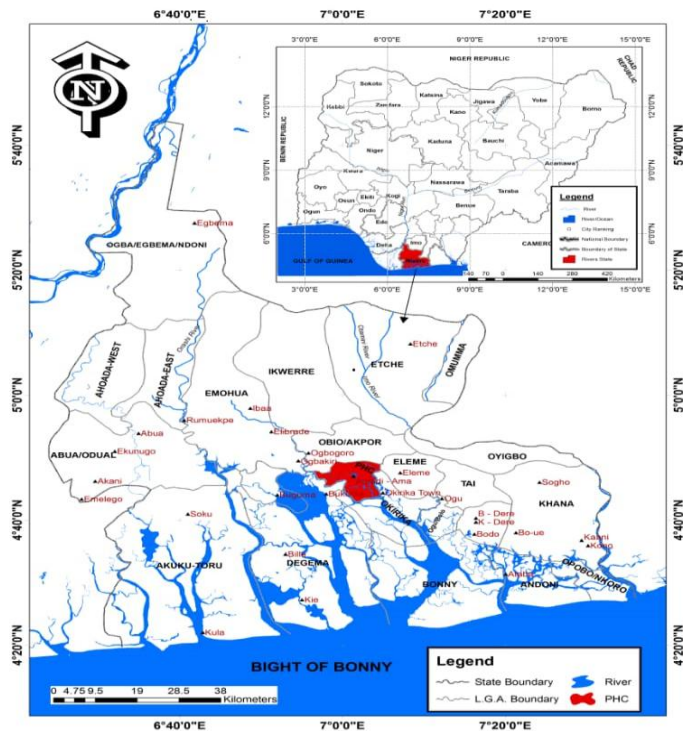


Figure 1. Map of Rivers State Showing Port Harcourt (State Capital)

Source: Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt. 2022

The city experiences a tropical monsoon climate, characterised by heavy rainfall and high humidity. The rainy season extends for most of the year, with September being the wettest month, averaging 370 mm of rainfall, while December records the lowest rainfall levels at approximately 200 mm. The Harmattan winds that influence much of West Africa are less pronounced in Port Harcourt due to its coastal position (Abatan et al., 2014). Temperatures remain relatively stable throughout the year, typically ranging between 25°C and 28°C, with relative humidity levels of 75% to 78% (Abatan, 2014).

Geologically, the city is located within the Lower Niger Delta, consisting primarily of quaternary alluvial deposits that have undergone gradual metamorphosis. The soil is generally poorly drained, with thick humus-rich topsoil but a deficiency in essential minerals such as nitrogen and potassium, due to intense leaching caused by frequent rainfall (Uwadiae Oyegun et al., 2023). The relief is low-lying, sloping gently at an average of 3m to 5m from the northwest to the southeast, while its drainage system is structurally controlled by the coastal lowlands, featuring a dendritic pattern that allows water to flow into the Bonny and New Calabar rivers before emptying into the Atlantic Ocean (Umeuduji & Aisuebeogun, 1999). Due to poor drainage, parts of the city are prone to seasonal flooding, particularly during the rainy months.

The demographic expansion of Port Harcourt has been substantial over the years. The 2006 national census recorded a population of 1,255,387, which was projected to 1,337,800 by 2009 (NPC, 2013). By 2021, the city's population had surged to approximately 2,848,176, reflecting

a rapid urban growth rate of 6.5% (NPC, 2019). This increase has led to numerous urban challenges, including uncontrolled development, high traffic congestion, a proliferation of informal settlements, and rising unemployment rates. The economic structure of Port Harcourt is primarily driven by its strategic position as the centre of Nigeria's oil industry. The city houses numerous multinational firms, major oil refineries, and industrial hubs that contribute significantly to Nigeria's petroleum exports, making it one of the most economically significant cities in sub-Saharan Africa (Kojima et al., 2010). Additionally, the seaport, railway network, and major highways connecting the South-South and South-East regions bolster trade and attract investors (Ojo et al., 2018).

Urban planning in Port Harcourt is divided into central business districts (CBDs), industrial zones, and residential areas, which are further categorised into low-, medium-, and high-density areas. The low-density zones, known as Government Reserved Areas (GRAs), are typically occupied by senior government officials and affluent individuals, featuring large plots of land, ample parking spaces, and green areas for recreation (Port Harcourt Master Plan, 1975). Medium-density areas, such as D/Line and the town centre, cater to middle-income earners, while high-density areas are designated for low-income residents, characterised by overcrowding and minimal open spaces (Eyenghe, Williams & Tobi, 2019). Despite these zoning efforts, many indigenous enclaves within the municipality remain unplanned, resulting in informal settlements that pose significant infrastructural and governance challenges. The increasing urban sprawl, coupled with weak enforcement of physical planning regulations, has contributed to the complexity of land use and development control within the city.

The Brick House, as part of Port Harcourt's governmental and architectural landscape, exists within this broader urban and socio-political context. Its location within the Old GRA, a historically significant area, underscores its importance as a seat of power and governance in Rivers State. The transformation of its architecture over time mirrors the city's evolving socio-political dynamics, economic growth, and infrastructural development. The architectural evolution of the Government House reflects shifts in governance ideologies, colonial legacies, and modernisation efforts, making it an essential part of Rivers State's political and architectural history.

Data

This study relied on both primary and secondary data sources to examine the architectural evolution and values of the Rivers State Government House. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with key informants, direct observations, and oral histories. A total of 18 key informants were selected using a judgmental (purposive) sampling technique. These informants included five architects (from private practice and academia), five builders, five government officials (serving and retired), and three historians. The interviews provided valuable insights into the architectural transformation of the government house, its historical significance, and the design principles underlying its construction.

In addition to interviews, direct personal observations were conducted to examine the architectural features of the Rivers State Government House. Photographs were taken to document key structural elements, ensuring a visual record of the building's architectural evolution. Oral histories from historians further enriched the study by providing chronological insights into the development and transformation of the government house over time.

Secondary data were collected from various sources, including government archives, published literature, and online materials related to Nigerian Statehouses and their architectural significance. These sources helped contextualise the architectural evolution of the Rivers State Government House within the broader framework of Nigerian governmental architecture.

Methods

The study adopted a qualitative research approach, guided by a constructivist research philosophy. Constructivism asserts that knowledge is socially constructed through human experiences and interactions. This perspective was essential in exploring and interpreting the architectural values of the Rivers State Government House. A case study research design was employed to allow for an in-depth examination of the subject matter. This approach facilitated a detailed understanding of the historical and contemporary significance of the structure, drawing insights from multiple sources.

Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the qualitative data. Interview responses were coded and categorised into themes that captured key aspects of the architectural transformations of the government house. This method allowed for a structured analysis of the diverse perspectives gathered from key informants.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments, content and face validity measures were employed. Experts in architectural heritage and cultural studies reviewed the interview questions to verify their relevance to the study objectives. A pilot survey was also conducted to refine the research instruments, ensuring their consistency and accuracy. By subjecting the data collection tools to expert validation and preliminary testing, the study ensured that the findings accurately reflected the architectural characteristics and historical evolution of the Rivers State Government House.

Results and Discussion

Result

Influence of Colonial and Modernist Architecture

The findings indicate that the architectural designs of Statehouses in Nigeria have been significantly shaped by colonial-era influences, particularly British architecture. Respondents noted that Gothic and neoclassical styles were prominent in early Statehouse designs, reflecting the architectural trends of the colonial period. Neoclassical elements such as large columns, symmetrical facades, and grandeur were adopted to convey authority, order, and stability, which were essential to colonial administration. Similarly, Gothic-inspired features, including pointed arches, vaulted ceilings, and intricate detailing, were observed in some older government buildings.

With independence, there was a transition toward modernist architecture, characterised by functional designs, minimal ornamentation, and efficiency in space utilisation. However, despite this shift, colonial architectural influences persisted, with many Statehouses continuing to incorporate neoclassical and Gothic elements. Some respondents observed that while efforts had been made to integrate Nigerian motifs and cultural symbols, such indigenous features remained secondary to the dominant colonial and modernist styles. This limited representation

of indigenous elements suggests a continued reliance on foreign architectural principles rather than a fully localised approach.

Regional and Ethnic Variations

Nigeria's ethnic and regional diversity plays a crucial role in shaping the architectural identity of Statehouses. Respondents highlighted that each state has incorporated unique motifs, materials, and decorative elements to reflect its cultural heritage. This variation in architectural expression ensures that each Statehouse is distinct and resonates with the traditions, values, and historical influences of its region.

For instance, Statehouses in Northern Nigeria may incorporate elements of Hausa-Fulani architecture, such as intricate geometric patterns, mud-brick construction, and expansive courtyards. In contrast, Statehouses in the Southwest may exhibit Yoruba-inspired motifs, including carved wooden doors, sculptural reliefs, and open verandas. Similarly, Southeastern Statehouses may integrate Igbo architectural elements, such as the use of natural materials and symbolic representations of chieftaincy and governance.

While these regional adaptations contribute to the cultural richness of Nigerian Statehouses, they also create a lack of uniformity in architectural identity at the national level. Some respondents noted that, as a result, there is no singular architectural style that defines Nigerian Statehouses collectively. This diversity, while reflective of Nigeria's multi-ethnic composition, raises questions about whether Statehouse designs should maintain regional distinctions or strive for a more unified national identity.

Space Management and Functionality

Space management emerged as a key architectural consideration in Statehouse designs. Respondents emphasised that the layout and spatial organisation of these buildings play a crucial role in defining their functionality and symbolism. The design of Statehouses is centred around their primary administrative role, serving as the seat of government, decision-making, and governance. Consequently, their architecture is designed to project authority, order, and efficiency.

Respondents noted that the grandeur and size of Statehouses remain a common trend across Nigeria. The scale of these buildings is intentionally large to signify power and legitimacy. Expansive halls, grand entrances, and imposing facades are designed to reflect the significance of governance and to command respect from citizens and visitors alike. Some respondents also observed that space utilisation varies across states, with some Statehouses incorporating expansive gardens, open courtyards, and traditional gathering spaces to enhance their functionality and public engagement.

Additionally, space management influences how Statehouses accommodate their occupants, from administrative offices to ceremonial halls. Respondents highlighted that while some Statehouses have been designed with efficient spatial planning, others face challenges in space utilisation due to evolving government structures and the increasing demand for administrative space. This raises concerns about the adaptability of these buildings to future governance needs.

Restricted Public Access and Limited Architectural Awareness

A notable challenge identified by respondents was the restricted access to Statehouses, which limits public engagement and appreciation of their architectural significance. Unlike government buildings in some Western countries—such as the White House in the United States or 10 Downing Street in the United Kingdom—Nigerian Statehouses are heavily secured, making them inaccessible to the public. Respondents noted that this restricted access prevents broader public awareness and appreciation of the architectural and historical value of Statehouses. Many Nigerians, including architects and researchers, have limited knowledge about the principles, styles, and motifs used in these buildings due to security concerns that prevent open visits. This lack of access means that the symbolic and artistic representations embedded in Statehouse designs remain largely unexplored by the wider population.

Furthermore, the secrecy surrounding Statehouse architecture has implications for architectural scholarship and preservation. Unlike heritage buildings that are documented and studied extensively, many Statehouses are not widely researched, limiting discussions on their design evolution and cultural significance. Some respondents suggested that increasing controlled public access or providing virtual tours could enhance awareness and appreciation of these important government buildings.

Impact of Location and Environmental Considerations

The geographical location of each Statehouse plays a significant role in shaping its architectural style, material selection, and maintenance strategies. Respondents highlighted that climatic conditions influence the choice of construction materials and architectural adaptations. For instance, in the humid and rainy regions of southern Nigeria, Statehouses are designed with materials that resist moisture damage, such as reinforced concrete and weather-resistant paints. In contrast, in the arid northern regions, buildings often incorporate traditional cooling techniques, such as thick walls, high ceilings, and natural ventilation, to mitigate extreme heat. The use of local materials, such as laterite and stone, is also more common in these regions due to their availability and durability.

The environmental context further influences the sustainability of these buildings. Some respondents noted that Statehouses constructed with locally sourced materials tend to be more environmentally sustainable and cost-effective in the long run. However, others observed that modernisation efforts have led to increased reliance on imported materials, which may not always be suited to Nigeria's diverse climatic conditions. Additionally, location determines the prominence of Statehouses within their respective cities. Some are strategically positioned on elevated terrains or central districts to symbolise authority and visibility. Respondents noted that in some states, the positioning of Statehouses reflects traditional leadership structures, where governance centres are historically placed at the heart of a community for accessibility and prestige.

Blending of Colonial and Indigenous Elements

A recurring theme in the findings is the blending of colonial and modern architectural influences with indigenous elements. Respondents acknowledged that while Statehouses incorporate some local motifs and cultural representations, these elements are often secondary to Western architectural styles. The dominant features of Nigerian Statehouses, including

symmetry, grand facades, and classical detailing, reflect European influences more than indigenous architectural traditions.

Some respondents noted that the integration of indigenous elements is often superficial, limited to decorative motifs rather than fundamental design principles. While efforts have been made to include Nigerian artistic symbols such as traditional carvings, textile patterns, and sculptural reliefs - these elements do not significantly define the architectural identity of Statehouses. Instead, the overarching design language remains rooted in colonial and modernist traditions.

The persistence of Western design principles raises questions about architectural identity in Nigeria. Some respondents suggested that future Statehouse designs should prioritise indigenous architectural philosophies, drawing inspiration from Nigeria's rich cultural heritage. This approach could enhance the authenticity of Statehouse architecture, ensuring that these buildings are not only functional but also deeply representative of Nigerian identity and values.

Discussion

The findings from the key informant interviews align with and, in some cases, diverge from existing literature on the relationship between architecture and governance. Nigerian Statehouses are significantly shaped by colonial-era architectural influences, particularly British neoclassical and Gothic styles. This supports Goodsell (1988a) assertion that government buildings are designed to convey authority and legitimacy. The prominence of grand facades, large columns, and symmetrical designs reflects the historical use of architecture to project governance ideals, which Lasswell and Fox (1979) describe as a communication tool to reinforce political power structures. However, while previous studies (Mayo, 1996; Goodsell, 2001) emphasise that government buildings evolve to reflect shifting political ideologies, the persistence of colonial influences in Nigerian Statehouses suggests a slower transition toward a fully localised architectural identity. Unlike the mid-20th-century democratic architectural shifts in Western countries, Nigerian Statehouses continue to rely on inherited European design elements, with only minimal integration of indigenous motifs. This limited localisation of architectural identity suggests that while political independence was achieved, architectural sovereignty remains incomplete.

The study's findings affirm Goodsell's (2001) argument that government architecture not only symbolises political authority but also preserves cultural values. The incorporation of Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo motifs reflects a broader trend where governance structures adapt to local cultural contexts. This aligns with Bonta (1979) view that architecture serves as a historical record, capturing societal transitions and regional identities. However, unlike Goodsell (1988a) emphasis on the role of national government buildings in shaping a cohesive political culture, Nigerian Statehouses exhibit significant regional architectural diversity without a unifying national aesthetic. This raises questions about the extent to which government architecture should balance cultural representation with national identity. Lasswell and Fox (1979) classification of architectural styles suggests that democratic governance tends to favour fraternity-based designs that promote inclusivity, yet the varied regional architectural styles in Nigeria do not necessarily contribute to a shared political narrative. Instead, they highlight the country's fragmented socio-political landscape, reinforcing ethnic and regional affiliations over a collective national identity.

The emphasis on space management as a key architectural consideration in Nigerian Statehouses aligns with Goodsell (1977) argument that government buildings serve both functional and symbolic purposes. The findings confirm that the grandeur and spatial organisation of Nigerian Statehouses are deliberately designed to command respect and project authority, a concept that Lasswell and Fox (1979) describe as architectural response modelling where design influences public perceptions of governance. However, unlike the Western models examined by Goodsell (2001), where legislative buildings increasingly prioritise public engagement through open and accessible designs, Nigerian Statehouses tend to maintain a hierarchical spatial arrangement. While some Statehouses incorporate traditional gathering spaces, the overall design prioritises exclusivity over inclusivity. This aligns more with Mayo (1996) description of propaganda architecture, where space utilisation is structured to reinforce power and control rather than foster democratic accessibility. The finding that space utilisation varies across states, with some facing constraints due to evolving government structures, also supports Bickford (2000) assertion that architectural design must remain adaptable to administrative growth and governance demands.

The restricted access to Nigerian Statehouses, which limits public engagement with their architectural significance, contrasts with the literature on government building accessibility in democratic societies. Lasswell and Fox (1979) emphasise that democratic governance is often reflected in architectural openness, allowing citizens to engage with political institutions physically. In contrast, Nigerian Statehouses remain heavily secured, reinforcing hierarchical power structures that Goodsell (1988a) associates more with autocratic regimes. The lack of public awareness and limited architectural scholarship on Nigerian Statehouses further contradicts Goodsell (2001) argument that political buildings actively shape civic engagement. Unlike well-documented government buildings in Western democracies, the secrecy surrounding Nigerian Statehouses prevents their full exploration as cultural and political artifacts. This lack of engagement hinders their potential role in shaping public perceptions of governance, a function that Putnam et al. (1992, 2004) identify as critical for reinforcing civic trust. The suggestion that controlled public access or virtual tours could enhance awareness aligns with Kohn (2004) advocacy for increasing the visibility of political institutions to strengthen democratic participation.

The finding that climatic conditions influence the material selection and design of Statehouses is consistent with Goodsell's (1988a) assertion that government buildings must be adapted to their physical and socio-political environments. The use of reinforced concrete and traditional cooling techniques in different Nigerian regions supports the idea that architecture is not merely a symbolic tool but also a functional response to environmental constraints. However, the growing reliance on imported materials rather than locally sourced options contrasts with the sustainability principles discussed by Goodsell (2001). In Western contexts, there has been a shift toward environmentally conscious government architecture that prioritises energy efficiency and local materials. The Nigerian trend toward modernization through imported materials, despite their incompatibility with local climatic conditions, suggests a divergence from global best practices in sustainable governance architecture. This also ties into Bonta (1979) argument that architectural choices reflect political and economic decisions, with Nigeria's preference for foreign materials potentially signalling a deeper reliance on external influences rather than indigenous innovation.

The finding that Nigerian Statehouses incorporate indigenous elements superficially, while predominantly adhering to colonial and modernist styles, supports Mayo (1996) argument that architecture often functions as propaganda, preserving historical power structures even amid political change. The continued dominance of neoclassical and Gothic elements in Nigerian Statehouses mirrors the persistence of colonial administrative traditions, reinforcing the idea that architecture serves as a tool for maintaining political legitimacy rather than actively redefining governance identity. This finding also resonates with Robin (2014) analysis of how New Deal-era architecture in the U.S. strategically reinforced governmental authority through a blend of traditional and modern design elements. However, unlike the U.S. case, where national architecture evolved to reflect changing governance models, Nigerian Statehouses have yet to fully integrate indigenous architectural principles into their core design frameworks. This suggests a tension between historical preservation and the need for architectural decolonisation, highlighting an area for future reform in Nigerian governance architecture.

Therefore, while the influence of colonial and modernist architecture confirms existing theories on power projection through design, the limited integration of indigenous elements and restricted public access reflect governance structures that prioritise authority over civic engagement. The regional variations in architectural styles underscore Nigeria's complex socio-political landscape, raising critical questions about the role of architecture in fostering national unity versus reinforcing ethnic distinctions. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse on the intersection of architecture and governance by highlighting how Nigerian Statehouses simultaneously reflect historical influences, functional demands, and socio-political tensions. Future architectural strategies should seek to balance these factors, integrating indigenous design principles more meaningfully while ensuring that government architecture serves as a tool for both authority and inclusivity.

Conclusion

This study has explored the intricate relationship between Nigeria's national socio-economic and demographic characteristics and the architectural designs of Statehouses. The findings reveal that while these buildings serve as powerful symbols of governance, their designs are deeply rooted in colonial and modernist influences, with only limited incorporation of indigenous architectural elements. This persistence of foreign design principles suggests that Nigeria's architectural identity in governance remains largely untransformed, even decades after independence. Although some regional adaptations exist, reflecting ethnic and cultural diversity, there is no unified national architectural style that defines Nigerian Statehouses collectively. This raises important questions about the role of government architecture in shaping national identity and civic engagement.

The study also highlights that Statehouses are designed to convey authority, power, and legitimacy through grandeur, spatial organisation, and restricted accessibility. While this aligns with global architectural trends in governance, it contrasts with democratic ideals that emphasise inclusivity and public engagement. The restricted public access to Nigerian Statehouses limits public awareness of their architectural and historical significance, reinforcing the perception of government as distant from the people. Additionally, while environmental and climatic factors influence material selection and construction techniques, the increasing reliance on imported materials raises concerns about sustainability and economic

efficiency. However, for these buildings to evolve as true representations of Nigerian identity and governance ideals, there is a need for deliberate efforts to integrate indigenous architectural principles more meaningfully. Future Statehouse designs should balance tradition and modernity, ensuring that government architecture serves not only as a symbol of power but also as a tool for fostering national unity, civic engagement, and sustainable development.

REFERENCES

- Abatan, A. A., Abiodun, B. J., & Omotosho, B. J. (2014). On the characteristics of sea breezes over Nigerian coastal region. *Theoretical and applied climatology*, 116, 93-102.
- Adam, R. (2012). *The globalisation of modern architecture: The impact of politics, economics and social change on architecture and urban design since 1990*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Bickford, S. (2000). Constructing inequality: City spaces and the architecture of citizenship. *Political theory*, 28(3), 355-376.
- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2000). Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership. *National Association of Secondary School Principals. NASSP Bulletin*, 84(612), 88.
- Bond, S., & Worthing, D. (2016). *Managing built heritage: The role of cultural values and significance*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Bonta, J. P. (1979). *Architecture and Its Interpretation [Sistemas de Significación en Arquitectura Y Dise~ no, Engl] A Study of Expressive Systems in Architecture*.
- Eriksen, A. (2014). *From antiquities to heritage: transformations of cultural memory* (Vol. 1). Berghahn books.
- Eyenghe, T., Williams, G. I., & Tobi, D. S. (2019). Assessment of Socio-Economic Impacts of Squatter Settlements of Bundu and Nembe Waterside Communities in Port Harcourt Municipality. *RA Journal of Applied Research (RAJAR)*, 5(02), 2298-2304.
- Goodsell, C. T. (1977). Bureaucratic manipulation of physical symbols: An empirical study. *American Journal of Political Science*, 79-91.
- Goodsell, C. T. (1988a). The architecture of parliaments: Legislative houses and political culture. *British journal of political science*, 18(3), 287-302.
- Goodsell, C. T. (1988b). *The social meaning of civic space: Studying political authority through architecture*: Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas.
- Goodsell, C. T. (2001). *The American statehouse: Interpreting democracy's temples: Studies in Government & Public*.
- Kojima, M., Matthews, W., & Sexsmith, F. (2010). Petroleum Markets in Sub-Saharan Africa. *World Bank*.
- Lasswell, H. D., & Fox, M. B. (1979). The Signature of Power: Buildings. *Communication, and Policy*, 15-16.

- MacIntyre, A. (2018). *The power of institutions: Political architecture and governance*. Cornell University Press.
- Mayo, J. M. (1978). Propaganda with design: Environmental dramaturgy in the political rally. *Journal of architectural education*, 32(2), 24-27.
- Mayo, J. M. (1996). The manifestation of politics in architectural practice. *Journal of architectural education*, 50(2), 76-88.
- National Population Commission. (2013). *Nigeria demographic and health survey 2013*. National Population Commission, ICF International.
- Nelms, C., Russell, A. D., & Lence, B. J. (2005). Assessing the performance of sustainable technologies for building projects. *Canadian Journal of Civil Engineering*, 32(1), 114-128.
- Nigeria Population Commission. (2019). *Nigeria demographic and health survey 2018*. NPC, ICF.
- Ojo, A., Papachristodoulou, N., & Ibeh, S. (2018). The development of an infrastructure quality index for Nigerian metropolitan areas using multivariate geo-statistical data fusion. *Urban Science*, 2(3), 59.
- Owei, O. B., Obinna, V. C., & Ede, P. N. (2010, September). The challenges of sustainable land use planning in Nigerian Cities. The case of Port Harcourt. In *46th ISOCARP congress* (pp. 1-10).
- Putnam, R. D., Leonardi, R., & Nanetti, R. Y. (1992). *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*: Princeton university press.
- Putnam, R., Feldstein, L., & Cohen, D. (2004). *Better together: Restoring the American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Robin, R. T. (2014). *Enclaves of America: The Rhetoric of American Political Architecture Abroad, 1900-1965*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Robin, R. T. (2014). *Enclaves of America: The Rhetoric of American Political Architecture Abroad, 1900-1965*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Selim, H. S., Mayhoub, M. S., & Abuzaid, A. (2024). A Comprehensive Model to Assess Sustainable Architecture in Emerged Megacities: A Closer Look at Cairo's New Administrative Capital (NAC). *Sustainability*, 16(12), 5046.
- Umeuduji, J. E., & Aisuebeogun, A. (1999). Relief and drainage in Port Harcourt Region. *A Paragraphics, Port Harcourt*.
- Uwadiae Oyegun, C., Lawal, O., & Ogoro, M. (2023). The Niger Delta Region. In *Landscapes and Landforms of Nigeria* (pp. 107-121). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.
- Vale, L. J. (2014). *Architecture, Power and National Identity* (2nd ed.). London: Taylor & Francis.