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# Uneven development, politics and governance in urban Africa:
## An analytical literature review

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## Abstract

This paper considers the foundations of contemporary African urban economies and how these intersect with the evolution of urban politics, carving a route through a wide range of existing literatures relevant to the politics and political economy of African urban development. It considers the economic and demographic drivers of urbanisation in Africa and their consequences for urban restructuring and uneven development, before turning to the forms of urban politics that have emerged alongside, responded to and also helped shape these urban economic developments. In distilling the African urban politics literature, it examines the politics of urban clientelism, collective action and street politics, the urban dimensions of electoral and party politics, the urban politics of war and conflict and, finally, the politics of urban governance and service delivery. As well as mapping the "state of the discipline" in the field of African urban politics, the paper also aims to historically and geographically contextualise the politics of Africa's urbanisation, identify key gaps in the literature and associated debates, and indicate potential directions for future research on urban politics and political economy in Africa.

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# Contents

This paper considers the foundations of contemporary African urban economies and how these intersect with the evolution of urban politics, carving a route through a wide range of existing literatures relevant to the politics and political economy of African urban development. In the first two sections, it explores the economic and demographic drivers of urbanisation in Africa and their consequences for urban restructuring and uneven urban development. In Sections 3 to 7 it examines the forms of urban politics that have emerged alongside, responded to and also helped shape these urban economic developments. These sections address the politics of clientelism and urban development, collective action and street politics, the urban dimensions of electoral and party politics, the urban politics of war and conflict and, finally, the politics of urban governance and service delivery. As well as mapping the "state of the discipline" in the field of African urban politics, the paper also aims to historically and geographically contextualise the politics of Africa's urbanisation, identify key gaps in the literature and associated debates, and indicate potential directions for future research on urban politics and political economy in Africa. It has been commissioned to accompany the conceptual framework paper (Kelsall et al., 2021) produced by the African Cities Research Consortium to guide its research into the political economy of urban development in Africa.[1]

## 1. Demographic transition, economic restructuring and African urbanisation: An historical perspective

This section provides a broad historical overview of African urbanisation, focusing particularly on the late colonial and early postcolonial period, to explore urbanisation trends in Africa since the mid-20th century, as well as questions of economic structure, urban investment and disinvestment up to the period of economic crisis and structural adjustment during the 1980s/90s. It situates these processes alongside some of the major political trends shaping postcolonial Africa that have particular implications for how these economic and demographic processes were managed.

Understanding urban politics in Africa is impossible without some attention to the processes that have historically underpinned urbanisation on the continent. While it is beyond the scope of this review to discuss Africa's urban history in any depth, it is worth highlighting both the long history of urban settlement in Africa – dating back to ancient times on several parts of the continent – and the relative lateness of large-scale urbanisation compared to other continents (Fox and Goodfellow, 2021). While Egypt's ancient urban history is well known, a number of parts of sub-Saharan Africa – including but not limited to present-day Nigeria and Ghana, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and parts of the Indian Ocean coast from Somalia down into Mozambique – have been sites of substantial urban settlements for hundreds and sometimes thousands of years prior to European colonialism. In fact, while the literature suggests that ancient African urban settlements differed significantly from Asian, Mesoamerican and ancient

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[1] Go to https://www.african-cities.org/ for more about the African Cities Research Consortium, including the conceptual framework paper.

Egyptian urban forms (Mabogunje, 1969; Anderson and Rathbone, 2000; Kusimba et al., 2006; Connah, 2015), archaeologists have found precolonial African cities to be of similar size to those in most of the world (Storey, 2006).

In this respect, Africa's urban history is as long as that of many parts of the world, even if urban settlements were relatively dispersed across the continent. As Reid (2001) has shown, cities were – as in early Europe – sometimes linked to warfare and state-building (Reid 2001); indeed, the words for "state" and "town" are difficult to disentangle in some African languages (Fourchard, 2011a: 242). Like everywhere in the world, early urbanisation occurred in areas of particular population density and economic concentration, which were limited by geographical features such as desert, rainforest and topography. Population density and economic concentration were also progressively undermined by the slave trade from the 16th century onwards (M'baye 2006). With the onset of European colonialism, existing urban centres were often the very areas that colonisers avoided for the establishment of new cities. Consequently, as Satterthwaite (2021) notes, very few of the largest cities in Africa in 1800 are among the continent's largest cities today. Many of these more historically significant cities are barely discussed in existing scholarship, reflecting the broader lack of interest in Africa's urban history and the misguided assumption that the continent had little urban history to explore (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1991; Anderson and Rathbone 2000).

## 1.1.  Colonial urbanisation

The fact that many major African cities today are creations of colonialism, which focused particularly on port cities for resource extraction as well as centrally located administrative centres to project power across dispersed territories, is well covered in the literature (see, for example, Southall, 1971; King, 1976; O'Connor, 1983; Home, 1997; Burton, 2001; Myers, 2003; Freund, 2007; Njoh, 2009; Fourchard, 2011a). This has important implications for urban spatial development and the kinds of urban economies that evolved and, relatedly, for the nature of urban social class relations and urban politics. A certain kind of political economy and socio-spatial hierarchy is built into the DNA of many African cities, with colonial towns having been created as highly segregated and stratified spaces by colonial planners, as well as sites of value extraction rather than intensification of productive activity (Cooper, 1983; Mabogunje, 1990; Demissie, 2007).

Meanwhile, they were also sites of territorial control and the projection of colonial authority (Myers, 2003; Njoh, 2009). Many cities were thus created as "centres of dominance" (Coquery-Vidrovtich 1991: 8) and to a substantial extent remain that way today (Mbembe, 1992; Goodfellow and Jackman, 2020). Important changes to "traditional" authority structures also took place as colonial rule sought to deploy forms of "direct rule" in cities alongside "indirect rule" in the countryside (Mamdani, 1996). In this way, the association of the rural with the "tribal", "customary" and "traditional" and the urban with the "modern" was further institutionalised. Indeed, despite the long

precolonial existence of many forms of indigenous authority structures, their designation as "traditional" as well as many concrete aspects of them were fundamentally colonial, hence Amanor and Ubink (2008) argue that "customary land tenure" was basically created by colonialism. One consequence of this urban-rural dimension of colonialism famously theorised by Mamdani (1996) is that traditional authorities have for the most part been analysed as a rural phenomenon; yet, in the context of urban growth and peri-urbanisation, they have become increasingly key players in urban politics and governance, as we explore further in Section 7.

Despite the rise in significance of cities during the colonial period, for the most part they remained relatively small across sub-Saharan Africa. This is because i) the agricultural surplus that enables urbanisation was relatively limited in much of Africa; ii) colonial regimes invested very limited resources in urban industry; and iii) colonists placed active restrictions on rural–urban migration intended to ensure that African populations did not rapidly urbanise (Brett, 1973; Rodney, 1972; Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1991; Fox, 2012; 2014). A general hostility towards African urbanisation was rooted partly in the fear that in an urban context African colonial subjects would become politicised and prone to protest and other politically destabilising behaviour (Mayer, 1962; Mamdani, 1996), as well as potentially developing greater class consciousness (Brett, 1973). Despite this, in the late colonial period, African urban populations started to boom when changing colonial strategies led to greater investment in production in many parts of the continent, alongside an increased acceptance of urbanisation of the population and investment in some forms of infrastructure (Cooper, 1996; Byerley, 2005; Iliffe 2007). Meanwhile, limited productivity in rural areas led growing numbers of Africans to migrate to cities in search of employment, through processes described by Bryceson (1996) as "deagrarianisation".

## 1.2.  The postcolonial urban inheritance

In the late colonial period, global improvements in public health, alongside some easing of restrictions on mobility, drove increasingly rapid urbanisation on the continent (Fox, 2012), though it was in the postcolonial period from the 1960s that the real urban explosion became evident. Rates of natural population increase rose gradually through the 1960s and 1970s, coming to outstrip migration as the main cause of urban growth on the continent (O'Connor, 1983). Meanwhile, the severely limited colonial investment in both housing and urban productive activities meant that informal settlements rapidly proliferated (Fox, 2014) and the urban labour force was largely engaged in what soon came to be known as the "informal sector" (Hart, 1973).

The colonial inheritance was thus one in which – with some important exceptions – large-scale capitalist enterprises, and associated capitalist wage relations, were very limited in most African cities. Coquery-Vidrovitch (1991: 33) suggests that African cities in the colonial period "existed in an age of capitalism, but in places where capitalist relations of production were still tenuous and contested". Meanwhile, authors such as Mabogunje (1990) and Mbembe (1992) examine how postcolonial states inherited

many colonial patterns of social and political relations, which "undermined the further penetration and rationalization of capitalist relations", and meant the majority of urban dwellers had to create other sorts of productive and political relationships in order to survive (Mabogunje, 1990:123). This has had profound implications for the kinds of political settlements that developed in postcolonial African states and cities.

One consequence of the way in which colonialism ended in many states was to engender a new "politics of clientelism". The new political elites had little time to form political parties on a programmatic basis, leaving them reliant on reaching out to rural voters on the basis of patron–client relations (Allen, 1995) and different groups struggled to gain control of state resources in a context where capitalist profits and government revenues remained limited (Cooper 1983; 1996; Gray and Whitfield, 2014). The outcome of this crisis varied across the region. In some cases, it was resolved through the consolidation of one-party regimes, although these still differed in the extent of internal competition among patron–client factions (Hyden and Leys, 1972; Okumu and Holmquist, 1984; Shivji, 1976; Whitfield et al., 2015; Riedl, 2014). In other cases, the crisis was left unresolved, leading to political breakdown, coups and military rule (Allen, 1995; Mutibwa, 1992). Whether or not they turned to military rule, most postcolonial African states saw increasing centralisation; attempts to build nationalist parties and the inheritance of centralised colonial bureaucracies made capital cities primarily sites of national rather than urban politics, consolidating a trend towards "centripetal states" in the postcolonial context (Fox and Goodfellow, 2021). In some parts of the continent, where struggles for independence generated protracted civil wars in the post-independence period, there were profound consequences for urban development and dramatic changes in urban population size (see, for example, Cain, 2013), as discussed further in Section 6.

With the major demographic and political changes that accompanied decolonisation from the 1960s, African cities became a topic of scholarly interest. Given the influence of ideas of "modernisation" around this time, cities were seen by some scholars as "islands" of relative modernity, though this was accompanied by concerns that urban "detribalisation" was pulling apart traditional societies (Mayer, 1962; Cohen, 1969). This built on beliefs that cities were somehow un-African and constituted a break with tradition, generating a range of social ills as traditional social organisation and stratification broke down (Mayer, 1962; Cohen, 1969). At the same time, as "modern" spaces cities were subject to a continuation of colonial obsessions with cleanliness and hygiene as forms of urban governmentality and associated territorial stigmatisation (Burke, 1996; Home, 1997; Bandauko, 2020). The dominance of these ideas about urban hygiene at the level of elite policy discourse feeds right through to the present, and has generated and perpetuated new forms of inequality through public health and planning regimes that persistently stigmatise low-income city-dwellers (Songsore and McGranahan, 1998; Obrist, 2004; Njoh, 2016). More generally, the colonial norms through which urban Africans were treated as being "out of place" (Southall 1971) – both by the authorities and sometimes in scholarship – had very real implications for

post-colonial cities, not only in terms of spatial segregation but in ongoing failures to adequately plan for urban growth and employment (Stren and White, 1989; Mabogunje, 1990; Mamdani, 1996; Fox, 2014; Lynch et al., 2020).

In response to the employment challenge, and building on late colonial efforts to "stabilise" the urban labour force in the face of increasing urban growth (Mabogunje, 1990; Cooper, 1996; Byerley, 2005), the first couple of decades after independence saw the governments of many newly independent states move towards import-substitution industrialisation (Mkandawire, 1988; Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999; Gray, 2013; Chitonge and Lawrence, 2020). Indeed, import substitution was considered central to the "nationalist dream" in much of post-independence Africa (Mkandawire, 1988). These efforts were usually concentrated in the capital or economically "core" cities that postcolonial states inherited, again building colonial legacies into the structure of urban systems and tending to produce very high concentrations of urban populations in a single, primate city (Mabogunje, 1990). These industrialisation efforts were initially quite effective in some countries, but were generally limited in their capacity to generate large-scale employment in the face of the scale of urban growth (Mkandawire, 1988; Bryceson, 1996; Nugent, 2012), which – as noted above – was driven more by demography and rural poverty than by the reality of widespread urban waged labour.

As urban populations were rapidly expanding in the mid- to late 20th century without substantial formal employment to absorb them, the "urban labour question" taxed both postcolonial African governments and scholars of urban Africa. Some urbanites found waged work, and trade union membership increased in many parts of the continent (Sandbrook and Cohen, 1975), but the attempt by postcolonial regimes to maintain dominance over the economy alongside the limited productive base constrained the evolution of working-class identity (Cooper, 1996). Gender relations began to change as well. Notwithstanding important differences across the continent in terms of women's existing roles in trade, women moved increasingly into the sphere of informal urban petty production and service provision, sometimes accentuating gender-based tensions as men struggled with unemployment and the change in household labour relations (Little, 1973; Tripp, 1997; Chant,1998; Meth, 2009; Cooper, 2017).

## 1.3. Urbanisation under structural adjustment and political liberalisation

These dynamics were turbocharged when, from the 1980s onwards, international financial institutions and donors began aggressively promoting policies associated with the "Washington Consensus", specifically in the form of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs). The promotion of SAPs needs to be situated against the growing sense of economic crisis, both globally and in Africa by the late 1980s, culminating in the World Bank's notorious "Berg Report" (Berg, 1981). Intended to promote primary commodity exports by liberalising trade and capital flows and stripping back the policy instruments for the protection of domestic industry, SAPs have been described as economic "maladjustment" (Mkandawire, 2005). These policy measures largely failed

to address problems of agricultural productivity, while decimating aspects of the urban economy cultivated in the early postcolonial period of urban industrialisation and investment (Harris and Fabricius 1996; Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999; Demissie 2007). Given the new influence of ideas of "urban bias" (Lipton, 1977; Bates, 1981), which posited that rentseeking urban elites were sucking resources from the countryside into state-sponsored industrial projects, the negative effects of SAPs on urban economies were in many ways quite intentional (Becker et al., 1994; Riddell, 1997; Potts, 2005; Jones and Corbridge, 2010). At the same time, the rural consequences of structural adjustment also further fuelled processes of "de-agrarianisation" that were already underway (Bryceson, 1996; 2002).

Consequently, structural adjustment drove people into cities at the very same time as it was undercutting urban economies and employment opportunities. In some contexts, notably Zambia, the economic crisis on the Copperbelt was such that it had the opposite effect, driving or exacerbating some counter-urbanisation (Potts, 1995; 2005; Crankshaw and Borel-Saladin, 2019). The overall effects of SAPs on urbanisation itself are complex, given their impacts on rural and urban populations alike (Potts and Mutambirwa, 1998; Bryceson and Potts, 2005), but regardless of their effects on the *pace* of urbanisation, their negative urban economic consequences were profound (Simon, 1997). To the extent that some "labour stabilisation"— had occurred during the late colonial and early postcolonial period, through nascent industrialisation and investments in certain kinds of urban infrastructure and basic public goods, the SAP agenda radically reversed this; indeed SAPs "undermined the very sectors of the economy where labour had become the most stabilized" (Cooper, 2017: 138). The implications of this for the further informalisation of the urban labour force are self-evident. By the time the urban consequences of adjustment were fully apparent in the 1990s, this provided further stimulus for the burgeoning literature on the urban informal economy (MacGaffey, 1991; Meagher, 1995; Mhone, 1995; Tripp, 1997), explored more below. Meanwhile, the ideological currents that gave rise to SAPs also promoted the privatisation not only in relation to production but also to service delivery – discussed further in Section 7 – reconfiguring urban state–society relations in the process (Batley and Larbi, 2004).

These developments set in train new forms of incorporation of urban populations into both national and global economic processes, accompanied by new forms of politics that were products of informalisation and adjustment. These new politics included, in many states, increased protest, urban "bread riots" and popular pressure for political reform, which helped propel the multiparty transition and restoration of civilian rule that occurred across much of the region from the early 1990s (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1992; Simutanyi, 1996). Democratic consolidation remained limited in most states (Bleck and Van de Walle, 2019). Yet multiparty competition, however flawed, increased the pressure on political elites to secure electoral support, particularly within the urban informal economy of major cities, as discussed more in Section 3. In this respect, the political economy developments associated with structural adjustment and the wave of

political liberalisation in many African countries in the early 1990s mutually shaped one another, intensifying many of the forms of clientelist politics that we discuss below.

Notwithstanding the abovementioned economic factors and their political ramifications, we should not lose sight of the underlying demographic processes, driven by technological and institutional change, that are at the root of much of Africa's urbanisation (Fox, 2012). Demographic factors are central to urbanisation throughout history and across the globe but are often obscured because of the economic development processes that accompany and often catalyse urbanisation. In the case of Africa, the limited economic transformation led many economists to puzzle over the continent's so-called "over-urbanisation" relative to its economic development (Davis and Golden, 1954; Davis, 2016). Yet when demographic considerations are fully taken on board, this "puzzle" disappears: African urbanisation since the mid-20th century can be explained by "mortality decline and improved access to surplus food supplies made possible by the application of technologies and the consolidation of institutions" (Fox, 2012: 286). This also highlights the important role of natural population increase – as opposed to migration – in Africa's urbanisation story.

This section has aimed to provide a brief historical overview of the driving forces of African urbanisation and how they shaped the urban political context over the *longue durée*. This has necessitated engaging with a range of literatures extending beyond those explicitly concerned with the urban context, as the forces shaping Africa's recent urbanisation trajectory are to a significant extent global and national in nature, and were rooted in historical developments when Africa's urban population itself remained small. Only in the late 20th century, when cities were mushrooming in size, did scholarship begin to focus more concertedly on African cities themselves and, relatedly, their politics, as discrete objects of enquiry. While there is much other tangentially relevant Africanist literature not covered here – such as anthropological accounts of urban life and historical studies of urban economic development, planning and administration – there is something of a gap with respect to analysis at the urban scale of the changes to political coalitions, and dedicated studies of the historical role of urban elites and other nascent urban social classes in forging or unsettling national political settlements.

We now turn to the literature on the political economy of African urban development since the late 20th century. The following section teases out some of the key themes and debates in the burgeoning literature that has sought to understand how, in the context of "urbanisation without industrialisation", pervasive informality and rapidly expanding urban populations, cities are being reshaped by the intersection of politics and capital.

## 2. Informalisation, accumulation and dispossession in contemporary African cities

This section builds on the above to unpack political economy developments since the late 20th century. It examines literature on how African cities have been incorporated into global capitalist development, with particular attention to the informalisation of urban labour, the channelling of resources into real estate and infrastructure, and associated dynamics of spatial inequality, displacement and urban land dispossession. The ways in which African urban economies might respond to the economic challenges and pervasive sense of crisis evident by the 1990s was initially unclear, even well into the 2000s, as reflected in Bryceson and Potts' (2005) volume, *African Urban Economies: Viability, Vitality or Vitiation?* Could African cities, the authors asked, become a force to be reckoned with in the 21st century, despite all that they had endured? The answer that the experience of the last two decades provides is, to a significant extent, yes – though not perhaps in the ways that 20th century post-independence nationalist leaders might have imagined.

Unpacking the literature on the political economy of African urban development since the late 20th century is a challenging task, as there has (at least until recently) been relatively little that explicitly engages with this, despite a wealth of literature with relevant insights from the fields of geography, politics, development studies, urban planning and anthropology. The task is therefore to draw out the threads from a) various literatures that focus on political economy but are not explicitly urban, and b) a large literature on African cities that is not explicitly concerned with politics or political economy. In pursuit of this aim, this section explores the intersection of these literatures through sections on i) The political economy of urban informality, ii) the role of international capital in African cities and its increased role with respect to urban infrastructure and associated spatial transformations, and iii) the political economy of housing and urban property development.

### 2.1. The political economy of urban informality

African cities have been incorporated into national economic processes and global circuits in diverse ways, but one overriding trend has been the extent of urban economic activity operating beyond state regulation and formal, contract-based employment relations. This, of course, relates to the forms of labour captured initially under the term "informal sector" and also through terms such as "hidden economy" (Meagher, 1990), 'real economy" (MacGaffey, 1991), "second economy" (Bagachwa and Naho, 1995) and, most widely used of all, "informal economy" – terms which all aim to overcome the misleading idea that informality comprises a discrete "sector". There is no space here to detail the extensive debates on the informal economy (for overviews see Potts, 2008; Chen, 2012; Goodfellow, 2016; Barchiesi, 2019; Banks et al., 2020), but a few general points will help to contextualise debates on the political economy of urban informality.

A first point is that by no means all urban economic activity in Africa is "informal" – notwithstanding debates on whether we can even concretely distinguish between formal and informal economic processes, given the extensive links between the two (Guha-Khasnobis et al 2006; Diao et al., 2018). Part of the difficulty in specifying a discrete informal sector or economy is that as well as the existence of many unregistered micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, substantial numbers of people are informally employed by large firms too; informal *employment* may be in either the formal or informal "sectors" (Chen et al., 2016). Regardless of the extent of informality within their workforce, large formal firms and parastatals (some with colonial origins and others rooted in postcolonial industrial endeavours or the expansion of "modern" service sectors) are often central to the political economy of capital cities by virtue of its centrality in national politics – as evident, for example, in Dar es Salaam (Gray, 2013; Chachage, 2018) and Kigali (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 2012; Behuria, 2016; 2019; Behuria and Goodfellow, 2019). In addition, the state itself is the most significant source of formal employment in most African countries, creating on average as many formal wage jobs in public administration and state-owned enterprises as the whole private sector (though the latter generates many more informal jobs) (Stampini et al., 2013).

Second, there is reason to believe that the nature of informal employment in Africa differs from other parts of the world in certain ways, as well as being highly differentiated within the continent and subject to significant change over time. Although some statistics indicate that informal work as a percentage of non-agricultural labour is somewhat lower in sub-Saharan Africa (66%) than in South Asia (82%), the percentage that is self-employed is substantially higher – 67% in sub-Saharan Africa compared to 51–53% in other parts of the global South (Chen et al., 2016: 332). Policies towards the informal economy also change periodically in many cities, meaning that activities such as street trade might be granted certain kinds of licensing at a particular time. This renders these activities somehow less informal, even though they are still widely considered informal in political discourse; and, moreover, it can create a tiered continuum of more or less "official" workers within these broadly informal "sectors" (Mitullah, 2003; Brown, 2006; Young, 2017). These kinds of policy and regulatory changes can feed into the politics of either division or solidarity among urban groups, with implications for mobilisation and potentially even social class formation over the long term – though this is relatively underexplored in the literature. There is, however, a significant literature on the politics of specific urban economic sectors such as market vendors and street traders (Setšabi and Leduka, 2008; Brown et al., 2010; Musoni, 2010; Goodfellow and Titeca, 2012; Goodfellow, 2013a; Monteith, 2015, 2019; Lindell, 2010, 2019; Young, 2017, 2019; Adama, 2020). We consider some aspects of this in the section on clientelism and collective action below.

A third general observation relates to the sectoral composition of urban informal economies. When thinking about urban economic development and associated politics,

it is important to remember that substantial amounts of urban agriculture exist in many African cities (Ezedinma and Chukuezi, 1999; Lee-Smith, 2010; Egziabher et al., 2014). Significant interest in urban agriculture among donors has generated several northern-funded research programmes, including a major IDRC study (Mougeot ,2006). In some cities close to major natural resource extraction, the informal economy is also profoundly shaped by the political economy of natural resources (Salau, 1983; Bryceson et al., 2012; Obeng-Odoom, 2014; Cardoso, 2016). Nevertheless, the majority of informal urban economic activity involves service provision and forms of petty production, and it is these that drive the bulk of urban job creation (Aryeetey, 2015; Diao et al., 2018). Much of this activity takes place in the home, including in major metropolises such as Lagos, where one survey found that 45% of respondents rely solely on home-based enterprises (Lawanson, 2012). Home-based work is highly gendered, with women's role in social reproduction requiring many of them to remain close to the house, despite the need to work (Gulyani, 2006; Gulyani and Talukdar, 2010).

As noted in Section 1, the depth and scope of economic informality in Africa is deeply rooted in the deliberate holding back of African industrialisation during the colonial era (Brett, 1972; Rodney, 1972), the postcolonial urban demographic explosion (Fox, 2012), and the reversal of nascent efforts towards industrialisation in the context of structural adjustment (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999). In a key contribution to informal economy debates, Meagher (1995) argued that growing informality in the wake of SAPs in Africa was not a reflection of the entrepreneurial zeal of informal workers, as had been asserted by analysts such as Chazan (1988) and De Soto (1989),but was "a strategy on the part of dominant formal sector interest groups to defend their conditions of accumulation in the face of crisis" (Meagher, 1995: 260). From this perspective, the informal economy was not about entrepreneurs gamely entering a regulatory void but rather an effort by the state and the (globalising) formal sector to ensure a flexible pool of casualised labour. This perspective reasserted the role of the state and elite interests in actively creating informal economies, something explored systematically in the case of Kampala by Young (2019).

While the informal economy literature has grown explosively in the 21st century, the scholarship that deals explicitly with the politics and political economy of these activities is much smaller. With the shift away from seeing the informal as a separate "sector", there has been growing attention among some scholars to this broader political economy, both in relation to informal settlements and land use (discussed in the section on housing and real estate below) and informal economic practices (Tripp, 1997; Meagher, 2010; Obeng-Odoom, 2016; Rizzo, 2017; Banks et al., 2020; Goodfellow, 2020a). In analysing the role of the state in the discursive and legal construction of the "informal", some authors draw on Agamben's (2005) idea of the "state of exception" to emphasise that informality is not the chaos that *precedes* order (like some kind of Hobbesian state of nature), but the situation that results from the deliberate *suspension* of order (Roy, 2005; Lindell, 2010). This leaves informal actors

perpetually "walking the tightrope" between the legal and illegal, licit and illicit, in ways that confer substantial power to those able to selectively enforce laws and regulations (Lourenço-Lindell, 2002). It is, however, important not to overgeneralise on this point, given that some enterprises enjoy stable and predictable relations with political elites (see, for example, Pritchett et al., 2017), and the sense of being in a "gray space" and vulnerable to regulatory whims (Yiftachel, 2009; Rubin, 2018) is certainly not evenly distributed.

In the context of urban politics and clientelism, Holland's (2016) concept of "forbearance" is of particular relevance when considering how the uncertainty and vulnerability associated with informal work is instrumentalised by political actors. Holland defines "forbearance" as "the intentional and revocable nonenforcement of law", which – importantly – is distinct from the mere *incapacity* to enforce the law and can function both as a means of extracting bribes or a means of mobilising voters. Informal economies, of course, can and do flourish due to weak capacity for legal and regulatory enforcement (Centeno and Portes 2006), but a substantial amount of economic informality is rooted less in incapacity than in forbearance, which is a key instrument in urban clientelism discussed further in the section on "varieties of clientelism".

Some literature has focused on the political economy of informality at a grander scale, analysing the ways in which informal activities are incorporated into broader processes of global production and distribution that actively disempower large proportions of the urban population through "adverse incorporation" (Hickey and Du Toit, 2013). Even before the rise of global value chains, much urban informal activity was deeply imbricated with broader economic processes (see Clark, 1994). Yet as Meagher and Lindell (2013) argue, in the context of economic hyperglobalisation, the informal economy is increasingly not about communities "withdrawing into subsistence" but involves tapping into value chains and trading networks that are often global in scope, and often highly disempowering (see also Meagher et al., 2016; Meagher, 2018). Elsewhere this has been referred to as "pernicious assimilation", which involves "crippling Faustian bargains" that actually undermine informal livelihoods (Kamete, 2018). The question of whether informal workers can be empowered through collective organisation is one that needs to be considered at different scales – not only vis-a-vis global corporations but also in attempts to bargain with national and local governments. For some authors, such as Meagher (2010: 299), popular organising is of limited utility because "the limited access of the poor to resources and decision-making structures may distort rather than enhance their agency within decentralised urban governance systems". Yet collective organising can also be of great importance for marginalised urban populations, as discussed later in the section on collective action.

## 2.2. International capital and urban infrastructure

In parallel with these dynamics of informalisation, the role of international capital in African cities has been an issue of growing scholarly interest over the past decade,

particularly following the "Africa rising" narrative dominant from the early 2010s. Long before this, however, authors such as Simon (1989;, 1992) explored the ways in which African cities were being incorporated into global circuits of capital in an increasingly globalised economy, with growing concerns about the sociocultural and exclusionary consequences of this within cities (Simone, 1999; Beall, 2002). There has also been interest in the effects of global integration on the relationship between capital cities and smaller urban centres until recently relatively "untouched" by globalisation (Cheru, 2005), though this is changing as these urban centres become connected (or bypassed) by new infrastructures and are unevenly drawn into complex global trade patterns (Mainet and Racaud, 2015). By the 21st century, scholars emphasised that African cities have a range of distinct roles to play in global urban networks (Simone, 2001; Robinson, 2002; Onyebueke, 2011). More recently, increases in FDI have accelerated, though the sectoral focus of this varies regionally across the continent and the majority of FDI is focused on a handful of countries, such as Egypt, Nigeria, South Africa and Ethiopia (UN-HABITAT, 2018). At the city level, the top ten cities in terms of FDI inflow (in order) are Cairo, Johannesburg, Tangier, Lagos, Casablanca, Algiers, Cape Town, Nairobi, Abidjan and Dakar (ibid: 46).

Despite new forms of global integration, a landmark 2017 World Bank report devoted explicitly to the economic potential of African cities (Lall et al., 2017) presented them as "closed to the world", trading comparatively little with the rest of the global economy and held back by institutional constraints, opaque land markets and infrastructure bottlenecks. The apparent contradiction between this perspective and the "globalising Africa" discourse reflects the fact that while African cities are deeply implicated in global flows of capital, finance and trade, this primarily takes particular forms and is limited in scale by contrast with some world regions.

The sense of African cities as places of great investment potential intensified throughout the 2010s, and academic scholarship has started to closely follow patterns of international urban investment, which increasingly focus on infrastructure. The limited industrial heritage in most African countries makes industry itself a highly challenging investment option, despite increasing efforts by many governments to promote such investments (Goodfellow, 2017a; Behuria, 2019). Yet it is also apparent that infrastructure limitations are part of the reason for the difficulty in attracting industrial investments (UNECA, 2017). Infrastructure has thus become a central focus, among both donors and international institutional investors seeking new forms of asset in the wake of the global financial crisis (Goodfellow, 2020b; Zajontz and Taylor, 2021). This is generating a world of "global infrastructures" (Wiig and Silver, 2019), often taking the form of large-scale infrastructure corridors. Kanai and Schindler (2019) thus explore the extent to which, across the global South, there is an emerging "infrastructure scramble" as urban sprawl gives way to ideas of polycentric urban development, with urban nodes connected by internationally financed infrastructures. They further argue that this emerging paradigm reflects a resurgence of older ideas of

regional planning[2] with a new focus on "getting the territory right", in order to connect major urban regions and thereby integrate territory with global networks of production and trade (Schindler and Kanai, 2021).

This "infrastructure scramble" is one way in which some cities can be seen as implicated in geopolitical processes, including superpower competition between the US and China. In sub-Saharan Africa specifically, this kind of large-scale infrastructure, with the power to reconfigure city-regions, is still relatively limited, and certainly tends to be focused on capitals and major commercial centres, such as Maputo (Carolini, 2017), Kampala (Wiig and Silver, 2019; Goodfellow and Huang, 2021) and Lagos (Olajide and Lawanson, 2021; Sawyer et al., 2021). The following two subsections explore this interest in globally oriented urban infrastructure in more detail, first through the related discourse of "global" or "world class" cities and, second, through the politics associated with the material dimensions of infrastructure as it "hits the ground".

## 2.2.1. Visions of the "world class city"

There is also growing academic interest in discourses of "world class cityness" that accompany the increased flows of international finance into infrastructure, promoting particular visions of modern urban development and urban interconnectivity that speak to the agendas of both investors and governments. Goodfellow and Smith (2013) and Croese (2018) have explored how, in Kigali and Luanda, respectively, globalised ideals of urban modernity have actually been part of political projects driven by national governments seeking political stability and legitimacy, opening up new flows of international capital but with benefits to particular political supporters and constituencies in mind. As Croese (2018) notes, the boosterist language of internationally competitive, entrepreneurial cities with world-class infrastructure is often mimicked in pursuit of more local and political goals. Similar points have also been made about the redevelopment of Lagos by de Gramont (2015) and Cheeseman and de Gramont (2017), who explore the ways in which Lagos' directly elected governors under Nigeria's federal system were able to mobilise their "megacity ambitions" by building political support for raising taxes, partly by positioning Lagos State vis-a-vis the corruption and neglect of the national government. Adama (2020), meanwhile, explores the ways in which the idea of "world class city construction" in Lagos combines both modernist and neoliberal tropes as a way of framing urban transformation in relation to new ideas of citizenship (see also Olajide and Lawanson, 2021). Elsewhere in Nigeria, Roelofs (2021) explores how in Ibadan ideas of "world class" urban renewal actually draw deeply on Yoruba cultural nationalism to legitimise this project. In the context of Nairobi, Smith (2019) juxtaposes Nariobi's "Vision 2030" with the ways in which residents remake this vision into aspirations of an urban future that is more meaningful to them.

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[2] On the recent significance of the city-region in Africa, see also Beall et al. (2015) and Watson (2021).

These enactments of globally sanctioned ideals of world-class urbanism, partly reflecting the dynamics that Ghertner (2015) has termed "rule by aesthetics" in the context of India, are also promoted by digital visualisations of urban futures that speak to the urge to replicate the kinds of urban experience associated with urban economies elsewhere, from Dubai to Singapore (Watson, 2014). Watson (2020) has thus argued that digital visualisation has itself become a driver of urban change in Africa, in many respects worsening the "conflict of rationalities" between state planners and ordinary people struggling to survive in informal settlements (De Satgé and Watson, 2018). Moreover, these city visions are also rendered concrete in many African countries in the form of "new cities", sometimes built from scratch as comprehensive enclaves in peri-urban or rural areas (Van Noorloos and Kloosterboer, 2018). Though sometimes presented as innovative ways of addressing acute urban challenges, these plans often generate ongoing uncertainty for local residents, especially given the many challenges and delays in implementing them (Lindell et al., 2016). Conseqently, Van Noorlos and Kloosterboer (2018) and Moser (2020) speculate that many of these new cities are producing social exclusion on an unprecedented scale. This relates to a broader trend towards urban spatial "enclaving" in Africa (Ashoub and Elkhateeb, 2021; Nielsen et al., 2021), echoing broader and longer-standing patterns of economic enclaving noted by Ferguson (2006: 380), through which capital "hops" over "unuseable Africa" into spaces that are secured and privately or semi-privately governed for investment. While Ferguson was mostly concerned with mineral enclaves, there is a growing awareness that substantial sections of cities are sometimes also enclaved and disconnected from surrounding society in a similar way (Nielsen et al., 2021).

The ideas behind both these conceptions of "world class" infrastructure and "new cities" in themselves have a clear politics, producing not only new opportunities for capital accumulation but new imaginaries of spatial privilege, segregation, verticality and pleasure – as well as new forms of resistance that we will explore later on. Yet these visions also clearly reflect a certain convergence of the agendas of international financial actors seeking new horizons and the domestic agendas of political elites. The pervasive discourse of the "infrastructure gap", while rooted in very real infrastructure deficits and inequities inherited from the past, has become a hook onto which financial actors seeking new "high risk/high reward" investments can hang their agendas relating to new forms of high-yield asset class (Goodfellow, 2020b). Meanwhile, the coalitions of actors and discourses underpinning "new cities" involve new forms of "seductive" boosterism through which national and urban elites can present exclusionary visions of urban development as being developmentally beneficial, sustainable or even necessary (Côté-Roy and Moser, 2019).

### 2.2.2. The politics of infrastructure on the ground

The politics of developing "world class cities" through internationally supported infrastructure investment plays out in different ways in different contexts – and can change quite dramatically, even in a given context, with shifts in regime or regime priorities. This is starkly illustrated by the case of Addis Ababa in recent times. Until

2018, the flagship investment by the government in mass housing, which was financed domestically (see below), was accompanied by a focus on directing international finance towards large-scale transport infrastructure along with investments linked to a specific vision of making Addis Ababa the "diplomatic capital of Africa" (Ejigu, 2014; Weldeghebrael, 2020; Goodfellow and Huang, 2021; Rode et al., 2020). After Abiy Ahmed's ascent to power, however, the nature of infrastructure investment changed as Abiy sought to position Addis as a site for urban tourism and luxury real estate megaprojects, funded from and inspired by new allies in the Gulf while openly courting a new urban elite constituency (Terrefe, 2020). While very different on the surface, these developments under the new government continue and potentially exacerbate the exclusion of low-income communities from services and housing in the inner city.

There has been significant attention in the literature to transport infrastructure, particularly in the form of bus rapid transit (BRT), light rail and major roads, and the politics of urban transport infrastructure investments. While Wood (2014, 2015) has extensively examined the "policy circulations" and accompanying emulative politics that led to widespread BRT adoption in South African cities, Rizzo (2015, 2017) critiques the celebrated BRT project in Dar es Salaam with reference to the complex struggles over displacement of existing transport workers and potential affordability of the service – issues that now also haunt proposed transport reforms in Greater Kampala (Goodfellow and Mukwaya, 2021). Meanwhile in Addis Ababa, the centralisation of governance over major transport infrastructure projects has limited the role of urban planning expertise and, consequently, the integration of these projects with the urban fabric (Rode et al., 2020). Goodfellow and Huang (2021) consequently argue that urban populations have used them in ways not anticipated either by the government or by Chinese financiers and contractors. As such, the political outcomes of such infrastructure projects are uncertain, even if the political agenda behind their construction is clear. The contingent and generative nature of these infrastructural outcomes is echoed by Nielsen et al. (2021), who in their work on African urban enclaves argue that, unlike in many global North cities, enclaving does not reflect "specific and clearly defined socio-economic divides", so much as embody "a fluid and transformative form of detachment and separation that generates new forms of urban positions, strategies and ideals" (Nielsen et al., 2021: 898).

Transport projects are not the only forms of large-scale infrastructure attracting scholarly interest. There has also been growing attention to Chinese investment in special economic zones – including regarding the challenges of compensation and resettlement for such projects in the face of the growing scramble for urban land and consequent soaring land values (Giannecchini and Taylor, 2018; Lawanson and Agunbiade, 2018). Meanwhile, the construction boom across Africa generally – explored more below in relation to housing and real estate – has created a whole political economy around sand mining and associated ecological change – effectively an "urbanisation of sand" and associated politics that has been explored in Ghana

(Dawson, 2021) and is also an increasing issue in Lagos (Mendelsohn, 2018; Goodfellow and Owen, 2020).

This reflects a broader burgeoning of literature on urban political ecology in Africa (Lawhon et al., 2014), including with respect to the sociopolitical worlds of urban energy distribution and provision (Castan Broto, 2019) and the associated "prefigurative politics" of infrastructure incrementalism (Silver, 2014). Urban water infrastructure, which poses particularly thorny challenges for investment, especially in terms of reaching low-income areas (Jaglin, 2002; Budds and McGranahan, 2003), has suffered from a lack of state investment but also proved difficult to privatise, leading to the widespread adoption of forms of commercialisation and financialisation under public corporations in countries like Kenya and Zambia (K'Akumu, 2006; Dagdeviren, 2008; Williams, 2021). This has tended to further transfer costs onto households, "deepening the gulf between service areas that are deemed profitable (or potentially profitable) and those that are not" (Williams, 2021: 1), while also institutionalising "heterogeneous"' or "two-tier" systems, in which low-income areas deprioritised for infrastructure remain dependent on often expensive informal water vendors (Mitlin et al., 2018). Perhaps reflecting the individualised modes of provision, protests against poor water services have also sometimes been more individual than collective, as was the case in urban Tanzania, limiting their capacity to generate pressure for substantial change (Nganyanyuka et al., 2018).

Urban waste – both in the form of municipal solid waste management (Myers, 2017; Doherty 2019) and questions of human excreta – have also been subject to political analysis, including in contexts where urban sanitation has become an actively s issue (Ayee and Crook, 2003; Chalfin, 2014; McFarlane and Silver, 2017). This speaks to another growing sub-literature on the relationship between material infrastructures and questions of citizenship (Von Schnitzler, 2016; Gastrow, 2017a; Mains, 2019; Lemanski, 2020a). Some of this work considers the disjuncture between the "promises" inherent in global visions and discourses around infrastructure (Anand et al., 2018) and the realities of infrastructural life for most citizens, which can take the form of what Gastrow (2017b) terms "aesthetic dissent" as city-dwellers reject the city visions emerging around them, or violent attacks on infrastructure including through arson (Chance, 2015; Lemanski 2020b).

## 2.3. The political economy of urban expansion, land, property and housing

The above discussion reflects the extent to which global finance and associated political economic shifts – and local political contestation – have become focused on infrastructure. Here we consider land, housing and property development separately, because while they clearly intersect with infrastructure, there are distinct and separate literatures on these issues. Beginning again from the period of structural adjustment, Yeboah (2000), Briggs and Mwamfupe (2000) and Briggs and Yeboah (2001) explore the extent to which new forms of urban residential sprawl and peri-urban development in Africa have been driven in part by the ways that SAPs deconcentrated economic

activity, while also driving rural–urban migration. More generally, the growing interest in changing African urban form, and specifically the growth of new forms of residential and commercial urban periphery, has been marked in recent literature (Mbiba and Huchzermeyer, 2002; Mabin et al., 2013; Sawyer, 2014; Sawyer et al., 2021).

The literature on these forms of urban expansion around the turn of the century widely adopted the concept of the "peri-urban", examining forms of land use change on the city edge as agricultural and urban land uses became increasingly intertwined (Gough and Yankson, 2000; Mbiba and Huchzermeyer, 2002). As land and property development outside urban core areas has evolved and diversified, more recent work has examined the extent to which these new urban edges constitute forms of "suburb" often driven by a growing middle class (Bloch 2015; Buire, 2014; Mercer, 2014, 2017, 2020; Sumich and Neilsen, 2020). Of particular relevance here, the politics of these spaces have come into focus, particularly in cities such as Harare, where they have become highly contested "frontier" spaces – though the politics of Harare's periphery is very specific (McGregor and Chatiza, 2019, 2020a, 2020b). More generally, far from being economically or politically peripheral, urban edge spaces are increasingly seen as key sites of "accumulation by dispossession", as African landscapes reflect new forms of extended urbanisation (Gillespie, 2016, 2020; Mbiba, 2017; Adam, 2020).

Back in the early 2000s, Yeboah (2000) and Briggs and Yeboah (2001) noted that much peri-urban development in Ghana was mainly financed by domestic sources and migrants' remittances. This speaks to a key point made by Goodfellow (2017a, 2020b) and McGregor (2014) about the nature of capital in property development in Africa which – in contrast to the discussion of infrastructure in the preceding section – often flows from diasporic and domestic elites, rather than foreign investors. This is not to say that foreign investment is not playing any role; over time it is apparent that international finance is starting to get in on the opportunities at the "real estate frontier" (Gillespie, 2020). But acknowledging the primarily domestic and diasporic nature of much contemporary real estate investment is important for understanding political settlements in many African countries (Goodfellow, 2018). This relates not only to the investment choices of economic elites in the context of constrained domestic opportunities and perverse incentives that render real estate the perceived "safest bet" for investment (Goodfellow 2017a, 2017b), but also to the connection between the urban middle classes and the state in many contexts, which has promoted particular kinds of lifestyles and driven forward middle-class housing provision (Buire, 2014; Mercer, 2014, 2020; Croese 2017; Planel and Bridonneau, 2017; Sumich, 2018; Gastrow, 2020a). Interestingly, there is a particularly strong focus on this relationship between middle classes and housing in the post-conflict lusophone Africa literature.

Residential property development has also been driven by a range of other factors, including, in cities with economies fuelled by natural resource wealth, hyperdevelopment echoing the forms of "petro-urbanism" associated with the Persian Gulf (Rizzo, 2013). This has been a particular feature in Luanda (Cardoso, 2016) and

parts of Ghana, such as Sekondi-Takoradi (Obeng-Odoom, 2009, 2014). While urban development in parts of Nigeria is certainly heavily affected by natural resource extraction (Daramola and Ibem, 2010), interestingly there does not seem to be much literature on the political economy of this.

In addition, of course, there is a sizeable and growing literature on the most crucial natural resource of all for property development – urban land. There is a particularly notable literature here on the political economy of urban land access and use in Ghana (for example, Owusu, 2008; Cobbinah and Amoako, 2012; Obeng-Odoom, 2014; Ehwi and Asafo, 2021) Uganda (Nkurunziza, 2006, 2007, 2008; Goodfellow, 2013b; and Tanzania (Kombe, 2005, 2010; Wolff et al., 2018). One important collection edited by Rakodi (2006) examines informal processes of land delivery in five African cities, including (alongside Kampala) some less-studied ones – Enugu in Nigeria, Maseru in Lesotho, Gaborone in Botswana and Eldoret in Kenya. Rakodi (2006: 263) argues that "informal land delivery processes are often both continuations of earlier land administration practices and also responses to the failure of formal systems", going on to suggest that they are generally much more successful in delivering large amounts of urban land than formal systems, even if the social institutions underpinning them are weakening. On a similar note, Andreasen et al. (2020) argue that, in Dar es Salaam and Mwanza, informal land acquisition is beneficial to the housing needs of the urban poor and middle class and therefore the formalisation of the land market may not serve the interest of the low- and middle-income households. Relatedly, Magina et al. (2020) argue that Tanzania's urban land tenure regularisation programme overemphasised private property rights at the expense of attention to the public interest.

This focus on the public interest also speaks to a broader literature on government land acquisition, expropriation and displacement for major urban projects, explored in the literature in the cases of Dar es Salaam (Kombe, 2010), Nairobi (Manji, 2015), Accra (Gillespie, 2016), Harare (Mbiba, 2017), Addis Ababa (Weldeghebrael, 2020) and Kigali (Goodfellow, 2014; Uwayezu and de Vries, 2019; Esmail and Corburn, 2020), among others. While the majority of the literature cited in this section focuses on major, primate cities, some recent literature, such as Koechlin et al. (2017), explores urban land politics in smaller secondary cities – an area that clearly requires further research, given that most growth on the continent is in secondary cities. More generally, the literature on land titling has burgeoned in response to the arguments of Hernando De Soto's arguments in *The Mystery of Capital* (De Soto, 2000). While there is no space here to go into detail on the voluminous critical literature on his arguments about the virtues of private property titling – which have been extremely influential now for two decades – of particular note are critical pieces by Payne (2001); Gilbert (2002); Musembi (2007); Bromley (2008). Meanwhile, a number of studies of African cities specifically have shown that claims to property in urban areas are far more complex than can be accommodated by a focus on titling, and involve layers of social institutions that titles in themselves cannot simply overwrite. These include studies of Nairobi (Gulyani and Bassett, 2007), Maputo (Earle, 2014); Dar es Salaam (Andreasen

et al., 2020) and Lagos (Agboola et al., 2017; Goodfellow and Owen, 2020) as well as South African cities (Marx, 2009).

When it comes to the politics of housing provision itself, there is also an extensive literature, some of which is connected to the above issues of titling and their implications for housing for lower- and middle-income groups. While the literature on urban housing in Africa dates back decades, much of it is focused on the scale of need and different modalities of delivery (for example, Okpala, 1986; Tipple, 1994), rather than politics and political economy, and a very sizeable proportion of it focuses on South Africa (which we deliberately exclude for the most part in this review, due to its highly specific histories of urban planning and housing). However, these are coming to the fore much more in the recent literature, including through two Special Issues in the journal *Environment and Urbanization* in 2020. Aspects of the relationship between urban land and housing explored in these collections include gentrification in Tanzanian cities (John et al., 2020), and the gendered politics of access to housing in Mogadishu (Bonnet et al., 2020) and Hawassa, Ethiopia (Hassan et al., 2020). These studies all demonstrate in different ways that access to land and shelter is governed by complex systems of formal and informal rules, which particularly disadvantage vulnerable groups, such as women, tenants in the city centre, farmers on the periphery, migrants and displaced people. More positively, Delgado et al. (2020) explore the politics of an informal settlement upgrading process in urban Namibia, the relative success of which was linked to a co-productive approach that prevented power being concentrated too much in the hands of any one stakeholder.

Alongside the large literature on conditions of life in informal settlements or "slums", which mostly falls outside the remit of this review, there is some literature that explicitly considers the political economy of such settlements in specific cities like Nairobi (Gulyani and Talukdar, 2008; Dafe, 2009) or across Africa more generally (Fox, 2014). This literature emphasises the "status quo" interests of those for whom "slums" are a profitable business – namely landlords, who are very often also political elites. Slum upgrading can inevitably become highly politicised, including along party lines. Muchadenyika and Waiswa (2018) argue, based on a comparison of Kampala and Harare, that both the effective localisation of national-level policy frameworks and the ability of leaders to defuse partisan politics through genuinely inclusive governance are necessary for upgrading to succeed. Meanwhile, in the context of widespread practices of incremental self-build housing, there is some literature on housing finance (for example, Sheuya, 2007; Kalema and Kayiira, 2008), though little of it engages with the political economy of this and, again, the vast majority of literature focuses on South Africa.

In recent decades, policies towards housing have started to shift, albeit in rather uneven ways across the continent. Stren (2018) explores changing housing policies across Africa, while Mitlin (2020) examines the politics of shelter provision comparatively in Nairobi, Mogadishu and Hawassa, deploying a political settlements

framework at city level to examine the combination of clientelism and paradigmatic ideas about housing to explain different outcomes. One issue rising up the policy agenda is the rise of rental housing, both in reality and as a normative agenda in the context of massive shortages of affordable housing across Africa. As Scheba and Turok (2020) argue, this is a "dynamic but neglected" issue, though is starting to attract more attention in some non-South Africa contexts, such as Ghana (Owusu-Ansah et al., 2018) and Nairobi (Mwau and Sverdlik, 2020). Owusu-Ansah et al. (2018) argue that renters do potentially have some power vis-a-vis landlords, through their potential to influence the state, though this is generally overwhelmed by the power of landlords, indicating that further research would be useful in understanding when renters can engineer policy changes in their favour.

The other issue attracting particular attention and a burgeoning literature is state-financed housing. Indeed, there has been an increased focus on large-scale mass housing programmes in a number of countries (Buckley et al., 2016), after a long period in which "self-help", self-build and small-scale development were not only the norm but were actively promoted and celebrated (Jenkins et al., 2006). In the case of Luanda, Croese (2017) and Croese and Pitcher (2019) have examined in depth the ways in which housing relates to the quest for political legitimacy on the part of governments, as do Planel and Bridonneau (2017) in relation to Addis Ababa's condominium housing. In a comparative exploration of "varieties of residential capitalism" in Luanda and Nairobi, Pitcher (2017) contrasts the "statist market economy" in the former with the "hierarchical market economy" of the latter, and their implications for housing provision. Much of this housing is in remote urban peripheries, minimising the cost of land or problems of acquisition, which has multiple disadvantages for the residents concerned (Meth et al., 2021).

Mwau et al. (2020) zone in on the political economy of Nairobi's housing market, though focusing more specifically on who is included and excluded from this. Alongside state-provided housing, in Kenya there has been a particular focus on medium-rise housing targeting middle-income residents and associated with land-buying companies, unregulated construction in pursuit of enhanced rents and, all too often, building collapses (Mwangi, 2016; Smith, 2020). Meanwhile in Harare, Chipungu and Magidimisha (2020) explore the ways in which the ruling party itself superseded the state in the making of decisions and policy about housing, underlining the political nature of housing opportunity – as also emphasised by McGregor and Chatiza (2020a). There is a very extensive literature on urban housing provision in South Africa, the politics of access and associated social movements (Huchzermeyer, 2001; Charlton and Kihato, 2006); Patel, 2016) though it is not possible to do justice to this here.

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This section, on informalisation, accumulation and dispossession in contemporary African cities, has examined an extensive range of literatures on the political economy

of African urban development, with the aim of tracing the political currents through this research, which – though not always very explicitly – engages with questions that are fundamental to urban politics. Despite the wealth of literature examined here – and we cannot claim that this is exhaustive – there are some notable gaps in the way these issues are explored. There is limited work on urban infrastructure, land and housing in secondary cities and towns, though this is an area of growing interest. There is limited coverage (at least in English language academic journals) of the political economy of urban development in countries outside common countries of Anglophone focus (notably Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and South Africa) as well as several lusophone countries (Angola and, to lesser extent, Mozambique). Furthermore, while there is quite a bit of literature on the relationship between middle-class identities/lifestyles and infrastructure and property, there is limited attention to other forms of identification, such as gender and ethnicity, as they relate to infrastructure, land and housing. Nor is there much research exploring working-class identity formation, or new forms of urban solidarity beyond occupation-based mobilisation or "slum dweller" identities.

As well as these areas, fruitful potential lines of research could be to explore more the politics not only of mass housing delivery and high-end property development (which are already attracting attention) but of rental housing and of different forms of housing finance at a range of scales. There is also room for more research on the systemic intersections of different forms of infrastructure: for example, how the politics of land and the politics of water, energy or sanitation intersect. This is something that the African Cities Research Consortium should be well placed to engage in, given its focus on systems and the multisectoral nature of urban development domains such as land, housing and informal settlement upgrading. An overarching challenge for future research on the politics of the dimensions of urban development discussed above will be how to address these systemic aspects while also exploring the power configuration in relevant domains. A focus on the role of powerful groups seeking to protect rent streams and territorial influence will need to be combined with attention to how claims made by popular groups can, and sometimes do, shift both the terms of negotiation and the prevailing discourses, in ways that can produce more inclusive outcomes.

## 3. Uneven development and varieties of clientelism in urban Africa

The uneven patterns of development in African cities have generated particular forms of economic rent, as well as deep inequalities. This section explores how, against this backdrop, the concept of clientelism has been deployed to examine the relationship between urban politics and distributional outcomes in the African context. Despite its centrality in the study of African cities, as well as African politics more generally, clientelism remains a somewhat ambiguous concept; scholars use it to characterise a range of different modes of exchange and power relations. These different conceptual approaches, in turn, shed light on different kinds of distributional politics while, at times, ignoring others.

To tease out these analytical differences, as well as their advantages and disadvantages, this review first examines the literature on relationships between political and economic elites that are often discussed through the language of "patronage networks" or "cronyism", but have sometimes also been conceptualised as elite clientelist ties, and how these affect accumulation and dispossession in African cities. While clientelism is most commonly defined as a "vertical" relationship (see below), a number of authors have found value in also situating these kinds of reciprocal elite relationships within a language of clientelism, given that they involve the informal allocation of resources by a political patron to actual or potential elite supporters. Following this discussion, the section then explores the much larger literature on vertical ties between politicians and voters. This literature, at least within more mainstream political science, tends to focus on the exchange of private goods or "handouts" for electoral support. It also explores how urban clientelist politics are affected by urbanisation itself, class differences or ethnicity. An alternative literature, notably from geography and urban studies, expands this focus. It considers not just "handouts" but the role played by taxation, regulatory enforcement, land and other economic assets in clientelist politics, as well as their profound distributional implications.

## 3.1. The horizontal power distribution and elite clientelist ties

It may seem counterintuitive to begin a review of the clientelism literature with a focus on horizontal power relations and elite clientelist ties. Indeed, as noted, conventional definitions associate clientelism with a reciprocal but *unequal* exchange relationship between patron and client. There are also myriad other ways scholars analyse inter-elite relations, for instance, studying the character of the "deals space" within which political and economic elites interact (Bukenya and Hickey, 2017; Pritchett et al., 2017). Whatever its potential shortcomings, though, there is a notable scholarly tradition of examining elite patronage and forms of clientelist exchange, plus how these structure economic outcomes. In a classic conceptual study of political clientelism and development, Lemarchand and Legg observe that clientelism may "persist" among "notables and influentials" (Lemarchand and Legg, 1972: 152). Clientelist relations can thus, according to this characterisation, be "found among the political and economic elite", even if "the *near status equality* of the participants may make it difficult to separate the roles of client and patron" (Lemarchand and Legg, 1972: 168–169).[3] The specifically Africanist literature, meanwhile, has its own history of analysing elite clientelist ties, including how these variously shape power relations as well as patterns of accumulation among political and economic elites (Swainson, 1977; Boone, 1992; Hyden and Leys, 1972; Okumu and Holmquist, 1984; Baylies and Szeftel, 1984; Mwansasu, 1979; Whitfield et al., 2015; Gray, 2018).

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[3] Note that in some of the literature, "patronage" is presented as a *subcategory* of clientelism, distinct from the kinds of "vote-buying" associated with vertical clientelism (see below) and concerned more with building party membership (Stokes et al., 2013: 7). In this vein, patronage can be seen as a form of clientelism potentially involving any stratum of society, including elites, that the political patron wishes to bring into the ruling coalition.

More recently, scholars have begun to turn this analytical lens onto the study of African cities. An interdisciplinary literature from urban political science, geography and urban studies probes how elite power relations are organised through patron–client networks and how these shape urban development outcomes. This research draws inspiration notably from the political settlements analysis of Mushtaq Khan (Khan, 2010, 2018), although there are alternative retheorisations of the political settlement analytical framework (such as Kelsall, 2018), including through the conceptual framing of the African Cities Research Consortium, which, as we note in the conclusion to this review, offers opportunities to explore some of the gaps in existing urban analysis (Kelsall et al., 2021). According to Khan's definition, a political settlement is the combination of institutions and an underlying distribution of power in society. In low-income countries, where capitalist profits and state revenues are more limited, political settlements are "clientelist" in nature. As in, power is commonly exercised through "personalised transactions", which are organised through patron–client networks or "factions". These networks operate both within and outside formal institutions, at times reinforcing them and at times undermining them. Ultimately, the key aim of this approach is to study the distribution of power in society – notably as defined by differing patron–client structures[4] – and how this intersects with formal institutions to shape political and economic outcomes.

To make sense of these different patron–client structures, scholars – particularly in some of the political settlements literature – analyse the distribution of power along a "vertical" and "horizontal" axis. For Khan (2010), the horizontal axis refers to the distribution of power *between* a ruling coalition and rival opposition actors. The vertical axis, meanwhile, refers to the power distribution between the ruling coalition at the national-level and lower-level factions. Scholars have since refined their analysis of the horizontal axis, emphasising the need to study the distribution of power not only between the ruling coalition and opposition forces but also *within* the ruling coalition itself (Whitfield et al., 2015; Gray, 2015). Whitfield et al. define the "horizontal distribution *among ruling elites*" as the extent to which these elites are "fragmented or cohesive"; where power is fragmented, it is "relatively equal" and elites focus on "jockeying" among themselves, making it difficult for government leaders to "control rent-seeking opportunities" and manage economic outcomes (Whitfield et al., 2015: 98; Gray, 2015, 2018; Behuria, 2016; Behuria et al., 2017). In this respect, the way in which individuals and groups with sufficient power to command a place are brought into the coalition constitutes part of a broader clientelist system of "personalised transactions"; patron–client relations may always involve some power differential, but

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[4] The discussion of clientelism here focuses primarily on clientelist relations between political and economic elites. But material wealth and formal political positions are not all that shape these relations. Khan, and scholars inspired by his approach, emphasise that power has more varied sources. Wealth and formal positions within the state matter but traditional norms, informal authority structures, and ideology, among other factors, also shape the organisation of clientelist networks and, ultimately, the distribution of power in society (Khan, 2018; Gray, 2018; Behuria et al., 2017).

they assume different structures, encompassing networks among elites with varying amounts of power.

While Africanist scholars have mainly focused on political settlements at the national level (Whitfield et al., 2015; Gray, 2018), this framework has informed the recent literature on African cities as well. Differences in a horizontal distribution of power – especially within ruling coalitions – have emerged as a prominent theme and an important focus for explaining a range of urban development outcomes, including investment in infrastructure and real estate, related forms of speculation and capital accumulation and, on the flip side, displacement and dispossession.

In this vein, Goodfellow analyses how "varieties of clientelism" – namely, variation in the distribution of power and, with it, the configuration of formal and informal institutions – affect urban planning and land allocation in Rwanda, Uganda and Ethiopia. In Uganda, for instance, where the power distribution is "relatively diffuse", due to the prevalence of "horizontally" excluded factions (such as certain traditional authorities) and powerful "lower-level" factions (such as former soldiers), "the need for continued patronage" led to the "dominance of informal institutions which directly subverted formal rules in the process of allocating benefits to individuals and groups with relatively substantial holding power", including through a "virtual free-for all" in unregulated urban development (Goodfellow, 2018: 210). This is contrasted with the structures of clientelism evident in the Rwanda and Ethiopian capitals, and associated urban physical outcomes. In this way, Goodfellow uses an analysis of varying patron–client structures, or "varieties of clientelism", to explore how relatively powerful groups are differentially incorporated into a system of urban benefit distribution. These differences then produce sharply contrasting outcomes in terms of how urban land is exploited for private profit and political gain, with significant implications for the urban built environment in the three capital cities – Kigali, Kampala and Addis Ababa (Goodfellow, 2018).

Other scholars have applied a similar analytical lens to other cities. Shifting focus to Luanda, Dias stresses how the effort to sustain Angola's system of "centralised clientelism" under former President Dos Santos helped motivate more profit-driven urban policies, enabling capital to flow from Angola's banking sector into high-end real estate development (Dias, 2021). This politically motivated pattern of investment benefited a narrow elite, while fragmenting and segregating Angola's urban landscape, further marginalising the urban poor. Moreover, it proved both politically and economically unsustainable after the 2014 fall in oil prices led to the departure of many expatriates from the country and a collapse in the urban real estate market. Although not always directly drawing on a political settlements framework, other studies have similarly highlighted how differences in the distribution of power across elite clientelist networks affect property speculation as well as the production and distribution of housing, as discussed above (Pitcher, 2017; Croese and Pitcher, 2019; Goodfellow, 2014, 2020b).

There is also a growing literature examining how ruling elites co-opt both elites and non-elite groups into new clientelist relationships within the ruling coalition, as part of broader strategies to dominate cities politically, even if this does not use the specific language of "horizontal" and "vertical" power distribution (Goodfellow and Jackman, 2020; Gebremariam, 2020; McGregor and Chatiza, 2020b). Whether it involves clientelist competition within the ruling coalition or between a ruling party and opposition forces, these elite political manoeuvres affect patterns of dispossession among squatters (Gillespie, 2017; Asante and Helbrecht, 2020), regulatory enforcement among transport workers as well as street and market vendors (Muwanga et al., 2020; Young, 2018; Lindell and Appelblad, 2009), urban security (LeBas, 2013), and more. These themes are addressed in more depth below; however, it is worth noting that a key rationale for analysing clientelist networks at the elite level is to then examine how these patron–client factions reach down to encompass a range of non-elite actors (Khan, 2005, 2010; Whitfield et al., 2015; Kjær, 2015). Indeed, as noted previously, advocates of this approach view clientelist modes of political organising as pervasive in developing countries and as forming a complex web of power relations, in which elite and non-elite actors are mutually dependent.

In sum, a growing literature is examining how the distribution of power across these networks and between ruling coalitions and opposition parties shapes contrasting urban political and development outcomes. This analysis of elite clientelism arguably stretches the concept, at worst turning "clientelism" into a fairly blunt instrument for understanding power relations. Advocates of this approach nevertheless emphasise how it helps integrate an analysis of "personalised transactions", which pervade the politics of low-income countries, occurring at multiple levels and taking on diverse forms. Partly in an attempt to capture the interrelated nature of clientelist exchange at these multiple levels, the literature highlights how patron–client networks are organised along both horizontal and vertical axes, which jointly determine the distribution of power and patronage and the strategies of political dominance within a regime. While this sub-section considered a horizontal power distribution and elite patron–client networks, we now turn to review the more conventional focus on vertical clientelist ties.

## 3.2. The vertical power distribution and politician–voter clientelist ties

Much of the mainstream political science literature associates clientelism with a very specific form of exchange. As suggested earlier, elite-level clientelist/patronage networks are often overlooked, certainly within the study of cities in the Global South (Post, 2018). There is, however, a much larger political science literature examining vertical patron–client ties between politicians and urban African voters. This literature focuses principally on the provision of private and club goods (Auerbach et al., 2018; Post, 2018). It also examines how clientelism is affected by urbanisation as well as by class and ethnicity. Despite the many positive contributions from this research, its narrow association of clientelism with "handouts", as well as its frequent focus on electoral outcomes as a dependent variable, limit what it can say about broader

distributional trends. A second literature, outside the political science mainstream and more interdisciplinary, examines clientelism not only as it manifests through the provision of private goods but also through the discretionary enforcement of policies relating to tax, licensing, zoning and land tenure, among others. This work explores how discretionary enforcement – or "forbearance", to use Holland's term (Holland, 2015, 2016) – may be central to clientelist political strategies and with significant distributional implications, marginalising opponents and rewarding supportive populations. This literature is especially valuable for understanding how clientelist politics shapes the everyday experience and economic opportunities of informal actors, and especially their vulnerability in the face of selective enforcement.

### 3.2.1. Clientelism as handouts

A key question posed in the literature on handouts is, first, whether urbanisation can diminish the strength of patron–client ties between politicians and voters and, relatedly, the strength of co-ethnic voting. There is an important tension in the literature here, as scholars provide conflicting answers.

There is some evidence of a rural–urban divide: clientelism and ethnic appeals are less effective in urban areas, where the population has more access to media, is more diverse, and has a less cohesive social structure (Koter, 2013; Vicente, 2014). Poor urban voters may also respond better not to purely clientelist or ethnic appeals but, rather, to a form of "populism", which according to Resnick combines an anti-elite discourse with a socially inclusive policy message and charismatic leadership (Resnick, 2012, 2014a). These conclusions resonate with a body of work that suggests ethnicity is less salient at the individual level among urban Africans (Robinson, 2014; Green, 2014; Conroy-Krutz, 2009).

There is, however, a countervailing literature that reaches a reverse set of conclusions. Scholars argue that, contrary to expectations, clientelism and personal rule have not declined in cities (Paller, 2014, 2019). One explanation is that low-income voters are still influenced by both handouts and ethnicity, while middle-class voters, who otherwise might constitute a swing vote, abstain because politicians are unable to deliver on the public policies that they prefer. Middle-class abstention then reinforces an existing clientelist trend in politics (Nathan, 2016a, 2016b). These claims align with a literature that also emphasises the continued relevance of ethnicity among urban populations (Habyarimana, 2009) but in ways that may be contingent on election timing or class status (Michelitch, 2015; Grossman and Honig, 2017).

It is also worth stressing that much of the recent literature using surveys and survey experiments to assess whether politicians' clientelist appeals win them electoral support has focused specifically on rural areas, or else carefully balance urban and rural populations within their survey samples, thereby limiting scope for the study of specifically urban dynamics (Wantchekon, 2003; Vicente and Wantchekon, 2009; Guardado and Wantchékon, 2018; Lindberg and Morrison, 2008; Weghorst and

Lindberg, 2011; Fujiwara and Wantchekon, 2013). There is thus considerable room for further survey research in this area.

Leaving aside the question of limited data, one way that scholars have tried to resolve the above-outlined contradictory claims is by examining how the strength of clientelist and ethnic appeals varies *within* cities, notably depending on the class and ethnic makeup of different neighbourhoods. Most of the literature on clientelism in African cities seeks to generalise findings, suggesting evidence from one area is indicative of trends across an urban agglomeration – or indeed, across cities in general – without offering this more fine-grained neighbourhood-level analysis. By way of a corrective, Nathan examines how the ethnic and class composition of neighbourhoods affects whether voters are receptive to clientelist or ethnic appeals in Accra, Ghana (Nathan, 2016b). While he suggests that lower-income voters are always receptive to these appeals, he finds that middle-class voters are so only selectively; ethnic voting is less common in diverse middle- and upper-class neighbourhoods but remains prevalent in similarly affluent neighbourhoods where a voter's ethnic group is the local majority.[5] Other scholars similarly stress that popular attitudes regarding ethnicity as well as parties' strategic use of co-ethnic appeals varies, depending on the diversity of neighbourhoods (Kasara, 2013; Klaus and Paller, 2017).

While the turn to neighbourhood-level analysis is an important advance in the literature, and one that calls for further research, it does not necessarily resolve the above-observed tension. Granted, it could be that, while handouts and ethnic appeals are less effective in urban than rural areas, they still hold sway in cities, particularly in lower-income or more ethnically homogenous neighbourhoods. What is perhaps harder to reconcile is Resnick's claim that populist appeals resonate with low-income voters and, indeed, are more effective at winning votes than purely clientelist or ethnic appeals. This analysis does not sit easily alongside, for instance, Nathan's emphasis on lower-income voters' receptiveness to handouts and co-ethnic voting.

Resnick's study may raise questions about supply-side explanations for clientelist politics. As in, she developed her argument about the efficacy of populist appeals through a study of the Zambian opposition party, the Patriotic Front (PF), under the charismatic leadership of Michael Sata. Sata's PF was a distinctive phenomenon, one

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[5] This finding is at odds with modernist expectation – including some of Nathan's own (Nathan, 2016a) – that Africa's urban middle classes would be less clientelist, less susceptible to cooptation and more programmatic in political orientation. Research on the urban middle classes in Maputo and Luanda presents a similar challenge to more straightforward modernist expectations, indicating that this privileged social category is itself a creation of the party-state (Sumich, 2018) and identifying government programmes – such as subsidised house purchases – specifically designed to "appease and co-opt a rising urban middle class" (Pitcher, 2017: 377). More generally, there is a rapidly expanding literature on Africa's urban middle class. However, much of this consists of a sociological analysis of the nature, origins and consumption patterns of the middle class (Mercer, 2020; Lentz, 2020 *rather than an exploration of any distinctive middle-class politics.* This constitutes a notable gap in the literature worth addressing in future research.

that inspired not only Resnick, but several other scholars, to speculate about the prospect of a new kind of African populism (Larmer and Fraser, 2007; Cheeseman and Hinfelaar, 2009). Meanwhile, as Nathan suggests in the Ghanaian case, the two main political parties focused on appealing to urban voters through clientelism (Nathan, 2016a). So, it may be that populism, however defined, is effective but only occasionally incorporated into party strategy. Cheeseman and Larmer offer one explanation, suggesting that politicians' ability to use populist strategies depends on the prevailing socio-economic conditions (Cheeseman and Larmer, 2015). More specifically, they argue that populism can flourish where there is a history of "urban radicalism" combined with close urban–rural ties, both of which feature in Zambia.[6]

Alternatively, it may be that scholars do not see what they do not look for. Much of the research on clientelism and ethnic appeals focuses on whether voters demand handouts or prefer more programmatic appeals, yet this framing arguably sets up an over-simplified binary. The populism literature itself tries to break down this binary, stressing that populist strategies may contain elements of clientelist, programmatic and ethnic appeals (Resnick, 2014a; Cheeseman and Larmer, 2015). However, there are also routine forms of political contestation, popular claim-making and party strategy that – whether we choose to label them populist or (more often) not – defy the straightforward clientelist-programmatic binary. These include contestation relating to other forms of clientelism  – not handouts, but clientelism linked to tax, regulatory enforcement, land, housing and more. Yet we must look beyond the mainstream political science literature to find a more sustained analysis of clientelism not merely as handouts.

### 3.2.2. Clientelism as discretionary enforcement

In a recent review article on cities in the global South, Post highlights this gap in the political science literature on clientelism. She writes, albeit focusing more on Latin American cities:

> "The overwhelming emphasis of the recent clientelism literature on handouts has left unexamined many other types of city policies that are, in many cases, subject to contingent exchanges. These include both positive and negative inducements to support particular politicians. For example, city policies such as

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[6] Although Zambia and Sata's PF dominate the Africanist literature on populism, there is a growing interest among scholars in the "populism" of Museveni (Carbone, 2005) and his latest political rival, Bobi Wine (Melchiorre, 2021), as well as in the populist appeals of former Tanzanian President, John Pombe Magufuli (Shivji, 2021; Nyamsenda, 2018; Paget, 2021; Jacob and Pedersen, 2019). However, this research does not adopt a specifically urban focus. It also mainly examines the framing and rhetoric used by these charismatic political leaders without pursuing a close study of voters' response, for example, by replicating the survey analyses conducted by Resnick. Finally, the definitions of populism used vary considerably, raising questions about what precisely it refers to. More generally, the interest in African variants of populism has also grown as the concept has gained international popularity in recent years (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017).

business licensing, zoning, and property tax collection can be implemented in a discretionary manner, yet they have received very little attention within the clientelism literature. City officials can also enforce the payment of user fees for municipal services such as water or trash collection in a strategic or contingent fashion." (Post, 2018: 121)

There are some exceptions to this apparent oversight, notably Holland's work on "forbearance", which focuses on Latin American cities (Holland 2015; 2016). As noted in an earlier section, Holland uses the term forbearance to denote politicians' use of discretionary enforcement, or "intentional and revocable government leniency towards violations of the law" (Holland, 2016: 233). She stresses that politicians use forbearance to consolidate a political base, rewarding supporters and punishing opponents. She also stresses its significant distributive implications, whereby it directly shapes broader patterns of urban accumulation and dispossession, as discussed in the previous section.[7] The focus on handouts, by contrast, says little about the large-scale distributional implications of clientelism, and indeed, distributional outcomes are not the primary concern of the political science literature, which tends to emphasise electoral results as its dependent variable.

There is nevertheless a literature on forbearance in African cities, albeit one that comes mainly from area studies, urban studies and geography, rather than political science. These literatures document how, for example, in Kampala and Gulu (Uganda) parties mobilise voters by denouncing "land grabbing" and dispossession of urban communities (Meinert and Kjær, 2016). Similarly, depending on the electoral calculus of ruling parties, government officials may be more or less tolerant of encroachment in urban space by squatters, hawkers and street vendors (Gillespie, 2017; Young, 2018; Shearer, 2020). Meanwhile, "politically induced displacement" – dispossession of rival parties' supporters – is widespread in both capital and secondary cities in Ghana (Asante and Helbrecht, 2020). Clientelist management of security and selective use of violence is also linked to party competition everywhere, from South African townships to Lagos, Nigeria to Nairobi, Kenya (Fourchard, 2011b, 2012; LeBas, 2013). Selective enforcement of regulations in the transport sector is another strategy to court the votes of transport workers (Goodfellow and Titeca, 2012; Goodfellow, 2015; Agbiboa, 2018; Muwanga et al., 2020).

Aside from these specific case study analyses, there is a more explicitly comparative and theoretical literature, aiming to examine through what mechanisms politicians and parties seek to coopt or coerce urban electorates into a compliant, supportive position (Goodfellow, 2020a; Goodfellow and Jackman, 2020). Echoing in some ways older trends in comparative urban political science, such as urban regime theory (see, for

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[7] Another strength of Holland's conceptualisation is that she neatly captures how "forbearance" applies both to elite and non-elite groups, meaning it occurs along both the horizontal and vertical axes of clientelist distribution. Its distributive implications can also be regressive or progressive, depending on who benefits.

example, Mossberger and Stoker, 2001), as well as broader political economy literatures, this work diverges from the electoralist frame that characterises much of the clientelism literature within political science. As such, it claims that it is in "unregulated or informally-regulated spheres" that "much of the political negotiation that shapes public life and economic opportunity" occurs (Goodfellow, 2020a: 2–3) – something that is explored in depth from the bottom up in the context of urban Ghana (Paller, 2019). Paller proposes a "new logic of political accountability", not electoralist but instead dependent on routine interactions between leaders and their followers, on "dignified public expression" and on the cultivation of mutual respect.

Crucially, the study of political informality proposed in this work refocuses attention on the *ongoing* interactions between a diverse array of social and political groups; these interactions may be influenced by party politics and electoral dynamics but cannot be reduced to them. Rather, they comprise a dynamic interplay between top-down strategies of cooptation and repression, on the one hand, and more bottom-up forms of popular organisation and collective action. This emphasis again contrasts with the literature on clientelism, particularly the literature focused on elections, which tends to assume the subordinate position of "client" populations within an unequal, dyadic exchange. Yet this emphasis risks overlooking more diverse forms of popular resistance – combining contention, collaboration and subversion (Mitlin, 2018) – as well as its relationship with elite strategies of political control.

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To recap, this section explored, first, a growing literature on elite patron–client relations and how these networks shape urban development outcomes, notably investment in real estate and associated patterns of capital accumulation, dispossession and displacement. It then delved into the more expansive literature on vertical clientelist ties, moving from a review of the political science literature on handouts to a more interdisciplinary literature on clientelism, as it relates to regulatory enforcement, tax, land and the management of other key economic assets. The latter body of work helps to capture a wider range of distributional outcomes linked to discretionary enforcement, as well as the political and economic vulnerability of informal actors in African cities, a theme considered from a different angle in Section 2. There is room to expand on this interdisciplinary literature on clientelism, as well as to reframe it within a broader study of political informality.

One way in which this research could move forward is to tackle head-on the ambiguities and tensions intrinsic to debates on clientelism, including with respect to the limitations of distinguishing between "horizontal" and "vertical" versions, given the more subtle power differentials and different *forms* of power that can characterise clientelist relations. ACRC's attention to the relationships between groups within, outside and "liminal" to the ruling coalition in a more nuanced way, which recognises diverse manifestations of power and mutual dependency and their shifting nature,

could be a productive way forward. This reframing would encourage the study of more varied forms of political contestation, including the impact on urban politics of bottom-up organising and protest, a topic to which we now turn.

## 4. Collective action, protest mobilisation and the politics of the street

Clientelist relations are often unable to manage political pressures and conflicts in African urban environments, generating varied forms of popular organisation and claim-making. This collective action manifests through urban social movements, as well as more sporadic protest and rioting.

Before proceeding to a review of the relevant empirical literature, a brief note on the relevant concepts that have been deployed to capture the nature of collective action in urban settings. Different forms of urban collective action suggest differing organising logics and popular subjectivities, leading scholars to mobilise concepts of class and citizenship as alternatives to the more oft-used concept of clientelism. For instance, on class, scholars call for a closer study of employment relations in urban informal economies, which can be uncovered through a careful exploration of "organizational dynamics and power relations" (Meagher, 2010: 16). This structural analysis then paves the way for a study of the contingent ways workers' collective action generates class identities. This happens, first, through a "struggle over class" – as workers develop a shared subjectivity – and, second, through a "struggle between classes", as they challenge owners of capital and allied state actors (Rizzo, 2017; Rizzo and Atzeni, 2020; Harriss-White and Gooptu, 2009).

Especially where urban collective action is directed more at the state, and also due to differing theoretical leanings, some scholars frame popular organising as a renegotiation of a rights-bearing citizenship and associated entitlements (Holston, 2008, 1999; Fredericks, 2018; Diouf and Fredericks, 2014; Nuttall and Mbembé, 2008; De Boeck and Plissart, 2004). In the introduction to an edited volume covering cities in Africa, Europe, Latin America and North America, Holston and Appadurai note that "struggles over the nature of belonging to the national society" are "particularly evident in the social movements of the urban poor for rights to the city" (Holston and Appadurai, 1999: 10). According to this analysis, cities are especially likely to generate fresh demands for socioeconomic and political rights; they are "sites for the operations of more globally oriented capital and labour", featuring "new concentrations of wealth and misery" that drive collective action by the working poor (Holston and Appadurai, 1999: 10).

The above framings of both class and citizenship link them with a positive assertion of popular agency. However, this popular mobilisation may also have more ambivalent normative implications. For instance, scholars note that collective assertions of citizen identities may assume an exclusionary, xenophobic or violent character (Nyamnjoh, 2007). Meanwhile, all forms of popular collective action are subject to top-down cooptation and repression; elite-led interventions undermine popular solidarity through

the (sometimes violent) reassertion of vertical, clientelist power relations (Mueller, 2008; LeBas, 2013).

Leaving aside this conceptual discussion, the below review explores the political grievances that have fed collective action and protest. It then considers how the literature has engaged with the politics of urban violence and elite cooptation.

## 4.1. Popular organising and collective action

Within the growing literature on popular organising in African cities, there is a particular focus on collective action within the informal economy and informal settlements. This work examines how low-income urban workers and residents attempt to use collective action to reshape unequal processes of urban development, challenging both private-sector and state actors in the process (Brown et al., 2010; Lindell, 2010; Mitlin, 2014; Rizzo, 2017). This literature also explores state-led interventions to coopt or suppress these popular efforts. This bottom-up mobilisation and top-down response together form part of an ongoing and uncertain political struggle, a dimension of urban politics not captured by some clientelist analyses that emphasise more predictably ordered, hierarchical and dyadic modes of exchange.

Beginning with the literature on informal markets, Grossman finds that markets in Lagos, Nigeria "maintain institutions to support trade not in the absence of government, but rather in response to active government interference" (Grossman, 2020: 47). Associations develop these "pro-trade" market institutions "when threatened by politicians they perceive to be predatory and when the organizations can respond with threats of their own" (ibid.). Also examining informal market politics in Lagos, Nwankwo offers a gendered analysis, noting that in response to the "the [male] dominating structures of market and government authorities, women traders devise strategies of resistance, sometimes pushing the boundaries of legality to secure their livelihoods" (Nwankwo, 2019: 78). In Kampala, Uganda, meanwhile, the ruling National Resistance Movement tries to use the distribution of money, notably through Savings and Credit Cooperatives (SACCOs), to coopt and divide market vendors, but not always especially successfully (Muwanga et al., 2020; Titeca, 2014).

Markets aside, a growing literature examines collective action in the urban transport sector. For instance, Agbiboa looks at how commercial motorbike-taxi drivers in Lagos use their association to resist urban renewal projects that would negatively affect them (Agbiboa, 2018). Rizzo explores how bus drivers in Dar es Salaam are able to move past mutual aid through loose associations to instead challenge state transport regulations and poor labour conditions through union organising and strike action (Rizzo, 2017; Rizzo and Atzeni, 2020). Motorbike-taxi drivers in Kampala have also used their associations to push back against unfavourable state regulations to limit their circulation and numbers (Goodfellow and Titeca, 2012; Goodfellow, 2015; Muwanga et al., 2020).

Important questions nevertheless remain about the nature and scope of transport workers' success when engaging with political authorities. More often than not, their interactions amount to a "sporadic exchange of short-term 'favours'" (Goodfellow and Titeca, 2012: 269). Yet recent scholarship suggests some unions and worker associations, domestic policymakers and foreign donors are beginning to take more seriously the idea of accommodating informal workers and their representative organisations within formal urban transport planning. The aim is to both improve public transit and ensure inclusive ownership and employment (Spooner et al., 2020; Goodfellow and Mukwaya, 2021).

While trade and transport receive the lion's share of attention in the literature, there is also notable research on collective action in other areas. These include waste management and waste collection (Alene, 2018; Fredericks, 2018), water management (Schindler et al., 2021; Adams and Boateng, 2018), and housing (Chitekwe-Biti, 2018; Chirisa et al., 2015; Mitlin and Mogaladi, 2013), among other sectors. In some cases, these popular struggles relate to the shifts towards private service delivery and new forms of urban governance, discussed in Section 7.

Taken together, this work highlights a persistent theme, namely the dynamic interaction between bottom-up organisation and top-down efforts to assert control and political dominance. At times, these top-down strategies coopt and repurpose organisations of would-be democratic collective action, as has happened with housing cooperatives in Harare (Chirisa et al., 2015). At other times, though, these efforts to coopt and suppress fail in the long term, such as in Kampala's transport sector, which is "too unruly to submit easily to domination" without this domination resulting in "levels of violence that undermine the NRM's position" (Muwanga et al., 2020: 30). Top-down cooptative efforts aside, several studies also point to the weakness of collective organisations themselves and their ultimate inability to overcome structural constraints to generate real change (Brown et al., 2010; Meagher, 2010; Young, 2017). Again, this point is relevant to Kampala's transport sector; even if state actors have proved unsuccessful in their own reform efforts, workers' collective action has, as noted above, mainly resulted in only "short term favours" (Goodfellow and Titeca, 2012: 269). Where collective action does succeed, organisations of the urban poor often work slowly and strategically to gradually build their influence, initially avoiding overt confrontation, in order to overcome the constraints of clientelist politics (Mitlin, 2014, 2018; Rizzo, 2017).

The literature on collective action, particularly collective action linked to the economic grievances, is growing. However, more work can be done to centre this research in the study of urban politics and development; the literature on political science and development studies remains preoccupied by the study of clientelism, while only sporadically engaging with more dynamic ways in which power is organised and contested, both from above and below.

## 4.2. Urban protest politics

Interest in urban protest, as a form of collective action, has also experienced a revival in recent years, particularly following a "wave" of protest coinciding roughly with the period of the Arab Spring. Harris and Hern observe that protest incidence increased fivefold between 2011 and 2014, while the principal driver, according to their analysis of Afrobarometer data, were "valence" issues to do with economic conditions, service delivery, wages and economic inequality (Harris and Hern, 2019). Branch and Mampilly adopt a more qualitative and historical approach, contextualising the latest wave of protest in relation to two previous waves, first against colonial rule and then in favour of democratisation, a wave of uprising that also coincided with anti-austerity protest (Branch and Mampilly, 2015). Through their empirical case studies, they aim to identify continuities between today's protests and past waves, although they also show that these movements are eclectic, with diverse leadership and visions. Yet even the diverse protests they do analyse may only provide a narrow view of the range of protest activity in African cities, particularly as they focus on case studies where middle and professional classes led the actions, for instance, Occupy Ghana and Walk to Work in Uganda.

Other studies of protests emphasise how they can crystallise economic grievances (Philipps, 2016; Philipps and Kagoro, 2016) or how they can strengthen parties, "[reorienting] social boundaries around the lines of partisan affiliation" (LeBas, 2011). In a longitudinal study of protest politics in Ghana, Asante and Helbrecht (2018: 159) argue that the themes of urban protest have exhibited significant continuity along lines they categorise as "proletarian (high cost of living, dispossession and inadequate infrastructure), republican (participatory governance and corruption) and corporatist (working conditions and unemployment)". Scholars also stress how protests can assume markedly different styles, some more directly confrontational or "noisy" and some "silent", as Goodfellow explores in his comparison of Kampala and Kigali (Goodfellow, 2013a). "Silence", in this instance, refers to the ways socially embedded practices may actively discourage a politics of contestation, thereby reinforcing or else obviating the need for more direct top-down control. This anti-protest politics, however, may also give way to other forms of "silent", quietly subversive action, for instance, Kigali market traders taking to the streets at night or shifting to other parts of the city, rather than actively protesting the closure of their urban markets (Goodfellow, 2013a; Shearer, 2017). Indeed, as Shearer (2017, 2020) highlights, even in Kigali efforts to suppress subversive action cannot fully succeed, and forms of more subtle protest persist through rejecting the government's drive to create "modern" forms of order, similar to Gastrow's (2017b) idea of "aesthetic dissent".

Other scholars, researching cities from Accra to Nairobi, similarly explore how a politics of "encroachment" may go from "quiet to bold"; squatters and street hawkers first occupy urban spaces and then take collective action to defend their access and push back against state-led dispossession (Bayat, 2000; Gillespie, 2017b; Lines and Makau,

2018). This literature blurs the lines between protest, conventionally understood as a more contentious politics, and other forms of direct collective action. One possible conclusion to draw is that protest politics, rather than studied separately, should be integrated into a broader exploration of collective action strategies, the understanding being that protest is but one form of collective action which can be combined with or substituted by others. Future research could also engage more with the interaction between bottom-up protest politics and elite power structures, for instance, using a political settlement analysis to examine when and why different forms of protest politics and collective action emerge, and how frequently.

Finally, there is also a small literature on protest in secondary towns, which is vital to an understanding of the full range of urban protest activity (Harsch, 2009). Regarding the relationship between protest incidence and urban geography more generally, Fox and Bell's quantitative study challenges the conventional wisdom that high levels of urbanisation lead to more protest and unrest, observing that the reverse appears to be true, although it is the case that absolute urban population size correlates with increased protest (Fox and Bell, 2016).

Overall, the impression from the literature on protest in African cities is that much more work can be done to systematically review protest activity, including in smaller towns and by more economically marginalised actors. More work can also be done to integrate an analysis of protest into a broader analysis of collective action urban politics and how this collective action intersects with different elite power structures and forms of authoritarian control.

## 4.3. Popular networks and the politics of violent patronage

There is a substantial body of work examining forms of popular mobilising turned bad, often at least in part due to cooptation by elite actors. This work examines the use of violence by popular networks, the majority of which are community militias and policing organisations (Fourchard, 2012; LeBas, 2013; Thill, 2019) but not exclusively (Meagher 2010). For instance, transport workers in Lagos have become implicated in the politics of violent patronage and extortion rackets (Agbiboa, 2018). This literature also emphasises how elite cooptation, factionalism and inter-party competition can strengthen these organisations, further distancing them from the communities from which they originated, while also intensifying their predatory behaviour and use of violence (Fourchard, 2012, 2011a; LeBas, 2013; Meagher, 2010; Agbiboa, 2018; Bénit-Gbaffou et al., 2012; Asamoah, 2020; Hendriks, 2018; Schuberth, 2018). Meanwhile, elites – notably politicians aiming to mobilise vigilantes against rivals' supporters – often lose control over groups whose growth they initially helped foster (LeBas, 2013; Mueller, 2008).

While this literature on popular networks and violent patronage is rich, it is focused on a small number of countries and cities: cities in South Africa, Nairobi in Kenya and Lagos in Nigeria. While these places may stand out, due to relatively high levels of violence, it

would be helpful if the literature offered a clearer sense of trends in urban insecurity across the region. Finally, more research on success cases, places previously notable for more violence but where violent incidents have decreased, could help clarify what changes in urban politics and development can limit urban insecurity. As it is, there is a small literature considering drivers of insecurity and strategies for mitigation (Fox and Beall, 2012; Otiso, 2015), but there is room for further analysis. Where there is now a significantly larger literature is on urban land conflict (for example, Chitonge and Mfune, 2015; Lombard and Rakodi, 2016; McMichael, 2016; Asafo, 2020) and on the relationship between cities and broader violent conflict in war and post-war settings, which we explore in detail in Section 6.

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Whereas the previous section reviewed the literature on clientelist politics, this section examines how elite patronage intersects with various forms of popular mobilisation; this mobilisation ranges from the collective action of informal sector workers through to urban protest and more predatory popular networks, using violence to secure political and material advantage. Motivating these varied forms of popular mobilisation are a range of material and welfare concerns, including a desire for improved labour conditions, access to urban space, a right to state-delivered services, protection from dispossession and violence, and more. Meanwhile, state and private-sector actors manoeuvre to coopt or repress popular organisations, reasserting political dominance and perpetuating patterns of capital accumulation and dispossession aligned with elite political and private interests. A challenge for future research is to explore how collective action, protest and urban political violence are shaped in specific domains of urban life, not only through clientelism but also through claims and discourses of citizenship, inclusion and rights.

## 5. Urban dimensions of electoral and party politics

While political parties and elections loom large in the literature on African urban politics, this review has kept a discussion of party politics in the background so far, focusing instead on mechanisms of political organising and mobilisation through clientelism, more programmatic or populist appeals, as well as collective action and popular protest. This section now aims to bring these different analytical threads together around the role played by political parties in these processes, particularly in terms of how parties appeal to the electorate: how clientelist politics shape party competition; what programmatic or populist appeals parties use; and how they leverage organised groups. It then considers how ruling parties seek to circumvent party competition in urban areas, notably through legal manoeuvres and the sidelining of local government institutions.

### 5.1. Party competition and party strategy

First, much of the Africanist literature on parties and party competition focuses on the national level, with more of a bias towards understanding party organising and appeals

in rural rather than urban areas (Mohamed Salih, 2003; LeBas, 2011; Arriola, 2012; Riedl, 2014; Harding, 2020). Regarding party activity in cities, one of the main findings is that opposition parties tend to be more successful, while incumbents dominate in rural areas (Jeffries, 1998; Harding, 2010; Resnick, 2011; Koter, 2013). The question is, why? As noted earlier, some scholars argue that incumbents, who have a resource advantage, due to their control of the state apparatus, can more effectively use clientelist appeals in rural than in urban areas (Koter, 2013). Yet other scholars complicate any straightforward narrative implying that rural areas are receptive to clientelist appeals and urban areas not (Paller, 2014, 2019; Nathan, 2016a, 2016b).

This ambiguity has motivated studies exploring why some opposition parties succeed in cities, while others struggle. Helle and Rakner, for instance, compare results in Uganda and Zambia and conclude that opposition political parties are more likely to win elections in cities where there are high levels of urban poverty relative to rural poverty, while they are likely to lose where rural poverty is higher (Helle and Rakner, 2012). Resnick, by contrast, argues that the answer lies in the different strategies used by opposition parties; they win where they make effective use of populist appeals, as the PF did in Zambia, while they struggle where they continue to rely on clientelism to attract poor urban voters, as was true of opposition parties in Senegal (Resnick, 2014a).[8] There is evidence of opposition parties elsewhere using elements of a populist strategy successfully. For instance, in Kampala, Uganda, opposition politicians appealed to urban slum dwellers concerned about land dispossession (Meinert and Kjær, 2016). But, as noted earlier, a more systematic investigation of parties' use of populist strategies is missing from much of the political science literature, which focuses more on a simple distinction between clientelist and more programmatic appeals. Moreover, even the literature assessing the efficacy of clientelist appeals in cities is limited, meaning there is a need for further research in this area.

Finally, parties – especially ruling parties – supplement their direct appeals to voters with more targeted strategies to coopt or subvert numerically important and influential groups, groups that are otherwise perceived as opposition-leaning. A particular target is organisations within the urban informal economy, including associations of market vendors, hawkers and workers in transport, among others (Hinfelaar et al., 2020; Muwanga et al., 2020; Titeca, 2014; Goodfellow and Titeca, 2012). Ruling and opposition parties also both target groups to act as political vigilantes, as discussed previously (LeBas, 2013; Mueller, 2008). As is true of parties' populist appeals, their efforts to organise with informal groups deserve more sustained attention within the literature on parties and elections in African cities, particularly within the more mainstream political science literature.

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[8] It is worth also noting that these populist strategies may come to fail them over time once they are in power, leading to and increased resort to coercive strategies to maintain power (Hinfelaar et al., 2020).

Relatedly, the effects of party competition on organised groups themselves, their autonomy and leverage, is an understudied topic. Available research points in conflicting directions, highlighting the dangers of aggressive cooptation and repression where competition is intense (Titeca, 2014) but also the space that competitive elections afford groups of informal sector workers to flout regulatory constraints and pursue their economic activities unimpeded (Young, 2018; Gillespie, 2017). It is worth noting that these studies often examine politics in the same city, for instance, both Titeca and Young focus on Kampala. One possible conclusion is that even where informal actors successfully leverage multiparty competition to their advantage, any gains remain limited and highly vulnerable to reversal, especially in the aftermath of an election. More research in this area may uncover examples of longer-term successes. However, the current emphasis on sporadic and marginal gains is consistent with a broader comparative literature, going right back to Piven and Cloward's classic study of "poor people's movements" in the United States (Piven and Cloward, 1979).

## 5.2. Subverting multiparty competition

While the success of opposition parties does vary, their tendency to dominate in major cities has led authoritarian ruling parties to pursue non-electoral strategies to regain control in cities, particularly capital cities. Ruling parties in Uganda, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe have all sought to sideline elected local government institutions through a variety of formal and informal interventions. In Uganda, this involved instituting a new Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) with an administrative head appointed by the president, and subsequently also a "minister of Kampala" with new powers (Gore and Muwanga, 2014; Muwanga et al., 2020). In Ethiopia, the now defunct EPRDF responded to opposition electoral success in 2005 by level manoeuvring to marginalise rival political coalitions in Addis Ababa (Gebremariam, 2020). In Zimbabwe, ZANU-PF sought to "neutralise the opposition-controlled local government by invalidating its decisions, frustrating its actions, and forcing it to toe the government line", thereby "[perpetuating] and [strengthening] ZANU-PF control of the city's affairs" (Kamete, 2006). These authoritarian state interventions do not, however, guarantee success, particularly where opposition parties continue to enjoy a strong political base. The saga of KCCA in Uganda, and the constant tensions between its appointed director and the popular elected lord mayor of Kampala, is a case in point Muwanga et al., 2020).

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This section reviews the literature on party competition in African cities, the strategies used by both opposition and incumbent parties to appeal to voters, as well as the authoritarian interventions of ruling parties seeking to subvert or circumvent multiparty competition entirely. The discussion stresses how previous analysis of clientelist politics, populism, as well as varieties of more bottom-up of street politics, all feed into dynamics of party competition. There is, however, considerable room for further research into the nature and efficacy of party appeals to urban voters, including through political settlement approaches, which thus far have remained quite separate

from the literature on party politics and on the nature of politician–voter linkages beyond clientelism. There is therefore scope for work to be taken forward that links factional conflict and manoeuvring with political coalitions to the specific dynamics of party organisation, and to political strategies such as populism. Future research could also continue to explore the implications of multiparty competition for popular collective action strategies, by addressing questions of whether, how and how much informal actors can turn party competition to their advantage. Before turning to questions of how these varied forms of urban politics shape urban governance processes, we turn to how the most extreme forms of politics – war and violent conflict – have shaped cities across the continent, and how this has been examined in the literature.

## 6. The urban politics of war and conflict

War and conflict have often had major consequences for cities, including in the context of struggles for independence, as noted above. Yet the relationship between cities and violent conflict has been the subject of burgeoning literature only over the past decade or so, as urbanisation and urban growth have intersected with the rise of some kinds of violence, and decline of others, across the world. The broader literature on war and conflict in Africa is beyond the scope of this review, as is much literature that documents migration and population dynamics in war contexts. However, we here briefly touch on aspects of this literature as relevant to the question of the urban politics that emerges out of broader conflicts or, importantly in some cases, the cessation of war. This section first briefly overviews some of the ways in which questions of urban politics emerge out of existing research on war and conflict in Africa, before turning to literature on violent conflict within cities across in "post-war" situations.

### 6.1. Cities and warfare

In the 2000s, despite a growing interest in the role of cities in contemporary war and terrorism (Graham, 2004, 2010; Abrahamsen et al., 2009; Coward, 2009), there was relatively little attention paid to Africa in this literature. While some authors considered in passing the effects of war on cities (for example, Mamdani, 1988; Sommers, 2003, 2015; Bryceson and Potts, 2005) this was rarely a central aim of research and analysis, with a few exceptions relating to emblematic cases, such as Mogadishu (Webersik, 2006; Lindley, 2010), and studies of specific conflict-related issues, such as the militarisation of labour organisation in Freetown and Monrovia (Hoffman, 2007). However, within the broader literature on conflict in Africa, urban politics comes through indirectly in some analyses of the causes of civil war, even when that war itself plays out primarily in rural terrain. Mkandawire (2002) argued that in Africa, most late-twentieth-century rural civil wars ought to be seen as fundamentally urban in origin, rooted in significant 'urban malaise' (Mkandawire, 2002). These rebellions are often led by urban-based elites, even though the vast majority of foot soldiers are rural dwellers, reflecting decisions by urban elites to shift their struggle to the countryside after being defeated in the urban political arena. In this respect, "the locus of discontent is urban", in the sense that the mobilisers of conflict were urban elites seeking to recapture urban

control, rather than being rooted in agrarian crisis, as sometimes assumed (Mkandawire, 2002: 191).

The relative neglect of Africa within the literature on cities and war has reversed over the past decade, with a raft of articles and several edited journal collections examining the relationship between the two. An edited collection on cities and conflict in "fragile states" (Beall et al., 2013) contained a number of papers on the role of cities in conflict and post-conflict settings in Africa, including Gulu, Uganda (Branch, 2013), Goma, DRC (Vlassenroot and Büscher, 2013) and Kigali (Goodfellow and Smith, 2013). In this collection, Beall et al. (2013) distinguish between three types of conflict – sovereign conflicts between states; civil conflicts within state borders; and civic conflict, defined as the violent expression of societal grievances within cities. Authors in this collection note that while urban areas are often targets of attack in both sovereign and civil conflicts, they can also be "eyes of the storm" in civil conflicts (as was the case in Gulu) as well as important economic hubs for war economies (Goma). The same cities that have been "safe havens" can also be sites of new forms of "civic conflict" that break out after wars have ended – examined here in the case of Gulu by Branch (2013). The fact that cities can remain relatively secure and calm, even in civil war situations, has also come through in literature on Kinshasa (Ellis, 2003; Freund, 2009) and Juba (Martin and Mosel, 2011). This literature speaks to a more general concern with the urbanisation of conflict over time (Beall et al., 2013; Golooba Mutebi and Sjögren, 2017) and the idea of "fragile cities" (Muggah, 2014, 2015). If cities in the early independence period were seen as political spaces, largely by virtue of being elite/government hubs that politically dominated mostly rural territories, in the late 20th and early 21st centuries they have often been characterised by their own internal political conflicts and associated violence.

The agenda of exploring the urban dimension of conflict and post-conflict dynamics has been taken forward in a further special issue edited by Büscher (2018), building on her earlier work (Büscher, 2012, 2016). Aiming to "bridge both the 'urban gap' in African conflict studies as well as the 'political' gap in African urban studies" (Büscher, 2018: 193), the collection explores the relationship between conflict and urban centres in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, DR Congo, South Sudan and Kenya. Büscher's introduction focuses on the ways in which war reshapes cities on three levels: urban landscapes, urban governance and urban identities. Within the collection, articles examine issues including the role of small towns in Rwanda as post-conflict spaces of strategic control (Cottyn, 2018), and the role of roads and motorcycle-taxi drivers in producing urban space and social networks in Goma (Oldenburg, 2018). Van Acker (2018), meanwhile, argues against the idea that the 2015 uprising in Bujumbura represented an urbanisation of conflict, suggesting that a rural–urban opposition in Burundi has been constructed politically and obscures more complex dynamics.

While cities can sometimes grow and even thrive in war contexts, as the cases of Gulu, Goma, Luanda (Gastrow, 2020b) and Maiduguri (Abdul-Azeez, 2018) testify, they can

also radically shrink during wartime, as happened in Kampala in the 1980s (Bryceson and Potts, 2005) and Mogadishu in 2007–08 (Lindley 2010). Some cities also have periods of shrinkage and periods of growth in different phases of war, as exemplified by the case of Juba (Martin and Mosel, 2011). Real estate markets often boom, attracting significant speculation, as is evident in the case of Eastern Congo's urban centres (Peyton, 2018). Relatedly, there have been numerous articles examining the phenomenon of what might be termed "humanitarian urbanism" (Büscher et al., 2018), with Bartlett et al. (2012) examining how, in the context of Nyala in Darfur, the arrival of humanitarian agencies generated "a distinct spatial structure" and "niche gentrification", alongside a thriving informal economy. These dynamics can also feed into urban politics, particularly where the humanitarian economy reconfigures existing socioeconomic relations, hierarchies and decision-making norms, as has been observed in Gulu (Branch, 2013; Büscher et al., 2018) or provides new opportunities for consolidation of elite dominance, as in Kigali (Goodfellow and Smith, 2013).

## 6.2. The politics of "post"-conflict urbanism

Regardless of the nature of population dynamics during war, the phenomenon of explosive urban growth after civil wars is widespread, with Kigali (Goodfellow and Smith, 2013) as well as various cities in Angola and DRC (Udelsmann et al., 2021) being particularly notable examples. The politics that can emerge in immediate "post-conflict" cities is inevitably complex and riven with tensions, which, depending on how they are managed and the ability of the incoming government to suppress them, can either explode into new forms of "civic" conflict or remain below the surface, as again evident in the case of Kigali (Goodfellow and Smith, 2013; Finn, 2018). The fact that civic conflicts often emerge after the formal cessation of armed conflict underlines the difficulty in cleanly distinguishing between conflict and post-conflict situations. This was evident in Freetown, where crime rates increased year-on-year after the war ended, with the emergence of youth gangs which demonstrate "more similarities than differences with what is subsumed under the banner of 'armed conflict'" (Kunkeler and Peters, 2011: 282; see also Mitton, 2021). Post-conflict Juba has experienced a proliferation of violent conflicts, with residents observing that "Before the peace the enemy was definite. Now, in comparison, the enemies are many and unknown" (Martin and Mosel, 2011: 30). One of the key sources of conflict in post-war situations of urban growth is usually access to land, as again evident in the case of Juba, where McMichael examines the "opportunism of a range of civilian and military actors seeking to benefit from the fluid post-war context" (McMichael, 2014: 389) by exploiting their access to land and associated patronage networks. The intensification of this conflict was partly rooted in the way in which public officials and traditional leaders manipulated ethnic tensions to ethnicise land to serve their interests, despite the limited role of ethnic tensions in actually driving the conflict (McMichael, 2014, 2016).

The politics of managing post-conflict cities is thus commonly bound to the rapid urban growth noted above, consequent pressures on land and the difficulty in finding creative and durable solutions to this. Beall and Goodfellow (2014) argue that the failure to

address challenges of post-conflict urban governance can be linked to the 'myth of the temporary city', noting that governments and international development actors repeatedly 'fail to perceive that the urban growth that occurs in wartime is extremely difficult to reverse, and likely to be permanent, instead treating their swollen cities as a temporary aberration' (Beall and Goodfellow, 2014: 26). Questions of policing can also be politically contentious in post-conflict settings, where new combinations of residents, refugee influx and reconfigured power relations, as well as the proliferation of arms, generates ongoing challenges to everyday security. Studies on post-conflict urban policing dynamics include Baker on Sierra Leone and Liberia (Baker, 2006, 2010), Hendriks (2018) on Goma and Lamarque (2020) in Kigali and Gisenyi in Rwanda.

Violent urban conflict is not, of course, limited to war or post-war situations. Globally, there is a large literature on urban violence, much of which has focused on Latin America, with particularly notable contributions from Moser and McIlwaine (2004, 2006), Jütersonke et al. (2009), Rodgers (2004, 2009) and Moncada (2016, 2020). A more recent edited collection by Moser and McIlwaine (2014) explores the evolution of urban violence and shifting paradigms of urban violence research and policy intervention, though with only one contribution on Africa from McMichael (2014). More generally, however, there is a substantial literature on urban violence in certain African cities, most notably (outside of South Africa) Nairobi (for example, LeBas, 2013; Obala and Mattingly, 2014) and Lagos (Akinwale and Aderinto, 2011; LeBas, 2013) as also discussed in Section 4.3. Elfversson and Höglund (2019) argue that violence in Nairobi is linked to a broader "conflict complex" that transcends the urban arena, while Jones and Kimari (2019) centre gender in their analysis and highlight the "often invisibilised emotional, reproductive and socio-economic gendered labour" done by women in Nairobi's informal settlements.

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This section has examined the various ways in which cities in Africa have been affected by war and conflict, as discussed in the existing literature. Much of this literature has come from either conflict studies, area studies, geography or urban studies, rather than political science or political economy. Perhaps in consequence of this, some of the ways in which these processes intersect with the broader dynamics of capitalist development are underexplored, as are the intersections between these forms of conflict and other aspects of politics, such as clientelism and party politics. This literature also remains quite separate from the development studies-oriented literature on urban service delivery, though these things are strongly conditioned by conflict dynamics in many parts of the continent. There is therefore significant room to build on the above literatures to help better understand the nature of urban politics and governance processes in countries, regions and cities affected by violent conflict. This could be an aspect of research on African cities that brings forms of political settlement analysis rooted in political economy and development studies into closer conversation

with the rather different body of work on political settlements associated with conflict and peace studies.

## 7. The politics of urban governance and service delivery

Having considered various manifestations of the politics of contemporary African cities, this section considers the literature on decentralisation, urban governance and urban service delivery, which are affected in multiple ways by the forms of politics outlined in Sections 3, 4 and 5, as well as feeding back into them. It considers the extent to which the literature on urban formal governance institutions relates to politics, as well as examining the politics of planning and of specific forms of service delivery.

### 7.1. Decentralisation and urban governance

Across the globe, decentralisation is the foundation on which urban governance has been built since the late 20th century. From the 1980s onwards, "decentralisation fever" gripped the international community (Tendler, 1997), and it has certainly been a widely adopted policy strategy: Crook and Manor (1998) estimated that by the mid-1990s, 80% of countries were engaged in some form of decentralisation While there is no space to go into the vast literature on decentralisation and its relationship to governance (see Faguet [2014] for an overview), we here highlight some of the work that is particularly relevant to Africa, and to urban governance specifically.

Stren and Eyoh (2007) have indicated that there have been three waves of decentralisation in Africa. The first wave (1940s–1960s) involved an attempt by the colonial administration and nationalist leaders to establish local authorities as the avenue to democratise the delivery of local services. After independence, local governments were abandoned by the nationalist leaders who regarded them as having the potential to generate regional sentiments that could challenge central planning and national integration. By the late 1970s, the second wave had taken off, as central governments were looking for administrative means to transfer the delivery of some functions and projects to the district level, closer to the people, but these efforts were quite weak and ineffectual. The third and most recent wave, which began from the late 1980s and has been the most far-reaching, was associated with structural adjustment programmes and subsequent concerns with "good governance". This has occurred alongside the growth of civil society as a means of promoting democratisation and the push for local authorities to be more entrepreneurial. In some cases, however, including Uganda and Tanzania, this also happened to align well with extending the territorial reach of regimes seeking to consolidate their power. Relatedly, some of the literature on decentralisation has focused on the politics of central–local relations, which are central to the effectiveness and accountability of decentralised governance. Crook (2003) finds that decentralisation has been used as a tool of central patronage rather than local empowerment, arguing that "'elite capture' of local power structures has been facilitated by the desire of ruling elites to create and sustain power bases in the countryside" (Crook, 2003: 77). These findings have been echoed by Boone (2003)

in the context of West Africa, and Green (2010) and Lindemann (2011) in relation to Uganda, although decentralisation in Uganda has also generated new local-level conflicts (Green, 2008). Lambright, meanwhile, finds that the performance of district councils differs enormously, depending on the nature of informal political linkages between central government and local government personnel (Lambright, 2011).

In common with much of the literature on decentralisation in Africa, however, these studies focus primarily on rural areas. There is, however, a growing literature on decentralisation and the politics of this in urban areas in Africa. The implications of decentralisation for urban service delivery, in particular, have long been a concern, including in the donor community, particularly given that political and especially fiscal decentralisation often lag behind administrative decentralisation in Africa (Dillinger, 1994). Particularly significant in exploring the politics of decentralised urban governance specifically has been the work of Resnick (2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2021). Resnick (2021) provides an excellent overview of the variations in institutional frameworks of urban governance that have emerged from the current wave of decentralisation in African cities, including with respect to both vertical and horizontal relations. In contrast to the discussion of vertical and horizontal power relations in some of the political settlements literature, "vertical" generally refers to relationships between city governments and national governments, while "horizontal" refers to relations between different actors – for example, elected politicians versus non-elected bureaucrats – at the city government level. Variations in intra-governmental relations across both these dimensions are not necessarily defined along the lines of colonial inheritance. For instance, in lusophone Africa, assemblies and executive bodies in Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tomé and Principe are elected throughout the country, while both assemblies and executives are appointed in Angola and Guinea Bissau. Mozambique operates a hybrid version. Similar variation in fiscal transfers, legislative framework and mode of raising own revenue exist among countries in anglophone, lusophone and francophone Africa.

Much of the literature on decentralisation that has been most influential within the field, including that which pays concerted attention to urban areas, has not been focused on Africa but on other regions of the world, such as Latin America (Tendler, 1997; Faguet, 2004, 2012, 2014; Grindle, 2009). In much of Latin America, colonialism ended substantially longer ago than in Africa, and both industrialisation and urbanisation advanced substantially earlier – all of which provided more scope for city governments to develop relative political autonomy from the centre. It is therefore important to note that the kinds of decentralised municipal governance successes that have been celebrated in Latin America are not necessarily easy to replicate in African contexts (Smit and Pieterse, 2014).

Several case studies across Western, Eastern and Southern Africa have demonstrated that the model of electing executives (for example, mayors) is likely to result in vertically divided cities, whereby opposition parties gain control of major cities

(Resnick, 2014a; Lambright, 2014). This has led to the situation in which central governments deny, or unduly delay, resource allocation to opposition-controlled cities, limiting their autonomy and ability to provide urban infrastructure and services to the people.[9] In countries such as Ghana, where mayors are appointed, Bob-Millar and Obeng-Odoom (2011) noted that there have been concerns that mayors are not accountable to the citizenry, but to the president and the ruling political party, thereby generating a public discussion of introducing multi-party elections in the local government system. This is largely based on the perception that the elected mayoral system will make mayors more accountable to the people and bring more rapid urban economic development (Obeng-Odoom, 2013). Nevertheless, Obeng-Odoom (2013) argues that multi-party elections in urban governance alone will not lead to mayoral accountability and poverty reduction, particularly in the Ghanaian context, where elections are characterised by ethnicity, voter illiteracy, tribalism, vote buying, bloated voter register and election rigging. Deeper accountability is also impeded in many African countries because municipal budgets are too small and often lack transparency in reporting (Mitlin et al., 2018).

These struggles between city governments and national governments have led to a notable recent trend of central governments attempting to reverse aspects of decentralisation and take back control over capital cities particularly. Central governments have long been reluctant to relinquish control over their most economically and politically significant cities, for obvious reasons (Wunsch, 2001), but in recent times these dynamics have been especially evident in Kampala (Gore and Muwanga, 2014; Muwanga et al., 2020) and Dar es Salaam (Ewald and Mhamba, 2015; Fjeldstad et al., 2017; Schindler et al., 2021). These recentralisation efforts are often closely linked to issues of control over tax revenues, as we discuss in the section on fiscal politics below. At the same time, despite clear political motivations, arguments for recentralisation are often bound up with the very real technical challenges of governing cities with fragmented authority structures, worsened by the pace of urban growth and the spilling of cities beyond their municipal borders (Cirolia, 2020a). For major cities, a key contemporary challenge is how to create new metropolitan authorities to govern the wider urban conurbation, including but surpassing the city itself. These processes are inevitably highly contested politically, given that they involve shifting formal authority away from existing agencies and vesting it in others (Gore and Gopakuma, 2015; Goodfellow and Mukwaya, 2021). Again, there is a longstanding literature on South African on issues of metropolitanisation (see, for example, Cameron, 2005; Binza, 2008) but little beyond this, despite the increased urgency of this issue across the continent.

Another aspect of the politics of urban governance that has received considerable attention concerns contentious relations between local governments and social groups

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[9] See Gorelick (2018) for a discussion central government resistance to the raising of municipal bonds by city governments.

that are excluded from urban space or decision-making, due to alliances between municipal authorities and private business rooted in a mutual interest in intensifying urban land use (Lindell and Appelblad, 2009; Lindell and Ampaire, 2017). This – along with modernist and globalist urban planning visions that stigmatise informality – can result in deliberate attempts by the state, through crackdown exercises and market infrastructural redevelopment, to displace urban traders from inner-city spaces to make way for the valorisation of the private sector (Obeng-Odoom, 2013; Gillespie, 2016; Asante and Helbrecht, 2019). Likewise, municipal authorities sometimes displace residents of informal settlements in cities, in order to provide prime lands for large-scale real estate development (Afenah, 2012), as also explored in Section 2. It is against this backdrop that Obeng-Odoom (2011) contends that state intervention in cities target not just the economic activities of informal workers but also their places of abode. Urban governance is thus drawn into the politics of "sanitising" urban space, while city politicians often seek to garner votes from the informal workers and settlers at the same time by offering to shield them from these governance interventions, often spurring conflict between different arms of city government (Goodfellow, 2013b; Muchadenyika and Williams, 2017).

## 7.2. Urban governance and the politics of planning and service delivery

It is difficult to separate the politics of urban governance from the political dynamics underpinning the planning and delivery of urban infrastructure and services in African cities. Planning itself is fundamentally shaped both by legacies of colonialism and the politics associated with these legacies, and by clientelist politics and dynamics of "forbearance" as these impact on efforts to plan and regulate urban space. It is therefore possible to consider the politics of planning in relation to varying temporalities and scales, from the role of elite "city visioning" of the kind discussed in Section 2, to the everyday, street-level politics that conditions the efforts of planners, regulators, enforcement agencies and building inspectors on the ground.

In explaining the root causes of the urban planning and governance problems in African cities, Lynch et al. (2020) are of the view that colonial planning and policies created African cities which were ill-prepared to cope with post-independence growth. They further indicate that these challenges have been complicated by the numerous post-colonial crises and the failure of successive governments to adopt contemporary practices of urban planning and management, creating urban planning crises which require urgent intervention. Similarly, de Satgé and Watson (2018) contend that the urban planning crisis in African cities has been perpetuated and exacerbated by the imposition of visions of cities such Dubai, Shanghai or Singapore on African cities which are largely informal and poor, creating conflict between the ambitions of state and non-state actors. In coping with the failures of urban planning, Deuskar (2019) posit that the urban poor resort to clientelism in order to gain access to state resources, albeit the benefits are inadequate and sometimes interfere with the implementation of formal plans. Andersen et al. (2015) demonstrate that urban dwellers adopt collective

forms of sociocultural organisation to guide land use practices in unplanned areas, leading them to pose the question: who actually plans the African city?

Thus, if much of the "forward planning" in African cities is hampered by existing colonial urban spatial structure while also being drawn into ambitious digitised visions of a particular "world class" modernity,[10] the regulatory side of planning plays out at street level through very different kinds of everyday politics. In the sphere of urban "development control" (that is, enforcing compliance with existing plans, land use regulations, building controls, and so on) the dynamics of "forbearance" (Holland, 2016) discussed in Section 3.1 are often central. Thus, while the view from above is often about using planning to decongest cities in order to attract investment – commonly alongside an agenda of social control echoing colonial urbanism (Mabogunje, 1990; Myers, 2003; Njoh, 2009; Silva, 2015) – this clashes with the majority politics of African cities, through which urban dwellers frequently bargain their way through urban life through the negotiability of planning and regulatory frameworks. One particular obsession of many governments is the "eradication" of informality and framing of informal areas as "spatial pathologies" to be removed (Kamete, 2013), which, Kamete argues, defies the realities of the whole urban process (ibid). Meanwhile, Goodfellow (2013b) examines why efforts to enforce regulatory compliance meet such divergent outcomes in Kampala and Kigali, exploring how the "political bargaining environment" conditions the extent to which a permissive attitude to regulation is politically viable or desirable in different contexts.[11] Cirolia and Berrisford (2017) offer a comparative analysis of Nairobi, Addis Ababa and Harare, arguing that each case represents a distinct form of "negotiated planning", with a wide range of actors involved in this negotiation and significant differences between central and peripheral areas.

These analyses of the bargaining and negotiation involved in the everyday implementation of urban plans and regulations also indicate the important role of "street-level bureaucrats" (Lipsky, 1980) in African cities; it is the building inspectors and development control officials involved in the planning approval process that often determine whether buildings that fail to comply with standards and planning frameworks get built. As Holland (2016) points out, it is important to distinguish between politically driven non-enforcement (forbearance) and the everyday permissiveness at the street level, which is more about petty corruption than building political support. A significant literature exists on "everyday corruption" in Africa (for example, Olivier de Sardan, 1999; Blundo et al., 2008; Smith, 2010). In the context of cities specifically, this literature highlights how the political economy of post-structural adjustment Africa – in which many public bureaucracies were underfunded and

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[10] See Watson (2015) and Mboup and Oyelaran-Oyeyinka (2019) for a discussion of the "smart city" concept in the African context.

[11] Note that, as with other sections, we do not consider in detail the literature on planning and associated politics in South Africa, which is very large compared with the rest of the continent but is also often quite specific in focus, given the distinct Apartheid legacy. A few key sources here are Harrison (2006); Harrison et al. (2007); Harrison and Todes (2015); Parnell (1993); Todes (2012); Berrisford (2011).

understaffed and aspects of urban governance increasingly privatised – has given rise to significant new opportunities for petty corruption in service delivery (Gombay, 1994; Blundo, 2006; Crook and Ayee, 2006).

Scholars have analysed the connection between urban governance and urban service delivery in African cities. Jones et al. (2014) believe that governance and political economy factors provide insight into the determinants of effective delivery of public services in urban areas. Devas (2001) takes it a step further by identifying these factors, comprising of (1) a political system in which the votes of the poor count; (2) a city government system with some capacity to deliver; and (3) a dynamic civil society which can press the case of the poor. Nevertheless, certain local institutional dynamics could limit the capacity of the local government system to give meaning to the voting power of the urban poor. Depending on the context, where urban areas are opposition-leaning this can either lead to enhanced attention from government service delivery agencies, where the ruling party sees this as a way to claw back support, or, conversely, can stimulate government neglect as a form of punishment for opposition parties (Lambright, 2014). Evidence suggests, however, that voting patterns rarely make a sustained difference to the quality or affordability of service delivery in urban areas in Africa (Mitlin et al., 2018). While the lack of resources and autonomy affecting most local governments clearly play a role, Omar (2009) contends that the problem of inadequate delivery of urban service is not lack of funds but lack of transparency and accountability in governance, underqualified staff and administration, and the tenuous relationship between the urban residents and local governments.

Obeng-Odoom (2017) and others have also explored the unequal distribution of services among social groups. Cobbinah (2017), for instance, observed in Kumasi that there are social and spatial inequalities among people living in different classes of residential neighbourhoods, as low- and middle-class neighbourhoods received limited service delivery compared to "high class" neighbourhoods. This reflects the extent to which urban planning in African cities is elitist in nature, prioritising the needs of the few wealthy people, while making little room for participation and aspirations of the majority of urban poor (Cobbinah, 2017; Bidandi and Williams, 2020). Moreover, far from delivering services to try and build support, city authorities are sometimes found applying brutal force in their quest to resolve urban planning problems in low-income neighbourhoods. An extreme example was Zimbabwe's 2005 controversial urban clean-up campaign, Operation *Murambatsvina* ("Restore Order"). This sought to eradicate "illegal" housing and informal jobs in cities, which led to the eviction of 700,000 people (Kamete, 2009; Potts, 2006). Though exceptional, small-scale evictions are commonplace across African cities (Lines and Makau, 2018). Access to key utilities, notably safe and reliable piped water, are similarly limited in lower-income neighbourhoods, a trend that decades of water privatisation have done little to reverse, contributing instead to additional affordability challenges (Budds and McGranahan, 2003; Mitlin et al., 2018).

## 7.3. The role of traditional authorities in urban governance

Traditional authorities are the oldest political and governance institutions in most parts of Africa (Mahama, 2009), though their role, authenticity and continuity are the subject of extensive debate (Mamdani, 1996; Kyed and Buur, 2007; Marrengane et al., 2021). In pre-colonial times, local administration centred significantly on traditional authorities who were considered the repository of executive, judicial, military, legislative, cultural and religious functions (Tonwe and Osemwota, 2013). Increasing population in many indigenous African communities coincided with the arrival and expansion of the colonial administration, which fundamentally transformed traditional institutions, as noted in Section 1 (Mamdani, 1996; Marrengane et al., 2021). Consequently, the role of traditional authorities became increasingly complex, as they were required to provide the additional administrative function of enforcing policies and laws of the colonial government, under the indirect rule. The educated elites at the time were often opposed to the intermediary role of traditional authorities. After independence, the early post-colonial government, led by these educated elites, across the continent sought to reduce or eradicate the influence of traditional authorities (Mamdani, 1996) – as evident, for example, in the cases of South Africa (Beall et al., 2005) and Uganda (Engelbert, 2002a; Goodfellow and Lindemann, 2013) - but they have never completely disappeared from the political landscape (Olivier de Sardan, 2011). Indeed, there was a widespread "resurgence" in the role of traditional authorities in many African countries in the late 20th century (Engelbert 2002b; Ubink, 2008) with important implications for urban governance (Beall et al. 2005; Ubink, 2007; Goodfellow and Lindemann, 2013).

In the contemporary political environment in Africa, the major debate has been whether traditional authorities harm or help efforts by central and local government authorities to deliver projects and programmes to their communities. In responding to this question, some scholars are quick to associate traditional authorities with rural development, due to their evolution and indigenous practices. For instance, Baldwin (2016) argued that traditional authorities in most parts of Africa facilitate the delivery of many public goods to their rural communities through collaboration with politicians. Nevertheless, Tieleman and Uitermark (2019) have indicated that traditional authorities not only endure in rural areas but play a number of crucial roles in the urban governance of Africa's fast-growing cities.

Firstly, in some countries, appointment of persons into local assemblies are done by the president, in consultation with the traditional authorities and other relevant stakeholders in the area. Ghana's Local Governance Act of 2016 makes provision for this kind of consultation. Secondly, city authorities are often in engagements with traditional authorities to offer lands for major urban infrastructural projects. This is because traditional authorities own a large part of urban lands in some countries. This is why Tieleman and Uitermark (2019) believe that, although the formation of a modern state has barred the involvement of traditional authorities in politics, it has afforded

them greater power as managers of the lands in urban, peri-urban and rural communities, which is sometimes seen as part of the "social contract" in modern Africa (Nugent 2010). In conflict-prone countries, such as South Sudan, traditional authorities are also still relevant in providing local justice and conflict resolution in urban areas (Santschi, 2014).

Owing to these crucial roles, Beall (2006) suggests that hybrid and collaborative forms of urban governance, involving traditional authorities and city authorities, are crucial for the fast-paced urban transformation that most African cities desire. Olowu and Eroro (2000) have, however, cautioned that a possible convergence of state and society institutions should take into consideration the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats which characterise these local institutions, otherwise efforts at achieving good governance will yield little or no appreciable results. Moreover, Goodfellow and Lindemann (2013) examine how conflict ensued in the case of Kampala when the Kingdom of Buganda and government institutions failed to agree to their respective roles in relation to issues concerning land and decentralised governance.

While the literature on traditional authorities and development is extensive, few studies had explicitly examined the role of these authorities in urban governance, until very recently. A new special issue edited by Marrengane et al. (2021) plays an important role in addressing this gap, with case studies from Burkina Faso, Senegal, Ghana, South Africa, Botswana and Eswatini (Swaziland). The editors argue that traditional authorities play a much more central role in urban governance and politics than is often assumed. Land inevitably plays a central role in this, but the special issue also engages with the roles of traditional leaders as moral authorities, the cooptation of traditional authorities by the state, and the various ways in which they are used to bolster government legitimacy claims. The rising significance of traditional authorities as urban areas expand ever more into previously rural terrain (Simelane and Sihlongonyane 2021) has therefore opened up an important new area of research on African urban politics and governance. There is also growing awareness of the ways in which traditional authorities are actively involved in forms of urban planning (Akaateba et al., 2018; Molebatsi and Morobolo, 2021).

## 7.4. Urban governance and fiscal politics

The fiscal dimensions of governance are particularly important in urban areas, given the extensive and complex service delivery responsibilities of municipal governments and the corresponding need for them to raise more substantial revenues than rural areas (Parnell and Pieterse, 2014; Fjeldstad, 2006; Cirolia, 2020a; 2020b. These issues of taxation, budgeting and spending are inevitably highly political. Cities (and especially capital or economically core cities) generate large proportions of national tax revenues as well as local ones, yet are often opposition-leaning, which generates political battles between central and municipal governments about how much revenue should remain with the city government and how much central government resource should be transferred downwards to municipalities. Consequently, fiscal transfers and

their link to service delivery needs are some of the most contentious aspects of central–local government relations in African cities (Resnick, 2014b, 2021; Lambright, 2014).  While rural and smaller urban areas often rely heavily on central government transfers, larger cities often raise significant amounts of their own revenue through sources such as property taxation, business licenses, fees paid by market vendors and transport operators, and user fees for services (Fjeldstad, 2006).

Urban fiscal politics has been an important aspect of the urban governance discourse in Africa, though most literature that has examined fiscal issues through a political lens has focused on property taxation and participatory budgeting. Studies have sought to explain the reasons behind the inability of African cities to collect property taxes for urban development. Fjeldstad et al. (2019) argue that, in the context of Tanzania, a central reason is lack of institutional trust, particularly given repeated attempts by the central government to take over property tax collection from city authorities, often quite suddenly, generating resentment that undermined effective transfer of information and impeded administrative capacity. Likewise, Nyabwengi et al. (2020) observed in Nairobi that policy, administrative and political challenges – such as an outdated legal framework, irregular revaluations of the tax base and lack of political will – have resulted in low revenue generation from property taxation. Goodfellow (2017b) similarly examines the reasons behind poor property tax collection in Kigali and Addis Ababa, arguing that property taxation has been obstructed by conflicting imperatives on land reform and tax reform, alongside resistance from vested interests created by the rapid generation of real estate-based wealth.

Sierra Leone has been highlighted as a relatively rare example of success in significantly improving property tax collection (Jibao and Prichard 2015; 2016). The authors highlight that the relative success of the property tax reform programme in Sierra Leone is attributable to locally owned reform strategies that were able to confront both technical and political challenges, partly by engaging in public outreach and visibly contentious efforts to enforce tax payment by elites (Jibao and Prichard, 2016). They also show significant differences between different urban councils, arguing that opposition councils have a greater incentive to raise their own resources through property tax, and that heightened electoral competition can generate sustained revenue gains (Jibao and Prichard, 2015). This, however, sits in tension with experiences elsewhere, such as Kampala, where opposition councils are subject to constant efforts to interfere with their tax-collecting power as well as sometimes the withholding of central transfers (Lambright, 2014).

Another context that has attracted significant interest with respect to taxation reforms and associated politics is Nigeria, and especially Lagos. Bodea and Lebas (2014) emphasise that individuals in Nigerian cities with a positive experience of public delivery of urban infrastructure and services are more likely to pay property taxes. They, however, indicate that where access to community-provided urban infrastructure and services is a better alternative to one provided by the state, individuals are less

likely to pay property tax. The enormous increases in revenue collection by Lagos State, which has substantial taxation powers within Nigeria's federal system and collects personal income tax, are explained by Cheeseman and De Gramont (2017) in relation to political factors such as electoral competition and the commitment of the Lagos elite to building a global "mega-city" in the context of federal government neglect and hostility. Meanwhile, Goodfellow and Owen (2020) examine how in Lagos increases in willingness to pay property tax specifically are also linked to people's perception that it bolsters their tenure security and property rights, as well as their expectation that it cements a social contract with the state, potentially leading to enhanced service provision that they do not yet have.

At the other end of the fiscal process is budgeting and spending, which has also started to attract attention in the literature – particularly in relation to participatory budgeting. Studies on participatory budgeting in African cities generally agree that it is usually tokenistic in nature. Marumahoko et al. (2018) argued that participatory budgeting in Kwekwe city is not participatory because it has a top-down orientation and allows for the domination of budgeting by local bureaucrats and elected councilors. Muse (2016) shares a similar concern, finding the participatory budgeting process in Lagos to suffer from a lack of awareness by citizens of what participatory budgeting is all about, overdependence on financial handouts from unreliable central governments and a deficit of transparency and accountability. There is very little positive information about the practice of participatory budgeting in African cities, except for Cabannes (2015), who conducted a cross-national comparative study of 20 cities, including four in Africa, which indicated that participatory budgeting can improve urban governance and service delivery, whilst doing little to alter existing power relations between city authorities and urban dwellers.

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This section has considered various aspects of urban governance and the ways in which the politics of these has been explored in the literature. This literature is now quite extensive, with some attention to urban governance as well as growing interest in the politics of planning and service delivery, the role of traditional authorities and "hybrid' forms of governance" in urban areas, and the politics of fiscal governance. All of these areas of literature feel quite nascent and underdeveloped with respect to their engagement with urban politics, however – a consequence of the long legacy of focusing primarily on rural areas in the 20th-century literature on African governance and decentralisation.

Some notable gaps emerge with respect to the meso- and micro-level politics of urban governance, such as the internal politics of urban governance in African cities, particularly the engagement between elected and appointed local councillors, between local councillors and their electorates and between bureaucrats and local councillors. There is also lack of studies on the role of appointed local councillors in the urban

governance of African cities. The literature on planning and services could also explore much more in terms of how efforts to coproduce these aspects of urban governance in incremental, community-based and decentralised ways are politically facilitated, obstructed or contested. When it comes to traditional authorities, the literature is concentrated on West African countries, such as Ghana and Nigeria, and South Africa, while we know very little about these issues in Eastern and Central Africa. This is partly due to the different history and contemporary roles of traditional (or indeed religious) authorities in these areas, but still constitutes a significant gap in the literature that any approach to political settlements in urban areas should address. Finally, there is room to expand on the emerging literature on the politics of property taxation, which remains the greatest source of untapped revenue potential in Africa (Monkam and Moore, 2015), as well as exploring other aspects of municipal taxation and expenditure. Research could examine the politics of property tax reforms that are being initiated or are ongoing in many countries, as well as exploring other existing or potential forms of land value capture.

## 8. Conclusions and future research directions

This review has explored a wide range of literature on African urban politics and political economy, to provide an overview of existing research, as well as an analysis of key debates on how the politics of African cities has responded to both national-level political currents and global capitalist pressures. It began with a discussion of uneven urban development, from its colonial roots through to contemporary dynamics of urban economic restructuring (Sections 1–2). It then explores what varied forms of urban politics have emerged alongside this uneven development, from clientelist politics to collective action to urban manifestations of electoral politics to the urban politics of war and conflict (Sections 3–6). Finally, the review turned to urban governance, examining themes including decentralisation and urban governance, the politics of planning and service delivery, the role of traditional authorities and urban fiscal politics, plus how these relate to the broader political economic trends discussed in earlier sections.

The review has revealed that a substantial range of issues relevant to urban politics is discussed in the literature, with a notable recent surge of research interest in the politics of informal labour and informal settlements, different forms of clientelism at the city level, the political economy and ecology of investments in land, infrastructure and property, urban conflict and violence, and varying forms of urban popular mobilisation and protest. Amid this wealth of scholarship, there are nevertheless significant gaps – or areas in which research and analysis feels more underdeveloped – that we have highlighted and in conclusion will briefly reflect upon. Without rehearsing all these again, we here summarise some of the main trends in terms of thinner areas of literature and how these might be addressed through ACRC and other research.

A first concern is that the large range of disciplines with an interest in African cities research has generated a dispersed literature that engages with politics in limited and fragmentary ways. For example, while there is substantial scholarship on land

administration, decentralised governance, planning and housing, the majority of this remains technical and managerial in approach, with a relatively small literature explicitly examining their political dimensions. A shift towards analysing these aspects of urban development as politically constituted domains embedded within systems, as proposed by ACRC, offers significant potential here. There is also scope for much more research on the politics of changing modalities of service delivery and of new forms of infrastructure financing, as well as on the relationship between infrastructure and services and urban electoral politics. The everyday relationships between different tiers of government within the city, as well as between politicians and bureaucrats, and the allocation of roles between different agencies and spatially defined authorities, are all riven with conflicts and tensions that are crucial to comprehending prospects for urban change.

A second overarching finding is that the literature that *is* explicitly concerned with urban politics is split between a political science literature with a dominant focus on clientelism, especially the relationship between politicians and voters, and literatures from disciplines such as geography and anthropology examining issues of dispossession and struggles for voice and emancipation, with relatively little engagement between these two fields. This impedes our overall understanding of the politics shaping urban development domains, in which reformers might seek to stimulate progressive change. How the exchange of material benefits through clientelism relates to (or conflicts with) discourses of urban citizenship, rights-based identities and the capacities of social groups to mobilise both discourses and violence, among other repertoires of collective action, is still inadequately understood in many contexts. Moreover, further research on the political geography of African cities would enable a greater knowledge of how investment and disinvestment in different parts of the city relate to how political mobilisation and voting patterns play out across urban space.

The potential for ACRC's research to make advances in this area is substantial. Its emerging conceptual framework (Kelsall et al., 2021) attends to the varying ways in which social groups with differential potential and motivation to disrupt the prevailing political settlement are coopted into the settlement's social foundation, or repressed, or both – and how this can change over time. This will be valuable in understanding existing patterns of resource distribution and service provision. However, attempts to enhance the value of political settlements analysis for urban research need to be able to engage with the fluidity of urban politics and ways in which social relations can "crystallise" into new alliances and conflicts, sometimes quite rapidly, depending on contingent circumstances or exogenous influences. A key challenge will be whether a political settlements-based approach can adequately take on board not just the "map" of power in a given context and how this relates to formal and informal institutions, but also how change to this map actually happens – including through the mobilisation of new claims and development of organisational and ideational capabilities of specific social groups. The question of how mobilisation occurs around both social goals and

material systems requires augmenting political economy/political settlements approaches with analytical frames that foreground these questions of process and practice, discourse and claim-making in relation to particular domains of urban development.

For example, if we know that changes to a political settlement in a certain direction have opened opportunities for progressive reform in a particular urban development domain, then the capabilities for mobilisation, agitation and coalition-building that underpinned this change need to be fully comprehended. It is clear that many groups can shift in and out of coalitions with relative fluidity, which presents both opportunities and risks. Within the ACRC framework, it appears that a *broad social foundation* is essential to providing elites with the incentive to deliver inclusive development outcomes, so how exactly such broadening happens remains a key area for research. This could be rooted in exogenous shocks or gradual change in organisational capabilities, but also may involve the sparking of new discourses, including around ideas of rights and responsibilities, and innovations in the mobilisation of these ideas. Moreover, the material and social systems constituting the city can themselves exert influence on the political settlement, as well as vice versa.

Related to this, a third overarching area of relative weakness in the existing literature relates to the changing sociological foundations of urban development and how this conditions the politics of the possible. While there is a burgeoning literature on the urban middle classes in a range of African countries, particularly those in the middle-income category, this is not yet matched by an understanding of other process of class formation or changing forms of identification – for example, in relation to waged vs self-employed labour, gender, youth, religion and ethnicity – and the consequences of this for urban change. These mobilisations of identity relate to, but are clearly not reducible to, changes in the distribution of income through economic growth and patterns of economic development in a globalised economy. Such forms of identification are likely to draw on claims to rights, voice and legitimate presence in the city as much as on reciprocal relations of clientelism. The ACRC focus on *domains* as arenas of urban life constituted by epistemic communities, knowledge and particular forms of practice, as well as material interests and flows, is likely to be a strength in addressing these gaps. The challenge will be to draw the links between specific domains and the broader sociological changes at city level, within the frame of a national political settlement.

A further problem that urban research in Africa needs to grapple with is that of scales of analysis. National-level political settlements will be more relevant to city-level outcomes in some cities than others, as will organised pressures from "below". As a meso-level scale for analysis, the city scale is challenged not only by complex multilevel webs of power but also by the high levels of penetration of international ideas and capital that concentrate in cities, *and* a uniquely intricate array of governance structures often including ward, district/division, municipal, city, metropolitan and/or regional scales of governance as well as a high presence of national government institutions. The

challenge of scale relates not only to politics and governance but to city systems themselves, given that the systemic nature of many of the social and material systems comprising cities does not evaporate at city borders. Research is likely to have to proceed with a multi-level focus on national, city-level and local developments – while also keeping global and regional dynamics in view – in order to fully make sense of domains and city systems.

Finally, there are clear geographical imbalances in research on African cities that need addressing. In the anglophone literature, there is a clear and unsurprising bias towards anglophone countries, and engagement with research and policy communities working in other languages should be a priority, in order to maximise the benefits of international comparison. Additionally, the existing foci of research in specific countries (whereby there is, for example, a substantial literature on urban/peri-urban land in Ghana, urban conflict dynamics in DRC, or youth and employment-related issues in Ethiopia) likely reflect path dependencies as well as the "urgency" of research in those areas. In this regard, exploring domains systematically across a number of countries and cities – including ones where they have not yet been the focus of substantial interest – will be important in challenging assumptions or the tendency to overgeneralised from particular, better researched cases.

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# AFRICAN CITIES
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## A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO TACKLING COMPLEX PROBLEMS IN THE CONTINENT'S RAPIDLY CHANGING CITIES.

### Where we're working

ACRC has identified 13 initial cities within sub-Saharan Africa with the potential and need for urban reform.

- Accra, Ghana
- Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo
- Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
- Freetown, Sierra Leone
- Harare, Zimbabwe
- Kampala, Uganda
- Khartoum, Sudan
- Lagos, Nigeria
- Lilongwe, Malawi
- Maiduguri, Nigeria
- Mogadishu, Somalia
- Nairobi, Kenya

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