

# Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics

## Slum Politics in Africa

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### Summary and Keywords

Africa's growing slums are complex, diverse neighborhoods with their own histories. Currently, these places, characterized by spatially concentrated poverty and human rights abuses, are where large proportions and, in many cases, the majority of Africa's growing urban populations live. These slums often have a politics characterized by clientelism and repression, but also cooperation, accountability, and political mobilization. Importantly, they must be understood within a wider political context as products of larger historical processes that generate severe inequalities in standards of living, rights, and service provision. Varied approaches (modernization vs. more critical historical and political economy approaches) attempt to explain the emergence, dynamics, and persistence of slums and the politics that often produces, characterizes, and shapes them in Africa. While raising important questions about the link between urbanization and democracy, modernization theories, which are typically ahistorical, do not fully explain the persistence and actual growth of slums in African cities. More historically grounded political economy approaches better explain the formation and dynamics of slums in African cities, including the complex, uneven, and inadequate service delivery to these areas. Whether the conditions of Africa's slums and the social injustice that undergirds them will give birth to greater democratization in Africa, which, in turn, will deliver radical improvements to the majority, is a critical unanswered question. Will social movements, populist opposition parties, and stronger citizenship claims for the poor ultimately emerge from slum—and wider city—politics? If so, will they address the political problem of inequality that the slum represents? A focus on cities, slums, and their politics is thus a core part of growing concern for the future of African cities and democratic politics on the continent.

Keywords: slums, democracy, spatial injustice, inequality, land, urban planning, informal settlements, citizenship, political economy, urbanization

# Introduction

Africa is in a period of urban and demographic expansion. The continent's population is projected to double by 2050 (to 2.5 billion people), with the share of Africans living in urban areas likely to grow from 36% in 2010 to 50% within the same time period (Günerlap, Lwasa, Masundire, Parnell, & Seto, 2017; United Nations, 2014). The infrastructure and service provision required to accommodate this many people is unprecedented in human history; an estimated 700 million housing units are needed by 2050, along with access to water, sanitation, electricity, education, jobs, transit, and a livable, healthy environment. This raises the question of whether a substantial and growing fraction of the human population living in Africa will be able to thrive by leveraging opportunities created by dense, creative interactions and efficiencies of urban life. The answer to this question depends fundamentally on whether democratic and inclusive city politics can emerge that will deliver more equitable access to resources like land, services, and opportunity.

Sub-Saharan Africa has one of the highest levels of "slum incidence" of any major world region, a level significantly higher than the developing region average of 32.7% (UN-Habitat, 2008). Further, some estimates suggest that African slum populations are growing at 4.5% a year, which is faster than the rate of urban population increase as a whole (Marx, Stoker, & Suri, 2013). It is critical to note that majorities in many African cities live in slum neighborhoods and that many of these, like Nima and Ga Mashie in Accra or Mathare and Kibera in Nairobi, are old, stable, and growing neighborhoods. This challenges the notion that these places are "informal" or transitory rather than fundamental to Africa's historical forms of urbanization, the city, and how politics works (Bolay, 2006; Kallergis, 2018; King, 1976; Sims, 2010).

This persistence and growth of slums casts a shadow on the prospects for inclusive urbanization and politics, raising many serious questions about the nature of power dynamics in African cities. With urbanization and increased contestation and negotiation over land, space, and services, these questions will only grow in importance. African cities are also gaining a growing share of votes and, at the same time, concentrating wealth and inequalities. How urbanization and politics will interact in this context plays into the overall prospects for democracy and democratization with profound distributional consequences. A focus on cities, slums, and their politics is thus a core part of growing concern for the future of African cities and democratic politics on the continent.

Africa's growing slums are complex, diverse neighborhoods with their own local and varied histories. Yet they are embedded in wider political context and historical global processes, which sometimes lead to shared features and types of politics. This article takes a critical look at some of the varied approaches to explaining the emergence, dynamics, and persistence of slums. It also looks at the politics that often produces, characterizes, and shapes these places in Africa and in so doing tries to give a flavor for the rich political dynamics of these neighborhoods and communities in context, i.e., why these "slums" are so important to the continent and the future of cities and democracy.

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Slums are often defined in multiple ways, and the terminology is ambiguous and contested, raising questions and critique (Bartlett, 1989; Gilbert, 2007). For the purposes of public policy, UN-Habitat (2007) defines a slum household as

a group of individuals living under the same roof in an urban area who lack one or more of the following: 1) durable housing of a permanent nature that protects against extreme climate conditions 2) sufficient living space which means not more than three people sharing the same room 3) easy access to safe water in sufficient amounts at an affordable price 4) access to adequate sanitation in the form of a private or public toilet shared by a reasonable number of people 5) security of tenure that prevents forced evictions.

Such definitions are meant to be useful to measure specific interventions like housing upgrading or provision of sanitation. However, they primarily focus on the lack of something that needs to be provided (e.g., housing, sanitation, tenure security). As such, the definition fails to capture the full dynamics of communities where slum households cluster and the social ties, interactions, cultural production, and economic and political dimensions of these highly complex places.

Given the historically entrenched negative associations of slums with crime and disease, some argue that the use of the word “slum” is problematic and pejorative. Indeed, residents of these poor neighborhoods are often stereotyped as vectors of disease and criminality (Furedi, 1973; Gilbert, 2007). The most dangerous use of the word “slum” is by authorities who wish to justify “slum clearance” or “eradication,” often entailing violent eviction and the production of more poverty and homelessness (Bartlett, 1989). It is also important to note that not all extremely poor households live in spatial concentrations. Some are found in interstices of the city where they find access to space and proximity to a livelihood. Sometimes these places are tucked away in wealthy neighborhoods or back alleys of the central business and market and retail areas. Also, not everyone living in a slum is poor. This complexity, and the problematic ways in which the idea of a slum can be used, is critical to keep in mind

The idea of the slum—understood as a contested and problematic concept—still has some analytical utility when understood as a spatial concept revealing concentrations of poverty, lack of recognition, poor services, and human rights violations as well as particular histories of exclusion and formation. The political processes creating these spatialized power dynamics and the particular conditions of these poorer neighborhoods demand attention and study.

Living in areas designated as slums is often dangerous precisely because residents face threats posed by land grabbing, gentrification, and demolition, often justified because they are slums or “informal settlements” (an equally if not more problematic term). Slums reflect particular conditions of precarity and even danger for residents. Residents are susceptible to injury because many live in poorly constructed, unregulated housing susceptible to the elements in dense neighborhoods. These neighborhoods often are located in marginal areas like flood zones, compounding risk. Charcoal stoves and pirated elec-

tricity contribute to these precarious living arrangements, often leading to deadly fires (Birkinshaw, 2008; Chance, 2015).

Combined neighborhood effects of slums often produce particular health concerns. For example, respiratory illness can be linked to poor air quality (which, in turn, is linked to a lack of access to electricity (leading to charcoal stove use for cooking) or poor solid waste collection (leading to burning of waste) as well as living close to industrial pollution sources (Ezeh et al., 2017; Ngo et al., 2015, 2017). Feelings of ghettoization are intensified by systematic violence and repression that young men and women face because they live in these places. In Kenya and South Africa, young men, some of whom are part of gangs, face particularly high levels of extrajudicial killings (Pinnock, 2016; Van Stapele, 2016). Public health experts have thus argued that more attention needs to be paid to the specific health challenges, including mental stress, arising out of these conditions (Ezeh et al., 2017). Thus, it is important to highlight and understand the array of structural violence, human rights abuses, stigmas, and service failures involving people targeted or neglected precisely because they live in slums. At the same time, it is critical when using the concept of a slum as a spatial and political concept to avoid essentializing and reinforcing the problematic ways the term is used within politics.

Somewhat paradoxically, precisely because of the many pressing issues confronting neighborhoods with these slum conditions, they are also vibrant arenas of associational life and often highly contentious politics (Klopp, 2008; Paller, 2019A). Politicians and their political parties find valuable support in populous poor neighborhoods facing serious problems, especially when they promise some forms of redress, if not justice (Bob-Milliar, 2012; de Smedt, 2009; Nathan, 2019; Resnick, 2014). Resnick (2014) argues persuasively that opposition politicians that use populist, anti-elitist, and pro-inclusion platforms are more likely to gain the urban vote of the poor. Residents, often by necessity, organize, create dense social networks, demand goods, and resist demolitions and human rights abuse (Afenah, 2012; Grant, 2006; Klopp, 2000, 2008; Obeng-Odoom, 2012). These organizations are useful for political mobilization during campaigns. Overall, these neighborhoods are central to the construction of public life and protest in African cities (Chalfin, 2014; Chance, 2018), which explains why they often loom large in literature, art, song, and film, contributing to the emergence of distinct urban forms and practices (and even languages like Nairobi's Sheng) that are unique to Africa's post-colonial experience (Diouf, 2008; Diouf & Fredericks, 2014; Nuttall & Mbembe, 2008; Simone, 2004).

## Slums, Modernization, and Progress

Despite evidence of persisting and expanding slums in African cities, much policy and political analysis of slums in Africa contain elements of a largely discredited modernization theory of economics and politics. Modernization theory tends to assume that Africa's urbanization is occurring within ever-growing capitalist economic growth and that, as societies become more urban and industrialized, citizens will become wealthier and demand more rights, propagating democratization and economic growth. Slums, then, are "both

the product of and vehicle for activities which are essential in the process of modernization” (Turner, 1969, p. 509) and should decline and disappear with economic growth and modernity (Frankenhoff, 1967; Turner, 1969).

In the classic articulation of modernization theory in politics, the transformation from a traditional to modern society contributes to the emergence of liberal and democratic values; this is propagated by urbanization and industrialization (Lipset, 1959). As individuals move from rural to urban areas, their preferences change (Inglehart, 1997), ties to traditional ethnic solidarities should weaken (Green, 2013; Severino & Ray, 2011), and ethnicity should play less of a role in daily life. Overall, urban voters are also expected to become less susceptible to clientelism. Urbanization and growing cities may produce new forms of political contestation that destabilize entrenched ethnic and class solidarities (Barnett, 2017).

Some evidence exists that cities in Africa are producing more class and cross-ethnic voting. For example, Koter (2013) finds clientelism declining in urban Senegal, undermining incumbency advantage in cities. In Uganda, Barry (2014) documents how rural areas have more entrenched patronage networks than urban areas, and cities are more information-rich environments for opposition parties. Using data from 16 African countries, Robinson (2014) finds urban, educated respondents who are formally employed in the “modern” economic sector are more likely to identify with the nation than ethnic group. A strong anti-incumbent voting pattern exists in African capital cities where mass protests remain a political tool of the urban majority (Branch & Mampilly, 2015; Resnick, 2014).

As a result, cities are often seen as spaces of protest and democracy where all people—including those who are politically and economically marginalized—have a “right to the city” (Dikeç, 2001; Friedmann, 1995; Holston, 1999; Purcell, 2003; Souza, 2001; Staeheli, 2003). This would seem to suggest that this urbanization should lead to a politics that starts to deliver services and improvements to those in the slums, who carry the majority of the votes. Such a politics that “empowers poor citizens to organize around redistributive right-claims of citizenship” deepens democracy (Holston & Appadurai, 1996, pp. 196–197). This potential of urbanization to disrupt the status quo leads some influential scholars to even suggest that an “urban revolution” is happening across the world (Barber, 2013; Harvey, 2012; see also Parnell & Pieterse, 2014, on Africa). In the African context, even Mamdani theorized a dualism where cities were historically repositories of civil society compared to rural areas with despotic or ethnic rule (Mamdani, 1996).

## Slums Within Global and Historical Context of Late Colonialism

The celebration of cities as intrinsically democratic and urbanization as democratizing is at odds with some critical aspects of historical and contemporary experience. Cities have always been sites of opportunities and cosmopolitan mixing which help drive urban growth and innovation, but they also concentrate global forces that often drive inequality

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(Holston & Appadurai, 1996). Cities are also sites of exclusion along ethnic, racial, social, class, and gender lines (Davis, 2006; Harvey, 2003). Indeed, cities serve as “specialized sites for the operations of more globally oriented capital and labor” with processes of transnationalization that often lead to new inequalities (Holston & Appadurai, 1996, p. 196) but also organizing. Within these processes, slums remain the most evident spatial expressions of political marginality, repression, rights deprivation, and various inequalities in access to land; housing; and a green, healthy, and clean environment.

In contrast to the assumptions of modernization theory, Africa’s urbanization appears to be occurring without a structural transformation of economy and growth but instead from rural-urban migration, natural population growth, and sometimes war and other forms of violence (Barrios, Bertinelli, & Strobl, 2006). In other words, urbanization is embedded in wider historical and political dynamics and global forces, which modernization theories tend to ignore. In particular, Africa’s historically distinct urbanization dynamics appear to emerge out of late colonialism (Myers, 2003, 2011) and are embedded in dynamics of global capitalism, including colonial infrastructure investment designed for export of raw materials, land appropriation and speculation, and resource extraction, with industrial activity actively discouraged until near-independence for many countries (Davis, 2006; Fox, 2012; Harvey, 2012; King, 1976).

Despite a long history of cities and in some cases poverty within those cities in Africa (Freund, 2001; Iliffe, 1987), a whole new process of urbanization emerged out of imperialism and colonialism. Cities were often developed for small static populations (Fox, 2012). Africans were most often considered as rural visitors to cities without rights. Elaborate pass systems were set up to prevent movement of Africans into cities and towns. However, labor was needed by the cities, and so some Africans—primarily men—were given permission forms to allow them to travel outside of their “designated” areas, gendering urbanization in a striking way. Some women, however, found their own ways into the city with its economic opportunities and relative freedoms often in order to support families under stress in rural areas (White, 1990).

Many cities themselves emerged as afterthoughts, growing out of the dynamics of global capitalism within colonial geopolitics. Kenya’s cities, for example, dot the railway line like a string of pearls starting at the port of Mombasa to the port on Lake Victoria. Much to the chagrin of colonial officials, Nairobi town emerged in an unplanned way out of a railway camp. In southern Africa, cities like Kimberly and Johannesburg were produced out of resource extraction, especially the mining industry. This form of colonial economic development relied heavily on the exploitation of African labor through repression, leading to “labor reserves” within or on the outskirts of cities often with squalid conditions.

Cities emerging within settler colonies had—and continue to have—some of the most extreme forms of segregation and spatial inequality. This emerged through severe racial segregation, labor exploitation, and political repression. In South Africa, this gave rise to townships that under apartheid were constructed as little more than labor reserves far from the central core of cities and white neighborhoods. Nevertheless, these places creat-

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ed their own lively social networks, art, music, and mechanisms of survival. In Kenya, slums were produced within the central city and near the industrial zones by design. Once again, these places were far from the wealthy settlers living in green suburbs, which are today still Nairobi's wealthier areas (Anyamba, 2008; Hake, 1977; Hirst, 1994).

Despite the presence of African villages at the very beginning of Nairobi's birth as a town, the colonial state deemed residents "temporary" and hence, to be forced into "labor reserves." These reserves were seen as holding places for primarily male native labor and thus were not the subject of much consideration in terms of services, except among small numbers of reformers. This led to numerous public health concerns where specialists pointed to the dangers of crowded, unsanitary conditions but often blamed these conditions on the "natives" themselves, which served to reinforce segregation. Overall, by blocking Africans from purchasing and claiming land in the city and forcing them into limited areas, slum creation was assured. In the absence of strong urban land redistribution and reform in the postcolonial period, poor migrants to Nairobi found their housing by paying rent to landlords who had political access to land and the city. Postcolonial national governments confronted with large numbers of migrants freed from pass systems often took a colonial attitude, unsuccessfully encouraging these migrants to stay in rural areas, which, in turn, recreated the idea that they were only in the city on a temporary basis.

In older African cities like Accra, which began as a trading town in the 15th century, slum formation had a different history. Indigenous claims to urban land created hierarchies of belonging, with settler and native identities being replicated in segregated urban forms. The political history of urbanization in Ghana can be understood with respect to informal norms of settlement and belonging, and in the oldest neighborhoods in Accra that pre-date colonialism populations make indigenous claims to land and territory that often exclude the many more recent migrants (Paller, 2019A). Politically, these claims contribute to a conception of citizenship that provides these groups with the entitlement "to enter the struggle for resources" based on ethnic origin (Mamdani, 2002, p. 505).

During the colonial era, when Accra experienced a cocoa boom and increased investments in infrastructure, migrants moved to the city for employment opportunities as well as to flee conflicts in the Northern regions. When migrants were not assimilated into indigenous neighborhoods, they formed "stranger" settlements on the outskirts of the city. Early settlers—usually migrant leaders—purchased plots of land directly from indigenous landowners. Some residents joined the colonial police force as a group, named locally as the Hausa Constabulary, creating new distinctions between indigenous hosts and strangers. The politics of these often much poorer neighborhoods, locally called *zongos*, became central to struggles over citizenship and nationhood in post-colonial Ghana (Kobo, 2010).

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# Colonial Continuities and Contemporary Slums

The impacts of colonial rule left a lasting legacy across Africa's urban spaces and planning (King, 1976; Mabogunje, 1990; Mamdani, 1996; Myers, 2011; Njoh, 2006, 2009). Indigenous and migrant African communities were subjects (not citizens) and as such were kept out of evolving institutions and decision-making around city planning and largely deprived of valuable urban land and social services. Often perceived by colonial governments as temporary labor reserves, African neighborhoods were outside formal planning, and as a consequence they developed in an organic nature and according to different emergent rules and processes, in part shaped by resistance to repression and exclusion. Colonial authorities used zoning laws, public health rationales, and building codes in an attempt to control urban development and strengthen social control over African populations. Considered illegal or "informal," urban development that deviated from colonial codes and laws was subject at any time to punishment (Ocheje, 2007). Such rules essentially gave colonial officials arbitrary power over land and space in African neighborhoods, which were often thus called "informal" (Klopp, 2008; Njoh, 2009). This led to tenure insecurity among residents, one of the central features of slums.

Colonial urban policy also left important legacies. First, urban land and services were profoundly skewed in most cities, leading to massive inequalities across cities, with slums and wealthy suburbs the most visible forms of these gaps. This spatial injustice has rarely been openly addressed adequately by post-colonial governments, although some attempts were made to develop more public housing. South Africa is a good example, where efforts have been made to address the shocking levels of inequality generated by apartheid, but despite the rapid building of housing, much of it follows old spatial patterns of building on the peripheries of cities requiring massive commuting and keeping substantial racial and social segregation in place (Murray, 2011; Nell, 2018).

Second, rather than an ethic of redress and equitable service provision, the colonial norms within city planning with respect to poor neighborhoods persist, leading to slum clearance, relocation, and redevelopment rather than upgrading (Ocheje, 2007, p. 183). The notion that slums are illegal or informal serves to negate city responsibility toward poorer citizens with its redistributive implications outside of electoral and patronage politics. Governments also often use the threat of forced eviction and forceful demolitions to enforce ghettoization as well as hobble popular mobilization. The violent demolition of Muoroto in Nairobi at the beginning of multi-party politics in Kenya in the 1990s is one clear example (Klopp, 2008). Demolitions are sometimes also knee-jerk responses to environmental problems like flooding (Obeng-Odoom, 2010). Given that many poor are left living in environmentally precarious or toxic sites, they are particularly vulnerable to threats such as pollution and flooding, which are likely to increase with urbanization and climate change. All this has clear environmental justice implications that are rarely spelled out in the African policy context.

As in colonial times, the urban poor often become scapegoats for broader structural and political problems (Obeng-Odoom, 2012). Slum dwellers are blamed for crime, poor infrastructure, and lack of sanitation, while politicians and municipal authorities fail to deliver the public services needed to keep cities safe. Municipal planners often advance demolition and displacement as solutions rather than in situ and creative upgrading strategies and increasing housing stocks by freeing up land on a citywide scale (Gulyani & Bassett, 2007). As Nigerian planner Tunde Agbola notes, many of Africa's urban poor are "transients in a perpetual state of relocation" (Davis, 2006, p. 98).

## Speculative Urbanism, Slum Upgrading, and the Ideology of "World Class" Cities

In addition to the legacies of late colonialism, global economic forces based on poorly regulated market capitalism and competition continue to play into inequalities and slum expansion in Africa. This is reflected in the focus on building "world class" cities on the part of governments and planners who aim to attract investments that often are highly regressive, unsustainable, and more about speculation and rate of return for the few rather than creating inclusive, better functioning cities. The race to build a "world class" city often means attracting massive investment in mega-sports facilities for international events or a "high rise financial district" (Cheeseman & de Gramont, 2017; Myambo, 2017), gated communities, and entire new cities (Grant, 2009; Sims, 2014; Watson, 2014).

Playing to high modernist fantasies of many African leaders, global architecture firms design fantastical visions of new cities (Sims, 2010; Watson, 2014). These "new cities" encourage a vision of escape, social segregation, and exclusion. Part of this vision is the construction of large highways that help wealthier citizens access the actual city from exclusive areas. They often also serve as barriers separating poor neighborhoods from wealthier ones and generate enormous amounts of traffic violence, most often against the poorer classes who walk. This highly regressive development increases debt, pollution, crashes, and costs of service delivery, with highway-driven land use, and encourages inefficient, low-density development (Klopp, 2012). Figure 1 is a picture taken from Nairobi's Vision 2030 where public transport, walking are not considered, and markets, homes, and economies of the poorer majority are non-existent in line with the vision of a "city without slums" (Huchzermeyer, 2011).



Figure 1. Vision 2030 for Nairobi.

(Source: Ministry of Metropolitan Development, Kenya.)

It is interesting to note that slum dwellers out of necessity create low-carbon walking paths and local economies in their neighborhoods to service local populations as well as the rest of the city. These neighborhoods are often well connected to popular transport, like minibuses, that receive no subsidies and face constant state extraction from bribes and fees, reducing the quality of their services. Popular transport employs many people, including the poor, and provides critical access to services and opportunities in the city (Campbell, Rising, Klopp, & Mwikali Mbio, 2019). In Nairobi, wealthy neighborhoods often ban public transport vehicles seen as vectors of noise and crime, and this creates hardship for the many laborers from the slums who cook, clean, care for children, tend to gardens, build, and, ironically, contribute to security in these wealthy homes.

It is critically important to note that the era of structural adjustment in the 1980s and 1990s witnessed the collapse of many services, including affordable transport, and as a consequence accelerated the expansion of urban poverty and slums (Potts, 1995; Riddell, 1997). In many African cities, this led to the emergence of a new form of poor urban neighborhood—the “squatter settlement”—in interstitial spaces in the city most likely expanding the number and spread of slums (Konadu-Agyemang, 1991). Most critically, with the decline of the formal economy under structural adjustment, the informal sector expanded dramatically, “establishing informal survivalism as the new primary mode of livelihood” (Davis, 2006, p. 178). Expanding slums were at the center of this creative survivalism that keeps the economy as a whole ticking.

While structural adjustment has been widely critiqued, many of the Washington Consensus principles have remained in place in terms of service delivery, including an aversion to subsidies for services and avoidance of attention to improving labor conditions. Often as a default—as in transport—the results are highly regressive interventions that make conditions in slums worse and ignore the multitudes of lower-income people employed in the sector and how their conditions play into some of the service problems (ITF, 2018; Rizzo, 2017).



Figure 2. Waiting for demolition for a new road in Kibera.

(Source: Jacqueline Klopp.)

For example, the highway between Thika and Nairobi was designed for high-speed vehicle traffic and spurred real estate speculation including gated community construction. It also created a more dangerous barrier between the Mathare slum and the wealthy neighborhoods where many of the poor work (Hagan, 2011). This kind of ubiquitous investment in Africa's major cities tends to generate a fragmented, splintered urbanism that reinforces the marginalization and hazards of living in a slum, in addition to the new wave of displacement, poverty creation, gentrification, and slum destruction linked to highway and other kinds of megaproject construction. Further, this construction is not designed to create more access to the city for all. Instead, this kind of investment often tears away at the fabric of poor neighborhoods, much like urban renewal programs in the United States in the 1950s and often with similar profound consequences of social dislocation.

## Resistance, Organization, and Agency of the Poor in African Cities

While the conditions faced by Africa's slum dwellers are harsh, these places are the sites of resistance and productive politics and organization. The constant hustle for survival leads to serious problems but also remarkable creativity and energy as well as civil society organization and political action. Some of this action has helped shape antagonistic state policies into more collaborative engagement around in situ upgrading, which often focuses on improving basic housing, water, and sanitation (Lines & Makau, 2018). Global coalitions, including Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), an international federation of slum dwellers, have helped shape the Sustainable Urban Development Goal (to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable) "to ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums by 2030" including a key target to "by 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums" (UN General Assembly, 2015, p.

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14). Similarly, the New Urban Agenda, a global policy document coming out of the World Forum, places an emphasis on equity and social justice.

One aspect of this political action involves taking more control of data about slums through bottom-up enumeration processes encouraged by SDI, along with control of mapping and the narratives told about slums. Mapping and counting—all fundamental parts of “planning”—are intertwined with power. Delineating and defining boundaries in rigid ways into zones or land parcels is fundamental to the way property is “performed” and mobility and access to space and resources are circumscribed. How people are counted and how aspects of their lives, including access to water, sanitation, housing, food, clean air, as well as compensation for displacement, are measured can have profound implications in terms of “seeing” or “hiding” what is happening within cities.

In many African cities, important information about slums is simply missing (Fox, 2012; Kallergis, 2018; Lines & Makau, 2018). This absence of information and records can lead to more leeway to negotiate informal arrangements around land and space, but this situation can also create deliberate invisibilities; when whole communities are represented by blank spaces on a map, it is easier for some parties to portray them as outside the “formal” recognized part of the city. At an official level, this absence of critical information can conveniently allow the characterization of these areas within planning as waste and unoccupied—or illegally or temporarily occupied—land despite their many and important functions, histories, and meanings to large numbers of people (Locatelli & Nugent, 2009). In such cases and in certain contexts of struggle for rights and claims, rendering such deliberate invisibilities in a public form can help generate the recognition needed for stronger political negotiation.

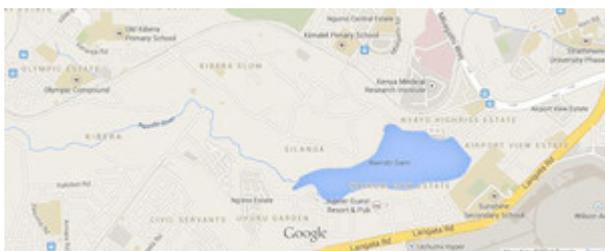
Nairobi, for example, is currently a site of active experimentation in slums on how to use technology to create data from the bottom up and use this as a conduit for information from citizens in poor neighborhoods to the broader public realm. Residents in these historically marginalized areas are also taking to the Internet to tell their own stories and launch their own campaigns, sometimes with foreign as well as local non-governmental organizations and community groups. At the same time, these poor neighborhoods are constantly vulnerable to problematic government interventions in the form of demolitions, displacements, or housing-upgrading projects, often with an array of “development partners” that tend to lead to displacement and elite capture of benefits. With the increase in real estate values in the city core and rising numbers of infrastructure developments, residents of the slums are extremely vulnerable to displacement.

One of Africa’s most well-known slums, Kibera, serves as an interesting example of a place undergoing experiments in using basic GPS technology and citizen mapping for advocacy. Kibera is a complex place, home to approximately 170,000 people and the site of important industry, artistic creation, and commerce. Despite the importance of Kibera to Nairobi and the fact that it has been extensively studied, little public information and quality data on the area exists. The Google map of the Kibera area of Nairobi from May 2014 shows a largely open space nestled between the golf course and a body of water

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called the Nairobi dam (despite the big blue splotch on the map, the water is no longer visible beneath vegetation).



*Figure 3.* Screenshot of 2014 map showing Kibera slum as a large empty space.

(Source: Google Maps.)

A deeper look at Kibera shows that this space, which Google called “unnamed,” is filled with homes, businesses, schools, churches, mosques, and small roads. Starting in 2008, an international team of mappers worked with Kibera citizens in the Map Kibera Project to map out the areas—13 villages, streets, facilities, and features of their neighborhoods—that mattered to them. Using simple GPS devices, household surveys, and walking through the streets, the citizen mappers captured key aspects of their neighborhoods. The resulting data were used to make maps on Open Street Map, the publicly available map of the world that is being built through crowd sourcing.



*Figure 4.* Screenshot of Kibera’s many small roads and paths on Open Street Maps post-mapping.

(Source: Map Kibera.)

The maps of Kibera created by this work show more finely textured spaces populated with churches and schools and other landmarks, a better reflection of the degree to which the land and space is being utilized and given value. It captures some of the “high-content environment” of the Nairobi street in a former African area where codification and systematic naming of place and streets was ignored. It also shows, for those who care to look, at how few facilities exist for a relatively large set of interconnected and rooted neighborhoods that no longer appear “informal.” Assisting in a “politics of recognition” through better data and representations by those living in these historically oppressed and poor neighborhoods and putting data and data creation in their hands and in the public view are the aims of this movement toward citizen mapping and data creation from below (Hagan, 2011).



Figure 5. Screenshot of Kibera's schools, lights, water points, and places of worship post-mapping.

(Source: Map Kibera.)

Since the Map Kibera project, more community mapping of poor neighborhoods is happening in Nairobi, Accra, and across the continent, literally putting these places on the map and representing them as part of the city as a whole. The data, all open and available for use by the public through Open Street Map, can be helpful to advocates and civil society in and for improving these places not as “informal settlements” or slums but as neighborhoods with severe pockets of poverty and inadequate services for the population numbers that require addressing.

While these bottom-up efforts to enumerate residents and gain control over data, representation, and narratives are important efforts at reasserting the agency and political and social recognition of these critically important places, severe barriers still exist, including the political economy dynamics that make slums quite profitable for a wide range of politically connected actors in African cities (Fox, 2012). Further, concern exists that some of the approaches taken by organizations like SDI, which focus on pragmatic cooperation with government around slow incremental upgrading, conflict with needed political mobilization and more forceful rights-based approaches. This includes leveraging those rights enshrined in some of Africa's more progressive constitutions and fighting for them in courts and through spirited advocacy (Huchzermeyer, 2011; Williams, 2005). In this view, the hard struggle for services, resources, and rights for those living in slums is fundamentally tied to the expansion of inclusive constitutional and democratic politics.

## Contemporary Politics of Slums and Democracy

Persistent exclusionary urban planning and segregated residential settlement, along with global economic forces and high levels of informal employment in African cities, have important implications for distributional politics and democracy. In particular, intense inequality and fragmentation tend to lead to political patronage and brokerage instead of more representational politics. This, in turn, often limits downward delivery of goods to personalistic arrangements rather than entitlements and universal service delivery. Scarcity and repression created by historical institutional dynamics and poor economic regulation mean “ad hoc governance arrangements and infrastructure deficiencies be-

queathed by colonial administrations . . . created opportunities for postcolonial political and economic entrepreneurs to cultivate instrumental patron-client networks and exploit rent-seeking opportunities” (Fox, 2014, p. 191).

Slum dwellers face a “low-quality, high cost-trap” (Gulyani & Talukdar, 2008; Talukdar, 2018) where housing is not affordable, infrastructure does not improve, and people are stuck with poor and insecure living conditions. In Nairobi, this has been shown to be quite lucrative for many, often the politically connected and former powerful beneficiaries of African elite capture of the postcolonial state, who serve as slum landlords and get high rental returns for providing next to no services, including safe shelter (Huchzermeyer, 2011). Owning property in Kenyan slums requires political connections and payment of significant fees (and often bribes) to get a building permit (Amis, 1984). The failure of affordable public transport contributes to this situation; it is more cost-effective to live in poorer-quality and higher-rent homes within walking distance from work and services than to live in a cheaper location but with high and unreliable transport costs to access work, opportunity, or services (Campbell et al., 2019; Klopp, 2012).

“Low-quality, high-rent” or spatial poverty traps represented by slums also can involve extraction of rents from poor citizens who wish to build a shack on land controlled by slum landlords rather than land delivered by the state to create affordable housing. An investigation by the Sierra Leonean journalist Sorious Samura revealed that in order to build a shack in Kibera in Nairobi, payments were needed to numerous local civil servants contributing to making the cost of a shack very high (Samura & Jones, 2008). Others rent from landlords who benefit from informality and ambiguous land tenure rights and work very hard to maintain the status quo and resist any slum-upgrading efforts that raise questions about the legal status of land.

Politicians also use tenure insecurity as a way to mobilize voters, promising private goods in exchange for electoral returns (de Smedt, 2009). This political context contributes to a situation in which politicians have an interest in maintaining insecure rights around these critical public goods needed for making a city function because they are part of networks that benefit from the status quo (Paller, 2015). In Ghana, some traditional authorities benefit from selling land multiple times (Onoma, 2009). This contributes to numerous land disputes that get stuck in a complex pluralistic legal system. In Kenya, “land grabbing” wreaks havoc on land use and transport planning as well as provision of public space and services and creates a need for precarious political protection and dependency for survival (Klopp, 2000, 2008).

The spatial inequality that emerged out of colonialism and the formal and informal institutions around land and planning continue to affect electoral politics as well, undermining the transformative potential of African urban politics. As Noah Nathan (2019) details, certain neighborhoods are “trapped” in a context of ethnic and clientelistic politics, despite the growing middle class and vibrant programmatic politics across the country. In Accra, ethnic voting remains prevalent in slums because dense concentrations of poverty allow politicians to distribute goods through patronage networks (Nathan, 2016). Ethnic segre-

gation has also been shown to contribute to ethnic favoritism with respect to local public goods provision in Malawi, undermining a more democratic politics of universal service delivery (Ejdemyr, Kramon, & Robinson, 2018).

Community leaders and their followers often internalize societal norms to win elections (Lindberg, 2010). For example, politicians strive to be parents, employers, and friends to their constituents, often using state goods and resources as patronage for their political supporters (Paller, 2014). This undermines the development of more programmatic service delivery with wider distributional implications and more spread-out impacts on urban inequality. This points to the importance of local leaders, political parties, and “brokers” in the reproduction and persistence of slums. Gangs (LeBas, 2013), vigilante groups (Smith, 2015), pastors, imams, and chiefs (Klaus & Paller, 2017) compete for control over urban space as well as incorporation into formal governance. However, this does not always preclude cosmopolitan and class-based action (Furedi, 1973; Klopp, 2000, 2008; Rizzo, 2017) or the appeal of more populist politics that promises to redress inequalities (Resnick, 2014).

Paller (2019A) demonstrates how these relationships form in the everyday politics of Accra’s neighborhoods. In many cases, residents rely on their leaders to secure their land tenure as well as provide jobs and other benefits. But leaders are also expected to act as opinion leaders by gaining respect and authority through service to the community. They help enroll the children of new migrants into schools and get deals on school uniforms from neighborhood tailors. They introduce women to the leaders of the market associations in order to secure a stall or link young men to potential employers. Most importantly, they listen to the needs of their constituents, providing necessary guidance and attempting to do what they can to help with the situation (Paller, 2019B). In return, they are publicly honored as good leaders. The role that these leaders play in political parties—as brokers, politicians, or local representatives—is an emerging area of study in African political science (Brierley, 2018; Kramon, 2017). How this accountability politics might create the building blocks for more democratic politics that might start to deliver services and promote policies that address spatial inequality is a critical question to explore.

## Conclusions

Urbanization is likely to radically challenge Africa’s politics at the local, national, and global scales. In the future, Johannesburg, Accra, Nairobi, and Dar es Salaam will join the ranks of the world’s largest cities, and across the continent towns and smaller cities will continue to grow (Fox, 2017; Ingelaere, Christiaensen, De Weerdt, & Kanbur, 2018). With the growth of cities and towns, we also see the growth of slums as vibrant spaces of political competition, dialogue, and creativity but also a living reflection of deep problems of inequality and lack of voice and power over budgets, resources, data, programs, and planning of the poorer majority in Africa’s cities.

## Slum Politics in Africa

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As cities grow and gain a greater share of political power, votes, and influence, the urgent question of how to create more inclusive planning, projects, and investments to deliver more efficient and equitable services and opportunity as well as the right to determine the future of the city to the majority living in slums is fundamental to African politics (Obeng-Odoom, 2013). Whether resistance to the current profoundly inequitable allocation of resources and political power in African cities will transform into redress and inclusion through democratic and distributional politics is unclear. Whether middle-class and poor coalitions can form around critical issues that affect both as fellow city dwellers is an open question.

What we do know is that as African politics becomes increasingly urban, slums are poised to be one of the formative arenas of contestation and challenge, shaping the direction of voting and politics and fundamental aspects of the content of citizenship. Rather than an unintended consequence of distributive politics, or a failure of Africa's modernization experiment, slums are a central and foundational building block for Africa's democratic future, which, without more transformative urban politics, is likely to see deepening inequality, poverty, and repression exacerbated by environmental stress, including the growing threat of climate change.

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