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Contesting the growing city? Forms of urban growth and consequences for communal violence

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ABSTRACT

How does rapid urban growth affect risks of communal violence in cities? In rapidly growing cities, poor planning and weak institutions combined with an unregulated influx of migrants can create a potent recipe for violent mobilization. In addition, politicized identity groups often compete for resources and interact in close proximity in urban areas. Despite a growing research agenda on the relationship between rapid urban growth and urban violent unrest, findings remain inconclusive. One explanation for the disparate conclusions is that the theoretical pathways connecting urban growth and unrest largely fail to consider both the violence-generating and violence-stemming effects of urban growth. With a focus on conflict-ridden societies, we theorize processes through which urban growth influences different aspects of group relations in the city, and thereby contribute to prevent, suppress or generate communal violence. To illustrate the framework, we draw on insights from Nairobi, Kampala and Addis Ababa. By paying attention to processes, we are able to identify a range of developments associated with city growth which in turn have different implications for communal violence.

1. Introduction

Rapid urban growth in the Global South creates challenges for peaceful and sustainable development. In many fast-growing cities, an unregulated influx of migrants occurs in the context of poor planning and weak institutions, with many migrants ending up in informal or slum settlements, or on the urban outskirts where state control and authority is weak or inexistent (Glass, Seybolt, & Williams, 2022). While a majority of urban residents, including in poorer areas, just live their daily life, dire living conditions and lack of employment opportunities can create a potent recipe for violent mobilization and conflict (Gizewski & Homer-Dixon, 1995; Moser & McIlwaine, 2014). Risks of urban violence are further exacerbated in divided societies with a history of civil war or communal conflicts, when urbanization forces politicized identity groups to compete and interact in close proximity. This article interrogates the conditions under which tensions caused by city growth erupt into violence, asking: How does rapid urban growth affect risks of communal violence in cities?

Broadly, urban violence includes phenomena like urban warfare, terrorism, gang violence, and riots, as well as discursive, psychological and structural violence (Glass et al., 2022; Pavoni & Tulumello, 2020). Much research on urban violence focuses on Latin America where

several cities experience extreme levels of homicides and gang violence (Guiterrez Sanin & Jaramillo, 2004; Moncada, 2016; Moser & McIlwaine, 2006). In-depth study of these and other cities across the Global South, highlights how citizens' behavior changes in response to insecurity and violence, and also how efforts to build trust and social cohesion are critical steps in in urban violence prevention (Salahub, Gottsbacher, De Boer, & Zaaroura, 2019).

While some research theorizes cities and the process of urbanization as inherently violent (Pavoni & Tulumello, 2020), other work focuses on understanding patterns of manifest physical violence across different cities and regions. Research has begun to assess the relationship between rapid urban growth and urban violence, but findings about the conflict-inducing effect of growth remain inconclusive (Buhaug & Urdal, 2013; Fox & Bell, 2016; Gizelis, Pickering, & Urdal, 2021; Raleigh, 2015; Urdal & Hoelscher, 2012; Østby, 2016). One reason is that research on urban violence often includes a wide range of forms of violence into the analysis. Distinct forms of urban violence are the result of different background conditions and causal pathways. We therefore focus on one single category of violence: communal violence. The focus is justified given the high rates of projected growth in states affected by communal tension. In addition, communal violence tends to feature less formal organization than urban warfare, and different mobilizing patterns than,

for instance, gang violence (Brosché & Elfversson, 2012; Sundberg, Eck, & Kreutz, 2012). In essence, different forms of violence call for the probing of distinct causal processes.

Another reason for the disparate conclusions in existing research, is that the theoretical pathways outlined to connect urban growth and urban unrest largely fail to consider both the violence-generating and violence-stemming effects of urban growth. Our study, thus, theorizes how urban growth in conflict-affected societies influences different aspects of communal relations in the city which in turn elevate or reduce risks of violence. By paying attention to different *processes* and their effects, we synthesize existing theory into a coherent framework.

In what follows, we develop a theoretical framework capturing the connection between city growth and processes that contribute to generate, prevent, or suppress communal violence. Next, we illustrate the dynamics at play with examples from Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Nairobi (Kenya), and Kampala (Uganda). These three cities are all growing rapidly, but display different patterns of communal violence and coexistence, as well as state strategies to meet challenges of growth and conflict. The cases illustrate the processes captured by our framework, and demonstrate how the effects of urban growth are conditioned by both national and city-level factors, such as the salience of ethnicity in national politics and the ethnic cleavages that follow in the city, as well as the historical trajectory of cities in terms of growth patterns. The analysis helps grasp why communal violence is prevalent in Nairobi, why such violence has been rare in Kampala, and why Addis Ababa for a long time remained relatively untouched by the communal violence affecting other parts of the country.

Our approach to understanding urban communal violence is useful for several reasons. First, with a process-oriented approach, we are able to identify different consequences resulting from city growth and the steps that unfold to create or exacerbate communal conflict. We acknowledge how urban growth can result from different developments: natural population growth, in-migration, and growth through the spatial expansion of the city. Second, a focus on processes allows us to theoretically articulate the varying effects of urban growth on communal violence. Different forms of communal violence arise in cities alongside outcomes like inter-group conflict management and tolerance, which also shape patterns of violence and co-existence. Our approach also takes into consideration other processes that suppress overt violence while failing to resolve the underlying grievances, such as the militarization of urban space and repressive policing.

2. Urbanization and communal violence: previous research

Communal violence refers to violent clashes or attacks where the groups involved are organized, or targeted, based on ethnicity or some other shared communal identity.[1] Such violence can manifest between state actors (ethnically defined or not) and communal groups, between two groups, or between one communal group and a conglomeration of communal groups. Examples include communal conflicts, violent protest along ethnic lines, ethnic riots, one-sided violence along communal lines, and violent state repression targeting specific identity groups. Governance structures and political institutions condition whether communal identity is politicized and activated for violent mobilization (see e.g. Berenschot, 2011; Fjelde & Østby, 2014; Tajima, 2014). In divided societies with a history of violent conflicts, urbanization may aggravate ethnic tensions when communities are forced to compete and interact in close proximity. Inequalities tend to be particularly stark in the urban context, which concentrates political and economic power and the most despairing poverty (Klopp & Paller, 2019). However, cities also

offer opportunities that can mitigate inter-group tensions (Reuveny, 2007, p. 659).

Different bodies of literature speak to the relationship between urban growth and communal violence. A first strand assesses the potential link between urbanization and urban violence using quantitative approaches (Buhaug & Urdal, 2013; Gizelis et al., 2021; Urdal & Hoelscher, 2012; Østby, 2016).[2] These studies have provided useful steps towards theorizing the specific conditions under which urban in-migration may lead to conflict (Petrova, 2021; Østby, 2016), which parts of the city are more likely to see violence (Gizelis et al., 2021), and how changing incentive structures affect different forms of urban conflict (Raleigh, 2015). However, much of this work has focused on a broad range of "urban unrest" and not specifically theorized or tested specific pathways between urban growth and communal conflict. The evidence of a general correlation between urbanization and violent conflict is also mixed. Buhaug and Urdal (2013), for instance, find that lethal urban unrest events have become more frequent over the time period 1960–2006, but no general association between urbanization and rising levels of violence in the cities. By contrast, Gizelis et al. (2021) find population growth to be associated with higher levels of protest and riots in African cities, but only in peri-urban areas, pointing to the uneven effect of growth on cities.

Focusing more specifically on communal violence, several studies investigate how urban growth affects conflict around autochthony. Goldstone (2002) suggests that it is not migration per se that creates conflict, but rather when there is a mismatch between the rate of in-migration and the supply of employment and economic opportunities, or when in-migration of one identity group challenges the dominance of pre-existing residents. Rapid growth exceeding the state's ability to control space and provide social provisions undermines state control and often deepens inequality, fueling popular grievances (Glass et al., 2022). Cottier's (2018) study on rural-urban migration in sub-Saharan Africa finds that migratory flows increase the risk of "nativist violence," but primarily when the native population faces marginalization from the central government. Research also cautions against securitizing migrants, because they tend to remain politically passive, while long-deprived urban dwellers are more likely to cause unrest (Østby, 2016, pp. 493-4). Urban in-migration due to violent displacement may have distinct consequences. Conflict-induced internal displacement can contribute to the diffusion of ethnic conflict (Bohnet, Cottier, & Hug, 2018) and ethnic segregation due to combined urban in-migration and armed conflict (e.g. van Acker, 2018).

Research on inter-group relations points to the importance of the social organization of local communities, as well as the responses by national and local authorities, in mediating the effects of rapid growth. Ethnic networks, for example, have been shown to ensure protection in a volatile situation of urban growth, by providing a social safety net (van Overbeek & Tamás, 2018). But ethnic networks can also be used to solidify difference and ethnic boundaries, and ultimately facilitate the instigation and mobilization of violence (Berenschot, 2011). Critical urban studies highlight how state and city-level authorities can either exacerbate or alleviate communal conflict, through policies ranging from social service delivery, housing and land-use planning, and the organizational setup of the municipal government, as demonstrated in a number of ethnically divided cities (Bollens, 2007; Rokem, Weiss, & Miodownik, 2018). While some urban policies uphold and intensify ethnic division, the potential of the city to bridge differences, regenerate the economy and signal progress can also be leveraged by governments as a strategy to rebuild and reconstruct post-war societies (Cottyn, 2018).

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[1] We define communal identity as subjective group identification based on, for instance, a common history, religion, ethnicity, culture or core values, acknowledging communal identity as socially constructed and self-ascriptive rather than as a static phenomenon (Brosché & Elfversson, 2012).

[2] Several qualitative studies address violent inter-group conflict in cities but do not focus on urban growth specifically. See, for example, case studies of cities in Colombia (Guiterrez Sanin & Jaramillo, 2004), Pakistan and Afghanistan (Esser, 2004), Kenya and Nigeria (LeBas, 2013).

In summary, cross-national studies indicate the importance of further probing the linkages between city growth and urban violence, generally, and case-study evidence highlights how urban growth contributes to communal tension and violence, specifically. However, existing research does not systematically consider the different processes through which growth either increase and decrease risks of communal violence, and looks at a very broad range of violent outcomes.

3. Urban growth and its consequences

In theorizing processes that connect urban growth and communal violence, we consider three dimensions: first, the different forms that urban growth takes; second, different processes set off by growth that may generate, suppress or prevent communal violence; and third, the conditioning effect of state responses in the face of insecurity resulting from city growth.

Structural, institutional and proximate factors interact in shaping risks of urban violence (Salahub et al., 2019). The processes we outline exist within a range of structural conditions under which different pathways are more or less likely to play out. Some of these conditions are common to many rapidly growing cities in the Global South that are experiencing 'late' urbanization. Such conditions include intense demographic growth (in contrast to more slow-growing populations under previous urbanization periods), stronger integration of cities in the global economy than ever before, the significance of the central state for city development, and the impact of impending environmental destruction (Fox & Goodfellow, 2022; Glass et al., 2022).

In addition, there are a number of country- or city-specific circumstances that condition the implication of city growth for communal violence. For instance, the overall strength and responsiveness of state institutions matters for the ability of urban planners and governors to meet the needs of a rapidly growing population. Responses also depend on the material resources available, as well as the willingness of the state to use those resources for dampening negative effects of urbanization (Glass et al., 2022; Salahub et al., 2019, p. 5). Political dynamics, such as the form of electoral system and the relative salience of communal identity in party and national level politics, condition some of the pathways we lay out below. Notably, socio-economic and political networks within cities and their different neighborhoods tend to follow conflict lines existing nationally or regionally (Büscher, 2018, p. 194).

3.1. Urban growth: demographic and spatial dimensions

Urban growth has both a demographic and spatial dimension relating to three overarching phenomena: natural population growth; urban in-migration; and spatial growth of the city and its boundaries (Gizewski & Homer-Dixon, 1995). While often overlapping, they represent qualitatively different social processes. For instance, in-migration (a changing population composition due to the movement of people into the city) is often much more rapid that natural growth (when the rate of births in the city exceeds the rate of deaths). In turn, while demographic growth is largely a bottom-up process, the formal spatial expansion of the city is the outcome of political decision-making. Still, pre-existing structural conditions as well as deliberate state interventions shape both the pace and effects of all forms of growth.

When *demographic growth* is rapid, two consequences are common. First, demographic growth increases pressure on urban resources, such as land, jobs and social services. Such pressure aggravates competition over resources that already were scarce and become in even shorter supply due to population growth. Second, demographic growth can change the political landscape and affect the size and/or composition of political constituencies (Goldstone, 2002). Urban in-migration can result in rapid and dramatic shifts, especially in contexts of political, social and ecological instability. Migrants often contribute to the city's economic and sociopolitical development, but when the pace of in-migration exceeds the ability of city planners and the economy to accommodate needs arising, marginalization (either of in-migrants, or of prior urban residents) and inequality often ensues (Gizewski & Homer-Dixon, 1995; Homer-Dixon, 1994; Østby, 2016). Generally, rapid growth due to in-migration, particularly when combined with low state capacity, is associated with the emergence and growth of informal settlements and slums (Beall, Goodfellow, & Rodgers, 2013; Gizelis et al., 2021; LeBas, 2013; Østby, 2016). The reasons for urban in-migration also matter. In-migration can be due both to pull factors, such as economic or lifestyle opportunities, and/or push factors, such as climate change or conflict (Gizewski & Homer-Dixon, 1995). In-migration due to displacement can be very fast and affect the demographic profile and urban landscape in pervasive ways (Bartlett, Alix–Garcia, & Saah, 2012). In the midst of conflict, cities often gain status as safe havens, attracting both people and investment (Bakonyi, Chonka, & Stuvøy, 2019; Büscher, 2018) and conflict-induced internal displacement to cities can directly contribute to the diffusion of ethnic conflict (Bohnet et al., 2018).

Spatial growth refers to expanding city boundaries, including formal reclassification, and material expansion of the cityscape or sprawling suburbs. Such growth entails rural areas and communities being "absorbed *whole*, whether by annexation (actual expansion of the city fringe) or simple reclassification (reflecting de facto urban expansion)" (Iaquinta & Drescher, 2000, p. 5). Spatial expansion can lead to conflict by encroachment on surrounding areas, generating grievances and land conflict. Polarization and inter-group conflict result as people move into the newly incorporated area from the urban core, changing local power dynamics (Meth, Goodfellow, Todes, & Charlton, 2021). Spatial growth of the city is often associated with investments in infrastructure and construction (Pedrazzini, Vincent-Geslin, & Thorer, 2014). While development of city space holds the promise of more income-generating opportunities and better housing opportunities, development may come at a cost. For example, reconstruction of urban space can fuel communal conflict when such interventions result in forced evictions, social segregation, and destruction of heritage sites that hold significance for particular identity groups. Investments in infrastructure and mobility may also have direct consequences for intergroup relations (cf. Rokem et al., 2018).

3.2. Violence-generating processes

How does demographic and spatial growth set off processes that generate violence between communal groups?

First, previous research has emphasized that demographic growth (particularly through rapid in-migration) can create a mismatch between the resources available and the demands and needs of the urban population, fueling competition and collective mobilization between groups (Goldstone, 2002). Competition over scarce urban resources can assume an identity component, and thereby a collective dimension. Grievances are more likely to turn violent along identity lines in cases where relative deprivation follows such cleavages, and when political elites capitalize on grievances to agitate on the basis of ethnic identity (Klaus & Mitchell, 2015; Stewart, 2016; Østby, 2016). Relative deprivation, in turn, can result when "the proximity of privileged elites among the old urban residents raises the migrants' awareness of their marginal role" (Østby, 2016, p. 493).

Second, demographic growth can have ethnopolitical consequences when it upsets the demographic balance, influencing the core constituencies from which political elites draw their support. Such shifts have been highlighted as a potential destabilizing factor particularly when in-migrants and previous residents are divided along identity lines (Østby, 2016). Destabilizing dynamics pertain particularly to in-migration, as rapid influx of migrants belonging to another sociopolitical group may induce fear among first-comers that they will lose their status and power (Huang & Keepper, 2009). In-migration may also more specifically tip electoral voting scales, which can generate ethnic violence in contexts

where political lines follow communal cleavages. Such violence typically seeks to intimidate voters in order to uphold electoral dominance, or takes more expressive forms in reaction to election results.

Third, demographic growth in the form of in-migration causes conflict diffusion when rural conflicts travel into cities. If urban in-migrants displaced by violence find themselves living in close proximity with people from the same communal group they were in conflict with, tensions reproduce in the city. In-migrants displaced by ethnic violence are also likely to ascribe salience to ethnic identity (cf. Kunovich & Hodson, 1999) and can be targeted for mobilization by ethnic militias (LeBas, 2013, p. 247). Migrants from areas affected by violent conflict can be perceived as more threatening by existing urban communities, leading to polarization and ethnic profiling. Communal violence in cities also flares up due to dynamics related to urban-rural straddling: When urban residents retain strong ties to their rural community of origin, events happening outside of the city can cause violence to erupt in the city.

Fourth, spatial expansion of the city can cause tension and violence between identity groups. The formal or informal incorporation of peri-urban areas often generates grievances related to land tenure and use, for instance, if former grazing land or farmland are incorporated into the city and demarcated for development (Balestri, 2019; Doan & Oduro, 2012). Expansion of the city also upsets existing structures for inter-group conflict management when previous local authorities are replaced by city governance institutions. Research illustrates how the growth of urban centers creates a discrepancy between the situation on the ground and the suitable political institutional or administrative structure, and how entrenched political interests impede efforts to reform the formal institutions for improved efficiency and better representation (Mathys & Büscher, 2018). Iaquinta and Drescher (2000; see also Balestri, 2019) identify newly incorporated areas as often having strong and conservative institutions further aggravating the potential for conflict. Spatial expansion can also induce election-related communal violence in line with the second process outlined above, if it entails more conservative communal groups being incorporated into the urban electorate (cf. Iaquinta & Drescher, 2000). More broadly, the spatial expansion of the city can displace groups from their homes or livelihoods. If rural and urban elites represent different groups, such city expansion can fuel communal violence. Spatial growth can also entail the destruction of heritage or symbolic spaces of importance for particular groups which can generate violence along communal lines (Pedrazzini et al., 2014).

Finally, growth has spatial consequences inside the city which may generate communal violence. In many cities, urban sprawl comes in the form of informal settlements, which by definition come under the threat of forced eviction and demolition (Klopp & Paller, 2019, p. 3). Responses to growth by urban planners and city governors include re-classification of land, slum upgrading, and slum demolition. While such strategies are often framed as efforts to improve the living conditions of urban citizens, they can directly or indirectly generate violence, which takes on communal dimensions if areas of certain groups are disproportionally targeted. Housing security is closely linked to citizenship, and local elites are often central in the implementation of upgrading programs (Patel, 2016). Where upgrading succeeds in improving the status and influence of marginalized groups, this can be perceived as threatening the interests of dominant groups, such as landlords benefiting from informality (Klopp & Paller, 2019). Efforts to develop and "modernize" the city in the face of rapid growth can also increase the segregation between different socioeconomic groups and reduce spaces for inter-group mixing (Pedrazzini et al., 2014).

3.3. Violence-stemming processes

Parallel to the violence-generating processes, or as substitutes, demographic and spatial growth also induce processes that reduce the risk of communal violence.

First, urbanization can feed transformation processes that mitigate collective grievances held by communal groups. Generally, when the share of rural voters diminishes, demands by urban constituencies cannot be ignored (Anku & Eni-Kalu, 2019). Electoral shifts due to demographic growth can promote crosscutting mobilization and the election of politicians who are responsive to the needs of the urban poor. More generally, cities offer a growing population a mobilization advantage that can be leveraged to push for changes in how the city is governed and resources distributed (Holston & Appadurai, 1996; Koster & de Vries, 2012). Such initiatives for reform can challenge exclusive elite networks and socioeconomic inequality which generate intergroup conflict.

Second, cities can foster multiethnic tolerance and peaceful co-existence (Bollens, 2007, p. 248; Huijsmans, Harteveld, van der Brug, & Lancee, 2021; Sassen, 2012). With rapid population growth, the heterogeneous and dense nature of cities creates opportunities for the merging and mixing of identities, facilitating the acceptance of other groups. Inter-ethnic tolerance can come about as social networks in the city expand, and as a result of the intermingling of individuals from different groups in both public and private spheres, including in residential areas, work places and during social activities (Varshney, 2002; Vertovec, 2007). More generally, urban growth can stimulate the emergence of a vibrant civil society (Klopp & Paller, 2019; Nagle, 2013) and promote new notions of citizenship, rights and participation (Holston & Appadurai, 1996; Sassen, 2012). Such dynamics can enable cross-ethnic peaceful mobilization for deepened democracy, as exemplified in the recent broad-based popular movement in urban Sudan (Berridge, 2019).

Third, urban growth can regenerate the economy, which in turn can diminish both the salience of ethnic identity, the importance of ethnically-held grievances and undermine the recruitment base for mobilization. A favorable economic situation affects the ability of local governments to improve basic services and infrastructure, and more job opportunities offer individuals' better standards of living. Such improvements at the societal and individual level reduce the need for violent collective mobilization along communal lines. Importantly, the informal economy often plays a major role in improving the lives of urban residents, and the city as a whole (Rigon, Walker, & Koroma, 2020).

3.4. How state responses condition the effects of growth

Finally, we consider how state actors, responding to the different processes set off by growth discussed above, condition violent and non-violent outcomes. State actors – the politicians in power at national and city level, and their administrations – can apply strategies mitigating the underlying grievances that spur communal violence, suppress communal violence without addressing the causes of it, or even intensify violence-generating processes.

In some cases, the state intentionally or unintentionally amplifies violence-generating effects of growth. The growth of urban centers can be perceived as a threat by incumbent regimes, because cities – notably, urban informal settlements – are often opposition strongholds (Harding, 2020; Lambright, 2014; Resnick, 2011). As a result, rulers can fuel intergroup tensions and foment violence to mobilize their own voters and intimidate opposition-aligned groups. Regimes also resort to

Table 1
Key processes linking urban growth to communal violence.

Forms of urban growth	Violence-generating processes	Violence-stemming processes	Conditioning state responses
Natural population growth	Pressure on urban resources	Improved urban governance	Grievance-reducing interventions
Urban in-migration	Shifting demographic balance between ethno-communal groups	Expanding cross-cutting networks	Conflict resolution/regulation mechanisms
Spatial expansion	Conflicts imported from rural areas to cities	Economic regeneration creating income-generating opportunities	Segregation
	Land tenure issues		Repression
	Expropriation, forced evictions		Active fueling of communal violence

coercive strategies to control urban space and populations by use of forced evictions, heavy clampdown by security forces on peaceful protest, and harassment of opposition organizations and urban activists, as well as ordinary urban dwellers. Such repression constitutes communal violence if it targets specific identity groups; in other cases, control through coercion may suppress communal violence which would have surfaced in a less repressive context.

Spatial segregation is another intentional strategy to suppress violence in a context of high communal tension. At the extreme, this approach entails the erection of barriers separating formerly warring communities in war-affected cities, as in Jerusalem and Belfast. In a more informal manner, private security and gated communities can assume ethnic dimensions in cases where class and ethnic belonging strongly overlap and where security is intended primarily for a small elite. While such outcomes appear more related to private interests, official zoning policies enable or prevent such developments (see e.g. Fabiyi, 2006; Rothwell & Massey, 2009).

The state can also respond by seeking to manage or resolve conflicts that arise. Local state representatives are often important mediators in cases of intergroup conflict in slums (Elfversson & Höglund, 2018). Community policing is another state-driven tool applied in urban settings to prevent and resolve local conflicts before they turn violent, including conflicts with an ethnic dimension (Ojebode et al., 2016). In many cities, the state's relationship with non-state actors – including groups sporadically or routinely using violence – is complex and must be analyzed with a critical eye. The relationship can range from being highly competitive and conflictual to collaborative, whereby the state colludes and benefits from the economic and political resources non-state armed groups have accumulated and where politicians use these resources to win elections and retain political power (Arias & Barnes, 2017; Berenschot, 2011).

Finally, city governors and planners can aim to address some of the negative implications of rapid urbanization and thereby ameliorate economic and social grievances that could otherwise be mobilized for intergroup violence. For instance, interventions aimed at improving social service delivery, housing and economic opportunity can improve inter-group relations and reduce tensions (Bollens, 2007). While the state plays a key role in policy shifts and implementation, private actors also have an interest in and can push for reform due to the destructive effect of violence on local economies.

Table 1 outlines the different forms of urban growth, and how we theorize those to induce processes associated with violent and non-violent outcomes. In addition, the table outlines how state responses condition these processes through measures ranging from interventions addressing grievances, to repressive measures that suppress violence, to responses amplifying communal conflict.

4. Communal conflict and coexistence in Nairobi, Addis Ababa, and Kampala

Africa is the site of intense urbanization, and has the highest rate of urban growth of all regions (Fox & Goodfellow, 2022; UN-Habitat, 2022). Visions about sustainable urban growth are at the heart of policy

agendas such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 (Karuri-Sebina, 2020), yet city growth in Africa unfolds where more than half of the urban population lives in informal settlements characterized by absent or scarce public services (World Bank, 2015). Insights from three African cities – Nairobi (Kenya), Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), and Kampala (Uganda) – illustrate the processes connecting urban growth with violent outcomes as well as the consequences of state responses.[3] All three cities are national capitals growing rapidly over recent decades: From 1980 to 2015, Addis Ababa's population tripled, Nairobi saw a seven-fold increase, and Kampala's population more than an eight-fold increase. Placed in context, the 74 African cities with over 1 million inhabitants in 2015 grew on average 5.6% across the years 1980–2015. Among these, Kampala was the 19th and Nairobi the 22nd most rapidly growing cities (with an average 6.2% and 5.6% respectively), while Addis was on the lower end of the scale, with an average 3% growth rate.[4] The three cities see in-migration from across the country, but Addis Ababa and Kampala are in the heartland of one main ethnic group, the Oromo in Ethiopia (Abate, 2019) and the Buganda in Uganda (Goodfellow & Lindemann, 2013). Nairobi is a city that cannot naturally be claimed by any of the larger ethnic groups.[5] In all three countries, ethnopolitical conflict and inter-group violence have been commonplace, yet patterns and dynamics of communal violence and coexistence vary markedly across the three cities. These differences allow us to probe how urbanization dynamics through different processes impact outcomes in communal violence. In Nairobi, levels of communal violence have been relatively high, while in both Addis Ababa and Kampala, communal violence has not manifested in the city to the same extent. However, these cities have not been free from tension and contestation.

4.1. Nairobi: communal violence in the city that belongs to No-one

Kenya has been spared from civil war but has experienced high numbers of violent communal conflicts as well as spillover effects from the war in neighboring Somalia. In Nairobi, competition for urban land rights and political elites' mobilization of group-based grievances have contributed to prevalent communal violence (Obala & Mattingly, 2014). Kenya's electoral politics has revolved strongly around ethnicity, and conflict lines originating in rural areas have remained politicized and at times violent in the city. Communal violence takes the form of inter-group clashes as well as excessive use of force by police against "ethnic militias" and political protest with ethnic overtones. The most

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[3] The authors have extensive research experience from these cities, and the analysis builds on interviews, field observations, reports and academic literature. Prior to field interviews, ethical approval was obtained from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority and consent from local authorities where relevant. Interviews were conducted under informed consent and the material stored securely in the field, as well as thereafter.

[4] Based on data from Africapolis (OECD/SWAC, 2018). Addis grew from 1,3 to 3,7 million inhabitants, Nairobi from 0,86 to 5,9 million inhabitants, and Kampala from 0,46 to 3,8 million inhabitants.

[5] Notably, the Nubians, a small ethnic group in Kenya, claim parts of Kibera in Nairobi as their homeland (Balaton-Chrimes, 2015).

prominent example is the post-election violence 2007–8, that erupted with high intensity in Kibera, Nairobi's largest informal settlement and an opposition stronghold (Omenya & Lubaale, 2012), as well as in other informal settlements of the city.

Urban growth has contributed to communal violence in different ways. Kibera, which has seen recurring violence along ethnic lines, illustrates the process from urban growth through in-migration to communal violence in the form of land- and housing-related conflict, with political overtones. Beginning as a settlement for Nubian former soldiers, Kibera grew rapidly following Kenya's independence in 1967 (Balaton-Chrimes, 2015). Those able to gain positions of power in Kibera were largely Nubians (as the first settlers) and Kikuyu businessmen (who belonged to the same community as Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta). These groups increasingly subdivided properties and rented out rooms to others, largely to urban in-migrants. Among the latter, many belonged to the political opposition, notably the Luo community, whose presence in Kibera has grown rapidly particularly since the early 1990s. Luo (and other opposition-aligned communities) thus tended to become tenants, dependent on (largely) Kikuyu landlords with ties to the political elite. The rapid influx of settlers in Kibera has both contributed to land conflict, pitting the original settlers against other groups (Balaton-Chrimes, 2015; Elfversson & Höglund, 2018), and to ethnic clashes along macro-political lines particularly around election times, when political candidates have played on existing grievances to mobilize voter support along communal lines (de Smedt, 2009).

Another example from Nairobi is Kawangware, which showcases how city growth has set off changes in the demographic configurations and contributed to communal violence. Kawangware is another low-income and partly informal settlement in Nairobi, situated near the western edge of Nairobi and bordering the Kikuyu heartland Kiambu outside the city. Kawangware was for long Kikuyu-dominated and electorally aligned with political incumbents (Obala, 2011; Omenya & Lubaale, 2012). However, in the last two elections, the political opposition has gained the upper hand. The shift is connected to a changing population composition, which also led to the subdivision of the constituency Kawangware belongs to.[6] The political shift marks a turning point where ethnic groups aligned with the opposition "are rising, taking over space. Kisiis teamed up with other communities to choose the leadership in Kawangware," in reaction to perceived historical exclusion from access to power and resources.[7] As a result, intergroup relations have turned increasingly violent, manifesting in ethnic clashes as well as one-sided attacks on individuals and property with targeting along ethnic lines (Kahura, 2017; Omenya & Lubaale, 2012).[8]

There have also been deliberate attempts to mitigate the destructive effects of Nairobi's rapid growth, including efforts to dampen intergroup grievances. For example, slum upgrading has improved security in Korogocho. It is another of Nairobi's major slum settlements, located in the northeastern parts of the city. Hosting an ethnically-mixed population, Korogocho was a hotspot in Kenya's 2007 election crisis, hit hard by the ethnopolitical violence which ravaged the country in response to what was seen as a stolen election. Residents experience extreme unemployment, poor health conditions, and almost non-existent service provision and live on the edge of Dandora, the largest dump site in Nairobi. Since 2008, and partly in response to the post-election violence, authorities have sought to improve living conditions through the Korogocho Slum upgrading programme, a joint initiative by the governments of Kenya and Italy (IFRA-Nairobi, 2011). The programme improved infrastructure and basic services in the area (roads,

electricity, sewerage, a new playground and sports fields), and the dump site (an entry point to Dandora) has been closed.[9] The program, in particular the closing of the dump site which was a source of illicit revenues, at first generated tensions, but in the longer run the interventions have reduced insecurity and inter-ethnic tensions.[10] Generally, the effect of slum upgrading programs across the city has been uneven. For example, in Kibera, several initiatives have generated tension due to perceptions and rumors that certain communities benefit disproportionally from the allocation of new housing.[11]

4.2. Addis Ababa: coexistence with violent exceptions

Ethiopia has seen longstanding armed contestation over regional and national power, and numerous violent communal conflicts around the country. In Addis Ababa, resistance to the ruling coalition's ethnic-based governance system has been high, leading for example to crosscutting mobilization of opposition parties and civil society during the 2001 and 2005 national elections, when urban protests against election rigging triggered post-election repression (Melakou, 2008; Merera, 2011).

In many regards, Addis Ababa is an example where a multiethnic urban identity developed despite a national political system closely intertwined with ethnic identity. The relative overrepresentation of ethnic Amhara in Addis Ababa (Central Statistical Agency, 2007) has constituted a longstanding grievance of the Oromo, who have denounced their lack of access to the capital's resources (Benti, 2002). Nevertheless, established Oromo residents, similarly to Addis Ababans from other ethnic backgrounds, mostly do not identify by their ethnicity.[12] Unlike many other African cities, Addis Ababa was never the subject of large-scale colonial segregation (Pedrazzini et al., 2014), a circumstance that has facilitated the mixing of different groups in the city and contributed to the emergence of a shared urban identity. With mixed social networks, ethnicity has for many urban residents been perceived as a redundant concept.[13] Although some elements of negative stereotyping are present, in a broad sense the multiethnic character of Addis Ababa has favored the emergence of a metropolitan identity linked to urban rather than ethnic identification.

However, the relatively low levels of violent intergroup conflict in Addis Ababa are also a product of repression. The ruling coalition Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)[14] governed the country with an iron fist 1991–2019, suppressing any form of anti-government activism, including pro-democracy urban activists (Gagliardone & Pohjonen, 2016; Markakis, 2011). State repression prevented political mobilization along ethnic or other identity lines for nearly three decades. While the urban elites in Ethiopia, particularly in Addis Ababa, are known for questioning the country's ethnic federalism and politicization of ethnicity, political mobilization and protests were brutally repressed in the few instances where they occurred (Melakou, 2008; Merera, 2011). After political reforms were initiated in 2018, communal violence has become more commonplace in Ethiopia, including in Addis Ababa. The reduced power of the state, the politicization of ethnicity in the renegotiation of the political settlement, and the growth of the Oromo nationalist struggle as well as Amhara nationalism have intensified communal conflicts country-wide. While

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[6] Interviews NGO representative, 23/10/19; youth group representative, 24/10/19.

[7] Interviews NGO representative, 26/10/19; local government representative, 24/10/19.

[8] Interviews NGO representative, 23/10/19; youth group representative, 24/10/19; youth group representative, 26/10/2019.

[9] Interview local government representative, 29/10/19.

[10] Interview NGO representative, 25/10/19.

[11] Interview NGO representative, 7/3/18.

[12] Interview Gerji resident, 15/12/20; informal conversation, resident from British Embassy area, 18/08/20.

[13] Interviews Hayat resident, 15/12/20; Sarbet resident, 16/12/20. In the Afrobarometer, 2020, an overwhelming 78% of respondents in Addis report feeling more or only "Ethiopian," compared to identification with an ethnic group. Comparative figures for the rest of Ethiopia was only 32%.

[14] In 2020, Abyi Ahmed established the Prosperity Party. PP breaks with the tradition of ethnic federalism, merging coalition members into a unitary party.

Addis Ababa has not been the main theatre of violence, the capital city has not remained untouched.

One case where changes in the demographic balance have led to rising inter-group tensions and limited violence, is the in-migration of Oromo into the suburbs of Addis Ababa since the beginning of the political reforms in 2018. Rumors that Addis Ababa's deputy mayor Takele Uma (2018-2020) used to drive an Oromo nationalist agenda fueled anti-Oromo sentiments among many non-Oromo Addis Ababans. Non-Oromo residents have reported that preferential access to government housing is given to Oromos, that land titles based on false claims of ancestry have been granted to Oromo, that ethnic Oromos have been hired in large numbers in the city administration, and that the local government offices have distributed resident cards to non-permanent residents in Addis Ababa coming from Oromia.[15] While these alterations in demographic configurations have so far only on rare occasions led to physical violence, rising inter-ethnic tensions have been reported by city residents. In particular, the violent protests and associated turmoil that rocked Addis Ababa in June/July 2020 after the assassination of the Oromo singer Hachalu Hundessa had clear ethnic dimensions (Pellerin & Ashenafi, 2022). Residents in some neighborhoods preemptively turned against newly settled Oromo migrants, fearing that they would join the protests.[16] In the suburbs of Addis Ababa, Oromo protesters particularly targeted Amhara households.[17]

Urban-rural conflict linkages have also triggered communal tension in the city. Developments after the outbreak of armed conflict between the Tigrayan People Liberation Front (TPLF) in Tigray regional state and the ruling Prosperity Party in November 2020 are illustrative. The eruption of the conflict resulted in the targeting of Tigrayans working in the civil service, businesspeople and private citizens by government forces (Marks & Abdi Latif, 2020). Based on existing as well as perceived ties of urban Tigrayans with the TPLF, the government ethnically profiled Tigrayan residents in Addis Ababa. Largescale suspensions of Tigrayans working in the civil service in the capital, prevention of Tigrayans from leaving the country through Bole International Airport and temporary arrests and imprisonment of Tigrayan citizens are but some examples.[18] Addis Ababans of Tigrayan origin also reported that their bank accounts were frozen, their homes searched, and harassment from neighbors of non-Tigrayan origin (Freudenthal, 2020). Many non-Tigrayan residents supported the government measures, holding that most Tigrayans were TPLF supporters.

The expansion of the city into the surrounding Oromia regional state has led to conflicts, sometimes violent, over land between Addis Ababa residents, the state, and the Oromo living in the areas bordering the capital (Abate, 2019). The city growth has resulted in displacement of Oromo residents fueling grievances and communal violence against Amhara, but also involving other groups, such as clashes between Oromo and Dorze in Burayu on the Addis Ababa's outskirts in 2018 (Manek & Tasfaye, 2018; Pellerin & Ashenafi, 2022). Farmers have been expropriated without sufficient compensation, and rising housing prices in the growing suburbs have rendered it nearly impossible for former rural residents to stay in the area (Abate, 2019; Záhořík, 2017). The suburbs of the capital, which transgress the formal boundaries of the city, have on numerous occasions seen the outbreak of communal violence targeting non-Oromo residents. The violence has occurred in the context of Oromo protests since 2015, denouncing the marginalization of the Oromo in the capital city and contesting the larger political

settlements in the country.[19] This wave of protests also contributed to political reform and the ascent to power of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in 2018 (Temin & Badwaza, 2019). The grievances related to the expansion of the city were also emphasized during the violent protests ignited by the assassination of Hachalu Hundessa, mentioned above.

4.3. Kampala: urban contestation, but not communal violence

Successive governments in Uganda have been involved in armed conflict with a number of regionally or ethnically mobilized rebel groups since independence. Yet ethnicity does not feature in the urban contestation of Kampala to the extent of, for example, Nairobi.

For long effectively in a one-party state, Kampala is an opposition stronghold where resistance to the National Resistance Movement (NRM), Uganda's ruling party, is powerful.[20] Kampala has seen protests, rioting and violent repression. The marred elections of 2011, 2016 and 2021 featured widespread urban protest and security crackdowns (Abrahamsen & Bareebe, 2016). Yet, the NRM is not ethnically mobilized in the same way as parties in Kenya and Ethiopia,[21] and electoral competition has historically not taken on ethnic dimensions. However, Kampala is the site of the Buganda kingdom and the Baganda the largest ethnic group in Uganda. The kingdom's elites have been both friendly and hostile to the NRM, while simultaneously enjoying special privileges. They maintain a political and economic resource base outside of the state. Given Kampala's position as an opposition stronghold, resolve on the part of President Museveni to quell opposition and to manage Buganda has coalesced around different strategies of coercion, cooperation and confrontation. Historically, potential group-based mobilization in the city has been kept in check through increasingly repressive state security and police tactics, including the use of local armed and unarmed groups such as the hundreds of thousands of 'Crime Preventers' in advance of elections and against protests (Muwanga, Mukwaya, & Goodfellow, 2020).

Initially, Museveni sought to accommodate the Buganda kingdom's preferences for exceptionalism as a cultural institution, and its control over land and resources in Kampala.[22] However, relations between the NRM and the kingdom became more confrontational after 2007. Growing tensions of a communal nature have arisen partly due to the inevitable consequences of the city's spatial and population growth, due to increasing rates of fertility, decreases in mortality and being the focal point of urban in-migration in the country (Nyakaana & Lwasa, 2007, pp. 3–4). The city has grown from its original 8 km^2 in 1962 to a metropolitan area that is estimated as 189 km^2 (Nyakaana & Lwasa, 2007), generating competition for land and services. Migrants are from northern, eastern and western Uganda and different ethnic groups, mainly unskilled or semi-skilled workers in search of labor and income opportunities (Nyakaana & Lwasa, 2007; Vermeiren, Van Rompaey, Loopmans, Serwajja, & Mukwaya, 2012).

The demands of migrants and their needs have, over time, been addressed by more state intervention, a development that affects the Baganda and their indigenous claims on the city. In 2007, the government proposed a land amendment to defend tenant occupants of crown ('mailo') land controlled by Baganda traditional leaders. This move fueled group-based grievances and divisions between the NRM and the *Kabaka* (the king of Buganda). In September 2009, Baganda youth

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[15] Interviews Kotebe resident, 16/12/20; Balbula resident, 4/7/20; Maganagna resident, 6/7/20.

[16] In Bulbula, local youth living in the government condominiums threatened and physically assaulted new residents in the neighbourhood speaking Afan Oromo (fieldnotes 5/7/20; interview, friend of Bulbula resident, 15/12/20).

[17] Interview, Alem Gena resident, 16/12/20.

[18] Interview, Haya Arat resident, 18/11/20; informal conversation, Hayat resident, 12/12/20; fieldnotes 11/11/20.

[19] Interviews, Hayat resident, 15/12/20; Alem Gena resident, 16/12/20.

[20] The ruling party NRM has not won a political majority in Kampala since 1996.

[21] NRM's precursor, the National Resistance Army, "was multi-ethnic … and operated in Buganda even though its top leadership came from Western Uganda" (Golooba-Mutebi & Sjögren, 2017, p. 26).

[22] NRM sought to appease Baganda by allowing it to establish a shadow government and parliament, although the constitution excludes traditional leaders from political activities.

demonstrated violently against Museveni for barring the *Kabaka* from visiting a breakaway group outside of Kampala (Goodfellow & Linde-mann, 2013). The demonstrations became violent and police used lethal force. At least 40 civilians were killed in the riots (HRW, 2010), shutting down the city. Fear of ethnic targeting among non-Baganda spread beyond the Kampala metropolitan area. There were reports of rioters attacking people from western Uganda, primarily people from the Banyankole ethnic group to which Museveni belongs.

Kampala also illustrates how state reform of the city administration can be used to weaken ethnic claims to power over the city. In response to the more confrontational relations with the Baganda kingdom after 2007, the NRM pushed for reforms to fundamentally alter the administration of Kampala and weaken the power of the *Kabaka*. The Kampala Capital City Act of 2010 established a cabinet-level position of minister of Kampala and created a corporate entity for managing the city, the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCAA). The KCAA enabled the ruling party to avoid having outspoken critics in charge of Kampala. The KCAA has financial and administrative powers that are superior to those of the city's elected representatives. It is responsible for provision and super-vision of essential health services, waste management, education and community development of the city, but mainly accountable to the central government. This arrangement was particularly important for the NRM's capacity to hold power in the country's capital city, even when it had lost its political mandate among the urban electorate.

Urban growth has also given rise to a mismatch between resource demands and service delivery, which has prompted mobilization for responsive governance. But in Kampala such mobilization has only to a limited extent been ethnic. Socioeconomic hardship, high unemploy-ment rates and dismal housing, combined with frustrations with the ruling party, have contributed to the emergence of new political movements rooted in 'slum' constituencies (Renzaho, Doh, Mahumud, Galukande, & Kamara, 2020, p. 3). In this context, anti-establishment figures from the slums, such as successful rap musician Bobi Wine (Robert Kyagulanyi) from Kamwokya, gain political currency. Known as the "Ghetto President," Wine was elected into parliament in 2017 and became a leading voice against the removal of presidential age limits (Osiebe, 2020). Despite multiple arrests and harassment of his sup-porters, Wine ran for president in 2021, winning 35,08% of the national votes and 72,8% in Kampala (ECU, 2021). Wine's political movement has sparked national and international solidarity. With Kampala as his main base and being Baganda, Wine has also turned to the Buganda kingdom for support (Reuss & Titeca, 2020), and used ethnic identity as a political calling card to mobilize support against the NRM. In response to Wine's success in the 2021 polls, Museveni has, in turn, claimed that the Baganda vote in Kampala districts was based on sectarianism and prejudice against non-Baganda (Daily Monitor, 2021). These references to ethnicity signal a change in Ugandan politics. Previously, neither the state nor Kampala-based opposition leaders fomented ethnic divisions in order to mobilize political support.

5. Conclusions

Urban growth is a two-edged process affecting the risk of communal violence in cities. As we show, the varied forms of growth require unpacking, because they engender different processes that cause communal violence, as well as processes that foster coexistence. In Nairobi, Addis Ababa, and Kampala, processes that raise the risk of violence are present, but the outcomes differ between and within the cities, and across time and space. By considering also the violence-stemming effects of growth, and the way different trajectories are conditioned by state responses, the framework provides a nuanced ac-count of the processes resulting in different city-level outcomes.

Dynamics in the three cities illustrate how state responses, but also the broader political context, condition the effect of growth on communal violence. Of particular relevance for understanding the forces at work, national-level politics in Uganda revolves much less around communal identity than politics in Ethiopia and Kenya. As such, it is unsurprising that election-related violence in Kampala is less about communal mobilization and a changing demographic balance, compared to Nairobi. In Kampala, the ruling party's strategy of appeasing the Buganda kingdom, alongside high levels of repression, also helps to explain low levels of urban political mobilization based on ethnocommunal identity. However, the shift to a more confrontational strategy toward the kingdom, and the president's branding of opposition candidates as appealing to sectarian interests, could elevate the risk that such mobilization becomes "ethnicized" and violent, for example, in relation to elections or as urban residents increasingly mobilize for more responsive urban government.

The cities also display different spatial patterns, suggesting impor-tant next steps for future research. For instance, violence in Addis Ababa has, as expected in much of the literature on growth and conflict (see Gizelis et al., 2021), manifested in the 'peri-urban' parts of the cities, where the spatial expansion is happening and the rural meets the urban. In Nairobi, dynamics are different and much of the communal violence has been in the "urban core," due to the location of some of the major and violence-prone slums close to the city center.

Temporal dimensions of urban growth are also important to consider. To begin, the broader relationship between urban growth and violence is clearly contingent on the historical trajectory of city devel-opment. For example, Addis Ababa grew more slowly and without a history of colonial zoning, whereas Nairobi (and Kampala) grew quickly after independence, due to a large influx of newcomers to urban areas which previously had been closed off for Africans. Such historical tra-jectories condition local networks and power relations among urban communities, as well as how the state responds to growth. In addition, time can allow for adequate responses and redress. Periods of urban disorder and communal conflict, spurred by rapid city growth, can in turn create the intervention and innovation that is required to stem communal violence. For example, efforts to improve security in Kor-ogocho in Nairobi was a direct result of the destructive effect of the violence along communal lines that hit the area in the post-2007 elec-tion conflict.

Features of the framework are applicable to the broader literature on urban violence. We have focused on communal violence, posited to originate and manifest in partly different ways than, for instance, terrorism or organized violent crime. However, some of the theoretical pathways we identify are relevant for other forms of violence as well. Notably, the effect of urbanization on communal violence depends on whether it exacerbates or alleviates socioeconomic inequality; in a similar way, urban inequality is held as a cause of rampant criminal violence in Latin American cities (Glass et al., 2022; Moser & McIlwaine, 2006; Muggah, 2012). Insights from cases like Nairobi on how political aspirants manipulate inter-ethnic grievances are also relevant for un-derstanding violent mobilization in contexts where identity cleavages other than communal or ethnic become salient in politics. In addition, state responses and policies can reduce urban inequality, and findings about the violence-mitigating effect of strategies like Medellín's 'social urbanism' (Sotomayor, 2018) would be appealing to apply to contexts characterized by communal tensions.

Future research can make use of our process-oriented framework in different ways to further knowledge on the relationship between urban growth and communal violence. With single-case and comparative case studies the presence and importance of the pathways we identify can be traced and assessed. In addition, the framework can help improve quantitative analyses by drawing attention to factors with divergent effects that need to be considered for more precise statistical models. For instance, to more accurately assess the violence-inducing effects of urban growth, scholars need to control for factors such as state repres-sion and economic regeneration. Finally, along similar lines, future comparative research should explore the conditions where violence-generating and violence-stemming effects of urbanization are more likely to play out, and when and how violence is suppressed.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Acknowledgments

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