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## The Politicization of Urbanization: An Analysis of City Creation in Uganda

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Urbanisation is a transformative global phenomenon, profoundly shaping societies and economies in the 21st century. In Africa, many governments are actively pursuing the creation of new cities as a strategy to stimulate economic growth, enhance decentralisation, and implement governance reforms. Uganda, aligning with its Vision 2040 strategic development framework, has embarked on an ambitious initiative to transition from a predominantly agrarian economy to a modern, urbanised nation through the establishment of new cities. In 2020, ten new cities were declared by the Ugandan government, with further plans for additional urban centres by 2025, aiming to bolster local economies, upgrade infrastructure, and decentralise administrative functions. However, this initiative has not been without significant contention. Scholarly discourse suggests that political motivations have been a primary driver in determining which towns are elevated to city status, frequently overshadowing genuine developmental needs and economic viability. This politicisation of urban development is not unique to Uganda; studies across sub-Saharan Africa indicate that urban administrative reforms are often influenced by political agendas aimed at consolidating power, securing electoral victories, and manipulating demographic voting blocs. This paper critically analyses the city creation process in Uganda, examining the extent to which political considerations have shaped urbanisation trends and their subsequent impact on governance structures and the efficiency of service delivery. By investigating the interaction between political objectives and urban development outcomes, this research aims to provide insights into the challenges and opportunities for sustainable urbanisation in Uganda and offers recommendations for a more equitable and development-focused approach to city creation.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The rapid pace of urbanisation globally underscores its role as a principal force of change in the 21st century. Governments, particularly in developing regions like Africa, are increasingly adopting the strategy of creating new cities to drive economic expansion, foster decentralisation, and introduce critical governance reforms. Uganda exemplifies this trend, with its Vision 2040 framework explicitly targeting a national transformation from an agrarian to a modernised, urbanised society. As part of this strategic vision, the Ugandan government designated ten new cities in 2020, with further plans for urban expansion by 2025. These initiatives are ostensibly designed to invigorate local economies, enhance infrastructure, and devolve administrative responsibilities.

Despite the stated developmental objectives, the process of city creation in Uganda has been subject to considerable controversy. A growing body of scholars contends that political considerations have disproportionately influenced the selection and elevation of towns to city status, often at the expense of genuine developmental imperatives (Afrobarometer, n.d; Mbabazi & Atukunda, 2020). This phenomenon is not isolated to Uganda; research on decentralisation across sub-Saharan Africa consistently reveals that urban administrative reforms are frequently shaped by political manoeuvring aimed at consolidating power, securing electoral advantages, and manipulating voter demographics (Green, 2019; Dickovick & Riedl, 2014). This paper undertakes a comprehensive analysis of Uganda’s city creation process, investigating the degree to which political motivations have driven its urbanisation course and the profound implications these motivations have had on local governance and the provision of essential services. The subsequent sections delve into the

historical and contemporary context, present empirical findings, and offer a critical analysis of the politicisation inherent in Uganda’s urban development strategy, concluding with actionable recommendations for a more sustainable and equitable urban future.

Urbanisation in Uganda cannot be viewed solely as a recent phenomenon driven by strategic policy documents such as Vision 2040. It has deep historical antecedents dating back to the colonial era, when administrative and trading centres like Kampala, Jinja, and Entebbe were deliberately developed to support colonial extraction and governance (Byerley, 2013). These early urban formations introduced spatial hierarchies and political centralisation that continue to influence modern city creation. Post-independence urban policies largely inherited this model, with successive governments grappling with the dual imperatives of modernising the economy and maintaining political control (Omolo-Okalebo, 2010). This legacy shapes current urbanisation dynamics, where policy formulation is often interlinked with attempts to manage political legitimacy and territorial influence.

The tension between developmental planning and political expediency is further amplified by Uganda’s hybrid political system, which exhibits both democratic features and authoritarian tendencies (Williams, 2022). City creation in this context becomes a tool of political messaging and elite negotiation, where urban status is framed as a reward for loyalty or a response to regional demands for visibility and recognition. The use of urban designation as a form of political appeasement is well-documented in African political studies literature and underscores the instrumentalisation of urban policy for regime survival. As Williams (2022) concludes, this not only complicates the governance landscape but

also weakens the technocratic foundations of urban planning, making it susceptible to *short-termism* and regional disparities.

In addition, the challenges associated with the politicisation of urbanisation must be situated within broader global debates on the role of cities in achieving sustainable development. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 11 emphasises inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities (UN-Habitat, 2023). However, when urban governance is compromised by political interference, these global ambitions are undermined. In Uganda, the disconnect between political motives and actual urban needs, such as housing, transport, service delivery, and employment, raises questions about the long-term viability of the newly designated cities. Understanding this context is essential for proposing reforms that realign Uganda's urban agenda with its developmental goals and international obligations.

The initial declaration of new cities in 2020, followed by subsequent plans for more by 2025, while partly reflecting a governmental commitment to accelerate urban growth, must be critically examined through the lens of policy implementation and its real-world consequences. While the rhetoric often centres on economic development and improved service delivery, the empirical evidence and scholarly analyses increasingly point towards a strategic political calculus underlying these urban transformations. This paper argues that understanding the politicisation of urbanisation in Uganda is crucial for discerning the true impact of these policies on equitable development, democratic governance, and sustainable urban futures. By deconstructing this complicated interaction, the study aims to contribute to broader debates on urban development in competitive authoritarian regimes and to offer specific policy recommendations for Uganda.

## Context

Uganda's Vision 2040 articulates an ambitious long-term goal: to transform the nation into a competitive upper-middle-income country

primarily through accelerated industrialisation and urbanisation. Historically, Uganda's urbanisation rate has been notably slow, with over 70% of its population residing in rural areas as recently as 2018 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2022). However, a discernible shift is underway, characterised by increasing rural-to-urban migration, largely propelled by the allure of enhanced economic opportunities and better infrastructure in urban centres. This demographic movement has compelled the government to intensify its focus on urbanisation as a cornerstone of national development.

The strategic establishment of new cities in Uganda aligns with broader regional trends in decentralisation and urban growth observed across East Africa. For instance, Kenya, through its 2010 constitution, implemented a system of devolved governance by creating counties, a move intended to foster local governance and catalyse economic development at the sub-national level (Dickovick & Riedl, 2014). Similarly, other African nations have embraced urban administrative reforms to enhance local autonomy and spur economic growth (Kamana et al., 2023). In line with this regional momentum, the Ugandan government's declaration of ten new cities, including prominent urban centres such as Arua, Gulu, Lira, Hoima, Fort Portal, Mbale, Jinja, Mbarara, Masaka, and Soroti, was framed as an integral component of this wider decentralisation and urban expansion agenda.

However, the declared motivations for city creation—economic growth and administrative efficiency—have been met with scepticism. There remain significant questions regarding the true drivers behind the timing and geographical placement of these new urban entities. A key critique posits that the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) has strategically leveraged city creation as a political instrument. This tool, critics argue, is employed to consolidate electoral support and to reward regions perceived as loyal to the regime, particularly in the lead-up to national elections (Afrobarometer, n.d.; Mbabazi & Atukunda, 2020). This suggests that the process is not solely driven by developmental logic but is

deeply associated with political calculus, where urban planning serves partisan objectives. The implications of such politicisation extend beyond mere administrative boundaries, potentially impacting the equitable distribution of resources, the efficiency of public services, and the overall trajectory of sustainable urban development in Uganda.

Additionally, the historical context of decentralisation in Uganda provides an important backdrop. While decentralisation policies were initially introduced to improve service delivery and democratic participation, their implementation has often been characterised by central government control and manipulation (Green, 2019). This history of a centralised approach to ostensibly decentralised reforms provides a crucial context for understanding the current patterns of city creation. The selective elevation of certain towns to city status, alongside the establishment of new administrative units, can be seen as a continuation of this broader trend, where political considerations frequently override purely technical or developmental justifications. The rationale for specific locations and the resources allocated to them often appears to align more with political reward mechanisms than with strategic urban planning based on economic viability or population density.

## METHODOLOGY

This study primarily employs a qualitative, analytical, and critical review methodology, synthesising existing scholarly discourse, research findings from other African contexts, and insights drawn from reports by entities such as the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS). The approach involves a comprehensive literature review and synthesis, where arguments and findings from various academic sources (e.g., Afrobarometer, n.d.; Mbabazi & Atukunda, 2020; Green, 2019; Dickovick & Riedl, 2014; Kamana et al., 2023; Pieterse, 2010) are integrated to construct a refined understanding of the politicisation of urbanisation in Uganda. This foundational step allows for the identification of recurring themes, contentious points, and

established theories within the academic discourse surrounding urban development and political influence in the African context.

Building upon this synthesis, the methodology extends to a critical analysis, where the declared governmental motivations for city creation are rigorously compared against observed on-the-ground trends and the prevailing political realities in Uganda. This involves contextualising Uganda's specific urbanisation patterns within broader regional and political frameworks, drawing parallels and distinctions with experiences in other sub-Saharan African countries. Through this analytical lens, the study aims to uncover the discrepancies between policy rhetoric and practical outcomes, particularly concerning the equitable distribution of resources and the efficiency of service delivery in newly designated urban areas.

To achieve this, a systematic process was employed to identify and organise relevant data. First, academic articles, government reports, policy briefs, and think tank publications were selected through a targeted search using digital academic databases (e.g., JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Scopus) and institutional repositories of key organisations such as UN-Habitat, ACODE, and the Uganda Bureau of Statistics. Key search terms included 'city creation Uganda', 'urbanization and politics in Africa', 'decentralization', and 'political influence on urban governance'. After retrieval, sources were reviewed for credibility, relevance to the Ugandan context, and methodological rigour. Duplicate and outdated materials were removed. All eligible documents were stored in a database, which was used to code and manage references.

Following collection, the data was cleaned to remove non-substantive material such as editorials, duplicate case examples, or anecdotal evidence lacking a scholarly basis. The remaining literature was then manually coded using thematic analysis to identify key sub-themes such as 'political motivation in city creation,' 'electoral strategy and urban expansion,' 'resource allocation disparities,' and 'impact on service



delivery and governance.’ These sub-themes were used to structure the analytical sections of the paper, ensuring that findings were logically grouped and adequately supported by the sources. This process allowed for a coherent presentation of how politicisation has shaped Uganda’s urbanisation trajectory and informed the interpretive analysis that follows.

Ultimately, the methodological framework was designed for inferential reasoning, allowing for the derivation of conclusions and the formulation of actionable recommendations based on the comprehensive synthesis and critical analysis of the available information. It is important to note that this study is not an empirical investigation involving primary data collection methods, such as surveys, interviews, or experiments. Instead, it serves as an interpretive academic discourse, meticulously constructed upon existing knowledge and a thorough examination of secondary sources to shine a spotlight on the complex relationship between politics and urban development in Uganda.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### Demographic and Economic Trends in New Cities

The declaration of new cities in Uganda has undeniably triggered significant demographic shifts and economic reconfigurations within the urban landscape. Data from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) indicates that population growth in cities like Mbarara and Gulu has substantially outpaced that of other newly designated cities, such as Soroti and Lira. This observable disparity in growth rates can be largely attributed to pre-existing economic fundamentals and infrastructural development. Cities that already possessed a relatively robust economic base, diversified economic activities, and well-developed infrastructure, such as Mbarara, have demonstrated a greater capacity to attract investment and experience more rapid growth. Mbarara, for instance, benefits from its strategic location as a regional hub for trade and commerce, boasting established markets, transport networks, and a comparatively stronger private sector

(Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2022). This inherent advantage allowed it to leverage its new city status to consolidate its position as a growth pole.

Conversely, cities like Soroti and Lira, which lacked comparable infrastructure and a vibrant private sector at the time of their elevation, have struggled to fully capitalise on their elevated city status. Their growth has been more modest, and the anticipated economic boom has yet to materialise uniformly across all new urban centres. This uneven growth arc highlights a critical challenge in Uganda’s urban development strategy. Research from other African contexts corroborates this pattern, demonstrating that cities with existing infrastructure and inherent economic potential tend to grow more rapidly than those where urbanisation is primarily driven by political imperatives rather than economic realities (Pieterse, 2010; Kamana et al., 2023). The mere declaration of city status, without concomitant investments in foundational infrastructure, robust economic diversification strategies, and local capacity building, proves insufficient to stimulate organic, sustainable growth.

This disparity in urban growth poses substantial challenges to achieving balanced and sustainable urban development across the country. Cities that lag behind in terms of economic activity and infrastructure development often find themselves unable to provide adequate public services or cultivate sufficient economic opportunities for their expanding populations. The consequence is a widening gap between urban centres, leading to concentrated development in a few areas while others struggle to meet the basic needs of their residents, thereby undermining the national objective of balanced and equitable urbanisation. The failure of some new cities to attract significant investment or generate sufficient internal revenue streams perpetuates their reliance on central government transfers, which are often inadequate and contribute to a cycle of underdevelopment.

**Table 1: Population Growth and Key Economic Indicators of Selected New Cities in Uganda (2019 vs. 2023) According to Uganda Bureau of Statistics**

City	Population (2019 est.)	Population (2023 est.)	Growth Rate (%)	Key Economic Activities (2019)	Major Infrastructure (Post-2020)
Mbarara	195,000	240,000	≈ 23%	Trade, services, agro-processing	Upgraded & constructed new city roads; expanded commercial facilities such as the central market
Gulu	180,300	225,500	25%	Education, services, commerce	Gulu University expansion, new market upgrades & roads
Soroti	101,300	133,100	31%	Agriculture, small trade; rising education activity	Limited road rehabilitation; plans for market/airport improvements
Lira	235,300	253,700	8%	Agriculture, informal trade; emerging light industry	Road network improvement, satellite lab & power line

### Political Considerations and Electoral Strategy

The political underpinnings of city creation in Uganda are inextricably linked to the country's competitive authoritarian political landscape. In such a system, initiatives like decentralisation and urbanisation are frequently utilised by the ruling elite to consolidate and perpetuate political power (Green, 2019; Dickovick & Riedl, 2014). This strategic deployment of urban administrative reforms for political gain is a recurring theme across sub-Saharan Africa, where governments often manipulate such processes to achieve partisan objectives (Kamana et al., 2023). The NRM government, led by President Yoweri Museveni, has demonstrated a consistent pattern of leveraging state resources and administrative reforms to maintain its long-standing grip on power.

One primary manifestation of this politicisation is the use of city creation to solidify electoral support. The Afrobarometer(n.d.) argues that by granting city status to certain towns, the government can project an image of delivering development and progress to specific regions, thereby garnering votes and reinforcing loyalty, particularly in the run-up to national elections. This tactic effectively transforms urban development into a political commodity, where the benefits of city status—such as enhanced

resource allocation, administrative upgrades, and promises of future development projects—are selectively distributed to areas deemed strategically important for electoral success. The timing of city declarations, often preceding major elections, further supports the argument that political expediency plays a more significant role than genuine developmental criteria (Mbabazi & Atukunda, 2020). For example, the 2020 declaration of ten new cities occurred just months before the fiercely contested 2021 general elections, suggesting a direct correlation between political timing and policy implementation. Similarly, the recent declaration of Tororo district as a new city in April 2025 has come amidst heightened political tensions preceding the 2026 general election.

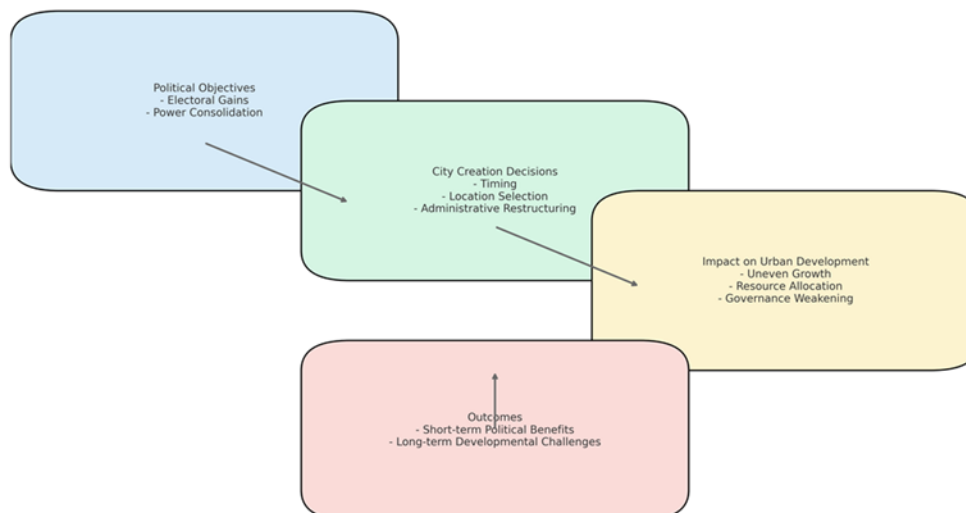
Besides, the creation of new cities can be a mechanism for manipulating demographic voting blocs. By altering administrative boundaries and elevating certain localities, the government can redraw electoral maps in ways that favour the ruling party, dilute opposition strongholds, or create new constituencies that are more amenable to the incumbent. This 'gerrymandering' through urban reclassification distorts the democratic process, ensuring that the political benefits outweigh any potential developmental drawbacks. The process also allows for the rewarding of loyal

political elites and the marginalisation of dissenting voices, further entrenching the power of the ruling party. Newly created city administrative roles often become avenues for patronage, offering positions to politically aligned individuals, which further cements the NRM's influence at the local level.

Finally, the politicisation extends to resource allocation and governance structures within these newly created cities. Decisions regarding infrastructure investment, service provision, and administrative appointments may be influenced by political considerations rather than technical

expertise or genuine local needs. This can lead to inefficient resource utilisation, inadequate service delivery, and the undermining of local governance institutions, as their autonomy and decision-making processes are compromised by central political directives. The result is a system where urban development becomes a tool for political control, potentially hindering sustainable growth and equitable access to resources for all citizens. The perceived political favouritism in resource distribution can also fuel local discontent and exacerbate inter-regional inequalities, challenging the very notion of national unity and balanced development.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Politicised Urbanisation in Uganda; an Illustration of How Political Motives Influence City Creation and Impact Long-term Urban Development**



### Impact on Governance and Service Delivery

The politicisation of city creation in Uganda has had profound and often detrimental impacts on governance and service delivery within these newly designated urban areas. When cities are created primarily for political expediency rather than robust developmental criteria, their foundational governance structures often lack the necessary institutional capacity, financial resources, and trained personnel to manage expanded responsibilities (Kamana et al., 2023). This deficiency frequently results in a significant mismatch between the expectations associated with city status and the reality of their operational capabilities. The sudden elevation from a town or municipal council to a city status implies a

massive increase in administrative complexity and service demand, which many new cities are ill-equipped to handle without substantial prior planning and investment.

One critical impact is the strain on service delivery. New cities are expected to provide a higher standard of urban services, including improved infrastructure, waste management, public health facilities, educational institutions, and public safety. However, if their creation is not accompanied by adequate financial devolution and technical support, these cities struggle to meet these demands. For instance, cities that lack pre-existing economic bases or robust private sector activity, such as Soroti and Lira, have found it challenging to generate sufficient local revenue to

fund essential services, leading to a reliance on the central government, whose transfers are not always consistent or sufficient (Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2022). This financial dependency compromises their autonomy and ability to address local needs effectively, leading to a perpetuation of service deficiencies rather than improvements.

In addition, the political motivations often lead to an emphasis on symbolic development projects rather than addressing fundamental urban challenges. Resources might be directed towards visible, politically expedient projects like grand administrative buildings, which offer high political returns, while critical but less visible areas like sanitation, informal settlement upgrading, public transport planning, or storm water drainage are neglected. This skewed allocation of resources exacerbates existing urban inequalities and creates new challenges, particularly for vulnerable populations who are disproportionately affected by inadequate services (Pieterse, 2010). The rapid influx of people into these newly declared cities, often without corresponding improvements in housing and basic amenities, has led to the proliferation of informal settlements, increased pressure on already strained public services, and heightened environmental degradation.

From a governance perspective, politicised city creation can undermine the principles of good governance, including transparency, accountability, and public participation. When decisions about city status are made in opaque processes driven by political calculations, it reduces public trust and limits opportunities for citizens to engage meaningfully in urban planning and development (Green, 2019). Furthermore, the appointment of political loyalists to key administrative positions within new cities, rather than merit-based selections, can lead to inefficiencies, corruption, and a lack of responsiveness to local needs. This weakens local democratic institutions and hinders their ability to function as effective agents of development. The overall consequence is a system where political control overshadows developmental imperatives,

leading to unsustainable urban growth and a diminished quality of life for many urban residents. The fragmentation of urban planning and governance across multiple new administrative units, sometimes created without logical geographical or economic coherence, further complicates the effective management and coordination of urban development efforts.

### **Interpretation of Results in Relation to Prior Research and Study Limitations**

The findings of this study are consistent with a growing body of literature that critiques the political underpinnings of urban administrative reforms in sub-Saharan Africa. Much like the cases documented in Ghana, Nigeria, and Kenya, where city status and administrative upgrades have been used as instruments of political patronage and territorial influence (Resnick, 2021; Klopp & Williams, 2021), Uganda's city creation strategy appears to be heavily driven by electoral and regime-strengthening motives. The study corroborates prior analyses by Green (2015) and Mbabazi & Atukunda (2020), which argue that in Uganda, decentralisation and urban development initiatives are often repurposed to serve political ends rather than developmental priorities. The disproportionate growth of cities with pre-existing economic infrastructure, such as Mbarara and Gulu, relative to others like Soroti and Lira, mirrors patterns observed in countries where political favouritism overrides data-driven planning. This reinforces the argument that without technocratic planning frameworks and objective eligibility criteria, city creation risks deepening regional inequalities.

This study is not without limitations. As a desk-based, interpretive analysis that relies solely on secondary sources, it does not incorporate firsthand accounts from stakeholders such as city planners, political actors, or urban residents who experience the impacts of city creation in practice. The absence of primary data means that the study could not validate or challenge official narratives through empirical interviews, surveys, or observational methods. Furthermore, the reliance on publicly available literature and reports may



introduce publication bias, especially if politically sensitive documents are inaccessible or underreported. These limitations may constrain the granularity of insights into localised governance issues, public perceptions of legitimacy, and real-time resource distribution in newly designated cities. Future studies using mixed methods, including interviews, GIS analysis, and participatory research, could offer a more rounded, ground-level perspective of these dynamics.

Anomalies in the findings include the surprisingly slow growth of some politically favoured cities such as Lira, which was expected to experience more significant infrastructural and economic transformation following its elevation. This contradiction challenges the notion that political patronage alone guarantees urban success and suggests that underlying socio-economic fundamentals still play a critical role in determining urban outcomes. Additionally, while the study confirms the electoral logic of city declarations preceding general elections, it also finds instances, such as Tororo's 2025 city status, that complicate the narrative by reflecting long-standing regional demands rather than merely top-down political strategy. These exceptions point to a more layered and dynamic process in which local advocacy, historical neglect, and regime interests intersect. Such findings signal the need for further investigation into the relative weight of local agency versus central political calculus in the politics of urban designation.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of city creation in Uganda reveals a complicated relationship between genuine developmental aspirations and pervasive political motivations. While the government's Vision 2040 rightly identifies urbanisation as a crucial driver for national transformation, the implementation of new city declarations has been significantly influenced by political considerations, often overshadowing core developmental needs (Mbabazi & Atukunda, 2020). The uneven growth witnessed in newly designated cities, with those possessing pre-existing economic bases and

infrastructure thriving more than others, underscores the challenges inherent in politically driven urbanisation. This disparity creates a precarious urban landscape where some cities struggle to provide essential services and opportunities for their rapidly expanding populations.

The politicisation of city creation manifests in various ways, including the strategic use of city status to consolidate electoral support, reward loyal regions, and manipulate demographic voting blocs, particularly in the run-up to national elections. This approach not only distorts the democratic process through administrative gerrymandering but also compromises the integrity and effectiveness of local governance (Green, 2019; Dickovick & Riedl, 2014). When decisions regarding urban development are primarily driven by political expediency rather than evidence-based planning, it leads to inefficient resource allocation, inadequate service delivery, and the erosion of public trust. The emphasis on symbolic projects over foundational urban challenges further exacerbates existing inequalities and hinders sustainable urban growth. Ultimately, the politicisation of city creation in Uganda risks undermining the very objectives of its Vision 2040, creating urban centres that are not truly sustainable or equitable for all residents. Addressing these challenges requires a fundamental shift towards a more transparent, participatory, and development-centric approach to urbanisation.

The long-term implications of this politicised approach extend beyond immediate electoral cycles. It creates a pattern of urban development that is fragmented, inefficient, and potentially unsustainable. Cities that are elevated without the necessary economic foundations or planning capacity risk becoming administrative centres without genuine economic vibrancy, placing a perpetual burden on the national treasury. Moreover, the lack of genuine public participation in these processes breeds cynicism and disengagement, undermining the democratic potential of decentralisation itself. For Uganda to truly harness the transformative power of

urbanisation, a recalibration of priorities is essential, moving from a political calculus to a developmental imperative that prioritises the well-being and prosperity of its urban citizens.

### Recommendations

To mitigate the adverse effects of politicised city creation and foster more sustainable and equitable urban development in Uganda, the following recommendations are crucial. Firstly, Uganda should develop and rigorously implement clear, objective criteria for elevating towns to city status. These criteria must prioritise economic potential, infrastructure readiness, and robust governance capacity, moving beyond mere political expediency (Pieterse, 2010). This approach would ensure that new cities are designated based on their ability to genuinely contribute to national development rather than serving narrow political interests. Successful urbanisation policies in countries like Kenya and South Africa, which emphasise strategic planning and economic viability, could serve as valuable models (Kamana et al., 2023). An independent technical committee, free from political interference, should be tasked with evaluating potential cities against these predefined criteria, ensuring that decisions are data-driven and objective.

Secondly, it is imperative to significantly strengthen the capacity of local governance structures within newly created cities. This involves providing comprehensive capacity-building initiatives for local government officials, focusing on areas such as urban planning, financial management, service delivery, and public administration (Green, 2019). Beyond training, substantial fiscal decentralisation is critical. New cities must be empowered with greater autonomy in revenue generation and expenditure management, reducing their over-reliance on central government transfers. This could involve exploring local taxation mechanisms, urban land value capture, and public-private partnerships tailored to local contexts. Drawing lessons from successful decentralised systems in other African nations can provide valuable insights and best practices for

empowering local authorities to effectively manage their expanded responsibilities and ensure accountability (Dickovick & Riedl, 2014).

In addition, to ensure inclusivity and prevent the capture of the city creation process by political elites, robust mechanisms for genuine public participation must be established and enforced at all stages of urban development—from initial planning to implementation and monitoring. This includes involving local communities, civil society organisations, urban professionals, and the private sector in decision-making processes related to urban planning, infrastructure development, resource allocation, and service provision. Public hearings, citizen assemblies, and accessible digital platforms for feedback can foster transparency and accountability. Genuine public engagement can foster ownership, enhance transparency, and ensure that urban development initiatives are responsive to the actual needs and aspirations of the residents, leading to more equitable and sustainable outcomes.

Each newly designated city should be supported in developing comprehensive, long-term urban development plans that are integrated with national and regional planning frameworks. These plans must move beyond mere administrative boundary delineation to include detailed land use zoning, infrastructure development blueprints, economic diversification strategies, and social service provision frameworks. Accompanying these plans should be robust investment strategies that attract both public and private sector funding, focusing on productive sectors and creating sustainable employment opportunities. Prioritising basic services like water, sanitation, public transport, and affordable housing in these plans is crucial to ensure that growth is inclusive and benefits all segments of the population.

Finally, there is a need to encourage and facilitate platforms for inter-city learning and collaboration among the newly created cities and established urban centres in Uganda and beyond. This can involve sharing best practices in urban management, service delivery innovations, and local revenue generation. Peer-to-peer learning

can help overcome common challenges and foster a sense of collective progress in urban development. Such networks can also serve as advocacy platforms for greater autonomy and support from the central government, resulting in a more unified approach to addressing national urbanisation challenges.

By addressing these critical challenges and implementing these recommendations, Uganda can steer its urbanisation path away from the pitfalls of politicised city creation and cultivate a more sustainable, inclusive, and equitable urban future for all its citizens. This transformative shift requires a strong political will to prioritise long-term developmental goals over short-term political gains, fostering genuine decentralisation and empowering local actors to drive the urban agenda.

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