



Urbanization and Political Regime Maintenance in Cameroon: A Qualitative Study of Selected Sub-Divisions in Ndian Division

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of towns and cities has implications not only for economic development and social organization but also for political participation, political mobilisation, and the maintenance or transformation of political regimes. This study examines the relationship between urbanisation and political regime maintenance in Cameroon, with particular attention to selected Sub-Divisions in Ndian Division of the South-West Region. The study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore how changing patterns of population settlement influence political participation and the consolidation of political regime. Data were collected through verbal semi-structured interviews and were analysed thematically. Findings show that urbanization does not produce a uniform political effect. While urban areas create opportunities for political awareness and exposure to alternative political ideas, it also contributes to build mechanisms through which political regimes may be sustained. Therefore, urbanization should not be understood just as a force for political regime change, its political consequences depend on the institutional, socioeconomic, and political conditions within which urbanization occurs.

Keywords: Urbanization, Political Regime and Regime maintenance.

INTRODUCTION

Urbanization has emerged as one of the defining demographic transformations of the twenty-first century. Across the African continent, population growth and migration have resulted in the rapid expansion of towns and cities. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA, 2017) identified urbanization as an important feature of Africa's development trajectory and as a phenomenon with implications for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals under the 2030 Agenda.

Africa has experienced particularly rapid urban population growth. Projections have suggested that the proportion of Africans living in urban areas will continue to increase substantially over the coming decades. This development represents a major departure from the historically dominant rural settlement pattern of the continent. Smit (2018) similarly describes Africa as one of the world's most rapidly urbanizing regions. Bocquier et al. (2023) further emphasize the importance of demographic transformation and changing population settlement patterns in understanding contemporary Africa.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, urbanization has become one of the most important demographic and socioeconomic trends (UN-Habitat, 2022). The growth of cities is particularly significant because urban populations contain large numbers of young people. Young people frequently migrate from rural communities to urban centres in search of employment, education, business opportunities, social amenities, and improved living conditions (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA], 2018; World Bank, 2023). Consequently, urbanization is not simply a demographic phenomenon; it also transforms social relationships, economic opportunities, political identities, and patterns of political participation (Fox, 2014; Resnick, 2014).

The political implications of urbanization are complex (Glaeser et al., 2004). On the one hand, as posited by



Resnick (2014) cities can provide spaces in which citizens interact, exchange political ideas, access information and participate in political processes. Urbanization may therefore facilitate political consciousness and collective action. On the other hand, urban residents may be primarily concerned with socioeconomic survival and access to employment and services. Economic pressures, unemployment, and insecure livelihoods can therefore constrain political participation and collective political action according to Cheeseman & Larmer (2015).

As opined by Cheeseman (2015) the relationship between urbanization and political regimes is particularly important in Africa, where political systems have frequently been characterized by dominant political parties, patronage networks, personal rule, institutional continuity, and varying degrees of political competition. Consequently, an increase in the urban population does not necessarily translate into political regime change. Rather, the political consequences of urbanization depend on the institutional context, the organization of political actors, socioeconomic conditions, and the strategies adopted by governing and opposition groups (Resnick, 2014; Van de Walle, 2007).

Cameroon provides an important context for examining this relationship. The country has experienced significant urban expansion and population mobility over the past decade, reflecting broader demographic and socioeconomic transformations in Central Africa (UN DESA, 2018; World Bank, 2023). In particular, the conflict in the North-West and South-West Regions has contributed substantially to internal displacement and migration toward other parts of Cameroon (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2024; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2024). The escalation of the conflict has resulted in movements of populations toward urban centres such as Douala, Yaoundé, Bafoussam, and Dschang, thereby changing patterns of settlement and placing additional pressure on urban infrastructure, employment, housing, and public services (IDMC, 2024; OCHA, 2024).

Urbanization in Cameroon therefore needs to be considered not only from the perspective of economic development but also from the perspective of political organization and participation. The concentration of populations in towns and cities may create new political constituencies and new forms of political engagement. At the same time, established political actors may adapt their strategies to changing demographic realities, including the emergence of new urban constituencies and changing patterns of political mobilization (Resnick, 2014; Cheeseman & Larmer, 2015).

Dorward et al. (2025) draw attention to the distinction between urbanization and industrialization. Although industrialization has historically been an important driver of urban growth, many low- and middle-income countries experience rapid urbanization without comparable levels of industrial development. This situation is particularly relevant to many African cities, where population growth may occur alongside limited formal employment and industrial opportunities as stipulated by Dorward et al. (2025) and Fox (2014). The political implications of such urbanization therefore deserve closer examination, particularly regarding how young urban populations, migrants, internally displaced persons, and economically vulnerable groups interact with political institutions and established political actors.

Stoll (2023) opines that the increasing significance of African cities has implications for political processes. Using Kenya and other African countries as examples, Stoll demonstrates how urbanization play on political patterns. Beissinger (2022) and Dorward & Fox (2022) similarly emphasize the potential role of urban spaces in political mobilization and collective action. However, urbanization does not automatically weaken established political regimes. Political parties may establish strong organizational structures within cities, while political elites may use patronage, political networks, development projects, and access to public resources to maintain political support. Elischer (2013) also demonstrates that political identities and party support in Africa are shaped by complex social and institutional factors.

As a result, the Cameroonian government's development strategies have also recognized the opportunities and challenges associated with urbanization. The Growth and Employment Strategy Paper identified urban development as an important component of national development while also recognizing that rapid urban growth could create challenges for governance, employment, and socioeconomic development (ECA, 2017).



This study investigates the relationship between urbanization and political regime maintenance in Cameroon. It seeks to understand whether the growth of towns and cities and the increasing concentration of young people in urban spaces necessarily weaken existing political structures or whether urbanization can also contribute to the reproduction and consolidation of political authority.

Statement of the Problem

The rapid growth of towns and cities in Cameroon has been accompanied by increasing movement of young people from rural communities to urban areas due to employment, education, business, social amenities, and improved living standards. While rural-to-urban migration can contribute to socioeconomic transformation, it may also have political consequences. Young people who are considered important agents of political and social change, can contribute either to the transformation of political systems or to the reinforcement of existing political regimes. However, young migrants may become more focused on economic survival than politics thus creating vacuum in political participation. Having a substantial proportion of the youthful population move to towns and cities, causes a demographic transformation which can affect political participation and political regime maintenance. This becomes significant to Cameroon because a political regime has demonstrated considerable continuity over four decades. As such, a study on whether the growth of cities play a role in this longevity of regime is an aspect that needs not to be overlooked. Also, research on African urbanization has focused greatly on matters regarding the economy with less attention devoted to understanding how urbanization interacts with political regime maintenance in Cameroon. This study examines the nexus between urbanization and political regime maintenance by exploring the experiences and perceptions of participants in selected Sub-Divisions of Ndiab Division.

Research Objective

To investigate the role of urbanization in political regime maintenance in Cameroon by examining the role of political networks, patronage, and political elites in political regime maintenance.

Research Question

How has urbanization influenced the consolidation and maintenance of political power in Cameroon?

Significance of the Study

The importance of this study cannot be overlooked for several reasons; First, it contributes to the literature on urbanization and politics in Africa by examining urbanization not only as a demographic and socioeconomic process but also as a political phenomenon.

Second, the study seeks to understanding youth political participation. Since young people constitute a significant component of the urban population, understanding their movement into cities and their subsequent political engagement is important for understanding political change and continuity.

Third, it provides insights into political regime maintenance from the local level from where local political structures provide opportunity to understand how national political authority is reproduced within communities narrowing the discussion surrounding political regimes focusing on national political institutions.

Finally, findings may be useful to policymakers, local government authorities, civil society organizations, researchers, and other stakeholders interested in urban governance, youth participation, and political development in Cameroon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reports from UN-Habitat (2022) holds that expansion of urban population is influenced by natural population growth, rural-to-urban migration, administrative reclassification, conflict-induced displacement, and the



concentration of economic opportunities in urban areas as reiterated by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA] (2018). UN-Habitat (2022) identifies urbanization as a major factor shaping the future of Sub-Saharan Africa. However, African urbanization differs considerably across countries and regions, with some cities experiencing rapid population growth without corresponding levels of industrialization, formal employment creation, and economic transformation (Fox, 2014; UN-Habitat, 2022).

Dorward et al. (2025) argue that urbanization can occur in the absence of extensive industrialization. This creates a situation in which large numbers of people live in cities while continuing to experience economic insecurity and limited access to formal employment. Such conditions may have important political consequences because economically vulnerable urban residents may depend on political institutions, social networks, and informal relationships for access to employment, public services, and other opportunities as purported by Cheeseman (2015) and Resnick (2014). Nevertheless, the relationship between economic insecurity and political support is not necessarily automatic, as urban residents may respond to socioeconomic conditions in different ways depending on their political identities, institutional experiences, and perceptions of government performance (Resnick, 2014).

With young people constituting a significant component of Africa's growing urban population, they are frequently attracted to cities by employment opportunities, education, entrepreneurship, entertainment, social networks, and access to services (UN DESA, 2018; UN-Habitat, 2022). These urban environments expose young people to diverse social and political ideas creating spaces for political interaction, networking, and mobilization as posited by Cheeseman & Larmer, (2015); Resnick (2014). However, urban youth should not be treated as a homogeneous political group. Some young people may actively participate in politics while others may remain largely disengaged because of unemployment, economic insecurity, political distrust, or competing socioeconomic priorities (Resnick, 2014). Consequently, youth presence in urban areas should not in itself be interpreted as evidence of either increased political participation or opposition to an existing political regime.

Political regime maintenance refers in this study to the processes through which existing political authority, institutions, organizational structures, and patterns of political support are reproduced and sustained over time. Urbanization may influence regime maintenance by changing the social composition of political constituencies and creating new sites of political organization and competition (Cheeseman, 2015; Resnick, 2014). Political parties and political actors may establish organizational structures within urban communities and develop relationships with local leaders, community organizations, youth associations, and other social networks. Such relationships can facilitate political communication, mobilization, and the distribution of resources.

Political regimes can also respond to urbanization through development policies and the provision of public goods. Where urban residents perceive that political authorities are responsible for improvements in infrastructure, public services, housing, employment opportunities, or other aspects of urban development, such perceptions may influence attitudes toward the government and patterns of political support (Resnick, 2014; Van de Walle, 2007). Thus, urbanization should not automatically be considered a threat to political regimes. It can also create opportunities for regimes and political actors to establish new relationships with expanding urban populations and incorporate emerging constituencies into existing political networks.

Kitschelt & Wilkinson (2007) posited that to better understand political regime maintenance, political patronage also needs to be considered as an aspect of analysis. According to Van de Walle (2007) patronage refers broadly to relationships in which political actors provide access to resources, employment, positions, services, or other benefits in exchange for political support or loyalty. For this study, particular attention is given to what respondents refer to as the **“godfatherism” syndrome**. The concept is used here to describe relationships in which established political actors exercise influence over political opportunities and access to resources through established political networks (Van de Walle, 2007). Individuals who benefit from such networks may have incentives to support the continuation of the relationships and political structures from which they derive benefits. Patronage can therefore contribute to political continuity where political networks create reciprocal relationships between political elites and beneficiaries as purported by Kitschelt & Wilkinson (2007).

However, patronage should not be assumed to explain all political relationships or patterns of political support (Cheeseman, 2015). Political support may also derive from ideological commitments, political identity, perceptions of government performance, policy preferences, ethnic or regional affiliations, personal political beliefs, or evaluations of political leadership (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). This study treats patronage and “godfatherism” as one possible mechanism through which urbanisation may interact with political regime maintenance, rather than as a universal explanation for political behaviour.

Conceptual Framework

Urbanisation influences political participation and political regime maintenance through several interconnected mechanisms rather than through a single, automatic causal pathway. It is not merely a demographic process involving the increasing concentration of populations in towns and cities but transforms the social, economic, institutional, and political environments in which citizens interact with political authorities. In the Africa, the political consequences of urbanisation are particularly important because cities increasingly constitute major sites of political mobilisation, service delivery, political organization, and interaction between citizens and the state (Hoelscher et al., 2023; Hoelscher et al., 2026).

The relationship between urbanisation, political participation, and political regime maintenance can therefore be understood through several interrelated mechanisms. The first mechanism is population concentration. Urbanisation brings large numbers of people into relatively concentrated geographical spaces. This increases opportunities for citizens to interact, exchange information, develop social networks, identify common interests, and discuss political issues. Dense urban environments can consequently facilitate political communication and the formation of collective political identities (Hoelscher et al., 2023; Post, 2018).

Population concentration can influence political participation because citizens living in close proximity to one another may find it easier to communicate grievances, organize meetings, mobilize supporters, and coordinate collective activities. Urban neighbourhoods, markets, workplaces, educational institutions, religious organizations, and community associations can therefore function as spaces in which political information and demands circulate. Recent research describes African cities as increasingly important sites of social mobilisation and changing state–society relations (Hoelscher et al., 2026).

However, population concentration does not necessarily produce opposition to an existing political regime. The same networks that facilitate collective action can also be used by political parties and government actors to communicate with citizens, mobilize supporters, and incorporate urban communities into existing political structures. Urbanisation can therefore simultaneously increase the potential for political participation and strengthen the organizational capacity of established political actors.

A second mechanism is increased exposure to political information. Urban residents generally encounter a wider range of political actors, organizations, media platforms, civil society organizations, and social networks. These interactions can increase citizens' awareness of political institutions, government policies, elections, rights, and opportunities for political participation (Hoelscher et al., 2023).

Political awareness can encourage participation by enabling citizens to recognize shared problems and identify opportunities for collective action. For example, citizens experiencing inadequate housing, unemployment, poor sanitation, or limited access to public services may transform individual socioeconomic grievances into collective political demands. Recent research on African neighbourhoods demonstrates that residents use political connections, neighbourhood organizations, voting blocs, and youth associations to make demands on government and pursue access to rights and services (Agbalajobi et al., 2025).

At the same time, greater political awareness can also benefit political regimes. Governments and political parties can use urban communication networks to disseminate information about development programmes, public policies, and political achievements. Political information therefore does not inherently produce regime opposition; its political effect depends on how citizens, political parties, civil society, and state institutions use the available information.



A third mechanism is the expansion of political opportunities for collective action. Urban areas can provide organizational resources that make collective political action easier, including civil society organizations, political parties, youth associations, professional groups, neighbourhood organizations, and other forms of collective organization (Hoelscher et al., 2023). From a political-opportunity perspective, citizens' ability to mobilize depends partly on the political environment within which they operate. Where political institutions are relatively open, urban organizations may facilitate petitions, demonstrations, electoral campaigns, community meetings, and other forms of participation. Where political opportunities are restricted, however, urban organizations may face surveillance, repression, co-optation, or institutional barriers.

Importantly, empirical research cautions against assuming that youthful urban populations automatically produce greater political mobilization. Dorward and Hoelscher's (2026) analysis of 399 cities across 36 African countries finds that local urban demographic context matters for political behaviour and that the relationship between youthful city populations, voting, and protest is more complex than a simple "youth bulge produces protest" argument. Thus, urbanisation creates potential political opportunities, but whether those opportunities result in participation depends on institutions, resources, political incentives, and citizens' perceptions of the costs and benefits of participation.

A fourth mechanism concerns socioeconomic conditions. Urbanisation can generate employment and business opportunities, but many African cities also experience unemployment, informal employment, housing shortages, poverty, and inadequate public services (Fox, 2014; Resnick, 2014). These conditions can have contradictory political consequences. On the one hand, socioeconomic insecurity can generate grievances and encourage citizens to make collective demands for employment, housing, services, and better governance. On the other hand, individuals struggling to secure livelihoods may have limited time, resources, or willingness to participate in political activities.

Harris et al. (2023), for example, show that socioeconomic and institutional conditions can affect the capacity of marginalized urban residents to organize collectively. Consequently, urbanisation can increase the potential demand for political participation while simultaneously constraining citizens' capacity to participate. This helps explain why urban populations should not be treated as politically homogeneous.

A fifth mechanism is government performance and service delivery. Urban populations depend heavily on public institutions for infrastructure, transportation, sanitation, water, housing, education, security, and other services. Consequently, citizens' everyday experiences with government institutions can shape their perceptions of political authority (Resnick, 2014). Where citizens perceive that a political administration has improved their living conditions, they may develop more favourable attitudes toward that administration. Urbanisation can therefore contribute to regime maintenance when development outcomes are politically attributed to the incumbent authorities.

Conversely, persistent service failures may generate dissatisfaction and collective demands for government responsiveness. Resnick (2014) emphasizes that urban service delivery in Africa is deeply political because decentralization, local government capacity, resource constraints, and political interests affect how services are provided. Thus, service delivery can become an important mechanism linking urbanisation to political legitimacy and regime maintenance.

A sixth mechanism is the adaptation of political parties to changing urban constituencies. Urbanisation changes the social composition and geographical distribution of voters. Political parties consequently have incentives to establish branches, recruit supporters, develop relationships with community organizations, and respond to the demands of urban residents. Nathan's empirical research on urban Ghana demonstrates that urban political competition can involve multiple strategies, including appeals based on government resources, political identity, clientelism, and service provision (Nathan, 2016).

Urbanisation therefore does not necessarily weaken established political organizations. Instead, political parties can adapt their organizational strategies to the changing urban environment. This mechanism is important for understanding regime maintenance because established political actors may incorporate newly



urbanized populations into existing political structures. The urban transition can consequently create new constituencies without necessarily producing a fundamental transformation of political authority.

A seventh mechanism is political patronage and clientelism. Urbanisation creates new demands for employment, housing, services, licences, political positions, and other resources. Where formal institutions are unable to satisfy these demands adequately, citizens may rely on personal and political networks to obtain access to resources. Nathan (2016) argues that urbanization can actually reinforce incentives for patronage where governments have limited capacity to provide basic services. Comparative research on African urban politics similarly identifies clientelism as an important component of urban political organization (Collord et al., 2021).

This mechanism is particularly relevant to political regime maintenance. Established political actors can use patronage networks to recruit supporters, distribute opportunities, build political loyalty, and influence political succession. In Cameroon, Mişcoiu and Kakdeu (2021) identify networks of authoritarian clientelism linking central political authority with formal and informal political actors. Their findings demonstrate how clientelistic networks can contribute to the reproduction of political influence within the political system. The concept of “political godfatherism” in your study can therefore be situated within this broader mechanism of political networking and patronage, while retaining the respondents' own terminology as an empirical finding.

An eighth mechanism is political incorporation through local institutions. Urbanisation increases the importance of municipal and local administrative institutions because expanding populations require services, infrastructure, planning, and representation. These institutions consequently become important points of interaction between citizens and political authorities. Local institutions can facilitate political participation by providing citizens with opportunities to make demands, participate in consultations, organize community initiatives, or engage elected representatives.

However, they can also serve as mechanisms through which national political structures are reproduced at the local level. Resnick (2014) notes that decentralization has transferred important service-delivery responsibilities to subnational authorities in many African countries, although local governments frequently face significant resource constraints. This creates a political environment in which local institutions can become arenas for both political accountability and political control.

A ninth mechanism is elite adaptation. Urbanisation changes the social composition of political constituencies and can alter the interests and strategies of political elites. Hoelscher et al. (2023) specifically identify changes in the composition, interests, and influence of elites as one mechanism through which urbanisation can affect African politics. Political elites may respond to urban demographic change by modifying their policies, developing new organizational structures, cultivating relationships with community leaders, incorporating youth organizations, or expanding patronage networks. This means that urbanisation can produce political adaptation without necessarily producing regime transformation. Political regime maintenance should therefore be understood as an active process of adaptation and reproduction, rather than simply the absence of political change. Regimes may maintain authority by responding to new urban demands, incorporating new constituencies, distributing resources, strengthening political networks, or adjusting organizational strategies.

Finally, urbanisation can facilitate contentious political participation. Cities provide geographical and organizational conditions that can make demonstrations, protests, strikes, neighbourhood mobilization, and other forms of collective action more visible and potentially easier to coordinate. African cities have increasingly become sites of political contestation and new political movements (Hoelscher et al., 2026). However, urban growth can also alter the incentives of political elites. Elfversson (2025), for example, argues that rapid urban growth can affect electoral violence through mechanisms involving uncertainty about electoral outcomes and the ability of politicians to mobilize grievances among urban groups. This demonstrates that urbanisation can influence not only citizens' political behaviour but also the strategies adopted by political elites.

The relationship can therefore be represented as follows:



Urbanisation → demographic and socioeconomic transformation → changes in political opportunities, information, networks, resources, and grievances → forms of political participation → political response and adaptation → regime maintenance, accommodation, or contestation. The important point is that urbanisation does not have an inherently pro-regime or anti-regime effect. Hoelscher et al. (2023) emphasize that there are no deterministic associations between African urbanisation and political change. Instead, urbanisation changes the environment in which political participation and regime maintenance occur.

For this study, the mechanisms can consequently be grouped into two broad pathways. The first is a participatory pathway, through which population concentration, political information, social networks, civil society, and collective organization create opportunities for citizens to participate in politics. The second is a regime-maintenance pathway, through which political parties, local institutions, service delivery, patronage networks, elite adaptation, and political incorporation enable existing political structures to respond to and potentially reproduce themselves within changing urban communities.

This distinction is particularly useful for analysing Cameroon because it allows urbanisation to be understood neither as an automatic driver of political change nor as inherently supportive of regime continuity. Instead, the political consequences of urbanisation depend on how citizens and political elites interact with the institutional, socioeconomic, and organizational opportunities created by urban transformation.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the **political opportunity and collective-action perspective**, which emphasizes the importance of the political and institutional environment in shaping the capacity and willingness of citizens to organize and participate collectively (Eisinger, 1973). The political opportunity perspective suggests that collective political action is influenced not only by citizens' grievances or interests but also by the openness, constraints, and institutional structures of the political environment within which they operate (McAdam, 1996). Tarrow then added by establishing that political opportunities may include access to political institutions, the presence of political allies, divisions among political elites, and the degree to which authorities tolerate or constrain collective mobilization (Tarrow, 2011).

Urban areas can provide important opportunities for political participation because of population concentration, communication networks, political organizations, civil society institutions, and proximity to government structures. The concentration of people and organizations in cities can facilitate the exchange of information, the formation of social networks, and the mobilization of citizens around shared interests (Tilly, 1978; Tarrow, 2011). Urbanization may therefore create social and institutional environments in which individuals can interact more frequently, develop collective identities, communicate political grievances, and coordinate collective action.

However, the existence of political opportunities alone does not determine whether citizens participate collectively. Collective action also depends on the availability of resources, organizational networks, shared interests, perceptions of political opportunities, and individuals' assessments of the potential costs and benefits of participation (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Olson, 1965; Tilly, 1978). Individuals make decisions within particular social, economic, and political circumstances, meaning that urban residents may respond differently to similar political opportunities depending on their socioeconomic position, access to networks, political experiences, and perceptions of political institutions.

From this perspective, urbanization can have contradictory political consequences. On the one hand, the concentration of populations, organizations, information, and political networks in urban areas may facilitate political awareness, collective organization, and mobilization. On the other hand, the same urban networks and institutional structures may provide opportunities for established political actors to strengthen patronage relationships, mobilize supporters, and reproduce existing political arrangements (Cheeseman, 2015; Tarrow, 2011; van de Walle, 2007). Urbanization should therefore not be understood as automatically producing political opposition or regime transformation. Rather, it creates a changing political environment in which both challengers and established political actors can use available organizational networks and political opportunities to pursue their interests.



The political opportunity and collective-action perspective is consequently useful for this study because it provides a framework for examining how urbanization affects political participation while also considering the mechanisms through which existing political networks may adapt to changing urban demographic conditions. It allows the study to examine whether urban population growth creates new opportunities for collective political action, how citizens respond to those opportunities, and how established political actors may use urban political and social networks to maintain existing patterns of political support.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' experiences, perceptions, interpretations, and explanations concerning the relationship between urbanization and political regime maintenance. Rather than measuring the relationship statistically, the study seeks to understand how participants make sense of political and socioeconomic changes associated with urbanization. A qualitative descriptive research design was employed. The design enabled the researcher to obtain detailed accounts from participants regarding urbanization, youth migration, political participation, political authority, and political networks.

The study was conducted in the South-West Region of Cameroon, focusing on selected Sub-Divisions in Ndian Division. Ndian Division provides an important setting for the study because of its loss of its youth population to urban areas. The wider context of conflict and displacement in the South-West Region also makes the study area relevant to an examination of changing population settlement and political participation.

The study population consisted of eight (08) individuals, four (04) males and four (04) females of 45 years and above, residing in each of the selected Sub-Divisions who possessed knowledge relevant to the issue this study aim at addressing; that is, urbanization and political developments. Participants were selected based on their perceived ability to provide information concerning urban growth, youth migration, political participation, local governance, political networks, and political regime maintenance. The study employed purposive sampling technique. With this technique, participants were deliberately selected because of their knowledge, experience, or involvement in issues relating to the research topic.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. An interview guide was developed to ensure that the major issues relevant to the study were addressed within the duration of 45 minutes to one hour. The interview questions focused on the relationship between urbanization and political participation; political support and political continuity; political patronage and the role of young people in political change. The semi-structured format allowed participants to provide detailed explanations and enabled the researcher to explore issues that emerged during the interviews. Participants' confidentiality and anonymity was considered for the protection of respondents throughout the research process.

Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed about the purpose of the study before the interviews were conducted. participants were identified through pseudonyms or codes rather than their real names. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher identified recurring concepts and patterns within the participants' responses and organized them into themes. The major themes identified were: Urbanization and socioeconomic opportunities; Political patronage and "godfatherism," political support and political continuity.

FINDINGS

Regarding urbanization and the search for socioeconomic opportunities, the findings indicate that participants generally associated urbanization with the pursuit of employment, education, business opportunities, social amenities, and improved living conditions. Respondents explained that young people are attracted to towns and cities because urban areas are perceived to provide greater opportunities for improving their socioeconomic circumstances. This finding is consistent with the broader literature on African urbanization, which identifies rural-to-urban migration as an important component of urban population growth and emphasizes the role of employment, education, markets, and access to services in shaping migration decisions (Fox, 2014; UN-



Habitat, 2022; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA], 2018). In the Cameroonian context, urban centres have similarly attracted migrants because of their concentration of economic activities, educational institutions, public services, and other socioeconomic opportunities (Beauchemin & Bocquier, 2004; World Bank, 2023).

The findings therefore suggest that the growth of towns and cities does not eliminate the socioeconomic motivations underlying rural-to-urban migration. Rather, urban areas continue to attract young people because they are perceived as locations where individuals can improve their socioeconomic position. This finding is particularly relevant to the political analysis of urbanization because migration undertaken primarily for economic reasons can nevertheless produce political consequences. As young people move into urban areas, they become part of new political communities and are exposed to political institutions, organizations, social networks, and forms of political communication that may differ from those in their places of origin. Resnick (2014) argues that urban environments can create new opportunities for political organization and interaction, although the political effects of urbanization depend on the institutional and socioeconomic context.

Another important finding concerns the relationship between development outcomes and support for political administrations. Interviewees indicated that when a political administration implements policies that produce visible improvements in people's lives, citizens may become more willing to support the continuation of that administration. Development therefore has a political dimension. Improvements in infrastructure, public services, employment opportunities, and other material conditions may shape citizens' perceptions of political leadership and influence their attitudes toward existing political authorities.

This finding corresponds with research on political accountability and the performance-based dimension of political support. Van de Walle (2007) observes that citizens in African political systems may evaluate governments in relation to their capacity to deliver material benefits and public goods. Similarly, Cheeseman (2015) argues that political support in African contexts cannot be understood solely through coercion, ethnicity, or patronage because citizens may also respond to government performance and the delivery of services. Resnick (2014) further shows that the provision of urban services can have political implications because political institutions and urban governance structures influence citizens' experiences of the state.

The finding from this study therefore suggests that some citizens may support political continuity because they associate continued political authority with the continuation of development programmes or improvements in living conditions. However, this should not be interpreted as evidence that development automatically produces political support. Rather, perceived development outcomes constitute one of several factors that may shape citizens' political attitudes. Political identity, policy preferences, trust, patronage, ideology, and perceptions of political institutions may also influence political behaviour (Cheeseman, 2015; van de Walle, 2007).

The findings further indicate that citizens may evaluate political regimes partly on the basis of the policies and programmes implemented during their period in office. Respondents suggested that where policies are perceived as beneficial, political supporters may develop an interest in maintaining the political administration responsible for those policies. This finding is consistent with the broader literature on retrospective political evaluation, in which citizens' assessments of government performance can influence political support (Duch & Stevenson, 2008).

In African political contexts, however, performance-based support operates alongside other mechanisms of political mobilization. Cheeseman (2015) notes that political competition in Africa can involve a combination of policy performance, political identity, patronage, institutional factors, and elite strategies. Similarly, van de Walle (2007) demonstrates that political clientelism and the distribution of material benefits can coexist with other forms of political accountability. The present finding therefore contributes to the argument that political continuity should not automatically be explained through coercion or patronage. Citizens may also support political continuity because they perceive the government as delivering desirable policies or development outcomes.



Participants also discussed the formation of political classes and the reproduction of political relationships through local institutions. According to respondents, political systems can produce groups of individuals who become closely associated with political authority. At the local level, municipal and council administrations were identified as important sites where political relationships are reproduced. Participants suggested that individuals associated with the ruling political structure may occupy influential positions within local administrations and political organizations.

This finding can be situated within the literature on political clientelism and elite networks in Africa. Van de Walle (2007) argues that political clientelism can become embedded within state and political institutions, creating networks through which political elites distribute resources and maintain relationships with supporters. Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007) similarly conceptualize patron-client relationships as exchanges involving political support and access to resources, positions, or other benefits. In the context of urbanization, local government institutions may therefore constitute important arenas in which political networks are organized and reproduced.

The findings consequently suggest that urbanization does not necessarily disrupt established political structures. Instead, expanding urban communities can become incorporated into existing political organizations and administrative networks. Local political institutions may serve as intermediary structures through which national political arrangements are translated into community-level relationships. This observation is consistent with Resnick's (2014) argument that urban governance structures can have important political consequences because local institutions shape interactions between citizens, political actors, and the state.

Political "godfatherism" emerged as another important theme in the findings. Respondents used the term to describe relationships between established political figures and individuals seeking political opportunities. According to participants, established political actors may support individuals perceived as loyal to them and facilitate their access to political positions and opportunities. Such relationships may create networks of political dependence, whereby individuals who benefit from established political networks have incentives to support the continuation of existing political structures.

This finding corresponds closely with the literature on political patronage and clientelism. Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007) describe clientelistic relationships as exchanges in which political actors provide resources or opportunities in return for political support. In African political systems, patronage networks have historically been important mechanisms through which political elites establish relationships with supporters and consolidate political influence (Cheeseman, 2015; van de Walle, 2007). The findings of this study therefore suggest that what respondents describe as "godfatherism" can be understood analytically as a form of patronage or clientelistic political networking.

The concept of political godfatherism has also been examined specifically in the African context. In Nigeria, for example, Albert (2005) identifies political godfatherism as a relationship in which influential political actors exercise considerable influence over political processes and political succession. Although the institutional and historical contexts of Cameroon and Nigeria differ, the concept provides a useful comparative framework for understanding respondents' descriptions of influential political actors facilitating access to political positions and opportunities.

From the perspective of political regime maintenance, these relationships may contribute to political continuity by creating networks of political dependence. Individuals who obtain positions, resources, or political opportunities through established networks may have incentives to preserve those networks. However, the findings should not be interpreted to mean that godfatherism or patronage explains all political support. Existing research emphasizes that political behaviour can simultaneously be influenced by policy performance, political identity, ideology, socioeconomic interests, institutional factors, and evaluations of government performance (Cheeseman, 2015; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007).

Overall, the findings indicate that urbanization has political consequences that operate through multiple and



sometimes competing mechanisms. Young people may initially move to urban areas in pursuit of socioeconomic opportunities, but their incorporation into urban political communities exposes them to new political institutions, networks, and forms of mobilization. At the same time, urbanization can provide established political actors with new constituencies and organizational spaces through which political relationships can be reproduced. The findings therefore support a multidimensional understanding of political regime maintenance in which development performance, policy perceptions, local political structures, patronage, and political networks interact rather than a single factor explaining political continuity.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study demonstrate that urbanization and political regime maintenance are interconnected through several socioeconomic and political mechanisms. Rather than producing a uniform political outcome, urbanization appears to reshape the social environment within which political actors, citizens, institutions, and networks interact. This finding is consistent with empirical research showing that the political consequences of urbanization in Africa depend on the interaction between demographic change, socioeconomic conditions, political institutions, and the strategies of political actors (Nathan, 2016; Resnick, 2014).

First, urbanization is strongly associated with the pursuit of socioeconomic opportunities. The findings indicate that young people move toward urban centres primarily because of their perceptions of employment, education, business, and social opportunities. This finding is consistent with the broader literature on African urbanization, which identifies employment opportunities, access to markets, education, and services as important factors underlying rural-to-urban migration (Fox, 2014; UN-Habitat, 2022). Fox (2014) particularly demonstrates that urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa has frequently occurred in contexts characterized by limited formal employment and weak industrialization. Consequently, migration to cities does not necessarily mean that migrants will obtain secure formal employment; rather, cities are often perceived as locations offering comparatively greater socioeconomic opportunities. The findings of this study therefore reinforce the argument that socioeconomic aspirations remain an important basis for urban population growth.

Second, the findings indicate that urbanization does not necessarily produce political regime change. Although cities may create opportunities for political awareness, interaction, organization, and collective mobilization, political regimes can adapt to urban demographic changes by establishing political structures and networks within urban communities. This finding is consistent with Nathan's (2016) empirical study of electoral politics in urban Ghana, which demonstrates that urbanization does not automatically produce a particular form of political behaviour. Instead, urban political competition may involve combinations of clientelism, political identity, demands for government performance, and other forms of political engagement. Similarly, Resnick (2014) argues that urban political outcomes are shaped by the institutional structures through which urban populations interact with political authorities. Urbanization should therefore be understood as changing the political environment rather than automatically determining its outcome.

Third, perceptions of development can contribute to political support. The findings suggest that where citizens associate improvements in their living conditions with a particular political administration, they may develop an interest in maintaining that administration. This finding is consistent with empirical research showing that citizens' perceptions of government performance and service delivery can influence political attitudes. Lwanja and Mwandama (2026), using comparative Afrobarometer data from sub-Saharan African countries, find a relationship between perceived service delivery and political trust. Similarly, Olawole (2023) demonstrates that service provision can have political consequences for voter participation in Nigeria. These findings support the argument that development outcomes can acquire political significance when citizens attribute improvements in their material conditions to government action.

However, the empirical literature also indicates that the relationship between government performance and political support is not automatic. De Kadt and Lieberman (2018), for example, demonstrate that citizens' responses to service delivery in Southern Africa can vary and that improved public services do not necessarily translate directly into increased support for incumbent political parties. Teklemariam and Ng'ethe (2025) similarly find that the relationship between perceived government performance and democratic support varies



across different levels of urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa. The findings of the present study should therefore be understood as indicating that perceived development is one potential mechanism of political support and regime maintenance, rather than as evidence that development inevitably produces political loyalty.

Fourth, political networks and patronage may contribute to political continuity. The respondents' discussion of political "godfathers" suggests that established political elites may influence political opportunities, recruitment, and succession through networks of loyalty and support. This finding corresponds with empirical research on political clientelism in Cameroon. Mişcoiu and Kakdeu (2021), for example, demonstrate how clientelistic networks in Cameroon connect political authority with individuals who occupy formal and informal positions within the political system. Their analysis provides support for the finding that political relationships can involve networks of loyalty and access to political opportunities.

The finding also corresponds with Tsana Nguegang's (2015) empirical study of political entrepreneurs and local populations in Cameroon, which identifies reciprocal exchanges between political actors and local populations involving resources, influence, and political support. Comparative evidence from Nigeria also provides a useful perspective. Albert (2005) shows that political godfatherism can involve influential political actors using their resources and networks to influence political recruitment and succession. Although the political contexts of Cameroon and Nigeria differ, these studies provide empirical grounds for interpreting respondents' use of "godfatherism" as a form of elite networking that may overlap with broader processes of political patronage and clientelism.

Fifth, the findings demonstrate that the political consequences of urbanization cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between political change and political stability. Urbanization may simultaneously create opportunities for political participation and provide new spaces in which existing political structures are reproduced. This finding is consistent with Nathan's (2016) observation that urban political environments can contain multiple forms of political organization and competition. Urban populations may create new demands for accountability and representation while political elites may simultaneously develop strategies for incorporating emerging constituencies into existing political networks.

The political effects of urbanization are therefore mediated by political institutions, socioeconomic conditions, political parties, elite networks, development outcomes, and citizens' perceptions of government performance. This multidimensional interpretation is supported by empirical research on African urban politics, which demonstrates that urbanization does not have a uniform political effect (Nathan, 2016; Resnick, 2014). In some circumstances, cities can facilitate political organization, collective action, and demands for improved governance; in other circumstances, political actors can incorporate urban populations through political parties, patronage networks, local institutions, and service provision.

The findings further suggest that political authority is not maintained exclusively through national political institutions. It may also be reproduced through municipal structures, community networks, political organizations, and relationships between political elites and local actors. Research on Cameroon provides empirical support for this interpretation. Mbuagbo and Oroch (2012), in their study of urban governance in Kumba, demonstrate the importance of local political and administrative structures in understanding political inclusion and urban governance. Similarly, Mişcoiu and Kakdeu (2021) show that political clientelistic relationships in Cameroon can extend through networks linking political authority with individuals and institutions beyond the immediate centre of political power.

Overall, the findings suggest that urbanization should not be viewed as an automatic force for either political change or political stability. Instead, it creates a changing demographic and socioeconomic environment within which different political actors pursue their interests. Young people may enter cities primarily in search of socioeconomic opportunities, but their incorporation into urban communities can expose them to political institutions, organizations, information, and networks. At the same time, established political actors may adapt to these demographic changes by developing political structures, cultivating local networks, responding to demands for development, and maintaining patronage relationships. The political consequences of



urbanization are therefore contingent upon the interaction between socioeconomic aspirations, political opportunities, government performance, institutional structures, and political networks.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between urbanization and political regime maintenance in Cameroon, with particular attention to selected Sub-Divisions in Ndian Division of the South-West Region. The study found that urbanization is strongly associated with young people's pursuit of socioeconomic opportunities. However, the political consequences of this population movement are more complex. Urbanization can create opportunities for political awareness, interaction, and collective action. At the same time, it can contribute to political regime maintenance through development-based support, political networks, political class formation, and patronage relationships.

The study therefore concludes that urbanization should not be viewed as an automatic force for political change. Its political consequences depend on the institutional, socioeconomic, and political conditions within which urbanization occurs. The findings also suggest that understanding political regime continuity in Cameroon requires attention to political processes at the local level. Political authority is not maintained exclusively through national institutions; it may also be reproduced through municipal structures, community networks, political parties, patronage relationships, and perceptions of development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were proposed:

- There should be a strengthening of youth participation in local governance. Local authorities and relevant institutions should create meaningful opportunities for young people to participate in community decision-making and local governance.
- Also, promote transparency in political appointments. Greater transparency in political and administrative appointments can reduce perceptions that access to political opportunities depends primarily on personal political connections.
- In addition, encourage youth representation. Political parties and local institutions should provide meaningful opportunities for young people to participate in political decision-making.
- For further research, studies should be done comparing rural and urban communities to determine how youth migration affects political participation in both places of origin and destinations.

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