

# Urbanization: A Tool in Bringing Social and Political Change in Pakistan

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Article Information	Abstract
Received: June 07, 2022 Revised: June 27, 2023 Accepted: June 29, 2023	Urbanization is an important phenomenon which is happening all over the world. Never ever before in history, there were such high levels of urban population. Pakistan is no exception, and it is the most urbanized country in South Asia. The studies related to urbanization in Pakistan is limited to understanding demographic and population changes, rural-urban migration, and economic and environmental implications. This research study has focused on the role of urbanization in bringing social change in Pakistan in the last few years. A descriptive and analytical approach is applied in contemplating the impact of urbanization on changing social structures, roles, values, and processes as well as on political culture, educated youth, social, ethnic and group conflict and prospects for national integration. The study of such impacts is essential because Pakistan has a huge young population, and it is witnessing high rates of population growth and urbanization which is important in setting the nation's economic and political trajectory as well as changing the national social outlook in a few years.
<b>Keywords</b> <i>Urbanization</i> <i>Social Change</i> <i>Political Culture</i> <i>Conflict</i> <i>Integration</i>	

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## 1. Introduction

“Pakistan has the highest rate of urbanization in South Asia. According to the 2017 Population Census, 36.4 percent of the population lives in urban areas.” (UNDP, 2019). The high levels of urbanization in Pakistan are explained by three factors i.e., rural-urban migration, high population growth, and the rural urbanization. Urban life is quite different from rural life having contrasting characteristics. The standards of living, social and gendered division of labour, economic opportunities and diversity, social and local political system, social structure, their composition, and function, etc. are all different in both rural and urban systems.

At the time of independence, a high proportion of population of Pakistan was living in rural areas and Pakistan was largely an agrarian society. The processes of industrialization, modernization along with technological changes, economic opportunities in urban areas and other forces unleashed the waves of rural-urban migration. This also relieved pressure from agricultural land having a large but not full time, underutilized labour force. High population growth also exacerbated the situation. Similarly, rural urbanization is another simultaneous phenomenon.

All of this is contributing to a high level of social, political, and cultural changes in Pakistani landscape. People are adopting urban social values. Individualism, a product of modernization is

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slowly but continuously replacing the traditional system and its core values of community life and hierarchical setup. This individualism is also responsible for economic growth as it unleashes a person from the clutches of social authoritative forces and inculcates the virtues of innovation and creativity. Constituency based politics, while a reality in rural areas is being transformed into participant politics because young and educated people and a new vibrant urban middle class is more oriented towards service delivery by politicians and the ruling elite. This new class is not influenced or motivated by caste, and *Baradri*-based politics.

Social movements are a more prominent feature in dense urban areas. Urbanization also has its drawbacks because rural-urban migration brings people from different ethnic backgrounds which can be the source of social tensions and conflict and even political violence, though the prospects of integration and new diverse heterogeneous and multicultural society cannot be ignored. Even so, there are problems of slums, class-based, race-based, and *Baradri*-base neighbourhoods even in urban or semi-urban areas and lack of urban facilities and pressures on existing infrastructure.

## 2. Literature Review

Phillips (1964) investigated the process of urbanization in different provinces and other units of Pakistan during the period 1951-61. The number of urban centres in Pakistan increased during this period. West Pakistan was more urbanized as compared to East Pakistan. Furthermore, the size of large urban centres increased. The author also finds that urban centres had a high male-to-female sex ratio. This is explained by forces of internal redistribution of population causing rapid urbanization with its own problems and prospects. Mustafa and Sawas (2013) argued that only that narrative would be successful in Pakistan's political landscape in future which would at its core focus on social justice and economic growth. They work on studying the impact of urbanization on electoral politics. They contend that the rise of urban middle class is more focused on service delivery than patronage and constituency-based politics in rural as well as in urban areas. This is also evident with the increment of youth especially educated ones in total population.

Belokrenitsky (1974) wrote on the functional nature of the cities and categorizes the urban centers as poly-functional, uni-functional and those performing local functions. These functions vary from political to industrial and trade and transport to cultural and educational functions. Each of them has different social structures. Service sector is more prominent in urban centres and majority of city dwellers are paid or salaried employees performing in non-agricultural sectors in contrast to rural areas where unpaid family workers are a considerable proportion of employment.

Gurung (2004) contrasted the processes of urbanization in developing and developed countries. Urbanization in Europe and North American was driven by industrialization while European colonies underwent different type of urbanization to meet demands of the colonizers. The writer studies the materialistic aspect of urbanization mainly pattern of land use in urban areas in both developing and developed countries. Urbanization in developed countries is marked by local shift of commercial activities, sub-urban areas, racial, status and colour segregated neighbourhoods while there is caste, religious and voluntary segregation, slum areas, mixed residential and commercial usage of urban areas in developing countries.

Mughal (2019) worked on the changing patterns of land use in rural areas of Pakistan which are undergoing urbanization in contrast to rural-urban migration. Due to inheritance laws, the size of land per family is becoming smaller unsuitable for profitable and commercial agriculture. Therefore, small landowners are selling their lands to factories owners or commercial traders. Educated rural population is also attracted to various other occupations. Feudal landowners are interested in industrialization because of high profits. The author also notes that this is bringing a change in socio-economic status of the rural population where *Baradri* and patron-client relationships are being replaced by individualism and a cash-based market-oriented economy and social relations.

Belokrenitsky (2017) analyzed the history of urbanization in Pakistan by dividing it into two periods. The first one was driven by industrialization and the second by agglomeration of overcrowding of the urban centres. Moreover, he underwent the socio-economic problems that Pakistan urban centres are facing in the contemporary times like high levels of poverty and unemployment, lack of basic urban facilities and a big role of informal sector in providing jobs in cities. Furthermore, the study conducted by Abdul and Yu (2020) covered many themes related to urbanization processes in Pakistan including the challenges its presents, the development of national urban resilience models to tackle with such challenges and a comparative analysis with the global models.

Kasarda and Crenshaw (1991) have concentrated their efforts on the study of urbanization processes in the developing countries. They make a short comparative analysis of the historical and contemporary trends of urbanization, various dimensions of urbanization in many academic disciplines, various major theories and the factors and determinants of urbanization process in the third world countries.

Jabeen, Farwa, and Jadoon (2017) have adopted a developmental approach of presenting a case of urbanization in Pakistan. The author describes the developmental approaches adopted in Pakistan and worldwide in tackling high rates of globalization in the preceding decades. The author calls for a concept of urban governance to be adopted by policy makers in tackling the emergent socio-economic changes and problems with increasing urbanization.

### 3. Conceptual Framework

Pakistan is one of the fastest urbanizing countries in the world, especially in the region. High rates of urbanization create swift social changes and together with a high population growth rate of almost 2% those social changes can have profound facts on other aspects of life (World Bank, 2022)

This present study has tried to analyze the impacts of urbanization and consequent social changes in Pakistan. Karl Marx's Conflict theory of social change shall be the underpinning theory of this paper. Marx held that there is a constant conflict among different economics classes and this class struggle is the driving force for social change. Later, many theorists extended Karl Marx's conflict theory to other identity groups in society beyond the concept of economic classes e.g., ethno-linguistic, sectarian, religious and racial groups etc. Multilinear theory of evolution of social change as opposed to uni-linear theory of evolution propounded by sociologists and anthropologists and Modernization theory of social change (Talcott Parsons, Gabriel Almond, Lipset etc.) shall also be applied to some limited extent. Further, this study has focused on how greater levels of urbanization are weakening the basis of centuries old traditional values based upon hierarchy setup and patron-client relationship. The old social structures are now crumbling and are being replaced by new ones. New social divisions of labour are emerging replacing caste, *Baradri* social divisions with class based and professional social division.

Urbanization is also replacing joint and community-based system with nuclear family system and values of individualism. This is evident by the rise of a young, educated elite having a college and university degree education and higher levels of consciousness than their preceding generations. Furthermore, this study has also analyzed that how such social and culture changes are bringing significant impacts on the political culture of the country with more focus of national level politics and welfare system. This is also contributing to coming of different ethno-linguistic groups in major urban centres causing social tensions and conflicts as well as mixing of these diverse populations setting up the grounds for national integration. The problems of urbanization like slums, scarcity of land and other resources, etc. will also covered.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

This research paper employs secondary and tertiary sources of information using e-books, e-journals, online research papers, data compiled by government and international bodies and organizations in the form of reports. A descriptive and analytical approach is combined in explaining and comprehending the role of urbanization in bringing social changes in Pakistan as well as social problems and impacts on the political system, processes, and values.

#### **5. Significance of the Research**

There are a lot of studies on the causes of urbanization in Pakistan and its effects on the environment, economy and living standards of people. However, there is less focus on the role of urbanization in changing the values, processes, structures, and functions of Pakistani society (societies). A common reader from all age groups will find this study quite fruitful in comprehending the rapid social and cultural changes happening in Pakistan in the last few years and grasp the changing realities as well as the underlying factors responsible for this change.

This research has tempted researchers from other academic disciplines to work on this area in the contemporary age and employing other theories for explaining the urbanization phenomenon and accompanying changes in social life of common Pakistani citizens. Furthermore, an increase in research in urbanization along this dimension will prove helpful for policy makers to devise better policies for urbanization and incorporating stakeholders from academic social science disciplines to innovate solutions for the emergent social problems of urbanization including group conflict and lack of urban facilities.

#### **6. Urbanization and Social Changes in Pakistan**

As urbanization is creating a lot of social changes in Pakistan, there is a detailed explanation of many of them below under different headings.

##### **6.1 Urbanization and New Social Structures**

There is no doubt that the social structures in Pakistan are either undergoing rapid transformation or the old ones are being replaced by new ones. The rural village life which is dominated by traditional values, attitudes based upon kinship and clans, hierarchical order and vertical relationship is in sharp contrast with urban city life having different social values focused on equality, meritocracy, and professionalism. Urbanization is creating a conflict between these different social structures.

Karl Marx's Conflict theory of social change is very prominent in explaining the origin of social change. It posits those different social structures which are at odds with each other, and conflict creates social change. Conflict theory suggest that there is constant competition among various groups where those who are dominant and wealthy employ societal, economic, political, and cultural instruments to maintain the status quo.

Conflict theory is very helpful in explaining the cause of social change which lies in a conflict between the old and new social structures. However, it does not adequately explain the origin of those new social structures. Modernization theory is somewhat useful in this regard which borrows some of its theoretical basis from evolutionary theory. Modernization theory emerged in the 1950s and 1960s after World War II. Major proponents of Modernization theory are Talcott Parsons, Gabriel Almond, Lucian Pye and Lipset etc. Modernization theory holds that industrialization transforms a society from a premodern, agrarian, and traditional society to a modern and industrialized society. An industrialized society has different modes of production and a new set of division of labour. Technological change is responsible for the emergence of an industrial society.

Industrialization is responsible for structural differentiation of a society. Most of the functions in a traditional society are performed by a single social unit. Traditional societies are not that much complex. However, industrial activities require high levels of specialization, and it creates a sharp division of labour. A small single social unit is not compatible to perform multiple functions of a complex, large industrial society. Therefore, structural differentiation occurs and a breakdown of traditional social systems (Strasser & Randall, 1974).

Evolutionary theory explains that societies evolve from simple forms of social life to complex and advanced forms of social life. Auguste Comte provided the uni-linear theory of evolution that society evolve and progress only in one direction. Other notable figures are Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim. However, multiline theory of evolution states that the path of social transformation is not something direct, continuous, or uni-linear but each society with its our history, cultural values can take multiple paths in its evolutionary development (Mondal, 2021).

The emergence of new social structures will imply that their roles and functions are different from the old ones as well as social processes and values help by its members individually and whole.

## **6.2 Patron-Client Relationship between Equal and Competitive Relationships**

In rural areas based of traditional social systems, there is a predominance of a patron client relationship. An inscriptive criterion is embedded in every facet of life. One's social position defines one's economic, political, cultural, and even religious roles and this social relationship is pre-determined. One's social position in a social order is fixed and decided at birth (Hagen, 1964).

Elders are respected not only because of any of their achievements but also of their gained experiences in old age. Such types of relationships are a necessity in agrarian setup because of survival considerations where there are not surplus resources and one's position in a tribe or a clan can give one access to resources. One must respect higher authority or develop an authoritative attitude to get valuable resources.

In urban life, this is not the case where the process of structural differentiation has replaced a single social structure by multiple structures performing various roles. (Strasser & Randall, 1974). These structures values efficiency and output. This is only possible by focusing on achievement criteria and adoption of universalist attitude and values including meritocracy. Every person has an equality of opportunity in a modern social setup of an urban life and people compete to get a place (role) in different structures of urban society.

With increasing levels of urbanization in Pakistan, there are now low levels of deference for older people in village setups and even age-old patrons because they no longer control the material resources which are essential for survival. Such an understanding can also explain social perspectives of rural-urban migration and economic perspectives of more jobs in urban areas.

## **6.3 Urbanization and Emergence of New Social Values**

As new structures come into existence and new social relationships are formed, new social values emerge. As already mentioned, achievement criteria are preferred over inscriptive norms and universalistic ideals are preferred over particularistic ideals (Coleman, 1971). As rigid hierarchical relationships decline, individualism emerges. Individualism is very important because it creates ambitions for one to self-improve and are vital for creativity and innovation in a technological advanced industrial society (Hagen, 1964). Individualism is complemented by a concept of human rights.

Individualism creates a new sense of higher consciousness which then transforms into demand of political and civil rights as well economic and social rights. New social groups also emerge like

labour and workers groups and associations, entrepreneurs, industrialists, and professional classes. There is a change from clan, kinship, tribal, *Baradri* based relationship to class and professional based relationship. A new social division occurs. These new groups: class and professional groups find commonality between them, and mutual interests and a new type of competitive relationship emerges among these new groups of a modern industrial society. These new groups form associations and unions and compete in the social as well as in the political arena. The individual rights are then supplemented by group rights in the modern urban setup.

Interestingly, the forces of urbanization along with modernization and industrialization changes the gendered social relations, roles, and values. Traditional agrarian societies are patriarchal in nature where the head of a family or a social unit is a patriarch. As rigid social structures are absenting in urban areas, the concept of patriarchy begins to disintegrate. Universalistic, and achievement norms have no regards for patriarchy, and it does not matter if women are participating in dominating and important societal, political, and economic roles as long as they are competitive and efficient.

All these developments are visible in a rapidly urbanizing and emerging Pakistan where women, while still behind men considerably in all aspects of social life, are climbing the ladders of liberation and empowerment and contributing to every facet of national life. More and more women are getting education in Pakistan, and many are coming from far-flung rural areas to urban educational centres to get professional and college degree education.

Pakistanis are also opting for individual lifestyle as well as nuclear family setup and small families. Urban people have more consciousness about their rights as compared to rural areas and have more access to courts and information via social media and e-media platforms. Formal, modern education is also playing a key role in all of this.

#### **6.4 Urbanization and the Emergence of an Educated Youth**

Educational facilities especially qualitatively better higher education centres and universities in Pakistan are present in urban centres. Urban youth have more opportunities of access to quality and higher education. Formal higher education inculcates values and culture which are different from mainstream traditional culture and societal values. No doubt, universities in Pakistan have been the agents of social as well as political change in its history. Educational centres are also platforms of socialization where one gets a change to engage with diverse pool of people from different ethnic, linguistic, social, religious, sectarian, and national backgrounds. This broadens the outlook of an incumbent who has only socialized before with a limited number of people i.e., families or peers (Evans, 1964).

An educated vigorous youth is always an agent of social transformation and social and political movements are successful when the youth of a country are active participants of it. This results in a generational shift. A concept of post materialism (Hague & Haropp, 2013) is employed in this case. Pakistani older parents and the preceding generation may have faced economic hardships just to provide good education and life for their children. These children then having not faced the same hardships as their parents had demand for more than economic opportunities. They may denounce economic inequality as well as corruption in the national political landscape, nepotism, patriarchy, violation of human rights and make demands on the political elites and political system.

The access to these educational centres is not only accessible for people of urban areas. Young people come from far-flung rural areas to get quality education. This new educated youth acquiring new ideas, attitudes and values go back to their hometowns and villages and contribute as a source of social change.

#### **6.5 Urbanization and Political Culture**

Political systems and social systems are overlapping. Any social change is in correspondence with a political change and vice versa. Hence, one can establish a relationship between urbanization and political change. Urbanization establishes new social structures and values and leads to a decline in traditional hierarchical relationship. Patron-client relationships are a fact in Pakistani politics too.

People tend to vote along *Baradri*, caste, and tribal lines in different provinces and regions of Pakistan (Ahmed, 2009). Pakistan's political culture can aptly be described as parochial-subject culture in rural areas (Almond & Powell, 1966). There is less focus on national level politics and more on local and constituency-based politics. This can be attributed to low levels of political and national consciousness, low access to information and media and mainly a hierarchical structure present in backward rural areas which is basis of the distribution of resources.

In urban areas, though constituency-based politics exist in some form, it is overshadowed by national level politics. Urban areas are composed of people from various backgrounds and relationships and communication can be established across ethnic, linguistic, and religious lines in Pakistan. People are more focus on service delivery, urban life facilities and welfare services. Thus, voting behaviour and patterns are different in rural and urban areas. Urbanization may also change the landscape of Pakistan's politics and especially its political culture becoming more participant or even civic culture with the emergence of civil society and a strong urban middle class which will form the majority of the total population.

## 6.6 Urbanization, Social Conflicts and National Integration

Rural-urban migration in Pakistan brings people from different regions having different ethnic backgrounds. This is a source of social conflict which can transform into violence. This can even become worse if there is lack of social capital or trust among different communities and low or non-existent levels of communication. Sindhi-Muhajir conflict is a vivid example in the political and social history of Pakistan. Muhajirs from Northern India came to Pakistan after the Partition of 1947, and many shifted to Karachi and other urban areas of Sindh. This changed the ethno-linguistic demography of urban Sindh and Muhajirs becoming a majority. The social tensions between all these years and violence that ensued in the 1980s and 1990s is an example of demerits of rapid and unplanned urbanization. A civil society has not emerged in Karachi so far for now (Khan, 2014).

Rapid and unplanned urbanization may also create slums (Fazal & Hotez, 2020) Rural-urban migration is mainly due to economic and social factors. People want better economic opportunities, but cities in Pakistan offer limited jobs and infrastructure. This leads to crowded, poorly build and unhygienic slums. Slums are associated with also poor psychological development (Sclar, Garau, & Carolini, 2005). Slum's areas are also a manifestation of class divisions in a society where rich live in well-planned gated societies having all urban facilities. The focus on development of suburban areas against the development of proper housing facilities for people living in slums is a vivid example of economic inequality. Urbanization which should be process of increasing standard of living and providing a high cultured life for citizens is now creating new forms of unequal social structures. Similarly, in both slums and suburban areas, caste, ethnic, tribe and religious based neighbourhoods can also emerge which is determinate for social cohesion and development of a vibrant heterogeneous and multicultural society. Examples like Youhanabad and Rana Town in Lahore and many communities like remote neighbourhoods in Karachi are some of the examples.

Despite all the odds, urbanization has the potential to bring a revolutionary social change in Pakistan by assimilating all the ethnic, linguistic, and religious, sectarian groups into one nation (Ahmed, 1996). There has been a lot more effort on state building in Pakistan than nation building. Even the national building efforts were artificial and imposed. Policy makers made the mistake of treating official Pakistan nationalism at odds with sub-nationalisms. An organic development of national consciousness is only possible by the emergency of a civil society whose members are the educated urban middle class. Pakistan's new educated urban youth from different backgrounds has high levels of national consciousness and are a voice of social and political change.

## 7. Conclusion

There is an urgent need to understand the implications of urbanization upon societal change by everyone in Pakistan. Urbanization in Pakistan is merely understood by policymakers and all other stakeholders as a demographic phenomenon having economic and environmental implications. There is very little focus on social and political impacts of urbanization in Pakistan. Research in this area is made by few and decades ago and there is a need of revival in understanding social change.

This research has focused on the impacts of urbanization on existing social structures, their deterioration, and replacement by new ones. The new social structures are defining new societal values and processes and allocating new roles. It is even defining new gender roles because an urban economy focuses on economic output, efficiency, and competitiveness. It does not respect hierarchy and traditional mores. Urban centres are the venues for social and political movements and as social structures and roles are redefined, so is the level and nature of consciousness of urban folks. The new urban society does not identify strongly with old castes, *Baradri* and tribal affiliations. It is more focused on high standard of living, modern lifestyle, and materialistic outlook.

Similarly, politics and political culture is different in urban areas where people vote based on performance and not based on loyalty to family, clan, *Baradri* and tribal ties. The young, educated elite is the binding strong force or urban social systems in Pakistan which has a different outlook of society and politics from their parents.

Finally, urbanization in Pakistan can be a source of ethnic, linguistic, religious, and sectarian conflict. However, mitigation of these conflicts is possible by efforts to establish a civil society having a civic culture. This can enhance the efforts of national integration and strengthen the narrative of official Pakistani nationalism. There is also a need to tackle urban poverty, poor infrastructure, and slums in cities.

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