

## UNDERESTIMATING URBANISATION<sup>2</sup>

In transitional societies, urbanisation and its key characteristics are major determinants of the political process. Independence, historically significant areas of poverty and social deprivation, with their societal structures, and explicit economic policies adopted by governments have contributed to the shaping of the urban systems and hierarchies in Pakistan.

The differentials and variations in the sub-national context of urbanisation, and its implications for the participation of citizens in the political processes, need to be understood in a historical context. We argue here that although an analysis of the census data would highlight the major demographic trends in the national context, a number of important aspects of the current urban demography are not captured. Leading Pakistani demographers and social scientists (M. S. Jilani, Sultan Hashmi, Akhtar Hasan Khan, G. M. Arif and others) have made comments, raised questions or offered explanation on the apparently low urban growth rates given the higher projections made by the Planning Commission (M. S. Butt, Shahid Javed Burki and others). Some of these questions are addressed here.

In 1901, the population of what is the geographical area of Pakistan today was 16.5 million. The urban population, 10 per cent of the total population, was growing at one-quarter of the overall growth rate of 1.6 per cent per annum. However, global events, such as the two world wars and the Great Depression of the 1930s, and local economic policies such as the development of canal irrigation, led to changes in this pattern. By 1941, the population had reached 28 million, 15 per cent of which was urban. Most significant, however, was the fact that the urban population was growing at twice the overall growth rate and nearly three times that of the rural one. The rate of economic growth in British India during 1901-41 averaged 0.4 per cent per annum, falling to 0.2 per cent per annum during the last 20 years of colonial rule.

Independence brought a major change in the political economy of urbanization. At independence in 1947, the population was almost 31 million, of which about 5 million was urban. A number of subsequent urban regions, systems and hierarchies that have developed can be traced back to the nature of the in-migration and settlement patterns of the Muslim population that migrated to the new homeland. In what has been termed as the single largest movement of population ever recorded in history, nearly 11 million people left their homes. Pakistan's population in 1951 was 33.8 million, of which 6.5 million were Muslim refugees from India. This represented 19.3

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2 Ali, Reza, 'Underestimating Urbanisation' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.XXXVII, Nos.44-45, Nov. 2-9, 2002; 'Underestimating Urbanisation' in Zaidi, S. Akbar (ed.), *Continuity and Change: Socio-Political and Institutional Dynamics in Pakistan*, City Press, Karachi, 2003; reproduced in Zaidi, S. Akbar, *Issues in Pakistan's Economy*, Second Edition (Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2006), and Bajwa, Khalid (ed.) *Urban Pakistan - Imagining and Reading Urbanism*, (Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2013). An earlier version 'How Urban is Pakistan?' was published in *Dawn*, *The News*, *Independent*, (Dhaka); translated and published in the Urdu, Sindhi, Pushto and Balochi languages, and reproduced in Hasan, Arif, *The Scale and Causes of Urban Change in Pakistan*, Karachi, Ushba Publishing International, 2006.

per cent of the national population, with the transfer of population resulting in a net gain of over 1.8 million, or 5.4 percent.

The distribution of Muslim, refugees across the provinces was uneven. While the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) recorded a net loss of population, Punjab had the greatest net increase (26 percent). Sindh was second (19 per cent) and then Balochistan. Significant numbers tended to head towards the urban areas. In Sindh, over 82 per cent of the Muslim refugees settled in the cities, mainly Karachi and Hyderabad. In Punjab, the dispersal of refugees was more even across urban centres due to the settlement pattern accompanying the canal irrigation network, which had already laid the foundation of a significant urban diaspora. In 1951, nearly one-fifths of Pakistan's population comprised Muslim refugees from India: they formed 45 per cent of the urban population and 15.6 per cent of the rural. In Punjab, which had 5.3 million refugees (or 81 per cent of the total), they comprised 46 per cent of the city population and in Sindh 54 per cent of the urban population. In 1951, one half of the population of the 10 largest cities of Pakistan comprised Muslim refugees: Karachi 57 per cent, Lahore 43 per cent, Hyderabad 66 per cent, Rawalpindi 37 per cent, Muslim 50 per cent, Faisalabad 70 per cent, Gujranwala 50 per cent and Sargodha 69 per cent. Lahore, which had been the largest city since census taking began under the British, was pushed into second place by Karachi in 1951 because of this influx.

The latest census, in 1998, reported Pakistan's urban population as 42.458 million, growing at a rate of 3.5 per cent per annum over 1981-98. During the period after independence (1951-98), the population growth rate fluctuated from 2.4 per annum in 1951-61 and 3.1 per cent in 1972-81 to 2.6 percent in 1981-98. Urban areas grew significantly from 6 million in 1961 to 43 million in 1998. The urban population of Pakistan, as a percentage of the total population, went up from approximately 18 per cent to over 32 per cent since 1951. This increase was fairly significant in all four provinces. In the NWFP, the urban population went up from 11 per cent to 17 per cent, in Punjab from 17.5 per cent to 31 per cent, in Sindh from 30 per cent to 50 per cent, and in Balochistan from 12 per cent to 23 per cent.

During 1951-61 and 1961-72, the momentum of urbanization varied among the provinces. Sindh had experienced a higher urban growth rate – 3.3 per cent per annum and 4.6 per cent per annum respectively – than the national urban growth rate. However, for the periods 1972-81 and 1981-98, the urban growth rates in Sindh, Punjab and NWFP were similar at around 3.5 per cent per annum. In each province, the urban systems, with their provincial hierarchies and urbanization patterns developed differently. The growth phenomena for the major cities recorded in the 1998 Census are broadly summarized here.

### **Re-estimating Urban Population**

There are eight cities with a population of over 1 million each (the 'million-plus' cities), five in the Punjab, two in Sindh and one in the NWFP. Together they account for over one half of the total urban population; the 10 largest cities (including the million-plus cities) have 55 per cent of the urban population. In Punjab, the million-plus cities account for 48 per cent of the urban and 15 per cent of the total provincial population; the respective figures for Sindh are 70 per cent and 34 per cent, with Karachi alone accounting for 62 per cent of the urban and 30 per cent of the total population of the province. The annual growth rates during 1981-98 for the top 10 cities varied between a high of 5.7 per cent per annum for Islamabad followed by 4 per cent per annum for Quetta to a low of 2.5 per cent per annum for Hyderabad and 3.2 per cent per annum for Lahore.

In terms of city ranking, during 1981-98, Quetta and Islamabad replaced Sialkot and Sargodha in the lists of the top ten. Six of the cities have been on these lists since 1901.

Although the census data allows us to highlight major demographic trends and features of the settlement patterns, a number of important aspects of the current urban demography are not captured. This is due to the underestimation of the urban population resulting from changes in the census methodology as well as the spatial demography of urbanisation. Below we argue that there are two main reasons for the underestimation of the urban population.

First is the issue of definition. Until 1972, the same definition and system for the classification of urban areas was used. An area was regarded as urban if it had a minimum of 5,000 inhabitants or had the administrative status of a municipal corporation, municipal committee, town committee or a cantonment board (regardless of population size). In addition, census commissioners had the discretion to consider any area as urban that had 'urban characteristics'. In the 1981 Census, the discretion of the census commissioners on classifying an area as urban was removed and standardization, based on the administrative criterion that only areas with municipalities, town committees and cantonment boards should be considered urban, was imposed. This has probably resulted in the underestimation of the urban population. In 1981, 1,462 places, each with a population of 5,000 or more, were classified as rural. In addition, 54 areas that were classified as urban in the 1972 Census were declassified due to application of the administrative definition and placed in the rural category. The number of places with a population of 5,000 or more that have been classified as rural in the 1998 Census is 3,691, where over 31 million people are living. It is not possible to determine how many of these places would have been classified as urban under the earlier definition and to estimate the magnitude of the difference.

Second, and leading from this definition, is the fact that administrative boundaries became a factor in the census. This meant that people living outside the administrative boundaries were not counted in the urban category. As city populations have extended outside the administrative boundaries, this has resulted in an underestimation of some magnitude. In Lahore, many public sector and most private sector developments are not included in the census count for urban Lahore. Thus the proportion of the population living in the rural areas of Lahore district is shown as higher in 1998 than in 1981, with the 1981-98 annual growth rate for urban population being 3.2 per cent compared with 4 per cent for the rural. Re-estimation of the urban agglomeration would result in an almost 20 per cent increase – a difference of nearly one million – in the urban population of Lahore.

Earlier we noted that demographers and social scientists have questioned the 1998 Census results for the urban population for being inconsistent with trends and projections. They have argued that the urban population as a percentage of total population is not less than 40 per cent and could be up to 50 per cent.

Even with the underestimation of the urban population, it is important to understand the spatial nature of urbanisation and urbanism in Pakistan. The major aspects of the spatial demography are summarized below:

- Primary cities, which have historically been significant areas of urban growth, have major urban systems.

- The phenomenon of peri-urban areas has gained significance. Settlements peripheral to the cities, capitalizing upon their proximity, transport links, employment opportunities and access to urban services, have grown substantially and even acquired some 'urban characteristics', though they do not have any institutional arrangement, for providing basic civic services.
- Ribbons of development along the highways, between major urban centres and industrial satellite areas, have developed largely due to accessibility to transport links, availability of skills and services as well as tax and tariff incentives. In Lahore, Gujranwala and Sheikhupura, these developments have come up along the Lahore-Gujranwala and Lahore-Sheikhupura roads. Similar developments can also be seen along other major cities throughout the country. A review of occupational structures shows that people residing in the rural areas of these districts have a strong occupational interface with the urban areas.
- A separate, but related, phenomenon is also apparent in the more rural areas, where the population settlement pattern that has emerged shows a very high density of population along the major road corridors. One of the least urbanized districts (12.3 per cent urban) of Punjab, Narowal, has 60 per cent of the population living within 4-km belts along the highways. This enables easier access to higher-level services in urban areas and will possibly play a significant role in the transformation of the rural areas into urban areas.

The cumulative effect of these factors is evident in certain urban districts/divisions. Intense urbanisation, connectivity and integration of services and industries across city boundaries and contiguity of city boundaries have resulted in the emergence of clearly identifiable urban regions. Some of these urban regions, comprising peri-urban areas, satellites or small towns, have formed around primary cities. Karachi has an urban system of well over 10 million, and Hyderabad and Multan of 2.5 million each. In other cases, contiguous districts, comprising major cities, medium-sized and small towns, peri-urban areas and ribbons, have formed urban regions. Today, the central Punjab urban region – Lahore, Sheikhupura, Faisalabad and Gujranwala districts (and Chiniot tehsil, Jhang district) – has a combined population of 19 million, accounting for over 25 per cent of the provincial population. This system includes three of Punjab's five one-million-plus cities and a number of medium and small towns. Different stages of this phenomenon are apparent in the NWFP (Peshawar-Nowshera-Risalpur-Mardan) and in northern Punjab (Rawalpindi-Taxila-Wah).

There is an urgent need to recognize and understand the significance, magnitude and nature of the phenomenon of urbanisation. Urbanisation has a major impact on the realisation of political rights and participation in political processes, on the relationship of and responsibilities between the citizen and the state and the related institutional structures, on the nature of the breakdown of existing societal structures and the forging of new and complex ones, and on the composition of revenue base and the criteria for resource allocations. It has an effect on the nature of poverty, empowerment, gender, governance, culture and marginality. Understanding urbanisation is a key to developing an understanding of the political process.