Emerging Global Cities and the Tilt of Influence

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Throughout history, the building of great and influential cities has symbolized global influence and power. Cities are a global phenomenon and have been since the rise of civilization. With the rise of urbanization, it is not merely influence wielded through power, but also through population. The vast majority of urban growth has shifted to the Majority World.[2] Or as Tim Bunnell puts it, "the future is not where it used to be."[3] The previous century saw unprecedented urbanization in countries often labeled "developed".[4] Latin America and Eastern Europe have already experienced significant growth of cities in the past half century.[5] The cities of Asia are emerging as some of the most significant hubs of commerce, innovation, and international traffic in the world.[6] The African continent is urbanizing faster than anywhere else in the world and quickly catching up to global urbanization figures (see Figure 1).[7]

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[2] A number of terms are used to refer to Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. Terms like "developing nations" and "Global South" risk communicating inaccurate or unnuanced realities. For example, tagging a nation as developed or developing relies on arbitrary metrics. Majority World isn't perfect, but it is the term with the fewest issues.

[3] Tim Bunnell, "Futurity and Urban Asias," in *Urban Asias: Essays on Futurity Past and Present*, ed. Tim Bunnell and Daniel P. S. Goh (Berlin: JOVIS, 2017), 9.

[4] Many of these post-industrial cities are facing population decreases. Thomas Elmqvist et al., eds., *Urban Planet: Knowledge towards Sustainable Cities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[5] Latin America is the most urbanized region of the world with an estimated 80% (260 million people) of the population living in urban areas. It is predicted that the urbanization rate will climb to 90% by 2050. Adrienne Arsht, "Urbanization in Latin America," *Atlantic Council* (blog), February 5, 2014, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/commentary/article/urbanization-in-latin-america/.

[6] Cities are not new to these regions of the worlds, particularly Asia. At different times Asian cities thrived when cities in Europe did not (ex. Chang'an, Delhi, and Istanbul). Arthur F. Wright, "Changan," in *Cities of Destiny*, ed. Arnold Toynbee (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 143–49; Thomas F. Madden, *Istanbul: City of Majesty at the Crossroads of the World*, Reprint edition (New York: Penguin Books, 2016); Southall describes the rich urban history of East Asia: "The world's pre-modern urban history was mainly a Chinese phenomenon. Of approximately 4% of the world's population living in cities of over 10,000 inhabitants in 1800, about one third, or 12 million, lived in China which led the world in economic development until the eighteenth century, when it may have been surpassed by Japan, as well as by western Europe. Some two-fifths of the world's population were in China and Japan, yet 'until now there have been no knowledgeable comparisons of Chinese and Japanese cities with each other or with cities in other countries'." Aidan Southall, *The City in Time and Space* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 125.

[7] Jamal Saghir and Jena Santoro, "Urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa: Meeting Challenges by Bridging Stakeholders" (Center for Strategic & International Studies, April 2018), https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180411_Saghir_UrbanizationAfrica_Web.pdf?o02HMOfqh99KtXG6ObTacIKKmRvk0Owd.
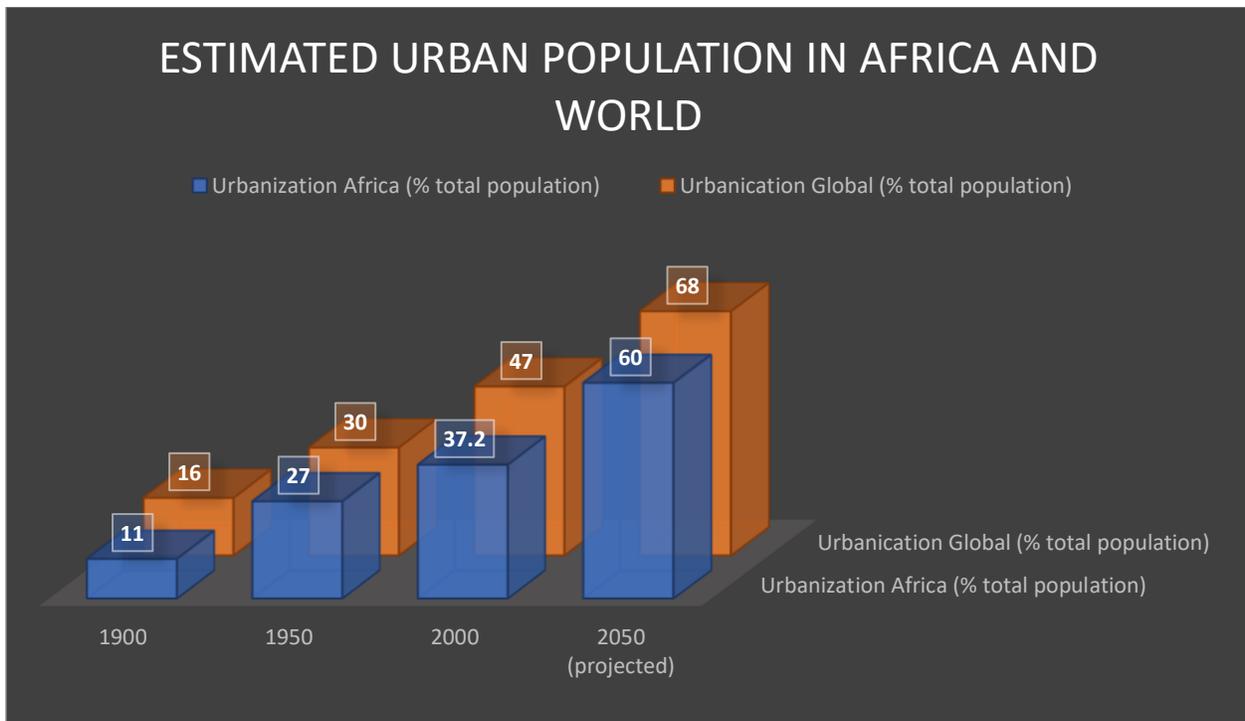
ESTIMATED URBAN POPULATION IN AFRICA AND WORLD

■ Urbanization Africa (% total population)   ■ Urbanication Global (% total population)

| 1900 | 1950 | 2000 | 2050 (projected) |

Africa: 11, 27, 37.2, 60
Global: 16, 30, 47, 68

Urbanication Global (% total population)
Urbanization Africa (% total population)

Figure 1: Estimated Urban Population in Africa and the World

Asia and Africa—the two most populous continents—display the greatest change in terms of urbanization. There are more urban dwellers in the cities of Asia than in the rest of the world combined.[8] This amounts to nearly 2.3 billion urban dwellers in living in Asian cities and more than 29% of the global population. As of 2019, Asia is more urban than non-urban.[9] The cities of Asia are already the centers of economic and cultural influence. T. Kearney compiles 27 metrics on 125 global cities to rank their global influence.[10] Of the 125 cities, 58 of the cities are Asian. The Chinese government anticipates the number of urban dwellers in the country to reach a billion this year (2020).[11] According to *Business Insider*, Singapore has been the most expensive city in the world for the last five years.[12] Seven of the top ten most visited cities in the world are

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[8] According to a UN report, 54% of the world's urban population (4.2 billion) is in Asia. "2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects | Multimedia Library," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, May 18, 2018, https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html.

[9] United Nations, *The Future of Asian and Pacific Cities: Transformative Pathways Towards Sustainable Urban Development* (Bangkok: United Nations, 2019), 20.

[10] AT Kearney, "Global Cities 2016," Global Cities Index, 2016, https://www.atkearney.com/research-studies/global-cities-index.

[11] Lily Kuo, "Why China's Cities Need to Get Denser, Not Bigger," The Atlantic Cities: Place Matters, March 25, 2014, http://www.theatlanticcities.com/politics/2014/03/why-chinas-cities-need-get-denser-not-bigger/8716/; "China Unveils Landmark Urbanization Plan," News Service, Xinhuanet, March 16, 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-03/16/c_133190495.htm?_ga=1.72585363.1493930855.1396398327.

[12] Marissa Perino, "These Are the Most Expensive Cities in the World in 2019," Business Insider, March 19, 2019, https://www.businessinsider.com/most-expensive-cities-in-the-world-2019-1.

in Asia.[13] Africa's urban population is expected to double in the next twenty five years[14] rapidly approaching one billion urban dwellers in the continent. European and North American cities once dominated the lists of largest metropolitan areas. Today Asian cities dominate the least. Tomorrow African cities are quickly moving to top the lists of largest cities.

The growth of cities in the Majority World is leading to a shift in the epicenters of global influence. New York City, London, and Los Angeles must make room for new urban giants like Singapore, Lagos, and Mumbai. The forces of urbanization and globalization (sometimes called glurbanization) are working in tandem to great effect. The implications of urbanization in the Majority World are multifaceted and will have global impact which will be manifested in economics, culture, and politics.

Fast Facts About the Fast Rise of Asian Cities

- 14 of 20 largest cities in the world are in Asia.
- 58 of 125 (4 of the top 10) global cities ranked by A. T. Kearney are in Asia (AT Kearney, 2016).
- In 1990, 19 of the 20 tallest buildings in the world were in North America. Thirty years later, 17 of the 20 tallest buildings are in Asia.
- China will have 1 billion people in cities by 2020 (Kuo, 2014).
- Beijing's Central Business District, home to multiple multi-national corporations, didn't exist in 1990 (AECOM, 2010, p. 194).
- 5 of 10 busiest airports are in Asia.
- 65 million live in urban slum conditions in India (S, 2013).

Economic Impact

Booming cities across the Majority World will change global trade and local economies. China's One Belt, One Road Initiative is building infrastructure to enhance trade throughout Asia and Africa. They are building deep seaports in Pakistan, Tanzania and Malaysia. They are building train lines through Laos and Cambodia and inland highways in multiple nations in Africa. Southeast Asian nations, through ASEAN, are working more collaboratively to develop better trade with other nations. The African Union is moving towards similar collaboration for enhanced trade. This increase of infrastructure and international trade is creating further interdependence of cities on each other. It is also internationalizing cities that were once only significant in a particular region. In these ways, globalization effects cities. Simultaneously, urbanization will impact the globe.

Rise of the Informal Economy

Unprecedented rural-to-urban migration as well as flows of migrant labor and refugees is adding many thousands to cities every day. It is estimated that one in four urbanites lives in an informal settlement (or slum). 880 million people in informal housing also means a significant informal

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[13] Alexandra Talty, "Bangkok Is The Most Visited City In The World...Again," Forbes, September 4, 2019, https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexandratalty/2019/09/04/bangkok-is-the-most-visited-city-in-the-world-again/.

[14] Saghir and Santoro, "Urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa: Meeting Challenges by Bridging Stakeholders."

economy.[15] I observed, on a recent visit to Kibera, an informal community of 700,000 in Nairobi, it is evident that it functions as a massive city within the city of Nairobi with markets, schools, churches and mosques, and their own transportation systems.

An informal economy is traditionally unwelcomed by city governments. Jai Sen describes how the urban poor are needed and exploited simultaneously:

> There is little or no genuine attempt to accept the poor and disadvantaged as equal and integral citizens, to develop the city also according to their needs as a society different from the urban, to develop ways through which their disadvantage might be reduced. Quite the opposite; not only are they exploited but their lifestyles and livelihoods are often made illegal, and then even the 'illegality' is exploited.
>
> And yet, and this is not understood sufficiently, the poor as a group are an absolutely indispensable part of the city and of society as it is presently structured. The middle-class and the wealthy, and the economy more generally, could not survive without them and their services. The urban city is totally dependent on them—as dependent and perhaps more so than they are on it. But the city is not made for the poor; it has evolved not to reduce dependency but to take advantage of it; it is not made so as to enable the poor to improve their conditions but rather to serve the wealthy and to allow them to enjoy and increase their advantage.[16]

The poor, who make up much of the informal economy are caught in a no-win situation. Because they aren't registered businesses, they aren't paying taxes or adhering to legal codes. These large populations, however, do not have the resources to go through the red tape needed to have official businesses. Yet, woven throughout the informal sector are small companies innovating technologies and solutions to issues faced by the urban poor. This is given a lift through smart phone technology available globally and internet platforms accessible globally.

Rise of Global Consumerism

Cities typically produce middle and upper classes with expendable income. There was a time when consumer products were manufactured in one part of the world and shipped to a more prosperous part of the world. With the rising percentage of urban dwellers in the Majority World, the consumer market map will change dramatically. The most luxurious malls in the world are in Asia and are teeming with shoppers. As consumers increase across the Majority World, the flow of goods and the nature of the goods will change. Economic hegemony will become increasingly decentered and will likely foster a market with continuous fluidity (or volatility).

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[15] Rosamond Hunt, "These Are the World's Five Biggest Slums," World Economic Forum, October 19, 2016, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/10/these-are-the-worlds-five-biggest-slums/.

[16] Jai Sen, "The Unintended City," in *The Oxford Anthology of the Modern India City: Making and Unmaking the City: Politics, Culture, and Life Forms*, ed. Vinay Lal (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 147.

Cultural Impact

The massive growth of cities around the world is having a significant cultural impact. Media, art, sports, fashion, and government are all urban.

As the informal sector gains footing and innovates and produces products for one-fourth of the urban population and consumerism shifts economic distribution to the Majority World, there will be inevitable changes in cultural influence. In other words, where the cash goes the culture flows. Urban dwellers produce culture and consume culture. In many respects, the urbanites are the arbiters of the culture that influences the world.

Multidirectional Influence

For many years Hollywood had a monopoly on the global entertainment market. Hollywood's popularity means far more than an economic boom for Southern California; these movies spread ideas, ways of life, and even culture. However, it might surprise us to know that the United States only ranks third among nations producing the most movies. India produces more movies than any other country in the world. Their movie industry, often called Bollywood[17] (which, strictly speaking, is only a portion of the Indian movie industry), has become popular all over the world. These dramatic films infused with song and dance have gained a faithful following on every continent. Nigeria boasts the second largest movie industry in the world. Dubbed Nollywood, Nigeria's movie industry brings in over 10 billion dollars a year and is popular throughout the African continent and is gaining popularity around the world. Digital filming technology and distribution through the internet makes global viewership a reality. Telenovelas, Korean dramas, and movies made all over the world are distributed easily through Netflix and the proliferation of other streaming entertainment companies.

As city dwellers around the world produce their own culture products, people everywhere have choices to eat, watch, wear, listen, read products from anywhere in the world. A Singaporean can consciously choose to listen to K-pop, wear the latest in Hong Kong fashion, watch Bollywood movies, while eating a hot bowl of Vietnamese Phở. This individually curated lifestyle will collectively change families, neighborhoods, and cities. Local is increasingly complex. As each generation is more immersed in this cultural complexity, it will begin to change traditions, beliefs, morals, and societal norms. As we change cities, the cities will change us.

Cultural Urbanism is Global

As populations establish families for the first time in cities, it will dramatically change the ways people think, live, and interact. In other words, cultures around the world will undergo an urbanization process. I've been to some very rural corners of the planet but have never been anywhere with a human settlement that didn't have access to television, even if it requires a pirated satellite feed powered off of a car battery. Landline telephones never made it to many places, particularly informal settlements in cities. Cell phone technology has connected urban to rural like no other technology. Media and entertainment created and produced by city dwellers in cities is the staple of entertainment for the world.

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[17] Bollywood is a portmanteau combining Bombay (the former name of modern-day Mumbai, India) with Hollywood. Much of the Hindi language movie production comes from the industry in Mumbai.

Geopolitical Impact

Due to the higher percentage of the world's most influential decision-makers being in cities, particularly global cities, these cities wield disproportionate influence on the world. Foreign Policy magazine, in an issue devoted to the impact of global cities, writes: "The 21st century will not be dominated by America or China, Brazil or India, but by the city. In an age that appears increasingly unmanageable, cities rather than states are becoming the islands of governance on which the future of the world order will be built"[18]

Critical Mass Will Impact Governance

Around the world, city dwellers have discovered the power they wield by bringing a city to a stop. The EDSA Revolution in Manila in 1986 brought down a national dictator. Urban masses in Tunis, Cairo, and other cities in the Middle East triggered major changes in government in 2011. More recently Hong Kong citizens stood up to the Chinese government in 2019. These movements are distinctly urban and will likely increase with the increase of urbanization. This is especially true if cities fail to provide governance that links people to infrastructure and basic needs.

The rising numbers of city dwellers will affect politics and decision-making. Governments will have to decide whether they will fight against these uprisings or make adjustments to laws and injustices. When the poor are kept from advantages given to the middle and upper classes, they will find ways to make their voices heard.[19] Urban populations with viable paths to give voice to their issues are the ones that will thrive.

Political Influence of Cities will Increase

As the masses bring their collective voice to bear in cities, this will lead to increased influence of cities on nations and regions. As national economies depend greatly on cities and their welfare, then nations are shaped by these cities. Internationally, cities with thriving economies have leverage and influence over surrounding regions and governments. Cities like Dubai or Kuala Lumpur can negotiate terms with countries that depend on sending migrant labor for remittances. Non-Western cities have absorbed most of the world's asylum seekers and refugees.[20] All of these factors lead to a rise in influence from cities in the Majority World.

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[18] Parag Khanna, "Beyond City Limits," *Foreign Policy*, October 2010.

[19] James Manor, "The Poor and the 'System' amid an Urban Catastrophe," in *The Oxford Anthology of the Modern India City: Making and Unmaking the City: Politics, Culture, and Life Forms*, ed. Vinay Lal (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 185–96; Seabrook estimates two-thirds of Mumbai lives in slums. Sheer numbers give leverage to making change. Jeremy Seabrook, "Dharavi," in *The Oxford Anthology of the Modern India City: Making and Unmaking the City: Politics, Culture, and Life Forms*, ed. Vinay Lal (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 196–208.

[20] Johnny Wood, "These Countries Are Home to the Highest Proportion of Refugees in the World," World Economic Forum, March 19, 2019, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/03/mena-countries-in-the-middle-east-have-the-highest-proportion-of-refugees-in-the-world/.

Cities are emerging throughout the Majority World that are increasingly becoming the major actors on the world stage. However, much of the research and writing on cities and urbanization has been based on cities in North America and Western Europe.[21] Along with this has come assumptions that cities around the world operate similarly. At a superficial level, global cities start to look alike. They have flashy skyscrapers, high-end shops, and a lovely public space beside water that gives the impression of urban vibrancy. Underneath the glitz, however, every city is working with unique realties and underlying worldviews that need to be understood.

As cities emerge in new places and grow to unprecedented sizes, there will be inevitable changes that will impact all of us. Further research on these emerging cities is a necessary step to healthy growth and development.

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[21] Much of urban studies has been fragmented by regions. Some studying cities in China, Africa, the Muslim world, etc. In particular, the field has been dominated by Euro-American scholars. This fragmenting has resulted in little crossover for broader perspective. Southall, *The City in Time and Space*, 5.

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