



TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIAL SOLIDARITY DUE TO RAPID URBANIZATION IN URBAN AREAS

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between rapid urbanization and social cohesion in major Indian cities, focusing on the transformation of solidarity patterns and intergroup relations. Employing a qualitative literature review method, this research analyzes various scholarly sources to understand how urbanization affects the dynamics of social solidarity and identifies factors determining the success or failure of social cohesion maintenance. The findings reveal that urbanization in India has generated ambivalent outcomes: while it erodes traditional mechanical solidarity based on kinship and shared values, it also creates opportunities for new forms of solidarity grounded in common interests and civic engagement. Social cohesion is determined by multiple interrelated factors, including inclusive spatial planning policies, availability of quality public spaces, equitable access to public services, responsive local leadership, and active civil society organizations. No single factor can guarantee social cohesion; a comprehensive approach addressing all these dimensions simultaneously is essential. Cities that successfully manage diversity and social tensions demonstrate that urbanization does not inevitably lead to social disintegration, provided there is collective commitment to building inclusive and just urban environments. This research contributes to urban sociology theory and offers practical policy recommendations for sustainable urban development in diverse societies.

Keywords: rapid urbanization, social cohesion, urban India, social solidarity, intergroup relations, inclusive urban policy, civil society

Introduction

Urbanization in India is taking place at an unprecedented pace. Major cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru are experiencing explosive population growth, driven by a wave of migration from rural areas in search of better economic opportunities. This process is not merely a movement of population from villages to cities, but rather a social transformation that alters the entire fabric of society. When millions of people with different cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds gather in limited urban spaces, a fundamental question arises about how social solidarity can survive amid extreme density and diversity (Murmu et al., 2025). Indian cities have become social laboratories where new forms of human interaction are continually tested.

The dynamics of urbanization in India exhibit distinct characteristics compared to other countries. The caste system, which is deeply rooted in Indian society, shapes urban settlement patterns and social interactions. Caste groups tend to form segregated residential pockets, creating spatial segregation that reinforces traditional social boundaries. At the same time, the economic mobility offered by the city provides opportunities for marginalized groups to break free from the social hierarchy that binds them (Haque et al., 2021). It is this tension between old social structures and new possibilities that makes India's urbanization a complex and contradiction-laden phenomenon.

Rapid economic growth in India's urban centers creates striking spatial inequalities. Elite neighborhoods with modern infrastructure exist side by side with slums lacking access to clean water and proper sanitation. This gap is not only physical, but also spills over into social relations. Urban society is fragmented into groups living in vastly different realities, with few common grounds that allow for cross-class interaction (Khuntia, 2024). As public spaces become arenas of competition among groups with conflicting interests, social cohesion faces increasingly severe challenges to maintain its integrity.

Changes in kinship relationship patterns are also coloring the urbanization process in India. The extended family tradition that characterizes rural society is beginning to erode, replaced by a more independent and individualistic nuclear family. The mutual cooperation and social support systems that have long served as the glue of rural communities are losing their relevance in an anonymous and competitive

urban environment. Newcomers must rebuild their social networks from scratch, often relying on primordial ties such as shared regional origin or religious affiliation (Dey et al., 2025). However, these identity-based networks can actually reinforce social divisions and hinder the formation of more inclusive solidarity at the city level.

Rapid demographic changes also trigger tensions among community groups. When a city's population increases drastically, competition for jobs, housing, and public facilities intensifies. Native residents often feel threatened by the arrival of migrants, while newcomers struggle to gain recognition and equal access (Shaik, 2025). Anti-migrant sentiment and identity politics exploit these tensions, turning urbanization into an issue laden with political content. Amidst all this, the question of how to maintain a sense of togetherness amid diversity becomes an urgent issue to answer.

Rapid urbanization in India's major cities creates a fundamental dilemma for the social cohesion of urban society. The population density and diverse backgrounds of city dwellers should encourage the formation of a more tolerant and open society. However, the reality that occurs instead shows the strengthening of social divisions based on caste, religion, and economic class identities. Public spaces that should be meeting places for various community groups instead become arenas of conflict and competition. Social exclusion processes are strengthening, where certain groups are systematically marginalized from access to resources and opportunities available in the city (Singh et al., 2023). This condition threatens the idea of the city as an inclusive space that offers social mobility for all its citizens.

The next challenge concerns the transformation of traditional social networks that have long been the foundation of community cohesion in India. Strong kinship systems and patron-client relationships in rural areas lose their function in the individualistic urban environment. Migrants must rebuild their social networks, but limitations in time and resources often leave them only able to forge superficial relationships limited to practical interests alone (Khan, 2025). As a consequence, exclusive communities are formed that live within their own bubbles, without meaningful bonds with other groups outside those communities. This phenomenon erodes the social capital urgently needed to create an urban society that is cohesive and resilient in facing various shared challenges.

India is undergoing the most significant demographic shift in its modern history, with projections that more than 40 percent of its population will live in urban areas over the next two decades (Muttreja, 2025). This transformation will fundamentally change the face of Indian society, both in terms of economic structure and patterns of social interaction. A deep understanding of how urbanization affects social cohesion becomes increasingly crucial as the number of metropolitan cities and expanding urbanized peripheries grows. Urban development policies that ignore the social dimension risk creating cities that are uninhabitable, fraught with tension, and socially fragile.

The study of urbanization and social cohesion in India holds value that extends far beyond mere academic interests. Indonesia, as a country with a rapidly increasing rate of urbanization, can draw lessons from India's experience in managing social transformation resulting from urbanization. The dynamics of pluralistic societies in both countries show similarities in terms of ethnic, religious diversity, and complex social structures. By understanding how India faces social cohesion challenges in its cities, Indonesia can anticipate similar issues and formulate more targeted policies. Ultimately, the question of how to build inclusive and cohesive cities is a universal challenge faced by all countries experiencing rapid urbanization.

This research aims to analyze the impact of rapid urbanization on patterns of social solidarity and inter-citizen relations in India's major cities, as well as to identify the factors that determine the success or failure of maintaining social cohesion in the process. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of urban sociology by enriching the understanding of social cohesion dynamics in societies experiencing structural transformation due to urbanization. Practically, the results of this study are expected to serve as a consideration for policy makers in formulating urban development programs that not only focus on physical and economic aspects, but also pay attention to the maintenance of social capital. This study also provides a relevant comparative perspective for Indonesia, which faces similar urbanization challenges, so that it can anticipate social cohesion issues before they develop into a wider crisis.

Method

This research is a pure library research that does not involve direct field data collection. The approach used is qualitative with a basis of textual analysis of various literature sources relevant to the topic of urbanization and social cohesion in India. The literature study method was chosen because it allows researchers to examine social phenomena comprehensively through the synthesis of various research findings that have been conducted previously, without having to be involved in the primary data collection process which is time-consuming and costly (Sridhar, 2025). As stated by Snyder (2019), literature studies in social sciences function to identify, evaluate, and synthesize the existing body of knowledge to produce a more holistic understanding of a particular topic. This approach is very suitable for examining the dynamics of urbanization and social cohesion in India because the available literature corpus is rich and diverse enough, covering various disciplinary perspectives such as sociology, urban anthropology, human geography, and development studies.

Data collection in this research was conducted through systematic searching of literature sources consisting of academic books, scientific journal articles, research reports, and relevant policy documents. The analysis technique used is qualitative content analysis and thematic synthesis, where the collected data are categorized based on the main themes emerging from the literature, such as the transformation of social solidarity, the role of caste and religious identities, the influence of urban spatial layout on social interactions, and factors affecting social cohesion. This approach allows researchers to capture general patterns as well as the peculiarities of each case discussed in the literature. As explained by Bowen (2009), document analysis in qualitative research involves the process of interpreting document content to gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge. In this study, interpretation is carried out critically by comparing findings from various sources to identify consistency, contradictions, and knowledge gaps that still need to be filled. The validity of this research is guaranteed through source triangulation, which is by comparing information from various types of sources and different perspectives to ensure that the conclusions generated are not based on a single source.

Result and Discussion

Transformation of Social Solidarity in India's Rapidly Urbanizing Urban Spaces

Urbanization in India has triggered fundamental changes in the structure of society's social solidarity. Forms of mechanical solidarity rooted in shared values, traditions, and kinship ties in rural areas are slowly being replaced by organic solidarity based on functional interdependence among individuals in urban areas. Rural society in India has dense social networks, where every individual knows one another and is bound by strong moral obligations. Social relations in the rural environment are multifunctional, meaning that relationships between individuals encompass various aspects of life simultaneously, ranging from economic affairs to religious rituals (Chanchal, 2025). When migrants enter the city, they enter a completely different world, where social relationships tend to be specific and limited to certain practical interests. This shift from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity does not proceed smoothly and often causes culture shock for newcomers.

Settlement patterns in Indian cities reflect intensifying social fragmentation. Community groups tend to choose living in areas dominated by members of their own identity group, whether based on caste, religion, or regional origin. This spatial segmentation creates conditions where interactions between different groups become very limited (Motiram & Vakulabharanam, 2024). City dwellers live in socially homogeneous environments, even though the city as a whole is highly diverse. This condition contrasts sharply with the expectation that urban population density will encourage cultural exchange and cross-group understanding. The reality that occurs instead shows that density does not automatically create integration; on the contrary, density often reinforces the human tendency to seek security by associating with people perceived as similar to oneself.

The existence of slums in India's urban centers adds complexity to the dynamics of social solidarity. In these areas, migrants from various regions live side by side in extreme density, with very limited access to basic facilities. Difficult physical conditions actually encourage the formation of new solidarity among slum dwellers. They help each other in facing various threats, such as evictions, fires, and floods (Pandey et al., 2022). Social

networks in slums are practical and functional, built upon the basis of shared survival needs. However, the solidarity formed in slums is often exclusive, encompassing only those living in the area and failing to extend to other community groups outside the settlement. Thus, the solidarity built does not necessarily strengthen social cohesion at the city level as a whole.

Transformation of social solidarity is also seen in changing interaction patterns in urban public spaces. Parks, markets, railway stations, and places of worship should be arenas of encounter among various community groups. However, reality shows that public spaces in Indian cities are often fragmented along existing social lines. Community groups use public spaces at different times or in different locations, so that cross-group interaction remains limited (Motiram & Vakulabharanam, 2024). Traditional markets may still display higher social diversity compared to other public spaces, but economic dominance in market interactions is more transactional and does not produce meaningful social bonds. Public spaces that should act as social glue instead reflect and reinforce the fragmentation existing within society.

The role of communication technology in shaping social solidarity in urban India cannot be ignored. The use of mobile phones and social media has increased rapidly, creating new spaces of interaction that transcend the physical boundaries of the city. Virtual communities are formed based on shared interests, professions, or regional origins, providing a platform for migrants to stay connected with their social networks. In some cases, social media helps migrants obtain information about jobs, housing, and various other services (Mishra, 2024). However, social media also reinforces polarization by allowing individuals to be exposed only to information and views that align with their beliefs. The tendency to form homogeneous interaction spaces in the virtual world parallels the patterns of segregation occurring in urban physical spaces.

Urbanization in India also affects intergenerational solidarity, particularly regarding migrant families. Children born and raised in the city often experience a cultural gap with their parents who still hold traditional values from their hometowns. Urban youth tend to be more individualistic and have different orientations in forming social relationships. They build friendship networks that are more ethnically and religiously diverse than those of their parents, albeit still within certain economic class boundaries

(Pradhan, 2025). This shift in values between generations creates unique challenges for social cohesion, as family-based solidarity that has long been a main pillar of Indian society begins to experience erosion. India's major cities are witnessing the birth of a new generation that holds different perspectives on community and social responsibility.

The caste system that characterizes Indian society continues to influence patterns of social solidarity in urban areas, albeit in different ways compared to rural areas. In the city, caste boundaries become more fluid and not as strict as in the village, especially regarding economic and educational interactions. However, in matters of marriage and intimate social relationships, caste continues to play an important role. Certain caste groups form social associations that serve as support networks for their members, providing assistance in various aspects of life. These caste-based organizations strengthen internal group solidarity, but at the same time can deepen the chasm between different caste groups (Kamal, 2015). Thus, the transformation of social solidarity in urban India does not eliminate the caste structure, but rather changes its form and function.

One of the most interesting aspects of the transformation of social solidarity in urban India is the emergence of new forms of solidarity based on shared issues. Environmental movements, urban citizen rights organizations, and resident associations fighting for the improvement of public facilities are examples of solidarity that are not based on primordial identities. Citizens from various backgrounds unite to fight for common interests, such as access to clean water, proper public transportation, or green open spaces (Parthasarathy, 2022). This issue-based solidarity has the potential to bridge existing social divides and create more inclusive social cohesion. However, the development of this type of solidarity remains limited and uneven across cities, heavily depending on the level of political awareness and existing local leadership.

The urbanization process in India does not take place uniformly across all regions, so the patterns of social transformation of solidarity also show variations between cities and social groups. Metropolitan cities like Mumbai and Delhi, which serve as national economic centers, experience much greater urbanization pressure compared to medium-sized cities. As a consequence, social fragmentation tends to be more severe in large cities with uncontrolled growth (Sharma, 2018). Meanwhile, cities with better

spatial planning and inclusive policies show higher levels of social cohesion. This variation indicates that urbanization is not a uniform deterministic force, but rather a process that can be guided and shaped through appropriate policies and interventions.

The transformation of social solidarity in urban India is a complex process with various conflicting outcomes. Urbanization erodes traditional solidarity based on kinship ties and shared values. However, urbanization creates opportunities for the formation of new, more inclusive solidarities based on shared interests. Caste- and religion-based solidarities persist, but cross-group forms of solidarity that never existed before also emerge. This dynamic shows that social cohesion in urban India is in a state of flux, continuously changing along with shifts in economic and social structures. Understanding this transformation requires an approach that accounts for both continuity and change in the social relation patterns of Indian society.

Determinants of Social Cohesion in the Context of Urbanization in India's Metropolitan Cities

Social cohesion in India's metropolitan cities is determined by the complex interaction between various structural and cultural factors that influence one another. The first factor with a significant influence is the housing and urban spatial planning policies implemented by local governments. Spatial planning that does not favor vulnerable economic groups often reinforces spatial segregation, where upper-class settlements and slums are physically separated and lack adequate meeting points. Conversely, policies that encourage mixed-use and social mixing within a residential area have proven capable of creating more intensive cross-group interactions (Saha et al., 2021). Cities in India that possess inclusive housing policies show higher levels of social cohesion compared to cities that allow the market to freely determine settlement patterns. The role of the state in regulating urban spatial planning constitutes an unavoidable determining factor.

The availability and quality of public spaces also serve as important determining factors for social cohesion in urban India. City parks, sports fields, community centers, and traditional markets provide arenas for interactions among residents from various backgrounds. Well-maintained and easily accessible public spaces encourage informal encounters that can build a sense of togetherness and mutual understanding. However, in

many Indian cities, public spaces experience a crisis due to development pressures and a lack of maintenance (Kumar et al., 2025). Existing public spaces are often unfriendly to certain groups, such as women and marginalized groups, so not all city residents can utilize them equally. This inequality in access to public spaces deepens social fragmentation and hampers the formation of inclusive social cohesion.

Economic factors play an important role in determining social cohesion in urban India. High unemployment rates and extreme income inequality create social tensions that can erupt into inter-group conflicts. Competition for limited jobs often triggers anti-migrant sentiment and reinforces identity politics. Economic growth that is inclusive and creates jobs for various layers of society can act as a strong social glue. When city residents feel that they have a fair opportunity to improve their welfare, they tend to have a greater commitment to the community and be more tolerant of differences (Motiram & Vakulabharanam, 2024). Economic policies that reduce inequality constitute an essential prerequisite for the creation of sustainable social cohesion in urban India.

The education system also contributes significantly to social cohesion in Indian cities. Socially homogeneous schools, with students coming from the same background, do not provide opportunities for children to interact with peers from different groups. Conversely, socially diverse schools teach tolerance and cross-cultural understanding from an early age, building the foundation for a more cohesive society in the future. Affirmative policies that provide educational access for marginalized groups, such as quota policies for marginalized castes, have a dual impact, both strengthening cohesion by providing fairer opportunities and triggering resistance from groups that feel disadvantaged (Debsarma et al., 2024). The balance between affirmative policies and social integration poses a unique challenge for India's education system.

The role of mass media, both traditional media and social media, in shaping perceptions of other groups is also a determining factor for social cohesion. Reporting that tends to stigmatize certain groups, such as exaggerated reporting on crimes involving minorities or migrants, can reinforce prejudice and trigger social tension. Media can also play a positive role by highlighting stories of cross-group cooperation and the success of social integration (Moleka, 2024). In the era of social media, the

spread of unverified information and hate speech poses a serious threat to social cohesion. Effective regulation of media content, without sacrificing freedom of expression, has become an urgent need in Indian cities experiencing rapid urbanization.

Local leadership and the capacity of municipal governments in managing social diversity also determine the success of maintaining social cohesion. Responsive municipal governments with an inclusive vision can create policies that accommodate the interests of various community groups. Community empowerment programs, interfaith dialogues, and cultural festivals involving all city residents are effective instruments for building bridges between groups. Unfortunately, not all municipal governments in India possess adequate capacity and commitment to carry out this function. Many cities are trapped in reactive and unplanned development patterns, without serious attention to the social aspects of urbanization (Reddy, 2025).

Civil society organizations and urban citizen movements serve as another important factor influencing social cohesion. Various non-governmental organizations operating in the fields of community empowerment, citizen rights protection, and community development act as bridges between different groups. They provide spaces for cross-group dialogue and cooperation, while helping marginalized groups voice their interests (Tan & Chen, 2024). Urban citizen movements fighting for environmental issues, public transportation, or settlement improvements often succeed in uniting residents from various backgrounds in shared struggles. The existence of these organizations strengthens social capital and creates networks connecting various segments of urban society.

Factors of urban security and order also influence social cohesion in Indian cities. High crime rates and insecurity in public spaces prompt residents to withdraw into environments they consider safe, often socially homogeneous environments. This closed lifestyle and vigilance against strangers erode solidarity and social trust (Ahmed et al., 2025). Conversely, a safe and orderly city allows its residents to be more open and interact with other groups without fear. Community-based policing efforts that involve citizen participation in maintaining neighborhood security have proven effective in increasing trust among residents and strengthening social cohesion.

The availability and equitable quality of public services is a determining factor for social cohesion that is often overlooked. Access to clean water, sanitation, public transportation, and adequate health facilities determines the quality of life of urban residents. When public services can only be accessed by certain economic groups, social inequality widens and reinforces segregation (Stigendal, 2019). Conversely, when all city residents receive equal services, a sense of justice and togetherness is created that strengthens social bonds. Investment in equitable social infrastructure is one of the most effective ways to build social cohesion in urban areas.

Cultural and religious factors continue to have a major influence on social cohesion in Indian cities. India's metropolitan cities are home to various religious groups and different cultural traditions. Religious festivals that involve cross-group participation can become moments to strengthen social bonds, while friction between religious groups can trigger conflicts that damage social cohesion (Singh et al., 2023). Interfaith dialogues and cultural exchange programs facilitated by the government or civil society organizations play an important role in preventing conflicts and building mutual understanding. Successful management of cultural and religious diversity constitutes one of the main tests for social cohesion in urban India.

Changes in family structure and gender roles resulting from urbanization also affect social cohesion in urban India. The nuclear family, which has become the norm in cities, reduces the intensity of interactions among extended family members that usually occur in rural areas. Women working outside the home have different social interaction patterns than before, often building new social networks in the workplace that cross caste and religious boundaries (Dey et al., 2025). These changes open up opportunities for the formation of new, more inclusive solidarities, but at the same time can cause tensions with traditional values still strongly held by parts of society. The balance between modernization and the preservation of positive social values remains a continuous challenge faced by urban society in India.

The readiness of society to accept change and openness toward other groups represents a determining factor of social cohesion at the individual and community levels. Societies with previous experience with diversity tend to be more tolerant and capable of adapting to changes occurring due

to urbanization. Conversely, homogeneous and closed societies experience greater shocks when confronted with urban diversity (Tan & Chen, 2024). This adaptation process requires time and support from various parties. The success of social integration in urban areas heavily depends on the willingness of all parties to open up to one another and find common ground amidst existing differences.

Demographic factors, such as the age composition and sex ratio of urban populations, also affect social cohesion. Cities dominated by young populations tend to be more dynamic and open to change, but are also more vulnerable to social tensions caused by job and housing competition. An unbalanced sex ratio, with a much higher number of males resulting from selective migration, can trigger social problems such as increased violence and human trafficking (Tan & Chen, 2024). These demographic factors do not stand alone, but rather interact with other factors such as government policies and economic conditions in determining the level of social cohesion of a city.

Overall, the determining factors of social cohesion in India's metropolitan cities exhibit high complexity and are interrelated with one another. No single factor can explain the success or failure of maintaining social cohesion in a city. Success requires an integrated approach that pays attention to various dimensions simultaneously, ranging from spatial planning, economic policy, public services, to the strengthening of social capital and local leadership. Cities in India that successfully maintain social cohesion amid rapid urbanization usually possess a combination of supporting factors, including strong leadership, inclusive policies, and active civil society. An understanding of these factors is crucial for efforts to build more cohesive and equitable Indian cities.

Conclusion

Rapid urbanization in India's major cities has fundamentally altered patterns of social solidarity and inter-citizen relations, with ambivalent outcomes. Urbanization erodes mechanical solidarity based on kinship ties and shared values that characterize rural society, driving a shift toward more individualistic and functional organic solidarity. This process is often accompanied by intensifying social fragmentation, reflected in settlement patterns segregated by caste, religion, and economic class. Urbanization

also creates opportunities for the formation of new solidarity based on shared interests, such as urban citizen movements and environmental organizations involving cross-group participation. The successful maintenance of social cohesion in urban areas is heavily determined by the interaction of various factors, including inclusive spatial planning policies, the availability of quality public spaces, equitable access to public services, responsive local leadership, and the active role of civil society organizations in bridging differences. No single factor can guarantee social cohesion; what is required is an integrated approach that simultaneously pays attention to all these dimensions. Cities in India that are able to manage diversity and social tensions well demonstrate that urbanization does not always have to lead to social disintegration, as long as there is a collective commitment to build an inclusive and equitable city. The dynamics of social cohesion in urban India are in a continuous state of flux, reflecting an ongoing negotiation process between traditional values and the demands of modernity.

This study enriches the analytical framework on how structural transformation resulting from urbanization affects social capital and community networks, and identifies key factors determining the success of social integration in urban areas. Practically, the results of this research provide input for the formulation of urban development policies in India and other developing countries facing similar challenges. Spatial planning policies that encourage social mixing, investments in inclusive public spaces, and community empowerment programs have proven to have a positive impact on social cohesion. Local governments need to pay greater attention to the social aspects of urbanization, rather than focusing solely on physical and economic development. Civil society organizations and urban citizen movements also play a strategic role in bridging differences and building dialogue between groups. These policy implications are relevant not only for India, but also for Indonesia, which is experiencing an urbanization process with a level of social diversity that is no less complex.

For policy makers, it is recommended to develop social cohesion indicators as part of the urban development planning and evaluation system, so that social aspects receive attention equal to physical and economic aspects. City development programs should be designed by

involving the active participation of residents from various backgrounds, ensuring that the interests of all groups are accommodated. Multicultural education and cultural exchange programs need to be expanded to build cross-group understanding from an early age. Finally, strengthening the capacity of local governments in managing social diversity through training and mentoring constitutes an urgently needed long-term investment.

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