

INTERNATIONAL REPORTS



From Village Community to Megacity

INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

3 | 2018

Editorial

Dear Readers,

According to United Nations estimates, two thirds of humanity will live in cities in 2050. In 1950, it was only one third. During the same period, the number of metropolises could rise from 28 to more than 40 (and by “metropolis”, we mean a settlement area of more than ten million inhabitants). While the number of people who live in urban areas is continuously rising, the rural population is noticeably shrinking. So it is not surprising that a “rural exodus” is being observed all over Europe.

In this issue, Nino Galetti and Philipp Lerch take this development as an opportunity to call for a renaissance of the village. They use a German-French perspective to point out the notoriously underestimated potential of rural areas and show that Europe’s further development will depend to a large extent on the successful use of resources outside the cities.

The sociologist Andreas Reckwitz also sees a great deal of potential in rural areas, as he articulates in an interview in this issue. There is a reason why people in large cities tend to seek out rural retreats. However, according to Reckwitz, this “urban exodus” will be limited in the foreseeable future by practical concerns, since knowledge economy jobs for highly qualified personnel are concentrated in the big cities.

Céline-Agathe Caro uses examples from the United States to demonstrate the political dimension associated with the urban-rural divide. She dives into the last presidential election to show how deep the split in American society is, and how it contributed to Donald Trump’s success. Her conclusion is that the only way the Democrats have a chance of unseating Trump in the next presidential election is to put forward a candidate who can bridge the urban-rural divide.

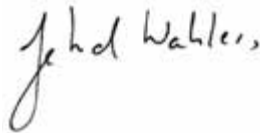
Currently, the greatest pent-up demand for urbanisation continues to be in Africa. Development there is proceeding rapidly. Forecasts show the urban population in Africa tripling and the number of large cities quintupling by 2050. This will entail a series of huge challenges and will shift the focus to the issue of security. Tilmann Feltes’s article therefore takes a look at police work and crime prevention.

If millions of people live together at close quarters, the initial concern, even aside from all the security issues, is the housing challenge. Many look to Singapore for answers, wondering how the city-state has succeeded, despite its rapid growth, in providing almost all its citizens with sufficient living space. Frederick Kliem's article provides an answer to that question.

In conclusion, Kathrin Zeller explains how cities and their mayors have even come to participate in forums such as the United Nations Climate Change and the G20 that are traditionally reserved for nation states. This trend, which is associated with the hope of practical, people-oriented approaches, clearly shows the extent to which humanity's future is tied to the urban future in so many ways.

I wish you a stimulating read.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerhard Wahlers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'G'.

Dr. Gerhard Wahlers is Editor of International Reports, Deputy Secretary General and Head of the Department European and International Cooperation of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (gerhard.wahlers@kas.de).

1989

Bahadurgarh

Ghaziabad

New Delhi

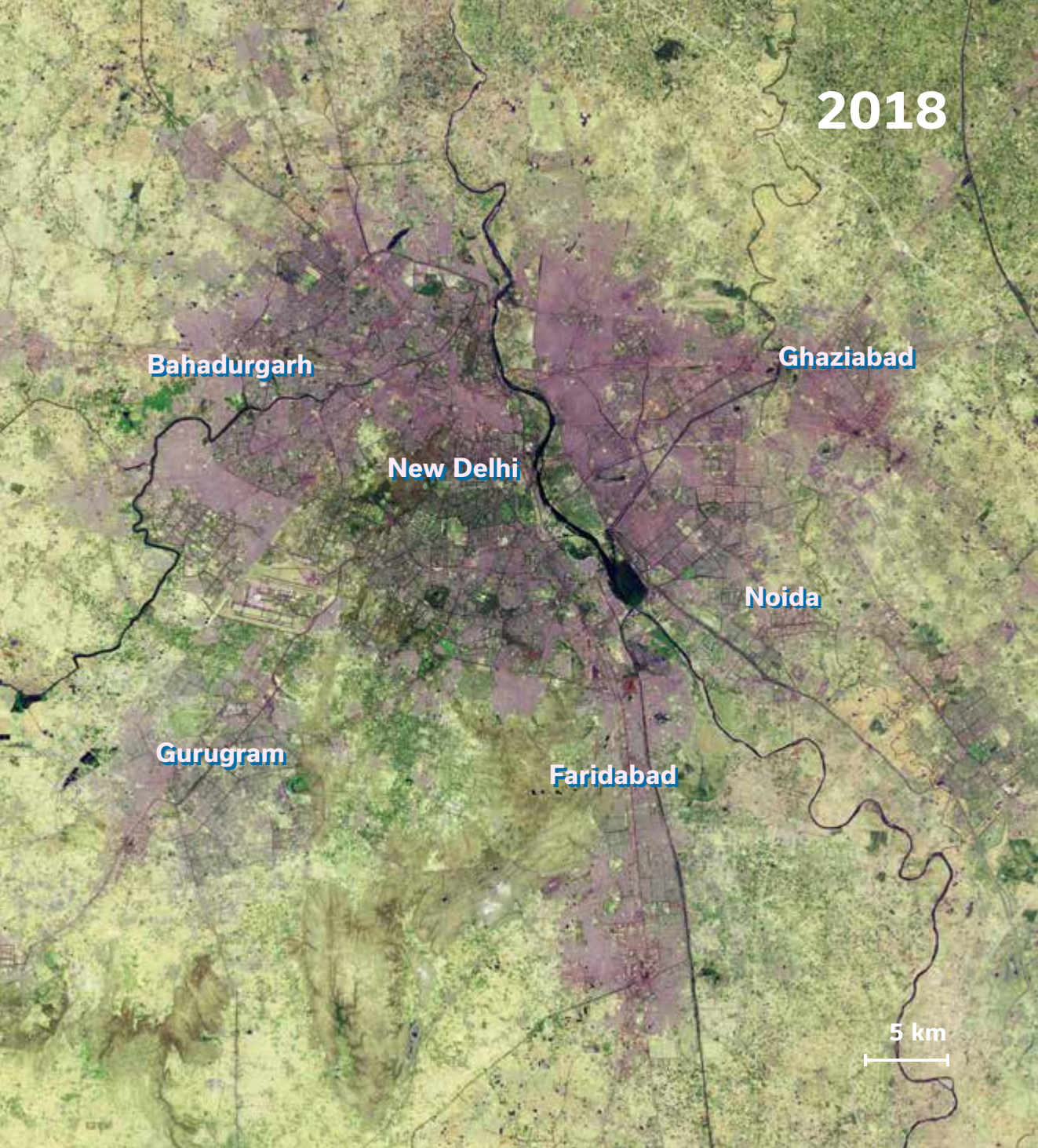
Noida

Gurugram

Faridabad

Urban Growth

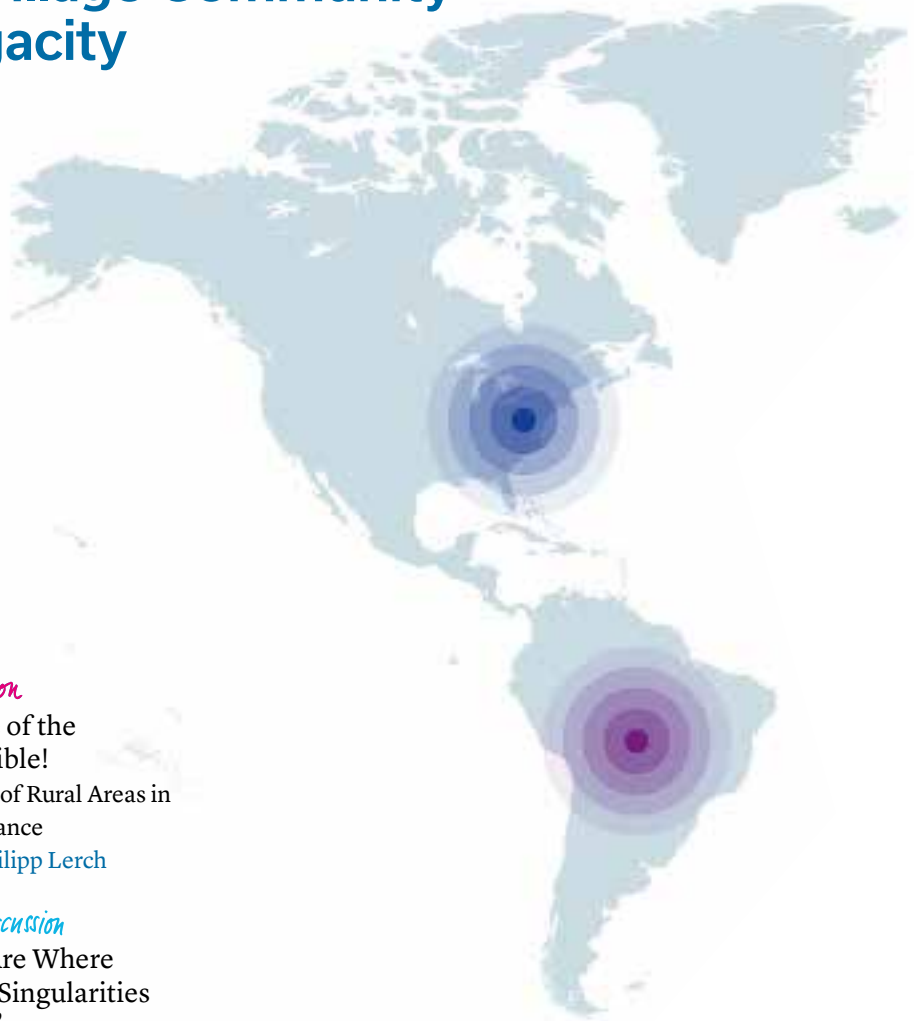
The capital of India, New Delhi, is one of the fastest growing cities in the world. Vast areas of croplands and grasslands are being turned into streets, buildings, and parking lots, attracting an unprecedented amount of new residents. By 2050, the United Nations projects India will add 400 million urban dwellers – the largest urban migration in the world.



These images show the growth in the city of New Delhi and its adjacent areas (metropolitan area Delhi) from December 5, 1989, (left) to June 5, 2018 (right).

Source: Kasha Patel and Lauren Dauphin, NASA Earth Observatory.

From Village Community to Megacity



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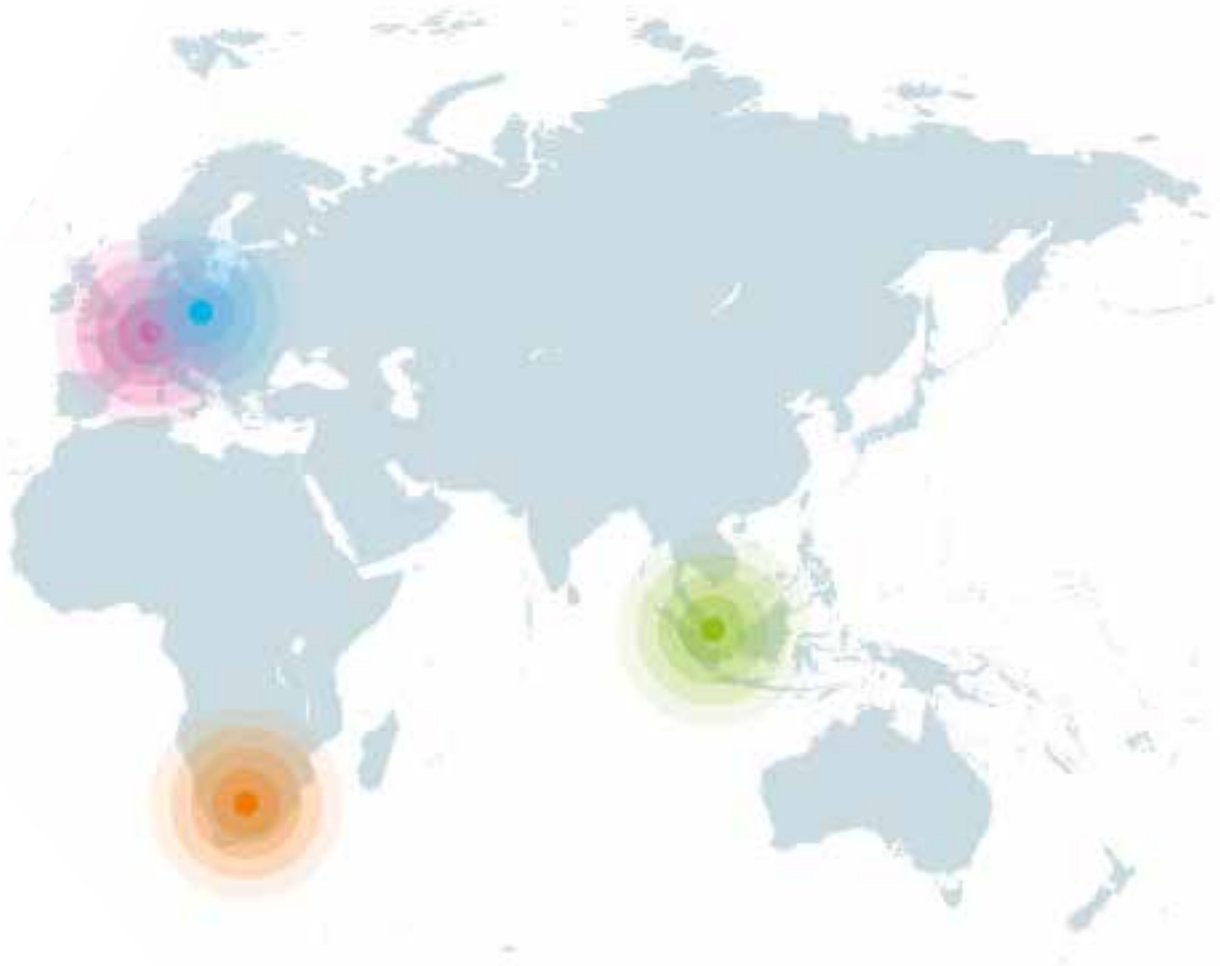
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Source: © Johannes Höhn.

Interjection

From Village Community to Megacity

A Renaissance of the Village is Possible!

On the Potential of Rural Areas in Germany and France

Nino Galetti/Philipp Lerch

In both France and Germany, people are attracted to the big cities – but at the same time, the yearning for a rural life is increasing. The potential of rural regions to create identity, preserve traditions, and constitute a sense of home should not be underestimated. The economical and societal developments in the 21st century depend, among other things, on how the multifaceted reserves of energy in rural areas are used.

The ubiquitous availability and networking of information at any time from any place seems to be increasingly shrinking the world into a “global village”. Original quotations by US President Donald Trump or astronaut Alexander Gerst are available to anyone on Twitter in real time. Weather in Berlin or Böblingen, Paris or Moulins, a person’s location is becoming increasingly irrelevant to knowledge, participation, and involvement. The classical contrasts between urban and rural are vanishing. Digitalisation is leading to increasing independence from location – in both private and everyday professional life. And yet, in many places there is still a striking divide between large cities and villages. It is obvious that the differences between urban areas and rural ones are still important. Some even think that the disparity between urban and rural is becoming greater and that the 21st century could one day go down in history as the “century of megacities”.

What is the situation in the core European states of Germany and France? Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and President Charles de Gaulle signed the Élysée Treaty 55 years ago. The two countries pledged close cooperation in all important political questions and at all levels from this point forward and promised to dedicate themselves to exchanging ideas, rapprochement, and establishing equal living conditions. Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Emmanuel Macron are currently planning to revise the treaty governing German-French cooperation, reorienting it and, in particular, further strengthening cooperation in the areas of economy, education, and culture.

What starting points, what common answers, and what different developments or speeds are there in Germany and France with respect to the omnipresent challenge of “urban and rural”?

Despite obvious as well as far-reaching differences, Germany and France have a comparable range of population densities, ranging from sparsely populated peripheral areas to dense metropolises. Both in the federally structured Federal Republic and in centrally organised France, many people still tend to move to large agglomerations. In addition to professional prospects, finely meshed infrastructures of all kinds – from good transport connections to medical care to cultural offerings – are central factors when people select their main place of residence. In both Germany and France, living space in large cities is scarce and expensive. At the same time, some rural regions on both sides of the Rhine complain of demographic imbalances and abandoned property or even depopulation. There is no question that excessive urbanisation is not good for “rural areas”. Phenomena such as closed production sites, abandoned businesses, or emptying town centres that were initially only to be found in areas with weak structures in the (new) Eastern *Länder* in Germany have begun to appear in Germany’s west and several regions in France, too. Small municipalities outside of the metropolises, far from central transport routes and tourist attractions, are especially subject to this suffering and deterioration.





Depopulation in rural areas has long ceased to be an exclusively Eastern German phenomenon.

It appears worthwhile to provide a comparison of France on the subject of “urban and rural”. The initial situation and challenges are essentially comparable and transferable, but our neighbour’s ratio of inhabitants to area makes it easier to see: There is only an average of about 100 inhabitants per square kilometre in France; in Germany, there are some 230. Additionally, the tension between the administration, which continues to be very centralised, and the few large metropolises on the one hand and the particularly strong cultural historical importance of rural areas on the other, clearly accentuates the differences between urban and rural in France.

La France profonde as the French countryside and its lifestyle is known, is enchanting. It seems to preserve the “good old days”. We think of the films *Jour de fête* with Jacques Tati or *Le Tatoué* with Louis de Funès and Jean Gabin. We recall the strong atmosphere, sometimes melancholy, of the rural stories of George Sand and other French writers. We whistle the tune to *Douce France*, in which Charles Trenet extols the beloved, happy country life of his childhood. Enchanted, ochre-coloured façades, weather-beaten roofs, rough cobblestone squares, and sublime church steeples form an impressive panorama of regional building materials and historical craftsmanship in many towns that have been preserved completely and unchanged. What at first glance appears to be an untouched, even idyllic village centre with a pleasant patina conceals a darker side that, even with all the fascination and appreciation, must also be given attention. Estates

← City lights: Despite strong ties to their rural origins, especially young people in France are attracted to the metropolitan regions. Source: © Johannes Höhn.

that used to be managed by large families and those employed by them, and alleyways that were once filled with hustle and bustle and children's laughter, are now home to only a few people, many of them elderly. Houses and shops are frequently empty. Classic rural agriculture consisting of farmsteads inhabited and run by families, long proud of their contribution to "Europe's breadbasket" and still to this day a fixed component of France's cultural identity, is in many places being replaced by machine-friendly agriculture with industrial operations and growing areas of cultivation.

These processes are accompanied by alienation and hopelessness among young French people. Many of them are still deeply rooted in their rural home regions, however. Rural areas continue to be a place of yearning. This longing finds expression in the often realised desire of many French city-dwellers for a "weekend house in the country" – accompanied by a willingness to spend Friday afternoons and Sunday evenings on the motorway, often in congested traffic. The leisurely pace of village life, quiet, and even seclusion is sought as compensation for hectic daily routines. Order and manageability have their place in this longing, too. There is no doubt that rural areas have great emotional potential to create identity, preserve traditions, and create a sense of homeland. Their *pied-à-terre*, or "foot on the ground" is what many French people proudly and lovingly name their second home in the country. By this, they mean far more than just "property", even though a country house may often represent pension savings or merely the hope for "retirement in the country". No, they are often the houses of parents or grandparents and thus associated with childhood memories. They are family hideaways. In this way, quite a few "city dwellers" retain and deepen sustained emotional ties to one of France's many rural cultural landscapes.

Many of these features can be found in Germany, too. There is an unwavering longing for a "type of rural life" as sales figures for magazines about a love of the countryside, the urban gardening trend and the waiting list for allotment gardens

attest. However, rural areas can also offer great potential beyond their emotional strengths; providing development opportunities, particularly in industrialised nations. The future of Germany and France in the 21st century is crucially dependent on how the multifaceted reserves of energy in rural areas are exploited and positively utilised. Ignoring "rural areas" involves not only neglecting houses, monuments, places, and landscapes, but also entails striking at the roots of our identity and established culture, cohesion, language, special-interest groups and clubs, and the preservation of traditions and age-old customs. Both French *Régions* and *Départements* and German *Länder*, *Landkreise*, and *Bezirke* are subject to the following principle: promoting rural areas consolidates social cohesion, strengthens integration, and facilitates equal living conditions. Local self-government is also secured: after all, small regional authorities have proven especially successful in "regulating the concerns of local society on one's own authority", as Article 28, Paragraph 2 of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany dictates. "Rural areas" also offer its inhabitants a high degree of security, especially from a social perspective. Here, social networks are usually closer knit than those in large cities: "We know each other", "We take care of each other", "We help each other", "We are there for each other", and "We do not let each other down" are sentiments that can often be heard in the country.

With appropriate support, much more potential could be released in rural areas.

Rural areas constitute the undervalued "power centres of our country", as summarised by Julia Klöckner, Germany's Minister of Food and Agriculture, in her inaugural speech in March 2018. Based on this foundation, people can shape their future with confidence, self-determination, and care. The following twelve fundamental theses are offered as a basis for the discussion of the situation in Germany and France:

1. Rural areas must be promoted and individually developed at the local level with respect to economy and agriculture, ecology and tourism, infrastructure, education, and society and culture.
 2. Even if there is no “countryside” as such, but many widely varying rural areas, basic support for them is indispensable for creating and safeguarding equal living conditions. Besides the availability of electricity and drinking water and viable transports connections, today in particular this also includes: fast internet connections and reliable mobile communications coverage even in remote communities, functioning local and regional transport or adequate alternatives, infrastructure, decentralised provisions to ensure health and care services, investment in the protection of nature and of historical monuments, and practical funding or projects for culture and leisure activities.
 3. Rural areas must not be patronised. What we have long since realised to be true of development cooperation is at least as valid for supporting rural regions: don’t spoon-feed them, but help them to help themselves – don’t merely subsidise them, but listen to them, appreciate them, and support them.
 4. Rural areas need room for manoeuvre and freedom. Supporting them requires ensuring that they have sufficient funds, but then allowing them as much freedom in their decisions as possible: the local people are the ones who know best how to use the available resources.
 5. Rural areas require attention and appreciation, which motivates people to volunteer in politics, clubs, and initiatives.
 6. In a globalised, flexible world, people are increasingly searching for a home, roots, feeling of security, origins, and reliability – and they find them particularly often in rural areas.
 7. Rural areas have a special opportunity, responsibility, and almost a duty to observe the individual in their inalienable dignity, worries and hopes. Whilst urban areas often require pursuing politics for the collective body, the more manageable communities in rural areas allow a stronger and clearer emphasis to be placed on the individual.
- Rural areas must conceive themselves as future workshops. Thus they could become a role model for other communities.**
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8. Rural areas must be creative and search for their own, at times unusual paths from a multi-purpose building and common markets to agile public buses and mobile libraries right through to coordinated delivery services and new developments in telemedicine. It is helpful to differentiate the spacial structure here: what should each locality focus on, what services should be maintained by whom, and what medium centres should be jointly constructed?
 9. Rural areas must not become or appear self-referential. They must conceive themselves as workshops for constructing the future, network themselves in a special way, exchange good and best practices, and benefit from each other’s experience, even across borders.
 10. Rural areas must not put their heads in the sand. On the contrary, courageous communities in rural areas play a pioneering role: they develop structures with streamlined bureaucracies, cultivate close ties to business, complete joint projects and measures with churches, clubs, and initiatives, and in doing so encourage other cities and communities.

11. Rural areas thrive on a distinct, independent culture of voluntary work. These areas clearly radiate the dignity of civic engagement. Local politics should recognise, cultivate, and foster it accordingly – and not take it for granted. Social cohesion collapses in the absence of civic engagement. Conversely, the rural volunteer spirit is a vital nucleus of the *énergie démocratique* in Germany and France.
12. Those responsible for rural areas should not bemoan their state or lose themselves in descriptions of their problems, even though such behaviour might appear justified. They should function as confident, passionate facilitators and thus create solutions to problems.

In short, rural areas should strengthen their strengths and weaken their weaknesses. The fact that cities often imitate rural life by emulating village structures and vital village neighbourhoods and community activities, shows how attractive “country life” and how modern the love of the countryside is. There is no reason for rural areas to envy big cities, emulate them, or “play city”. Rebranding themselves with their obvious weaknesses would be foolhardy – and, realistically, doing so would cause rural regions to fail. Fortunately, rural areas in France, Germany, and elsewhere have their own dignity combined with so many individual strengths that it pays to make use of them. A renaissance of the village is possible – and seen up close, it is *déjà en route*.

–translated from German–

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Philipp Lerch is Head of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's KommunalAkademie.

IR: Professor Reckwitz, your book “The Society of Singularities” paints the picture of a society that is downright obsessed with the extraordinary: unusual hobbies, individual eating habits, highly styled apartments, and customised adventure holidays – maximum self-realisation appears to be the only measure of a “good” life. Is there no room left in our society for that which is general and binding?

in fact carefully examine the social mechanisms through which these processes of singularisation, that is, of orientation on that which is unusual and unique, have spread in Western societies over the last few decades. What is at work here goes beyond mere individualism. It is not just individuals who are trying to be special and non-interchangeable – which becomes especially obvious in digital media like Instagram and Facebook –, things and objects, such as the goods of cultural capitalism from the individual piece of craftsmanship to the Netflix series, are also to be experienced as unique.

Andreas Reckwitz: I do not want to sink into generalised pessimism about culture. But my book does

IR: So interpreting it as hyperindividualism would fail to go far enough?

competition by attempting to design themselves as units with special urban landscapes, special atmospheres. Or take the singularisation of temporal units: the trend is away from routines and toward events, special moments, or projects. Ultimately, we are seeing the paradoxical profiling of collective units as special in the wake of the “Society of Singularities”. One conspicuous example are “imagined communities” such as regionalistic movements extending from Catalonia to Scotland: one's own people with its special history is also singularised here; this enables the power of identity to unfold. Thus, singularisation goes far beyond the “individualism” of individuals.

Andreas Reckwitz: Most certainly, since even spatial units such as cities are engaging in global

IR: So, “Be special!” is, in a sense, the imperative that provides orientation not only to everyone, but also to everything?

unique is itself a thoroughly societal process in which entities are assessed, produced, and experienced as being unique. Almost everything in late modern society that promises identification and emotional fulfilment takes the form of the singular – from holiday trips to attractive jobs, romantic relationships, and desirable places to live through to political projects. Overall, this is shifting the primary societal evaluation criteria: whereas during the period of the classical industrial society from the 1950s to the 1970s, dominant criteria included the normal and the standardised: the same standard of living, the same types of residence, major political parties, mass culture, etc. These criteria have increasingly shifted towards the unusual. This is because singularity promises authenticity and attractiveness. These are the primary values of the late modern period. What society therefore deems to be weak and of little emotional appeal is ordinariness, routine, and uniformity.

Andreas Reckwitz: Yes, but it is important to see that the orientation towards the unusual and

IR: A society does not make fundamental changes for no reason at all. What do you think are the causes of the development you have described?

Andreas Reckwitz: I identify three sets of causes in particular: economic, cultural, and technological. The economic one refers to the goods that promise cultural value and uniqueness, *the* area of growth of late modern economy – be it tourism or the internet industry, education or nutrition. The classical industrial economy reached its limits back in the 1970s and is being increasingly displaced by a cognitive, cultural, or immaterial capitalism. What is successful here is what marks a difference, what promises a special experience or identificational potency. It is therefore no wonder that only about 20 per cent of workers are employed in industry – it used to be 50 per cent. The spearhead of this development, however, is the so-called knowledge economy. But singularisation is not merely the result of economic competition. A cultural factor is also of importance: what late modern individuals *want* for their lives is not the standard, but the singular. They are influenced by a life principle of successful self-realisation, and individual development in a multitude of opportunities. This is the result of a far-reaching shift in values, which have been underway since the 1970s: away from duty and acceptance values toward self-realisation values. Of course, there is a long tradition behind this shift, but it was not until the development of a broad new middle class, most of whom had high levels of education and participated in the knowledge economy, that a lifestyle of successful self-realisation found a substantial social group to support it and thus became culturally dominant for the first time. Finally, there are also technical framework conditions for singularisation: digitalisation. The internet’s algorithms ultimately create an individualised world of consumption and information that is identical to no other such world, addressing each person in his or her uniqueness via data tracking. Additionally, the internet also generates a massive selection of images and texts that are compliant with the radical laws of the attention economy. In this economy, the only way to succeed, whether that be a YouTube video or Instagram photo, is not to be like everything else, but to have an interesting difference to attract attention through singularity.

IR: If you look at what things succeed on platforms like Instagram and Facebook, you see the new designer tennis shoes, dinner from a popular sushi place, or a selfie with someone who is more or less a celebrity – all of them things that you would associate with trendy neighbourhoods like Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin and not so much with Kirchberg an der Iller or any other little village in the countryside. Is the “Society of Singularities” primarily a big-city phenomenon?

Andreas Reckwitz: Yes and no. On the one hand, singularisations exist independently of the city-countryside question. Everyone participates in the internet, and it allows the promises of cultural capitalism to penetrate into even the remotest of villages. On the other hand, big cities are in fact the places where the Society of Singularities concentrates – which is not surprising, since cities have always been at the cutting edge of new developments throughout modern history. There are also reasons for that in this case: as I said, the supporting group is the new middle class, the highly qualified, and they




Society of Singularities: "It is not just individuals who are trying to be special and non-interchangeable, things and objects are also to be experienced as unique." Source: © Reuters.

congregate in large cities, if for no other reason than that this is where they can study and get jobs in the knowledge economy. At the same time, of course, big cities offer an especially wide range of opportunities for singular goods in the broadest sense: opportunities for high and scene culture, widely varied choice of schools for children, gastronomy of various types, exercise classes from Tai Chi to tango, and so on and so on. The influence of global culture is especially great in the big "cosmopolitan" cities.

IR: But can't a village also be a place of self-realisation?

Andreas Reckwitz: Sure, and that is an idea that is as current as it is old. Around 1900, a life reform movement fed the longing of big-city-dwellers for a return to the countryside. Today, there are also tendencies among city dwellers to acquire a second property in the countryside or even to migrate completely – from Berlin to the Brandenburg countryside,



for instance. People expect to find something that they do not get in the city: nature and peace, preferably in “unique” surroundings. However, a new flight from the cities seems to be constrained by practical limits for the time being: the highly qualified professions in the knowledge economy concentrate in cities.

IR: So there is competition not primarily between city and countryside, but more among the cities themselves?

Andreas Reckwitz: In fact, industrial cities were relatively interchangeable in industrial society.

In post-industrial society, on the other hand, cities polish their profiles so as to be unique: that applies to Hamburg or the Ruhr, Marseille or Copenhagen. That is not merely a question of city marketing, but of structural design of the cities themselves. Why do they do it? The reason is primarily the significance of the new, educated middle class and its great spatial mobility, including the workplace mobility of highly qualified individuals. The cities find themselves in competition in order to appeal to inhabitants, visitors, and companies. The ones that succeed are those that can offer the right quality of life, those that successfully develop a “self-logic”, as Martina Löw put it in “Sociology of Cities”. In the late modern era, we are therefore experiencing polarisation at the spatial level as well: between boom towns and abandoned regions. The boom towns are beginning to suffer the consequences of their success as singular locations, however: overcrowding, congestion, high rental prices, etc.

IR: You already mentioned Hamburg, the Ruhr, Marseille, and Copenhagen. Does that mean that the phenomenon of singularisation is primarily a European or Western one?

Andreas Reckwitz: Yes and no. Transformation due to singularisation does indeed initially centre

on Western societies. They were the first industrial societies and are the first post-industrial societies. They therefore experience especially intense competition among their cities. But the rapid social changes in several emerging countries are clearly beginning to exhibit singularisation processes. Consider metropolises like Shanghai, Singapore, and the cities of the United Arab Emirates.

IR: So singularisation is becoming noticeable in Asia, even though the collective group traditionally enjoys a much higher value there?

Andreas Reckwitz: That is an important question, and it would require a separate study to answer

it. There is a long tradition of distinguishing Western individualism and Eastern Asian collectivism, but you have to be careful not to think of them as closed cultural circuits, like adjacent spheres with no mutual influence. Cultural capitalism and the digital attention economy exert massive influence in places like Japan, South Korea, and the Chinese metropolises. They will probably result in a mixture of singularism and elements of these cultures’ collectivist heritage.

IR: The phenomenon of singularisation also has another dimension: self-realisation is, after all, not necessarily what social cohesion is based on, and even if some people may be disdainful of such things as church on Sunday, fire brigade festivals, and neighbourly cooperation, these practical social measures play important societal roles. My question is therefore: what price does a society pay for increasingly allowing these things to die out?

advantages, and it has costs. Life according to the criteria of successful self-realisation provides great opportunities for individual fulfilment and quality of life – more than in the classical industrial society. But there are winners and losers, and there are societal structures that are forced into the defensive. Industrial society had distributed social recognition relatively evenly: almost everyone was in the middle class. In the post-industrial society, polarisation set in: expanding education allowed the rise of the ambitious, urban new middle class. But another group are on the decline: the new underclass of low-qualified people, often employed in providing simple services, or outside the labour market altogether. Between the two is the old middle class, which feels itself to be at least somewhat on the cultural defensive and tends to champion the lifestyle typical of the old industrial society. “Being left behind” takes on various forms. In these three groups, people live in completely different worlds. The groups have diametrically opposed feelings for life. Those involved in public politics need to deal with these differences, but are themselves in crisis: digitalisation is dissolving what has been the “general public” that still had fixed points of reference such as the daily paper and the television that everybody used. Political communication is itself being singularised online. The notorious filter bubbles are forming.

Andreas Reckwitz: The Society of Singularities is indeed to be observed with ambivalence. It has

IR: You describe the major parties in this context as “stewards of the commons” who almost inevitably experience crises in a “Society of Singularities”. Are major parties relics of the past?

industrial society. In a society that is quite homogeneous in any case, they were able to combine the interests of various milieus. Indeed, since the 1980s, a shift in political structures has accompanied the societal shift. One dimension is the singularisation of the party system. If you look at Scandinavia, the Netherlands, or more recently at France, this becomes especially clear: a number of new parties have arisen to address more closely networked milieus, but they develop a great identity-forming character. The major parties – the conservatives and the social democrats – lose when that happens.

Andreas Reckwitz: The major parties were characteristic of the “dominion of the commons” in

IR: If you were a consultant for a major party, what strategy would you recommend? Enhancing the core brand and focusing on the base? Ultimately, one could also argue that a “Society of Singularities” is especially dependent on political forces that focus on what is common and what binds society together.

Andreas Reckwitz: There are two possibilities for such a singularised party system: either there

is polarisation in which everybody insists on their own unique selling point, or a new culture of compromise arises among the many small segments of the party. In the latter case, it matters little whether these compromises are reached within a single large party (the major party model) or among many small parties. You cannot simply advise the major parties to concentrate on their voter base. The fact that these bases are eroding is the very cause of the problem.

Generally, however, late modern politics in particular faces the question of a renaissance of commonality: society – business, technology, lifestyles – is singularising rapidly, but shouldn't politics compensate for that development by creating common and generally applicable framework conditions? This affects the “cultural question” as well as the “social question”: the question of securing infrastructures, participation in social goods, and education for everyone, of securing basic standards and a generally observed level of civility on the internet. The question of what form a general policy should take as part of a Society of Singularities is the central question of the politics of the future.

The interview was conducted by Sebastian Enskat.

–translated from German–



[From Village Community to Megacity](#)

Fifty States, Two Worlds

The Political Dimension of the Urban-Rural
Divide in the United States

[Céline-Agathe Caro](#)

There is a chasm between urban and rural populations in the US. Donald Trump's success in the last presidential election showed the enormity of the political implications of the urban-rural divide. It appears that it will be difficult to close this gap even in the medium term. The differences between city and countryside will therefore continue to play a decisive role in future elections.

American society is becoming increasingly polarised in many domains: Democrats versus Republicans; a portion of the middle class versus the establishment; and globalisation supporters versus globalisation opponents. However, these various dimensions of polarisation are not always identical and cannot be summarised by means of a simple left-right opposition. There are globalisation opponents on both sides of the political spectrum and in all classes of society, for instance. What all these forms of polarisation have in common, however, is the increasing degree of irreconcilability with which the respective groups confront one another.

The American public's awareness of one dimension of this polarisation has increased since the last presidential election, even though it has affected the country for decades: the growing political divide between urban and rural areas. Experts have noted that, since 2008 in particular, the correlation between population density and voting behaviour in the US has risen. US cities are becoming bluer (blue is the official colour of the Democratic Party) while much of the non-urban space is becoming redder (red is the official colour of the Republican Party, or the GOP – the Grand Old Party). This phenomenon is especially marked at the extremes – in the large cities¹ and in the most rural areas of the US. In the last decade, a political chasm has opened up between urban and rural populations.

In the 2016 presidential election, this urban-rural divide was especially noticeable: Large American cities overwhelmingly supported the Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, while

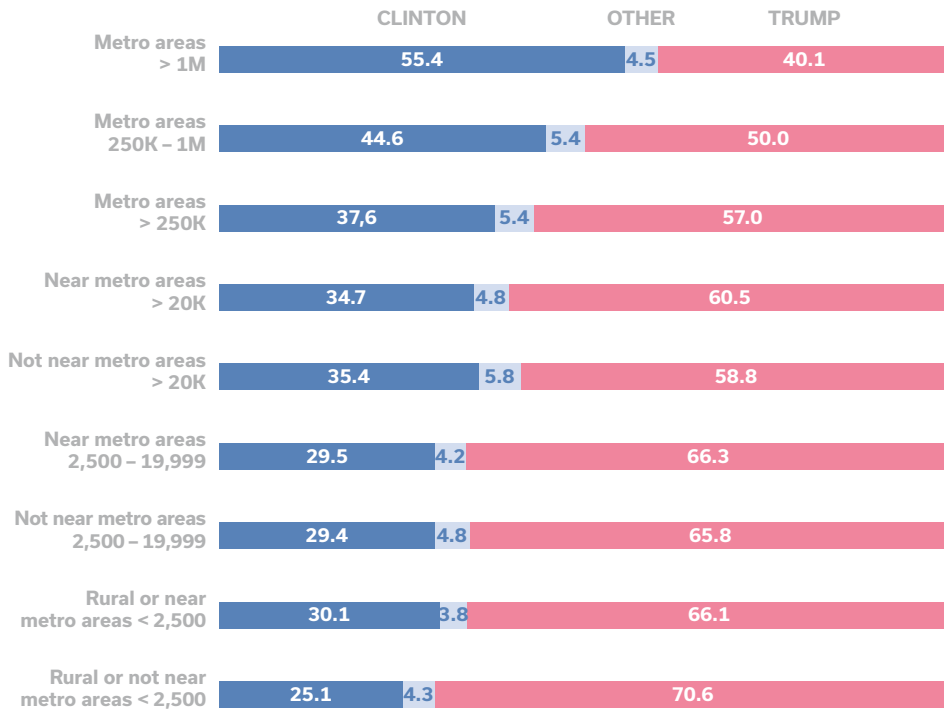
Donald Trump and the Republicans gained votes everywhere else in the country. The Republican candidate was particularly popular in small towns and rural areas: the more rural the constituency, the stronger the support for the unconventional politician (see fig. 1). This political divide goes beyond electoral preferences: A recent study by the Pew Research Center shows that in rural areas and in the largest metropolises alike, the majority of Americans think that people in rural and urban areas have different values. In addition to outright disagreements on controversial issues, such as immigration, same-sex marriage, and the role of the US government, each group believes that the other fails to understand their problems and condemns them.²

The divide between urban centres and their peripheries constitutes the core of this article. The aim is to map out the socio-economic characteristics of the urban-rural divide in the US in order to then analyse the resulting current political consequences. Doing so raises the following questions: What political conclusions can be drawn from this situation? What challenges are Republicans and Democrats facing in the next election because of this urban-rural divide? And a final important question: What can be done to bridge this divide?

I. The Urban-Rural Divide

The US Office of Management and Budget (OMB) distinguishes between metro counties – urban counties in or in the immediate vicinity of large cities of at least 50,000 people –, and

Fig. 1: Votes in the Presidential Election 2016 (in Per Cent by Population Area)



Source: Own illustration based on Fisher, Tyler/Hurt, Alyson, NPR, in: Kurtzleben, Danielle 2016: Rural Voters Played A Big Part In Helping Trump Defeat Clinton, NPR, 14 Nov 2016, in: <https://n.pr/2fk4eC7> [26 Sep 2018].

non-metro counties – counties that encompass both small towns outside of major concentrations of people (2,500 to 20,000 people) and rural regions. According to the Department of Agriculture, 85 per cent of Americans live in urban centres (metro counties, which will be referred to here as “urban”) and 15 per cent in the countryside.³

People tend to have the same concerns about rental prices, poverty, and the availability of jobs, whether they are in large conurbations or in rural regions.⁴ There are nevertheless significant economic and social differences between urban and rural areas.

Economic Challenges in Rural Areas

The rural-urban discrepancy is particularly striking on the labour market: As in other Western countries, jobs have been disappearing from rural America in the agricultural and manufacturing industries for decades. This is due to both process automation and increasing competition worldwide. However, the development of the service sector and of new technologies is creating new jobs in the conurbations. This is where most qualified people live (low-skilled positions in the service sector, such as call centres, tend to be outsourced to foreign providers). Until the mid-1990s, one third of all new companies were founded in the most rural counties in the US; this has long ceased to be the case.⁵ The economic recession of 2008/2009 exacerbated the situation further: The rural labour market

shrank by 4.26 per cent between 2008 and 2015; yet, despite sinking until 2013, the urban labour market grew by 4.02 per cent. Since 2013, the creation of new jobs in rural regions has continued, but, as Steven Beda of the University of Oregon emphasises, those jobs are not in traditional sectors, but in the service industry: “So Appalachian coal miners and Northwest loggers are now stocking shelves at the local Walmart.”⁶

Average annual income has fallen slightly across the country since 2000 due to the financial and economic crisis. However, people who work in

rural regions still earn almost 30 per cent less than their compatriots in big cities (35,171 compared to 49,515 US dollars annual income).⁷ According to Enrico Moretti of the University of California, Berkeley, this gap is now 50 per cent greater than it was in the 1970s.⁸ Poverty levels in rural regions are comparable to those in cities (18 per cent against 17 per cent). Nevertheless, 31 per cent of rural counties compared to only 19 per cent of large cities face “concentrated poverty” (at least one fifth of the population below the poverty line).⁹ In addition, following the real estate market collapse, prices in rural



On the streets: Forced evictions have become a part of daily life, especially in low-income areas.
Source: © Larry Downing, Reuters.

areas have risen more slowly than prices in cities, which has eroded the financial capital of many households on the periphery.¹⁰ In light of these reasons, for many Americans on the periphery, the economic crisis has not been overcome yet, while city dwellers can already look to the future with greater confidence.

No Country for Young Men

Given these economic characteristics, it is not surprising that the rural population has a different demographic profile to that of the urban population. For one thing, it is older: Since 2000, 88 per cent of rural counties have seen people of working age (25 to 54 years old) move away. The average age in small towns is now 41 – five years above the median in large cities. The rural population is generally less well-educated, even though the overall share of Americans with an academic degree has risen since the year 2000. For instance, there are more people in cities with a bachelor's degree than those holding merely a high-school diploma. This relationship is reversed in rural areas.¹¹ Moreover, 11.8 per cent of the inhabitants of large cities (defined as communities of 50,000 or more) suffer from disability. In small towns (between 10,000 and 50,000 inhabitants), the rate is 15.6 per cent, and in the most rural areas, it rises up to 17.7 per cent.¹²

As in other Western countries, the strained economic situation and demographic development have led to the decline of rural areas. In small towns, there are fewer and fewer retailers and service providers, such as post offices, child care centres, and schools. This can have dramatic consequences, especially in the health-care sector, for example, when those who are ill are forced to travel long journeys to the nearest doctor, or even experience difficulty in getting an appointment at all. According to the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, 79 hospitals in rural counties closed between 2010 and 2017.¹³ This situation is particularly challenging in the context of the opioid crisis¹⁴, which is more pronounced in small rural communities than in large cities. Between 1999 and 2015, the

mortality rate caused by opioids in rural areas quadrupled among 18 to 25 year olds and tripled among women.¹⁵ A University of Michigan study showed that between 2003 and 2013, the number of newborns with opioid withdrawal symptoms in rural communities grew 80 times faster than in cities.¹⁶

A majority of Americans believe that rural areas receive too little financial support from the government.

While large American cities in the 1980s and 1990s were notorious for their lack of security, high crime rates, and socio-economic problems, the situation today is quite different. The city centres of most US conurbations are becoming increasingly attractive for companies and employees. The process of gentrification is causing rapid rises in real estate prices and is changing the cityscape due to increasing demand for public infrastructure, such as tram lines and cycle paths. On the other hand, the situation in rural areas today is worse than in the rest of the country in many respects, including: average age; level of education; employment rates among working-age men; disability rates; teenage pregnancies; divorce rates; and a number of medical complaints, such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and chronic pulmonary diseases.¹⁷ Interestingly, there is a strong consensus among Americans that government funds are not being apportioned fairly, with too little being allocated to rural areas.¹⁸

II. Political Wake-Up Call

It was only the result of the 2016 presidential election and the surprising defeat of mainstream candidate, Hillary Clinton, that brought to light the political dimension of the urban-rural divide in its entirety.

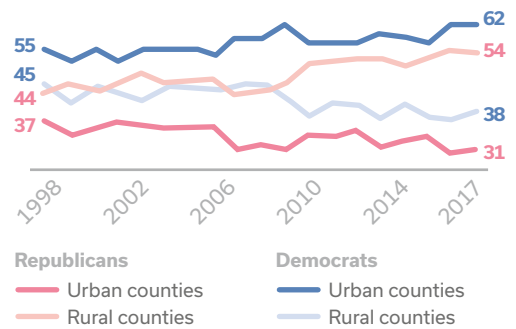
The statistics of the last 20 years show that the majority of urban dwellers have consistently favoured the Democrats, in ever great proportions (55 per cent in 1998, 62 per cent in 2017, see fig. 2). In rural districts, on the other hand, support for the GOP has grown, especially since 2008, so that it now enjoys a majority (44 per cent in 1998, 45 per cent in 2008, 54 per cent in 2017).¹⁹

Bill Clinton was the last Democratic candidate to win a majority of voters in both urban and rural areas: In both 1992 and 1996, he won almost half of the 3,100 counties in the US. Since then, the Democrats have been successful primarily in cities. In 2000, Al Gore, won the popular vote, although he won fewer than 700 counties. Barack Obama won 86 of the 100 most populous counties in the country in 2012, which was decisive for his victory, since he won only around 600 of the remaining 3,000 counties.²⁰ Hillary Clinton's defeat was the result of a combination of two weaknesses: Her support in key urban areas was significantly weaker than Obama's in 2012, such as in Detroit or Philadelphia, and she lost even more votes outside the largest urban areas than the last Democratic president did (see fig. 3).

This growing polarisation is most noticeable in the largest urban areas (500,000 inhabitants or more) and in the most rural ones (25,000 or fewer). The Democratic Party fared better in 2016 in 112 of the 137 most populous counties (where a total of 157.8 million Americans live) than it did in 2004; at the other end of the geographical spectrum, the share of votes that went to the Democratic Party decreased in 1,362 of the 1,508 most rural counties in the country (with a total of 17.5 million inhabitants) in the same period (see fig. 4).

A key factor in the 2016 presidential elections, however, were the medium-sized counties, i.e. districts, suburbs and small to medium-sized cities with between 25,000 to 100,000 inhabitants – where a total of almost 50 million

Fig. 2: Voters Preferences (in Per Cent)

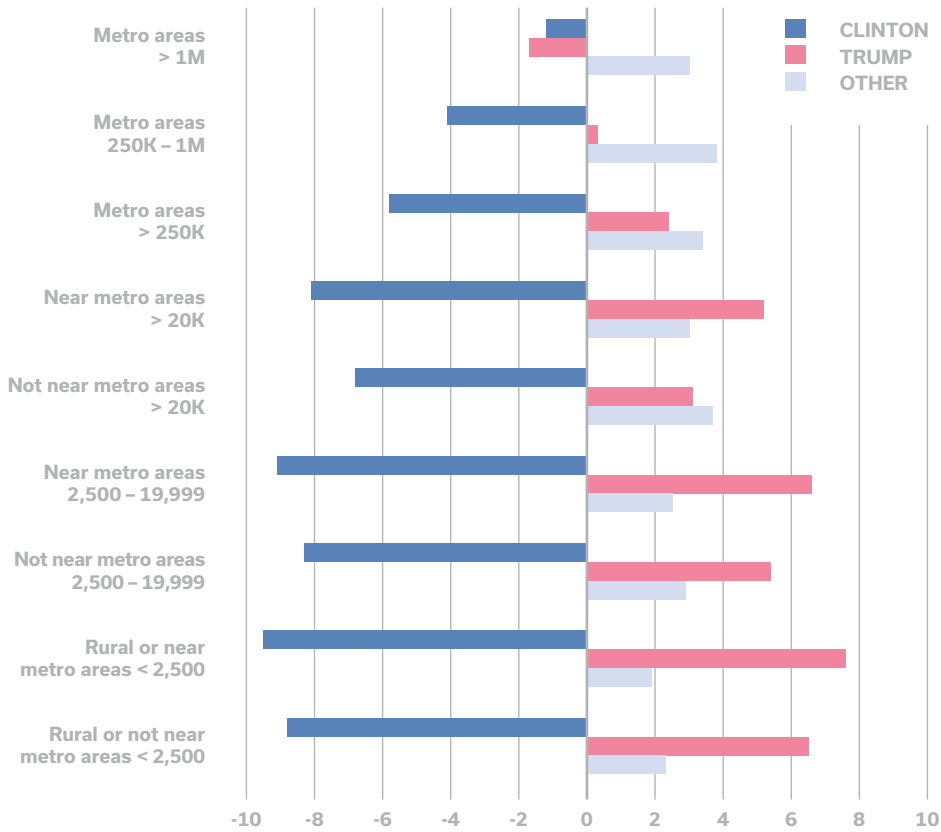


Source: Own illustration based on Parker et al., n. 2, p. 29.

Americans live. While they had strongly supported the Democrats in 2008, eight years later they voted overwhelmingly for the Republicans (see fig. 4). This development was a decisive factor in Donald Trump's victory in the so-called swing states of the Midwest. For instance, 68 of Wisconsin's 72 counties gave the Democrats less support in 2016 than they did in 2004 (see fig. 5). In the 2008 and 2012 elections, the majority of these counties still opted for the Democratic candidate. This shift in 2016 primarily affected small and medium-sized counties (marked by thin red lines in fig. 5). However, large suburban counties, such as Racine and Kenosha (between Milwaukee and Chicago) have also changed sides politically. Urban counties such as Dane (which includes Madison, the capital) and Milwaukee have remained loyal to the Democrats throughout.

The American presidential election system, which favours rural states, was an important factor in Donald Trump's triumph, which occurred despite the opposition of most city-dwellers. The conflict between urban or populous states and rural states was already at the centre of a Constitutional compromise at the founding of the American Republic. It was determined at the time that rural states would always have two senators, even if their population only gave them the right to one seat in the House of Representatives. This leads to very different voting weights from state to state. Rural states

Fig. 3: Difference in Support for Democratic, Republican and Independent Presidential Candidates in 2016 versus 2012 (in Percentage Points)



Source: Own illustration based on Fisher, Tyler/Hurt, Alyson, NPR, in: Kurtzleben, Danielle 2016: Rural Voters Played A Big Part In Helping Trump Defeat Clinton, NPR, 14 Nov 2016, in: <https://n.pr/2fk4eC7> [26 Sep 2018].

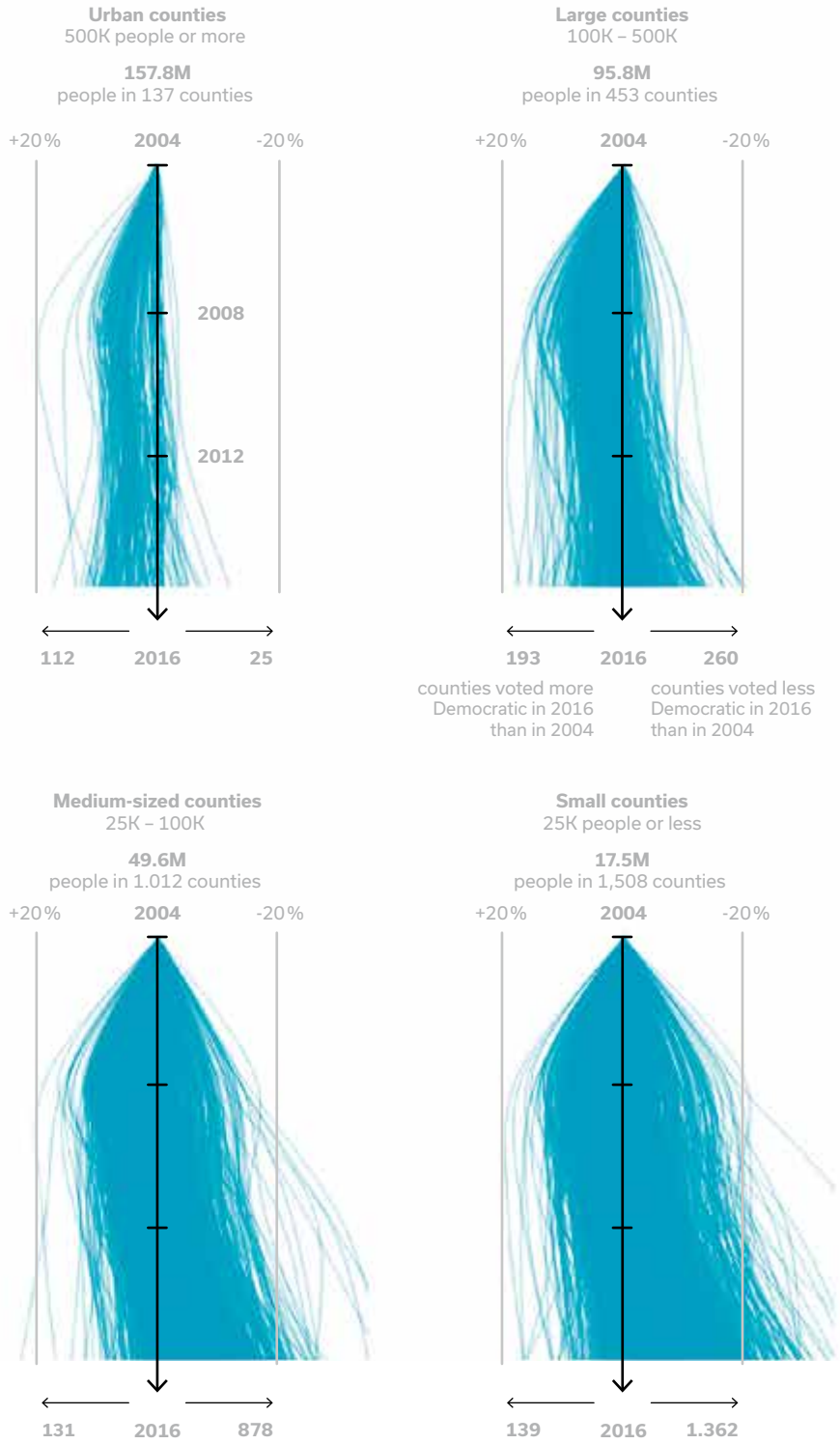
are also overrepresented during presidential elections: Due to the distribution of Electoral College votes, a vote in Wyoming, a very agrarian state, has four times the weight of one in the state of New York, for instance.²¹

Resentment as a Driver of Polarisation

The reasons for the growing urban-rural divide are complex. According to surveys, politically conservative individuals traditionally prefer to live in large houses in small towns or rural areas, among those with similar religious views, while Democrats generally prefer apartments in cities, where they can get around on foot and where people of various origins live.²² Current

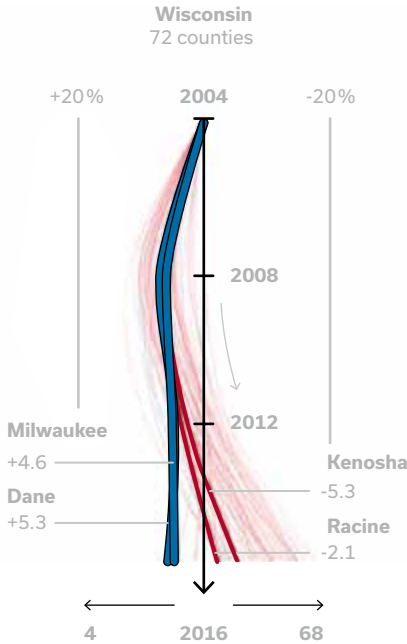
studies by Gregory Martin and Steven Webster of Emory University emphasise that these geographical preferences fail to explain the widening political divide between urban and rural areas. There is a kind of “sorting” going on, as urban Republicans leave cities to live in the countryside while rural Democrats move to the cities. However, this process is much too weak, Martin and Webster point out, to explain the heightening correlation between population density and election results. They come to the conclusion that geographical location exerts a certain influence on voter political preference – not the other way round.²³

Fig. 4: Evolution of the Democratic Vote in Every County Since 2004



Source: Own illustration based on Gamio, Lazaro 2016: Urban and rural America are becoming increasingly polarized, The Washington Post, 17 Nov 2016, in: <http://wapo.st/2g1W289> [26 Sep 2018].

Fig. 5: Evolution of the Democratic Vote in Wisconsin Since 2004



Source: Own illustration based on Gamio, Lazaro 2016: *Urban and rural America are becoming increasingly polarized*, Washington Post, 17 Nov 2016, in: <http://wapo.st/2g1W289> [26 Sep 2018].

The heightened polarisation since 2008, especially with respect to the increased support for Republicans in rural areas (see fig. 2), has often been put down to the candidacy of Barack Obama and the associated racial element it introduced.²⁴ However, the 2016 presidential election, during which the polarisation of US politics intensified, has put the economic and cultural concerns of the white lower middle class at the centre of the political debate. This issue is closely related to the economic and social differences between rural and urban areas, since Trump supporters tend to live on the periphery rather than in the main conurbations (see fig. 1). The demographic profile of the average Trump supporter – older, white, without a college degree, and employed in a low-skilled job²⁵ – is more common in rural areas than in urban ones (see part I). This demographic group is also the one that suffers

most from globalisation, not least because of the relocation of jobs abroad.

In her 2016 book “The Politics of Resentment”, which has since become famous, Katherine Cramer, professor at the University of Wisconsin, documented the economic concerns, social fears and resentments of the white rural population towards the white urban upper class in her state. She describes how citizens in rural Wisconsin today feel powerless and ignored because they have the impression that everything is decided in the big cities, and that the cities also receive all public resources while their rural communities are being abandoned. Cramer also highlights how rural residents feel that urban dwellers do not respect them, often considering them to be racist, and patronising them without understanding the challenges of those who live in the countryside or in small communities.²⁶

The frustration in rural America that Cramer describes helps explain the success of Donald Trump in the Midwestern states that were decisive for his victory. Trump’s promises to revive rural regions resonated in these states: combating globalisation with re-nationalisation and isolation practices, including job creation in traditional industries, such as mining and manufacturing, as well as by fewer international free-trade agreements; curbing immigration and instituting rules to ensure American citizens have priority on the labour market; modernising infrastructure; and deregulating environmental and industrial sectors to stimulate economic activity. Hillary Clinton’s infamous characterisation of half of Trump’s supporters as “deplorables”, during the campaign, shows how little the Democratic candidate had understood the concerns of rural Americans.

III. Political Implications for the Future

The implications of the urban-rural divide are different for Republicans and Democrats. However, the associated political challenges are vast, both for the president and for the two political parties.

Donald Trump and His Base

During the election campaign, Donald Trump regularly spoke out against cities, which he views as areas of economic and moral decline where violence and drugs prevail – despite the current trend of city centre revitalisation in the US and the associated problems of gentrification. Since moving into the White House, Trump has, in his public statements, cultivated the contrast between his rural or small-community voter base and the urban elites. Trump accuses the latter, with their “swamp” (Washington D.C.), their media (CNN and The New York Times, which he regularly refers to as “fake news”), and their figureheads (primarily Hillary Clinton, but also Nancy Pelosi, the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives), of neglecting common Americans for years. It is interesting to note here that the real estate magnate from Queens who was never recognised or accepted by the Manhattan elite has decided to take the side of rural Americans in his political career.

Trump publicly cultivates the contrast between urban elites and his rural voter base.

The first year of his presidency saw open showdowns between the Trump administration and several American cities. Many communities on both the West and the East Coast, as well as metropolitan areas in the heart of the country, such as Minneapolis, Chicago, Denver, New Orleans, and Houston, have all passed laws to thwart Washington’s decisions, against a backdrop of strong mobilisation among residents and local businesses. Tensions are especially great in the areas of climate change and immigration. For instance, many cities, with or without the support of their states, have an active environmental policy, despite Donald Trump’s decision to withdraw the US from the Paris Agreement. Many have become sanctuary cities, which refuse to extradite illegal immigrants who

are obliged to leave the country, yet have committed no crime.²⁷ Equally, in the area of gun laws, some cities have moved ahead of Washington, introducing more stringent regulations.

The president remains in campaign mode. He continues to organise regular rallies for his supporters, hoping that mobilising his base outside the major conurbations will be sufficient to secure re-election in 2020. He thus makes many domestic and foreign policy decisions (from gun laws to the Iran deal to the relocation of the US embassy in Israel) based primarily on his campaign promises and the support they are likely to generate from his base.

The challenge for Donald Trump is to keep his base happy until 2020. Even if he retains a solid core of the Republican electorate – with 38 per cent of Republicans agreeing with him on “all or almost all” political questions²⁸ – he will still need to provide concrete results at the end of his term. So far, there appears to be a consensus among experts that the policies of the Trump administration, especially as regards abandoning the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), anti-immigration measures, tax reform, punitive tariffs on imported goods, and the “Buy American, hire American” strategy will not in fact contribute to significantly improving the everyday lives of his supporters. If Trump’s policies prove to be counterproductive, as some economic experts fear, rural regions, where his most dedicated supporters live, but which are the most vulnerable to economic downturns, will be the hardest hit.

The Republicans’ Achilles’ Heel

The Republican Party faces its next big challenge in the November 2018 mid-term elections. During their campaigns, GOP candidates traditionally focus on rural regions and the periphery of large cities, since most of their supporters live there. Populist decisions by Donald Trump, however, are meeting with incomprehension in parts of the conservative camp. In this context, some suburbs may represent a potential Achilles’ heel for the GOP. These areas are seen as urban counties (see the definition in part I), but in fact



"Deplorables": Calling a part of Trump's supporters "deplorables" is now seen as one of Hillary Clinton's biggest mistakes during the election campaign. [Source: © Brian Snyder, Reuters.](#)

constitute a transitional zone between city and countryside. Today, 55 per cent of Americans live in suburbs of large cities or in smaller urban areas that the Pew Research Center categorises as suburbs.²⁹

Although these geographical zones have traditionally been rather conservative, recent statistics show an even distribution between Democrats and Republicans (47 per cent Democrat, 45 per cent Republican).³⁰ This development may be associated with demographic

trends such as the process of diversification resulting from African Americans and immigrants moving from the inner cities. A certain urbanisation of the suburbs is also underway because more and more public transportation and individual businesses are changing the profile of the suburbs, making them more attractive to new population groups.³¹ According to Richardson Dilworth of Drexel University, the decision to live in the suburbs today tends to be an economic rather than an ideological one.³²



Another factor is that many Republicans with university degrees live in the suburbs. Statistics show that they tend to be somewhat more sceptical towards the current president than their fellow Republicans in rural regions.³³ Nowadays, Republican candidates must therefore often run campaigns that attract both of these demographic groups. This can be particularly challenging in elections where gerrymandering³⁴ plays no role and the competition with the Democrats is real (gubernatorial and Senate elections, for example). For instance, Edward

Gillespie, the moderate Republican candidate, narrowly lost the governor's race in the swing state of Virginia in November 2017. He presented himself as a Trump ally and ran a confrontational campaign. This election was considered a test for the 2018 mid-terms and for the overall mood of American voters. A decisive reason for Gillespie's defeat, besides the strong mobilisation of Democratic voters, were the poor returns in the suburbs of the Washington D.C. metropolitan area as well as in Virginia Beach, a populous, suburban tourist area on the Atlantic Coast.

The Relatively Conservative Campaigns of some Democrats

After the 2016 debacle, the greatest challenge now facing the Democrats is to win back voter confidence in rural areas and in small and medium-sized cities, especially in Midwestern states. As party insiders admit, the liberal positions of the Democratic elite in almost all social issues may have permanently eroded their support in rural areas.³⁵ Recent votes have shown, however, that Democrats may be successful if they reach out to rural voters and former workers. These voters were particularly disappointed by the Obama administration and turned their backs on the Democratic Party in 2016. The success of Democrat Conor Lamb in Pennsylvania on 13 March 2018 is considered especially indicative of this potential.

The 33-year-old former Marine and federal prosecutor won a House of Representatives special election in Pennsylvania's 18th District. In 2016, Donald Trump won there by a margin of almost 20 per cent. The district includes Pittsburgh suburbs where many college graduates live, as well as rural regions where coal and steel production once flourished. Conor Lamb's campaign, which convincingly combined classically liberal positions with a socially conservative programme, resonated in both areas. While supporting unions and defending the welfare state (including Obamacare, welfare, and Medicare, the public programme providing health insurance to the elderly), he opposed such measures

as stricter gun laws. Additionally, as a devout Catholic, he opposed abortion. He also supported Trump's decision to impose higher tariffs on steel and aluminium imports.

Lamb is not the only one in the Democratic Party who is currently succeeding with similar positions in rural Republican strongholds. Another example is Dan McCready, who won the North Carolina Democratic primary for a seat in the House of Representatives in May 2018 and will be trying in November to be the first Democrat to win the 9th District seat in 55 years. Like Lamb, McCready is a young Christian who emphasises his status as an outsider and a veteran and defends the right to private gun ownership. Both are conducting pragmatic, somewhat conservative campaigns aspiring to attract voters disappointed by Trump. In doing so, they also distance themselves from the party leadership, especially Nancy Pelosi. As a representative of the Democratic elite of San Francisco, she is seen by both candidates as too distant from the concerns of the white lower middle class – much like Hillary Clinton was.

This trend among Democrats raises questions for the next presidential election: Will the Democratic Party learn from its defeat in 2016? Another candidate from one of the two coasts, who comes from elite circles and is unable to attract voters from rural areas and small towns, will therefore probably lose once more. Democratic Party strategists should instead find inspiration in Bill Clinton's profile: As a white politician from Arkansas, an agrarian Southern state, he was able to reach people of all social groups and thus bridge the urban-rural divide in two presidential elections. It is also a fact that the last four successful Democratic presidential candidates – Barack Obama, Bill Clinton, Jimmy Carter, and Lyndon B. Johnson – all had a rural family background. They were able to communicate with conservative rural swing voters as well as with the city-dwellers and minorities that form the traditional Democratic base. Hillary Clinton's "deplorables" comment confirmed the worst fears of many rural voters and showed what her comfort zone was: urban, educated

voters who have always supported the Democratic Party. Her comment was also symptomatic of the failure of her presidential ambitions, since no US presidential candidate has ever been able to completely ignore rural America and still win.

Conclusion

The economic and social divide between rural and urban areas is not unique to the US. It is also present in European countries and influences many election results. The outcome of the referendum in the United Kingdom in June 2016 was a shock for many Londoners and residents of other English cities who had spoken out strongly against Brexit. The urban-rural divide also played a role in the last presidential elections in France, as well as in the Bundestag elections in Germany.

No US presidential candidate has ever been able to completely ignore rural America and still win.

What is special about the American situation is the dimension of the chasm between the socio-economic situation of rural residents and those who inhabit the nation's major conurbations. Equally significant is the influence of political resentment outside the agglomerations on national politics. The 2016 presidential elections brought the scope of this phenomenon to light, thus representing a turning point. This dimension of polarisation in the US is now being taken into account in the campaigns of many Democrats and Republicans. For the 2018 mid-terms and for the 2020 presidential election, many experts recommend observing the political mood in rural regions, without ignoring the mood in many suburbs that no longer speak so clearly in favour of a single party.

Can the divide be closed in future? Several previous attempts were only partially successful. This





Farmers and the stock market: The gap between “deplorables” in the countryside and the socio-economic elite in the cities has further widened since the financial and economic crisis. [Source: © Eric Thayer, Reuters.](#)

is true of the rural development programmes under Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society Agenda in the 1960s, and of the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) of 2010, which expanded access to health insurance, especially for those with low incomes. Thus, demographers, sociologists, and economic experts are developing new recommendations for improving the situation in rural America.

Brian Thiede of Pennsylvania State University, for example, recommends paying particular attention to the structure of rural economies and communities in order to reduce rural poverty.³⁶ The Chicago Council on Global Affairs suggests another strategy: enhancing the physical, economic, and social links between urban, suburban, and rural communities. To this end, the think tank recommends intensifying

regional planning efforts in order to avoid the wide disparity of effects of political decisions on urban and rural populations. New York Times columnist Ross Douthat considers large cities to be the problem because they are attracting too many resources and jobs. He would therefore prefer to unbundle the country’s largest cities and distribute their administration and businesses throughout the surrounding area.³⁷ In his book “The Fractured Republic”, Yuval Levin of the Ethics and Public Policy Center suggests not only enhancing the principle of subsidiarity, but also paying more attention to the local level. He believes that reviving “mediating institutions” from civil society, such as the family, schools, and religious organisations could help check the polarisation of American politics.³⁸

These are all approaches that can be tried out in the future. Unfortunately, several experts agree that it will be difficult for policy-makers to remedy the economic, social, and political dimensions of the urban-rural divide in the short or medium term. The contrast may even become more aggravated during Donald Trump's presidency, pessimists fear.³⁹ However, beyond the US president's political decisions and their impact on the welfare of rural America, this analysis leads to the following conclusion: If, during the next presidential election, the Democratic Party does not succeed in selecting a candidate able to bridge the urban-rural divide, the probability of Donald Trump's successful reelection will remain fairly high.

-translated from German-

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- 2 Cf. Parker, Kim / Horowitz, Juliana / Brown, Anna / Fry, Richard / Cohn, D'Vera / Igielnik, Ruth 2018: What Unites and Divides Urban, Suburban and Rural Communities, Pew Research Center, 22 May 2018, p. 5, in: <https://pewrsr.ch/2DYXdob> [20 Aug 2018].
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- 4 Cf. Parker et al., n.2, p.45, p.7 (executive summary).
- 5 Cf. Adamy, Janet / Overberg, Paul 2017: One Nation, Divisible: Rural America Is the New 'Inner City', The Wall Street Journal, 26 May 2017, in: <https://on.wsj.com/2qntwlo> [20 Aug 2018].
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- 7 Cf. Parker et al., n.2, p.28.
- 8 Cf. Adamy / Overberg, n.5. More publications by Moretti on the issue of "Economics of Cities and Region" can be found at: <https://bit.ly/2xKdRBC> [20 Aug 2018].
- 9 Cf. Parker et al., n.2, p.26.
- 10 Cf. Adamy / Overberg, n.5.
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- 13 Cf. Adamy / Overberg, n.5.
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- 28 Pew Research Center 2018: Trump Viewed Less Negatively on Issues, but Most Americans Are Critical of His Conduct, 3 May 2018, in: <https://pewrsr.ch/2HSyOOZ> [20 Aug 2018].
- 29 Parker et al., n. 2, p.17.
- 30 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 5.
- 31 See among others: Davidson, Justin 2017: Cities vs. Trump: Red state, blue state? The urban-rural divide is more significant, New York Times Magazine, 18 Apr 2017, in: <https://nym.ag/2oqERiD> [20 Aug 2018].
- 32 See quote in: *ibid.*
- 33 Cf. Parker et al., n. 2, p. 31.
- 34 Gerrymandering is a political practice aimed at drawing voting districts in a first-past-the-post system so as to optimise the results for one party. See among others: Caro, Céline-Agathe 2016: Trump is Simply the End Product. The Polarisation of U.S. Politics Is the Culmination of Long-Term Trends, International Reports, 18 Jul 2016, pp. 90 ff., in: <http://kas.de/wf/en/33.45431> [1 Oct 2018].
- 35 Cf. Brownstein, n. 20.
- 36 Cf. Thiede, Brian 2017: Poverty is higher in rural areas, PBS News Hour, 17 Mar 2017, in: <https://to.pbs.org/2yMwqEt> [20 Aug 2018].
- 37 Cf. Douthat, Ross 2017: We should treat big cities like big corporations, and bust them up, Dallas News, Mar 2017, in: <https://bit.ly/2oa2YD2> [20 Aug 2018].
- 38 Levin, Yuval 2016: The Fractured Republic: Renewing America's Social Contract in the Age of Individualism, Basic Books.
- 39 Cf. analyses by Moretti, Enrico in: Adamy/Overberg, n.5; cf. Brownstein, n.20.



Source: © Johnny Miller

[From Village Community to Megacity](#)

Mastering Africa's Urban Future

Safety and Security in South African Cities

Tilman Feltes

Africa's future is urban and young: by 2050, the urban population in Africa will have tripled, the number of African megacities will have quintupled, and the majority of urban residents will be young people. For some, these are the most important challenges surrounding development in Africa. Challenges such as safety and security will become an important focal point. How can crime prevention and policing keep pace with such challenges? Will Africa's urbanisation translate into a better and economically prosperous life for all, or is it set to increase violence, inequality and mal-administration?

Introduction

Over the last few years, the focus of debates around population growth and urbanisation and their implications for the governance sector has been shifting from Asia to Africa. The reason for this is that the predicted population growth rates for Africa will outnumber the Asian rates by far (see fig. 1 and 2). The overall political management of the challenge facing African urbanisation is also crucial for Europe given the geostrategic positioning of the African continent, and the interdependencies in the fields of economy, stability, food security and migration.

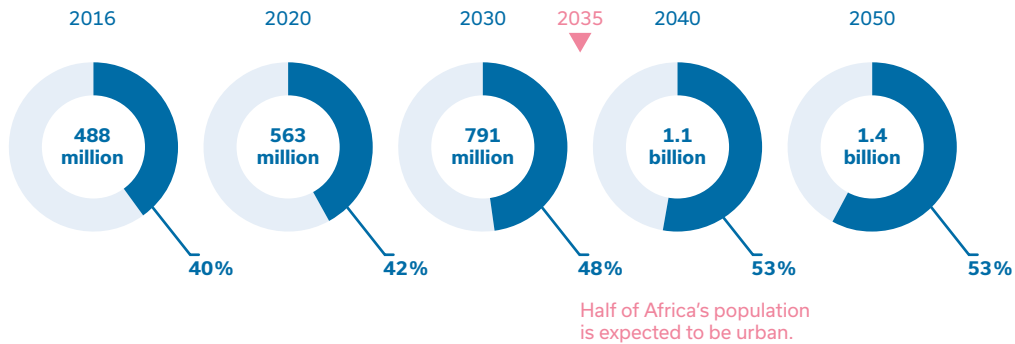
Urbanisation is a defining phenomenon of the 21st century. In 2050, two thirds of people will live in cities and the urban population on the African continent will have tripled. The majority of this growth will take place in low- and middle-income cities especially in Africa and Asia, while the share of growth in Europe, North America, and Oceania is projected to decline steadily until 2050. The London Urban Age Project calculated that in Lagos, for example, the population grows by over 58 people per hour. In comparison, London's population grows by only six in the same time. With an annual population growth rate of almost four per cent, Africa has the fastest urban population growth rate worldwide, and cities such as Ouagadougou, Bamako, Addis Ababa and Nairobi are currently growing at an even faster rate than that.¹

However, the process of urbanisation is not only accompanied by new chances and opportunities, but also by enormous challenges. Thus, the level of crime is especially high in metropolises: in a period of five years, 70 per cent of city dwellers in Africa fall victim to a crime.² To secure ongoing important technological, economic, urban, environmental, and socioeconomic changes, safety and security need to be improved in African cities, because safety and security play a key role in economic upsurge and democratic development in these societies.

Currently, the question of sustainable urban development is also on top of global development agendas such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the UN-Habitat's African Urban Agenda. The newly established goal no. 11 of the SDGs ("making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable") in particular, shows that urban development is now perceived as an individual topic in its own right, as opposed to one that is cross-sectional. This promises new impetus for much-needed future urban investments and policies, which are vital, especially in Africa.

This article addresses the political relevance of urbanisation, the role of youth and related political fields such as urban governance and safety and security in African cities. The main focus will lie on urban violence and crime prevention as the most innovative and creative policy approaches are currently being developed in this field.

Fig. 1: Africa's Urban Population Growth 2016 to 2050



Source: Own illustration based on UN DESA 2014, n.1.

Urbanisation and Economic Growth

Research from the World Bank indicates that poverty is increasingly urbanising, some experts are warning about the “planet of slums”.³ The reality is that the majority of urban residents in Africa today live in slums or informal settlements, lack access to basic services, and have an informal low-wage and low-productivity job at best. Even though future improvements in urban poverty reduction are likely, the sheer number of poor (as well as young) people who lack access to the job market as well as to other social, medical or educational services is expected to increase dramatically. The African Economic Outlook 2016 predicts that Africa’s slum population will grow in line with the cities’ population growth. Hence, the aim of minimising urban slum populations will not be realised if the current development of the majority of countries will be followed.⁴ Even though such structural hurdles are highly problematic for the economic development of cities, urbanisation also goes hand in hand with great transformative potential. Cities have been and still are engines of economic growth, innovation and productivity. Yet in Africa, urbanisation takes place against the background of urban poverty and inequality.

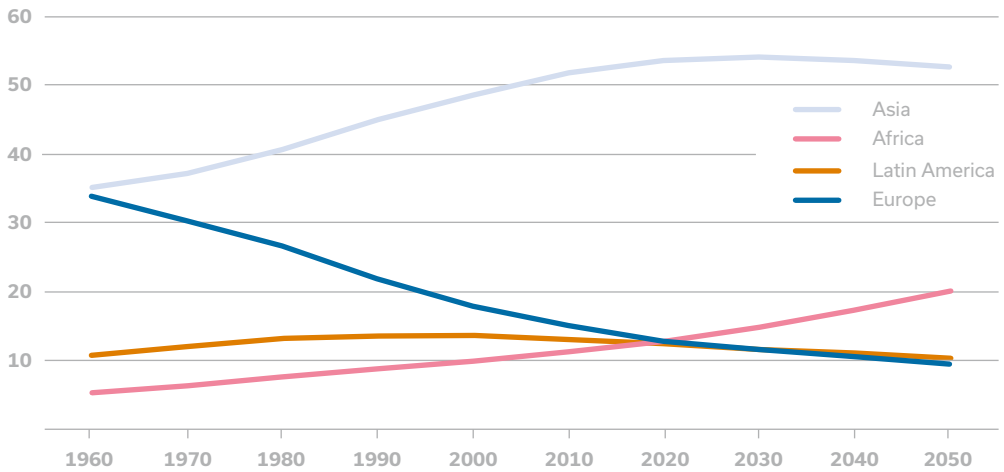
Furthermore, structural change that takes too long severely hampers the adjustment of the

cities and their administrations to the demographic development: there are still too few educational and job opportunities, social and healthcare provisions as well as the supply of electricity and water are inadequate in many places and young people’s future prospects are bleak.

Yet, more and more people, and especially the youth, migrate to the cities. Dissatisfaction with the public administration, as well as the implications of climate change and armed conflicts are the main reasons for rural exodus in Africa.⁵ In contrast to Latin America, Africans do not necessarily expect better employment opportunities from migrating to urban areas. New studies show that there is no real correlation between economic development and urbanisation in African cities as we witnessed in Europe decades ago.⁶

According to the African Economic Outlook, this “urbanisation without growth” has exacerbated the consequences of slow structural transformation in sub-Saharan cities. Economic development continues to positively effect urbanisation dynamics, but urbanisation in Africa can and does happen in contexts of low growth. At the moment, we can see this for example in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) where the GDP per capita is one of the lowest worldwide yet the country’s level of urbanisation is in line

Fig. 2: Shares of World Urban Population between 1960 and 2050 (in Per Cent)



Source: Own illustration based on UN DESA 2014, n.1.

with the African average. In addition, countries such as Angola and Nigeria are urbanising rapidly despite the lack of industrialisation. These factors need to be analysed and monitored more carefully since we know that there is a link between urbanisation and development; higher levels of urbanisation generally correspond to higher levels of human development and vice versa (measured according to the HDI; see fig. 3). This is not yet the case for sub-Saharan Africa. Here, given the high official and even higher unofficial unemployment rates, the informal labour market in particular should be the focus of attention and subject to more in-depth analysis in regards to urban planning and development measures.

The Aspects of Safety and Security⁷ – Reasons, Challenges and New Crime Prevention Strategies

Violence and Crime in Cities

Incidents of violence, whether politically or criminally motivated, are common in Africa's cities, and, just like poverty, violence is urbanising. Crime rates are always much higher in large cities than in small cities or rural areas.⁸ In most

cases, urbanisation is inextricably linked to high rates of crime and violence due to factors such as extreme inequality, unemployment, inadequate services and health provisions, weakening family structures, less social ties, social exclusion and overcrowding.

While the rising number of armed conflicts in the area compels many to move to the city, unplanned, overcrowded settlements can also become a breeding ground for violence.

Furthermore, armed conflicts, riots and protests are on the rise in sub-Saharan Africa, too. The often oppressive state responses to protests are also a problem. In South Africa's Gauteng province (home to Johannesburg and Pretoria), for example, people took to the streets on average more than 100 times each year between 1997 and 2016 – more often than in any other African megacity⁹ region. Unplanned, overcrowded settlements populated mostly by marginalised

youth can be hotbeds for violence. Armed conflict has triggered rural-urban migration, and hence accelerated urbanisation. This is currently the case in the DRC and in Nigeria.¹⁰

Violence and conflicts weaken the democratic and economic development of cities and contribute to decreased levels of economic growth even of entire national economies. Conversely, there is a strengthening of local democracies and economic development if a decrease in violence, conflict and crime is achieved.

It goes without saying that private and public investors avoid high-risk districts and this negatively affects the socioeconomic stability in the country as well as the population’s quality of life. Even just a perceived lack of security poses a risk to a city’s sustainable development.

Safety and Security and the Youth Bulge

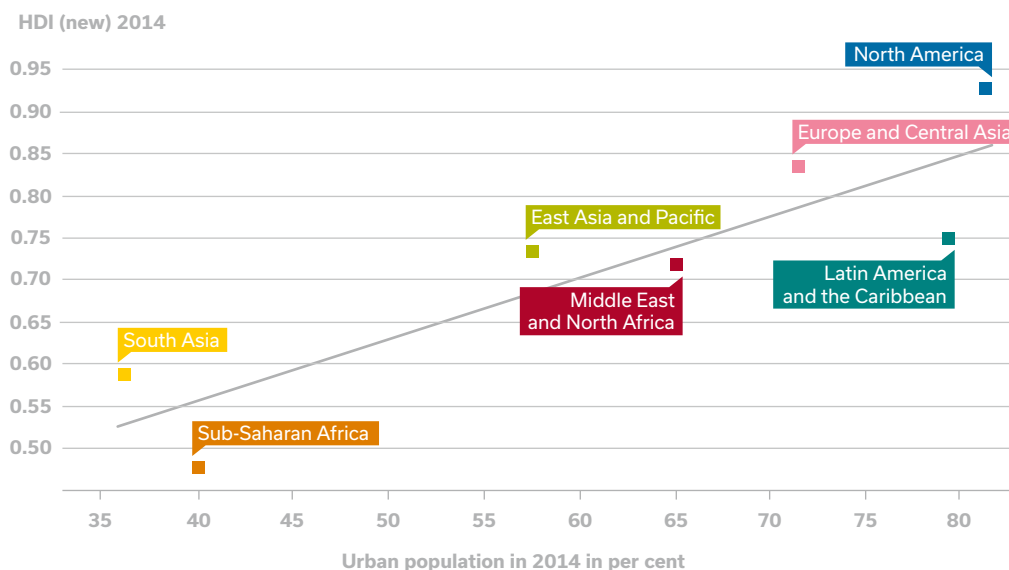
We refer to a “youth bulge” if at least 20 per cent of the population is between the ages of 15 and 24. This age group makes up the majority of

both victims and perpetrators of crime everywhere in the world.

The role of the youth needs to be a critical focus area in light of urban demographics in Africa (see fig. 4). Africa has by far the youngest population worldwide, and younger people are generally more prone to migrate to urban areas than older ones.¹¹ This boosts the proportion of the working-age population in cities and potentially contributes towards economic dynamism. On the other hand, the exclusion and marginalisation of urban youth may also increase the risk of urban violence.

The role and impact of young people on democratic and participatory governance as well as on economic development and social cohesion are important for every society and any future democratic development.¹² According to some, the youth represents huge potential for the development of democracy in the future, while others are more pessimistic and correlate, for example, the numbers of young people (mainly of young men) with the likelihood of violent

Fig. 3: Levels of Urbanisation and Human Development Worldwide Represented by Human Development Index (HDI) Rating



Source: Own illustration based on UN DESA 2014, n.1.



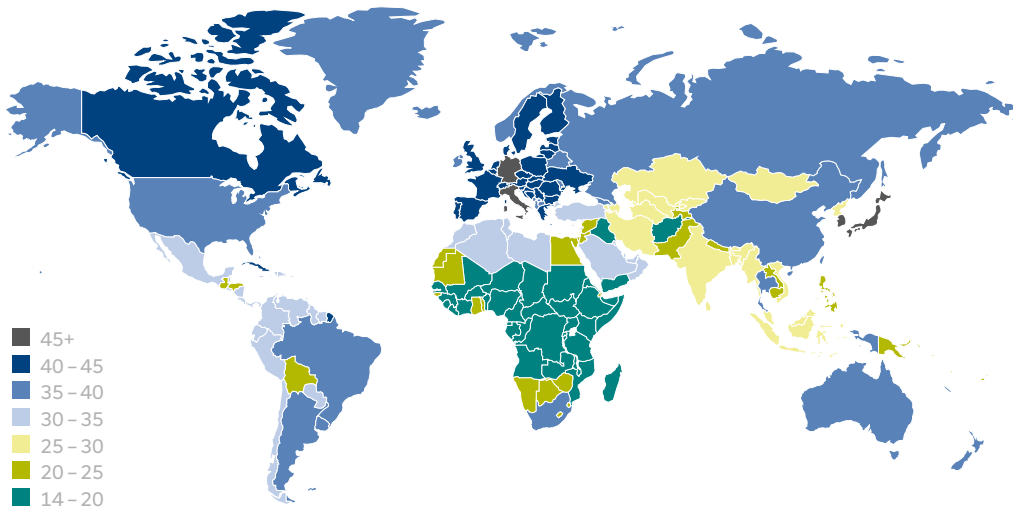
Incendiary mixture: Armed conflicts, riots, and protests are continually on the rise in Sub-Saharan Africa.
Source: © Siphwe Sibeko, Reuters.

conflicts¹³ – however, the majority see a stronger link between jobs, poverty and violence. Young people without proper school education or vocational training are more likely to commit crimes due to their experienced or perceived lack of individual development perspectives. If the youth cohort is reasonably well educated but there are no jobs, this will often trigger youth protests and cities are the main locus of these protests for the most part. The well-known “Arab Spring” uprisings in 2011 exemplify these types of urban protests; we now increasingly see them in sub-Saharan Africa, too. In Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, urban youth-led protests in 2014 led to the resignation of long-term President Compaoré after 27 years in power. In South Africa, so called “service delivery

protests” were shaking communities and the hegemony of the ruling African National Congress (ANC). Another very prominent example are the *#FeesMustFall* student protests witnessed in South Africa over the last few years, which finally shed light on other political fields such as social cohesion etc.

This is why the youth needs to be the focus of political education measures; otherwise, social apathy, violence and crime will increase dramatically in urban areas. Young people must participate in societal debates and have a voice in the political arena. If the youth have no real voice in society, the resulting frustration could lead to a feeling of abandonment by society and easily turn into acts of violence and crime.

Fig. 4: Median Population Ages across the World



Source: Own illustration based on Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) 2011: *The World Factbook 2011*, in: <https://bit.ly/2NgdJzz> [20 Aug 2018].

Youth violence and juvenile delinquency must not be overlooked when it comes to international cooperation. It results in high economic and social expenses, alienates internal and external investors and is generally considered one of the greatest barriers to development.¹⁴

Crime and Violence Prevention Strategies in South Africa

Similar to other African countries, urbanisation in South Africa is striking. Whilst 52 per cent of the population lived in urban areas in 1990, 71 per cent will live in urban areas by 2030 and the figure will rise to 80 per cent by 2050 (see fig. 5). In addition to the facts already mentioned, the legacy of socially and spatially segregated urban development during apartheid plays a crucial role in South Africa.¹⁵ Violence and crime is particularly concentrated in urban centres. The South African government has developed a comprehensive national violence prevention policy (White Paper on Safety and Security¹⁶); however, implementation at the local level is generally weak. The country has a very high rate

of murders, assaults, rapes, and other crimes compared to most other countries. Crime rates have declined since the end of apartheid, but they remain 4.5 times higher than the global average. Unfortunately, the most recent statistics do not reflect this decline. In the last four years, the murder rate has again increased by 20 per cent and the number of armed robberies has risen by 30 per cent.¹⁷ This happened during a period when the South African Police Service (SAPS) annual budget increased by 50 per cent. Much of this undesirable development is associated with poor political appointments, arguably due to corruption linked to former President Jacob Zuma.

Crime Prevention in Townships: Hotspot Policing and Urban Upgrading

The described decline in the murder rate over the first two decades of democracy in South Africa was primarily due to the introduction of a new series of SAPS deployment strategies, shifting the focus towards “hotspot policing” or “high density policing” operations. The

interventions exclusively focused on the townships (South African term for slums) and their micro hotspots such as hostels, shebeens (formerly illegal bars) and taxi ranks. Reasons for violent crime in these hotspots are mainly alcohol and firearms misuse combined with youth unemployment, weak social cohesion and social norms that are generally pro-violence.¹⁸ During such operations, SAPS members are usually heavily armed and deployed in battle-ready formations with the support of armoured personnel carriers and helicopters. Soldiers from the South African National Defence Forces accompanied the police on many occasions. Today, SAPS have taken a more passive and complementary approach of policing urban hotspots and is moving towards community-oriented policing models, as is the case in many other countries¹⁹. In the meantime, community policing has become the organisational paradigm of public policing in South Africa.

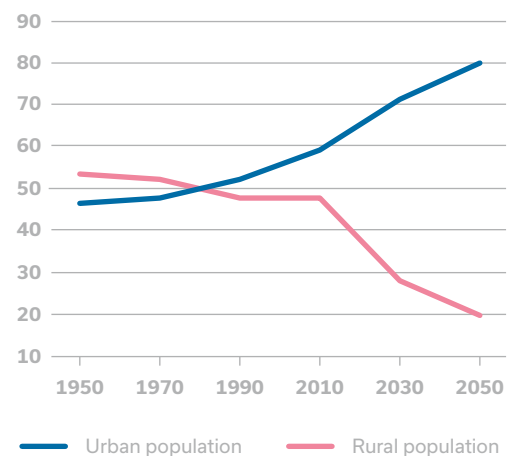
“Through community policing governments can develop the self-disciplining and crime-preventive capacity of poor, high-crime neighborhoods. Community policing incorporates the logic of security by forging partnership between police and public. Since safety is fundamental to the quality of life, co-production between police and public legitimates government, lessening the corrosive alienation that disorganizes communities and triggers collective violence. Community policing is the only way to achieve discriminating law enforcement supported by community consensus in high-crime neighborhoods.”²⁰

In one of the largest and most violent townships in Cape Town, Khayelitsha, local gang wars led to the temporary shutdown of all services delivered by the city. During a six-month gang war between the “Taliban” and the “America” gangs, schools were closed, transport was disrupted and health services in the community were restricted. As this example shows, crime is concentrated at specific places.²¹ Against this background, in June 2018, South Africa’s Police Minister announced a new “high density stabilisation intervention” to tackle crime. It includes the deployment of desk-based police officials to

the streets, particularly in “identified hotspots” such as Khayelitsha in accordance with the new community-policing philosophy.

“Hotspot policing” is now more often accompanied by social and infrastructural crime prevention initiatives. In Khayelitsha, for example, a municipal project called “violence prevention through urban upgrading” aims at reducing crime, increasing safety and security and improving the social conditions of communities through urban improvements and social interventions. The project is unique in South Africa insofar as it integrates all forms of development concepts and not only the infrastructural upgrading of urban spaces. The project combines planning efforts by state institutions with community-based protection measures.²² This includes the connection of policy frameworks, private security and neighbourhood watches and the easier access to justice for residents. The project uses different lenses, one being the “Situational Crime Prevention” approach. The term “Situational Crime Prevention” seeks to reduce crime opportunities by increasing the associated risks and difficulties, and reducing the rewards. It is assumed that positive changes

Fig. 5: Percentage of Urban and Rural Population in South Africa, 1950 to 2050



Source: Own illustration based on South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), press release, 22 Jan 2013, in <https://bit.ly/2Ogmclg> [20 Aug 2018].

in the physical environment ultimately lead to safer communities. Changes such as the “Active Boxes” are to be used for this approach: small three-story buildings with offices, a caretaker flat and a room for community patrollers, which are built close to the so-called “micro hotspots” mentioned above. Another aspect of the project is the “Social Crime Prevention” approach that promotes a culture of lawfulness, respect and tolerance. The project focused on three areas: patrolling street committees combined with law clinics (in collaboration with the University of the Western Cape) and social interventions such as school based interventions and early childhood development programmes. The implementation is carried out using local resources to the greatest extent possible. A visible decrease in crime rates in Khayelitsha has been recorded since implementing the project.²³

*Crime Prevention in South African Suburbs:
“Cities Without Walls”*

The counterpart to the townships are the wealthy South African urban suburbs. South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world, which these suburbs are a clear reflection of. At the end of apartheid, South African suburbs began to change dramatically due to rising levels of crime. This is a typical development for countries in transition, particularly for those characterised by high levels of inequality. With the demise of the inner city economy, businesses, together with their employees, started to move to the South African suburbs. The inner cities were abandoned and crime became widespread. With the associated increase in the fear of crime, suburb dwellers built higher walls and erected electrified fences as a means of defence. This initially attracted strong support and was bolstered by the private security industry, which had vested interests in the rush to monitor space and strengthen security.²⁴ To date, high walls have become a part of the accepted landscape in the suburbs. New research has now proven that crime rates are higher in places surrounded by walls. Solid, high walls are viewed as an obstacle to policing. Furthermore, natural surveillance

by neighbours and patrolling by police or private security services are limited. Against this background, another interesting approach to tackling crime is the “city without walls” project in Durban where academics, the Metropolitan Police Service, private security firms and local communities are working together. The objective is to challenge the perception of crime, to eliminate the perception of alienating neighbours and to strengthen a cohesive community. Selected communities and institutions such as the *Alliance Française* and the *Goethe-Institut* participated in the project, tore down their own walls and replaced them with transparent and see-through fences or walls. Research proved this pilot project to be successful: lower crime rates and more social cohesion in the pilot communities.²⁵

State police violence destroys trust in the police and democracy, as well as leading to a vicious circle of violence, aggression, prejudice and mutual rejection.

Conclusion: The Increasing Power of Cities and the Role of Good Governance

Cities in Africa have enormous potential to provide sustainable solutions to democratic development. They offer opportunities for social and economic change and participation but also for political protest and unrest. Unfortunately, there is a lack of urgency within local city governments to respond to these challenges and opportunities in a sustainable way. The reasons for this is that they are overloaded with other (social) problems, they are not equipped with the necessary knowledge and infrastructure, and they are not willing to see this problem for what it is: a real danger to future democracy in Africa.





Source of unrest: African cities have enormous potential for change. However, this potential often erupts into violence as well. Source: © James Akena, Reuters.

To ensure that the upcoming urbanisation translates into sustainable development, African cities need far better urban planning and innovative approaches that are tailored to their diverse urban realities. It is therefore important to foster political education and participation among the youth. Civil society together with political parties or political movements can be strong drivers to initiate dialogue and create platforms for engagement; however, local governments and authorities must always be involved in such processes.

The community-based and people-oriented policing approaches in South Africa after the end of apartheid are an example of how modern African administrative structures could be organised. On the other hand, exaggerated

state police violence as we saw recently in the DRC, Ethiopia, Burundi, Zimbabwe and Tanzania (against the political opposition) destroys trust in the police and in democracy, as well as leading to more aggression and a vicious circle of violence, aggression, prejudice and mutual rejection. As a result, young people develop deep hatred against the police and hence against the state itself. In this context, policing needs to be seen as a diverse and pluralistic set of social acts. Policing in African cities will also need to stay abreast of the current technology (including social media) for an enhanced system of communication with the local communities and to therefore improve safety in urban spaces.

The newly established “Institute for Global City Policing” at University College London stated

that due to the emerging political power held by city governments, they should be seen as “change agents of the future” or “change drivers”. In some cases, megacities now already have more political power than nation states. In light of this, local governments become more important in the national and the global context and need to be included as new players in global political processes such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the UN Conference of the Parties (COP) or the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). There are now a number of African cities in which progressive or liberal non-socialist opposition parties govern big cities or capitals (e.g. Johannesburg, Cape Town, Pretoria, Harare, Bulawayo, Dar es Salaam, Addis Ababa) and they often follow different approaches in regard to tackling crime and violence than those of the national government. Such a “non-coherence” of urban policies and strategies could hamper urban development, but in other scenarios, this could also lead to more independent and stronger cities. As regards security aspects, it could also lead to a stronger politicisation of the urban space including more political protests, demonstrations and violence.

The legitimacy of the people charged with ensuring public safety and order must be a key emphasis in every security environment. Increases in the numbers of police or the army should not necessarily be the best antidotes to insecurity. Military and policy exchange, as currently witnessed between the Colombian and Nigerian or the Malian and European police forces concerning the fight against local terrorism for example, together with an extended community or partnership approach would be an ideal framework for tackling future challenges. The root causes of crime and the foundations of law and order can be found in the nature and dynamics of each society. Therefore, a democratic, equal and just society based on the rule of law is the best prevention of crime and violence. Recently, the African continent presented an abundance of positive examples. Decade-long leaders or dictators together with their patronage networks were urged to

step down to make room for political improvements and reforms (e.g. in Angola, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, South Africa, The Gambia) – these positive developments will trickle down to the local level and guide the process for more people-centred local government politics.

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- 1 Cf. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) 2014: World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision, New York. Attention should be paid to the general limitations of data and projections on Africa's population. It should be noted, for example, that some of the former UN-Habitat projections were generally highly overestimated in this regard.
- 2 Cf. UN-Habitat 2014: The State of African Cities. Re-Imagining Sustainable Urban Transitions, Nairobi, p.276. Cf. UN-Habitat 2007: Enhancing Urban Safety and Security. Global Report on Human Settlements, Nairobi, p.55.
- 3 Davis, Mike 2011: Planet of Slums, London.
- 4 Cf. African Development Bank (AfDB), OECD and UNDP 2016: African Economic Outlook: Sustainable Cities and Structural Transformation, p.154, in: <https://bit.ly/2mIh6mI> [20 Aug 2018].
- 5 Cf. The World Bank 2016: From Oil to Cities: Nigeria's Next Transformation, p.63.
- 6 Cf. Jedwab, Remi / Vollrath, Dietrich 2015: Urbanization without Growth in Historical Perspective, in: Explorations in Economic History 58, Oct 2015, pp. 1-21.
- 7 In cities, the terms "safety" and "security" are often used interchangeably. In fact, in the German language, there is only one word (*Sicherheit*), and there is no differentiation. However, from a political and academic point of view, it makes sense to differentiate: Security is seen as the degree of resistance to, or protection from, harm. It applies to any vulnerable and/or valuable asset, such as a person, dwelling, community, item, nation, or organisation. Security is the more technical term, covering the process of establishing safety and relying on those, who are responsible for ensuring safety (such as the police). Safety is the condition of being protected from harm or other non-desirable outcomes, health and well-being included. Safety has both emotional and physical attributes, and both must be ensured for safety to be achieved. Safety is more than not being victimised and it implies the feeling of being safe. The existence of both safety and security is important because they are interrelated and the absence of one necessarily affects the other.
- 8 Cf. Glaeser, Edward / Sacerdote, Bruce 1999: Why Is There More Crime in Cities?, in: Journal of Political Economy 107: 6, Dec 1999, pp. 225-258.
- 9 Megacities have a population of ten million inhabitants or more. At the moment, these are Lagos, Cairo and Kinshasa. In 2030, Johannesburg, Luanda and Dar es Salaam are predicted to become megacities. In 2040, Abidjan and Nairobi and in 2050, Addis Ababa, Bamako, Ouagadougou, Dakar, Ibadan and Kano might join.
- 10 In Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeastern part of the country has displaced an estimated 1.5 million people since 2009, and the city population of Maiduguri may have more than doubled to two million due to the influx of internally displaced people.
- 11 Cf. Fox, Sean 2011: Understanding the Origins and Pace of Africa's Urban Transition, Crisis States Research Centre Working Paper 89, Sep 2011, p.5.
- 12 Cf. Feltes, Tilmann 2013: Youth and Democracy: The Promotion of Youth Participation by the International Community in Kosovo, Security and Human Rights, Vol. 24, pp. 195-209, in: <https://bit.ly/2xWchMR> [20 Aug 2018].
- 13 Cf. Abbink, Jon / van Kessel, Ineke 2005: Vanguard or Vandals: Youth, Politics and Conflict in Africa, Leiden; Wagschal, Uwe / Metz, Thomas / Schwank, Nicolas 2008: Ein "demografischer Frieden"? Der Einfluss von Bevölkerungsfaktoren auf inner- und zwischenstaatliche Konflikte, in: Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft 18: 3, pp. 353-383.
- 14 Cf. Imbusch, Peter 2010: Jugendgewalt in Entwicklungsländern. Hintergründe und Erklärungsmuster, in: Imbusch, Peter (ed.): Jugendliche als Täter und Opfer von Gewalt, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden, pp. 11-90.
- 15 Since violence and crime in South Africa are often a reflection of structural economic and socio-political exclusion, we also have to keep the historical context of policing during the apartheid time in mind. During the 1980s, one of the South African Police's responses to the growing political resistance in the country was to hastily train groups of men who were deployed as the "municipal police" to combat the so called "anti-apartheid terrorism" in the slums or townships. However, there was only little accountable control and thus, they gained a reputation for high levels of excessive and inappropriate use of violence against almost exclusively black South Africans. Many of the now 25 to 35 year-old black South Africans experienced police violence when they grew up. On top of that, witnessing violence as a child renders a person 3.8 times more likely to be a victim of domestic violence later in life, while living in a high crime neighbourhood makes someone 5.6 times more likely of the same.
- 16 Civilian Secretariat for Police Service 2016: White Paper on Safety and Security, in: <https://bit.ly/2Okz4MB> [20 Aug 2018].
- 17 Cf. South African Police Service (SAPS) 2016: Crime Situation in South Africa, p.10, in: <https://bit.ly/2tgDoC8> [20 Aug 2018].
- 18 Cf. Seedat, Mohamed et. al. 2009: Violence and Injuries in South Africa: Prioritising an Agenda for Prevention, in: The Lancet 374: 9694, 25 Aug 2009, pp. 1011-1022.

- 19 Cf. Department of Safety and Security 1997: A Manual for the South African Police Service, Apr 1997. Cf. Rosenbaum, Dennis 1994: The Challenge of Community Policing. Testing the Promises, SAGE Publications, London/New Delhi.
- 20 Bayley, David/Shearing, Clifford 1996: The Future of Policing, in: Law & Society Review 30: 3, pp. 585-606, here: p.604.
- 21 In the most recent crime statistics, two per cent of police stations recorded 20 per cent of all murders in the country, and 13 per cent recorded 50 per cent of murders.
- 22 Cf. Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU) 2015: A Manual for Safety as a Public Good, in: <https://bit.ly/2N7YOXS> [28 Sep 2018].
- 23 Cf. Graham, Alastairs/Giles, Chris/Krause, Michael/Lange, Udo 2011: Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, South Africa: Achievements and Trends of a Bilateral Financial Cooperation Programme, in: Coeser, Marc/Marks, Erik (eds.): International Perspectives of Crime Prevention. Contributions from the 3rd Annual International Forum 2009, Godesberg, pp. 67-90.
- 24 In South Africa, the number of private security companies doubled in the last twelve years and now outnumbers the public police force by three to one.
- 25 Cf. Marks, Monique/Overall, Chris 2015: Breaking Down Walls: New Solutions for More Effective Urban Crime Prevention in South African Cities, in: Stability. International Journal of Security and Development 4: 1, p. 3, in: <https://bit.ly/2NLON8b> [28 Sep 2018].



[From Village Community to Megacity](#)

Building a Nation, Building a People

Public Housing in Singapore as a Holistic,
Multi-Dimensional Public Policy Construct

Frederick Kliem

No single policy issue is as indicative of Singapore's success and its social, cultural, and political DNA as its public housing. In a few decades, the city-state has transformed from a slum-invested port town into one of the world's most developed nations. One cannot understand Singapore if one does not understand Singaporean public housing.

Introduction

Many countries are proud of their public housing projects. Yet, in very few does public housing reveal the very DNA of the state and its people quite as much; in very few states are citizens quite as devoted to and supportive of their public housing as in Singapore. Hardly a day goes by without newspapers and TV channels discussing the topic. If one wants to understand the distinctive nature of the world's only true city-state, Singapore, one need not look any further than its public housing. Arguably, no single subject matter, landmark, sight or historical event better encapsulates the fabric of Singaporean politics and society, its history, self-perception, and challenges and successes in one go.

How did Singapore transform, in only a few decades, from a slum-infested mess, with one of the worst housing crises, into one of the most developed countries on par with Denmark and Germany? Moreover, into a country, where almost all citizens own their own well-maintained home, despite its population tripling over that period? This paper argues that Singapore's public housing symbolises what the city-state has achieved and how it achieved it more than any other public policy. It provides a holistic perspective on this unique Singaporean story and explores how something as profane as public housing became the trademark of what characterises the uniquely different city-state of Singapore.

HDB Estates – the Linchpin of the Singaporean DNA

Like all local politics in Singapore, public housing operates top-down, entirely government-driven.

More than three quarters of all residential property in the country is built by the government agency Housing & Development Board (HDB). Homeownership is largely financed through Central Provident Fund (CPF) savings, a compulsory employment-based savings scheme for working Singaporeans into which employees pay 20 per cent of their monthly salary (employers contribute a further 17 per cent). The complementing interdependence of those two schemes results in almost universal coverage, with no less than 82 per cent of all Singaporeans living in public housing and about 90 per cent owning their home.¹ Singapore's 91 per cent overall homeownership rate is the second highest in the world (52 per cent in Germany).

The HDB scheme is a cornerstone of Singapore's socio-economic policy framework, a hallmark of Singaporean identity, and an anchor for the ruling People's Action Party (PAP), which has ruled Singapore since independence. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (LKY, 1959 to 1990), Singapore transformed from a tropical slum with shantytowns and high poverty and crime rates into one of the world's most developed nations. Modern Singapore was built under two generations of highly capable and committed leadership, who never concealed their conviction that such unparalleled development required strong top-down government: a semi-autocracy, as critics argue.

From Shanty to State-of-the-Art Towns

The Singapore of the 1950s and 1960s was in an abysmal state. The British colonial administration had taken a laissez-faire approach towards such basic needs as housing and city planning.

A housing committee reported in 1947 that Singapore suffered from unrestrained, unplanned growth to the detriment of health and morals.² One third of the entire population were reported to live in cramped squatter settlements, consisting of wooden huts and rusty, corrugated makeshift constructions with inadequate ventilation and sanitation facilities on the fringes of the island or ramshackle shop houses in the city. A rapidly growing population merely exacerbated overcrowding.³

What was required was a radical policy approach to address such detrimental living conditions and the determined Prime Minister Lee oversaw the establishment of the HDB on 1 February 1960. With the Chairman Lim Kim San in the lead, HDB became the primary component of the government's visionary overall housing strategy.⁴ The strategy also included the Land Acquisition Act (LAA) in 1966 and the 1968 restructuring of the CPF to become a means of housing finance under the Public Housing Scheme.⁵ Henceforth, Singaporeans could use their mandatory retirement savings to finance HDB mortgages instead of having to rely on their disposable income. Originally, HDB intended to build rental housing only to rehouse the poor from the slums, but within four years, it had switched to the concept of "leasehold ownership" for all. In less than three years, the government built 21,000 flats and 54,000 in less than five, and at the time of writing HDB had completed over one million apartments to house an entire nation.

Residential HDB complexes are clustered around 23 planned townships (suburbs and city centre) that extend in a semicircle around the island of Singapore, alternatively painted in unassuming shades of brown or bristling pastel colours. Each HDB block is maintained, serviced and regularly renovated by the government. By virtue of this continuous general maintenance as well as irregular major renovation and modernisation schemes, the government ensures that no area or block becomes derelict and no neighbourhoods become undesirable due to neglect. Singapore also uses

its regulation privilege to cover ground on its sustainable development strategy and it introduced solar photovoltaic technology to public housing. HDB has installed solar PV systems across approx. 1,000 HDB blocks throughout the island; by 2020, it will have been extended to 5,500 blocks.⁶

Each year, HDB sells a new batch of unfinished flats (17,000 in 2018) mostly to first-time buyers, who must then wait until completion. Alternatively, one can choose to buy existing apartments directly from their previous owners, who have been able to sell at controlled but attractive market prices since the 1990s. However, all HDB apartments are bought on a 99-year leasehold within which the flat can be rented out or sold under certain conditions; but after which the flat must be returned to the government. Three-bedroom flats cost an average of 250,000 to 350,000 Singapore dollar (150,000 to 220,000 euro), depending on factors such as remaining lease period and location. Government grants entitle first-time buyers in particular to cut 50,000 Singapore dollar or more off the purchase price. Buying a comparable private flat from private property developers, who primarily cater to wealthy Singaporeans and expatriates, costs three times as much or more. Selling implies a profit motive, which is only true for the resale market, however. The government sells at below-market price and citizens are entitled to use some of their CPF savings for initial down payment as well as to generous government grants and comparatively cheap mortgages, which can also be met by drawing from the buyer's CPF. Hence, Singaporeans pay in practice, but the government does not incur a profit – at least not in monetary terms – nor is there a significant tangible impact on the personal disposable income of the buyer.

By all measures, HDB is a unique Singaporean success story that enjoys ongoing high levels of popular as well as political support. Estates can be somewhat monotonous, but they are clean, well maintained, virtually crime-free and safe. The latest HDB survey found 91 per cent owner satisfaction with their flat, neighbourhood, and

estate facilities.⁷ The scheme also ensures that housing is more affordable than in other rich, popular, and dense cities, such as Hong Kong or London. There is hardly any homelessness in Singapore, nor are there slums or ghettos, and almost all working citizens, by current accounts, will be able to live in their own home at old age. There is no doubt that HDB is an expensive programme, but it does bear fruit.

Accounting for Singapore's Limited Space

Singapore's limited space is optimised by centralised urban planning, approximating perfection. The country's 730 square kilometre landmass is even less than the comparatively small German City of Hamburg. Yet, while Hamburg is home to only 1.8 million people, the Republic of Singapore's population trends at 5.8 million. It accommodates approx. 8,000 people per square kilometre, making it the third densest country in the world (Hamburg houses 2,400 per square kilometre). At the same time, Singapore is one of the world's greenest cities with one third of urban area covered by greenery, ahead of Oslo and Vancouver.⁸ Home to many large parks, wetlands, and rainforests, Singapore attempts to reduce its carbon emissions and be a liveable and attractive home. Combining such facts, one can easily imagine the pressures on public housing. Land is Singapore's most sacred resource.

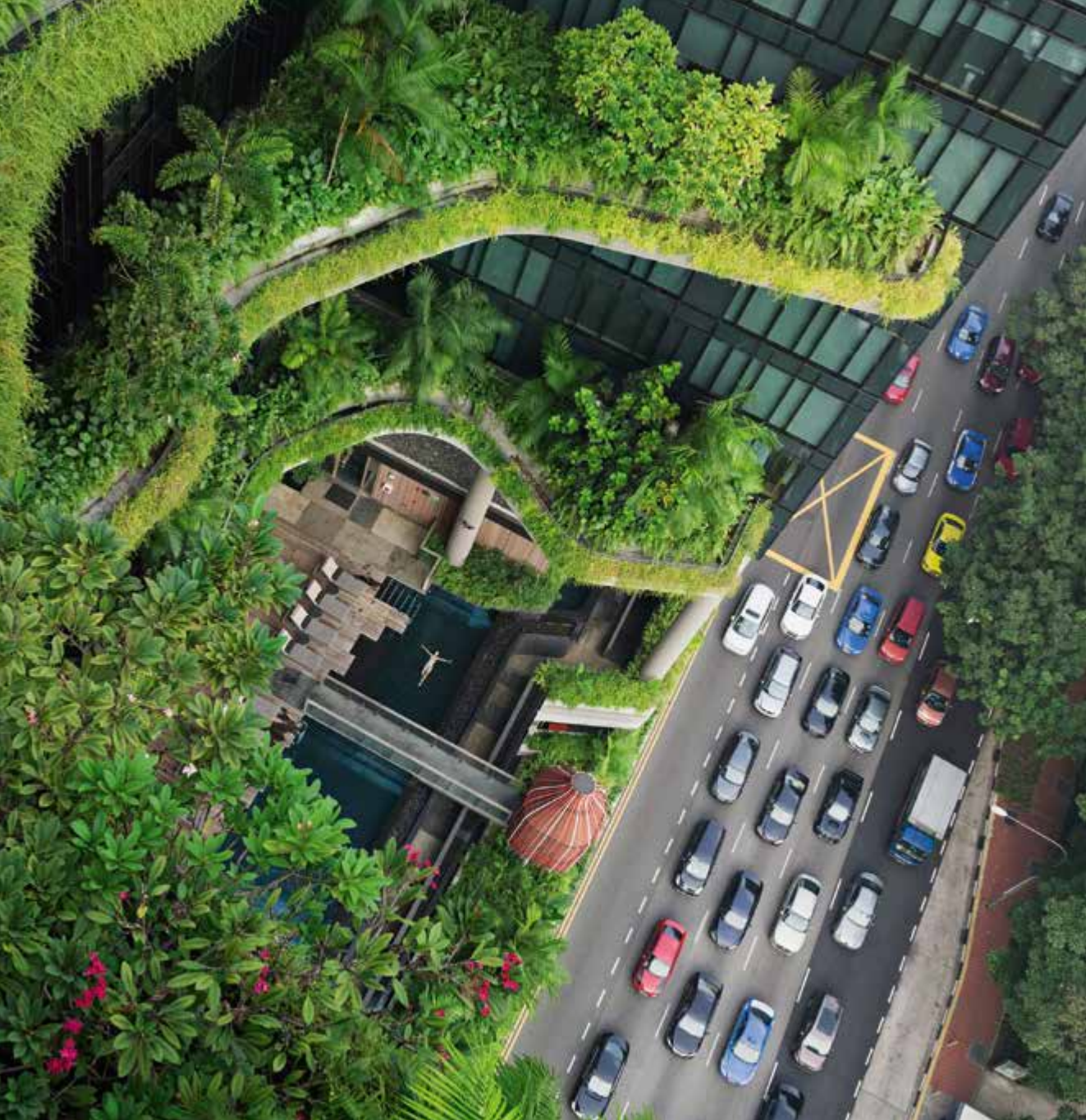
The enactment of the LAA bestowed the government with vast powers over all Singaporean land and enabled it to acquire virtually all of it from private landowners at well below market prices. Nowadays, more than 90 per cent of all Singaporean landmass belongs to the state, building the backbone of public housing.⁹ LKY justified the drastic LAA:

“When we were confronted with an enormous problem of bad housing, no development, overcrowding, we decided that unless drastic measures were taken to break the law, break the rules, we would never solve it. We therefore took overriding powers to acquire land at low cost, which was in breach of one of the fundamentals of



British constitutional law – the sanctity of property. But that had to be overcome, because the sanctity of the society seeking to preserve itself was greater.”¹⁰

The fact that a limited number of very wealthy individuals owned much of the private land in



Urban Green: Singapore is one of the most densely populated cities in the world, while also being one of the greenest.
Source: © Lucas Foglia.

Singapore in the 1960s¹¹ helps to explain why government and people regarded large-scale nationalisation of land as fair. In addition, by artificially reclaiming land from the sea with imported sand, Singapore has grown some 22 per cent since independence.¹² To date, there is no right to, nor indeed culture of owning land.

HDB, itself a government agency, “leases” the land from the government to build high-rise blocks to then sub-lease individual units to leasehold owners.¹³

Impressive governance capacity in Singapore and the ability to plan and implement over the

Table 1: Use of Singapore's Public Land

| Land use | Planned land supply (hectare) | |
|---|-------------------------------|---------------|
| | 2010 | 2030 |
| Housing | 10,000 (14%) | 13,000 (17%) |
| Industry and commerce | 9,700 (13%) | 12,800 (17%) |
| Parks and nature reserves | 5,700 (8%) | 7,250 (9%) |
| Community, institution and recreation facilities | 5,400 (8%) | 5,500 (7%) |
| Utilities (e. g. power, water treatment plants) | 1,850 (3%) | 2,600 (3%) |
| Reservoirs | 3,700 (5%) | 3,700 (5%) |
| Land transport infrastructure | 8,300 (12%) | 9,700 (13%) |
| Ports and airports | 2,200 (3%) | 4,400 (6%) |
| Defence requirements | 13,300 (19%) | 14,800 (19%) |
| Others | 10,000 (14%) | 2,800 (4%) |
| Total | 71,000 (100%) | 76,600 (100%) |

Source: Ministry of National Development Singapore: A High Quality Living Environment For All Singaporeans, Land Use Plan to Support Singapore's Future Population, Jan 2013.

long-term, facilitates urban design. In 1971, Singapore announced the first of several Concept Plans, a design plan for future land use, which was instrumental in shaping modern Singapore. It was the first coherent and coordinated urban development strategy to address the initial basic infrastructure needs of a young nation. It mapped out broad principles to develop new housing towns, industrial estates, transport infrastructure, and recreational areas across Singapore by creating a semicircle of satellite towns around the waterfront Central Area. Modern Singapore's urban design, with its many nature reserves and water reservoirs, surrounded by satellite towns, is a direct result of the Concept Plan. The same applies to the all-connecting urban transport infrastructure, such as the Expressways and the public transport Mass Rapid Transit (MRT). This near-perfect network was implemented as planned since the government knew the precise

development trajectory and could set aside land for eventual construction well in advance. All government agencies and ministries had a reference document guiding and coordinating their respective activities. This whole-of-government approach to address the country's needs is exemplary for all public policy in Singapore and aided by a trusting populace and an unchanging, highly centralised single-party government.

Identity and Nation Building

While the acute space and housing shortage was the main driver behind the HDB scheme, there is much more to it than this. The role public housing plays in the shaping of Singaporean society and identity cannot be overestimated. Housing and homeownership became important institutional pillars of Singapore's nation-building efforts and a power-anchor for the PAP.

In the aftermath of its independence, Singapore had to forge a nation from scratch.

Achieving national unity was the primary concern for all Southeast Asian nations emerging from colonialism. Singapore was the only state that never strove for independence, believing that the city was not capable of survival following its expulsion from Malaysia. 1965, however, presented a *fait accompli* and Singapore was confronted with the need to forge a nation out of a diverse population; mostly generations of ethnic Chinese, Indian, and Malay immigrants of different religions. Previously, Singapore had never been a nation and therefore inherited colonial structures and legacies. It was felt that Singapore lacked the binding glue every nation needs: an experience of common nationhood, a sense of nationalism and belonging, a sense of being part of the same people. Without a significant degree of this, all other efforts of post-independence nation building would be in vain. LKY and his government had to build not only a state, but a nation from scratch.

Homeownership was regarded as vital for identity building, for considering oneself not Malay, Indian, or Chinese, but Singaporean. LKY notes, “[m]y primary preoccupation was to give every citizen a stake in the country and its future. I wanted a home-owning society.” It was also:

*“to give all parents whose sons would have to do national service [Singapore’s compulsory military service] a stake in the Singapore their sons had to defend. If the soldier’s family did not own their home, he would soon conclude he would be fighting to protect the properties of the wealthy. I believed this sense of ownership was vital for our new society which had no deep roots in a common historical experience.”*¹⁴

Indeed, the above-cited survey indicates a great sense of belonging of people to their communities (98.8 per cent).¹⁵

The PAP also had power motives. Singapore’s slums were breeding grounds for political dissatisfaction and leftist forces. LKY was convinced that in contrast to this, proud home-owning families would make Singapore “more stable.”¹⁶

*“I had seen how voters in capital cities always tended to vote against the government of the day and was determined that our householders should become homeowners, otherwise we would not have political stability.”*¹⁷

Political stability – read: PAP longevity – did not only develop from well-maintained infrastructure, but from continuing trust and appreciation of steady and effective governance, which was best demonstrated if people could rely on safe and sound living conditions. HDB demonstrates the PAP’s concern for the ordinary people. Allocation also ensured that potentially leftist opposition supporters could be dispersed across the islands without the re-emergence of a political stronghold. To date, the opposition, such as the Workers’ Party, have repeatedly alleged that the government maintains and renovates PAP stronghold estates more than opposition districts.

Integration in a Multi-Ethnic Society

Singapore is the only ethnic Chinese majority state in Southeast Asia and sits within an immediate environment dominated by Malays and Indonesian ethnicities. Post-independence, it faced manifold racial challenges that were aggravated by a hostile regional environment. Domestically, Singapore was and still is a multi-racial and -religious country, with the Chinese majority roughly comprising 76 per cent of the population, Malays 15 per cent, Indians seven per cent, and others two per cent.¹⁸ Owed partly to its favourable maritime location, attracting seafaring and trading migration over centuries; owed, however, even more to the sinister logic of colonialisation which creates artificial multi-ethnic societies alongside racial segregation in order to “divide and rule” their subjects. Singapore’s diverse ethnicities dwelled in mostly separate living spaces across the island,

retaining their distinct cultures with neither the aim, nor the opportunity to interact.¹⁹ It was a divided society, and remnants of this, such as heightened ethnic sensitivities, are still palpable today. Unlike today, however, immediate post-colonialism was characterised by serious conflicts, especially Sino-Malay sectarian tensions that came to a head on several occasions across Singapore (and Peninsular Malaysia). In 1964, such violence led to dozens of deaths and hundreds of injured persons in Singapore alone.

Given the ethnic diversity in Singapore, assimilation policies were adopted to maintain social cohesion.

PAP leaders were determined to put an end to this and to build a harmonious multi-racial, ethnically egalitarian society that would allow various ethnic groups to practise their own culture and religion; a policy priority to this day. However, they were also mindful of the complete absence of social cohesion, leading to each group staunchly defending their own narrow individual interest. Hence, the government began to devise a complicated, comprehensive web of unique, finely nuanced and strategically astute whole-of-society policies, conducive to identity assimilation; in other words, to engineer multi racialism.

A significant component of this policy network was indeed public housing. The HDB scheme provided the government with an opportunity to blend societal groups; to encourage them to interact, to cohabit, and ultimately to identify as Singaporeans above all else. In new settlements, the aim is to forge a sense of community with Chinese, Malays, and Indians living as neighbours along common corridors and facilities within housing blocks, eating at the same hawker centres (popular open-air food courts), shopping at the same markets, going to the same schools and community centres. In other words, regular multi-ethnic engagement in day-to-day

activities. This was nation building by inclusive housing and homeownership in order to knit together a divided society, while continuing to allow the practice of individual traditions – but in direct proximity rather than in racial enclaves. Therefore, it was along the common corridors of the new HDB towns that a sense of community began to arise.

Initially, HDB rigorously allocated newly built flats to evenly distribute all ethnicities. However, as the first wave of building and rehousing slowed down and a first re-sale market grew, a trend of ethnic regrouping resurfaced. In 1989, the government pre-emptively initiated the Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP) to safeguard its approach. To this day, EIP ensures an ethnically balanced community with all HDB sales, new and re-sale flats, regulated by pre-determined quotas roughly reflecting the overall ethnic make-up of Singapore. A maximum of 84 per cent of all flats in one neighbourhood can be sold to Chinese buyers and a maximum of 87 per cent of each flat in one given block; the figures are 22 and 25 per cent for Malays, and twelve and 15 per cent for Indians and other minority groups. When the set quotas are reached, owners may only sell to buyers of the same ethnic group so as to maintain the delicate balance. This is a well thought-out policy strategy, tailored towards peculiar and indeed unique Singaporean circumstances and reflecting Singaporean history and societal needs. Enforced integration remains an important principle and the government continues to insist that public policies across the spectrum must ensure a cohesive, well integrated, and racially harmonious society.

HDB allocation also mitigates socio-economic segregation. The demographic mix encourages the broad middleclass and the less well off from all ethnicities to engage with their neighbours irrespective of their background, occupation or social status. Each neighbourhood and each estate is considered a community and a microcosm of Singapore in which neighbours can see how others are doing in life, how their career progresses, and how they educate their children.

To promote such social and ethnic interaction, each block has built-in common areas, such as the so-called “void-deck” – the ground level of each block that is intentionally left empty. Void-decks are sheltered, but at the same time open shared spaces for community activities of the estate where weddings, funerals, parties, and bazaars take place. Often, they include hawker-centres and smaller independent shops, called “mamashops”. Another common feature are facilities such as playgrounds, kindergartens, fitness and medical centres. Especially hawker-centres are popular common spaces visited by patrons of all ethnicities and social-classes on a daily basis – perhaps excluding the very wealthy – and, therefore, creating opportunities for social interaction. Indeed, 85.7 per cent of residents regularly interact with neighbours of other ethnic groups.²⁰

The quota allocation in combination with HDB’s grant and mortgage schemes have, thus, facilitated an egalitarian housing market with almost every Singaporean citizen living in almost identically styled accommodation. Of course, the desirability of estates and towns varies depending on age, convenience, and location, and this is reflected in rental and purchase prices. The less well-off and more traditional families tend to live in the HDB heartlands, further away from the centre of the island’s semicircle. Yet, HDB blocks are very common even in desirable neighbourhoods and in the city centre; since the government mandates that every area includes a predetermined number of HDB blocks. Neighbourhood management also dictates a certain individual mix of office, retail, and function buildings as well as public and private residential accommodation. The common feature of slum areas or ghettos in large cities in Southeast Asia and much of the world are non-existent in Singapore and most towns are microcosms of Singapore as a whole.

Welfare and Social Engineering

It is surprising that in a state known for its aversion to extensive social welfare, known for low income and business taxes and for

attracting multi-national conglomerates, Singapore’s public housing gives the impression of socio-economic egalitarianism. Government housing assistances are the main reason why Singaporeans do not necessarily require a conventional welfare and pension system. Most Singaporeans – except the very wealthy – live in the same style accommodation, have a similar retirement provision, and, most of all, Singaporeans do not amass property and/or wealth from landownership to be passed on to successive generations, creating and perpetuating a wealthy “inheritance elite”. Income ceilings ensure that the very wealthy do not buy HDB flats for further wealth creation. And in theory, all Singaporeans own their accommodation at retirement, in addition to having some CPF and perhaps private savings. Especially once children have become first-time buyers and have moved into HDB flats of their own, elderly Singaporeans are encouraged to downsize, or to “right-size” as HDB calls it, or apply for special grants upon retirement to unlock some cash funds.²¹

At the same time, the government uses its absolute control over the housing market for social engineering beyond ethnic quotas. Special measures encourage what a largely socially-conservative society considers to be sound families. First-time buyers must be married in order to qualify at any time for the generous government grants that make HDB such good value. Singles can take part in the so-called Singles Scheme once they have reached 35 years of age. Divorcees face a three-year debarment during which only one party can take part in a HDB purchasing scheme, unless children under the age of 18 are involved or divorcees either immediately remarry or move in with their parents. First-time buyers are also granted additional discounts if they buy in the vicinity of their parents’ HDB flat, nudging them to take care of the elderly, a task that often falls upon the state in Europe. 36.7 per cent of married couples either live with or in close proximity to their parents and 90.3 per cent of married couples and their parents visited each other at least once a month.²² Singaporeans almost universally

support this top-down social engineering: they are mindful of the overall goal.

Conclusion: Urban and Social Planning – A Holistic, Whole-of-Government Approach

HDB is perhaps the world’s most comprehensive and fascinating public housing policy. The “Singapore miracle” allowed an underdeveloped Singapore, ripe with ethnic tensions and social inequality, to become one of the world’s safest, cleanest, and most developed countries. Against the odds, Singapore leapfrogged the rest of the region and most of the developed world within a few decades. Credit goes to the government’s remarkable political skill and its ability for long-term planning to ensure enduring societal progress, aided by effective implementation by a competent, reliable public sector that is second to none.

Public housing is central to the “Singapore miracle”.

This article has tried to demonstrate how central public housing is to this “Singapore miracle”, an essential part of its holistic whole-of-government approach to manifold challenges following independence. Public housing in Singapore is a multi-dimensional policy scheme that simultaneously addresses the significant political and societal challenges surrounding severe space limitations, ethnic segregation and conflict, national loyalty and belonging. HDB addresses social welfare and social dynamics, enforces ethnic integration, aids ethno-religious harmony, and meets the basic material and social needs of Singaporeans.

Top-down urban planning further ensures a safe, clean, and functional environment without socio-economic enclaves. It is also one of the main reasons for the longevity of the PAP. Voters reward a government that successfully addresses real basic needs, and housing in a megacity is certainly one of those. But it is also

true that the government uses its prerogative to reward a loyal public and knows that home ownership encourages a risk-averse electorate, neither interested nor daring enough to attempt political change. But far from being cynical here, there can be no doubt of the, by all means, genuine support for the PAP in general and for public housing in particular.



Where is HDB Headed?

In the medium-term, planned developments for completion are “smart”, incorporating up-to-date digitalisation, and are “green”, including ever more green space with the dual function of increasing wellbeing and having practical use, e.g. water reservoirs. New towns will also

test so-called “first- and last-mile” automatic driving that allows citizens to use self-driving shuttlebuses.

Over the long-term, HDB could take a step back and refocus its “social mission” and the incentive schemes in order to adapt to changing circumstances. An increase in inter-ethnic and



Microcosm: The interaction with the neighbours is welcomed and thus considered in the planning of the respective building complexes. Source: © Tim Chong, Reuters.

transnational marriages gives rise to a more diverse population. Young adults are forced to live at home until they marry or turn 35, although an increasing number tends to rent for an intermediate period at high costs. And while taking care of one's elderly parents is laudably encouraged, homosexual individuals, divorcees, and younger single parents are structurally disadvantaged. Very few Singaporeans navigate around government provisions by either permanently renting or buying on the limited private housing market. Aside from the fact that this makes little financial sense – even well-earning Singaporeans often do not have the financial means to do so –, competing with wealthy expats who do not pay into the CPF and whose companies often subsidise their high rent in private houses or condominiums, ruins the market.

A Model for the Rest?

Singaporean governance capacity is impressive. Yet, the underlying principles of all Singaporean public policy, housing and otherwise, are unique to Singapore, and those advocating replication ought to be mindful of the particular circumstances. Before asking what the developed and less developed world may have to learn from the Singaporean model, one ought to ask whether one is willing to accept the unintended consequences of such centralised, top-down governance. Are interested countries willing and able to exert absolute control over land use and urban development, and are they willing to accept a certain degree of curtailment on individual freedoms and a centralised property and wealth redistribution in otherwise capitalist free-trade economies? And most of all, are governments ready and capable of galvanising their public behind perhaps incongruous means to further societal ends? Singapore is ready and capable, and this works for Singapore and for Singaporeans. But can it be transferred to different cultures?

Singaporean attempts to prevent ethnic segregation and inter-cultural/religious tensions, for instance, are laudable causes and bring to mind the “racial-ghetto” discourse in what is still a

significantly less multicultural society in Western Europe. However, while appropriate and accepted in Singapore, top-down allocation of flats according to ethnic affiliation is unthinkable in most European societies that prioritise minimal interference in individual freedom of choice. A further example is the enactment of the LAA, which bestowed the government with vast powers over all Singaporean land. A political act of authoritative empowerment that is by and large unquestioned by Singaporeans, yet almost unthinkable in countries that place a higher premium on the individual citizens' rights.

So what can be learnt from Singapore? Effective town planning, government-controlled maintenance of estates and well-maintained recreation facilities, and the high premium on greenery and the holistic sustainability approach are essentially questions pertaining to the allocation of public funds and governance subsidiarity; certainly not a prerogative of semi-democratic single-party systems. However, the underlying principles of HDB cannot be replicated in the European context. The intention of this article was not to promote the Singaporean model of public housing as exemplary, but to show how something as profane as public housing can explain much of a nation's political and societal fabric; how the HDB scheme is perfectly in-sync with Singaporean society.

There is no doubt that HDB is a Singaporean success story. The city-state faced manifold challenges, but the HDB scheme has done its bit to implement the vision of Singapore's remarkable LKY. Yet, one ought to resist the temptation to mistake a particular success for universal success; HDB may solve Singapore's problems, but it cannot solve Europe's.

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[From Village Community to Megacity](#)

An Urban World

How City Networks Support the Global Order

Kathrin Zeller

Cities, which already represent more than half of the world's population, are conquering fora traditionally reserved for nation states, such as the United Nations Climate Change Conference and the G20, sending their mayors to represent them. It is not just the practical, people-oriented approach, but also the hope for alternative models in times of great uncertainty that is putting cities in the spotlight.

The Rediscovery of “Urban Consciousness”

A brief glance at the past shows that cities play a central role in the development of civilisations, and have been directly involved in shaping the structure of international relations throughout history. The *polis*, a type of city-state of Antiquity, enabled the development of a forerunner of modern democracies. Such cities' interests were already represented in far-ranging networks by the *proxenoi*, who functioned as honorary consuls.¹ Until the middle of the last millennium, cities – particularly trading cities such as Milan – were still active as independent entities on the global stage. With the emergence of nation states, arose the heyday of classical diplomacy among nations, later including supranational organisations such as the United Nations (UN). Following the end of the Second World War, cooperation among cities played a major role in peace efforts, with prime focus upon bilateral treaties for cooperation in the areas of culture, education, and sport.

By the 1990s at the latest, the view of cities as international actors began to shift once again. On the one hand, globalisation was accompanied by strong urbanisation and thus, in many countries, by internal centralisation. So-called global cities arose,² concentrating important hubs of the global economy, such as headquarters of the finance industry, and other global corporations. At about the same time, the debate on the shaping of global sustainable development and its actors gained significance. The connections between ecological and development policy efforts at the UN level were discussed for

the very first time at the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992. One of the key findings was the realisation that sustainable development requires cooperation between various partners, and that global challenges would be increasingly coupled with urban development. This gave rise to Agenda 21, a plan of action to which 172 countries agreed, and in which municipalities were involved as players in global sustainable development. The underlying principle was one familiar from urban planning and environmental movements: think globally, act locally.

The City at the Centre of Global Development

Currently, about 55 per cent of the world's population live in urban areas. The fact that this share was only around 30 per cent in 1950, and that it is forecast to rise to 68 per cent in 2050, shows how rapidly the world is urbanising. Both the rise in the overall population as well as the upsurge in migration to cities will lead to an increase of 2.5 billion additional people in cities, according to UN forecasts. This urbanisation will progress most rapidly of all in emerging and developing countries, with nearly 90 per cent of this growth projected for what are currently mid-sized cities in Asia and Africa. Most of the 43 megacities expected to arise and grow by 2050 will also be located on these continents.³

Although cities cover less than two per cent of the earth's surface, they consume about 78 per cent of the world's total energy. More than 60 per cent of total carbon dioxide, and substantial quantities of other greenhouse gas emissions

from energy production, vehicles, industry, and biomass are generated in cities.⁴ At the same time, cities are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of climate change. Seventy per cent of the world's megacities are located in coastal areas.⁵ A UN study indicates that at least half of the more than 1,500 cities surveyed are highly vulnerable to at least one in six natural disasters (hurricanes, floods, droughts, earthquakes, landslides, and volcanic eruptions). This also has consequences for economic development. Because global cities in particular are central units of the global economy, their development – both positive and negative – has significant global impact. Tokyo's gross domestic product is comparable to that of Canada or Australia, for instance.

Cities account for 78 per cent of global energy consumption.

This shows that the shaping of global sustainable development depends to a large degree on the shaping of urban development. Last but not least, cities can also make a crucial contribution in this domain since they wield fundamental decision-making powers in areas such as land-use planning, waste management, transportation, and energy use.⁶ This applies in particular to the emerging megacities in Asia and Africa, which will require massive quantities of resources, for instance, for the construction of infrastructure. These cities are already making investment decisions in infrastructure, housing policy, and other issues of city administration that will lay the foundation for development in the coming decades – not only for the cities themselves, but beyond city limits and even across national borders. The success of cities in meeting these challenges will ultimately also determine the course of global dynamics, such as handling climate change, migration pressures, and competition for increasingly scarce resources.

City Networks and Their Functions

Cities are thus an important instrument for global sustainable development, especially in their role as actors of international cooperation. Particularly in the run-up to, and the aftermath of, the Earth Summit in 1992, many cities began to organise themselves into networks. These networks operate either within certain regions, or globally. The focus is largely on various aspects of sustainable development.⁷ An analysis carried out by Boston University distinguishes between networks that function as a kind of gathering place, by opening themselves up to a wide swathe of participants, and those that exhibit club characteristics, making membership conditional upon certain criteria.⁸ The study, which relates to US environmental networks, also showed that most of the networks considered operate at two levels: first, at the level of urban cooperation through knowledge transfer and support of local capabilities, and second, at the level of lobbying their respective nation states, or supranational organisations. Eight of the 15 networks studied were initiated by the mayors themselves. The main reason for joining them was the opportunity to join forces in pursuit of a common interest. Other reasons were to signal certain priorities to voters, or to gain access to successful models and to other information.

The above analysis can also be applied to transnational networks of cities. Additionally, such networks often pursue an internal strategy that combines both cooperation and competition among cities. The competition for the reputation of pioneer ought to lead to ever more ambitious goals, such as regarding the reduction of greenhouse gases. At the same time, however, cities cooperate regarding concrete measures and the implementation of these objectives, for instance, by exchanging experiences in project development and good practices. Transnational networks support their members in the development of common projects, the acquisition of funding, and organise their own conferences, workshops, and study trips. Lobbying also includes placement of mayors at international

conferences. Some networks even award prizes in order to provide their own incentives to improve performance and thus provide participating mayors with an instrument for communicating success in their respective local arenas.

The number of city networks rose especially quickly after the Earth Summit, tripling within about 15 years to the current number of about 160. Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI), founded in 1990, operates with its approximately 1,000 members in various areas of sustainable municipal development. ICLEI sees itself both as a form of lobby group for the interests of cities worldwide, as well as a provider of services for municipalities, such as technical support during the preparation of urban climate assessments. United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is a global interpretation of the principle of subsidiarity, representing about 24,000 members for democratic local self-government.⁹ The Rockefeller Foundation runs the RC100 Network, which supports 100 cities in the development of strategies and management structures for urban resilience, both in the form of financing, and in the form of advice from the direct exchange of ideas with other cities. C40 was founded in 2005 with the goal of uniting 40 of the largest cities in a coalition of the willing to reduce greenhouse gases. It tasks each of its now more than 90 members with the preparation of a climate action plan that meets the requirements of the Paris Agreement. Cities in the Global South in particular receive support for this, part of which is financed by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety. C40 thematic sub-networks are intended to allow cities to exchange information about obstacles and solutions, thus accelerating the development of urban infrastructure and management on the road to climate neutrality and climate adaptation. As part of this programme, cities with a developmental advantage in a certain area – such as Rotterdam regarding storm surges, or Bogotá when it comes to public transport by bus – support their colleagues in other cities.

New Forms of Influence

There are various interpretations of the increasing rise of inter-city networks and their role within global governance. Some analyses are based on a perspective that sees cities as places whose increasing mass of urban population can be harnessed to make them drivers for the global population overall. Until the 1990s, the rise in the number of city networks may well have remained strongly influenced by this perception. The special role of cities as actors in the implementation of innovative solutions to global problems was recognised in the past few decades. The UN settlement programme HABITAT, for instance, dates back to 1978, and was founded to alleviate the increasing housing shortages.

For the past decade or so, the role of cities has been increasingly analysed from the perspective of global governance, and city networks have been seen more as a piece of a larger puzzle. It is assumed that since about the end of the last century, there has been an ongoing fragmentation of global power distribution away from nation states to new actors. Multinational and transnational companies such as Nestlé, Amazon, and Google, as well as non-governmental organisations such as Greenpeace, can operate outside of national regulatory systems. This development was reinforced by the emergence of global crises, such as the financial crisis of 2007. Questioning the justice of the global economic system and of the Western model of progress – and thus also the role of representatives and actors of this model – has by now grown from a niche into a mainstream theme. In the group of new, transnational actors, cities are increasingly joining in, often represented in global fora by their networks' agents.

The expiration of the Kyoto Protocol for limiting human-induced global warming was also a political crisis that occurred during this period. For years, negotiations for a follow-up agreement at the UN level gave the impression of irreconcilable differences among nation states concerning one of the most urgent challenges

in human history. This vacuum ultimately also affected cities, which had already begun to implement the international agenda at a local level. Without an agreement, there was a lack of clear objectives. Moreover, the refinement of mechanisms for cooperation – for instance, the transfer of know-how and financial resources for the implementation of measures – stalled.

To counteract this development, cities began increasingly to mobilise themselves. In 2012, for instance, during the summit marking the 20-year anniversary of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro that produced Agenda 21, more than 30 megacities from the C40 network met for a parallel summit. Michael Bloomberg, former mayor of New York City and the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Climate Action, warned that neither mayors nor cities had the luxury of sitting around discussing problems. Instead, he announced specific plans and voluntary commitments for cities that wanted to reduce greenhouse gases.¹⁰ By 2015, 392 cities had joined the Compact of Mayors, a network that involved, among other organisations, C40 and ICLEI. At the same time as the 21st UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, these cities voluntarily committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 739 million tonnes per year by 2030 via their construction, transportation, and waste policies. When, in 2015, a compromise was finally reached for a successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol – the Paris Agreement –, many cities and their most prominent networks had already committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and organised themselves as primary players. In the meantime, the first climate action plans have already been drawn up by cities such as New York or Paris; these plans comply with the Paris Agreement on limiting global warming to a rise of less than 1.5 degrees centigrade, and contain both strategies and specific measures for reaching climate neutrality by 2050.

The fact that, at the end of 2017, New York was the first city to propose such a plan may well have to do with the current domestic political situation in the US. When the debate concerning a US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement



began, a coalition of US cities opposed the withdrawal and announced that they would continue to conform to the Agreement. The US president's claim, when announcing the withdrawal in 2017, that he had not been elected to represent the residents of Paris, but those of Pittsburgh, unexpectedly provided the coalition with



Urban swarm: Particularly in Asia and Africa, immigration to major cities is progressing at an enormous pace.
Source: © Johannes Höhn.

additional attention. Pittsburgh's mayor reacted to the announcement with a tweet observing that the US was joining a group that included Russia, Nicaragua, and Syria, which had also announced that they would not comply with the Agreement. He went on to say that he believed that implementing the Agreement was no longer

the responsibility of the US federal government, but of US cities, including Pittsburgh.¹¹

While the Paris Agreement continues to underscore the significance of nation state cooperation, it also emphasises that all levels must cooperate to prevent climate change.¹² In the meantime,

the urban agenda has also found its way into the updated catalogue of goals for global development and is represented in Agenda 2030 as “Goal Category 11: Sustainable cities and communities”. In the so-called New Urban Agenda, a strategy paper that was ratified at the third and most recent World Conference on Urban Development, HABITAT III, in 2016, the UN pursues sustainable and integrated urban development while calling for a strengthening of urban governance, its institutions and mechanisms, and for more effective financing models.¹³

Municipalities are increasingly being given more responsibility in regional areas such as the EU as well. As early as 1992, the Maastricht Treaty stipulated that, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, decisions within the Union should be taken as closely as possible to the citizen. The Lisbon Treaty of 2007, confirmed regional and local self-government. In the “Pact of Amsterdam” the EU recently adopted an urban agenda designed to provide cities with improved opportunities for codetermination. Since last year, there has also been a group representing the interests of cities within the G20, called the U20, or Urban20.

Urban Diplomats on the World’s Stages

With the increasing emergence of networks, a new global community has arisen alongside the traditional networks of nation-state diplomacy. This community is capable of greatly influencing global political decisions.¹⁴ The slogan of the 1992 Local Agenda 21, “Think globally, act locally” is today reversed: “Think locally, act globally”, emphasising the local actor’s claim to play a key part in global policy. This background also characterises the concept of city diplomacy as a form of decentralisation of international relations management.¹⁵ However, there is an enormous variance in the resources that cities invest in international relations. Often, there is an international relations department within municipalities. Sometimes there are entire teams consisting of multiple players that may include an ambassador, and sometimes there is a single person. City networks link up with

these structures, but in some cases also spread further into other administrative units or municipal companies, such as those relating to public transportation or waste management.

Mayors and representatives of city networks present this development as a new self-image for cities, offering cities as the bearers of hope for an innovative form of international cooperation, and thus an additional alternative to cooperation among nation states. The core argument is often that cities can bridge disparate political orientations due to their pragmatic approach at the technical level. Network structures instead of hierarchies allow expertise to be transferred in other ways than just from top to bottom. Depending on project and expertise, cities can learn and share their own knowledge at the same time. The hope is that this will also bridge the global North-South gap, allowing for cooperation to occur on an equal footing. The idea is therefore to use the expertise of cities, on the one hand. Where could one find better-educated and more experienced urban waste management experts than in the cities themselves? At the same time, innovative projects in the Global South can also lead to learning processes in the Global North or in other cities in the South.

Beyond the level of technical cooperation, cooperation among cities promises to become a permanent pillar within the framework of international relations, which, unlike cooperation among nation states, cannot and ought not bear responsibility for core national tasks such as monetary policy and external security. Thus, city networks are in a unique position to use their non-binding, pragmatic character to overcome international conflicts and employ decentralised communication channels to maintain the exchange of ideas at the level of problems and solutions. Cities can thus be part of global governance, enabling the development of an institutional and regulatory system, and new mechanisms of international cooperation, for the continuous management of global challenges and transnational phenomena.¹⁶

The International Urban Agenda in Germany

German cities can look back on a long history of bilateral cooperation at the international level. It is common for lists of partner cities in other countries to appear next to German town signs. German cities are also involved in city networks. There are 20 German members of ICLEI, including larger cities such as Hamburg, but also smaller cities such as Münster or Ludwigsburg, while the organisation itself is headquartered in Bonn. Berlin and Heidelberg are members of C40, and Heidelberg recently joined a group of cities that have voluntarily committed to procuring only emissions-free buses from 2025 as part of an effort to make a large part of the city emissions-free by 2030.¹⁷

The German federal government supports several international city networks.

Organisations such as *Servicestelle Kommunen in der Einen Welt* (Service Agency for Communities in One World, or SKEW) promote the exchange of ideas among German cities in various areas of development cooperation. The German federal government itself already supports several international networks and alliances (ICLEI, Cities Alliance, UCLG, Metropolis, and C40).¹⁸

The *Interministerielle Arbeitskreis Nachhaltige Stadtentwicklung in nationaler und internationaler Perspektive* (IMA Stadt, the Inter-ministerial Working Group for Sustainable Urban Development at the National and International Level) was established in 2015. Its organising principle was that the success of sustainable development must be demonstrated in specific local living environments and that municipalities deserve increasing national and international recognition for their important practical and political functions.¹⁹

The German federal government's urbanisation guidelines, published in 2015, focus on the achievement of international climate goals and on Germany's efforts to actively contribute to sustainable global development, to promote peace and security, and to safeguard human rights. The exchanges of information involved should occur on an equal footing, also allowing the German side to benefit from the experience of its international partners in the sustainable design of urbanisation. The guidelines also criticise the international system's focus on the nation state and recommend that the role of the city should no longer be limited to that of a stakeholder. Urbanisation partnerships, which also follow these guidelines, have existed for several years, for instance, with Brazil and China, and are regularly embedded in government consultations. The urbanisation guidelines also expressly support the international activities of German cities, associations of cities, and federal states in the field of urbanisation.²⁰

Overcome Obstacles, Strengthen Networks

Meanwhile, at least within the fields of environmental and climate policy, the rapid increase in networks appears to be reaching saturation, while the largest networks, such as UCLG and ICLEI, are becoming consolidated.²¹ With respect to the performance of city networks, various studies are currently generating diverse insights: Global city networks appear to have successfully established structures that allow them to organise their own global activities. However, the results regarding actual behavioural change and improvement of environmental conditions are mixed. One possible explanation is the complexity of mastering the social, economic, and political processes at various levels of governance, for which, access to knowledge through networks is fundamental, but insufficient.²² Therefore, the role of city networks as political players, beyond the sphere of technical cooperation, appears even more important. Despite all the progress and efforts to establish cities as players in the global agenda, especially on the part of city networks, their participation is often limited



Playground megacity: Efficient waste management is only one of many challenges concerning urban life.
Source: © Andrew Bira, Reuters.

to a presence in sideshows. It is telling that the voluntary commitment of the cities in Paris was not announced within the conference itself, but within the so-called official side events. Given the importance of cities for socially just, peaceful, sustainable development at all levels of global coexistence, the voices of cities should be an integral component of international negotiations, especially in any area in which they are not only disproportionately affected, but also constitute an important part of the solution.

Furthermore, the extent to which the promotion of cities whose sustainability is already above average can be established in a more comprehensive trend remains unclear. Despite the large

number of cities that are organised into networks, many cities do not belong to any network. This also raises the question of what effects non-participation of many urban actors has on the increasing networking in large parts of the urban world. The contribution of city networks to bridging the global North-South gap ought to be viewed in this context and appears at times to be making only moderate progress.²³ There also appears to be a strong geographical disparity within the EU – between the participation of Western and Eastern European cities and regions.²⁴ In view of the far-reaching effects of urban development in China, India, and various African countries, the future success of networks will depend in part on their ability to reflect the



weight of these cities within their own structures. Providing greater resources that allow cities not only from industrialised nations, but also from nations without a corresponding budget, to actively participate will be a significant deciding factor in their representation within the networks. At the same time, the achievement of sustainable results relies on constant cooperation that goes beyond temporary participation in events. It is not only that municipal enterprises and other institutions for public service have so far been provided insufficient resources to allow them to engage in international cooperation, especially at the level of technical personnel; recognition of the role of cities, including their status as players in development cooperation, has so far been accompanied by very few financial resources that would allow for long-term commitment, such as by means of mentoring processes.

There is no doubt that cities will influence the further course of global development. The realisation that in 2050 nearly 70 per cent of the world's population will live in urban areas allows conclusions to be drawn not only about the geographical distribution of that population, but also its weight in global policy design. Therefore, cities and their actors should not only receive additional support, but their capacities should also be made use of – as technical experts, managers of urban sustainable development, and, not least, as key players for sustainable global development. Cities are already players in the new political architecture that allows new structures to arise and become linked. Additional policy discretion can promote innovative forms of cooperation and effective solutions that do justice to the complexity of current and future challenges.

–translated from German–

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A Salvageable Relationship?

Society and Political Parties
in Latin America

Ángel Arellano

For years, Latin Americans' trust in the established political parties has found itself in a downwards spiral. This brings young movements and political novices to the scene, who have been winning elections all over the continent lately. Nevertheless, doubts are justified as to whether these political outsiders are able to solve the myriad of crises.

"It may be that parties as political institutions gradually disappearing, slowly being replaced by new political structures more suitable for the economic and technological realities of twenty-first-century politics."¹

Latin America has been hit by a wave of corruption scandals that has stained the reputation of state administrations in almost every country in the region. With hundreds of politicians jailed and hundreds more under investigation, these cases have not only shone a light on society's ethical standards by testing the strength of its institutional architecture. They have also shown there is a connection between economic crisis (or at least a slowdown in growth) and the misappropriation of public funds – a link the Internet has done much to publicise. The situation has raised questions about democracy itself and has led to conflict between the system with its governing bodies and political machinery on one side, and newly emerging social movements, political groups and outsider candidates on the other.

What do the latter demand? Some call for urgent, radical change to how politics is conducted, structural reforms to institutions, and improved opportunities for new actors and generations unencumbered by corrupt practices. Others seek recognition and a role in agreeing measures that can be implemented through the existing system. Yet others want to get into government and effect change through new policies.

It is common knowledge that the relationship between political parties and civil society is fraught with complex problems. Today these problems have actually increased exponentially

in the face of social networks having turned into a space, used by a large part of society to argue, ask questions, and/either applaud or condemn what it sees as right or wrong. This sea of subjectivities, in which *post-truth* is the new buzz word, has put public servants and political leaders under permanent scrutiny in a world that is increasingly "transparent" – or at least less opaque.

As a global window on anything that anyone does, the Internet has turned the negative phenomena created by bad action on the part of the government into a powerful body of opinion, which punishes the "bad" in politics on an unprecedented scale. Sartori,² Duverger³ and other theorists taught us that democracy is made possible by political parties. Like society itself, and indeed because of society, political parties continuously change as they strive to become a better version of themselves in order to broaden or maintain their support base in their ongoing quest for power. But globalisation and the exposure of bad political practices via social media have undermined the foundations of that party-base relationship.

In late 2017, *Latinobarómetro* published a study of the political perceptions of over 20,000 people throughout Latin America. It found that even in Uruguay, where society appreciated political parties the most, that level of trust barely reached 25 per cent. The lowest scoring country was Brazil, with seven per cent.⁴

Is the relationship between society and political parties failing? If so, someone else might be filling the void. That possibility raises another question: What is the role of social movements, emerging groups and outsider candidates in contemporary Latin America?

To answer the first question, we must revisit the figures measuring trust in the parties, which have suffered a seemingly inexorable decline since 2011. We must also examine the discouraging figures showing how Latin Americans judge democracy.

Figure 1 measures average levels of trust in political parties over the 1995-2017 period. During those 22 years, the highest point was during the mid-1990s (1996), when the region was plagued by many occurrences of political and economic crises. This score then rapidly declined until 2002, when it began to increase in line with the rising tide of so-called progressive governments throughout Latin America. Only to fall once again in 2011.

The second question concerns the role of social movements, emerging political groups and

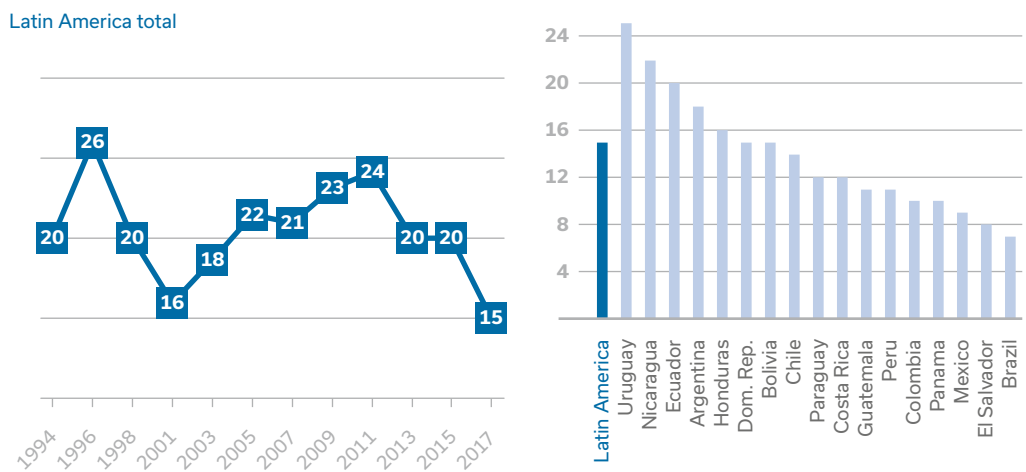
outsider candidates. These actors burst onto the political scene presenting themselves as an alternative to traditional politics and as far removed from corruption and the abuse of power. However, not all of them are new – said categories may include figures who in the past served as elected representatives, stood as candidates or belonged to a party. Nonetheless, their conduct and the way they “do” politics sets them apart from the establishment.

As noted, the scandals surrounding so many leaders are now setting the regional political agenda, with no country escaping the serious accusations levelled against high-ranking politicians and public servants. It is in this context that a space has opened up both for social movements to advocate reforms aimed at cleaning up the system and bringing in new actors, as well as for involving independent personalities in government, too. Let us turn briefly to one such case that will allow us to contextualise this argument.

Uruguay’s *Autoconvocados*

The new social movements emerging in the current juncture give society a non-party voice.⁵

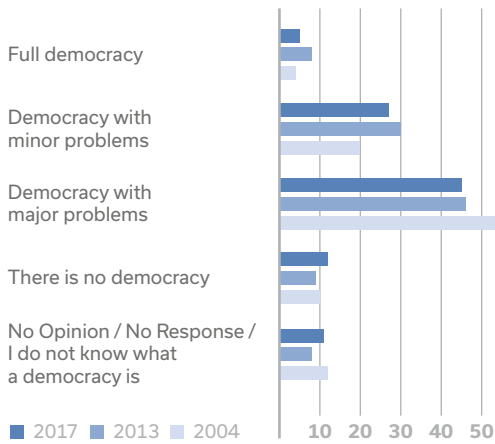
Fig. 1: Trust in Political Parties (in Per Cent)



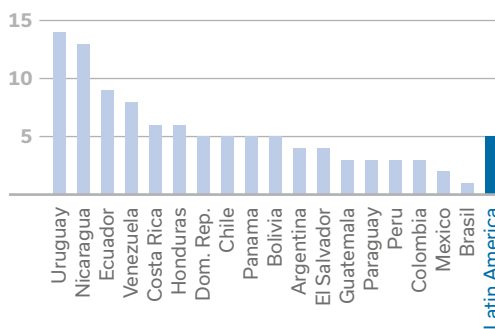
Source: Own illustration based on Corporación Latinobarómetro: Informe 2017, in: <https://bit.ly/2Os1vbE> [1 Oct 2018].

Fig. 2: Evaluating Democracy (in Per Cent)

How would you describe democracy in your country?



Full democracy



Source: Own illustration based on Corporación Latinobarómetro: Informe 2017, in: <https://bit.ly/2Os1vbE> [1 Oct 2018].

They seek to interact directly with decision-makers, exploiting the political opportunity afforded them⁶ and making themselves heard via a mobilising agenda that influences public opinion. One case in point is the movement of the *autoconvocados* (the self-convened) known as *Un Solo Uruguay* (There is only one Uruguay). It first appeared in rural Uruguay at the start of 2018, and it comprises small- to large-scale farmers and ranchers calling for a change to the economic conditions that have stifled growth and generated losses in the sector.

Who could have imagined a social movement on this scale in a country where politicians have

traditionally been linked to the world of farming and cattle breeding, and which stands out as one of the best democracies on the continent?

Un Solo Uruguay's mobilising, action-based agenda was neither initiated nor articulated by parties or producer associations. The party-society link did not function in this case and as a collective behaviour it has expressed itself through protests, vigils, communiqués and alternatives to the usual institutional routes. Playing by the rules but competing on a different terrain with the parties and associations, the *autoconvocados* have achieved widespread recognition and influence in the public opinion. They have used this capital to push for their demands, which not only include economic measures to revitalise rural production, lower fuel and electricity prices, and better conditions for rural entrepreneurs; but also a decline in state spending and an end to government corruption.

This state of affairs arises partly as a result of those in the movement who lie outside the spectrum of traditional parties⁷ but whose involvement in politics is also motivated by electoral ambitions as they seek to take advantage of the situation. Thus, in Uruguay we have the example of Edgardo Novick; a businessman who stood as a mayoral candidate in Montevideo in 2014, and who now hopes to become president through his own party, the *Partido de la Gente* (“the People’s Party”), which identifies with the political centre. Made up of independents as well as leaders from other parties,⁸ it was “borne of a spontaneous clamour on the part of society” and “aims for a transfer of power on the basis that the country is in urgent need of change and transformation”.⁹ That does not, however, mean the *autoconvocados* or similar movements have ended up serving as a platform to directly promote Novick or any other candidate – in fact, they have not managed to get close to any of the presidential favourites. Rather, what we seek to show is that such situations collaterally open a window of opportunity for an outsider discourse centred on renewing political parties, reforming the state, cleaning up public institutions, making



Sitting on a volcano: The risk of a violent escalation amongst the population increases if politicians do not manage to solve pressing social ills. Source: © Carlos Garcia Rawlins, Reuters.

public service honourable again and enabling new faces to enter into politics. Thus, the likes of the *Partido de la Gente* invariably gain a certain amount of ground in circumstances where the traditional parties fail to act as a bridge between social demands and the State.

Thus, the winner of the next presidential election in Uruguay will almost certainly be an established political leader. But there is mounting evidence to suggest that we cannot rule out the possibility of actors currently outside the mainstream parties taking centre stage in the future.



The end of an era: In 2015, there was finally change in Argentina after 13 years of Kirchnerism.
Source: © Martin Acosta, Reuters.

The Outsiders: Different Terrain, Same Game

Peruvian journalist Gustavo Gorriti describes the outsider politician as a “stranger to the system, like the character in an old Western who rides into town and leaves his mark”.¹⁰ Rodríguez, on the other hand, describes outsider candidates as: “Firstly, those candidates who stand for election without any previous experience in politics, and therefore come to it from elsewhere, from different professional backgrounds. Secondly, politicians who do not follow or appear to reject traditional political conventions, presenting themselves as an alternative or as a critic of established practices. And finally, with everything against them and little hope of becoming elected, they manage to get ahead and win.”¹¹

Electing an outsider is becoming the norm across many countries afflicted by serious political and economic crises. One-time Buenos Aires mayor Mauricio Macri was elected President of Argentina on the back of a coalition of parties and movements at odds with the system, which, among other things, called for sweeping changes after thirteen years of *kirchnerismo*. Other figures then began to appear across the region. They include Jimmy Morales, the businessman, actor and comedian who became president of Guatemala, and Lorenzo Mendoza, a successful Venezuelan industrialist who was topping local opinion polls without ever confirming his presidential bid.¹² Also heading that way is regional giant Brazil, where the whole of the political spectrum is in deep crisis. Outsiders popular with Brazilian voters are not a new occurrence: the number of sports personalities and celebrities entering the political arena has been

on the rise for some time; the most prominent amongst them are ex footballer Romario (senator) and comedian Tiririca (federal deputy). But now such figures are aiming higher, setting their sights on the office of president. Entrepreneur and television host Luciano Huck, whose popularity is partly explained by his much-watched programme on the influential *TV Globo* channel, enjoys an enviable 43 million followers on social media and the support of Fernando Henrique Cardoso – one of the region’s most well-liked former presidents. With Huck, the idea of an outsider president has begun to gain momentum in Brazil. Even when he refused to take part in the presidential race,¹³ it was clear that his potential candidacy was quick to attract support. Hence, the surveys of voting intentions put him on eight per cent¹⁴ as expectations of him standing for office grew between January and February 2018. A similar case is that of João Dória Júnior, the TV presenter and businessman elected mayor of São Paulo in 2016 and who is now another non-traditional politician in the running for president.

The electoral success of political outsiders has long ceased to be an exceptional phenomenon.

Donald Trump’s election as US President set a milestone in the rise of outsiders to the top positions in global politics. Trump is essentially the most important outsider in politics today, and his victory has once again highlighted the part played by figures from outside the status quo all over the world. For instance, a poll carried out in the US in January this year, revealed that if Oprah Winfrey were to stand as presidential candidate, she would be backed by 50 per cent of those surveyed.¹⁵

Elsewhere, the majority of candidates standing as deputies in Honduras’ last two electoral contests came from outside the traditional parties.¹⁶ In Paraguay, cumbia singer Nadia Portillo stood for the Chamber of Deputies whilst rancher

Fidel Zavala, famous for being kidnapped by Paraguayan People’s Army guerrillas, ran for Senate. In Chile’s last presidential elections, the Broad Front (left) candidate, Beatriz Sánchez, came not from party ranks but from a background in journalism instead. And in Costa Rica, evangelical singer and conservative candidate Fabricio Alvarado even won the first round of the presidential elections earlier this year, to be later defeated in the run-off.

Mexico is another country that is no stranger to this phenomenon. Former Mexico City mayor Andrés Manuel López Obrador recently made his third bid for president, this time on behalf of the newly created National Regeneration Movement. His victory, on the back of a radical discourse that targeted the traditional political system, has generated huge uncertainty concerning that system’s immediate future. Mexico is in fact teeming with outsider figures. One of the most interesting is 28-year-old Pedro Kumamoto, the first independent legislator for the state of Jalisco, who contested a seat in the national Senate in the country’s most recent elections. Kumamoto is a member of *Wikipolítica*, a left-wing youth movement founded in 2013 that provides a platform for young independent candidates in state and federal elections and which seeks to change traditional politics by winning elected positions. According to Roberto Castillo, a former *Wikipolítica* candidate to Mexico City’s Legislative Assembly: “Growing up in a country governed by the PRI [Institutional Revolutionary Party], we thought there was only one way to do politics [...]. That meant the politics of cronyism, with personal relationships trumping meritocracy, achievements, education or leadership skills. They convinced us that was the correct and morally acceptable way.”¹⁷

Outsiders are making noise throughout Latin America, attacking the traditional political class and adopting different strategies to those used by older parties. They propagate the idea that outsiders can resolve issues that career politicians cannot, because the latter are implicated in corruption scandals, are incompetent or accountable for poor outcomes when in government.

Being an outsider is no guarantee of positive outcomes when in government.

But is that really the case? Can the region's various political crises be fixed simply by putting a brand new leader in charge? We cannot know for sure, but the experiences are there for all to see. Salvadoran journalist Mauricio Funes, who began his political career only shortly before being elected president, is currently exiled in Nicaragua while his country's justice system investigates him for illicit enrichment and embezzlement. In Guatemala, Jimmy Morales has also been accused of corruption, and his popularity ratings have dipped below 17 per cent. Meanwhile Donald Trump's approval rating

averaged 39 per cent in his first year in office, the lowest ever for a US president over that period. Being an outsider is no guarantee of popularity. Neither does it guarantee positive outcomes when in government. It merely represents a different route to power.

High levels of disapproval of the political class are a feature throughout Latin America. The *Latinobarómetro* survey referred to earlier shows how little political parties are trusted in the region, and its message is loud and clear: The way politics is conducted needs to be rethought and greater efforts are required to re-establish the points of contact between society and formal political organisations. The bridge connecting voters and their elected officials is no longer fit for purpose. The Internet and social networks have uncovered deplorable events that have damaged the relationship between the people



Prototype: Donald Trump's victory shows how extreme outsiders can shake up established democracies.

Source: © Mike Segar, Reuters.

and their representatives. But politics is the art of the possible, and it can use the tools at hand to rebuild that link and reengage with society. It is a tough, complex job and one that will require many sacrifices.

Yet, one thing is clear: Traditional politics no longer has a place in an ever-changing world. The challenge facing the region's political leaders is to adapt to new realities, restore the reputation of political parties as binding and necessary democratic institutions, and prepare to play their role in the uncertain future that lies ahead.

-translated from Spanish-

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- 2 Sartori, Giovanni 1980: *Partidos y sistemas de partidos*, Madrid.
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- 5 French sociologist Alain Touraine argues that a social movement is “the collective, organized behaviour of an agent who is fighting an adversary for the social stewardship of historicity in a concrete collectivity”. Cf. Touraine, Alain 2006: *Los movimientos sociales*, in: *Revista Colombiana de Sociología* No.27, pp. 255–278. Translation into English: Curtin, Faith, in: <https://bit.ly/2C3YO9D> [30 Aug 2018].
- 6 Doug McAdam theorises political opportunities as “opportunities afforded insurgents by the shifting institutional structure and ideological disposition of those in power”. Cf. McAdam, Doug 1996: *Orígenes terminológicos, problemas actuales y futuras líneas de investigación*, in: Mc Adam, Doug / Mc Carthy, John D. / Zald, Mayer (Hrsg.): *Movimientos sociales, perspectivas comparadas: oportunidades políticas, estructuras de movilización y marcos interpretativos culturales*, Madrid, pp. 49–70.
- 7 In this context we would consider the traditional parties to be the Colorado Party (founded 1836), National Party (1836) and Broad Front (1971), which have all governed Uruguay in the past.
- 8 Some on the Uruguayan political spectrum regard the centre as a threat to the democratic system. Thus for Senator Constanza Moreira, a member of the leftist Broad Front, “It is a conceptual and, what is worse, a political error. The conceptual error lies in thinking that those in the ‘centre’ are ‘politically moderate’, when almost by definition the centre is where those with no interest in politics all end up [...]. If politics is the art of taking sides, then the search for the centre is the art of avoiding doing just that.” Cf. Abelando, Victor Hugo 2018: *Los candidatos deben ser de la generación de relevo*, *Brecha*, 16 Feb 2018, p. 3.
- 9 Cf. Partido de la Gente 2016: *Declaración de principios*, in: <http://novick.com.uy/partido> [20 Aug 2018].
- 10 Cf. *El Comercio* 2018: *Análisis: la anatomía del outsider*, 8 Mar 2018, in: <https://bit.ly/2Mp8X76> [20 Aug 2018].
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- 12 It is worth noting that although in some countries outsiders have begun to tilt the electoral balance in their favour, or at least influence voting preferences before the day of reckoning (whether or not they then change), there is enough evidence to indicate that this does not necessarily produce corruption-free governments, which are successful in economic and political terms.
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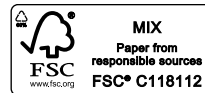
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