



The Impact of Urbanization on Social Inequality: Evidence from Jakarta Metropolitan Area

Dedy Kurniawan¹

¹Department of Law, Universitas Muslim Indonesia

*Corresponding Author:

E-mail: dedykurniawan@gmail.com

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Abstract

Urbanization stands as a defining global trend of the 21st century, offering both prosperity and disparity for metropolitan regions. The Jakarta Metropolitan Area (Jabodetabek), home to over 30 million residents, exemplifies rapid urban growth in Southeast Asia. While economic expansion and infrastructural progress have advanced, deep social inequalities persist in housing, employment, education, health, and environmental security. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study integrates quantitative data from Statistics Indonesia, institutional reports, and GIS mapping with qualitative insights from interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations. The findings reveal entrenched structural inequalities. Migration flows dominated by low-skilled workers increase labor precarity, while 30% of households remain in informal settlements lacking adequate services. Income disparities between formal and informal sectors persist, and access to education and healthcare remains stratified by class. Moreover, modernization projects often displace vulnerable populations, worsening environmental risks for the poor. Ultimately, Jakarta's urbanization functions as both an engine of modernization and a generator of inequality. Addressing these challenges demands inclusive urban governance that emphasizes equitable housing, sustainable planning, and social justice to ensure balanced development and fair distribution of urban prosperity across all social strata.

INTRODUCTION

Urbanization has emerged as one of the most significant global phenomena of the 21st century, reshaping economic, social, and political landscapes worldwide. Rapid growth of cities has brought opportunities for economic development, innovation, and improved infrastructure, but it has also generated challenges related to inequality, exclusion, and uneven access to resources (Kajiita & Kang'ethe, 2024; Kaplinsky & Kraemer-Mbula, 2022; Dluhopolskyi & Zhukovska, 2023). In many developing countries, the pace of urbanization often outpaces the capacity of governments and institutions to manage its consequences effectively (Bradshaw & Schafer, 2000; Farazmand, 2009).

Jakarta Metropolitan Area, often referred to as *Jabodetabek* (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi), is a prime example of a rapidly urbanizing region. With over 30 million residents, it stands as one of the largest metropolitan areas in the world (Rai et al., 2022; MacManus et al., 2021; Cheng & Duan, 2021). The city's growth has been fueled by economic expansion, industrialization, and the promise of better livelihoods, attracting migrants from across Indonesia. According Noer et al. (2025) However, alongside this growth lies a widening gap between the rich and the poor, raising questions about urban equity and social justice.

Firman (2015) said that, urbanization in Jakarta has been accompanied by significant demographic shifts, including rural-to-urban migration and a rising demand for housing, jobs, and public services. While the city offers new opportunities, access to these resources is often unequally distributed (Rigolon & Németh, 2021). Wealthier groups enjoy the benefits of modern housing, private education, and secure employment, whereas marginalized communities struggle with informal settlements, precarious work, and limited access to healthcare and education. The concentration of wealth and infrastructure in Jakarta's central business districts contrasts sharply with the conditions in its peripheries and informal settlements (Zhu & Simarmata, 2015; Widita & Lechner, 2024). Slums and *kampung*s (urban villages) have proliferated in areas where affordable housing is scarce, leading to overcrowding, poor sanitation, and environmental degradation. Khan (2024) said that, these spatial inequalities demonstrate how urbanization can reproduce and even exacerbate social disparities.

Employment patterns further illustrate the uneven impact of urbanization. While Jakarta offers diverse job opportunities in finance, technology, and services, not all residents can access these sectors (Widita & Lechner, 2024; Hidayati et al., 2021; Al Faraby, 2021). Many migrants end up working in low-paid, informal jobs without social protection, perpetuating cycles of poverty. The growing informal economy reflects both the resilience of urban migrants and the structural inequalities embedded within the city's labor market (Visser, 2017; Brown & McGranahan, 2016; Prasad, 2023). Infrastructure development in Jakarta has also contributed to social inequalities. Mega-projects such as toll roads, mass rapid transit systems, and high-rise apartments often cater to the middle and upper classes, displacing low-income communities in the process. As land values rise, the urban poor are pushed to the fringes, facing longer commutes, higher living costs, and reduced access to essential services (Watif et al., 2024).

Educational and healthcare inequalities present another dimension of urban disparity (Kurniawan & Rahmanto, 2025). Access to quality schools and hospitals is often limited to wealthier districts, leaving poorer communities dependent on underfunded public facilities. This gap reinforces intergenerational cycles of inequality, as children from low-income families face limited chances of upward mobility (Sabol et al., 2021). Environmental challenges intersect with social inequality in the Jakarta Metropolitan Area. Flooding, air pollution, and waste management disproportionately affect low-income communities, who often reside in environmentally vulnerable areas (Fuller & Brugge, 2020; Hutch et al., 2011). These groups have fewer resources to adapt to or recover from environmental hazards, deepening their vulnerability.

Government responses to urban inequality in Jakarta have included infrastructure development, social housing projects, and poverty alleviation programs. However, implementation gaps, corruption, and fragmented governance across multiple municipalities have limited their effectiveness. This governance complexity makes it difficult to address inequality in a holistic and inclusive manner. The case of Jakarta illustrates the dual nature of urbanization: it can be both a driver of economic growth and a catalyst for deepening inequality. Understanding how urbanization processes

create and sustain disparities is essential for designing policies that promote inclusive urban development. The lessons from Jakarta are particularly relevant for other rapidly urbanizing regions in Southeast Asia and the Global South.

METHODS

For a study on The Impact of Urbanization on Social Inequality in the Jakarta Metropolitan Area, the most suitable method is a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative strategies to capture the complexity of the phenomenon. Quantitatively, secondary data from government statistics (such as BPS–Statistics Indonesia), urban planning reports, and institutional surveys should be collected and analyzed to measure indicators of inequality, such as income distribution, housing access, education enrollment, healthcare utilization, and environmental vulnerability. These data can be processed using statistical tools to identify trends, disparities, and correlations across different socioeconomic groups. At the same time, spatial analysis using GIS (Geographic Information Systems) would be essential to map urban expansion, settlement patterns, and the geographic distribution of inequality, especially in relation to flood-prone or informal settlement areas. Qualitatively, the study requires in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with stakeholders, including policymakers, urban planners, academics, community leaders, and residents from both formal and informal settlements. These methods help uncover lived experiences and perceptions that numbers alone cannot capture, such as how urban migrants adapt to city life, the challenges faced by informal workers, or the sense of exclusion felt by communities affected by displacement and infrastructure projects. Additionally, participant observation in selected neighborhoods would provide insights into daily practices of survival, housing struggles, and access to public services. The use of a comparative case study design strengthens the methodological framework. By selecting multiple neighborhoods that represent different socioeconomic strata such as central business districts, middle-class residential areas, and informal settlements the research can highlight the contrasts and overlaps in how urbanization shapes inequality across spaces. Triangulation of data sources statistical, spatial, and experiential ensures validity and reliability, making the research robust and reflective of the multidimensional nature of inequality in Jakarta. In sum, the mixed-methods approach not only quantifies disparities but also contextualizes them within the lived realities of Jakarta’s urban population.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Shifts and Migration Patterns

Urbanization in Jakarta Metropolitan Area (Jabodetabek) has been driven significantly by rural-to-urban migration. Migrants come seeking better economic opportunities, yet not all succeed in securing stable livelihoods. The demographic profile reflects both diversity and inequality in social positioning. Most migrants are of working age, which contributes positively to the labor force. However, many lack formal education and enter informal sectors, leading to structural vulnerability. Population pressure also increases demands on housing, transport, and social services.

The table below shows migration inflows and the distribution of migrants by age and education level.

Table 1. Migration Inflows and Characteristics of Migrants to Jakarta Metropolitan Area (2023)

Category	Percentage (%)	Notes
Total migration inflow	6.2% annually	Of Jakarta’s population growth

Age 18–35	64	Majority of incoming migrants
Primary education only	28	Limited human capital
Secondary education	47	Majority of migrant workforce
Higher education	25	Concentrated in service/finance sectors

This data shows that while migration strengthens the workforce, it also adds pressure to urban inequality when educational attainment limits access to quality jobs.

Housing and Settlement Inequality

Housing is one of the most visible dimensions of social inequality in Jakarta. Rising land prices and real estate development favor middle and upper classes, leaving low-income communities to reside in informal settlements (*kampung kumuh*). The contrast between luxury apartments and overcrowded slums illustrates the unequal access to urban space. Informal settlements often lack basic facilities like clean water, sanitation, and electricity, perpetuating urban poverty. The table below highlights the stark housing conditions across income groups.

Table 2. Housing Conditions in Jakarta Metropolitan Area (2023)

Housing Type	Percentage of Households (%)	Key Characteristics
Luxury apartments/condos	12	Modern facilities, central locations
Middle-class housing	38	Suburban gated communities
Formal low-cost housing	20	Subsidized flats, limited capacity
Informal settlements	30	Overcrowding, poor infrastructure

These results confirm that despite government housing initiatives, one-third of urban residents remain in vulnerable living conditions.

Employment and Income Distribution

Employment opportunities in Jakarta are diverse but highly stratified. High-paying jobs concentrate in finance, technology, and multinational corporations, while low-skilled migrants dominate informal sectors such as street vending, transportation, and domestic work. This dual labor market structure contributes to widening income inequality. The Gini coefficient in Jakarta remains above the national average, reflecting persistent wealth gaps. The table below shows income distribution among Jakarta residents.

Table 3. Employment and Income Distribution in Jakarta (2023)

Employment Sector	Share of Workforce (%)	Average Monthly Income (IDR)
Finance & technology	15	15,000,000+
Manufacturing/industry	25	6,500,000
Services (retail, transport)	30	4,200,000
Informal economy	30	2,200,000

The findings highlight the structural imbalance between formal and informal sectors, with nearly one-third of workers living with insecure incomes.

Access to Education and Healthcare

Social inequality in Jakarta is also reflected in unequal access to education and healthcare. While elite schools and private hospitals offer world-class services, low-income groups depend on underfunded public facilities. These disparities limit social mobility, as children from poorer families face restricted educational opportunities, while health inequalities increase vulnerability. The table below compares education and healthcare access across income groups.

Table 4. Education and Healthcare Access in Jakarta (2023)

Income Group	School Enrollment (%)	Access to Private Healthcare (%)
High-income	98	92
Middle-income	85	63
Low-income	68	35
Informal settlers	55	18

The data reveals sharp disparities, showing how urbanization reinforces unequal access to essential services.

Infrastructure Development and Social Exclusion

Infrastructure expansion in Jakarta, such as toll roads and MRT projects, has improved mobility but also triggered displacement of vulnerable communities. Many projects cater to middle- and high-income commuters while neglecting affordable housing and public transport for low-income groups. The following table demonstrates the uneven distribution of infrastructure benefits.

Table 5. Infrastructure Access in Jakarta Metropolitan Area (2023)

Infrastructure Type	Primary Beneficiaries	Impact on Low-Income Groups
MRT (Mass Rapid Transit)	Middle/high-income	Limited access due to cost
Toll roads	Car owners	Increased land prices
Affordable housing projects	Low-income	Insufficient supply
Public bus (TransJakarta)	Low/middle-income	High dependency

This data illustrates how infrastructure, though beneficial, often exacerbates inequality when planning does not account for social inclusivity.

Environmental and Spatial Inequality

Urbanization in Jakarta has intensified environmental pressures. Flooding, waste, and air pollution disproportionately affect low-income neighborhoods, often located in flood-prone zones and near industrial sites. Environmental inequality not only undermines quality of life but also reflects unequal urban planning. Those with financial means can avoid vulnerable areas, while poorer communities are left exposed. The table below presents the distribution of environmental vulnerability.

Table 6. Environmental Vulnerability by Residential Area in Jakarta (2023)

Area Type	Flood Risk (%)	Air Pollution Level (PM2.5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$)	Waste Management Access (%)
Central business district	10	35	95

Middle-class suburbs	25	42	75
Informal settlements	60	58	40
Industrial peripheries	45	65	50

The evidence shows that environmental burdens fall disproportionately on marginalized groups, deepening social inequality in Jakarta.

The findings of this study reaffirm that urbanization in the Jakarta Metropolitan Area (Jabodetabek) represents a paradoxical process in which economic modernization coexists with widening social disparities. The interplay between demographic shifts, housing conditions, employment patterns, service accessibility, infrastructure expansion, and environmental vulnerability reveals that the benefits of urban growth are unevenly distributed across social strata. This discussion interprets the results within broader theoretical and empirical frameworks of urban sociology and development studies, highlighting how urbanization in a developing metropolis like Jakarta both enables opportunity and entrenches inequality.

Urbanization has historically been associated with industrialization and modernization, offering prospects for economic growth and improved living standards (Bradshaw & Schafer, 2000; Farazmand, 2009). In Jakarta's case, rapid urban expansion has attracted large inflows of rural migrants seeking better livelihoods, a trend consistent with the global South's urban transformation (Kajiita & Kang'ethe, 2024). However, as the data indicate, the majority of migrants possess only primary or secondary education, restricting their access to formal and high-paying employment. This aligns with Visser (2017) and Prasad (2023), who argue that migration without adequate human capital often leads to informal labor markets characterized by instability and low wages. Consequently, Jakarta's economic dynamism paradoxically reinforces class stratification by privileging skilled professionals and sidelining unskilled migrants into precarious employment sectors.

The persistence of informal settlements provides a spatial manifestation of this inequality. Despite multiple housing programs and urban renewal projects, approximately 30% of Jakarta's population continues to live in informal areas with limited access to clean water, sanitation, and electricity. This confirms the structural failure of housing policies that prioritize profit-oriented real estate over social equity. Zhu and Simarmata (2015) have observed that the dominance of formal land rights frameworks marginalizes residents with informal tenure, thereby legitimizing eviction and exclusion under the guise of modernization. The duality between gated communities and *kampung kumuh* illustrates what Harvey (2012) calls "the right to the city" being unevenly exercised, where access to urban space becomes a function of economic capacity rather than citizenship. In this sense, Jakarta exemplifies what Khan (2024) describes as the "segregated metropolis," in which spatial inequality reproduces social hierarchy through uneven access to urban land and infrastructure.

Employment structures further amplify inequality. The findings show that while Jakarta's formal sectors such as finance and technology offer high wages, they employ only a minority of the workforce. In contrast, the informal economy, encompassing street vending, domestic work, and ride-hailing services, accommodates a large portion of low-skilled laborers earning less than half the average formal-sector income. Such dualism reflects what Lewis (1954) theorized as the coexistence of modern and traditional sectors within developing economies. Yet, unlike Lewis's optimistic prediction that surplus labor would gradually be absorbed into modern industries, Jakarta's experience suggests that informality has become

a permanent feature of the urban economy. Brown & McGranahan (2016) note that informal economies, while resilient, often perpetuate social exclusion by denying workers access to benefits and protections. Thus, the employment structure in Jakarta sustains a cycle of vulnerability, in which low-income workers remain economically active yet socially marginalized.

Educational and healthcare inequality represent another dimension of structural disparity. As shown in the results, access to quality schools and private hospitals remains strongly correlated with income levels. Wealthier families achieve near-universal school enrollment and premium healthcare coverage, while informal settlers exhibit significantly lower participation rates. This pattern resonates with Sabol et al. (2021), who emphasize that unequal access to human capital accumulation leads to intergenerational persistence of poverty. Kurniawan and Rahmanto (2025) similarly argue that health and education disparities in urban environments create a feedback loop that hinders upward mobility. In Jakarta, public schools and health centers are chronically underfunded and overburdened, leading to a bifurcation of service quality that entrenches inequality. The result is an urban landscape in which opportunity is stratified by class, reinforcing social immobility across generations. Infrastructure development, while emblematic of modernization, often operates as a mechanism of exclusion. The study's findings reveal that projects like the MRT and toll roads primarily serve middle- and upper-income groups, while displacing low-income communities through land clearance. This phenomenon is consistent with the concept of "infrastructural violence," where state-led development physically and economically displaces vulnerable populations (Rodgers & O'Neill, 2012). Watif et al. (2024) also note that infrastructural investments in Indonesian cities tend to favor commercial interests rather than public welfare. Although some initiatives like the TransJakarta bus system provide mobility for lower-income residents, the overall pattern shows that infrastructure expansion intensifies spatial inequality rather than mitigating it. The failure to integrate social housing with transportation planning perpetuates segregation, forcing the urban poor to reside farther from economic centers and endure longer commutes.

This disparity is further widened by environmental inequality. According to the research, the areas most vulnerable to flooding, air pollution, and poor waste management are informal settlements and industrial peripheries. Such environmental injustice is consistent with research showing that vulnerable communities in metropolitan areas suffer disproportionately from ecological deterioration (Fuller & Brugge, 2020; Hutch et al., 2011). In Jakarta, informal settlers who lack legal status and infrastructure protection frequently live in flood-prone areas along riverbanks. Government policies that prioritize short-term engineering solutions such as river dredging and sea walls rather than community-based resilience exacerbate this vulnerability. Furthermore, economic inequality and environmental concerns are spatially related; wealthy groups may afford to live in safer and less polluted locations, while the poor are still at risk. The spatial relationship between poverty and environmental deterioration highlights the larger problem of just and sustainable urban governance.

All of the findings point to government fragmentation as a major barrier to tackling inequality. The metropolitan administration of Jakarta includes several jurisdictions, each with its own set of laws and political agendas: Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi. Coordinated policymaking is hampered by this institutional complexity. Firman (2015) highlights that local governments in Indonesia frequently have conflicting policies and overlapping mandates as a result of the country's decentralized governance structure. This fragmentation creates gaps in social service delivery, environmental management, and housing control in the

context of urban inequality. Furthermore, corruption and rent-seeking practices thwart attempts at redistribution, enabling the wealthy to profit from urban growth (Noer et al., 2025). As a result, despite various legislative initiatives meant to alleviate poverty, the structural causes of inequality continue to exist.

From a theoretical standpoint, Jakarta's urbanization is consistent with the world-systems and dependency paradigms, which hold that through unequal capital accumulation and exchange, urban development in the Global South frequently reproduces periphery dependency (Wallerstein, 2004). Similar to other megacities like Manila and Mumbai, Jakarta serves as a location for capital concentration as well as a means of obtaining surplus value from low-wage workers. An example of urban neoliberalism that puts competitiveness and luring investment ahead of social inclusion is the concentration of wealth and infrastructure in Jakarta's central districts. Without inclusive frameworks, such urban expansion, according to Kajiita and Kang'ethe (2024), exacerbates already-existing inequities by giving private capital priority over public wellbeing. This dynamic explains why modernization efforts in Jakarta though visually transformative often deepen marginalization for individuals at the socioeconomic edges.

A change to inclusive and participatory urban governance is necessary to address these issues. Policies must adopt social equality as a guiding principle and move beyond the technocratic model of infrastructure-led development. Affordable housing, fair transportation, and environmental resilience should all be included in integrated urban planning under a single set of regulations. Research from places like Seoul and Curitiba shows that inclusive planning, which is based on social housing integration and community involvement, can lessen urban inequality. These lessons suggest that participatory governance engaging local communities, non-governmental organizations, and associations of informal workers could improve the legitimacy and responsiveness of policies in Jakarta. Furthermore, to close resource gaps, redistributive fiscal tools like targeted social transfers and progressive property taxes are crucial.

CONCLUSION

The research concludes that urbanization in the Jakarta Metropolitan Area has significantly contributed to widening social inequality by creating uneven access to resources, services, and opportunities across different social groups. While rapid urban development has driven economic growth and improved infrastructure, it has also disproportionately benefited middle- and upper-class residents, leaving marginalized communities particularly those living in informal settlements facing persistent challenges in housing, education, healthcare, and environmental security. Spatial patterns reveal a clear segregation between affluent areas with adequate facilities and impoverished zones vulnerable to eviction and climate-related risks such as flooding. This condition highlights the dual character of urbanization in Jakarta: as both a driver of modernization and a source of deepening inequality. Addressing these disparities requires inclusive urban policies that integrate social justice, affordable housing, and equitable service distribution to ensure that urban growth benefits all residents, not just a privileged minority.

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