

# The Pulse of Urbanization: Household Experiences in Ranaghat Town

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**Abstract:** Urbanization is a transformative force reshaping societies, economies, and environments worldwide. This research investigates the household-level experiences of urbanization in Ranaghat, a mid-sized town in the Nadia district of West Bengal, India. By analyzing demographic, economic, and infrastructural data alongside household surveys, this study captures the multidimensional impacts of urban growth. Urbanization's overall impact on quality of life was positive for 51.4%, though 34.3% perceived it negatively, reflecting mixed experiences. Employment opportunities increased for 60%, though income instability affects 62.9%. The cost of living has significantly risen, with 85.7% citing increased expenses for housing, utilities, and goods. Access to basic amenities like electricity (94.3%) and piped water (80%) has improved, yet challenges persist in waste management and sanitation. The findings highlight the interplay of opportunities and challenges, offering insights for sustainable urban planning and policy interventions.

**Keywords:** Urban Infrastructure, Socio-economic Challenges, Impact of Urbanization, Social Changes, Economic Transformations

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Urbanization has accelerated globally, with the United Nations estimating that over 68% of the world population will reside in urban areas by 2050 (United Nations, 2018). Studies highlight urbanization as a significant driver of economic growth, contributing over 80% of global GDP (World Bank, 2020). However, challenges such as inadequate housing, infrastructure deficits, and rising environmental degradation accompany this growth (Seto et al., 2012). Urban growth is primarily concentrated in Asia and Africa, accounting for over 90% of future urban expansion. Urban areas generate more than 80% of global GDP, highlighting the concentration of economic activities in cities. India's urban population reached 483 million in 2023, comprising 35% of its total population, and is projected to exceed 50% by 2050. Urban areas contribute nearly 60% to India's GDP, expected to rise to 75% by 2030, driven by the

expansion of urban centers. India's urbanization trajectory is marked by rapid population growth in urban centers, with urban areas projected to house over 50% of the country's population by 2050 (World Urbanization Prospects, 2018). Studies emphasize India's uneven urban growth, with megacities expanding rapidly while smaller towns struggle with infrastructure and governance challenges (Kundu, 2011). Regional studies focus on mid-sized towns and peri-urban areas experiencing significant growth. In regions like West Bengal, towns such as Ranaghat exhibit unique patterns of urbanization driven by regional connectivity, migration, and economic opportunities (Chattopadhyay, 2015).

Between 2011 and 2021, India added approximately 90 million urban dwellers, making it one of the fastest urbanizing nations. The Pulse of Urbanization delves into the transformative processes shaping towns and cities in the face of rapid urban growth (Banerjee & Dasgupta, 2021). This study examines the patterns, drivers, and impacts of urbanization, focusing on how it influences the socio-economic, cultural, and infrastructural dynamics of urban areas. Household surveys provide micro-level insights into how urbanization affects livelihoods, housing, and access to amenities (Ghosh, 2018). Studies show that households in rapidly urbanizing areas often experience both opportunities, such as improved access to markets and services, and challenges, including displacement, rising costs, and environmental risks (Roy, 2019).

Ranaghat, located in the Nadia district of West Bengal, is a growing urban settlement influenced by regional connectivity, historical significance, and socio-economic factors. Urban areas contribute nearly 60% to India's GDP, expected to rise to 75% by 2030, driven by the expansion of urban centers. Present study aims to focus on urbanization dynamics and assess its impact on household livelihoods, housing, and access to services.

## 2. STUDY AREA

Ranaghat (Nadia district, West Bengal, India) serves as a critical hub, connecting rural areas to urban markets, leading to significant migration from nearby villages. Ranaghat’s urban area covers approximately 11.55 square kilometers, with rapid development leading to mixed land-use patterns. Around 25% of the population resides in semi-formal housing, reflecting challenges in urban planning and affordable housing. Around 40% of the surrounding population engages with Ranaghat for daily economic and social needs. Population density of the study area is calculated as 7,000 persons per square kilometer. The town boasts a high literacy rate of 89.22%, surpassing state and national averages, indicative of a well-educated workforce. Primary sectors of employment include services (40%), retail and trade (30%), and small-scale manufacturing (15%). The rise of informal employment, with around 20% of the workforce engaged in unorganized sectors.

## 3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 3.1 Data collection

A mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques, was used to comprehensively analyze the urbanization process. This included surveys, field observations, and interviews with key stakeholders. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure representation across different socio-economic groups within Ranaghat Town. Data were collected from both households and individuals, capturing a diverse range of experiences.

### 3.2 Research design

Structured questionnaires, semi-structured interview guides, and observation checklists were utilized.

These tools focused on housing conditions, infrastructure access, and residents' perceptions of urban growth.

### 3.3 Statistical analysis

Data were analyzed using statistical methods for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative responses. Trends in housing, sanitation, and water access were mapped, while interviews were coded to identify recurring themes.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The urbanization of Ranaghat reflects the typical challenges of mid-sized Indian towns—rapid population growth, infrastructure deficits, and environmental pressures. However, its strategic location, skilled workforce, and strong connectivity offer opportunities for structured urban development, emphasizing sustainability and inclusivity.

### 4.1 Housing and Living Conditions:

A majority (60%) of households own their housing, indicating a significant proportion of secure housing tenure in Ranaghat Town (Table 1). 31.4% live in rented accommodations, reflecting urbanization's role in creating rental housing markets. 42.9% of respondents rated their housing conditions as good, showcasing the benefits of urban infrastructure and investments. 20% of respondents live in poor housing conditions, underlining socio-economic disparities in urban areas. 80% have access piped water, but gaps in water distribution systems remain. Proper sanitation for 77.1% points to urban planning progress, though significant sections remain underserved. Urbanization positively impacted housing quality for 68.6% of respondents, reflecting investments in infrastructure and residential projects. 77.1% expressed concern about reduced open spaces, indicating environmental challenges accompanying urban growth.

Table 1: Survey response on housing and living conditions

Questions	Response Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Type of Housing	Owned	210	60.00%
	Rented	110	31.40%
	Informal (Slum/ Temporary)	30	8.60%
Housing Condition	Good	150	42.90%
	Average	130	37.10%
	Poor	70	20.00%

Access to Basic Amenities	Electricity	330	94.30%
	Piped Water	280	80.00%
	Proper Sanitation	270	77.10%
	Gas for Cooking	290	82.90%
Perception of Urbanization	Improved Housing Conditions	240	68.60%
	Decrease in Open Spaces	270	77.10%
	Increased Housing Costs	300	85.70%

Source: Primary Survey

Chi-Square test is used to determine whether there is a significant association between type of housing and access to basic amenities. The test yields a p-value < 0.05, suggesting a significant association. Correlation between housing condition and satisfaction with urbanization ( $r = 0.45$ ), indicating a moderate positive relationship.

#### 4.2 Urban Infrastructure and Services:

A majority (57.1%) find public transport services adequate, suggesting significant coverage. However, 42.9% report inadequacies, which may point to inconsistent service frequency, lack of connectivity, or overcrowding issues (Table 2). About 17.1% need to travel more than 3 km for healthcare, indicating service gaps for these areas, particularly in the town's

peripheries. While 60% report regular waste management services, nearly 40% experience either irregular services or none at all. The 11.4% without access highlights critical areas requiring attention to improve sanitation and public health. 34.3% average and 20% poor ratings indicate uneven quality, often tied to specific neighborhoods or maintenance lapses. Water supply is reliable for two-thirds of respondents, ensuring consistent access. However, 34.3% unreliability indicates areas still affected by intermittent supply, particularly during peak demand or dry seasons. A large majority (77.1%) believe urban infrastructure has improved, showing positive impacts of urbanization. 22.9% feel infrastructure has worsened, possibly due to increasing population pressures, resource competition, or maintenance delays.

Table 2: Human response on Urban Infrastructure and Services availability in Ranaghat town

Questions	Response Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Availability of Public Transport	Adequate	200	57.10%
	Inadequate	150	42.90%
Access to Healthcare Facilities	Within 1 km	180	51.40%
	1-3 km	110	31.40%
	More than 3 km	60	17.10%
Waste Management Services	Regular	210	60.00%
	Irregular	100	28.60%
	Not Available	40	11.40%
Quality of Roads	Good	160	45.70%
	Average	120	34.30%
	Poor	70	20.00%
Water Supply Reliability	Reliable	230	65.70%
	Unreliable	120	34.30%
Street Lighting	Sufficient	250	71.40%
	Insufficient	100	28.60%
Perception of Urban Infrastructure Improvements	Improved	270	77.10%
	Worsened	80	22.90%

Source: Primary Survey

A significant association between road quality and perceived public transport adequacy (chi-square value is 12.34 (P-value < 0.05) is estimated. A

moderate positive relationship is observed between Street Lighting vs. Perceived Improvement in Infrastructure ( $r = 0.62$ ).

4.3 Impact of Urbanization:

A significant 65.7% experienced increased employment opportunities, reflecting urbanization-driven economic activities such as retail, services, and small enterprises. The remaining 20% saw no change, indicating stable employment scenarios for certain groups. Urbanization has driven costs up for 85.7% of households, especially in housing, utilities, and food (Table 3). Only a small fraction (2.9%) experienced a decrease, potentially due to access to subsidized services or markets. Over half (57.1%) perceive environmental degradation, likely linked to pollution, loss of greenery, and urban sprawl. A smaller group (25.7%) noticed improvements, such as better waste management or water systems in

certain areas. About 31.4% reported stronger bonds, often in neighborhoods that foster community engagement through shared spaces or cultural events. For 25.7%, there was no significant impact on social connections. Rising urban housing costs were a concern for 60%, indicating significant affordability issues. Only 28.6% found housing affordable, likely due to older leases or residing in less developed areas. A majority (77.1%) recognize improvements in urban infrastructure, such as roads, lighting, and public services. The majority (57.1%) view urbanization positively, highlighting better living standards, economic opportunities, and infrastructure. A significant minority (25.7%) express negative sentiments, citing challenges like overcrowding, environmental loss, and rising costs.

Table 3: Survey response on urbanization impact in the Ranaghat town

Questions	Response Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Changes in Employment Opportunities	Increased	230	65.70%
	Decreased	50	14.30%
	No Change	70	20.00%
Effect on Cost of Living	Increased	300	85.70%
	Decreased	10	2.90%
	No Change	40	11.40%
Environmental Changes Experienced	Improved	90	25.70%
	Degraded	200	57.10%
	No Change	60	17.10%
Effect on Community Life	Strengthened Community Bonds	110	31.40%
	Weakened Community Bonds	150	42.90%
	No Change	90	25.70%
Housing Affordability	Affordable	100	28.60%
	Expensive	210	60.00%
	Unchanged	40	11.40%
Infrastructure Improvements	Improved	270	77.10%
	Deteriorated	50	14.30%
	No Change	30	8.60%
Perception of Urbanization	Positive	200	57.10%
	Negative	90	25.70%
	Neutral	60	17.10%

Source: Primary Survey

A significant relationship between urbanization and improved infrastructure leading to better employment (Chi-square value = 18.45, p-value < 0.01). Cost of Living vs. Housing Affordability showed a strong positive relationship (r = 0.68).

4.4 Socio-economic Challenges:

A majority (62.9%) of household's report income instability, likely driven by shifts in employment patterns, rising living costs, or irregular job availability. Only 37.1% of households find their

income stable, often those with secure jobs, established businesses, or government employment. Urbanization has positively impacted employment for 60% of respondents, reflecting new opportunities in sectors such as retail, construction, and services. However, 22.9% experienced worsening employment conditions, possibly due to skill mismatches or the displacement of traditional livelihoods. Safety perceptions are divided, with 45.7% reporting decreased safety due to higher crime

rates, overcrowding, or inadequate policing. 40% feel safer, potentially due to improved infrastructure, better lighting, and increased police presence. A majority (51.4%) perceive urbanization as improving their quality of life, citing access to amenities, employment opportunities, and better infrastructure. However, 34.3% experienced negative impacts, such as environmental degradation, rising costs, and loss of community bonds.

Table 4: human perception on Socio-economic challenges due to urbanization in Ranaghat town

Questions	Response Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Household Income Stability	Stable	130	37.10%
	Unstable	220	62.90%
Employment Opportunities (Post-Urbanization)	Improved	210	60.00%
	Worsened	80	22.90%
	No Change	60	17.10%
Crime and Safety	Increased Safety	140	40.00%
	Decreased Safety	160	45.70%
	No Change	50	14.30%
Overall Impact of Urbanization on Quality of Life	Positive	180	51.40%
	Negative	120	34.30%
	Neutral	50	14.30%

Source: Primary Survey

A strong association between improved education facilities and enhanced quality of life (Chi-square value = 15.67, p-value < 0.01) is observed. A correlation between crime and safety vs. overall quality of life ( $r = -0.55$ ), suggesting a moderate negative relationship where decreased safety negatively impacts quality of life.

### 5. SUMMARY

Urbanization in Ranaghat Town has brought multifaceted changes, reshaping household experiences and quality of life. The research examines changes in housing, infrastructure, socio-economic conditions, and community life, highlighting both positive developments and challenges. Most households (60%) own their homes, while others live in rented (31.4%) or informal (8.6%) housing. Perceptions of urbanization showed an improvement in housing conditions for 68.6% of households but increased housing costs for 85.7%. Public transport availability is deemed adequate by 57.1% of respondents, but healthcare accessibility is limited, with 48.6% traveling over 1 km.

Employment opportunities have increased for 60% of respondents, though 62.9% face income instability. Urbanization has positively impacted the quality of life for 51.4% of respondents, with improved infrastructure and employment opportunities being significant factors. Research from European and South Asian contexts demonstrates that urbanization fosters both functional and cultural transitions, often altering residents' relationships with their environment UN-Habitat (2022). In places like Switzerland and South Asia, urbanization has shown to enhance civic engagement but sometimes at the cost of ecological and social stability. Such patterns are evident in Ranaghat, where infrastructure improvements coexist with rising environmental concerns and community strains

The study underscores the dual-edged nature of urbanization. While it brings modernization and opportunities, it also poses challenges such as affordability, environmental stress, and socio-economic disparities. A balanced approach focusing on sustainable development and inclusive policies is essential for addressing these challenges.

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