

Building a Slum-Free Mumbai? State and Informal Urbanization in India by Yue Zhang

As the largest democracy and one of the most vibrant emerging economies in the world, India is experiencing sustained economic growth hand in hand with urbanization. A major challenge facing Indian cities is the expansion of informal housing beyond state control or regulation. In Mumbai, the financial capital and most populous city of India, forty-two percent of the population lives in slums. What explains the informal urbanization in India characterized by the proliferation and persistence of informal settlements? This paper argues that informality must be understood not as the object of state regulation but rather as produced and institutionalized by the state itself. It is the institutional structure of the state that shapes state actors' intentionality and preferences and in turn affects their decisions about urbanization and informality. Specifically, the paper demonstrates how fragmented intergovernmental relations and contested party politics, as two major defining variables of the institutional structure of the Indian state, influence the formation, persistence, and redevelopment of slums in Mumbai. Using the case of Mumbai, the paper challenges the notion that informality is caused by a lack of state control and spatial discipline. Instead, it shows that informality is the product of deliberate political and social construction and has become the new normal in Southern cities.