

Abstract  
Planning Kabul: The politics of urbanization in Afghanistan  
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This dissertation is an analysis of how the city of Kabul is being planned. This study addresses a gap in planning scholarship, which rarely focuses on the planning of cities in “developing” countries. Kabul is uniquely important in the geopolitics of security; and at the same time, Kabul is a mid-sized, rapidly-growing city with limited resources and substantial constraints to effective governing. In these respects, the case of Kabul is representative of the way most of the world's urbanization is being planned—more so than the planning of any city in “developed” countries.

The core argument is that urban planning in the capital of Afghanistan occurs in three modes that operate both in parallel and in tension with each other. The first mode is formal planning, in which Afghan public agencies are developing and implementing strategies for guiding urban development. The second mode is informal planning, in which the urban regime sets both direct and indirect rules that guide urban development. These include denial of recognition, exclusion from the legal sphere, and maintenance of a ‘vulnerable reserve’ of available labor and space for potential investment. The third mode is exceptionalist planning, in which elites—including Afghans, Afghan-expatriates, and non-Afghans—violate rules and expectations with knowing impunity.

I argue that in each mode, the *management of risk* strongly defines the political rationalities that shape policy. Formal planning encourages deeper local investment because it clarifies spaces of reduced potential conflict with the urban regime. Informal planning is a space in which poor households submit to conditions of elevated risk in exchange for long-term opportunities for their families. Exceptionalist planning involves lowering the life-risks of elite individuals, often at the expense of increased risk for non-elites.

The three modes of planning identified through this research are explained as a product of both specific conditions in Kabul and underlying tensions within political rationality itself. The context-specific conditions include a century of modernization and thirty years of political violence that have become increasingly geopolitical, resulting in a substantial fragmentation of sovereignty. The underlying political rationalities which shape and are shaped by this context are *sovereign political reason* and *biopolitical reason*. These political rationalities operate at the local, national, and transnational scale to constitute a de facto urban regime in Kabul. The tension between these two political rationalities has been resolved into a series of sociopolitical ‘bargains’ over the past two

centuries. At the urban level each bargain involves a rearticulation of the relationship between coercive authority and the promotion of health, prosperity, and material conditions. In Kabul the 'modernization bargain' was succeeded in turn by the 'developmentalist bargain' of the Cold War era, and then the 'neoliberal bargain' of market-led growth. Although deregulation continues to be promoted in Kabul, a new bargain of 'segmented security' is being negotiated across urban space.