

# The Regularisation Trap: Governance Failure, Political Economy and the Perpetual Growth of Unauthorised Colonies and Slums in Delhi

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**Abstract:** *Delhi's urban expansion has produced one of the most complex informal settlement landscapes in the Global South. More than 40% of the National Capital Territory's population now lives in unauthorised colonies or jbuggi-jhopri (JJ) clusters — a figure that has grown not despite governance, but in many ways because of it. This article examines the structural dynamics driving this proliferation, drawing centrally on I. Ahmed Khan's 2026 documentary account rooted in his decade-long insider engagement with the UNICEF–Government of India joint initiative (1988–2000). Tracing the arc from Delhi's first regularisation policy in 1977 — when 607 colonies existed — to the PM-UDAY scheme of 2019 covering 1,731 colonies, the article argues that each cycle of policy leniency created new incentive structures for colonisers, politicians and land intermediaries to seed further settlements. The article identifies four interlocking failure modes: the regularisation-incentive paradox, vote-bank politics, institutional fragmentation and judicial ambiguity. It concludes by assessing the structural conditions required for a credible departure from this trap.*

**Keywords:** *unauthorised colonies, Delhi, informal settlements, regularisation policy, urban governance, jbuggi clusters, PM-UDAY, vote-bank politics*