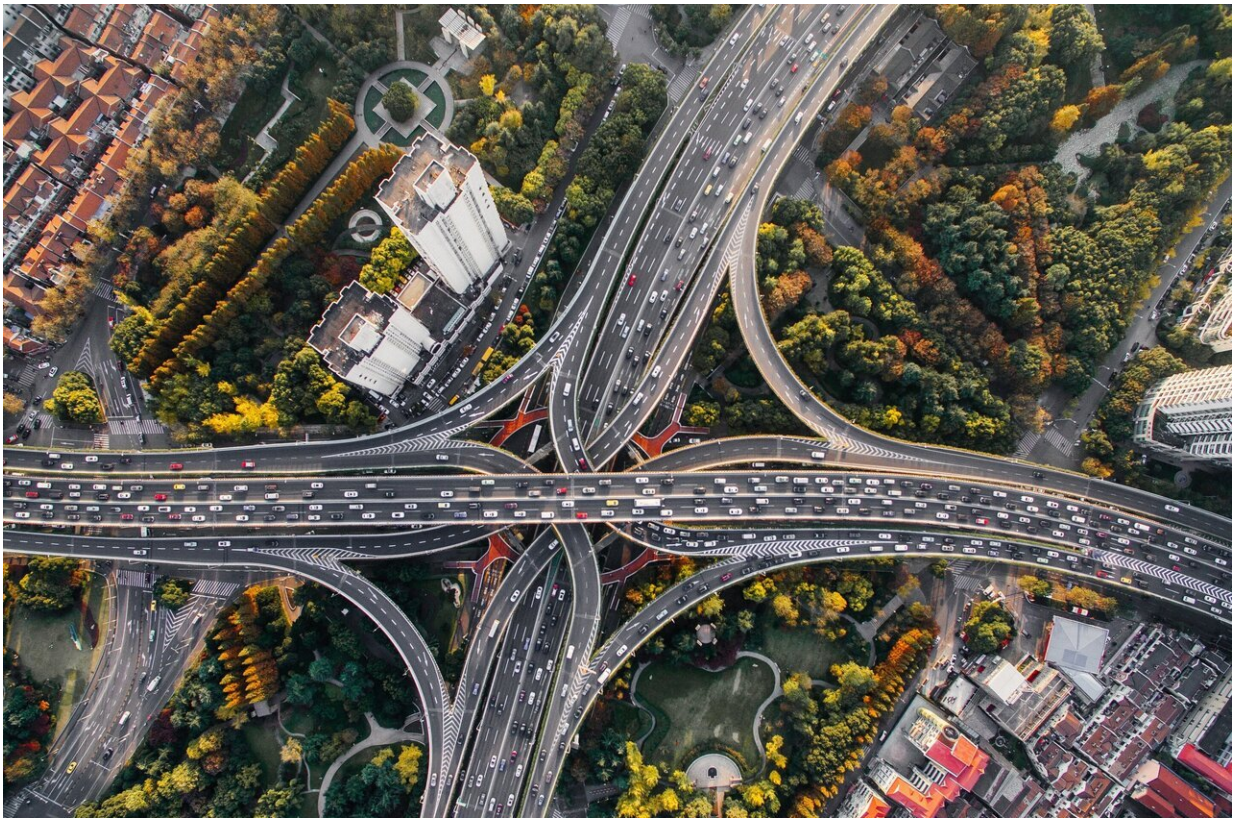


First global survey of mayors shows urgent climate, infrastructure, equity challenges

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A new [global survey of city leaders](#) underscores pressing challenges facing municipalities, including rising inequality, extreme heat and flood risks exacerbated by climate change, and a need to rebalance

transportation systems that overly favor private automobiles.

The survey was conducted by researchers at Cornell University and is the first of its kind—capturing data from 241 cities worldwide. It reveals many cities in developing [countries](#) face enormous challenges in providing core urban services that support [economic growth](#), as they have very limited fiscal resources. While in developed countries, large shares of urban leaders report land constraints, high housing costs, and a mismatch between available jobs and residents' skills.

"The future of the world is urban and many cities are unprepared for the urban population increase that will continue over the next three decades," said Victoria A. Beard, lead researcher and director of the Cornell Mui Ho Center for Cities housed in the College of Architecture, Art, and Planning. "This survey gives us a perspective we've never had before: a first-ever glimpse of what city leaders around the world see as their greatest challenges, where they will spend precious municipal resources, and underscores where cities have an opportunity to work together across diverse geographies on priority areas they have in common."

Key findings

City leaders universally agree [climate change](#) has intensified exposure to [extreme heat](#), [water scarcity](#) and flooding, with 43% of leaders in developing cities agreeing climate change has intensified water scarcity. A little over half the cities in developing countries report having climate mitigation (57%) or adaptation plans (51%). Only 6% of developing-country city leaders (and just 2–3% in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean) reported no climate change impacts, compared with 16% in developed countries.

A majority of all city leaders (66%) agree there is too much emphasis on

private automobiles and that cities should support more active and sustainable urban mobility. Eighty-seven percent somewhat or strongly agree their city should be more receptive to biking and walking.

The challenges facing city leaders in developing regions are acute, especially on the economic front. While approximately 82% of leaders in developed cities consider their city's economic condition good or excellent, only 49% of leaders in cities in developing countries say the same.

The findings show that cities in developing countries will not realize the full benefits of urbanization because they lack core [urban infrastructure](#), such as roads and public transportation systems as well as drinking water and wastewater infrastructure systems. City leaders in developing countries said their top three infrastructure priorities are wastewater infrastructure (50%), roads (44%), and public transportation (40%).

In developed-country cities, 87% of leaders thought their drinking water infrastructure was good or excellent, but only 46.5% in developing countries said the same. The top challenge identified in providing drinking water—cited by a quarter of city leaders in developing countries, and 54% in Sub-Saharan Africa—was the need to extend piped water to all households.

In terms of wastewater management, 91% of city leaders in developed countries rated their management of human waste as good or excellent, only 48% in developing-country cities did the same. Among the latter, almost 30% said they still needed to extend piped sewer service to all households, and 11% said their city had no wastewater treatment facility.

In terms of COVID recovery, city leaders report that their jurisdictions are returning to normal. The vast majority of cities are back to normal or almost back to normal. Only 17% of city leaders in developed cities say

they are not back to normal (7% in developing cities).

Mental health is an overwhelming public health challenge for city leaders in the developed world. In cities in developed countries, 61% consider [mental health](#) a top public health challenge followed by substance abuse (47%), air pollution (39%) and obesity (38%). In developing countries, meanwhile, there were so many different public health concerns that only one, inaccessibility of quality health services (34%), was selected by more than a third of city leaders.

Budgetary concerns are weighing on city leaders in developing regions who believe they can only fund 59% of anticipated expenses in the coming year. Conversely, 85% of [city leaders](#) of developed cities feel confident they can meet their funding needs.

Provided by Cornell University

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