

# **Urban Decay in South Africa**

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### 1. Hypothesis / Problem Statement

Urban decay in the inner city of Johannesburg, particularly in the Central Business District (CBD), is a growing issue that stems from a combination of socioeconomic, infrastructural, and political factors. This research investigates the hypothesis that urban decay is driven primarily by neglect, insufficient infrastructure maintenance, increasing population density, and poor governance. The problem affects both the physical environment-through derelict buildings and pollution-and the people-through heightened crime, economic stagnation, and social marginalization. Identifying the severity, causes, and possible solutions to this issue forms the basis of the research inquiry.

### 2. Mapping

Mapping of Johannesburg's CBD was conducted using Google Maps and GIS tools. The main areas under investigation include Hillbrow, Yeoville, Berea, Braamfontein, and the core CBD. Coordinates range around -26.2041° S and 28.0473° E. Buffer zones of 2 km radius were created around hotspots of urban decay. Visual data layers were used to identify building density, waste collection points, traffic congestion areas, and known high-crime locations. Each layer helps visualize the multifaceted nature of urban decay.

[Insert MAP IMAGE here: Annotated Google Map with buffer zones and labeled landmarks]

### 3. Background Information About the Study Area

Johannesburg, South Africa's economic powerhouse, was founded in 1886 following the gold rush. It has since evolved into a dense urban landscape with over 5.6 million residents. The inner city historically functioned as a hub for commerce, finance, and government. However, over the past three decades, it has witnessed severe decay due to urban sprawl, white flight, informal migration, and poor municipal services. Population growth has outpaced infrastructure development, resulting in overcrowded buildings, increased unemployment, and failing public services. Over 200 buildings are listed as unfit for habitation. The area is characterized by high rates of crime, homelessness, and informal trading. Public spaces have deteriorated, and land use zoning has become erratic.

### 4. Data Collection

#### Primary Data Collection:

- Surveys: Distributed 50 questionnaires to residents, 30 of which were returned. Questions included perceived safety, access to services, and housing conditions.
- Interviews: Conducted 5 interviews with local shop owners, city officials, and community leaders.
- Observations: Documented 25 decaying buildings and photographed illegal dumping sites and informal vendor setups.

#### Secondary Data Collection:

- Used reports from StatsSA (2023), the City of Johannesburg, and various academic journals.
- Reviewed media coverage from News24, eNCA, and Mail & Guardian.
- Used internet sources to track historical trends and previous urban renewal initiatives like the Better Buildings Programme.

[Insert IMAGE: Survey form snapshot or graph of survey results]

### 5. Analysis and Synthesis of Data (Part 1)

The analysis revealed key patterns contributing to urban decay. Common responses in surveys highlighted poor waste removal (80% dissatisfaction), unsafe housing (65% feel unsafe in their building), and lack of police presence (70% believe crime has worsened in the past 5 years). Photographs showed collapsing infrastructure, graffiti, and makeshift housing. Interviews cited lack of government follow-up and corruption in housing departments. A review of secondary data showed a 22% decrease in municipal revenue from the CBD since 2012, aligning with a 35% drop in property investment. Many services such as waste collection, policing, and road repairs are irregular or absent.

[Insert GRAPH: Crime rates in Johannesburg inner city from 2010-2025]

6. Analysis and Synthesis of Data (Part 2)

Synthesis of the data shows clear relationships between governance failures and environmental degradation. Illegal occupation of buildings is rising, with many lacking running water and sanitation. Property owners have abandoned structures due to high maintenance costs and safety risks. Spatial data reveals that buildings most affected are within walking distance of key transit hubs and market zones, suggesting economic strain pushes more people into these areas. There is also an increase in informal street economies, which occupy pavements and contribute to waste buildup.

[Insert TABLE: Survey responses categorized by theme]



## **7. Recommendations and Possible Solutions (Part 1)**

Urban renewal must be addressed through a holistic strategy:

1. The City of Johannesburg should relaunch and expand the Better Buildings Programme, with community input.
2. A dedicated Urban Decay Response Unit should be formed to coordinate between housing, safety, and sanitation departments.
3. Encourage private investment through tax incentives and low-interest loans for CBD revitalization.
4. Establish urban policing units trained in human rights and crowd control to address crime without exacerbating tensions.

## **8. Recommendations and Possible Solutions (Part 2)**

5. Reinforce waste management infrastructure by installing monitored dumpsters and scheduling daily removals.
6. Create legal pathways for informal traders to regularize businesses and contribute to urban upkeep.
7. Repurpose abandoned lots into temporary housing and urban farming projects with public-private partnerships.
8. Involve NGOs in education and rehabilitation efforts, especially around substance abuse and homelessness.

[Insert IMAGE: Concept art of urban revitalization in Johannesburg]

## **9. Conclusion**

This research confirms that Johannesburg's CBD is experiencing a severe form of urban decay primarily due to ineffective governance, poor infrastructure maintenance, and socio-economic inequalities. The hypothesis is therefore accepted. Reversing urban decay is possible, but only through collaborative, well-funded, and community-informed efforts that address both the built environment and human needs.

## **10. Bibliography**

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