World Development 192 (2025) 107010

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

World Development

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/worlddev

Regular Research Article

Claiming the city: Citizenship and political connections in African neighborhoods☆

Damilola Agbalajobi [a], Mohammed S. Awal [b], Taibat Lawanson [c], Jeffrey W. Paller [d,*]

[a] Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria
[b] Ghana Center for Democratic Development
[c] University of Lagos, Nigeria and University of Liverpool, UK
[d] University of San Francisco, USA and Uppsala University, Sweden

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Social capital
Political capture
Claim-making
Public goods
Urban governance
Africa

ABSTRACT

Rapid urbanization is changing the way Africans experience and engage the state in their everyday lives, creating new opportunities for urban claim-making. But it also creates the conditions for local capture. In their quest for rights and services, how do neighborhoods navigate these rapidly changing political environments? How does this vary across poor, middle-class, and wealthy neighborhoods? Based on 16 focus group discussions and 87 key informant interviews in eight neighborhoods in Lagos (Nigeria) and Accra (Ghana), we find that residents in low-income neighborhoods seek direct connections through voting blocs and the instrumental use of their concerned youth associations, while high-income neighborhoods use personal connections and leverage their residence associations to influence state power. We argue that a neighborhood's class structure shapes the political connections that residents have to the state, thereby shaping the everyday strategies that residents use to claim citizenship.

1. Introduction

In the heart of Surulere, residents take immense pride in their neighborhood, a place rich in cultural history and bustling with life. It's a community where people come together to celebrate and share in daily moments of joy, but beneath this vibrant surface, they face numerous challenges that weigh heavily on their lives. "When it rains, the entire area floods," one resident sighs during a focus group discussion (Bode Thomas FGD 5). Boreholes often don't function, toilets are in short supply, streetlights are dim, and instances of theft and attacks are frequent. At times, residents reach out to the local Community Development Associations (CDAs) for help, but more often than not, these efforts prove futile. "I don't see what the CDA is doing. They're only being used for political purposes to cast votes," one frustrated resident explains. "Whenever there's a contract, they divide it amongst themselves" (Bode Thomas FGD 5). With limited options, many find themselves pooling personal resources to fix the problems themselves (Beveridge & Koch, 2017).

These scenarios illustrate the puzzle of state-society relations in African cities today. Rapid urbanization is creating new opportunities for urban claim-making via multiple avenues of citizen participation, including voting. But it also creates the conditions for local capture, especially by political parties and politicians. Residents must navigate these diverse pathways to the state, which involve relying on dense horizontal ties as well as vertical linkages to those in government. How do residents in these rapidly changing political environments navigate these decision-making pathways in their quests for citizenship rights and public services? And what explains these differences across neighborhoods?

Based on 16 focus group discussions and 87 key informant interviews in eight neighborhoods in Lagos (Nigeria) and Accra (Ghana) we find that a neighborhood's class structure shapes the political connections that residents have to the state, thereby shaping the everyday strategies that residents use to claim citizenship. This includes how residents engage with decision-making structures, demand access to public space, and contribute to social, political, and cultural life (Harvey, 2008). We focus on citizenship as a method of inclusion at the local scale and as an expression of social and political participation involving the formulation of new claims and the defense of existing rights (Beauregard & Bounds, 2000). We argue that residents in poor neighborhoods usually seek

☆ This article is part of a special issue entitled: 'Political Change in African Cities' published in World Development.

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: jeffrey.paller@statsvet.uu.se (J.W. Paller).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.107010

Available online 12 April 2025
0305-750X/© 2025 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

direct connections through voting blocs and the instrumental use of youth associations, while those in wealthier neighborhoods use personal connections to individuals in government and leverage their residence associations to indirectly influence state power.

Scholars have largely overlooked the underlying historical and institutional development of a neighborhood in their assessment of social capital, associational life, and citizen participation – key factors in the process of urban claim-making. Our findings challenge the notion that Africans have little recourse to demand and secure public services without formal representation, while also expanding beyond the narrow framework of political clientelism. Instead, we show that residents take advantage of the diversity of decision-making pathways at multiple contact points to engage an array of claim-making strategies in their pursuit of citizenship rights (Gallagher, Kruks-Wisner, & Taylor, 2024; Ostrom, 2010).

The study of urban politics in Africa mostly focuses on the poor and informal settlements (Nathan, 2019; Paller, 2019). Middle-class and wealthy neighborhoods have mostly been relegated to an analytic space of private governance and exclusionary politics (Goodfellow, 2022; Gillespie, 2020). Yet all residents must navigate a complex terrain of formal and informal authority structures that require engaging the state in some way, whether it is to get land documents (Krishna, Rains, & Wibbels, 2020), building permits, water distributed (Harris, 2021), or roads and streetlights fixed (Wilson, n.d.).

International development programs increasingly promote people-centered programs that focus on citizen participation to achieve good governance and urban sustainability (Dongier et al., 2018; Casey, 2018; Mansuri & Rao, 2013). While smart technology, infrastructure upgrades, and technical urban planning continue to drive aid budgets, these projects typically require a minimum level of citizen engagement and participation. Sometimes these projects engage already existing associations, while other times they circumvent existing local networks. Recent research suggests that co-production, or governance and participation by individuals and institutions in different arenas, offer a way to synergize state-society relationships (Ostrom, 1996; Paller, 2021). These arrangements can be especially difficult to scale up due to contextual and structural factors, as well as competing visions of urban futures (Mitlin, 2021) or conflicting rationalities as described by Watson (2014). Across all of our cases, we find that everyday politics, or the practices, interactions, and negotiations in daily life, constrains possibilities for development, while political connections open up opportunities that would otherwise be closed off for residents.

Urban development will be one of the most prescient challenges that African governments face in the years ahead. The number of cities has doubled from 3300 to 7600 since 1990, adding 500 million more urban residents (OECD/UN/ECA/AfDB, 2022). Accra and Lagos are two of the fastest growing cities on the continent, and are now characterized as "city-regions" that transcend administrative boundaries, highlighting the complexities of multi-level governance (Kaufmann & Sidney, 2020; Olajide & Lawanson, 2021). Lagos State is one of 36 federal units comprised of 20 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and 37 Local Council Development Areas (LCDAs). Each have elected committees (CDCs) and community development associations (CDAs) at the neighborhood level, though they are not mandatory and do not exist everywhere.[1] Greater Accra is one of Ghana's 16 administrative regions made up of 29 Metropolitan/Municipal/District Assemblies (MMDAs). MMDAs comprise elected representatives and unit committees (akin to CDAs) to represent citizen interests.[2] These policies are part of a general trend toward devolution of municipal authority through decentralization reforms across the world (Rodden, 2019). Yet these reforms occur unevenly, and residents must also turn to non-state organizations and political party structures to provide and manage basic services.

This article is organized as follows. We first outline the pathways of urban claim-making and show how social capital, participatory inequalities, and political interference underlie state-society relationships. Next, we explain our case selection and methodology. We then historize the state-society relationships in Lagos and Accra, and provide evidence from a paired case comparison of eight neighborhoods in the two cities and explain how political connections differ across neighborhood class structure. We conclude with a comparative discussion of state-society relations and political connections in the Global South.

2. Pathways of urban claim-making

We outline three different pathways of urban claim-making that residents use to demand citizenship rights. These include formal structures of representation, non-state authorities, and political party networks. While there is a wide divide between the study of urban neighborhoods in the global south and the global north, we integrate these approaches to show how studies from different settings can inform each other. Importantly, we suggest that social capital, participatory inequalities, and political interference impacts which pathways residents use, and how successful they are at achieving their goals.

2.1. Formal structures of representation

Urban residents have representatives in multiple levels of government, including street committees, wards, neighborhood bodies, municipal assemblies, regional units, and national lawmaking and executive councils. The strength and power of these organizations varies across jurisdictions, but they set the context for accessing the state (Baldwin, Kao, & Lust, 2024). These committees are important arenas to communicate policies, deliberate over neighborhood concerns, and bring leaders and constituents together (Paller, 2019b). These grassroots levels of government are often the first place of contact for residents to organize, and they often begin their pressure activities with writing letters or petitions to alert their local governments and then their formal representatives with their problems (Sharp, 1984). These pathways coincide with decentralization reforms which have delegated authority to municipalities in order to bring governments closer to the people (Rodden, 2019).

Yet local governmental units are also prone to political capture (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2000; Bardhan & Pranab, 2006) whereby powerful interest groups or organizations shape institutions in their interests at the expense of the public. They might also become agents of political parties, which use them to facilitate electoral mobilization. In addition, residents complain that local government units are beset with underlying ethnic tensions and everyday politics, undermining their effectiveness (Paller, 2019; Onifade et al., 2024).

This is especially problematic in centralized and unitary systems of government (like Ghana), where the presidency holds immense power to appoint municipal executives. This undermines the ability of local communities to electorally sanction their leaders (Resnick, 2023). Residents who have direct connections to the legislators typically prefer to go straight to them and use these informal networks to access state power. It is educated residents who often form these elite networks.

[1] In Lagos, there are more than 4,000 Community Development Associations (CDAs) registered with the State government (street committees made up of 4–8 streets), and hundreds more Community Development Committees (made up of CDA executives); these bodies represent residents at the street- and neighborhood-level (Abimbola & Moses, 2020). They are not directly linked to political parties. The executive committee members of the CDAs are often local politicians, and leverage their connections with those in power to attract services and infrastructure for their communities. The chairmen and secretaries of all the CDAs in a local government make up the CDC.

[2] In Accra, unit committees and zonal councils represent residents at the lowest level of government. The MMDAs finance, administer, and manage most development projects in partnership with the central government.

Partisans will use their ties to higher-ups in the party to leverage support for their own constituents. In addition, powerful politicians deliver patronage goods to residents beyond their constituencies, seeking to expand their base of power. This is evident in urban political machines globally (Stone, 1996). These insights suggest that wealthy neighborhoods with more educated residents depend more on personal connections to access the state, bypassing local government units or other formal pathways of engagement.

Structures of representation also face participatory inequalities, or disparities in the extent to which certain groups participate in civic activities. For example, in the US, small groups of activists are more effective at voicing their interests at neighborhood meetings, in effect "capturing" the political process (Gilens, 2014; Hajnal & Trounstine, 2016; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2012). This is especially the case in housing policy, where participatory inequalities lead "neighborhood defenders" to stop the construction of new housing (Einstein, Glick, & Palmer, 2019). Property owners talk more at community meetings and donate more to local politicians (Yoder, 2020). In addition, more cohesive groups – like seniors who are active and engaged – are able to turn this local collective action into policy representation (Anzia, 2019). Additionally, homeowners in the United Kingdom have "place-protective motives" and act to protect neighborhood character and a way of life (O'Grady, 2020), often undermining the construction of affordable housing for the poor and working class.

Political interference operates at multiple scales. For example, Carlitz (2017) distinguishes between local capture and politicized misallocation by local governments, and finds that new construction of water infrastructure in Tanzania – a dominant party system that underwent a program of decentralization – is concentrated in areas with higher support for the ruling party, and wealthy- and better-connected individuals gained from new construction. Across Latin America, competing reforms in the water and sanitation sector creates incentives for politicians to cater to short-term electoral interests, thereby undermining long-term reforms. Citizens resort to informal channels such as protest vandalism, illegal re-connections and collective action to meet their needs (Herrera & Post, 2014: 631).

2.2. Non-state authorities

Scholarship on global south neighborhoods tend to emphasize slums and informal settlements, or areas of limited state capacity and institutional reach (Harbers, 2015; Auerbach et al., 2018; Roy, 2009). Authorities outside the state often provide public services and resolve disputes; sometimes acting as substitutes for the state whereas other times complementing state efforts at service delivery (Cammett & MacLean, 2014; Post, Bronsoler, & Salman, 2017). Residents are often forced to take matters into their own hands when it comes to building housing, providing services, and combatting climate change (Marr & Patience, 2023). Residents are members of kinship organizations and traditional authorities; residents or landlord associations; youth and occupational groups, and; other community-based organizations (CBOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that also make claims on them (Lust, 2022). These structures are important sources of self-provisioning of services, as well as interest groups to place pressure on the state for public services.

Across Africa, land is still controlled by families with ancestral ownership claims. The politics of indigeneity often structures state-society relations. Traditional authorities can restrict access to natives and capture the political process for their own group. We call this indigenous capture, which emerges out of a long history of citizenship conflicts and a politics of belonging on the continent (Dorman, 2014). The centrality of first-settler dynamics positions poor neighborhoods in a unique position to the state: it often privileges leaders with a long settlement history – and often ties to powerful indigenous families – above others, and can undermine collective action across ethnic groups (Nathan, 2019; Paller, 2019).

In addition, residents and landlord associations represent the interests of property owners, but often at the exclusion of tenants and outsiders. Resident associations are common in high-income neighborhoods, especially in estates or gated communities. The associations have contact with the municipal governments. They offer hope that their self-provisioning will draw the attention of local authorities so that they will receive support in the future—so that their efforts will be recognized.

Social capital, or the "norms and networks that enable people to act collectively," (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000: 225), can play a mediating role in assisting residents in claiming citizenship and producing public goods and services (e.g. Habyarimana et al., 2009; Putnam, 1994). Theoretically, social capital enables citizens to monitor politicians more effectively (Boix & Posner, 1998), often through instrumental voting (Jottier & Heyndels, 2012). In Brazil, neighborhood associations provide coordination mechanisms that enable citizens to use bloc voting as a way to hold politicians accountable (Cooperman, 2023). Similarly, well-organized slum organizations in Argentina facilitate the demand and maintenance of public goods by pressuring their leaders to effectively lobby their governments (Paniagua, 2022). Youth groups and NGOs are especially ubiquitous in urban Africa, and can be used to lobby political parties and demand services to their neighborhoods (Bob-Milliar & Paller, 2023). In addition, outside NGOs are involved in development projects, and engage in cross-sector collaboration with government agencies (Kritz, 2023).

Non-state authority structures and neighborhood associations are also prone to elite capture. In a study of slum organizations across three cities in India, De De Wit and Berner (2009) find that CBO leaders captured resources and misused them for private interests, concluding that the organization "gradually became more like a useful patron" (937). Neighborhood leaders quickly learn the bureaucratic process and can use their authority to access infrastructure and services, often for private benefit (Das & Walton, 2015). Policies of women's empowerment in Kenya enabled men and wealthy women to enter into leadership positions in CBOs, further marginalizing the disadvantaged (Gugerty & Kremer, 2008). Similarly, local officials in wealthy communities had better access to information about a nationwide Ugandan public education program, enabling them to gain a larger share of projects (Reinikka & Svensson, 2004), while in Tanzania, richer districts produced more applications than poorer ones, enabling them to receive more development projects due to better access to media, education, and political participation (Baird, McIntosh, & Özler, 2013). These demonstrate how elite capture and participatory inequalities can interact to privilege better-off residents, calling into question the direct link between social capital and government performance (Grossman & Slough, 2022).

2.3. Political party networks

These institutional factors make political parties a crucial avenue that residents use to gain access to state services and jobs (Brierley & Nathan, 2021, 2022; Bob-Milliar, 2012; Sigman, 2023). In urban India, dense party structures enable urbanites to demand and access public services from the state (Auerbach, 2020). Across Africa, party organization branches extend deep into the neighborhoods giving parties a local presence (Krönke, Lockwood, & Mattes, 2022). Polling stations or local wards have branches with local executives, including organizers and secretaries (Klaus & Paller, 2017). These party structures are often the most accessible governance bodies available to residents on the ground. Party activists use these networks to communicate information while residents use them to demand government responsiveness and articulate preferences (Auerbach, 2020).

Local leaders act like "organizational brokers," navigating different pathways by representing interest organizations but also renegotiating ties to political parties between election cycles (Holland & Palmer-Rubin, 2015). As Krishna, Rains, and Wibbels (2020: 1984) explain, "Local neighbourhood intermediaries – or leaders – who are particularly

knowledgeable or well connected, play a crucial role in leveraging political discretion to advance an entire neighbourhood." These leaders help urban residents cement associational ties to gain a political foothold in the city (Ren, 2020) by drawing on allies in local councils (Pasotti, 2020) or making connections to municipal institutions (Donaghy & Paller, 2023).

Fig. 1 provides a visual illustration of these three pathways to the state. The degree to which they present themselves as pathways to urban citizenship will differ across contexts. We deduce three major propositions from the literature. First, political interference and participatory inequalities vary across neighborhoods, highlighting the need to address the process of urban claim-making at the scale of the community – beyond the individual or household-level. We therefore need to consider residential factors like the built environment (Nathan, 2024), length of residence (Hays, 2015), as well as segregation and spatial integration which can affect political preferences (Xu, 2023). Importantly, we suggest that the class structure of the neighborhood will shape the political connections that residents have to those in power, mediating state-society relationships and pathways to urban citizenship.

Second, social capital moderates the effectiveness of claim-making, but is still susceptible to underlying participatory inequalities and political capture that contributes to winners and losers. These studies show that associational activity and vertical ties are both important, but contingent upon underlying political processes. As Björkman (2014) emphasizes, social organizations and associations do not exist as an "outside reality" separate and disengaged from "local political processes." Therefore, we suggest that high social capital can strengthen the local power of neighborhoods through bloc voting, lobbying, and protests, but only when it strengthens connections between residents and the government.

Third, urban claim-making is deeply embedded in "local political processes" that reflect the long histories of settlement, migration, and state-building. Populations make claims to belonging, land ownership, and territorial control, drawing upon various understandings of rights and recognition. Colonial rule and post-Independence political developments have intensified the politicization of identities, leading to the division of populations and the creation of spatial inequalities in cities. We propose that the history of political interference in neighborhood life positioned communities in specific relationships with the state, shaping the pathways to citizenship that residents navigate today.

3. Research design and methods

3.1. Case selection

This study uses cross-national small-N analysis (CSNA), a type of multilevel research design that involves purposeful case selection at two levels of analysis (Dosek, 2020). Accra and Lagos provide a replicatory comparison which allow for "a side-by-side reproduction of a subnational case study or comparison in one or more additional countries" (Sellers, 2019: 95). Lagos and Accra are both Nigeria and Ghana's largest cities, respectively, and are their country's dominant economic hubs. They are sprawling, coastal metropolises with in-migration, high population density, and big-city challenges. The cities share similar structural constraints, including disruptive British colonial legacies, ambiguous property rights regimes with a strong customary rights influence, fractionalized administrations, and competitive multi-party electoral systems with strong organizational strength. Land governance is especially important in both settings as governments negotiate with traditional authorities and landowners to make way for development projects (Lawanson & Agunbiade, 2018; Paller, 2019a). This paired country comparison allows us to observe interaction effects between national and municipal institutions, structural contexts, and local variations (Riedl, 2017).

Our second-level of analysis seeks to explain territorial variation at the neighborhood level by integrating multi-level governance frameworks with subnational research (Giraudy & Niedzwiecki, 2022). National and municipal urban development is experienced unevenly at the neighborhood level. This can be attributed to global economic forces and neoliberalism (Olajide & Lawanson, 2021), as well as neighborhood factors like density, social capital, bonding, and trust (Obaitor, Lawanson, Stellmes, & Lakes, 2021).

We purposively select neighborhoods based on a concept of socio-economic status measured at the neighborhood-level, observed as a function of housing type and infrastructural development (Heller, Swaminathan, & Varshney, 2023). The logic behind this is that these factors correlate with neighborhood and household wealth and assets. Poor neighborhoods are comprised of slum housing and shacks, with low levels of running water and flush toilets. Middle-class neighborhoods are made up of single-, multi-level concrete structures, as well as apartment complexes, with planned street layouts and some access to sewers and water connections. Residents typically are in the middle of a household asset and wealth index; they have higher levels of education and jobs in the formal sector (Nathan, 2019). Wealthy neighborhoods house high-income people, with running water, flush toilets, electricity, and paved roads. They are often gated.[3]

We select four neighborhoods each in Accra and Lagos. Low-income neighborhoods are Oworonshoki (Lagos) and Nima (Accra). We select two middle-income neighborhoods each. We do this because these neighborhoods are unified under a single name – Surulere (Lagos) and Madina (Accra) – but because of rapid growth these jurisdictions encompass multiple population areas that residents view as distinct neighborhoods. These are Bode Thomas and Lawanson in Surulere (Lagos), and Zongo and estates in Madina (Accra). Our high-income areas are Magodo Scheme II (Lagos) and Manet Gardens estates, Spintex Road (Accra). See Table 1 for a comparison of the cases, and Appendix I for a description of each neighborhood.

3.2. Methodology

We conducted 16 focus groups and supplement these with key informant interviews with activists, community leaders, politicians and bureaucrats. Focus groups are "a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher" (Morgan, 1997: 6). See Appendix II for information about the focus groups and interviews, and Appendix III for the questionnaire.[4]

We analyze the data in three steps. First, we leverage the comparative cross-national case selection to historicize the cases in Ghana and Nigeria's national political development. Second, we develop codes from the theoretical propositions to find patterns and generalizations in the focus group and interview data. Third, we show how class structure helps explain differences in claim-making across neighborhoods (Table 2).

4. History of state-society relations in Lagos and Accra

This controlled case comparison demonstrates how associational life and political party activity emerge out of a long history of state-building and political development (Cohen, 1969; Owusu, 1971; Schildkrout, 1978).

Lagos' associational structure has long been characterized – and dominated – by ethnicity, with the Yoruba sub-group Awori claiming

[3] For a lengthy discussion about the differences between African neighborhoods, see Appendix I.

[4] We do not hold focus groups in the wealthy neighborhoods in both cities because of challenges recruiting enough participants to a meeting at the same time. Instead, we rely on key-informant interviews with residents and observations of residence association activities. We supplement these interviews with residents of surrounding areas and political party members who have experience working with people in the neighborhoods.

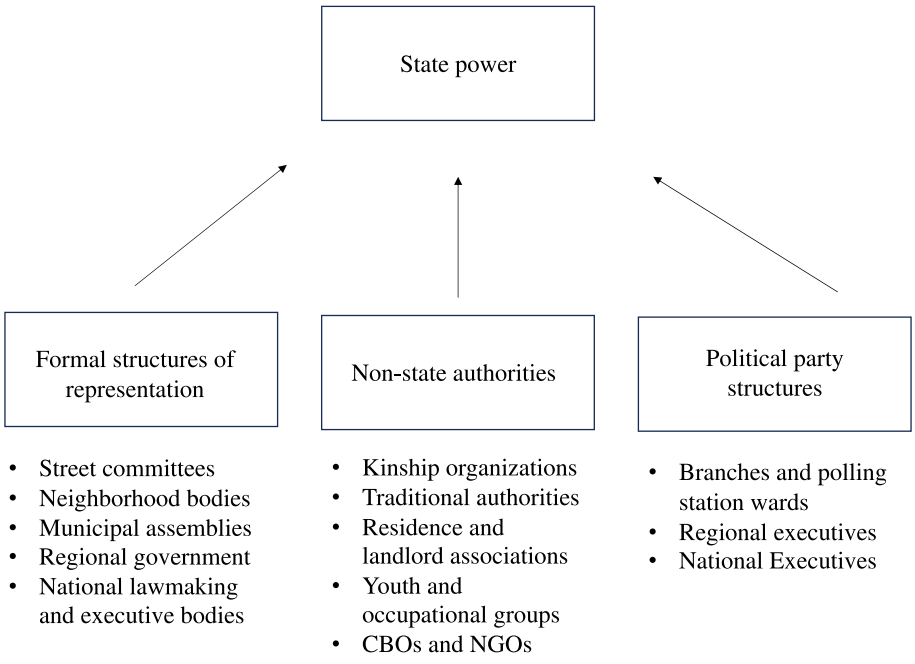

Fig. 1. Pathways to the state.

Table 1
Neighborhood selection across cities.

	Neighborhood	City	Local Government	Political Party	Built Environment
Wealthy	Magodo	Lagos	Kosofe LGA	APC	Gated Estate
	Manet Gardens	Accra	Ledzekoku Municipal	NDC/NPP	Gated Estate
Upper Middle Class	Surulere I (Bode Thomas)	Lagos	Surulere LGA	APC	Gridded, government-allocated
	Madina Estates	Accra	Madina Municipal	NDC/NPP	Gridded
Lower Middle Class	Surulere II (Lawanson)	Lagos	Surulere LGA	APC	Dense, unplanned
	Madina Zongo	Accra	Madina Municipal	NDC	Dense, unplanned
Poor	Oworonshoki	Lagos	Kosofe LGA	APC	Dense, unplanned
	Nima	Accra	Ayawaso East Municipal	NDC	Dense, unplanned

Table 2
Differences across neighborhoods.

	Income	Occupation	Education	Political Dynamics	Position to State
Poor	<$2, economically insecure	Informal sector	Low	Indigenous capture + political clientelism + vote banks + youth politics	State capture (via patronage and patrimonialism)
Middle-class	$2–20	Mixed, formal sector, "bureaucratic bourgeoisie"	High school and college	Vibrant electoral politics + leverage powerful political representatives	Social contract
Wealthy	Diaspora, private capital	Global jobs, politicians	University	Fundraising and influence	Parallel but cooperative

indigenous status to the land and control of the fishing activity due to their "first arrival" in the territory that now makes up Lagos (Mann, 2007). While indigeneity helped craft a unifying Awori identity, as family leaders and headmen were incorporated into the Idejo chieftaincy system, a complicated hierarchy emerged due to middlemen status with colonial authorities and military strength among powerful chiefs (ibid). Family heads received regular contributions of food and labor, and in return "were expected to assist the members of their households in times of need, represent them in ritual, social, political, and legal affairs, and provide strangers with hospitality" (ibid: 26).

The status of traditional leaders was entrenched with the capture of the city by the British in 1851 and its subsequent 1861 annexation (Akinyele, 2009: 118). Through its strategy of indirect rule, the British administration built up a complex set of patron-client relations that were inscribed in the very built environment of the city – its streets, its neighborhoods, and its shorelines (Adelusi-Adeluyi, 2018). Traditional leaders acted strategically, shifting their roles to adapt to the "modern urban marketplace," forming interest groups like landowner associations, secret societies, and religious groups, to secure needs and services, and offer dispute resolution in neighborhoods (Barnes, 1977). As the city grew in population, sparked by returned slaves and migrants from the hinterland, neighborhood associations emerged to maintain authority over migrants who were often viewed as criminal delinquents (Fourchard, 2006). Migrants, and their leaders in particular, used the ownership of land and their control over tenants, as a powerful resource to establish political power, and form their own political communities (Barnes, 2018). "They dispensed, among other resources, information, contacts, and services that were particularly helpful in meeting the needs of urban life," writes Barnes. "In return they received support for their political goals" (ibid: 70).

But the rapid growth of the city, mixed with government mismanagement and failed industrial policy during the postcolonial era (Davis,

2006; Gandy, 2006), led to the proliferation of slums in areas like Ajegunle, Mushin and Somolu which were "characterised by new forms of anomie, violence and community breakdown" (Gandy, 2006: 380). In response, the government took a heavy-handed approach, engaging in slum demolitions, policing urban space, and relocating some communities to estates, like Surulere (Immerwahr, 2007). The hollowing out of social services and rise of unemployment due to the structural adjustment programs led to the increase in urban violence (ibid), and the emergence of the phenomenon of violent gangs or "area boys" who controlled the streets (Omitogun, 1994: 203). These gangs were often infused with an ideology of ethnic nationalism, as is the case of the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) which formed following the 1993 national elections to defend Yoruba interests (Salvaire, 2020: 397), security enforcement (Akinyele, 2007), and act as an "extralegal governance agency" (Guichaoua, 2009: 528–529). These "area boys" have morphed into road transport workers who also act as enforcement arms of political parties (Lawanson, 2021).

These challenges were heightened by an intense rivalry between the two major political parties, which Fourchard describes as "an often neglected, although central, factor in the changing urban landscape" (Fourchard, 2012: 76). A coalition of northern and eastern parties dominated Lagos political affairs between 1914–1991 when it was the seat of the national government. The streets of Lagos became sites of violent confrontations (Fourchard, 2007), where politicians mobilized associational and occupational groups – thugs, market women and motor-park union leaders – building on existing rivalries embedded in complicated chieftaincy affairs (Adeboye, 2007). But, rather than being a source of anarchy and disorder, "the outsourcing of state functions to various political, religious and associational entrepreneurs (vigilante groups, market associations, union leaders and so on) are part of an ongoing process of state formation" (Fourchard, 2011: 44) and establishment of urban order (LeBas, 2013).

Despite these well-organized occupational and associational groups playing a formative role in state-building and party politics, they never provided "the political connections necessary to translate large and dynamic informal economies into political voice" (Meagher, 2014: 435).

The evolution of associational life in Accra mirrored the experience in Lagos. Like the Awori, the Ga ethnic group established first-settler status in what is now Accra, and maintained political dominance until the colonial era. Migrants assimilated into Ga society, contributing to a long process of "becoming Ga" (Sanjek, 1972: 47). This process of assimilation ended in the early 1900s, when migrants sought new political connections to British colonial government and developed their own political communities. While non-Ga ethnic headman had no formal or legal position, they were informally recognized by the British authorities and Ga chiefs (Acquah, 1958). Rapid urbanization during colonization commercialized the land market and led to significant alienation of land (Quarcoopome, 1992), as Ga leaders took advantage of the new political and economic resource to expand their power (Parker, 2000; Sackeyfio, 2012: 314).

The expansion of Accra into an industrial city during colonial rule led to the growth of its migrant population. Excluded from formal governance and control over land, migrant populations took over various businesses and economic sectors (Peil, 1971). They also "established their own permanent quarters under their own chiefs or headmen" (Skinner, 1963: 309). Pressure groups like the Gold Coast Muslim Association formed to demand resources from the government and provide their own representative bodies (Ahmed-Rufai, 2002).

Due to the competitive two-party system that emerged in Ghana's post-colonial political development, which had deep connections to the grassroots, local leadership structures and associational activity were quickly incorporated into the dominant political machines. The experience in Accra's poor neighborhoods was very similar to what Schildkrout observed in stranger settlements – called zongos – in Kumasi: "The party controlled the zongo in two main ways. First, it removed the non-co-operative headmen from office. Second, it gained control of certain voluntary organisations, changed their traditional functions, and forced others to disband" (Schildkrout, 1970: 264). This clouded out political space for other social groupings based on ethnicity, gender, or ideology. Parties co-opted occupational and associational groups (Austin, 1970: 199), while ordinary residents sought these connections as an opportunity for social mobility (Apter, 1955: 179).

Like Lagos, state institutions and politicians "outsourced" key functions of governance like security to non-state actors, including neighborhood watch committees, traditional security mechanisms, landguards, NGOs and civil society, "machomen", and religious organizations (Badong, 2009). District assemblies, too, delegate development responsibilities to informal actors, as formal "unit committees" are weak or non-existent and other functions have been co-opted by party activists (Owusu, 2011). Clearly, the success of these local committees depends on the underlying structural and spatial features (Serbeh & Osei-Wusu Adjei, 2024). Young men are often mobilized for political party purposes during elections (Bjarnesen, 2020; Bob-Milliar & Paller, 2023), but largely sit outside the formal governance structures in everyday life.

The histories of Lagos and Accra demonstrate the long-standing role that neighborhood-level associations play in state-society relations. Yet they also call into question important assumptions about associational activity, namely that they are bounded social organizations devoid of vertical political interference. Instead, state-society relations in urban Africa must be understood as part of a long history of urban settlement, host-migrant relationships, state building, institutional development, and partisan politics which clarify the interaction between associational life, citizenship, and government.

5. Political connections across neighborhoods

We now show how the class structure of the neighborhood shapes the connections that residents have to the state, providing the key mechanism through which residents claim citizenship. Following the theoretical propositions, we show how poor neighborhoods rely on their associations and political party networks to lobby and pressure the state, but these are also prone to capture and clientelism. Middle-class neighborhoods show emerging social contracts between the state and residents, but residents also depend on personal connections with strong representatives in government. Wealthy neighborhoods cooperate with the state, but seek autonomy due to private governance and direct personal connections to state power.

5.1. *Poor neighborhoods*

The cases of Oworonshoki and Nima demonstrate how the urban poor use their leverage as vote banks to demand urban citizenship. Political party activity is most intense in these neighborhoods, and offers urbanites opportunities for social mobility and financial access. But parties are hardly democratic bodies, and operate on logics that focus on short-term electoral gain rather than long-term developmental priorities. This has also led to the infiltration of political parties into the formal representative bodies, leading to local capture of CDAs, CDCs, unit committees, and MMDAs. When party politics fails, youth associations – often self-called "concerned youth" – attempt to address these shortcomings.

Residents of Oworonshoki take pride in their importance in electoral politics. "It is very important to them [politicians]. They've got to win it" (Oworonshoki, Interview 19). But this has also led to the proliferation of party capture into all facets of neighborhood life by "infiltrating" the CDAs (Oworonshoki, Interview 6). Politicians use the neighborhood to enrich themselves personally, and then often move out of the area (Oworonshoki, FGD 1). Over time, the intense partisanship and political capture led to a citizen backlash, and the development of a "concerned youth" association called The Oworo Youth Forum.

The neighborhood supported the group to combat challenges like potholes and crime (Oworonshoki, FGD 1). They subsequently created

the Oworonshoki Trust Fund to provide security patrols; every house pays into the account, and they use the money to buy patrol vans. International and domestic NGOs have assisted its development. Security issues were bad during the COVID-19 lockdown, with incessant attacks on the community by One Million Boys, a local gang. Over time, community policing and partnerships with the security sector led to a structured security apparatus for the community [See elaboration in Appendix VI].

The Youth Forum and Trust Fund were instrumental in organizing collective decision-making, as one resident explains:

> "If you want to call meeting now, it's easier for us to mobilize to call a meeting because something connects us together. All the houses in the community, we have their database. We have their contact. We took the map data of each the house. We have it in Excel. It's well digitized" (Oworonshoki, Interview 6).

The group has been especially innovative with their use of WhatsApp to connect with people at different government agencies to assure responsiveness. They use it to ensure that light is restored when there are electricity blackouts, and that water is delivered when the taps go dry (Oworonshoki, Interview 6).

Like Oworonshoki, Nima, a stranger settlement in central Accra, has grown rapidly in the years since Independence in 1957. It is now "one of the most extremely diverse communities you can ever come across" (Nima West, FGD 10). The neighborhood has long been a vote bank for the NDC due to early inroads made by the CPP.

Nima's strong associational structure persists, where informal authorities continue to hold a lot of sway in neighborhood affairs by "directly or indirectly controlling affairs" (Nima West, FGD 10). Political parties "use" Nima youth to win elections, but do not invest in the neighborhood long-term. Residents complain that NGOs reproduce these developments by hosting "peace conferences" before elections but not investing in long-term development projects (Nima West, FGD 10).

Residents perceive politicians as partisan, and only likely to support their own. Because of this, government officials and politicians are not representing all residents, but rather only their constituents. One resident says that "You only go for help from people that you have some inclination towards" (Newtown, FGD 12). When "their party" is not in power, residents say they have no path to claiming public services. As one resident notes, "It seems like we live in a community where politics has taken over everything" (Nima West, FGD 10). "We are politically hijacked right now" (Nima, Interview 4), another explains.

The politicization of the Assembly also contributes to elite capture. Until the 2025 change in government, the municipal chief executive and Presiding Member of the Municipal Assembly were both NPP. This is not typical because 10 of the Assemblypersons are members of the NDC (and theoretically could be a check on government), and these members must vote for the Presiding Member. Residents think that assembly members colluded with the mayor. Now, the Assembly has lost legitimacy on the ground (Nima, Interview 4).

Residents appreciate the recent political development that created stand-alone municipalities, rather than the old system of sub-metros which were a function of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA). In the past, one of the local chiefs of Nima explained, "When you discussed something at sub-Metro, it was subject to approval at AMA. Now we have power to make decisions. All the indigenes go to meet at AMA. They feel like Accra belongs to them" (Nima, Interview 8). Residents felt as though their neighborhoods were sidelined by Ga interests through the process of indigenous capture (Paller, 2019).

Traditional authorities exist in Nima – both indigenous Ga who claim ownership of the land and migrant headmen who lead their respective ethnic groups. On the one hand, "Chiefs are the mouthpiece of the locality," one resident explains. "Without chiefs we can't get development done" (Nima, Interview 10). However, they do not always make a positive impact on long-term development. In fact, there is a resurgence of tension around the chieftaincy, with diverse factions mobilizing for local control. The divisions manifest in tension between a faction supporting the Ga landlords, and a group fighting against the Ga seeking power for a coalition of strangers. This has led to a common sentiment: "Our chiefs are another problem. They will not do what we need from them" (Nima, Interview 6).

Elections provide some accountability. For example, residents were fed up with the uncovered gutter that had been a problem in the neighborhood for decades. After many years, residents threatened to withhold their vote for the MP if he did not do anything, "so he started doing something about it actually" (Newtown, FGD 12). Anger over the gutter reached its peak with a demonstration in 2013, which brought together diverse political factions from across the entire neighborhood (Nima West, FGD 10). The assembly, which was a sub-unit of Accra Metropolitan Assembly at the time, partnered with the Millennium Cities Initiative to re-construct the gutter [See elaboration in Appendix VI].

Over the years, numerous CBOs, NGOs, and self-help organizations have stepped in to help Nima residents. The Concerned Nima Youth emerged as a group representing youth in the neighborhood, seeking to change the representation of young people born in Nima. These associations, in partnership with the Assemblypersons, are now using WhatsApp platforms to ensure that developmental needs are met. One resident explains how the Assemblyperson is the first point of contact, serving as the link between residents and the government, being "on the ground to understand their aspirations and frustrations" (Nima, Interview 3).

In both cities, residents use their status as powerful voting blocs, strength as party activists, and self-organization as concerned youth to gain attention of the state, and make demands on the government for citizenship rights. While the success of these efforts varies, they remain a formative way for poor urban neighborhoods to make claims on the state.

5.2. *Middle class neighborhoods*

Middle class neighborhoods like Surulere and Madina leverage their political influence in slightly different ways. Like poor neighborhoods, they can still be powerful vote banks. But, in contrast to poor neighborhoods, politicians and local officials often reside in these neighborhoods, using their political power to upgrade the neighborhoods because they benefit as well. This is akin to Olson's (1993) influential theory of stationary bandits, which suggests that leaders have the incentive to encourage economic success and protect property rights – rather than pillage, steal, and destroy – because they will be in power long enough and remain in the neighborhood to benefit from the success. In this case, leaders will benefit from neighborhood development. Importantly, having a representative in central government – especially as a Minister or someone who is close to the President – provides the closest link to state power.

We find evidence for this logic in Surulere, and the hope for this arrangement in Madina. Surulere is a cosmopolitan neighborhood called New Lagos and is relatively planned with indigenes and middle class migrant groups who mostly settled as a result of professional status as government civil servants. It is often considered a "connection point" in the city, with a vibrant nightlife and live music on Fridays, as well as a "beehive of economic activity."

Residents emphasize the importance of its influential leaders, "Go to Surulere for example, you will find out that all the roads are neat and tarred and that is because the [Speaker] lives there" (Lawanson, Interview 38). These big men are viewed as major neighborhood assets and drive collective action. The CDA chairman and the executive council will fundraise from neighbors, and reach out to the landlord associations if they need to raise funds (Obele Kolade, Interview 45). But this is not without problems, as there are now two CDAs because internal splits driven by ethnic and partisan interests got in the way of community cohesion (Surulere, Interview 40) [See elaboration in Appendix VI].

Residents appear most concerned about the prevalence of area boys in parts of the neighborhood. This has become a much bigger issue in recent years, as one resident explains: "I live in a 'warzone'. There are some days that I will be enjoying myself and they will just call me that there is a fight going on in my street" (Surulere, Interview 37) [See elaboration in Appendix VI].

There is a chain of connection from the residents to the state. The most influential leader is Olufemi "Femi" Hakeem Gbajabiamila, the former Speaker of the House of Representatives who represents Surulere I constituency, and is now Chief of Staff of President Bola Tinubu. Gbajabiamila's influence extends beyond his own constituency, as one resident explains, "Look at Gbaja for Surulere here, Gbaja is even making his presence felt even in vicinity that is not under his own jurisdiction" (Lawanson, FGD 3).

As Fig. 2 demonstrates, Gbajabiamila's strength is illustrated by the developmental projects that he delivered in Surulere I, but also neighboring Surulere II. He has leveraged his closeness to those in power to benefit his constituents and those in surrounding areas [See elaboration in Appendix VI].

Similar to Surulere, Madina is a rapidly growing neighborhood that now consists of several areas, including a Zongo community and estates. It is a suburb of Accra that sits next to the University of Ghana, Legon campus. Today, this close proximity to the university is increasing land values, as gentrification threatens to displace indigenous populations.

Like Surulere, strong leaders play a central role in the development of the community. Some of these are chiefs, as a resident explains, "Madina is a community held together by the traditional authorities" (Madina, Interview 14). Strong local leaders have been able to build up "bases" at the grassroots, which serve as contact points for youth to talk politics and organize collective demands from the state. As one resident explains, "We go to the bases through the leaders…they are always available to us (Madina, Interview 12). But while residents take great pride in the number of politicians who are from the neighborhood, they are also unhappy that this has not manifested in the "strategic ministerial appointments" (Social Welfare, FGD 15).

A social contract has emerged in middle-class neighborhoods. But residents continue to use their political connections, hoping that their representatives will climb the party ranks and gain a stronger foothold in the central government.

5.3. Wealthy neighborhoods

The relationship between high-income neighborhoods and political parties is understudied. We spoke to several party activists who admitted that they do not focus on high-income areas because it is more costly; there are less voters and they are difficult to reach. Parties do not view these neighborhoods as vote banks. Alternatively, residents use a diverse array of strategies – through personal connections and very competitive residence association elections – to ensure that their needs are met.

Magodo is close to the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway and is well-ordered with paved roads and high-quality services. High-income professionals reside there. The neighborhood mixes commercial and residential life, as a resident explains, "We have hospitals, dental clinics, fitness and spas, supermarkets, two restaurants, laundry services, schools; we have a whole lot here" (Magodo, Interview 13). Residents take great pride in its cosmopolitanism, and espouse an almost Utopian vision of their neighborhood, and one says, "What I enjoy most is that there is peace of mind. The environment is serene. I can sleep with my eyes closed. The presence of the private security and the police around helps" (Magodo, Interview 10).

Despite the well-ordered living arrangements, the neighborhood is amidst a long-standing property and land dispute. Current residents of

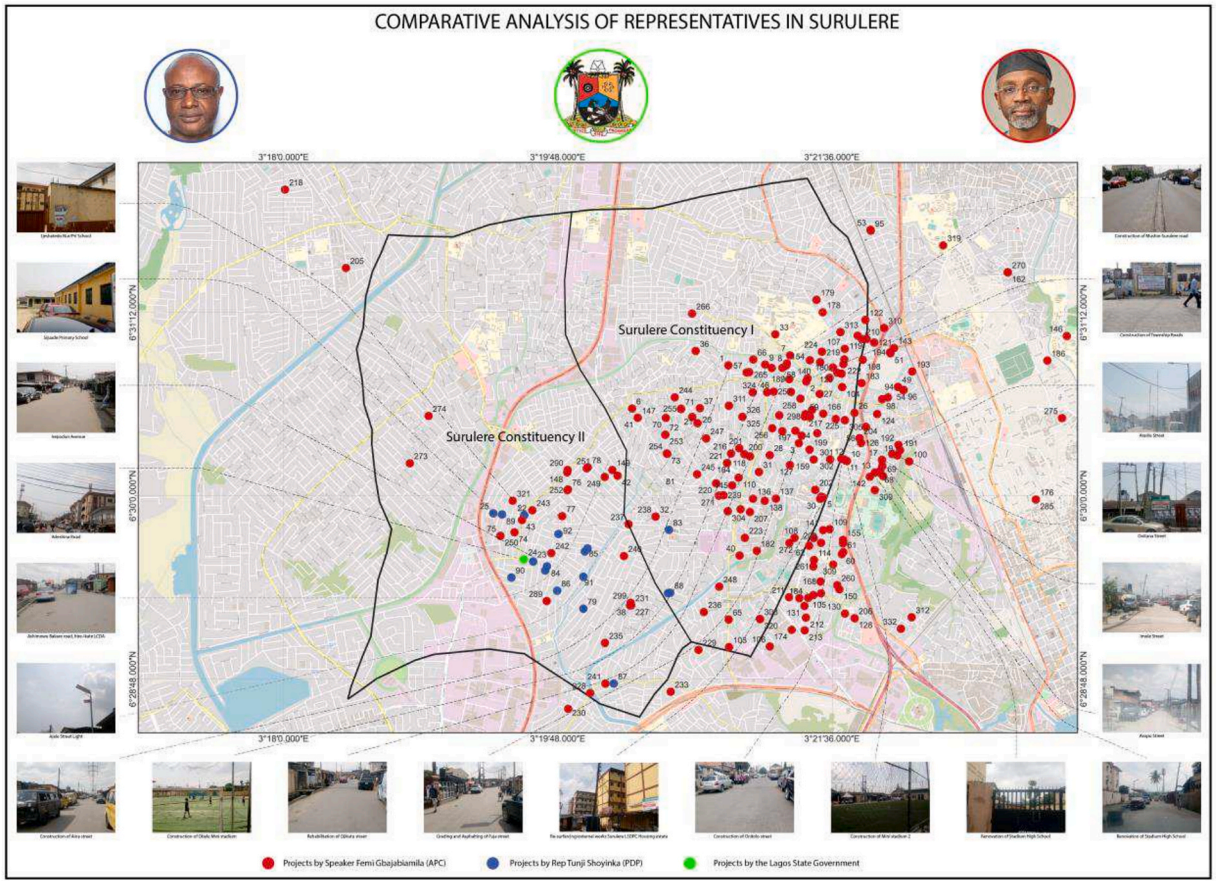

Fig. 2. Projects sponsored by Femi Gbajabiamila and Tunji Shoyinka (2019–2023).

the neighborhood understand the complex land issue, but do not see it as a major threat to their tenancy. Instead, they see the issue as a dispute between the Lagos State government and original landowners (Magodo, Interview 11). The fact that the early settlers were government officials provides a sense of security among current residents (Magodo, Interview 14) [see elaboration in Appendix VI].

The Magodo Residents Association governs the neighborhood, which operates independently from the government. It operates as parallel to CDAs by splitting the estate into 21 zones with executives. There is a structured executive committee that includes a chairman (two-year term), vice chairman, secretary, assistant secretary, treasurer, financial secretary, as well as welfare and social secretaries (Magodo, Interview 11). Zones have a certain amount of autonomy in what they decide to do, as one resident explains: "In my zone, we have street sweepers who sweep our street, and we also pay welfare fees when we want to maintain certain things like our streetlight. Each zone has its peculiarities" (Magodo, Interview 13).

The government aims to ensure that properties are used in compliance with zoning directives, differentiating between commercial and residential purposes. If someone violates these rules, the MRA, LCDA, and town planning authorities work together to rectify the situation. Residents are quick to assert their autonomy. They do not want any "unnecessary intervention or interruption… if it is a project that obstructs our independence, we are very much averse to it" (Magodo, Interview 13).

The MRA engages with government agencies directly to secure public services. Most residents have private boreholes and systems, while only a few rely on the Water Corporation of Lagos (Magodo, Interview 11). Residents write written requests for road and utility improvements. Over the last twenty years, citizens self-provisioned streetlights, water, electricity, and road improvements, and now the MRA presides over these jurisdictions. The number of residences has likely doubled during that time.

Strong collective action and resident participation explains the evolution of the neighborhood from one with security challenges to a peaceful and safe community. Due to security challenges in the early 2000s, residents lobbied to open a police post in the neighborhood. They then implemented checkpoints and installed gates. Residents partner with the police and hire various private security companies.

The Magodo Residence Association elections are now extremely competitive affairs, and have even become "aggressive" [see elaboration in Appendix VI]. Over the years, Magodo has become more politically important because influential voters "of high caliber" can have outsize impact outside the neighborhood, as one resident explains, "There are influencers within the estate who can make things happen for you outside the estate. They can connect you with people and support your cause if they believe in it, not just within the estate but also beyond" (Magodo, Interview 14). For this reason, governors and other prominent politicians hold town hall meetings to hear from residents, especially during election campaigns (Magodo, Interview 13). While residents and MRA leaders align with different parties, they all seek connections to the ruling party to gain influence (Magodo, Interview 14).

Magodo currently faces many of the issues that well-established, big city neighborhoods face including gentrification, speculation, rezoning possibilities, and housing development. Residents are trying to pass a ban on commercial activities on many streets, and implement necessary regulations to deal with short-term rentals like AirBnB. A resident acknowledges the future challenges:

> "I see a lot of developers taking our properties and shrinking the ones we have. A lot of population is coming in, and there is going to be pressure on infrastructure and amenities. It is already happening. People are building properties with not enough parking space" (Magodo, Interview 12).

The secondary challenge involves formalizing MRA's relationship to the Lagos State Government. While some residents foresee a benefit to working closer to Lagos State others want to assert their independence so as not to be captured by political interests.

More research is needed to fully validate our claims in Manet Gardens, but we observe similar processes. Members of the local unit committees of the area say they have very little contact with residents in the estate, explaining that it is mostly indigenes who have ties to the land that are involved in local politics. Residents of the community go to the property manager when they need assistance, who keeps close connections to government agencies. Some residents use the people they know in government agencies when they have a water or electricity issue, bypassing the local government structures altogether. Political party representatives explain that they do not bother campaigning in the estate – it is too difficult to mobilize. They rely on the local government bodies and party branches outside of the estate.

6. Discussion

Our findings suggest that there are significant "neighborhood effects" – the direct or indirect impact of the place one lives on behaviors and social outcomes (Sampson, 2013) – with respect to how social capital, elite capture, and political interference operates in everyday life. Residents experience these social and political processes in their neighborhood—a collection of people and institutions occupying a defined area defined by ecological, cultural, and political forces (Park & Burgess, 1925: 147–154). This is consistent with Nathan's (2019) argument that the political geography of a city shapes political behavior, calling into question theories of modernization that suggest structural changes will lead to more programmatic politics and less clientelism. Instead, there are different "geographies of citizenship practice" across neighborhood types (Auerbach & Kruks-Wisner, 2020).

Across all residential class structures, neighborhood associations play a formative role in claim-making and public service provision, due to social embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985) and interest articulation (Hays, 2015), but also because of their historical and institutional importance in post-colonial development. In poor neighborhoods like Nima and Oworonshoki, social capital enables youth associations to coordinate voters and use bloc voting as a way to hold leaders accountable, as Cooperman (2023) identified in Brazil. These neighborhood organizations lobby governments for development (Paniagua, 2022), and residents leverage their party networks to "demand development" (Auerbach, 2020).

Yet poor neighborhoods are also susceptible to political capture and everyday politics. Neighborhood leaders, in particular, capture the decentralization process to serve their personal interests, similar to the experiences documented in India (Das & Walton, 2015; De Wit & Berner, 2009) and Ghana (Paller, 2019). On the other hand, local leaders, like those in Oworonshoki, also play an active role in local governance and their impact persists even when they step away from powerful positions. For example, the local youth leader had ties to the traditional leader who was working with the developer. He chose to step down in order to not distract from advocacy and protests that occurred after the July 2023 evictions. This enabled the organizational growth to continue. In addition, these local leaders take on the role of "organization brokers" by serving as intermediaries between political parties and neighborhood associations in between electoral cycles (Holland & Palmer-Rubin, 2015).

As Nelson (1979) convincingly argued several decades ago, political party structures – and patron-client relationships – offer poor residents some of the few avenues to state power and social recognition (Klaus, Paller, & Wilfahrt, 2023). These relationships are moderated by a neighborhood's social context, as recent evidence in Malawi, Kenya, and Zambia suggest (Jöst & Lust, 2022). Political party networks, therefore, are a distinct analytical space for claiming citizenship and public services. As Heller, Swaminathan, and Varshney (2023) observe in Bangalore, India, the poor rely on political participation – which also involves engaging in clientelism – to access the state. This political

participation plays an integrative role: residents feel more attached to the place – and city – the more involved they become in community-level affairs (Zhang et al., 2023).

We also observe intra-neighborhood divisions along ethnic lines – between Yoruba and Igbo in Lagos, and Ga and Hausa in Accra – and focus group participants alluded to the challenge of sanctioning outgroup residents (especially among the youth) as Habyarimana et al. (2009) find in Ugandan poor neighborhoods. It is important to note that most of these intra-neighborhood disputes are not due to ascriptive differences between populations, but rather histories of settlement and belonging—who settled in the neighborhood first, and how (Paller, 2019). Residents of poor neighborhoods also navigate multiple and competing arenas of authority (Lust, 2022). Nima residents, for example, are navigating political struggles between leaders aligned with Ga chiefs and those with migrant headmen, as well as tensions between religious sects of Islam. It is in these poor neighborhoods where we see the greatest tension between dense social organizations at the neighborhood level (based on indigeneity and ethnicity) at odds with efforts of integration of outsiders or migrants at the city level (Kearns & Forrest, 2000).

Madina and Surulere possess the aspirational qualities of middle-class status in Africa: residents aspire for prosperity, cosmopolitanism, and financial security, and living in a quality dwelling with paved roads is a start (Lentz, 2020; Mercer, 2020). Many perceive their residence in these neighborhoods as an entrance into the African middle class, and they go through a process of "boundary making" to distinguish their neighborhoods from poorer ones (Bloemraad, Esses, Kymlicka, & Zhou, 2023). The desire for social mobility explains why many residents moved from neighborhoods like Nima and Oworonshoki to Madina and Surulere. These neighborhoods also have a higher degree of state penetration, leading to the more regulated provision of public services, which provide more formal channels for the distribution of services (Post, Bronsoler, & Salman, 2017).

Once residents settle in these neighborhoods, they also have different "pathways of engagement" to the state, relying on different types of personal connection to claim citizenship (Donaghy & Paller, 2023). Residents rely on well-connected bureaucrats and politicians to make their grievances, demand rights, and secure services. For example, residents in Lawanson go directly to government bureaucrats and political representatives because they live in these neighborhoods, and they are expected to deliver resources and services to them, operating as "stationary bandits." Gbajabiamila in Surulere fulfilled this promise, and set a city-wide precedent for how "big men" can build political support through "godfatherism" and enhancing the political machine. This draws similarities to political development in Pittsburgh and St. Louis in the late 1800s, where corrupt city administrations rigged contracts and empowered local businessmen while still investing in infrastructural innovations, therefore building state capacity (Strach et al., 2019). This illustrates the importance of the "district-based politician," who forges neighborhood-level ties or city-wide partnerships in their governance activities (Marwell, Marantz, & Baldessari, 2020).

While Madina residents do not have representatives in ministerial positions, they demanded this sort of connection, suggesting that they envisioned their social contract with the state should resemble that of Surulere. Therefore, the focus on local capture is less relevant than the municipal-wide politicized allocation of services, similar to what Carlitz finds in Tanzania (2017). It is at this level of analysis where inequalities and political interference occur, calling for more attention to neighborhood segregation, differences between residential areas (Xu, 2023; Trounstine, 2020), and electoral logics of redistribution (Holland, 2017).

The desire for political autonomy is especially important in wealthy neighborhoods, where residents seek security from the crime-ridden city, but also insulation from corrupt and inefficient municipal governments. For these reasons, they look to "purchase private alternatives" (MacLean, 2011) to supplement the failures of the state (Post, Bronsoler, & Salman, 2017). They create their own governance structures through residence associations, which can contribute to participatory inequalities. Property owners are more likely to participate in governance (Yoder, 2020), but also use their leverage to turn this participation into policy representation (Anzia, 2019). In our interviews, we find that residents develop a deep sense of place attachment, imagining a utopian-like neighborhood outside the complications and chaos of the bigger city. These gated communities can promote strong social interactions through the vibrant residence associations, as Asiedu and Arku (2009) find in Accra as well. This might foreshadow the emergence of "place-protective motives," where residents act to protect the neighborhood character and a way of life (Morange et al., 2012; O'Grady, 2020).

For leaders, executive positions on residence associations offer opportunities to secure contracts from the State Government and from the residence association for their private businesses. These organizations can also be exclusionary, as in the case of Magodo where the president of the residents' association must be a home owner and not a tenant. This is the case with private security contracts, construction of gates, and implementation of other smart city technology in Magodo. One thing is clear: governance processes blend informal and formal processes, even (and perhaps especially) in wealthy neighborhoods (Mabin, Butcher, & Bloch, 2013). This focus on the neighborhood emphasizes the importance of place and space, as Lemanski explains, "The space of the city is not merely a static container for urban processes (such as poverty, governance, citizenship), but that the spatiality of the city itself plays a dynamic role in creating and perpetuating such processes" (2020: 3).

7. Claiming citizenship in urban Africa and beyond

As people move to African cities and the urban footprint rapidly grows, residents will sort into poor, middle-class, and wealthy neighborhoods. As a long tradition of urban sociology has demonstrated, these neighborhoods are more than containers of surplus labor or sites of domination, but rather arenas of vibrant politics with logics of political participation that are rational (Portes, 1972), insurgent (Holston, 2008), and collective (Walton, 1998; Bayat, 1997). But these residents are not only poor, and they do not only settle into informal settlements or slums. Our paper shows how differences in class structure across neighborhoods create different geographies of citizenship practice, shaping the distinct strategies residents use to access the state. "Neighborhood effects" exist not only for prospects of social mobility and community cohesion, but for citizenship practice, service provision, state-society negotiations, and political participation as well. The implications are great: more comparative research is needed—across countries, cities, and neighborhoods.

State-society relationships will shift depending on where and in what type of neighborhood people live. As Auerbach finds in India, neighborhood associations continue to be a powerful way for urban residents to exercise their political voice and demand development (Auerbach, 2017). But neighborhood associations have different orientations and relationships to the state, calling for scholars to revise theories of citizen participation, co-production, social capital, and political capture to pay attention to the class structure of urban neighborhoods. In poor neighborhoods, relationships between political parties and citizens are crucial, offering spaces for participation but also capture. In wealthy neighborhoods, residents seek personal connections to individuals representing or working for the state. In all three, participatory inequalities emerge shaping collective action and participation.

The article also reconciles differences that we see in citizenship practice between the global north and the global south. In Africa, wealthy individuals with higher education are less likely to be civically engaged and vote, especially in local elections. But residents from wealthy neighborhoods are very active in their residence associations, similar to their behavior in housing associations in the north. However, in Africa they are less likely to make citizenship claims on the state,

further enclaving the rich from the rest of society.

These participatory institutions attempt to remain autonomous – not officially sanctioned. Therefore, it might be more difficult to incorporate them into participatory planning initiatives. The challenge will be to incentivize these associations to more formal pathways so that they are more transparent and accountable. Alternatively, residents of poor neighborhoods are very active in politics and make citizenship claims at a much higher rate than the poor in the global north. This offers a bright spot for strengthening democracy as long as they are not captured or subsumed into clientelist networks.

Development interventions and policy prescriptions need to be designed to consider neighborhood social context, paying close attention to the participatory inequalities and potential for local capture. These interventions are not merely technical endeavors, but will contribute to a long history of state-building and political development.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Damilola Agbalajobi: Writing – review & editing, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Mohammed S. Awal:** Project administration, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Taibat Lawanson:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Jeffrey W. Paller:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Acknowledgements

The authors appreciate the generous funding provided by the Norwegian Research Council as part of the project Political Transformation in African Cities (PACE), grant number 315400. Victor Umoren and Japhet Awonusi provided excellent research assistance. Thanks to participants at the Uppsala Forum for Africa Studies for great comments on an earlier version of the manuscript, as well as participants at the PACE Special Issue Development workshop, University of San Francisco faculty seminar series, and APSA 2024. All errors are our own.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.107010.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

References

Abimbola, B. S., & Moses, T. O. (2020). Effectiveness Of Community Development Associations (CDAs) In Implementing Development Projects In Surulere, Lagos State. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research, 3*(6), 157–166.

Acquah, I. (1958). *Accra Survey. A Social Survey of the Capital of Ghana, Formerly Called the Gold Coast, Undertaken for the West African Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1953–1956*. London: University of London Press.

Adeboye, O. (2007). 'Iku Ya J'esin': Politically Motivated Suicide, Social Honor, and Chieftaincy Politics in Early Colonial Ibadan. *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines, 41*(2), 189–225. https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2007.10751356

Adelusi-Adeluyi, A. (2018). Historical Tours of 'New' Lagos: Performance, Place Making, and Cartography in the 1880s. Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle. *East, 38*(3), 443–454. https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201x-7208790

Ahmed-Rufai, M. (2002). The Muslim Association Party: A Test of Religious Politics in Ghana. *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana, 6*, 99–114. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41406671.

Akinyele, R. T. (2007). *The involvement of the Oodua Peoples' Congress in crime control in Southwestern Nigeria*. Edited by L. Fourchard. Gouverner les villes d'Afrique. Etat, gouvernement local et acteurs privés. *KARTHALA Editions*.

Akinyele, R. T. (2009). Contesting for Space in an Urban Centre: The Omo Onile Syndrome in Lagos. In *African Cities* (pp. 109–133). Brill.

Anzia, S. F. (2019). When Does a Group of Citizens Influence Policy? Evidence from Senior Citizen Participation in City Politics. *The Journal of Politics, 81*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1086/699916

Apter, D. E. (1955). British West Africa: Patterns of Self- Government. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 298*(1), 117–129. https://doi.org/10.1177/000271625529800113

Auerbach, A. M., LeBas, A., Post, A. E., & Weitz-Shapiro, R. (2018). State, Society, and Informality in Cities of the Global South. *Studies in Comparative International Development, 53*(3), 261–280. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-018-9269-y

Asiedu, A. B., & Arku, G. (2009). The Rise of Gated Housing Estates in Ghana: Empirical Insights from Three Communities in Metropolitan Accra. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment, 24*(3), 227–247. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10901-009-9146-0

Auerbach, A. M. (2017). Neighborhood Associations and the Urban Poor: India's Slum Development Committees. *World Development, 96*, 119–135. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.03.002

Auerbach, A. M. (2020). *Demanding Development: The Politics of Public Goods Provision in India's Urban Slums. Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.*. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108649377

Auerbach, A. M., & Kruks-Wisner, G. (2020). The Geography of Citizenship Practice: How the Poor Engage the State in Rural and Urban India. *Perspectives on Politics, 18*(4), 1118–1134. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592720000043

Austin, D. (1970). *Politics in Ghana, 1946-1960*. Oxford University Press.

Badong, P. A. (2009). "Security Provision in Ghana: What Is the Role and Impact of Non-State Actors?" King's College London, African Leadership Centre, *ALC Report* No. 5.

Baird, S., McIntosh, C., & Özler, B. (2013). The Regressive Demands of Demand-Driven Development. *Journal of Public Economics, 106*(October), 27–41. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2013.07.002

Baldwin, K., Kao, K., & Lust, E. (2025). Is authority fungible? Legitimacy, domain congruence, and the limits of power in Africa. *American Journal of Political Science, 69*(1), 314–329. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12837

Bardhan, P. K., & Mookherjee, D. (2000). Capture and Governance at Local and National Levels. *American Economic Review, 90*(2), 119–135. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.90.2.135

Bardhan, & Pranab, K. (2006). Dilip Mookherjee. In *Decentralization and Local Governance in Developing Countries: A Comparative Perspective*. MIT Press.

Barnes, S. T. (1977). Political Transition in Urban Africa. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 432*(1), 26–41. https://doi.org/10.1177/000271627743200104

Barnes, S. T. (2018). *Patrons and Power: Creating a Political Community in Metropolitan Lagos*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429444432

Bayat, A. (1997). Un-Civil Society: The Politics of the 'Informal People.'. *Third World Quarterly, 18*(1), 53–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436599715055

Beveridge, R., & Koch, P. (2017). The Post-Political Trap? Reflections on Politics, Agency and the City. *Urban Studies, 54*(1), 31–43. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098016671477

Bjarnesen, M. (2020). The Foot Soldiers of Accra. *African Affairs, 119*(475), 296–307. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adz028

Björkman, L. (2014). 'You Can't Buy a Vote': Meanings of Money in a Mumbai Election. *American Ethnologist, 41*(4), 617–634. https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12101

Bloemraad, I., Esses, V. M., Kymlicka, W., & Zhou, Y. Y. (2023). Unpacking immigrant integration: Concepts, mechanisms, and context. World Bank. Background paper to the world development report 2023: Migrants, refugees, and societies.

Bob-Milliar, G. M. (2012). Political Party Activism in Ghana: Factors Influencing the Decision of the Politically Active to Join a Political Party. *Democratization, 19*(4), 668–689. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2011.605998

Bob-Milliar, G. M., & Paller, J. W. (2023). The Social Embeddedness of Elections: Ghana's 2016 and 2020 Campaigns. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics, 61*(3), 293–314. https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2023.2242107

Boix, C., & Posner, D. N. (1998). Social Capital: Explaining Its Origins and Effects on Government Performance. *British Journal of Political Science, 28*(4), 686–693. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123498000313

Beauregard, Robert A., & Anna Bounds. (2000). "Urban Citizenship." In *Democracy, Citizenship and the Global City*. Routledge.

Brierley, S., & Nathan, N. L. (2021). The Connections of Party Brokers: Which Brokers Do Parties Select? *The Journal of Politics, 83*(3), 884–901. https://doi.org/10.1086/710783

Brierley, S., & Nathan, N. L. (2022). Motivating the Machine: Which Brokers Do Parties Pay? *The Journal of Politics, 84*(3), 1539–1555. https://doi.org/10.1086/717185

Cammett, M., & MacLean, L. M. (2014). *The Politics of Non-State Social Welfare*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Carlitz, R. D. (2017). Money Flows, Water Trickles: Understanding Patterns of Decentralized Water Provision in Tanzania. *World Development, 93*(May), 16–30. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2016.11.019

Casey, K. (2018). Radical decentralization: Does community-driven development work? *Annual Review of Economics, 10*, 139–163. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-080217-0503339

Cohen, A. (1969). *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa: A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns. Routledge.*

Cooperman, A. D. (2023). Bloc voting for electoral accountability. *American Political Science Review, 118*(3), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055423000989
Das, V., & Walton, M. (2015). Political Leadership and the Urban Poor: Local Histories. *Current Anthropology, 56*(S11), S44–S54. https://doi.org/10.1086/682420
Davis, M. (2006). *Planet of Slums*. Verso Books.
De Wit, J., & Berner, E. (2009). Progressive patronage? Municipalities, NGOs, CBOs and the limits to slum dwellers' empowerment. *Development and Change, 40*(5), 927–947. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2009.01589.x
Donaghy, M. M., & Paller, J. W. (2023). Sustainability Politics and Housing Development in Urban Brazil and Ghana. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society, 36*(3), 329–347. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-023-09449-y
Dongier, P., Van Domelen, J., Ostrom, E., Rizvi, A., Wakeman, W., Anthony Bebbington, … Margaret. (2018). Community-Driven Development. *World Bank, PRSP Sourcebook, 1*.
Dorman, S. R. (2014). *Citizenship in Africa: The Politics of Belonging*. In Routledge Handbook of Global Citizenship Studies: Routledge.
Dosek, T. (2020). Multilevel Research Designs: Case Selection, Levels of Analysis, and Scope Conditions. *Studies in Comparative International Development, 55*(4), 460–480. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-020-09313-6
Einstein, K. L., Glick, D. M., & Palmer, M. (2019). *Neighborhood Defenders: Participatory Politics and America's Housing Crisis*. New York: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108769495
Fourchard, L. (2006). Lagos and the Invention of Juvenile Delinquency in Nigeria, 1920-60. *The Journal of African History, 47*(1), 115–137. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853705001660
Fourchard, L. (2007). Violence et ordre politique au Nigeria. *Politique africaine, 106*, 5–28.
Fourchard, L. (2011). Between World History and State Formation: New Perspectives on Africa's Cities. *The Journal of African History, 52*(2), 223–248. https://doi.org/10.1017/S002153711000259
Fourchard, L. (2012). Lagos. In *Capital Cities in Africa: Power and Powerlessness*. In S. B. Bekker, & G. Therborn, (Ed.), HSRC Press.
Gallagher, J. K., Kruks-Wisner, G., & Taylor, W. K. (2024). *Claim-Making in Comparative Perspective*. *Cambridge University Press.*
Gandy, M. (2006). Planning, Anti-Planning and the Infrastructure Crisis Facing Metropolitan Lagos. *Urban Studies, 43*(2), 371–396. https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980500406751
Gilens, M. (2014). *Affluence and Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America*. *Princeton University Press.*
Gillespie, T. (2020). The real estate frontier. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 44*(4), 599–616. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12900
Giraudy, A., & Niedzwiecki, S. (2022). Multi-Level Governance and Subnational Research: Similarities, Differences, and Knowledge Accumulation in the Study of Territorial Politics. *Regional & Federal Studies, 32*(3), 393–411. https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2021.1941900
Goodfellow, T. (2022). *Politics and the Urban Frontier: Transformation and Divergence in Late Urbanizing East Africa*. Oxford University Press.
Granovetter, M. (1985). Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness. *The American Journal of Sociology, 91*(3), 481–510.
Grossman, G., & Slough, T. (2022). Government Responsiveness in Developing Countries. *Annual Review of Political Science, 25*, 131–153. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051120-112501
Gugerty, M. K., & Kremer, M. (2008). Outside Funding and the Dynamics of Participation in Community Associations. *American Journal of Political Science, 52*(3), 585–602. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2008.00331.x
Guichaoua, Y. (2009). Self-Determination Group or Extra-Legal Governance Agency? The Multifaceted Nature of the Oodua People's Congress in Nigeria. *Journal of International Development, 21*(4), 520–533. https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.1569
Habyarimana, James, Macartan Humphreys, Daniel N. Posner, and Jeremy M. Weinstein. (2009). *Coethnicity: Diversity and the Dilemmas of Collective Action*. Russell Sage Foundation.
Hajnal, Z. L. & Trounstine, J. L. (2016). Race and class inequality in local politics, 139-155. In J. Hooker, & A.B. Tillery, Jr. (Eds.) *The double bind: The politics of racial & class inequalities in the Americas*. Report of the APSA Task Force on Racial and Class Inequalities in the Americas.
Harbers, I. (2015). Taxation and the Unequal Reach of the State: Mapping State Capacity in Ecuador. *Governance, 28*(3), 373–391. https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12117
Harris, L. M. (2021). Everyday experiences of water insecurity: Insights from underserved areas of Accra, Ghana. *Daedalus, 150*(4), 64–84. https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_01873
Harvey, D. (2008). The Right to the City. *New Left Review, 53*, 23–40.
Hays, R. A. (2015). Neighborhood Networks, Social Capital, and Political Participation: The Relationships Revisited. *Journal of Urban Affairs, 37*(2), 122–143. https://doi.org/10.1111/juaf.12137
Heller, P., Swaminathan, S., & Varshney, A. (2023). The Rich Have Peers, the Poor Have Patrons: Engaging the State in a South Indian City. *American Journal of Sociology, 129*(1), 76–122. https://doi.org/10.1086/725592
Herrera, V., & Post, A. E. (2014). Can Developing Countries Both Decentralize and Depoliticize Urban Water Services? Evaluating the Legacy of the 1990s Reform Wave. *World Development, 64*(December), 621–641. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2014.06.026
Holland, A. (2017). *Forbearance as Redistribution*. Cambridge University Press.
Holland, A. C. (2017). *Forbearance as Redistribution: The Politics of Informal Welfare in Latin America*. *Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.*. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316795613
Holland, A. C., & Palmer-Rubin, B. (2015). Beyond the machine: Clientelist brokers and interest organizations in Latin America. *Comparative Political Studies, 48*(9), 1186–1223. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414015574883
Holston, J. (2008). *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil*. *Princeton University Press.*
Immerwahr, D. (2007). The Politics of Architecture and Urbanism in Postcolonial Lagos, 1960–1986. *Journal of African Cultural Studies, 19*(2), 165–186. https://doi.org/10.1080/13696810701760450
Jöst, P., & Lust, E. (2022). Receiving More, Expecting Less? Social Ties, Clientelism and the Poor's Expectations of Future Service Provision. *World Development, 158*, Article 106008. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.106008
Jottier, D., & Heyndels, B. (2012). Does social capital increase political accountability? An empirical test for Flemish municipalities. *Public Choice, 150*(3/4), 731–744. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-010-9727-1
Kaufmann, D., & Sidney, M. (2020). Toward an urban policy analysis: Incorporating participation, multilevel Governance, and 'Seeing like a City'. *PS. Political Science & Politics, 53*(1), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096519001380
Kearns, A., & Forrest, R. (2000). Social Cohesion and Multilevel Urban Governance. *Urban Studies, 37*(5/6), 995–1017.
Klaus, K., & Paller, J. W. (2017). Defending the city, defending votes: Campaign strategies in urban Ghana. *The Journal of Modern African Studies, 55*(4), 681–708. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X17000453
Klaus, K., Paller, J. W., & Wilfahrt, M. (2023). Demanding recognition: A new framework for the study of political clientelism. *African Affairs, 122*(487), 185–203. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adad014
Krishna, A., Rains, E., & Wibbels, E. (2020). Negotiating Informality– Ambiguity, Intermediation, and a Patchwork of Outcomes in Slums of Bengaluru. *The Journal of Development Studies, 56*(11), 1983–1999. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2020.1725483
Kritz, J. (2023). *Redefining Development: Resolving Complex Challenges in a Global Context*. *Cambridge University Press.*
Krönke, M., Lockwood, S. J., & Mattes, R. (2022). Party Footprints in Africa: Measuring Local Party Presence across the Continent. *Party Politics, 28*(2), 208–222. https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688211008352
Lawanson, T., & Agunbiade, M. (2018). Land Governance and Megacity Projects in Lagos, Nigeria: The Case of Lekki Free Trade Zone. *Area Development and Policy, 3*(1), 114–131. https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2017.1399804
Lawanson, T. (2021). PART 3 - THE POWER OF NAMING: Lagos, Nairobi, Rio de Janeiro, Johannesburg. Society and Space. Available: https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/part-3-the-power-of-naming-lagos-nairobi-johannesburg.
LeBas, A. (2013). Violence and Urban Order in Nairobi, Kenya and Lagos, Nigeria. *Studies in Comparative International Development, 48*(3), 240–262. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-013-9134-y
Lentz, C. (2020). Doing Being Middle-Class in the Global South: Comparative Perspectives and Conceptual Challenges. *Africa, 90*(3), 439–469. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972020000029
Lust, E. M. (2022). *Everyday Choices: The Role of Competing Authorities and Social Institutions in Politics and Development*. Cambridge University Press.
Mabin, A., Butcher, S., & Bloch, R. (2013). Peripheries, Suburbanisms and Change in Sub-Saharan African Cities. *Social Dynamics, 39*(2), 167–190. https://doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2013.796124
MacLean, L. M. (2011). State retrenchment and the exercise of citizenship in Africa. *Comparative Political Studies, 44*(9), 1238–1266. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414010374704
Mann, K. (2007). *Slavery and the birth of an African* (pp. 1760–1900). City: Lagos: Indiana University Press.
Mansuri, G., & Rao, V. (2013). Can Participation Be Induced? Some Evidence from Developing Countries 1. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy, 16*(2), 284–304. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230.2012.757918
Marr, S., & Patience, M. (2023). *DIY urbanism in Africa: Politics and practice*. Bloomsbury Academic.
Marwell, N. P., Marantz, E. A., & Baldassarri, D. (2020). The Microrelations of Urban Governance: Dynamics of Patronage and Partnership. *American Journal of Sociology, 125*(6), 1559–1601. https://doi.org/10.1086/709250
Meagher, K. (2014). Disempowerment from Below: Informal Enterprise Networks and the Limits of Political Voice in Nigeria. *Oxford Development Studies, 42*(3), 419–438. https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2014.900005
Mercer, C., & Lemanski, C. (2020). The lived experiences of the African middle classes introduction. *Africa, 90*(3), 429–438. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972020000017
Mitlin, D. (2021). Editorial: Citizen Participation in Planning: From the Neighbourhood to the City. *Environment and Urbanization, 33*(2), 295–309. https://doi.org/10.1177/09562478211035608
Morange, M., Folio, F., Peyroux, E., & Vivet, J. (2012). The Spread of a Transnational Model: 'Gated Communities' in Three Southern African Cities (Cape Town, Maputo and Windhoek). *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 36*(5), 890–914. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2012.01135.x
Morgan, David. 1997. *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412984287.
Nathan, N. L. (2019). Does Participation Reinforce Patronage? Policy Preferences, Turnout and Class in Urban Ghana. *British Journal of Political Science, 49*(1), 229–255. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123416000351
Nathan, N. L. (2024). Do grids demobilize? How street networks, social networks, and political networks intersect. *American Journal of Political Science*, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12912

Nelson, J. M. (1979). *Access to power: Politics and the urban poor in developing nations*. Princeton University Press.
Obaitor, O. S., Lawanson, T. O., Stellmes, M., & Lakes, T. (2021). Social Capital: Higher Resilience in Slums in the Lagos Metropolis. *Sustainability, 13*(7), 3879. https://doi.org/10.3390/su13073879
OECD/UN/ECA/AfDB. (2022). *Africa's urbanization dynamics 2022: The economic power of Africa's cities. West African studies*. Paris: OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/3834ed5b-en
O'Grady, T. (2020). NIMBYism as Place-Protective Action: The Politics of Housebuilding. *OSF*. https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/d6pzy
Olajide, O., & Lawanson, T. (2021). Urban Paradox and the Rise of the Neoliberal City: Case Study of Lagos, Nigeria. *Urban Studies, 59*(9), 1763–1781. https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980211014461
Olson, M. (1993). Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development. *The American Political Science Review, 87*(3), 567–576. https://doi.org/10.2307/2938736
Omitogun, W. (1994). The Area Boys of Lagos: A Study of Organized Street Violence. *IFRA*.
Onifade, Victor, Damilola Agbalajobi, Marie Huchzermeyer, and Taibat Lawanson. 2024. "Local Government Autonomy, Electoral Systems and their Implications for Social Contracts in Nigeria." In Appelhans, Nadine, Carmel Rawhani, Marie Huchzermeyer, Basirat Oyalowo, and Mfaniseni Fana Sihlongonyane. 2024. *Everyday Urban Practices in Africa: Disrupting Global Norms*. Taylor & Francis.
Ostrom, E. (1996). Crossing the Great Divide: Coproduction, Synergy, and Development. *World Development, 24*(6), 1073–1087. https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(96)00023-X
Ostrom, E. (2010). Beyond markets and states: Polycentric governance of complex economic systems. *American Economic Review, 100*(3), 641–672. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.100.3.641
Owusu, G. (2011). *Decentralization in Ghana: Policy, Practice and Performance*. Saarbrücken: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing.
Owusu, M. (1971). Culture and Democracy in West Africa: Some Persistent Problems. *Africa Today, 18*(1), 68–76.
Paller, J. W. (2019a). *Democracy in Ghana: Everyday Politics in Urban Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108578721.
Paller, J. W. (2019b). Dignified Public Expression: A New Logic of Political Accountability. *Comparative Politics, 52*(1), 85–104.
Paller, J. W. (2021). Everyday Politics and Sustainable Urban Development in the Global South. *Area Development and Policy, 6*(3), 319–336. https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2020.1799716
Paniagua, V. (2022). When Clients Vote for Brokers: How Elections Improve Public Goods Provision in Urban Slums. *World Development, 158*(October), Article 105919. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.105919
Park, R., & Burgess, E. W. (1925). *The city: Suggestions for investigation of human behavior in the urban environment (Heritage of sociology series)*. University of Chicago Press.
Parker, J. (2000). *Making the Town: Ga State and Society in Early Colonial Accra. Boydell & Brewer.*
Pasotti, E. (2020). *Resisting Redevelopment: Protest in Aspiring Global Cities*. *Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.*. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108775700
Peil, M. (1971). The Expulsion of West African Aliens. *The Journal of Modern African Studies, 9*(2), 205–229.
Portes, A. (1972). Rationality in the Slum: An Essay on Interpretive Sociology. *Comparative Studies in Society and History, 14*(3), 268–286.
Post, A. E., Bronsoler, V., & Salman, L. (2017). Hybrid Regimes for Local Public Goods Provision: A Framework for Analysis. *Perspectives on Politics, 15*(4), 952–966. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592717002109
Putnam, R. D. (1994). *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton University Press.
Quarcoopome, S. S. (1992). Urbanisation, Land Alienation and Politics in Accra. *Research Review, 8*(1–2), 40–54.
Reinikka, R., & Svensson, J. (2004). Local Capture: Evidence from a Central Government Transfer Program in Uganda. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 119*(2), 679–705.
Ren, X. (2020). *Governing the Urban in China and India: Grabs, Slum Clearance, and the War on Air Pollution. Princeton University Press.*
Resnick, D. (2023). Mayoral Elections and Partisan Dynamics in Africa's Local Governments. *Democratization, 30*(7), 1195–1214. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2023.2189700
Riedl, R. B. (2017). Sub-National–Cross-National Variation: Method and Analysis in Sub-Saharan Africa. *American Behavioral Scientist, 61*(8), 932–959. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764217720965
Rodden, J. A. (2019). *Decentralized governance and accountability: Academic research and the future of donor programming*. Cambridge University Press.
Roy, A. (2009). Why India Cannot Plan Its Cities: Informality, Insurgence and the Idiom of Urbanization. *Planning Theory, 8*(1), 76–87. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095208099299
Sackeyfio, N. (2012). The Politics of Land and Urban Space in Colonial Accra. *History in Africa, 39*(January), 293–329. https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2012.0005
Salvaire, C. (2020). From Urban Congestion to Political Confinement: Collecting Waste, Channelling Politics in Lagos. *Territory, Politics, Governance, 8*(3), 390–406. https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2018.1561324
Sampson, R. J. (2013). *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect. Edited by William Julius Wilson*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Sanjek, R. (1972). Ghanaian networks: An analysis off inter-ethnic relations in urban situation. Diss. PhD dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Columbia University.
Schildkrout, E. (1970). Strangers and Local Government in Kumasi. *The Journal of Modern African Studies, 8*(2), 251–269.
Schildkrout, E. (1978). *People of the Zongo: The Transformation of Ethnic Identities in Ghana. Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.*. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511557620
Schlozman, K. L., Verba, S., & Brady, H. E. (2012). *The unheavenly chorus: Unequal political voice and the broken promise of American democracy*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
Sellers, J. M. (2019). From Within to Between Nations: Subnational Comparison across Borders. *Perspectives on Politics, 17*(1), 85–105. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592718002104
Serbeh, R., Osei-Wusu Adjei, P., & Forkuor, D. (2024). Unit committees and participation in community development: Does spatial location matter? *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, January. https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096231225956.
Sharp, E. B. (1984). Citizen-Demand Making in the Urban Context. *American Journal of Political Science, 28*(4), 654–670. https://doi.org/10.2307/2110992
Sigman, R. (2023). *Parties, political finance, and governance in Africa: Extracting money and shaping states in Benin and Ghana*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009262798
Skinner, E. P. (1963). Strangers in West African Societies. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute, 33*(4), 307–320. https://doi.org/10.2307/1158077
Stone, C. N. (1996). Urban political machines: Taking stock. *PS. Political Science & Politics, 29*(3), 446–450. https://doi.org/10.2307/420821
Strach, P., Sullivan, K., & Pérez-Chiqués, E. (2019). The Garbage Problem: Corruption, Innovation, and Capacity in Four American Cities, 1890–1940. *Studies in American Political Development, 33*(2), 209–233. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898588X19000087
Trounstine, J. (2020). The Geography of Inequality: How Land Use Regulation Produces Segregation. *American Political Science Review, 114*(2), 443–455. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055419000844
Walton, J. (1998). Urban Conflict and Social Movements in Poor Countries: Theory and Evidence of Collective Action. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 22*(3), 460–481. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.00152
Watson, V. (2014). African Urban Fantasies: Dreams or Nightmares? *Environment and Urbanization, 26*(1), 215–231. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956247813513705
Wilson, Nicole E. "Seeing like an estate: Middle class tax compliance in Lagos." *Working Paper*.
Woolcock, M., & Narayan, D. (2000). Social Capital: Implications for Development Theory, Research, and Policy. *The World Bank Research Observer, 15*(2), 225–249. https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/15.2.225
Xu, A. Z. (2023). Segregation and the Spatial Externalities of Inequality: A Theory of Interdependence and Public Goods in Cities. *American Political Science Review, 118*(3), 1431–1448. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055423000722
Yoder, J. (2020). Does Property Ownership Lead to Participation in Local Politics? Evidence from Property Records and Meeting Minutes. *American Political Science Review, 114*(4), 1213–1229. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000556
Zhang, Y., You, C., Pundir, P., & Meijering, L. (2023). Migrants' Community Participation and Social Integration in Urban Areas: A Scoping Review. *Cities, 141*(October), Article 104447. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2023.104447