


two opposite things at once. While road taxes are largely informal, they do simultaneously feed into the formalised and informalised spheres of capital accumulation. Comparing roadblock occupants and users to agents circulating in the non-capitalist sphere leaves the reader with the confusing idea that supply chains keep expanding globally, but the capital they generate remains somehow confined to the central corridors of multinational corporations. Not only has this contradiction been refuted, but it also highlights a misunderstanding around the social construction of scale which is, again, rather odd for a book in geography.

To end on a positive note, *Roadblock Politics* definitely shows the relevance of informal and militarised taxation for global value chain analysis, not just with regards to market exchange, but also more generally in areas where armed conflict and sporadic public authority make circulation a risky and unpredictable endeavour. The policy relevance of this book should not be understated, as OECD, UN and other international institutions are urging companies to show their due diligence when it comes to such risky logistics. Inviting us to move beyond a narrow 'conflict economy' perspective, which, as the author rightly confirms, has only reinforced existing inequalities in the distribution of profit and risk, he carefully reframes the issue as one of uneven global development. As long as there will be a need to outsource the risks associated with so-called 'nonconventional logistics' to the brokers and agents running commodities in conflict-prone areas (of which the globe is paved increasingly), erecting roadblock astride obligatory points of passage will be a logical move for actors who feel excluded from the wealth generated by global capitalist supply chains and have the violent means to do so. Especially for this reason, the book should warrant a more precise analytic and the furthering of a research agenda that builds on the shoulders of existing studies.

doi:10.1017/S0022278X23000472

## **Africa's Urban Youth: challenging marginalisation, claiming citizenship**

**by Amy S. Patterson, Tracy Kuperus & Megan Hershey**  
**Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2023.**  
**Pp. 202. UK£25.99 (paperback).**

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Young people between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five make up about 65% of Africa's population, yet in the main they are marginalised from political and

economic decision-making. What does it mean to be ‘good citizens’ in such a constraining environment? To answer this question, Amy S. Patterson, Tracy Kuperus and Megan Hershey examine how urban youth in Accra, Dar Es Salaam and Kampala understand and cultivate citizenship using extensive qualitative data from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews which they compare to quantitative data from the Afrobarometer. Leaning on theories of ‘everyday citizenship’, they thus show that youth’s sense of citizenship manifests itself primarily in communal relations and responsibilities, and varies by economic, religious and gender identities. Their book fits within a growing body of literature that seeks to ‘see like youth’ (King *et al.* 2020).

The book opens with a concise introduction, outlining four reasons for studying youth citizenship in urban Africa. Besides sheer demographics and the continent’s steep urbanisation rates, the authors argue that youth represent a social category in their own right, not in the least when it comes to their unique experiences with the destabilising effects of neoliberalism. Next, the first chapter presents the book’s theoretical framework and methodological approach. It situates the authors’ understanding of youth within the anthropological tradition, which perceives of youth as a socially constructed identity, and summarises recent scholarship on ‘everyday citizenship’. It further describes how data collection choices were made to centre youth voices. In six consecutive chapters, the reader then discovers what it means for young people living in the (former) capitals of Ghana, Uganda and Tanzania to be a ‘good citizen’. To start, the authors’ inductive analysis shows that urban youth citizenship is predominantly acted out in the communal sphere, and informed by social norms that define ‘acceptable behavior’ (chapter 2). Markedly, legalistic understandings of citizenship are not prominent at all, even though Afrobarometer shows that the large majority of young people votes (chapter 3). Next, chapters four, five and six examine how respectively socio-economic status, religiosity and gender affect youth’s sense of citizenship, each concluding with specific case studies of youth programmes implemented in the three case study countries, as well as in South Africa and Zambia. It so appears that lower- and higher-income youth have different reasons for defining citizenship in terms of obeying the law and paying one’s taxes (self- vs other-oriented); that churchgoing youth are motivated by their religious beliefs to engage in political activism; and that patriarchal norms shape what type of communal activities young men and women readily engage in to give sense to their citizenship. To wrap up the empirical section, the authors discuss how a fringe group of young men and women, who are frustrated and disappointed because of their marginalisation, contest citizenship through exit, by excluding (largely ethnic) others and/or by supporting populism, rather than translating it into community-level actions (chapter 7). The authors nonetheless conclude that urban youth’s sense of citizenship is active, creative and optimistic.

Altogether, the book gives voice to over 300 young men and women from urban contexts in five African countries. The extensive fieldwork conducted over a time span of ten years (2011–2021) on its own is impressive, but more importantly permits the authors to achieve their goal of placing youth

stories and perspectives at the heart of the book. By comparing their rich body of empirics from focus group discussions and in-depth discussions with national-level Afrobarometer data, moreover, the insights are indicative for tendencies beyond the particularities of the case study contexts. Further, notwithstanding the empirical nature and inductive approach, the book is firmly grounded in theory. Relevant key concepts are explained in plain terms, allowing a broad readership ranging from scholars to policy-makers and practitioners involved in youth programming in Africa.

Still, there are some opportunities for further strengthening of the book that the authors left unaddressed. Although a great many voices are heard, first, many others remain excluded. The exclusion of young men and women belonging to non-Christian faiths is particularly noticeable in this respect. Although the authors briefly recognise that their study, like most others, privileges Christian-majority anglophone countries (p. 23), they do not explain why they privileged Christians within these country contexts and how this bias affects their results – note that the authors do reflect on the implications of their findings for rural youth. Second, while using multiple criteria to select participants, intersectionality could have been explored in much more depth. While we learn a great deal about differences between men and women, lower- and higher-income youth and frequent and infrequent churchgoing young people, we do not know how gender, socio-economic status and religiosity interact when it comes to young people's sense of citizenship. Third, there is a notable disadvantage of comparing the qualitative data to – existing – quantitative data: the current comparison focuses mainly on notions of legalistic citizenship (for which survey data are available), even though such notions were hardly discussed in the interviews and focus group discussions. The quantitative analysis, moreover, is very basic. The authors could at the least have tested for significance when describing the (often small!) between-country and within-country differences. From a conceptual point of view, finally, it could have been interesting to not only account for the citizen–state relationship, but also for the citizen–city relationship – after all, the book focuses on urban youth only.

In conclusion, this book provides a promising starting point for understanding how youth facing adverse structural conditions in Africa's growing cities understand and experience citizenship. The focus on youth as a social category should not, however, obfuscate the heterogeneity within that very category and could be extended to multiple levels of governance.

## Reference

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doi:10.1017/S0022278X23000484