'This country is free, but for the few': Informal labour, class politics, and urban order in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania☆

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the relationships between regime consolidation, labour informality, and class formation in African cities. It examines how, as part of broader efforts to build political support, incumbent leaders and their parties manipulate class formation among urban informal workers.

A defining feature of Africa's rapid urbanisation is the expansion of a large tranche of low-income informal workers. We argue that, in a manner reminiscent of colonial efforts to control a then emerging urban working class, leaders adopt approaches to regulating labour informality—especially workers' *access to space* and their *symbolic recognition*—that then influence class formation. These regulatory interventions either encourage greater unity among workers, or else help divide an incipient 'urban mass', introducing hierarchies between 'respectable' classes of small-scale 'entrepreneurs' and their more unruly counterparts. Having drawn these distinctions, we further theorise how and why incumbent leaders pursue one strategy or another, arguing that they regulate informal workers—and seek to influence their intra-class solidarities—in ways consistent with efforts both to consolidate a ruling coalition and to counter opposition electoral pressures.

We explore this theory further through our case study—Tanzania's commercial capital, Dar es Salaam. This involves contrasting the regulatory approaches adopted by Presidents John Pombe Magufuli (2015–2021) and Samia Suluhu Hassan (2021–), both from Tanzania's long-time ruling party, CCM. For our empirical material, we combine focus groups, interviews, participant observation, and press reviews. Finally, while our case study involves an authoritarian regime, we use our conclusion to reflect further on commonalities and differences across regime types, democratic or authoritarian, and on the significance of class-differentiated experiences of freedom and repression in the city.

1. Introduction

This article explores the intersection between strategies of political dominance, labour informality, and class formation in African cities. There is increased academic interest in each of these topics. Scholars of African politics are developing more multi-scalar analyses, examining how ruling coalitions 'control the capital' as part of securing their incumbency nationally (Croese, 2017; Goodfellow & Jackman, 2023; Ouma, 2023). There is a related, fast-growing literature on the politics of urban labour informality, especially when and how state actors choose to tolerate or repress informal economy workers (Gillespie, 2016; Kamete, 2018; Morange, 2015; Resnick, 2019; Young, 2018). Finally,

there is a renewed interest in urban class politics, although focused primarily on Africa's '*middle*' classes (Melber, 2016; Nathan, 2019).

This article connects all three strands of literature, but in so doing, it moves them in a different direction. It examines how leaders' attempts to consolidate political support involve important interventions to regulate urban labour informality and, at the same time, to manipulate class formation among informal workers. Class formation here refers to the dynamic processes shaping *intra*-class relations, i.e., the nature and extent of informal workers' shared material position, collective identification, and group solidarities (Fantasia, 1995, 275–76).[1] Adopting Michael Burawoy's (1998) 'extended case method', we bring the wider literature into dialogue with an analysis of labour informality and class

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[1] Broader class structures—or *inter*-class relations—influence but do not determine these intra-class dynamics.

formation in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's commercial capital, thereby 'extending' existing theory with the following arguments.

A defining feature of Africa's 'late urbanisation'—its accelerated urban growth from a low base—is the expansion of a large tranche of precarious, low-income, informal workers (Fox and Goodfellow, 2022). We argue that, in a manner reminiscent of colonial efforts to control a then emerging urban working class, a threatening 'urban mass' (Cooper, 1987; Finn, 2023), incumbent leaders today are both preoccupied by urban labour informality and actively attempt to manipulate related processes of class formation. To simplify, we distinguish between two ideal typical patterns of state intervention. Each involves different strategies for regulating informal workers, especially: one, their access to *urban space*; and two, the nature of their symbolic recognition, whether valorising or stigmatizing (Wacquant 2014). These differing state interventions, in turn, have contrasting effects on *class formation*, be it to unite or divide.

Incumbent leaders may adopt an *undifferentiated regulatory approach*, applying a similar blanket strategy to a broad tranche of informal workers. This approach can be punitive or permissive, involving either sweeping evictions and stigmatization of informal workers or relatively open access to urban space and positive recognition. Regarding class formation, an undifferentiated approach has a homogenizing effect, encouraging a shared understanding among informal workers of their class position, group identity, and solidarity. Conversely, the state may pursue a *differentiated regulatory approach*, introducing new gradations of formality and informality. This involves, one, segmenting workers' access to urban space and, two, distinguishing between 'respectable' classes of 'entrepreneurs' and their would-be unruly counterparts. More a divide-and-rule strategy, this approach encourages the formation of new class hierarchies, breaking up an incipient 'urban mass'.

In what follows, we first conceptualise class formation among urban informal workers and how it is influenced by contrasting top-down approaches to informal labour regulation. We then theorise how and why incumbent leaders pursue one strategy or another. We argue that leaders regulate informal workers—and seek to influence their *intra*-class solidarities—in ways that align with broader efforts to secure political dominance, both at city and national levels. These broader efforts encompass leaders' approach to balancing not only *intra*- but also *inter*-class relations, for instance, whether they privilege elite visions of a 'world-class' city and prioritise a middle-class electorate, or conversely, make populist appeals to classes of urban poor (Resnick, 2019; Shivji, 2021; Manji, 2015; Lefebvre, 2009).

Following our theoretical discussion, we offer a within-case comparison of changing informal labour regulation and class formation under Presidents John Pombe Magufuli (2015–2021) and Samia Suluhu Hassan (2021–), both hailing from Tanzania's long-time ruling party, *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM). In keeping with our core argument, we show how both leaders adapted strategies of informal labour regulation and class manipulation to reinforce their own political control, as well as that of the ruling party. Magufuli sought to appeal directly to *wanyonge* (the wretched), adopting a radically permissive approach to urban labour informality even as he centralized power and accumulation at the elite level. By contrast, his successor—Samia, as she is known—began by restoring a pre-Magufuli political status quo, which included evicting informal workers en mass. Only later, amidst fears of opposition electoral pressures, did she selectively recognize certain categories of 'respectable' workers in the city. For data, we draw on focus groups, interviews, participant observation, and press reviews.

Overall, this analysis underscores the relevance of class—and specifically, working-class formation—both to Africa's urban politics and to leaders' broader strategies of political dominance. While our case study involves an authoritarian regime, the literature we engage with suggests similar dynamics may recur in more democratic contexts, and indeed, we frame our analysis as about the strategies of political incumbents, whether authoritarian or not. We nevertheless use our conclusion to reflect on commonalities and differences across regime types, in the process, probing the significance of class-differentiated experiences of state-society relations, of freedom and repression in the city.

2. Theorising class politics in the city

In this theory section, we first present two ideal types to help account for the ways that state regulation influences class formation. Second, we explore *how* and *why* state actors pursue one approach or another as part of their broader efforts to secure political dominance.

2.1. Urban labour informality, state regulation, and class formation: Two ideal types

Class formation among informal workers, as well as the potential for state regulations to influence this process, remains 'relatively underexplored' in the recent literature on Africa's urban politics (Cheeseman, 2022; Collord, Goodfellow, and Abedi Asante, 2021, 12). There *is* an important literature exploring informal workers' political subjectivities; however, these studies often emphasise workers' multiple, context-specific identities while cautioning against an over-emphasis on class (Lindell, 2019; 2010; Simone, 2022). They note how class identities fragment when confronted by economic and political pressures and by alternative gendered, ethnic, religious, and familial ties (Agbiboa, 2016, 2022; Meagher, 2010). This literature also points to something more like 'false consciousness' or 'generalised' elitism; the world-class city becomes 'not only the fantasy of economic and political elites but also the dream shaping the aspirations and subjectivities of the subaltern' (Lindell, 2019, 7; Roelofs, 2021, 393). Market traders in Ibadan, for instance, reproduce discourses of 'elitism and enlightenment', thereby *approving* the urban renewal projects that led to their own displacement (Roelofs, 2021, p. 413). Similarly in Nairobi, the State has co-opted vendors' organisations and, through them, propagated an 'ideal of the responsible entrepreneurial citizen' (Morange, 2015).

Certainly, this research makes clear that urban informal workers' political subjectivities 'cannot be read from their uncertain position' (Lindell, 2019, p. 4). Any straightforward 'reading' is further complicated by the inequalities within the informal economy itself (Meagher, 1995). There are nevertheless approaches to studying class that capture its political significance without losing sight of this complexity. There is a mix of political economy, sociological, and historical literatures—inspired by both Marxian and Weberian traditions, among others—that share a view of class as an historical relationship, one dependent not just on economic hierarchies but on contingent social and political processes as well (Cooper, 1995; 1987; Fantasia, 1995; Lefebvre, 2009; Rodney, 1975; Wacquant, 2013). This work recognises that 'classes of labour', *plural*, are themselves 'always partial social configurations', constantly reorganizing 'in relation to their conflicts with other classes' and with the state (Bernstein, 2021; Fantasia 1995, 275). Even when apparently absent, for instance, in the case of market traders' 'generalised' elitism (Lindell, 2019), class can still be significant. As in, traders' *lack* of separate class identity may itself be the product of a distinctive class politics, one focused on 'manufacturing consent' (Burawoy, 1979; Katznelson, 1982).

In what follows, this article presents a framework for analysing how class formation among urban informal workers, far from incidental or irrelevant, can be embedded within state strategies to regulate labour informality and, thereby, reinforce political dominance in cities. To explain this approach, we must first address the question, why focus on state regulation of informality? And how does this relate to class and class formation? The relevance of the state stems from its centrality to the very meaning of informality; as in, 'it is often the power of the state that determines what is informal and what is not' and 'which forms of informality will thrive and which will disappear' (Cooper, 1983; Roy, 2009, 826; Roy, 2005, 180). *Class* distinctions then become relevant in so far as the state uses its 'power to determine' in ways that reinforce unequal, class-based patterns of accumulation and dispossession, as

indeed scholars argue occurs in many African cities (Gillespie, 2016; Obeng-Odoom, 2012; Olajide and Lawanson, 2022). These observations resonate more broadly with a political economy literature that positions the state—and notably the African post-colonial state (Mandaza, 1994; Rodney, 1975; Shivji, 1976)—as mediating the extension of capitalist logics and related class formation (Lefebvre, 2009). Given the centrality of the state, this literature then stresses the significance of 'secondary class struggles'—for instance, over state regulations, taxes, and the like—as 'the immediate organizers of the political field' (Bernstein, 2021; Davis, 2018, xix).

How do such 'secondary class struggles' manifest in the specific context of state regulation of urban labour informality? And how can they impact on class formation among informal workers? Informal labour is itself a heterogeneous category, as noted earlier, hence '*classes of* labour' (Bernstein, 2021; Meagher, 1995); yet, scholars also highlight commonalities among informal workers (Gidwani, 2015; Nyamsenda, 2021b; Shivji, 2017). The focus here is on the many workers who rely on access to *urban space*—the 'street'—to earn the equivalent of a daily wage, often through so-called 'self-employment' as vendors, motorcycle-taxi drivers, waste-pickers, porters, mechanics, and the like.[2] In what followed, we argue that *the regulation of informal workers' access to space—whether more open or closed, homogenous or hierarchal—can play a central role in urban class formation.* However, class formation comprises not only *material* but also *symbolic* dimensions, which together shape processes of group-making, of class composition and *de*-composition (Fantasia, 1995; Wacquant, 2014). We therefore underscore how state actors combine their manipulation of workers' access to space with a closely related 'symbolic order of honour' (Wacquant, 2014), either *valorising or stigmatization* informal workers or sub-categories of worker.

In analysing this state manipulation, we distinguish between two ideal typical approaches. These abstractions are only ever approximated in real-life situations of informality, which feature characteristic gradations of semi-formality and 'gray space' (Yiftachel, 2009). Even so, the two ideal types are valuable in so far as they help us understand different regulatory logics and their effects on class (see Fig. 1). First, the state may adopt a relatively *undifferentiated regulatory approach*, treating informal workers operating from the street or from equivalent shared urban space in a similar fashion. This approach can be punitive, involving large-scale evictions and stigmatization, or permissive, affording informal workers relatively open access to space while offering more positive recognition. This undifferentiated approach then has a *homogenizing* effect on class formation. Fewer distinctions are drawn between categories of workers; they have a common interest in shared space and a common experience interacting with the state. This sense of shared conditions or 'linked fate' may, in turn, reinforce broader 'cultures of solidarity', for instance, a shared language of self-identification, a shared sense of stigma or honour, a shared perception of inter-class and state-society relations, and common practices of mutual aid, among other forms of collective action (Fantasia, 1995; 1989; Kimari, 2020).

The state may, alternatively, adopt a *differentiated regulatory approach*, segmenting urban space and differentiating amongst the informal workers operating within it. For instance, it may enforce sharper distinctions between illegal street vendors versus *semi-legal*

market traders, 'semi' because even traders in recognised markets may not comply with all formal regulations. At the same time, state actors reinforce these socio-spatial distinctions with a parallel symbolic order, legitimizing some workers while stigmatizing others. This overall differentiated approach then has a *fragmenting* effect on class formation, *producing hierarchies* within space and among informal workers.[3] Workers' seeking to reinforce a claim to official recognition may engage in 'practices of internal social differentiation and distancing', embracing 'micro-hierarchies detectable only at ground level' (Wacquant, 2008, 183). These differentiating practices involve 'overclassing' oneself, notably by '[demonstrating] adherence to a dominant norm' or, in this case, by endorsing state-sanctioned visions of the 'responsible entrepreneur'[4]. At the same time, recognised workers may 'downclass' or 'scapegoate' others, such as the remainder of informal workers who fail to win state recognition or conform to the 'dominant norm' (Wacquant, 2008, 183; Paugam, 1991, 193–205).

In developing this analysis, we drawn on several additional sources alongside those already mentioned. Inspired by urban theory, we note Lefebvre's emphasis on how 'in the chaos of relations among individuals, groups, class factions, and classes, the State tends to impose a rationality, its own, that has space as its privileged instrument'; the State 'engenders social relations in space', notably through variegated regulatory strategies to homogenize or hierarchize urban space (Lefebvre, 2009, pp. 225–226). Other urban theorists similarly emphasise the state's role 'as a classifying and stratifying agency' key to the 'organization of urban hierarchies', including through the manipulation of both space and an associated 'symbolic order' (Soederberg, 2021; Wacquant, 2014, 1699).

Beyond urban theory, we are most directly inspired by Africanists' analysis of colonial efforts to address an emerging 'labour question' in towns (Cooper, 1987; 1983), in the process, first introducing the formal-informal distinction itself (Finn, 2023). Crucial to these accounts is an analysis of the colonial state's evolving strategies to manage urban labour, including whether to encourage homogenizing or hierarchizing processes of class formation. As in, the state could allow for a fluid (and cheap) urban labour force; alternatively, it could control this 'floating population'—and with it, the city—by producing new hierarchies of 'respectability', including through new strategies of urban planning (Cooper, 1987; Kironde, 2007). As Cooper concludes in his study of colonial Mombasa, 'the problem' for colonial officials was 'at base, one of class', of dividing and dominating the urban working classes so as to 'meet the escalating demands of the postwar era' while avoiding 'mass unrest' (Cooper, 1987, 259). As we shall see, the concerns of contemporary state actors—and the strategies adopted to address them—still echo these colonial preoccupations.

So far, though, we have focused on the 'what' question as it relates to state regulation of urban labour informality: what overarching approach and with what (class) outcome. We now shift to the questions of how and why the state might pursue one or the other of the above-theorised ideal types.

2.2. The political economy of class formation

Answering these questions requires sensitivity to 'place' and to the contingencies of politics operating across multiple scales (Hoelscher

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[2] Many informal economy workers are not, in fact, 'self-employed' but rather tied into something approximating a labour-capital relation with, for instance, vehicle owners, wholesalers, or creditors (Meagher 1995; Rizzo, Kilama, and Wuyts 2015). Moreover, where self-employed, these workers are nevertheless compelled to 'self-exploit' to 'survive' (Shivji 2017). Finally, while their individual productivity and earnings remain low, scholars note that these workers' overall contribution to urban transport, food, and waste collection systems, among others, helps sustain both urban livelihoods *and conditions for accumulation* in the city (Gidwani 2015; Kerzhner 2023; Rizzo 2017; Roever and Skinner 2016; Shivji 2017).

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[3] By emphasising the differentiating role of the state here, we do not want to disregard instances in which tensions emerge amongst and between groups of informal workers themselves (Lindell 2019, 12), for instance, established motorcycle-taxi drivers and new uber drivers in Hanoi, Vietnam (Turner and Hanh 2019), or in our own case, between motorcycle-taxi drivers and established (car-based) taxi and bus drivers (interviews with informal transport workers, Dar es Salaam, 2023).

[4] See also the earlier discussion of 'generalised' elitism (Roelofs 2021; Morange 2015; Lindell 2019).
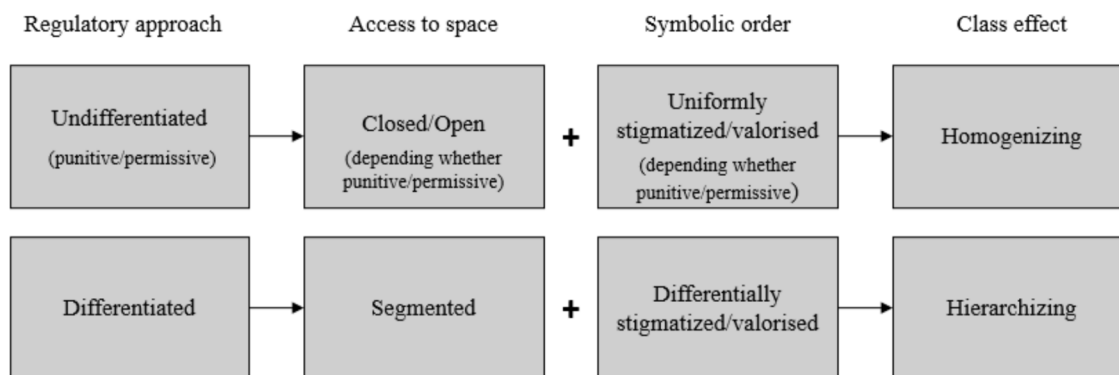
Fig. 1. Two ideal typical regulatory approaches and their socio-spatial effects.

et al., 2023; Burawoy, 1998). In what follows, our aim is not to propose testable hypotheses regarding *specific* tools of state intervention nor their political motivations, which are diverse, context-dependent, and may appear in multiple combinations; however, drawing on wider literature and our own case, we do identify important tendencies, which show how specific motivations and tools can combine to impact class formation (see Table 1 for a summary). These tendencies then speak to our *main theoretical claims*, namely: one, different regulatory approaches can shape class formation among urban informal workers, and two, incumbent leaders try to influence this class formation as part of broader efforts to balance class interests and secure political dominance. Our later empirical analysis demonstrates this core argument while offering an illustration of the diverse motivations and mechanisms deployed in specific instances.

First then, regarding *how* the state pursues an *undifferentiated* versus *differentiated* regulatory approach, we distinguish between its passive 'forbearance' and active 'recognition'. Holland's (2016) influential concept of forbearance underscores how state actors use the intentional *non*-enforcement of regulations, notably in the context of urban informality, as a political tool. In our view, depending on whether 'forbearance'—or its revocation—applies to all workers or only some, it may contribute to an undifferentiated or differentiated approach, homogenizing or segmenting class. Whatever the aim, though, its effects on class formation are amplified when combined with a politics of 'recognition'.

Here we adapt Klaus et al.'s (2023) theorisation to the case of urban informal workers. 'Recognition' denotes the process through which informal workers—or select categories of workers—are recognised as 'dignified human beings and members of an identity group' (Klaus, Paller, and Wilfahrt, 2023, 1). It entails a tri-partite effort by state actors: to 'listen' to informal workers; to negotiate with their leaders; and to improve or at least stabilise urban labour conditions, e.g., by offering opportunities to occupy space without fear of eviction. To these three we add a fourth dimension, namely, *discursive* recognition, the use of language to magnify a (desired) group identity. Language is a 'powerful means by which new subjectivities are constructed and enforced' (Massey, 2013, 11), part of the 'symbolic power' of the state that strengthens its 'classifying and stratifying' role (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Wacquant, 2014, 1699). Together, then, these tools of forbearance and recognition influence how state actors shape the construction of identity in space. We detail examples of specific interventions—depending on the choice of overarching regulatory approach—in Table 1.

Having briefly discussed the 'how' question, it remains to probe the motivations behind an undifferentiated or differentiated approach. Why might state actors pursue one or the other? As already stressed, these motivations are context-specific and cannot be derived purely in abstraction. Moreover, while we have so far referred to 'the state' or 'state actors' as a shorthand, authority is often fragmented in rapidly

urbanizing areas, notably across neighbourhood, city, and national scales (Auerbach et al., 2018). Power configurations also vary within and across ruling and opposition coalitions (Goodfellow, 2022; Kelsall et al., 2021). Political tensions may themselves motivate state interventions, such as crackdowns on informal workers in opposition-controlled cities (Resnick, 2019); conversely, political fragmentation may undermine the coherence of any attempted intervention (Lindell, Ampaire, and Byerley, 2019). While bearing in mind the need for context-specific nuance, we nevertheless identify a range of factors that can motivate leaders to choose an undifferentiated versus differentiated regulatory strategy. These motivations and related outcomes vary both *spatially* across the city and *temporally*.

Regarding *spatial variation*, urban planning and regulatory enforcement often depend on the affluence and political prioritization of different urban zones (Njoh, 2009; Watson, 2009). This same spatial variation applies to state regulation of informal labour (Nnkya, 2006), especially—we suggest—when it involves a 'differentiated approach'. Indeed, *strategies of differentiation—and their effects on class—likely have their own uneven urban geography*. Informal workers operating in wealthier or more commercially sensitive areas may be under greater pressures to comply with formal regulations in exchange for 'recognition'; they attempt to gain this 'recognition'—and thus a degree of security in an otherwise competitive, closely surveilled urban area—by embracing a state-sanctioned norm of respectable 'entrepreneur', e.g., formally registering their operating area and adapting their behaviour and attitudes in a related, conforming manner. Meanwhile, state actors make little effort to 'recognise' informal workers operating in poorer, low-priority neighbourhoods or 'zones of relegation'; their occupants are subject to 'powerful territorial stigma', finding themselves at 'the bottom of the hierarchy of places', 'a "dumping ground" for poor people, downwardly mobile working-class households, and dishonoured categories' (Wacquant, 2008, 168–69).[5] A 'hierarchy of places' may, thus, inform state differentiation among informal workers and, relatedly, may amplify the hierarchizing effect on class; aspiring 'entrepreneurs' operate more out of affluent areas while a 'down-classed' working poor remains in 'zones of relegation'.

Spatial variation aside, making sense of why regulatory approaches *vary over time* is, in some ways, more complex. As noted earlier, a diverse range of strategies are negotiated at neighbourhood level; however, where there *is* a more concerted, city-wide approach, this is *often initiated by national leaders*, who then task city-level authorities with implementation (Goodfellow, 2022; Goodfellow and Jackman, 2023; Resnick, 2019). These interventions can thus reflect certain state *'rationalities'* (Lefebvre, 2009), which are rarely singular but reveal the

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[5] Wacquant's 'hierarchies of place' resonates with the 'coloniality of space', i. e., the racial hierarchies or 'racial zones' in colonial urban planning that continue to shape present-day geographies of urban development and class formation (Mercer 2024).

Table 1
Summary: Regulatory choice and example tools and rationales.

Example tools & rationales	Choice of regulatory approach		
	Undifferentiated – Permissive	Undifferentiated – Punitive	Differentiated
State interventions – How? Possible context-specific state interventions *N.B. Sate actors can exercise forbearance to varying degrees and in combination with different forms of 'recognition' (differentiated or undifferentiated). While seemingly contradictory, these combinations are consistent with the tendency for ongoing negotiations and with the incoherencies manifest in varieties of semi-formality and 'gray space'.*	**Widespread 'forbearance'**, e.g., partial or non-enforcement of regulation that would otherwise bar or constrain informal workers' access to public. space. **Widespread 'recognition'** of informal workers operating from public space, e.g., meetings with leaders; inclusive and valorising discourse; and a combination of 'forbearance' (especially as regards stricter regulations) with new, more lenient policy initiatives involving, for instance, lower taxes, fees, and fines as well as IDs granting free access to public space.	**No 'forbearance'**; widespread **forced evictions** of informal workers from public space; routine and often extra-legal confiscations, fines, and arrests by state security forces (police, militias, and similar). **No 'recognition'** of informal workers operating from public space, blanket stigmatization.	**Selective 'forbearance'**, e.g., tolerance of partial regulatory compliance among 'recognised' informal workers while, for others, maintaining strict and/or extra-legal enforcement, including through confiscations, fines, and arrests. **Selective 'recognition'** of informal workers, e.g., meetings with leaders; discursive valorisation of 'recognised' workers but stigmatization of others; and new policies and initiatives like official signage to demarcate 'recognized' workers' designated operating areas, personalised IDs linked them to those areas, and targeted loan schemes.
Spatial variation – Where and why? Possible context-specific rationales	**Limited spatial variation** across urban areas.	**Limited spatial variation** across urban areas.	**Significant spatial variation.** Stronger efforts to 'recognise' informal workers operating in wealthier or commercially sensitive urban areas amidst stigmatization and relative neglect of workers in poorer or less desirable areas.
Temporal ('episodic') variation – When and why? Possible context-specific rationales	A **short-term pre-election strategy** where an incumbent—belatedly—appeals to an urban poor electorate. Or, part of a more sustained **populist legitimation strategy**, e.g., where an incumbent leader's coalition relies on support from the urban poor and especially where elite or middle-class support is fragile.	A **post-election or semi-routine 'cleanup' operation**, e.g., where an incumbent leader's coalition is committed to more **elitist visions of a 'worldclass' city**, where it pursues a related 'urban renewal' initiative, where it relies on elite and middle-class voters, and/or preceding a **high-prestige international event**.	Part of a more sustained **strategy to perpetuate an urban renewal initiative** consistent with 'worldclass' city visions and/or to selectively co-opt and control informal workers, e.g. to dampen potential protests or to prevent an important electoral constituency of urban poor uniting behind the opposition.

structurally linked—as opposed to additive—objectives of a ruling coalition, e.g., economic, political, ideological, and security-related (Cooper 1983; Goodfellow, 2022; Lefebvre, 2009). In this vein, we underscore how incumbent leaders' regulation of informal workers—and their *intra-class* identify formation—varies along with efforts to shape an *inter-class* balance of power and interests within a regime and, thereby, to secure political dominance. Relevant considerations include leaders' linked choices about who can accumulate and who is dispossessed (Manji, 2015; Gillespie, 2016), about whether to espouse elitist urban renewal initiatives (Roelofs, 2021), and about whether to rely for electoral support and legitimacy on elite and middle-class constituencies or to rally an urban poor (Resnick, 2019). In what follows, we elaborate, identifying possible state 'rationalities' that—evolving with a changing ruling coalition and fluctuating electoral pressures—can help explain temporal or 'episodic' variation in regulatory approaches.[6]

For an *undifferentiated regulatory* approach, recall that this may be punitive or permissive. Where *punitive*, strict enforcement is likely short-lived because politically damaging, contributing to a more united and oppositional 'urban mass' (Cooper 1987). This approach is nevertheless consistent with an overall elitist political, economic, and ideological orientation, prioritising modernist visions of a 'worldclass' city (Kamete, 2018; 2013; Manji, 2015; Watson, 2014). Regarding timing, major evictions of informal workers may be a backlash against a more permissive approach, as was partly the case when President Samia took over in Tanzania, discussed below. They may also be framed as a semi-routine 'cleanup' operation, designed to remove urban 'filth' (Kamete, 2018). Relatedly, they may appeal to a 'middle-class' electoral base

while punishing an opposition-leaning urban poor, or be strategically timed ahead of an international prestige event, like a sports competition (Resnick, 2019; Watson, 2014).

Where *permissive*, an undifferentiated approach may be part of a populist appeal, framed as favouring the 'working people' over the elite, as was the case in Tanzania under President Magufuli and seemingly in Zambia under the Patriotic Front, at least initially (Hinfelaar, Resnick, and Sishuwa, 2023). Moreover, this 'populism' may itself be rooted in the changing composition of the ruling coalition. Again, Magufuli's CCM—and arguably, the early PF government too—sought partly to balance its fragile elite coalition and controversial 'resource nationalism' with appeals to the urban poor. Finally, an undifferentiated and *permissive* regulatory approach may also be short-lived and result from equally short-termist political motivations. For instance, it may be part of a pre-election effort to curry favour with urban voters but without this politically expedient populism threatening a fundamentally elitist orientation, which can then resurface through renewed post-election crackdowns (Brown, Msoka, and Dankoco, 2015; Goodfellow and Titeca, 2012; Young, 2018).

Regarding a *differentiated* regulatory approach, one with a hierarchizing rather than homogenizing effect on class, this may be part of a longer-term strategy consistent with an overall elitist political, economic, and ideological orientation. It may involve selective 'recognition' of some workers—subject to certain conditions—and repression of others all while preserving a modernist approach to urban planning, 'neo-liberal' priorities in real estate development, and the like (Di Nunzio, 2022; Morange, 2015; Roelofs, 2021). It may also stem from a desire to reassert control—through partial co-optation—over a restive 'urban mass' following protests (Gebremariam, 2023). There may be an element of 'participation' here, notably of certain associations and their

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[6] On 'episodic' strategies, see Goodfellow and Jackman (2023, 247–50).

leaders, but this does not alter the often exclusionary and extractive political and economic logic in play.

How to achieve a more *genuinely* participatory approach, accommodating diverse categories of workers, remains an open question. Isolated examples—both from the African region and elsewhere (Bhatt, 2006; Dobson, Skinner, and Nicholson, 2009)—underscore the political and practical possibilities of inclusive urban planning, which caters to the specific needs of workers, rather than political logics of differentiation, division, and exclusion. Yet this more promising approach remains exceptional in the African context where many planning interventions exacerbate rather than resolve challenges of labour informality (Kamete, 2018; Okoye, 2020; Rizzo, 2017; Roever and Skinner, 2016; Bähre, 2014). Exploring participatory possibilities further is beyond the scope of this article, although a vital area for research.

To recap (see also Table 1), this theoretical discussion first outlined how state regulation of informal workers—through manipulation of both their access to space and classification within a 'symbolic order' of worth—can influence urban class formation. An undifferentiated regulatory approach, whether permissive or punitive, may have a homogenizing effect on class formation; by contrast, a differentiated approach likely encourages more hierarchical distinction. Second, we unpack *how* state actors pursue these contrasting approaches, including through strategies of 'forbearance' and 'recognition'. Finally, we offer some initial insights into *why* ruling elites pursue one strategy over another. We emphasise that these motivations vary across both space and time and that they are often *structurally linked*; they are part of incumbent leaders' broader strategies to balance class interests and consolidate political power, both within a ruling coalition and against opposition electoral pressures. These broader strategies—or state 'rationalities' (Lefebvre, 2009)—shape whether and how leaders seek to repress the 'urban mass', divide and control select class*es* of labour, or actively encourage a more unified 'working poor' identity. As a final nuance, state interventions are simultaneously—we should stress—*a response* to workers themselves, to urban protests, to fears of electoral retribution, to strikes, and the like. While our focus here is on the politics of top-down class manipulation, these efforts only make sense as a response to bottom-up action and reaction (Cooper, 1987; Davis, 2018). They aim to discourage more autonomous, oppositional claim-making by working class subjects.

3. Case selection and methodology

Dar es Salaam is, in many ways, typical of Africa's 'late urbanisation' (Fox and Goodfellow, 2022; Gollin, Jedwab, and Vollrath, 2016). Its population has nearly doubled in the last decade, rising from an estimated 4.8 million in 2014 to 8.2 million in 2024 (World Population Review, 2024). Meanwhile, its informal economy has expanded to reach 22.5 percent of regional GDP and 'provides a livelihood for the vast majority', especially 'females and those with low education levels' (United Republic of Tanzania, 2020, xii). Significantly, given our focus here on the relationship between shared urban space and informal labour, 76.6 percent of informal businesses operate from 'non-permanent premises' (United Republic of Tanzania, 2020, xii). Dar es Salaam reflects a 21st century urban paradox; the informal economy is a source of urban growth and capital accumulation, yet many informal workers remain highly precarious (Rizzo, 2017; Roever and Skinner, 2016; Soederberg, 2021).

While typical of Africa's 'late urbanisation', Dar es Salaam is arguably idiosyncratic in other ways. Tanzania in general is an outlier in terms of the (low) political salience of ethnicity (Robinson, 2014). As for Dar es Salaam itself, without 'prior urban society predating rapid 20th century growth', it is the 'contemporary exemplar of Swahili virtues of cosmopolitanism and cultural exchange' (Brennan and Burton, 2007, 13). This 'cosmopolitanism' may mean that class subjectivities could feature more prominently than in cities where religious, ethnic, or native-migrant distinctions are more pronounced (LeBas, 2013; Michelitch, 2015; Nyamnjoh, 2007; Paller, 2019).[7]

As discussed below, Dar es Salaam during President Magufuli's presidency also presents an outlier case in so far as Magufuli's reordering of elite power and his populism—including his permissive attitude to informal workers—were unusual by both Tanzanian and regional standards. However, Magufuli's politics and the opportunity to study within-case variation—tracing changes from his presidency to his successor's—is partly what makes this case fruitful for theoretical innovation (Gerring, 2007, 101).

Ultimately, though, whatever Dar es Salaam's 'representativeness' relative to other African cities, we are interested in how its politics help us 'reconstruct' theory; we draw on Burawoy's 'extended case method', bringing the city case into 'dialogue' with the wider literature and thereby refining 'cognitive maps through which we apprehend the world' (Burawoy 1998, 5, 19). Multi-scalar analysis, long a preoccupation of urban theory (Cirolia and Scheba, 2019; Goodfellow, 2022, 18–21; Lefebvre, 2009), is also central to this method, which seeks to '[locate] social processes at the site of research in a relation of mutual determination with an external field of social forces' (Burawoy 1998, 19). For us, this means relating everyday experiences of class formation to evolving elite political rationales and state regulatory interventions, among the other 'social forces' impacting the 'tangled processes of causality in urban development' (Goodfellow, 2022, 21).

Our ethnographic orientation also fits with this 'extended case method'. Our fieldwork involved regular visits to several sites across Dar es Salaam over a total of nine months spanning 2022 to 2024. We use multiple tools both to analyse political process and to 'glean the meanings' that research participants attach to 'their social and political realities' (Schatz, 2009, 5). These include: eight focus group discussions (FGDs) in one low-income neighbourhood, Manzese, with a cross-section of informal workers (street and market vendors, motorcycle-taxi drivers, informal mechanics, metal workers, shoeshines, porters, and waste pickers, among others); a further eight FGDs with market traders, street vendors, and motorcycle-taxi drivers operating in wealthier neighbourhoods and in the Central Business District; semi-structured interviews to collect work-life histories from informal workers; participant observation of meetings convened by workers' associations; observation of meetings between workers and state actors, including the police, local government officials, and CCM leaders; sustained observation of other processes, for instance, extended municipal-led campaigns to formally register motorcycle-taxi stands; more casual 'hanging out' with research participants at their workplace; and interviews with political leaders and bureaucrats, private sector actors, and leaders of workers' associations. We also draw on press reviews and government policy and planning documents.

Our ethnographic orientation is especially important for the study of class formation. We avoid asking respondents to condense their experience, e.g., by questioning them directly about their 'class' identity or perceptions of 'the state'. Instead, we aim to 'treat class ideation in its natural (and historical) habitat', situating ideas, attitudes, and related practices in the contexts 'in which they are formed, negotiated intersubjectively, and given meaning' (Cooper 1995; Fantasia 1995, 284). We also follow an analytical tradition that views class ideas and solidarities not as static, and not necessarily as requiring a long period of consolidation; rather, they are often subject to 'oscillations and shifts' that, again, are best understood in context (Mohandesi, 2013; Fantasia 1995, 271; Cooper 1987).

Our analysis examines, more specifically, whether and how class formation among informal workers evolves with their experience of different state regulatory approaches, whether differentiated or undifferentiated. Regarding data collection, our use of participant

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[7] That said, there is evidence that class may trump ethnicity even in less reputedly 'cosmopolitan' urban contexts (Grossman and Honig 2017).

observation—recorded daily in fieldnotes—and our approach to interviews and focus group discussions enabled us to relate participants' ideas, actions, and inter-actions to the immediate circumstances in which they unfolded (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 2011, 134; Fantasia 1995, 284).[8] We are particularly interested in how workers—depending on these circumstances—convey ideas of unity or hierarchy, how they present their symbolic or moral worth, and how they engage in practices either of solidarity or of 'internal social differentiation and distancing', reinforcing 'micro-hierarchies' (Wacquant, 2008, 183; Fantasia 1989). As discussed earlier, where workers are subject to an *undifferentiated regulatory approach*, we anticipate them adopting language and practices that convey a shared self-identification, a shared sense of stigma or honour, a common view of state-society relations (negative or positive), and a responsibility to participate, for instance, in mutual aid. Where workers experience a *differentiated approach*, by contrast, we examine how 'recognised' workers may 'overclass' themselves—using language and other symbolic modes of expression to embody a state-sanctioned norm of 'responsible' workers—while 'downclassing' other, unrecognised and stigmatized workers.

To some extent, our approach resembles how scholars study 'boundary work' among Africa's urban 'middle classes', i.e., the social and political processes 'necessary to transform a socio-economic category of people into a (middle) class' (Lentz, 2020, 459). However, in contrast to the relatively autonomous 'boundary work' of the middle classes, for instance, as they imbue their suburban housing with markers of middle class distinction (Mercer, 2020), the inferior political and economic position of informal workers means that their class formation is negotiated more with and against the controlling efforts of the state.

4. Urban politics and class formation in Dar es Salaam

We here offer a within-case comparison of shifting informal labour regulations—their political rationales and class effects—from Presidents Magufuli (2015–2021) to Samia (2021—). First, we explore how, why, and to what effect Magufuli pursued an *undifferentiated and permissive* approach, appealing directly to the urban poor. Second, we examine Samia's abrupt switch to an *undifferentiated and punitive* approach involving large-scale evictions. Third, we analyse how and why a Samia-led coalition later moderated its stance, adopting a *differentiated regulatory strategy* and, thereby, selectively recognizing certain categories of 'respectable' worker in the city. This third section also unpacks how a differentiated approach can reflect and amplify an uneven urban geography, with 'hierarchies of place' influencing patterns of class formation across the city.

The primary aim of this analysis is to demonstrate our core theoretical claims, retracing: one, how each leader used contrasting strategies of labour regulation to impact class formation among informal workers; and two, how this class manipulation was embedded within their evolving strategies of regime consolidation and urban political dominance. In particular, the two leaders sought to manage the urban poor in ways that fit within a desired inter-class balance of power and interests. A secondary aim of this analysis is to illustrate how more specific motivations and tools of state interventions—those summarised in Table 1—can combine to support these broader logics of political control.

4.1. The Magufuli rupture

President Magufuli's undifferentiated and permissive approach to urban labour informality—and his attitude to class formation among informal workers—can be understood as part of a populist legitimation

strategy. Through his regulatory approach, he encouraged the cohesion (and political) support of urban informal workers, and this, partly to *counterbalance* his parallel efforts to centralize power within Tanzania's ruling party, which alienated many elite ruling-party factions, related private sectors interests, and middle-class constituencies.

We begin with some important context. Since urban labour informality became entrenched in the 1980s, aided by economic crisis and structural adjustment reforms, the political status quo for Dar es Salaam's informal workers has been one of routine repression with spells of relative tolerance (Msoka and Ackson, 2017; Nnkya, 2006). Magufuli's immediate predecessor, Jakaya Kikwete (2005–2015), began his presidency with a sustained nationwide campaign to evict urban informal workers, which culminated in an estimated one million people losing their livelihoods (Lyons and Brown, 2009). Faced with increased electoral competition during his second term, notably in urban areas, Kikwete moderated his approach. Even so, formal trading areas remained economically unviable and regulations proved too costly for many to comply with (Steiler and Nyirenda, 2021). Informal workers—be they traders, motorcycle-taxi drivers, or similar—thus experienced routine harassment by police and militias (Ibid; interviews with informal workers). One woman street vendor remembered her stall being demolished six times in different areas across the city, causing both material deprivation and depression (FGD, August 2022).

After Magufuli took office, the change in his government's approach to labour informality was not immediate; rather, it unfolded gradually alongside parallel changes in Magufuli's political and economic objectives. While he hailed from CCM—the same, long-time ruling party as his predecessors—his arrival in power marked a rupture in Tanzania's post-socialist status quo. Beginning in the 1980s, liberalizing economic reforms had engendered a new class of private accumulators, who either came from within the ruling party or forged ties with one of its fast-multiplying factions (Shivji, Yahya-Othman, and Kamata, 2020; Gray, 2018). As a result, CCM elites were increasingly understood to be nurturing a 'type of primitive accumulation associated with corruption in public finance' that 'mainly led to unequal processes of individual enrichment' (Kamata, Ng'wanza, 2012; Gray, 2015, 400).

Enter Magufuli. His nomination as CCM presidential candidate in 2015 was, in large part, due to two CCM factions—each headed by prominent political elites and financiers—knocking each other out of the running (Collord, 2024, 125–31). Once in office, this unlikely victor began centralising power and forging his own, neo-statist development agenda. On the latter point, Magufuli's 'resource nationalism' involved a greater emphasis on sovereignty over natural resources, more public ownership and investment, and related efforts to discipline private capital, particularly where this involved the allegedly corrupt granting of tax exemptions, import licenses, and the like (Andreoni 2017; Nyamsenda, 2018; Pedersen and Jacob, 2019). Meanwhile, the new president lacked a strong political base, relying instead on co-opting leaders from outside the established CCM elite. This weakness influenced his dual strategy to consolidate power. First, he sought to suppress rival CCM factions, directing various coercive measures against politicians, prominent businessmen, and political financiers (Collord, 2024, 252–55). The victims of Magufuli's excesses were not only CCM elites, though; they included opposition politicians, journalists, and NGO officials, to mention but a few (Nyamsenda, 2018; Paget, 2021). This brings us to the second part of Magufuli's dual strategy; as his faction directed coercion towards the elite and middle classes, it sought consent from a lower-income majority, appealing to 'wavujajasho' (the working people) and 'wanyonge' (the poor) (Shivji, 2021).

Regarding urban contexts specifically, his regulatory approach was unprecedented for being highly permissive in its recognition of informal workers and their right to access public space (George, Msoka, and Makundi, 2023; Steiler and Nyirenda, 2021). Magufuli's first major intervention came in December 2016. Prompted by a clash between local authorities and street vendors in Tanzania's second largest city, Mwanza, the President ordered all executive officers, including Regional and

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District Commissioners, to stop evicting vendors (Magufuli, 2016). Two years later in December 2018, he announced the introduction of new ID cards for informal workers. No official policies were adopted; rather, Magufuli detailed the initiative through several addresses (Steiler and Nyirenda, 2021, 10–11). While branded '*machinga*' IDs, implying they were for street vendors, *all* informal workers with capital worth less than Tsh4m (then approximately $1740) could pay for an annual ID costing Tsh20,000 ($8.7). They thereby contributed to revenue collection—another Magufuli preoccupation—while also acquiring the right to operate in unoccupied urban spaces, e.g., road reserves.[9] Together with a series of more minor interventions, such as the lifting in 2020 of a ban on motorcycle-taxis in Dar es Salaam's CBD (Uhuru, 2020), this ID initiative constituted the core of Magufuli's approach to informal labour.

Digging deeper, the approach combined a politics of 'forbearance'—for instance, where Magufuli called for an end to evictions—with a proactive politics of 'recognition'. This recognition included 'listening' to informal workers, a point stressed in speeches, and negotiating with their representatives from various associations and trade union (Steiler and Nyirenda, 2021). It also incorporated an element of symbolic valorisation, of discursive recognition. Magufuli's December 2016 address illustrates how he sought to reinforce an inclusive, undifferentiated class identity for '*wanyonge*', the poor, while simultaneously associating this with his parallel critique of an unproductive, corrupt elite (Magufuli, 2016). In elaborating these two components of his populist, legitimating logic, he denounced 'fake investors', asking, 'When will poor Tanzanians be investors in their country?' (authors' translation from Swahili). Regarding evictions of urban informal workers, he was even more explicit about the class implications. He affirmed that, were these evictions to continue, it would mean that 'there are some Tanzanians of a certain *class*,' here he inserted the English word, 'who are allowed to stay in the city, and there are Tanzanians of another class who are not allowed to stay in the city.'

Interviews and focus group discussions in Dar es Salaam confirm that Magufuli's *discursive appeal*, along with an experience of actual *material improvements*, left a profound impression on informal workers, including of diverse occupations and operating in both poorer and more affluent urban areas (see also George, Msoka, and Makundi, 2023; Nyamsenda, 2023; Steiler and Nyirenda, 2021). Participants frequently referred to a *common experience* of improved state-society relations, highlighting the reduction in state harassment and, more broadly, articulating a sense of *shared freedom*. 'The city militia would always come to evict us', recalled a shoeshine, 'but Magufuli banned them [from evicting informal workers]'. 'When there were IDs, many had a bit of freedom', noted one informal mechanic. 'In the Magufuli days, you could work the whole year without being stopped by police', a motorcycle-taxi driver said, explaining, 'Magufuli did not like bribes'.

This positive experience also encouraged informal workers to affirm their *collective worth*. 'We were like gold covered in mud', noted a street vendor, 'but Magufuli came and washed us off. Now we know our value' (author translation, *The* Chanzo, 2021). This statement echoes a common theme—especially in conversations arising during focus group discussions—whereby informal workers would contest the stigma attached

to them and their work. A maize porter insisted, 'We are the poorest of the poor, [but] we also help feed Dar es Salaam'. He elaborated, 'If you eat ugali [staple food made of maize meal], know it came from us. You built a house. Know that my son here,' referring to a younger porter in the same focus group, 'carried the cement. You had a drink. My son contributed.' A vendor similarly noted, 'Street trading is a big business, but people call it 'petty' because of how society sees us.' 'Shoeshines are important people', affirmed a man of that occupation. 'We help our fellow citizen'.

From the above statements, we begin to grasp how Magufuli's undifferentiated and permissive approach amplified a sense of positive group identity, and this among an inclusive cross-section of informal workers. Participants were sometimes explicit in affirming a collective 'we' born out of a sense of linked fate, of shared 'street life' (Di Nunzio, 2019). 'We're all similar', said one mechanic. 'Even a mama lishe [woman street caterer], if she came here, she would complain of the very same things'. 'We are *wanyonge*' (the poor, or literally, 'the hanged'), affirmed another participant.

Finally, Magufuli's approach to labour informality both reinforced this collective 'we' among informal workers while—in keeping with his broader regime consolidation effort—rendering more salient an inter-class cleavage. One motorcycle-taxi driver commented, 'Truly, Magufuli looked after the weak (*wanyonge*)' while another agreed, 'he helped the low down (*watu wa hali ya chini*)', adding, 'not high-class people (*watu wa hali ya juu*)'.

4.2. Samia, phase one: renewed evictions

The political economy logics underpinning Magufuli's undifferentiated and permissive regulatory approach—as well as the intended and *actual* impact on class formation and legitimation—is even clearer when contrasted with the sharp reversal that occurred after his death and Samia's succession from Vice President to President. Her switch to an *undifferentiated* but *punitive* regulatory approach was part of a 'clean up' operation consistent with an overall more elitist political orientation and urban renewal agenda.

Samia entered power as a triple-minority: a woman, a Muslim, and a Zanzibari. At the elite level, she quickly renewed with the factional base of former President Kikwete (2005–2015), including restoring ties with business elite-cum-political financiers, and relatedly, re-emphasizing the importance of attracting investors for private sector-led growth (The Citizen, 2021a). While sidelining close Magufuli allies, she reappointed stalwarts of the Kikwete era to key government and party positions. These moves were celebrated as restoring 'unity' within CCM (The Guardian, 2023), but CCM politicians and prominent business elite also stood to prosper (Africa Confidential, 2021). An advisor working for a leading private sector association in Dar es Salaam echoed this view. 'I feel like it's Kikwete 2.0′, he noted. There are 'businesses coming in, people opening up companies left, right, and centre', but 'corrupt practices have increased' (Interview, August 2022).

Samia paired her enthusiasm for a 'business friendly' investment climate with her decidedly more punitive approach to urban labour informality. Months after coming to power, she oversaw a mass eviction campaign, which resembled former President Kikwete's evictions, mentioned earlier. The campaign started in Dar es Salaam and then spread countrywide, featuring the frequent arrest of informal workers and burning of their goods (Sippy 2022; The Chanzo 2021). Samia justified the measures both as a response to complaints of unfair competition from formal business operators and as a strategy for collecting more revenue from tax-paying formal traders (The Citizen, 2021b). The eviction process itself also underscored the rising influence of larger-scale business interests. For instance, two prominent businessmen accompanied the Dar es Salaam Regional Commissioner through the commercial area of Kariakoo while evictions were ongoing (Nyamsenda, 2021a).

Regarding class formation, our research suggests that Samia's undifferentiated, *punitive* approach further reinforced a unified class identity but, this time, associated with shared experiences of dispossession, state violence, and stigma (FGDs, August 2022). 'Eeeh arrests

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[9] There were a range of criticisms of the IDs. For instance, some local authorities worried that they undermined other forms of taxation benefiting local government. IDs were also reportedly abused by larger business operators, who took advantage of their simple design—no photo, for instance—to distribute them to casual labourers, who then sold the goods of these larger operators in the street. Finally, there was uncertainty about how sustainable this permissive ID system might be, given the rapid spread of street trading (Steiler and Nyirenda 2021; George, Msoka, and Makundi 2023). While these concerns raise questions about whether and how IDs could become part of a longer-term, inclusive urban planning strategy, they are beyond the scope of this article. The main focus here is on how these IDs affected processes of class formation and authoritarian legitimation.

have increased', observed a motorcycle-taxi driver. 'These days all that's left is evict, evict, remove', said a street vendor. Others contrasted the Magufuli and Samia eras more explicitly. 'For the three, four years before Magufuli passed away, there was some calm', an informal mechanic recalled. 'But these days we are harassed a lot.' 'It was "be free" for all wavujajasho (working poor) in the Magufuli time', insisted motorcycle-taxi driver. 'Now it is suffering.'.

While not always referencing Magufuli or Samia, informal workers' discussion of their recent experiences repeatedly returned to this theme of hostile state-society relations. Their statements illustrate a link between this hostility and workers' shared perception both of their own stigmatized class position and of cross-class inequalities. One street vendor referred to 'sky and earth' when talking about attempts to negotiate with government, as in, they never meet. 'The government just gives orders', emphasised another vendor. '"Do this!" You do it. People are like cattle'. Other workers likening their treatment by the state to that of a 'chicken', 'trash', 'dirt', 'hooligans', 'pests', and 'thieves'. In perhaps the most direct identification of class—and class *inequalities*—mediating state-society relations, one motorcycle-taxi driver queried, 'This country is free, so now, why is this freedom for the few?'.

However powerless informal workers may have felt, the widespread evictions did also generate their own countermobilization. From 2021 into 2022, street vendors and other workers protested sporadically, responding to their often physically violent removal by constructing mini blockades, laying stones across roads, among other tactics (The Chanzo, 2021). Motorcycle-taxi drivers—after they were again banned from the CBD—also marched on CCM's Dar es Salaam Headquarters (Interviews, August 2022).

4.3. Samia, phase two: Moderation, differentiation

As suggested in the earlier theoretical discussion, semi-routine 'clean up' operations are likely short lived, not least because of the unity and opposition they engender among an urban poor. Incumbent leaders' and their ruling coalitions may—without significantly altering their more elite and middle-class political orientation—moderate their approach to informal labour regulation, and this, to shore up their urban political dominance. In 2022, Samia's government began to move in this direction with the adoption of a *differentiated* regulatory strategy. The new approach involved more actively dividing urban space between 'recognised' and 'unrecognised' areas and, relatedly, encouraging *hierarchies* of legitimate and illegitimate workers.

At least two, *inter-related* political and economic concerns informed both the new approach and the specific tools used to advance it. First, although CCM elites initially showed little interest in how evictions might be received by informal workers, concerns soon emerged amidst an apparent slump in Samia's popularity relative to Magufuli, a drop that was particularly pronounced in urban areas (Afrobarometer, 2023; 2021).[10] Meanwhile, Samia also promised to allow for more political

pluralism after Magufuli's authoritarian turn (Lukelo, 2023).[11] It is unsurprising, then, that CCM MPs with urban seats previously held by the opposition began arguing for a more tolerant attitude to informal workers (Kaitira, 2023; Lazaro, 2022). The second factor motivating Samia's change in tack relates to her renewed emphasis on private sector-led growth. The government efforts to differentiate among informal workers have been pursued in close partnership with Tanzania's banks, among other private sector interests (Interviews with bank managers, association leaders, and municipal officials, 2023–2024). The result is a new strategy that aims to bolster CCM's political support, create new markets for commercial lending, and raise revenue—a perennial concern—all while still constraining informal workers' access to urban space.[12]

At the time of writing, the more differentiated approach is being pursued through renewed 'forbearance', given that nearly all targeted workers remain *semi*-formal. Evictions are still ongoing but have been more localised and sporadic ahead of elections in late 2024 and 2025. Alongside this forbearance comes a new politics of 'recognition'. At national level, Samia has rebranded herself as a champion of 'special groups' (*makundi maalum*), which now encompass nearly all 'small business operators' in urban areas (*wafanyabiashara ndogo ndogo*), most prominently street vendors and motorcycle-taxi drivers. As part of this rebrand, the Ministry of Community Development now oversees these 'special groups', working notably with co-opted worker associations.[13] In this vein, the Ministry has convened several meetings with association leaders in the capital, Dodoma (Gwajima, 2023, pp. 24–25; Interviews, March 2024). One such meeting in May 2022 featured a call-in from 'Mama' Samia, who addressed traders as 'my children, my group', adding that she had 'heard of their challenges' and was therefore promising them Tsh10m ($4,304) in each administrative region (Hassan, 2022). Muted reactions from attendees suggest this amount was underwhelming.

The Ministry has since announced a new loan scheme—negotiated with NMB, a leading commercial bank—whereby Tsh18.5bn ($7m) will be made available to 'special groups' (Gwajima, 2024). Another loan scheme—overseen by the President's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG)—has also been relaunched and expanded to target a wider range of 'small business operators' (Ayo, 2024; Mchengerwa, 2024). These new initiatives are being touted alongside the *reintroduction* of '*machinga*' IDs. The IDs again cost Tsh20,000 to acquire, as under Magufuli. Unlike the earlier version, though, these new IDs do not afford free access to urban space; rather, the holder is promised reduced tax, *if they formally register*, and becomes eligible for an NMB loan, in some instances, to be administered *via* one of the co-opted associations. If anything, the IDs and loans are a throwback not to Magufuli's populism but to Kikwete-era pre-election clientelism,[14] recalling the 'JK billions' distributed ahead of the 2015 elections (Brown et al., 2015, p. 9; Interviews, December 2023).

In Dar es Salaam, local government and party officials are taking

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[10] The Afrobarometer surveys conducted around the time of Magufuli's death in 2021 and then roughly 18 months later in 2022 show a fall in the percentage of respondents answering that the country is 'going in the right direction' with the sharpest drop in urban areas, 78 to 55 per cent. Personal job approval ratings for Magufuli and Samia reflected a similar pattern with a particularly precipitous fall in the proportion—down from 58 to 24 per cent—of *urban* respondents answering that they 'strongly approved' of Samia's performance. It is worth noting that there are a range of 'exogenous' factors that could also influence this shifting popularity, for instance, the rising cost of living exacerbated by the war in Ukraine and supply-chain issues following the Covid-19 pandemic.

[11] Samia's government later reneged on many of its initial reformist promises. Even so, CCM elites remain concerned about the party's waning popularity and an opposition threat, not least as liberation parties have performed poorly across southern Africa in recent elections. As such, the political rationale outlined here—borne out of fear of declining popularity—endured into 2025.

[12] For more on the logics of 'poverty finance', labour informality, and expanding debt markets, see Bernards (2022).

[13] Another pillar of the broader 'recognition' strategy, these associations serve variously as mechanisms of political control, clientelist distribution, and where they coordinate with the banks and government to deliver on various loan schemes, as debt collection agencies.

[14] Samia's personal ties with Kikwete have frayed since the early days of her presidency, but her overall economic orientation still bears notable similarities.

their cue from the national level. They have strengthened ties with street vendor and motorcycle-taxi associations and, in part through these groups, have negotiated parking areas and vending spaces.[15] Local authorities have also championed the new language of 'special groups' or, for motorcycle-taxi drivers specifically, 'transport officers', thereby incorporating the discursive element of Samia's 'recognition' strategy. Regarding the financial component, these same officials have encouraged banks to develop additional loan schemes (Interviews with bank managers, association leaders, and local government officials, 2023–2024). For instance, with government assurances, including about workers' continued access to certain urban areas, banks have introduced loans whereby vendors use their informal stalls as collateral and associations act as guarantors, responsible for tracking down defaulters. Rival banks are also negotiating loan schemes with equally rivalrous motorcycle-taxi associations. Meanwhile, bank managers celebrate the 'outstanding' performance of their 'micro- and small- enterprise' loan portfolios (Interviews, bank managers, 2023).

While these initiatives are building momentum, their growth across Dar es Salaam remains uneven; 'hierarchies of place' influence patterns of state intervention and, with it, class formation across the city. As per our earlier, theoretical discussion of a *differentiated* regulatory approach, 'recognised' workers are concentred in more affluent areas, and it is these workers who tend to express class subjectivities more directly aligned with state-sanctioned ideals; meanwhile, stigmatized informal workers, who are not a focus of state 'recognition', remain in poorer 'zones of relegation'. To explore these trends further, we here narrow our focus somewhat, exploring regulation and class formation among workers of a single occupation: motorcycle-taxi driving.

A top-down insistence on formally registering motorcycle-taxi parking areas is most common in neighbourhoods like Oyster Bay and Masaki, or in the Central Business District (CBD). Since the colonial period, these parts of Dar es Salaam have remained among the most affluent, as well as the most heavily policed (Burton, 2007). Faced with heightened state pressure, motorcycle-taxi drivers in these areas are more likely to register their stands and to affirm their own status as 'recognised'. 'Recognition' here is not just a theoretical concept (Klaus, Paller, and Wilfahrt, 2023) but a colloquial term used to demarcate formal and informal (to be recognised, *kutambulika*, or not).

To reinforce this demarcation, drivers draw on a range of discursive and visual tools, which align with official modes of 'classifying and stratifying' informal workers. For instance, they are more closely integrated into formal associations and more likely to praise 'Mama Samia' for elevating them.[16] They are also more likely to embrace their recent designation by state actors as 'transport officers', meanwhile insisting that they are not '*wahuni* (hooligans) anymore' nor *waporaji* (thieves).[17] They point to recently installed official signposts with the name of their stand, which again, following a change in language by state officials, they refer to as *kituo* (a station or stop), rather than the more colloquial *kijiwe* (literally, a stone). They also display any number of ID cards, some issued by the 'community police', some by drivers' associations, some by local government, even if many of these cards—arguably artefacts of a

street-level 'boundary work' (Lentz, 2020)—are of dubious significance. Finally, while stressing their own 'recognised' status, they may criticize other drivers who do not conform to official norms. For instance, one driver from a recognised parking area in the CBD likened his stand to his 'office'. He then suggested that drivers who did not register their parking areas lacked 'understanding' and were on 'another level', presumably a lower level.

The official attention paid to affluent areas in Dar es Salaam contrasts sharply with another of our research sites, Manzese, a historically stigmatized—even infamous—part of the city (Brennan and Burton, 2007). As Mercer (2020, 532) recounts, '"It's like Manzese" is a common refrain among the suburban middle classes when referring to undesirable residential areas, referencing the well-known high-density, low-income, inner-city neighbourhood'. In interviews, leaders of a city-wide motorcycle-taxi drivers' association reflected this same disdain. One noted that areas like Manzese or Mbagala—another low-income neighbourhood—were not 'sensitive', not priorities. He then joked that everyone in those places are *wahuni* (hooligans) who would steal your phone.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, drivers in Manzese mostly lack formally registered parking areas. They are not well-integrated into district or regional drivers' associations, nor do they use the new language of 'transport officer' or *kituo*. Meanwhile, they are keenly aware of a shared stigma, continue to lament an increase in police stops and fines, refer to themselves collectively as *wanyonge* (the poor) or *watu wa hali ya chini* (the low down), and exhibit close ties with other informal workers in the area. For instance, in a focus group discussion with Manzese-based *waste pickers*, among the most stigmatized informal workers, participants recounted how they contributed to the medical expenses not of another waste picker but of a motorcycle-taxi driver, who also operated in Manzese and who had suffered an accident. The waste pickers' initiative reflects a common practice, which involves circulating a *daftari*, a notebook, to everyone in a workplace or nearby area so that they can record their contributions towards paying for, most often, someone's medical emergency. Less a form of class-differentiating 'boundary work', this *daftari* practice suggests community and class integration—or more plainly, solidarity (Fantasia 1989).

To recap, Samia's ruling coalition shifted to a 'differentiated' regulatory approach, thereby encouraging new 'micro-hierarchies' among informal workers—distinguishing between those who are respectable (and bankable) and those who are not—all while reordering urban space. These exercises in class manipulation are then embedded within a broader strategy to bolster CCM's popularity while maintaining greater control over urban space, thereby creating opportunities for accumulation, notably by larger private sector and politically aligned interests.

One final nuance. Whatever the rationale and methods used, nothing guarantees the success of state efforts to manipulate class; indeed, the results of recent interventions under Samia remain uncertain, not least because formality and 'recognition' are often a matter of ongoing negotiation and contestation, leaving room for 'gray space' (Yiftachel, 2009). This 'gray space', in turn, accentuates the 'ambivalence' of class formation (Fantasia 1995, 271). While the State can influence 'micro-hierarchies' among informal workers, this ability is also *partial*, undermined not least by the state's own fragmented authority and planning inconsistencies (Auerbach et al., 2018; Lindell, Ampaire, and Byerley, 2019).

To illustrate, we can revisit the example of motorcycle-taxi parking areas. In spring 2024, attempts to mobilise drivers around the CBD to pay annual transport license and parking fees were met with confusion. Many drivers were unable to pay the Tsh53,000 ($20) required within the brief timeframe given. An unexpected reduction in the number of approved drivers per parking area—which was now lower than the number marked on the official signposts—also caused worry. Still more drivers were concerned that their parking areas were denied formal recognition entirely. Some considered appealing to one of the city-wide drivers' associations but lamented that they did not know which one to trust, if any. While the municipality continued to exercise 'forbearance',

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[15] Especially as regards street vendors, formal planning efforts have also given way to the privatization of public space. Following the initial wave of evictions under Samia, vendors are slowly returning to prime commercial areas, but state officials, elected politicians, and association leaders reportedly command a high price for access and protection, a tendency that all but disappeared under Magufuli (Abdallah 2023).

[16] These associations routinely mobilise drivers to attend public meetings with state and CCM party officials, which invariably double as campaign rallies for Samia, whose name and image feature prominently.

[17] There is an explicit electoral logic in play here as the language of 'transport officer' became much more common after a former opposition MP for Arusha town referred to motorcycle-taxi drivers as a 'curse' in March 2023. The politician's speech went viral on social media, motivating CCM to seize the moment and champion the newly christened 'transport officers' (Ayo 2023).

some drivers anticipated renewed evictions after the upcoming elections, leading to 'chaos' (Interviews, March 2024). Drivers recently christened 'transport officers' could—if evicted—find that label rendered meaningless. In the words of one driver, 'we live politically' (Interview, November 2023).

5. Conclusions

Class formation among urban informal workers—far from irrelevant—is a focus of active manipulation by incumbent leaders seeking to reinforce their political dominance. We first identify two ideal-typical regulatory approaches, which leaders may pursue to reshape sociospatial relations and, in the process, influence urban class formation. An 'undifferentiated' approach—whether permissive or punitive—entails a more uniform regulation of informal workers' access to urban space and their symbolic recognition; it then has a homogenizing effect on class identities. Conversely, a 'differentiated' approach segments access to urban space and differentially recognises workers, valorising or stigmatizing, and thereby reinforces micro-hierarchies amongst them. Regarding incumbent leaders' choice of one or the other approach, we argue that this varies depending on their broader efforts to secure political dominance, both at city and national level. Relatedly, leaders shape informal workers' *intra*-class relations—their class formation—in ways that compliment an inter-class balance of power and interests.

In our Dar es Salaam case, we detail significant changes in approach to informal labour regulation and class formation between Presidents Magufuli (2015–2021) and Samia (2021—), and how these changes were embedded within each leaders' efforts to consolidate power. Magufuli's crackdown on an elite class of accumulators was counterbalanced by a populist legitimation strategy. This included overtures to urban informal workers, which encouraged a unified class identity among *wanyonge*, the poor. By contrast, Samia's reintegration of sidelined political-cum-economic elites was first accompanied by evictions and dispossession of informal workers. Only later, amidst fears of falling popularity, did her government adopt a more moderate, 'differentiated' approach, seeking to square the presence of select, 'respectable' street workers with the imperative of a 'business friendly' urban investment climate.

Having explored a politics of top-down class manipulation in African cities, we ask, what—if anything—can this analysis reveal about the nature of urban politics more broadly, particularly its democratic or authoritarian character? While this is an area for further research, *regime type* per se may not decisively impact informal workers' experience of fluctuating regulatory interventions—by turns repressive, by turns co-opting—nor parallel forms of class manipulation. Indeed, similar regulatory interventions recur in *relatively* democratic contexts—like Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, or Zambia (Resnick, 2013; Gillespie, 2016; Obeng-Odoom, 2012; Kimari, 2024; Morange, 2015)—as well as authoritarian ones, like our own case of Tanzania. Moreover, both democratic and authoritarian incumbents appear to adapt their regulatory interventions to reinforce their political dominance (Resnick, 2019; Goodfellow and Jackman, 2023).

There is also a danger that conventional measures of democracy versus authoritarianism, while not clearly explaining variation in the treatment of informal workers, actually *obscure* class-differentiated experiences of freedom and repression in the city. Tanzania offers an example of this. President Magufuli's authoritarianism was rightly decried, both at home and abroad, albeit with little attention paid to the experience of informal workers. By contrast, many initially welcomed Samia as a would-be democratic reformer (Dahir, 2022), again though, largely overlooking urban workers' testimony of dispossession and loss of freedom.

There are various ways of accounting for this persistent oversight. The sociologist Loïc Wacquant (2009; 2003) refers to a 'dictatorship of the poor' and qualifies even established democracies as 'centaur states'—humane to the affluent on top and beastly to the poor at the

bottom. Yet, where scholars distinguish cleanly between more democratic and authoritarian rule, there can be no 'centaurs'; indeed, such clean distinctions—which also tend to focus on national rather than subnational levels—do not encourage a study of how states 'stratify citizenship along the dimensions of race, class and geography' (Weaver and Prowse, 2020, 1177–78).

Returning to the analysis in this article, it offers a framework for understanding one important way that incumbent leaders may 'stratify citizenship'. They balance interests across class even as they seek to manipulate class formation among informal workers, variously uniting, dividing, and ultimately, constraining class as a basis for more autonomous claim-making, or 'popular democracy' (Shivji 2000, 2021). Amidst Africa's rapid urbanization, class manipulation may become ever more relevant to strategies of both city- and national-level political dominance. It thus deserves practical and scholarly attention, both to understand the exercise of political power and to capture class-differentiated experiences of the state, including where more democratic regimes may conceal an authoritarian underbelly.

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.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.107027.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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