Summary

This study is about citizenship and informality in megacities. The percentage of the world population living in cities is expected to further increase in the coming decades. Urbanisation is characterised by informality in large parts of the globe. Despite urban dwellers formally having the right to a roof above their heads, public services and work, these basic livelihood features remain inaccessible for many. They do not have land titles or rental contracts; they live in improvised houses, obtain their electricity from private generators and earn their income in the informal economy. Notwithstanding, the city also offers them specific opportunities for political mobilisation and participation: this is the so-called “citizenship paradox”. In order to explore this paradox in greater depth, this study concentrates on the ways in which citizenship is shaped for poor inhabitants of two contrasting megacities. Based on six months fieldwork in Mexico City and six months in Khartoum, spread over a period of three years, I argue that there are surprising similarities in the ways in which poor residents negotiate their citizenship with the local government in these two cities. These similarities are expressed in the role of intermediaries or brokers in the ‘grey zone’ of (state) power. They mediate between the population, the local government and other ‘authorities’ such as religious organisations, neighbourhood organisations, (development) NGOs and sometimes even criminal organisations. What is striking in the light of existing theories is that this kind of intermediation (often described as clientelism) does not disappear with democratisation. In Mexico City, which is democratic yet also characterised by scarcity, brokers operate in roughly the same way between the state and citizens as in Khartoum, which is authoritarian. Moreover, they even benefit from the democratic transition in Mexico, while the difference between Mexico City and Khartoum lies in the relative power position of the brokers vis-a-vis the local government. In Mexico, the brokers can choose between multiple political bosses, which gives them space to manoeuvre in relation to the state and strengthen their own position. In Khartoum, brokers depend on a sole political boss – the ruling party, which means that they often operate as an extension of the state. Given that has consequences for the negotiation position of the poor residents, I plea for making a distinction between multipolar and unipolar brokerage.

This book consists of 2 parts. In the first part – from the introduction until chapter 3 – I draw the frameworks for the more empirical parts of the study: this is where I describe the methodology, conceptual framework and background of both cases. In the second part – chapters 4 through 6 – I discuss my empirical findings. In chapter 7, I formulate a number of conclusions and discuss their implications for theory building on citizenship and state society relations. In this chapter, I introduce the notion of unipolar versus multipolar brokerage.

In chapter 2, I develop the conceptual framework for this study on citizenship in two contrasting megacities. Based on recent empirical literature, I assume that urban informality heavily influences the ways in which poor residents can shape their citizenship. First, I explore the role of informality in the daily lives of poor residents of megacities. I argue that the informality, violence and inequality that characterise the lives of the urban poor stand in sharp contrast with the dominant notion of citizenship, involving the central principles that all citizens are equal before the law and are entitled equal access to
the resources of the state. Informality has consequences for the different dimensions of citizenship, which are closely interconnected: exclusion of access to claims on land, shelter and employment also determines the conditions for the exercise of political participation.

It has been increasingly recognised within recent literature that formal and informal forms of governance are intrinsically linked. This claim mostly relates to hybridity in the relation between the state and its citizens, which is interchangeably based on a particularistic and universalistic logic. This is what I refer to with the term ‘vertical hybridity’. I wish to add the notion of ‘horizontal hybridity’, which relates to the increasing role of private organisations in the public sphere and the resulting intermingling between the public and private. In the context of rapid urbanisation and a lack of regulation, the state depends on ‘informal’ forms of leadership for the execution of its authority (cooperation of traditional leaders, neighbourhood organisations, et cetera). When, in addition, the state outsources tasks as part of an active policy, as a result of which private organisations start to execute public tasks, this dependence increases. Horizontal and vertical hybridity are interconnected when ‘informal’ authorities in the city start to act as mediators between the state and its citizens: this whole constitutes a ‘grey zone’ of state power.

Subsequently, I analyse what the above means for the political agency of the urban poor. I return to social movement studies’ ideas on the importance of motives, resources and opportunities for the political strategies of both power holders and subaltern. ‘Political opportunity structure’ is the dominant concept for the analysis of the interaction between state and society. This concept puts the most important explaining factor with the nature of the regime in place. Social movements are supposed to be the dominant form of mobilisation in democracies, whereas under authoritarian regimes we are more likely to observe silent opposition or armed resistance. I argue that the grey zone of vertical and horizontal informality represents the political opportunity structure within which the urban poor can make their claims towards the state under different kinds of regimes, and assume that brokers occupy central positions within this grey zone.

In chapter three, I introduce both cases in their national political and historical context. I briefly describe the urbanisation history of Mexico City and Khartoum and highlight how huge popular areas have been formed in both cities. In order to interpret political relations within these areas, I also provide an image of the most important national political developments in the past decades. Iztapalapa is a popular neighbourhood in the South-East of Mexico City, with approximately two million inhabitants. The area is almost entirely regulated: 70% of the residents owns the land on which they live and 95% are connected to the water, drainage and electricity networks. Even though it can thus be disputed whether Iztapalapa can be termed as a ‘slum’, it is undoubtedly one of the poorest areas of Mexico’s Federal District. Iztapalapa is often associated with criminality, because organised crime has a foot on the ground there. In order to understand political activities in Iztapalapa, we have to include the history of the neighbourhood as well as the national political context. Different parts of Iztapalapa have been populated in different ways: some parts have been planned by the government, whereas others have been populated through the illegal selling of communal land. In the latter areas above all, strong social
movements have originated around the struggle for public services. These social movements gained strength after the major earthquake that devastated large parts of the city and played an important role in the democratisation process that eventually led to the end of the one party state at the national level in 2000. The democratisation process has also lead to more autonomy and space for political participation on the level of the Federal District and its boroughs. Since 1988, the Federal District has been governed by the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), a party whose support base is located in Iztapalapa. Nowadays, many of the social movements have been incorporated into the PRD.

Mayo is a neighbourhood in the South of Khartoum, comprising a mixture of refugee camps, squatter settlements and regularised living areas. The area frequently makes the headlines due to its high number of internally displaced persons in the area, as well as the conflicts that this has entailed, particularly surrounding the relocations that are an essential part of urban planning policies. Political relations in Mayo cannot be understood without the national political context, including the conflicts between the national government in the centre and armed movements in the rest of the country. Until the 1980s, subsequent governments tried to limit the influx of rural migrants into the city, because they formed a political, economic and security threat from the perspective of the powerholders (and the urban population). The current government of Khartoum has accepted the pertinence of the migrants and has engaged in various urban planning efforts. The regime of which it forms part can be characterised as authoritarian. It acts tough on every form of political opposition, which is associated with the armed opposition elsewhere in the country. The regime came into to power in 1989 and since strived to implement a social transformation based on an ideology of Islamisation and Arabisation. As a result of these policies, rebel movements from South, Central and Western Sudan, who were already fighting against marginalisation before the regime came to power, intensified their resistance. Indeed, many internally displaced from these areas actually live in Mayo. In 2005, the government and the largest rebel movement, the SPLA, reached a peace agreement and the SPLA transformed into a political party, the SPLM. This gave SPLM supporters in Mayo a political framework to claim their rights, although in practice this has had limited effects, also because the priority of the SPLM lay with the separation of Southern Sudan and the return of the displaced to the South.

In sum, both cities are marked by important differences. Whereas Mexico City can been seen as a consolidated urban area, Khartoum is fully in flux. Mexico has undergone a democratic transition, whilst Khartoum falls under authoritarian rule and is the capital of a country marked by various armed conflicts. In Khartoum, the security services play a dominant role between the state and residents. However, at the same time there are also similarities: urbanisation has been based on comparable ‘drivers’ and popular neighbourhoods have developed along similar lines (they are to a large extent unplanned). Moreover, both popular areas provide ample support to important opposition parties.

In chapter 4, I discuss poverty and exclusion in Iztapalapa and Mayo. There is scarcity in both neighbourhoods, albeit in different areas and in different measures. In Iztapalapa, exclusion is mainly a matter of lacking access to good quality public services, employment and security. Compared to the rest of the city, the quality of water provision can be considered poor, partly due to the geographical
location of Iztapalapa. The government compensates for the limited water supply through the distribution of water through lorries, although this distribution system is vulnerable to manipulation and corruption. Public spaces and green areas are also scarce in Iztapalapa. While all land has formally been allocated, this allocation is being challenged on a daily basis. Public areas are being claimed by new settlers with the support of political actors, but also by groups of residents: the (retired) elderly and (unemployed) youth, who do not attend school. Youth gangs contribute to the perceived insecurity in the area. Furthermore, residents complain about a lack of employment opportunities. Despite Iztapalapa having a significant share of the economic activities in the Federal District, this does not translate into employment opportunities for the residents of Iztapalapa themselves. Most of the residents work in small family enterprises that are often considered part of the informal economy. The salaries in these enterprises are relatively low, which translates into a poor quality of housing. Migration to the U.S. and opportunities in the drug trade as a quick route to economic success are other consequences of a lack of employment. Accordingly, Iztapalapa is commonly associated with criminality and residents of Iztapalapa are generally stigmatised by other inhabitants of Mexico City.

In Mayo, exclusion is first and foremost a matter of lacking access to land, housing, public service delivery, employment and protection. Some residents have been waiting for land regularisation for twenty years, with relocations still being executed. In neighbourhoods where land ownership has not been regularised, there are no public services either: people buy their water from donkey carts and electricity from private generators. Inhabitants of Mayo mostly work in the informal economy, as day labourers in other parts of the city, as street vendors, rickshaw drivers or cleaners. Government jobs are not easily accessible for people with relatively little education. Revenues are generally insufficient for sustaining a livelihood. Security is a complex topic in Mayo: on the one hand, it is a safe area with little criminality; however, on the other hand, the police and security services pose a security threat for parts of the population, including the women who develop economic activities that are prohibited under shari’a law (such as the selling of alcohol). Political activities are a security risk for the inhabitants and membership of a specific ethnic group alone can already lead to suspected support to rebel groups. Despite the inhabitants of Mayo formally enjoying the right to protection, public service delivery and political participation, in practice they can hardly exercise such rights. Exclusion determines the social dimensions of citizenship to an important extent.

In chapter 5, I explore the residents of Mayo and Iztapalapa’s possibilities to claim equal access. First of all, I discuss the players involved: the providers of public goods and services and the claimants. In Mayo, the state hardly offers anything itself; rather, it almost entirely leaves service delivery to (state-owned) companies, NGOs and religious organisations. In theory, these ‘alternative authorities’ operate within the frameworks set by the government and intermediate for the poor vis-a-vis the government. In Iztapalapa, while the state is the most important provider of public services, their distribution is often conducted via neighbourhood organisations. In both areas, fields of claim-making are thoroughly hybrid, with both state institutions and political parties and other organisations playing a role in providing access to important goods and services for the poor. On the demand side, social organisations in Mayo are characterised by tribal bonds, whereas neighbourhood organisations are the dominant form of
social organisation in Iztapalapa. This kind of organisations plays an important role in formulating the residents’ demands vis-a-vis the government and other service providers, such as development NGOs and religious organisations. Professional organisations are gaining importance in both areas.

In a context of scarcity, intermediation between the aforementioned supply and (organised) demand becomes a necessity. This happens in different ways. In both Iztapalapa and Mayo, there are official institutions for citizen participation. In principle, the government of Mexico City supports interaction between the government and the local population on the basis of equality, although the model to represent the citizens towards the government had not yet been set up in 2008. Therefore, citizen participation took place upon the invitation of and under the conditions posed by the government. In Mayo, there is only one organisation for citizen participation, which belongs more to the state than the residents themselves. Therefore, the government puts its mark on the ways in which the residents can exert influence or make claims. Political parties fulfil an important task in both cities in mediating between supply and demand. They do not limit themselves to the struggle for political power and the control thereof via the parliament. In both cities, political representatives of districts have offices in the neighbourhoods and interfere directly with service delivery from the government to the residents. In both areas, ‘social activism’ is an important condition for political success, with politicians engaging in public service delivery and successful service deliverers becoming politicians.

The intermediaries or brokers who operate between the state and the residents are noticeably similar in both areas. Almost without exception, they started their political careers as social activists, claiming and/or organising land rights and public services for their support base (mostly newcomers to the city). In both Iztapalapa and Mayo, there is still space for these so-called political entrepreneurs who fulfil double functions between state institutions, political parties and other organisations involved in public service delivery. However, an important difference between the two cities lies in the local power relations. In Iztapalapa, the democratic transition (the fact that state power and resources are accessible for multiple parties at the same time), in combination with the factionalism inside the PRD, leads to what I call ‘competitive clientelism’. Local leaders can make a choice between different political bosses who compete with each other, which gives them a certain power position. In Mayo, different organisations all have to succumb to the ruling party, which virtually controls all economic resources. In both areas, the ‘political opportunity structure’ thus consists of a grey zone that is characterised by double functions of intermediaries or brokers, although these relate differently to one another and the local government.

In chapter 6, I analyse the consequences of this political opportunity structure for the agency of the residents of both areas. I analyse the political strategies of the population in relation to the strategies of the government and the brokers themselves. In both areas, the poor try to defend their interests collectively, with local leaders playing a central role. One important similarity between the two areas is that the residents tend to approach the state through individuals who they know personally, which reinforces the role of the local leaders. A second similarity is that the way in which the poor try to defend their interests is always a certain variety of a negotiation game. The poor maintain a variety of
strategies that are employed according to the context – sometimes simultaneously, sometimes invariably. Clientelism occurs in both areas, as well as the strategy characterised by Bayat as ‘quiet encroachment’. (Violent) resistance takes place incidentally in both areas, when vital interests are at stake. While I did not encounter social movements in either case (anymore), I did encounter other forms of collective interest representation in both. Ultimately, the residents’ strategies are always directed at reaching negotiations with the local state. The stakes in these negotiations is determined by the brokers to an important extent.

Subsequently, I study the strategies the both governments employ. Both governments dispose of different means to increase their legitimacy as well as maintaining control. Brokers also play a crucial role in these strategies. During elections, both governments were shown to make use of the tactic of vote buying via intermediaries, while in between elections they both tried to gain local leaders on their side by coopting them. Another possibility that both governments made use of – albeit more so in Mayo than Iztapalapa – was the infiltration of local organisations and the nomination of leaders by the government.

Finally, I analyse the interaction between the residents and the government from the perspective of the intermediaries themselves. I show how they build up and exploit a certain degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the residents and the local government in Iztapalapa, by creating and occupying monopoly positions. Ultimately, the relation between the state and its citizens in Iztapalapa is not dyadic (as the definition of clientelism supposes), but rather a triangle in which the third figures take the shape of brokers. In Mayo, brokers also play an important role, although they act much more as a prolongation of the ruling party. Consequently, the options for the residents to negotiate with the government are much more limited.

Finally, in chapter 7, I first draw a couple of conclusions regarding the ways in which poor residents in Mexico City and Khartoum (can) claim access to public goods and services. Subsequently, I discuss the implications thereof for theory formation around citizenship and the hybridisation of state-society relations. There are important differences between the motives and opportunities for mobilisation of residents in Iztapalapa and Mayo: in Mayo, poverty is much more absolute and the state is much less directly involved in service delivery. Therefore, it is striking that I still found similarities in the political agency of the poor residents in the two areas: from my research, it appeared that that poor residents in both cities tended to address their government indirectly, through persons who they knew, and they disposed of a variety of strategies that they employed simultaneously or invariably. Moreover, intermediaries or brokers between the residents and the local governments played an important role in deciding which strategy was employed and when in both areas. How can these similarities be explained with the aforementioned differences in mind? A closer look at the motives and opportunity structures in the two areas also highlights some parallels. First, processes of exclusion are comparable between the two areas: in a context of scarcity, access to services is not guaranteed by public institutions but rather has to be negotiated on a daily basis. These practices do not respond to formal rules. Second, in both cases there is a hybrid or ‘grey’ opportunity structure in which the role of the state is mixed with other forms of authority, via the double functions of brokers.
The difference between the ‘democratic’ Iztapalapa and the ‘authoritarian’ Mayo are thus not so much expressed in the presence of one or another political strategy of the urban poor (social movements in Iztapalapa and clientelism of ‘quiet encroachment’ in Mayo). In fact, all strategies occur in both areas. The difference is between the positions of the intermediaries in relation to the local government. The democratic transition in Iztapalapa has generated more pluralism in the access to resources of the state, with brokers consequently able to gain certain autonomy. In Mayo, the brokers fully depend on the ruling party and have relatively less room to manoeuvre, which has consequences for the negotiation position and thus also for the outcomes for the urban poor.

Therefore, the more favourable negotiation position of the urban poor in Iztapalapa has less to do with the formalisation of democratic state-society relations than with the pluralisation of power and resources. This nuances the value that the concept of ‘political opportunity structure’ attributes to national regimes and their character, whether democratic or authoritarian. My conclusion is that although regimes in a broader sense provide a useful entry point for explaining differences in the exercise of citizenship between Iztapalapa and Mayo, the political process approach (and political opportunity thinking in particular) tends to overlook specific features in the interaction between the state and the urban poor that can explain similarities in the exercise of citizenship in such different socio-political settings as Mexico City and Khartoum. I argue that in order to understand state-society interaction in cities like these, it is necessary to accept the existence of a grey zone based on the intermingling of formal and informal forms of authority and formal and informal forms of interaction between the state and residents. Brokers are the crucial linchpins within this grey zone of state power.

In a mega city context, they know how to take benefit of administrative chaos and scarcity by creating monopoly positions. The comparison between Mexico City and Khartoum shows that brokers can even benefit more from a democratic system in which competition concerning (state) power is central than an authoritarian system in which they have limited space to manoeuvre. In fact, in Mexico City one can speak of ‘multipolar brokerage’, because the brokers have the choice between political bosses, whereas in Khartoum one can speak of ‘unipolar brokerage’, because the brokers depend on a single power source. It is possible that these findings count above all for poor neighbourhoods in large cities, because the tension between the needs of the residents and the search for legitimacy by the government is most notable in a context of scarcity. In order to verify this, further empirical comparisons between cities worldwide could offer interesting insights. Despite Roy and Alsayyad (2003) rightfully arguing that informality works out differently in different contexts, this study has proven that there are sufficient reasons to believe that – even in contrasting cases – informality generates comparable effects in terms of state-society relations.