



# Beyond a state-centric approach to urban informality: Interactions between Delhi's middle class and the informal service sector

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## Abstract

This article presents original research on relations between middle-class residents and informal-sector workers in Delhi, India. It shows how middle-class associations used their consumption preferences as well as relationships with local authorities to legitimize the work of street hawkers and waste workers. These findings suggest that the toleration of informality can be traced to governance regimes comprised of both state and non-state powerbrokers.

## Keywords

Global South, India, informal economy, middle class, urban governance

## Introduction

Initial research on informality viewed it as economic practice beyond the reach of the state, connected to the income generation activities of 'the urban sub-proletariat seek[ing] informal means of increasing their incomes' (Hart, 1973: 67). Subsequent scholarship broadened the concept to include unregulated land-use (e.g. informal settlements) and service systems (e.g. water and waste management). More recent work acknowledges the role played by the state in enabling informality. Paradoxically, then, while some scholars identify activities and spaces as informal if they are beyond the reach of the state, others argue that the state actively produces informality. In both of these formulations the state

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remains a key reference point. This article suggests that a focus on the state can hinder our understanding of informality, and it makes this claim with a focus on the role played by middle-class associations in regulating informal-sector street hawkers and waste collectors in Delhi, India.

In many affluent neighbourhoods in Delhi, door-to-door delivery of basic foodstuffs and the collection of waste has become so routinized that the rigid distinction between formal/informal commerce has broken down. While middle-class associations cannot lawfully charge street hawkers or wastepickers a fee to operate, such practices are widespread and institutionalized, and as such they serve to sanction hawkers' and wastepickers' use of space while also shielding them from formal regulations and low-level municipal officials. Given these citizen-led practices, it is misleading to privilege the state as the primary reference point for identifying and understanding informality. Instead, an understanding of informality should be broadened to account for the ways in which middle classes and other influential non-state actors also sanction the informal use of space and services.

Middle classes rarely appear in accounts of informality, largely because of the scholarly preference for studying producers rather than consumers of informal services. This bias may be a product of the longstanding concern with defining who or what exactly should be considered informal. Such debates involved more than proposing typologies (Hart, 1973). A number of international organizations set about devising ways to measure informality, and by the 1980s the International Labour Organization had established itself as the primary source of standardized country-level data on the informal economy (Elyachar, 2003). Despite the work of statisticians to render the informal visible, measurable and comparable, their efforts failed to provide policy makers or scholars with useful categories for differentiating the formal and the informal. Portes (1983: 156) anticipated the limitations of prevailing formulations of informality, noting that the classification of people/activities as informal was imprecise because it included 'entrepreneurs and their workers, self-employed artisans and merchants, disguised wage laborers subcontracted by formal firms, and direct subsistence workers'. He further argued (Portes, 1983: 156) that by looking for a rigid dividing line between the formal and informal, scholars failed to understand that informal practices were part and parcel of a single economic system.

An impetus for both the definitional and conceptual rethinking of informality came from the neoliberal economist Hernando de Soto's (1989) efforts to expand the concept to include land-use. With a focus on the ways in which land is occupied and evolves into informal settlements in cities of the developing world, he found informality is a potential source of growth rather than a barrier. But in order to unleash its pent-up energy, he also argued that regulations must be rolled back and bureaucracies weakened. Thus, informality went from being a narrowly-defined set of economic activities that hindered growth, to a broad set of practices surrounding economic activity and land-use with the potential to foster economic growth.

Scholars struggling with theory developed in the Global North to understand urbanization in the Global South further broadened the scholarly conceptualization of informality. In their landmark volume, AlSayyad and Roy (2004: 1) diverge from De Soto's view of the state, and demonstrated that governments actively facilitated activities and land-use hitherto considered informal. Roy (2009: 82) went so far as to identify informality as

an 'idiom' of urbanization in India, in the sense that 'legal norms and forms of regulation are in and of themselves permeated by the logic of informality'.

This insight complements research on urbanization in India that demonstrates how the state, operating through a mixture of formal and informal channels, imposes formal land-use regulations selectively (Björkman, 2014; Ghertner, 2010; Johnston, 2014). More recently, the sectoral domains in which informality operates have been broadened further to include service provision. Incomplete urban infrastructure systems are a lasting legacy of colonialism (Gandy, 2004; McFarlane and Rutherford, 2008), and scholarship has shown that in response, informal networks facilitate the supply of water in many cities (see De Alba, this issue; Gopakumar, 2014; Graham et al., 2013). Similarly, formal waste management systems are complemented by vast informal systems in many cities, with the two interlinked and difficult to disentangle (Schindler and Kishore, 2015). All in all, urban informality is now broadly defined and includes economic activity, land-use and service provision – in which these spheres oftentimes overlap in a plethora of configurations.

In the remainder of this article, I draw on my own fieldwork to suggest that when it comes to service provision, the state is only one actor among many that seeks to govern cities. Stated differently, localized governance regimes are as likely to be constructed and imposed by non-state actors as the state. In particular, I argue that middle-class associations play an important role sanctioning informal economic activity, regulating space, and managing localized service provision. The data come from 10 months of fieldwork in 2011 and follow-up visits in 2012 and 2013 in Delhi, India. During my visits I researched street hawking and volunteered with an NGO whose activities support wastepickers in various ways. Both groups are considered a threat to public order; yet in both instances, members of the middle class are eager to take advantage of the cheap services they offer. Thus, middle-class associations sought to render street hawkers and waste collectors non-threatening by reworking and regulating urban space in ways that structure the terms of their interactions. In fact, the regimes imposed by these middle-class associations became institutionalized to such an extent that it makes little sense to refer to them as 'informal', even as their actions vis-a-vis informal service providers also challenged the latter's own informal status.

## **Informality and urban India's dynamic social structure**

Informality in urban India is a constantly moving constellation of activities whose relationship with public-sector bureaucracies and private-sector enterprises can shift over time and in space. In many cases an activity's designation as 'informal' simply indicates an absence of a state-issued licence. For example, unlicensed street hawkers may be subjected to raids by municipal authorities, but their activities can suddenly be formalized with a favourable court ruling. The boundary between formal/informal is contested by a range of interest groups, such that the definition of informality is ever-shifting and what is deemed informal today may be formal tomorrow or vice versa (Björkman, 2014; Schindler, 2014a). There is nothing inherently 'informal' about a particular economic activity, but rather, the boundary between formal and informality is blurry, fluid and determined by a corpus of regulations, court rulings, enforcement practices, and efforts to skirt regulations.

While the boundary between formal and informal is blurry, most street hawkers and waste collectors operate squarely in the latter. Even so, many are able to operate, and hence earn a livelihood, precisely because of their relationship with middle-class associations. In the context of urban India the term ‘middle class’ is contested (see Lemanski and Lama-Rewal, 2013), but there is a general consensus that a new class has emerged – or at least grown considerably – whose newness ‘refers to a process of production of a distinctive social and political identity that represents and lays claim to the benefits of liberalization’ (Fernandes, 2006: xviii). This class is highly visible: its members live in exclusive gated communities that are remaking skylines, their expensive imported automobiles are ubiquitous in snarled traffic, and they conspicuously consume in high-profile shopping centres. In addition, India’s new middle class<sup>1</sup> is increasingly politically assertive in its attempt to influence the transformation of the city, while it is also dependent on cheap services provided informally (e.g. drivers, nannies, waste collectors, domestic servants, street hawkers, gardeners, security guards, clothes washers, parking attendants and so on). Associations representing the new middle class regulate activity and urban space in ways that allow their members to benefit from the availability of cheap, informal-sector services such as street hawking and waste collecting, but circumscribe informal-sector workers’ use of space.

### *Wastepickers*

Delhi residents are legally obliged to deposit waste in neighbourhood depots, where its removal becomes the responsibility of municipal authorities who are increasingly reliant on private-sector waste management enterprises (Municipal Corporation of Delhi Act, 1957). In reality, Delhi’s public-sector solid waste management services have a spotty track record, so there are between 150,000 and 200,000 informal-sector waste workers in Delhi – hereafter ‘wastepickers’ – whose labour has historically augmented municipal efforts to manage waste (Chaturvedi and Gidwani, 2011).<sup>2</sup> Wastepickers collect recyclable material throughout Delhi and sell it to formal and informal recyclers. Most work independently or in teams and have standing agreements with buyers of recyclable materials, while some are contracted by middlemen. The most comprehensive study of Delhi’s informal waste sector showed that it exhibits a rigid division of labour, with individuals specializing in particular materials or activities such as segregating, collecting or processing (Gill, 2010). According to Gill (2010: 99), wastepickers throughout the industry ‘face regular interference from police and security guards in residential colonies’. Not only is this interference a result of rent-seeking by those powerful enough to determine how and by whom urban space is used, but as demonstrated below, it is also a result of middle-class associations seeking to impose order within their environs.

Given the inability of the public waste management system to collect and process Delhi’s waste, middle-class residents are dependent on the services offered by wastepickers. In one focus group discussion with representatives of market traders in an affluent satellite city on Delhi’s outskirts, there was unanimity that public officials were unable to manage the city’s waste, but disagreement over whether the state was unaccountable or incompetent: ‘The government people, you tell them that there’s a problem with the garbage collection. They will buy the best of the trucks, but just after one or two years

you will find that [the trucks] are broken.’ Another participant agreed that municipal efforts to manage waste were inadequate, but insisted that part of the problem was that ‘citizens’ were not ‘sensitive’ and tended to dispose of their waste haphazardly. I intervened and asked if waste was disposed of haphazardly by local residents, and municipal authorities failed to collect it, how was it collected at all? One participant explained that ‘somehow or other waste is collected’, and the conversation shifted to the complex arrangements that the participants developed with informal-sector waste collectors in the market and their neighbourhoods.

These arrangements varied from place to place, but there were two underlying principles in all the agreements. First, the composition and volume of waste determined whether wastepickers paid or were paid to collect waste. One participant explained that ‘in most of the Western world the segregation of garbage is done on the basis of degradable and bio-degradable. Here there’s only one factor, valuable and non-valuable’. Wastepickers pay to collect waste composed of a large amount of recyclable material (e.g. plastic, metal and paper), while they are paid to collect waste that is primarily organic or inert (i.e. non-recyclable). The market generated a significant amount of recyclable waste, much sought after by wastepickers, but participants in the focus group explained that there was a constant struggle to ensure that wastepickers also collected organic waste. Second, all of the agreements between middle-class residents and traders only covered waste collection and removal; none of them addressed disposal. Once waste was collected, wastepickers segregated the recyclable from non-recyclable material, but they had little incentive to dispose of it at the dumping grounds designated by municipal authorities because attendants there charged a fee. Middle-class residents and wastepickers were in agreement that this system made little sense – the former was incensed by haphazard disposal of waste throughout the city, while the latter complained of constant pressure from low-level officials to pay bribes.

Unlike older residential communities in Delhi, the neighbouring residential community lacked a depot for residents to deposit their waste. As a result, it had to be collected from residents’ doorsteps; and in the absence of an effective public waste management system residents were left with little choice but to contract wastepickers. This was arranged collectively, and since a significant portion of the waste was non-recyclable, each household above the ground floor paid Rs 100–200 per month. Security was a primary concern among residents, and while the community was originally not gated the resident welfare association had erected metal gates to the consternation of residents from the neighbouring community because it limited their access to a main thoroughfare. Wastepickers were provided with identification, which was inspected by security guards stationed at the entrances of the community. While wastepickers provided the only waste removal services in the community, they were also subject to suspicion as the conversation below demonstrates:

*Respondent 1:* Many of these ragpickers who collect this garbage early in the morning, they are more interested in finding some opportunity where they can pick up something from inside the house. It is a kind of disguise.

- Respondent 2:* I have never noticed this. I have never seen this as a problem.
- Respondent 1:* I have experienced this, in my home also there was a burglary some years back. When I talked with the police guy he said ‘you know these rag pickers, they come at such an early hour, it’s very difficult to do policing at that hour’, and you know what they do, they just go inside the houses, pick up things. If you detain them, you see, they know all their human rights, have the agencies which will come to the police station [to help them].
- Interviewer:* NGOs?
- Respondent 1:* These are the kind of NGOs that are misused. They have the specific function of shielding these people.

Residents developed a licensing system in an effort to reconcile their goals of maintaining security and ensuring waste removal. The wastepickers who worked in this colony expressed satisfaction with the arrangement because it guaranteed monthly income. Furthermore, it ensured that they did not face competition from other wastepickers. The use of security guards was highly effective at prohibiting entry of anyone who was an unlicensed non-resident. One security guard beamed with pride as he explained that there had not been a single complaint regarding security in five years. The licensing system is not limited to wastepickers but includes other informal service sector workers. For example, in the centre of the community is a small field in which a tailor sits most days with a pedal-operated sewing machine. Thus, the residents of this community managed to modify the built environment (i.e. erect gates) and impose a localized regulatory regime that determined who could enter and circulate through their community. The limits to their control were evident: the land directly behind the community had become an informal landfill where wastepickers disposed of non-recyclable waste. The inability of residents to control this land highlighted both the fragility of their control over urban space as well as the patchwork nature of space in Delhi.

In conclusion, the absence of effective formal solid waste management services motivated middle-class Delhi residents to interact with wastepickers. Arrangements became unique and localized, with their exact terms determined by the composition of waste (i.e. the proportion of recyclable material). As such, the local community was forced to pay wastepickers to collect their waste because it was primarily organic. Residents sought to impose rules that would ensure their waste was removed while maintaining control over who circulated within their environs. Residents were able to enforce a licensing regime because they had erected gates and stationed security guards at the entrances to their community. Meanwhile, limits to their control of urban space were evidenced by the emergence of an informal dumping ground behind the community. The juxtaposition of an affluent neighbourhood bordering a *de facto* landfill is an example of splintering urban space *par excellence*, produced as a result of the arrangements forged between wastepickers and residents.

### Street hawkers

Retail in India is largely informal, and in Delhi approximately 500,000 street hawkers sell a range of goods from food to household goods and decorative items (Joseph et al., 2008;

SEWA, 2012). The vast majority of street hawkers are unlicensed and hence they run the risk of having their goods confiscated in raids conducted by municipal officials. The criminalization of street hawkers is heightened in certain areas where authorities hope to showcase a 'clean and green', 'world-class' vision of urban transformation (Dupont, 2011; Truelove and Mawdsley, 2011). Periodic raids conducted by municipal authorities are the primary threat to street hawkers, and in order to limit risk and gain access to urban space they must navigate physical barriers and a plethora of overlapping governance regimes established by non-state actors. Unlike municipal officials who steadfastly resist legally sanctioning of street hawkers' use of urban space, associations that represent the middle class facilitate street hawkers' access to urban space in exchange for their adherence to a strict code of conduct regarding their demeanour and appearance, when they can operate, how much they can charge for their products and so on (Schindler, 2014b).

In one bustling market in a rather affluent area of south Delhi, large crowds are drawn by the range of products offered – from cheap imitations of branded goods to luxury wedding garments. Street food stalls dish out local favourites just steps away from a KFC outlet. The traders association seeks to maintain the character of the market, which means allowing a certain number of street hawkers to operate. The president of the market's largest traders association explained that 'from our level [the] market should be neat and clean, shop person should be neat and clean. Let the customers come inside ... You'll get all items here, you'll get fruits, all items you're getting, even textiles, jewellery, medicine. Your hawkers are there, rich people, all are there.' Thus, the traders association considers hawkers an integral part of the market, and it seeks to regulate their activity and number. The president of the association explained that 'we are a little bit strict with the hawkers. Whenever I move on the road, most of the hawkers are hiding. Moreover we have some security guard outside, instructing them not to harass any customers.' While hawkers are subjected to the regulations imposed by the market traders and enforced by private security guards on an everyday basis, they must be wary of municipal authorities who carry out periodic raids, typically once per week, in search of unlicensed hawkers. During these raids the vast majority escape to nearby alleyways and parks, only to return after the departure of authorities. These raids inevitably disrupt commerce, which partly explains why the market traders association opposes them. Their president stated that 'it affects our business whenever the MCD [Municipal Corporation of Delhi] or different people come [to raid the market] ... moreover, the customers get harassed ... "What happened here? Why did it happen?" ... When [a raid] is there in the market customers get panicked.' Furthermore, the raids serve as a challenge to the market traders' authority to regulate the market. This was illustrated by the opposition of the president of the traders association to a municipal scheme that involved licensing a number of hawkers:

MCD has planned to build small stalls inside here, the market, under the direction of the Supreme Court. But we are not allowing them ... Supreme Court said 2.5% of the population [are hawkers] ... They want to build up kiosks around the park [in the centre of the market]. But we are opposing that.

The hawkers who work in this market are somewhat cynical about the payments they have to make to middlemen in order to operate. When pressed about who she pays, one

female hawker just shrugged and said ‘everybody takes [money]’. The fee for operating in the market varies according to a range of factors, such as a hawker’s age, gender and what they sell. While most hawkers considered the fee rather high, they were not opposed to the system in principle because it provided a secure livelihood. One hawker explained that if there were no restrictions ‘everyone who is unemployed would become a vendor’. Echoing the president of the market traders association, hawkers valued the heavy foot traffic within the market. One hawker who sold socks and had previously worked at another market explained that as a result of the limited number of hawkers who operate in the market he is able work fewer hours: ‘Over here I come at 2, I work until 9. But in the previous location I would have had to work from early morning [to earn the same amount of money].’ Another hawker explained:

In the shopping mall they sell [these products] for more. That does not make a difference to me, there are so many people in this world, they don’t all go to the same place. Some feel products here are nice, some feel products there are nice ... People who come here are not just the people with money, there are different kinds of people coming here.

This hawker directed his ire at municipal authorities, a sentiment that was nearly universal among hawkers within the market.

A similar arrangement obtained in a nearby neighbourhood, in which hawkers paid a fee to a resident welfare association (RWA) for permission to sell door-to-door. In this case, however, there were far fewer hawkers and they were required by the RWA to undergo a thorough licensing procedure (licences listed identifiable marks on hawkers’ bodies). Hawkets who had operated in the neighbourhood for years prior to the implementation of the licensing system were favoured; and in comparison to the market, the fee was trivial because the primary concern of residents was to regulate those who entered their neighbourhood. A candidate contesting an election for the RWA explained that ‘the hawker menace’ was ever-present, and this explained the RWA’s regulation of the practice. Since the licence was not issued lawfully it could be revoked by the RWA at any time. Thus, hawkers were forced to maintain a peaceful disposition, because, as one hawker explained: ‘Pass is meaningless if somebody complains. If they make one call in a minute you have to move.’ Nevertheless, the hawkers were satisfied with these terms because the system limited competition from unlicensed hawkers and municipal authorities did not patrol the neighbourhood.

Although there was near universal agreement among residents that hawkers provided a valuable service and that hawking should be regulated, disagreement ensued over various aspects of the regulatory regime, often impacting association politics. One candidate for the RWA election explained that only residents on one side of the neighbourhood had invested in security, and unlicensed hawkers were able to enter the other side. This created tension among residents because those who had invested in security felt others were free-riding and that the neighbourhood remained unsafe. These conflicts translated into political disagreement which influenced the RWA and how it chose to regulate the neighbourhood. For example, one citizen candidate faced opposition to an idea of constructing a toilet for informal service sector workers within the colony, forcing her to acknowledge that it could result in other problems for the RWA: ‘Where to build it? Who will maintain it? Then people go there and start doing some [bad] things.’



And while residents and hawkers were satisfied with the licensing system in principle, other hawkers took advantage of the absence of security in half of the neighbourhood to operate without approval from the RWA. One unlicensed hawker claimed that because he sold household products (e.g. soap) he did not have regular customers who purchased from him daily like some of the hawkers who sold fruit. He thus had to operate in numerous neighbourhoods, all of which had similar licensing schemes, thus forcing him to purchase multiple licences.

In both the market and the neighbourhood there were hawkers who sought to operate on the margins. In the market, the police had erected metal detectors and metal gates at some of the entrances. While the metal detectors were perpetually out of order, they served to mark the boundary of the market for the hawkers. Beyond the gates hawkers did not pay to operate, yet by operating in the shadow of the market they avoided detection by municipal authorities. Most likely they also came to know of impending raids. One hawker who sold bangles outside the gates of the market claimed that he used to work in another south Delhi market but had the good fortune of obtaining a licence to operate because of a disability. However, he claimed that his licence was not recognized by the middleman who collected fees for operating within that market; and when he complained to police, they demanded bribes to help him assert his lawful right to operate.

If these assertions are true, then they demonstrate that it can be easier and cheaper for hawkers to operate in the shadows than to operate legally. A similar phenomenon was evident just outside the gates of the neighbourhood. Hawkers operating there were less exposed to authorities than they would be on a main road, even as they were not forced to obtain a licence from the RWA. According to one fruit vendor whose stall sat outside the gates of the neighbourhood, there was little reason to pay for the privilege of selling door-to-door: 'What's there to a licence? I'll earn whether I'm inside or outside.' Another hawker received orders by phone for milk and other perishable goods from residents, employing a boy to deliver them. This was only possible because he had established a rapport with many of the residents over a period of years. In these examples, hawkers operated without sanction from authorities or a local powerbroker, thus reducing their operating costs. But it remains unclear if, in the long term, they are at a disadvantage in comparison to their peers working in the market and gated neighbourhood.

## Conclusion

I have shown that resident associations representing middle classes play an important role in determining provision of regulated and unregulated services in Delhi. Localized regimes comprised of middle-class associations, regulatory authorities and service providers confer legitimacy on the work of street hawkers and waste workers and on their capacity to use urban space and provide services. These cases not only introduce a degree of 'formalization' in the treatment of informal providers by middle-class associations, they also expose a fragility in the control exercised by such resident associations, who can be superseded by municipal authorities and challenged by workers. The existence of such practices renders the city into a dynamic institutional kaleidoscope of overlapping jurisdictions. Rather than essentializing particular activities (i.e. street hawking) as

'formal' or 'informal', these activities should be understood as the product of complex relationships. In the cases presented here, negotiated relations between formally registered non-state institutions (i.e. resident welfare associations and market traders associations), on the one hand, and street hawkers and waste collectors, on the other, determined the patterns of 'informal' activity, land-use and service provision. These relations are contested and can change rapidly.

These findings suggest that rather than *a priori* classifying which people or institutions, activities or land-use are labelled '(in)formal', a relational approach provides a deeper understanding of actually existing practices that define everyday life of urban residents, and which are produced collectively by multiple actors. Likewise, these findings demonstrate that the state is simply one of a number of actors struggling to regulate activity, land-use and service provision in Indian cities. Although state actors may seek to impose order through formal, legal channels, they are often joined by or pitted against organized non-state actors, like middle-class associations, who also have a position on informality. As such, we must be prepared to analyse and theorize local 'governance regimes' comprised of state and non-state actors, whose combined priorities will sanction and institutionalize economic activity, land-use and service provision and its attendant status as formal or informal.

To be sure, further research focused on the co-production and enforcement of such regimes would certainly show that street hawkers and waste collectors are vulnerable to exploitation by state- and non-state actors alike. A focus on relations and regimes imposed by powerbrokers would also leave room for a revamped conceptualization of informality as defined in the context of local negotiations over the rules of space occupation and service provision, rather than as attributable to a certain activity. For example, street hawkers who operate just outside the gates of markets and gated communities exist in limbo: beyond the reach of middle-class associations but close enough that they are not 'at large' and thereby avoid scrutiny from officials. Similarly, waste collectors act informally when they surreptitiously dump non-recyclable waste adjacent to affluent communities to the consternation of residents and officials alike. All this suggests that future research should focus on instances in which particular actors (e.g. state officials or non-state associations) are more or less successful at imposing their will, with what potential challenges, and by whom. Is the state more likely to foster unregulated service provision (e.g. waste collection) than economic activity (street hawking), and why? Are officials wilfully ceding regulatory control to non-state actors in certain places (e.g. the urban periphery or within gated communities), and where? These questions will loom large in future research on informality, even as they help reveal the wide range of actors who seek to regulate or legitimize informality in land-use and service provision in urban India and perhaps even elsewhere.

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## Notes

1. While acknowledging the complexity of the debate surrounding the 'new' middle class, I hereafter use the term 'middle class'.

2. A recent op-ed in the *New York Times* (Karnad, 2015) put the figure at 350,000, although it did not cite any sources.

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### Author biography

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### Résumé

Cet article présente une recherche inédite sur les relations entre des habitants de la classe moyenne et des travailleurs du secteur informel à New Delhi en Inde. Il montre comment les associations de résidents de la classe moyenne utilisent leurs relations avec les autorités locales pour légitimer les activités de camelots et de récupérateurs de déchets à qui elles accordent leurs préférences. Les résultats de cette recherche suggèrent que la tolérance de l’informalité trouve son origine dans des régimes de gouvernance instaurés par l’État et des acteurs non étatiques influents.

### Mots-clés

économie informelle, Inde, classe moyenne, Sud, gouvernance urbaine

### Resumen

En este artículo se presenta una investigación original sobre las relaciones entre los residentes de clase media y los trabajadores informales en Delhi, India. Se muestra cómo las asociaciones de clase media utilizan sus preferencias de consumo, así como las relaciones con las autoridades locales para legitimar el trabajo de los vendedores ambulantes y trabajadores de desecho. Estos hallazgos sugieren que la tolerancia de la informalidad remonta a los regímenes de gobierno compuesta tanto por agentes del poder estatales y no estatales.

### Palabras clave

economía informal, India, clase media, Sur global, gestión urbana