

Negotiating the Road

Community-Led Advocacy and the Governance of Extortion at Senegalese Police Checkpoints

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ABSTRACT

Extortion at police checkpoints is a pervasive governance challenge affecting long-distance haulage across Africa, imposing significant economic and social costs on drivers and communities. While state-centric anti-corruption measures are well-documented, the role of grassroots, community-led advocacy in directly influencing checkpoint governance remains under-explored. This study investigates how organised, community-based advocacy initiatives shape the practices and governance of extortion at police roadblocks, specifically from the perspective of truck drivers operating on key transit corridors. A qualitative, ethnographic design was employed, comprising in-depth, semi-structured interviews with truck drivers, community organisers, and local officials. Non-participant observation was conducted at selected checkpoints. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Community-led advocacy, particularly through formalised driver associations, created a countervailing force against arbitrary extraction. A central theme was the strategic use of collective logbooks to document and report illicit fees, which reduced the incidence of demands by an estimated 40-60% on routes with strong association presence. This introduced a system of informal accountability. The research demonstrates that bottom-up, collective action can reconfigure power dynamics at street-level bureaucracies, establishing informal but effective mechanisms of oversight that complement, and at times substitute for, weak formal institutional controls. Policymakers should recognise and formally engage with legitimate driver associations as governance partners. Donor programmes should support the capacity building of such community structures in documenting extortion and facilitating dialogue with security sector authorities. extortion, police checkpoints, community advocacy, road transport, informal governance, Senegal This paper provides novel empirical evidence on the specific mechanism—the collective, verified logbook—through which community mobilisation directly alters the cost-benefit calculus of street-level officials, a policy mechanism previously unreported in the literature.

Keywords: *Community-led advocacy, Roadblocks, Extortion, Senegal, Transport governance, Qualitative case study, Informal governance*

Article Highlights

- Driver associations created a countervailing force against arbitrary extraction at checkpoints.
- Collective logbooks introduced a system of informal accountability previously unreported in the literature.
- Bottom-up action can reconfigure power dynamics at street-level bureaucracies.
- Findings advocate for formal engagement with driver associations as governance partners.

Policy Implications

Policymakers should formally engage legitimate driver associations. Donor programmes should support their capacity to document extortion and facilitate dialogue with authorities.

This qualitative case study reveals how community-led advocacy establishes informal oversight mechanisms.

ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

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