

Regional citizenship regimes: comparing ECOWAS and ASEAN

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Abstract

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This thesis investigates the relationship between citizenship and regional organisations in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Specifically, it studies variation in regional citizenship regimes, how regional actors interpret the notion of regional citizenship, and what these variations and interpretations mean for our understanding of regional citizenship regimes. The thesis takes a qualitative, comparative case study approach and draws on empirical data from official documents and 49 semi-structured interviews conducted with ASEAN and ECOWAS officials and staff from non-governmental organisations. The study is guided by a four-tiered concept of citizenship regime that provides the analytical framework for the analysis and comparison of a legal citizenship regime (ECOWAS) and a non-legal citizenship regime (ASEAN). The study is motivated by the increasing development and regulation of citizenship by regional organisations which create a new, ‘added-on’ membership status beyond national citizenship. As intra-regional movement is vast within many regions, these new citizenship statuses impact the lives of millions of people. In spite of their increasing importance, there is little research on regional citizenship regimes outside of the European Union (EU). The EU-dominance results in limited attention to informal and legally non-binding forms of regional citizenship and, thus, a limited understanding of the ways in which these forms of regional membership shape the formation of regional citizenship regimes. The study presents three important findings: first, a high degree of legalisation is not a necessity for regional citizenship regimes. Second, even in cases where regional citizenship regimes can be characterised as having a higher degree of legalisation, other aspects, notably those that touching on identity and belonging, are considered equally important by those designing the regimes. Third, the level of socio-economic development in a region has a direct impact on how regional citizenship regimes are constructed. Consequently, this thesis makes a series of contributions which advance our understanding of regional citizenship regimes by illustrating the need for revising the criteria for what we consider a citizenship regime. It also provides a rare, in-depth comparative account of the assumptions upon which regional organisations base their citizenship regimes. In so doing, it contributes to our understanding of the ways in which political realities shape institutional design and citizenship policies in West Africa and Southeast Asia.

Keywords: regional citizenship, regional integration, community-building, regional organisations, comparative regionalism, ECOWAS, ASEAN

This thesis consists of the Kappa and the following four articles:

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Weinrich, A. (2023). Regional citizenship regimes from within: unpacking divergent perceptions of the ECOWAS citizenship regime. Accepted for publication in the *Journal of Modern African Studies*.

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