



Democracy in Ghana

Rapid urbanization and political liberalization is changing the nature of African politics and societies. This book develops a framework for the study of democracy and development that emphasizes informal institutions and the politics of belonging in the context of daily life, in contrast to the formal and electoral paradigms that dominate the social sciences.

Based on fifteen months of field research including ethnographic observation, focus group interviews, and original quantitative survey analysis in Ghana, the book intervenes in major debates about public goods provision, civic participation, ethnic politics and democratization, and the future of urban sustainability in a rapidly changing world. By developing new understandings of democracy, as well as providing novel explanations for good governance and development in poor urban neighborhoods, the book transcends the narrative of a failing and corrupt Africa and charts a new way forward for the study of democracy and development.

JEFFREY W. PALLER is an assistant professor of politics at the University of San Francisco. He has conducted fieldwork in Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa and his work is published in *Polity*, *African Studies Review*, *Africa Today*, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, *Africa Spectrum*, and *Current History*. His dissertation won the African Politics Conference Group-Lynne Rienner Best Dissertation in African Politics Award. He is secretary for the African Politics Conference Group and chair of the Comparative Urban Politics Related Group for the American Political Science Association. He curates the weekly news bulletin, *This Week in Africa*.

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Everyday Politics in Urban Africa

JEFFREY W. PALLER
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For Kathleen

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Preface

Ghana is one of Africa's most successful democracies. It holds free and fair elections, has experienced multiple turnovers of power, and hosts an unrestricted press and independent judiciary. These institutional developments emerge in a broader context of political liberalization and urbanization, placing the country on what should be a healthy path toward democratic deepening and consolidation. Yet this formal institutional progress coincides with nondemocratic developments, including the persistence of political clientelism, the capture of public goods for private gain, and the sustenance of ethnic politics. This prompts a puzzling question: Why do these nondemocratic elements endure despite the strengthening of liberal democratic institutions? Moreover, how do societies overcome these challenges to their political systems? Conventional accounts of democratization blame governance failures on formal institutions or entrenched societal structures, failing to account for the ways in which these formal institutions interact with informal social organizations in the context of everyday life.

These nondemocratic characteristics are even more surprising in cities, where economic modernization and rapid population growth are transforming Ghanaian society. Yet the reality is that the impact of urbanization is uneven, contributing to different political developments in distinct neighborhoods within the same city. This book provides a view from below, giving a glimpse into how local urban communities make democracy work – or fail to overcome existing nondemocratic elements. The book's main argument is that informal norms of settlement and belonging continue to structure everyday politics in Ghana's cities, helping to explain logics of political clientelism, elite capture of public goods, and ethnic politics. But they can also contribute to the development of legitimate and responsive representatives, public spheres of collective decision-making, and a multiethnic civic life in Ghana's poorest neighborhoods. A democratic politics in Ghana's cities depends on how informal norms of settlement and belonging shape the everyday politics of its neighborhoods.

Acknowledgments

My mind often wanders to my first full day of ethnographic research in 2011 when I surprised Philip Kumah at his tailor shop in Old Fadama. I was excited to work with Mr. Kumah on issues of governance and urban development, and he walked me through the neighborhood and introduced me to the big shots: I Don't Mind, Abdullah, Ayatu, Chief Inspector Paul, Inspector Saibu, Chief Zachi, M. Suala, Laryee, Bujati, Mosi Chief, Mallam, Nii Ayi, and Billy. I would later meet Chairman, Frederick Opoku, Latif Osman, Bright Dzila, Ato, Kobe, Jima and many others. It took me a full year to understand their importance to the community, but I could not have done my research without their support and willingness to have me wander through the paths of their neighborhood. The same can be said for Honorable Latif, Mr. Ashalley, Nii Lantey Vanderpuye, Nii Tackey, Lena, Victor Okaikoi, and Hussein Addy in Ga Mashie, and Mr. Zonyira, Jonathan Avisah, Selormey, Charles, Fawaz, and Bronx in Ashaiman.

Mama Angela in Ashaiman and Mama Rose Thompson in Ga Mashie made sure that I never went hungry, and taught me what real Ghanaian food tastes like. Faidal-Rahman Haruna spent one of my favorite days of research with me watching the Champions League final. Governor explained to me the intricate details of Ga culture, as well as local politics. His friends carried me through the streets of Ga Mashie on their shoulders during the Homowo Festival. Isaac was a master at campaign strategy and I had some of the most interesting conversations about Odododiodioo politics with him. Sarah and Mabel were always around Ga Mashie for a laugh, and became close friends. Belinda, Samira, and Joyce made sure I was fed and comfortable at the tailor shop. Hamid introduced me to many great people in Nima. Raymond provided great insights and friendship during my visits to Ashaiman. Former mayor of Accra Nat Nunoo Amarteifio provided rich details about governance in Accra, and the development of informal settlements in the city.

Five people were essential to my research, and helped shape the contours of the project. They offered novel insights, introduced me to diverse networks of leaders and residents, and discussed their personal challenges and neighborhood struggles with me. We became partners in the research process. In many ways, we were co-ethnographers. Philip Kumah opened his tailor shop, his family, and his decision-making process to me. He translated interviews, led focus groups, and enumerated the survey. I constantly asked myself “What would Mr. Kumah do? What would Mr. Kumah think?”

Innocent Adamadu Onyx served a similar role in Ashaiman. He took his role as social worker seriously, and was deeply interested in the project for his own intellectual development. Nii Addo Quaynor’s passion for Odododiodioo politics is unprecedented, and he made sure to pass that excitement onto me. Addo knows everyone in Ga Mashie, and walking through the neighborhood with him introduced me to the who’s who of indigenous Ga politics. Alhassan Ibn Abdallah’s intuition about politics is unparalleled. On many occasions he explained to me the politics of Northern Ghana, the settlement of Old Fadama, and the intricacies of the NDC party. Every time I spoke with Abdallah I learned critical facts about Ghanaian politics, and when we discussed his culture and family, I felt like I somehow knew Ghana better. Abubakar Addy is a true scholar, and always knew exactly the type of information I was looking for. He was more than a research assistant; he became an economist. I grew up with these five men, and my project evolved with them.

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