

Democracy in Ghana: Everyday Politics in Urban Africa by Jeffrey W. Paller. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2019. 328 pp. \$99.00.

Scholarship on political participation in Ghana, which has maintained its status as a “mature” democracy, commonly situates electoral politics as the metrics for the health of good governance. These largely top-down studies fail to capture the essence of civic engagement, partly because of their silence on local-level everyday politics, where citizens are most politically active and invested. Jeffrey W. Paller provides a corrective to this trend in *Democracy in Ghana*, his impressively researched and persuasively argued first book.

Paller interrogates everyday politics—how people act, think, and feel about power on a daily basis—in seven chapters divided between two parts. Each chapter examines different iterations of governance and development in three neighborhoods in Accra, Ghana’s capital, and, by extension, Paller suggests, cities in Africa. In the two chapters of Part I, his theoretical framework for understanding everyday politics rightly highlights neighborhood-level structures of authority that predate European colonial rule, but he also explains how colonial-era policies and more recent economic structural adjustment programs contribute to the urban political complex. Despite this amalgam of elements, he contends, urbanization has limited transformative potential, because informal norms of settlement and belonging at the neighborhood level shape political developments.

These arguments set the stage for a more granular analysis of everyday politics in Accra’s Old Fadama, Tulaka (Ashaiman), and Ga Mashie neighborhoods, in the four chapters of Part II. Paller situates these neighborhoods within a growth pattern that extends from an indigenous core, to a multiethnic city, to a sprawling cosmopolitan metropolis. Within these neighborhoods, residents’ relations with power, authority, and resources are influenced by their community’s status as indigenous, settler, and squatter.

This model undergirds Paller’s significant claim that patron-clientelism retains its social, political, and economic function in urban Ghana and the potential to produce positive outcomes for civic engagement. His argument contrasts with assessments in much of the literature on politics in Africa, which presents patron-clientelism as detrimental to good governance. Paller’s astute analysis calls attention to the fact that clientelism’s form and function differ in each neighborhood, as opinion leaders—various types of “civic leaders”—and the practice of distributive politics reflect the informal norms of settlement and belonging of their local setting. “Distributive politics,” he argues, “can serve the public good, and ethnic politics can be

overcome in African cities” (p. 248). Again, these claims are a striking and welcome contrast to scholarship that posits clientelism’s deleterious effects.

For his admirable study, Paller immersed himself in residents’ daily lives in the three Accra neighborhoods. Over the course of a year, he visited at least one of these communities daily, sharing meals, observing meetings, visiting politicians’ and chiefs’ private offices, participating in party rallies, and attending ritual events. He complemented his participant-observation method with archival research, focus groups with local residents, and household surveys. From these experiences, Paller acquired an “in-depth understandings of urban Ghanaian’s decision-making process,” including the informal norms of settlement and belonging, the key factors that shape the structure of everyday politics in Ghana’s cities (p. 24).

Democracy in Africa offers an outstanding analysis of the intersection of perceptions of indigeneity and belonging, political authority, and political participation. Paller successfully demonstrates the importance of everyday politics for democracy. When focused on Accra, Paller’s analysis is impressive and his arguments are convincing. His innovative, immersive, bottom-up political method for exploring neighborhood-level politics in Accra brings a fresh perspective to the dynamics of governance and blazes a trail for studies that measure the successes and limits of democracy in Africa.

BENJAMIN TALTON
Temple University

Law without Future: Anti-Constitutional Politics and the American Right by Jack Jackson. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019. 200 pp. \$45.00.

The years of the Donald J. Trump administration have been unusually chaotic. Amid this chaos, the political left has bemoaned Trump’s disregard for constitutional norms. In these criticisms of the Trump administration, the left has become—consciously or not—a vocal defender of law and the Constitution. Jack Jackson aims to provoke a careful examination of this situation: of how the political right developed what Jackson argues is an anti-constitutional politics, and of the implications of the left’s recent embrace of constitutionalism.

Jackson makes many claims in this short book. One of his central claims is that the current administration’s approach to the Constitution is not a departure for the contemporary political right. In the first substantive chapter of the book, Jackson argues that while criticisms of the right’s apparent