

Barry Driscoll. 2023. *Power, Patronage, and the Local State in Ghana*. Athens: Ohio University Press. 279 pp.

Patronage and all other offspring associated with a neo-patrimonial political order have in the last four decades attracted numerous scholarly interventions. Yet, how patronage has been entrenched at the level of the “local state” has perhaps been under-explored by scholars. Instead, scholarly attention has mainly concentrated on the manifestations of patronage at the central state level. Perhaps the imperative of bridging this seeming knowledge gap would appear to have heralded Barry Driscoll’s book under review.

In *Power, Patronage, and the Local State in Ghana*, Driscoll attempts to explain the multifaceted dimensions of patronage politics at the sub-national level in Ghana. The book seeks to lay bare the variegated factors and actors that have contributed to entrenching a patronage political order at the local state level. Organizationally, Driscoll partitions his book into six thematically arranged chapters, including an introduction. In the introductory chapter, the author not only highlights the core issues surrounding the book but also attempts to lay out the conceptual framework for analysis in subsequent chapters. Herein, while attempting to clear the conceptual undergrowth beneath some core concepts deployed in the book, Driscoll also frames them in the context of the existing literature and the questions that animated the study.

The author’s core concern in the second chapter is resolving the puzzle of why some local districts in Ghana are more competitive than others. Drawing on the history of party formation and organization in Ghana, the author informs readers that patronage does not drive competitiveness but rather competitiveness is rooted in party formation, which predated the local state. In the second and third chapters, Driscoll, drawing from his field studies in selected local districts, unearths the factors and actors that have nurtured patronage politics at the local state level in Ghana. The author informs the readers that the insulation of local state chief executives from pressures to dispense patronage to party activists is a function of the party in power at the center and the level of competitiveness of electoral contests at the local district levels. As the author puts it, “District chief executives were ‘president men’ where a less competitive electoral scene afforded them greater insulation from patronage demands. But in highly competitive districts, chief executives understood that they were ‘our men,’ a vehicle for local patronage demands” (p. 77).

In the next chapter, Driscoll, drawing from rich arrays of quantitative data sourced from surveys conducted in a few local districts, submits that the central state-level actors have tended to legitimize patronage systems at the local state level. As the author notes, “the central government is not only aware of the behavior of local state actors but also frequently central government actors who provide the means with which districts provide patronage” (p. 125). In the fifth chapter, Driscoll insists that patronage and state capacity can co-exist. To be sure, he submits that contrary to widely held views in the scholarly literature, patronage and all its corollaries may not necessarily be an obstacle to an effective local state. In chapter six, the author, in a comparative manner, arrays the Ghanaian case with other African cases and submits that vote buying is more common in less stable party systems, while turn-out buying is more common in more stable party systems.

Overall, Driscoll's book is a worthy addition to the burgeoning literature on decentralization and local governance in Africa. Each chapter, organically and systematically arranged, lays bare the various dimensions of local state politics in Ghana. Another beauty of the book is discernable in the manner in which the author deploys quantitative data to drive home his positions. Not only this, the manner in which the facts were represented and presented in tabular and graphical forms is equally worthy of accolade. However, a lacuna noted in the book is the non-inclusion of a list of abbreviations. Including such a section could have further added to the book's accessibility since many abbreviations were deployed. Notwithstanding, Driscoll's book is an empirically grounded masterpiece that will be valuable to students and scholars of African politics and governance, especially those working in the areas of decentralization and local governance.

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