

Power, Patronage, and the Local State in Ghana



BARRY DRISCOLL

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Ohio University Research in International Studies

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Barry Driscoll

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Preface

No matter how often I go to Ghana, my immediate reaction as I leave the airport is always the same. I am overwhelmed by how little I know about the country. So I write this book not as an expert on a place but as one attempting to learn incrementally more about it and hopefully to learn more about other places like it along the way.

This isn't the book I had planned to write. I wanted to write about how the capacity of the Ghanaian state varied subnationally. I thought that understanding the original motivation behind decentralization would offer a pathway into deeper questions about what the state looks like in smaller cities and towns. But as often happens, doing fieldwork—actually being there—changed my question. After spending a lot of time with politicians and civil servants in local government buildings, I started to wonder more about the people in front of the desk rather than behind it: the people filling the hallways and waiting rooms, many of whom were connected to the party in power.

I turned back to scholarship on political parties and tried to learn more about the enmeshment of the governing party in the Ghanaian state. I wondered how pressure from the incumbent's own party might vary subnationally and whether the intensity of local partisanship would shape the behavior of local officials. I found that political competition appeared to provide some politicians with little insulation from electoral pressures from their

own supporters, while politicians in less politically competitive areas had the ability to pursue the agenda of the national party.

But there was more to it. It was not the case that politically competitive districts gave out more rewards to the incumbent's own supporters and thus had weaker state offices in some general sense. Some politicians responded to pressure by surrounding themselves with qualified bureaucrats to help them secure resources from the central government or from donors. Making sense of this is how I hope to contribute to our understanding of politics and development in poor countries.

When I was in graduate school, the classics in comparative politics, especially scholarship on the state, were predominantly written from the perspective of the capital city. Even scholarship on the ability of African states to project power was itself written from the perspective of the center. My book hopes to contribute to a new generation of scholarship focused much more on African states at the local level. That begins by spending extended periods with local state actors and the people they purport to govern.

I am intentional in using the term "local state" rather than "local government" because I want to invoke the full spectrum of state infrastructure rather than the narrow institutions of government. In political science, the word "government," narrowly defined, means the people and parties doing the governing (making laws, signing treaties, and so on). Government is what people in the United States call "the administration," or the executive. But "state" refers to a much broader thing. It includes the people doing the governing, but it also includes people who don't change from one election to another, such as teachers, court clerks, health inspectors, and soldiers. It includes the objects that make up the ecosystem of social life. The state is the currency in people's hands, the ID card in their pockets, the vaccine in their bodies, or the SIM card in their phones. And it includes objects whose absence reminds people of the state's failures: empty bookshelves in the school library, clinics without nurses. In that sense, the state is a broad thing that is partly embodied in people, in physical things, and in imagined things.

It is not the case, however, that the state is an amorphous but homogeneous thing in people's minds. People certainly distinguish between central and local government, between the town and the capital city. But when thinking about local government, what they actually have in mind is the state—that is, the totality of actors, offices, and objects that physically exist in their town, irrespective of whether those actors are technically local government or not. Even centralized state institutions may have local offices, appearing as “the state in this town,” even though that office takes direction from the capital city rather than local offices. Documenting this empirically has not been my focus, but I believe that it is true—that citizens in one town have a mental image of the state, blending together centralized and decentralized state actors, and that this mental image differs from town to town.

I hope readers interested in these topics will find something to take from my book.

Acknowledgments

This book began life as a project in the late 2000s. I went to Ghana with a simple question: Why had central government “given” away power in the form of decentralization? So many people gave of their time and helped me better articulate my questions, knowing that I could only offer thanks in return. The incredible generosity of “ordinary people” made it possible for me to travel around the country—for me to merely exist in Ghana. People looked sympathetically on a sweaty and confused White man, guilty of oh-so-many cultural faux pas but eager to learn. Now that my son is three years old, I know the feeling of being peppered with a thousand questions when you are busy doing other things. I was that child, innocently moving through Ghana, always helped along by the kindness of strangers.

Because I have anonymized my research sites, I cannot identify here the many people who I spent countless hours with while they asked nothing of me in return. I have thanked them in person, though I cannot do so on this page. But some were so exceptionally generous that I will thank them using only their last names: Mr. Bosompem, Mr. Sarpong-Siaw, Mr. Boampeng, Mr. Oteng, Mr. Nawil, Okyeame AP, Mr. Ameyaw, Mr. Biyo, and Hon. Ade. In Anwomaso, near Ejisu, I owe so much to Ms. Felicia Amanzele, Mrs. Helen Nti, and Mr. Isaac Quansah. In Accra, I was helped immeasurably by Mrs. Agnes Lamptey, Mr. Johnson Alifo, Hon. Elvis Afriye-Ankrah, Prof. Kwamena Ahwoi, Prof. Joseph

Ayee, Mr. Ampomah Banchie, Mr. Frank Assimeng, Hon. Gariba Boya, and Peter Ruskin.

My survey team alone was over two hundred people, almost all of them recent university graduates. I was the beneficiary of the enterprise, initiative, and underemployment of Ghana's next generation. Though it was just a few days' work for them, the quantitative data used in this book would not have been possible without them.

I would also like to thank several people who gave me a chance in my twenties, before my academic life. I was an Irishman abroad with little in the way of credentials or experience, but I was given a chance by Jeff Thindwa, Carmen Monico, Sarah Lister, Bjørn Førde, Scott Hubli, and Heather Kashner.

At the University of Wisconsin–Madison, I had the great fortune of the mentorship and guidance of Michael Schatzberg and Scott Straus. And although he had formally retired by then, my fondest memories were simply listening to Crawford Young speak. At Wisconsin I was also fortunate to befriend two stellar comparativists, Adam Auerbach and Emily Sellars. I also appreciated learning about cocoa from Matthew Mitchell.

After Wisconsin I began to teach at Grinnell College, where I was helped by my friend and mentor Eliza Willis and my ever-supportive colleagues Barb Trish, Danielle Lussier, Gemma Sala, Peter Hanson, Wayne Moyer, and Leif Brottem. Working at Grinnell allowed me to work beside outstanding students, and I would like to thank those who helped me finish my book: Farah Omer, Vincent Benlloch, and Octavia George.

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the American Political Science Association, the African Studies Association, and the Midwest Political Science Association. Slices of the book's ideas and data appeared in issues of *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *Democratization*, and the *Journal of Modern African Studies*. At Ohio University Press I would like to thank Rick Huard for helping me navigate the publication process and for giving me the opportunity to present my work. I also thank the anonymous reviewers who provided me extensive and useful feedback on the manuscript.

I wish to thank my parents, Dennis and Zelig, who sacrificed so their children might thrive. And Taylor, my wife, who has been by me through it all: rejections, fieldwork calamities, self-doubt, hospitalizations, exhaustion, occasional triumphs, awkward self-promotions, and just too much time working. She has seen up close what bruises this project has left. How lucky I am to have married my best friend.

Go n-éirí an bóthar libh. May the road rise to meet ye all.

Introduction

The Local State in the Twenty-First Century

States remain the most important drivers of poverty and prosperity in modern history. While waves of democratization have made competitive politics a main route to controlling most states, actors beneath the national level—the local state—have been given more responsibility for carrying out the daily functions of state power.¹

In the face of these forces, how does a local state actually work in twenty-first-century poor countries? I offer a descriptive account of a local state as well as a causal explanation for how political competition affects the local state apparatus in one developing country, Ghana. I show how one of the greatest sources of pressure on local state actors is not violent gangs, rent-seeking bureaucrats, landed elites, or boisterous opposition parties but rather the demands for favors coming from their own party supporters. Going deeper, I explain how political party systems mediate this relationship between local state actors and the groups that keep them in power. Moreover, I also explain how the patronage sought by partisans may not automatically weaken state capacity: the drive to provide patronage can compel politicians to build stronger bureaucracies *in order* to deliver patronage. To make sense of this complex picture, let's start with Felicia.

Felicia's Problem

Felicia sells onions at the main market in Oran, a small cocoa town in western Ghana.² She and her fellow market traders told me that George Biyo, the head of local government, was a very fat man. When I visited George at his office, he did not disagree: "You know, these days we don't suffer, and people in this district love me. They respect me. I am their father," he said, leaning back into a deep faux-leather couch, arms extended wide as if embracing his flock. "They know me as a Big Man here. They say I am a fat man," he said with a smile, grabbing his stomach. "But in this town we are practicing good governance!" he added, his smile given way to solemnity. "Everyone in this district eats well" (author's field notes, April 3, 2012).

When Felicia told me Biyo was a fat man, she meant it literally and metaphorically. Fatness in this part of the world is a metaphor for accumulation (Schatzberg 2001). While eating and consumption speak to one's access to resources, overeating speaks to one's greed, selfishness, and corruption. Note how Biyo described himself as eating well but couched the revelation in terms of shared prosperity: "These days we don't suffer. . . . Everyone in this district eats well." There is nothing wrong with an expanding waistline, so long as the meal is shared.

In the weeks before my meeting with Biyo, I had spent time with traders such as Felicia in Oran's marketplace. Like every sizable settlement in West Africa, Oran has a centrally located outdoor market, where about sixty traders (mostly women) sell everything from soybeans to dish soap. Felicia's onion stall is open seven days a week whenever there is daylight, save for Sunday morning, when she attends church. Traders pay rent for the market space to the Oran District Assembly.³ In return for taxes paid, they expect services rendered in the form of a night watchman, trash pickup, and electric lamps to allow selling into the evening.

I had originally come to Ghana to study why some local governments were better able to tax their populations than others. I

cared less about taxes themselves than about what tax collection could tell me about subnational variation in state capacity.⁴ But I also wanted to learn how the local state worked in a broad sense, beyond simply its revenue activities. Local state actors and offices also interested me because they are where citizens meet their state—in schools, at roadblocks, or during visits from tax collectors, or where the state is notable by its absence: potholes, illegality, and vigilantism. I spent most of my time in the local government offices of a few midsize towns, typically of around fifty thousand people, talking to civil servants and politicians about their work. I asked about their ability to collect taxes—a dry topic—because I was interested in how they approached this basic task of authority. In addition to these local state officials, I also spoke to market traders like Felicia, since town markets are a taxation target of Ghanaian local governments, as they are in so much of the developing world. Unlike national governments, local governments in developing countries generally cannot borrow internationally, and they cannot print currency, so they have few easy sources of revenue.

Back to Felicia, who sells onions and didn't mind me hanging around. Though I had first approached her as just one of many of the market traders in Oran District, it emerged that Felicia had an interesting life away from work. She was an active volunteer for the governing political party, the same party that governed Oran District and the whole country during my research. But she did not think things were going her way. I usually avoided asking about politically sensitive things when I first met someone, but Felicia took no prompting to rail against George Biyo, Oran District's chief executive and a fellow party member. English was not Felicia's first language, but she spoke it better than I spoke Twi, so what follows took place in English:

"That man is a crook oo! Those men [from the district] come here and tax money and they make promises. All nice. But we get nothing. Local government does not clean this market." She pointed angrily to the ground, which to me seemed cleaner than that of most markets.

"Does the local government not do anything in town?" I asked.

"They build maybe schools and boreholes [for water]. But for me they do nothing."

"And what happens to the money you pay to the district?"

"As for that one, we don't know. Even if I go to that man [Biyo] and say I am also NDC, he will insult me" (author's field notes, March 13, 2012).

The NDC is the National Democratic Congress, which was in its second stint in power nationally since Ghana returned to constitutional government and multiparty elections in 1993. During my fieldwork, conducted from 2009 to 2012, the NDC was the party of the president as well as the party of Biyo since the president controls the office of chief executive in every district. Felicia had reminded District Chief Executive Biyo that she had campaigned alongside him for the NDC the previous year:

I went to that man and said, "Honourable, I need small loan for my business, but you don't see me." He said, "You go again, and my men will come to the market." But they never come. So, I went back again, and this time he would not see me. I waited at the district assembly building, and when I saw him, I even shouted that he had forgotten his party. But he insulted me and told me to go. Those Big Men at the assembly, they eat well, but here we are starving, and even we are his party members! (author's field notes, March 13, 2012)

Metaphors of fatness Felicia used to describe Biyo were consistent with how Ghanaians talked about politicians, but I gradually saw that the metaphor turned out to be misleading in Biyo's case. I found no evidence that he was any more corrupt than other district chief executives. The source of Felicia's ire was not Biyo's corruption. Rather, it was that he was not corrupt *for her*. She wanted *public* services for the taxes she paid, but she also wanted *private* services in the form of special treatment by the local government since she was a longtime volunteer for the governing party. Note, for example, how she acknowledged that the district provided

some public services (“They build maybe schools and boreholes”), but since these were open to all people in the district, they conferred no special reward on individuals who worked hard for the party. This is how one should understand Felicia’s complaint that “for me they do nothing.”

What surprised Felicia—what offended her—was that the man and the party for whom she had toiled had reneged on an election promise to “take care” of her after winning the election. “Taking care” could mean any number of things, including a public sector job, such as cleaning the district building or driving the district tractor; access to the fruits of the state, such as small business loans of \$100 or expedited access to state-subsidized fertilizers; or protection *from* the state, such as insulation from officials (Nathan 2019; Sigman 2022; Bob-Milliar 2012; Paller 2019). These are textbook cases of clientelism, in which a person (the client) supports a person in power (the patron) in return for favors and rewards.⁵ Generally, when the client is a worker or volunteer for a political party, rewards to that person are called “patronage.” When the client is a voter, rewards to that person are usually referred to as “vote buying” or “turnout buying.” The version examined in this book is patronage, since my data are not on voters but on local officials and activists like Felicia who work to keep them in power.⁶ Moreover, patronage rather than vote/turnout buying is the dominant form of clientelism in Ghana, which I explore in greater detail in the final chapter.

The electoral strategy of Ghana’s two main parties is to rely on grassroots volunteers to mobilize their neighbors, families, and friends (Brass et al. 2020; also Gans-Morse, Mazzuca, and Nichter 2014; Cox 2010). This places volunteers like Felicia in a position to demand patronage for her work. But if parties are dependent on party volunteers to mobilize voters, why was Felicia so unhappy? Much to Felicia’s chagrin, merely being a member of the governing party was not enough for her to receive patronage. Felicia expected such privileges because of the experience of her nephew, Isaac, in neighboring Aman District. Like Felicia, Isaac

is known locally as a party activist, meaning a volunteer who is active for their party even outside of elections.⁷ In the months before the recent election, Isaac had attended NDC rallies in the main town's square. He had jogged behind the party minivan waving party colors as NDC messages were broadcast through town. He had torn down posters of the major opposition party, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), from electricity poles and taped NDC posters in their place. He was always prepared to engage in hostile confrontation with NPP volunteers when word spread that they were planning a march. His rewards came in the months following the election: a job as a night watchman on the district premises, timely delivery of a birth certificate for his brother's boy, and priority access to state-provided fertilizer for his uncle (author's field notes, May 19, 2012).

As I tried to figure out how the local state worked, Isaac's experience made sense to me. The job he received and the benefits he made available to his family were precisely the patronage rewards I expected to find. It was Felicia's treatment that was more puzzling. Like Isaac, she was a well-connected activist, and she used these connections to demand privileges from local government. Yet local government was not responsive to her. But why? Why did NDC-controlled Aman District provide more patronage to NDC party activists than NDC-controlled Oran District? The explanation developed throughout the book is that political competition shaped how exposed a politician was to their own supporters. In Felicia's Oran District, the district chief executive was relatively insulated from demands for patronage from *his own* NDC party activists because his party's electoral strength was not precariously balanced. Much to Felicia's chagrin, merely being a member of the governing party was not enough for her to receive patronage.

Rather than be attentive to the demands of party activists, Biyo was freer to pursue the agenda of the national government. National governments set targets for each district, such as the percentage of residents enjoying clean water, and the performance of chief executives is measured against them (Asunka 2016). Hitting

these targets can mean directing local government services to the poorest settlements in the district, which may even be opposition areas. I learned over time, and I explain in this book, how and why the major obstacle to a local government carrying out such public services is not opposition politicians, incompetent or intransigent civil servants, or entrenched landowners or chiefs. Instead, the major obstacle faced by district chief executives is *their own active party supporters*. Political competition shapes the insulation of officials from their own activists: in less competitive Oran District, Biyo had relatively more freedom to sink boreholes without bowing to pressure from NDC activists to have a borehole sunk in their neighborhoods. Much to Felicia's displeasure, Biyo was largely able to ignore her demands.

The relative insulation of local politicians from their own party activists was thus the proximate factor explaining variation in local state patronage. This finding runs counter to the theory that local governments in developing countries are prone to "elite capture" by corrupt politicians (Bardhan and Mookherjee 2002; World Bank 2012a; UNDP 2016). In that view, the insulation of bureaucrats from politicians is what set effective Southeast Asian developmental states apart from states that were capricious, predatory, and patrimonial.⁸ By contrast, patronage in the Ghanaian local state is shaped by the insulation of politicians from their own activists rather than the insulation of the bureaucrats from these same politicians. In fact, as I show in chapters 5 and 6, Ghana's local civil servants are largely skilled and politically neutral. My point is not that these other scholars are "wrong" but that their findings may have limited scope.

How Strong Parties Can Structure Politics

Whereas the insulation of politicians is a proximate source of variation in local state patronage, I argue in this book that the party system is the deeper determinant.

In many developing countries, political parties are often more organizationally capable than the administrative bodies of the

state.⁹ Political scientists dating back to Huntington (1968) and Zolberg (1966) have identified the importance of parties in structuring power. Comparative politics scholars have turned to parties once again to explain the endurance of authoritarian regimes in an era of democratization (Brownlee 2007; Gandhi 2008). Parties are what De Leon, Desai, and Tugal (2015, 4) call “partisan sources of social organization” because they “integrate collective identities, coalitions, and institutions.” In places like Ghana, weak state institutions create dependence on party actors such as Isaac and Felicia to carry out the work of government (Remick 2002; 2004; Boone 2003; Ziblatt 2006). Ghana’s parties are organizationally strong. Chapter 3 contrasts local state institutions that often exist only on paper with a local-level political party organization that is a genuine force. One indication of this was given by a party organizer who said that his party’s informational strength was so significant that “in every house when I enter the house, I already know that in this house we have 10 NPP, 5 NDC.”¹⁰ The organizational strength of the two main parties actually enhances state power by providing officeholders with an apparatus through which they can discipline, communicate to, or incentivize local actors.

Ghana’s democracy is widely lauded for its stability, in particular its party system centered around two dominant parties. But the stability of Ghana’s party system has a curious effect: since the two parties have quasi-ethnic identities, voters are effectively “stuck” with one party. Because voters have little meaningful choice between parties, elections are won by mobilizing likely supporters rather than by persuading nonsupporters (Daddieh and Bob-Milliar 2014; Nathan 2019, 181).¹¹ For example, it would be strange for Felicia as an ethnic Brong to cast her lot with the NPP since they are not seen as the party of the Brong. Such partisan and ethnic allegiances are not a given, of course. They have changed slowly in historical shifts I explain in the next chapter. But for most of her life, Felicia’s political socialization has reinforced knowledge of the “social fact” that the NDC is the party for Brongs. Whether or not Felicia likes the NDC candidate, she will

assume that the NPP candidate will divert resources to an NPP neighborhood.

Felicia's political socialization has also involved learning about the role of activists within this quasi-ethnic political system. She told me that about fifteen years ago, before she became politically active, she saw how NDC volunteers in her neighborhood prospered while the NDC was in power. Their families and farms seemed to recover from calamities more quickly than others, and their children were well fed long after cocoa harvests. When Felicia began to volunteer, most of her energies were directed in her own neighborhood rather than in the NPP-supporting Asante neighborhoods. This focus made sense: part of her value to the NDC was that she knew people in her community.¹² She was much less familiar with people in the Asante community across town (author's field notes, February 18, 2012).

Felicia's experience illustrates why strong parties may limit choice for voters in contexts in which identity politics is salient. Leaving one's party is made even more difficult given the logic of clientelism, in which allying with the opposition guarantees a defector's exclusion from patronage networks should they gamble on the wrong party. Felicia is free to wear an NPP shirt, put an NPP sticker on her front door, or attend NPP organizing events. But doing so would guarantee her exclusion from any benefits should the NDC get into power. Voters have agency in clientelistic systems, as Nichter (2018) and Auerbach and Thachil (2018) remind us, but a voter with agency is not necessarily a voter with meaningful choice. Clientelism thus compounds the immobility of voters facing already limited choices.

The challenge the disaffected voter poses to a party, therefore, is less the threat of voting for the opposition and more so the threat to not vote at all. This approach to electoral strategy has historical resonance in Ghana. Observers of the 1969 election noted that "the Progress Party assumed throughout (quite correctly as the results demonstrated) that their problem was simply one of getting electors to the polls with an understanding of the

mechanism of casting a ballot, not one of persuading them to vote for the PP rather than for their opponent” (D. Austin and Luckham 1975, 183).

Were elections won by identifying dissatisfied opposition or swing voters in other neighborhoods, activists like Felicia and Isaac would be less useful. Instead, parties would need brokers. More than mere muscle, brokers are skilled political intelligence officers who can help parties tap into blocs of persuadable voters in unfamiliar neighborhoods (Koter 2016; Nathan 2019; Stokes et al. 2013; Auerbach and Thachil 2018). But when elections are won by mobilizing likely voters, political intelligence is of reduced value. What parties need is numerically strong party operations. This is why activists such as Isaac and Felicia are key.

So, the nature of the party system—its institutional strength, social embeddedness, legitimacy, and so on—can determine the balance of power between state officials and the nonstate actors upon whom they depend. This dependence gives patronage-seeking activists (like Isaac) leverage over their own parties. Thus, the effect that political competition has on behavior of local state actors is mediated by the party system. In the Ghanaian local state, electoral vulnerability lessens the insulation of politicians from their own patronage seekers.

Thinking about State Responsiveness in Developing Countries

I had set out to learn how states in developing countries worked at the local level. A few core concepts and theories formed my mental model, and I share them here. They shaped the questions I asked, the assumptions I made, and the hypotheses I considered worth testing.

Clientelism and Patrimonialism

An informal rule in Ghanaian politics holds that those who campaign and vote for a politician, in that order, deserve priority access to state resources. In the study of African politics and society, this relates to the long-standing theme of the so-called Big Man in

everyday life (Vansina 1990, 2004; A. Pitcher, Moran, and Johnston 2009; Driscoll 2021). The Big Man is a patron sitting atop a pyramid of power. Beneath him are his followers, to whom he must supply rewards for their ongoing support. This relationship is clientelistic: it involves a reciprocal relationship between unequals, one of whom provides rewards to a less powerful person in return for political allegiance. Thus, clientelism has a political use and is not “mere” theft or corruption. Clientelism is typically how order is achieved in societies without strong bureaucratic institutions (Khan 2005a, 2006; also North et al. 2013). Recent studies suggest clientelism is not necessarily the death knell for either effective states or development in general (Kiser and Sacks 2011; Grindle 2007; Whitfield et al. 2015; Vom Hau 2012; Gray 2018). Indeed, in Isaac’s district, where patronage was rife, local bureaucrats were on average *better* educated than comparable districts with less patronage. Chapter 5 explores this finding in greater detail. Last, one can easily overemphasize the extent to which Big Men—figures of disproportionate power—are centers of unchecked authority. As I show in chapter 3, some Big Men were constantly harangued by party activists and feared for their political lives.

Scholarship on (neo)patrimonialism and clientelism had a profound effect on the questions I thought were worth asking. Where my book differs from present studies of clientelism is in my primary interest in the state rather than brokers or voters. I am interested in nonstate actors, of course, but my main interest is in how states are shaped by clientelism. This distinguishes my book from major new works on clientelism’s persistence (Weitz-Shapiro 2014; Szwarcberg 2015; Nathan 2019; Diaz-Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni 2016), the role of voters (Nichter 2018; Kramon 2017), the role of brokers (Corstange 2017a; Stokes et al. 2013), and how clientelism affects public goods (Auerbach 2019; Diaz-Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni 2016). Because I conceived of my outcome of interest as different from those studies, I hope my book will be read alongside rather than against them.

State Capacity

The second area of study that influenced me was research on states. The weak state capacity argument suggests that bureaucracies in developing countries are inept or rife with corruption (often both) and that this is especially so at the local level since central government has difficulty broadcasting its power throughout its territory. The bureaucratic quality aspect of this argument is most closely associated with Weber (1978) and Carpenter (2001) and the spatial aspect with Herbst (2000) and Boone (2003). State capacity in these traditions implies that government responsiveness will be weak as a function of meager governing resources or weak social embeddedness (Evans 1995).

State capacity can also matter in a way suggested by the literature on clientelism. An important characteristic of political systems dominated by clientelism is the general absence of programmatic parties (Nathan 2019; Shefter 1977; Cruz and Keefer 2013; Stokes et al. 2013). Parties know that many desirable policies, such as nationwide vaccinations or seat belt checkpoints, are not feasible because the state apparatus is too weak to make such ambitious programs happen.

Weak state capacity in the context of clientelism, therefore, has implications for government responsiveness: politicians running the government may wish to be responsive to a broad cross section of the population, but the bureaucracy may not enable them to do so. Government responsiveness is endogenous to state capacity: without a strong bureaucratic machine, governments attempt to respond to voters through personal networks—clientelism—rather than through public programs.

I spent most of my time in buildings of the local state and gradually found state capacity less useful than I initially expected. As I show in chapter 5, I found that districts with the best-qualified civil servants were the *most* likely to provide patronage. Isaac's political access secured for him precisely the kind of patronage Felicia wanted, yet it was Isaac's district that had the better-educated civil

servants. For example, Aman's district finance officer had a master's degree in accounting from the Accra-based Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration, a well-respected institute of higher learning for professionals. He had participated in numerous workshops in Ghana, elsewhere in West Africa, and in Europe on themes related to accounting and public management. Moreover, however bitterly NDC or NPP politicians complained about one another, they spoke of the finance officer as capable and politically neutral (author's field notes, June 2, 2012).

If we are surprised by the image of a local government official in Africa with a master's degree, it is because we have not been paying attention to a changing Africa. My book is therefore a response to calls, made by anthropologists rather than political scientists, to produce studies of "the 'real' state in developing countries which is based on detailed empirical analysis and grounded theory" (Lentz 2014, 30). The simple finding that many local bureaucrats were skilled challenges the assumption—asserted more than tested—that local governments in Africa, and local bureaucrats especially, are ineffective (Bierschenk and Sardan 2014). These assumptions persist because research on states in developing countries since the Cold War has been dominated by a concern with failed states, despite their empirical rarity: most states, most of the time, are weak but not failed.¹³ As a result, we know surprisingly little about "quotidian governance" in contemporary states, which is the engagement of a state in a multitude of otherwise mundane activities, such as taxing, licensing, schooling, immunizing, or jailing its people. States engaging in quotidian governance grab neither popular nor academic headlines. They are neither the strongest nor the weakest—neither Denmark nor Somalia—but they constitute the majority of contemporary developing states.

Indeed, in later chapters I provide suggestive evidence that local governments that provided the most patronage may also have *better* administrative quality. Some officeholders facing intense pressure to provide patronage often do the most to build

administrative capacity. This finding pushes back on ideas that dominate thinking about effective states in international development, in which administrative capacity is built by an accountable government seeking to deliver public services. By contrast, I argue that administrative capacity may be built by a government seeking to deliver nonpublic services in the form of patronage. But this finding may not be all that novel. Scholars of the state have understood for several decades that state capacity is often the unintended consequence of a state's pursuit of some political end, rather than as an attempt to raise aggregate welfare for society as a whole. This is a core finding of the studies on the role of war in building effective states, in which the primary goal of states was self-preservation but the intended consequence was often better roads, greater command of the economy, more efficient taxation systems, and so on.¹⁴

Decentralized Local Governance

The third area of scholarship that informed my study was decentralized local governance. The local governance argument holds that highly centralized states are distant from the problems they are supposed to manage (Murtazashvili 2019). The result is states that have poor knowledge about, and are unresponsive to, the daily lives of ordinary people. The trend toward decentralized governance in developing countries is motivated by this logic. After two decades of decentralization, the very shape of states has changed in large parts of the developing world, such that most are now decentralized to some extent (Ndegwa 2002; Weingast 2014; Faguet 2014; Riedl and Dickovick 2013; Dickovick 2011; Lambright 2011). Substantial power has been transferred to subnational units for the delivery of basic public services in the areas of health, education, sanitation, and security. As Rodden (2006, 2) notes, "Other than transitions to democracy, decentralization and the spread of federalism are perhaps the most important trends in governance around the world over the last 50 years." International development expenditure on local government capacity building is in the

billions of dollars, and the academic literature on local governance and decentralized goods provision is enormous.¹⁵

I had come to Ghana precisely because it was two decades into a decentralization process that began under the slogan “power to the people.” Recent scholarship, however, had identified so many ways in which the promise of decentralization might fail that today one must justify a belief in the benefits of decentralization rather than merely assert them (Dickovick 2011; Ziblatt and O’Dwyer 2006). On the other hand, social scientists must study states as they are. Studying government responsiveness in contexts of (imperfect) decentralization remains important because it is the reality for most developing countries today. Doing so reveals an overemphasis on central government in studies of state effectiveness. Even scholars who have studied how contemporary forces of globalization affect states, such as Evans (1997), Weiss (2000), and Wade (2003), have nonetheless analyzed problems from the perspective of central government. This centrist perspective is also true with the spatial turn in statist literature, such as Herbst (2000) and Boone (2003), which is concerned with the ability of states to project authority over their territory. These “center-centric” approaches have not fully theorized the changing shape of contemporary decentralized states, and to the extent that they are interested in the “periphery,” it is often from the center’s perspective. But the story of a state—its capacity, its constraints, its interests—can no longer be told strictly from the center (Schouten 2022).

Democracy and Accountability

The fourth area of study that shaped this book suggests a government will remain unresponsive so long as officeholders do not have to appeal to citizens to stay in power.¹⁶ Alongside its experiment with decentralization, Ghana has for the past two decades been one of Africa’s most stable electoral democracies. There have been regular and competitive elections for president, parliament, and local government since the early 1990s. I expected poor-quality

government to thrive in the absence of electoral competition, but I found the opposite: in the most electorally competitive local governments, district governments tended to provide relatively *more* patronage to their own party volunteers.

This finding has implications for our ideas about how government responsiveness is affected by competitive electoral politics. Social scientific interest in states boomed before the end of the Cold War, with many foundational works published in the 1980s.¹⁷ This was a period of political and economic crisis for developing countries, most of which were politically closed. Today, however, people in most developing countries are governed by states in which electoral competition shapes political behavior. Just as decentralization matters because it changed the *administrative shape* of states, democratization matters because it changed the *political rules* of states. But social scientists have rarely considered the *joint* effect of decentralization and democracy on states.

This gap in our knowledge is surprising since there are enormous social scientific literatures in which democracy and elections are used to understand political order, violence, growth, and prosperity. In one field of inquiry, scholars have shown how intense electoral competition can worsen the problems of developing countries by stoking social tensions and shortening politicians' time horizons.¹⁸ A second field of inquiry focused on the relationship between elections and pro-poor or pro-growth government, as reflected in the huge democracy and growth literature (Acemoglu et al. 2008; Dincecco 2017). Yet, despite rich stand-alone literatures on decentralization and democratization, remarkably little attention had been paid to their point of intersection: how electoral competition affects the responsiveness of local governments.¹⁹

Some studies that appear interested in political competition may actually use "competitive" as a stand-in for the word "democratic" (Stasavage 2005) or equate "competitive" with having more political parties (Chhibber and Nooruddin 2004). By contrast, I am interested in political competition in a narrow understanding

of the term—as proximity between contesting groups—rather than as a synonym for democracy more broadly.²⁰

Social Capital

The theories and approaches just described concern political institutions in some form. By contrast, the fifth area of scholarship that shaped my thinking—the theory of social capital—relates to social institutions. The social capital argument holds that communities in which people are interconnected through things like intermarriage will be more trusting of one another and take greater interest in a responsive and effective government. Such citizens will be actively engaged in public affairs because they feel a responsibility to do so as well as sense that being active will lead to (or sustain) quality government. According to the social capital model, the quality of government is likely improved when citizens are actively engaged in public affairs.²¹ Theories of social capital and trust probably had their heyday in the 1990s and 2000s but have regained support to explain why some societies responded so differently to the COVID-19 pandemic.²²

Perhaps Felicia's problem had less to do with her party and more to do with community relations around her. Indeed, I found that in these highly competitive districts, in which public services were underprovided while patronage was overprovided, survey respondents reported more political conflict. Of course, that should be expected since in these places, elections are closely fought. But contrary to the social capital model, respondents in these highly competitive districts reported no more or less trust of strangers, yet they reported more civic engagement in the form of things like radio listenership. This is surprising since the social capital argument would predict that politically active citizens are more engaged in public affairs and more trusting of community members. Thus, I found the concept of social capital to be of limited use. It could not help me make sense of communities in which residents received poor public services yet had relatively more civic engagement.

Implications

The findings in this book have implications for two major strands of research on states and the political economy of development.

First, there are implications for how we think political competition works in developing countries. In the literature on local governance and service delivery, many scholars have identified clientelism as a reason why decentralization has often led to corruption and rent seeking. As Khemani (2010) explains, “Decentralization is subject to political capture, with local spending targeted to vote-buying, patronage, or pork barrel projects,” and “funds devolved to local governments are more likely to go towards clientelist transfers rather than improvement of public goods” (2, 25; also Khemani 2013). It is in this spirit that Eaton, Kaiser, and Smoke (2010, 25) warned of the threat posed to decentralized governance when “electoral outcomes turn largely on the ability of political machines to exchange votes for material benefits.”

In the search for remedies for such ills, scholars have been buoyed by researching linking better local governance to elections (Janvry, Finan, and Sadoulet 2010; Ferraz and Finan 2008; Skoufias et al. 2011). As Diaz-Cayeros and Magaloni (2003, 31–32) explain, “Political monopoly, or at least reduced political contestation at the local level, seems to be an important element that leads to clientelism.” The logic is intuitive and broadly consistent with ideas about accountability and democracy in the study of development. The solution they advance is also logical: “On the other hand, vigorous political competition can undermine, although not necessarily eliminate clientelism” (also Rose-Ackerman 1978; García-Guadilla, Pilar, and Pérez 2002). Here, chronic failures in local government should become less likely as political competition becomes more robust. But my book explains how a party system may instead intensify patronage rather than decrease it. Ghana’s stable ethnoregional parties make switching parties very unattractive for voters. Rather than invest in persuading opposition voters, Ghana’s parties use volunteers—party activists—to

maximize turnout within their community. This increases the leverage that activists have over their own party and even more so when elections are closely fought. I develop this argument in the concluding chapter, in which I show how varieties of clientelism across Africa correspond to the strength of party systems.

The second implication concerns states and state capacity. At the beginning of my research, I expected that the districts that were underproviding public services would be those with weak administrative capacity. My original research question tried to explain subnational variation in state capacity. I soon realized, however, that this was not a fruitful line of inquiry. So *unimportant* did state capacity appear to be as an explanatory device that informants found it strange when I persisted in asking about it. State capacity as a conceptual variable *did* matter, but it never approached levels of significance that would allow me to explain variation in the behavior of local state actors across the country. A focus on state capacity simply obscured deeper phenomena.

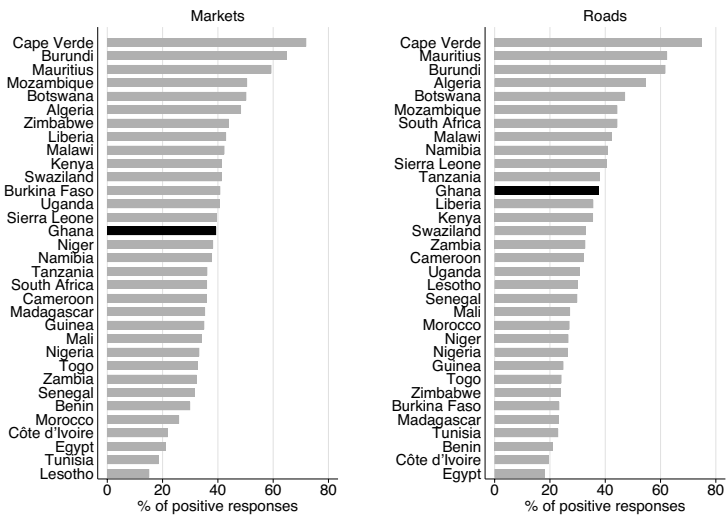
Students of development attribute significant explanatory power to state capacity, and I include myself in that community. But the language of state capacity was not helpful at the local level, where officials did not fit the image of the local government official as incompetent or corrupt. Defects in local governance were not to be found in bureaucratic quality but rather in the very real political constraints that shape incumbent behavior. In chapter 5, for example, I tell the story of an ambitious revenue-generation scheme developed by a budget officer who was disappointed to learn that his political superiors had no interest in making tax collection more efficient. This leads me to end the book with a call for greater attention from political scientists to an inductive, empirical study of the African local state.

Why Ghana?

Ghana was a useful place to study how competitive politics affect local states, for two main reasons. First, Ghana's history is representative of many developing countries in recent decades. It has

gone through periods of structural adjustment and a transition from authoritarianism. State retreat from the economy enabled the growth of a new class of politico-economic entrepreneurs for whom the state is a dispenser of contracts (Opoku 2010). The state has decentralized, yet the central government retains important sources of control over local government finance and personnel. These are familiar headlines for observers of developing countries (Dickovick and Wunsch 2014).

Second, there is a troubling disconnect between outsiders' image of Ghana and the way Ghanaians view their state. The country remains one of Africa's star performers for its political stability and economic growth. Yet the nation that is held up by outsiders as a model for its neighbors is seen in many towns and villages as a model of corruption, rentierism, and inequity. For example, in a Gallup survey of one thousand adults in 129 countries, Ghanaians' views on government corruption were similar to those of residents of Nigeria, Indonesia, Thailand, and Russia (Gallup 2013).²³ And in the Afrobarometer, which conducts nationally representative surveys across thirty-four sub-Saharan countries, Ghanaian perceptions of corruption were above the median.²⁴ These popular views are also reflected in indexes of state capacity, in which the Ghanaian state emerges as quite an "average" developing country. In the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, Ghana ranks sixteenth in Africa on indicators that relate to state capacity, such as statistical capacity and revenue collection, and twentieth for infrastructure. Lee and Zhang (2017) use an index developed by demographers to measure the quality of censuses.²⁵ Their data show that the quality of Ghanaian censuses is now, and has been for decades, below the median for the subcontinent. Last, perceptions of the quality of local government in Ghana put the country in the middle of the pack in Africa (see figures I.1 and I.2). Taken together, proxies for the power of the Ghanaian state suggest it is not an outlier in terms of the quality of its institutions. This disconnect between external image and local perception is worthy of close analysis precisely because of Ghana's reputation.



FIGURES I.1 AND I.2. Satisfaction with local government in Africa. *Note:* Data from Afrobarometer Round 5 (2011–13). Respondents were asked, “What about local government? I do not mean the national government. I mean your metropolitan, municipal, or district assembly. How well or badly would you say your local government is handling the following matters, or haven’t you heard enough about them to say, ‘Maintaining local marketplaces/roads?’” The graph shows positive responses, which combines “fairly well” and “very well” responses. $N = 50,405$.

Research Design, Methodology, and Data

I conducted a total of fourteen months of fieldwork in Ghana across three trips from 2009 to 2012, including nine months spent living in a small town equidistant from my six local government case studies. The first two-thirds of 2012 were spent conducting qualitative research. I situated my case study research in the study of “normal politics,” a term for the study of the everyday practice of government. It is a mode of inquiry that begins with the knowledge that what happens most of the time, in most of the world, is neither hotly contested elections nor boisterous riots. Instead, everyday governance comprises hundreds of small interactions between authorities and those they purport to govern. These

interactions may involve the paying of licenses, petitions for patronage, the collection of ID cards, or requests for the waiving of school fees. They are a key site of intersection in which bureaucrats, politicians, and ordinary people either change or renew their beliefs about one another (Adebanwi 2022; Blundo et al. 2013; Blundo and Le Meur 2009).

I was motivated by the field of fiscal sociology, which is concerned with how a ruler's imperative to raise revenue obliges them to interact with their citizens and shapes how they do so. "The budget," Rudolf Goldscheid argued, "is the skeleton of the state stripped of all misleading ideologies" (cited in Schumpeter 1954).²⁶ Taking a "street-level bureaucrats" approach, I began by spending time with tax collectors and the object of their activity, which is predominantly market traders (Lipsky 1979; Blundo 2006; Crook and Ayee 2006). But my approach went beyond the street-level bureaucrats, as I also spent time with managerial civil servants in each district assembly, actors whose job was not purely engaging the public. After several months, I pivoted from a narrow interest in the process of tax collection to a broader interest in the forces shaping local state behavior. Once my research was reframed, it quickly became clear what it had been missing: a concern with political parties and how they infused local governance. Party activists fill the hallways, waiting rooms, and offices of local state buildings.

The data in this book are the product of mixed methods research, as I triangulate data emerging through semistructured ethnographic interview and survey methods. The research design used a nested analysis approach as described by Lieberman (2005), in which small-*N* qualitative case study research is nested within large-*N* subnational survey research. The value of a nested analysis is that a researcher can first use large-*N* data to guide case selection, statistical analysis can then test emergent hypotheses from case studies, and small-*N* data ultimately allow the researcher to validate or amend the causal logic (Seawright 2016; Thachil 2018).

The research design is explicitly subnational. The value of a subnational approach is to allow the researcher to hold constant important macro variables such as electoral systems and to deal with problems of reverse causality within one case (Pepinsky 2019; Snyder 2001). But studies of local governments should not be treated in isolation from their supralocal contexts, so I point out how Ghana's central government is constrained by its dependence on party activists in neighborhoods and villages throughout the country (Riker 1964; Rodden 2006; Wibbels 2006; Sinha 2012).

I used five criteria to select six districts from the existing 170, using a "most similar" case selection approach (Gerring 2017; Seawright and Gerring 2008). First, cases needed to vary along my explanatory variable of political competition.²⁷ Second, I narrowed my sample to Akan districts to take advantage of my training in the Akan/Twi language and to control for potential effects of differences in ethnic social structure and the nature of traditional authority. Third, I excluded districts with very large populations since I could not adequately get to know key actors in huge districts with my limited resources. Since two-thirds of Ghanaians live in districts with populations under 125,000, this criterion did not severely restrict the sample. Fourth, I chose districts that varied in age because the number of districts has increased over time, and institutional continuity and learning should affect the quality of government. From all 170 districts, these criteria gave me eight possible districts.

Finally, to choose from among these eight candidate districts, I used performance in tax collection to establish variance among them (see appendix table A.1). It was reasonable to assume that a district performing poorly in tax collection reflected an inability to collect revenue—a basic and essential governing behavior—rather than a policy choice (Levi 1988; Joshi et al. 2008; Slater and Simmons 2010; Stotsky and WoldeMariam 1997; Bird, Martinez-Vazquez, and Torgler 2005). That assumption may not prove correct, of course, but that is the purpose of the case study research. I arrived at six districts, lived roughly in the middle of

them all, and drove to a different one each day. Table I.1 provides a snapshot of the district cases.

Table I.1. Summary statistics for case study districts

Comp.	District	Pop.	Ethnic Fract.	Illiterate	Urban	Area (km ²)	Age	Tax p/cap.	Vote NDC
Yes	Koko	100,000	0.6	30	30	800	6	0.98	49
Yes	Aman	90,000	0.8	40	50	1,400	22	1.69	53
No	Oran	140,000	0.3	20	30	700	22	1.17	18
No	Guba	140,000	0.4	20	60	1,600	22	1.09	24
No	Braka	120,000	0.6	30	10	1,900	6	1.23	35
No	Lamda	150,000	0.4	10	32	800	6	1.98	21
	<i>Country average</i>	<i>145,052</i>	<i>0.4</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>1,471</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>1.77</i>	<i>49</i>

Note: All numbers have been rounded to protect district identities. “Comp.” indicates if the district is classified as highly competitive using the share of valid votes for the NDC candidate in 2008, the most recent national election at the time of my fieldwork. The NPP vote share and the competitiveness of the election can be inferred from the NDC vote. “Ethnic Fract.” is an index of ethnic fractionalization where higher numbers indicate greater fractionalization. Data for “Ethnic Fract.,” “Population,” “Illiterate,” and “Urban” come from the 2010 census (Government of Ghana 2012). “Tax p/cap.” is total locally collected revenue in cedis (the Ghanaian unit of currency), per capita, averaged over all available years. “Age” is the number of years since the district’s creation.

In the final third of my fieldwork, I developed a network of over two hundred research assistants to implement a survey of district assembly bureaucrats and politicians. These survey data form the centerpiece of my dataset on district assemblies, which is analyzed throughout the book. The survey methodology is fully explained in an online appendix found on my website.

Organization of the Book

This chapter has introduced the research question: how does a local state actually work in twenty-first-century poor countries? Remaining chapters offer a descriptive account of a local state as well as a causal explanation for how political competition affects the local state apparatus. I argue that local state actors are affected

by their relative insulation from the daily demands of their own partisans and that political competition shapes this insulation. Going deeper, I argue that the party system mediates the effect of competitiveness because party systems shape the locally salient varieties of clientelism.

Chapter 1 provides historical context for the book by asking a simple question: Why are some districts more competitive than others? It is possible that district competitiveness is the result, rather than the cause, of the patronage behavior of local states. If so, my argument that competition causally affects patronage would be backwards. Chapter 1 addresses this concern with a historical-institutionalist account of party and state formation. The key finding is that the behavior of patronage-providing districts does not drive their level of competitiveness. Rather, party competitiveness within districts is rooted in patterns of migration and party formation that came before the present local government system. Using historic census data, I show that migration into cocoa areas had by 1970 established patterns of ethnic geography that would predict district-level electoral competitiveness over thirty years later. This means important determinants of district-level competitiveness *predate* the contemporary system of local government.

Chapters 2 and 3 offer descriptive accounts of the key political actors linking the party and the local state: district chief executives and their party activists. I draw on months spent in local state offices to illuminate the lives of these district chief executives (chapter 2) and party activists (chapter 3), including how they view their political world and how they affect one another. What emerges is a picture in which chief executives are subject to considerable pressure from fellow partisans once in office. Chief executives who fulfill electoral pledges to reward activists remain in office. I then describe the political downfall of chief executives who *failed* to discriminate in favor of their activists as well as chief executives who were able to ignore their activists. Chapter 3 introduces party activists through four questions: Who and where are

they, and what do they want and how do they get it? I show how activists make themselves heard and what happens when politicians violate the rules of the relationship.

Chapter 4 uses quantitative data to show that political competition is causally related to patronage across the country. The key outcome of interest is patronage operationalized as local government employment. The data come from an original survey I conducted of district officials and subjective data from a nationally representative survey of three thousand individuals. Results show that highly competitive districts overprovide patronage relative to districts that are less competitive. The analysis includes an identification strategy that exploits plausibly exogenous variation in political competition arising from historical migration of ethnic blocs.

Chapter 5 is motivated by political economy scholarship on the role that civil servants play in government behavior. Again, drawing on qualitative and quantitative data, I report the strikingly consistent finding that district politicians hold the skill and political neutrality of senior district civil servants in high regard. Moreover, I present the counterintuitive finding that high-patronage districts are not only *no* worse in their internal administration than other districts but may also be *more* internally efficient and meritocratic than relatively low-patronage districts. In other words, there are highly competitive districts that dole out patronage in the form of low-skill public jobs *and* have skilled senior civil servants. I introduce the logic of capacity for patronage to make sense of this, in which the governing strategies of some incumbents involve developing bureaucratic capacity to better help the incumbent deliver patronage. I then use the experience of staff in tax collection to describe how the political world of bureaucrats is structured and show how politicians retard improvements in tax collection in highly competitive districts. These findings suggest that patronage may not be an obstacle to building effective local state institutions.

Chapter 6 concludes the book by setting major themes in comparative context. First, the book argues that party systems

matter in developing countries because they affect the ability of voters to switch parties. This implies that clientelism should work differently where voters can threaten to leave their party. Using data from nationally representative surveys across Africa, I show vote buying is more common in less stable party systems, while turnout buying is more common in more stable party systems. Thus, political systems can be “differently clientelistic,” and party systems are contributors to this variation. Second, drawing on my finding that many district politicians are often embattled figures weighed down by their own followers, I speak to the Africanist literature on Big Men. I argue that district Big Men are powerful but not despotic—that is, they are actors with constraints. I argue that much contemporary usage of the Big Man concept confuses the Big Man with dictatorship. Third, motivated by my finding that local states’ bureaucrats are surprisingly skilled, I argue that the Ghanaian state is not fundamentally “weak” in terms of its internal administrative capacity. Rather, its weakness is outward facing. Its present political equilibrium encourages citizens to evade the state’s intrusions into their homes, farms, stores, and savings.

1

Why Some Districts Are Competitive

The Order of Local State Formation

In the previous chapter I argued that the responsiveness of local state actors to demands for patronage is shaped by their relative insulation from their own political party activists. Delving deeper, I argued that activists can exert leverage over the politicians because voter mobilization is of paramount importance to political parties, and activists like Isaac and Felicia use this leverage to their benefit. When local elections are closely fought, activists in those areas (like Isaac) further increase their leverage over their copartisans in local state offices.

But could government responsiveness drive competitiveness rather than the other way around? Patronage-providing districts may stir political contestation and make a district more electorally competitive as a result. To argue that political competition has a (mostly negative) causal effect on local state behavior, I need to demonstrate that district competitiveness is not a by-product of (i.e., not endogenous to) local government behavior.

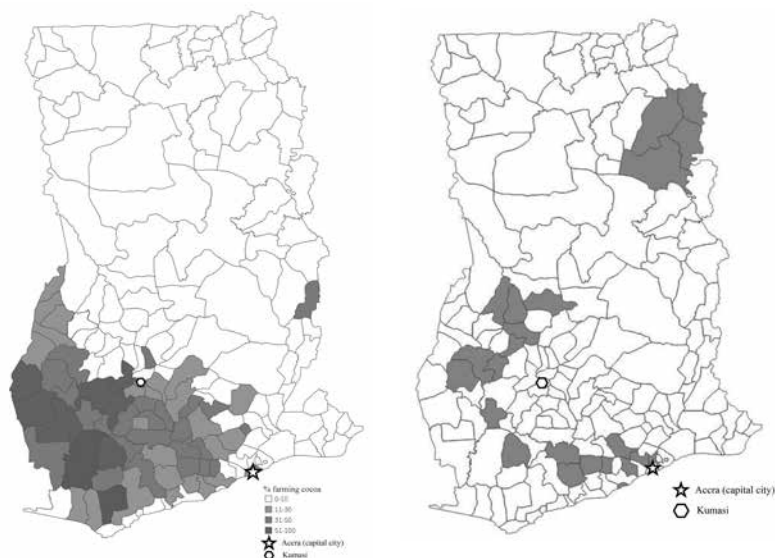
The ideal test would be to observe if changes in the competitiveness of a district over time changes the behavior of local government. But such an approach is not possible for two reasons.

First, since my fieldwork was conducted across several districts at one point in time, I could not observe the effect of changes in political competition on one district. Second, and more important, levels of electoral competitiveness within districts have been remarkably stable over time due to the stability of the major parties.¹

An alternative solution is simply to reformulate the problem as a research question: Why are some districts more competitive than others? Is it *because* of dynamics such as patronage, or are there other explanations? This chapter demonstrates how the factors that made some districts highly competitive came long before the present district assembly system. This is a historical chapter that will argue that *party formation preceded state formation*. Electoral competitiveness in today's districts has been shaped by periods of political party formation that crucially predate the present district assembly system. The significance of this argument is that districts had developed the conditions of their competitiveness well before the creation of the modern district assembly system.²

The 1950s–1970s was a period of *party formation* in which communities began to align behind long-term political party traditions that dominate politics up to today. Crucially, it was also a period of immense socioeconomic flux due to migration west and southwest for cocoa. Cocoa migration made neighbors out of various groups that began enduring alignments behind distinct political party traditions. This is why most of the electorally competitive districts today are in cocoa areas in the country's center and southwest (see figures 1.1 and 1.2).

The period of party formation was followed by the period of local state formation in the 1980s and 1990s, in which today's local state structures took shape under President Jerry Rawlings. His military government introduced the modern district assembly system onto communities that were already aligned behind distinct political traditions. Communities that were overwhelmingly in support of one political tradition emerged as strongholds of that party and remain so up to today. Communities that were split



FIGURES 1.1 AND 1.2. Maps of cocoa production and competitive elections. *Note:* Figure 1.1 (*left*) shows districts where at least 10 percent of farmers reported farming cocoa. Data from the 2005 *Ghana Living Standards Survey* (Ghana, Government of, 2005). Figure 1.2 (*right*) shows districts in which the margin between the NDC and NPP presidential candidates in 2012 was less than 5 percent. Districts shown meeting this threshold in the noncocoa north account for less than 10 percent of the approximately three million voters living in highly competitive districts. The aggregate is used because some districts have more than one electoral constituency.

between the two traditions emerged as highly competitive and remain so today. Thus, local state institutions reinforced district-level party fissures. It did not create them.

In adopting a historical-institutionalist approach, I assume actors make choices given their incentives, information, and constraints and that these choices generate path dependence over time—equilibriums from which actors have neither the incentive nor the capacity to deviate. The key path dependent development in this chapter is the emergence decades ago of a political party system centered around two (Cirone and Pepinsky 2022).

I divide the chapter into three sections. The first two sections explore the twin phenomena of cocoa migration and party development, which were central to the period of party formation, the 1950s through the 1970s. Cocoa formed an early cleavage during the emergence of party politics in the 1950s, and the effects of cocoa migration today can be seen in the distribution of (often northern) migrant laborers now living in cocoa areas. The third section covers the formation of local state institutions, specifically the district assembly system, in the 1980s and 1990s. The system marked a considerable break from the past in terms of local control and possibilities for local elites to access state patronage, but by that point significant political alignments had occurred throughout the country that Rawlings could not unmake. The core aim in this chapter is to rule out the possibility that districts became competitive *because of* local levels of patronage. Since the development of the cocoa economy is chronologically prior to important developments in party formation, our story begins with cocoa and migration in the early twentieth century.

Cocoa and the Growth of “Stranger” Communities

Ghana’s cocoa economy is concentrated in the southwest of the country.³ Cocoa has its roots in the late 1800s in areas north of the coastal capital city, Accra, but only with its move westward into forested areas from the turn of the century did it begin to boom and transform the country (Hill 1963). By 1911 Ghana was the world’s leading exporter of cocoa, but the crop did not boom all at once throughout the country. Figure 1.1 shows the location of cocoa production today. None of this area had cocoa in the late 1800s. Cocoa actually started north of Accra around 1900. In the two decades or so thereafter, cocoa farming spread to and beyond Kumasi, shown in the map with a hexagon. Cocoa continued to spread farther westward and southward in the subsequent decades. Important for our discussion is the labor and human settlement that enabled and followed this counterclockwise movement in Ghana’s southwest. As we will see, people migrating for cocoa

permanently shaped local demographics and, eventually, local-level voting patterns.

In the early stages of the shifting cocoa frontier, chiefs of small polities were typically welcoming of farmers willing to clear their forests, improve their land, and pay for the privilege. In the early 1900s the dominant migrant farmers were Asantes, the major group within the locally dominant Akan ethnolinguistic group (Hill 1961; Mitchell 2013). Over time the selling (leasing is more accurate) of land by chiefs often fanned local conflict as those viewing themselves as “indigenes” lashed out at the land scarcity created by “strangers.” While “citizens” of an area traditionally had customary rights to land, “strangers” had to negotiate usage rights with chiefs who had the right to lease land to strangers but not to sell it. Thus the use—and increased scarcity—of land following the influx of migrants gradually fed into local citizen-alien tension and played into broader discourses of autochthony, meaning the tension between indigenes and aliens (Boone and Duku 2012; Hill 1963). The persistence of autochthon-stranger, or citizen-alien, conflict in cocoa areas is important because it explains patterns of nonincorporation of migrants (especially non-Akans) into host communities, divisions that would ultimately be politicized.

Around the 1920s, motorable roads helped substantially larger numbers of non-Akan migrants come to cocoa areas (Dunn and Robertson 1973, 61). It was these migrants—mostly northerners, and often Muslims, from present-day Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, and also northern Ghana—who today constitute the migrant neighborhoods in a typical cocoa town. In these towns, people refer to clusters of (usually poor) neighborhoods as the *zongo* (“stranger”) part of town. Ask which people live in the *zongo*, and you will be told that is where the northerners and the Muslims live.⁴ As the cocoa economy spread, so did *zongos*, both in their size and in their numbers.

But it was not always the case that northerners were treated as aliens. Contrary to what my Ghanaian friends would tell me, “*zongo*” did not originally mean “stranger.” It is actually the Hausa

word for “caravan.” In the precolonial period, northern areas were linked to southern Ghana by trade routes and in particular by the slave trade. These northerners were not just present-day northern Ghanaians but were also from Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), Nigeria, Mali, Niger, Dahomey (Benin), and Togo. A zongo referred to the camping place of a caravan of traders, usually on the outskirts of one of the main towns in the Asante Kingdom. In this precolonial period, Muslim traders from the north even intermarried with Asante—the major Akan subgroup—and were generally welcomed in Kumasi, home of the Asante Kingdom (Schildkrout 1978, 67; also Berry 2001, 19). Nevertheless, it is significant that today people use the terms “Muslim,” “northerner,” and “zongo” interchangeably. Whatever its provenance, a zongo today is a neighborhood of nonincorporated migrants.

This picture of a relatively harmonious relationship between the Asante Kingdom and Muslim traders was disrupted by the British defeat of the Asante Kingdom in 1874 and with increasing colonial control over the Asante state in the decades that followed. The incorporation of non-Asante migrants into Asante society seen before colonialism was not repeated in the colonial period. The British actually recruited northerners to fight against the Asante, and with the destruction of its sovereign power the Asante state lost the ability to regulate the flow of migrants through its borders. This not only meant that northerners could enter in greater numbers—it also meant that the growing Kumasi zongo depended on the British for support and moreover that its own growth was implicated in the destruction of the Asante Empire (Schildkrout 1978, 71). This was the beginning of the shift in perceptions of northerners from traders to be treated civilly to social and cultural aliens to be resented and isolated.

By 1920 the look of zongos had changed. The first generation of zongo residents were typically Muslims from centralized societies such as the Hausa, Yoruba, and Mossi. The second generation consisted of unskilled northern laborers, many of whom were from traditionally noncentralized societies, and many were

not Muslim. They became a second tier in zongos in the burgeoning cocoa regions. It was the earlier generation of settlers who shaped an emerging zongo identity that was notably situational: "One of the main characteristics that all members of the Zongo have in common is that they are neither Asante, southern Ghanaian, European, Lebanese, or Indian—the other main groups in the town. The Zongo exists in conceptual opposition to these other categories" (Mikell 1989, 88; also Boni 2005, 82). The fact that host communities were generally non-Muslim, and that early zongo inhabitants were Muslim, partly explains why today Islam is often an important part of zongo identity, even if many zongo residents are not Muslim.

Around World War II, the polity that would soon be called Ghana was changing its appearance. It was around this period that many of the towns that are most electorally competitive today were settled by varying combinations of ethnic groups that would eventually come to serve as ethnically based voting bases. The result of decades of migration and nonincorporation is described by Mikell: "The upheaval and migration during the Ashanti wars and British conquest, as well as in response to the mobility of the cocoa economy, had resulted in considerable ethnic heterogeneity within rural cocoa areas" (Mikell 1989, 159). Population increases in the west and southwest from the early 1900s up until the 1970s were dramatic. From 1931 to 1960, important towns in the midwest grew rapidly: roughly tenfold increases in the important towns of Berekum and Nkoranza, fivefold in Sunyani, triple in Techiman, and double in Wenchi (Mikell 1989, 76). In the 1970 census, three-quarters of all migrant northerners lived in the cocoa-growing regions of Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo, or Western.

The last major shift in the cocoa frontier brings us up to today. This was the movement into Western Region, the very southwestern corner of the country, in the 1980s as cocoa prices and the economy began to recover from a dip (Awanyo 1998). The tide settled by the 1990s, by which time most land had been taken and

prices had risen dramatically (Moller-Jensen and Knudsen 2008, 318). Yet data from the 2010 census suggests a continuing link between northerners and cocoa regions. Of northerners enumerated outside their region of birth, over one-third were found in just the cocoa-rich Western and Brong-Ahafo Regions alone. These people moved into settlements and changed the political demographics along the way. Cocoa, and the movements of northern migrants marginalized as zongo people, formed the backdrop against which important developments in party politics played out in the 1950s, which I turn to next.

Initial Party Formation

The main parties today trace their lineages back to the late colonial period (Kelly and Bening 2013; Whitfield 2011).⁵ The New Patriotic Party (NPP) is understood in terms of its “Danquah-Busia tradition,” which is a reference to precursors to the modern NPP, which began under the leadership of Dr. J. B. Danquah and then Kofi Busia. National Democratic Congress (NDC) supporters occasionally refer to their Nkrumahist populist legacy stretching back to the 1950s, though this is highly contested even within their own ranks. But although the 1950s was a period of party growth, ethnic alignments we see today didn’t begin to crystallize until the late 1960s. So, evidence for ethnically aligned parties is actually not strong around the 1940s and 1950s (Fridy 2013).

In 1947 Kwame Nkrumah became general secretary of the new United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), which was a conservative elite-based movement pressing for greater self-government. Two years later, Nkrumah broke from the UGCC and formed the more radical and populist Convention People’s Party (CPP). Under the twin themes of rejecting the aristocratic power of colonial-backed chiefs and of ending British abuses in the cocoa sector, he and the CPP emerged as a populist force. The CPP was thus explicitly *nonethnoregional* in origin. It is perhaps unique in Ghanaian history as a politically dominant force that was primarily ideological in nature.

Nkrumah and the CPP dominated the preindependence elections of 1951, 1954, and 1956. He and the CPP worked tirelessly to build a political organization spanning territory and societies that had never been united. D. Austin (1970b, 175–76) writes that the “strengthening of the party during these years . . . was a constant preoccupation on the part of the leaders.” What Nkrumah and the CPP were attempting was nothing less than the political incorporation and unification of diverse societies that only decades before had been relatively autonomous political systems.

Nkrumah’s CPP was dominant from independence in 1957 to his violent removal in 1966.⁶ In the 1950s it became obvious that access to political office—including to the Cocoa Purchasing Company—came with huge benefits and this enhanced incentives for political entrepreneurs to form parties (D. Austin 1970b; G. Austin 2005). Studying developments in northern communities, D. Austin noted:

It was recognized by 1956 that parties were more than labels, that they were avenues to power not only remotely in Accra, but in Kassena-Nankanni and Bongo. . . . There were many now, including chiefs like Pagapio, who began to argue that the sensible way to behave was to show one’s loyalty to the new government by joining the party. “The CPP is strong.” “They can do anything.” “They are the new white men.” These were the sort of phrases used. (D. Austin 1976, 82–83; also Dunn and Robertson 1973)

The CPP used local offices to secure alliances and punish the opposition, though the country would not become a one-party state until 1964. Nkrumah installed CPP faithful in communal governance positions in places like the Kumasi zongo and banished or exiled many of the zongo’s more critical opponents of the CPP (Mikell 1989, 174).

As the CPP expanded in the early 1950s, regional parties grew with diverse concerns. Nkrumah’s CPP had represented itself as the party of “young men” and as the party of the common man

against elites. Nkrumah's rhetoric exerted a centrifugal force by compelling distant forces to ally with one another. The Northern People's Party was formed in 1954, and its strength was based on fears that Nkrumah was against traditional authorities (D. Austin 1970a; Schildkrout 1978, 209). The eastern-based Togoland Congress was formed in 1951 to unite Ewe people in British Togoland and French Togoland. But note that these political alignments were regional but not ethnic: the fact that the Togoland Congress did not run candidates in Ewe communities outside of Volta/Togoland reveals that the Togoland Congress, as with other parties at the time, were motivated by the issue of what form the state should take rather than by ethnicity per se.

In the 1954 election, CPP candidates promised higher cocoa prices after having frozen them in 1951, but after their electoral victory they reduced cocoa prices further (Boone 2003, 160). This is what gave rise to the Ashanti-based National Liberation Movement (NLM) in 1954, the first Asante-dominated political party (Allman 1993, 29). From the outset, the NLM brand married cocoa with Asante identity. In 1955 attendees of a rally just outside Kumasi were told that "the NLM was the Ashanti Nation and the Ashanti Nation the NLM. It was therefore the duty of every Ashanti to support it" (Allman 1993, 97). An early NLM pamphlet asked rhetorically, "Ashantis produce more cocoa than the colony. Is there any cocoa in the northern territories? No! Why should Government tax cocoa farmers to develop the country in which Ashantis suffer most?" (Allman 1993, 28). It is significant that almost sixty years later a political storm erupted when a former NPP finance minister was recorded complaining that although most of the country's natural resources came from Akan areas, it was ethnic northerners in government who controlled them (*Daily Graphic* 2015).⁷

This Asante nationalism at the heart of the NLM was precisely what hurt it elsewhere in the country since Asante votes alone would not see it win a general election. The party had trouble convincing cocoa farmers outside of Asante land that it

could stand for them. As cocoa producers in the south “listened to the propaganda coming out of the Ashanti capital, and saw the preparations being made for the expansion of the party into the Colony [on the coast], they saw the NLM not as the farmer’s friend but as the spearhead of a new Ashanti invasion of the South” (D. Austin 1964, 344). These fears of Asante domination were also historically rooted in memories of oppression by the Asante Kingdom in the collective minds of non-Asante Akans in today’s Central, Western, and Brong-Ahafo Regions (Mikell 1989, 161; also D. Austin 1976). Just as Nkrumah compelled cocoa-rich Asantes to organize, Asante unity in turn compelled other groups to do so also.

By the mid-1950s, no communities could escape the invasion of party politics, and elites and voters alike were compelled to take sides. As a measure of how party politics was becoming institutionalized in this period, the number of independent candidates declined from about half in the 1954 election to about one-quarter only two years later.⁸ The number of winning independent candidates went from 31 percent to 6 percent. By late 1950s, people in once autonomous polities were being politically incorporated into a variety of political organizations seeking to control a state that would soon be independent.

The growth of zongo communities also played into emerging party politics, as national-level political entrepreneurs came looking for votes in “stranger” neighborhoods. What outside forces had to offer zongo elites was the all-important power of formal recognition of the community’s leadership (Schildkrout 1978, 207). At various times in Kumasi’s history, for example, it was the British and then the Asante who had the power to decide zongo leadership. In the emergent independent state, the power to control the zongo would again come from Accra. Today candidates seek out zongo communities as distinct voting blocs, which I explain in chapter 3.

In summary, the significance of this period was *not* that it set in stone today’s political allegiances. Rather, it was in the

development of supralocal political organization that compelled communities to take sides. Nkrumah's nonethnic posture forced an ethnically centered reaction among the Asante, and the chain reaction was ultimately to force others to mobilize against them. Two enduring party traditions emerged from this, seen in today's NPP and NDC.

The Emergence of Ethnic Parties in the 1960s and 1970s

Three years after the coup that removed Nkrumah in 1966, voters returned to the polls once more.⁹ The 1969 election was notable for three reasons. First, it was perhaps the first and last time the country witnessed pan-Akan voting. With Nkrumah and the CPP so unpopular, and Nkrumahist parties banned, the Danquah-Busia tradition (precursor to today's NPP) overwhelmingly won the election under the leadership of Busia and the Progress Party (PP).¹⁰ Despite its lineage, it differed from previous Asante-dominated parties because it "succeeded in rallying coastal and inland Akan under one umbrella" (Chazan 1983, 222). It was able to present a pan-Akan front because Busia was a non-Asante Akan, and the party was able to take advantage of anti-Ewe and anti-Ga sentiment arising from their dominance of the post-Nkrumah military regime.

Second, the 1969 election birthed the alignment of Ewes against the Asante/Akan party, which is continued in the allegiance of Ewes to the NDC today. In the 1969 election, Busia's PP "did not expect to be so heavily trounced in Ewes areas" (Dunn and Robertson 1973, 349), as in the 1950s Ewes in Volta Region had given their support to the Danquah-Busia line because of coinciding interests on the issue of separatism. But in 1969 the Nkrumahist National Alliance of Liberals (NAL) was led by Ewes to large victories in their home Volta Region but large losses elsewhere. From this point on, ethnic Ewes began reliably supporting today's NDC.

Third, the 1969 election marked the heightened salience of ethnicity in government. While elections in the 1950s saw a

“nationalist party dominating several parochial parties, this first post-independence election was defined by competition between ethnic blocs” (Fridy 2013, 21). Observing the election in Abuakwa, Peasah noted “the increased use made of ethnicity to gain political support. . . . Almost to a man, the Ewe in the constituency rallied to the support of the [Nkrumahist] NAL, and the overwhelming majority of the Akim [Akan] (barring highly localized and deep rivalries) gave their support to the PP” (Peasah 1975, 230). The 1960s were more generally a period of identity-based divisiveness. The 1963 Aliens Act required residence permits from foreigners wishing to engage in commercial activity. The shift in legal language was significant. Whereas a stranger is akin to a guest to whom a host is obliged to provide respect, an alien is a figure to be barely tolerated.

In 1969 Busia and the PP introduced the Aliens Compliance Order, which gave non-Ghanaians two weeks to obtain residence permits, under penalty of expulsion from the country. Mitchell (2013, 19) describes the socioeconomic backdrop quite well:

On the economic front, unemployment was rampant during the months leading up to the order. There was also much concern over the extent of foreign monopolies, as aliens were over-represented in many industries. Finally, the decline of the cocoa frontier in the late 1960s also contributed to the economic malaise of the period. Many in government circles and the media blamed immigrants that had originally migrated to Ghana to work in the cocoa sector but had since taken up petty trading because of the worsening conditions in the cocoa sector.

The order reinforced the social distance between northerners and Akans in cocoa areas (Schildkrout 1978, 42). It continues to resonate: when I asked why people in the zongo vote NDC, the answer invariably included a reference to the Aliens Compliance Order. In the 1996 presidential election, the NPP candidate was alleged to have threatened to deport migrants, an idea quickly seized upon by Rawlings and the NDC to mobilize zongos

throughout the country, despite little evidence that the statement had ever been made (Mitchell 2013, 26).

Busia's Aliens Compliance Order was followed by the Ghanaian Business (Promotion) Act of 1970, which was another attempt to "indiginize" businesses. This was also seen as an attack on Ewes, who were disproportionately being removed from the civil service (Chazan 1983, 226).

While the 1950s was a period of party formation along ideological and regional lines, by the 1970s the country had taken an explicitly ethnic turn. Ewes and Asantes were aligned in opposition to each other, a situation that remains today. Busia alienated not only Ewes but also Gas, Fantes, and northerners, groups that today are the core of NDC's support. In the next section, we will see that local state structures were introduced that have persisted to today. Yet, by the time of their creation, the settlement of Ghanaian towns and villages had already been changed, with enduring partisan affiliations for some ethnic groups.

Rawlings and the Modern Two-Party System from the 1980s

Rawlings's second coup came in 1981, and it began his two decades in power, first with a decade of military rule followed by one decade of constitutional government.¹¹ In the early 1980s his military government battled economic collapse, which was sweeping through much of sub-Saharan Africa. Foreign aid kept the regime afloat at a time of weak foreign investment and export performance.

By the late 1980s, however, political dissent was growing in response to regime suppression (Nugent 1995). In the face of domestic and international pressure, Ghana entered a period of constitutional reform in the late 1980s and early 1990s, culminating in the present democratic constitution of 1992. But although the economy had recovered by the time of political liberalization, recovery did not come with a resurgent capitalism. Rawlings's famous speeches regularly attacked Ghanaian capitalists for the country's situation, and few senior officials were drawn from the business community. Manufacturers, meanwhile, contributed

little to the economic recovery, but this also meant they were too small to be a threat to the government (Whitfield et al. 2015, 153). Therefore, when the Rawlings government initiated limited political reforms in the late 1980s, it was done from a position of incumbent strength rather than weakness. By the late 1980s the country's macroeconomy had improved, thanks to foreign aid but also the return of cocoa and gold exports. Writing around 1990–91, Herbst described Ghana's economic progress as "spectacular" in comparison to other African countries (Herbst 1993, 71). This is important for understanding why the resultant electoral system favored the emergence of a party system centered on two main parties rather than a multiparty system (Riedl 2015).

Political parties were banned during the drafting of a new constitution and only legalized in the months before the 1992 election. The Consultative Assembly created to draft a constitution was criticized for being "packed with PNDC [Provisional National Defence Council, the name of Rawlings's government] supporters and sympathizers" (Ayee 1994, 128) and was boycotted by the National Union of Ghana Students and the Ghana Bar Association. As a senior figure in the Rawlings government explained, "we could have resisted the [reform] pressures to a greater degree, but we took the decision at the time necessary to be able to control the process."¹² One of the legacies of Rawlings's control of the democratization process is that Ghana remains a *de facto* two-party system today because the constitution erected high barriers to entry for new parties. After the ban on parties was lifted, Rawlings's PNDC became today's NDC (Nugent 1995, 243). The Danquah-Busia tradition reemerged in the form of the NPP. It was symbolically significant that it chose as its party symbol the elephant, "the ultimate embodiment of wealth and power within Akan thought" (Nugent 1995, 224).

National and local elections since the 1990s have produced a fairly consistent pattern of allegiances. On one side sit the Asante and some smaller Akan groups. Opposed to them sit several groups: Ewes, alienated by Busia decades earlier and excited by

the prospect that Rawlings, “a son of the soil,” would channel resources their way; Muslims, alienated by Busia and treated as “strangers” in the south; and Akans such as the Fante, with deep memories of domination by the Asante Kingdom. These basic alignments survived into the 1990s, and they remain today.¹³

To show how important these historical patterns of party formation and cocoa migration are for political competitiveness today, I use migration data from 1970 to predict the presence of district-level competitiveness in recent elections. These data allow me to show the long-term effect of migration on electoral competitiveness. Data on ethnicity was not collected in the 1970 census, but I have collected data from that census that records whether or not a person was born outside their region of enumeration, and the data is coded at the district rather than regional level. The dependent variables (the outcomes I care about) are the margins between the NDC and NPP candidates in the 1996, 2000, and 2004 presidential elections. The explanatory variable (the thing affecting the outcome) is the district share of residents who were born in another region in 1970. I provide more detailed discussion and the full results in the appendix. The result is that districts with greater in-migration in 1970 are more electorally competitive today. This means a large migrant population in 1970 is associated with a highly competitive district twenty to thirty years later.

In summary, districts with the largest migrant populations in 1970 are the most politically competitive today. Cocoa made neighbors of distinct ethnoregional groups, some of which would find themselves politically opposed over time. This explains why highly competitive districts today can be found along a boomerang-shaped pattern around Kumasi and into the cocoa regions. It was this combination of cocoa migration and ethnoregional political alignments in the decades *before* the modern district assembly system that accounts for much of the present distribution of highly competitive districts. In the next section, I detail the political logic that led Rawlings to reform local state institutions in the aftermath of these long-term settlement patterns.

Local State Formation

Local state institutions in Ghana in the twentieth century first involved the removal of chiefs from local government and then the recentralization of power by the state through to the 1970s. This consisted of greater central control of local staffing, the frequent postponement and eventual abandonment of elections for local office, and creeping authoritarianism.¹⁴ When Rawlings came to power in a 1982 coup, local authorities were initially dissolved before central government elaborated new plans for—what was presented as—revolutionary acts of decentralization. Local Government Law 1988 (PNDC Law 207) converted the existing sixty-five councils into 110 district assemblies, which would be the highest local political authority and would be vested with deliberative, legislative, executive, and administrative powers (Ahwoi 2010, 46). Perhaps the most important innovation was that the head of the local government—the district chief executive—became subject to some local control. This was a significant move away from the previous system, with its nonlocal, centrally appointed district commissioner who governed without a local assembly. In that system, a retired assembly member recalled, “the government thinks for me” (author’s field notes, March 16, 2012). In the new system, however, with an elected representative body and an elected executive, local preferences over planning and distribution would be legally protected. This system was enshrined in the 1992 constitution, which provides for most functions and staff of central government to be decentralized to district assemblies.

Just as we saw in Rawlings’s reforms to the political system, his reforms to local government were carried out from a position of strength. The effect of this program of decentralization was not a weakening of the state but rather an expansion of state infrastructural power. This is why the preeminent scholar of Ghanaian decentralization, Joseph R. A. Ayee (1994, 127), described decentralization under Rawlings as “a mirage, myth and mask.” A senior Rawlings adviser made it clear that the intention was to

“obstruct demands for liberal democratic reforms.”¹⁵ Local government structures and the nonpartisan 1988 elections were used as part of the PNDC strategy to retain control of the country more generally. As the minister for decentralization revealed, “The local district elections of 1988 provided the incumbent party with experience overseeing elections and installed loyal regime agents at the district level.”¹⁶ Rawlings’s elaboration of the district assembly system was precisely the kind of advantage that made easy his decision to embrace elections in 1991–92: “The local government reforms enabled the PNDC to strike up working relations with the most influential power brokers at the community level. . . . Those who were elected to the district assemblies tended to be the very same figures who conventionally dominated community affairs” (Nugent 1995, 205). The district assembly system is thus rooted in attempts by Rawlings to consolidate power by extending the bounty of the state to local elites.

The system introduced by Rawlings in the 1980s remains largely intact decades later, making it the longest-lasting, most stable, and most locally responsive local government system in the history of independent Ghana. Beneath central government are ten small regional bodies that were designed to be weak in order to frustrate Asante collective power.¹⁷ Beneath these are 170 district assemblies, which are the key local governance authority.¹⁸ Within each district sit smaller urban or town councils, which in most cases perform little service. The bottom layer of the state comprises unit committees. Legislation from 1994 envisioned the operation of up to sixteen thousand of these fifteen-member unit committees to represent five hundred to one thousand people each, but today those involved admit “the structures are at best dysfunctional and at worst non-functional” (Ahwoi 2009, 6). Unit committees have practically no resources or authority and only voluntary membership, so it is not surprising that in many districts they either do not function or simply do not exist. To speak of key levels of the state, therefore, is to speak of the central government and the 170 district assemblies.

But the extent to which Rawlings transformed the local state landscape should not be overemphasized. Rawlings could not redraw the sociopolitical groups and their boundaries, whose memories had been forged over many years. In fact, it is worth asking why district boundaries have remained largely unchanged for decades. The answer lies in understanding the colonial roots of district boundaries and how these boundaries are protected today by local chiefs. During the colonial period, the British relied on chiefs not only for everyday maintenance of law and order, tax collection, and dispute settlement but also in crucial periods of institutional creation, like the formation of internal boundaries (Eriksen, Naustdalslid, and Schou 1999; Schiffer 1970; Arhin 1985a; Arhin 1985b; Bening 1999, 23). In 1907 the policy used when managing boundaries in the creation of Gold Coast Colony districts was to “re-adjust them as far as possible in conformity with the boundaries, so far as they exist, of the Divisions of the Native Headchiefs” (*Gold Coast Gazette* 1908, 101; also Bening 1999). Thus, subnational boundaries in the early twentieth century corresponded to British understanding of traditional domains. The importance of traditional boundaries in early state formation continued into the late colonial period. As the preeminent scholar on Ghana’s internal boundaries notes, “Native Authority boundaries of 1946 were to form the basic pattern of future administrative divisions after 1952, when modern local government was inaugurated in the country” (Bening 1978; also Greenwood 1957, 5; Berry 2001, 12).

Seven decades later, though governments have changed the number of districts over time, the boundaries made in the colonial period have stuck to a remarkable extent. This is largely because Ghanaian chiefs, despite being barred from holding local office, remain important protectors of community identities. This partly explains why boundary disputes today are almost always disputes between chiefs about the “true” extent of their respective domains (Ghana 2012; also Ayee 1994, 168). Any attempt by politicians to gerrymander boundaries today would fall flat on its face if such boundary changes were perceived to violate a chief’s area.

The larger point is that central governments from Nkrumah to Rawlings have been unable to remake local communities as they pleased. The system of local government in the 1980s and then multiparty electoral democracy in the 1990s encountered communities that had been long undergoing transformations due to migration and party alignments. Party formation preceded state formation, and levels of district-level competitiveness have remained remarkably stable.

This chapter has engaged with the possibility that political competitiveness at the local level might be the outcome, not the cause, of local state behavior. I pursued a historical institutional analysis that began with a simple research question: Why are some areas more competitive than others? Answering this question required me to examine not only the political alignments of major groups but also how these voters came to be spatially distributed as they are. I argued that cocoa migration was a long-term phenomenon and that it had long-lasting effects. By the 1970s, ethnoregional groups had begun to align behind new party traditions following decades of migration. Those settlement patterns, and the local state institutions that came after them, have remained persistent. It is thus the quasi-accidental dispersion of different social groups across the territory that explains why some districts are electorally competitive while others are not. Migration alone does not explain all the variance in Ghana's electoral competitiveness, and cocoa migration is just one part of the country's bigger migration picture. But some important factors in contemporary political behavior have deep roots. The presence of intense district-level party politics cannot be explained in terms of the behavior of district assemblies themselves.

2

Why Some Districts Fear Their Party Activists

On paper the chief executive is an administrator, not a czar, but in practice he has his hands in everything.

—Assembly member, Oran District (author's field notes, May 8, 2012)

In a typical district, it is rare to find a politician more beleaguered, overstretched, and underequipped than the district chief executive, the mayor-like figure in charge of each local government. To be sure, they have more resources than most in a district. No other local state actor has greater legal authority over budgets, official permissions, or personnel, and the prestigious office comes with an official residence, a car, and a chauffeur. But they do not have the administrative capacity to execute targeted income tax plans, complex welfare programs, or coordinated market policies (Nathan 2019). Their budgets are too small, and their staff too few. They do not possess information on their population's private lives, and they lack the means to access it. In the absence of tools to pursue programmatic public policies, politicians stay in power by providing personalistic services. The district chief executive is the most important figure in this picture. Their office sits at the

apex of the district. It is a point of convergence between supralocal institutions and the district populations those institutions purport to govern.

The result is district chief executives are pulled in opposite directions. From above, the central government relies on the chief executive to carry out the state's national development plan within the district. The national government develops five-year plans for the country as a whole as well as for each of the 170 district assemblies. These plans contain targets on things such as kilometers of roads paved, share of students in roofed schools, and the share of people in walking distance of clean water. The job of the district chief executive is to ensure that the government's targets for the district are met. Thus, the national government frequently refers to the district chief executive as "the president's man" in the district.

But from below, there are multiple and competing demands for the chief executive's attention; parents complain of a storm-damaged school roof; market traders demand new lightbulbs for the marketplace; mourners ask for help paying for a funeral; NGOs seek permission to carry out projects. But as we will see in this chapter, the greatest pressure from below comes from activists of the chief executive's own party. In contrast to the view of district chief executives as "the president's men," they are seen as "our men" from the perspective of district party activists. In this case, "our" does not refer to the district public as a whole but rather the small slice of the district public who expects to benefit from partisan links to the chief executive. He is the supply side of patronage. The chief executive balances pressures from above and below. Inevitably he will prioritize some over others and ready himself for the scorn of the overlooked.¹ The aim of this chapter is to explain how electoral competitiveness renders some chief executives "the president's men" while others become "our man" in local government. In electorally competitive districts, the national party selects for the office of chief executive "our man"—figures who will be very responsive to patronage-seeking party activists.

In relatively less competitive districts, however, the national party places less emphasis on selecting a chief executive who will be locally responsive. Instead, they select a “president’s man”—a figure who will faithfully implement the national development plans of the central government. The central government does this in full expectation that the party’s own district-level activists will vent their rage but also with the knowledge that the party can afford to irritate some activists where elections are not close.

The data in this chapter come from semistructured interviews and ethnographic observation. I divide the chapter into chief executives in highly and less competitive districts to draw out the different political environments in which chief executives found themselves (see table I.1 of case studies in the introduction). I explain what chief executives did to stay in office, but I also consider their paths to power to be equally illuminating. To frame the discussion, I begin with some general characteristics of district chief executives. Most of this data comes from a survey of chief executives I conducted. How I gathered that data is explained in the online appendix available on my website.

Central Control over Local Government

Although Ghana is supposedly decentralized, the central government retains important instruments of control over local governments. First, and most important, the president may dismiss a chief executive. This affords the national governing party the power to control districts even in opposition strongholds. From 2009 to 2012, one in five districts replaced their chief executive, which meant that central government threats to use this power were credible.² The president is also the sole authority empowered to nominate a chief executive, and the president appoints 30 percent of a district’s assembly members. Confirming the president’s nominee for chief executive requires a two-thirds vote of the district assembly, which means that the governing party need only win about half of the *elected* assembly seats in order to confirm the president’s nominee.

The second source of the center's control comes through control of staffing. The constitution says that "persons in the service of local government shall be subject to the effective control of local authorities."³ But the Local Government Service Act 2003 (Act 656) allows the Local Government Service to appoint staff. The central government thus hires, fires, pays, and rotates most public workers in a district. I collected data on the size of district staff. I asked districts to tell me how many staff work at the district assembly and of those how many are locally hired and locally paid. Across all districts the median percentage of staff that are paid centrally versus locally is 78 (also Brierley 2020). The only staff that are locally controlled are those that are hired by a district and paid with local taxes. These are low-skilled workers only, such as cleaners, security, and drivers. Their jobs are one of the most important sources of patronage over which a chief executive has explicit control.

The third source of the center's control over local state officials comes through control of public policy. Plans have existed to decentralize most government departments since the beginning of the district assembly system in the late 1980s. The past two decades have seen not only failure to implement legislated decentralization but also even changes in the list of departments to be decentralized. At the time of writing, major departments that are deconcentrated (not decentralized) include the Ghana Education Service and the Ghana Health Service (Ahwoi 2009; Ahwoi 2010; Crook and Manor 1998; Ayee 1994). "Deconcentrated" means there is an office in every district, but each local office is directly under the relevant central ministry rather than the local district assembly. For example, in the education sector, control over manpower (teachers) and policy (curricula) rests with the central government. But when a school is to be built, it is up to a district to choose the location and select a contractor.⁴

The fourth source of the center's control is fiscal. The most obvious form this takes is the reliance of districts on funds from the central government. But there is more to it. Figure 2.1

illustrates the central-local relationship using monthly district assembly budget data. There are a few things to note. First, focus on the top (solid) line, which shows median funds given to the districts by the central government. Compare it to the broken line running through the bottom of the graph, which shows median locally raised revenues. The simple picture is that districts rely far more on central government funds than on their own locally raised funds. Second, note the dotted line running roughly between the top and bottom lines. This shows actual expenditure on capital projects by district assemblies. The picture is again clear: locally raised revenue is never close to being enough to fund infrastructure projects. Third, note the inconsistent flow of central government funding (and thus capital expenditure). Often there are lags of two months between disbursements, but in this particular year districts had to wait almost one-third of the year before getting sizable funding from the central government.

With capital scarcity and credit constraints, contractors often cease public works and move to private projects until significant funds have arrived in the district bank account once again. This is especially the case where contractors can substitute private for public projects, given the explosion of semiurban and rural mansions being built by Ghanaians currently living abroad or in Accra. In addition, transfers are substantially reduced by the time they reach the district assembly's bank account, as they are often ear-marked for expenditure on programs decided by the central government. Both the slow release of funds and their heavy deductions are major sources of complaint among district assembly actors.⁵

It is important to understand how fiscal dependence on Accra is not experienced as a mere accounting headache. Rather, district actors often understand it as a sort of politically produced scarcity. It is not the result of formal policy or constitutional order but is rather the result of a *de facto* political order in which the Leviathan is all-consuming and tosses mere morsels out to subnational units.⁶ The National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP) provides a useful example. In 2006 the government launched the

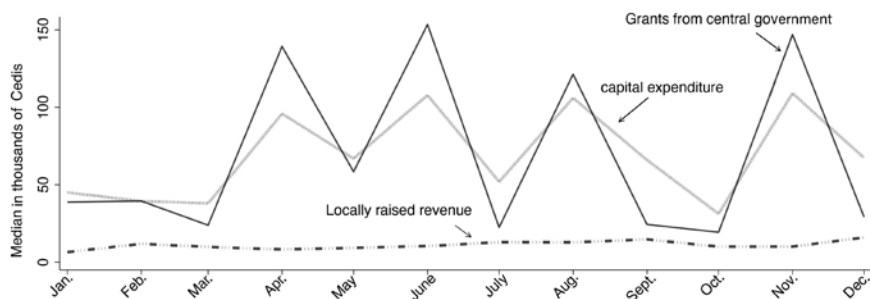


FIGURE 2.1. Reliance of districts on central government funding. Graph shows monthly medians for 140 districts. *Source:* Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development.

World Bank–funded NYEP in order to provide paid internships and professional training to about two hundred thousand people per year (World Bank 2012b). A major part of this program is the Youth in Sanitation module, which employs tens of thousands of young adults, mostly as street cleaners. The central government contracted with Zoomlion Limited, a major private contractor, to clean the main road in every town throughout the country. The central government pays 500 cedis (approximately \$300) monthly for each worker. Money is deducted at source from the District Assembly Common Fund, which is the most important—and constitutionally protected—source of funding for local governments. Of this amount, however, a whopping 80 percent is kept as a management fee, which means a sanitation worker receives approximately \$2 per day, while Zoomlion earns upwards of \$10 million per month.⁷ In 2013, as workers complained of wages that had not materialized and of equipment that was either deficient or absent altogether, reports emerged linking a former head of the program (now a member of parliament) as well as a former minister and his senior civil servant with contracts that proved hugely profitable for the private contractor (*Joy News* 2013c).

This is just one example of how local state actors experience the central government as a producer of scarcity. When the center enters into contracts on their behalf but without their participation or knowledge, local actors are denied distributional opportunities. When the center takes from their core development fund, districts already resource-poor are deprived further. When workers do not get paid and equipment does not appear, districts are helpless. When they learn how central elites benefit from these contracts, their helplessness is married with frustration. The political production of scarcity is a daily reminder for subnational actors that even if they climb the heights of local power, the national cake is first consumed in Accra.

Thus, the central government retains four instruments it can use to control district chief executives: power over political appointments, power over staffing, control of policy, and fiscal control. But although a system in which district chief executives are beholden to the central government was precisely the aim of Rawlings's 1980s reforms, the impotence of local state actors should not be overstated. The central government is reliant on local actors to implement policy and maintain order. There are three notable sources of local state autonomy.

The first source is distributional control over projects and jobs. In most cases the money for district infrastructure projects comes from the central government. Once the money arrives, however, it is up to the district chief executive to choose the location and contractor for the project. This includes projects falling under both decentralized and nondecentralized departments. Whether the project is to build a school or a market, the twin distributional prizes of site location and contractor are the prerogative of the chief executive.

The location of a project becomes a site of political struggle as assembly members, party notables, building contractors, and even traditional authorities organize and lobby to "bring development" to their neighborhood. Atop this mass of small-town elites struggling for access to the distributional spigot sits the chief executive,

for whom the power to award contracts presents a major opportunity to extract rents, reward loyalists, and marginalize opponents. In one district the presiding member told me the chief executive is “running the place like it is his personal business,” collecting a percentage of every contract. But as we will see, it seems just as likely (if not more) that these resources are used to maintain local power networks.

The other distributional power enjoyed by the chief executive concerns jobs. This has two variants. One is low-level staff directly employed by the district, who can be hired, paid, and fired by the district. Data that I collected show that, on average, 20 to 25 percent of total district staff are locally paid, which also means locally hired and fired. Typical jobs include driving or servicing district vehicles, cleaning the assembly building, and protecting the assembly building at night.⁸ The second category of jobs over which districts have some control is low-skill labor employed through the NYEP. Although the NYEP is centrally controlled, district NYEP offices hand out low-skill jobs to party activists. At many district offices, the line of people waiting outside the NYEP office is second only to that for the chief executive. Securing one of these low-skill jobs is tantamount to a right for party activists. As is often the case, this rule is best observed when it is violated. In a news report, National Democratic Congress (NDC) activists expressed anger at their district chief executive for failing to use NYEP (since renamed the Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Agency) to help them: “Footsoldiers of the ruling NDC in the Akwapim South District Assembly are on the heels of the [NDC] District Chief Executive, Afari Djan, for what they described as neglect, after winning the general elections. The footsoldiers are accusing the DCE of *refusing to recruit them* into government employment programmes, such as the Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Agency (GYEEDA) among others” (The Chronicle 2013, emphasis added).

The second way in which a district exerts autonomy from the central government is through the center’s reliance on local

actors for information. All types of local information—policy preferences, internal disputes, project performance, factional organizing—are passed upward through the channels of the governing party. Information is moved vertically and horizontally through dense party networks via phone calls, radio shows, funerals, and weddings. Through this dense party network, central actors construct an image of the interests, intentions, and ideas of the towns and villages beneath them. Party networks connect streets, neighborhoods, village, and towns to regional and national institutions of rule. Party networks make legible the terrain of governance (Sigman 2022).

The third form of local autonomy is punitive power over bureaucrats. Although most district civil servants are controlled by the central government, a chief executive with a modicum of political clout communicates their preference for this technocrat over that one through the channels of state or party hierarchy. At my first general assembly meeting in one of my case study districts, the chief executive publicly warned his technocrats in front of an audience of local journalists and assembly members, “I don’t have the power to sack heads of department, but I do have one power: I can seek your removal” (author’s field notes, April 30, 2012). I found chief executives mostly tried to control bureaucrats with constant threats of rotation to another district.⁹

Who Are District Chief Executives?

The typical chief executive is a fifty-year-old man who is a son of the soil: 92 percent are from the district in which they serve. Their backgrounds were most often in the education sector (see figure 2.2), and about one-third have a master’s degree or equivalent. The dominance of the public sector in elite life is made even clearer when we combine those with backgrounds in education, civil service, security and medicine, which account for 71 percent of all backgrounds. This is similar to middle-class and professional people in many developing countries, in which employment in small towns and cities away from the capital usually comes

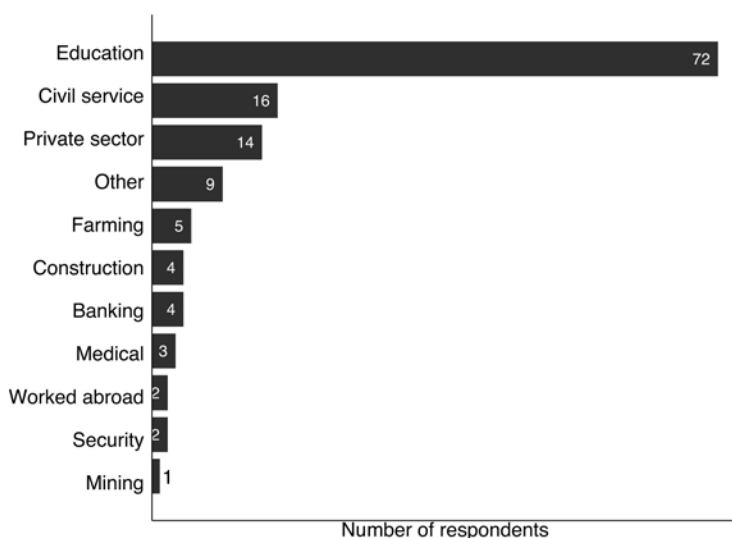


FIGURE 2.2. Professional backgrounds of district chief executives.

through public bodies. While half of respondent chief executives once served as an assembly member, almost none had served as a member of parliament. This reveals that ambitious chief executives aspire to become MPs but never the other way around.

The office of chief executive can be lucrative, but one must first be nominated by the president. The most important criterion is a solid background in the party's district branch. An aspiring chief executive must be an active party member. Being active not only means one has earned the right to be nominated, but it crucially also means the local party network knows the nominee and trusts the person will govern in the interests of the party—that is, the candidate will be “our man” rather than “the president’s man.” At the beginning of my fieldwork, people smiled when I asked if it is possible for a nonparty person to be nominated. It was a knowing smile of embarrassed sympathy on my behalf. I quickly learned it was a silly question, but its very silliness revealed how unthinkable it was that a nonparty person could be nominated to be a chief executive.

Winning the nomination and the subsequent confirmation vote in the district assembly leaves many in financial debt (Asante and Kunnath 2018; Daddieh and Bob-Milliar 2012). Informants explained that a candidate for chief executive should “host people well” by giving a little to a lot of people as a sign of his intentions. They should be able to articulate the concerns of the district to outside audiences and also be able to lobby government as well as nongovernment agencies, including international donors. Thus, a candidate for chief executive should be able to “speak well.” This is meant literally in the sense of being well spoken, particularly in English, as well as knowing how to speak to dignitaries including traditional authorities, which requires knowledge of customary practices. One disgruntled assembly woman of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) complained that the NDC district chief executive “speaks well, but that is all I can say of him.” In other words, he is at least educated and respectful in formal engagements. Since districts welcomed the presence of international NGOs bringing in resources, “speaking well” also meant an ability to speak the language of the aid and NGO community. This explains why a presiding member introduced himself to me by offering unsolicited the news that “we are practicing good governance here” (author’s field notes, April 30, 2012). In conversation he peppered his speech with development jargon such as “inclusive,” “best practice,” “stakeholder,” and “capacitate.”

In my survey, 95 percent of respondent chief executives reported borrowing money or using personal savings for “small favors” for constituents, such as school fees. For chief executives without much wealth, small amounts of money are necessary to ease the process of nomination and confirmation. I was told by one head civil servant that the district’s chief executive had taken out a bank loan to cover his campaign debts and that “people who love him” continue to help him financially while in office. Indeed, people frequently explained a chief executive using public money as related to paying off campaign-related

debts rather than naked personal enrichment. One opposition politician complained to me about the chief executive’s inflation of a contract to build speed bumps through town. Rather than describe the chief executive as a pure thief, however, he described how the money was being used to repay the chief executive’s financiers. This speaks to how actors often understood “corruption” in institutional rather than personal terms. This is also a departure from academic literature on the political economy of development, as well as policy literature on good governance, in which politicians are scorned for their venality, immorality, and larceny (Hope and Chikulo 2000; Campbell and Grane 2017). It is not my contention that politicians in Ghanaian local government are paragons of virtue and integrity. Rather, and more simply, it is that we may better understand their behavior if we come to see it as embedded in the political economy of government survival.

Having learned about the relationship between the local and central governments and about the office of district chief executive, we can now learn how the balance of pressures faced by the chief executives—“the president’s man” or “our man”—is affected by how electorally competitive local politics is. We will begin with how chief executives in highly competitive districts are exposed to demands for patronage. Table 2.1 provides a snapshot reminder of the districts where I conducted research.

Table 2.1. Chief executives in case study districts

District	Chief executive	Competitive	Vote NDC
Koko	Kofi Adu	Yes	49
Aman	Abenaa Boafo	Yes	53
Oran	George Biyo	No	18
Guba	Trust Oteng	No	24
Braka	Christian Ofori	No	35
Lamda	Yaw Adofo	No	21

Eye of the Storm: Chief Executives in Competitive Districts

Several months after a president begins a four-year term, the government releases the names of the nominees to become chief executives for the country's 170 district assemblies. By the time that happens, however, local branches of the governing party send the name of their preferred local nominee to the capital city. After some vetting, that person typically emerges as the president's official nominee shortly thereafter.

In the first of my competitive case studies, Kofi Adu was Koko District chief executive. But he was not the district's first chief executive under the NDC administration in power since 2008. The first Koko District chief executive had been removed in early 2011 against a backdrop of complaints by NDC partisans that he was not doing enough to hurt the NPP. His comments to the media upon his dismissal were telling: "I only ever worked tirelessly and did everything for the party. If I have been fired it is because I am not able to do the job, and I accept that. But I gave everything for the party and the district."¹⁰

He added that he had learned of his dismissal while donating some items and money to an NDC party office. It is noteworthy that he, or the reporter, thought to include that information and that he framed his time in office in terms of service to the party rather than solely the district or the country. That an elected representative of an office that is legally nonpartisan would feel so comfortable telling the media that he did "everything for the party" speaks volumes about the overlap between party and state in the country.

Within a few months of the dismissal of the first chief executive, Kofi Adu emerged as the nominee to fill the vacancy, but his path to power was to prove especially rocky. After the president has nominated a person to be the district chief executive, district assembly members vote to confirm or reject the nominee in a secret ballot. There is only one candidate, making it an up-or-down vote, and the nominee can only be voted upon a maximum of three

times before they must stand down. In the first two rounds of voting, Adu failed to secure the two-thirds needed for confirmation. Failure in the third round would compel him to withdraw.

The confirmation process became violent sometime around the second vote. NPP figures alleged that the NDC brought in “macho men” to intimidate the NPP assembly members. Some assembly members left the premises with hatchet wounds after clashes. Such tension and political violence was not unfamiliar in the district, as violence occurred around the 2004 and 2008 general elections. At a graduation ceremony I attended weeks later on the assembly premises, a policeman told the university students gathered, “I’ve served under five chief executives, and they’ve all said the past opposition treated us so badly so now is our turn. Then election violence begets election violence” (author’s field notes, July 24, 2012).

Though the voting had turned violent, Kofi Adu was eventually confirmed. How the voting impasse was resolved is not clear. Some attributed it to a realization within the NPP that without a chief executive the district would receive no central government funds, a situation that would benefit no one. Others attributed it to the intervention of the leading chief, while some familiar with the negotiations told me small amounts of money were paid to a few NPP members to switch their vote. However it was resolved, the conflict is useful because the violence conveys the extraordinary anxiety experienced by elites and nonelites around transitions in and out of power.

On the morning of the second vote, rumors spread that NPP assembly members would try to deny the assembly a quorum. Since President John Atta Mills of the NDC would only nominate NDC figures, it seemed obvious to me that an NDC chief executive—*some* NDC chief executive—would eventually be confirmed. But to the NDC activists in Koko District, it was entirely plausible that the NPP could lose the presidency yet still thwart the NDC. For Kofi Adu’s supporters, the possibility that NPP assembly members would abstain and refuse the assembly

a quorum was not just outrageous for reasons of procedural democracy but more so because, after investing themselves in getting the NDC into office, the behavior of the NPP assembly members threatened their ultimate enjoyment of the fruits of power.

Kofi Adu's path to power had not been smooth. As the months passed after that tumultuous confirmation process, it became clear that his tenure would not be much easier. Although it was common for a chief executive to deal with party matters on a daily basis, Adu's experience was saturated in local party politics. He complained to me about the intensive or even invasive nature of the job. He felt exposed to the unending stream of demands for favors. To get a sense of how party life infused district government, and after several weeks of visits, I spent the entirety of July 24, 2012, in his presence. We had agreed that I could attend every meeting and that I would not quote conversations between identified individuals.

Most of the day was spent in his office, which was large and darkly lit. Thick drapes hung ceiling to floor, blocking out most natural light. Multiple air conditioning units kept the room too cold even for my Irish blood. A small fridge sat in the corner with bottled water and juice for guests, and above it was a small tea set with a doily set in a large plastic bowl used for washing hands before meals. Several large, deep, and lavish leather couches lined the walls. The glass jalousie windows never formed a seal, so the room's two air conditioners ran in a constant battle against the heat and humidity seeping in from outside. The harmattan—dry and dusty Saharan winds that blow through West Africa—had passed months ago, leaving reddish dust on the drapes, couches, and dark carpet. Pictures of President Mills and of Chief Executive Adu sat high on the wall. The chief executive's desk was solid wood, and on its front panel was painted "KD:DCE:3," which was an inventory code for district, the office, and the desk itself. The desk of a chief executive usually swims in official documents, but Adu preferred to work from one of the couches and its long glass coffee table.

A long trail of people had followed the chief executive into his office upon his arrival. I sat beside him on the couch, where we remained for several hours. With the radio on in the background, the chief executive went between his mobile phone and conversations in front of him, each interaction lasting no more than two minutes. Staff brought documents for him to sign while he spoke to callers and visitors. His secretary arrived with water. Her office was adjacent and doubled as the waiting room. She had no phone or files—only an unusable desktop computer she said had viruses. All files appeared to be in the chief executive's immediate possession. Political talk shows on the radio descended into shouting. More midlevel staff arrived for his signature. His mobile phone hopped as visitors streamed in and out. A cocoa farmer complained of being ejected from his land because the owner found out he was NDC. A market trader complained about not getting access to lockable stores in the market. An old lady came for help with her grandchildren's school fees. By 1:33 p.m. three separate meetings were unfolding at the same time.

The chief executive was clearly overburdened, rubbing his temples and closing his eyes as he tried to troubleshoot a multitude of problems big and small. The finance officer walked in, talking loudly on his mobile phone as though he were alone, as the chief executive engaged in two conversations with constituents while trying to catch up on official documents as the radio played national news in the background. The head civil servant dropped in. A young man with a university rejection letter arrived. The chief executive's daughter called from boarding school. A man from a nearby zongo arrived to complain about his toilet. A middle-aged man and teenage boy came for help with school fees. The district assembly's presiding member arrived to discuss ongoing building projects. By 2:15 p.m. no less than six separate visiting parties sat on couches on either side of the chief executive.

By 3:00 p.m. the call to prayer could be heard from the nearby mosque. The chief executive excused himself to visit the bank to send money to his daughter. He returned quickly and dealt with a

large group of disabled children who had come to apply for social welfare assistance, which would give them school fees and pocket money. The chief executive took a fistful of beaten two-cedi notes (about \$1 each) from his pocket and passed them out for the children to buy chicken. Two prominent members of the Muslim community arrived. Their elite status was discernible by how little dust surrounded the rims of their footwear. The presiding member returned to talk.

At 4:16 p.m. the chief executive had no one in the room but me for the first time that day. He said he normally goes to bed about 11:00 p.m. and wakes at 4:00 a.m. and that today was a quieter day for visitors. His first phone call had been at 6:00 a.m. He said people also visit him at his official residence, but the phone calls never stop. Visitors to the house include party people as well as businessmen or religious leaders. With such a concentration of power in his hands, his personal blessing is required on a wide range of party and district activities. "But can you not turn the phone off?" I asked. Another polite smile, for it should have been obvious. "If I do, it is not the ordinary man in the district who will give me trouble—it is my party people! If I do not pick [take] the call, the next morning they will be on to the castle [Osu Castle, the seat of government in Accra at the time]!"

At 4:30 p.m. we walked a short distance to an empty classroom in a nearby primary school for an NDC party meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to organize for the upcoming general election. As participants slowly filed in, word began to spread through texts and phone calls that something was happening in Accra. The meeting was off before it started. By 4:40 p.m. news had spread that President Mills was dead. We made a slow walk back to the chief executive's office. I sat with him, senior staff, and local party members and listened to national radio. The sound of the *odurugya*, a traditional flute, was heard on radios throughout the assembly premises and from cellphones on the street outside. Among the Akan, the *odurugya* is played upon news of a person's death and at their funeral. The instrument provided a song of

mourning and grief that provided the musical backdrop for visitors now in shock in the chief executive's office.

More than any Ghanaian president in living memory, Mills was respected as a mostly decent, incorruptible old lawyer. He was the NDC's hope for another four years of dominating national and local institutions. Should the NDC lose the presidency, all NDC chief executives would be removed, and NPP people would take their place. For many NDC chief executives, already in their fifties, it would be the end of their political careers. Senior civil servants began filing into the room to join the mourning and share a drink. Should the NDC lose, many civil servants would be rotated to other districts. They would not lose their jobs, and some would even welcome the opportunity to move to another town or city. An old couple arrived and downed some gin. When they heard the flute, they said, they knew it was true. On the station Adom FM, callers wailed. The chief executive was on the phone throughout. Moans of "Oh, Prof!" and "sixty-eight years old in three days" rang around the room. By 6:00 p.m. the radio was turned up, and NDC figures from the earlier party meeting arrived, in greater numbers this time and in tears.

The mourning reached a level of professionalism and intensity when two stout middle-aged women entered to wail and thrash about the floor. They occasionally stopped to interject forcefully into a nearby conversation, then returned to a highly performative crying. By 7:00 p.m. we had moved to the personal residence of the chief executive, a house of about fifteen hundred square feet set on grounds about six times that size and surrounded by a high cement wall. We sat in the living room watching national TV coverage, as the government in Accra prepared for Vice-President John Mahama to be immediately sworn in. The living room was like the chief executive's own office, dark and obscenely cold. The same deep and opulent couches were there. The decor was a West African chic seen in elite homes in Nollywood movies: white tiles, minimal decoration, leather couches, and a large TV. The wailing continued, buttressed on either side by people complaining about

former president and NDC founder Jerry Rawlings and the in-party spat he had with Mills. With the general election just a few months away, conversations had turned from sentiments of sadness to explicit political strategy.

At 8:13 p.m., less than four hours after news of Mills's death had filtered through, Mahama was the new president of Ghana. The TV coverage drew to a close as did the evening, but the chief executive's phone never stopped. A day that promised to be unremarkable for the chief executive turned out to be hugely memorable. I was struck by the personal nature of his power: how the institution of the local state is so concentrated in the body of one person. The chief executive took calls and visitors constantly because he is the crucial bottleneck in local governance. To his officers he delegated tasks but never power. The chief executive *is* the local state. Everything flows through him. In this sense he is the quintessential "Big Man," the key figure in a patronage network in which personal relationships are what matter most. He answered to many people and was acutely aware of this. He felt hounded, not by "the voters" in some broad sense but rather by activists from his own party specifically. Visitors streaming through his office were not simply "locals" but rather an exclusive group (i.e., NDC members). Party life was inseparable from district governance, and the chief executive had to carefully attend to even the smallest concern from a fellow partisan.

This was characteristic of incumbent life in highly competitive districts. Local and national party elites knew that the parliamentary and district assembly seats in Koko District were sites of fierce competition. Turning people away from his office was not an option for Kofi Adu. Elite and nonelite NDC supporters alike understood the purpose of political participation was to control government, not to share it. Adu did not expect to be insulated from the unending demands for patronage. He understood that distribution to the group that put him in power was the point of government.

In the other of my two competitive cases, Aman District chief executive Abenaa Boafo had a farming background and was active

in the NDC's constituency branch. Because of her background and seniority within the local party, her path to power was conventional. She was formerly the party treasurer and was well aware of the problems activists could cause, especially in a closely fought district. Her strategy was to build their interests into her work: "Controlling your people is not hard so long as you listen to them. In some other places these activists think they are not getting enough from their party in power" (author's field notes, July 31, 2012). So as long as she remained responsive to them, she encountered no problems. Because she was attentive to the demands of local partisans, her time in power was smooth. The waiting room outside her office was always full, and among active NDC members in the community I found few complaints about her.

Sheltered from the Storm:

Chief Executives in Less Competitive Districts

In highly competitive Koko District, Chief Executive Kofi Adu was hounded by the appeals of activists. By contrast, as we will see, in less competitive districts chief executives were better able to withstand appeals for patronage. The conflict between activists and their party is most often intense during the appointment of a new district chief executive. Activists want the president to nominate a person who is "known to them," by which they mean a person who is part of the local party network. If the president does *not* nominate a person favored by the activists, the aggrieved partisans take to the streets and the airwaves, and they accuse party elites of "forgetting about them." In other words, there is an informal institution—an unwritten rule—that party faithful toil for the party and will benefit when their party wins. A president who fails to nominate the activists' chosen candidate is accused of violating this norm. Because of this backlash to an unpopular nominee, some candidates do not make it past the nomination stage. But for those who win confirmation and become district chief executives, the hardest part is over. They enjoy relative insulation from

their party's activists. They become able, in other words, to be *less* responsive to demands for patronage.

This book began with the story of Felicia in Oran District. She was angered because District Chief Executive George Biyo was ignoring her requests for help (i.e., patronage), despite the fact that she and Biyo were NDC members. Oran District is the first of my less competitive cases. In the most recent presidential election, the NDC candidate received 18 percent of the vote share in Oran, with the NPP gaining the clear majority. But the NDC candidate won nationally, so at the time of research this NPP stronghold was governed by the NDC's George Biyo. He had an unconventional and controversial background because he had switched from the NPP to the NDC only a few years earlier. When such figures become chief executives without emerging through the party's local apparatus, we observe distrust and animosity between them and party activists, on whom they had not relied for their position. A primary candidate explained to me that "90 percent of chief executives toe the government line, but some are more liberal minded and will look out for themselves. Some are not true party loyalists and manage to somehow get into the party." Chief executives who do not "toe the government line" are seen as fraudsters who have broken into a club, since party actors cannot rely on them to put the party (i.e., the partisans) first. An inability to count on a chief executive to do the "right thing" was a major cause of concern among activists. This was the case with the Oran District chief executive Biyo, who even had the NDC constituency chairman—the main local party official—arrested for allegedly operating his sandstone business without a license. NDC party officials publicly chastised the chief executive for having "no respect for party members," to whom he owed little.

In Lamda District, where the NDC got about 20 percent of the vote in presidential elections, Chief Executive Yaw Adofo also weathered a storm from within his own party. What struck me was how relatively little animus there was toward the (NDC) chief executive from the (NPP) opposition. By the time I arrived in Lamda

District, my conversations with opposition party officials—which meant the NPP during my fieldwork—had become formulaic. Asking how the chief executive was treating the opposition would elicit ten minutes of complaining. Asking how the opposition had been treated while the NPP was in power would elicit ten minutes on NPP’s bipartisan behavior. But Lamda District was different. In my first meeting with a senior NPP official, I was told that Adofa “helps the opposition” (i.e., NPP) and that the NPP had few complaints. They understood that Chief Executive Adofa had to look after NDC interests, but they also felt that projects were coming to their (NPP) neighborhoods and that NPP contractors had not been cut off from district projects to the extent they had been in other districts. Because opposition parties in Ghana are blocked from state resources, his tone was out of sync with the usual litany of complaints by NPP officials. He said repeatedly that the chief executive’s party was not much of a problem in the district. The bigger problem was the slow release of funds from the central government and weak district tax collection. I asked if NPP contractors had suffered under the current chief executive, and again he said no. Problems faced by contractors had more to do with arrears than partisanship. He made this point repeatedly only because I asked repeatedly.

Chief Executive Adofa introduced himself to me as an NDC activist of about twenty years. This was his first time in public office, and he was keen to show me all of the initiatives he had undertaken. He had memorialized these achievements in an official district calendar. Each month was adorned with images of new school buildings, refurbished public toilets, or an upgraded local road. In the waiting room outside his office and on walls throughout the two-story district building were signs with the chief executive’s email address and a promise of a response within three days. Like many NDC supporters in this part of the country, he was born locally, but his father’s roots were in the north. Even though his mother was of the region, his mixed lineage set him apart in this majority-Asante district.

Some NDC activists attributed his unfaithful governance to this mixed allegiance.

The NDC put forward Yaw Adofo's name in late 2010 or early 2011. Since he was "not known" in the area, even NDC figures were alleged to have been suspicious of him. What were his motives? To whom did he owe his career? Could he be trusted to govern for the party? Is he actually Asante? Some NDC activists alleged to me that he was formerly an NPP man, that he had connections at "the castle," and that he had an uncle in the upper echelons of the party. Both NPP and NDC supporters claimed that upon his uncle's death, Adofo took his uncle's name and became a low-level chief, ultimately using this royal name to lobby the central government for the chief executive nomination. Many claimed that at the time of his nomination he was actually living in Accra, the significance of which people thought was so obvious as to require no explanation even to an outsider. Not being "local" was a blow to his character, and it signaled to activists that he might not be responsive to them. Because of the unease about this "unknown" nominee, the regional minister telephoned the district assembly's government appointees to remind them that they served at the pleasure of the national government and would be expected to confirm the president's nominee.

Yaw Adofo's path to power was shrouded in distrust and suspicion among even his copartisans, and his time in power was little different. By the time I arrived, NDC partisans were furious. Stories circulated among NDC activists that Adofo had been "building houses for himself," implying that he filled his own stomach without thinking of those who put him in power. By May 2011 the district was buzzing with the news that Adofo had slapped the local police commander. While Ghana's police are often corrupt, they are rarely seen as partisan. The police commander was a local notable in his own right, so the image of this confrontation speaks to how Adofo was insulated from local power. Weeks later activists were upset to hear Adofo publicly describe the NDC as "a party for all," as it was a clear weakening of their privileged

position. In July disgruntled NDC activists told me that Adofo's passport had been seized because he was "planning to run away."

What was notable about his time in office was not only the constant intraparty struggles but also his ability to withstand such pressures. NDC members in the district assembly put forward motions of no confidence in the (NDC) chief executive. These were attempts by members of the governing party to remove *their own* party's head of local government. But none of these motions carried because the opposition NPP would not support the chief executive's removal. From above, the national government reminded the 30 percent of assembly members that were appointed that they served at the pleasure of the president, and so Adofo would not be removed. These government-appointed assembly members included the former and then party secretaries for the local NDC branch. But the national government threatened even them with immediate removal from the assembly. NDC party figures in the district appeared frustrated with what little leverage they appeared to have over Chief Executive Adofo.

Yaw Adofo is an example of a chief executive whose bipartisanship earns them a reputation as an essentially disloyal figure. The idea that bipartisanship contravened the basic point of controlling government approached an informal rule across my cases. So widely understood was this informal rule that some of my contacts thought I was naive to even ask about it. As a senior civil servant explained to me, the idea that the opposition would make life hard for a government was to miss the point entirely: governance is zero-sum, and those out of power can do little to stop you. The only question is what your own people can do to you. A strong chief executive is one who is insulated from their own party activists.

In Braka District, the third of my four less competitive cases, Chief Executive Christian Ofori was a retired teacher who had faced little opposition in securing the nomination and then the requisite assembly votes to get into power. However, like the Lamda District chief executive, Adofo, Ofori was also portrayed

as nonindigenous and thus as someone of questionable allegiance. Although he made it through the confirmation process, his time in office was marked by a public dispute with the main local chief. At a press conference the chief called on the president to fire him. The chief executive, he complained, "treats the chief and elders with contempt. He boastfully tells people around him that he owes his position to the President and the Regional Minister and not the chief." The implication was that although he (the chief) was the main local power broker, by nominating Ofori the president had ignored the locally preferred (i.e., the chief's preferred) candidate. The chief's letter continued with specific complaints:

During the last district assembly elections, the chief executive was seen moving from house to house distributing gifts and campaigning on tribal lines. . . . An old lady even came to my house one early morning to inform me that the chief executive came to his [*sic*] house to campaign against one of the candidates that he was a northerner and therefore should not be voted for. We also had reports that he threatened to deny some villages of projects if they voted for particular candidates. . . . Scholarships from the [education] GetFund are awarded to only the favourites of the chief executive. The traditional council is not consulted nor asked to nominate beneficiaries.¹¹

Note how the final complaint is not about the chief executive's abuse of power but rather the chiefs' exclusion from power ("nor asked to nominate beneficiaries"). The root of the animus between the chief and the chief executive was not clear to me or even to people I knew. I wondered how long Chief Executive Ofori could last in office having landed on the wrong side of the key local chief. Even after local religious leaders had mediated and "it was agreed that he pacify *nananom* [elders] with two sheep," the chief executive is alleged to have never followed through. By the end of my fieldwork, however, I was surprised to find that it was the Braka chief who appeared to have lost the struggle. Regional chiefs had begun to disassociate themselves from his behavior,

and higher-level traditional authority figures had issued a caution. He backed down. Speculation about the real cause of his retreat would not be of much use here, but it is significant that a chief executive could so aggravate the main local notable without dire consequences. I understood the chief executive's victory, such as it was, as owing to the little leverage the chief had over him.

In my final less competitive case, Guba District had no chief executive for the entirety of 2012. Trust Oteng had once occupied the office, but he did not last long. The schoolteacher had been one of seven candidates and was not even the favorite. The NDC's regional party chairman had personally intervened on behalf of Oteng, whom he knew through church. His loss of power interested me because it did not fit with the pattern I was discerning, in which chief executives in less competitive districts were better insulated from the demands of activists. In the case of Guba District, a chief executive was removed in a noncompetitive district. Closer inspection proved useful, however, because it revealed the importance of supralocal elites in district politics. The story of Oteng and Guba District illustrates the utility of studying "influential cases" (Gerring 2007, 108). These are cases that would appear to invalidate a theory but upon closer inspection actually lend strength to it.

NDC activists told me Trust Oteng was removed because he was not responsive to them. If true, this would insert a wrinkle into the pattern I observed in which only chief executives in highly competitive districts were likely to lose their jobs. Upon closer inspection, however, the particulars of land and royal politics in Guba provided evidence that Oteng likely lost his job due to powers from above rather than below. Oteng became involved in a dispute over land and a claim on an important local stool, which is a symbol of traditional authority among the Akan.¹² The chief with whom he struggled was also an NDC figure and was able to use his influence in Accra to have the chief executive removed. In other words, rather than a chief executive facing pressure and dissent from his followers "below," here a sword appears to have fallen from "above."

Local informants provided two different explanations for Oteng's downfall. First, some NDC activists were concerned that Oteng was not making enough trips to NDC areas in the constituency and that this would hurt the party in the upcoming election. Party cadres complained to me in military imagery that Oteng "wasn't in touch with the rank and file." This was an explanation for the removal of a chief executive that was consistent with many other sacking stories I had heard: NDC chief executive does not do enough for NDC activists, and NDC chief executive loses job. But Guba District was not electorally competitive. The NDC usually won about 25 percent of the local vote.

The second explanation came from people closer to Oteng himself. The story they relayed was top-down, in contrast to the bottom-up story I heard from activists. This explanation concerned Oteng's involvement in chiefly politics. The story not only helps us understand government responsiveness but also the intimate nature of district politics. In addition to the NPP/NDC cleavage in the district, an important division was between royal families wishing to control the local stool of traditional authority. In years prior to my fieldwork, and much to the ire of those who claimed to be Guba "indigenes," the chief of Guba gave land to Fulani herdsmen. The Fulani are a largely Muslim group of nomadic herders found throughout West Africa.¹³ Residents complained constantly that "indigenes" were being "raped and beaten" by the Fulani, and just after my final visit a Fulani herdsman was decapitated while grazing his cattle. One protester complained to the media, "My brother, we have had enough of the chief's unbridled sale of stool lands for his personal comfort and convenience."

The "Fulani issue" was about land but also about identity. Guba "indigenes" understood the Fulani as invaders. Quoting John F. Kennedy, one senior local NPP figure declared he would do anything for his "country," by which he meant the ethnopolitical entity of Guba.¹⁴ They had pursued legal means, he said, but their "environmental human rights" were being abused, and "when persuasion fails, force should be applied." Courts had ordered Fulani

to vacate the land, but they had not done so. My informants attributed this to the political backing the Fulani received. During the NPP administration (2001–8), when the Ghanaian president and Guba chief executive were NPP, the Fulani had not been forcibly removed from the land they used to graze their cattle. Because the Fulani were northerners, and since the NPP was weak in the north, many in Guba thought the NPP was affording them special treatment in order to expand its electoral support.

The issue made bedfellows out of political opponents. The NPP member of parliament and the NDC's Chief Executive Oteng used local radio to side with young farmers in their complaints about the Fulani. Although Guba is a strong NPP area, the traditional chief had become an NDC supporter about two decades ago, a time when it seemed to many that Rawlings and the NDC would always be in power. The chief served in Rawlings's government under both military and democratic rule. The fact that the main local chief was also NDC ought to have made life easier for an NDC district chief executive. But land in Guba is intertwined with royal politics, and Oteng and the chief were on opposite sides. The royal family in Guba are the Kwapongs, who are divided between two major clans, the Balam Kwapongs and the Mireku Kwapongs. The chief's family were the Balam side, while the chief executive's family were on the Mireku side. The chief is alleged to have been alarmed by the two most important politicians—the member of parliament and the district chief executive—engaging in a cross-party alliance against him on the Fulani issue. In a political system in which bipartisanship is rare and grounds for suspicion, this alliance raised the possibility that the chief might be outflanked on the land issue or, worse, lose his family's control of the royal seat at Guba. It is then alleged that he used his access in Accra to have Chief Executive Oteng sacked.

Why are states responsive to the patronage demands of some but not others? This chapter has described different logics of

responsiveness that emerge from variation in paths to power and insulation/exposure while in power. The basic distinction between chief executives in competitive and less competitive districts is their connection to the party apparatus, which generates two types of candidates for local state office.

In my two highly competitive cases, NDC national party elites nominated chief executives who were beholden to activists, as typified by Kofi Adu in Koko District and Abenaa Boafo in Aman District. But in the less competitive districts, NDC nominations were much less beholden to patronage seekers. In Oran District (home to Felicia), Chief Executive George Biyo was a former NPP man who seemed beholden to no one. NDC activists in the district accused him of having “no respect for party members,” which was certainly not a groundless claim, as evidenced by his order to arrest the NDC’s own constituency chairman. In Lamda District, Chief Executive Yaw Adofu was accused of being nonlocal and angered NDC activists by being insufficiently partisan. He withstood motions of no confidence from his fellow NDC assembly members, whose determination to rid themselves of Adofu was not met with sufficient interest even from the opposition NPP assembly members. In Braka District, Chief Executive Christian Ofori was accused of cutting local chiefs out of the process of government (though chiefs have no legal role in government) as well as insulting traditional authorities. But he, too, appeared sheltered from this storm and was able to govern in relative insulation from the chief’s request to be brought into the patronage network. Last, in Guba District, we saw that Trust Oteng appeared to be an exception to this pattern, as he failed to weather the storm of local protest with his incumbency. Upon closer inspection, however, we saw that his fall was most likely instigated “from above” thanks to his picking a fight with a chief with connections in national government.

The picture that emerges is of responsiveness as related to political exposure but not exposure in a broad sense as it might refer to constructs such as “the public.” Rather, what mattered

was exposure to those who keep a person in power. District chief executives were “the president’s men” where a less competitive electoral scene afforded them greater insulation from patronage demands. But in the highly competitive districts, chief executives understood that they were “our men,” a vehicle for local patronage demands. In the next chapter we will examine the demand side of this relationship: the party activists.

3

Why (and How) Some Party Activists Get Patronage

They will work during the campaign and help you to get into power but once the party gets into power they must be served first; no sense of sacrifice. This is a canker that plagues all political parties.

—Former president John Mahama, speaking
about party activists (MyJoyOnline 2010)

In the previous chapter, we saw how district chief executives are pulled in opposite directions. From above they are “the president’s men,” tasked with implementing faithfully the agenda of the central government. From below they are “our man,” a vehicle for transmitting fruits of power to loyal followers. Recall the story of Felicia, the onion seller, at the start of the book. Felicia complained bitterly that Chief Executive George Biyo had neglected her once he and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) won power. Every district chief executive faces these pressures from above and below. What tips the scale is the competitiveness of local politics, with chief executives more insulated from patronage demands in less competitive districts. The activists are attuned to where this insulation is lacking and exploit it wherever possible. They are

the people Ghana's former president John Mahama was speaking about in the quote that opened this chapter. Party activists—this “canker that plagues all political parties”—are the subject of this chapter.

The chapter is structured around questions concerning party activists. First, who are they, and where are they? Second, what do they want, and how do they get it? I begin by introducing party activists. Who becomes an activist, what is their position within their party, and what does an activist do? I use survey data to describe how voters view activists as well as to show where in the country activists appear most engaged in district life. Voters are aware of the unwritten rule in Ghanaian politics that party activists engage in activism in return for patronage and that this patronage can take several forms, including government jobs, protection from the police, and privileged access to government services. As we will see, the main predictor of highly visible activists is not poverty, diversity, or urbanization but rather political competition. Then, to understand what activists want and how they get it, I draw more heavily on interviews and newspaper accounts to describe how activists make themselves heard—that is, how they use leverage over officeholders to extract patronage. I use a structured comparison between highly and less competitive districts to show how demands for patronage—such as Felicia's—are more easily ignored in less competitive districts.

The data come from primary sources in the form of survey data and interviews with district party and government officials and from secondary sources in the form of newspaper archives and existing social scientific research. The survey data come from a nationally representative survey of three thousand individuals across each of Ghana's ten regions conducted under the auspices of a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) project on local governance.¹ Of secondary source materials, I note in particular the scholarship of George Bob-Milliar. A native of Ghana, he has conducted the best research on—and with—party activists.

Party Activists: “We Who Have Struggled”

Y’atu aban—we have overthrown the government.

—Chant of New Patriotic Party (NPP) activists upon winning power in 2008 (Bob-Milliar 2014)

National elites in every country require local partners with the capacity to deliver social order and to implement state prerogatives. Boone (2003) showed this in her comparative study of negotiated power between central and local elites in postcolonial Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, and Ghana. Ziblatt (2006) showed this in his comparative study of state building in nineteenth-century Germany and Italy. Remick (2002, 2004) showed this in her subnational comparative study of tax collection in two Chinese regions in the twentieth century (also Soifer 2015). Authorities in Ghana’s capital city, Accra, are no different. They rely on activists to get them into power and to implement their rule from afar. But activists are not passive pawns.² They have their own motivations and backgrounds, and they toil for themselves and their families as much as for the party. Thus, the quote from NPP activists that opens this section—“we have overthrown the government”—reveals not only their understanding of their agency (“we”) but also their expectation that the fruits of power will be consumed by the victors. By chanting that the outgoing NDC government has been “overthrown,” they reveal their understanding that power is exclusionary and zero-sum.³

An activist is a partisan who volunteers on behalf of their party even outside of elections.⁴ Whereas party *workers* are the small voluntary administrative force with formal positions within the party, “party activists” refers to a broader group of people who generally do not hold formal party positions. While a good party worker should be highly activist, not all activists are party workers. In Ghanaian political discourse, “party activist” can refer to one of three types of actors. The first is what Bob-Milliar (2012) labels “platform activists,” who are young and educated outspoken voices who emerge through the student wings of the NDC and NPP,

respectively. Accomplished platform activists will eventually form the core of their party's regional and national professional managerial class. The second type of activists is wealthy patrons known as "sympathizers." They are usually low-visibility donors who leverage their political relationships to further their enterprise in state-licensed activities or as public contractors. For example, in my case studies, people referred to as party sympathizers included a large cocoa farmer, the owner of a sawmill, a pharmacist, a soap factory owner, and a chief. The final type of activists are the most numerous. Known as "foot soldiers," these people devote much of their free time to campaigning for their party. They have a reputation for collective public displays of their allegiance, such as converging *en masse* to stage protests at government offices. For instance, many of my interviews with district officials were interrupted by impromptu protests by local activists.

Activists perform a multitude of basic but essential tasks for their parties. An activist can be depended on to attend rallies and to help with their organization; to visit the site of a district's construction project to monitor its progress; to collect names and phone numbers of drivers, traders, farmers, and hairdressers for mobilization; and to harass opposition officeholders during speeches and radio phone-ins. They engage in more nefarious activities such as intimidating opposition activists using verbal threats and physical confrontation and the destruction of opposition property. In rural areas they travel difficult roads and muddy paths to canvass farming communities. In urban areas they are loud and present in town squares, and they also conduct house-to-house campaigning. On election day they transport voters to vote, monitor electoral commission staff, and sometimes coordinate efforts to stuff ballots or otherwise help their party to overvote (Asunka et al. 2019; Bob-Milliar 2012). These coercive services are what earns the scorn of many and why voters often view party activists with contempt.

Bob-Milliar (2014) has documented the low-intensity electoral violence committed by party youth activists (also ACLED

2017). He gathered data on election-related violence from 1992 to 2012 using newspaper archives. In total he coded 5,707 events or incidents, supplemented with interviews with party activists. Half of all incidents were “molestation, physical assault, and violent intimidation” (137). Seizure of state property or occupying public property constituted one-third of all the incidents recorded. Typical targets included toll bridges, district vehicles, government buildings, and bus terminals. But he also recorded a significant decline in ballot box thefts, which is suggestive of improved quality of electoral administration by the state’s electoral commission. Activist violence tends to be spontaneous and localized. This stands in contrast to the larger-scale, and more organized, electoral violence witnessed in Africa in the 2000s, such as in Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Côte d’Ivoire (Burchard 2015; Kovacs and Bjarnesen 2018; Straus 2012).

Indeed, although Ghana is noted for the relative absence of political violence, often ignored are these forms of low-level violence in the form of beatings, threats, intimidation, and hostile confrontation, which dominate local news but rarely go national (Bjarnesen 2020; Kwarkye 2018; Paalo 2017).⁵ Bob-Milliar (2014, 131–32) writes, “Foot soldier political activism is very contentious as it is driven by passion and aggression. Their brand of political activism has features of lawlessness, and the line between conventional participation and contentious politics becomes blurred.” For the residents I knew, such low-level violence shaped their experience of politics as a base and violent thing. People regularly viewed activists with contempt, often referring to them dismissively as “party boys,” with a prominent national think tank describing them as the “soft under-belly of democratic politics in Ghana that must be reined in”: “While the victorious party’s foot soldiers are usually promised and often offered rewards, including jobs, supporters of the opposition parties are excluded. In this regard, the party foot-soldier phenomenon deepens the neo-patrimonialism and clientelism—the ‘politics of Big Man patronage’—that have bedeviled and retarded Ghana’s postcolonial development” (Ghana

CDD 2007). The irony, of course, is that while party activists are vilified in polite conversation, the media, and intellectual commentary, they play a key role in keeping governments in power. "The labor-intensive nature of political campaigns," Bob-Milliar (2014, 134) notes, "makes the services of foot soldiers indispensable in Ghana's electoral politics." Because activists provide a service to parties, they are similar to brokers in the literature on distributive politics, whom Stokes et al. (2013, 24) define as "ground-level intermediaries between the party and voters." But activists differ from brokers in important ways. What "makes brokers valuable to parties," according to Stokes et al. (2013, 100), "is the social embeddedness of brokers with constituents, and the information that this embeddedness provides." A broker can typically count the number of clients she can bring with her to the polling booth, but party activists in Ghana market themselves by their party allegiance rather than by their ability to control voters. They advertise their willingness to toil and suffer for the party rather than their position within an asymmetrical network of clients. They do not advertise the number of dependents beneath them. Unlike classical brokers, there is little evidence that party activists could, or even claim to, take voters away from a party.

The biographical profile of brokers and activists is suggestive of this. In the survey research by Stokes et al. (2013), brokers are typically in their forties, but Ghanaian activists are typically younger. They have low- or medium-skill professional backgrounds, such as welders, barbers, or laborers, or they are without secure or stable employment. "The popular image of party foot soldiers is of heavily built men or what is locally called 'macho men.' They are more likely to be male than female and within the age cohort fifteen to thirty-five. As a nonelite group, many tend to live in poor neighborhoods or in urban slums" (Bob-Milliar 2014, 132). What they offer to the party is their manpower first and foremost, rather than any power over groups of voters.

While social embeddedness and informational power are not central to what activists offer parties, their situational resources

within communities are important. Activists offer parties a person who lives among coethnoregionals who are also likely copartisans. An Ewe activist, for example, can loudly march through her neighborhood to bring fellow Ewes out to vote for the NDC.⁶ But this power does not translate to opposition neighborhoods, where she has little status among non-Ewes. This is an important point: elections that are won primarily through mobilization of likely supporters uniquely benefit those with a foothold within likely supporter neighborhoods. Persuasion strategies, on the other hand, require political operators with knowledge of *noncoethnic* neighborhoods, a situation that confers on party activists no special advantage. This helps us understand why Bob-Milliar (2014, 126) wrote about activist violence as “localized ethno-political violence.” What activists offer, therefore, is their labor and their residence among coethnics, who are expected to also be their copartisans.

An early conversation I had with Felicia was interesting in this regard. I asked her how to be a “good activist for the party.” This was her reply, again in her second language:

“An activist is always ready and looking around,” she said, raising her index finger to her eye. “If there is anything in the district, you must be there. Whatever the party wants, by all means you will do it. Maybe you will make demonstration with the foot soldiers. Maybe you will tell your brother and your sister [i.e., your peers] they should come out to vote. You wear the party colors, and you make noise, or maybe you help someone in your community with a small favor.” (author interview, July 8, 2012)

Note how a good activist would “tell your brother and sister they should come out to vote.” She did not say that you should tell them *how* to vote. This reveals how Felicia did not see her role as persuading opposition voters to support her party. Rather, she understood her job to be encouraging like-minded voters to simply come out to vote.

Activists such as Felicia are frontline workers in the party structures that connect their national party elites all the way down to villages and neighborhoods throughout the country. The organization of the NDC and NPP parallels the state's electoral divisions, with 230 parliamentary constituencies (and thus party constituency branches) divided into about five thousand electoral areas, which are divided into twenty-one thousand polling stations.⁷ The polling station is thus the basic unit of organization for the state's electoral system and for major parties. Unlike the state's lowest administrative level (unit committees), however, neighborhood-level party structures are genuinely functioning entities. This means that Ghana's parties have greater administrative reach than the state itself, a fact that elevates the importance of party activists for whichever party is in power.

The constituency chairmen oversee party activity and have an important role in the selection of chief executive and parliamentary candidates (Daddieh and Bob-Milliar 2012; Ichino and Nathan 2012b). Because the nomination for a chief executive comes from within the local party and is passed upward to the president, constituency chairmen understand their role as kingmakers in local administration, and it was common for them to use the term "kingmaker" in conversation with me.⁸

For a constituency chairman of the governing party, the state's local offices are open for use. I witnessed this most clearly in my first meeting with the NDC constituency chairman in Aman District. The experience revealed for whom the doors of the state are open. I had been put in contact with the chairman by an NDC assemblyman, who had introduced me by phone as a "White researcher friend." Knowing no more about me than that, the chairman arranged to meet me in the district office of the National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP), which was the government's main job-creating entity for tens of thousands of mostly low-skilled young adults. Recall that the district assembly system is supposed to be nonpartisan. Yet, to the NDC constituency chairman, it did not even merit explanation to this foreigner why

it was more appropriate to meet at the district office responsible for handing out jobs rather than the chairman's own party office. Moreover, we were joined in our meeting by the NYEP director himself. He appeared to be an uninterested bystander in our conversation, rarely lowering his newspaper to take in the meeting happening the other side of his desk. It did not merit explanation why the director would remain while the chairman and I spoke.

Although the NYEP director is a civil servant and the constituency chairman is a political figure, the two had a comfortable relationship. Over the next hour the constituency chairman and the NYEP director—the party official and the state official—referred to one another as “my chairman” and “my director.” There was no attempt on the part of either man to pretend to this stranger that the NYEP was anything other than a source of jobs for party activists and that the chairman had complete access to the spigot. The chairman took several calls during our conversation, and the phone passed between him and the director. In most cases the caller was being talked through the steps of accessing the NYEP: “Bring a letter to my director,” “Go to the regional office,” “Tell that man you have seen me” (author interview, March 18, 2012). The walls between the party and the state were not just permeable—they were completely absent.

Two other conversations with different constituency chairmen bear noting here. NPP chairmen were normally quick to point out that NDC chief executives, people about whom they struggled to muster a compliment, were *not* to blame for cutting NPP supporters out of district patronage. Rather, NPP chairmen knew that NDC chief executives *must* do this in order to stay in power. In Aman District, NPP constituency chairman Frank Mensah saw district governance as zero-sum and understood himself as firmly on the losing side. His sandstone business had suffered when the NPP lost national and thus local power in 2008. But his explanation of how power worked in the district was informative: “In [this district] we are very peaceful. Leaders mostly like to work

with the opposition, but we have people who are your backers who fight against that. I don't blame the government in power. It is their core supporters who punish them for cooperation. But we did the same when we were in power" (author interview, May 3, 2012). Here was an NPP figure passing up the opportunity to criticize the NDC government that had directly hurt his income. In place of partisan fury, he offered a resigned explanation of the way power works, in which some governments have little or no buffer between themselves and their own supporters.

In Oran District, NPP constituency chairman Nicholas Agyemang was not short of complaints about the NDC chief executive: "No due diligence is being done in the tender process; everything is going to party men; contractors are just using boards to build footbridges and the district is paying them huge amounts" (author interview, May 16, 2012).⁹ What interested me was how he explained the chief executive's "abuses" in institutional terms: "If this chief executive fails to help his party boys, it will be the NDC who makes life hard for him." He understood district politics in institutional rather than personal terms. From the perspective of this most qualified of NPP activists, NDC officials were not bad people. It was the system—its rules, habits, assumptions, and hierarchies—that made them dole out patronage and cut out NPP supporters. Politics was not personal.

Thus, party machinery within each district is headed by constituency chairmen, but even they know that patronage does not reflect the absence of morality or civic virtue of those in power. Rather, patronage was always due to one's activists as a function of how power works. The only question from district to district is how much patronage the activists will get.

What Do Activists Want?

Party activists are players in the wider game of politics whose rules are widely understood, and what activists want is no secret. In a 2010–12 survey conducted by Afrobarometer, a representative

sample of twenty-four hundred Ghanaian voters was asked which of the following statements was closest to their view:

A: *Political party foot soldiers in Ghana toil for their parties because they believe in their programs.*

B: *Political party foot soldiers in Ghana toil for their parties because they expect material rewards after winning political power.*

Sixty percent said foot soldiers toil for material rewards, while only 31 percent said they do it for programmatic or ideological reasons.¹⁰ Perhaps most interesting was that 58 percent agreed that the “demands of political party foot soldiers who toiled to get their parties elected are legitimate and should be satisfied by government.” Respondents thought the demands of activists were generally merited.

In a different survey of three thousand individuals on the subject of local government performance, a majority of respondents felt it was “somewhat” or “very important” to be a party member in order to get a government job or to “get development projects built in your community,” while one-third thought such connections were somewhat or very important if a person wants to “get out of trouble with the police.” In the Afrobarometer survey, 81 percent agreed that “political interference has made efforts of the Police to arrest and prosecute party foot soldiers who indulge in criminal acts an impossible task.” I analyze these survey data more systematically in chapter 4.

It is not enough to have merely voted for the party or even to be a dues-paying party member. One must be an active partisan. A remarkably high 77 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “when a party is in power, only its party activists receive benefits. It is not enough just to have voted for the party.” And when asked, “If a person works hard for their party and their party comes to power, do you think they will be rewarded with a job?” 85 percent of respondents said probably or definitely yes (Huntington, Schultz, and Wibbels 2015).

Party activists are, of course, well aware of such privileges. In the same survey, respondents were asked if political party activists are active “in your area.”¹¹ Table 3.1 shows the correlation between places where activists were reportedly “very active” and where it was “somewhat” or “very important” to be a member of the ruling party in order to get something from the state. The data show that the places where party activity matters for getting a government job, getting out of trouble with the police, or getting a development project for one’s community, are also places where activists are heavily involved.

Table 3.1. Correlations between patronage expectations and presence of party activists

Somewhat/very important to be a member of the ruling party to . . .	Activists are “very active here”	“Only activists receive benefits”
. . . get a government job	0.278**	0.263**
. . . get out of trouble with the police	0.186*	0.344**
. . . get development projects	0.252**	0.241**

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Note: Constituency-level aggregates.

The survey data also reveal the kinds of districts where activists are most visibly engaged in public life. Table 3.2 shows correlations between the district share of respondents saying activists are “very active here” and aggregate characteristics of the district, such as its poverty, diversity, distance from higher levels of government, and—importantly—its political competitiveness. The only robust predictor is that party activists are most active in highly competitive districts. Electoral competition is also a robust predictor in a multivariate regression shown in the appendix. Importantly, the regression model tests whether the presence of party activists is driven by local electoral variability rather than the electoral margin between the two parties. The results suggest

the presence of activists is not driven by variability in the margin from one election to the next.

Table 3.2. Correlations with share of respondents saying activists “are very active here”

	Party boys active
Population (2010)	0.12
Urban (2010)	-0.02
Illiterate (2010)	-0.01
No toilet (2010)	-0.03
Electricity (2010)	-0.00
Area (km ² , land)	0.13
Population density	0.03
Distance to Accra	-0.11
Distance to regional capital	0.09
Ethnic fractionalization (2010)	0.05
Electoral margin (2012)	-0.20*
Std. dev. in average margin (2000-2012)	-0.13

* $p < 0.05$

Note: District-level aggregates.

So, party activists are highly visible people. They are found in districts of varying geography and living standards, and what they want is publicly known. But *getting* what they want involves interaction with patrons who have state access. Thus, activists simultaneously seek out, and are sought out by, local and supralocal party elites in need of labor to engage in the mundane chores of party life. Party elites and party activists understand this mutual need and the reciprocal obligations it entails. The rule that activists will be rewarded is informal, but it is not a secret. It is discussed openly in interviews and speeches. For example, the Nadowli District chief executive told an audience in the presence of journalists “that no one in the NDC is bigger than the foot soldiers who had won the party power in 2008” (Ghana News Agency 2010a). In another public event, a regional minister cautioned newly inaugurated

district chief executives that “when you are eating don’t forget the foot soldiers,” while a former minister of state explained, “We must make sure that our boys have chopped [consumed] first before extending the invitation to others” (Bob-Milliar 2014, 135).

Party activists are not altruists, and they are not without agency. They engage in partisan activity because their own welfare is typically precariously balanced: they are welders, barbers, farmers, or unemployed individuals who have thrown their lot in with their party and outed themselves as party activists. Theirs is less an economy of affection and more one of protection: politicians are their path to modestly elevating their living standards, and they are fully aware of how both actors—politician and activist—are using one another instrumentally. This is an important point: their party activism should not be understood as volunteerism: “The political activism engaged in by foot soldiers is not seen as a voluntary activity in the formal or theoretical sense, but one that is mediated by an institutionalized Ghanaian traditional custom of reciprocity (or gift giving)” (Bob-Milliar 2014, 132). In other words, it is a transaction in which the activist expects something concrete in return. As one activist explained, “Government property is for all citizens and since the men we help to attain public office are the ones in charge of the state resources we expect them to share the resources with us” (133).

Here it is worth a brief note on the cultural significance of the imagery of age evoked when people speak of “party boys” and party “Big Men.” Most Ghanaian societies are run in an essentially gerontocratic fashion, in which a person may claim power and respect simply by virtue of age. “Young man” can refer to a man in his twenties or early thirties, while “boy” can refer to the same age group but connotes lower social standing. The significance of youth as a social identity in Ghana has been described by Jean Allman in her study of late colonial Asante nationalism: “In Asante, the youngmen had been a potent and active political force since at least the midnineteenth century, when they were known as the *nkwankwaa*. . . . The sense of the term was not that the

nkwankwaa were literally young, but that they existed in often uneasy subordination to elder or chiefly authority" (Allman 1993, 29). Thus, "youth" is meant literally but also figuratively to connote subordination and relative powerlessness. Nor are such tensions around gerontocracy unique to Ghana. As John Iliffe (2007, 97) writes, conflict between male generations has been "one of the most dynamic and enduring forces in African history."

Today the power dynamic between boys and men, and the place of the "young man" within it, is acted out and can be observed through subtle interactions between grown men of different ages. In countless district offices I observed how a "young man" would be asked to procure breakfast or a newspaper for his "father" or "uncle," terms used figuratively to communicate a code of respect, obligation, and duty rather than actual blood relation. When a man old enough to be the father of the "young man" asked for such a favor, I never once witnessed him being turned down. To decline the request would betray a lack of culture in the young man.¹² The contravening of such basic social institutions would suggest to the elder figure that his "son" may not be trustworthy.

One hears constant references to the problem of "young men" who are seen as restless in the face of an informal social institution that prevents them from enjoying significant social mobility until at least their midthirties, at which point a man is no longer considered to be a "young man." These "young men" are often adult males trying to ignite their careers in the public or private sector. Their experience is reflected in youth unemployment rates, which for the age group fifteen to twenty-four is three times that of the age group forty-five to sixty-four (African Economic Outlook 2014). The behavior of "party boys" must be seen in this context of a widespread perception that Ghanaian society is structured to hold back young adults, and as a result foot soldiers are wary that their political fathers might eat too much and forget to feed them. Thus, "young men" permit themselves to be used instrumentally, but they do it fearing that the father figures for whom they toil might not have their interests at heart. The behavior of activists

should be understood in this context of anxiety, uncertainty, and inferiority.

What activists want is laid bare in two ways: first, when the central government does not nominate activists' preferred candidates for district chief executive; second, when central or local government "neglects" activists by ignoring their demands for patronage, as happened to Felicia. I provide examples of each.

If the governing party has retained power after a general election, a significant minority of district chief executives will be replaced. Bringing in a new chief executive involves a nomination by the president and an up-or-down vote on that nominee by the district's assembly. In the months after the new administration takes office, names of nominees bubble up from district-level party activity to the central government in Accra, which then announces nominees. In most cases the president's nominees are those selected by each district's party apparatus. But when a different name emerges, the fury of activists sheds light on how they understood their role in politics.

In the following example, NDC activists in Kumasi were angered when they suspected their preferred nominee for Kumasi metropolitan chief executive was being overlooked by NDC party elites. It is important to note that all actors in the example were members of the NDC:

The timely intervention of the new Ashanti Regional Minister, Mr. Eric Opoku, prevented a group of heavily built foot soldiers of the NDC in Kumasi from carrying out their threat to use violence to stop Mr. Kojo Osei-Bonsu from becoming the Kumasi Metropolitan Chief Executive. About 50 men on motorbikes stormed the NDC's Ashanti Regional Office at Asafo about 11 a.m. Tuesday and forced the regional executive members who were in a meeting to flee for their dear lives. The foot soldiers accused the regional executive of influencing the nomination of Mr Osei-Bonsu, claiming that since *the nominee was not known* in the party in the region, they would not allow

him to take up the position. (*Daily Graphic* 2013, emphasis added)

“The nominee was not known” is the key phrase. Not being a “son of the soil” reflects activists’ anxiety that the officeholder would not fulfill the implicit contract by *failing* to discriminate in favor of his group. A candidate who is “not known” cannot be trusted to deliver since they did not emerge through the local party apparatus and thus does not owe their political career to local activists. This was the situation described earlier, in which Lamda District chief executive Yaw Adofo was seen as an outsider and distrusted by local activists.¹³

Such protests have precedence in Kumasi, which, despite being an NPP stronghold, has a large NDC base given the sheer size of the city. In 2009 an NDC vetting committee tasked with reviewing applicants for public positions was interrupted by angry NDC supporters. The protest took place at the residence of the Ashanti regional minister, where participants included the general secretary of the NDC and the minister for local government:

[Protesters] contended that some of them toiled during times of adversities to ensure the victory of the party but the party hierarchy has sidelined them during consideration for positions. Some of them also claimed their names had been penciled for persecution if the NPP had won power because of their open support for the NDC. . . . According to them, there were a number of defeated parliamentary candidates in the region who should be considered for the position rather than going for somebody they claimed had not been involved in the cause of the party. . . . [In response, the NDC said] all the names that have come up before the vetting committee were people who are known to be staunch members of the NDC. (*Modern Ghana* 2009)

The example is useful for several reasons. First, note the willingness of low-level activists to physically confront their own party leaders, including national-level cabinet and party figures and at no less than the residence of the regional minister.¹⁴ Second, note the equivalence drawn between “toiling” for the party and the right to a public office. Third, rather than disqualification on grounds of education, experience, or character, the objectionable candidate was accused of “not being involved in the cause of the party.” Last, note in the response of the NDC leadership the assurance that the candidates being considered for appointment to public office were “staunch members of the NDC.” There was little pretense that such public offices existed for any other reason than to serve partisans.

Another example shows such incidents are not unique to Kumasi:

Irate NDC Youth in Salaga in the East Gonja District of the Northern Region last night destroyed properties and bill boards bearing the name of [NDC] President John Dramani Mahama. . . . The Youth marched through the streets causing mayhem and threatening to set ablaze the NDC party vehicles and constituency office. . . . The youth maintained that their protest was to send signal to President John Mahama that his decision to nominate Mohammed Amin Lukman ahead of three shortlisted candidates was not welcomed. A member of the irate Youth Seidu Aziz Jawula told Joy News that the president *nominee is not known* to them in the district and warned the nominee not to set his foot in Salaga. (*Joy News* 2013a, emphasis added)

In Asawase Constituency, the “Concerned Youth of Asawase NDC” called on the president to rescind his nomination for chief executive: “Alhaji Nuru Hamidan is *not somebody who has suffered* for the party in the constituency and he is not the people’s favorite. *We have not seen him* in any of our party activities in the constituency” (*Daily Guide* 2013, emphasis added). Note again that a worthy candidate is one local activists “seen” and who has “suffered for the party in the constituency.”

Nor are such protests an exclusive feature of the NDC. At the time of writing, some NPP activists had rioted when the newly elected president failed to place the activists' chosen people in local office. The ACLED project, whose violence dataset is widely used in political science, reported:

One main issue since President Nana Akufo Addo, from the New Patriotic Party (NPP), took office end December 2016, has been the rejection of his regional and district appointees by NPP supporters. Through protests and riots across several regions from as early as February, NPP supporters expressed frustration at the lack of participation of these appointees in the party's electoral success. In the Ashanti region in particular, riots were led by an NPP-affiliated gang under the name of "Delta Force," who played an important role in ensuring security and support for local party officials during the campaign and was expecting rewards in the form of government appointments among their ranks. As these appointments did not materialise, they felt neglected. On 24 March, the gang stormed the premises of the Regional Coordinating Council in Kumasi, destroying public property and manhandling the new Ashanti Regional Security Coordinator, whom they did not support. Two weeks later, the group freed its fellow members charged after the first incident by attacking the Kumasi Circuit Court. (ACLED 2017)

While the earlier examples largely came from the NDC, note that this example came from the NPP. This illustrates a basic point, which is that although my fieldwork took place while the NDC was in power, both of Ghana's major parties rely on activists to mobilize voters, and so both are vulnerable to pressures from their own activists. Note also, and again, the contractual understanding of the party-activist reciprocal relationship ("played an important role in ensuring security and support for local party officials during the campaign and was expecting rewards"). Last, note again that the activists of the governing party

were prepared to use violence against the state's own coercive bodies in the form of the Ashanti regional security coordinator and the Kumasi circuit court.

The second major way in which the interests of activists are laid bare is when they complain publicly about neglect by their party in government. A press statement from activists of Ablekuma Central Constituency is typical: "After the party has stayed in power for almost seven years, the foot soldiers have been forgotten and none of the foot soldiers have seen a change in their lifestyles and right now there are troubles in our marriage homes where some of us cannot pay our children's school fees and even most of us are thrown out of our homes because we cannot face our responsibilities" (cited in Bob-Milliar 2012, 677). These are the activists who consider themselves to be neglected by their party. The kinds of rewards being sought can be seen in the next example: "Footsoldiers of the ruling NDC in the Akwapim South District Assembly are on the heels of the District Chief Executive, Afari Djan, for what they described as neglect, after winning the general elections. The footsoldiers are accusing the chief executive of refusing to recruit them into government employment programmes, such the Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Agency (GYEEDA) among others" (*The Chronicle* 2013). Following several failed confirmation attempts in mid-2013, *Joy News* reported "the president's nominations are fiercely resisted by grass root supporters of the governing National Democratic Congress, youth groups and assembly members. Some groups have even gone to the extent of destroying properties in protest against some nominees" (*Joy News* 2013d).

In the next example, foot soldiers attempted to gain control of a public toilet. For a low-skilled party activist, the job of toilet toll collector can provide a steady income, at least for as long as the party is in power. The example is interesting because we observe a district chief executive trying to keep his side of the bargain with local activists: "A timely intervention by the Police in Hohoe in the Volta Region prevented a bloodbath between some irate National

Democratic Congress youth and residents of the area over the ownership of a public toilet. The confusion according to reports ensued after the youth with the *support of the Municipal Chief Executive* tried to take over the management of a public toilet in the area" (CitiFM 2014, emphasis added). Public seizures of this kind are not uncommon. Even before I began my fieldwork, NDC activists in Hohoe had locked the assembly building in 2010 and demanded the chief executive release from prison several NDC supporters (Ghana News Agency 2010b).

Complaints of neglect are often framed in opposition to the behavior of the party Big Men, who are seen as eating too well at the trough of the state. Activists in Tamale Central complained that regional and national executives had failed "to recognize their sacrifices to the party. . . . Those who could not hitherto buy even bicycles are building mansions [and they] come to tell us that there is nothing" to share (*Joy News* 2013e). NDC activists in the Lower West Akyem Constituency echoed a similar complaint: "[The party elite] told us that when NDC lost, we being the polling agents will be held responsible because we did not perform well enough. . . . After we won the elections, we the polling agents have been neglected and they are fighting on the job. If we hadn't done our work well, the NDC party will not have won and they would not have gotten the opportunity that they are enjoying now" (CitiFM 2013). Rewards go beyond jobs to include things like roads, bridges, and streetlights. While a road is often thought of as a public good, it may be a *de facto* club good since nonmembers can be excluded from its use because of the spatial clustering of communities. Thus, activists clamor for jobs for themselves but also rewards for the communities in which they live:

The youth of the party at Agogo Zongo in the Asante-Akim North District said their community deserved to be rewarded with developmental projects for their political loyalty. They said they were not comfortable with the "total neglect," and warned that if the situation did not change, it could affect the

party's fortunes in 2016. . . . They bitterly complained about the poor and dusty nature of roads running through their area, and asked that this must be tackled without delay.

[The chief executive] said he is determined to go every length to improve the socio-economic conditions in the Zongos.

. . . Baba Adul-Rahman, Chief of the Zongo Community, said they were going to hold the chief executive to his word. (Ghana News Agency 2014)

Zongos are slum-like parts of town that have been settled by nonindigenes, typically northern Ghanaians, many of whom are Muslim.

These examples show activists want material improvements in their lives and in their communities, and they understand their relationship to their party in a contractual manner. They are not pawns to be endlessly shifted about in a political game, and they are keen to let their party leaders and the voting public know that they expect their just deserts.

Leverage: How Activists Get What They Want

Activists represent a transaction cost for parties: the administrative cost of distributive linkages to voters. They are not a deadweight loss, however, since they provide a service. The price parties pay, metaphorically, for this service varies according to uncertainty about electoral victory. Parties pay a lower fee when an election outcome is more certain: when they are in a stronghold or an opposition area and they are highly likely to win/lose. In competitive places, where electoral outcomes are uncertain, parties pay premiums for the services of activists.

Yet it is not obvious that the leverage of activists should be greatest where the two parties are roughly equal in strength. One could expect their leverage to be higher in strongholds, for example, since in presidential elections every additional vote matters, and additional votes are theoretically easier to get where a party is strong. But recall that parties fight for control of three major

offices: the presidency, in which the entire country is one constituency, and thus an additional vote matters even in a stronghold; parliamentary seats, in which additional votes in strongholds or opposition areas do not matter as much as additional votes in competitive constituencies; and district assembly seats, in which majority control of the assembly provides a party with a bargaining chip even if the chief executive is from the other party. It is these latter two seats—in parliament and in a district—that explain why politics is so fierce in highly competitive places, even when the presidency can be won without winning competitive districts.

I observed this logic in competitive and less competitive districts. In the less competitive Lamda District, where the NPP typically earned 80 percent of the vote, District Chief Executive Yaw Adofo (NDC) did not emerge from local party structures. His strategy for negotiating activist agency was to seek bipartisan deals and worry less about NDC activists. Even an NPP coordinator in the area said this NDC chief executive would help the opposition. When I asked if life in the district would be any different if the chief executive was NPP, to my amazement this NPP official said no. The attempt by Chief Executive Adofo to not appear overly partisan was corroborated by one technocrat:

Me: How does the chief executive balance the need to work for the party and raise its profile in an election year, with the need to cooperate in order to get things done?

Technocrat: He definitely plays both sides, and the NDC party people are often frustrated. I can tell you about the beautiful manner in which we strategically pick key vocal NPP people. He calls them into his office before an assembly meeting to get their agreement. Then in the assembly meeting the presiding member will call on them, and they will speak in your favor. [As for the appointed assembly members,] they are very easy to get on your side; they are from the zongos. They are not smart people, and they will readily vote for the chief executive. (author interview, July 24, 2012)

Chief Executive Adofo was constantly assailed by the NDC's own activists, but they had little effect on him. Over the months of my visits, the recurring thorn in Adofo's side was complaints that he wasn't sufficiently putting the boot to the necks of the NPP. NDC youth repeatedly threatened to defect when the chief executive publicly described his party as a party for all residents in the district. When people spoke to me about the challenges the chief executive faced in running the district, they often referred specifically to the "zongo boys." In Lamda District, NDC activists in the main zongo told me that many of them had defected to the NPP. They formed the Nasara Club (Hausa word for "victory" or "success") and claimed to have met with the NPP and begun to pay dues. When I asked if they were defecting because of being upset with what the NDC was doing in the country as a whole, or if their defection was more about what Chief Executive Adofo was failing to do, it was strongly the latter. One of the disgruntled activists told me that "the youth are upset with the chief executive," who had told them they would get jobs and loans, but they had not received any (author interview, February 16, 2012).

Adofo's reluctance to put party first was a subject of real bitterness among NDC supporters. The following was reported in a national newspaper:

Irate NDC supporters in the area, who feel let-down by President Mahama's administration, allegedly stormed the place to vent their spleen on the District Chief Executive, Yaw Adofo. According to them, numerous promises made to them by the party, including providing them with jobs, had not been fulfilled after the party had been in power for six years. They complained that they were starving to death. The angry-looking NDC supporters, who were clad in red attire and singing war songs, decided to rush to the chief executive's office to teach him "bitter lessons." . . . The NDC supporters said they were hungry and without work to do so they would not allow the party's leadership in the area including the chief executive, to

have any peace of mind until the government had fulfilled its promises to them. (*Daily Guide* 2014)

Despite their efforts, the NDC activists did not manage to unseat their copartisan Adofo. The case of Lamda District is useful for what it suggests about the insulation of politicians from patronage demands in less competitive districts. Although the chief executive was accused of being insufficiently partisan, his bipartisanship should not be exaggerated. The meaningful comparison is not between a chief executive who governs purely in the public interest and one who governs purely for himself or his party but between a chief executive who governs for himself or his party and a chief executive who does the same but with slightly less exclusionary zeal. So it was that the Lamda District chief executive was not immune to accusations of zero-sum governance: some complained that NPP contractors were hurting and NDC contractors were thriving; others complained of being turned away from his office for being of the “wrong” party. Nevertheless, what matters is the *relative* insulation from patronage demands enjoyed by some politicians.

While in less competitive Lamda District Chief Executive Adofo paid little political price for ignoring his party’s activists, in highly competitive districts there was no insulation from such pressures. In the first example, Aman District chief executive Adwoa Nti (NPP) paid the ultimate price for shunning partisanship. Nti had spent her career as a midwife but in the early 2000s served as chief executive under the NPP. The seventy-two-year-old was perhaps the least partisan political figure I met. She was a pragmatist who viewed party politics with contempt. In conversation she spoke critically of political figures on both sides, and several NDC people in the area spoke well of her in private with me. She became politically involved in the 1980s as a recruiter of women in the area, a job she was well positioned to do as a midwife. She had waited until the end of her professional life to get into politics because she felt that becoming political too early can

cause a young professional to burn many bridges. When I asked her about the experience of governing NDC communities as an NPP chief executive, she was clear where her obstacles lay:

Only my own people will give me trouble. When I ran for chief executive in fact it was NPP people who tried to frustrate me. But I am experienced. As a nurse I came across difficult people all my life. One time they asked me to get rid of the district driver, because he is NDC, and to give the job to a party boy. I said to them “unless they are sabotaging my work, I won’t get rid of them.” Truly I believe mostly good people get into politics but it is your own people who corrupt you. (author interview, June 6, 2012)

She remembered her official car being stoned by her own supporters when a rumor circulated that NDC people were benefiting from a government program. She had received advance warning that protests were likely at a project launch she was going to attend but stressed again that the problem was all “my own people.” The current chief executive spoke kindly of Adwoa Nti despite coming from opposite parties. Abenaa Boafo told me the same story of the car stoning with a laugh, though as a current chief executive she understood what Nti had gone through, and she felt for her. Nti proved to be *insufficiently* partisan for local activists, and when the NPP’s John Kufuor won a second term in office, she was not renominated.

In the other highly competitive district, the agency of activists could not be ignored by officeholders. Activist agency announced itself in daily remonstrations at the district offices. A civil servant recounted to me a meeting in his small office between him, the police chief, and the party’s constituency executive to discuss the upcoming vote to confirm the president’s nominee for chief executive: “The chief executive has no control of party boys here. At the chief executive vote, they stormed my office and hit the door with an axe and broke my desk even with the party Big Men here” (author interview, July 30, 2012). As luck would have it, our

conversation was interrupted by shouting outside. NDC activists had started a fight with a district assembly driver. Activists had taken the vehicle during Mills's funeral celebration, but the official driver was unable to start it the following day. After a screaming match lasting a few minutes, the civil servant continued the story. NDC activists were concerned that NPP assembly members would not attend the confirmation vote and thereby deny their man a quorum: "NDC boys wanted to bring in their own people and pretend they were assemblymen to cast votes [Laughs]. But the police chief and I refused and we insisted they would be brought to court if they tried that. So, while we were in the office the NDC boys kicked in my door and smashed my desk. The chief executive doesn't have power over them" (author interview, July 30, 2012). He had made a point of not repairing the desk and was able to show me an ax mark in the wall behind my seat. In this highly competitive district, activists were ever-present in the halls and offices of the district building. The chief executive could not ignore them.

Party activists have real agency in political life, and they use it to pressure their copartisans for patronage. Politicians seeking to gain access to the state need the activists to do the grunt work of electoral politics: staging protests, joining marches, and, most important, mobilizing the electorate. The behavior of these activists must be understood in light of the existential uncertainties of living in a very poor country. Paths to material and social well-being are chartered most clearly through the public sector. Activists see the material gains accruing to small groups of Ghanaians, and they embrace the vulnerability that comes with being a vocal community member because—for elites and nonelites alike—the point of politics is to control the state. While district chief executives sit atop the distributional spigots of local governance, they are genuinely constrained in their behavior. These constraints covary with a district's electoral competitiveness. This is the subject of the next chapter.

4

Beyond Case Studies *Countrywide Analysis*

In the previous two chapters we were introduced to major forces in Ghana's local state: party activists and district chief executives. Through a comparative case study, we saw how chief executives are situated uneasily between forces above and below. From above, they are "the president's men." They dutifully carry out the mandate of the president and his party since the president nominates and may fire the chief executive at will. In Lamda District, Chief Executive Yaw Adofo infuriated his party's activists by ignoring them and by choosing instead to negotiate with the opposition assembly members in order to get the central government's infrastructure plans underway. But from below, a chief executive is "our man" in the eyes of the activists of the governing party. In the activists' view, the chief executive occupies that office because the activists got him there. They did this by toiling to get their party in power in national elections as well as by advancing the name of the chief executive for the president to nominate in the first place. Chief executives are vehicles for the expression of the activists' needs and wants rather than those of the party as a whole. In Aman District, Chief Executive Abenaa Boafo attributed her ability to "control" her party's activists to simply "listening to them" and being receptive to their demands.

We saw in those chapters that party activists use their power to demand patronage from district chief executives, but they are only sometimes successful. The major determinant of their success is the competitiveness of local politics since this in turn affects the chief executive's insulation from activist demands. In highly competitive districts, chief executives are politically exposed to the activists from their own party. But can we be sure that the lessons that emerged from these case studies hold true elsewhere in the country? My cases were chosen according to systematic criteria intended to ensure that potential selection biases were minimized, but no cases are ever truly representative.

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the generalizability of the case study findings using quantitative data on patronage and political competition covering the whole country. I first explain how data were collected. Then I explain how variables were constructed using those data. After visualizing the basic relationship between patronage measures and political competition, I discuss results from statistical analyses. The chapter aims to make a discussion of statistical findings approachable for a reader with intermediate experience with statistics, such as multivariate regression.

Data Collection

The outcome of interest is patronage, which means preferential treatment from government for party members. An ideal measure of this is simply the number and type of local government jobs, but such data is typically hard to get in developing countries. Data on Ghana's local government employment sits in the filing cabinets and paper folders of each of the 170 district assemblies. While the central government knows the number of people employed at a district assembly who are paid by the central government, I found during my time spent at the Ministry of Local Government that the central government did not know the number of locally hired employees. At a district assembly, this number is recorded by the human resources (or personnel) officer. My task, therefore, was to

get basic data on the number of district employees from a survey of 170 district human resource officers. The research challenge was in physically distributing and then collecting the documents from 170 districts. With a limited budget and a poor transportation network, hiring researchers at my base and sending them out to remote districts was not feasible. It was also unfeasible to use Ghana's postal system. Not only is it highly unreliable, but I also knew from my time spent at districts that unless a researcher was physically present a questionnaire would be ignored.

Given these constraints, I combined a snowball sampling technique with social media to hire over two hundred research assistants who were already physically located throughout the country. I took advantage of a preexisting network of university graduates who were engaged in public service work in every district. These graduates were employed through the state National Service program, a mandatory two-year posting to entry-level government positions for all of the country's university graduates. They number in the tens of thousands and are placed in schools and government offices around Ghana. The National Service personnel I knew were intelligent, motivated, and, crucially for me, bored and underpaid. They were also tech-savvy. All had smartphones and used social media. I realized that if I could tap into this network, I could hire a very large number of assistants to deliver and collect the questionnaire.

I attempted to build this nationwide network of research assistants by first asking the twenty or so National Service personnel I knew to recommend National Service personnel in other districts and to see if those personnel could recommend personnel in yet another district. This "two degrees of separation" method was important because I did not have the resources to employ a survey firm or to personally implement the survey. The method ensured that the many research assistants I hired would be trustworthy since they were connected to me through a mutual friend. The research design also included additional steps to verify the accuracy of data, such as hiring more than one researcher in

randomly selected districts. Those researchers were unknown to each other and were asked to collect the same data, which I could then compare. More examples of these reliability checks are in the appendix. Within three weeks I had hired over two hundred National Service personnel located in almost every district in the country, all of whom were connected to me through a social network.

This network approach allowed me to cover 132 of the 170 districts (78 percent). Responses are mapped in the appendix. Non-responses were mostly quasi-random owing to the sudden death of Ghana's president on July 24, 2012. Districts that had not completed their survey by that point ultimately returned no survey at all because government business ground to a halt for the late president's funeral. By the time government business resumed, I was hospitalized and immediately thereafter was scheduled to leave Ghana. Results reported in the appendix show no systematic relationship between the predicted probability of survey response and district characteristics. In other words, I have little reason to worry that the districts that responded to my survey were in some way systematically different from those who did not respond.

Dependent Variable: Patronage

In the political economy of development, patronage is typically measured objectively or subjectively. Objective measures are actual things that are observable and not open to different interpretations among witnesses. An objective measure of patronage could be government jobs or contracts given to party supporters. When direct measures are not available, indirect measures are used, such as bags of rice or housing materials (Gordin 2002; Calvo and Murillo 2004; Remmer 2007; Gibson, Hoffman, and Jablonski 2015). Ideally, social scientists prefer to use objective measures of the phenomena we are trying to study, but objective measures are not easily obtained, or they may not exist at all. In data-poor developing countries, even central governments often lack basic data on their own local governments. I recall a conversation in a central

government ministry in which a midlevel civil servant repeatedly got wrong the number of district assemblies in the country, which was a remarkably basic and elementary fact of the state.

It is this absence of basic data in developing countries that leads researchers to use subjective data. This usually takes the form of surveys of “expert” or “popular” opinions about the pervasiveness of patronage (e.g., Herbert Kitschelt 2013). The advantage for the researcher is not having to get data from people who have the most to gain by concealing it. But subjective data have two potential weaknesses. First, a perception of patronage may be out of sync with reality since humans are often bad at accurately representing the world around them (Thaler and Sunstein 2008). Nevertheless, a perception of pervasive patronage in government may be a politically salient “social fact,” even if objectively inaccurate (Onuf 1989). Second, people in the social environment being studied may not actually consider the acts to be patronage. For example, a bag of rice is objectively a bag of rice, but it does not necessarily follow that it is objectively an act of patronage. In saying that a bag of rice is an objective measure of patronage, one must avoid confusing an object (the bag) with the *act* of giving the bag. The subjective experience of giving and receiving a bag of rice may not be experienced as an act of patronage.

So, objective and subjective measures of patronage have strengths and weaknesses. I gathered data on objective and subjective measures of patronage in order to get the best of both approaches. I used my network of researchers to gather objective data on local government employment in all of Ghana’s 170 district assemblies, which I combined with subjective data on perceptions of patronage gleaned from a nationally representative survey of households.

My dependent variable, *staff size*, is the actual number of district assembly jobs, which are a key source of patronage for local party volunteers. I also use the log of *staff size*, since there are economies of scale to administration of very large or populous settlements (Gehlbach 2008). My measure of patronage is

similar to conventional measures but has the advantage of using actual staff sizes rather than proxying with staff expenditure. In addition, I collected data that break down overall staff sizes. In a typical district assembly, districts employ and manage approximately 20 to 25 percent of staff without central government involvement. Thus, *low-level staff* is the sum of drivers, cleaners, and security guards employed by the district. For consistency with my measure of overall staff size, I use a log of *low-level staff*. These staff generally work at the district building (e.g., they are night-watch staff rather than district police). These data allow a more fine-grained measure of patronage than overall staff size, since a district may hire (and fire) these workers using locally collected taxes and because these positions are sought after by party volunteers without much education. Though these jobs may be “low skill,” they are highly desirable. In 2012 the lowest-paid district worker could expect to earn 3,400 cedis (about \$1,650), slightly higher than the country’s gross national income per capita.

Subjective data on patronage came from a nationally representative survey of three thousand individuals across each of Ghana’s ten regions conducted under the auspices of a United States Agency for International Development project on local governance. The survey used a three-stage stratified sampling design to select twenty households in 150 districts (H. Huntington, Schultz, and Wibbels 2015). The survey asked respondents, “How important is it to be a member of the ruling party if someone in your village/town wants to” do any of the following: register land, get a job with the government, get out of trouble with the police, get development projects built in your community, get a stall in the market. Responses to these questions can be used to gauge the perception that party membership is key to living and thriving.

Explanatory Variables: Political Competition

I measure political competition with a continuous variable, *margin* (2000–2012 avg., *presidential*), which is the electoral margin between the presidential candidates of the New Patriotic Party

(NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) at the district level, averaged over four elections from 2000 to 2012.¹ An average ensures results are not sensitive to one election, but for robustness I also include margins in the 2008 presidential race, which was the election that preceded the data collection.

Although vote shares in district assembly elections would be the most obvious way to measure district competitiveness, district elections are legally nonpartisan, so candidates do not list their party memberships. This was acknowledged even by former president John Kufuor to be a charade since the affiliation of every candidate is known locally (Ahwoi 2010). Nevertheless, this means district assembly election data do not reveal party support. The alternative is to use district voting in presidential elections since district vote shares in presidential elections accurately predict the number of district assembly seats held by each party (i.e., districts do not dramatically switch voting behavior from local to national elections).² I also include parliamentary election data for robustness but do not rely on them for estimating relationships because of the problem of independent candidates. Independent candidates are typically members of one of the parties who has lost a primary, and they often split some of their party's vote, but I have no way of knowing afterward if an independent was "truly" NDC or NPP.

Figure 4.1 visualizes the relationship between patronage measures and political competition. These are bivariate relationships, meaning only two variables are considered and no other variables beyond patronage and competition are factored in. The horizontal axis in each figure is political competition measured with *margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)*, with highly competitive districts to the left (low margin). Different measures of patronage are on the vertical axis, with higher values corresponding to more patronage. We see a clear and simple picture: patronage is highest where electoral margins are smallest. For example, *help with police* is high when electoral margins are low. This means that the share of respondents in a district saying that it is important to be a party

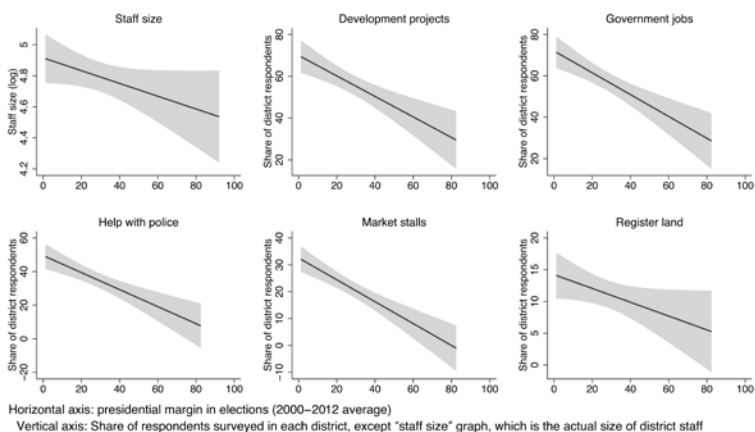


FIGURE 4.1. Relationship between political competition and patronage.

member in order to get help with the police tends to be higher in politically competitive districts (where margins are low).

Control Variables

My dataset includes variables that could plausibly affect the supply or the demand for patronage. I use 2010 census data for a number of proxies for district levels of development. *Illiterate* is the share of the district adult population recorded as illiterate in any language. *No toilet* is the share of the district population reporting no access to a toilet or latrine for solid waste. *Electricity* is the share of the district population with electricity as the main source of lighting. I am less concerned that these controls might be endogenous to the dependent variables since these variables are subject to control by the central government. Other control variables include *population* (2010, log) and *population density* (log), the share of the district population in urban areas (*urban*), and the number of years the district has existed in its current form (*district age*), which may affect institutional memory and thus institutional capacity. *Ethnic majority* and its squared term is the size of the district's largest ethnic group, following Posner (2004).

I also collected data on major economic endowments that could affect the availability of rents (i.e., income that is unearned), often because of monopoly power. A large literature in political economy argues that the behavior of states is shaped by how hard it is for officials to fund themselves. For example, local state officials could easily tax the movement of goods as it passes through main roads, which are easily staffed by state agents (Schouten 2022). Or, if the state relies on citizens to be forthcoming about the location and value of their goods in order to tax them—what Scott (2009) refers to as *escape agriculture*—state officials may try to legitimize their rule through better public services or a greater say for nonstate actors in governance (Bates 2008b; also Sánchez de la Sierra 2020).

First, I estimated the value of agricultural production by district. I used bimonthly commodity wholesale price data for 2010 from the Ministry of Agriculture. I took the median price of each crop across all available towns to get median prices across the country for one month, and I then calculated median prices for the year combined with yield data. For each district this generates one value, *crop value*, which is the total (logged) estimated value of all crop production in cedis, excluding cocoa.

Second, I estimated the size of district cocoa economies since Ghana is one of the world's largest cocoa producers and cocoa has been central to its postcolonial political economy. Cocoa data at the district level are surprisingly hard to collect. The Ministry of Agriculture collects data through its local offices on the yields of multiple major agricultural commodities such as yams and plantains, but it does not collect data on cocoa. The task of collecting data on cocoa falls to the Ghana Cocoa Board, which does not report district-level cocoa data. To measure cocoa yields, therefore, I use data from a nationally representative household survey in 2005, which asked farming households about past and future farming activities, including their farming of cocoa. *Cocoa* is a dummy variable coded "1" if at least 20 percent of respondents

planted or harvested cocoa in 2005. I confirmed the accuracy of this data by overlaying it with maps of exposure to direct sunlight and of soil types.

I also created three spatial measures since the physical location of local state offices matters, according to studies of African politics by Herbst (2000) and beyond (Soifer and Vom Hau 2008). To calculate direct distances, I used a GIS shapefile and Google Earth to obtain geocoded locations of every district capital and used a standard equation for calculating distances in kilometers.³ First, I calculated district distances to the central government in Accra. Second, I calculated distances to the culturally, economically, and politically significant city of Kumasi, which has the largest marketplace in West Africa in addition to the distinction of being home of the powerful *Asantehene* (Ashanti king).

Third, as Ghana is one of the top ten gold producers in the world, I calculated the distance from a district capital to the nearest major mine. It was important to record not only the existence of a mine within a district but also the proximity of neighboring districts to that mine. *Distance to mine* is the distance in kilometers to the nearest major gold mine, calculated as a continuous variable to allow for spillover effects into neighboring districts. I combined data from the annual reports of the Ghana Chamber of Mines and minerals yearbooks from the US Geological Service with Google Earth to first establish a list of all mines currently active and operated by a legally recognized company.⁴

The unit of analysis is the district assembly, of which there were 170 for the period under study. I estimate variations on a basic model in which the dependent variable is patronage in a district. The statistical approach involves testing the relationship between these measures of patronage and political competition while holding constant factors that might affect patronage, such as ethnic politics, urbanization, poverty, and

proximity to the central government. Results from this statistical analysis show that political competition is robustly related to patronage, even when patronage and competition are measured in different ways.

Identification Strategy: Instrumental Variables Regression

The value of simple regression techniques is they allow us to show that A and B are correlated even when we control for C and D. But this does not necessarily mean that A *caused* B. Simple regression techniques can demonstrate robust correlations between variables but not the direction of causality.⁵ B could cause A, or both A and B could be caused by Q, M, or any other factor that we have not thought to measure. While patronage may well be correlated with political competition, it is possible that both patronage and competition are themselves driven by some other factor that I have not measured (“omitted variables bias”) or reverse causality. One way of addressing this problem is to use an instrumental variables regression. (I explain the logic of this methodology in simple terms in the appendix.)

Since my explanatory variable (*margin*) is potentially endogenous to patronage or may suffer from omitted variables bias, my identification strategy exploits plausibly exogenous variation in political competition arising from historical migration of ethnic blocs with distinct political allegiances. Since voting in Ghana is quasi-ethnic (see chapter 1), the raw size of *some* ethnic groups in a district is highly correlated with party strength. My identification strategy takes advantage of the fact that four prominent Akan groups are reliably strong NPP supporters and that *some* Akan subgroups, *some* Guan subgroups, *some* Gurma subgroups, *some* Mole-Dagbon subgroups, Dangme, and Ewe are reliably strong NDC supporters. The instrument is constructed by taking the sum of the core NDC bloc population in a district and the sum of the core NPP bloc and subtracting the difference to obtain the *ethnic bloc difference* for each district. For

example, in a hypothetical district in which the voting age population is 45 percent Asante, 20 percent Bimoba, and 35 percent Nankani, we can reasonably assume that the NPP bloc will be approximately 45 percent since Asantes are known NPP supporters. We can also assume the NDC bloc will be the size of the Bimoba and Nankani populations (55 percent). The instrumental variable, *ethnic bloc difference*, is thus 10 percent—that is, the difference in the size of the two major politically aligned ethnic blocs.

To satisfy the exclusion restriction, there should be no reason to believe that the mere size of ethnic blocs affects district assembly behavior in any way other than *through* its effect on political competition. The intuition behind the instrument comes from the literature on ethnic politics and public goods that focuses on ethnic diversity specifically rather than on ethnicity generally. While some scholars argue that coethnics find it easier to cooperate than non-coethnics, these results are explicitly *not* interpreted in terms of group tastes (Habyarimana et al. 2007; Miguel and Gugerty 2005; Lyall, Imai, and Shiraito 2013; Nathan 2016). Ethnic diversity is said to have negative effects because, unlike homogeneous communities, heterogeneous communities do not possess the norms and networks that facilitate sanctioning of group members. It is through diversity and heterogeneity, therefore, that ethnicity is said to affect goods provision. Further explanation in the appendix shows that ethnic heterogeneity differs from the instrument, which measures only the size of ethnic blocs rather than heterogeneity per se.

To provide further evidence of the plausibility of the instrument, I test its implication, which is that a district's level of interparty competitiveness is driven by the size of its ethnic blocs. In chapter 1, I presented 1970 census data that asked respondents if they were born in their region of enumeration. I showed that districts with greater in-migration in 1970 are more competitive about thirty years later. This is a "hard test"

since this period predates the establishment of the modern district assembly system by two decades. Chapter 1 explained how cocoa made neighbors of distinct ethnoregional groups, some of which would find themselves politically opposed over time. This explains why highly competitive districts today can be found along a boomerang-shaped pattern around Kumasi and into the cocoa regions (see maps in chapter 1). It was this combination of cocoa migration and ethnoregional political alignments in the decades before the modern district assembly system that accounts for much of the present distribution of highly competitive districts. Thus, the instrument is plausible because the size of ethnic blocs affects local politics *through* its effect on levels of competitiveness.

Results and Analysis

The main results from estimated models for the size of district staff are shown in table 4.1. The dependent variables are the overall size of the district assembly's staff (models 1 and 2), the size of low-level staff specifically (models 3 and 4), and the share of district assembly staff that are paid by the central government rather than the locally hired staff (model 5). We see that electoral competitiveness is consistently associated with larger staff (smaller electoral margins are associated with "bigger government"). In model 1, the coefficient on *margin* is statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level, meaning we would arrive at this result by chance only one out of every one hundred times. The coefficient means that a one-unit change in *margin* is associated with a decrease in *staff size* of 1.28, which means for every percentage point increase in an electoral margin, we would expect a decrease in the number of district assembly staff of 1.28 people, holding all else constant. Substantively, and again holding all else constant, going from the least to the most electorally competitive district in the country is associated with 130 extra staff, which is almost a one standard deviation change.

Table 4.1. Regression models for size of district staff

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Staff size	Staff size (log)	Low-level staff	Low-level staff (log)	Paid centrally
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)	–1.280*** (0.444)	–0.005*** (0.002)	–0.341** (0.171)	–0.004 (0.003)	–0.168* (0.096)
Population (2010, log)	537.068 (601.574)	3.206 (3.230)	209.171 (221.446)	4.641 (5.333)	16.729 (142.484)
Urban (2010)	1.512*** (0.500)	0.010*** (0.002)	0.565*** (0.206)	0.014*** (0.003)	0.072 (0.138)
District age	1.220 (1.012)	0.003 (0.004)	0.639 (0.387)	0.012* (0.006)	–0.289 (0.282)
Distance to mine (log)	30.392** (14.051)	0.022 (0.037)	10.024 (6.054)	0.031 (0.079)	3.734* (2.096)
Crop value (log)	–20.403 (16.376)	0.088** (0.041)	–9.346 (10.054)	0.068 (0.074)	3.623* (2.118)
Illiterate	–0.763 (0.922)	–0.013*** (0.005)	0.211 (0.406)	0.002 (0.007)	–0.163 (0.259)
No toilet (2010)	–0.087 (0.528)	0.003 (0.003)	–0.335 (0.233)	–0.003 (0.004)	–0.088 (0.134)
Distance to Kumasi (log)	–62.171** (29.355)	–0.052 (0.047)	–10.669 (7.065)	0.007 (0.081)	–1.889 (2.488)

Table 4.1. Regression models for size of district staff (*cont.*)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Staff size	Staff size (log)	Low-level staff	Low-level staff (log)	Paid centrally
	(20.082)	(0.061)	(7.383)	(0.097)	(2.576)
Population density (log)	−378.994	−2.579	−161.983	−4.051	−16.333
	(594.670)	(3.223)	(220.357)	(5.326)	(140.249)
Area (km ² , land)	−397.360	−2.610	−164.423	−4.042	−15.905
	(600.457)	(3.227)	(222.367)	(5.363)	(141.590)
Ethnic majority	−1.056	−0.004	−0.510	−0.004	−0.370
	(2.391)	(0.010)	(1.198)	(0.017)	(0.441)
Ethnic majority ²	0.004	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.005
	(0.017)	(0.000)	(0.008)	(0.000)	(0.003)
Electricity	−0.317	−0.001	0.223	0.005	−0.108
	(0.723)	(0.003)	(0.285)	(0.005)	(0.156)
Cocoa dummy	−20.330	−0.165**	−3.375	−0.095	0.640
	(19.031)	(0.078)	(8.542)	(0.142)	(4.694)
Constant	−1500.85***	−2.997***	−529.354***	−5.540***	38.309
	(346.596)	(1.091)	(164.879)	(2.063)	(65.622)
Observations	131	131	127	127	131
R ²	0.705	0.701	0.531	0.512	0.156

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

The estimated model is visualized in figure 4.2. Each dot is a district. The horizontal axis plots the actual size of district staff against the vertical, showing the size of district staff as estimated

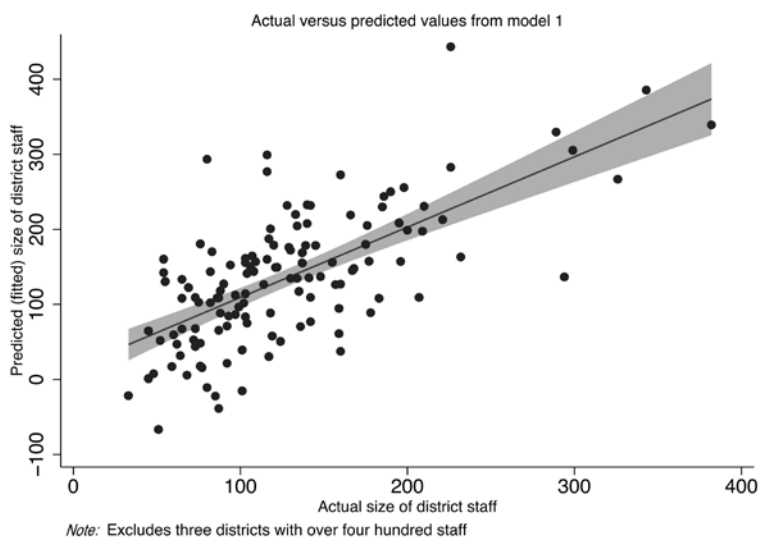


FIGURE 4.2. Regression line for model of district staff size.

in model 1. The figure excludes metropolitan assemblies due to their very large staff sizes. We see a clear relationship between the actual size of district staff and the size as predicted by the model. Finally, model 2 shows that specifying staff size in log form does not change the results.

Consistent with models for overall staff size, estimated models for the size of low-level staff show larger electoral margins are associated with fewer low-level staff (i.e., smaller electoral margins are associated with more low-level staff). In model 3, the coefficient on *margin* is statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. Substantively, and holding all other variables at their median, going from the least to the most competitive district is associated with thirty-four more low-level staff. Recall that the average number of low-level staff is forty-six. The coefficient on *margin* in model 4 approaches conventional levels of statistical significance ($p > 0.144$) and is in the theorized direction. Substantively, and holding all else constant, a 10 percent increase in the electoral margin is associated with a 4 percent

decrease in the number of low-level staff. Finally, in the model for *paid centrally* (%), which is the share of district staff paid by the central government, the estimated coefficient on *margin* is statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level. Substantively, and holding all else constant in model 5, going from the least to the most competitive district is associated with a decrease by 20 percentage points in the share of staff paid by the central government—that is, a larger share of local government staff are hired and paid locally rather than by the central government in relatively more competitive districts. Again, as shown in the appendix, these estimates are robust to using alternate measures of competition and to instrumenting for competition, and the results are not explained by features of local elections such as turnout or electoral volatility.

Table 4.2 presents estimated models from the household survey in which respondents were asked how important it was to be a member of the governing party if a person wanted to get assistance, which was defined in a number of ways. We see in models 1 through 4 that respondents were especially likely to point to the importance of party membership in highly competitive districts. For example, the dependent variable in model 1 (*projects*) is the district sum of respondents saying it is somewhat or very important to be a member of the ruling party “if someone in your village/town wants to get development projects built in your community.” The estimated coefficient on *margin* is statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level. The sign on the coefficient is negative, which means as electoral margins get larger (as elections becomes less competitive), the share of respondents saying it is somewhat or very important to be a member of the ruling party in order to get development projects goes down—that is, there is a greater expectation that patronage is the rule in relatively highly competitive districts. Substantively, and holding all else constant, going from the least to the most competitive district is associated with approximately 25 percent more respondents saying party membership mattered for getting development projects.

Table 4.2. Regression models for importance of being in the party to get . . .

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Projects	Govt. jobs	Help with police	Market stalls	Land
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)	–0.385**	–0.477***	–0.423***	–0.339***	–0.101
	(0.162)	(0.162)	(0.138)	(0.085)	(0.067)
Population (2010, log)	124.446	–336.504	–99.157	–52.910	–21.596
	(311.619)	(354.606)	(236.141)	(170.244)	(124.237)
Urban (2010)	0.149	0.016	0.080	0.035	–0.082
	(0.177)	(0.184)	(0.165)	(0.104)	(0.084)
District age	0.514	0.259	0.135	0.104	–0.027
	(0.341)	(0.337)	(0.309)	(0.193)	(0.175)
Distance to mine (log)	–1.677	–4.337	–3.376	–4.949**	–1.099
	(4.926)	(4.615)	(3.930)	(2.394)	(1.611)
Crop value (log)	–4.199	–3.811	–6.158	–2.879	–1.480
	(3.534)	(3.523)	(3.783)	(2.268)	(2.341)
Illiterate	0.090	–0.059	0.218	0.385	0.113
	(0.365)	(0.414)	(0.421)	(0.281)	(0.272)
No toilet (2010)	0.170	0.324	0.037	–0.204	–0.008
	(0.207)	(0.228)	(0.234)	(0.158)	(0.128)
Distance to Kumasi (log)	5.421	2.254	6.656	2.540	2.206
	(4.529)	(4.365)	(4.061)	(2.591)	(1.815)
Distance to Accra (log)	13.945**	8.114	12.488**	10.589***	–0.204
	(5.313)	(5.650)	(5.051)	(3.124)	(3.032)

Table 4.2. Regression models for importance of being in the party to get . . . (*cont.*)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Projects	Govt. jobs	Help with police	Market stalls	Land
Population density (log)	-114.790 (310.181)	347.377 (354.560)	107.820 (234.502)	56.567 (169.969)	19.771 (124.089)
Area (km ² , land)	-123.559 (310.510)	340.426 (354.025)	102.031 (234.971)	54.181 (169.785)	18.881 (123.963)
Ethnic majority	0.771 (0.849)	0.703 (0.965)	-0.436 (0.858)	-0.758 (0.680)	-0.464 (0.499)
Ethnic majority ²	-0.006 (0.006)	-0.006 (0.007)	0.003 (0.006)	0.006 (0.005)	0.003 (0.004)
Electricity	-0.109 (0.219)	-0.025 (0.242)	-0.072 (0.206)	0.046 (0.134)	0.095 (0.108)
Cocoa dummy	11.459* (5.975)	4.061 (6.148)	4.317 (6.061)	-4.610 (4.006)	-2.520 (2.653)
Constant	-89.964 (113.945)	-46.570 (102.665)	-56.327 (112.094)	-9.772 (62.823)	55.437 (53.290)
Observations	116	116	116	116	116
R ²	0.368	0.305	0.383	0.415	0.117

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable is a survey question that asked, "How important is it to be a member of the ruling party if someone in your village/town wants to get help with . . . ?"

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

To further show the robustness of the results in tables 4.1 and 4.2, I include more statistical tests in the appendix (tables A.9–A.16) with varying controls and alternative specifications of political competition. These include the 2008 presidential or parliamentary elections rather than the 2000–2012 average; instrumenting with

ethnic bloc difference; whether the sitting member of parliament was a copartisan of the governing party; volatility in electoral margins since 2000; the number of candidates for district assembly seats; the share of district assembly seats that were contested; voter turnout in the 2006 metropolitan, municipal, and district assembly elections and the 2008 general election; and, finally, because results could be driven by Ghana's handful of very large districts, I estimate separately the main models without the metropolitan assemblies. The results are robust to these alternate specifications.

Alternative Explanations

One alternative explanation for cross-district variation in patronage comes from scholarship on the quality of center-periphery relations and the ability of rulers to broadcast power over their territory. Herbst (2000) is a prominent proponent of the image of the African state as historically dominant in the center but with weakly radiating power as one moves into the periphery, away from urban centers and the capital city and into small towns and rural areas. For Herbst, low population density meant rulers fought over people and trade routes rather than territory, and so African states before, during, and after colonialism tended to underdevelop institutions that would enable them to control their territory. The long-term result is the many African states today that are unable to control their people or their territory. To test the weak-states hypothesis, it is important not to misrepresent Herbst's theory. It was not the mere distance from the ruler that mattered for the long-term development of states. Rather, it was that population densities shaped the ability of rulers to develop infrastructure through which they could broadcast power. The topography hypothesis might then be that the nature of local institutions should covary with the ability of the center to develop institutional and physical control infrastructures over local actors, which itself would be a function of the isolation and density of those communities. It should also be noted that Herbst did not consider Ghana to be a country with unfavorable geography, but

I engage with the hypothesis nonetheless, given its prominence in the literature (e.g., Fukuyama 2011; Nunn 2008).

Across multiple models already shown, controls for population and isolation were rarely statistically significant. Even when they were, measures of political competition were robust to their inclusion. Similarly, the correlations between electoral competitiveness measured as a continuous variable and distance to Accra, land area, or population density are not statistically significant. In simple terms, there is no relationship between district competitiveness and district spatial characteristics.

What I observed during fieldwork makes these findings unsurprising. The central government not only is aware of the behavior of local state actors, but it is also frequently central government actors who provide the means with which districts provide patronage. In one of my research sites, for example, a chief executive told me that the deputy regional minister promised his own ministerial seat in the future in return for the chief executive's help in ensuring that the deputy regional minister would win the upcoming parliamentary election. In the months leading up to the 2012 general election, the deputy regional minister provided materials for construction projects to the chief executive, who in turn connected local copartisans to these resources and ensured they ended up in the "right" neighborhoods. The behavior was not at the cost of central control over a small rural polity, but rather central and local actors interacted in ways that were mutually beneficial *and* produced perverse governance outcomes.

A second prominent alternative explanation comes from scholarship on social capital, in which weak ties among neighbors are linked with low rates of civic participation and social trust (Putnam 1993; Varshney 2002). Where trust in institutions is lacking, personal relationships become essential to surviving and thriving in society. The plausible link to patronage is that fewer constraints exist on actors involved in patronage activities in these less civically minded communities. Measuring social capital is less easy since my survey data come from 2012 while the only available

data offering measures of social capital is from 2003. I use two approaches to overcome this data problem. The first uses the 2003 social capital data in the main models for which the data is mostly from 2010–12. In addition to the time gap, the downside is that this reduces the sample since some districts have been adjusted in the intervening period. The second approach takes advantage of the finding that political competition is related to patronage. Since districts' levels of political competition have been remarkably stable over time, and since I have data on political competitiveness from the early 2000s, I can see if social capital covaries with political competitiveness in that earlier period.⁶ If districts with significant patronage today are highly competitive and if highly competitive districts ten years ago had no distinct social capital outcomes, then this suggests that social capital appears unrelated to patronage provision.

Data come from the 2003 Core Welfare Indicators Survey of forty-nine thousand households. In models reported in the appendix, I find that political competition is not associated with marriage outside of one's group, perceptions of safety and communal tension, or collective action in the form of neighborhood watch associations. Social capital does, however, appear robustly related to higher political competition in the following ways: more general distrust, more political conflict, and *more* civic participation in the form of radio listenership. The last finding is especially curious, since civic-minded actors are supposed to trust more and participate more, while exposure to media was theoretically important in Robert D. Putnam's *Italy* and Alexis de Tocqueville's *America* (Putnam 1993, 92). But my analysis finds a weak overall relationship between social capital and political competition, and what correlations do emerge do not fit together in a social capital frame.

Finally, it could be the case that "bloated" local state offices actually provide relatively better public services. If so, then larger staff sizes may not be evidence of patronage at all. I use four variables to test this. *Bad garbage* is the share of district residents who

report burning, burying, or dumping their garbage in the 2010 census. *No toilet* is the share of the district population reporting no access to toilets of any kind, including pit latrines, in the 2010 census. I also test the possibility that district patronage may be a function of district budgetary resources (Boulding and Brown 2014). *Revenue per capita* (2010) is total district revenue, per capita, in 2010. *Capital exp.* (%) is the share of the district budget spent on capital expenditure, such as schools and boreholes for water. In results shown in the appendix, I find no correlation between electoral competition and these measures of public services. This is significant because it suggests that local governments with relatively more workers are *not* providing relatively more or better public services.

The results shown in this chapter lend support for my central claim: intense political competition causes greater patronage. Greater numbers of government workers could not be explained by the size or population density of a district or by its wealth, human capital, or social capital or by the availability of extractive economies such as cocoa or gold.

Yet a prominent alternative explanation remains: institutional quality. Perhaps these highly competitive, patronage-providing districts are simply bloated and inefficient. This would make sense if so many government workers are hired based on party connections rather than on merit. Indeed, the outcomes I analyzed in this chapter hew more closely to what districts “do” externally than how they self-administer or self-organize internally.

The next chapter explores this relationship between political competition and administrative quality. I use interviews with politicians and civil servants as well as quantitative data on each district’s head civil servant. I present a striking finding: not only is administrative quality no worse in these highly competitive, patronage-providing districts, but there is also evidence to suggest that such districts may actually have better administrative

quality than less competitive districts. I make sense of this finding through the logic of building governing capacity for patronage provision. A state's capacity to govern can be built in a number of ways, some intentional and others not. In many cases, capacity is an unintentional spillover when politicians need an administrative body to carry out their plans. Governing capacity can be built for "good reasons," such as the need to deliver health care for all, but it can also be built in the pursuit of "bad" things, such as the need to exterminate a population or deliver favors to friends. I will present evidence that some districts actively seek to strengthen their administrative capacity in order to provide patronage.

5

Why Patronage and State Capacity Can Coexist

In mid-2010 I accompanied a Ministry of Local Government inspector on a visit to a district assembly in Eastern Region. The district was not especially poor, but its administration had been performing badly in official assessments, and the inspector was going to find out why. The inspector's arrival sent local civil servants scurrying to gather reports and documentation. He asked for a list of all projects begun in the past five years and randomly chose some to visit in the company of senior officials. I followed along. The evidence was clear: little progress had been made in three years of construction of stalls in the main market. Project funds had slowed to a trickle and then stopped entirely, so contractors downed tools and did not return. In a tense meeting back at the district offices, the inspector told the civil servants to raise the market taxes and finish the job.

Many districts are littered with such unfinished projects. They stand as permanent and visible reminders to residents of the noncredibility of government promises. The specter of projects begun but not completed will resonate with readers familiar with government performance in many developing countries. In some countries the authorities do not secure sufficient funds to see a project through. Perhaps they overestimated what was needed, or

perhaps officials depleted the project funds through clientelism or corruption. The narrative thread that knits these explanations together is the image of the typical developing country as lacking in state capacity (Levy and Kpundeh 2004; Amsden 1989; Kohli 2004). The concept of state capacity is used by social scientists, development practitioners, and policymakers to understand how and why many public projects are planned and executed in ways that seem inefficient or downright incompetent. Social scientists have characterized some states as occupied by a rentier class of civil servants who abuse their official positions. Hence, the weak capacity of states is often attributed to these dens of inefficiency and corruption (Sandbrook 1993; O'Dwyer 2006; Hydén 1983). Indeed, the idea that state capacity is what many developing countries lack is precisely why billions of dollars is spent in foreign aid to train and equip civil servants.

It seemed fitting, then, for me to think about weak state capacity when touring the half-finished district projects with the inspector. Cement carcasses on abandoned construction sites seemed a perfect representation of government mismanagement. The truth, of course, was not so straightforward. Later that day, the inspector explained to me that chief executives often start projects all over a district in order to raise their visibility, fully aware that funds will be stretched too thinly for all contractors to be paid and all projects completed. When a new chief executive takes over, the project is abandoned altogether because the new chief executive does not want to give the honor of a completed project to his predecessor. This was the situation with an unfinished assembly building in a district where only a foundation existed after five years of construction (see figure 5.1).

While unfinished projects could easily be attributed to a lack of some generalized state capacity—poor planning and management by corrupt or incompetent bureaucrats—the inspector's insight told a different story. While the civil servants gathered that morning suffered the humiliation of the inspection, I ultimately found that bureaucrats were bystanders rather than active drivers



FIGURE 5.1. Unfinished assembly building five years into construction, Eastern Region. Author photo.

of local state behavior.¹ It was the nature of Ghana's political institutions, rather than the quality of its administrative apparatus, that lay at the heart of these unfinished projects.

Many of the local state bureaucrats I spent time with were tax collectors. I had chosen this group because of the historically important link between tax collection and state capacity (Bräutigam, Fjeldstad, and Moore 2008; Sánchez de la Sierra 2020). The setting of tax rates and the schemes through which taxes can be collected require two distinct forms of capacity—internal and external. First, internal capacity means administrative quality in the form of fiscally literate staff to generate revenue projections or to logistically implement tax collection. The evidence in this chapter shows that local civil servants are on balance competent and trusted, so this internal capacity is not sorely lacking in Ghana. My ethnographic and interview data show that elite district civil servants are more meritocratic and politically neutral than we might expect.

The second kind of capacity states need in order to gather taxes is external capacity, which is the ability of civil servants to actually “see” revenue in society—in farms, behind stalls, under mattresses—and to have the means to efficiently extract it. In contemporary states this outward-facing capacity is often enabled by invasive technologies such as computers, e-commerce, and satellites that enable state monitoring and control of bank accounts,

investment, and physical assets. In premodern states, without advanced surveillance technology, authorities who purported to govern (and tax) their populations relied on communities and their elites to enable the authorities to detect and extract wealth. This generally remains the case in the world's less wealthy countries.

The major finding in this chapter is that the Ghanaian local state tends to lack this external dimension of capacity (discussed further in the concluding chapter). To the extent that Ghana's local state actors have weak capacity, it is because administrative agents are unable for political reasons to go about their work. If district governance appears inefficient or incompetent, it is not due to the low quality of the administration. Rather, it is because inefficiency or incompetence is politically expedient for office-holders. Indeed, I present evidence that the politically competitive districts that engage in patronage politics are not only administratively no weaker than other districts, but that the *opposite* may be the case: highly competitive districts have incentives to be highly responsive to their own supporters, and so they desire efficient and experienced technocrats to help them deliver goods. This explains why many districts simultaneously engage in patronage politics while also building their administrative capacity. Before I lay out this logic of building capacity to provide patronage, I first want to show how key local state bureaucrats are held in high regard.

Meritocracy in the Local State

The hiring of civil servants on the basis of merit is an important variable in the political economy of development. Bureaucratic merit is associated with sound execution of public policies, perceptions of state legitimacy, political stability, and attractiveness to international investors (Evans and Rauch 1999; Mazzuca and Munck 2014; Fukuyama 2005; Fortin-Rittberger 2012; Andersen et al. 2014). Scholars of African politics have provided a wealth of information on the relationship between state weakness and the appointment of officials on bases other than merit—that is,

patronage rather than entrance examinations. In an intellectual lineage running back to Weber (1978), Africanists have extensively documented the (neo)patrimonial nature of African states, in which employment is offered as a means of securing political support or acquiescence rather than bureaucratic efficiency.² The result after several decades of independence, as van de Walle (2001, 131) notes, were African civil services “characterized by pervasive absenteeism, endemic corruption, politicization, declining legitimacy, and low morale.” By contrast, an intentional decision to introduce and sustain a meritocratic civil service tells us something about those controlling the state. It not only suggests that official policies will be executed with efficiency and impartiality, but it also suggests that the political system that produced such a bureaucracy is itself modern and mature.

I spent time with local state bureaucrats to get a sense of their “merit,” and toward the end of my fieldwork I gathered data on the characteristics of the elite local civil servants. I used my survey (described in the previous chapter) to gather basic information on the most important local civil servant, known as the district coordinating director, as well as what are locally called the “core technocrats,” meaning the small number of senior bureaucrats such as a district budget officer, finance officer, or engineer. These civil servants generally begin their careers by first taking a (genuinely) competitive entrance exam with the Public Services Commission and thereafter are managed by the centrally controlled Local Government Service.³ The civil servants I discuss in this chapter are these high-level actors in district administration. They should be distinguished from the low-level district staff such as drivers and cleaners in the previous chapter, whose jobs were patronage prizes for activists.

Basic summary statistics shown in table 5.1 are a good place to start. I include characteristics of the chief executive (head politician) for comparison. First, *from district* shows that while 92 percent of chief executives serve in their home district, this is true for only 4 percent of coordinating directors. The same pattern

emerges when we look at *from region*.⁴ Almost all chief executives are from the region in which they serve, compared to about one-third of coordinating directors. At a first glance, this suggests the top civil servants do not owe their local government positions to their place in local power networks and that these positions are not being filled by local allies of the chief executive. Survey research from Sigman (2022) supports this. She found that only 4 percent of Ghanaian civil servants thought political connections were the most important factor when colleagues were hired, compared to 15 percent in nearby Benin.

Table 5.1. Summary statistics for head civil servants

	Age (avg.)	Graduate degree (%)	From region (%)	From district (%)	Avg. years at district
Chief executive	50	35	96	92	3.6
Coordinating director	48	51	38	4	5.0

Source: Data from author survey.

Second, *graduate degree* shows one-third of chief executives have a graduate degree, such as a master's or similar professional qualification, compared to just over half of all coordinating directors.⁵ This reveals another basic fact about the core civil servants in a district: they are overwhelmingly better educated than the politicians for whom they work and certainly better educated than the fewer than 1 percent of Ghanaians with similar advanced degrees. This not only shows that top civil servants are well educated, but it is also suggestive of an elitism that I describe later in the chapter.

Finally, core technocrats have more organizational experience and institutional memory than their political master's. We see in *average years at district* that chief executives had spent an average of 3.6 years at their district, compared to 5.0 for coordinating directors. In data not shown, 98 percent of chief executives were first-time chief executives, with about half having previously

served as an assembly member. This contrasts with coordinating directors, who worked in an average of four district assemblies before their current district and for whom the median number of years working in the district assembly system (not just the present district) was fifteen. These statistics communicate a reality that is understood within the halls of local government: top civil servants are seasoned government professionals when compared to even the most important district politician.

I also surveyed politicians and bureaucrats on what they thought of the “skill and expertise of the core civil servants,” where “core” is understood to mean the small group of elite technocrats such as the finance and budget officers but not low-level workers such as typists or drivers. Respondents were strikingly positive about the competence of the core civil servants. Figure 5.2 shows significant satisfaction across respondents. Overall, chief executives felt the skill and expertise of the core civil servants was good (63 percent) or excellent (21 percent). The same pattern held for coordinating directors, with 91 percent saying good or excellent, and presiding members, with 81 percent saying good or excellent.

The quality of senior civil servants can also be seen in professional profiles gleaned through my case studies. While the

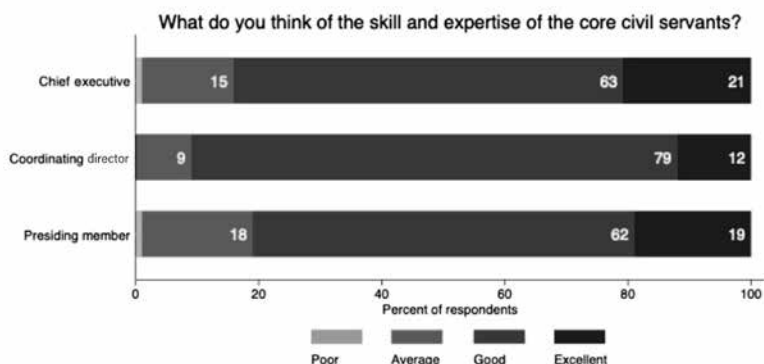


FIGURE 5.2. Views on the skill and expertise of district civil servants, by respondent. *Note:* Omits response option “very bad,” which had no responses.

time horizon for district politicians is short and lends urgency to their behavior in office, district civil servants expect long careers. A smart civil servant will bide their time in the knowledge that steady progress up the professional ladder will provide gradual growth in income and/or social status. If they are smart enough, it would also offer occasional opportunities for nongovernmental revenue generation. One finance officer described to me his well-diversified portfolio. Only one week after being rotated to his present district, he approached the local traditional chief for access to land. His plan was not to farm but to speculate by storing maize until the off-season. He planned to use a garage in Kumasi he had built for his Accra car dealership, where he stored cars that his brother sent to him from the United States. He also lectured part-time at the Institute of Chartered Accountants. In conversation he described with ease how the district's finances should be understood in light of broader market developments, which was a financial sophistication that could not be said of the chief executive.

Such entrepreneurship was not limited to top civil servants. In the same district, a young civil servant used his meager salary to set up an outdoor theater in his neighborhood where locals could pay to watch soccer matches. He spent 700 cedis on the wood and labor for the walls, benches, and roof, 1,000 cedis on several televisions, and about 150 cedis a month for cable access (about \$700 in total). Depending on demand, locals paid anywhere from five to fifty cents to watch matches. He constantly reinvested this income in order to expand with paid labor, better televisions, and more comfortable seating. His energy contrasted with his district office job, where he complained of boredom and of work that could be done by people with less education. Occasionally he even slept at his desk during the day. He had few files and a computer that did not work. The scene conforms to the stereotype of the inefficient African bureaucrat. The reality was different, however. He *was* skilled. He *was* capable, entrepreneurial, imaginative, and hard-working. One of the ways institutions matter for development is

by incentivizing people to make long-term investments (Robinson, Acemoglu, and Johnson 2005). Bureaucrats such as him were making investments—just not in their public professions. The institutional space he occupied as a civil servant neither enabled nor needed him to make use of these qualities.

Such entrepreneurship could also be found among retired civil servants. Unlike professionals in industrialized societies, top Ghanaian civil servants retire to work, not to rest. Most elderly technocrats I knew planned to retire to a farm or run a business. One district inspector retired in his sixties and started a private revenue-collection company. The retirement plans of another district inspector included purchasing refrigeration equipment to supply the region's growing ice cream industry. In another district, the coordinating director had lobbied to be stationed in his final posting close to his two-hundred-acre farm of mango, cocoa, citrus, and teak, which he would expand with paid labor and imported farm equipment once he retired from public service.

For many younger civil servants, the job was a steppingstone to something else. Online degrees from Europe and the United States were very popular, and many officers I knew aspired to undertake either a master's or a doctorate in administration, economics, or political science. Just a few years in the local government system was all it took for many officers to become jaded with their supporting roles in political dramas. So it was with one budget officer I knew who had just been enstooled as a low-level chief in his home village. He was formerly a teacher and had a master's in statistics, which he felt was not being put to use in his current position. He wanted to get a PhD, possibly in the United States, and go back into teaching. The basis of our friendship was PhD programs and techniques for taking college entrance exams. He was very unhappy with his job and with its location in a small cocoa town, which he usually referred to dismissively as "the village," and he longed to join his wife in Accra. During one conversation in which he talked about his feelings toward "these people in the village," shouting erupted in the courtyard between

civil servants and some locals. "You see, this is what we deal with," he said, drawing closed the paper-thin curtains in a futile attempt to drown out the noise (author's field notes, March 22, 2012).

For similarly well-educated civil servants, the goal was to move to a nicer town at a time when Ghana was undergoing a construction boom, with shopping malls, megachurches, and modern homes popping up in major cities. Indeed, the flip side of these elite civil servants being well educated was their elitism. Many had done further studies in subjects relating to public affairs or governance and expressed interest in my research. Many were conversant in the "politics of exclusion" in Africa (Whitaker 2005), even using that exact term, and were in tune with policy debates surrounding good governance and the political economy of developmental states.

Many longed for a time when enlightened civil servants could fashion society in more rational ways. Ghana's failings were often explained to me in terms of the cultural failings of "the African" and his willingness to engage in the "tribalism" of poor countries rather than the scientific legal rationalism of "White countries" (author's field notes, July 24, 2012). These discourses were reminiscent not only of colonialism but also of contemporary cultural approaches to development in social sciences and in international development policymaking. In the cultural view, a major obstacle to development resides in the minds of poor people in poor countries. Examples include "backward" views on women, moral acceptance of bribery, and negative attitudes toward private ownership of land (Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales 2006; Arias 2011; Landes 2006). Civil servants frequently saw the public as resistant to the modernizing influences of local government because of their poor education. For example, civil servants tended to think that residents' unwillingness to pay taxes was influenced by their levels of "education" on the role of taxes in development. One finance officer told me, "Property tax alone should be able to finance an assembly, but most people are not willing to pay because they don't understand the benefits of

taxation. Even my own grandmother. She was tearing down an old home to build a new one. The assembly came by and spray-painted that they needed to come [to the assembly] for a license. My grandmother was furious! But I explained to her that all they want from you is to register so they can provide you with service” (author’s field notes, March 12, 2012). In his view, the orderly pursuit of government was slowed by a citizen’s ignorance. In another example, one coordinating director thought the problem with Ghana was the “ways of thinking” of the country’s leaders and those who keep them in power:

Ghana has made no progress since the introduction of the local government system in the 1980s. I have served under plenty of politicians in my time, including teachers, soldiers, professors, and more, and they’ve mostly all been bad. Men like [former Minister of Local Government] Kwamena Ahwoi had great ideas, but there just aren’t many like him. Look at [Accra Metropolitan Assembly chief executive Oko] Vanderpuije. He has great vision. He understands public private partnerships from his time in the US. But look at this man [pointing to the office of his chief executive]. I tried to get royalties for environmental degradation from this neighboring district that produces diamonds. I brought it up with the chief executive here to see if he could lobby for some change, but nothing happened. He is not well educated. (author’s field notes, July 24, 2012)

This coordinating director made constant reference to the educational achievements of the chief executive, as did so many of the technocrats I knew. The fact that coordinating directors were indeed a better-educated class than chief executives or assembly members partly explains why politicians feared being outmaneuvered—they would say “sabotaged”—by cunning civil servants. Senior or well-educated coordinating directors often carried an air of paternalism in their attitude toward their chief executive, and many resented having to get their hands dirty while helping the chief executive deliver patronage. Many appeared to

resent the grip politicians had over the instruments of government. The same coordinating director continued:

In fact, cooperation is often punished by your own party supporters! We have had violent clashes here around every election. What we should do is have competitive selection of chief executives. They should advertise the position in the newspaper and not restrict it to indigenes. Because familiarity breeds contempt and if you are a local, this being Africa you will never be able to do a good job because of the pressures. You see, here we have the mentality of the black man and tribalism. Sometimes when a [government] service gets a new regional director, his tribesmen will try to get postings under him in the belief that they will get preferential treatment with offices and jobs. This is why President Mahama will be good for [his coethnics] the Gonjas and the northerners. (author's field notes, July 24, 2012)

The elitism of technocrats could also be seen in their reluctance to engage with individual members of the public. One technocrat explained to me the difference between his present district, which was large and rural, and his previous district, which had a large town: "In that place they have a big town so people were always coming for things!" He swiped the air dismissively to underline his exhaustion. "But here the people stay in their farms, and they don't want to get involved in the day-to-day administration!" This was not to lament the absence of participatory governance but to celebrate the freedom to write reports and plan projects in peace (author's field notes, March 21, 2012).

The elitism of technocrats could also be seen in their reactions to the design of district offices. In some districts, official buildings are located at the heart of the town's activity, which is typically understood to be the site of the main marketplace, or else they are on the outskirts of town. One district engineer explained why his current posting was an upgrade on his previous one: "In this town the people are relaxed, and we can do our job. But in that place [his previous district] the local people are always at the assembly.



FIGURE 5.3. A one-story open-plan district building. Author photo.

And it is very hot. They give you no peace. But here [in the present district] we are out of town so people will not travel to confront you” (author’s field notes, July 23, 2012). In other words, the district building was simply too long of a walk, or too expensive a drive, for all but the most dedicated citizens to attempt to reach. Indeed, district buildings on the outskirts of town were invariably quieter than those located centrally, which typically bustled with groups hoping to speak to district officials.

The other physical feature that mattered was architectural. In two of my cases, the district assembly office was a one-story building, which meant technocrats could be reached from the front steps of the building (see figure 5.3). The building’s square layout was straightforward, so a visitor could easily navigate to their desired office. Only the offices of the chief executive, and sometimes the coordinating director, have air conditioning, so for all other staff the open windows carry in dust, heat, and voices of the public. In figure 5.4, three stories and a front wall provide officials with plenty of “protection” from outside noise. Navigating the building was also less straightforward. Visitors are frequently stopped to ask what their business is, providing multiple opportunities for blocking access to the most important offices.

These interviews, surveys, and ethnographic observations construct an image of elite district civil servants as well-educated professionals. More than that, they see themselves apart from and



FIGURE 5.4. Multistory building with walled-off exterior. Author photo.

above the politicians and the public for whom they nominally work. The competence of civil servants, however, is only one side of the coin. A civil servant may be competent but may put that competence to any number of ends. In the next section I turn to questions of civil servant neutrality and independence in order to answer the question “For whom did civil servants work?”

The Political Neutrality of Civil Servants

One concern with the quality of any civil service is that offices are used to reward clientelistic networks—for example, by awarding positions to coreligious, copartisan, or coethnic individuals. In the districts included in my sample, we saw that almost no coordinating directors come from the districts in which they served. This small piece of evidence suggests coordinating directors are unlikely to be ethnically biased in their work. Moreover, since ethnicity often overlaps with partisanship in Ghana, the fact that coordinating directors are rarely coethnic with their district suggests overlap between partisan identities and ethnic identities of coordinating directors is likely to be minimal.⁶

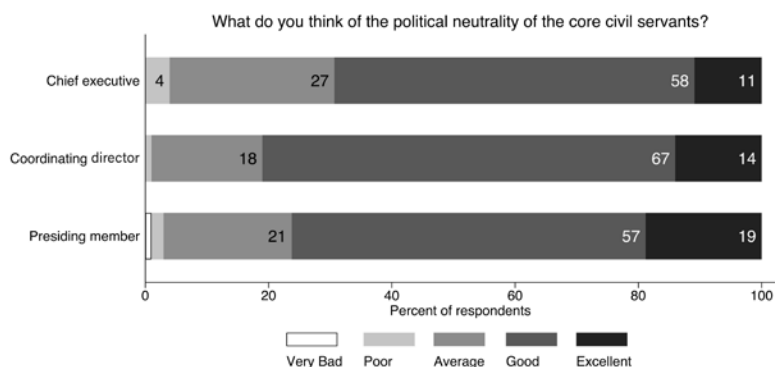


FIGURE 5.5. Views on the political neutrality of district civil servants, by respondent.

To measure civil servant neutrality and impartiality more directly, my survey asked respondents about the political neutrality of core civil servants. Figure 5.5 shows strikingly positive views on the political neutrality of civil servants. Sixty-nine percent of chief executives said good (58 percent) or excellent (11 percent), and combined “good” and “excellent” responses were the majority from coordinating directors (81 percent) and presiding members (76 percent).

These survey data were supported by interviews with politicians. In one of my most unexpected findings, politicians rarely had bad things to say about civil servants. This was true of politicians who were in power *and in opposition*. Typically, asking an opposition politician what they thought of the chief executive was a double-edged sword: it would get the interviewee talking, but it would be impossible to unpack accurate facts from outlandish allegations. But when I steered the conversation to the district’s civil service, the tone completely changed, as though I had switched from asking about war to asking about the weather. More often than not, the neutrality and competence of core civil servants was a nonissue. Interviewees usually wanted to me to return to the topic of how awful the incumbent was. In one stronghold of the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP), an assembly member spent

most of our meetings railing against the National Democratic Congress (NDC). He could expound on the assorted “crimes” of the chief executive and the district without much prompting, and he was rarely the first to end our conversations. When I asked about the civil servants beneath the chief executive, however, he became disinterested:

Assemblyman: That core staff is very good and trustworthy.

Me: Have they always been like that?

Assemblyman: Yes, they have been like this for years, and this is how it is in other districts. You have some men like the director of the National Youth Employment Programme who have revealed their party colors and are behaving in a certain partisan way. He has been advising the chief executive how to behave.

The official he referred to was a political appointee and was not considered a technocrat anyway. His tone when discussing civil servants was so different, and his answers so short, that I asked for several clarifications:

Me: What about the finance officer? Is he neutral?

Assemblyman: Yes, he is fine. He may have partisan allegiances, but he just does his job.

Me: And what about a few years ago under the NPP? What was that finance officer like?

Assemblyman: It was the same back then. (author’s field notes, April 27, 2012)

My notes recorded short answers and a loss of interest in the conversation. It was a vote of confidence in the core civil servants from a politician who was not only in the opposition and thus enjoyed little benefit from the district but also one of the most delightfully partisan and incendiary politicians I knew.

In another district, I spoke to an NPP assemblyman whom the NDC chief executive publicly referred to as “Lucifer.” When I asked how he felt about the civil servants, he said, “Some are okay, but some are partisan.” I was excited to hear this after weeks of probing, but his clarification only reinforced the emerging finding: the civil servants he did not trust were not dishonest. Rather, “they fear the chief executive, so they do whatever she says” (author’s field notes, May 2, 2012). In other words, the basis of his complaint was that the civil servants do as they are told. This was a damning critique in his eyes since some civil servants are asked to engage in activities that benefit the NDC over his NPP. For me the picture was more mundane: an executive asked an administrator to carry out a function, and the function was carried out. “Lucifer” seemed disappointed that I did not share his outrage.

In another district, the NPP constituency chairman detailed the sins of the NDC chief executive: the politics of exclusion, the persecution of NPP-aligned businesses, and the undoing of the NPP’s projects. But on the subject of the political neutrality and competence of the technocrats he had no problem at all. In my interview notes, I have several pages on party discipline, governing strategies, incumbent abuses, and ethnic favoritism but only two lines on the question of civil servant neutrality and competence. There was simply little to discuss. He answered my questions about civil servants directly and waited for me to bring the conversation back to more interesting matters.

In the same district an NDC assembly member said, “Sometimes you will go to the assembly and find this civil servant has been rotated, and you don’t know if it is for some political purpose, but that does not happen often” (author’s field notes, June 21, 2012). A former chief executive of the district said technocrats “did not show their colors” during her tenure, and she was generally happy with their quality. “Some had weaknesses, with women and things, but mostly they were fine” (author’s field notes, July 31, 2012). In my other highly competitive district, the pattern was the same: conflictual political relations and occasional electoral

violence, but when it came to the civil servants, assembly members said, "They are nonpartisan, and you don't know what party they belong to" (author's field notes, May 11, 2012). Even the NPP constituency chairman had confidence in the technocrats serving the NDC chief executive. Referring to one of the main towns with significant NDC support, he said, "These people are not giving the technocrats any peace of mind" (author's field notes, July 23, 2012). This was a reference to NDC activists arriving at the district office to stage impromptu protests and demand meetings with the chief executive. The district's challenges were political, not bureaucratic.

Although political figures had few complaints about core civil servants, it is also important to understand the atmosphere of fear that governs civil servants' lives. Fear of rotation is especially prominent. It was widely known, for example, that the engineer of a prominent district in Ashanti Region was rotated for frustrating the chief executive's plans to extract commissions on every capital project. I never established whether this actually happened, but its significance was in how widely shared the story was in the region. In a different district, an internal auditor complained that "it is an open secret that auditors get moved around when they irritate chief executives and coordinating directors. They will use coercive power. Some coordinating directors and chief executives who are identified by auditors as misbehaving will target them" (author's field notes, March 21, 2012). A chief executive with a modicum of political clout and connections will communicate their preferences for a particular technocrat through the levels of state or party hierarchy, first to the regional level and if necessary to the central level itself. As one chief executive warned his technocrats at a public general assembly meeting, "I don't have the power to sack heads of department, but I do have one power: I can seek your removal" (author's field notes, April 30, 2012).

The way in which this fear pervades the lives of civil servants was explained to me by a coordinating director nearing retirement, who said, "One of the things we have in our favor is the recruitment to the civil service is meritocratic. But even there is

a lot of fear running through all levels of the civil service about political punishment and rotation" (author's field notes, July 24, 2012). Then he paused. I wasn't sure what I had missed or if I had done something improper. Looking apprehensive, he asked me if I was recording. I promised him that I was not, and I explained that I would not record without permission, and in any event I rarely record interviews. I showed him my note pad and phone and offered to leave them in another room. He declined the offer and smiled nervously in a failed attempt to hide his anxiety. I had never before felt an interviewee to be so cautious in a country noted for its relatively free press and civil liberties. His trepidation spoke to the fear experienced by many civil servants he was trying to describe.

Satisfied he was not being taped, he continued talking about his experiences with politically motivated rotation. In the late 1990s President Rawlings (NDC) had moved him from a district in Eastern Region because NDC people had reported seeing him at the home of a member of a royal family that was led by a well-known NPP supporter. But the man he had actually been visiting was the district's presiding member, whom he regarded as an elder figure and with whom he played checkers. The NDC activists passed the message up to the president's office, and a transfer was immediately ordered. He continued, "Now a technocrat like me must be careful when he buys his food or petrol in case he is seen to favor a party businessperson. Even if the [NPP] MP visited my office right now, a call would be made to the [NDC] deputy regional minister about it" (author's field notes, July 26, 2012). This story of politically motivated rotation was representative of so many I had heard, in which the bias is not against the civil servant for their voting behavior or their allegiance but rather for the appearance of partisan behavior *while in office*. In other words, civil servants worry about politically based rotation but not because they must support the party of their chief executive. Rather, they tread carefully because in tense political environments they are quickly accused of being partisan in their official duties. As

one district budget officer told me, "As a civil servant you only have problems if you are openly political" (author's field notes, March 13, 2012).

Although chief executives are open about their willingness to rotate noncompliant staff, in practice such punitive action is mostly done in the pursuit of an administrative body that serves the executive. Most civil servants I knew lived under the fear of rotation, but very few were ever actually rotated. This is because a civil servant knows that all they have to do to avoid punishment is to avoid being partisan in their work and to avoid frustrating the executive. This is how one finance officer explained the control of staff to me:

Finance officer: A chief executive does not have a lot of say when it comes to who is the finance officer, budget officer, or coordinating director because that is with central government. But he has indirect control! He can use his party network, and of course the ministry is controlled by the president.

Me: Does that mean it is a partisan thing?

Finance officer: No. It involves politics, but it is not partisan! The decision about which senior technocrats are posted to which districts is not partisan. The chief executive does not care about having party faithful work for him. What he really cares about is having competent professionals that will not lead him astray or embarrass him. (author's field notes, March 20, 2012)

Several sources told me about a politically motivated staff rotation in one of my cases. The episode is relevant because, on further inspection, the truth was the opposite of the rumor and speaks to this theme of political neutrality. The rumor I had heard was that the chief executive (NDC) had learned that her deputy coordinating director was socializing with a known NPP activist and that she had promptly orchestrated his move to another district. The story was repeated to me by several people across several districts.

It was typically relayed with tones of disapproval but not incredulity, which speaks to how such behavior is an accepted part of the game of state, even if it is frowned upon. It was months before I discovered the civil servant's name, however, and it turned out be a deputy coordinating director in one of my other case studies. When I followed up on the matter with him, he laughed it off as mischief-making by "these hyper-partisan people":

It really was no story. What happened was that woman [the chief executive] accused me of being an active NPP member against her, but it was only a brief thing, and that is not why I moved. In late 2009 I received a transfer letter from regional government. At that time my coordinating director was frail, and the other deputy was new, so the director insisted I should stay to help. The chief executive herself took the issue to [the regional government], and I stayed. Then in 2010 [the regional government] sent another transfer letter, this time to work at [the regional government]. I went there for one month, but they never sent anybody to replace me in the district! So, chief executive called [the regional government] to complain and said they should send me back. I got another transfer letter in 2011 for another district, and chief executive told me if I wanted to stay, she would plead with [the regional government]. So, that was it. (author's field notes, May 7, 2012)

Apart from referring to her as "this old woman," he had nothing bad to say about the politician rumored to have punished him for political activities.

A coordinating director in a neighboring district said that the real issue with the rotation of bureaucrats is with coordinating directors "who are partisan or lazy. So, it is really not so political." He continued:

Coordinating director: It is not the chief executives getting rid of you because you are an Ewe or because you are not their party. If a chief executive has a coordinating director that they cannot

work with, they can go through the channels to get rid of them, through their political colleagues in the Local Government Service.

Me: So, a coordinating director will be safe so long as he is not lazy or partisan?

Coordinating director: Yes. Of course, it happens that there might be a coordinating director who is good and is getting in the way of a mischievous chief executive, and that chief executive will try to get rid of that goody-two-shoes coordinating director. . . . It is not so important that a chief executive and a coordinating director come from the same party and be aligned like that. It is more a question of personalities or personal interests clashing, even within the same party. When I was getting posted here, NDC people counseled the chief executive not to accept me because they said, "Oh, that man is NPP." But the chief executive spoke to the other candidate, and he wasn't impressed, and now we have a good relationship. (author's field notes, May 2, 2012)

Civil servants knew they had little to fear so long as they stayed out of politics. They had to deal with politicians, of course, but their interactions spoke to mutual understanding of this norm. When I asked a budget officer if assembly members trusted the technocrats, he said, "Technocrats have to spend their time explaining and justifying the decisions made by the chief executive, but they don't see the technocrats as the [chief executive's] lackeys. The political decisions about which community gets a road are made at the subcommittee level, so the technocrats are not the ones deciding who gets what" (author's field notes, April 25, 2012). The only bureaucrats who experienced persecution in the form of rotation were those found to have openly campaigned for a political party or those who stood in the way of the chief executive, usually because they thwarted his attempt to extract rents. While that behavior may not be consistent with norms of bureaucratic

insulation and independence, it is consistent with a system in which the bureaucracy exists to carry out executive orders, irrespective of their nefarious content.

Recall the oft-cited episode in the history of governance systems from late seventh-century China, when Empress Wu opened up the imperial entrance exams to commoners and gentry, who were previously blocked by virtue of their class (Hucker 1975). This meritocratic system of entrance examinations lasted until the twentieth century. Empress Wu's reasons for this innovation were not rooted in benevolence. She was in conflict with aristocratic families because of her own lower-class beginnings, so breaking the aristocracy's hold on the civil service made political sense. Indeed, although scholars note that her "murderous and illicit methods of maintaining power" gave her "a bad reputation among male bureaucrats," her reign was nonetheless generally marked by stability and prosperity (Fairbank and Goldman 2006, 82). A more meritocratic state strengthened her hand, in other words, even if it was an iron one.

Why Patronage Politics and State Capacity Can Coexist

The main lessons so far are that local state technocrats are generally well educated, they do what their political masters ask of them, and they are held in high regard by politicians for their neutrality and competence. People considered the threat to a technocrat's career to come from their own ill-advised political activities rather than their ethnic or partisan identity. If there is a general lack of state capacity, it owes little to the quality of its administrators.

We can now bring these findings together to look at bureaucratic quality across the entire country using data from my survey of local state officials. We can assess if there is a systematic relationship between measures of bureaucratic quality and other things we care about, such as patronage or political competition. My survey asked the head district civil servant (the coordinating director) in each district to self-report their rank within the civil service, how many years they have worked in the district assembly

system, whether they were reshuffled in 2009 when the NDC administration took power, whether they were from the region they served in, and whether they had a master's degree or a professional equivalent. The responses, summarized in table 5.2, can be thought of as measures of the quality of senior local state bureaucrats.

In earlier chapters I showed how the patronage behavior of local state offices was exacerbated by political competition. The purpose of this next section is different: I want to show that the same highly competitive districts that engage in patronage provision do not have worse bureaucratic quality overall. Building on that argument, I want to then suggest that these highly competitive, patronage-providing districts may actually have relatively *better* bureaucratic quality overall, relative to less competitive districts.

Table 5.2. Explanation of variables for coordinating directors

Variable	Mean	Coding
Highest rank	0.47	1.00 if the respondent reached highest rank possible
> 15 years' Experience	0.43	1.00 if respondent worked in local government system for over 15 years
Moved in 2009	0.71	1.00 if respondent arrived at present district during or after 2009, when NDC administration took over
From the region	0.38	1.00 if respondent works in home region
Master's degree	0.51	1.00 if respondent has master's degree or equivalent

Results from regression models are shown in table 5.3. The complete results are shown in the appendix. The dependent variables are dummy variables, so the cells in the table show marginal effects. In models 1 and 2, political competition is positively associated with *highest rank*. Model 2 measures competition with a dummy variable and so offers the easiest interpretation. The marginal effect of being in an electorally competitive district (where the average electoral margin from 2000 to 2012 was less than

8 percent) on the probability that the coordinating director has reached the highest rank was 34 percent—that is, a district that is highly competitive is estimated to be 34 percent more likely to have a head civil servant with the highest rank. We also see that highly competitive districts are likely to have relatively more experienced coordinating directors (models 3 and 4), even controlling for the age of the coordinating director. In model 4, holding all else constant, the marginal effect of being in a highly competitive district on the probability of having a highly experienced coordinating director was 29 percent.

Table 5.3. Regression models for quality of the head civil servant

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Highest rank	Highest rank	>15 years' experi- ence	>15 years' experi- ence	Moved in 2009	Moved in 2009	From the region	From the region	Master's degree	Master's degree
Margin (2000– 2012 avg., presiden- tial)	–0.001		0.001		0.003		0.005*		–0.000	
	(0.002)		(0.002)		(0.002)		(0.002)		(0.003)	
Competi- tive (<8, 2000– 2012 avg.)		0.339**		0.288**		–0.246*		–0.068		0.098
		(0.119)		(0.102)		(0.101)		(0.149)		(0.125)
Age (coord. dir.)	0.030**	0.030**	0.032**	0.031**					0.002	0.002
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.007)					(0.006)	(0.006)
Observa- tions	134	134	133	133	138	138	135	135	136	136

Note: Full results in appendix. Standard errors in parentheses. Marginal effects from logit.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Because the majority of core technocrats are rotated when a new national government takes office, we can compare districts

in which a coordinating director moved to those where they were retained. This is important in light of the interviews in which top civil servants spoke about attempts by a district chief executive to retain them in their district rather than see them leave. The results from models 5 and 6 show that coordinating directors are *less likely* to have been shuffled in highly competitive districts. When electoral margins increase (model 5), the probability that a coordinating director was moved in 2009 also increases. The estimated coefficient approaches statistical significance at conventional levels.⁷ Added to the other findings, this means that highly competitive districts not only have highly experienced coordinating directors, but they are also *less likely* to see them rotated when a new president takes over.

Two more findings are also noteworthy. In models 7 and 8, we see that coordinating directors are *less likely* to work in their home region in highly competitive districts. Finally, in models 9 and 10 for the probability that a coordinating director has a master's degree (or equivalent), we see results that are consistent with the picture emerging so far. Being in a highly competitive district is associated with a greater probability that a coordinating director has a master's.

These results support two conclusions. First, while in the previous chapter I showed that highly competitive districts have systematically more patronage, here we see no evidence that highly competitive districts are inefficient or inexperienced at the level of their top civil service. In other words, it does not appear that high-patronage districts have weaker bureaucratic quality. Second, and counterintuitively, there is some evidence that the opposite is true: highly competitive districts may have *greater* administrative capacity than less competitive districts. Especially in the most highly competitive districts, the head civil servant tends to be highly ranked and experienced and there on merit rather than on the basis of their regional identity and education.⁸

The data are suggestive rather than conclusive, but they correspond to what I saw in highly competitive districts. Chief executives under pressure seek out the best technocrats to help them

access resources from the central government *precisely in order to provide patronage*.⁹ To understand why, recall a finance officer quoted already, who said, “The chief executive does not care about having party faithful work for him. What he really cares about is having competent professionals that will not lead him astray or embarrass him” (author’s field notes, March 20, 2012). My informants and respondents understood that chief executives were under pressure from their activists and that they needed good bureaucrats to help them secure goods from the central government. While chief executives might give party activists menial jobs, they tried to strengthen their administration by bringing in competent bureaucrats.

My findings so far are important because patronage is typically considered poisonous to state capacity. Some scholars suggest patronage politics occurs because states lack the administrative capacity to deliver rewards to supporters through logistically complex programs such as tax credits or social insurance—that is, low state capacity might lead to patronage politics (Stokes et al. 2013). Patronage, in turn, may cause or reinforce low state capacity because it encourages citizens excluded from patronage to avoid the predatory state by concealing their farm yields, savings, or family size (Scott 2009). While political systems with such dynamics can get “stuck” in these low-trust, low-capacity dynamics or equilibriums, scholars should open themselves to the possibility that patronage politics could actually lead to increases in state capacity (Grindle 2010). Again, recall the example of Empress Wu, a leader who sought a capable and effective bureaucracy in order to punish her opponents. A simple conclusion presents itself: states may build administrative capacity for nefarious reasons, and this may include the incentive to provide patronage. Patronage may not be an obstacle to building state capacity.

The Political Economy of Weak Taxation

In this section I shift focus from the personnel who make up the local state to the behavior of the state “in society.” That is, what

did I see local state actors doing when they left their desks and offices? The otherwise dry topic of taxes provides a window here because funding their existence is generally something that most states want to do.

Scholars of the state are particularly inspired by two insights about taxation, one theoretical and one empirical. Theoretically, states are organizations that need revenue, and a state that is bad at funding itself is likely also weak at other state functions. Empirically, the incentive to collect taxes in order to pay for wars or public programs has been an important source of growth in state capacity.¹⁰ Taxes are therefore worth studying as they reveal political priorities and governing abilities. For these reasons tax collection in Ghana has received increasing attention from social scientists and policymakers, as it has in many developing countries (Prichard 2009; Prichard 2016; Prichard and van den Boogaard 2017; Moore et al. 2015; OECD/ATAF/AUC 2016; Moore, Prichard, and Fjeldstad 2018; Prichard 2015).

What sets developing countries such as Ghana apart from today's wealthiest countries is income tax. As Kiser and Karceski (2017, 79) argue, the development of income tax was "the most important turning point in the history of pre-modern tax structure" for two reasons. First, by closely linking taxation to fluctuations in economic fortune, governments could avoid overburdening the economy when incomes sagged but also reap the benefits as incomes rose. Second, taxing income allowed for a much more progressive taxation of wealth than was possible before. This could stimulate growth by consumption while also legitimizing government in the eyes of the nonelite majority.

But states in poorer countries generally lack the administrative capacity to tax personal income: governments lack both the knowledge of people's paychecks as well as the means to extract from them. Since most Ghanaians neither work for the state nor major private companies, the state has no ability to monitor or extract from their wage incomes. My time spent with local state actors revealed that while districts generally possess skilled and

impartial technocrats, they have a poor understanding of revenue potential and limited means of extracting wealth. In this respect, the Ghanaian state bears a striking parallel with premodern states described by Mann (1993, 60): “Agrarian states could not even know the worth of their subjects, let alone tax them accurately. They could not tax income at all, assessed only crude indicators of wealth (size of landholding or house, value of goods brought to market, etc.), and relied on autonomous local notables to extract it.” This was true of “local notables” during Ghana’s colonial era, when the British relied on chiefs to collect taxes (Boone 2003; Rathbone 2000a). Today some of the most important “local notables”—such as the heads of local government—find it politically useful to retard tax collection.

What emerged from my study of tax collection in Ghana’s local state is that the constraints on tax performance are political rather than bureaucratic. The data I collected led to three findings. First, while most local state offices in Ghana have increased the amount of taxes collected over time, electorally competitive districts experience significantly slower growth in this trend. Second, levels (i.e., rates) of taxation are not different for highly competitive districts, meaning the observed slow rate of growth holds true even when we control for tax policies. Third, districts with poor tax performance fare no differently in measures of administrative capacity. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that tax collection is weaker in highly competitive districts, but it is not due to administrative capacity. Many tax collectors I knew experienced the obstacles to their work as explicitly political. I asked one experienced chief revenue superintendent if his current district was any different from other places he had worked over his long career. “This place has high political tension,” he said. “And how does that affect you?” I asked. “It does not affect you personally, but maybe the assembly workers cannot easily do its job” (author’s field notes, March 22, 2012). This points to my wider point that the factors inhibiting greater local states capacity, measured here as capacity to tax, lie outside the bureaucracy.

In the first few months of fieldwork, I asked local state officials involved in revenue about the possibility of what Tendler (2002) calls the “devil’s deal,” where politicians exchange the promise to shield voters from taxes and inspections in return for political support (see also Holland 2017 on idea of forbearance). I asked one budget officer if people made electoral threats when faced with rising taxes. He said he had not seen much of that where he has worked. Generally, officials avoid large increases in an election year, he added, “but really the increases are small and don’t cause much protest anyway” (author’s field notes, April 25, 2012). Indeed, through all the days I spent in local state offices, I rarely witnessed a meeting with stakeholders on the subject of tax increases in any of my case study districts. I heard something similar in Lamda District, where the budget officer told me, “When it comes to interacting with the rate payers, we only reach out to them if the increases are large, and most years we don’t raise rates at all.”

“And how long do your negotiations with the rate payers last?”

“We do it in August, but it is only about two days, so it is not much” (author’s field notes, March 16, 2012). The Koko District budget officer told me that people did not come in to discuss tax rates and that the assembly does not notify rate payers about changes “but expects assemblymen to relate them once in effect” (author’s field notes, March 22, 2012). This was not evidence of a devil’s deal.

But in Guba District, an elected member of the district assembly told me the chief executive had tried to rein in the tax collectors in 2007 because elections were approaching. This seemed to fit what I had in mind. The collectors obeyed, but at the next assembly meeting there were inquiries and complaints about declining revenue, and the collectors began work again. Senior officers in Aman District could not think of any examples, either at their present district or any previous, of a chief executive intervening in the process of tax collection in an election year. The finance officer said the chief executive “cannot and will not make any attempt to interfere” with their work but that “we take into consideration political circumstances for fee raising” (author’s

field notes, March 12, 2012). In Koko District, I asked the NPP constituency chairman if the NDC chief executive interferes with tax collection: “No, they are happy to collect taxes, and there is no interference on that.”

“But why doesn’t he interfere? Doesn’t he have constituents who want to pay less tax or none at all?”

“Because the [local tax] is their only chop money, so they need it” (author’s field notes, July 23, 2012). “Chop money” was used here to mean small discretionary money, or a slush fund, where “chop” is a colloquialism for eating or consumption. This was the only money that a district could use free of central government monitoring. If a district wanted to raise its own allowances for attending meetings or hire more low-level staff, it would need more local tax.

I still did not understand the general absence of a devil’s deal, which I thought would exist, given the low expectation of services rendered for taxes paid and the sensitivity of politicians to electoral threats. Eventually I learned the devil’s deal did exist, but it was more subtle than I expected. It took the form of standing in the way of administrative reforms and improvements. It could be seen in the work of a district budget officer, upon whom the responsibility lies for projecting a district’s tax collection. A good budget officer is able to identify a district’s tax handles, estimate their value, and propose a means of extraction. In my case studies, budget officers were generally well educated, with degrees in economics, finance, or business. The difficulty in projecting revenue is that projections are endogenous not only to a district’s past performance but also to its knowledge of its revenue potential. A poorly performing government often does not know precisely how poorly it is performing. This is especially problematic since districts rely on street-level tax collectors to update official knowledge of revenue potential. Without information from tax collectors, a district has no data on the traffic in and out of daily markets and thus cannot know how successful it really is in its tax collection efforts. Budget officers know this is a problem. A frequent complaint of budget officers was the inadequacy of their

revenue list. When asked about the district's knowledge of its revenue potential, over half of revenue officers reported having a list or database that was either incomplete or out of date.¹¹ The budget officer in Guba District said they sometimes send out National Service personnel "to count things" but that they had to be careful because "in some places if you try to do anything about corruption, they will target you," where "they" was an opaque reference to the Big Men who run the economy and the government (author's field notes, February 10, 2012).

Budget officers often tried to improve their revenue lists, but politicians rarely wanted to invest resources in the exercise. The Lamda District budget officer spent a lot of his time thinking about how to boost the district's revenue. He was a methodical planner, and on his laptop he had ambitious spreadsheets waiting to be filled with data on district revenue items. The idea that excited him most involved making a census of all revenue items in the district. This would include counting every taxable item in the district, which included items as diverse as pigs, burial plots, dogs, market stalls, bicycles, and houses. Even for the most able of states, it would have been a considerable task.

Watching him at work reminded me of Scott's (1999) *Seeing like a State*, where central planners have all the maps but none of the local knowledge. The budget officer had maps on land use (this land is suitable for grazing, that land for mining), but he did not have data on what was *actually happening* on the ground. How many cattle graze there? Who owns the cattle? Are the cattle inputs or the taxable final product itself? How many small-scale miners are there? What is an optimal rate at which to tax the mines to avoid discouraging activity? Budget officers were aware that they needed to leave their desks to get these answers.

The Lamda budget officer's spreadsheets aimed to make the district legible for revenue extraction.¹² He had even developed a budget for the exercise: 140 people would take three weeks at a cost of 120,000 cedis (about \$50,000), which was over 10 percent of the district's annual locally collected taxes, the taxes over which

it has total control. But it mattered little since by the end of my research the budget officer's initiative fell flat due to a lack of interest from the chief executive and the coordinating director, who, according to the budget officer, "were okay with the amount of money coming in" and hesitant to invest such a sum at the expense of infrastructure projects (author's field notes, March 16, 2012; see also Lentz 2014). This was the devil's deal I ultimately found: citizens think higher taxes won't mean better or more public services, local politicians are aware citizens think this, and so politicians are reluctant to increase the state's own capacity to tax.

I gathered data to find out if there was a systematic relationship between politics and local state capacity to collect taxes. Figure 5.6 shows growth in per capita tax collection by district from 2008 to 2010, which are the years of the new NDC administration during the period under study and the latest available tax data, respectively. Districts below the line had higher per capita tax collection in 2010 than 2008. We see that there was broad growth in tax collection at the local level. I wanted to know whether the *rate* of growth differed between different kinds of districts.

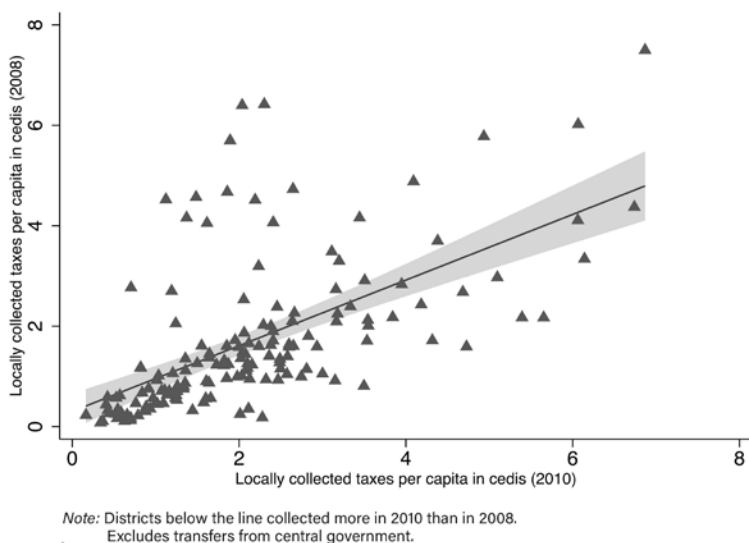


FIGURE 5.6. Growth in local tax collection.

This locally raised revenue is not remitted to the central government and may be used at the discretion of the district.

In table 5.4, I regress the rate of a district's growth in tax collection from 2008 to 2010 on a number of variables that plausibly affect tax collection, such as agricultural productivity, urbanization, and proximity to major markets or mines. Most important, I control for actual tax levels (rates) using data I collected in 2012. For space I show only the explanatory variables of interest. The appendix provides the complete statistical results.

Table 5.4 Regression models for the rate of growth in tax collection (condensed)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Tax growth (2008–10)	Tax growth (2008–10)	Tax growth (2008–10)	Tax growth (2008–10)	Tax growth (2008–10)
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)	1.184*** (0.432)		1.699** (0.773)	1.208*** (0.442)	
Margin (2008, presidential)		1.256*** (0.423)			
Margin >20 (2008, presidential)					40.242** (17.518)
Instrumental variable	N	N	Y	N	N
Includes larg- est markets	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Tax rate ranking	-53.712 (36.762)	-53.423 (35.246)	-60.028* (35.283)	-53.675 (37.172)	-55.064 (36.606)
Observations	119	119	119	116	119
R ²	0.295	0.307	0.282	0.293	0.285

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

We see that highly competitive districts experienced slower growth in tax collection compared to less competitive districts. This holds true if we measure electoral competition from 2000 to 2012 (model 1), the 2008 margin (model 2), instrumenting for the potentially endogenous explanatory variable (model 3), excluding the districts with the largest markets (model 4), or when including a dummy for districts where the 2008 margin was over 20 percent (model 5). Model 5 shows that holding all else constant, being in a district where the electoral margin in 2008 was 20 percent or greater is associated with a 40 percent increase in the tax-collection growth rate compared to districts under that electoral margin. This negative relationship between tax performance and political competition also holds when controlling for *tax rate ranking*, which is a district's average ranking across a number of taxes (explained further in the appendix). Indeed, the correlation between electoral competition and tax levels is low and not statistically significant.¹³ This is an important finding because it means cross-district variation in growth in tax collection is not explained by differences in tax policies set by those districts.

Still, even if highly competitive districts are no different in their tax levels, it is possible that they are nonetheless weak in administering actual collection or projecting the following year's revenue. To assess this, I collected data on each district's revenue projection for the forthcoming year and compared that to their actual collection. Figure 5.7 presents this expected-to-collected ratio. A value of 100 on the horizontal axis means a district collected 100 percent of what it initially estimated. The vertical axis shows the projected change earlier in the year. A value of 0 means a district projected 0 percent increase for the following year. We might expect a district that underperforms would revise downward their projections for the following year. Were that the case, the line in each graph would slope upward: more success in year one should mean higher projections for year two, and vice versa. But the more successful districts actually made *lower* projections for the following year, while the least successful tax collectors made the largest projections for the following year.

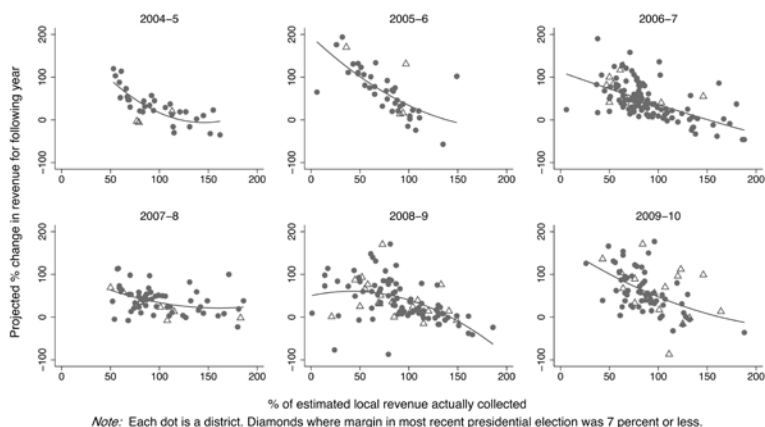


FIGURE 5.7. Success in projecting tax collection.

To show that technocrats in highly competitive districts are no less competent than those in less competitive districts, the graph shows in diamonds those districts where the margin in the most recent presidential election was 7 percent or less. This implies that some districts are better at forecasting and/or meeting targets than others, but, importantly, competitive and less competitive districts do not differ in this respect. Finally, there is no correlation between *tax growth* and civil servant skill or political neutrality as measured by surveys of chief executives and coordinating directors.¹⁴ This supports my argument that the factors affecting local state capacity to tax are external to the civil servants themselves.

I started this chapter with an account of time spent with a central government inspector on the day of his visit to a district assembly. I had thought that the issues of concern to the inspector—unfinished projects, weak tax collection—fit nicely into what I thought I understood about state capacity in developing countries. But the concept of state capacity was ultimately of limited use. Across the months spent with local state bureaucrats

and through analysis of survey data, I found districts' core civil servants to be generally meritocratic, nonpartisan, and trusted. One senior local bureaucrat was even writing a master's thesis on incumbent abuses of power in the local government system. This involved taking days off to conduct interviews in nearby districts. I was surprised that the head civil servant would write on such a sensitive topic. "Does the chief executive mind that you are doing this research?" I asked. "Oh no. They know it is just an academic thing so they won't worry" (author's field notes, July 31, 2012). So long as local civil servants are not openly partisan in their work, their allegiances and private interests were of surprisingly little concern to chief executives.

I did, of course, find that many civil servants work in fear of reprisals from their political masters. A major fear was of being rotated, but the fear did not center on civil servants' ethnicity, religion, or party affiliation but rather on how they carried themselves while at work. Technocrats who did exactly what the chief executive asked had little to fear. Because of this, I argue that the core civil service provides local state officeholders with competent instruments of authority. If it is not too much of a stretch, we may even begin to see in them glimmers of Weber's bureaucratic ethos: actors who share a motivation to reach the goals of the organization.¹⁵

When we listen to the voices of senior local civil servants and to the voices of people who work with them, we can start to challenge the image of bureaucrats as the local sources of state weakness. Indeed, I went further and presented evidence that highly competitive, patronage-providing districts may actually have more qualified top civil servants. I explained this finding in terms of a politician's need to build administrative capacity for patronage.

Having established that the root of weak local state capacity is not the quality of bureaucrats or the nature of their allegiances, I turned to the question of tax collection to understand what happens when local state actors leave their offices and venture "into

society.” I found bureaucrats set and collect taxes with a surprising degree of noninterference from politicians. I was struck by how rarely chief executives actively intervened. Politicization of taxation did not come in orders from above to penalize an enemy while privileging a friend, nor did it come from adjusting the levels of taxation.

The fundamental constraint on local state capacity is not bureaucratic incompetence but rather complex political constraints that gave incumbents little incentive to build a capacity to tax. Chief executives did not expend political capital on improving revenue collection and especially so in politically competitive places. Thus, bureaucrats were ultimately constrained by what was made possible by the politically negotiated power of the state itself—that is, what the state has been *allowed* to do in nonstate spaces.

I thought I might find the devil’s deal in taxation—exchanging political support for insulation from the state—but I did not. Understanding why the devil’s deal did not take an overt form involved listening to what was *not* being said, which is one of the strengths of qualitative research. I realized how rare it was for political conversations to involve matters of taxation. Everyday political conversation, whether with politicians, civil servants, or residents, usually involved distributive questions of who in town was getting what but was rarely about major changes in taxation or discriminatory targeting of groups in the process of tax collection. Since the two main parties are primarily divided along lines other than socioeconomic, both parties count among their supporters occupants of highly similar economic sectors.¹⁶ For example, it makes little sense for the NPP to raise taxes on market traders since such a tax would punish not only NDC-supporting traders but also NPP-supporting traders. The logic holds true for barbers, drivers, welders, newspaper sellers, and so on. These economic actors are found in the ranks of *both* parties, giving neither one an electoral advantage in placing on them disproportionate tax burdens. In the absence of politically salient class cleavages, taxation is not an attractive electoral tool for district politicians

(see also Kasara and Suryanarayan 2020). And from the perspective of many voters, there is little expectation that more taxes paid would equate to more services provided (Frey and Torgler 2007; Rothstein 2011). So, politicians have little incentive to increase tax burdens, while citizens have every reason to resist state intrusion into their economic lives. A low-trust, low-capacity feedback loop persists.

6

Some Comparative Perspective

The original claim of this book was that Ghana is typical of many developing countries in which state functions have decentralized while local politics has become more electorally competitive. I tried to bring my time spent with local actors to bear on the question of how these twin forces of decentralization and competition might affect how states work at the level of cities and towns.

I began with Felicia, a market trader and National Democratic Congress (NDC) activist in the New Patriotic Party (NPP) stronghold of Oran District. Like most party activists, she expected patronage when her party took power nationally and locally. Only some activists like Felicia who are on the demand side of patronage, explored in chapter 3, are successful at extracting patronage. On the supply side of patronage, discussed in chapter 2, are the district chief executives, only some of whom are insulated from patronage. Caught in the middle are the “core technocrats” who make up the top tier of the district civil service. We saw in chapter 5 that they were generally impartial and capable. The obstacle to more effective government was not feckless and corrupt bureaucrats. Rather, as many people explained to me, the obstacle to better government was a government’s own supporters. Recall the district chief executive who told me that her own supporters had stoned her official car (“It is your own people who corrupt

you"). The logic that knit together these actors were formal institutions in the form of party systems and competitive electoral politics and informal institutions in the form of clientelism. In this final chapter I want to broaden my lens beyond the Ghanaian local state and reflect on other places and the concepts we bring to them.

Varieties of Clientelism across Africa

In this section I want to explain how clientelism is related to the nature of a political party system. The key is to think about how easily voters can move between political parties and thus how much parties need to attract voters with clientelist rewards. Strong and stable party systems, such as Ghana's, have the ironic effect of *limiting* the ability of voters to switch parties. This loss of mobility then has implications for the mixture of clientelist strategies that parties will use during elections. Using survey data from across sub-Saharan Africa, I will show that vote buying is more common where party systems are weaker. But this does not mean countries with less vote buying are less clientelistic. Rather, they are differently clientelistic.

A new generation of scholarship has challenged the notion that political parties in Africa are mere vehicles for personalities, rising and falling with the passing of individual leaders, or that they are merely ethnic censuses (Arriola 2012; Ichino and Nathan 2012b; Ichino and Nathan 2012a; Ichino and Schündeln 2012; Lebas 2011; Riedl 2015; van de Walle 2003). Instead, scholars have documented variation across the subcontinent in party-system institutionalization.¹ Benin and Madagascar exemplify one end of the continuum, with parties born around elections as factions endlessly splinter, only to die soon after the election before the process repeats itself again at the next election. In these weakly institutionalized party systems, parties have no social bases, and they rise and fall with the fortunes of individual leaders. At the other end of the spectrum is Ghana, where the party system is highly institutionalized. The NPP and the NDC have significant

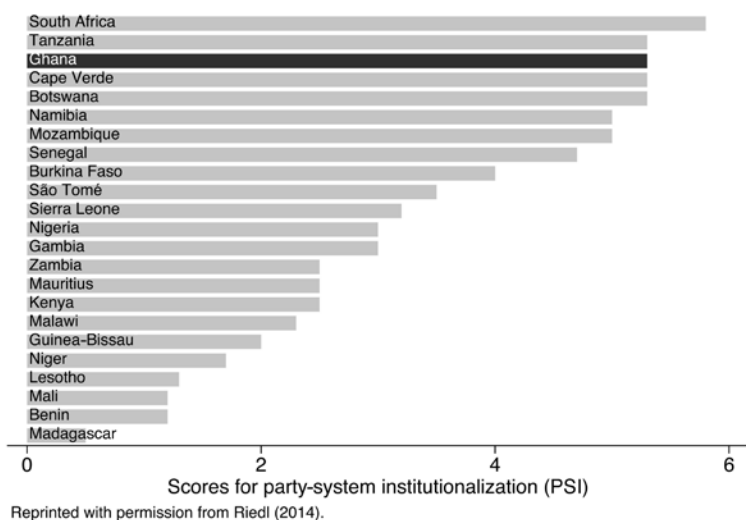


FIGURE 6.1. Ghana has a comparatively strong and stable party system. *Source:* Reprinted with permission from Riedl (2015).

historical roots and party identities that are well known to voters. They have endured beyond the life of one leader, and electoral performances are not subject to high volatility. Figure 6.1 visualizes variation in sub-Saharan Africa using Riedl's (2015) measure of party-system institutionalization.² Countries are arranged along a continuum of low to high party-system institutionalization.

Although the NDC and NPP form the core of a stable party system in Ghana, the parties are notable for the low salience of ideology in their platforms. Leading political scientist on Ghanaian politics Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi noted in an interview that "the extent of ideological position difference between the two camps is exaggerated. . . . It has largely been about groups organizing to take power" (cited in Riedl 2015; also Bob-Milliar 2014; Nathan 2019). Nevertheless, one must not equate the absence of a party *ideology* with the absence of a party *brand*. Ghana's major parties have strong brands and identities, even though they are not strongly ideological. This is an important point because it has implications for the electoral choices presented to voters.

The NDC is identified with Ewes, Gas, Fantes, and Muslims, together constituting about 45 percent of the population. The NPP is strongly identified with three ethnic Akan groups—Asantes, Akuapems, and Akyems—representing approximately 30–35 percent of the population. To argue that parties are ethnically affiliated is not to fall into the trap of describing African elections as mere ethnic censuses (Ichino and Nathan 2013; Bratton, Bhavnani, and Chen 2012; Harris and Posner 2018).³ It is not the case that all voters, or all ethnic groups, are strongly affiliated with either the NPP or NDC. Rather, because it is a two-party system, the NDC and NPP exert a centripetal force on otherwise unaffiliated voters, incentivizing alignment behind either party.⁴ Whether a voter is motivated by any ethnic bias is less important.

If voters have few choices where elections are quasi-ethnic and party systems are highly institutionalized, how might that matter for clientelism? First, recall that clientelism consists of two major subtypes: patronage, which is rewards to party workers, and vote buying or turnout buying, which is rewards to voters. We can see differences within clientelism in Ghana. In cross-national surveys, Ghanaians reported some of the *lowest* levels of individual vote buying across twenty-nine sub-Saharan African countries. When asked, “During the last national election, how often, if ever did a candidate or someone from a political party offer you something, like food or a gift or money, in return for your vote?” 93 percent of Ghanaians said never.⁵ This suggests that individual vote buying is not common in Ghana.

But if vote buying is not common, it could be the case that clientelism in any form is rare in Ghana. Other survey data do not support this interpretation. The only survey to ask respondents about their own experience with vote buying and about clientelism in general came in 2005. One question asked about the individual’s experience with vote buying using the question above. Another asked about clientelism more generally: “In your opinion, how often do politicians offer gifts to voters during election campaigns?” Note what the question did *not* ask. It did not ask about gifts contingent on the voter’s action, which is a key part of clientelism. It did not

specify if the gift was to vote a particular way or simply to show up / turn out to vote. Nor did it specify if the gift was to the respondent. It asked about the pervasiveness of clientelism, broadly defined.

The results are shown in figure 6.2. On the left, we see that clientelism in a general sense is alive and well in Ghana, where 68 percent said politicians offer gifts to voters “often” or “always.” This is almost identical to the average for all other surveyed sub-Saharan African countries (excluding Ghana), where on average 69 percent said politicians often or always offer gifts. Contrast this with the bar chart on the right concerning individual experience with vote buying. Only 12 percent of Ghanaians said this happened one or more times, which is approximately one-third fewer than the sub-Saharan African average. These data are consistent with the argument I have made thus far, in which patronage is widespread while individual vote buying is not.

Ghana’s strong party system leads to low voter mobility between parties, so clientelistic parties only need to buy voter turnout rather than buy turnout *and* the vote choice itself. But what if a party system is weaker than it is in Ghana? In contexts of low party-system strength, we should observe more voter mobility between parties and, as a consequence, more vote buying. Surprisingly, few scholars

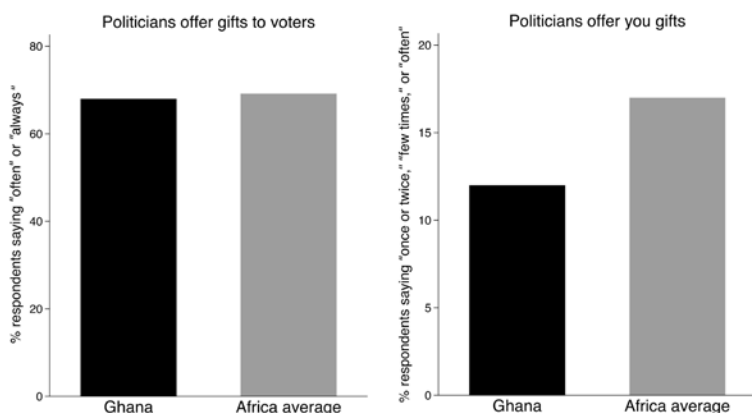


FIGURE 6.2. Varieties of clientelism across Africa. *Note:* Data from Afrobarometer 3 (2005–6).

have proposed that party-system strength or institutionalization might explain cross-country differences in types of clientelism. The cross-country literature has tended to focus instead on poverty, income inequality, electoral institutions, or bureaucratic capacity.⁶

To test the generalizability of this idea, I examined the relationship between party-system strength and vote buying in sub-Saharan Africa. The dependent variable is one form of clientelism: vote buying. The measure comes from survey responses from 50,404 respondents in twenty-nine African countries. The question asked, "During the last national election, how often, if ever, did a candidate or someone from a political party offer you something, like food or a gift or money, in return for your vote?" *Gift for vote: few/often* is a dummy variable coded "1" if the respondent said this occurred "a few times" or "often." The explanatory variable is *party-system institutionalization (PSI)*, which Riedl (2015) produced for twenty-three African countries above a democracy threshold.⁷ The countries with the highest scores for PSI have the highest share of respondents reporting no gifts for their votes. The strong relationship is shown in figure 6.3 ($R^2 = 0.48$).

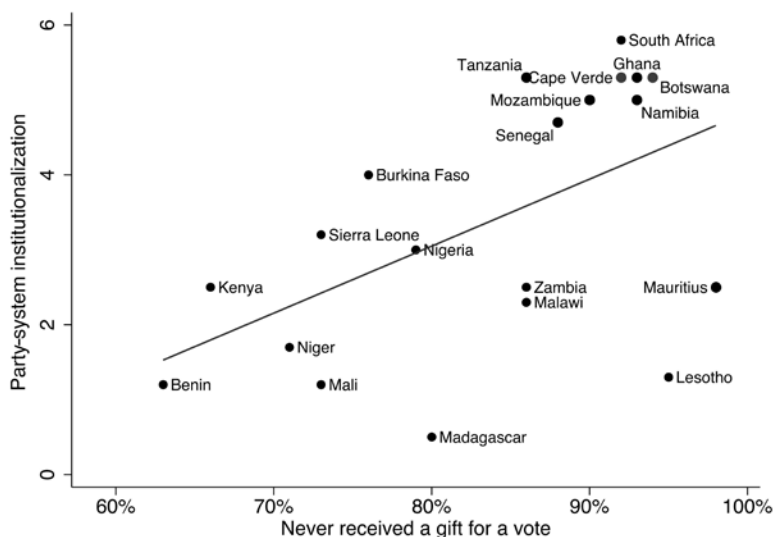


FIGURE 6.3. Less vote buying in countries with stronger party systems.

The relationship in the scatterplot is just between two variables, so we need to account for more factors in order to understand the relationship a little better. Because Afrobarometer surveys are nationally representative, I am able to use a hierarchical model that controls for individual- and country-level predictors of clientelism. Tables in the appendix explain in greater detail what variables I control for, but briefly: at the country level, I control for state capacity, form of government, poverty, rural population, and inequality. I also include individual-level controls for the survey respondent's age, welfare, education, and gender. The results from cross-country hierarchical models for vote buying are shown in appendix table A.26. Figure 6.4 visualizes the estimated relationships. The measure of party-system strength (*party-system institutionalization*) is statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level in both models. Substantively, and holding all else constant, a one-unit increase in *party-system institutionalization*

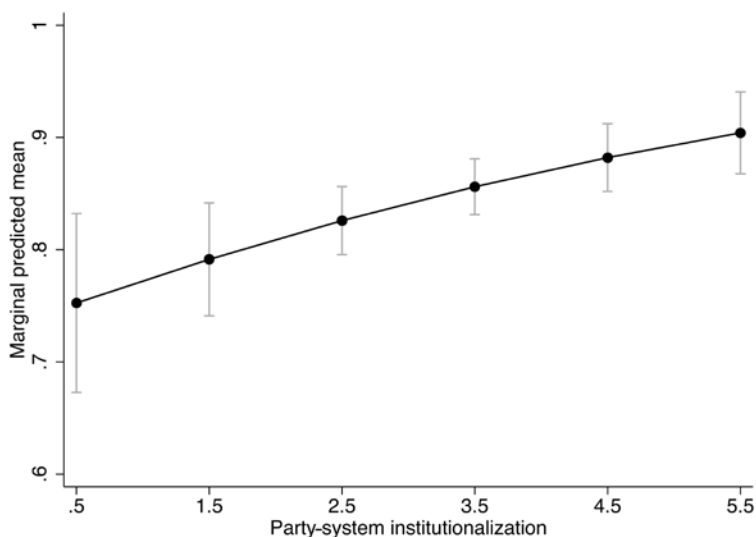


FIGURE 6.4. Lower probability of vote buying in stronger party systems across Africa. Note: Using model 2 from table A26, where the dependent variable is share of respondents saying they have never received a gift from a politician.

(scored 0 to 6) is associated with a 25 percent higher likelihood that a citizen reports no vote buying.

These results from Africa's party systems are consistent with my explanation: highly institutionalized party systems mean low interparty mobility for voters and, thus, relatively low value of voters for parties. While the dataset does not allow me to demonstrate that interparty mobility is what links party systems and vote buying, my findings lend support to the growing scholarship that explains how many developing countries are differently clientelistic (Gans-Morse, Mazzuca, and Nichter 2014; Kitschelt and Yildirim 2018). These findings mean a political system with very little vote buying may still have significant patronage and that party strength matters for how voters experience clientelism.

What Is a Big Man?

This book opened with Oran District chief executive George Biyo. He had earned a reputation as a local Big Man, and he embraced it in our first meeting, telling me, "They know me as a Big Man here." Indeed, district chief executives look like the archetypal Big Men that are recurrent characters in Africa's political history. As Moss (2007, 39–41) explains, the "politics and developmental trajectory of many African countries have been dominated by a handful of powerful men or, in many cases, by a single man who often stays in power for a very long time. This is sometimes called the Big Man syndrome." These figures monopolize resources and act as bottlenecks in local development. Many of these "decentralized despots" grew in stature during the indirect rule of the colonial period (Mamdani 1996). Their power is rooted not only in strong executive powers but also in dense webs of dependents beneath them (Médard 1996). The term is usually used in the context of overly strong presidents, but its use is not restricted to holders of national offices (Daloz 2003). Any community or any level of government can have a Big Man. As Utas (2012, 9) observes, Big Man systems go down to the grassroots level, so "even the boy has his boy." A person who is fortunate to have access to a Big Man

may enjoy the privileges of state, so long as they remain consistent in their displays of loyalty. In this respect, a Big Man is akin to a patron in comparative politics. In the African context a Big Man is also one who can act above or outside formal laws. Africanists also use the term “neopatrimonialism”—“the *core* feature of politics in Africa” (Bratton and van de Walle 1997, 62)—to connote the kinship aspect of traditional Big Man rule (Nugent 1995; Van Cranenburgh 2008; L. Diamond 2008; Schatzberg 2001).

But the time I spent with Big Men in Ghana’s local state offices made me question whether use of the term had become unmoored from its original meaning. I found that some Africanist scholarship depicted Big Men as unaccountable thieves, while others depicted Big Men in ways closer to the original meaning of the term, in which Big Men are powerful but indebted to the people (the “small boys”) beneath them. The result of this conceptual drifting has been the emergence of the “Big Man dictator,” a figure I argue is not a Big Man at all. In making this argument, I refer back to the work of Sahlins (1963), one of the originators of the Big Man concept. In his work on societies in the Pacific Islands, Sahlins explained that a Big Man’s authority comes from his personal power, which is amassed first and foremost by his ability to command a following. But he also noted the frailty of the Big Man’s power, because his followers must constantly be compensated. He was explicitly not a dictator, nor was he violent.

I wanted to know if my impression held up to systematic study, so I undertook a review of how scholars have invoked the Big Man concept.⁸ I reviewed uses of the term “Big Man” in leading Africanist journals since 1980 (see appendix table A.27). The final dataset identified 268 articles from eleven journals that met the criteria for inclusion, the most important of which was that the terms “Big Man” or “Big Men” must have been used at least three times in the main text. The major finding was that many scholars, and in particular political scientists, present Big Men as unaccountable thieves. This was especially the case when the author(s) used the Big Man concept in their literature review section

only, suggesting that scholars with less comprehensive knowledge of Big Man governance might be more likely to mischaracterize it.⁹ This review of Africanist scholarship suggested five ways in which the mental image of the Big Man dictatorship differed from the image of Big Man governance. The differences are stated in table 6.1., and in this section I briefly describe each.

Table 6.1. Five differences between Big Man governance and Big Man dictatorship

<i>Big Man governance</i>	<i>Big Man dictatorship</i>
Rules-bound—i.e., a regime	Makes his own rules
Uses reciprocity to earn following	May use violence
Predictable behavior	Arbitrary
Public resources used for the group	Public resources used by the Big Man
Nonelite; connects “small men” to power	Interelite; prebendalism

First, the Big Man dictator is not constrained by rules. Thom-son (2016, 117) explains that “these leaders ignored rules, bent rules, and made new rules to serve their own interests.” Moss (2007, 40) writes that “rules are subverted by the powerful.” In Moss’s list of Africa’s “Big Men,” Kwame Nkrumah’s Ghana “gen-erated into a dictatorship” (43), Kenya under Jomo Kenyatta saw “growing political authoritarianism” (44), and Côte d’Ivoire’s Félix Houphouët-Boigny was “autocratic” (49).

But Big Man governance is not an autocracy. The figure at the top is the apex of an unequal but ultimately rules-bound system. It is a regime in the way political scientists use the term: a set of rules, principles, and procedures specifying how a person or group can access power and how power can be used (Krasner 1982; O’Donnell 2001). By clarifying that it is a regime—a rules-bound order—we can see that the Big Man dictatorship model errs in depicting Big Men as operating by their own rules. That view also errs by conflating an individual Big Man with the Big Man system itself. While an individual Big Man may rise and fall, the system itself may remain, providing space that can be filled by an aspiring Big Man.

A wealth of historical research shows these constraints on Big Men. In precolonial systems, some chiefs worked under rules—not written down but rules nonetheless—requiring them to work in tandem with their councils (Ayittey 2006; Palagashvili 2018). Scholars of African traditional authorities have noted how outsiders have frequently mischaracterized the “typical” African chief as an absolutist ruler. In fact, it was (and is) much more often the case that a chief is an apex figure within a rules-bound system—that is, not a dictator (Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal and Van Dijk 1999; J. M. Williams 2010; Price 2016). Thus, a French colonial officer once wrote, “The most bloody and, to our eyes, the most barbaric Dahomey kings, for example, were in a certain sense far more subjected to popular control than Queen Victoria to say nothing of other contemporary sovereigns” (cited in Palagashvili 2018, 283). Vansina’s magisterial *How Societies Are Born* also supports this view: “Each settlement was thus structured around a House and the big man who was its linchpin because he was the only common reference point by kinship or by clientage that tied everyone else together. . . . A man could be a big man only if he *attracted and retained* followers” (2004, 230; italics added). “Attracted and retained” are key. The Big Man had to legitimize his position somehow. He could not turn to despotism. He had to demonstrate that he, too, was subject to rules. This need to rule legitimately relates to the third way Big Man governance differs from Big Man dictatorship: violence. While the *Christian Science Monitor* (2006) writes that a Big Man is “the kind who takes power by bullet or ballot and never lets go,” in Big Man governance violence is nonconsensual and thus not properly part of the regime.

Third, the Big Man dictator is arbitrary and idiosyncratic: rules are “arbitrary and unpredictable. . . . Even those that started with idealistic goals frequently descended into predatory patterns or tyranny” (Moss 2007, 39–41). Here the image of the Big Man as an eccentric or a psychopath is informed by rulers such as Gambia’s Yahya Jammeh, who claimed to be able to cure people of AIDS, and Uganda’s Idi Amin, “known for his eccentricities and

pathological behavior" (Moss 2007, 39). Thomson (2016) explains how a Big Man often changes rules overnight "to satisfy his own personal whims."¹⁰ But again these images ignore how Big Man governance is predictable precisely because it is rules-bound. The rules give the system predictability. Recall the activists who feared that their favored people would not be given powerful state positions, a prospect that to them broke informal rules. Powerholders were warned not to change these rules as they saw fit.

Fourth, the Big Man dictator is often a thief. This view can be found in the "good governance" and anticorruption approaches to development, as well as in sensationalist journalistic accounts of Africa's venal kleptocrats (Collier 2010; Wrong 2009; Wrong 2001). As *Newsweek* explains, "Africa is littered with Big Men who fell hard. . . . Some were assassinated, like Laurent Kabila of Congo. . . . Others died in mysterious circumstances, like Nigeria's Sani Abacha. . . . Others were chased into ignominious exile. . . . They plunder the continent's natural resources and leave little in their wake but ruin" (Bartholet 2001). By contrast, while Big Man governance also involves appropriation of public resources, resources are not consumed by the Big Man alone. In the language of public goods, once-public resources are converted into club goods but not private goods. As Amoah explained in the case of Asante chiefs, "Everything that the ruler acquired while he was in office . . . automatically became stool property. . . . The ruler was debarred from any close contact with the stool finances. He was neither permitted to hold the scale used for weighing out gold dust nor to open the leather bag in which the gold was kept" (1988, 177, cited in Aiyittey 2006, 164).

Indeed, as cultural anthropologists have explained, Big Men know that they must actually cultivate followers, and sharing resources is a major element of that effort: "Gathering of power and its maintenance are built on forms of reciprocity, and if the Big Man does not distribute enough largesse he will eventually lose his supporters" (Utas 2012, 8). Even if the Big Man takes public resources, it does not mean they are stashed in foreign bank vaults.

The fifth quality of this overly broad villain is his ultimate *unaccountability*. Big Men are depicted as detached from the political system. They are above it rather than within it. Larry Diamond (2010, xiv) explains that “Africa’s neopatrimonial systems” are alive and well and “characterized by personalized, unaccountable power.” Princeton Lyman, one of the longest-serving US diplomats to Africa, said that a hallmark of Big Man rule is “leaders unresponsive to the popular will” (Hourelid 2007). Accountability in this system is exercised between elites.

By contrast, Big Man governance is a system that connects “small men” to power. It is not an elite phenomenon. It is worth clarifying here the word “prebendalism,” as it is often used when scholars write about Big Man rule. A prebend is an interelite phenomenon in which a leader awards a piece of the state (an office, a title, etc.) to a lesser elite figure who has served the leader (e.g., Richard A. Joseph in Kasfir 1984, 30). The idea is that in systems such as Senegal under Léopold Senghor, the leader rules “jointly with other oligarchs” (Jackson and Rosberg 1982a, 77). But, by definition, a prebend does not reach down to nonelites, so leaders are accountable to other elites. Consider the case of an archetypal Big Man: Zaire’s Mobutu Sese Soko. The rewards circulated by Mobutu actually went to loyal politicians, not to the level of ordinary Congolese (Schatzberg 1988). This means Mobutu’s redistribution was to other elites, so he was no Big Man at all.

The importance of sharing downward is nicely explained by Cheeseman (2015, 64) in his discussion of *harambee* (i.e., “pull together”) in Kenyatta’s Kenya, in which MPs were responsible for leading community initiatives in the 1960s: “Because MPs faced regular elections, they went to great lengths to demonstrate their commitment to their constituencies, continually traveling home to hold meetings with local notables, and exchanging cash or other economic favours for political support. . . . This quickly turned them into classic Big Men; part representative, part local celebrity; part welfare state.” These examples demonstrate how a Big Man is the apex figure in a (neo)patrimonial system.

Unlike a dictatorship, Big Man governance has rules that bind and constrain the powerful. If this figure does not deliver, he is a dictator—not a Big Man (Dalož 2003; Hydén 2006, 102). This is the problem when scholars discuss Big Men with terms such as “autocratic” (J. Diamond and Robinson 2010).

My aim is to rekindle our understanding of Big Men as powerful actors with meaningful constraints. An important finding to emerge in my research is how district Big Men feel hounded by their activist supporters. Many of the local state Big Men I knew would be surprised to hear themselves described as unchecked centers of power.

The Capacities of Contemporary States

The third implication of my research concerns state capacity. Social scientists have identified the importance of state capacity for economic growth, violence and political order, and representation and democracy.¹¹ Although I began my research with an interest in the concept of state capacity, I found it to be unhelpful for understanding what states were doing at the local level. It is not that state capacity did not matter: many civil servants were poorly equipped, and offices were not optimally organized. But recall from chapter 4 that patronage-providing districts had some of the most qualified civil servants. In these districts, patronage was not provided because of some generalized state incapacity. Rather than discard the concept, however, I argue for greater focus on one specific dimension of state capacity—*external capacity*—which is the salient form of capacity that contemporary developing states need to develop (Weiss 2000).

State capacity is the ability of a state to formulate and implement policies throughout its territory. Most definitions rely on Mann’s (1984) classic distinction between a state’s despotic power and its infrastructural power. Whereas despotic power is “the range of actions which the [state] elite is empowered to undertake without routine, institutionalized negotiation with civil society groups,” infrastructural power is “the capacity of the state actually

to penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm" (113). Contemporary states have shifted from rule by despotism to rule through infrastructural power, however, so the despotic state category is of marginal analytic value today.¹²

Infrastructural power is closer to what we think of when we talk about modern state capacity. It has two faces (Mann 1993; Soifer and Vom Hau 2008). First, *internal capacity* is the quantity and quality of state officials and their material resources, including their spatial spread. It comprises nonpolitical officials as well as the organizational resources that make their work possible, such as phones, cars, guns, railways, and outposts. It refers to the existence of these things as well as the ability of state leaders to control these officials. But focusing only on this internal dimension tells us little about the ability of state actors to penetrate society (Bräutigam, Fjeldstad, and Moore 2008). A focus on the state's spatial reach through its territory tells us little about what it can actually do in remote villages and hilltop forts (Fearon and Laitin 2003).

The second face of infrastructural/state capacity relates to what state actors can actually do in the world when they leave their official buildings and vehicles. *External capacity* is a state's ability to monitor and regulate bodies and assets. This capacity exists in relations between state and nonstate actors.¹³ Sometimes this interaction is direct, with state actors directly engaging nonstate actors, as with Scandinavian eugenics programs in the 1930s and China's one-child policy. Sometimes the interaction is indirect, and states rule through intermediaries such as slave owners, chambers of commerce, or religious authorities (Boone 1992; Villalón 1995; Beck 2008). Either way, states cannot build significant external capacity without some negotiation with citizens.¹⁴ State officials would like to read a person's bank account and watch as their family eats dinner, but they find it very hard to do so in the absence of quasi-voluntary compliance because it is just too logistically difficult to be this invasive across a huge

population (Levi 1988).¹⁵ This negotiated relationship is why increases in bureaucratic power lead to decreases in despotic power (Scott, Tehranian, and Mathias 2002; Acemoglu 2005; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012).

Once nonstate actors allow for state monitoring and regulation of their domains—their children, slaves, tenants, customers, or employees—both the state and the economy may grow, given appropriate use of public investments (Bates 2008a; Rodrik 2011). In the industrial period, constrained executives were able to mobilize resources to invest in public goods like impermeable borders, public universities, health technologies, and insurance markets. Among states that rapidly developed their economies over the past half century, states were able to coordinate actors, provide solutions to market failures, and thereafter continued to innovate and engage in creative destruction (Schumpeter 1942; Ostrom 1996; Weiss 1998; Evans 1996). This can be a positive feedback loop.

What prevents weak states from improving their external capacity is the logic of their political equilibrium: citizens may wish for public inputs (schools, food safety standards, etc.). But doing so requires an enhanced penetrative power by the state in order for it to raise revenue, fund investments, coordinate economic activity, and enforce contracts. State leaders would like such an enhanced penetrative power, but citizens will not voluntarily grant it because they believe (probably correctly) that letting the state into their lives will enhance the welfare of state officials at their own expense.¹⁶

Enhancing external capacity in a sustained way is difficult in poorer countries. In some, institutions that underpin state-society relations are personalized rather than institutionalized and hard to sustain (van de Walle and Bratton 1997; Jackson and Rosberg 1982a; Posner and Young 2007). In other places, state-society relations do not provide for institutional evolution, innovation, or creative destruction (Adams 2005), while in still others, those with the power to disrupt order can shake a political equilibrium if they are excluded from enjoying rents (Khan 2010; Khan 2005b;

Parks and Cole 2010; North et al. 2007). The last factor is crucial in many developing countries, where nonstate elites block state access to bodies and assets.

I'd like to connect these observations about state capacity to one of the recurring themes in this book: what competitive elections can do in developing countries. Competitive electoral politics may matter for state capacity in two ways. First, it may incentivize zero-sum, divisive, and exclusionary modes of politics, the result of which is the underprovision of public goods. Second, it decreases the willingness of citizens to be exposed to state authority since citizens have a front-row seat when witnessing the ugly face of electoral politics. Competitive electoral politics may thus impact state capacity by shaping citizens' willingness to be monitored or controlled.

In Ghana's basic political equilibrium, one party holds exclusive control of the state, yet elections are sufficiently fair and closely fought to sustain the opposition's engagement, even if it is otherwise excluded from state rents. The consequence is that although a government may improve bureaucratic capacity, perhaps by raising the entrance standards to the civil service, it finds it much harder to enhance its external capacity by doing things like improving its revenue-extraction ability. Recall the budget officer from chapter 5 who wished to make legible district wealth through a grand asset census but was prevented from doing so by his political master. As I documented, the state has reasonably well qualified and competent staff who are present throughout the territory. What hinders the state's external capacity—the ability of officials to do things when they leave their desks—is the political system that allows politicians to control public offices.

The Ghanaian state's core deficiency is this weak external capacity. It lacks greater external capacity because of formal institutions like highly competitive electoral politics and because of informal institutions such as clientelism, which incentivize patronage over public goods provision. As we saw in earlier chapters, the roots can be found in the state-building impulses in the 1980s.

The system of local government was originally an attempt to rebuild the state by extending its reach into the countryside after repeated economic and political crises in the 1970s and 1980s. Decentralization was intended to increase the state's capacity by posting to remote areas officials who would be beholden to the central state rather than to local people (Olowu, Wunsch, and Ayee 2004).¹⁷ Decentralization was also intended to incorporate local elites into a system that would ultimately be controlled by the center.

In the late 1980s, the Ghanaian state emerged from economic disaster having developed a particular type of capacity relevant to its survival: a distributive apparatus skilled at delivering patronage. This is its current equilibrium. But the kinds of political concessions required for it to become more skilled in delivering complex public programs did not emerge. That is, it is stuck in its equilibrium. Rawlings's state was reliant, as it is now, on non-state actors (like party volunteers) to collect information and to regulate bodies and assets on behalf of the state. And Ghanaian presidents before him had struggled in vain to weaken the power of Akan chiefs (Rathbone 2000a). The government is still reliant on these nonstate actors for access to their land and to their people. The eyes and ears of the Ghanaian central government are not local state officials—they are neighborhood- and village-level nonstate actors.

I have attempted to move from the specifics of Ghana's local state to general lessons for the field of comparative political economy. The first lesson concerns how varieties of clientelism are related to the strength of party systems. Political systems can be differently clientelistic, such that a system with very little vote buying could still be highly clientelistic (as Ghana is). Beyond that correlation, I have suggested some ways to think about the mechanisms linking the strength of a party system to a form of clientelism via the channel of voter mobility. Ironically, political systems with strong

and stable parties may actually limit voter choice, especially if the parties are clientelistic and/or identity based, which is a situation that describes great swaths of the developing world.

Second, I want to generalize to important concepts—specifically how Africanists use the term “Big Men.”¹⁸ While chief executives are immensely powerful local figures, we saw that—at least from their own perspective—they are also besieged figures. Recall from chapter 2 the account I provided of a day shadowing a chief executive on the same day the president died. In this concluding chapter, I related this observation to the broader Africanist interest in the concept of Big Men. I argue for a return to the original meaning in which Big Men are constrained actors rather than centers of unchecked power.

The second finding to emerge from this chapter concerns the nature of “corrupt” politics in local state offices. Observers of developing countries too often fail to distinguish between two basic types of corruption: theft and clientelism. Many of the examples of clientelism in this book would fit a general definition of corruption, in which public funds are used for some nonpublic end. But scholars need to pay close attention to whether sheeting for a roof is appropriated by a local politician for her network or instead used on her own home. When we know only that sheeting left the government store but never made it to the school, a little knowledge can be dangerous if we do not know how she eventually used the sheeting. The point is not to make the relativistic argument that an observer can never say what is corruption because every society defines corruption differently. Rather, it is that observers too readily describe the appropriation of public resources for nonpublic purposes as either an act of Mobutu-esque personal enrichment or as a base and distasteful attempt to keep a politician in power. Instead, such appropriation is very often intended to keep a *system*—not merely a person—in place. This does not make the behavior more ethical or palatable. Rather, I argue that individualizing the appropriation of resources is not analytically useful.

Third, bureaucrats are constrained less by their own (in) competence or lack of resources and much more so by the general political environment in which they find themselves. The deeper challenge for some weak states may not be in hiring better bureaucrats but in negotiating mutually beneficial pacts between state and nonstate actors.

The third finding concerns state capacity. The state in Ghana relies on nonstate actors for information and enforcement because the zero-sum manner in which official power is wielded generates too much opposition and too little quasi-voluntary compliance. Actors know the state serves supporters of the incumbent, so they avoid official attempts at codification or monitoring of their bodies or assets. Electoral competition may simply increase the returns to zero-sum politics. The challenge for political systems such as this is not incremental improvements in the tools or skills of civil servants. Although I found some local state offices overprovide patronage, it was not because of administrative weakness. Indeed, some patronage-providing districts may build better administrative capacity *in order to* provide patronage. Rather, the challenge is a political one: breaking out of a low-capacity equilibrium so citizens will allow into their lives a state apparatus they wisely avoid.

Appendix

Introduction Table

Table A.1. Estimating tax performance

	IGF per cap. (median, deflated)
Population (2010)	−0.00000365*** (−3.78)
Urban (2010)	0.0167*** (3.49)
Illiterate (2010)	−0.0355* (−2.44)
No toilet (2010)	0.0156 (1.73)
Electricity (2010)	−0.00320 (−0.49)
Area (km ² , land)	−0.00000236 (−0.07)
Population density	0.000537** (2.72)
District age	−0.0370*** (−5.07)
Distance to Accra (log)	−0.0459 (−0.26)
Distance to regional capital (log)	0.0107 (0.15)
Distance to Kumasi (log)	0.00594 (0.06)
Distance to mine (log)	−0.285* (−2.46)
Cocoa dummy	−0.251 (−1.24)
Crop value per capita (log, cedis)	0.0353 (0.31)
Constant	3.703** (2.73)
Observations	165
R ²	0.478

Note: *t* statistics in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Chapter 1 Tables

The dependent variables are the district margins between the NDC and NPP candidates in the 1996, 2000, and 2004 presidential elections. The explanatory variable, *born in another region* (1970), is the district share of residents who were born in another region in 1970. I include regional controls since strongholds of the NDC and NPP are concentrated in specific regions. This is the best alternative to the inclusion of other controls such as household or district wealth, urbanization, and literacy, for which data from 1970 are not available.

To analyze the correlation between 1970 migration and present district-level competitiveness, I matched the 141 local government areas used in the 1970 census with the 110 districts in existence from 1988 to 2004. Matching local government areas was made relatively straightforward since many local governments changed neither their names entirely nor their boundaries. Assin Local Council in 1970, for example, was Assin District Assembly from 1988. Many districts combined, of course, since the number of local governments went from 141 to 110. This involved joining two local governments without changing the boundary. Konongo-Odumasi Urban Council and Ashanti Akim Local Council, for example, became Asante Akim North Municipal Assembly in 1988. In these cases, the original (1970) districts are retained in the dataset, and their original values for migration are retained. For their political competitiveness values, I use Asante Akim North's election data for both. After 2004 the number of districts increased, so matching to 1970 districts was done with increasing error.

Table A.2. Summary statistics for migration models

	<i>N</i>	Avg.	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.
Born in another region (1970)	147	15.00	11.72	.9	64.3
Margin (1996, parliamentary)	136	36.76	24.12	1	95
Margin (1996, presidential)	147	40.09	28.58	.7	98.19
Margin (2000, presidential)	138	36.88	26.62	.9	92
Margin (2000, parliamentary)	147	31.30	22.14	.09	86.17
Margin (2004, presidential)	102	35.96	22.09	3.27	90.64
Margin (2004, parliamentary)	102	29.82	19.55	3.1	76.4

Table A.3. 1970 migrant populations predict contemporary competitiveness

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Margin (1996)	Margin (2000)	Margin (2004)
Born in another region (1970)	−0.813*** (0.187)	−0.791*** (0.171)	−0.342** (0.160)
Ashanti Region	1.472 (5.080)	11.880** (5.410)	13.027** (5.408)
Volta Region	22.049*** (8.305)	12.439 (7.671)	31.032*** (8.810)
Western Region	−1.511 (5.520)	−6.637 (5.728)	−10.530 (7.032)
Brong-Ahafo Region	0.404 (8.881)	6.263 (7.849)	−6.429 (5.249)
Greater Accra	13.798 (12.580)	7.934 (9.555)	8.958 (7.763)
Constant	49.234*** (4.103)	45.301*** (4.483)	37.006*** (3.749)
Observations	147	138	102
<i>R</i> ²	0.169	0.148	0.243

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Results from Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) models show that districts with greater in-migration in 1970 are more competitive today. In model 1, the explanatory variable is statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level. Substantively, holding other variables at mean values, going from the minimum to the maximum of the explanatory variable is associated with a decrease in the electoral margin of over 50 percentage points. This means a large migrant population in 1970 is associated with a highly competitive district twenty to thirty years later. The model is robust to the inclusion of regional controls and to varying the electoral period. It was not possible to estimate the effect of 1970 migrant populations on elections after 2004 because a proliferation of districts and constituencies made it too difficult to match 1970 units with present units. The statistical significance of the coefficients for *Ashanti Region* and *Volta Region* is not surprising since these are the heartlands of the NPP and NDC, respectively.

Chapter 3 Tables

Table A.4. Regression model for presence of party activists

	Party boys active
Margin (2012)	-0.161* (0.084)
Std. dev. in avg. margin (2000-2012)	-0.417 (0.291)
Population (2010)	-0.000 (0.000)
Urban (2010)	-0.084 (0.104)
Illiterate (2010)	-0.381 (0.289)
No toilet (2010)	0.131 (0.141)

Table A.4. Regression model for presence of party activists (*cont.*)

	Party boys active
Electricity (2010)	−0.105 (0.145)
Area (km ² , land)	9.763*** (3.678)
Population density	0.046** (0.018)
Distance to Accra	−0.019 (0.015)
Distance to regional capital	0.043 (0.036)
Ethnic fractionalization (2010)	−0.097 (0.085)
Constant	−20.024 (24.451)
Observations	114
R^2	0.141

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the share of district respondents who said, “Party boys are active here.” Data from Huntington, Schultz, and Wibbels (2015).

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Chapter 4 Tables

Survey Response Rates

The response rate was 88 percent ($n = 149$), meaning 88 percent of districts submitted some completed part of the questionnaire. Eighty-five percent of respondents (not all districts) completed at least five of the six sections. Response rates for individual respondents are shown in table A.5 and are visualized in figure A.1. Cells show responses as percentages of all districts (not percentages of respondents). The response rate is lowest for the presiding member because they did not work full-time at the district building.

Table A.5. Response rates for district assembly survey

Response rates by respondent	%
All districts	88
Chief executives	78
Presiding members	71
Coordinating directors	84
Personnel officers	78
Revenue officers	82
Finance officers	81

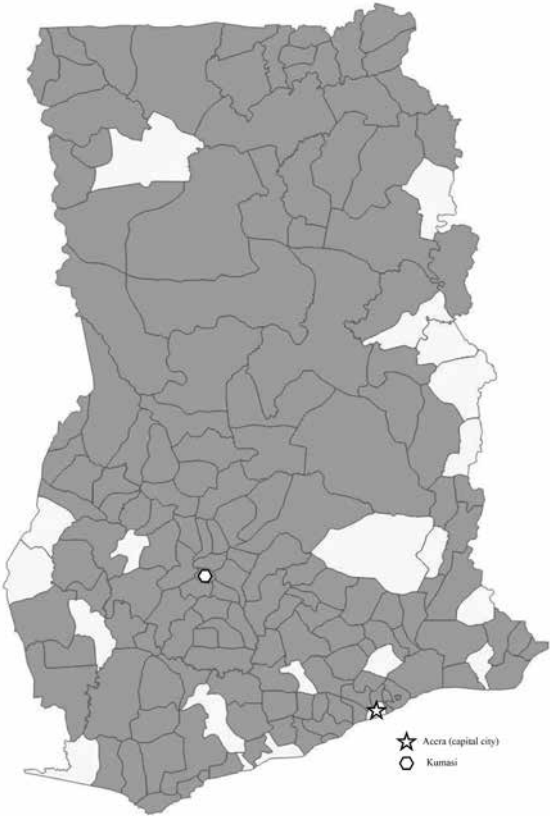


FIGURE A.1. Map of district survey responses. Note: Light-colored districts show no survey response received.

Nonresponses were quasi-random owing to the sudden death of Ghana's president on July 24, 2012. Districts that had not completed their survey by that point ultimately returned no survey at all because government business ground to a halt for his funeral. By the time government business resumed, I was hospitalized and immediately thereafter was scheduled to leave Ghana. Additionally, some of those who had not completed the survey by the time of the president's death were those that had not received a survey at all. Nonresponses were attributable to idiosyncratic difficulties with research assistants rather than district characteristics, which did not bias the data. Table A.6 shows no systematic relationship between the predicted probability that a district returned at least some part of the survey (model 1) or the total number of sections returned (model 2).

Table A.6. Regression models for bias in survey responses

	(1 Marginal effects from probit)	(2 OLS)
	Any survey section complete	Number of sections complete (max. 6)
Population (2010, log)	-0.043 (0.071)	-0.628 (0.485)
Urban (2010)	0.003* (0.002)	0.012 (0.010)
District age	0.000 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.024)
Distance to mine (log)	-0.009 (0.031)	-0.143 (0.216)
Crop value	-0.038 (0.032)	-0.017 (0.223)
Illiterate (2010)	-0.000 (0.004)	-0.012 (0.028)
No toilet (2010)	0.002 (0.002)	0.008 (0.015)
Distance to Kumasi (log)	-0.126*** (0.045)	-0.404* (0.223)

Table A.6. Regression models for bias in survey responses (*cont.*)

	(1 Marginal effects from probit)	(2 OLS)
	Any survey section complete	Number of sections complete (max. 6)
Distance to Accra (log)	0.020 (0.047)	−0.033 (0.312)
Area (km ² , land)	−0.002 (0.042)	−0.021 (0.259)
Ethnic fractionalization (2010)	0.001 (0.001)	0.004 (0.010)
Electricity (2010)	−0.002 (0.002)	−0.015 (0.016)
Cocoa dummy	−0.022 (0.072)	−0.364 (0.458)
Margin in pres. elections (2000–2012)	0.000 (0.002)	−0.002 (0.011)
Ethnic bloc difference	−0.000 (0.001)	−0.002 (0.007)
Constant		15.818*** (6.039)
Observations	168	168
R ²		0.051

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A.7. Summary statistics for districts

	Avg.	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.	N
<i>Dependent variables</i>					
Staff size	147.47	150.15	33	1,476	132
Staff size (log)	4.80	0.55	3.5	7	132
Low-level staff	45.79	55.74	7	460	128
Low-level staff (log)	3.52	0.71	1.95	6	128

Table A.7. Summary statistics for districts (*cont.*)

	Avg.	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.	N
<i>Dependent variables (cont.)</i>					
Projects	56.44	26.69	5.3	100	116
Govt. jobs	57.49	26.40	0	100	116
Help with police	35.52	25.82	0	100	116
Market stalls	21.34	17.18	0	63	116
Land	11.23	11.75	0	63	116
<i>Explanatory variables</i>					
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)	29.14	21.65	1.2	92	170
Margin (2008, presidential)	27.79	22.65	0.09	93	170
Margin (2008, parliamentary)	23.22	20.39	0.11	87	170
<i>Instrumental variable</i>					
Ethnic bloc difference	53.48	33.06	0	100	170
<i>Control variables</i>					
Population (2010, log)	11.66	0.52	10.75	15	170
Urban (2010)	35.89	24.06	0	100	170
District age	8.24	8.16	2	22	170
Distance to mine (log)	4.73	1.12	0	6	200
Crop value (log)	6.01	1.28	0.7	8	168
Illiterate	32.19	18.37	7.1	80	170
No toilet (2010)	30.73	29.57	2.8	93	170
Distance to Kumasi (log)	5.04	0.86	0	6	200
Distance to Accra (log)	5.30	0.90	0	6	200
Population density (log)	4.79	1.19	2	9	170
Area (km ² , land)	6.87	0.96	3	9	170
Ethnic majority	71.47	18.66	25.2	99	170
Ethnic majority ²	5,454	2,525	633	9,758	170
Electricity	51.39	21.17	8.3	94	170
Cocoa dummy	0.28	0.45	0	1	170

Note: 2010 data is from the 2010 census. Cocoa data is from the 2005 *Ghana Living Standards Survey* (Ghana, Government of, 2005). Crop data is from the Ministry of Agriculture (2010).

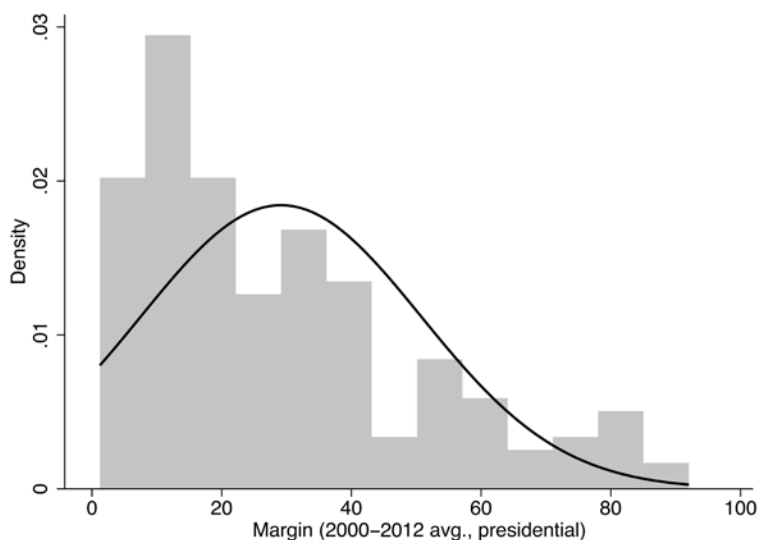


FIGURE A.2. Distribution of explanatory variable.

In its simplest terms, the logic of an instrumental variable is as follows. Suppose the factor affecting both competition and patronage, but which I have not measured, is the level of unemployment. Maybe unemployment gets more people politically involved, thus making local elections more competitive, while also making people more desperate for state largesse, in turn driving the market for patronage. Were that true, competition and patronage would be correlated, not because one causes the other but because both are separately caused by unemployment. We could address this problem were we able to find a factor that is correlated with electoral competition but (crucially) *unrelated* to patronage. For example, imagine districts had one of two types of electoral systems. Elections with single-member constituencies tend to generate competitive two-party systems, while places with multiple-member constituencies tend to generate multiparty systems with fractured oppositions. In this case, the level of electoral competition might be correlated with the type of electoral system.

Importantly, there should be no obvious reason why the type of electoral system affects the level of patronage. Since the electoral system (which we now call the “instrumental variable”) is correlated with electoral competitiveness (the explanatory variable) but is *not* correlated with patronage (the dependent variable), we can reasonably assert that any correlation between electoral system and patronage is due to the electoral system affecting political competition. In other words, when we allow for an instrument to “stand in for” our original explanatory variable, we can take advantage of any overlap between electoral system and patronage since we know that those two variables should not be theoretically correlated. This is a simplification of the statistical technique known as instrumental variables regression, or two-stage least squares regression. The distribution of the instrumental variable is shown in figure A.2.

The scatterplot in figure A.3 shows that the instrument is not measuring ethnic diversity. Each dot is a district. The horizontal

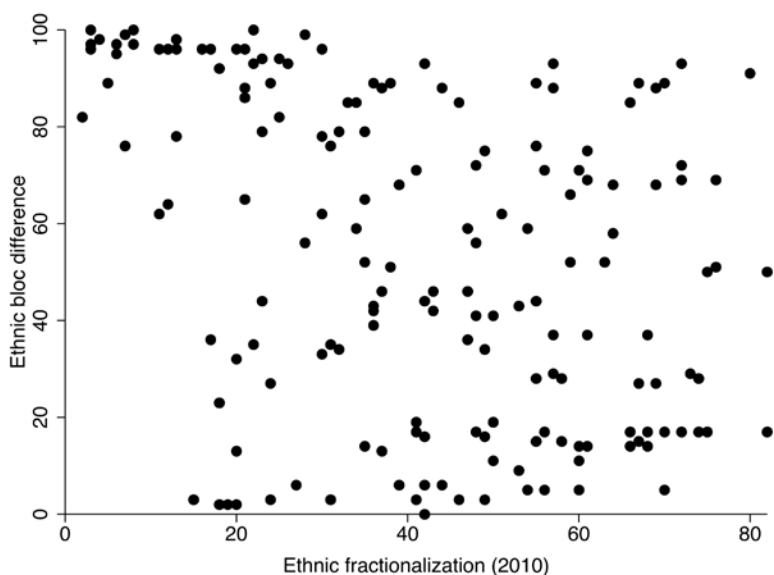


FIGURE A.3. Relationship between ethnic diversity and size of ethnic blocs.

axis plots ethnic diversity. Higher values (left to right) are associated with higher ethnic fractionalization. The vertical axis plots the instrument *ethnic bloc difference*. Where the value for *ethnic bloc difference* is 0, there is no difference between the size of the major ethnic voting blocs in the district. This is a situation of nearly perfect competition since the groups that vote NPP or NDC are in rough parity.¹

Data clustered in the top left are districts where *ethnic bloc difference* values are very high and where there is low diversity. These are party strongholds, dominated by one party and one ethnic group. For the NPP these are districts where Ashantis dominate, such as in Ashanti Region. For the NDC these are districts where Ewes dominate, such as in Volta Region. Outside of these strongholds, the instrument is measuring something entirely different from ethnic diversity. The test of the first stage shows that the instrument is highly correlated with the endogenous regressor with Durbin-Wu-Hausman F-statistics above 10.

Test of the First Stage

I estimate the following equation where *instrument* is *ethnic bloc difference*:

$$\text{PoliticalCompetition}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Instrument}_i + \beta_2 \text{GeospatialControls}_i + \beta_3 \text{DevelopmentControls}_i + \beta_4 \text{DemographicControls}_i + u_i$$

The Durbin-Wu-Hausman F-statistic is shown at the bottom of the table. As a rule of thumb, an F-stat equal to or above 10 is taken to mean that the instrument is correlated with the endogenous regressor (Sovey and Green 2011). This does not mean one possesses a “good” instrument but simply that the instrument meets the condition that the instrument and endogenous explanatory variable are correlated. A weak instrument, in which there is a low correlation between the endogenous regressor and the instrument, generates a biased two-stage least squares estimator.

Table A.8. Test of first stage for instrumental variable

	Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)		Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)
Ethnic bloc difference	0.231*** (0.042)	Distance to Accra (log)	5.000** (2.207)
Population (2010, log)	–190.519 (137.844)	Population density (log)	188.932 (138.037)
Urban (2010)	–0.158 (0.103)	Area (km ² , land)	194.729 (138.586)
District age	–0.148 (0.177)	Ethnic majority	–0.536 (0.442)
Distance to mine (log)	9.447*** (2.424)	Ethnic majority ²	0.005 (0.003)
Crop value (log)	–1.867 (1.649)	Electricity	–0.112 (0.151)
Illiterate	–1.142*** (0.208)	Cocoa dummy	–0.317 (3.411)
No toilet (2010)	0.210* (0.126)	Constant	36.479 (48.146)
Distance to Kumasi (log)	–9.807*** (1.812)	Observations	168
		R ²	0.559

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A.9. Supplementary regression models for size of district staff

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Staff size	Staff size	Staff size	Staff size	Staff size
Margin (2008, presidential)	–1.246*** (0.474)				
Margin (2008, parliamentary)		–1.294** (0.517)			
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)			–3.307*** (1.268)	–0.563** (0.231)	
MP is NDC (2008)					–8.544 (21.118)
Std. dev. in avg. margin (2000–2012)					
Candidates per EA (2006)					
% EAs contested (2006)					
Turnout (MMDA, 2006)					
Turnout (2008)					
Controls (see note)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	–1509.145*** (341.810)	–1484.156*** (342.858)	–1307.167*** (331.164)	–1139.133*** (355.253)	–1622.874*** (380.554)
Observations	131	131	131	128	131
R ²	0.705	0.702	0.662	0.547	0.688

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Models include controls for population, population density, urbanization, age of district, distances to mines/Kumasi/Accra, value of crops, literacy, district size/area, household access to electricity/toilets, cocoa production, and size of largest ethnic group. *EA* means “enumeration area.” *MMDA* means “metropolitan, municipal, or district assembly level.”

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A.9. Supplementary regression models for size of district staff (*cont.*)

	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Staff size	Staff size	Staff size	Staff size	Staff size
Margin (2008, presidential)					
Margin (2008, parliamentary)					
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)					
MP is NDC (2008)					
Std. dev. in avg. margin (2000–2012)	2.862				
	(1.891)				
Candidates per EA (2006)		–4.782			
		(11.227)			
% EAs contested (2006)			0.489		
			(0.852)		
Turnout (MMDA, 2006)				–0.579	
				(0.956)	
Turnout (2008)					–3.343
					(2.537)
Controls (see note)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	–1660.315*** (383.686)	–1222.748** (502.467)	–1324.479** (597.066)	–1258.312* (697.555)	–1365.837*** (359.309)
Observations	129	73	73	72	131
R ²	0.697	0.592	0.594	0.550	0.695

Table A.10. Supplementary regression models for size of low-level district staff

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Low-level staff	Low-level staff	Low-level staff	Low-level staff	Low-level staff
Margin (2008, presidential)	−0.290* (0.155)				
Margin (2008, parliamentary)		−0.359* (0.208)			
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)			−0.844* (0.509)	−0.119 (0.124)	
MP is NDC (2008)					−1.790 (8.923)
Std. dev. in avg. margin (2000–2012)					
Candidates per EA (2006)					
% EAs contested (2006)					
Turnout (MMDA, 2006)					
Turnout (2008)					
Constant (see note)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	−537.309*** (164.058)	−521.345*** (163.555)	−452.777*** (169.944)	−440.573*** (160.133)	−580.713*** (168.347)
Observations	127	127	127	125	127
R ²	0.529	0.530	0.512	0.434	0.523

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Models include controls for population, population density, urbanization, age of district, distances to mines/Kumasi/Accra, value of crops, literacy, district size/area, household access to electricity/toilets, cocoa production, and size of largest ethnic group.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A.10. Supplementary regression models for size of low-level district staff (*cont.*)

	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Low-level staff	Low-level staff	Low-level staff	Low-level staff	Low-level staff
Margin (2008, presidential)					
Margin (2008, parliamentary)					
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)					
MP is NDC (2008)					
Std. dev. in avg. margin (2000–2012)	1.438 (1.222)				
Candidates per EA (2006)		–8.855 (5.521)			
% EAs contested (2006)			–0.167 (0.360)		
Turnout (MMDA, 2006)				–0.537 (0.372)	
Turnout (2008)					0.274 (1.177)
Constant (see note)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	–590.824*** (170.391)	–422.748 (296.296)	–455.138 (339.198)	–476.873 (310.946)	–604.864*** (195.543)
Observations	125	70	70	70	127
R ²	0.536	0.472	0.452	0.462	0.523

Table A.11. Supplementary regression models for share of district staff paid by central government

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Paid centrally	Paid centrally	Paid centrally	Paid centrally	Paid centrally
Margin (2008, presidential)	-0.172*				
	(0.090)				
Margin (2008, parliamentary)		-0.218**			
		(0.105)			
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)			-0.060	-0.189*	
			(0.201)	(0.097)	
MP is NDC (2008)					0.765
					(3.343)
Std. dev. in avg. margin (2000–2012)					
Candidates per EA (2006)					
% EAs Contested (2006)					
Turnout (MMDA, 2006)					
Turnout (2008)					
Constant (see note)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	37.997	45.668	27.978	37.418	22.207
	(65.321)	(64.261)	(57.307)	(76.643)	(67.967)
Observations	131	131	131	128	131
R ²	0.160	0.167	0.147	0.131	0.133

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Models control for population, population density, urbanization, age of district, distances to mines/Kumasi/Accra, value of crops, literacy, district size/area, household access to electricity/toilets, cocoa production, and size of largest ethnic group.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A.11. Supplementary regression models for share of district staff paid by central government (*cont.*)

	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Paid centrally	Paid centrally	Paid centrally	Paid centrally	Paid centrally
Margin (2008, presidential)					
Margin (2008, parliamentary)					
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)					
MP is NDC (2008)					
Std. dev. in avg. margin (2000–2012)	0.084 (0.331)				
Candidates per EA (2006)		3.978 (3.440)			
% EAs Contested (2006)			−0.149 (0.245)		
Turnout (MMDA, 2006)				0.356 (0.334)	
Turnout (2008)					−0.126 (0.357)
Constant (see note)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	22.063 (68.948)	−77.811 (126.250)	−28.257 (127.817)	−66.122 (148.590)	31.911 (70.360)
Observations	129	73	73	72	131
R ²	0.136	0.245	0.236	0.247	0.134

Table A.12. Supplementary regression models for importance of party membership in development projects

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Projects	Projects	Projects	Projects	Projects
Margin (2008, presidential)	−0.432*** (0.149)				
Margin (2008, parliamentary)		−0.396** (0.173)			
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)			0.761* (0.412)	−0.385** (0.162)	
MP is NDC (2008)					4.332 (6.554)
Std. dev. in avg. margin (2000–2012)					
Candidates per EA (2006)					
% EAs contested (2006)					
Turnout (MMDA, 2006)					
Turnout (2008)					
Constant (see note)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	−88.099 (112.066)	−89.220 (113.875)	−220.500 (136.532)	−89.964 (113.945)	−130.556 (113.549)
Observations	116	116	116	116	116
R ²	0.386	0.368	0.004	0.368	0.330

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Models include controls for population, population density, urbanization, age of district, distances to mines/Kumasi/Accra, value of crops, literacy, district size/area, household access to electricity/toilets, cocoa production, and size of largest ethnic group.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A.12. Supplementary regression models for importance of party membership in development projects (cont.)

	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Projects	Projects	Projects	Projects	Projects
Margin (2008, presidential)					
Margin (2008, parliamentary)					
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)					
MP is NDC (2008)					
Std. dev. in avg. margin (2000–2012)	–1.032** (0.461)				
Candidates per EA (2006)		–1.888 (3.491)			
% EAs contested (2006)			–0.170 (0.226)		
Turnout (MMDA, 2006)				–0.259 (0.489)	
Turnout (2008)					–1.023* (0.532)
Constant (see note)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	–110.406 (111.908)	–110.441 (134.157)	–153.523 (123.264)	–154.733 (126.589)	–46.692 (123.430)
Observations	114	70	71	71	116
R ²	0.354	0.412	0.428	0.429	0.352

Table A.13. Supplementary regression models for importance of party membership in getting a government job

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Govt. jobs	Govt. jobs	Govt. jobs	Govt. jobs	Govt. jobs
Margin (2008, presidential)	−0.515*** (0.151)				
Margin (2008, parliamentary)		−0.500*** (0.171)			
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)			0.525 (0.443)	−0.477*** (0.162)	
MP is NDC (2008)					6.198 (6.904)
Std. dev. in avg. Margin (2000–2012)					
Candidates per EA (2006)					
% EAs Contested (2006)					
Turnout (MMDA, 2006)					
Turnout (2008)					
Constant (see note)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	−46.295 (100.079)	−44.659 (103.519)	−160.612 (123.569)	−46.570 (102.665)	−96.180 (105.828)
Observations	116	116	116	116	116
R ²	0.328	0.309	0.021	0.305	0.248

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Models include controls for population, population density, urbanization, age of district, distances to mines/Kumasi/Accra, value of crops, literacy, district size/area, household access to electricity/toilets, cocoa production, and size of largest ethnic group.

Table A.13. Supplementary regression models for importance of party membership in getting a government job (*cont.*)

	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Govt. jobs	Govt. jobs	Govt. jobs	Govt. jobs	Govt. jobs
Margin (2008, presidential)					
Margin (2008, parliamentary)					
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)					
MP is NDC (2008)					
Std. dev. in avg. Margin (2000–2012)	–1.222**				
	(0.486)				
Candidates per EA (2006)		–0.851			
		(3.808)			
% EAs Contested (2006)			0.006		
			(0.239)		
Turnout (MMDA, 2006)				0.258	
				(0.494)	
Turnout (2008)					–0.809
					(0.591)
Constant (see note)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	–70.741	–25.483	–81.441	–95.624	–31.906
	(104.497)	(125.700)	(117.808)	(119.285)	(113.654)
Observations	114	70	71	71	116
R ²	0.289	0.355	0.371	0.375	0.257

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A.14. Supplementary regression models for importance of party membership in getting a market stall

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Market stalls	Market stalls	Market stalls	Market stalls	Market stalls
Margin (2008, presidential)	−0.367*** (0.082)				
Margin (2008, parliamentary)		−0.354*** (0.096)			
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)			−0.004 (0.262)	−0.339*** (0.085)	
MP is NDC (2008)					−2.575 (4.204)
Std. dev. in avg. margin (2000–2012)					
Candidates per EA (2006)					
% EAs contested (2006)					
Turnout (MMDA, 2006)					
Turnout (2008)					
Constant (see note)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	−9.520 (61.121)	−8.575 (63.663)	−47.860 (68.883)	−9.772 (62.823)	−50.297 (65.149)
Observations	116	116	116	116	116
R ²	0.442	0.419	0.340	0.415	0.341

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Models control for population, population density, urbanization, age of district, distances to mines/Kumasi/Accra, value of crops, literacy, district size/area, household access to electricity/toilets, cocoa production, and size of largest ethnic group.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A.14. Supplementary regression models for importance of party membership in getting a market stall (*cont.*)

	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Market stalls	Market stalls	Market stalls	Market stalls	Market stalls
Margin (2008, presidential)					
Margin (2008, parliamentary)					
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)					
MP is NDC (2008)					
Std. dev. in avg. margin (2000–2012)	–0.441*				
	(0.239)				
Candidates per EA (2006)		–1.137			
		(2.897)			
% EAs contested (2006)			–0.020		
			(0.219)		
Turnout (MMDA, 2006)				0.125	
				(0.316)	
Turnout (2008)					–0.428
					(0.382)
Constant (see note)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	–34.955	–39.531	–51.455	–60.501	–11.858
	(64.641)	(90.595)	(89.928)	(84.444)	(75.406)
Observations	114	70	71	71	116
R ²	0.353	0.330	0.344	0.346	0.349

Table A.15. Supplementary regression models for importance of party membership in getting out of trouble with the police

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Help with police	Help with police	Help with police	Help with police	Help with police
Margin (2008, presidential)	−0.477*** (0.133)				
Margin (2008, parliamentary)		−0.462*** (0.138)			
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)			0.557 (0.419)	−0.423*** (0.138)	
MP is NDC (2008)					3.645 (6.640)
Std. dev. in avg. mar- gin (2000–2012)					
Candidates per EA (2006)					
% EAs contested (2006)					
Turnout (MMDA, 2006)					
Turnout (2008)					
Constant (see note)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	−54.003 (112.308)	−52.539 (112.277)	−167.860 (131.326)	−56.327 (112.094)	−101.727 (113.138)
Observations	116	116	116	116	116
R ²	0.407	0.390	0.098	0.383	0.332

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Models control for population, population density, urbanization, age of district, distances to mines/Kumasi/Accra, value of crops, literacy, district size/area, household access to electricity/toilets, cocoa production, and size of largest ethnic group.

Table A.15. Supplementary regression models for importance of party membership in getting out of trouble with the police (*cont.*)

	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Help with police	Help with police	Help with police	Help with police	Help with police
Margin (2008, presidential)					
Margin (2008, parliamentary)					
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)					
MP is NDC (2008)					
Std. dev. in avg. mar- gin (2000–2012)	–0.411 (0.406)				
Candidates per EA (2006)		0.586 (4.019)			
% EAs contested (2006)			–0.178 (0.316)		
Turnout (MMDA, 2006)				–0.090 (0.409)	
Turnout (2008)					–0.714 (0.547)
Constant (see note)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	–104.346 (114.381)	–141.980 (150.295)	–131.414 (143.162)	–143.105 (137.729)	–43.606 (124.802)
Observations	114	70	71	71	116
R ²	0.336	0.405	0.413	0.411	0.343

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A.16. Supplementary regression models for importance of party membership in registering land

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Land	Land	Land	Land	Land
Margin (2008, presidential)	−0.159*** (0.059)				
Margin (2008, parliamentary)		−0.169** (0.072)			
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)			0.507** (0.238)	−0.101 (0.067)	
MP is NDC (2008)					2.761 (3.045)
Std. dev. in avg. margin (2000–2012)					
Candidates per EA (2006)					
% EAs contested (2006)					
Turnout (MMDA, 2006)					
Turnout (2008)					
Constant (see note)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	60.783 (51.496)	63.009 (52.423)	−13.811 (75.267)	55.437 (53.290)	46.050 (51.419)
Observations	116	116	116	116	116
R ²	0.144	0.141	−0.412	0.117	0.109

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Models include controls for population, population density, urbanization, age of district, distances to mines/Kumasi/Accra, value of crops, literacy, district size/area, household access to electricity/toilets, cocoa production, and size of largest ethnic group.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A.16. Supplementary regression models for importance of party membership in registering land (*cont.*)

	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Land	Land	Land	Land	Land
Margin (2008, presidential)					
Margin (2008, parliamentary)					
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)					
MP is NDC (2008)					
Std. dev. in avg. margin (2000–2012)	–0.074				
	(0.283)				
Candidates per EA (2006)		0.431			
		(2.006)			
% EAs contested (2006)			–0.007		
			(0.140)		
Turnout (MMDA, 2006)				–0.065	
				(0.199)	
Turnout (2008)					–0.599*
					(0.308)
Constant (see note)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	40.712	–4.427	–0.834	2.162	95.022
	(53.618)	(65.076)	(61.990)	(57.209)	(57.378)
Observations	114	70	71	71	116
R^2	0.096	0.288	0.290	0.291	0.146

Table A.17. Summary statistics for social capital models

	<i>N</i>	Avg.	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.
Others look out for themselves	110	43.33	18.89	2.5	83.1
Peaceful groups	110	86.12	11.01	41.1	100
Safe to walk	110	93.39	6.99	61.5	100
Listens to radio	110	83.05	12.29	46.5	98.3
Reads newspaper	110	18.05	11.42	1.2	51.4
Intermarriage	110	22.62	13.26	.2	52.9
Neighborhood watch	110	18.12	13.61	.3	68.5
Turnout (2000)	68	62.32	6.93	40.9	73.9
Ethnic fractionalization	110	0.41	0.20	.1	.8
Population (2003)	110	187,857	237,319	49,253	1,818,050
% urban (2000)	96	31.16	23.05	0	100
Distance to regional capital	200	69.14	52.79	1	303
Distance to Accra	200	265.88	169.48	1	648
Distance to Kumasi	200	202.26	132.54	1	531
Distance to mine	200	176.16	142.76	1	543
Owns radio (2003)	110	66.42	10.02	41.5	90.8
Illiterate (2000)	110	43.66	17.42	12	87
Good wall (2003)	110	30.22	23.42	.7	92.6
Poor roof (2003)	110	24.27	24.58	0	90.3
Good water (2003)	110	30.61	26.01	0	99.5

Note: The 2003 data is from the *Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire* (Ghana, Government of, 2003). The 2000 data is from the 2000 census. *Distance to mine* is distance to nearest major gold mine. Variables for literacy, walls, roofs, and water are shares of the district population. *Good wall* is concrete. *Good water* is outdoor tap, piped, or from a vendor. *Poor roof* is mud or thatch.

Table A.18. Regression models for patronage (2012) and social capital (2003)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Low-level staff	Low-level staff	Low-level staff	Low-level staff	Low-level staff	Low-level staff	Low-level staff	Low-level staff
Others look out for themselves	0.357 (0.232)							
Peaceful groups		-0.587 (0.458)						
Safe to walk			-0.092 (0.852)					
Conflict is political				1.560** (0.685)				
Listens to radio					0.109 (0.475)			
Reads newspaper						0.293 (0.524)		
Intermarriage							0.281 (0.308)	
Neighborhood watch								0.311 (0.324)
<i>Full controls</i> <i>(see note)</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Constant	-19.449 (390.135)	-38.761 (364.549)	-18.310 (395.476)	-354.572 (298.039)	-17.218 (393.786)	-44.157 (409.041)	-168.497 (462.636)	51.415 (354.108)
Observations	32	32	32	31	32	32	32	32
R ²	0.969	0.968	0.965	0.976	0.965	0.965	0.966	0.968

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Includes controls for *urban* (2010), *district age*, *distance to mine* (log), *crop value* (log), *illiterate* (2010), *no toilet*, *distance to Kumasi* (log), *distance to Accra* (log), *population density* (log), *area* (km², land), *ethnic fractionalization* (2010), *electricity* (2010), and *cocoa*.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A.19. Regression models for political competition (2012) and social capital (2000)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Others look out for them- selves	Peaceful groups	Safe to walk	Listens to radio	Reads newspa- per	Intermar- riage	Neigh- borhood watch	Turnout (2000)
Margin (2000, presidential)	-0.198** (0.081)	0.042 (0.047)	0.040 (0.036)	-0.082** (0.033)	0.014 (0.050)	-0.001 (0.056)	-0.042 (0.061)	0.040 (0.035)
Owens radio (2003)				0.602*** (0.092)				
Full controls (see note)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Constant	63.156 (68.380)	234.167*** (51.586)	132.601*** (37.090)	124.942*** (38.779)	39.550 (39.373)	-69.276 (64.958)	-24.962 (71.575)	106.242*** (33.061)
Observations	103	103	103	103	103	103	103	103
R ²	0.405	0.288	0.196	0.718	0.606	0.231	0.173	0.257

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Includes controls for *urban* (2000), *district age* (2003), *distance to mine* (log), *distance to regional capital* (log), *illiterate* (2000), *distance to Kumasi* (log), *distance to Accra* (log), *population* (2003, log), *good wall* (2003), *poor roof* (2003), *good water* (2003), and *ethnic fractionalization*.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A.20. Summary statistics for public services

	<i>N</i>	Avg.	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.
Revenue per capita (2010)	167	21.49	9.32	5.29	56.83
No toilet	170	30.73	29.57	2.84	93.27
Bad garbage	170	75.63	16.57	6.62	96.77
Capital exp. (%)	161	79.45	13.20	35.68	98.4

Table A.21. Correlations between public services and political competition

	Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)	Revenue per capita (2010)	No toilet	Bad garbage
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)				
Revenue per capita (2010)	0.0163			
No toilet	−0.0763	0.259***		
Bad garbage	0.103	0.0616	0.309***	
Capital exp. (%)	0.000486	0.198**	0.535***	0.575***

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A.22. Regression models for public services

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Capital exp. (%)	Salaries as % of expenses	Revenue per capita (2010)	Bad garbage	No toilet
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)	−0.013 (0.047)	0.029 (0.033)	−0.007 (0.042)	0.018 (0.042)	0.063 (0.045)
Population (2010, log)	−16.639 (73.428)	13.014 (48.621)	12.838 (79.872)	24.648 (53.587)	−45.124 (153.030)
Urban (2010)	−0.078 (0.070)	0.093 (0.056)	0.066 (0.045)	−0.372*** (0.055)	−0.104** (0.047)
District age	−0.228** (0.091)	0.158** (0.064)	0.175** (0.089)	−0.125 (0.085)	0.012 (0.098)
Distance to mine (log)	1.059 (1.075)	−0.183 (0.739)	−0.078 (1.411)	−1.529 (1.042)	3.991*** (1.181)
Crop value (log)	0.801 (1.137)	0.723 (0.700)	−2.443*** (0.871)	1.507 (1.032)	−2.957*** (0.884)
Illiterate (2010)	0.137 (0.145)	−0.146 (0.098)	−0.160 (0.127)	0.064 (0.117)	1.318*** (0.112)
No toilet	0.080 (0.077)	−0.080 (0.054)	0.141* (0.076)	−0.014 (0.070)	
Distance to Kumasi (log)	−1.214 (1.232)	1.851** (0.797)	−0.494 (1.229)	−1.109 (1.249)	4.227*** (1.095)
Distance to Accra (log)	−1.414 (1.901)	2.553** (1.205)	1.238 (1.420)	−2.719* (1.639)	2.140 (1.982)
Population density (log)	11.374 (73.712)	−8.583 (48.837)	−25.010 (79.782)	−26.780 (53.430)	46.401 (153.228)
Area (km ² , land)	11.919 (73.970)	−7.707 (49.111)	−24.674 (79.860)	−22.574 (53.530)	44.680 (152.969)
Ethnic majority	0.171 (0.315)	−0.100 (0.237)	−0.050 (0.306)	0.016 (0.243)	0.102 (0.323)
Ethnic majority ²	−0.000 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.000 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	−0.001 (0.002)
Electricity (2010)	−0.081 (0.078)	0.009 (0.054)	−0.036 (0.069)	−0.033 (0.063)	0.090 (0.082)
Cocoa	1.034 (2.651)	−0.870 (1.758)	−0.661 (1.621)	−0.153 (1.940)	−2.746 (1.847)
Constant	131.535*** (37.463)	−68.128*** (22.170)	173.914*** (22.868)	97.792*** (27.406)	−53.536 (33.977)
Observations	160	160	165	168	168
R ²	0.487	0.351	0.304	0.712	0.902

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Chapter 5 Tables

In model 1, the estimated coefficient on *margin* is not statistically significant, but it is in the theorized direction: as electoral margins get larger, the probability of *highest rank* goes down, meaning less competitive districts are less likely to have coordinating directors of highest rank.

In models 3 and 4, because the number of years spent in the civil service are widely disbursed, I separated the data into coordinating directors serving more than fifteen years (43 percent of the sample) and those serving less (57 percent). In model 3, the estimated marginal effect of *margin* is positive and not statistically significant, suggesting the effect being picked up in model 4 is concentrated in the most highly competitive districts.

In model 6, holding all else constant, the marginal effect of being in a highly competitive district on the probability of coordinating director turnover was negative 25 percent. In model 7, the marginal effect of a one-unit increase in *margin* is 0.5 percent, which means going from a highly competitive district to a one-party stronghold—going from a zero percent to a 25 percent margin—is associated with a 13 percent greater likelihood that a district's coordinating director is a native of the area.

Table A.23. Regression models for quality of the head civil servant

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Highest rank	Highest rank	>15 years' experience	>15 years' experience	Moved in 2009
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)	−0.001		0.001		0.003
	(0.002)		(0.002)		(0.002)
Competitive (<8, 2000–2012 avg.)		0.339***		0.288***	
		(0.119)		(0.102)	
Age (coord. dir.)	0.030***	0.030***	0.032***	0.031***	
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.007)	
Population (2010, log)	4.576	4.773	2.562	1.857	5.861
	(4.109)	(4.262)	(4.878)	(5.923)	(6.954)
Urban (2010)	−0.002	−0.002	−0.001	−0.002	0.001
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.003)
District age	−0.001	−0.000	0.006	0.007	0.000
	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Distance to mine (log)	−0.002	−0.007	0.032	0.059	0.073
	(0.052)	(0.050)	(0.051)	(0.055)	(0.064)
Crop value (log)	−0.002	−0.008	−0.006	−0.013	0.004
	(0.056)	(0.060)	(0.043)	(0.045)	(0.052)
Illiterate	−0.009*	−0.013***	−0.009	−0.014***	−0.001
	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.007)
No toilet (2010)	0.005	0.006**	0.003	0.004	−0.001
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Distance to Kumasi (log)	−0.008	−0.007	0.038	0.019	0.063
	(0.057)	(0.049)	(0.063)	(0.053)	(0.067)
Distance to Accra (log)	−0.019	−0.004	0.160**	0.196**	0.057
	(0.076)	(0.078)	(0.072)	(0.077)	(0.093)
Population density (log)	−4.519	−4.719	−2.754	−2.033	−5.943
	(4.096)	(4.253)	(4.879)	(5.917)	(6.953)
Area (km ² , land)	−4.611	−4.798	−2.892	−2.149	−5.921
	(4.101)	(4.252)	(4.876)	(5.907)	(6.937)

Table A.23. Regression models for quality of the head civil servant (*cont.*)

	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Moved in 2009	From the region	From the region	Master's degree	Master's degree
Margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)		0.005**		–0.000	
		(0.002)		(0.003)	
Competitive (<8, 2000–2012 avg.)	–0.246**		–0.068		0.098
	(0.101)		(0.149)		(0.125)
Age (coord. dir.)				0.002	0.002
				(0.006)	(0.006)
Population (2010, log)	6.490	0.672	0.201	–6.101	–6.146
	(7.736)	(4.620)	(4.928)	(5.136)	(5.158)
Urban (2010)	0.001	–0.003	–0.004	–0.001	–0.001
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
District age	–0.002	–0.005	–0.005	0.010	0.010*
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Distance to mine (log)	0.089	0.014	0.080	0.003	0.005
	(0.060)	(0.059)	(0.059)	(0.064)	(0.058)
Crop value (log)	0.001	0.028	0.009	–0.049	–0.050
	(0.051)	(0.052)	(0.053)	(0.057)	(0.056)
Illiterate	–0.000	–0.005	–0.009	0.004	0.003
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.008)
No toilet (2010)	–0.001	0.003	0.003	0.000	0.001
	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Distance to Kumasi (log)	0.042	–0.007	–0.056	–0.069	–0.071
	(0.060)	(0.054)	(0.052)	(0.071)	(0.069)
Distance to Accra (log)	0.055	0.082	0.100	–0.087	–0.087
	(0.094)	(0.072)	(0.073)	(0.080)	(0.078)
Population density (log)	–6.574	–0.632	–0.173	5.933	5.978
	(7.735)	(4.615)	(4.919)	(5.148)	(5.171)
Area (km ² , land)	–6.556	–0.569	–0.088	5.927	5.979
	(7.718)	(4.628)	(4.936)	(5.144)	(5.166)

Table A.23. Regression models for quality of the head civil servant (*cont.*)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Highest rank	Highest rank	>15 years' experience	>15 years' experience	Moved in 2009
Ethnic majority	0.007 (0.014)	0.002 (0.015)	-0.008 (0.013)	-0.014 (0.013)	0.002 (0.017)
Ethnic majority ²	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
Electricity	0.000 (0.003)	-0.000 (0.003)	0.003 (0.003)	0.003 (0.003)	0.004 (0.003)
Cocoa dummy	0.001 (0.105)	0.009 (0.102)	-0.016 (0.096)	0.004 (0.090)	0.261** (0.116)
Observations	134	134	133	133	138
R ²					
Pseudo R ²					

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Marginal effects from probit models.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A.24. Regression models for the rate of growth in tax collection

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Tax growth (2008-10)	Tax growth (2008-10)	Tax growth (2008-10)	Tax growth (2008-10)	Tax growth (2008-10)
Margin (2000-2012 avg., presidential)	1.184*** (0.432)		1.699** (0.773)	1.208*** (0.442)	
Margin (2008, presidential)		1.256*** (0.423)			
Margin >20 (2008, presidential)					40.242** (17.518)
Tax rate ranking	-53.712 (36.762)	-53.423 (35.246)	-60.028* (35.283)	-53.675 (37.172)	-55.064 (36.606)
Population (2010, log)	469.430 (654.228)	528.353 (637.893)	447.100 (576.219)	456.772 (659.341)	576.500 (689.629)
Urban (2010)	0.306 (0.407)	0.250 (0.403)	0.461 (0.383)	0.313 (0.413)	0.001 (0.398)

Table A.23. Regression models for quality of the head civil servant (*cont.*)

	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Moved in 2009	From the region	From the region	Master's degree	Master's degree
Ethnic majority	0.003 (0.017)	0.005 (0.013)	-0.000 (0.013)	0.012 (0.017)	0.011 (0.017)
Ethnic majority ²	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
Electricity	0.004 (0.004)	0.002 (0.004)	0.002 (0.004)	0.002 (0.004)	0.002 (0.004)
Cocoa dummy	0.272** (0.121)	-0.286** (0.121)	-0.277** (0.113)	-0.104 (0.127)	-0.104 (0.126)
Observations	138	135	135	136	136
R ²					
Pseudo R ²					

Table A.24. Regression models for the rate of growth in tax collection (*cont.*)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Tax growth (2008-10)	Tax growth (2008-10)	Tax growth (2008-10)	Tax growth (2008-10)	Tax growth (2008-10)
District age	0.220 (0.672)	0.306 (0.668)	0.240 (0.634)	0.206 (0.676)	-0.016 (0.647)
Distance to mine (log)	-0.624 (7.083)	-1.258 (6.914)	-5.286 (10.391)	-0.662 (7.226)	6.454 (5.654)
Crop value (log)	2.713 (6.657)	3.670 (6.643)	4.696 (7.163)	3.717 (7.518)	0.965 (6.747)
Illiterate	4.483*** (1.536)	4.425*** (1.506)	4.908*** (1.465)	4.545*** (1.593)	4.162*** (1.485)
No toilet (2010)	-1.849** (0.872)	-1.742** (0.846)	-1.957** (0.788)	-1.848** (0.901)	-1.900** (0.883)
Distance to Kumasi (log)	17.842 (12.321)	21.811* (12.368)	24.460 (15.374)	18.171 (12.535)	15.231 (12.020)
Distance to Accra (log)	-26.044** (12.013)	-24.798** (11.809)	-29.583** (11.966)	-26.869* (13.720)	-23.875** (11.850)

Table A.24. Regression models for the rate of growth in tax collection (*cont.*)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Tax growth (2008–10)	Tax growth (2008–10)	Tax growth (2008–10)	Tax growth (2008–10)	Tax growth (2008–10)
Population density (log)	–460.518 (645.883)	–520.488 (630.503)	–438.692 (570.002)	–447.563 (650.169)	–568.216 (681.517)
Area (km ² , land)	–466.386 (651.953)	–528.566 (635.945)	–446.215 (575.138)	–453.690 (656.396)	–571.050 (687.179)
Ethnic majority	2.767 (2.526)	2.465 (2.462)	3.564 (2.524)	2.769 (2.554)	0.267 (2.405)
Ethnic majority ²	–0.026 (0.020)	–0.024 (0.020)	–0.033 (0.021)	–0.025 (0.021)	–0.005 (0.018)
Electricity	1.162 (0.741)	1.212 (0.734)	1.148* (0.675)	1.191 (0.779)	1.395* (0.768)
Cocoa dummy	36.974*** (12.393)	39.296*** (12.288)	36.878*** (12.141)	37.434*** (12.384)	37.760*** (11.918)
Constant	–254.204 (195.191)	–247.333 (195.391)	–285.086 (202.022)	–264.065 (232.140)	–196.515 (193.937)
Observations	119	119	119	116	119
R ²	0.295	0.307	0.282	0.293	0.285

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable, *tax growth* (2008–10), has a minimum of –302, a maximum of 90, a mean of 17, and a standard deviation of 67.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Chapter 6 Tables

Table A.25. Summary statistics for multicountry models

Variable	Mean	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.	N
<i>Country-level predictors</i>					
Party-system institutionalization	3.59	1.65	0.5	5.8	19
GDP per capita (PPP, log)	7.88	0.91	6.6	9.63	19
Country size (1,000s of km, log)	5.7	1.64	0.71	7.14	19
Population (m, log)	2.82	1.39	−0.69	5.2	19
Miles to equator (100s miles, log)	2.5	0.81	0.26	3.48	19
Poverty head-count ratio	43.97	13.28	19.3	75.3	19
Parliamentary	0.11	0.31	0	1	19
<i>Individual-level predictors</i>					
Gift for vote: often	0.03	0.16	0	1	31,770
Gift for vote: never	0.86	0.35	0	1	31,770
Age (centered)	0	14.85	−19.29	67.71	32,062
Age ²	0	336	−220	4,364	32,062
Economic conditions	2.89	0.98	1	5	31,349
Female	0.5	0.5	0	1	32,399
Full-time employed	0.23	0.42	0	1	32,283
Secondary/high school	0.2	0.4	0	1	32,338

Note: *Party-system institutionalization* comes from Riedl (2015), with higher numbers indicating greater institutionalization. *PPP* is “purchasing power parity,” an adjustment for differences in cost of living across countries. Data on GDP, country size, population, and poverty come from the World Bank Development Indicators. *Equator* is the log distance in hundreds of miles from the capital city to the equator. Data for individual-level variables come from Afrobarometer Round 5 (2010–12). *Gift for vote: few/often* asked, “During the last national election, how often, if ever did a candidate or someone from a political party offer you something, like food or a gift or money, in return for your vote?” *Economic conditions* asked, “In general, how do you rate your living conditions compared to those of others?,” where a maximum value of 5 means “much better.” I include country-level controls for the poverty head-count ratio at national poverty lines (*poverty*) because of literature associating clientelism with poverty (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Hicken 2007; Jensen and Justesen 2014; Faughnan and Zechmeister 2011). I also include individual-level controls for age, welfare, education, and gender (Peiffer and Rose 2014). *Parliamentary* is coded 1 if a parliamentary system and 0 if (semi)presidential, using Weghorst and Bernhard (2014). Further robustness tests are shown in Driscoll (2015).

Table A.26. Multilevel models for vote buying in sub-Saharan Africa

	(1)	(2)
	Gift for your vote: often	Gift for your vote: never
<i>Country-level predictors</i>		
Party-system institutionalization	-0.224*** (0.066)	0.249** (0.082)
Parliamentary	-1.022 (1.026)	0.367 (0.904)
GDP per capita (PPP, log)	-0.222 (0.162)	0.210 (0.149)
Country size (1,000s of km, log)	0.111 (0.217)	0.129 (0.209)
Population (m, log)	-0.039 (0.285)	-0.289 (0.267)
Miles to equator (100s miles, log)	-0.482*** (0.087)	0.420** (0.139)
Poverty head-count ratio	-0.010 (0.013)	0.010 (0.013)
<i>Individual-level predictors</i>		
Age (centered)	0.005 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.002)
Age ²	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000*** (0.000)
Economic conditions	0.011 (0.108)	0.057 (0.042)
Female	-0.419*** (0.101)	0.226*** (0.056)
Full-time employed	-0.192* (0.082)	0.209** (0.077)
Secondary/high school	0.256** (0.089)	-0.059 (0.041)
Constant	-0.007 (1.454)	-2.346 (1.373)
Variance component		
Constant	0.234 (0.184)	0.321* (0.142)
Countries	19	19
Respondents	29,161	29,161

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Country weighting used.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A.27. Journals included in Big Man dataset

Journal	Articles containing "Big Man" or "Big Men"	Articles included in dataset	Journal share of dataset (%)
<i>Journal of Modern African Studies</i>	104	54	20
<i>African Affairs</i>	99	43	16
<i>Review of African Political Economy</i>	56	33	12
<i>Africa: Journal of the International Institute</i>	165	33	12
<i>African Studies Review</i>	74	24	9
<i>Journal of Contemporary African Studies</i>	41	24	9
<i>Journal of Eastern African Studies</i>	25	19	7
<i>Africa Today</i>	59	17	6
<i>Journal of Asian and African Studies</i>	20	11	4
<i>Africa Spectrum</i>	30	5	2
<i>Journal of Southern African Studies</i>	55	5	2
Total	728	268	—

Note: The table can be read as follows: Ninety-nine articles from the journal *African Affairs* from 1980 to 2018 were found with mentions of “Big Men,” forty-three of which were eventually included in the dataset, representing 16 percent of all articles in the dataset.

Notes

Introduction

1. By “local state,” I mean state actors whose authority is geographically or spatially bounded by the sovereign state. I prefer “local state” over “local government” since a state is conceptually more expansive—and more important—than government. The “local state” can refer to the resources, plans, and claims to power of a geographically bound entity, whether in a system that is deconcentrated, devolved, or decentralized.
2. Names of people and places have been changed throughout. This decision to anonymize has implications for validation of my findings, but it was necessary since the individuals I spent time with were typically the sole occupants of local offices. For example, each local government has one chief civil servant, known as a coordinating director. It would be pointless to anonymize the name of a coordinating director if the real name of the district is given.
3. Local governments are called “district assemblies” or “metropolitan [or municipal] assemblies” for large cities. The head of a local government is called a “district chief executive,” which is similar to a mayor in other countries.
4. On the study of subnational variation in state capacity, see Bozcaga (2020) and the special issue on Latin America in Harbers and Steele (2020).
5. Clientelism is a political strategy in which rewards are provided over repeated interactions to individuals or groups in return for political allegiance (Auyero 2001; Bratton 2007; Kitschelt 2000; Stokes 2005; Sigman 2022). One form of clientelism is patronage, in which rewards are directed to party members. The kinds of privileged treatment sought by Felicia are examples of patronage. The other major form of clientelism is vote/turnout buying, in which rewards are directed at voters (Nichter 2008). In Africanist social science, clientelism is often described as neopatrimonialism, in which allegiance and loyalty are rooted in familial or kin-based relations (Médard 1982). Neopatrimonialism’s synonyms in Africanist political science are prebendalism (Joseph 1998) and personal rule (Jackson and Rosberg 1982a; Driscoll 2021).
6. On varieties of clientelism, see Gans-Morse, Mazzuca, and Nichter (2014), Corstange (2017b), Berenschot and Aspinall (2020), Kitschelt and Yildirim (2018), and Driscoll (2020).

7. They play roles akin to the everyday claim making described by Kruks-Wisner (2018) in India.
8. Evans (1995) remains the key work.
9. A state is a territorially bound organization with compulsory membership and a monopoly on the legitimate use of law and violence. An organization that claims to be a state claims *de facto* and *de jure* authority over the elements in this definition, which combines the classic definitions of Mann (1993) and Weber (1978).
10. Interview recounted in Nathan (2019, 190).
11. In 2012 only 5 percent of Ghanaians reported switching between the NPP and NDC presidential candidates, or vice versa, between the 2004 and 2008 elections (Afrobarometer Round 5, 2010–12). When asked whom the person would vote for if an election were held “tomorrow,” only 5 percent said they would switch their vote from their 2008 choice. This compares to the 12 percent of voting-age respondents reporting not voting at all in the previous election. In separate survey research by Weghorst and Lindberg (2013), 81 percent of voting-age respondents reported voting in the 1996, 2000, and 2004 elections, meaning that the share of voters that does not always turn out is likely much larger than the share of voters who switch parties. This is suggestive evidence that elections are swung by shifts in turnout and that party switching is rare. The data challenge other studies on Ghanaian voters. For example, Lindberg and Morrison (2005) estimated that about 18 percent of their sample voted for parliamentary candidates of different parties in the 1996 and 2000 elections. However, the period under question is one of growing strength of the NPP. This can be seen in their data: 95 percent of their respondents said they voted for the NDC candidate in 1996 and again in 2000, compared to 73 percent reporting voting for the NPP in both. See Kim (2018) for an argument that Ghana’s main parties draw support from socioeconomically distinct voters.
12. Nathan (2019) explains this dynamic in Greater Accra.
13. Where “failed” indicates a failure to monopolize violence within a significant part of the territory, and “weak” indicates more general state incapacity but without sustained insurgencies or rebellions.
14. See, for example, Tilly (1992), Stubbs (1999), Desch (2009), Thies (2005), Boudon (2002), and Besley and Persson (2008).
15. In 2011 total official development assistance to the sector was almost \$2 billion. The figure for “public sector policy and administrative management,” which typically involves local government capacity building, was almost \$4 billion (OECD/ATAF/AUC 2016). On decentralization, see Bardhan and Mookherjee (2002), Deyarajan, Khemani, and Shah (2009), Ahmad et al. (2005), Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006), Enikolopov and

- Zhuravskaya (2007), Calderia, Foucault, and Rota-Graziosi (2012), and Lambright (2011).
16. For the latest overview of the field, see Gerring, Knutsen, and Berge (2022) and Grossman and Slough (2022).
 17. Consider even the work of Migdal (1988), Skocpol (1979), Bates (1981), Chaudhry (1989), Skocpol, Evans, and Rueschemyer (1986), Jackson and Rosberg (1982b), Levi (1988), North (1981), Tilly (1992), and Anderson (1979).
 18. See Bates (1983, 2008b), Mansfield and Snyder (2001), Cederman, Hug, and Krebs (2010), Cederman, Gleditsch, and Hug (2013), Collier (2010), CCAPS (2013), Osorio (2012), and Wilkinson (2004).
 19. To the best of my knowledge, no other scholarly books have studied how political competition affects patronage in Africa. See Gottlieb and Kosec (2018) for a related article.
 20. What few article-length studies there are of political competition overwhelmingly come from India and Latin America, and the outcome of interest tends to be public goods rather than states themselves. On political competition and government spending, see Boulding and Brown (2014), Hecock (2006), Chatterjee (2018), Cleary (2007), and Crost and Kam-bhampati (2010).
 21. Important works include Coleman (1988), Putnam (1993), and Varshney (2002).
 22. For example, the arc of scholarship on civil society is nicely represented in the works of Tsai (2002), Tsai, Morse, and Blair (2020), and Fukuyama (1995, 2020).
 23. In response to the question “Is corruption widespread throughout the government in [country], or not?” 89 percent of Ghanaians said it was. Affirmative responses were 92 percent in Nigeria, 88 percent in Indonesia, 87 percent in Thailand, 89 percent in Cameroon, 80 percent in Russia, and 78 percent in Zimbabwe.
 24. Afrobarometer 5 (2010–12). Thirty-five percent said “most” or “all” government officials were involved in corruption, compared to a median of 26 percent for all thirty-four countries.
 25. The Myers Index measures deviations in a census’s age distribution, since the age of populations should follow a normal distribution, and the method controls for shocks like wars and human calamities. A higher Myers score is associated with a more error-filled census.
 26. See also Lust and Rakner (2018), Moore, Prichard, and Fjeldstad (2018), and Prichard (2015).
 27. To be considered competitive, the average margin between the NDC and NPP presidential candidates from 2000 to 2008 could not be more than 10 percent. To be considered a stronghold, one party must have won at least 75 percent of the vote in the previous election. It is not possible to

simultaneously study a competitive district, an NPP stronghold, and an NDC stronghold since nowhere in the country can one find such districts near one another. Thus, since I was based in Ashanti Region, my cases consist of competitive and less competitive districts, in which strongholds are NPP strongholds.

Chapter 1: Why Some Districts Are Competitive

1. For example, district voting in the 2000 election is highly correlated with voting in the 2012 election. Margins at the district level between the presidential candidates of the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party in 2000 are highly correlated with margins in the 2012 election. The correlation is 0.84 and is statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level.
2. The finding that sequence matters in the study of states and regimes is not new. See, for example, Huntington (1968), Sidel (1999), and D'Arcy and Nistotskaya (2017). For an opposing view see Gjerløw et al. (2021).
3. My understanding of cocoa and migration has benefited enormously from the scholarship and advice of Matthew Mitchell.
4. See Berry (2001, 153) for a discussion of this theme.
5. Boahen (1989) traces the Convention People's Party and Gold Coast Convention / Progressive Party tradition to the 1920s, long before Nkrumah and Danquah.
6. The fact that the CPP was weaker than is usually appreciated is an important finding running through the works of Austin (1970a), Owusu (2006, 215), and Dunn and Robertson (1973, 329).
7. Akan is the language family that includes the Asante ethnic group. Ashanti is simply the English spelling.
8. Out of 316 candidates, 152 were independents in the 1954 elections and 45 of the 194 candidates in 1956.
9. The National Liberation Council military regime governed from 1966. The PP's Busia was elected in 1969 but removed by a coup in 1972 at the hands of Colonel I. K. Acheampong and the governing National Redemption Council. Rawlings and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council replaced the previous regime in 1979, but they allowed elections to go ahead, and Hilla Limann was elected the same year.
10. Danquah died in prison under Nkrumah.
11. Rawlings's first coup attempt was on May 15, 1979, for which he was imprisoned.
12. P. V. Obeng interview in Riedl (2015).
13. Although it is common to refer to "northerners" as NDC supporters, the region is of course highly heterogeneous, and the NPP has often been able

- to gain a foothold by inserting itself into chieftaincy disputes (Kelly and Bening 2013; Lentz and Nugent 2000; Kelly and Bening 2007, 476).
14. Reforms under the Local Government Act 1961 (Act 54) planned for district councils to be entirely elected following the elimination of traditional representation, but local elections were a sham in the one-party state, even before one-party rule became *de facto*. As Nkrumah and the CPP fell, the fortunes of chiefs rose again: the 1969 constitution gave them one-third of the seats and brought them into regional councils. The one-third reservation again featured in the 1979 constitution but was then removed by Rawlings and the PNDC in 1988 and remains thus to this day. Later reforms in the 1970s sought to make local governments agencies of local development by giving them powers of taxation and by decentralizing key departments like health and education, yet no local democracy was planned. Reforms followed the release of three important reports, those of the Mills-Odoi Commission (1967), the Siriboe Commission (1968), and the Akufo-Addo Constitutional Commission (1968). After several years it was clear to observers that implementation was weak: most local governments appeared unable to raise revenue, regional administrations were not established, and the transfer of functions was not accompanied by the transfer of means. On this period see Rathbone (2000b), Eriksen, Naustadalslid, and Schou (1999, 87), Young (2012, 168), Schiffer (1970, 69), Owusu (2006, 292), Apter (1972, 377), and Dunn and Robertson (1973, 154).
 15. P. V. Obeng interview in Riedl (2015, 36).
 16. Kwamena Ahwoi cited in Riedl (2015, 135).
 17. Author interview with Kwamena Ahwoi 2009.
 18. Of these, 124 are ordinary district assemblies, and 40 are municipal assemblies. Six are metropolitan assemblies.

Chapter 2: Why Some Districts Fear Their Party Activists

1. Almost all district chief executives are men.
2. By mid-2012, 22 percent of districts had had two or more chief executives under the NDC administration.
3. Article 240(2)(d).
4. Luna (2019, 54) also explains the dynamic.
5. Williams (2017) estimated that about one-third of projects that start are never finished, accounting for about one-fifth of local government investment.
6. This is similar to the production of scarcity in Mobutu Sese Soko's Zaire, as explained in Schatzberg (1988, chap. 8). See also Abdulai and Hickey (2016).

7. Twenty percent of \$300 over a thirty-day month (*Joy News* 2013b).
8. This category does not include staff of nondecentralized departments even if they share the assembly building. “District staff,” therefore, does not include teachers, police, or nurses.
9. Luna (2019) and Brierley (2020) also discuss transfer as a means of disciplining bureaucrats.
10. I have paraphrased these comments and chosen not to cite the news story in order to protect the individual’s anonymity.
11. Chief’s letter to media, 2012. I have chosen to anonymize this letter so as to protect the identity of the chief.
12. In West Africa a stool, typically elaborately carved and sometimes inlaid with gold, is similar to a throne in European terms.
13. On Ghana’s Fulani, see the work of Tonah (2005, 2006). Also Brottem (2014) and Bukari (2022).
14. He used the Twi word *oman*, which translates to “country” or “nation.” It is an explicitly political term.

Chapter 3: Why (and How) Some Party Activists Get Patronage

1. The 2014 survey used a three-stage stratified sampling design to select twenty households in 150 districts. In return for sharing data with the project team, I added questions on party activists to the survey instrument, and I draw on that data in this chapter. See Huntington, Schultz, and Wibbels (2015).
2. On the principal-agent dynamic, see related work by Camp, Dixit, and Stokes (2014), Keefer and Vlaicu (2007), and Stokes et al. (2013).
3. See Oliveros (2020) for an explanation of why patronage relations might not need monitoring or enforcement since the fates of the patron and client are joined.
4. They contribute to the kind of citizen claim making described by Kruks-Wisner (2018) in India. Also see Nichter (2018).
5. Deaths are rare but not unheard of. Yakubu Yahuza, an NPP youth activist, was sentenced to be hanged for the 2009 murder of Rashid Alhassan, an NDC youth activist (*Joy News* 2013d).
6. Similar to the effect of “opinion leaders in informal personal networks” in Latin America, as described by Schaffer and Baker (2015).
7. A constituency is a legal entity that exists solely for the purpose of an election, in contrast to a district, which is an administrative body. Most districts contain one constituency, with identical boundaries, but larger districts contain several constituencies. The reverse does not occur: there are no constituencies covering several districts.
8. On party chairs as kingmakers, see Luna (2019, 58).

9. On the tender process, see Luna (2019, chap. 2).
10. Data from Afrobarometer Round 5 (2010–12), www.afrobarometer.org.
11. The question asked, “Political party activists are sometimes called ‘party boys’ or ‘foot soldiers.’ How active are they in your area?” The answers were “They are very active here,” “They are active here but only around elections,” or “We don’t hear much about activists in this area.”
12. In Akan culture, any man old enough to be one’s father or mother can be called “Father” or “Mother.” The same goes for people of one’s siblings’ age or grandparents’ age.
13. It is also a problem of credible commitments known in the clientelism literature. See Piattoni (2001).
14. See also Bjarnesen (2020).

Chapter 4: Beyond Case Studies

1. Ghana has a two-party system, so third parties barely register on the larger electoral scene.
2. I used information from contacts in my case study districts to get unofficial party affiliations of sitting district assembly representatives. When I learned from several sources that assembly member X was a member of party B, I could then estimate the number of local assembly seats controlled by party B. That figure was always highly correlated with local votes in presidential elections, which we would expect.
3. Known as the Haversine equation. Care is required in calculating the physical size of districts since some border Lake Volta, the largest reservoir by surface area in the world. To avoid including water in my calculations, I overlaid two GIS shapefiles, one with boundaries and one with Lake Volta, manually clipped out from each district bordering Lake Volta the water portion, and then used ArcMap to reestimate land area in kilometers squared.
4. This coding decision ensures my data cover all districts with mines of significant size. There is no concern that using a list of legally operating firms undercounts actual mining operations. Mines of significant size are operated by multinational mining companies such as Anglo-Gold Ashanti, and their operations are so large as to be easily observable by satellite imagery. Small-scale operations, by contrast, are labor intensive, low-tech, of low yield, and do not contribute to central or local revenue. Note that Ghana’s coastal oil had not started flowing during the period under study.
5. “Robust” means the finding of a relationship holds even if we account for other factors.
6. The standard deviation for the average NPP-NDC district margin in presidential elections from 2000 to 2012 is 6.7 percentage points.

Chapter 5: Why Patronage and State Capacity Can Coexist

1. See Robinson and Torvik (2005) for a discussion of the related phenomenon of “white elephant” projects. See Williams (2017) for a public choice explanation in Ghana.
2. Major works include Zolberg (1966), Callaghy (1984), Médard (1982), Clapham (1982), Jackson and Rosberg (1982a), and Bates (1981). Note, however, that it is not the case that African bureaucracies were always and everywhere weak (van de Walle 2001). See also Bach and Gazibo (2013) and Pitcher, Moran, and Johnston (2009).
3. The Public Services Commission oversees the standardization and uniformity of recruitment, appointment, and discipline for the all public services. Exam results are publicized, and successful candidates proceed to an interview and are then recruited into the service. I was told that the failure rates at the first round (which involves an English proficiency test) and the second round (usually an interview) are very high, perhaps as high as 70–80 percent (personal communication with Erin McDonnell, June 3, 2014). On Ghana’s civil service, see Nti (1980), Ayee (2001), McDonnell (2020), Antwi, Analoui, and Nana-Agyekum (2008), and Lentz (2014). This competitiveness corresponds with what university graduates told me about the civil service, which they saw as desirable but difficult to enter. It also chimes with what Lentz (2014) learned from following the lives of senior Ghanaian civil servants. She found patronage used to elevate one civil servant from a pool of otherwise qualified candidates was sometimes seen as legitimate, while promotion of a nonqualified candidate was less common and perceived as illegitimate.
4. There are ten regions.
5. Includes ongoing study.
6. On ethnicity within bureaucracy, see Bozcaga (2020) and Xu, Bertrand, and Burgess (2021).
7. $P > 0.20$.
8. On the home identity of civil servants, see Soifer (2015, chap. 2).
9. See Kitschelt and Kselman (2012) for a related idea.
10. For reviews, see Martin and Prasad (2014), Kiser and Karceski (2017), and Dincecco (2019).
11. The question was “How would you rate the assembly’s knowledge of its revenue potential? In other words, do you think you have a good database, or good knowledge, about all of the properties, artisans and so on, from which you can generate revenue?” Twenty-eight percent said that their list was “very good,” 15 percent said, “Better than most,” 47 percent said, “Not complete,” 9 percent said, “Outdated” or “Often incorrect,” and 2 percent said, “Very bad” or “None at all.”

12. On the idea of legibility, see Scott (1999), Brambor et al. (2020), D'Arcy and Nistotskaya (2017), Charnysh (2019), and Vom Hau, Peres-Cajías, and Soifer (2021).
13. The correlation between *margin (2000–2012 avg., presidential)* and *tax rate ranking* is 0.14 and is not statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.
14. There are no statistically significant differences in group means for *tax growth* when the sample is split between chief executives or coordinating directors reporting positively about the skill and expertise or political neutrality of “core technocrats” and districts where respondents did not report positively.
15. Evans and Rauch (2000). See McDonnell (2020) on the bureaucratic ethos in Ghana's central government.
16. See Kim (2018) for the opposing argument that Ghana's main parties draw support from voters who are socioeconomically distinct.

Chapter 6: Some Comparative Perspective

1. Riedl (2015, 25) defines party-system institutionalization as “the degree of stability or fluidity in repetitive strategic interactions between parties, the depth of party attachment, and the extent of acceptance and legitimacy of party competition.” See also Elischer (2013) and Sigman (2022). On variety in party systems, see Kuenzi and Lambright (2001), M. Pitcher (2012), and Weghorst and Bernhard (2014).
2. The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project supports Riedl's view, with Ghana in the top five most institutionalized party systems in sub-Saharan Africa for 2012 (Coppedge et al. 2017). Party-system institutionalization has three components. First, Riedl (2015) measures stability in interparty competition with volatility in presidential and legislative elections. Second, she measures parties' rootedness in society, with lower house seats currently held by parties in existence since transition as well as their average over the parties age. Third, she measures actors' expectation that party competition will persist in the future by scoring the quality of posttransition elections. For twenty-three countries from their first democratic election through to 2008, Riedl's composite index produces a continuous variable, *PSI*, where higher numbers indicate a more stable and deeply rooted party system, with South Africa the highest and Mali the lowest.
3. Research in India from Auerbach and Thachil (2018) argues persuasively that clientelistic benefits do not automatically accrue to coethnics.
4. The two-party system is encouraged by the use of single-member districts and first-past-the-post rules for parliamentary candidates and a two-round runoff for presidential candidates.

5. Afrobarometer Round 5, 2010–12. Survey data from Lindberg and Morrison (2008) add to this finding: only 5 percent of respondents said “personal gifts, assistance, or promises thereof from candidates” determined their vote choice in the 2000 election.
6. To the best of my knowledge, only Kramon (2013) has identified a link between party-system institutionalization and vote buying, though I argue for an explanation that differs from his.
7. Riedl’s *PSI* measure builds on the now standard measure of party-system institutionalization of Mainwaring and Scully (1995) and Mainwaring and Torcal (2006). The construction of her variable is explained in my appendix.
8. Published while writing this book. See Driscoll (2021).
9. An article was 20 percent less likely to describe Big Men as accountable if Big Men were only discussed in the literature review. See Driscoll (2021, 532).
10. Yet this vision of the Big Man has emerged despite one of the seminal texts stating, “nor are we interested in the rulers’ personalities” (Jackson and Rosberg 1982a, 4).
11. On direct effects on growth, see Evans and Rauch (1999), De Haan and Warmerdam (2012), Besley and Persson (2010), Bates (2008a), and Dincecco and Katz (2012). On political order and development, see Fearon and Laitin (2003), Hendrix and Young (2012), Straus (2006), De Jaun and Pierskalla (2014), Fjelde and De Soysa (2009), and Sobek (2010). On democracy, see Linz and Stepan (1996), Fortin (2012), and Andersen et al. (2014).
12. In Polity IV’s data for 2013, for example, only 4 percent of states had executives who ruled without constraints, and none of these were in sub-Saharan Africa. Monty G. Marshall, dir., “Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800–2013,” Center for Systemic Peace, last updated June 6, 2014, <https://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>. Mann (1993) thought a despotic state is not simply one that is brutal but one that is *arbitrary* and in which the state elites do not need to engage or consider the views of nonstate actors. A despotic state was one with an unconstrained executive, which is why “the exercise of despotic power is a sign of a weaker state” (353). The utility of Mann’s notion of despotic power is thus in its historical applications—in helping us think comparatively about the power of the ancient Akkadians, Assyrians, or Romans. See also Foucault (1977) and Giddens (1985).
13. The term is similar to the usage by Grindle (1996) but distinct from the term as used by Thies (2010), whose measure is actually a measure of revenue-extraction capacity, as well as Cummings and Nørgaard (2004), whose measure includes internal administrative relations.

14. I use “citizen” to be brief, but the category of “nonstate actors” more broadly includes noncitizens such as immigrants and organizations such as transnational corporations of churches.
15. Note, for example, that public opinion data suggest that the one-child policy is overwhelmingly supported by the Chinese public (Pew Research 2008).
16. It is akin to the stag hunt in game theory, in which each hunter does what they expect the other hunter to do. Both actors can elevate their welfare by cooperating, but mistrust leads to persistent suboptimal outcomes (Persson, Rothstein, and Teorell 2013). On viewing state-society relations as an equilibriums, see Kang (2003) and Booth and Cammack (2013).
17. The state was engaged in what Louis Althusser called the process of primitive political accumulation that is always at the heart of state formation, “during which the means of coercion and extraction are expropriated from autonomous and private powerholders through their subordination or incorporation into central state bureaucracies and conversion into paid public servants” (quoted in Sidel 1999, 19; see also Khan 2005b and Brenner 1982).
18. My mentor Michael Schatzberg reminded his graduate students not to forget the value of generalizing to theory and concepts, not just places and cases.

Appendix

1. Models were also estimated using measures of ethnic polarization rather than fractionalization, using the methodology shown in Montalvo and Reynal-Querol (2005), but the same pattern between the instrument and ethnic polarization obtained.

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