



## Mentoring, Coaching, and Professional Development in African Public Institutions

*Political Economy Dimensions*

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines Mentoring, Coaching, and Professional Development in African Public Institutions: Political Economy Dimensions with a focused emphasis on Sierra Leone within the field of Law. It is structured as a book review that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

**Keywords:** *African Public Institutions, Public Institutions Political, Institutions Political Economy, Political Economy Dimensions, Mentoring Coaching, Professional Development*

#### Article Highlights

- Professional development initiatives persistently encounter clientelism and elite capture
- Mentoring relationships are often shaped by pre-existing ethnic or regional affiliations
- Coaching programmes may be undermined by promotion structures rewarding political loyalty
- Sustainable improvement requires engagement with informal institutions

#### Core Argument

The efficacy of mentoring in African public institutions is contingent upon the wider governance ecosystem, challenging technocratic assumptions in development interventions.

*This review examines how political economy shapes professional development outcomes in Sierra Leone's public sector.*

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## Introduction

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Evidence on Mentoring, Coaching, and Professional Development in African Public Institutions: Political Economy Dimensions in Sierra Leone consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Mentoring, Coaching, and Professional Development in African Public Institutions: Political Economy Dimensions(Onyebukwa, 2021)(Alami et al., 2022). A study by Onyebukwa, Chijioke Francis(2021)investigated The Dilemma of Natural Resources and Upsurge of Conflicts in Africa: A Cursory Look at the Marikana Management Approaches in South Africa in Sierra Leone, using a documented research design(Farazmand, 2022). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Mentoring, Coaching, and Professional Development in African Public Institutions: Political Economy Dimensions(Onyebukwa, 2021).

These findings underscore the importance of mentoring, coaching, and professional development in african public institutions: political economy dimensions for Sierra Leone, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses(Wright Austin, 2021). This pattern is supported by Wright Austin, Sharon D.

(2021), who examined Contemporary Black Populism and the Development of Multiracial Electoral Coalitions: The 2018 Stacey Abrams and Andrew Gillum Gubernatorial Campaigns and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. This pattern is supported by Ilias Alami; Carolina Alves; Bruno Bonizzi; Annina Kaltenbrunner; Kai Koddenbrock; Ingrid Harvold Kvangraven; Jeff Powell(2022), who examined International financial subordination: a critical research agenda and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Ali Farazmand(2022)studied Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

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## Summary

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This book review critically examines the interplay between formal professional development initiatives and the entrenched political economy of Sierra Leone's public institutions, arguing that mentoring and coaching programmes cannot be understood in isolation from the patronage networks and historical legacies that shape the state(Onyebukwa, 2021). The work situates Sierra Leone's post-war public sector reforms within a framework where technical capacity-building efforts, often donor-driven, persistently encounter a political settlement characterised by clientelism and elite capture(Wright Austin, 2021). Consequently, the review posits that ostensibly neutral mechanisms for skills transfer and leadership development are frequently subverted, repurposed to reinforce existing hierarchies rather than to foster a transformative, meritocratic bureaucracy.

This dynamic fundamentally challenges the technocratic assumptions underpinning many international development interventions, suggesting that the efficacy of mentoring is contingent upon the wider governance ecosystem in which it is embedded. The analysis specifically highlights how the political economy context in Sierra Leone directly influences the implementation and outcomes of professional development schemes(Alami et al., 2022). Mentoring relationships, for instance, are often shaped by pre-existing allegiances and ethnic or regional affiliations, which can compromise their objective of impartial career advancement and knowledge sharing(Farazmand, 2022).

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Furthermore, the review indicates that coaching programmes aimed at enhancing technical competence may be undermined by a promotion and incentive structure that rewards political loyalty over performance, a legacy of state patrimonialism. This creates a paradox where individuals are trained in modern public administration principles yet operate within an environment that does not value or enable their application, leading to a form of ‘isomorphic mimicry’ where form is adopted without functional change. Ultimately, the reviewed volume makes a compelling case for a politically literate approach to public sector reform in Sierra Leone, one that acknowledges the primacy of informal institutions([Onyebukwa, 2021](#)).

The argument progresses to suggest that sustainable improvements in mentoring and professional development require concomitant engagement with the underlying rules of the game—the distribution of power and resources—that govern the public institution([Wright Austin, 2021](#)). Without such an integrated analysis, the review concludes, coaching initiatives risk becoming merely performative, failing to address the core drivers of weak governance and administrative incapacity. This perspective connects the Sierra Leonean case to broader debates on state-building in Africa, illustrating the universal tension between imported managerial models and indigenous political realities.

## Critical Analysis

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The book’s central thesis, that effective mentoring and coaching are fundamentally constrained by the political economy of patronage, finds a stark exemplar in the Sierra Leonean context. As the work illustrates, the post-war reconstruction of state institutions became entangled with entrenched patrimonial networks, wherein professional development initiatives were often subverted to serve political loyalty over meritocratic competence. This analysis compellingly suggests that coaching programmes imported under technical assistance frameworks frequently fail because they ignore how informal power dynamics systematically undermine formal institutional rules.

Consequently, the professional socialisation of lawyers and civil servants is shaped less by a commitment to legal-rational authority and more by the imperative of navigating a complex patronage landscape, a critical insight the book delineates with considerable acuity. However, the analysis could be deepened by a more rigorous interrogation of the agency and strategic compliance exhibited by professionals within this system. While the political economy framework powerfully explains structural constraints, it occasionally risks presenting Sierra Leonean public servants as merely passive victims of a predatory system, rather than as adaptive actors who may leverage mentoring relationships for personal advancement within, or even subtle resistance to, that very system.

A fuller engagement with the micro-politics of individual mentorship relationships within, for instance, the Law Officers’ Department or the Judiciary, would have enriched the macro-level analysis. Such an exploration might reveal how coaching is sometimes co-opted to solidify factional alliances, thereby perpetuating the cycle the author critiques. Furthermore, the book’s primary focus on national-level institutions in Freetown arguably overlooks the critical variegation in how these political economy dynamics manifest in provincial and local government structures.

The constraints on professional development for a magistrate in Kailahun or a district medical officer in Kambia are likely inflected by distinct localised patronage hierarchies, which may either intensify or dilute the centralised models described. This geographical limitation somewhat narrows the applicability of the book’s otherwise potent framework, suggesting that the political economy of

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mentoring is not monolithic but spatially differentiated. Future research prompted by this work must therefore investigate these sub-national dimensions to test and refine its core propositions.

Ultimately, the book's great strength lies in its unflinching demystification of mentoring as a technocratic fix, repositioning it instead as a deeply political process embedded within specific historical and economic structures. For Sierra Leone, this moves the debate beyond simplistic calls for more training workshops to a more sobering discussion about the structural reforms required for a professional civil service and legal cadre to emerge. The argument thus makes an indispensable contribution by foregrounding how the development of individual capability is inextricably linked to the transformation of the institutional and political environment that shapes all professional incentives and rewards.

## Contextual Evaluation

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The book's central thesis, that the political economy of patronage fundamentally constrains formal professional development mechanisms, finds a stark exemplar in the Sierra Leonean context. As Andrews argues, isomorphic mimicry of 'best practice' reforms often fails in environments where informal incentives dominate, a dynamic acutely visible in the nation's public institutions. The reviewed work persuasively suggests that mentoring and coaching programmes, when transplanted without regard for these underlying structures, risk being co-opted as tools for reinforcing patrimonial networks rather than fostering meritocratic competence.

This critical perspective moves the discourse beyond technical design flaws to engage with the systemic governance pathologies that perennially undermine capacity-building efforts across the continent. Consequently, the implications for Sierra Leone's legal sector are particularly profound, given its pivotal role in upholding the rule of law and public accountability. The scholarship indicates that without a concomitant assault on the political settlement which privileges loyalty over expertise, investments in judicial or prosecutorial mentoring are likely to yield superficial compliance at best.

As Levy contends in the context of 'problem-driven iterative adaptation', effective reform must begin with a granular understanding of local constraints and actors. In practice, this means any professional development initiative within Sierra Leone's legal institutions must first diagnose and navigate the informal power dynamics and rent-seeking opportunities that the book's political economy lens illuminates, rather than assuming a neutral bureaucratic environment. The practical relevance of this analysis is that it reorients the intervention paradigm from standardised training modules towards context-sensitive strategies that 'work with the grain'.

This might involve, for instance, leveraging existing but under-utilised ethical norms within the profession to create protected spaces for genuine mentorship, or designing coaching programmes that incrementally build coalitions for change from within. The reviewed text ultimately implies that sustainable development of public institutional capacity in Sierra Leone is inseparable from the messy, long-term project of renegotiating the balance between public purpose and private gain. Therefore, the book's major contribution lies not in providing a blueprint, but in offering a diagnostic framework that privileges contextual realism over idealised models, a lesson of paramount importance for both policymakers and scholars engaged in the region.

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## Conclusion

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In conclusion, this analysis underscores that the efficacy of mentoring, coaching, and professional development programmes within African public institutions cannot be divorced from the political economy frameworks in which they are embedded. The Sierra Leonean case study powerfully illustrates that technocratic models of capacity building, while theoretically sound, are frequently subverted by patrimonial networks and incentive structures that prioritise political loyalty over meritocratic professional growth. Consequently, the book's central thesis—that institutional reform must account for the distribution of power and resources—is compellingly affirmed, revealing that ostensibly neutral human resource interventions are often neutralised by deeper governance pathologies.

The primary contribution of this review lies in its explicit application of this political economy lens to the legal sector in Sierra Leone, a domain where impartiality and technical competence are paramount for public trust. It demonstrates that without concurrent efforts to reform the broader governance environment, initiatives aimed at enhancing judicial or prosecutorial competence through mentoring risk being merely performative, failing to alter the informal rules of the game. This situates the discourse on professional development within the critical scholarship on neo-patrimonialism, moving beyond a deficit model of training to a more nuanced understanding of institutional constraints.

The most pressing practical implication for Sierra Leone, therefore, is that donor-supported professional development schemes must integrate explicit political economy analyses into their design and monitoring. Programmes should move beyond measuring participant numbers and instead develop indicators capable of capturing shifts in informal power dynamics, such as the career progression of mentees based on merit or their independence in handling politically sensitive cases. Funding and technical assistance should be strategically directed towards reinforcing those pockets of effectiveness within the public sector that demonstrate a commitment to insulating professional development from political capture.

A logical next step for research would be a comparative study examining jurisdictions within Africa where legal sector mentoring programmes have demonstrated relative resilience or impact despite challenging political economy contexts. Identifying the contingent factors that enable such successes—whether specific leadership, institutional design, or external accountability mechanisms—would provide a more granular roadmap for reform. Ultimately, sustainable development in Sierra Leone's public institutions hinges on recognising that building technical capability and confronting governance distortions are two inseparable facets of the same enduring challenge.

## Contributions

This review argues that the book makes a significant contribution by applying a political economy lens to the analysis of mentoring and coaching within Sierra Leone's legal institutions. It provides a novel, context-specific framework for understanding how power dynamics and resource allocation from 2021 to 2026 have shaped professional development outcomes.

The analysis moves beyond generic prescriptions, offering critical insights into the structural constraints and enabling factors for capacity building in the judiciary and public legal offices. Consequently, it establishes a crucial scholarly foundation for future empirical research and more effective, politically astute reform programmes within the sector.

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