Words of Watershed: Mahama's 2024 Pre-Election Media Address as a Catalyst for Ghana's Political Transformation

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a critical discourse analysis of President John Dramani Mahama's July 7, 2024 media address, delivered 153 days before Ghana's general election on December 7, 2024 which he subsequently won. Through the analytical lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study examines how language was employed to position the speaker within Ghana's political landscape, construct political realities, and negotiate power relations within the country's political structure. The analysis reveals nuanced discursive strategies employed by Mahama that proved effective in his successful campaign, including crisis narrative construction, strategic intertextuality, and the careful balancing of experience with change messaging. The study finds that Mahama's speech reflected broader patterns in Ghanaian political discourse while successfully reshaping power relations through specific linguistic and rhetorical devices, ultimately contributing to his electoral victory. The findings contribute to our understanding of political discourse in Ghana and have implications for the study of electoral communication in emerging democracies.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Electoral Communication, Ghanaian Politics, Political Discourse, Presidential Campaign Rhetoric, Democratic Transition, Ghana.

Introduction

Ghana has been described as the beacon of democracy in the West African sub-region (Boateng et al., 2024; Sikanku, 2019), a status further reinforced by its successful December 7, 2024 election. The country found itself at a crucial juncture as it prepared for its 2024 general elections, which ultimately resulted in John Dramani Mahama's return to the presidency. The political landscape of Ghana was shaped by severe economic struggles and social tensions with fierce contest between the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the main opposition, National Democratic Congress (NDC) (Boateng et al., 2024; Darkwa et al., 2024), culminating in Mahama's victory on December 7, 2024. The contest between the two parties was particularly critical considering that Mahama, as a former president and opposition leader, successfully campaigned to reclaim his lost seat from the 2016 elections. Ahead of his eventual electoral triumph, Mr. Mahama delivered a significant speech to the media on July 7, 2024, just 153 days before the country went to vote.

Mahama, who served as the President of Ghana from January 2013 to January 2017, has been a prominent figure within Ghanaian politics for over a decade. After losing both the 2016 and 2020 elections to his opponent Nana Addo-Danquah Akuffo-Addo, Mahama positioned himself effectively in the Ghanaian political space to run again as the presidential candidate for the opposition NDC (Darkwa et al., 2024), ultimately securing victory in the election. His July media address, analyzed in this study, marked a critical point in the Ghanaian electoral landscape and proved to be a pivotal moment in his successful campaign. The speech provides a valuable text for analysis, reflecting not just his winning campaign strategy but encompassing the larger political dynamics of contemporary Ghanaian politics.

The paper's aim is to engage in a critical discourse analysis of Mahama's pre-election address to the media, examining how language was used to position the speaker in the vast political landscape of Ghana, construct the political realities of the time, and negotiate power relations within the country's political structure. Through deconstructing the socio-political context of the speech, its discursive strategies, and linguistic features, the study unravels the underlying power dynamics, ideologies, and political structures that contributed to Mahama's successful return to the presidency. This analysis offers important implications for understanding democratic and electoral processes in Ghana and similar emerging democracies.

Analytical Lens and Method

This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its primary analytical approach, following Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework. CDA views discourse as a form of social practice that both shapes and reflects power relations and social structures (Fairclough, 2001). The analysis

focuses on three key theoretical concepts: power, ideology, and intertextuality, which are particularly relevant to understanding political discourse in Ghana's democratic context (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2022).

Power in CDA is conceptualized as operating through both explicit authority and subtle mechanisms of persuasion and legitimation (van Dijk, 2018). Political speeches represent crucial sites where power relations are negotiated and transformed (Wodak & Meyer, 2021). Ideology is understood as organizing social cognitions shared by groups and institutions (van Dijk, 2022), while intertextuality refers to how texts incorporate and transform other texts and discourses (Fairclough, 2013).

The analytical process follows Fairclough's three dimensions. The first dimension involves textual analysis, examining linguistic features, vocabulary choices, and text organization (Fairclough, 2013). The second dimension focuses on discursive practice analysis, studying text production, distribution, and consumption processes, including how the speech incorporates other texts and discourses. The third dimension encompasses social practice analysis, considering the broader political and social context surrounding the discourse.

The study adopts a qualitative approach, beginning with careful reading and coding of the speech text to identify key themes, rhetorical strategies, and linguistic patterns. These elements are analyzed in relation to their social and political context, considering both immediate circumstances and broader historical patterns in Ghanaian political discourse. The analysis examines how linguistic choices and discursive strategies contribute to political positioning, identity construction, and power relations.

The contextual analysis examines Ghana's economic situation in 2024, the political landscape leading to the elections, and Mahama's position as an opposition leader and former president. This contextual understanding informs subsequent analyses of textual features, discursive strategies, and social implications.

The methodology enables examination of not only immediate political messaging but also broader social and ideological implications of the discourse (Fairclough, 2001). Through this integrated analytical approach, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how Mahama's speech functions as a political text and shapes Ghanaian political realities ahead of the December 7 election.

The analysis pays particular attention to how the speech navigates between different ideological positions while constructing a coherent political narrative that resonates with various segments of the Ghanaian electorate. This includes examining how Mahama's speech draws on and responds to various discourses circulating in Ghanaian political culture, including historical narratives, current debates, and future-oriented visions (van Dijk, 2021). The interaction between power, ideology, and intertextuality helps illuminate how political actors navigate existing power structures while attempting to reshape them through strategic discursive practices.

The next section looks into the context analysis, which is followed by a comprehensive textual, discursive, and the social practice analyses. All the sections entail significant citations and specific examples from the speech in drawing critical analysis. The study's discussions and conclusions provide a synthesis of the analysis in highlighting the speech's implications in the Ghanaian political structure and broader political discourse.

Context Analysis

A Snapshot of the Economic Situation Before the Elections

Ghana's economic landscape in 2024 was characterized by significant challenges, influenced by both domestic and global factors (Baidoo et al., 2024; Boateng et al., 2024). The lingering effects of the global coronavirus pandemic continued to impact key sectors, particularly manufacturing and tourism, while exacerbating pre-existing economic challenges (Boateng et al., 2024; Darkwa et al., 2024).

The country's debt situation remained critical, with the debt-to-GDP ratio reaching approximately 85% (International Monetary Fund (IMF), 2024). This high debt burden significantly limited the government's fiscal space for infrastructure development and social spending. Additionally, the Ghanaian cedi experienced continued depreciation against major global currencies, particularly the US dollar, leading to increased inflationary pressures and higher import costs (Bank of Ghana, 2024).

Despite these challenges, some sectors showed resilience. The digital economy demonstrated growth through increased technology adoption and internet penetration (Boateng et al., 2024a; Darkwa, 2024; Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), 2024b). The agricultural sector, especially cocoa production, maintained its significant role in the economy despite climate-related challenges (Ministry of Food and Agriculture, 2024).

Government efforts to diversify the economy through value addition initiatives and manufacturing projects yielded mixed results. While some progress was made in establishing industrial parks and attracting investments in sectors like automobile assembly, these initiatives had yet to realize their full potential (Ghana Investment Promotion Centre, 2024)

The Political Landscape of Ghana Prior to the Election

Ghana's political landscape approaching the 2024 elections was marked by intense competition and heightened public scrutiny over governance and development issues (Brobbey et al., 2024). The two major parties, NPP and NDC, remained the dominant political forces despite calls for alternative leadership (Baidoo et al., 2024; Darkwa et al., 2024).

The ruling NPP government faced significant challenges maintaining public support. Economic difficulties during President Akuffo-Addo's second term and corruption allegations had eroded the government's previous goodwill (Brobbey et al., 2024). The selection of Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia as the NPP's flagbearer marked a historic departure from the party's traditional Akan leadership, potentially reshaping regional and ethnic political alignments.

The opposition NDC, led by John Mahama, positioned itself as the alternative for leading Ghana's development, capitalizing on public dissatisfaction with the incumbent government (NDC Manifesto, 2024). Key campaign issues centered on economic management, anti-corruption initiatives, social welfare programs, and job creation (Brobbey et al., 2024).

Digital media played a crucial role in shaping political narratives, with major parties investing heavily in social media campaigning through platforms like Facebook, X, and YouTube (Boateng et al., 2024; Darkwa et al., 2024). However, concerns emerged about misinformation's impact on the electoral process. The Electoral Commission faced the challenge of balancing calls for increased transparency with maintaining electoral security and efficiency (Darkwa et al., 2024).

Mahama's Position as an Opposition Leader and Former President

Mahama occupied a unique position in the 2024 electoral landscape, combining his roles as former president and opposition leader for the NDC. This dual status offered both advantages and challenges in his bid to regain the presidency (Baidoo et al., 2024; Boateng et al., 2024a). As a former president, Mahama benefited from significant name recognition and a track record of achievements, particularly in infrastructure development and energy sector improvements (Campaign Team of Mahama, 2024).

However, his previous administration also faced criticism over corruption allegations and economic management issues (Boateng et al., 2024). The incumbent NPP government frequently referenced these criticisms to challenge Mahama's credibility. This situation required careful balancing in his campaign rhetoric, acknowledging past shortcomings while emphasizing lessons learned and new approaches to development.

As opposition leader, Mahama effectively critiqued the current administration's policies and performance. His criticisms of government corruption and economic mismanagement resonated with public dissatisfaction (Brobbey et al., 2024) over the country's economic situation. His campaign strategy emphasized his political experience while promoting a message of renewal, focusing on inclusive job creation, industrial development, and technological innovation (NDC, 2024; Mahama, 2024).

Mahama's international reputation also enhanced his position. His involvement in various peacekeeping initiatives before and after his presidency demonstrated his statesmanship and potential to strengthen Ghana's international relations (Boateng et al., 2024b). His selection of Professor Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Coast, as running mate for the second time strategically appealed to women voters while emphasizing gender balance in governance.

The combination of Mahama's experience, international standing, and campaign messaging created a compelling narrative for his return to power. His unique position as both former president and opposition leader provided a platform for critiquing current policies while offering credible alternatives based on past experience. This positioning proved effective in the competitive electoral landscape, contributing to his eventual victory in the December 7 election.

Textual Analysis

Structure and Organization of the Speech

The speech of Mahama shows a critically planned rhetorical structure made towards maximizing the influence on the larger Ghanaian populace as well as the immediate audience. Mahama's speech could be placed into several parts encompassing various sections that serve particular objectives which exhibits his electoral campaign strategy and narrative.

The speech's opening statement provides a kind of historical essence and urgency with the leader stating that;

"We are at a crucial moment in our nation's history- with 153 days before the elections" (Mahama, 2024).

The framing device used offered the audience with a kind of attention which underpinned the significance of the election. Just after the introductory comments, Mahama provided a form of retrospective approach with reference to his past speech in 2022. Within this, he criticizes the governing administration and their inability to go with his governance recommendation. Mahama's rhetorical mechanism employed here which is referred to as *"I told you so"* had the purpose of showing his foresight and credibility Mahama states:

"Two years ago in 2022, right here in this auditorium when I delivered my prophetic speech to the state, I made a submission to the governing body and the public that the country was at crossroads" (Mahama, 2024).

The speech of Mahama encompassed many essential themes, entailing job creation, revitalization of the economy, national unity and social justice. Every theme in the speech encapsulated valid statements which were followed with particular policy proposals. It also came with criticisms on the ruling administration regarding their performance, especially on the economic side. The thematic style offered in the speech provided the speaker with a much comprehensive structure for highlighting on the country's future focusing on development and at the same time keeping a narrative that is coherent and vivid (Fairclough, 2013).

The speech ended with an appeal to the Ghanaian youthful populace and a space for the media to ask questions and voice out their concerns. The mechanism provided by the speech offered a dual objective. One was to demonstrate Mahama's emphasis on the youthful population and the other was the avenue he paved for the scrutiny by the media which presented a contrast he wanted to compare with the ruling administration of the country.

Key Themes and Topics

Mahama's speech addressed a range of critical issues reflective of Ghana's socio-economic and political realities in 2024. Through a structured and rhetorically compelling narrative, he identifies core areas requiring urgent attention, including economic revival, governance reform, social justice, and national unity. These themes were not only central to his campaign but also resonated deeply with the challenges and aspirations of the Ghanaian electorate. By blending concrete policy proposals with emotional appeals, Mahama crafted a vision that sought to galvanize public support while presenting himself as the leader capable of addressing these pressing concerns. Below, the speech's key themes and their broader implications are explored in detail.

Economic Revival and Job Creation

A central theme of Mahama's speech was the call for economic revitalization and job creation, a pressing issue in the context of Ghana's economic challenges in 2024. Mahama introduces the concept of a *"24-hour economy,"* describing it as a transformative strategy aimed at creating decent, well-paying jobs while boosting productivity. The proposal, which envisions a shift to a more dynamic, round-the-clock economy, seeks to integrate both rural and urban economic activities, ensuring the participation of all sectors of society. He connects this initiative to policies promoting import substitution and export promotion, arguing that;

"The 24-hour economy will not only create jobs but also reduce dependence on imports by encouraging local production" (Mahama, 2024).

This focus on self-reliance is consistent with the findings of Darkwa & Atsriku (2022), who advocate for robust domestic industries as key to long-term economic sustainability   Furthermore, Mahama highlights the importance of addressing the unemployment crisis, particularly among the youth. His emphasis on job creation is framed around actionable policies, including investments in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and incentivizing private sector participation. By addressing key challenges such as unemployment and industrial underperformance, Mahama's economic revival message appealed directly to Ghanaians grappling with inflation, declining purchasing power, and limited job opportunity.

Governance and Anti-Corruption

Governance reform and the fight against corruption stood out as pivotal themes in Mahama's speech. He underscored his intention to run a lean and efficient government, promising to limit the size of his administration to no more than 60 ministers and deputy ministers. This promise reflects public discontent with what many perceive as the bloated nature of the current government, which has been criticized for inefficiencies and excessive spending (Baidoo, 2024; Brobbey et al., 2024). By presenting a leaner government, Mahama sought to demonstrate fiscal discipline and improve governance. Research by Transparency International (2024) and other governance watchdogs has shown that smaller, more efficient governments are often better equipped to deliver public services, while reducing opportunities for corruption.

Mahama also pledged a rigorous approach to fighting corruption. He announced plans to establish an independent value-for-money office tasked with scrutinizing government procurements. This measure, aimed at ensuring accountability in public spending, aligns with calls from civil society organizations like the Ghana Integrity Initiative (GII) for stronger anti-corruption institutions. The issue of procurement fraud, a significant concern in Ghana, has eroded public trust in governance, making Mahama's proposals timely and potentially impactful. His approach signified an understanding of the need for systemic changes to prevent the misuse of public funds, while promoting transparency and good governance   .

Social Justice and Equality

Mahama's speech placed significant emphasis on social justice and equality, addressing the structural inequities that hinder social and economic progress in Ghana. One of his flagship proposals is the establishment of a "national women's bank." This initiative seeks to empower women by providing them with access to financial resources tailored to their specific needs, helping to close the gender gap in economic participation. As argued by Boateng & Darkwa (2021a), enhancing women's access to financial resources is crucial for driving inclusive development in Ghana and other African nations. This policy resonates with ongoing global and local efforts to reduce financial exclusion among women, who are often disproportionately affected by poverty   .

Mahama also acknowledged the urgent need to address youth unemployment, promising to create at least 300,000 skilled jobs through a Digital Jobs Initiative (Mahama, 2024). This initiative is framed within the context of Ghana's burgeoning digital economy, which has emerged as a critical growth sector in recent years (Acquah et al., 2024; Boateng et al., 2024a; Darkwa, 2024). By focusing on digital skills development and entrepreneurship, Mahama aligns with the findings of Boateng et al., (2024), who highlights the potential of the digital economy to tackle unemployment and foster innovation. The emphasis on empowering youth through technology reflects Mahama's recognition of the demographic realities in Ghana, where young people represent a significant portion of the electorate   s.

National Unity and Inclusive Governance

National unity and inclusive governance form the backbone of Mahama's vision for Ghana. He critiques the polarization and partisanship that he claims have characterized the NPP government's tenure, emphasizing the need to bridge divides and foster a sense of national cohesion (Mahama, 2024). By using inclusive language and addressing all segments of the population, Mahama positioned himself as a unifying figure capable of governing across

regional, ethnic, and political lines. This approach is particularly relevant in Ghana, where issues of ethnicity and regionalism often intersect with political affiliations.

Mahama's pledge to foster inclusivity extends beyond rhetoric. He highlighted policies aimed at ensuring equitable resource distribution and representation in governance, emphasizing the importance of listening to marginalized voices. His repeated use of terms such as "our country" and "together" reinforces the idea of collective ownership of Ghana's future. Moreover, his selection of Professor Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang as his running mate signals a commitment to gender equity in leadership, reflecting broader global and national calls for women's inclusion in politics and decision-making.

Discursive Practices

Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity

Mahama's speech demonstrates significant intertextuality and interdiscursivity, drawing on various discourses and texts to construct his arguments and position himself within Ghana's political landscape. One notable instance of intertextuality is Mahama's reference to his own previous speech from 2022, where he states,

"Two years ago, in 2022, right here in this hall, in my prophetic address to the nation, I submitted to the government and to all Ghanaians that Ghana was at a crossroads" (Mahama, 2024).

This self-reference serves to establish continuity in his political narrative and reinforce his image as a consistent and foresighted leader (Wodak & Meyer, 2022). The speech also draws on historical discourses, particularly when discussing agricultural policy. Mahama invokes the memory of the "Operation Feed Yourself and Industries" program from the 1970s, stating,

"We will launch a programme similar to 'Operation Feed Yourself and Industries' of the early 1970s to make Ghana self-sufficient in basic staples and curb unnecessary imports" (Mahama, 2024).

This reference connects Mahama's proposed policies to a nostalgic narrative of Ghana's past economic initiatives, potentially resonating with older voters who remember that era. Interdiscursivity is evident in how Mahama integrates economic, social, and political discourses throughout his speech. For instance, his discussion of the "24-hour economy" combines elements of economic policy discourse with social welfare concerns and nationalist rhetoric. This interdiscursive approach allows Mahama to present his economic proposals as solutions to a wide range of national issues, appealing to diverse audience segments (Fairclough, 2020).

Framing of Issues and Events

Mahama employs strategic framing techniques to shape the interpretation of key issues and events in Ghana's political and economic landscape. The current state of Ghana's economy is framed as a crisis, with Mahama using stark language to describe the situation:

"Two years on, our country is in the worst state!" (Mahama, 2024).

This framing serves to create a sense of urgency and position Mahama's candidacy as a necessary response to dire circumstances. Conversely, Mahama frames his own tenure as a period of stability and progress, particularly in infrastructure development. He states:

"My presidency was marked by significant infrastructure development, building economic buffers for inclusive growth while ensuring macroeconomic stability" (Mahama, 2024).

This positive framing of his past administration contrasts sharply with his depiction of the current government's performance, creating a narrative of decline under the NPP and potential revival under his leadership (Bauer & Darkwah, 2024).

The December 7 election is framed as a critical juncture for Ghana's future, with Mahama declaring:

"This is the Time for Change... The TIME for CHANGE has COME!" (Mahama, 2024).

This framing positions the election not just as a choice between candidates, but as a decisive moment in the nation's history, elevating the stakes of the electoral contest.

Construction of Identities (Self, Opponents, and Citizens)

Throughout the speech, Mahama constructs various identities for himself, his opponents, and the Ghanaian citizenry. Regarding self-identity, Mahama presents himself as an experienced, visionary leader uniquely qualified to address Ghana's challenges. He emphasizes his past experience as president, stating:

"Unlike any other candidate, I have navigated Ghana through tough economic waters before" (Mahama, 2024).

This construction of identity positions Mahama as a seasoned statesman, contrasting with the implied inexperience of his opponents. Additionally, Mahama portrays himself as a man of the people, particularly through his references to farming and his understanding of youth concerns. By stating:

"I am a farmer myself," and discussing his plans for youth employment, Mahama constructs an identity, that bridges different segments of Ghanaian society" (Mahama, 2024).

In terms of opponents' identity, while Mahama generally avoids naming his opponents directly, he constructs an identity for the NPP government as incompetent and corrupt. He refers to:

"the deplorable leadership of the Akufo-Addo and Bawumia administration" and criticizes their *"dubious strategy of hiding incompetence under slogans"* (Mahama, 2024).

This negative portrayal serves to delegitimize the NPP administration and, by extension, Mahama's electoral opponents.

With regards to citizens' identity, Mahama constructs multiple identities for Ghanaian citizens throughout his speech. He portrays them as victims of poor governance, stating that;

"children, adults, including the middle class, and the elderly have all been hit very hard" by economic challenges (Mahama, 2024).

However, he also constructs an identity of resilience and potential, particularly for the youth, whom he describes as *"the backbone of this nation"* (Mahama, 2024).

Importantly, Mahama constructs a collective national identity, frequently using inclusive language like *"we"* and *"our country."* This collective identity is framed as being at a crossroads, with the potential for positive transformation under Mahama's leadership.

Social Practices

Power Relations in Ghanaian Politics

Mahama's speech reflects and potentially reshapes power relations within Ghanaian politics. As a former president seeking to return to power, Mahama occupies a unique position in the political landscape, simultaneously embodying both opposition and establishment identities.

The speech challenges existing power structures by critiquing the incumbent government's performance and proposing alternative governance models. For instance, Mahama's promise to run a leaner government with *"no more than 60 (sixty) ministers and deputy ministers"* (Mahama, 2024) directly contests the current administration's approach to governance and distribution of political power.

Moreover, Mahama's emphasis on empowering marginalized groups, particularly women and youth, suggests an attempt to alter existing power dynamics in Ghanaian society. His proposal for a *"national women's bank"* and focus on youth employment in the digital sector indicate a vision of more inclusive power distribution.

However, it's important to note that Mahama's speech also reinforces certain existing power structures, particularly the dominance of the two major political parties in Ghana's political system. While he presents himself as an agent of change, his candidacy itself is a product of Ghana's established political order.

Ideological Positioning

The speech reveals Mahama's ideological positioning on various issues, blending elements of social democracy, economic nationalism, and technocratic governance.

Mahama's emphasis on social justice, gender equality, and support for vulnerable populations aligns with social democratic ideals. His statement that *"social interventions and educational reforms will be strengthened"* (Mahama, 2024) reflects this ideological leaning.

Economically, Mahama adopts a position that combines elements of state intervention with market-oriented policies. His proposal for a *"24-hour economy"* and focus on import substitution suggest a form of economic nationalism, while his emphasis on private sector growth and entrepreneurship indicates a more market-friendly approach.

In terms of governance, Mahama positions himself as a proponent of technocratic, efficiency-driven administration. His promises of a leaner government and the establishment of an independent value-for-money office reflect this ideological stance.

Potential Social and Political Implications

The discursive strategies employed in Mahama's speech have several potential social and political implications for Ghana. Firstly, the speech's emphasis on change and transformation could mobilize voters dissatisfied with the status quo, potentially altering the electoral landscape. The framing of the election as a critical moment for Ghana's future may increase voter turnout and engagement.

Secondly, Mahama's focus on youth and digital economy could reshape policy priorities in Ghana, potentially accelerating investment and development in these areas regardless of the election outcome.

Thirdly, the speech's emphasis on national unity and inclusive governance may contribute to easing political tensions in Ghana, although the effectiveness of this rhetoric will depend on how it is received and interpreted by different segments of the population.

Lastly, Mahama's critiques of the current government and promises of anti-corruption measures could intensify scrutiny of government actions and potentially lead to institutional reforms, depending on the election results and subsequent political developments.

Mahama's speech represents a complex interplay of discursive practices, ideological positioning, and attempts to reshape power relations in Ghana. Its potential implications extend beyond the immediate electoral context, potentially influencing Ghana's long-term political and social development.

Discussion

Mahama's Discursive Strategies in Context

Mahama's speech employs a range of discursive strategies that must be understood within the broader context of Ghana's political and economic landscape in 2024. These strategies reflect both the immediate electoral context and longer-term trends in Ghanaian political discourse.

One key strategy is the construction of a crisis narrative. Mahama paints a picture of a nation in dire straits, stating, *"Two years on, our country is in the worst state!"* (Mahama, 2024). This crisis framing serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it creates a sense of urgency that justifies Mahama's bid for power. Secondly, it provides a stark contrast against which Mahama can present his vision for change. This approach aligns with what Krebs and Jackson (2007) term "rhetorical coercion," where political actors seek to frame the situation in a way that makes their proposed solutions appear inevitable.

However, this crisis narrative must be balanced against the risk of fostering pessimism or apathy among voters. Mahama attempts to mitigate this risk by coupling his critique with expressions of optimism and calls for collective action. For instance, he states, *"I am imbued with optimism and a steadfast belief in my God almighty and the amazing creativity of Ghanaians to assure you, tonight, that together, we shall turn this tide"* (Mahama, 2024).

This blend of critique and hope reflects what Fairclough (2013) describes as the "dialectic of discourse," where negative and positive representations are strategically combined to mobilize support.

Another significant strategy is Mahama's use of intertextuality to establish continuity with his previous tenure while also promising change. By referencing his *"prophetic address"* from 2022 and his past achievements as president, Mahama attempts to construct an image of consistent leadership and foresight (Mahama, 2024). This strategy aligns with what van Dijk (2018) terms *"political legitimation,"* where politicians draw on past actions and predictions to establish their credibility.

Mahama's emphasis on specific policy proposals, such as the *"24-hour economy"* and the creation of a national women's bank, represents a strategy of concretization. By offering detailed plans rather than vague promises, Mahama attempts to present himself as a prepared and competent leader. This approach aligns with research by Sides (2006), which suggests that voters' often respond positively to specific policy proposals, viewing them as indicators of a candidate's readiness to govern.

Broader Implications for Ghana's Democratic Process

Mahama's speech and its discursive strategies present several important implications for Ghana's democratic process. The emphasis on specific policy proposals and openness to media questions could enhance substantive policy debate in electoral discourse, aligning with deliberative democratic theories (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004). However, the speech's strong critique of the incumbent government risks deepening political polarization, which can hinder effective governance and erode public trust in democratic institutions (Carothers and O'Donohue, 2019; Kuyini Mohammed, 2023).

The proposed anti-corruption measures, particularly the independent value-for-money office for scrutinizing government procurements, could strengthen democratic accountability (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). Similarly, the focus on inclusive governance, especially regarding women's empowerment and youth engagement, could broaden democratic participation among previously marginalized groups.

However, the realization of these potential benefits depends on actual policy implementation rather than campaign rhetoric (Stokes, 2001). Moreover, while Mahama's crisis narrative proved effective as a campaign strategy, such narratives could unintentionally undermine public confidence in democratic institutions if they become pervasive (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018).

Conclusion

The analysis of President Mahama's speech demonstrates his strategic use of discourse to address Ghana's critical challenges while positioning himself as a unifying and transformational leader. Through his carefully crafted rhetoric, Mahama effectively framed his candidacy as a response to the urgent need for economic revival, governance reform, social justice, and national unity. His emphasis on inclusivity, accountability, and innovative policies resonated with the electorate, culminating in his decisive victory in the December 7, 2024, election.

This victory not only underscores the impact of his discursive strategies but also highlights the evolving dynamics of electoral communication in Ghana's democracy. By connecting with diverse constituencies and addressing their concerns with actionable proposals, Mahama redefined political leadership in a way that reflected both continuity and change. His return to the presidency offers a critical opportunity to translate campaign rhetoric into tangible policies that address Ghana's pressing socio-economic issues, foster national cohesion, and solidify the country's democratic gains.

Mahama's victory serves as a testament to the power of effective communication in shaping political outcomes and demonstrates the role of discourse in navigating the complexities of governance and development in an emerging democracy like Ghana. Future research might explore how his administration implements the promises made during the campaign and their broader implications for Ghana's political landscape and democratic trajectory.

Conflict of Interests:

The authors report no conflict of interests.

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