



Language and Power Play: A Literary Exploration of the 2024 Election Slogans of Ghana; “It Is Possible” and “Experience but Not Experiment”

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Abstract

This paper examines the 2024 presidential slogans of Ghana's two main political parties, focusing on the strategic use of rhetoric by the candidates to position themselves as the preferable choice for leadership. The study employs close reading and the Reader Response Theory for analyses. The Formal Vice President (FVP) of Ghana (2016- 2024), Mahamudu Bawumia, employs the slogan "Momma me steer no" (Give me the steering wheel), which metaphorically contrasted his role as a subordinate (driver's mate) with his ambition to become the President (driver). This metaphor indicates a transition from support to leadership, showing his desire for authority and the capacity to direct national policy. Dr. Bawumia's repeated invocation of the steering wheel suggested his perceived readiness to lead and portrayed an involuntary critique of his President. In contrast, the Presidential candidate of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) in 2024 general elections, President John Mahama, used the slogan "Experience but not Experiment" (Momfa me boo mma me), which suggests his extensive political experience and criticizes the notion of untested leadership. The John Mahama's slogan appealed to the voters' desire for stability and proven competence over the uncertainties of new approaches. The analysis therefore reveals how each candidate used cultural references, metaphors, and rhetorical strategies to appeal to Ghanaian voters and address concerns about governance continuity and change.

Keywords: Experience; Experiment; Slogan; Steering wheel; Electorates, Governance

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Introduction

Africa has delved into different forms of governance since it gained complete independence from the West and learned to manage its affairs. As a continent full of potential, Africa has experimented with civilian and military rule over decades. Of the seventeen countries that comprise West Africa, Ghana stands out as the second most populous country with nearly 35 million inhabitants. Her political terrain does not veer off the path of the lot. As a democratic country, Ghana has also experienced a mixture of civilian and military rule. In a quest to maintain the democratic momentum and degree of democratic consolation, 19 African countries had elections in 2024. According to Siegle and Cook, this multifaceted electoral docket provides opportunities for Africa to strengthen its multipartyism, and transition back to constitutionalism following the recent coups in its terrain (1)

One special interest that invokes this research is the political terrain of Ghana, and for that matter, the 2024 general elections, of December 7. Two key presidential candidates form the primary source of this research, thus John Dramani Mahama and Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia. Dr **Mahamudu Bawumia** was the

Presidential candidate for the New Patriotic Party (NPP), and Vice President of Ghana (2020- 2024). He secured his party's nomination with a significant majority. **John Mahama** was the Presidential candidate of the NDC in 2024, the elected President of the Republic of Ghana, 2025-2029, and leader of the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC). He was running for the third consecutive time in 2024 after he won the party's primary with an overwhelming majority.

Notable of these two Presidential aspirants are the slogans: —It is possible, momfa steer no mma mel (give me the steering wheel) and —Experience but not Experiment – Momfa me boo mma mel, respectively. According to Ngugi wa Thiong' O, language is the most important vehicle through which power fascinates and holds the soul prisoner. He adds that the bullet was the means of physical subjugation, however, language is the means of spiritual subjugation (Thiong'o 9). This statement from his *decolonization of the mind*, holds significance to understanding and unshackling boundaries in the slogans and speeches of the two flagbearers herein. Both flagbearers hailing from the northern part of Ghana, attempt the use of the Twi language to communicate to

their electorates, in a way never before in the political dispensation of Ghana. Whiles Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia says: —*Momma me steer no*||, John Dramani Mahama says —*momfa me boɔ mma me*.|| According to Ricks, ethnic overture has greater electoral appeal than formal speech. This is because it signals kinship ties to the electorates (p. 1). This spectacular turn in the electoral fortunes of Ghana has sparked several debates, but to me, it is a unique opportunity to widen the tentacles of literary studies into the terrain of political science.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this paper therefore are to critically examine and deconstruct the underlying cultural, leadership, and electoral fortunes embedded in: —It is Possible-Momfa Steer no mma mel||, and —Experience but not Experiment - momfa me boɔ mma mel|| by Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia and John Dramani Mahama respectively. It will provide in-depth clarity into the slogans of the Presidential hopefuls. The reader response theory coupled with close reading will serve as the theoretical framework of this study.

Literature Review

Since the inception of the fourth republic, the political landscape in Ghana has been largely dominated by two major political parties, thus, the New Patriotic Party (NPP)

and the National Democratic Congress (NDC). Each party has consistently employed slogans and mottos as critical components of their political communication strategies. These elements carry the parties' ideologies, connect with the electorate, and differentiate them from their rivals. A slogan is a recurrent statement of an idea or purpose used in a clan, political, commercial, religious, or other context with the intention of persuading the general public or a more specific target audience. A motto however is a brief phrase or sentence that expresses the guiding principles or core values of an individual, group, or organization. A motto is short and easily memorized. This review examines the evolution of the NPP and NDC slogans and mottos from 2000 to 2024, and explores how they align with the parties' broader political narratives and campaign strategies. Undeniably, both political parties have steadfast mottos that reflect their core values and ideological foundations. However, the interconnection between language and power, particularly within the sphere of political slogans, constitutes a critical area of inquiry in the analysis of political communication in Ghana. Political slogans, concise, emotive, and ideologically charged, are not mere rhetorical flourishes but calculated linguistic instruments used to influence public opinion, assert authority,

and shape electoral fortunes. As Chilton (7) and Charteris-Black (11) note in global contexts, the use of political language is inherently strategic, reflecting underlying power relations and ideological contests. In Ghana, this strategic use of language is amplified by the multiparty system, a vibrant media landscape, and the sociocultural value attached to speech as a performative act. Abass (14-32) investigates the ideological and rhetorical underpinnings of political manifestos in Ghana, revealing that slogans and policy promises are often crafted as seductive linguistic tools aimed at electoral success rather than sustainable development. His content analysis of manifestos from the NDC and NPP between 2008 and 2024 shows a pattern of repetitious promises in areas like infrastructure, poverty alleviation, and governance. Despite their rhetorical appeal, these manifestos, and the slogans that encapsulate them, are discarded post-election, contributing to policy discontinuity, social exclusion, and infrastructural decay. The study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and rhetorical theory to unveil how language is weaponized to gain power without a commensurate commitment to the public good. Thus, slogans serve more as vehicles for partisanship than genuine instruments of national progress. Complementing this, Naaikuur and Akapule

(193-203) focus on the 2012 presidential elections to demonstrate how language, particularly through rhetorical strategies embedded in campaign speeches, becomes central in constructing political credibility and influencing voter perception. Drawing on Cialdini's principles of influence and Marwell and Schmitt's compliance-gaining strategies, their analysis reveals that both Mahama and Akufo-Addo deployed carefully chosen slogans and speech acts that included promises, appeals to authority, and strategic self-presentation. These rhetorical elements were not isolated; they were woven into slogans that evoked collective aspirations and national identity, thus reinforcing the candidate's perceived legitimacy and leadership capacity. By using qualitative content analysis of Daily Graphic political coverage, the study underscores the extent to which language serves as a performative act of power, constructing personas and political imaginaries that resonate with voters. The work of Obeng (85-105) offers a more diachronic perspective on the nexus between language and power by examining letters authored by J. B. Danquah to President Kwame Nkrumah. Although these texts are not slogans per se, they illustrate how language operates as both a challenge to authority and a shield for liberty in

Ghana's political discourse. Obeng uses syntactic and discourse pragmatic tools to show how political actors linguistically navigate power structures, using devices like factives, presupposition, antithesis, and politeness to negotiate space for dissent in authoritarian contexts. This analytical lens reinforces the idea that political language, whether in the form of a manifesto, speech, or slogan, always entails a negotiation of power—an attempt either to claim it or to resist it. While Ghana provides a particularly rich site for this inquiry, parallels can be drawn from regional contexts. Tukwasibwe and Musungu (53-62), in a comparative East African study, underscore how slogans, jokes, and emotionally charged language function within the mediatized landscape of Kenyan and Ugandan elections. Their study confirms that language and literature are "conjoined twins" in political messaging. Politicians construct persuasive narratives not only to propose policy but to dominate emotional and cognitive spaces of the electorate. Slogans in these contexts become memorable catchphrases that encapsulate broader campaign themes, enabling politicians to brand themselves effectively while undermining opponents. Although the focus of this study is outside Ghana, the strategic communication patterns it identifies especially the use of humor,

metaphor, trolling, and performative speech acts—are deeply resonant with Ghanaian political campaigning practices, where media performance is as crucial as policy articulation. The justification provided by Tukwasibwe and Musungu introduces the concept of the

—mediatization of politics,¹¹ a process through which political systems adjust to the dynamics of mass and digital media. This concept is particularly pertinent to contemporary Ghanaian politics, where social media has amplified the reach and reactivity of slogans. The increasing use of hashtags, memes, and short campaign phrases: like —4 More 4 Nana,¹² —Breaking the 8,¹³ and —It is Possible¹⁴, attests to this trend. The convergence of traditional oratory with digital media tropes in slogans points to an evolving political communication ecosystem in which language's power is exercised across multi-modal platforms.

Addae et al. (1314–33) also offer a critical insight into how language functions as a vehicle for ideology in political discourse. Through a qualitative analysis grounded in Fairclough and van Dijk's critical discourse analysis (CDA) frameworks, their study examines President John Dramani Mahama's speeches to uncover the subtle linguistic mechanisms that conceal ideological positions. The authors identify

discursive structures such as evidentiality, pronouns, rhetorical questions, metaphors, and modal verbs as pivotal tools in Mahama's rhetorical arsenal. These elements according to them, do not merely communicate ideas but actively sustain unequal power relations between the speaker and the audience, revealing how political language is strategically employed to maintain ideological dominance. The study reinforces the understanding of politics as a language game, wherein mastery of discourse equates to control over public narratives and power asymmetries. In a complementary vein, Addy and Ofori (2019) investigate how language fosters identification and solidarity in campaign speeches, focusing on Ghanaian opposition leader Nana Akufo-Addo's manifesto launch. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model, they demonstrate that strategic use of pronouns—I, you, our, and we—combined with repetition creates a sense of inclusion and collective identity between the politician and the electorate. This linguistic bonding aims to persuade voters by positioning the candidate as a relatable and credible leader. Their study demonstrates the intersection of language, ideology, and social identity in political discourse, illustrating how language mobilizes support by constructing an —us

that voters can align with. Chinwendu Israel and Botchwey (2019) analyze the illocutionary acts within Ghanaian presidential inaugural addresses, applying Speech Act Theory (SAT) to unpack the intended communicative effects on audiences. Their study finds that assertive speech acts dominate these speeches, serving to depict national realities and project confidence in governance. The use of commissives, expressives, and directives further strengthens the performative function of these speeches, aimed at inspiring public trust and articulating governmental intentions. The absence of declarative acts signals a focus on persuasion and assurance rather than formal declarations. This research contributes to political linguistics by detailing how speech acts function rhetorically in official political discourse, reinforcing the role of language as a tool for legitimacy and public engagement. These studies from different spheres of reasoning show that political slogans in Ghana are not isolated from the broader matrix of discourse, ideology, and media. They are succinct expressions of political agendas, crafted to appeal to both reason and emotion, and deployed to generate allegiance or dissent. Slogans compress complex policy visions into digestible linguistic nuggets that promise change, hope, and renewal, yet often belie

the realities of governance. When examined through the lenses of Critical Discourse Analysis, Speech Act Theory, and rhetorical studies, these slogans reveal the subtle interplay between language and power, where the former does not merely reflect the latter, but actively constructs and contests it. However, this research uncovers, that despite the scholarly interpretation given on the subject of political slogans in Ghana, none has tackled the 2024 political slogans of the

NDC and NPP of Ghana. The 2024 election of Ghana is described popularly as the people's revolution. **Discussion of Findings** "Momma me steer no"

The pronouncement of —*Momma me steer no*,¹ translated (give me the steering wheel) by Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia follows the folkloric comparison of his role to that of a driver's mate. Addressing Ghana on Wednesday, February 7, He speaks:

As vice president, I am like a driver's mate.

But if, by the Grace of God, you make me President,

I will be in the driver's seat with constitutionally mandated authority to pursue my vision and my priorities.

(Mahmud Bawumia FVP, 2024)

The driver's mate conundrum is resolved in the text above. The text presents the speaker as a subordinate to a superior. In this subordination, there is a glimpse of hope by the subordinate to transition from the supporting role to the leading role. The metaphor expressed in —I am like a driver's mate¹, places the speaker in a humble background consonant to the culture of a driver's mate. It also gives a sense of strong connection to the driver as expressed in, —driver's mate.¹

Symbolically, the driver's seat suggests a position of ultimate control, power or authority. Backed by legal and constitutional mandate, such authority as presented by the speaker is in the hands of the local people. The allusion created to the driver's mate, suggests here that, the mate learns from the driver. The strengths of the driver are at his disposal, likewise the weakness of the driver. This allusion and connection take an entrenched position, taking the cultural background of the speaker. The driver is the owner of the Bus and has full control of the Bus. The Bus is a result of the struggle and sweat of the driver. The power in the hands of the driver is autonomous. The speaker's allusion to the driver, suggests culturally, that the driver has complete authority over who boards or onboard the car, and where the Bus goes. It is the driver's autonomy over when the car

goes for servicing and when not, how many passengers to take and how not, which day to work and which not, and either to proclaim the Bus for sale or give it out to another or his mate. Under this allusion, the driver owns not just the seat, but the entire bus as it is a synecdoche to the entire bus. This ownership means that the driver decides who to give the car to and under what conditions the new driver should work. Under this enlightenment, there is a contrast created in the proclamation further:

“But if, by the Grace of God, you make me President”

The ownership of the driver’s seat in this text now falls in the hands of the passengers onboard the Bus and the intervention of the supernatural. The speaker sees the rise to the driver’s seat (presidency) as the prerogative of divine will, and the will of the people. However, the speaker expresses a contradiction once again when he states:

“I will be in the driver’s seat”

This prevents the common noun (driver’s seat) under three possessives, thus the driver’s, the people’s and the candidates. Under this analogy, Dr. Bawumia proceeds with the statement:

“I will be in the driver’s seat with constitutionally

mandated authority to pursue my vision and my priorities”.

The use of the first-person singular, —I and possessive determiner, —my places the focus on the speaker’s capacity to make decisions and navigate the challenges that may come his way in leadership. However, the speaker’s wish to pursue his vision and priorities with his constitutionally mandated authority, without acknowledging the collaborative or collective efforts of others puts what is commonly referred to as the —Ghanaian dream or —Ghanaian vision to a halt. The Speaker expresses individualism in the prioritization of his vision and priorities.

Recounting the speaker’s strong sentiment toward executive power, he repeats in the following lines:

*mepe se momfa steer no mma me
(I want you to take the steering wheel and give it to me)*

*momfa steer no mma me
(take the steering wheel and give it to me)*

*momma me steer no –
(give me the steering wheel) na*

*mentwi kar no, enkɔ babiara eye se yeɔ
(for me to drive the car to where we are supposed to go)*

The repetition of the noun —steer wheel three times, coupled with the mood and tone

of the speaker, creates emphasis on the relevance of the —steering wheel, (Presidency) to the speaker. The speaker’s insistence on taking the wheel implies a need to direct the course of events, decisions, or actions. The speaker however affirms the need to change a course of direction. He states:

*na mentwi kar no, enko babiara eye se
yekɔ*

By making such a pronouncement, the speaker affirms that there is a destination yet uncovered, for which sake he seeks a mandate to cover. This assertion by the speaker carries two perceptions, one is the perception that the driver is ineffective, and another is the perception that the mate is better skilled and could drive better than the driver. Creating an allusion to this statement, Mathew 10:24-25, we read: ²⁴ The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. ²⁵ It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?

The biblical allusion to Dr. Bawumia’s statement stems from the connection between the driver’s mate and the driver. The terms "disciple" and "servant" serve

contextually as metaphors for a follower, learner or mate as in the statement. Under this biblical allusion, Dr. Bawumia is the servant, and the President (Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo) is the Lord. However, the tables turn when the servant canvases for support to drive the bus to the *expected destination*. The *expected destination* mentioned by Dr. Bawumia, suggests that his driver had not gotten to the required destination yet or had been driving on a different road. Drawing from the biblical allusion created earlier, we read:

It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord

Juxtaposing contextually, the verse employs parallelism in the structure, —the disciple ...as his master, and the servant... as his lord. This structure is meant to encourage the mate to learn from his driver. The Simile employed directs attention to the idea that the mate imitates the driver. Ironically, the word —enough, indicates that it is challenging and daunting a task to assume the driver’s seat. By doing so, the text reminds the mate of the high standards and expectations set for the one with the steering wheel. The challenges associated with steering the wheel, however, follow the biblical allusion quoted:

The FVP uses a familial analogy "senior brother," to refer to his political rivalry. This creates a personal and relatable image of political rivalry and reduces the harshness of political competition to a sibling relationship. Therefore, Dr. Bawumia appealed to the audience's sense of familial duty and respect for seniority, a cultural value, especially in many African contexts. While the understanding of Seniority under the cultural and historical domain of the his statements suggested otherwise, Dr. Bawumia demonstrated his knowledge of cultural protocols.

Bawumia's statement, "I will be able to be president for 8 years, and he can only be president for four years" is repeated in essence when he emphasizes that having the presidency for eight years is preferable to four. By those comments, he augments the practical and logical benefits of his tenure over his opponent, John Mahama. Dr. Bawumia appealed to the audience's sense of fairness with the statement, "so if the presidency is coming home, then we should have it for 8-years rather than four years." His strategic appeal related that justice would have been better served if the opportunity was maximized, and for that, subtly implied that his tenure would be a more beneficial investment of the presidency for the community ("coming

home"). Using "home" as a metaphor for the presidency taps into a sense of belonging and ownership. Dr. Bawumia therefore presents the Presidency as a shared community asset that should be managed wisely.

There is a comparative superiority in Bawumia's comment. In referring to his opponents, he says:

*"he has been president
before but I haven't been president
before"*

In the statement, the opponent (John Mahama) is subtly undermined by Dr. Bawumia, in saying that his time has passed and that it was time for a fresh perspective. This shifts the focus from, —Experience as the opponent holds dear to opportunity and equity, and reframes the opponent's past presidency as a reason to step aside rather than a qualification. Suggesting this comparative hierarchy positions Dr. Bawumia contextually as the more logical choice due to the opportunity for a longer tenure.

The presidency is personified in, —if the presidency is coming home. Personifying the presidency in these words creates an image of it as something that moves toward where it is most welcome or needed, adding an emotional layer to the logical argument. It also places autonomy in the hands of the

presidency as one that can exercise personal will or direction of its own as if it can choose where to "come." The interest placed in the longer tenure of the Presidency likens it more to traditional succession than political. **"Experience but not Experiment momfa me boɔ mma me"**.

The verb —Experience¹ connotes familiarity, competence, and reliability. It suggests a deep understanding derived from practical involvement over time. It was used by John Mahama on a political platform to imply that he had a proven track record and accumulated wisdom from past roles. However, Fox (36-54) believes that Experience is a complex, constructed —reality.¹ The American pragmatist philosopher Dewey demonstrates Fox's assertion by stating that, Experience is a continuous nature distinguished in general from having an experience, when an event that has lived has run its course and comes to a determinate conclusion - a consummation (Dewey, 21). Experiment as a verb on the other hand implies a testing phase, uncertainty, and innovation. It connotes a willingness to try new methods or policies that may or may not succeed. When used in politics, it suggests an approach characterized by trial and error that may not guarantee stability or predictability. Focusing on "Experience," the slogan promotes the idea of stability and

reliability. John Mahama in this way posits that experienced leaders are better equipped to handle the complexities of governance because they have a history of dealing with similar issues. Mahama's rejection of "Experiment" shows his skepticism towards new or untested ideas, possibly the potential risks associated with unproven policies or leadership styles.

In the Akan (Twi) language, "momfa me boɔ mma me" literally translates to "give me or return to me my stone." This text is commonly used when someone feels vindicated after being doubted or dismissed. Contextually, therefore, the Mahama's pronouncement implies that his initial predictions or statements regarding His political opponent were met with skepticism by the electorates, for which sake He was thrown out of government in 2016. However, he believed he had been proven right by the electorates adjudging the reign of his political rival. The "stone" suggests acknowledgement, validation, or a form of recognition for being right all along. This culturally rich text carries an element of triumph, self-assurance, and a demand for respect and recognition.

Mahama's invocation of the value of experience appealed to his ethos. It connects that the leader who has substantial experience is inherently more trustworthy

and capable. This rhetorical device is particularly potent where candidates often emphasize their track records to establish a sense of reliability and to differentiate themselves from opponents who may be perceived as inexperienced or experimental. His slogan resonates with the narratives of African Giants: *Matigari*, *Anthills of the Savannah*, *The Wizard of the Crow*, and *Americanah* amongst others.

John Mahama's slogan therefore suggests that the role of president should be entrusted to someone with the depth of experience necessary to lead effectively from the onset. It rejects the notion of leadership as a learning ground, proposing instead that it is a position for those already fully equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for governance. Mahama's slogan is a call for continuity and stability, appealing to voters who prioritize security and proven competence over change and uncertainty.

Under the weight of experience, the folkloric interpretation holds. The driver's experience is metaphorically linked in the statement to successful governance. While not refuting such in specific instances, the connection of experience to good governance is flawed. Under the weight of postcolonial Africa, the African novel has grappled with the narrative of corruption and bad governance, devoid of the

experience of African leaders. According to Obiora (82), In his study of Corruption in African Novels, focusing on Helon Habila's *Waiting for An Angel* and Ayi

Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Obiora (82) recounts that corrupt leaders in West Africa devoid of experience, embezzle public funds, oppress the masses, neglect duties and stop press freedom. The African narrative therefore considers subsidiary, the role of candidates' experience to electoral fortunes. The synonyms of Experience include Tenure, Expertise, Background, Track Record, Provenance, Practice, Acumen, Knowledge, Service and Competence.

Tenure and Track Record as Experience

As inferred from, "Experience but not Experiment", tenure and track record play diverse roles in electoral victory. According to Tsur (2022), Political tenure (Experience) is a double-edged sword, that expedites government performance while increasing political power with potentially harmful (corruption) ramifications. Tsur identified that within a voters-politician interaction framework, two key factors affect the tenure-welfare relation, thus: the learning curve of incumbents in conducting their regular task (public goods provision) and the learning curve of opportunistic incumbents in becoming effective

embezzlers. Following the slogan —momfa me boɔ mma mel, the electorates' dismissal of John Mahama's claim of a positive tenure was felt in two successive electoral defeats, 2016 and 2020 respectively, rendering the call for vindication a subjective proclamation. Mahama's tenure as a former Vice President and President, gave him knowledge and Practice.

However, these two essential synonyms of *Experience* came to a halt in 2012 following the electorate's change of a new government to the NPP. Rising from the background of *experience but not experiment*, Mahama's comment contextually faces his opponent (Dr. Bawumia) *as a person* and not his track record. Mahama's comment of *Experience but not Experiment* echoes back to October 17, 2021:

—I told them you have not been President before so you think it is an easy job. I told them and they didn't understand me but today, with their own two eyes, they have seen what I was talking about.

(Mahama, 2021)

This comment follows an earlier comment made by Mahama in reply to the —"Incompetent Mahama" comment of the NPP in 2016. He rebuts:

They told all their communicators,

—Anytime you mention Mahama or NDC, say incompetent!, And so you hear Bawumia and co say, incompetent Mahama administration, incompetent '...you've never held any responsibility anywhere near presidency before.

You don't know what it is like to be president. Choboi! I will take that word from Kuffour or from Rawlings because they have been there before. All of you guys have never ever come near the presidency. You know what it is to be a president? And you stand and say, Incompetent

Mahama

Administration,

Incompetent Mahama

Administration', choboi!, choboi!

What do you know about competence? All of them in the offices they occupy, they should show us what competence they have displayed.

Anyway, my competence is not for them to judge, it is for the people of Ghana to judge. Choboi! Choboi! And I know, that come 7th November 2016, the people of Ghana will judge my competence and they will give me a second term

in office and NDC will win another victory by the grace of almighty God. Thank you, God bless you all.

(Mahama, 2016)

Presenting himself as a seasoned leader, the EP set a higher bar for valid criticism. This is discovered in his response to the NPP's attempt to register him as —incompetent Mahama :

—I will take this word from Kuffour or Rawlings because they have been there before...!

This position by Mahama serves to undermine his opponents' criticisms. It depicts them as baseless or naïve and reinforces his narrative that governance is not an experiment for amateurs but a serious endeavor requiring expertise. Coming from Kuffour or Rawlings, he accepts such criticism, because of the experience of the personas. He echoes, therefore, his belief in the importance of experience in leadership, and thus contrasts his own tenure with that of his opponents. The phrase: "not been President before," suggests that the opponent, Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia lacked the firsthand knowledge needed to understand the intricacies of presidential duties.

Mahama remarks:

"With their own two eyes, they have seen what I was talking about,"

It suggests above that his predictions about the difficulties of governing have been validated by the administration's struggles. And under great optimism, Mahama concludes in a positive spirit regarding the 2016 polls. He relates:

Anyway, my competence is not for them to judge, it is for the people of Ghana to judge.

Choboi!

Choboi! And I know, that come 7th November 2016, the people of Ghana will judge my competence and they will give me a second term in office

In the 2016 general elections, the NPP (led by Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo and Bawumia) successfully branded the NDC government under John Mahama as “*incompetent*”. This label was repeated across campaign platforms, social media, economic lectures, and press conferences. Bawumia, then the NPP's running mate and chief economic spokesperson, was pivotal in pushing this narrative, especially through his regular —economic lectures! where he listed alleged failings of the Mahama administration.

While competence of governance does not always have a direct link to history of Ghana elections, asking the electorates to judge his competence by re-electing him placed his competence in the balance. The results of the 2016 election, however, affirmed the name-calling as thou the electorates answered, —You are incompetent‘. This affected his chances in the 2020 elections, because his name had become synonymous with incompetence, making him unpopular.

In the run-up to the 2024 elections, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) employed a powerful political strategy by repurposing the very rhetoric once used against them by the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Central to this maneuver was the label of “*incompetence*,” a term the NPP had effectively used in 2016 to discredit the then John Mahama-led NDC administration. The NDC turned the same label on Vice President Dr.

Mahamudu Bawumia, the NPP’s presidential candidate, in 2024 general elections portraying him as having failed to deliver on the economic promises that initially bolstered his political brand. One of the most prominent forms of attack from the NDC has been the accusation of economic mismanagement.

Ghana’s economic challenges, including record-high inflation, the dramatic

depreciation of the cedi, and the nation’s return to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2022, were cited as glaring evidence of Bawumia’s failure. These narrative strikes particularly hard because Bawumia had once styled himself as Ghana’s economic savior, confidently declaring in 2016 that “*If the fundamentals are weak, the exchange rate will expose you.*” The NDC has used this line to great effect, highlighting how the current state of the cedi under Bawumia’s leadership exposes the very weaknesses he once claimed to diagnose in others.

The NDC openly mocked Bawumia’s past speeches and public lectures, which had gained him significant popularity. These lectures, often data-driven and sharply critical of Mahama’s government, were replayed in satirical tones by the opposition. Statements such as “*Where is the economic wizard now?*” or “*The cedi has exposed his incompetence*” became common refrains in NDC communication, especially on media platforms and campaign trails.

Former President John Dramani Mahama has also weighed in directly. In his 2023 speeches and interviews, Mahama sharply rebuked Bawumia’s record, noting the irony of being branded —incompetent|| by a man who presided over what he described as Ghana’s worst economic crisis. Mahama remarked, “*Those who claimed we were*

incompetent are now managing the worst economy in our history. Is that competence?" This statement not only challenged Bawumia's credibility but also appealed to the memory of voters who reassessed past criticisms of Mahama's tenure. What made the NDC's strategy particularly potent in the run-up to the 2024 general elections is the political irony it encapsulated. Using the very term that once condemned them, the NDC engaged in a calculated rhetorical reversal. They did not only reclaim the narrative but also turned Bawumia's own words into liabilities. This approach stripped away the aura of technocratic competence that once defined Bawumia's appeal and reframed it as a failed political performance.

John Mahama's *Green Book*, dating back to 2016 was a quest to validate his assertion of *Experience*, however, he lost the election marginally. This put Mahama's slogan in a weighing scale for validity.

The electoral victory in favour of John Mahama on December 7th, 2024 occurred when the electorates, faced with severe economic hardships under the NPP government, began to reassess their earlier choice. The high cost of living, rapid depreciation of the cedi, unemployment, and the IMF bailout made many Ghanaians feel disillusioned with the promises of the

NPP, especially from Vice President Bawumia, who had been marketed as a technocratic "economic messiah." This shift created a powerful contrast between *"Experience"* and *"Experiment."* Mahama, once criticized as "incompetent," was now seen as the more experienced and stable option. Voters began to believe that his previous leadership, though flawed, offered better economic management than the Akuffo Addo administration of 2016-2024. This perception led to a massive swing in support, with many embracing Mahama's comeback as a return to trusted leadership—where *experience*, not *experiment*, was what Ghana needed most.

Abraham Maslow's Theory of Human needs connected with the electoral fortunes of the leading candidates in the 2024 general elections. Abraham Maslow relates:



Fig. 3 Maslow Hierarchy of Human Needs

Maslow considers the first and most important aspect of the citizen's problem as *Physical needs*. This connects with a biblical allusion to Mathew 4: 8 KJV: Man shall not live by bread alone. Bread therefore serves as the first and fundamental need for life. According to Maslow, humans strive to meet their needs in a predictable order or hierarchy, as shown in figure 3. People's physical and safety needs must be met before they can focus on their higher-order needs. These physical needs are to be supplied continuously since they are essential for living. Any break, discontinuity, insufficiency or poor quality of supply incurs the displeasure of the citizens. It cannot be underestimated that in the quest for physical needs, an appreciable number of citizens, when satisfied even temporarily to the polls, despite the past and prolonged period of hunger and insufficiency they experienced, can give their mandate to a candidate.

Concerning Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, Dar and Sakthivel (1-9), relates what Maslow wrote in his 1943 paper, "It is certainly true that man lives by bread alone – when there is no bread. This echoes therefore the importance of basic necessities to the survival of humans. To the candidates' quest for re-election, a very significant point noted is that —the electorates live by bread

alone – even when there is no bread. An attempt to jump the hierarchy caused Bawumia's electoral defeat. In considering Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs in line with Bawumia's slogan, —It is Possible, he sought to communicate in generality the possibility of his electoral victory by all known and unknown means possible. While his slogan did not tout his self-actualization, his trail fell partly under Maslow's second hierarchy of human needs, thus: Safety needs: protection, security, law, job and healthcare. These are nevertheless fundamental to the first hierarchy of human needs. However, the displaced concentration on other hierarchies of Abraham Maslow's theory of human needs, more than the physical needs is detrimental to electoral victory. When the people are satisfied, they will get hungry again, and when the people are hungry, they must get satisfied. This cycle well understood and inculcated improved the electoral fortunes of the NDC.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the 2024 slogans of the two leading presidential candidates in Ghana convey contrasting visions for the nation's future. Dr. Bawumia's slogan, —Momma me steer nol (Give me the steering wheel), leveraged a potent metaphor of the

transition from a subordinate to a leader, the analyses, rich in cultural and biblical resonance, reflected his perception of moving from a supportive role to a position of authoritative control, with an emphasis on his individual capacity to lead. The repetition and emphasis on the steering wheel suggested his desire for direct power and responsibility - a paradigm shift from the status quo to a new direction under his leadership.

Conversely, Mahama's slogan, "Experience but not Experiment", was his appeal for re-election. Following his track record, Mahama contrasted his seasoned governance with the uncertainties of new approaches. His call: "Give me back my stone", reflected therefore his call for recognition and validation. He believed that his past experiences provided a reliable foundation for future leadership. Both slogans no doubt reflected the candidates' strategic positioning within Ghana's political landscape

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