

MANIFESTO, RHETORIC, AND ELECTION IN GHANA, 2008-2024

GHANA'DA MANİFESTO, RETORİK VE SEÇİM, 2008-2024

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Abstract

This study looks at the effectiveness of manifestos in the Ghanaian political climate. The policies of successive governments have failed in developing the country and its people because of partisanship, and manifesto-based politicking. Party manifestos are drafted with fancy words towards winning elections and discarded afterwards. This has a detrimental effect on the common person in the form of poor healthcare provision, social inclusion, poverty, unemployment, the emergence of schools of shame (schools without classroom buildings and having lessons under trees), development, etc. This study was carried out through a meticulous assessment of the manifestos of Ghana's two leading political parties, the NDC and NPP, between 2008 and 2024. The parties make nearly similar promises to the electorate, and they include, inter alia, areas such as governance, infrastructure, poverty reduction strategies, security, economy, and education. Yet, instead of completing projects already in motion to meet the needs of the people, they start new projects only to cast them aside when power changes hands. Also, a questionnaire was administered to test how manifestos beguile citizens to go to the polls to vote during elections consistently. The study put forward that by adopting a national development policy outlook, the perils of manifesto-based politics, regarding underdevelopment and political insecurities, would be overcome towards socioeconomic continuity and human development. The paper uses qualitative structured interviews, secondary sources, and manifestos through the lenses of CDA and (political) rhetorics to study the role of manifestos in Ghanaian politics.

Keywords: Manifesto, Rhetoric, Election, Ghana, CDA

Öz

Bu çalışma Gana siyasi ortamında manifestoların etkililiğini incelemektedir. Birbirini takip eden hükümetlerin politikaları, partizanlık ve manifesto temelli siyaset nedeniyle ülkeyi ve halkını kalkındırmakta başarısız olmuştur. Parti manifestoları, seçimleri kazanmaya yönelik süslü sözlerle hazırlanıp, sonrasında bir kenara atılmaktadır. Bunun sıradan insan üzerinde kötü sağlık hizmetleri, sosyal katılım, yoksulluk, işsizlik, utanç okullarının ortaya çıkışı (sınıf binası olmayan ve ağaçların altında ders veren okullar), kalkınma vb. şeklinde zararlı bir etkisi vardır. Bu çalışma, Gana'nın önde gelen iki siyasi partisi olan NDC ve NPP'nin 2008-2024 yılları arasındaki manifestolarının titizlikle değerlendirilmesi yoluyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Partiler seçmenlere oldukça benzer vaatlerde bulunmakta ve bu vaatler diğerlerinin yanı sıra yönetim, altyapı, yoksulluğu azaltma stratejileri, güvenlik, ekonomi ve eğitim gibi alanları içermektedir. Ancak halkın ihtiyaçlarını karşılamak için yürütülen projeleri tamamlamak yerine, iktidar el değiştirdiğinde yeni projelere başlamakta ve eski projeleri gündemden kaldırmaktadır. Ayrıca bu çalışmada seçmenleri sandığa gitmeye nasıl ikna ettiklerini anlamak amacıyla bir anket uygulanmıştır. Çalışmada, ulusal kalkınma politikası bakış açısının benimsenmesiyle, manifesto temelli politikaların geri kalımsızlık ve siyasal güvensizliklere ilişkin tehlikelerinin aşarak sosyoekonomik devamlılığın ve insani gelişiminin sağlanabileceği ortaya konuldu. Makale, Gana siyasetinde manifestoların rolünü incelemek için CDA ve (siyasi) retorikler

aracılığıyla nitel yapılandırılmış röportajlar, ikincil kaynaklar ve manifestoları kullanmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Manifesto, Retorik, Seçim, Gana, CDA.

STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

Manifestos are policy documents that outline the policies and procedures a political party intends to implement when voted into power. They are necessary because they help the electorates to make rational choices during elections. The predominance of manifestos in the Ghanaian political climate started in the early 2000s and is still present today, i.e., produced as booklets and made available on the internet for a wider audience. From the 1950s onwards, they existed in Ghanaian political settings but in the form of flyers that were distributed and posted on walls of buildings and other structures or a handful of pages that outlined a candidate's or political party's policies. By the early 1990s, the audience had widened due to changes such as the introduction of democratic reforms, enhanced freedom of speech and the press, and improvements in human rights conditions.

Thus, with these changes in mind, this paper attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of manifestos on politics in Ghana and whether they have any influence on how the electorates vote during elections. The policies of successive governments have failed the nation and its citizens because of partisanship and manifesto-based politicking. By this, politicians employ rhetorical devices to draft their manifestos with one objective: to woo the electorate into voting them into power and then discard them afterwards. This has contributed to poor healthcare provision, low-quality education, increased poverty prevalence, and overall underdevelopment of the various sectors of society. Another negative outlook of the manifesto on the Ghanaian electorate is that politicians, instead of continuing infrastructure projects that have already been commenced by previous administrations, tend to abandon them to initiate similar projects, thus wasting the resources of the state and preventing the citizens from benefiting from those projects.

Thus, the paper conducted a meticulous assessment of the manifestos of the two leading political parties in Ghana, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), between 2008 and 2024 to identify the promises they made to the electorates and their aftermath when they were voted into power. Furthermore, using the convenience sampling method, a questionnaire was administered to test how manifestos get the electorates to go to the polls during elections. This was done through the lenses of Critical Discourse Analysis and rhetorics as used in politics. It is not surprising to witness the return of putsches to the African continents as was witnessed recently in six African countries—Mali, Guinea, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Gabon—as well as the Kenyan riots against President Ruto's tax laws. Ergo, the main causes of the various putsches and protestations, inter alia, were due to flawed policies of governments, corruption and embezzlements, nepotism, mass youth unemployment, security concerns, rising poverty rate, and dynastic-styled political democracies.

Political authority emanates from the citizens into the hands of political actors. As such, citizens have every right to demand accountability whether the elected politician is performing or otherwise. In Ghana, as in other African countries, citizenry probing of political administrators is necessary to promote transparency and equity and to strengthen state institutions and human development. Forlorn as it may sound, the flawed policy is rife in practically every institution in Ghana because of the negative use of (political) rhetoric and the lack of prosecution of culpable individuals. Thus, these contraventions reveal the juridical weaknesses of Ghana's legal and civic institutions as political discourse in the country is geared towards devising strategies to favour politicians.

There were two positions in the literature about flawed policies in emerging countries and their sequel to the citizens. The first maintained that they are precursory to economic growth and strengthening political institutions, while the second maintained that they reinforce structural inequalities and subjugate the mass

of the population under few individuals. This paper sides with the second position as the example of Ghana has proven. Flawed policies are difficult to deal with in Ghana because of partisanship politics. The political parties, almost all the time, get their followers to side with them fairly or unfairly. Some of the stratagems they employ include vote buying in run-ups to primaries and elections, offering job promises once elected, and presenting fanciful manifestos, etc. Thus, by siding with them fairly or unfairly, their followers contribute to the selection of unfit personnel to administer developmental policies and projects.

In Ghana, loyalty to a political party is virtually the only medium of getting closer to an equitable share of services and resources in the country. Thus, the paper assessed whether electorates consider the manifestos and the good or bad performance of the people they voted for previously in future elections notwithstanding the satisfaction they get from them. Thus, it is from this standpoint that the paper used descriptive and explanatory designs to study the effectiveness of manifestos and policies in Ghana from 2008 to 2024. Such exposures contribute to the debate on governance and development in Ghana.

Introduction

In recent times, putsches have returned to the African continent as was witnessed in Mali (2020), Guinea and Sudan (2021), Burkina Faso (2022), Niger (2023), and Gabon (2023). There were rumours of a potential putsch in Ghana in late 2023. However, the army came out clear to put the minds of the politicians to rest that it had no intention of toppling Ghana as it happened in other African countries. In June 2024, Kenyans protested the financial bill of President Ruto, which sought to hike taxes and led to the death of close to 40 citizens. This is yet another evidence of how bad governance policies could swiftly turn into conflicts to disrupt relative peace. Earlier in Senegal, President Macky Sall had attempted to postpone the country's scheduled presidential elections in February 2024 indefinitely because of a supposed dispute over the list of approved candidates. This led to protests in an already fragile country. The result of the protest was the election of 44-year-old Faye as president. But how did Africa find itself back to the phenomena of the mid-twentieth century? The main causes of the various recent putsches could be summed up as corruption and embezzlements, security concerns, dynastic-styled political democracies, nepotism, bad governance policies, and mass youth unemployment, inter alia.

Political scholars largely converge on the crucial importance of public policy to representative democracy. However, some scholars believe lapses in public policies, such as flawed policies are 'tolerable' in appraising or criticising the performance of elected officeholders and state institutions. Some of these scholars are of the view that political corruption, emanating from flawed policies, aided economic growth and advanced development in the West (Ekpo, 1979: p. 247; Balachandrudu, 2006; Amundsen, 1999), but the example of Africa provides a profoundly different route. Most African economies and governments are engulfed in corruption and underdevelopment. Thus, Kobina Sekyi¹ was apt when he

¹ Kobina Sekyi was a Ghanaian who lived between 1892 and 1956. He was a philosopher of cultural nationalism and supported continuing with the chieftaincy institution instead of the indirect rule, which was introduced by the British in Ghana during the colonial era. Kobina came from a very good background and was trained as a lawyer in England. He thus resorted to writing articles to criticize colonialism in Africa, and the world at large. Upon his return to the Gold Coast in 1914, he realised that his own Fante people had become so westernised to the extent that people preferred to speak English rather than Fante, their native vernacular. He wrote a play entitled "Blinkards", which he used to criticize the colonial authority of the Gold Coast, today's Ghana. He further changed his surname 'Sackey' to 'Sekyi' to reflect his Fante origin and blamed his parents for Anglicizing the name. He joined the Aborigines Rights Protection Society (ARPS) and used it as a medium to push the demands for independence in Ghana. His central argument over the years revolved around allowing societies, which were organic and evolutionary, to go through the natural process of evolution that is born internally without changes being superimposed on them. Whereas internally induced changes tend to bring out the true nature and character of the society, externally induced changes such as colonialism, which is a form of imposed change from outside, end up destroying the process of growth internally. Thus, when independence approached, the Gold Coast's economic, political, and social institutions had been influenced by colonialism to the extent that it lacked effective

posited about African emulation of European politico-economic fundamentals. He expressed that “only by rejecting European standards of economic development could Africa avoid a repetition of the corruption and materialism of Western Society” (Okonkwo, 1985, p. 113).

Change is eternal (Wallerstein, 2011, p. 3) and so is the role of rhetoric in politics. It is germane to reference Nye (2004, p. 2), who posited that power (political authority) is the ability to influence the behaviour of others to get the outcomes one wants through channels, such as coercion with threats, inducement with payments or through attraction and co-optation. Political authority emanates from the citizens collectively into the hands of political actors and parties. Ergo, it is the prerogative of the citizens to demand accountability, especially when these leaders with the political will, are failing the state and the citizens through political deceit and economic malfeasance. Thus, in Ghana, citizenry probing of political administrators and public office holders is necessary to promote transparency and equity in resource distribution to strengthen state institutions and human development. Forlorn as it may appear, the flawed policy is rife in practically every institution in Ghana and stems from the negative use of (political) rhetorics, and the media and citizens’ probes² even though are bringing bad policies into the limelight, leaving much to ponder about the paucity of Ghana’s legal and civic institutions. Thus, these incommensurable deficiencies in Ghana’s governance system with their disparate lapses across sub-units are reorienting political discourse in the country towards political cliques where political ‘gurus’ meet to devise strategies of enriching themselves instead of the state.

Two dissenting positions have emerged in the literature about flawed policy in emerging countries and its sequel to the general population. The first maintains that such failures are a precursor to economic growth with the attribute to strengthen political institutions over time (see for example Amundsen, 1999). Conversely, the second position, to which this study contributes, holds that while the first assertion may matter, it reinforces structural inequalities and cultural and ethnic distinctions thus leaving behind poverty and subjugation of large sections of the population under a few individuals with the potential to lead to political disturbances (see for example Mayanka and Nkuna, 2014; Brooks, 1909). Manifestly the political successes in many institutions and jurisdictions of Western countries against social inequalities and political irregularities could, to a greater extent be attributed to effective checks and balances mechanisms in recent times—this cannot be said for Africa, and Ghana in particular, thus leaving an expansive slit in Africa’s socio-political space.

In Britain for instance, before the passage of the Corrupt Practices Act in the nineteenth century, political actors, even in areas where they knew they did not stand a chance of winning votes/elections, would pay travel expenses to non-resident freemen to induce them to the polls, beer-shop taps would run freely for weeks at election-times, and it became a tradition that was handed down from father to son or mother to daughter and led to several election petitions sent before juries; some political actors also tended to contribute to local churches, flower shows, cricket clubs, school sports and friendly society galas from £500 to £1,500 a year (Porritt, 1906, p. 1004). Such was the nature of political philosophy bequeathed to Ghana. This and the state’s traditional culture of gift-giving and receiving transcended the community level into mainstream politics causing the country’s underdevelopment.

institutions to drive the needed internal changes and growth. What Ghana had as a result of the influence of colonialism, which had disrupted the internal growth and evolution of Ghanaian society, was the existence of quasi-institutions that were neither indigenous nor Western.

² The enactment of the Whistleblower’s Act (ACT 720) on 16 October 2006 by the President and Parliament saw an upsurge in the number of individual vigilantes, think tank syndicates, splinter groups of various political parties, etc. joining the tussle against causing political and economic loss to the state. Yet, cases brought up by these entities end up in the ‘court of public opinion’ and those that find their way to Ghana’s legal establishments linger on for far too long evanescing in mysterious circumstances in the long run.

'Rhetorical-based' flawed policies are difficult to deal with in Ghana because of partisanship politics. This paves the way for political parties and political elites to exploit their followers for their own voracious interests fairly or unfairly. One way of achieving that is through manifestos and fancy promises. The politician is a 'political animal' that is looking for any accessible means of winning elections or retaining political power. Hence, politicians and their parties employ stratagems such as vote buying in run-ups to primaries and elections, offer job promises, and more often than not they present fanciful manifestos and source for funds from financiers promising to issue contracts and concessions upon assumption of office without recourse to the legal frameworks for procuring such services. Ergo, such political actions lead to improper selections of personnel to administer developmental policies and projects leading to incompetence and offerings of mediocre services.

Beyond this, what is of merit to this proposed study is the level of adherence to issues of accountability. How do the political parties get the electorates to the polls? What variables enthrall the electorates (if not based on accountability) to vote in elections? Answers to these questions are dependent on the costs and benefits of voting due to salient factors such as high levels of poverty, low levels of education and media penetration, especially in rural areas (Kuenzi & Lambert, 2010), based on ethnocentric nuances emanating from the ideologies of the parties they support (Ayee, 2016) or as Riker and Ordeshook (1968, p. 28) put it, based on political satisfaction emanating from compliance with the ethics of voting, affirming a partisan preference, etc. In Ghana, citizens' partisan preferences are the exclusive mechanism for getting closer to an equitable share of services and resources of the country controlled by political actors under the political party in power, which has the position and persona to deal with disparate institutions and groups formally or informally. Thus, this study assessed whether conceptual or empirical facts regarding the good or bad performance of elected officials and political parties in Ghana could influence citizens during elections notwithstanding the satisfaction they get from the parties.

Across Africa, unemployment affects the youth greatly. Thus, the option left for them is to seek greener pastures, across the seas in most instances, into Europe or gang up to rob and engage in other vices in the society in search of a means of surviving. As Gyampo & Deborah put forward, the youth constitute about 70% of Ghana's labour and voting population (2013; p. 98). Thus, the greatest potential threat to the stability and development of Ghana is youth uprising against established institutions because of unfavourable policies that have the potency to plunge the country into complete chaos.

Objectives

The objective of this paper is to exhibit that flawed policies through political rhetorics and manifestos have stifled Ghana's socio-economic and political growth. Thus, there is a need to move from political party manifestos to national development policy outlook. Thus, the paper conducted a longitudinal study on politics and manifestos in Ghana from 2008 to 2024, to assess the effectiveness of manifestos in Ghana's politics and their effects on elections. It is important to understand the policy direction of a country through conceptual and empirical lenses to explain development over time. The following research question guided this study: What is the salient political variable in the activities and incentives of party politics in Ghana and do they matter to the electorate during elections? This was addressed to outline the specific preferences and expectations of the electorates when making voting decisions. Therefore, the following additional questions could be asked: Does the upside or downside performance of political actors in discharging their responsibilities matter in future elections? What are the implications of the findings of the above questions for the rest of society? Such exposures would contribute to the debate on governance and development in Ghana.

Methodology

Descriptive and explanatory designs were used to study Ghana from 2008 to 2024. The study used qualitative research methods in the form of political party manifestos, specifically those of the two leading political parties—NDC/NPP, a questionnaire, and secondary sources.

Framework

Rhetoric in Politics

The most central practice of politics is communication (Connolly, 2007, p. 3). This involves the use of speaking, writing, images, and gestures. Central to it is the use of language consisting of words, which are structured purposefully to reflect the thoughts of the politicians and their political parties through public speeches, manifestos, etc. It is the medium through which politicians disseminate their thoughts and policies to the electorate. Thus, language is the nub of politics for politicians as they use it to “inform, persuade, advertise, issue their rules and regulations, legislate and alike” (Rozina & Karapetjana, 2009, p. 112). Political ideologies are shaped by the art of using language, i.e., rhetoric. As such, descriptive linguistics views ideology not as “a possession of people’s minds or as a corpus of abstract ideas residing in their consciousness, but “as an object that has a material social existence in language, text, and discourse” (Rozina & Karapetjana, 2009, p. 112).

Before the Enlightenment era, rhetoric in public speaking was used to address and praise monarchs, and it was the language of the aristocrats and their households. However, during the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment provided the men of the era “with rhetoric as a weapon in their public struggle to promote their cause” (Robling, 1990, p. 411). Hence public speech from then came to be associated with debate of issues and even criticism of the political decisions of the rulers. From the mid-eighteenth century onward political rhetoric shifted so much from the aristocratic clique “to the middle-class public and broad mass of the people, as the true sovereign or judge of public affairs” (Robling, 1990, pp. 412-413). In essence, rhetoric focuses on “the use of language for persuasive purposes” (Jasinski, 2001, p. xiii) and may include ‘ethical speaking and effective persuasive strategies used by rhetors to construct and convey messages in particularly situated contexts’ (Dadugblor, 2016, p. 11).

Political rhetoric, according to Condor & Billing concerns “the strategies used to construct persuasive arguments in formal public debates and everyday political disputes” (2013, p. 262). This extensive usage in everyday political decisions makes rhetorical language a very powerful tool that has the aptness to “change the minds of people” and to “impact decision-making and actions in societies and countries” (Katamba, 2022, p. 74). Thus, the ability of politicians or any other group of people to employ this strategy “to make other groups of people do what they intend to be done”, according to Rozina & Karapetjana, is known as a linguistic strategy and it involves manipulative application of the language (2009, p. 113). Thus, language manipulation is a nub of political rhetoric since “political discourse is primarily focused on persuading people to take specified political actions or to make crucial decisions” (Rozina & Karapetjana, 2009, p. 113).

Lord Acton was apt when he expressed that “great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority” (Acton, 1887, p. 9). Influential power “leads people either to behave in certain ways or makes people adopt opinions/attitudes without exerting obvious force on them” (Rozina & Karapetjana, 2009, p. 113). That is what political rhetoric offers to politicians, whose objective is “to influence us to endorse their policies, or they call for the eventual voters’ political loyalty” (Rozina & Karapetjana, 2009, p. 114), thus imposing their influential power on us. This manipulative and influential power that rhetoric gives to politicians, led Kant in 1790, to describe rhetoric as a morally reprehensible

art “which borrows from poetry only as much as is necessary to win over men’s minds to the orator’s advantage before they have made a judgement, and to deprive that judgement of its freedom” (Robling, 1990, p. 409).

The linguistic devices used in political rhetoric, according to Rozina & Karapetjana, are allusion, metonymy, and metaphor (2009, p. 111). These devices are also used in Ghanaian and African politics at large. Zaleska (2012, p. 2) has also identified “the way of speaking, the source, and the theme” as the three commonly used criteria for addressing rhetoric in politics. Thus, whereas political science attempts to “distinguish the political from the non-political” by defining politics as “a unique form of participating in the polity”, rhetoricians, discourse analysts, and linguists focus “on the speakers’ linguistic and metalinguistic activity” and are interested in “what counts as politics in current communicative practices” (Zaleska, 2012, pp. 1-2). Hence, there is a causal relationship between politics and rhetorics, which can be presented in four ways: “politics-as-rhetoric; rhetoric as expressed by politics; politics as expressed by rhetoric; rhetorical criticism which deconstructs politics by applying rhetorical framework” (Zaleska, 2012, p. 4). The first instance “treats words as the very substance of politics, not its expression” whilst through the second instance, “unconscious rhetorical habits form a mental mould underlying politics” that internalises as “natural” to determine “what is thinkable and what is unthinkable”. Thirdly, politics, as expressed by rhetoric, means “communicating politics through appropriate rhetorical strategies and persuasive words in concrete settings”, and it involves the use of a “paradigmatic” perspective that focuses on “the paradigms of language from which a choice must be made by the speaker” and a “syntagmatic” perspective which “explores rhetoric at a quite different level of complexity, by focusing on reconstructing the underlying systematicity of choices”, in terms of “configurations, argumentations, and appeals rather than form, linguistic categories, or as separated elements” (Zaleska, 2012, pp. 4-5). The fourth, rhetorical criticism, as expressed by Zaleska, is the ability of rhetoric (as a theoretical framework) to deconstruct rhetoric (as actual communicative practices) by unveiling the obscure political implications conveyed by the ways of speaking (2012, p. 8). There are implications because the causal relationship between rhetoric and politics is often awry and breached through “eristic reasoning, contradictory commitments, and bald lies”, which are “accepted and easily implemented into incommensurable argumentations” (Zaleska, 2012, p. 8).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a methodology employed in diverse fields, including social sciences. It analyses how language is conveyed to the intended audience in tandem with the choice of wording. According to Norman Fairclough (1995), social institutions contain diverse “ideological-discursive formations” (IDFs) associated with different groups within the institution, where usually one of such determinants dominates, with the capacity to “naturalise” other ideologies into non-ideological “common sense”. Thus, to “denaturalise” such ideologies is the objective of a discourse analysis, which adopts “critical” goals, to show how social structures determine properties of discourse, and how discourse in turn determines social structures (Fairclough, 1995, p. 27). People live in clusters in societies, and their activities are regulated by power. Hence, CDA regards power and the linguistic rhetorics that are used to express it “as a central condition in social life” and makes efforts “to develop a theory of language which incorporates this as a major premise” (Wodak, 2001, p. 11).

As Lord Acton put it, “power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely” (Acton, 1887, p. 9). People do not relinquish authority easily and would do whatever it takes to hold onto it. Thus, Fairclough posited that those with power would be most likely to endeavour to maintain such dominance, where conditions existed for them (or required of them) to maintain their power through actively involving the “powerless” in the organisation and control of the institution (1995, p. 48). Hence, such an asymmetrical relationship will subordinate the weaker elements and deny them the space to transform power-based ideologies to challenge the dominant force. This leads CDA to assume that “language is not powerful on

21 | Usman Abass

its own,” but it only “gains power by the use powerful people make of it” (Wodak, 2011, p. 10). To address this imbalance, CDA “often chooses the perspective of those who suffer and critically analyses the language use of those in power, who are responsible for the existence of inequalities and who also have the means and opportunity to improve conditions” (Wodak, 2001, p. 10).

To this end, the use of language to better one’s position in society becomes inherent in the notion of the social order. Fairclough (1995) postulated that an inherent notion of discourse is that language is a material form of ideology, and language is invested by ideology. That is to say, discourse is shaped by structures and contributes to shaping and transforming them. These structures are immediately ideological—orders of discourse, codes and their elements such as vocabularies or turn-taking conversations—but also include forms of political and economic structures, relationships in the market, gender relations, relations within the state, and the institutions of civil society such as education (Fairclough, 1995, p. 73). Thus, Kress (1996, p. 15) expressed that CDA, from the onset, was politically oriented towards “altering inequitable distributions of economic, cultural, and political goods in contemporary societies.” Such an orientation aims to identify and analyse “opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language” (Wodak, 2001, 2) and to investigate them critically to help in “achieving a more equitable social order” (Kress, 1996, p. 15).

Thus, the purpose of CDA is that it serves to establish links between social practice and language, and the systematic investigation of connections between the nature of social processes and properties of language texts (Fairclough, 1995, p. 98). Thus, to Fairclough, what CDA does is

to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (i) discursive practices, events and texts, (ii) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes, and (iii) to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power (1995, p. 132).

Furthermore, CDA serves as a nexus between discourse and social power. Social power encompasses

the control exercised by one group or organisation (or its members) over the actions and/or the minds of (the members) another group, thus limiting the freedom of action of the others, or influencing their knowledge, attitudes or ideologies” (Dijk, 1996, p. 84).

If the dominant group is left in authority without effective oversight, they “may influence the structure of text and talk in such a way that” they may directly or indirectly be able to affect the mindset and persona of the less dominant groups “in the interest of the dominant group” (Dijk, 1996, p. 85). Hence, it is imperative to make judicious use of critical linguistics in decoding obscure expressions and words ingrained in speeches, manifestos, and other aspects of the social relations that are used for manipulative and persuasive purposes so that those that are not in authority can demystify “readings of ideology-laden texts” (Fowler, 1996, p. 6). Successful application of CDA, within the context of understanding ideology-laden texts, will help voters, policy analysts, and those interested in governance and other social policies, inter alia, peruse manifestos, propaganda, and government white papers effectively. The significance of that is to be able to detect discrepancies in policies and to challenge “common sense by pointing out that something could have been represented some other way, with a very different significance” (Fowler, 1996, p. 4). It is in this context that this paper makes use of critical language use in an attempt to establish how the politicians, through the use of political rhetoric and ideologies couched in their manifestos and public speeches, get the electorates to vote for them during elections, even though their policy documents are often too prolix and a majority of the voters might not even fully grasp what exactly they are being promised.

Manifestos, Policies, and Electoral Participation

Governance is the apparatus through which a polity is managed, and it encompasses laws, norms, policies, institutions, functions, and the interplay between rulers and their denizens. Thus, governance has been described as “the tension-filled interaction between citizens and their rulers and the various means by which governments can either help or hinder their constituents’ ability to achieve satisfaction and material prosperity” (Rotberg, 2004, p. 71). An important constitutive element of governance is the mechanism of accountability, which is the medium through which citizens can hold their elected and public officials to account. However, in recent times, especially in Africa, most people “are unable to hold their rulers accountable, to participate in or influence their governments, or to use electoral mechanisms to affect significant change” (Rotberg, 2004, p. 71) because of lapses in governance such as corruption, electoral fraud, flawed policies, clientelism, contravention of free speech and the press, and security concerns. Thus, whereas policy science necessitates “the use of empirical and scientific methods to determine the best approach to governance and policy”, public policies in Africa have failed “because politicians and civil servants assume they can determine policy approaches without evidence or research” (Akanle & Omobowale, 2023, pp. 124, 126).

Policies are central to governance and politics, and they are generally the criterion by which election choices depend. Thus, when a candidate or a party wins an election, it shows “an approval of the programmes and manifestos presented to the public” (Aiyede, 2023, p. 87). The efficacy of policies is tested by whether or not those policies were formulated in “institutionalised polities” with formal political structures, in which the legislature and state institutions can “place constraints on the behaviour of politicians and political elites” and “directly influence political outcomes” (Aiyede, 2023, p. 113). However, despite the existence of nearly all institutionalised structures in Africa, many of them are eroded and rendered kaput, and replaced with informal nexuses such as “kinship, ethnic ties, nepotism and corruption” (Aiyede, 2023, p. 113), and clientelism. By and large, the latter has come to dominate the Ghanaian political climate, and it involves, as put forward by Akewi, et al., an exchange between the individual politicians or political parties seeking election victory and individuals or a group of citizenries (2020, p. 1167).

The upshot of that is the dominance of Africa’s political climate by ineffective leaders who disregard the importance of policies, formulate policies without taking the dynamics of their polities into account, and do not pay heed to the need for broader policy participation, but merely to satisfy their clientele relations. Thoroughly participatory policymaking is vital to the success of any political administration because it paves the way for the government “to get all the necessary information concerning any policy it wishes to implement” (Edward et al., 2024, p. 66). However, in Africa, policies are not effective due to “the non-participatory approaches that are adopted in the development and implementation of projects and programs” (Mohammed, 2015, p. 43). Thus, one of the fundamental challenges facing many African countries in recent years is that of leadership crisis. Hence, Alidu was right to postulate that whether traditional or modern, leadership “has been identified as the bane of Africa’s development due to the myriads of challenges that it confronts as an institution” (2023, p. 219). The consequences of that are that most public policies in Africa “are beclouded with politics and implementation bottlenecks”, which lead to the “formulation of overambitious policies by political parties to win political capital coupled with excessive bureaucratic procedures”, without recourse to policy formulation guidelines or most often blatantly disregarding them, and so such policies “take place with much difficulty if not total failure” (Imurana et al., 2014, pp. 196, 200). Thus, from Crook’s standpoint, the lack of authority and lack of routinized compliance, are the crux of administrative problems in sub-Saharan Africa, which “fail to perform on a very crude scale of comparison” (Crook, 1989, p. 212).

Africans regard democracy “both as an end in itself and as a means to improve governance and welfare” (Bratton et al., 2005, p. 66). Electorates view democracy as a mechanism of keeping elected

officials “honest and accountable” (Fraser, 2009, p. 333) through political participation. Thus, political participation involves “the ability to take part in the electoral process and influence government decisions and policies, structure, and the appointment of officials” (Owusu-Mensah & Ijon, 2023, p. 72). Although Ghana represents a case of relatively successful democratization in Africa (Lindberg, 2003, p. 137), trust in the political class has been diminishing due to a poor crop of politicians, unfulfilled promises, and disregard for the general welfare of the citizenry. For instance, political parties and candidates in Ghana are enamoured with drafting manifestos that are largely “more of intangible promises that are designed to woo the electorate into voting a party into power” (Ayee, 2016, p. 93). Thus, in recent years, Ghanaian electorates have not believed in manifestos as they “doubt the credibility of the manifestos as promises made in previous elections were not fulfilled by the parties when it was in power” (Ayee, 2016, p. 99).

Political parties are the nub of representative democracy, and they give the electorates the forum to vote to elect their representatives whom they believe would partake in policy-initiative deliberations on their behalf. As such, loyalty to a political party in Ghana is “high and it has influenced how trust is generated in political parties and more broadly in the political system” (Lauterbach & Bob-Milliar, 2021, p. 88). Trust within the Ghanaian political system is misshapen with “expressions of party loyalty or allegiance being more important than trust in the political system”, and electorates “trust their own party and distrust other parties and trust public institutions when their party is in power” (Lauterbach & Bob-Milliar, 2021, p. 90). Thus, the distrust in Ghana’s political system has led to the emergence of issues and their impacts (Boakhye, 2018) on recent and future electoral politics in the country, including election petitions, election-day violence and death of citizens, and the proliferation of vigilante groups, *inter alia*. Party foot soldiers (Bob-Milliar, 2013) are employed to intimidate political opponents, snatch ballot boxes on election day, seize public property, and demonstrate for the removal of government appointees, etc. Furthermore, politics has been monetised in Ghana, where elections are seen as “a business sector” as well as a medium “to control the state for accumulation of private wealth” for the politicians, and for some electorates, they view elections as “a marketplace” where they “exchange their vote for material benefits” (Ninsin, 2016, pp. 118, 120). Politicians are happy to “pay voters and intermediaries to access political office under the guise of electoral competition” (Lassou et al., 2024, p. 6), thereby undermining the democratic tenets and their achievements in the country.

Manifestos are policy documents that are supposed to guide the electorates to make rational choices during elections. Although Ghanaian voters “may exhibit a measure of rationality at the polls”, Ninsin expressed that “being rational does not mean that they vote based on the policies of the competing political parties” (2016, pp. 118, 116). Thus, their election preferences are influenced by factors such as the pervasiveness of poverty, the candidate’s coterminous identity with the constituency or ethnic group, party affiliation, job promises by candidates, the candidate’s physical appearance, and based on catchy or fancy expressions used in manifestos, *inter alia*. Thus, it is from this perspective that the paper attempts to take a retrospect of the manifestos of the NDC and NPP between 2008 and 2024 towards winning elections and whether they were effective on the electorates.

Manifestos in Ghana

A manifesto is a social contract between the electorates and the political parties. It outlines the policy choices that political parties intend to use going into elections to seek a mandate from the electorates. In Ghana, the two largest political parties are the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), both of which were formed on 28 July 1992 as the nation was preparing to usher in the Fourth Republic. The NDC is a social democratic political party whilst the NPP is a liberal-conservative political party. In the early 1990s, manifestos were not so predominant in the Ghanaian political climate. However, from the early 2000s onwards, they became so climacteric in Ghanaian politics to the extent that when election periods come around, electorates glue to televisions and other media outlets, attend manifesto launches, download or print hard copies of the documents, etc., to listen to the policies of the political

parties and candidates about how they are going to solve the challenges facing the country and its people. Despite being a vital political appurtenance, manifestos are largely understood and circulated among the educated class since they are written in the English language, whilst citizens who are nescience of the English language rely on local radio stations and other media outlets that translate or broadcast the outlined policies in the local vernaculars of their respective regions. Furthermore, the political parties themselves sometimes do not set their manifestos in motion early and so, in some instances, they only put them in the public domain a few months before elections, thus hindering the circulation of the documents to the electorate, especially to the rural areas where there might not be electricity or internet connection. This thus prevents the electorates from digesting their policies to make informed decisions during voting.

Conspectus of NDC and NPP Manifestos, 2008-2024

The NDC adopted “Social Democracy” as its philosophy. What the party means by this is

a belief in the equality and egalitarian treatment of persons with respect to their political, economic, social, cultural and religious relations in a multi-party, multi-ethnic environment and a commitment to progressive politics and the protection of the under-privileged and the upliftment of the socially disadvantaged (NDC, 2004, p. 14).

Its flagbearer for the 2008 election was Prof. J.E. Atta-Mills, who also contested in the 2004 election. In the latter elections, J.J. Rawlings described Atta-Mills as “a good man, a man without pompousness and pretension, a man who cares deeply for this nation and our people. He is not seeking power. He is seeking the opportunity to serve. If we really want ‘A Better Ghana’, let us all support ‘A Better man’” (NDC, 2004, p. 11). He later went on to become one of the best leaders in Ghana under the Fourth Republic. His 2008 manifesto was dubbed “Agenda for a Better Ghana”. The manifesto was categorized into four thematic areas: i) Governance – Transparent and Accountable; ii) A Strong Economy for Real Jobs; iii) Investing in People; iv) Expanding Infrastructure (see NDC, 2008). The campaign ran on the mantra “Yeresesamu” literally meaning “We Are Changing”.

Conversely, as liberal conservatives, the NPP stand for the growth of a property-owning democracy in Ghana to enhance each citizen’s life, property, and liberty through the principles of freedom and justice. In 2008, the party presented Nana Akufo-Addo as its presidential candidate for that year’s election. They presented their ‘Moving Ghana Forward’ manifesto which was built around the ‘Agenda for positive change’ of John A. Kufour, the then-incumbent, thus it “centred on continuing the current projects and policies (Alhassan & Alhassan, 2019, p. 10) initiated by the NPP administration. They sloganeered about moving Ghana forward into the “new house of prosperity” (NPP, 2008, p. 20). Thus, the manifesto contained diverse promises including a mechanism for detecting and fighting corruption, creation of more districts and new regions, instituting systems that will change the attitude and values of the people to move the country forward—integrate science and technology into Ghanaian culture through the educational system, drama, and entertainment; discourage lateness to work and reward punctuality; rigidly enforce planning laws to avoid illegal structures; enforce hygiene laws and regulations—strengthen the rule of law, lift the Ghanaian economy to First World status, strengthen procurement procedures to enhance transparency and efficiency of government expenditure, restructure tax administration to meet developmental goals, (NPP, 2008, pp. 22-24, 38-40, 42-43) inter alia.

The NDC manifesto, on the other hand, was an outcome of a direct engagement with the people through “House to House tours and visits to organised groups to listen to people from all walks of life” (NDC, 2008, p. 7), which brought to the fore issues and challenges that the people want governments to solve for them. This strategy became known as “the door-to-door campaign” in Ghana’s political lexicon. Some of his promises were to “establish a lean but effective and efficient government by cutting out ostentation and profligate expenditure”, rationalize ministries and ministerial appointments, legislate tax

and tariff measures to provide relief for Ghanaians, tackle sanitation, eschew all partisan and familial considerations, provide a coordinated economic and social development policies in all sectors, to grow enough food to feed the people and industries, provide universal basic healthcare for all and review “the unwieldy bureaucracy and palpable corruption” of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), provide better and quality education, create an “Election Fund” to train political party agents during elections, provide housing, utilities and infrastructural facilities in all regions, create jobs through bold, pragmatic and innovative policies that sustain the growth of a strong economy, etc. (NDC, 2008, pp. 6, 37-38).

Going into the elections, Ghana’s Macroeconomic performance indicators were a per capita income of \$400; a growth rate of 5.8% in 2007; an inflationary rate of 18%; a domestic primary balance, in 2007, of negative 6.3% (NDC, 2008, p. 8); in addition to a national debt of €90 Trillion (from €41 Trillion at the end of 2000) despite the HIPC initiatives and debt write-offs, high unemployment, increasing incidence of poverty, etc (NDC, 2008, pp. 8-9). Thus, the NDC blamed the NPP for “turning Ghana into a beggar-nation and succumbing to Poverty Reduction Strategies prepared by outsiders who know nothing about poverty in Ghana” (NDC, 2008, p. 8). Rawlings also expressed that the sustainability of the nation’s achievements was “seriously threatened by the rule of a morally bankrupt and visionless elite that has transformed arrogance into an art, glorifying corruption in style and raping the country’s resources with shameless rapacity” (NDC, 2008, p. 2). Atta-Mills went on to win the 2008 election and by 2010 Ghana attained a middle-income status and a single-digit inflation. However, he died in office and was replaced by his vice, John Mahama as the party’s flagbearer going into the 2012 elections.

Mahama’s manifesto for 2012 built on what Mills had left behind. It was titled “Advancing the Better Ghana Agenda: Jobs, Stability, and Development”. Issues of corruption, economic mismanagement, and bad governance do not often become topical if successive elections are won by the same party because the incumbent tends to always downplay their seriousness as they are raised by the opposition elements and are made to appear like mere rhetorics and vote-seeking strategies. Mahama’s promises, inter alia, to the electorates were to expand the economy “from its marginal middle-income status to a full-fledged middle-income status”, reduce poverty substantially across the country, provide stable electricity for socio-economic transformation, expand access to quality education at basic and secondary levels of education, eliminate 60% of identified Schools-Under-Trees, establish 200 new Community Day SHS, establish a new public University in the Eastern Region, establish regional hospitals, double the number of Community based Health Planning and Services (CHPS) compounds from about 1,600 to 3,200 to meet the needs of under-served communities, ensure an average GDP growth of at least 8% per annum, and to attain a per capita income of at least \$2,300 by 2017 (NDC, 2012, pp. 8, 11-13).

Contrariwise, in 2012, the NPP sloganeered on ‘Transforming Lives, Transforming Ghana’ through a free, fair and prosperous society. Akufo-Addo’s campaign centred on free Senior High School education, building one public university per region, protecting media freedom by passing the Freedom of Information Act, providing quality healthcare, implementing social policies including housing, transforming the economy and creating jobs, etc. (NPP, 2012, pp. iii, 18, 27, 31). Akufo-Addo expressed that NDC ‘policies and personalities had brought untold hardships and poverty’ on Ghanaians thus they should vote them out because “God did not put us on this rich land to be poor” (NPP, 2012, pp. ii, iv). Mahama went on to win the presidential election against Akufo-Addo.

In his quest for a second term in office, Mahama presented his “Changing Lives: Transforming Ghana” manifesto for the 2016 elections to the electorates. The transformational agenda listed in the manifesto “entails moving away from over-reliance on commodity exports towards diversification and value addition” (NDC, 2016, p. 4). Thus, NDC’s priorities as captured in their manifesto were categorised into four: i) putting people first by investing in societal sectors to empower people through better educational systems, providing reliable and dependable healthcare, through social service interventions; ii) building a strong and resilient economy towards job creation and development; iii) providing a reliable

infrastructure; iv) improving accountability in governance by encouraging citizen participation in affairs of the State, and Civil Society Organizations to engage in the policy debate, formulation, and implementation processes (NDC, 2016, pp. 6-7). Furthermore, there was a pledge to establish an anti-corruption bureau—Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions towards “effective investigations and prosecution of corrupt conduct as well as recovery of stolen assets” (NDC, 2016, p. 70). As of 2015, Ghana was ranked second in Africa on the Rule of Law Index of the World Justice Project (WJP), fifth in Africa on the Democracy Index by the Economist Intelligence Unit, and seventh in Africa on the Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International (NDC, 2016, p. 68). Thus, the latter was instrumental in his defeat to Akufo-Addo in the 2016 general election as corruption cases and issues about flawed policies (see Abass, 2024, p. 16) pervaded his administration.

In the run-up to the election, Akufo-Addo said the nation was in a crisis “created and sustained by the mismanagement, incompetence, and corruption” (NPP, 2016, p. v) of the NDC. Thus, he put forward his ‘Change; an agenda for jobs’ manifesto and promised to build a Ghana beyond aid. The ‘teachers are suffering, students are suffering ...’ mantra of his vice, Bawumia, came to dominate all their rallies and town hall meetings with various sectors of the society and was used to highlight the suffering in the country. The NPP promised, inter alia, to achieve double-digit GDP growth annually in four years, reduce government borrowing and interest rates to encourage private sector investment, move the economy from taxation to production, and more importantly their flagship initiatives—One District One Factory Initiative, Strategic Anchor Initiatives (through partnership with the private local and foreign investors to establish strategic anchor industries in petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, vehicle assemble, etc.), Industrial Sub-contracting Exchange (enforcing local content provisions), and the Free SHS (NPP, 2016).

In 2020, Akufo-Addo came asking for ‘four more to do more for you’ and to consolidate what he had started. Between 2016 and 2020, his administration replaced the Unemployed Graduates Association with the Nation Builders Corps (NABCO), introduced free SHS, created 6 new regions, and commenced some infrastructure projects. Thus, the vice president, Mahamudu Bawumia, pointed out that they were “committed to initiating pro-poor policies and programmes to bridge the inequality gap” (NPP, 2020, p. xi) going into the next term. The National Chairman of the party said they had “delivered on at least 80%” (NPP, 2020, p. xiii) of their promises to the Ghanaian electorate including the flagship programmes. That is the challenge with politics in Ghana as it is well-nigh impossible to measure the utterances of the politicians about developmental projects because the accountability mechanism is abstruse. For instance, between 2017 and 2019, the NPP claimed to have created over two million full-time jobs in the public and private formal sectors, and through governmental initiated programmes (NPP, 2020, pp. 7, 9), but in their 2024 manifesto, they said they had “created over 2.3 million jobs since 2017” (NPP, 2024, p. 6). Thus, only a soupson of the jobs created in two years (2017-2019) were created in seven years (2017-2024). Nonetheless, the NPP put its credos before the electorates to give them four more years because they had kept faith with the people of Ghana ‘by delivering on their commitments’ and that a renewed mandate would ensure “that all the hard work over the last four years does not go to waste” (NPP, 2020, p. 134).

The NDC, on the other hand, in 2020, elected Mahama once again as the flagbearer of the party. This time around, he presented “the People’s Manifesto” towards job creation and development. The ‘Big Push’, which was a plan to undertake a \$10 billion accelerated infrastructural development, was a pith of the manifesto. There were about thirty-one items listed under this project including providing infrastructure for agriculture and agribusiness, developing regional digital and innovation centres, diverse road projects, aviation, completing abandoned health projects, etc. (see NDC, 2020, p. 89). The investment was to span five years as a result of improving social and economic infrastructure to create a platform for the transformation of the economy towards the One-Million-Jobs Plan (NDC, 2020, p. 88). There were other promises to do with fixing the economy and dealing with poverty, promoting human development, deepening international relations and foreign affairs, governance and corruption, energy sector, and education, inter alia. With regards to education, the Mahama team of 2020 promised to “abolish the double-

track system”, which was a result of the Free SHS policy of the NPP regime, which led to high enrolment in second-cycle institutions as the existing facilities could not accommodate all high school goers, “complete abandoned structures and E-Blocks to cater for current students and expected increase in admission, and to construct at least one senior high school in districts without schools” (NDC, 2020, p. 71).

The dominant issues during the election period were corruption and flawed policy related to the then-NPP government of Akufo-Addo and included scandals such as the Power Distribution Service (PDS), Bulk Oil Storage and Transportation (BOST) Company oil adulteration scandals, Australian Visa Scandal, fraudulent National Youth Authority (NYA) Street Lighting Contract, Kelni GVG, Kroll & Associates, the Agyapa Royalties Scandal, (NDC, 2020, p. 110), the “galamsey” bribery scandal involving some members of his party, the missing excavators and the disappearance of 400 motor tricycles at the Northern Development Authority (NDA), and the COVID-19 vaccine procurement irregularities (Bokpe, 2024), inter alia. They were instances of bloated contracts, mismanagement of public funds, or contracts awarded without due diligence, nor the interest of the state and its people considered, thus causing financial losses to the state. However, Mahama went on to lose the election to the sitting president, Akufo-Addo. No political party has thus far stayed in power for more than eight years under the Fourth Republic.

In 2024, Mahama was yet again presented by the NDC as its flagbearer. He campaigned with the manifesto “Resetting Ghana”, towards implementing his 24-hour economy policy for business development, growth, and job creation. They called it the “formula 1-3-3”, i.e., one job eight hours each shared between three people. According to Mahama, going into the 2024 elections, the Ghanaian electorates have two contrasting choices to make on the ballot, i.e., “to continue the slide down the present unsustainable path or to carry out an urgent reset that gives our nation a fresh start, restores good governance, ameliorate our people’s suffering and sets our country on a trajectory of economic transformation” (NDC, 2024, pp. 4, 6). Some of the key policies listed in the manifesto include a \$10 billion ‘Big Push’ policy for rapid infrastructure development, job creation, the 24-hour economy, scrapping some taxes (the E-levy, COVID levy, 10% levy on bet winning and emissions levy), implement the ‘Non-Academic-Fee’ policy for all first-year students in tertiary institutions, to implement a policy banning political appointees from purchasing state assets, probe the 2020 election killings of some citizens, etc. (NDC, 2024).

Akufo-Addo’s eight-year administration was blighted by corruption and public procurement breaches, high incidence of poverty among citizens, uncontrolled borrowing, suppression of freedom by attacking protesters and activists, and state capture as some members of his administration were engaged in purchasing state assets, even though back in 2016 the entirety of his campaign had been on fighting corruption and restoring freedom of speech and good governance. For instance, according to a report by Ghana Statistical Service, about 8.5 million Ghanaians went a day without food in 2023, unemployment was at 15% and youth unemployment at 32%, imposed about 40 different taxes (NDC, 2024, pp. 19-20), but got the Bank of Ghana, which was building a new office complex of over \$120 million even though it posted record losses of 60 billion cedis (\$5.2 billion) through mismanagement, to circumvent Parliament “to print excessive amounts of money to lend to the government” (Adogla-Bessa, 2023). None of the members of his administration who were allegedly caught in corruption cases and misfeasance were prosecuted.

Thus, his actions and inactions affected his party in the just-ended elections as voter apathy rocked the party even in their stronghold regions. As the NPP’s flagbearer for the 2024 election, Bawumia sloganeered about “a values-based, selfless leadership with bold solutions for jobs and business” and promised “to stimulate businesses and create jobs, with a strong focus on the private sector” (NPP, 2024, pp. iii, 18). Although the NPP administration had blamed Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war as the radix of the economic woes of Ghana, he promised to sustain and expand the economy to achieve

an average growth rate of 6%, expand mining and agriculture, continue Akufo-Addo’s flagship programmes, create jobs, complete all the Agenda 111 district hospitals as promised by the party, establish an Open University, (NPP, 2024, pp. 18-27) inter alia. Mahama went on to win the election decisively against Mahamudu Bawumia, the current vice-president and flagbearer of the NPP. This is one of the most decisive electoral victories in Ghanaian politics since 2000, as indicated below:

Table 1: Elections Results in Ghana between the NDC and the NPP, 2000-2024

Year	NDC (%)	NPP (%)	Candidate
2000	43.1%	56.9%	John A. Kufuor
2004	44.6%	52.45%	John A. Kufuor
2008	50.23%	49.77%	Prof. J.E.A. Mills
2012	50.7%	47.7%	John D. Mahama
2016	44.5%	53.7%	Nana Akufo-Addo
2020	47.4%	51.3%	Nana Akufo-Addo
2024	56.42%	41.75%	John D. Mahama

Source: (Anaman & Agyei-Sasu, 2012, p. 393), but updated by the author.

Thus, from the conspectus of the manifestos of the two parties, it can be deduced that they all formulate policies around issues that are pertinent to society with an end goal of improving the standard of living. The dominant issues are those related to the economy, education, healthcare, sports, social service intervention programmes, infrastructure, corruption, good governance, security, agriculture, industrialisation, and digital technology. However, their modus operandi differ, which should be the case in political settings. What is not normal is their demurrals to continue uncompleted projects left behind by the party leaving office, and it even goes further to undercut any of the rhetorics and pledges they put out in the public domain during elections, thus recapitulating the electorates’ distrust in the political system and the candidates. Thus, the way forward is to get all the political parties in the country to sign a pact promising to continue any developmental projects which were to be commenced by an erstwhile administration, through a National Development policy outlook. In 2008, for instance, J.E.A. Mills started to implement that by attempting to complete projects left behind by the government of J.A. Kufuor. He even went to the extent of maintaining some members of the erstwhile administration he thought had good intentions for the country and were diligent in discharging their responsibilities. However, he received a public backlash from members of his party and the public alike.

Findings and Discussion

The qualitative approach (Mocănaşu, 2020) is an important method of conducting (scientific) research in diverse fields of studies, including social sciences. One idiosyncratic feature of this research method is that there is no fixed number of participants. As such “there is no consensus of methodologists and practitioners” (Mocănaşu, 2020, p. 182) concerning sample size and even in instances where they do exist, these research methodologists “provide few concrete guidelines for estimating sample size” (Marshall et al., 2013, p. 11). Thus, it has been suggested that “between ten and twenty knowledgeable

29 | Usman Abass

participants are sufficient to uncover and understand the fundamental categories in any distinct cultural domain or study of lived experience” (Sarfo et al., 2021, p. 61). To that effect, this paper, using the convenience sampling method, randomly sampled eleven individuals from six Regions of Ghana to assess the significance of manifestos in Ghanaian political settings, through a questionnaire with semi-structured questions.

Semi-structured interviews are utilised in qualitative studies because they are qualitative in disposition and focus “on asking questions within a predetermined thematic framework” since the objective is “to generate a richer description of the phenomenon of interest” (Halidu, 2024, p. 2090). The eleven participants were from the following regions of Ghana:

Table 2: Regional breakdown of the participants

REGION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS (N= 11)
Ashanti	3
Upper East	1
Bono East	4
Western	1
Western North	1
Eastern	1

Thus, the participants came from six out of the sixteen regions of Ghana. The information on the questionnaire was divided into two parts: a) demographic information and b) semi-structured interview questions. The former requested information about the participants’ gender, education level, voting region, and their first-time voting experience (either before 2008 or 2008 and beyond). The gender question was to test the representativeness of the responses, while that of the education level is relevant to the purpose of the study since the manifestos are written in English. Thus, the demographic distribution is presented below as:

Table 3: Demographic attributes of the respondents

Demographic	Participants	Percentages
Gender		
Male	9	81.8%
Female	2	18.2%
Education Level		
Primary Education		
Secondary Education	5	45.5%
Bachelor’s or equivalent	6	54.5%
Graduate level education		

First-time Voting experience

Before 2008	4	36.4%
2008 and beyond	7	63.6%

The table above shows the demographic attributes of the 11 participants. From a gender perspective, there were 2 (18.2%) female and 9 (81.8%) males. Most women in Ghana are not so actively involved in politics. Even though the goal of the democratic reforms of the 1990s and beyond was “to promote equity and more balanced gender participation” (Abass & Doskaya, 2017, p. 155) in the Ghanaian political climate, women continue to be sidelined from mainstream politics due to, inter alia, “illiteracy, sexual exploitation of women in politics, poverty (Abass & Doskaya, 2017, p. 156), and the belief that politics is a trade reserved for men. Hence, this somewhat gives the sample a representative character. Furthermore, the education level distribution indicates that 6 (54.5%) of the respondents have completed some graduate level education, whilst 5 (45.5%) of them have completed bachelor’s or equivalent levels of education. This is significant in ascertaining whether a manifesto is effective or not because they are proficient in the English language. What this means is that the respondents have the language skills to wade through the manifestos and will be able to understand any obscure promises made in there, as to what policy promises are achievable or otherwise.

Finally, with regards to first-time voting experience, 4 (36.4%) respondents had voted before 2008, and 7 (63.6%) of the respondents had their first-voting experience from 2008 onwards, thus, overall, they have voting experience and know what influences them to vote during elections. Voting experience is important in making rational choices based on hindsight. This criterion is vital to testing whether the respondents, for instance, had changed their voting patterns due to underperformance by the party or candidate they previously voted for, unfulfilled campaign promises, or the unfulfillment of any other policy directives as captured in the manifestos of the party or candidate which convinced the voter to vote for them.

Regarding section B of the questionnaire on semi-structured interview questions, the following questions were asked: 1) What are your reasons for voting during national elections?; 2) How do political parties/candidates influence how you vote?; 3) How do you assess the performance of the candidate/party you voted for?; 4) Has your voting pattern changed over time? If yes, how and why did it change?; 5) How important is the political party/candidate manifesto for elections?

The responses of the respondents when asked about why they vote during national elections ranged from the desire to choose a good leader, the exercise being their civic responsibility, about jobs, development, good governance, to policies and promises made during the campaign window. For instance, the respondent from the Western Region who had been voting before 2008 expressed that he votes *to elect an able and competent leader to rule the nation*. One respondent from Ashanti expressed that he participates in elections because he wants to select *a better government* for the country. His sentiment was shared by two (male and female) respondents from the Bono-East Region. Another Bono-East male respondent answered that he goes to the poll to vote *to be employed and get a better living condition* because unemployment is rife in the country, especially youth unemployment. Furthermore, the respondent from Upper East said that he goes to the polls based *on the policies, manifestos, and campaign promises* of the parties or candidates, while the respondent from Western North participates in voting when he *sees developments* in his region. Some of the respondents said they only vote *because it is their civic responsibility as citizens*, which suggests that they might not care about the policies of the parties.

One of the questions guiding this study is to probe how the political parties and or candidates get the

electorates to vote. When this question was posed to the respondents, the respondent from Upper East said his voting pattern could be influenced by the *candidate's charisma, speaking vibes, charms, and oratory skills*. Four of the respondents said *the policies of the party/candidate* could influence how they vote especially if the party or candidate presents *clear and factual policies* on what they intend to do given the mandate. Three other respondents highlighted the significance of manifestos and past records if the party or candidate had been in power before. For instance, the respondent from the Western region opined that *the kind of development they embark on, in the aspect of infrastructure, education, health, security, employment, etc.* could influence how he votes during elections. Another respondent from Bono-East expressed that he takes into account *previous developmental projects if the party had been elected before and the manifesto they present*. Also, a respondent from Ashanti said by *their social interventions* his vote could be influenced. Thus, it suffices to say that the policies and promises politicians make to the electorate tend to be effective and persuading especially if they coincide with the expectations of each electorate.

A nub of this study is the question of how the electorate evaluates the performance of the people they voted for during elections. The issue of accountability is relevant in the sense that electorates vote politicians into power based on certain promises and expectations, and after four years in power, the politician will come back seeking re-election. So, how do the electorates evaluate the performance of the people they voted for? A female respondent from Bono-East and a male respondent from Eastern expressed that they monitor and evaluate the performance of the people they voted for *through the media, in particular, on television*. Another respondent from Bono-East said he *evaluates their performances by looking at whether they have fulfilled their campaign promises and implemented policies that aligned with his beliefs*. In contrast, the respondent from Western gave a perfunctory response demonstrating his apathy to issues of accountability. He said politicians *mostly do not fulfil their promises to the satisfaction of citizens and always seek for their personal gains and interests*, thus it is forlorn to waste time tracking whether they have fulfilled their promises or not. The rest of the respondents appeared to be not interested in matters of accountability. This shows that some people do not trust or have little faith in the institutions of the state in the fight against flawed policies, embezzlement of state resources, and the right to information.

Thus, if the issue of accountability matters to the electorate, do they change their voting pattern depending on the upside or downside performance of the political actors they voted for in future elections? Despite the concerns raised by the respondents when the second question was asked about what could influence their voting patterns, all bar one, said *no* to the fourth question. This goes to confirm the importance of loyalty to a political party in Ghana. The respondent from Western was the only one to say *yes*, his voting pattern has changed over time. He said he changed his voting pattern

due to how they (the politicians and their promises) fail and disappoint Ghanaians, development projects, and the stability of the nation through their campaign promises. Employment is made secretly and even graduates are asked to pay huge sums of money before being employed in the government sector.

This is a regular occurrence in Ghanaian society and the author could attest to that. The repercussion of what the respondent said is that it leads to the employment of mediocre personnel, stratifies society into the haves and have-nots, and contributes to higher crime rates and other vices for those who could not come up with huge sums of money to bribe their way into offices. Furthermore, if most of the participants do not change their voting patterns regardless of the upside or downside performance of the political actors they vote for, there could be other underlying pretexts aside from the issue of loyalty to a political party. Hence, it could be surmised that other partisan or societal ruse such as, inter alia, religious affiliation, ethnic affiliation, social status within the society, gender, age, and vocation of the political actors influence the electorate to maintain their voting patterns. In Ghana, the NPP has always selected their presidential candidates from the same line of ethnicity, the Akan ethnic group, since 1992. It only changed in 2024, when Bawumia from the northern tribe of Dagomba was selected. Contrarily, the NDC appeared to have

cut through the ethnic barrier to present presidential candidates from different regions of the country, predominantly among the Gonja, Ewe, and Fante ethnic groups. The NPP lost emphatically in the 2024 presidential elections when they changed the ethnicity of their presidential candidate, among other reasons

The last question asked the respondents how important they think manifestos are for elections. Nine of the respondents said *they are extremely vital since they lay the foundation of their policies and give us reasons to vote*. The respondent from Western added that a manifesto is *a form of framework that outlines the roadmap for governance* and helps the citizens *to know the right leader to rule the country* (a female respondent from Bono-East). Conversely, the other two remaining respondents said they do not believe in manifestos. One female respondent from Ashanti, for instance, said: *to me it is not important at all because they do not do what they say in there*. This was supported by a male respondent from Ashanti who said: *I really do not believe in a manifesto*. Thus, whilst manifestos may be regarded as important documents for elections, some electorates still do not believe in them because the political actors are free to act as they will after elections and there is no proper way of bringing them to account for their stewardship. This could partly account for voter apathy as was claimed by the NPP in the 2024 elections and voting along ethnic lines.

Conclusion

The paper reviewed the manifestos of the two leading parties in Ghana to identify the promise they made to the people of Ghana between 2008 and 2024. Using the convenience sampling method, a questionnaire was issued to test the effectiveness of manifestos on the electorates and how that influenced their voting pattern. Manifestos are policy documents that are supposed to guide the electorates to make rational choices during elections. As such several factors come into play before such choices are made. Some of the influencing factors on election choices include the pervasiveness of poverty, the candidate's coterminous identity with the constituency or ethnic group, party affiliation, job promises, the candidate's physical appearance, and rhetorics used in manifestos, and development promises, inter alia. Although manifestos are relevant in politics, they have been rendered as documents just for winning elections in Ghana. After elections, politicians do as they please and more often than not escape without prosecutions due to lapses in the country's juridical system. Thus, citizens are increasingly losing trust in their political leaders, state institutions, and the political system itself.

The manifestos of the NDC and NPP bear semblance, except in their modus operandi where there is a slight variation. They all promise, inter alia, to build schools, healthcare facilities, and infrastructure, expand the economy, and fight poverty to improve the standard of living of the people. Yet, when they are voted to power, instead of completing projects already in motion, they start building similar ones from scratch only to abandon them again when they lose elections. This is contrary to common sense. Thus, the paper suggested getting all political parties to support the adoption of a national development outlook as a way of dealing with the multitude of uncompleted projects in the country, which are depriving the people of an improved standard of living.

There is a nexus between manifestos and voter behaviour. As was evident from the administered questionnaire, the respondents go to the polls to vote during elections because they want to select good leaders who would develop their regions through the promises and policies, they put out there during political campaigns. This thus could be extended to reflect the general expectations of most electorates in the country at large. From their responses, it has been revealed that policies and manifestos, as well as promises made during campaigns, coax the electorate to participate in national elections with high expectations. Not only that, the demeanour of politicians in terms of their oratory skills, use of rhetorical vibes, and charisma influences how people vote during elections. Words are viewed as the substance of politics, and through rhetorics, they shape how voters think consciously or unconsciously over time. Thus,

manifestos employ paradigmatic and syntagmatic perspectives to present choices to electorates, and they also attempt to clarify obscure political commitments of rival political parties or candidates, which is done in most cases politically.

However, the lack of trust in the Ghanaian political settings was demonstrated when the issue of accountability came to the fore. While some of the respondents endeavoured to track the performance of the people they voted for via some media outlets and through a personal assessment of whether a campaign promise was fulfilled or not, most of the respondents expressed their disinterest in following up on the policies and promises of the politicians and their manifestos. This is because politicians ordinarily do not fulfil promises they make to the electorate. Despite that, party loyalty remains an important factor during elections in Ghana as electorates want to be associated with the ethics of voting by being identified as members or followers of a particular party or candidate and they may cling to the party without changing their voting patterns even if its policies are not favourable. Thus, while the majority of the respondents regarded manifestos as vital to politics and making election choices, others remained perfunctory about the effectiveness of manifestos since politicians do not fulfil their pledges when given the mandate.

The paper highlighted the importance of manifestos in Ghana in recent elections. Whilst they help voters to understand the clear-cut policies of political parties and candidates, they also pique distrust among voters due to the absence of effective checks and balances mechanisms in the political space to track and hold to account the political actors. It is rare to see leaders being held accountable in Ghana where policies continue to fail because politicians formulate policies without any research or scientific backing. Additionally, political parties do not pay heed to broader participation, which tends to deepen policy formulation and bring out prime issues that are central to the needs of the people. More often than not, policies are formulated only by the winning party and concerns of opposition parties, even if they sound and appear better than those of the incumbent party, are treated as mere propaganda. Thus, the non-participatory approach makes policies ineffective in Africa. Hence, the role of voters has been reduced to only taking part in the electioneering process, but not in the actual governance of the country.

The findings of this study, although limited in scope, contribute greatly to understanding the dynamics of politics, voting behaviour, and the role of manifestos in shaping policies in Ghana. Although the respondents agreed with the importance of manifestos in making voting decisions, the majority of them appear never to have changed their voting patterns whether the candidates they voted for previously performed or underperformed in office. This opens the door for considering other political determinants, other than manifestos and policies of political actors, that could influence the voting pattern of the electorate. Hence, future research could expand on the criteria used in this study to include religion, ethnicity, social status, and vocation of political actors to test if they could influence the voting pattern of voters in Ghana. Furthermore, the results could be improved by increasing the number of participants and regions in future research.

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36 | Usman Abass

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