

Continuity and Recovery: Role-Conditioned Mandate Argumentation in Ghana's 2016 Presidential Campaign

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Abstract

This article compares how incumbent John Dramani Mahama and challenger Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo organized competing mandate arguments in Ghana's 2016 presidential campaign. It analyzes a balanced corpus of eight source-verified texts across governing addresses, manifestos, campaign launches, and reported rallies. Combining Functional Theory with discourse-historical and legitimation analysis, the study identifies two role-conditioned trajectories. Mahama converts achievements, difficult decisions, and bounded responsibility into a warrant for continuity; Akufo-Addo converts crisis, culpability, citizen injury, and policy readiness into a warrant for recovery through alternation. Both candidates compete over lived experience and inclusive agency, rather than dividing neatly into record-based reason and emotion-based promise. I call this relational pattern role-conditioned mandate argumentation. Political position structures evidentiary and defensive burdens without determining linguistic choice. The analysis explains how continuity and change were made reasonable; it does not infer electoral effects from Akufo-Addo's victory.

Keywords: campaign discourse; Ghana; incumbency; legitimation; political argumentation; presidential challengers

1. Introduction

Incumbents and challengers do not enter an election with equivalent discursive burdens. An incumbent can point to experience and completed action, but must also answer for adverse conditions. A challenger can attribute those conditions to the government, but must show that replacement is safer and more capable than continuity. Campaign language addresses these asymmetries by converting descriptions of the present into reasons for an institutional action: renew this government or authorize another one. The central analytical problem is therefore not which candidate uses ethos, pathos, or logos. All candidates do. It is how political position conditions the warrants that connect evidence, identity, responsibility, and futurity to a vote request (Benoit 2007; Fairclough and Fairclough 2012).

Ghana's 2016 presidential election provides a strong paired case. John Dramani Mahama of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) sought another term as president; Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) challenged him after losing the 2008 and 2012 contests. Public debate concerned electricity shortages, employment, debt, corruption, education, public services, and visible infrastructure. Mahama could narrate roads, schools, hospitals, energy capacity, and administrative experience as a record of transformation. Akufo-Addo could redescribe the same period through hardship,

failed leadership, and the need for a policy alternative. He won in the first round, but that result cannot demonstrate that any particular formulation caused vote choice.

Political-science accounts support that caution. They explain the alternation through economic dissatisfaction, opposition organization, institutional learning after the 2012 election petition, internal NDC difficulties, and the declining protective power of incumbency (Ayee 2017; Cheeseman, Lynch and Willis 2017; Gyampo, Graham and Yobo 2017; Bob-Milliar and Paller 2018). Language formed part of this electoral ecology, alongside partisan identification, material conditions, media circulation, campaign organization, and institutional trust. A discourse study can reconstruct the offers made available to citizens; without reception evidence, it cannot rank their psychological effectiveness.

Existing linguistic work illuminates each candidate but leaves the relational problem underdeveloped. Studies of Mahama identify metaphor, pronouns, evidentiality, and positive self-presentation (Gameli and Angmorteh 2016; Ngula 2021; Addae et al. 2023). Addy and Ofori (2020) show how pronouns and repetition construct identity in an Akufo-Addo campaign speech. These analyses establish relevant resources, yet a list of devices does not explain how the incumbent's claim to continuity and the challenger's claim to alternation answer one another. Nor does a separate ethos-pathos-logos inventory reveal the practical conclusion toward which a passage works.

This article develops role-conditioned mandate argumentation as a comparative concept. It names the patterned conversion of an office-seeking position into a practical case for electoral action. Mahama's developmental incumbency moves from achievement inscription and executive authorization through temporal extension and defensive contextualization to a mandate invitation. Akufo-Addo's redemptive challenger rhetoric moves from crisis and culpability through citizen injury and ethical-programmatic authorization to collective futurity. The two trajectories are not deterministic scripts. They are recurrent solutions to different burdens of proof, and each contains overlaps, departures, and genre-dependent compression.

Three questions guide the comparison. First, how do the candidates construct the national present as evidence for continuity or change? Second, how do they authorize themselves while managing the liabilities of incumbency or challengership? Third, how do temporal and participant choices convert those representations into contrasting mandate invitations? The answers show that office-seeking position organizes relations among rhetorical moves more clearly than it separates devices into exclusive candidate repertoires.

2. Electoral context and the comparative gap

Ghana's Fourth Republic is a competitive two-party system in which the NDC and NPP have repeatedly alternated in government. By 2016, alternation was institutionally thinkable and organizationally prepared. The NPP's unsuccessful Supreme Court challenge to the 2012 result had consequences for electoral reform, party vigilance, and the opposition's 2016 organization (Bob-Milliar and Paller 2018). Akufo-Addo was consequently neither a new outsider nor an officeholder. His long public career offered experience that could be recoded as service, while repeated candidacy remained a potential vulnerability. Mahama's position also crossed institutional roles. The February State of the Nation Address was a constitutionally mandated governing genre, but it occurred in an election year, defended policy choices, represented a first-term record, and projected future action. Later NDC campaign and manifesto events condensed that governmental account into partisan advocacy. Comparing the genres does not make them

equivalent. It makes visible a recontextualization process in which presidential accounting becomes evidence for reelection.

Issue-oriented communication supplied a shared field of contest. Both manifestos foregrounded employment, education, infrastructure, accountable government, and economic management, although they narrated causes and means differently. Akeliwira and Owusu-Mensah (2022) argue that manifesto promises can operate as programmatic signals in Ghana, while Dankwa and Kolås (2026) identify a longer movement toward issue-based party competition across the 2016–2024 cycle. Policy specificity therefore belongs to both trajectories. The relevant contrast is not policy versus no policy, but the argumentative location of policy: delivered or ongoing means for the incumbent, proposed corrective means for the challenger.

The source manuscript captured a useful opposition between developmental incumbency and redemptive challenger rhetoric, but it treated the pair too symmetrically at one moment and too categorically at another. A broad coding grid assigned record-based logos and stability-oriented pathos to Mahama, while assigning policy promise, frustration, and hope to Akufo-Addo. Such labels describe themes but understate multifunctionality. A named project can supply evidence, moral identification, and executive ethos at once; a promise can rationalize a program, embody care, and authorize a prospective government (Charteris-Black 2018).

The original claim that Akufo-Addo's message was rhetorically superior because he won also exceeded the evidence. Simplicity, urgency, and policy memorability may be plausible hypotheses, but the textual corpus contains no audience responses and no counterfactual test. This revision instead asks a narrower question appropriate to the *Journal of Language and Politics*: how did each discourse make one institutional choice appear reasonable, and what does the relation reveal about language, political position, and democratic judgment?

3. Analytical framework: function, legitimation, and practical argument

Functional Theory distinguishes acclaims, attacks, and defenses in political campaign messages (Benoit 2007). An acclaim presents a candidate, record, or proposal positively; an attack represents an opponent or record negatively; a defense answers criticism. The categories identify a passage's immediate electoral direction, but they do not explain how actors are named, qualities assigned, causes narrowed, or futures populated. They also encourage misleading counts when a small corpus combines complete texts and reported extracts.

The discourse-historical approach (DHA) supplies that linguistic and contextual layer through nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification or mitigation (Reisigl and Wodak 2016). Nomination asks who enters the account; predication tracks qualities and actions assigned to actors; argumentation identifies the warrants joining premises to conclusions; perspectivization locates a knowledge claim; and intensification or mitigation calibrates its force. These strategies connect textual choices to a historically situated conflict without reducing those choices to context.

Legitimation analysis clarifies why a candidate, policy, or institutional action should be accepted. Authorization invokes office, expertise, experience, or exemplary persons; moral evaluation presents an action as consistent with valued conduct; rationalization links it to purposes and anticipated effects; narrative can reward or caution (van Leeuwen 2007). Candidate self-presentation is relational rather than self-contained. Claims to service, truth, decisiveness, or inclusion acquire meaning against a represented

opponent and public problem (Rossini, Stromer-Galley and Korsunskia 2021; Igwebuike and Chimuanya 2024).

Practical argumentation nests these perspectives. A political actor represents a present circumstance, selects goals and values, and proposes action as the means of moving toward a preferred future (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012). For an incumbent, prior action is both evidence and exposure: enough must be complete to authorize the agent, while enough must remain incomplete to justify another mandate. For a challenger, negative diagnosis must identify a politically alterable cause, while positive authorization must make replacement appear credible rather than merely disruptive.

Role-conditioned mandate argumentation treats those burdens as analytical expectations, not behavioral laws. The unit of analysis is a rhetorical move: a clause, sentence, or short sequence that performs a coherent act such as materializing achievement, assigning blame, contextualizing liability, enumerating remedies, or inviting collective action. A move may perform more than one Functional Theory category. Comparison concerns how moves are sequenced and warranted across candidate corpora, including negative cases that complicate a clean incumbent-challenger opposition.

4. Data and method

The study uses a balanced purposive corpus of eight publicly traceable election-year texts, four per candidate (Table 1). Each side is represented by two complete or candidate-signed texts and two contemporaneous reports containing direct quotations. Mahama's corpus includes the State of the Nation Address, the NDC campaign launch, his manifesto foreword, and the NDC manifesto launch. Akufo-Addo's corpus includes the full counter-address titled "The Real State of the Nation," his manifesto vision, reported remarks at Asikuma, and the NPP final rally.

Table 1. Source-verified comparative corpus

Code	Date and text	Genre / textual status	Primary analytical role
M1	25 Feb. — Mahama, State of the Nation Address	Complete presidential address; archived PDF	Achievement evidence, executive judgment, liability repair, projected action
M2	14 Aug. — NDC campaign launch, Cape Coast	Graphic Online report; direct quotations and embedded audio	Compressed adversity, repair, and remaining work
M3	Sept. — Mahama-signed NDC manifesto foreword	Complete first-person foreword; archived reproduction	Temporal bridge from delivery to renewed mandate
M4	17 Sept. — NDC manifesto launch, Sunyani	Citi FM report; multiple direct quotations	Public assessment and explicit continuity invitation
A1	29 Feb. — Akufo-Addo, "Real State of the Nation"	Complete counter-address transcript	Crisis, culpability, policy enumeration, mobilization

Code	Date and text	Genre / textual status	Primary analytical role
A2	9 Oct. — Akufo-Addo-signed NPP manifesto vision	Complete first-person vision, manifesto pp. v–vii	Citizen injury, ethical authorization, inclusive future
A3	24 Oct. — Asikuma campaign remarks	Citi FM report; direct quotations only	Regional compression of crisis and change
A4	4 Dec. — NPP final rally, Accra (reported 5 Dec.)	Graphic Online report; direct quotations only	Closing claims of recovery and collective construction

Sources: Mahama (2016); Graphic Online (2016a); NDC (2016); Citi FM (2016); Akufo-Addo (2016); NPP (2016); Nyabor (2016); Graphic Online (2016b).

Inclusion required a 2016 campaign-year date, direct candidate attribution, retrievable provenance, and substantive treatment of national condition, leadership, policy, or mandate. Post-election concession and victory speeches were excluded because they enact democratic closure rather than campaign choice. Party documents enter only where a candidate-signed foreword or vision makes individual attribution possible. The design therefore compares candidate rhetoric without treating an entire party manifesto as speech by one person.

Source status constrains inference. M1, M3, A1, and A2 are analyzed as complete texts. M2, M4, A3, and A4 are not reconstructed as transcripts: only direct quotations attributed to the candidate are coded, while journalistic prose establishes date, location, and event. The paired design balances this limitation across candidates. It can demonstrate recurrence and cross-genre compression, but it cannot support frequency comparisons between full texts and selected quotations.

Coding proceeded in three passes. The first reconstructed each candidate's practical argument by identifying representations of the present, responsible agents, policy means, leadership qualities, temporal markers, and requested public action. The second coded those passages for acclaim, attack, or defense and for DHA and legitimation strategies. The third built a cross-case matrix around five comparative problems: evidence, authorization, liability, temporality, and citizen agency. A negative-case search retained attacks by the incumbent, defensive work by the challenger, promises by Mahama, and retrospective claims by Akufo-Addo.

The method is qualitative and interpretive. Economic statistics, project totals, and policy promises are analyzed as candidate-presented evidence, not independently certified facts. Contextual research is used to situate the plausibility and political availability of claims, not to decide the success of every program. The analysis likewise distinguishes discursive availability from audience uptake. It identifies how a mandate could be inferred from a text, not whether citizens actually made that inference.

5. Analysis

5.1 Competing presents: achievement inscription and crisis construction

Mahama's State of the Nation Address opens its performance account with a metadiscursive problem: budgets, figures, and projects can make public policy remote from the people it is meant to serve. The address promises a "direct line between policy and people" [M1] and then alternates statistics with named beneficiaries, places, and short life histories. Enrollment, school construction, scholarships, and health

facilities are followed by accounts of who can now study or receive care. Achievement inscription is therefore more than an infrastructure list. Material output becomes experiential evidence through nomination and exemplification.

The NDC manifesto foreword condenses this demonstration into domains of people, economy, infrastructure, and accountable governance [M3]. The campaign and manifesto launches similarly transform adversity and delivery into a publicly assessable record [M2; M4]. Across genres, the candidate's perspective is that the national present contains visible proof of transformation. The move is an acclaim, but it also establishes an evidentiary standard: government should be judged by links between action and social consequence.

Akufo-Addo disputes both the content and the authority of that account. His counter-address appropriates the institutional form of the presidential speech while announcing a "nation in crisis" [A1]. The "tale of two Ghanas" [A1] contrasts an official perspective associated with the president and a socially insulated circle with the hardship of a wider public. This is perspectivization as attack. Disagreement over indicators becomes a dispute about who can see the real country and whose experience qualifies as national knowledge.

Citizen injury gives the counter-description scale and moral consequence. The manifesto vision nominates farmers, mothers, school leavers, unemployed graduates, workers, and kayayei, attaching hardship to school fees, health care, transport, electricity, and employment [A2]. Asikuma remarks compress the same diagnosis into health, education, and social-security failures [A3]. The challenger appears as a witness who recognizes effort and injury before he appears as a remedy. The present is thus made legible from household and bodily experience upward.

The comparison corrects a false opposition in the source manuscript. Mahama does not offer infrastructure while Akufo-Addo alone offers lived experience. Both candidates humanize their accounts. Mahama moves from institution and statistic to beneficiary; Akufo-Addo moves from harmed citizen to institutional culpability and remedy. Their difference lies in the direction of inference. For the incumbent, embodied consequence validates action already taken. For the challenger, embodied injury invalidates the official record and establishes the need for corrective action.

5.2 Authorizing agents: demonstrated judgment and credible substitution

Mahama's record becomes electorally useful only if it can be attributed to an authorized agent. The State of the Nation Address represents fiscal consolidation, subsidy changes, debt management, and engagement with the International Monetary Fund as difficult but responsible choices [M1]. The campaign launch repeats a compressed sequence of adversity, bold decision, stabilization, and work remaining [M2]. Office supplies institutional authority, yet the stronger claim is demonstrated judgment: the candidate asks to be evaluated as someone who has already governed under constraint.

Pronoun movement supports this authorization. Singular "I" concentrates promises, decision, and responsibility; "we" distributes implementation among government, institutions, workers, Parliament, and citizens. Addae et al. (2023) identify pronouns as ideological resources in Mahama's speeches. In this corpus, their argumentative work is more specific. The incumbent is both accountable executive and coordinator of collective achievement, allowing credit to expand without entirely dissolving personal responsibility.

Akufo-Addo cannot point to a presidential record, so authorization proceeds through service, truthfulness, scope of representation, and programmatic readiness. His manifesto vision converts a long political career and previous defeats into durable public service and promises to be a "President for all Ghanaians" [A2].

The counter-address presents accurate recognition of hardship as an ethical qualification [A1]. In this relational ethos, the challenger's claimed proximity and candor acquire force against an incumbent represented as detached.

Policy enumeration supplies administrative rather than purely moral authorization. Skills training, fiscal rules, transparency measures, a special prosecutor, tax reform, employment incentives, free secondary education, agriculture, and targeted development appear as components of an alternative agenda [A1; A2]. The list does not establish feasibility; costs and trade-offs remain underdeveloped. It nevertheless performs rationalization by linking diagnosed problems to proposed means and simulating a prepared governing program.

The role contrast is therefore retrospective demonstration versus prospective substitution, not experience versus inexperience or evidence versus promise. Mahama projects future initiatives and Akufo-Addo draws on past public service. Both use biography, policy, and inclusion. Position changes which relation carries the burden: the incumbent must show that exercised authority warrants extension; the challenger must show that an unexercised presidential mandate is supported by ethical and programmatic proxies for governing capacity. Nsiah (2020) documents the wider campaign background against which these competing claims became politically available.

5.3 National time: extension and recoverable rupture

Developmental incumbency contains a temporal tension. If little is complete, the record cannot authorize; if transformation is complete, another term appears unnecessary. Mahama manages the tension through temporal extension. The plant metaphor in the State of the Nation Address describes policies as seeds, some already becoming "trees bearing fruits" and others approaching maturity [M1]. Completed outputs validate competence, ongoing processes normalize incompleteness, and projected work gives continuity an object.

The manifesto foreword braids perfective, progressive, and future orientations: actions have begun, policies will be sustained and accelerated, and additional facilities and jobs remain to be provided [M3]. Ngula (2021) identifies growth, journey, and building metaphors across Mahama's speech corpus. Within this campaign-year sequence, growth does specific argumentative work. Uneven completion appears as a normal stage of development rather than as abandonment, a politically consequential counter-description in a setting where unfinished projects have documented institutional causes (Williams 2017).

Akufo-Addo organizes time around threshold and recovery. Crisis predication fixes the present as deteriorated and the governing path as exhausted [A1]. The manifesto vision then projects a country in which work, enterprise, merit, education, and accountable institutions can yield opportunity [A2]. Asikuma remarks spatialize alternation as movement toward a better era [A3], while the final rally represents a functional Ghana as something that can be built or restored [A4]. Rupture is meaningful because recovery remains available.

This temporal architecture is not an opposition between a future-oriented challenger and a past-oriented incumbent. Both arguments contain all three temporal horizons. Mahama's past becomes evidence, his present remains unfinished, and his future completes a trajectory. Akufo-Addo's past supplies a history of governing failure and personal service, his present constitutes crisis, and his future supplies corrective means. The difference is where each places the discontinuity: the incumbent locates change inside an extended program; the challenger locates it between governments.

Continuity is therefore represented as cumulative change, not stasis, while alternation is represented as recoverable rupture, not uncertainty. Each candidate neutralizes the unfavorable implication of his

preferred action. Mahama must prevent renewal from meaning more of the same; Akufo-Addo must prevent replacement from meaning risk without a plan. Temporal choices perform that defensive work before an explicit rebuttal is even made.

5.4 Responsibility: defensive contextualization and culpability

The electricity crisis, commonly called dumsor, provides Mahama's clearest defensive episode. The State of the Nation Address acknowledges rationing, household and business costs, earlier regret, and presidential responsibility before listing additional generating capacity and institutional responses [M1]. The sequence moves from disruption to responsibility, mobilization, repair, and the admission that "much work still needs to be done" [M1]. The campaign launch similarly represents the worst as past while making sustainability a continuing task [M2].

Defensive contextualization does not deny the liability or accept it as a total judgment on incumbency. Responsibility is bounded: the president owns a duty to respond while technical, climatic, fuel-supply, fiscal, and institutional constraints make the problem governable rather than purely personal. Achievement is also qualified rather than declared final. The problem becomes evidence of crisis management and then a warrant for continuity. Functional Theory labels this defense; the comparative sequence shows how acknowledgment can be converted into authorization.

Akufo-Addo's trajectory depends on the opposite causal movement. Crisis alone does not identify an electoral remedy, so negative predicates attach hardship to Mahama, the NDC, and governing choices. The counter-address concentrates the relation in "bad leadership and poor policies" [A1]. The manifesto vision coordinates mismanagement, incompetence, and corruption before presenting citizen injury [A2]. Because policies and officeholders can be changed through an election, causal compression makes hardship politically actionable.

That clarity has an analytical cost. Commodity conditions, institutional constraints, longer-term structures, and shared responsibility recede when causality is narrowed to incumbency. The campaign's account is rhetorically useful precisely because it makes an agent removable; it is not thereby an independently verified explanation of the economy. The finding is that culpability was made electorally legible, while Mahama made liability administratively contextual. The article does not decide which causal model was true.

Negative cases qualify a simple functional split. Mahama attacks opponents at campaign events, and Akufo-Addo implicitly defends the feasibility of change and the meaning of his repeated candidacy. The asymmetry concerns sequence and burden, not exclusive access to attacks or defenses. The incumbent's positive record must absorb liabilities that threaten continuity; the challenger's negative diagnosis must be bridged to a credible substitute so that blame does not remain protest alone.

5.5 Mandate invitations and modeled citizen agency

Mahama's final move turns the represented record into a requested public judgment. At the manifesto launch, he invites citizens to assess gains since 2012 alongside commitments for the next term and anticipates that the comparison will favor the NDC [M4]. The manifesto foreword names a renewed mandate and pairs it with verbs of continuation, acceleration, and introduction [M3]. Citizens are positioned as auditors who should infer future competence from selected evidence of performance.

Akufo-Addo's mandate invitation changes participant structure. Crisis passages foreground injured citizens and an accountable government; later passages use future tense, imperatives, and inclusive pronouns to reposition the public as an agent of recovery. "Change is coming" [A1] is joined to invitations

to participate, while the manifesto vision attributes prosperity to both governmental action and citizens' enterprise [A2]. The final rally similarly presents national reconstruction as collective work [A4]. The two modeled voter roles are different but not mutually exclusive. Mahama's auditor is invited to compare record and plan; Akufo-Addo's co-agent is invited to reject a damaged present and help enact an alternative. Audit foregrounds evaluative competence, whereas collective recovery foregrounds transformative agency. Both roles remain strategically managed. Candidates select the evidence, name the goal, and provide the preferred inference even while representing citizens as sovereign decision makers. Inclusive "we" is mobile in both corpora. It can refer to candidate and party, government institutions, an event audience, or the nation. That semantic elasticity distributes credit, sacrifice, and responsibility while allowing organizational agency to expand into national agency. The move may democratize the mandate by acknowledging public participation, but it can also blur hierarchy and disagreement. Inclusion is a claim to representational scope, not evidence that all audiences accepted the identity offered. Table 2 synthesizes the relational pattern. The incumbent trajectory makes delivery, managed difficulty, and incomplete transformation grounds for extension. The challenger trajectory makes injury, culpability, policy readiness, and collective recovery grounds for replacement. The shared endpoint is not simply hope. It is a practical conclusion about who should receive authority and what citizens are invited to do with the evidence presented to them.

Table 2. Role-conditioned mandate argumentation

Comparative problem	Mahama: developmental incumbency	Akufo-Addo: redemptive challengership
Present as evidence	Outputs and beneficiaries make transformation visible	Crisis and citizen injury invalidate the official account
Agent authorization	Exercised judgment, experience, and coordinated delivery	Service, truth-telling, inclusion, and programmatic readiness
Liability	Acknowledgment plus constraint and repair bounds responsibility	Culpability narrows complex conditions to removable leadership and policy
National time	Achievement + incompletion → acceleration and extension	Deterioration + credible means → rupture and recovery
Modeled citizen role	Auditor who compares record and plan	Co-agent who authorizes and participates in change
Mandate conclusion	Renew authority to complete a demonstrated trajectory	Replace authority to begin a warranted corrective trajectory

6. Discussion

The comparison advances campaign discourse research by shifting attention from inventories to relations. Ethos, pathos, logos, attack, acclaim, metaphor, pronouns, and policy labels remain useful descriptions, but they become explanatory only when placed in an argument. A beneficiary story can acclaim delivery,

authorize an executive, and make a statistic affectively legible. A crisis label can attack an incumbent, authorize a challenger's perspective, and establish the circumstance premise for policy change. Multifunctionality is not analytical noise; it is how compact campaign language works.

Role-conditioned mandate argumentation also refines Functional Theory. The strategic difference between incumbent and challenger is not reducible to the expected predominance of acclaim-defense or attack-acclaim. What matters is how those functions are ordered and warranted. Mahama's defense becomes part of an acclaim when acknowledged difficulty is followed by repair and remaining work. Akufo-Addo's attack becomes part of an acclaim when culpability is followed by ethical authorization and policy means. Sequence explains how negative and positive discourse form one mandate argument. The analysis further shows that political evidence is relational. Projects do not carry an automatic pro-incumbent meaning, and hardship does not speak for itself. Mahama selects outputs, beneficiaries, and trajectories that make the record creditable. Akufo-Addo selects social injuries, causal agents, and remedies that redescribe that record as insufficient or misleading. Their disagreement is epistemic as well as evaluative: it concerns whose perspective defines the national present and which experiences count as evidence.

Temporality reveals another productive overlap. Continuity needs internal change: an incumbent must promise acceleration, repair, and additional action rather than simple repetition. Change needs continuity of national values and governability: a challenger must connect rupture to familiar goals, institutional means, and a recoverable future. Position conditions where the break is placed, but both candidates manage a relation between preservation and transformation.

The Ghanaian case is theoretically useful because competitive alternation and issue-oriented party discourse make both mandate trajectories institutionally plausible. The model can guide comparison elsewhere by asking: What present is constructed? Which agent is made responsible? What substitutes for a governing record? How is unfinished action temporalized? Which citizen role closes the argument? These questions travel more readily than the claim that one candidate type owns a fixed set of rhetorical devices.

The study has limits. The corpus is balanced by number and source status, not by word count or medium. Four items are journalistic reports shaped by selection and gatekeeping. English texts cannot capture multilingual rallies, radio interaction, gesture, visuals, or regional adaptation. The analysis cannot estimate frequency across the campaign or reconstruct reception. A larger archive should preserve recordings, transcribe code-switching, compare candidate interaction in debates and media, and use interviews or experiments to test when citizens accept the proposed warrants.

Most importantly, the election result is not a validity test for textual interpretation. Akufo-Addo's victory is consistent with many political-economic and organizational explanations, and Mahama's defeat does not make developmental incumbency incoherent. The analysis identifies competing arguments that were available for uptake. Establishing which citizens accepted them, through which media, and with what weight requires a different research design.

7. Conclusion

Ghana's 2016 campaign was not simply a contest between a record and a promise. It was a relational struggle over how national reality should be known, who could be trusted to act on it, where responsibility should be located, and what temporal path a vote should authorize. Mahama's discourse converted material outputs, executive judgment, bounded responsibility, and incomplete transformation into a case

for continuity. Akufo-Addo's discourse converted crisis, culpability, citizen injury, ethical-programmatic readiness, and inclusive futurity into a case for recovery through alternation.

Role-conditioned mandate argumentation captures the asymmetry without turning political position into linguistic destiny. Both candidates used lived experience, policy, moral evaluation, attack, acclaim, retrospective evidence, future projection, and inclusive agency. Their distinction lay in the relations among those resources. Exercised authority had to be defended and extended; prospective authority had to be justified through a credible substitute for presidential performance.

This narrower account is also the more publishable one. It does not infer persuasive superiority from victory or treat campaign claims as verified causes. It shows how two office-seeking positions generated contrasting but interdependent practical arguments, each open to democratic acceptance, rejection, and counter-description. That relation connects the Ghanaian case to comparative study of incumbency, challengership, and the language through which electoral mandates become thinkable.

Data availability

All eight primary texts are publicly accessible through the URLs listed in the references. For reported campaign events, the analysis is restricted to direct quotations attributed to the candidate; journalistic paraphrase is used only for event metadata and immediate context.

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