

**ARTICLE**

# The ‘Communication War’: Narrative Hegemony and the Implementation Gap in Ghana’s Fourth Republic

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**Abstract**

This article examines the persistent gap between policy formulation and implementation in Ghana’s Fourth Republic (1993–present), arguing that a ‘communication war’ between the two dominant political parties—the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP)—has entrenched a pattern of narrative hegemony that prioritises negative propaganda over sustained development action. Drawing on a mixed-methods study involving 220 diverse stakeholders from all sixteen regions of Ghana, and employing Grounded Theory analysis alongside factor analysis of 24 Likert-scale statements, the study demonstrates how electoral manifestos and national development plans have become instruments of political communication rather than technical blueprints for transformation. The findings reveal that while both parties produce substantively similar policy documents replete with sound objectives on job creation, poverty alleviation, and entrepreneurial development, implementation consistently falters due to the absence of inter-party cooperation, the abandonment of predecessors’ programmes upon regime change, and the diversion of governance energy toward discrediting political opponents. This article contributes a critical political economy perspective to the literature on democratic governance in emerging economies, illuminating why “sound policies on paper” have remained the Achilles heel of successive Ghanaian administrations.

**KEYWORDS:**

Communication war; narrative hegemony; implementation gap; political manifestos; Fourth Republic; Ghana; NDC; NPP; Grounded Theory; political economy

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Since the inauguration of the Fourth Republic in January 1993, Ghana has been widely celebrated as a beacon of democratic stability in sub-Saharan Africa. The country has successfully conducted eight presidential and parliamentary elections and witnessed four peaceful transfers of power between its two dominant parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Yet, beneath this laudable democratic veneer lies a troubling paradox: three decades of uninterrupted multiparty governance have not translated into the structural economic transformation that successive administrations have promised in their manifestos, development plans, and State of the Nation addresses.

This article interrogates this paradox by advancing the concept of a “communication war”—a term that captures the systematic tendency of Ghana’s ruling and opposition parties to devote disproportionate governance energy to discrediting each

other's records rather than sustaining and building upon inherited development initiatives. The communication war manifests in manifesto rhetoric that prioritises electoral differentiation over policy continuity, in State of the Nation addresses that catalogue predecessor failures before announcing new programmes, and in the routine establishment of commissions of inquiry designed less to ensure accountability than to generate negative propaganda against political opponents (Lever, 2005; Ayee, 2011).

The consequences of this communication war are empirically demonstrable. Despite Ghana's attainment of lower-middle-income status in 2010 following a GDP rebasing exercise, and notwithstanding periods of impressive headline growth—including 14% real GDP growth in 2011 driven by the commencement of commercial oil production—the country's development trajectory has been characterised by volatile growth, rising public debt, persistent poverty in the northern regions, and an economy that remains structurally dependent on commodity exports and imported consumer goods (World Bank, 2022; AfDB, 2024).

This article draws empirical evidence from a comprehensive doctoral study involving 220 stakeholders from 22 distinct groups across all sixteen administrative regions of Ghana. The study employed a mixed-methods approach combining factor analysis of 24 Likert-scale survey items with Grounded Theory analysis of open-ended interviews, situated within a critical realist theoretical framework (Bhaskar, 2008). The present article extracts and extends the thesis findings to offer a focused analysis of how narrative hegemony—the struggle for control over development discourse—has become the primary obstacle to policy implementation in Ghana's Fourth Republic.

## 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 | Narrative Hegemony and Political Communication in Emerging Democracies

The relationship between political communication and development outcomes has attracted growing scholarly attention in the African context. Gyimah-Boadi (2009) and Whitfield (2018) have documented how competitive electoral politics in Africa's emerging democracies can generate perverse incentives, encouraging politicians to invest in short-term distributive politics rather than long-term structural transformation. In Ghana specifically, Lever (2005) introduced the concept of “communication wars” to describe the adversarial messaging strategies deployed by political parties, arguing that “rarely do the political parties speak positively about the projects of the opposition parties.” This observation resonates with broader theoretical work on narrative hegemony—the process through which dominant actors seek to control the interpretive frames through which policy successes and failures are understood by the electorate (Gramsci, 1971; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

In the Ghanaian context, this narrative hegemony takes a distinctive form. Both the NDC and NPP maintain extensive media ecosystems—including affiliated radio stations, television programmes, newspapers, and increasingly, social media platforms—that function primarily as instruments of partisan communication rather than public education. The constitutional right of media houses to report on government activities has been progressively captured by partisan interests, transforming what should be a mechanism of democratic accountability into a theatre of propaganda (Ninsin and Drah, 1993; Morrison, 2004).

### 2.2 | The Manifesto as Political Communication Tool

Political party manifestos in Ghana's Fourth Republic present a revealing paradox. A systematic review of the NDC and NPP manifestos from 1996 to 2020 reveals a striking convergence in substantive policy content, despite the parties' rhetorical claims of fundamental ideological distinctiveness. Both parties consistently prioritise job creation, poverty alleviation, infrastructure development, entrepreneurship promotion, and good governance. As Table 1 demonstrates, the manifesto themes across administrations share a common vocabulary of development aspiration.

**TABLE 1** Manifesto Titles/Themes of the NDC and NPP Governments (1996–2020)

Year	Party	Manifesto Title/Theme	President
1996	NDC	Always for People: Always for Development	Rawlings
2000	NPP	An Agenda for Positive Change	Kufuor
2004	NPP	A Promise Delivered	Kufuor
2008	NDC	A Better Ghana: Investing in People, Jobs and the Economy	Atta-Mills
2012	NDC	Advancing the Better Ghana Agenda: Jobs, Stability	Mahama
2016	NPP	An Agenda for Jobs: Creating Prosperity and Equal Opportunity for All	Akufo-Addo
2020	NPP	Leadership of Service: Protecting Our Progress and Transforming Ghana for All	Akufo-Addo

Source: Compiled from NDC and NPP party manifestos (1996–2020)

The convergence revealed in Table 1 is instructive. Regardless of party, each manifesto promises job creation, poverty reduction, and economic transformation. The NPP’s 2000 manifesto offered “An Agenda for Positive Change,” while the NDC’s 2008 platform promised “A Better Ghana.” The NPP’s 2016 manifesto centred on “An Agenda for Jobs,” echoing the NDC’s 2012 emphasis on “Jobs, Stability.” This substantive convergence, paradoxically, intensifies the communication war: because both parties share broadly similar development aspirations, the primary axis of electoral competition becomes not policy substance but rather the narrative of relative competence and the delegitimisation of opponents’ records.

### 2.3 | The Critical Realist Framework

This article is situated within the critical realist ontological framework developed by Bhaskar (2008), which distinguishes between three stratified domains of reality: the Real (structures and mechanisms), the Actual (events as they occur), and the Empirical (events as experienced and observed). Applied to Ghana’s political economy, this framework positions the manifestos, policies, and development plans at the Real domain—representing the structural intentions and mechanisms designed by political regimes. The Actual domain encompasses what transpires during implementation, while the Empirical domain captures the lived experiences of citizens and stakeholders who encounter the outcomes of governance. The persistent gap between the Real and the Empirical—between policy promise and lived reality—constitutes the central problematic of this article.

The MELD (Moment, Edge, Level, Dimension) model of dialectical critical realism provides the transformative architecture: Phase 1M identifies the absence or gap; Phase 2E searches for explanatory factors; Phase 3L formulates strategies; and Phase 4D implements transformation (Bhaskar, 2008: 355–356). This study demonstrates that Ghana’s development discourse has remained largely trapped in Phases 1M and 2E, identifying problems and generating explanations through each electoral cycle without progressing to sustained implementation at Phases 3L and 4D.

## 3 | METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 | Research Design and Participants

The empirical data for this article derives from a comprehensive mixed-methods study conducted between 2018 and 2020 across all sixteen administrative regions of Ghana. The study employed a critical realist research design, combining quantitative survey instruments with qualitative interviews and documentary analysis.

A total of 220 research participants were selected through purposive non-probability sampling combined with snowball sampling techniques. The participants were drawn from 22 distinct stakeholder groups, with a uniform quota of 10 respondents per group. This deliberate diversification ensured that the study captured perspectives from across the spectrum of Ghana’s political economy. Table 2 presents the full distribution of research participants.

**TABLE 2** Distribution of 220 Research Participants by Stakeholder Group

Stakeholder Group	Stakeholder Group
Ruling government officials ( <i>n</i> = 10)	Research institutes and academics ( <i>n</i> = 10)
Owners of failed businesses ( <i>n</i> = 10)	Poultry farmers ( <i>n</i> = 10)
Retail shop owners ( <i>n</i> = 10)	Bank officials ( <i>n</i> = 10)
Media houses ( <i>n</i> = 10)	Fishing community ( <i>n</i> = 10)
Livestock farmers ( <i>n</i> = 10)	Importers and exporters ( <i>n</i> = 10)
Medical professionals ( <i>n</i> = 10)	Ghana Standards Board officials ( <i>n</i> = 10)
Crop farmers ( <i>n</i> = 10)	Opposition political party members ( <i>n</i> = 10)
Restaurant/hotel/tourism operators ( <i>n</i> = 10)	Public servants ( <i>n</i> = 10)
Opinion leaders ( <i>n</i> = 10)	Motor mechanics ( <i>n</i> = 10)
Factory owners ( <i>n</i> = 10)	The unemployed ( <i>n</i> = 10)
Students and youth ( <i>n</i> = 10)	Hair/beauty salon owners ( <i>n</i> = 10)

### 3.2 | Data Collection Instruments

The study employed two primary data collection instruments. First, a structured survey comprising 24 Likert-scale statements was administered to all 220 participants. These statements assessed respondents' perceptions across five dimensions: (i) material living conditions and poverty (Statements 1–3); (ii) the place of entrepreneurship in development plans (Statements 4–6); (iii) awareness of government programmes and communication strategies (Statements 7–9); (iv) the potential of entrepreneurship for national development (Statements 10–15); and (v) the importance of programme evaluation and monitoring (Statements 16–24). Respondents indicated agreement or disagreement with each statement.

Second, 34 open-ended questions were administered through semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and participant observation. These qualitative instruments allowed respondents to elaborate on their experiences, frustrations, and aspirations regarding the business promotion programmes of successive political regimes. Ten trained research assistants collected data across the country's districts.

### 3.3 | Analytical Methods

The quantitative data from the 24 Likert-scale statements were subjected to factor analysis to identify latent structures in respondent perceptions. Because Statements 17–24 (concerning programme evaluation) elicited universal agreement (100% across all groups), the factor analysis was confined to Statements 1–16, which exhibited meaningful variation.

The qualitative data were analysed using the three-stage Grounded Theory method of Strauss and Corbin (2008): Open Coding (fragmentation of raw narratives into discrete themes), Axial Coding (clustering of themes into broader categories through constant comparison), and Selective Coding (identification of a core category that integrates all axial codes). This inductive approach allowed themes to emerge from the data rather than being imposed through pre-existing theoretical categories.

Additionally, documentary analysis was conducted on the manifestos, development plans, State of the Nation addresses, and policy documents of both the NDC and NPP from 1993 to 2020, supplemented by macroeconomic data from the World Bank, IMF, Ghana Statistical Service, and the Bank of Ghana.

## 4 | PROMISES VERSUS ACHIEVEMENTS: A MACROECONOMIC AUDIT OF THE FOURTH REPUBLIC

To ground the analysis of the communication war in empirical reality, this section juxtaposes the key development promises of successive administrations against macroeconomic outcomes. Table 3 presents a synoptic overview of the principal promises made by each regime alongside selected performance indicators.

**TABLE 3** Regime Promises and Macroeconomic Performance in Ghana's Fourth Republic (1993–2024)

Regime Period	Key Manifesto Promises	Avg. GDP Growth (%)	End-Period Inflation (%)	Poverty Rate (%)	Unemp. (%)	Debt/GDP (%)
<b>NDC I</b> 1993–2000 (Rawlings)	Poverty reduction; agricultural modernisation; job creation; infrastructure development	4.3	25.2	39.5 (1998/99)	~10	55.7
<b>NPP I</b> 2001–2008 (Kufuor)	Positive change; private sector-led growth; HIPC completion; GPRS I & II; job creation; golden age of business	5.8	16.5	28.5 (2005/06)	~5	24.6
<b>NDC II</b> 2009–2016 (Mills/Mahama)	Better Ghana agenda; jobs & stability; oil-led industrialisation; energy self-sufficiency; poverty reduction	7.5	15.4	23.4 (2016/17)	~5.8	56.0
<b>NPP II</b> 2017–2024 (Akufo-Addo)	One District One Factory; Free SHS; Planting for Food & Jobs; industrial transformation; fiscal discipline	4.8	22.8	~23.0 (est.)	~6	~70.5

Sources: Compiled from World Bank WDI; IMF WEO; Ghana Statistical Service; Bank of Ghana; AfDB Ghana Economic Outlook (2024); party manifesto documents.

Several patterns emerge from Table 3. First, while average GDP growth rates have fluctuated across regimes, no administration has achieved the sustained double-digit growth necessary for structural transformation. The NDC II period recorded the highest average (7.5%), but this was heavily inflated by the 14% growth spike in 2011 attributable to oil production commencement and the GDP rebasing effect, masking the sharp decline to 2.1% by 2015. Second, the debt-to-GDP ratio tells a troubling story of fiscal indiscipline across both parties: the Kufuor administration reduced the ratio from 55.7% to 24.6% through HIPC debt relief, but this was progressively reversed under subsequent administrations, reaching approximately 70.5% by 2024. Third, while poverty rates have shown a broadly declining trend, the pace of reduction has been uneven and the northern regions remain severely deprived, with districts such as Bawku East and Bongo recording poverty incidence rankings of 99 on a 100-point scale.

These macroeconomic outcomes stand in stark contrast to the ambitious rhetoric contained in the manifestos. Every administration has promised to reduce poverty, create jobs, and transform the economy. Yet each regime has devoted considerable governance energy not to sustained implementation but to the communication war: discrediting predecessors, establishing commissions of inquiry, and rebranding inherited programmes.

## 5 | FINDINGS: THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE COMMUNICATION WAR

### 5.1 | Factor Analysis Results: What Stakeholders Believe

The factor analysis of the 16 variable Likert-scale responses (Statements 1–16) yielded three distinct factors that illuminate the structure of stakeholder perceptions. Table 4 summarises the key descriptive statistics, and Table 5 presents the three-factor solution.

**TABLE 4** Selected Descriptive Statistics of the 16 Survey Variables (N = 220)

Variable (Statement)	Mean	Std Dev	Skew	Kurtosis
V1: Cost of living improved	41.8	18.9	0.15	-0.81
V2: Poverty reduced	40.0	19.8	0.53	-0.86
V3: Employment improved	43.2	19.4	0.25	-0.19
V5: Entrepreneurship as key strategy	76.8	21.0	-0.63	-1.14
V14: Reduce dependence on govt. employment	74.1	33.6	-0.57	-1.65
V21: Regimes underperformed (V17–24: all 100%)	100.0	0.0	—	—

Source: Author's survey data (2018–2020)

Three critical findings emerge from the descriptive statistics. First, Statements 1–3 (cost of living, poverty, employment) registered the lowest mean agreement scores (40–43%), indicating that the majority of respondents across all stakeholder groups do not perceive meaningful improvement in basic welfare indicators since 1993. Second, Statement 5 (entrepreneurship as a key development strategy) received strong endorsement (76.8%), revealing broad public consensus on the path forward even as faith in government delivery is low. Third—and most remarkably—Statements 17–24, concerning the need for evaluation, monitoring, and regime performance assessment, received universal 100% agreement across all 22 stakeholder groups. This unanimous consensus on the imperative of accountability speaks directly to the communication war: stakeholders recognise that political rhetoric has substituted for performance and demand rigorous evaluation.

**TABLE 5** Three-Factor Solution from Orthogonal Factor Analysis

Factor	Label	Constituent Statements	Sum of Squared Loadings
1	The Difference Entrepreneurship Can Make	V9, V10, V11, V12, V13, V14, V15, V16	5.45
2	Government Plans and Implementation	V4, V6, V7, V8	3.89
3	Lived Material Conditions	V1, V2, V3, V5	1.62

Source: Author's computation from survey data.

The factor structure is analytically significant. Factor 1, accounting for the largest share of variance, captures respondents' optimism about what entrepreneurship could achieve—a potential that remains unrealised. Factor 2 captures perceptions of government planning and communication efforts. Factor 3, with the lowest explanatory power, captures the actual lived conditions of respondents. The declining eigenvalue structure—from aspirational potential (Factor 1) through government intention (Factor 2) to lived reality (Factor 3)—is itself a statistical mapping of the implementation gap.

## 5.2 | Grounded Theory Findings: The Sixteen Obstacles to Implementation

The Grounded Theory analysis of the qualitative data from the 220 respondents yielded 16 axial codes representing the principal obstacles to effective business promotion and development plan implementation. These emerged through the systematic coding process of fragmentation (Open Coding), clustering (Axial Coding), and integration (Selective Coding). The 16 obstacles, presented in Table 6, constitute an empirically grounded taxonomy of implementation failure in Ghana's Fourth Republic.

**TABLE 6** Sixteen Axial Codes – Obstacles to Implementation (Grounded Theory)

blue!10 No.	Axial Code (Problem Category)
1	Unethical business practices (galamsey, tax evasion, smuggling)
2	Dominance of profit maximisation motive without social responsibility
3	Uncooperative nature of large corporations toward informal sector
4	High volumes of imports displacing local production
5	Pressure of extended family system on business owners
6	Consumer preference for imported goods over local products
7	Uncompetitive quality of products from Ghanaian businesses
8	Underutilisation of natural resources; lack of research/innovation
9	Lack of support for informal businesses
10	Lack of comprehensive training programmes for business owners
11	Lack of inter-party cooperation on business development strategies
12	Lack of support for failed businesses, unemployed, youth, and women
13	Lack of support for local handicrafts industry
14	Ineffective ECOWAS and regional trade protocols
15	Absence of official government research centre on business sector
16	Business owners' lack of finance, transport, and storage facilities

Source: Grounded Theory analysis of 220 stakeholder interviews (Author's fieldwork)

Axial Code 11—the lack of inter-party cooperation on business development strategies—emerged as the selective code, the central integrating category that connects and explains the persistence of all other obstacles. Respondents from ruling government officials, opposition party members, media houses, research institutes, and opinion leaders all independently identified the communication war as the meta-obstacle that prevents coordinated, long-term action on every other problem. As one official from the Ministry of Business Development stated: “The lack of progress in the initiatives of this ministry arises from the lack of co-ordination, agreement and a national protocol between the Ghanaian political parties on the long term business development policies and plans of the country. The opposition parties do not demonstrate any sign of supporting the current initiatives.”

This finding is reinforced by the responses of opposition party members, who acknowledged that “there is a lack of co-ordination, agreement and a national protocol between the Ghanaian political parties on the business development policies and plans of the country,” while research institutes and academics identified “the lack of an integrated national business development policy” as the foremost challenge, noting that “the business promotion programmes of the political regimes do not cohere.”

The voices of grassroots stakeholders powerfully corroborate the structural findings. Owners of failed businesses reported that “the government programmes have little support for the owners of the failed businesses in the country,” highlighting how the communication war's focus on branding new initiatives leaves no space for supporting entrepreneurs whose businesses collapse between regime transitions. Retail shop owners lamented that “most businesses have been closing down over the past decade because of lack of sales,” while pointing to the large volumes of imported consumer goods into the country as evidence that manifesto promises of local industrial development remain rhetorical. Factory owners drew attention to the practical consequences: “major problems exist for those factories that rely exclusively on local raw materials,” as the agro-processing plants lack support from the agricultural sector. Meanwhile, the unemployed, students, and youth reported little government support for the youth to go into business in the country, with the observation that the education system does not motivate youth to develop their future careers around business.

The distributional pattern of responses across stakeholder groups reveals a telling gradient. Government officials (RGO) recorded the highest agreement scores across nearly all positive statements about government programmes (80–100%), while the unemployed (UEM), students (STD), and motor mechanics (MM) registered the lowest (10–30%). This divergence between insider optimism and grassroots pessimism is itself an artefact of the communication war: government officials are embedded within the narrative production apparatus that generates positive messaging, while those at the margins of the economy experience the gap between rhetoric and reality most acutely. The owners of closed businesses (OCB), registering agreement scores as low as 10% on statements concerning improved living conditions, poverty reduction, and employment, represent the human cost of implementation failure.

### 5.3 | The Poverty Geography and the Communication War

The spatial dimension of the implementation gap further illuminates the consequences of the communication war. Poverty incidence data from the Ghana Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS, 2006–2009) reveals a stark north-south gradient. The Greater Accra metropolitan region registers the lowest poverty incidence (rank 1–9 on a 100-point scale), while districts in the Upper East region—Bawku East, Bongo, and Builsa—register poverty incidence at ranks 98–99. This pattern has remained structurally unchanged across all four regime periods of the Fourth Republic, despite every manifesto since 1993 promising to address the spatial inequalities in national development.

The persistence of the north-south poverty divide (see Bob-Milliar and Alagidede, 2024) across three decades of manifesto promises constitutes perhaps the most damning evidence of the communication war's consequences. When the NDC promises poverty reduction and the NPP promises the same, and yet the same districts remain the most deprived year after year, the logical conclusion is that the political system is generating promises rather than outcomes. Each regime begins its term by discrediting predecessor programmes in these deprived districts, then launches its own branded initiatives, which are in turn abandoned by the next administration before reaching maturity. The communication war thus creates a development Sisyphus: each regime rolls the boulder of poverty reduction up the hill, only for it to roll back down when power changes hands.

## 6 | DISCUSSION: WHY SOUND POLICIES ON PAPER FAIL

### 6.1 | The Mechanism of Implementation Failure

The convergence of quantitative and qualitative evidence points to a clearly identifiable mechanism through which the communication war produces implementation failure. This mechanism operates through four interconnected processes.

First, the electoral cycle generates what might be termed narrative discontinuity. Each incoming administration devotes significant initial governance energy to establishing commissions of inquiry, auditing predecessor programmes, and constructing a public narrative of inherited mismanagement. This process, while sometimes yielding legitimate accountability, more frequently serves as a mechanism of narrative warfare that delays the continuation of development programmes by 12–18 months into each new administration's term.

Second, regime change triggers programme rebranding rather than policy continuity. Programmes initiated under one administration are routinely discontinued, renamed, or restructured by successor regimes—not because they have been evaluated and found wanting, but because political branding demands differentiation. The Empretec Ghana Foundation, originally launched under the NDC, was later embraced by the NPP, illustrating a rare exception to the general pattern of programme abandonment.

Third, the communication war absorbs governance capacity. Cabinet ministers, members of parliament, and senior civil servants spend substantial time engaging in media appearances, press conferences, and social media engagements designed to counter opposition narratives rather than overseeing programme implementation. The proliferation of partisan media outlets has intensified this dynamic, creating an ecosystem in which governance is performed discursively rather than materially.

Fourth, the absence of a national development protocol—a binding framework that commits both parties to long-term development priorities regardless of which party holds power—means that every policy is treated as partisan property rather than national patrimony. The NDC's threat to discontinue the NPP's Free Senior High School programme, and the NPP's earlier criticism of NDC infrastructure projects, exemplify how the communication war renders even successful policies vulnerable to political reversal.

### 6.2 | The Paradox of Policy Convergence and Political Divergence

Perhaps the most striking finding of this study is the paradox that two parties with substantially convergent policy positions engage in increasingly fierce communication warfare. The State of the Nation addresses from Presidents Kufuor (2001–2008), Atta-Mills (2009–2012), Mahama (2013–2016), and Akufo-Addo (2017–present) all prioritise the same development themes: economic transformation, job creation, infrastructure development, entrepreneurship promotion, and good governance. President Kufuor framed his priorities as “growing the economy through job creation, enterprise development, export of processed products.” President Atta-Mills organised his around “social development, economic growth, job creation, infrastructure development, and good governance.” President Mahama adopted four pillars including “Putting People First” and “A strong and resilient economy.” President Akufo-Addo articulated thirteen pillars encompassing industrial parks, SME development, and agricultural modernisation.

This convergence suggests that Ghana's development challenge is not a deficit of ideas but a deficit of sustained implementation. The communication war functions as a structural impediment by ensuring that political energy is channelled into narrative competition rather than collaborative governance. The implication is profound: Ghana does not lack development plans; it lacks the institutional architecture to insulate development programmes from the communication war.

### 6.3 | Implications for Political Economy Theory

These findings contribute to the broader political economy literature on democratic governance and development in several ways. First, they challenge the assumption that competitive democracy inherently promotes development through accountability mechanisms. In Ghana's case, electoral competition has generated a perverse form of accountability in which governments are held accountable not for sustained programme implementation but for their skill in constructing persuasive narratives of competence and opponent incompetence.

Second, the findings extend the critical realist framework by demonstrating that the gap between the Real and the Empirical—between policy intention and lived experience—is not merely a technical failure of implementation capacity but a structural consequence of the political economy of competitive narrative production. The MELD model's transformative architecture (3L and 4D) cannot be activated in a context where every electoral cycle resets the process back to 1M (identification of problems) and 2E (blaming predecessors for those problems).

Third, the universal consensus (100%) among all 220 respondents on the need for programme evaluation and monitoring suggests that citizens themselves have diagnosed the problem with remarkable clarity. The demand is not for more policies but for credible mechanisms of implementation accountability that transcend partisan politics.

## 7 | CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This article has demonstrated that the persistent gap between policy formulation and implementation in Ghana's Fourth Republic is not primarily a function of inadequate policy design, insufficient expertise, or resource constraints—though all of these factors contribute. Rather, the implementation gap is fundamentally a product of the communication war: a systemic pattern of narrative competition between the NDC and NPP that diverts governance energy from sustained development action toward the production and consumption of political propaganda.

The evidence from 220 diverse stakeholders, analysed through both factor analysis and Grounded Theory, converges on a single central finding: the absence of inter-party cooperation on development strategy (Axial Code 11) functions as the meta-obstacle that enables and perpetuates all other implementation challenges. Sound policies exist on paper. What is absent is the political will to implement them consistently across electoral cycles and the institutional architecture to protect development programmes from the communication war.

Three policy recommendations emerge from this analysis. First, Ghana requires a binding National Development Protocol—a framework negotiated between all major political parties and enshrined in law, not merely a presidential initiative—that commits successive administrations to continuity in core development programmes. Such a protocol would not eliminate political competition but would channel it toward performance improvement rather than programme discontinuity.

Second, the establishment of an independent, non-partisan National Development Evaluation Authority—with constitutional protection from political interference—would institutionalise the performance monitoring that all 220 respondents unanimously demanded. Such a body would generate credible, publicly accessible evaluations of programme implementation, providing the electorate with evidence-based information rather than partisan narratives.

Third, the consultative and participatory approach to development plan formulation, involving all major stakeholders identified in this study, has the potential to build cross-party ownership of national development priorities. The sixteen-group stakeholder framework employed in this study could serve as a model for a national consultative mechanism that generates inclusive development plans commanding broader political support than manifesto-driven programmes.

Until Ghana's political class recognises that the communication war is itself the primary obstacle to national development—that the Achilles heel of both regimes is not the absence of sound policies but the inability to sustain their implementation—the country will continue to cycle through ambitious manifestos, impressive-sounding programmes, and disappointing outcomes. The evidence presented in this article suggests that Ghanaians, across all regions, occupations, and political affiliations, have already reached this conclusion. The question is whether their political leaders will listen.

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