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# A Comparative Analysis of Hillary Clinton and John Mahama's Concession Speeches in the 2016 US and Ghanaian Presidential Elections

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## ABSTRACT

Comparative research contributes to knowledge by providing a better understanding of how a phenomenon manifests in different socio-cultural contexts. In this present study, we examined the concession speeches of Hillary Clinton (United States, Democratic Party) and John Mahama (Ghana, National Democratic Congress, NDC) in the aftermath of their 2016 electoral defeats. Findings indicated that three similar frames emerged between the two candidates. Hillary Clinton's frames included: acknowledging pain and acceptance, democracy, values and nationalism, and gratitude. John Mahama's frames had: acceptance and concern, appreciation, unity, democracy, and nationhood. Both candidates accepted the electoral outcome, showed gratitude, and reaffirmed their belief in democracy and unity. However, there were slight differences. Hillary Clinton's frame on acknowledging pain and acceptance had a more open, forthright recognition of being hurt in a way that enabled her to process the loss and pain. Findings from this study provide insights into recent concession speeches across two socio-cultural and continental divides, which builds on literature in framing and political communication.

## KEYWORDS

concession; framing;  
Ghana; political  
speeches; United States

## Introduction

One of the least studied genres of political speeches is the concession speech. While there has been a compendium of research on other political speeches, such as the campaign stump speeches, inaugural addresses, nomination acceptance addresses, state of the nation address, and televised broadcasts, there's little work on the concession speech (Osei Fordjour & Sikanku, 2022; Lee, 2013). The victorious candidate often takes the limelight, and deservedly so. However—for a moment—the losing candidate gets the spotlight as voters and supporters monitor to observe their reaction. The losing candidate's words, utterances, or speech are essential for several reasons. First, it is an integral part of the democratic process as losers are expected to be

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magnanimous in their reactions to electoral contests. For many democracies, where the specter of violence is constantly hovering over election results, the losing candidate's speech is crucial because of the possibility to either incite violence or calm tempers. The acceptance or otherwise of electoral outcomes has been the bane of many democracies worldwide. Voters and party supporters look to their presidential candidates for cues regarding how to react, frame their arguments, and shape their behaviors (Hammond, 2021; Irimiea, 2010). Therefore, a concession speech becomes one of the most critical moments of democratic culture. The speech, therefore, serves as an essential framing opportunity for the candidate, his party, the electoral outcome, the media debates, and the entire national discourse.

The examination of concession speeches should be an important area of political communication studies, although it has received limited interest to date. Political transitions and the peaceful transfer of power have been an enduring concern for most democracy watchers and scholars (Sikanku, 2019). The language, tone, tenor, and how the losing candidate frames the loss are usually crucial in such critical transition periods, especially in the election's immediate aftermath. This paper takes a comparative approach by analyzing the concession speeches of the main losing candidates in the 2016 United States and Ghanaian presidential elections. Comparative communication research holds several benefits. According to Esser and Vliegenthart (2017, p. 4), comparative communication research also helps to "throw more light on political communication arrangements." This means comparative studies contribute to deepening our understanding of a phenomenon. Also, comparative research enhances our awareness and appreciation of other systems, especially in a bid to strengthen democratic culture worldwide.

This research aims to analyze the concession speeches of Hillary Clinton and John Dramani Mahama in the aftermath of the 2016 elections. While studying any one of these speeches will be worthwhile enough, taken, a comparative approach adds more value and contributes to the global move toward democratic entrenchment. The present study contributes to the literature on political communication by drawing valuable and exciting lessons which may not necessarily be apparent in a single text examination. Therefore, this research is significant on several levels, examining a less studied area of political discourse (speeches of losing candidates) and applying the framing approach to a different domain such as Ghana (one of the earliest studies of a concession speech). Lastly, the comparative dimension of the approach further enriches the scholarship in political communication. The primary objective of this study was to ascertain the major frames embedded in John Mahama and Hillary Clinton's concession speeches in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential elections and whether there were any similarities or differences in these frames.

### **Hillary Clinton, the 2016 elections, and her concession speech**

Hillary Rodham Clinton has been described as one of the most successful female politicians in United States history (Jones, 2016). Her success has been attributed to her self-presentation, advocacy, and vocalness on critical global issues such as women empowerment and climate change across the globe while occupying positions such as

First lady, Senator, Secretary of State, a presidential primaries candidate for the 2008 Democratic party primaries and finally a presidential candidate for the Democratic party in the 2016 elections (Bligh et al., 2010; Jones, 2016). Notably, her 2016 election against Donald Trump was historically captivating for many reasons. Some of such reasons were: the two candidates enjoyed global popularity in different fields (business and entertainment for Trump and international politics for Hillary Clinton); the actions of both candidates in the past stimulated negative sentiments from the public; and the two candidates displayed extremely opposite personae to the public (McCall & Orloff, 2017; Strolovitch et al., 2017; Wood & Herbert, 2019). These factors set the stage for manifestations of many latent characteristics of American politics, such as polarization and uncivil discourses.

Hillary Clinton's campaign hinged on promises such as stricter gun control policies, a fair tax system, an inclusive economy, equal rights, and affordable healthcare ("Hillary's Vision for America," n.d.). There was high optimism about her victory, considering the promise of having the first female President and her consistency in championing issues affecting women (McCall & Orloff, 2017). Despite winning the popular votes by close to a margin of 2.9 million, indicating having more popularity among the electorates who voted than Donald Trump, she lost the Electoral College votes by 227 to Donald Trump's 270 votes (Abramson, 2016).

Considering all that transpired in the election, Hillary Clinton delivered what has been described as a painful concession speech in a packed hotel event room in New York (Collinson et al., 2016). She wore a dark gray pantsuit with a purple blouse and lapels, an attire she had reserved for her victory; she was flagged behind by her husband, who wore a matching necktie, and her running mate, Senator Tim Kaine (Dicker, 2016). Her choice of clothing had several symbolic representations. First, purple symbolizes a united America, a combination of the red color for the Republicans and blue for the Democrats, as well as women's empowerment (Berlant, 1988). This implies her resolve and optimism for political equality, something her campaign had promised to deliver. Also, wearing a pantsuit can be described as a masculine rhetorical strategy employed by female politicians to build credibility and assert their agentic personality in the political space, considering it is a male-dominated sphere (Flicker, 2013). Lastly, since the United States has never had a female President, seeing former President Bill Clinton supporting her as she won would have been a new phenomenon and a statement toward gender equality. A phenomenon that has been described by Osei Fordjour (2022) as "a new form of spousal support" and an American fantasy (p. 8). Hillary Clinton's speech lasted for about 12 minutes.

### **John Mahama, the 2016 elections, and his concession speech**

John Mahama went into the 2016 Ghanaian elections as the incumbent President, making him the fourth President in the Fourth Republic of Ghana. The 2016 presidential election was the second time in three successive elections where John Mahama of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) faced a familiar and formidable opponent in the person of Nana Akufo Addo, the then opposition leader, candidate of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and current President of Ghana (since 2021). A rivalry

that was rubber-stamped in the 2020 elections. Being the incumbent President, John Mahama's party manifesto themed, "Changing lives; transforming Ghana," promised to improve the livelihood of Ghanaians by providing sustainable jobs through an industrialized economy ("NDC Manifesto 2016", n.d.). The 2016 Ghanaian presidential election was peculiar because it was the first election after President Akufo Addo challenged the 2012 presidential election at the country's Supreme Court. Though the ruling did not go in President Akufo Addo's favor, the verdict heralded 27 electoral reforms, tested for the first time in the 2016 elections (Osei, 2016). According to Aye (2017), such reforms included "...setting up of a national collation center to replace the 'strong room' perceived as nontransparent by party agents, a reduction in the number of voters per polling station from 1000 to 850, the institutionalization of the Inter-Party Advisory Committee IPAC, and capacity building and improved remuneration for EC staff" (p. 314). Ultimately, presidential results declared by the EC indicated that the challenger and opposition leader, Nana Akufo-Addo, garnered 53.9% of the total vote cast against John Mahama's 44.44%, making Nana Akufo Addo the winner of the 2016 presidential election (Aye, 2017). This was a bitter pill to swallow as the results made John Mahama the first incumbent President to lose a reelection bid since Ghana embarked on a democratic journey in 1992.

John Mahama was the sitting President making him a dominant figure in the race. In Ghana, although the country operates a multi-party system, researchers and scholars agree that two major parties dominate the system (e.g., Osei Fordjour & Sikanku, 2022). Candidates from the other parties hardly give concession speeches. Events from smaller parties barely garner national attention. As the sitting President and the losing candidate of one of two major dominant political parties, he was the only one who gave a concession speech on the night the election results were announced. His speech was the one that was covered live by most media networks and received massive attention as well. This made him and the speech he delivered relevant for analysis. Within the context of probable post-election violence, his speech was highly anticipated since he also commands, by being the second dominant party, a sizeable proportion of the populace who were looking up to him for leadership and cues. How he framed, himself was very important in shaping the reaction of his followers.

John Mahama delivered his concession speech at his official residence in a sea blue traditional Ghanaian attire; he was flanked on his left by the National Chairman of his party, the NDC; on his right, by former Vice President and his running-mate for the 2016 election, the late Paa Kwesi Amisshah-Arthur, which was a symbol of solidarity for John Mahama. Behind him were his official bodyguard and ministers from his administration. During his speech, his daughter walks to stand by him, an act that drew applause from the audience who were not visible, presumably the media. Semiotic scholars have described traditional clothes as a populist rhetorical strategy that symbolically portrays politicians as nationalist-oriented and aims to emotionally connect political actors with the people (Osei Fordjour, 2021; Owyong, 2009). In addition, other scholars have described the use of politicians' children in visuals as an asset for male politicians because it humanizes them by reducing the power relations between them and the public (Lee, 2013; Meeks, 2016). This means when male politicians display their children, it enhances their political capital. His speech lasted for a little above eight minutes.

## Contextualizing a comparative political study between Ghana and the United States

Ghana and the United States have different economic fortunes, with the former considered a low-middle-income economy and the latter a high-income economy (Ibekwe-Okafor & Wolf, 2021; “World bank country lending,” n.d.); several factors enhance their comparability in the geo-political sphere. Ghana is seen as a leading democracy in Africa, while the United States has long been touted as an exemplar of global democracy (Sikanku, 2019). Both countries have the same electoral calendar. Their four-year cycle is happening in the same year, albeit the United States elections take place in November while Ghana’s happens in December, usually in the same year. In addition, the political scene in both countries has seen the dominance of two main parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) for Ghana, whereas the Democratic and Republican parties have dominated the United States political scene. The President and the Vice President run on the same ticket in both countries, which compels presidential candidates to select running mates who complement their weaknesses.

Bilateral relations between both countries have existed since 1957. This has been reinforced culturally as three past United States Presidents (Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama) have all visited Ghana. On the other hand, three Presidents in the Fourth Republic of Ghana, a period that heralded Ghana’s last transition from military to civilian rule, have also paid visits to the United States (Kufuor, Mahama, Akufo-Addo) (Osei Fordjour & Sikanku, 2022). Also, Speaker Nancy Pelosi led the United States Congressional Black Caucus to participate in a joint legislative session with their counterparts in Ghana and tour some historic slave sites in Ghana in 2019. This shows that the relationship between the two countries transcends the presidency. Lastly, both countries practice the presidential system of governance where executive power is entrusted to the President from a governance perspective. These two countries, therefore, offer an exciting opportunity for comparative analysis.

The two speeches’ comparison holds relevance in analyzing concession speeches from two different democratic dispensations. A comparison between an established democracy and an emerging democracy helps, like in most comparative research, to bring out similarities, differences, and lessons for the global democratic practice. The fact that the candidates tend to be of different gender may, at face value, be a coincidence. Still, it may or may not reveal specific observations in concession speeches from candidates of different genders. Whatever the case may be, it contributes to our understanding of the concession speech from such a perspective. Considering global concerns and discourses regarding the sustenance of democracy as a governance ideal globally, such studies contribute to our appreciation, understanding, and provide insights into a democratic norm from a broader and comparative angle.

### Framing theory

The framing theory is well-established and well-recognized within media and communication studies. The concept is principally concerned with how an issue is defined, constructed, and presented (Entman, 1993; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Sikanku, 2020). Framing

involves how language organizes one's experience and conveys their understanding of issues within the public domain (Sikanku, 2019). Erving Goffman, one of the earliest contributors to the concept of framing, asserts that human beings naturally view the world from primary frameworks, which help them make sense of events happening around them (Goffman, 1974). This is supported by Minsky (1975), who asserts that discourse requires frames to lend understanding, persuasion, and meaning to what is being communicated. Entman (1993) defined framing as the process of selecting "some aspect of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text in a way that can promote a certain definition, interpretation, moral evaluation or treatment recommendation" (p. 52).

One of the most critical periods in many democracies is post-election or the immediate aftermath of the voting process when numbers are collated, and winners are declared. This post-election period is crucial because people begin making sense of the entire electoral process, the outcome, and ascribing meanings to their fate or fortunes when results become apparent. In periods like this, leading candidates, through their first post-election speeches, latch on to frames to interpret the outcome of the election, examine the causes of their loss or victory, make evaluations, and try to figure out the way forward. All these processes can be explained, viewed, or understood within the concept of framing.

Communication, language, and the power of words are not only necessary when the victor gives his victory speech but is equally significant in the face of defeat. Politicians use frames to internalize their loss and communicate with their supporters, the entire nation, and the world. The concession speech is also an opportunity for the losing candidate to begin framing their political future, political identity, and political defeat. The candidate decides what to include, exclude, highlight, foreground, or background in the speech. This essentially is the process of framing.

Carragee and Roefs (2004) allude to this when he asserts that "...frames construct particular meaning concerning issues by their pattern of emphasis, interpretation, and exclusion" (p. 17). Frames are helpful in communication because they help structure the world to bring meaning through socially shared symbols, values, and ideologies. Framing of messages involves using specific rhetorical devices such as metaphors, keywords, exemplars, quotes, and storylines to get specific messages across to supporters and the public. This research explores how Hillary Clinton and John Mahama, as political leaders, framed their concession speeches in the aftermath of their electoral defeat in Ghana and the United States, respectively.

## Methodology

Framing offers methodological tools for undertaking the analysis of texts. The candidate's speech profoundly influences their supporters and the public's perception of their political image. Among other things, candidates must connect socially, politically, culturally, and ideologically. Framing analysis grants us the opportunity to unearth how this was done. Framing analysis is well suited as a methodological approach to analyzing communication materials such as speeches because it offers both a conceptual entry point and analytic data devices for examining texts. This is because framing analysis involves the thematization of communication materials according to issues that were given prominence, arguments that were set forth, storylines that emerged,

and ideologies postulated. Overall patterns determine themes, issues emphasized, descriptions, background information, quotes, events cited, propositions implied, and evidence presented to support a thesis of a storyline when conveying messages (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Pan and Kosicki (1993) assert that framing “themes are intrinsically related to meaning” (1993, p. 59).

Framing analysis and the detection of themes can be done using framing devices. Framing devices include metaphors, catchphrases, examples, visual images, and statistics (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Mens & Van Gorp, 2006). These framing devices concisely communicate a frame by resonating with existing schemata among audiences. Through this process, the language used by speakers, or in this case, speeches by candidates, tend to make sense and enhance understanding. Consequently, the framing tradition allows researchers to examine how communication occurs and the underlying elements present in a communication text. This research-specific study takes a qualitative turn to help make meaning of the speech, decipher themes, account for context, framing devices, and identify existing patterns, all of which help deepen understanding. A theoretically guided approach applied to original speech texts enhances the study’s validity.

### Data and procedure of analysis

We purposely copied the full transcripts of the two speeches delivered by the two losing candidates in their respective countries. Methodologically, two specific framing approaches guided this study: the Pan and Kosicki (1993) and Entman (1993) traditions. For Pan and Kosicki, framing involves unearthing how politicians take “an increasingly proactive approach to amplify their views of what an issue is about” (p. 55). According to Entman (1993), framing devices (which help in framing analysis) can be operationalized as the “presence or absence of certain keywords or stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of fact or judgment” (p. 52). Other symbolic devices might include metaphors, exemplars, descriptions, word choice, arguments, catchphrases, depictions, moral appeals, visual images, as well as the context within which they might appear (Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). So, we assessed the keywords, stock phrases, word choice, metaphors, and sentences to arrive at our conclusion. Ultimately, we thematized our findings. In all, framing analysis offered us a more comprehensive, cohesive, and in-depth analysis of what is happening in the speeches and provided interpretive insights into speech content while deepening our understanding.

### Results and discussion

The analysis revealed the following themes in Hillary Clinton’s speech: 1. Acknowledging pain and acceptance, 2. *democracy, values, and nationalism*, and 3. *gratitude*. For Mahama, the subsequent frames were unearthed: 1. *acceptance and concern*, 2. *appreciation*, 3. *unity, democracy, and nationhood*. Concession speeches have become one of the main features of modern democracies. It offers candidates closure to a campaign that did not turn out in victory. It is also a critical framing moment for the candidates as they seek to reset and reconstruct their image after a lost election. This section discusses the major frames from the two concession speeches under study.

## Frames embedded in Hillary Clinton's concession speech

### *Acknowledging pain and acceptance*

Naturally, a presidential defeat comes with disappointment. How this disappointment is managed is very critical to the candidate, party, and the nation. Previous research shows that some view defeat as a traumatic process. One of the ways Hillary Clinton deals with loss is to pointedly acknowledge the pain that comes with losing the election:

I know how disappointed you feel because I feel it too, and so do tens of millions of Americans who have invested their hopes and dreams in this effort. This is painful, and it will be for a long time, but I want you to remember this.

The open acknowledgment of pain is a significant speech act or strategy of Hillary Clinton. The speaker does not background or hide this pain. This immediately humanizes her and enables her to relate with her supporters, who may be feeling similarly. Therefore, the emphasis on pain is her attitudinal response in terms of her feelings. This, from a communicative perspective, helps her engage with the audience positively, though it is not a happy moment for her. Such a framing approach is also adopted when she says:

Last night, I congratulated Donald Trump and offered to work with him on behalf of our country. I hope that he will be a successful president for all Americans. This is not the outcome we wanted or worked so hard for, and I'm sorry that we did not win this election for the values we share and the vision we hold for our country.

The Democratic presidential candidate, therefore, uses an honest discourse strategy to deal with failure. At the core, a concession speech is still a political speech, and like such speeches, the goal is to reach out to the minds and souls of the audiences. One of the framing devices she uses is an emotive appeal to connect with her voters deeply. This helps her connect on a humane or emotive level. Beyond that, she offers a pointed apology as the leader of the party. Acknowledging personal faults is a way leaders use language to demonstrate their leadership abilities by owning up to their role instead of shifting blame. Of course, there could be several other factors accounting for the loss, but Clinton, at the very least, admits her part, particularly as the Democratic candidate. This cements the interpersonal communicative act of Hillary Clinton while keeping her socially connected with the electorates.

Beyond that, Clinton clearly congratulates the newly elected President, Trump, adding that she has "offered to work with him." The function of this act is to frame Hillary Clinton as a bridge-builder by pledging support to the incoming administration. That is not all. This frame is also constructed with an optimistic indicator when she says:

To appreciate the precise function of this language requires putting it within context. Considering that non-acceptance of electoral outcomes constitutes one of the most notable instigators of democratic disruption and instability, the clear declaration of the losing candidate not only affirms the validity of the electoral outcome, but immediately helps to diffuse any potential tension in such a tense period. Hillary Clinton then offers hope by calling on her supporters to "look to the future" as well as offering the new president "chance to lead"

Such rhetoric imposes on her audiences a frame of acceptance and closure. It also, indirectly or subconsciously, seeks to quell any potential doubts about the electoral process or unwelcome action that may result from non-acceptance of the electoral outcome while maintaining the nation's peace, stability, and cohesion.

### ***Democracy, values, and nationalism***

Despite the electoral defeat, one of the central themes in Hillary Clinton's address was to reaffirm her belief in democracy and the values that embody the nation:

Our constitutional democracy enshrines the peaceful transfer of power, and we don't just respect that; we cherish it. It also enshrines other things; the rule of law, the principle that we are all equal in rights and dignity, freedom of worship and expression. We respect and cherish these values too, and we must defend them.

Hillary Clinton does not question or undermine the core framework underpinning the country's governance; that is democracy. There is, in general, an affirmation of the core values that characterize democracy, such as the rule of law, equality, and freedom. Two consequences of meanings ascribed to this reaffirmation merit mention. First, it prevents the escalation of any tension due to voter dissatisfaction with the governance process. Questioning the electoral college system and voting process has always been a major feature in American politics, particularly after an election. By Clinton emphasizing her belief in the process, she immediately cited the use of distrust in democracy or the process as a motivation or basis for any chaotic actions. Also, she goes just beyond affirming but advocating for the defense of democratic values, in the process, facilitating the healing process after the electoral defeat while decisively cementing her credentials as a Democrat. There are other examples of this frame:

Now – and let me add, our constitutional democracy demands our participation, not just every four years, but all the time. So, let's do all we can to keep advancing the causes and values we all hold dear; making our economy work for everyone not just those at the top, protecting our country and protecting our planet, and breaking down all the barriers that hold any American back from achieving their dreams.

The central frame here is supported by another feature of democracy, which is participation. One of the extraordinary difficulties in life is failure or loss. In such times, people may react in ways that may not be the best. In order to calm nerves and encourage her supporters, Clinton enjoins them not to see the election or voting as the end of participation but calls on them to continue participating in other ways. She then uses the opportunity to reaffirm some of her campaign values, such as economic equality and environmental protection. Further support is given to this frame of democracy and values as she mentions values of togetherness, fair policies, and an affirmation of her belief in the people of America:

We've spent a year and a half bringing together millions of people from every corner of our country to say with one voice that we believe that the American dream is big enough for everyone – for people of all races and religions, for men and women... our responsibility as citizens is to keep doing our part to build that better, stronger, fairer America we seek. And I know you will.

Taken together, these elements work in different ways to brand her political persona as a believer in democracy, a supporter of building bridges, and a defender of her values.

## **Gratitude**

A major aspect of Hillary Clinton's speech was dedicated to thanking supporters. This is consistent with the analysis of previous concession speeches, where one of the major thematic areas is that of showing appreciation. Hillary Clinton thanked a large swath of people, including her running mate, Tim Kaine, The Obamas, her husband, Bill Clinton, her daughter Chelsea Clinton, and her staff at her headquarters in Brooklyn. She also thanks other campaign staff, activists, volunteers, and citizens who contributed to the campaign. What is significant here is that her communication strategy is to wrap her appreciation in her enduring campaign values to frame her political identity. It also sends a message that though she lost, she still believes in those values. The first example is presented here:

Finally, I am so grateful for our country and for all it has given to me. I count my blessings every single day that I am an American. And I still believe as deeply as I ever have that if we stand together and work together with respect for our differences, strength in our convictions, and love for this nation, our best days are still ahead of us.

She expresses her gratitude for the chance to lead her party, presents herself as a patriot, and attempts to endear herself to the nation—despite the loss— by giving recognizing the pride and blessings of being American. She then ties in this to her campaign theme of unity and togetherness and diversity while attempting to inspire Americans by saying “our best days are still ahead of us.” A key strategic communication element of her concession speech was therefore showing appreciation and exhibiting consistency by emphasizing the core themes of the campaign even in the face of loss. Instead of just conceding, thanking, and then moving on, she does that in an effective way by touting her campaign themes and reminding listeners of her dedication to what she stands for. Another example can be found here:

Because, you know – you know, I believe we are stronger together and we will go forward together. And you should never, ever regret fighting for that. You know, scripture tells us, "Let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season, we shall reap if we do not lose heart." So my friends, let us have faith in each other; let us not grow weary; let us not lose heart, for there are more seasons to come. And there is more work to do.

Even in the middle of thanking her supporters, Hillary Clinton once again brings up another campaign theme: fighting and perseverance. From a framing perspective, she uses a religious scripture to communicate this frame, touching on the need to “not grow weary” and the need to “not lose heart.” Therefore, the stylistic element of the speech involved emphasizing who she was and a commitment to what she believed in even in the face of defeat.

## **Frames embedded in John Mahama's concession speech**

### ***Acceptance and concern***

John Mahama's messaging in his concession address, first, sought to accept the election's outcome. There is the statement of a formal call to the winner to congratulate him on his victory. There is also an admission of his defeat as a probable outcome of the election when he says:

Every election is a hard-fought battle, and this one was no exception. For those of us who choose to be contenders and go into electoral contests, we go about it as a win-lose proposition.” He then grounds his loss in a frame of citizen participation and respect for the people’s will, saying the “true winner is Ghana.”

John Mahama chose to process the loss not as a moment of pain but alludes to a winning moment, saying: “the true winner is always Ghana.” From a comparative perspective, Hillary is more direct in accepting the loss; pointedly points out her hurt and pain, openly acknowledges that Donald Trump is the next President in the most emphatic ways, and goes beyond that to call for support for the new President. Her display of such emotions and subsequent acknowledgment can be described as authentic, as she expresses her “true self.” Both Hillary Clinton and John Mahama call to congratulate the new president and accept the outcome of the result. Another noticeable aspect of John Mahama’s speech is that he mixes acceptance of the outcome with doubts about the sanctity and validity of the electoral process, saying: It is precisely on account of my belief in Ghana and its future that notwithstanding the irregularities associated with this election, I have decided at this stage to congratulate the President-elect.

That John Mahama does not fully accept the credibility of the election results is quite evident as he uses the keyword “irregularity” in relation to the election. These dynamics are present in some African as well as Western countries such as the United States, after presidential elections when doubt is cast on the outcome. Realizing the potential implications of his statement, particularly regarding the peaceful political transitions, he goes on to reiterate his belief in democracy:

I would like to assure the people of Ghana of my commitment to the sustenance of our country’s democracy and would work to ensure a smooth and peaceful transition to the incoming administration. I remain committed to the unity and stability of our great nation.

Clearly, John Mahama is aware of the unrest that any signal of non-acceptance of the electoral results or doubts about the results can cause. This is against the backdrop of chaotic political transitions generally in Africa. Therefore, it is not surprising that he moves quickly to assuage any such fears by reaffirming his belief in democratic governance.

### **Appreciation**

The next theme was centered on gratitude. This was also present in Hillary Clinton’s speech as well. Mahama thanked God, Ghanaians, and his campaign staff. He also used the opportunity to establish the point that he had contributed his bit to national development. He thanked his Vice President, but this came much later compared to Hillary’s speech. He thanked his family and the larger NDC. Compared to Hillary Clinton’s speech, he did not single out a former president from his party, although one could argue that in Hillary Clinton’s case that former president was her husband. That said, Hillary very early emphatically acknowledged Barack Obama and his family. Putting this into context, this can be related to the fact that Jerry John Rawlings (a former President of Ghana) had become distant from the NDC as a party and the Mahama administration. This was generally well known, especially with the former President’s increasing closeness to

Mahama's opponent, Nana Akufo Addo, and the NPP. He thanked the country's security services, civil society, and then repeated his thanks to God.

Compared to Hillary Clinton's speech then, we can say that Mahama recognized the role of God and openly showed appreciation more than Hillary Clinton. This is not a statement on the level of religiosity, but merely an observation about how open they are in acknowledging God openly. In addition, the noticeable difference in the mention of God can be attributed to the socio-cultural difference between the United States and Ghana. Though the Christian religion is the most dominant religion in both countries, it has a more noticeable impact culturally in Ghana than in the United States, particularly in giving political leaders moral legitimacy before their electorate (Coker, 2021). Mahama makes only a peripheral reference to his government's ideology, campaign themes, and values than Hillary Clinton's speech, which was suffused with many references to her ideals. He makes only a passing reference to the "Agenda for transformation," which was the banner head phrase for his government's national plan. This in sum, maps out how John Mahama showed appreciation in his speech.

### ***Unity, democracy, and nationhood***

President Mahama's last frame was focused on unity and consolidating our democracy and nationhood. This is like Hillary Clinton's theme on democracy, values, and nationhood. Clearly, amid their personal electoral loss, he still indulges in epideictic rhetoric by looking beyond the personal interest and focusing on higher national goals. This rhetoric is a challenge for any loser in an election, but it has the potential of restoring dignity, deepening citizenship and statesmanship as one concedes in an election. For Mahama, it is even more difficult as a sitting president compared to Hillary Clinton who seeks to occupy this high office for the first time. However, Hillary Clinton's entry point to this frame focused on tenets of America's constitutional character and her campaign values, while John Mahama focused on Ghana's leading role in African democracy, the need to preserve the nation by uniting the people. For example President Mahama said:

We have been a leader on so many fronts, not just on this continent but also in the world—from our attainment of independence to our development of a democracy that maintains at its core a pledge of stability and respect for the rule of law to our formation of much-needed peacekeeping and other humanitarian missions for other nations in need. And we have been able to do all these things because we have always functioned as one nation, one people.

From a communication perspective, such a frame helps Mahama establish himself as a unifier and a believer in democracy. With the preponderance of conflicts across Africa because of divisions, Mahama seeks to stake himself out as a unifier. He directly gives support to this frame when he states: "We see all throughout the world in countries that are much older than ours the devastation that division and intolerance bring." In a general sense, such rhetoric is analyzed as peaceful, conciliatory and seeks to preserve the democratic ethos rather than undermine it. Such discourse is again seen in the following example:

Notwithstanding our diversity, religious faiths, ethnic groups, and political affiliations, we have always recognized that we are all, ultimately, on the same side—the side of Ghana and its progress...So I pray that as we move forward, even as we voice our differences

and possibly even disagree on agendas and decisions and other details of governance, we always keep in mind the fact of our shared destiny and the undeniable possibilities of power that exist in our unity.

John Mahama embraces some of the core virtues of democracy, such as debate and diversity in thought and opinion, and tolerance. He also touches on the theme of oneness as a community using the metaphor of a “team.” The point that emerges from this frame is that John Mahama balances his defeat with the need for unity and the preservation of democracy. The reason why such discourse has so much currency is that taken within the African context where chaos has often characterized the post-election period, the commitment to such democratic ideas and foregrounding a language of unity and nationhood, is an especially healthy development for democratic consolidation in the nation and across the continent.

## Conclusion

This study examined the concession speeches of Hillary Clinton (United States, Democratic Party) and John Mahama (NDC) in the aftermath of their 2016 electoral defeats. The United States has a long-established record in democracy and is seen as one of the leading democracies globally. In contrast, Ghana has often been hailed as an exemplary democracy in Africa. The two nations also have very close bilateral ties and similar electoral calendars, with the United States election happening in November and Ghana’s election taking place in December, in the same year, every election cycle. This granted scholarly opportunities for such a study. Three very similar frames emerged for each of the candidates. Hillary Clinton’s frames included: acknowledging pain and acceptance, democracy, values and nationalism, and gratitude. John Mahama’s frames had: acceptance and concern, appreciation, unity, democracy, and nationhood. Both candidates accepted the electoral outcome, showed gratitude, and reaffirmed their belief in democracy and unity. However, there were slight differences. Hillary Clinton’s frame on acknowledging pain and acceptance had a more open, forthright recognition of being hurt in a way that enabled her to process the loss and pain in a very open and forthright manner. Perhaps this is more cultural, as Americans are more expressive in a direct and open way. It also helped her empathize, communicate strongly, connect with her voters, and humanizes her. While admitting and accepting defeat, John Mahama was a bit more closed in and was indirect in his approach. In fact, he goes beyond that to state his assumption that there were irregularities in the election. There was noticeable use of the name of God in Mahama’s speech compared to Hillary Clinton’s speech, which is attributable to the crucial socio-cultural impact of religion in Ghanaian politics.

Both candidates reiterated their belief in democratic nationhood and called for unity. However, much of the impetus for Hillary Clinton’s democratic frame was grounded in constitutionalism and her commitment to her campaign themes. At the same time, for John Mahama, it was centered on his record or contributions and Ghana’s leadership role in Africa. The final broad theme was gratitude and appreciation. As has become a normal tradition in concession speeches, both candidates showed gratitude generally. The rhetorical styles were different as Hillary Clinton foregrounded her vice-presidential

candidate, former President, and her family. Mahama did not recognize the former President from his party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), and repeatedly spoke about his appreciation of God, thereby foregrounding religion. Both candidates recognized family, with Hillary Clinton name-checking her close-knit family while Mahama only name-checked his wife. Although concession speeches have become customary in the United States, Ghana is gradually latching on to this custom. These speeches present meaningful framing opportunities for candidates to process electoral defeat, connect with their supporters, the nation, and construct their political identities moving forward. They are also crucial in granting closure to such a critical exercise with personal and national ramifications. The ability to master the moment or rise to the occasion in the face of defeat depends on critical messaging and framing choices. Different events present voters with the chance to view the leadership abilities of their candidates and nowhere is this more evident than during a moment of defeat. This study adds to the body of knowledge on concession speeches. To be specific, it adds to this knowledge from a comparative perspective, as it may well be the very first study that comparatively analyzes such a genre of speech from the United States and Ghana in the same study. The study also expands the application of framing comparatively to speeches, which are a major aspect of political communication, especially during elections. Generally, it helps to understand the art of concession. It underscores the importance of such discourse in preserving a nation's peace and democracy while helping to understand the workings of political rhetoric from a broader, comparative, and global perspective. Still, engaging in such a systematic study using two leading democracies is an important start.

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