

The Metaphoricity of Corruption: Exploring Ghana's Electoral Manifestos under the Fourth Republic



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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the metaphoricity of the noun "corruption" in the manifestos of Ghana's two leading parties: the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC). The study explored how metaphors have shaped the political narrative on corruption from 1996 to 2024 through the use of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Data on the word *corruption* from 14 manifestos were analysed for its metaphorical expressions based on the imprints of the preceding verb and other collocates. The findings revealed that corruption is metaphorically framed as war, disease, bushfire, business, and commodity. Opposition parties used these metaphors more frequently to critique incumbent governments and influence voters. The study highlights the strategic use of metaphors in shaping public perceptions of corruption, suggesting that metaphorical language serves as a powerful rhetorical tool in political discourse that influences electoral outcomes and governance narratives. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on political discourse by demonstrating how metaphorical language shapes the public's perception of corruption.

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, there is a consensus that corruption has plagued the very fabric of every facet of human existence. It has received worldwide discussions on several platforms and mediums and has been prominent in economic, political, and historical studies.¹ The topic has ignited continuous public discourse, as it is relevant in modern political and economic advancements. Researchers such as Andoh, Shannon and Chinoperekweyi have contended that actions associated with corruption have permeated the socioeconomic, political, religious, and everyday lives of individuals. The authors argued that corruption in public life in Ghana, especially, has been baneful to the country's socioeconomic and political advancement.² According to the authors, it has both contributed to and resulted from the structural deterioration left behind by years of rent-seeking politics in Ghana's post-colonial state. Corruption is a

¹ Saeed, A. S. Ibn, E. Wahaga, and G. Yankey, "Corruption under a Microscope, a Ghana Perspective," *International Journal of Development and Management Review* 18, no. 1 (October 17, 2023): 100–114, <https://doi.org/10.4314/ijdmr.v18i1.7>.

² Richard Andoh, "Theoretical Perspectives and Explanations of Political Corruption in Ghana," *Equinox Journal of Economics Business and Political Studies*, January 12, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.48064/equinox.804449>; Sarkodie-Addo Francis and Chinoperekweyi Justine, "Corruption and National Development: The Consequential Effects on the Sustainability in Ghana," *American Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation* 2, no. 3 (May 8, 2023): 32–40, <https://doi.org/10.54536/ajmri.v2i3.1434>.

phenomenon that has resisted years of political and economic changes, grown, and hampered attempts to raise Ghanaians' standards of living and promote democratic governance.³

The interest of the public in the fight against corruption in the country has been an age-long concern, dating back to the early 1960s when Ghana gained independence and established the First Republic. Owusu claims that during that time, the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, made corruption the main topic of his "Dawn Broadcasts."⁴ According to the author, high-profile judicial and extrajudicial commissions of inquiry were among the official measures taken to combat corruption in post-colonial Ghana; these commissions were occasionally followed by penalties. Examples of enforcement actions to promote "probity and accountability" associated with the 1979 "revolutions" include the "housecleaning exercise," the execution of three former heads of state, the imposition of harsh sentences, and the confiscation of assets of top public officials for alleged corruption. These actions may constitute the most ruthless forms of efforts to combat corruption in the country.

Public interest in the topic of corruption has progressively increased since the Fourth Republic's turn and the establishment of constitutional rule in 1993. One of the main concerns of many stakeholders, including the media, independent state agencies, religious organizations, and political parties, has been the need to combat corruption. A constant stream of revelations has come from the non-state media, some of which have caught the interest of government investigative agencies like the Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP) and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ). Political parties have also used the message of fighting corruption as an arsenal to persuade electorates to win elections. These promises are contained in their manifestos.

Historically, political party leaders have accused each other of bad governance based on corrupt practices. In 2016, for instance, the NPP made its case against erstwhile President John Mahama on two fronts: poor management of the economy and widespread corruption in government. The NPP promised to wage war against corruption when they assumed power, a campaign message that went down well with many electorates, ultimately giving them victory in the 2016 election. Perhaps one step toward reducing corruption after the NPP won in the 2016 general election was the creation of the OSP, an independent political body tasked with holding former and current government officials accountable. It remains unclear how far the war on corruption has progressed since the OSP was established over seven years ago.

Interestingly, 77% of Ghanaians continue to believe that governments have not done enough to combat corruption. The public's assessment of the fight against corruption has declined dramatically from 63% in 2002 to 25% in 2014. In 2019, only 40%, and in 2022 just fewer than 14% rated the fight against corruption well.⁵ Despite the widespread agreement among stakeholders that corruption is a serious issue in Ghana, the canker persists and threatens the nation's political, social, and moral fabric despite the strong will to combat it with the utmost ruthlessness. That the NDC is making the same pledges in their 2024 manifesto, is therefore not surprising. The context provided above makes it clear that Ghanaians have a serious issue with the idea of corruption and that it needs to be eradicated. This study thus attempts to investigate how the term "*corruption*" is defined figuratively in the manifestos of Ghana's two main political parties, the NDC and the NPP.

Previous Studies on Manifestoes in Ghana

Campaign messages all strips have been researched, including functional analysis, critical discourse analysis, communication, modality, and content analysis.⁶ From the existing literature, it is evident that

³ Ibn, Wahaga, and Yankey, "Corruption under a Microscope, a Ghana Perspective."

⁴ Maxwell Owusu, "Culture and Democracy in West Africa: Some Persistent Problems," *Africa Today* 18, no. 1 (1971): 68–76.

⁵ Afrobarometer Report, "Approval Rating of Government's Anti-Corruption Efforts Dips after Significant Improvement in 2017," *New Afrobarometer Study Shows* (Accra, Ghana: Ghana Center for Democratic Development, July 28, 2022).

⁶ Andoh, "Theoretical Perspectives and Explanations of Political Corruption in Ghana"; Shepherd Mpofo, Trust Matsilele, and Tawanda Nyawasha, "The Iconography of Persuasion: An Analysis of Political Manifestos and Messaging of Top Three Parties in South Africa's 2019 Elections," *Communicare: Journal for Communication Sciences in Southern Africa* 40, no. 1 (2021): 67–88; Kwabena Sarfo Sarfo-Kantankah, "Corruption Is a Big Issue: A Corpus-Assisted Study of the Discursive Construction of Corruption in Ghanaian Parliamentary Discourse," *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 29, no. 1 (June 8, 2018): 226–58, <https://doi.org/10.4314/ljh.v29i1.9>; D.A. Abena. Kyerewaa-Owusu, "A Critical Discourse Analysis of the 2016 Manifestos of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP)" (2017); John A Brierley, "The Role of a Pragmatist Paradigm When Adopting Mixed Methods in Behavioural Accounting Research," *International Journal of Behavioural Accounting and Finance* 6, no. 2 (2017): 140–54; Mark Nartey and Ferguson Ebo Yankson, "A Semantic Investigation into the Use of Modal Auxiliary Verbs in the Manifesto of a Ghanaian Political Party," *International*

researchers have conducted extensive studies on the various aspects of party manifestos. For instance, Sarfo-Kantankah conducted a corpus-based functional analysis of NPP and NDC party manifestos in Ghana.⁷ The study summarised the purpose of manifestos as a means to provide the electorate with the opportunity to make rational choices in their voting based on policies, ideologies and philosophies of political parties. While there are several linguistic studies on manifestoes in Ghana, there are no known studies in the analysis of metaphors in party manifestos, as per these authors' search, especially from CMT perspectives.⁸

Even though several studies can be found on metaphors in political discourse in Ghana, none of these studies have concentrated on manifestos.⁹ From Charteris-Black's Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), Kyeremeh et al. explored the communicative functions of metaphors in the political speeches of former President John Dramani Mahama.¹⁰ In addition, Ofori et al. examined how ordinary citizens in Ghana use conceptual metaphors and similes in their political discourse to critique politicians and address national issues while mitigating direct confrontation.¹¹ Although these studies make important contributions to scholarly research on metaphors in political discourse in Ghana, they do not give a comprehensive account of the realisation of metaphors in manifestos. In the main part of this study, the metaphoricity of the keyword "*corruption*" is examined. This noun is both used in manifestos and everyday political discourse in Ghana. Determining the metaphoricity of "*corruption*", its exact amount and quality by establishing its forms of linguistic expression, would be beneficial to all those who invoke the noun corruption in their professional and everyday discourse. The practical results of this analysis serve as guidelines for politicians and manifesto writers, where the key noun corruption appears.

Theoretical Framework – Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) serves as the fundamental framework for this investigation.¹² According to this view, metaphors are a cognitive mechanism that allows readers to grasp one domain of experience—typically an abstract one—by using the perspective of a different, more concrete domain. According to CMT, the physical interactions of humans with their environment inform the formation of conceptual metaphors. An illustrative example provided by Lakoff and Johnson is the metaphorical structuring of the domain of ARGUMENT in terms of WAR, as evidenced by expressions like:

(1) Your claims are indefensible.
He attacked every weak point in my argument.
His criticisms were right on target.
I demolished his argument.¹³

In the CMT framework, these metaphorical mappings create conceptual correspondences by applying knowledge from the source domain (e.g., WAR) to the target domain (e.g., ARGUMENT). These mappings are categorised as either "primary" or "complex." Grady explains that primary metaphors arise from fundamental physical and cognitive experiences, while Lakoff and Johnson assert that these are

Journal of Humanities and Social Science 4, no. 3 (2014): 21–30; Stanley Nelvis Glate, Dennis Yao Dzansi, and Darlington Peter Onojaefe, "Influence of Online Searches for Campaign Messages on Voting Behaviour in Ghana," *Heliyon* 10, no. 10 (May 2024): e31114, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e31114>.

⁷ Sarfo-Kantankah, "Corruption Is a Big Issue: A Corpus-Assisted Study of the Discursive Construction of Corruption in Ghanaian Parliamentary Discourse."

⁸ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, "Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language," *The Journal of Philosophy* 77, no. 8 (August 1980): 453, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2025464>.

⁹ Sarfo-Kantankah, "Corruption Is a Big Issue: A Corpus-Assisted Study of the Discursive Construction of Corruption in Ghanaian Parliamentary Discourse."

¹⁰ Jonathan Charteris-Black, *Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Yaw Sarkodie Kyeremeh et al., "Analysis of Communicative Functions of Metaphors in Selected Political Speeches," *Universal Journal of Literature and Linguistics*, 2023, 16–28.

¹¹ Emmanuel Amo Ofori et al., "The Use of Metaphors and Similes in a Political Discourse in Ghana," *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research* 18, no. 2 (2021): 74–95.

¹² Lakoff and Johnson, "Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language."

¹³ Lakoff and Johnson, "Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language."

universally acquired due to the shared nature of embodied experiences.¹⁴ They argue that primary metaphors, being universally applicable, are learned rather than innate. Complex metaphors, in contrast, are constructed from primary metaphors combined with culturally specific knowledge or beliefs, making them more susceptible to cross-cultural variation.

Despite its foundational influence, CMT has faced criticism. Scholars like Camsuzou have questioned the existence of conceptual metaphors, while others have critiqued the theory for its potential circular reasoning.¹⁵ Additionally, researchers such as Deignan and the Pragglejaz Group have critiqued the methodologies used to identify metaphors in discourse.¹⁶ Despite these challenges, CMT has undergone significant developments, with researchers exploring conceptual metaphors across various cognitive and cultural domains. For instance, Adamson has expanded the theory's application to new domains of human experience.¹⁷ The impact of conceptual metaphors has been demonstrated in various discursive communities. They include business,¹⁸ sports, law, everyday conversation, bereavement and healthcare.¹⁹ This study argues that metaphors serve as practical tools that can build an understanding of corruption from the ground up and exemplify how it might appear in Ghanaian political party manifestos.

METHODOLOGY

The data constitute two sub-corpora: the manifestos of the NPP and the NDC for elections 1996 to 2024 excluding the NDC's 2000 and NPP's 2004 manifestos, which were unavailable. The researchers extracted linguistic components from manifestos that contained multimodal characters such as pictures. The data were later transferred to LancBox X 3.0.0 for the statistical analysis of the Key Word In Context (KWIC) for the noun *corruption*.²⁰ LancBox X 3.0.0 was used because it recognises the genitive (i.e., the – s' in the possessive singular and the apostrophe in the possessive plural), the suffix for the past form 'd' (e.g., ask'd) and dashes (e.g., '- -'), and assigns them to the proper Part of Speech. To analyse the metaphoricity of the noun, the data was subsequently transferred to AntConc 4.3.1 for the concordance lines, and other linguistic properties that provide the inferences of the metaphor.²¹

Mode of analysis

The noun *corruption* was first analysed in the general sequence [verb_corruption]. The adoption of the sequence is based on various arguments about the origin of metaphors. Twardzisz and other researchers argue that metaphor partly originates primarily in verbs, and the neighbouring noun receives its imprint.

¹⁴ Joseph Grady, "Foundations of Meaning: Primary Metaphors and Primary Scenes" (University of California, 1997) ; George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, "Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought," *Choice Reviews Online* 37, no. 01 (September 1, 1999): 37-0239-37-0239, <https://doi.org/10.5860/CHOICE.37-0239>.

¹⁵ Sarah Camsuzou, "Good Grief: A Corpus-Driven Analysis of Conceptual Grief Metaphors in Online Discourse" (Oklahoma State University, 2021).

¹⁶ Alice Deignan, *Metaphor and Corpus Linguistics* (John Benjamins Publishing, 2005); Pragglejaz Group, "MIP: A Method for Identifying Metaphorically Used Words in Discourse," *Metaphor and Symbol* 22, no. 1 (January 2007): 1–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926480709336752>.

¹⁷ Tim Adamson, "Cognition and Conflation: Addressing a Paradox in Cognitive Linguistics," *Cognitive Semiotics* 1, no. s1 (September 1, 2007): 87–101, <https://doi.org/10.1515/cogsem.2007.1.fall2007.87>.

¹⁸ Teodora Popescu, "Business Metaphors Explained," in *Universals and Variants of English and Romanian Business Metaphors: A Corpus-Based Conceptual Mapping of Contemporary Journalese from a Pedagogical Approach*, ed. Teodora Popescu and Grigore-Dan Iordachescu (Editura Didactica Si Pedagogica, 2015), 13–21.

¹⁹ Popescu, "Business Metaphors Explained"; Marcin Grygiel, "The Conceptual Metaphor Business Is War in Business English," *Im Wirkungsdeld Der Konstrativen und Angewandten Linguistik. In the Field of Contrastive and Applied Linguistics* 6 (2015): 65–78; Fatih Dervent, "An Examination of Conceptualization of Sport Metaphors," *Journal of Education and Training Studies* 4, no. 4 (March 14, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v4i4.1400>; Inesa Šeškauskienė, "Metaphor in Legal Translation: Space as a Source Domain in English and Lithuanian," *Metaphor in Legal Discourse*, 2022, 114; Piotr Twardzisz, "The Metaphoricity of the Noun Law.," in *Metaphors in Legal Discourse*, ed. Inesa Šeškauskienė (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022), 1–20; George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Zoltán Kövecses, "Levels of Metaphor," *Cognitive Linguistics* 28, no. 2 (May 1, 2017): 321–47, <https://doi.org/10.1515/cog-2016-0052>; Esther Serwaah Afreh and Daniel Dwamena Ofosu, "The Language of Grief: The Role of Conceptual Metaphors in Family Tributes of Ghanaian Funeral Ceremonies," *Cognitive Semantics* 10, no. 2 (September 30, 2024): 253–82, <https://doi.org/10.1163/23526416-bja10064>; Ilkka Sairanen, "Metaphors in Health Communication between Nurse and Patient," 2015; Ignasi Navarro Ferrando, "Conceptual Metaphor Types in Oncology: Cognitive and Communicative Functions," *Ibérica: Revista de La Asociación Europea de Lenguas Para Fines Específicos (AELFE)*, no. 34 (2017): 163–86.

²⁰ Vaclav Brezina, Tony McEnery, and Stephen Wattam, "Collocations in Context: A New Perspective on Collocation Networks," *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics* 20, no. 2 (2015): 139–73.

²¹ Lawrence Anthony, "AntConc (Version 4.3.1) [Computer Software]" (Tokyo, Japan: Waseda University, 2024), <https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software>.

In this way, the metaphoricality of the noun *corruption* will be treated as a post-verbal noun, combined with a preceding verb. The position of this study is that, in as much as words primarily get their metaphors from the imprint of the preceding verb, metaphor may also be semantically inferred from other elements that co-occur with the word. Therefore, this study analysed the metaphoricality of the noun *corruption* based on the clipped sequence [**verb (...)** **corruption**], where (...) are optional items that can be placed between the verb and *corruption*, assuming that *corruption* functions as a syntactic object of its preceding verb, and even if the word is not strictly the syntactic object of its preceding verb, it is semantically related to it. The analysis involved a three-step approach.

- 1) First, the researchers generated a wordlist for each corpus to identify term frequencies, using (LancBox X 3.0.0) to sort terms alphabetically and by frequency.²²
- 2) Second, the researchers generated a KWIC list for "*corruption*" by comparing the NPP and NDC wordlists. These comparisons allow researchers to determine which words occur statistically more often in wordlist A when compared with wordlist B and vice versa.²³ Figure 1 illustrates the number of tokens and hits for noun *corruption* in both manifestos.

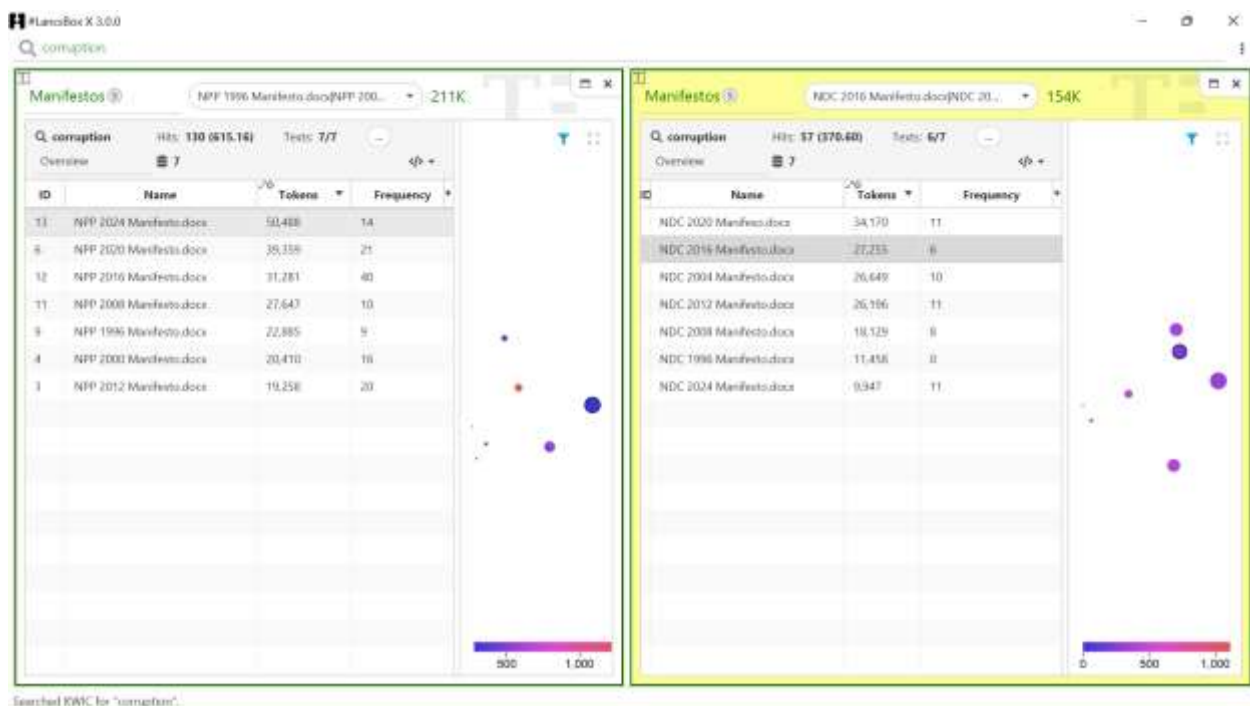


Figure 1: Number of tokens and frequency for *corruption* in the corpus

- 3) The researchers used the concordance tool to analyze the metaphor tied to the term, indexing it with preceding verbs and other linguistic elements. The concordance tool identifies all instances of a word or phrase within a corpus, which displays it with surrounding text.²⁴ In the current study, the keywords and the concordances helped to identify the enactment of metaphors for the concept of *corruption* in the NPP and the NDC manifestos.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The findings revealed that the NPP manifesto sup-corpus amounts to 211,328 words with 130 hits of KWIC for the noun *corruption*, while the NDC manifesto sub-corpus is 153,804 words with 57 hits of KWIC for the noun *corruption*. The details of the corpus are provided in Table 1 below.

²² Brezina, McEnergy, and Wattam, "Collocations in Context: A New Perspective on Collocation Networks."

²³ Kwabena Sarfo Sarfo-Kantankah, "The Policy or the Person? A Corpus-Based Functional Analysis of Manifestos of Two Political Parties in Ghana," *Contemporary Journal of African Studies* 8, no. 1 & 2 (December 31, 2021): 61–79, <https://doi.org/10.4314/contjas.v8i2.5>.

²⁴ Sarfo-Kantankah, "The Policy or the Person? A Corpus-Based Functional Analysis of Manifestos of Two Political Parties in Ghana."

Table 1: Text details

Names	Nature of the manifestos	Wordlist	KWIC for Corruption	
			Freq.	TOTAL
NDC 1996	Continuing (In power and won with the same candidate)	11,458	0	9
NPP 1996	Opposition (In opposition and seeking to take power but lost)	22,885	9	
NPP 2000	Opposition (Won power from the opposition)	20,410	16	26
NDC 2004	Opposition (In opposition and seeking to take power but lost)	26,649	10	
NDC 2008	Opposition (Won power from the opposition)	18,129	8	18
NPP 2008	Transitioning (In power and seeks to continue with another candidate but lost)	27,647	10	
NDC 2012	Continuing (In power and won with the same candidate)	26,196	11	31
NPP 2012	Opposition (In opposition and seeking to take power but lost)	19,258	20	
NDC 2016	Transitioning (In power and seeks to continue with another candidate but lost)	27,255	6	46
NPP2016	Opposition (Won power from the opposition)	31,281	40	
NDC 2020	Opposition (In opposition and seeking to take power but lost)	34,170	11	32
NPP 2020	Continuing (In power and won with the same candidate)	39,359	21	
NDC 2024	Opposition (In opposition and seeks to win with the same candidate)	9,947	11	25
NPP 2024	Transitioning (In power and seeks to continue with another candidate)	50,488	14	
		365,132	187	

Visualisation of the table reveals that the use of the keyword *corruption* in manifestos has increased significantly over time. For instance, *corruption* was used nine (9) times in the manifestos of both parties in the 1996 election. Significantly, the number increased to 26 in 2000 and 2004. It further increased to 18 in 2008, 31 in 2012 and 46 in 2016, and dipped down slightly in 2020 and 2024 with 32 and 25 hits, respectively. Additionally, the manifestos of the political parties in opposition frequently use the word corruption. From the data, 144 hits of the word corruption were realised in manifestos of parties that were in opposition and seeking to take power from the incumbent parties, compared to 32 hits in manifestos of parties that were in power.

The analysis demonstrates that Ghanaians may perceive corruption as a persistent and central theme in political discourse, especially when parties are campaigning against an incumbent. This finding is consistent with Hasty, Sarfo-Kantankah, and Asamoah who contend that the opposition frequently leverages the theme of corruption to critique the ruling government.²⁵ These critiques reflect the electorate's concerns about governance and accountability. Given the increase in mentions from 1996 to 2016, it appears that corruption is viewed as a critical issue that resonates with voters. It is however realised that there is a slight decline in 2020 and 2024. This decline could suggest the institutionalisation of the OSP in 2017 to investigate and prosecute all corrupt officials in the past and present. However, the consistent emphasis over time points to the issue's importance in the national conversation, especially, the interpretation of its frequency as a direct appeal to the desire for cleaner governance and transparency.

²⁵ Jennifer Hasty, "The Pleasures of Corruption: Desire and Discipline in Ghanaian Political Culture," *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (2005): 271–301; Sarfo-Kantankah, "Corruption Is a Big Issue: A Corpus-Assisted Study of the Discursive Construction of Corruption in Ghanaian Parliamentary Discourse"; John K Asamoah, "The Role of Leadership in Combating Corruption in Decentralized Governance Structures of Ghana: An Empirical Study of GA South District Assembly," *Review of Public Administration and Management* 05, no. 03 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.4172/2315-7844.1000228>.

The significant contrast between the frequency of corruption mentions in opposition manifestos (144 hits) compared to those of incumbent parties (32 hits) reinforces the idea that opposition parties use the issue as a key tool to challenge the status quo, while incumbent parties may avoid focusing too heavily on it in their manifestos. For example, despite the NPP's 2024 manifesto being 50,488 tokens long, the noun *corruption* appeared only 11 times. This underscores the idea that ruling parties tend to shy away from talking about corruption, likely because they cannot openly criticize their own administration.

It is also fascinating to note that winning manifestos (NPP 2000, 2016, 2020; NDC 2008, 2012) used the word *corruption* more than the losing manifestoes. In total, 96 hits of *corruption* were realised in winning manifestos, while 66 were realised in losing ones. The fact that the winning manifestos used the word *corruption* more frequently may suggest that Ghanaians are more likely to respond favourably to political parties that make corruption a focal point of their campaign messages. For instance, Ofori and Dogbatse argue that addressing corruption resonates with voters, and parties that emphasise it may be perceived as more credible in tackling governance challenges.²⁶ It implies that the electorate places significant weight on anti-corruption measures when choosing their leaders.

Metaphors associated with the noun Corruption

The data make it clear that political parties enact some concepts regarding corruption. The strongest evidence of conceptual framing, according to Pedavoah and Ansah, "occurs and emerges from the corpus sample in the form of whole data being shaped by a metaphor."²⁷ In the 14 selected manifestos from both the NPP and NDC, the political parties inferred metaphors pertaining to the noun *corruption* in 31 different linguistic units in 96 instances to describe different conceptualisation of corruption. The linguistic units marked with italics serve as tigers that instantiate the metaphors associated with corruption.

1. CORRUPTION IS WAR THAT CAN BE FOUGHT

Verbs: *Fight* (22), *Tackle* (6), *Combat* (8), *Curb* (3), *Mount ...against* (1), *Eliminate* (1)

Nouns: *Fight* (16), *War* (1), *Assault* (1), *Elimination* (1)

2. CORRUPTION IS A DISEASE

Verbs: *Prevent* (2), *Reduce* (1), *Demoralise* (1), *Avoid* (1), *Abhor* (2), *Investigate* (1), *Minimise* (1), *Eliminate* (1)

Nouns: *Diagnostic study* (1), *Negative effect* (1), *Incidence* (1), *Characteristics* (1), *Investigation* (1)

Adjective: *Uncounselled* (2)

3. CORRUPTION IS A BUSHFIRE THAT CAN SPREAD

Noun: *Wide spread* (1)

Adjectives: *Rampant* (1), *Rife* (1), *Uncontrolled* (2), *Widespread* (2)

4. CORRUPTION IS A BUSINESS ENTITY THAT CAN EXPAND

Verb: *Thriving* (1)

Noun: *Growing* (2)

Adjective: *Massive* (4)

5. CORRUPTION IS A COMMODITY THAT CAN BE TRANSACTED

Verbs: *Deal* (2),

Nouns: *Proceeds* (1), *Price* (2)

CORRUPTION IS WAR THAT CAN BE FOUGHT

One of the ways political parties frame the concept of corruption is through the idea of war. Political parties conceptualise *corruption* as an attacking force that needs to be fought, devise strategies to prevent its attack, and finally eliminate it. This implies that war is the source domain through which the political parties project their idea of corruption, which is the target domain. This idea is seen through collocates of the noun *corruption*, such as the verbs '*fight*', '*tackle*', '*combat*', '*mount ...against*', and '*eliminate*' and

²⁶ Michael Ofori and Felicity Sena Dogbatse, "‘We Are Only to Appear to Be Fighting Corruption...We Can't Even Bite’: Online Memetic Anti-Corruption Discourse in the Ghanaian Media," *Online Media and Global Communication* 2, no. 1 (March 28, 2023): 77–99, <https://doi.org/10.1515/omgc-2023-0001>.

²⁷ Emma Kusuoba Pedavoah and Gladys Nyarko Ansah, "Fighting a Global Pandemic and Local Stigmatisation: War Metaphors in Presidential Update Speeches and Their Effect on Attitudes to COVID -19 (Patients) in Ghana," *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 34, no. 1 (June 29, 2023): 36–65, <https://doi.org/10.4314/ljh.v34i1.2s>.

the nouns ‘fight’, ‘war’, ‘curb’, and *assault*. From the concordance lines as illustrated in Figure 2, the parties promised to fight (lines 7 – 12, Figure 2), combat (lines 5 – 6, Figure 2), tackle (line 15, Figure 2), curb (line 4, Figure 2), and eliminate (line 13, Figure 2) corruption. In addition, political party leaders pledged to “*mount a crusade against corruption*” (line 1, Figure 2) while waging a *ruthless war against corruption* (line 3, Figure 2).

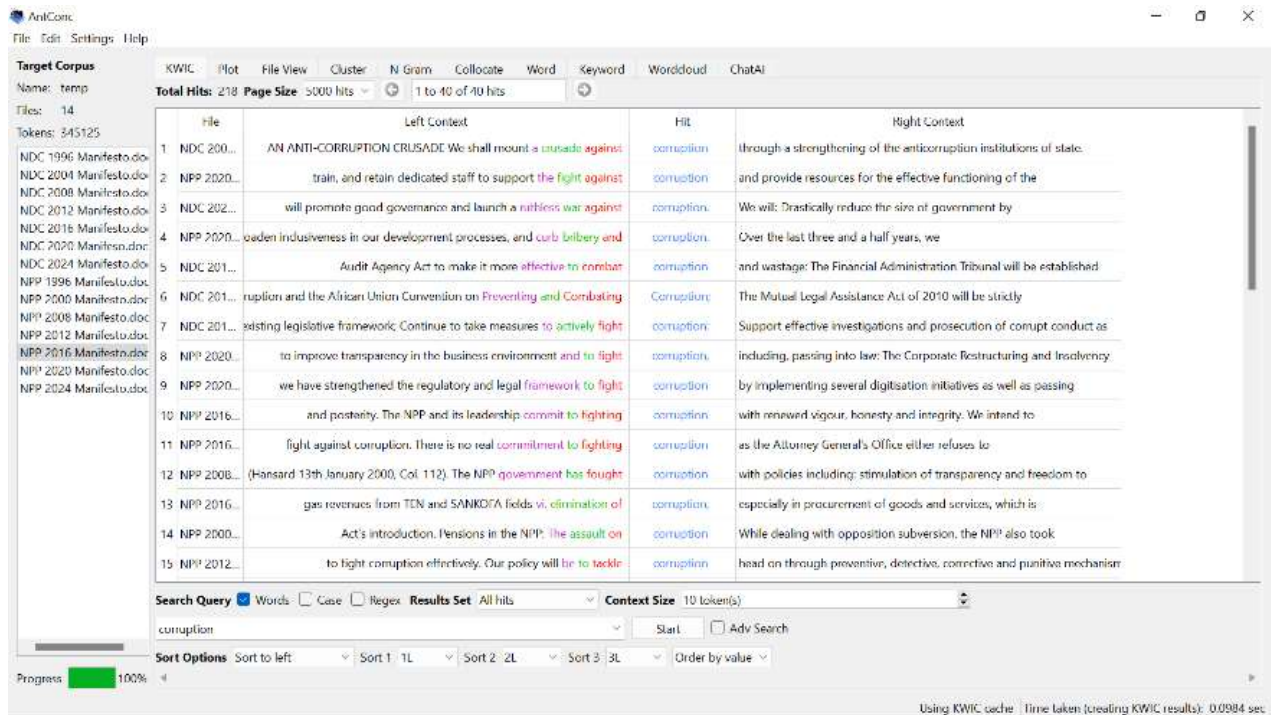


Figure 2: Concordance lines of linguistic units for war metaphor

The following examples 1-4 show how political parties used a war metaphor to frame their statements about corruption in their manifestos.

- 1) “The NPP and its leadership commit to **fighting corruption** with renewed vigour, honesty and integrity” (NPP 2016).
- 2) “The next NDC government will promote good governance and **launch a ruthless war against corruption**” (NDC 2024).
- 3) “The internal audit system will be revamped to make it more effective to **combat corruption** and wastage” (NDC 2012).
- 4) “Our policy will be to **tackle corruption** head on through preventive, detective, corrective and punitive mechanisms” (NPP 2012).

These extracts in Figure 2 and examples 1-4 confirm the claim that political parties see corruption as an enemy that stands in opposition to national development. The use of the word ‘fight’ in example 1 expresses a sense of urgency and a clear stance against continuing down a harmful or unsustainable path linked to corruption. Therefore, the speakers emphasise the political commitment to combat the enemy (corruption) that threatens the peace and security of the society. This can be done by “*launching ruthless war against corruption*” (example 2), *tackling* (example 4) and *eliminating* (line 13, Figure 2) corruption – an idea that is linked to fighting and winning a battle against the enemy.

CORRUPTION IS A DISEASE

It is evident from the corpus that parties see corruption as a disease and therefore conceptualise corruption as a disease that can be infectious, can be studied, has symptoms and preventive measures, and can be cured. Here, DISEASE is the source domain while CORRUPTION becomes the target domain. From the corpus, linguistic units that affect the noun *corruption* to be conceptualised as a disease include the verbs ‘prevent’, ‘reduce’, ‘demoralise’, ‘avoid’, ‘abhor’, *investigate*, ‘minimise’, and ‘eliminate’; the nouns

‘*diagnostic study*’, ‘*negative effect*’, ‘*incidence*’, ‘*characteristics*’, and the adjective ‘*uncontrolled*.’ This is illustrated in Figure 3 below.



Figure 3: Concordance lines for linguistic units of the disease metaphor

The examples below provide some other tokens from which the metaphor related to disease is inferred. Just as diseases can be studied to establish their symptoms, their ability to spread when not checked, and their ability to affect someone psychologically, corruption can also undergo similar processes.

- 5) “The widespread corruption is also the result of low levels of commitment to high ethics and integrity, as well as ineffectual policing and *investigation of corruption*” (NPP 2012).
- 6) ...“government on its part has extended an invitation to the World Bank to conduct *a diagnostic study on corruption* in Ghana” (NPP 2008).
- 7) “Under the NDC administration, *corruption has become widespread*, heralding the entry of the phrase” (NPP 2016).
- 8) “*Corruption demoralises* honest people and fills them with uncertainty, mistrust and fear” (NPP 2016).

From the concordance lines in line 3, Figure 3, political parties acknowledge that corruption, just like a disease has symptoms that can be *defined* based on its characteristics. Based on the symptoms of the disease, health workers conduct a study to determine the cause and prevention of the disease. This idea is further projected on corruption that has to go under “*a diagnostic study*” (example 6). From example 5, the speaker identifies “*low levels of commitment, ethics*” and *integrity*,” as well as “*ineffectual policing*” as the causes of corruption in the country. Diseases are also susceptible to spreading if not cured. This concept is viewed in terms of corruption in government institutions in the country. From example 7, the speaker bemoans the widespread nature of corruption under the NDC administration. Diseases, like corruption, if not checked could have adverse effects on individuals. From example 8, the speaker argues that corruption “*demoralises*” honest people just like disease can cripple a healthy person. In addition, when one is infected with a disease, the result is bad. This is the reason why the speaker sees the effect of corruption as “*negative*” (line 6, Figure 3).

CORRUPTION IS A BUSHFIRE THAT CAN SPREAD

Another way corruption is conceptualised in the manifestos is a bushfire. This bushfire has the potential to spread rapidly and rampantly, causing lots of harm to lives and property if it is are not controlled.

Therefore, BUSHFIRE serves as the source domain while CORRUPTION becomes the target domain. The word “*wide spread*” and the adjectives “*rampant*”, “*rife*”, and “*uncontrolled*” are linguistic units that help to infer the metaphoricity of CORRUPTION as BUSHFIRE. These ideas are illustrated by the tokens in the sentences below.

- 9) “The *wide spread corruption* is also the result of low levels of commitment to high ethics and integrity” (NPP 2012).
- 10) “As the Catholic Bishop Conference puts it, massive *uncontrolled corruption* has become the order of the day” (NDC 2024).
- 11) “The current unemployment crisis has been occasioned by reckless economic mismanagement, *rampant corruption*, waste, and disconnect between government policies and job outcomes” (NDC 2024).
- 12) “Lack of accountable and responsible public financial management creates a climate where leakage and *corruption are rife*” (NPP 2012).

The extracts in (examples 9 –12) demonstrate the magnitude of the effect of corruption in the country. In (example 9) for instance, the speaker acknowledges that corruption is ‘*wide spread*’, likening the challenge to bush fire. The widespread is because of economic mismanagement and incompetence. This conceptualisation of corruption as a bushfire suggests that corruption in public office is ‘*rampant*’ (example 11), ‘*rife*’ (example 12), and destructive. These challenges have come about because no controlling mechanisms were put in place to check these spreads. According to the speaker in example 10, corruption has spread quickly and indiscriminately, much like bushfire, because it was not controlled. The metaphor highlights how corruption consumes resources, erodes trust in institutions, and hinders progress, just as a bushfire devastates everything in its path.

CORRUPTION IS A BUSINESS ENTITY THAT CAN EXPAND

It is also apparent that political party leaders conceptualise corruption as a business entity. This is an entity susceptible to expansion through foul or fair means. In real businesses, people undertake strategies that can help their businesses grow and expand. The idea of expansion is projected on corruption. Party leaders in their manifestos highlight the expanding nature of corruption with linguistic units such as the verb ‘*thriving*’, the noun (gerund) ‘*growing*’, and the adjective ‘*massive*’. For instance, in lines 1-4, Figure 4, the leaders conceptualise corruption as a business entity that has expanded and become ‘*massive*’, continuously growing (lines 5-6, Figure 4) and flourishing amid adversity (line 7, Figure 4).



Figure 4: Concordance lines for linguistic units of the business metaphor

In lines 1-4, Figure 4 for instance, corruption is likened to a business with deep systemic control, underpinning setbacks in governance through practices such as ‘*nepotism and impunity*’ (line 1). The use of the phrase “*state capture*” (line 1) reflects how corruption expands by infiltrating independent state institutions and perpetuating a culture in which accountability is diminished. Like a business that grows through monopolistic practices, corruption consolidates power and influence, making it harder to dismantle. In addition, “*massive corruption*” and the focus on ensuring “*value-for-money*” (line 3, Figure 4) suggest that corruption functions like a business seeking profit through fraudulent means. The statement “*one thing is thriving – CORRUPTION!*” in (line 7, Figure 4) vividly presents corruption as a flourishing enterprise. This growth mirrors a business that capitalises on difficult circumstances to expand its operations and strengthen its hold. It suggests that, while many sectors are suffering, corruption, like a successful business, finds ways to survive and grow.

CORRUPTION IS A COMMODITY THAT CAN BE TRANSACTED

In the conceptualisation of corruption as a commodity that can be transacted, political party leaders in their manifestos utilised linguistic elements such as ‘*deal with*’ (lines 4-5, Figure 5) ‘*proceeds*’ (line 2, Figure 5), and ‘*price*’ (line 1-3, Figure 5) to imply that corruption functions like an economic good that can be exchanged, valued, and traded. This transactional metaphor positions corruption as something that can be bought, sold, and negotiated, much like a commodity in a marketplace. From the data, the speaker in (line 1, Figure 5) acknowledges that corruption, like a commodity, is expensive. The high price of commodity (corruption) is also referenced in the effects that corrupt practices have on the nation. This is explored in (line 3, Figure 5).

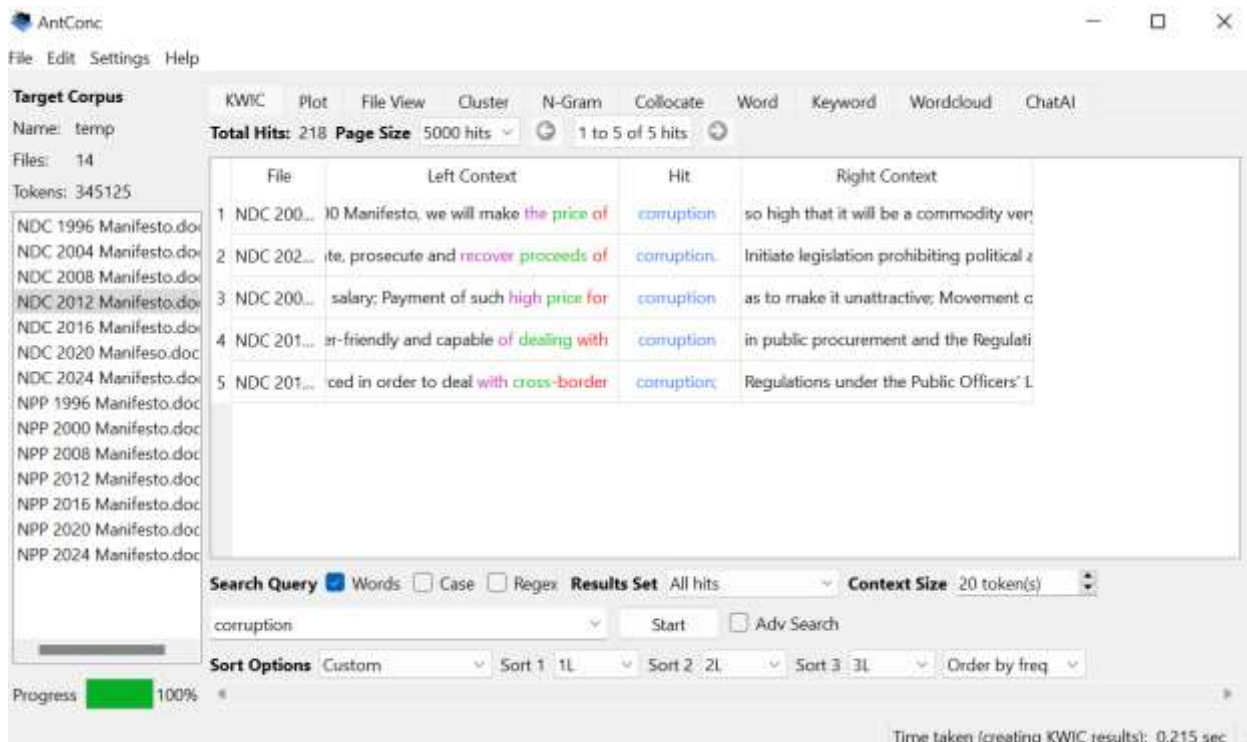


Figure 5: Concordance lines for linguistic units of the business metaphor

From the concordance line of the linguistic units in (line 1, Figure 5) for instance, the noun ‘*price*’ which instantiates the metaphor for the preceding prepositional complement ‘*of corruption*’ implies a direct parallel to the proceeds of a commercial transaction, where profits or returns are generated from the exchange of goods or services. In this context, corruption becomes a lucrative commodity that yields financial or material gains. It implies that those involved in corrupt activities receive tangible rewards, often at the expense of public resources or institutional integrity. Moreover, the ‘*price of corruption*’ projects the concept of “*price*” to the cost or value of a commodity. In (line 3, Figure 5), price represents

both the literal and metaphorical costs. On one hand, it may signify the bribes or payments made in corrupt transactions, and on the other hand, it reflects the broader societal costs, such as loss of public trust, degradation of institutions, and economic inefficiency.

DISCUSSION

The analysis has revealed the use of conceptual metaphor to frame the noun *corruption*. From the analysis, the metaphors identified—corruption as war, disease, bushfire, business entity, and commodity—serve as cognitive and linguistic tools that shape how political parties communicate the urgency of corruption problems and solutions to the electorate. The frequent use of war metaphors in the manifestos, for example, aligns with studies where political actors frame corruption as an enemy that must be defeated.²⁸ This framing is not unique to Ghana. Globally, leaders often adopt war metaphors to emphasise the adversarial nature of corruption and rally public support for anti-corruption campaigns.²⁹ In Ghana, this metaphor resonates with the public's long-standing concern over corruption, as evidenced by historical references such as the military takeovers and revolutionary “housecleaning” efforts in the late 20th century.³⁰ The persistent framing of corruption as an enemy that must be “eliminated” also reflects the perception that corruption is an existential threat to Ghana's democratic progress and socioeconomic well-being.³¹

Another aspect of the metaphorical framing of *corruption* is that of disease, which draws on the idea of contamination and infection. Therefore, it illustrates the pervasive and damaging effects of corruption on the nation's moral and institutional health. The metaphorical use of terms such as “widespread” and “prevent” positions corruption as an epidemic that requires both diagnosis and treatment. This aligns with a study by Ofori and Dogbatse who argue that metaphorical language in political discourse often frames corruption as an affliction to be eradicated, reflecting societal anxieties about moral decay.³² In Ghana, this metaphor has significant resonance as its political history includes numerous efforts to “cleanse” the system, such as the 1979 “housecleaning exercise.” However, as this study highlights, despite such efforts, corruption continues to spread, much like an untreated disease. This metaphor suggests that the fight against corruption requires reactive and preventive measures, akin to a public health response. The use of this metaphor in party manifestos is particularly effective in appealing to voters' concerns about the systemic nature of corruption, which is seen as undermining public trust and weakening state institutions.³³

Corruption as a bushfire metaphor also portrays corruption as rapidly spreading, and difficult to contain. Studies have observed that political discourse in Ghana frequently highlights the rampant nature of corruption, especially during election campaigns.³⁴ By framing corruption as a bushfire, political parties communicate the need for swift and decisive action, positioning themselves as the solution to the nation's moral and economic decay. Within the political and economic systems of Ghana, corruption is a business. From the analysis, the political parties conceptualised corruption as both a business that can expand and a commodity that can be transacted. These metaphors are particularly significant because they highlight the commercial nature of corruption, where individuals and groups engage in corrupt practices to maximise personal gains. The notion of corruption as a “thriving” or “massive” business enterprise mirrors the observations of CDD-Ghana, which argues that corruption in Ghana is both “a cause and a consequence

²⁸ Lawrence Lessig, “Republic, Lost: How Money Corrupts Congress—and a Plan to Stop It.” *Choice Reviews Online* 49, no. 12 (August 1, 2012): 49–717649–7176. <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.49-7176>; Emanuela Ceva, and Maria Paola Ferretti. “Political Corruption.” *Philosophy Compass* 12, no. 12 (September 18, 2017): e12461. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12461>; Ramona Zmolnig. “Framing Corruption: How Language Affects Norms.” *Crime, Law and Social Change* 70, no. 2 (November 9, 2017): 179–95. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-017-9726-y>.

²⁹ Andreas Musolff, *Political Metaphor Analysis* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016).

³⁰ Owusu, “Culture and Democracy in West Africa: Some Persistent Problems.”

³¹ Andoh, “Theoretical Perspectives and Explanations of Political Corruption in Ghana.”

³² Ofori and Sena Dogbatse, “‘We Are Only to Appear to Be Fighting Corruption... We Can't Even Bite’: Online Memetic Anti-Corruption Discourse in the Ghanaian Media.”

³³ Andoh, “Theoretical Perspectives and Explanations of Political Corruption in Ghana.”

³⁴ Hasty, “The Pleasures of Corruption: Desire and Discipline in Ghanaian Political Culture”; Joseph Yaw Asomah, “What Are the Key Drivers of Persistent Ghanaian Political Corruption?,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 54, no. 5 (August 13, 2019): 638–55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909619826339>.

of structural decay, perpetuated by rent-seeking behaviour and the monopolization of state resources.”³⁵ This metaphor suggests that corruption has become institutionalised just like a business that grows through networks of patronage and cronyism. In addition, corruption, like business, thrives in environments where accountability is weak, and public institutions are compromised.³⁶

Discussion Summary

This study has discussed the conceptualisation of noun corruption in the manifestos of the two main political parties in Ghana under the Fourth Republic. The study has established that electorates may be influenced to vote a part in office through strategies employed by the political party to combat corruption, a situation all Ghanaians find to be worrying. This is evident in the fact that political parties that won the election, especially from the opposition, used the noun corruption frequently in their manifestos more than incumbent parties that sought to continue to hold political power. Judging from a historical perspective, the noun corruption has increased in use over time. From the analysis, it is realised that the number increased to 26 in 2000 and 2004. It further increased to 18 in 2008, 31 in 2012, and 46 in 2016 and dipped slightly in 2020 and 2024 with 32 and 25 hits, respectively. Although the number dipped marginally in 2020 and 2024, the continuous utilisation of the noun signifies persistent decay in Ghanaian political dispensation.

CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the metaphoricity of the noun "*corruption*" in the manifestos of Ghana's two leading parties: the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC). From the analysis, it has become clear that "*corruption*" is conceptualised metaphorically as war, disease, bushfire, business, and commodity. These metaphors reflect the parties' understanding of corruption as a multifaceted problem. They can also serve as rhetorical tools to frame their political agendas and engage the electorate. Opposition parties consistently employ the noun "*corruption*" more frequently than incumbent parties, using it as a central theme to critique governance and appeal to voters' desire for transparency and accountability. This strategic use of metaphors highlights how deeply ingrained the issue of corruption is in Ghana's political landscape, and how it continues to influence electoral outcomes. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on political discourse by demonstrating how metaphorical language shapes the public's perception of corruption. The conceptualisation of corruption as a war or disease, for instance, emphasises the urgency and severity of the issue while framing it as a business or commodity underscores its economic implications and potential for growth if left unchecked. These metaphorical framings, when analysed alongside the frequency of corruption-related discourse in manifestos, affirm the prominence of corruption as a political issue in Ghana.

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³⁶ Lay Lian Chuah, Norman V. Loayza, and Bernard Myers, *The Fight against Corruption: Taming Tigers and Swatting Flies* (World Bank, Washington, DC, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1596/33171>.

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