CENTRE FOR PUBLIC DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (CPDA)

MEDIA MONITORING AND EVALUATION PROJECT REPORT

MASTER NARRATIVES IN THE 2026 NPP PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES GHANA

CPDA
CENTER FOR PUBLIC DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

In a presidential primary, information about candidate's records, background, character, position and ideas are crucial for delegates or voters to make well informed decisions. Following the work of previously established research such as the Pew Research Center for Excellence in Journalism and Harvard University Professor, Thomas Pattern of the Harvard Kennedy School and the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy, this study builds on such credible work to conduct an analysis of media coverage of the 2026 NPP Presidential Primaries in Ghana. How well candidates position themselves within the public domain—with the media –serving as an important catalyst, platform or conduit is important for success in a presential primary (Patterson, 2016). Media exposure and narratives should therefore not be taken for granted at all because it does contribute to the shaping of narratives and discourses surrounding a candidate and the impact it may have on the minds of delegates and the public.

Media exposure can bestow credibility, boost exposure, enhance the electability quotient, help with a candidate's overall standing and garner endorsement or funding. In Patterson's work, he quotes Theodore H. White author of *The Making of the President, 1972* who wrote that: "The power of the press is a primordial one. It determines what people will think and talk about—an authority that in other nations is reserved for tyrants, priests, parties, and mandarins." Among other factors, delegates and primary election voters also consider the wider political ecology, public narratives, existing images and concerns about a candidate before making their choices. And the build up to this
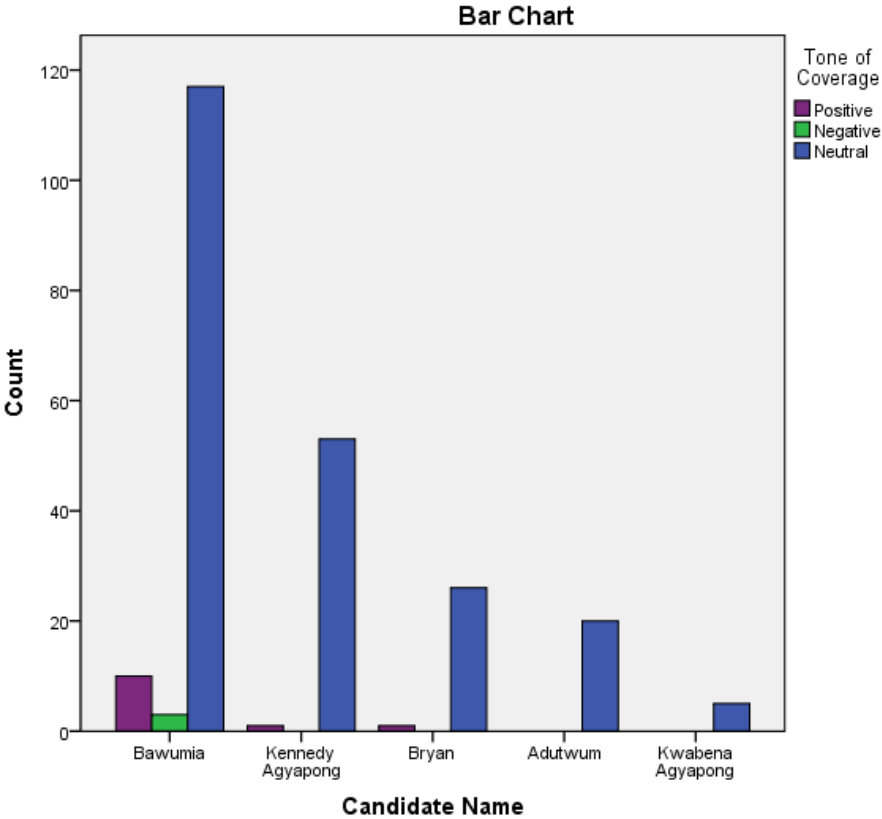
public image is influenced, to a great extent, by the media which plays a social shaping, agenda setting, agenda building and framing role.

The data for this research was gathered from August 2025 to January 2026 within which time coverage of the primary was substantial and had become a major term of news and public discourse. All data available within this period was gathered from well established a credible news organization in Ghana using content analysis. These organizations include: gbconline.com, Citinewroom, 3news.com, myjoyonline, Peace FM, Graphic online, and Metro TV. The variables coded were: Tone of media coverage, the subject matter, the type of frame, functional political communication frames, personal qualities, and story triggers.

Methodology: Content analysis is a systematic and objective research methodology used to analyze and interpret the meaning of text data, such as documents, articles, media posts, and more (Krippendorff, 2013). This was the main research method employed. A group of research assistants gathered the data for the five month period. The research assistants sampled all the news stories covered by the selected media houses from August 2025 to January 2026 on the presidential candidates. The data entry was done using SPSS. The collected data was taken through the inter-coder reliability test to determine the validity of the data. Inter-coder reliability for this research was calculated by comparing the data collected by the research assistants, where the total number of agreed-upon data is divided by the total number of data collected to determine the validity of the data. Inter-coder reliability was established at 0.91%.

Results and Discussion

Tone

Bar Chart

Out of a total of 236 coverage items, Bawumia stands out as the most visible candidate, commanding 130 coverage items, which represents more than half of the total. His coverage is predominantly neutral (90%) meaning media performance in covering stories was professionally done, but he also receives
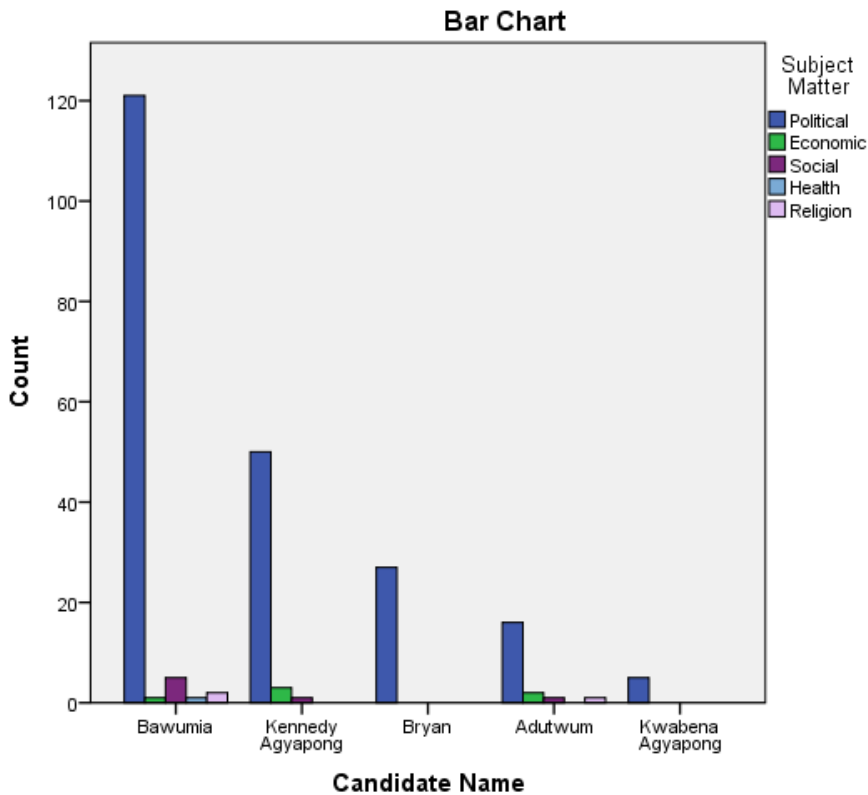
the highest proportion of positive mentions (7.69%) and the only notable negative mentions for (2.31%). This indicates that while he is the most scrutinized figure, he also benefits from favorable narratives, making his media presence both prominent and contested.

Kennedy Agyapong follows with 54 coverage items, nearly a quarter of the total. His coverage is overwhelmingly neutral (98.15%), with only 1.89% positive mentions and no negative framing. This reflects significant visibility but without the polarization seen in Bawumia's case. Bryan, with 27 coverage items, also receives mostly neutral coverage (96.30%), with a 3.7% positive mention. His presence is modest but slightly more favorable than Kennedy's in terms of tone.

Hon. Adutwum and Kwabena Agyepong receive the least attention, with 20 (100%) and 5 (100%) coverage items respectively. Both are covered entirely in neutral terms, suggesting minimal media framing beyond straightforward reporting. Their limited visibility places them at the margins of the media narrative compared to the other candidates.

Overall, the analysis highlights that neutrality dominates media coverage, with Bawumia emerging as the central figure who attracts both praise and criticism. The other candidates remain largely in the background, receiving coverage that is factual and uncontroversial. This distribution underscores the concentration of media narratives around Bawumia, while others are reported on in a way that avoids evaluative tones.
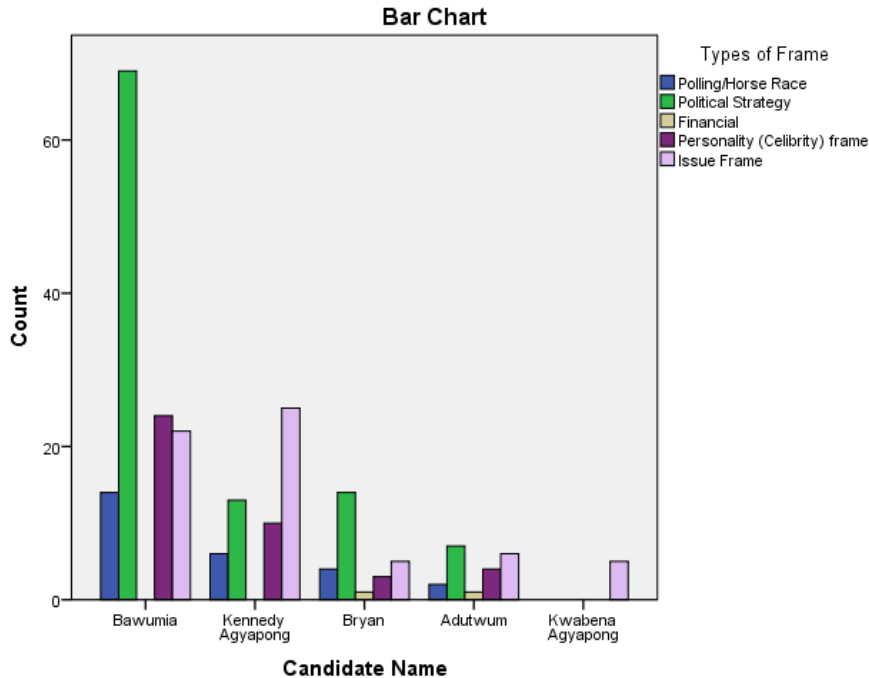
Subject matter/General Topic of coverage

Out of the total 236 items analyzed, the overwhelming majority, Bawumia dominates the coverage with 130 items, more than half of the total. His coverage is heavily political, with 93.28% items falling into that category. He also has small mentions in economic (0.75%), social (3.37%), health (0.75%), and religion (1.49%), making him the only candidate with visibility across all subject areas. This suggests that his public profile is not only politically centered but also occasionally touches on broader societal themes.

Kennedy Agyapong follows with 54 items, of which 92.59 are political. He has limited coverage in economic (5.56%) and social (1.85%) matters, but none in health or religion. His media presence is therefore concentrated almost entirely on political issues, with only slight diversification into economic and social discussions. Bryan's coverage is narrower still: all items are political 100%, with no representation in other subject areas. This indicates a singular focus on his political role without broader thematic engagement.

Adutwum's coverage is more varied compared to Bryan and Kennedy. Out of 20 items, 80% are political, but he also appears in economic (10%), social (5%), and religion (5%). This shows that while his coverage is primarily political, he does receive some attention in other spheres, reflecting a more multidimensional profile. Kwabena Agyapong has the least coverage overall, with only 5 items, all of which are political 100%. His presence is minimal and entirely confined to the political domain.

The analysis reveals that political issues dominate the media narrative for all candidates, with very limited attention to economic, social, health, or religious matters. Bawumia emerges as the most visible and diversified candidate, appearing across all subject categories, while the others are largely confined to political coverage. This underscores the centrality of politics in shaping media attention, with only occasional diversions into other thematic areas.

Type of Story Frames

Out of the total 235 items analyzed, Bawumia emerges as the most covered candidate, with 129 items. His coverage is overwhelmingly framed around **Political Strategy** (53.49%), highlighting narratives about tactics, positioning, and maneuvering. He also receives notable attention in **Personality Frames** (18.60%) and **Issue Frames** (17.05%), while his presence in **Polling/Horse Race Frames** (10.85%) suggests some focus on his electoral prospects. Interestingly, he has no coverage under the financial frame, indicating that economic or financial narratives are not tied to his profile in this dataset.

Kennedy Agyapong follows with 54 items. His coverage is more balanced across frames compared to Bawumia. He has 46.30% under **Issue Frames** , making this his strongest area, followed by **Political Strategy** (24.04%), **Personality Frames** (18.52%), and **Polling/Horse Race Frames** (11.11%). This suggests that Kennedy's media portrayal leans more toward substantive issues, while also reflecting his personality and strategic positioning. Like Bawumia, he has no financial frame coverage.
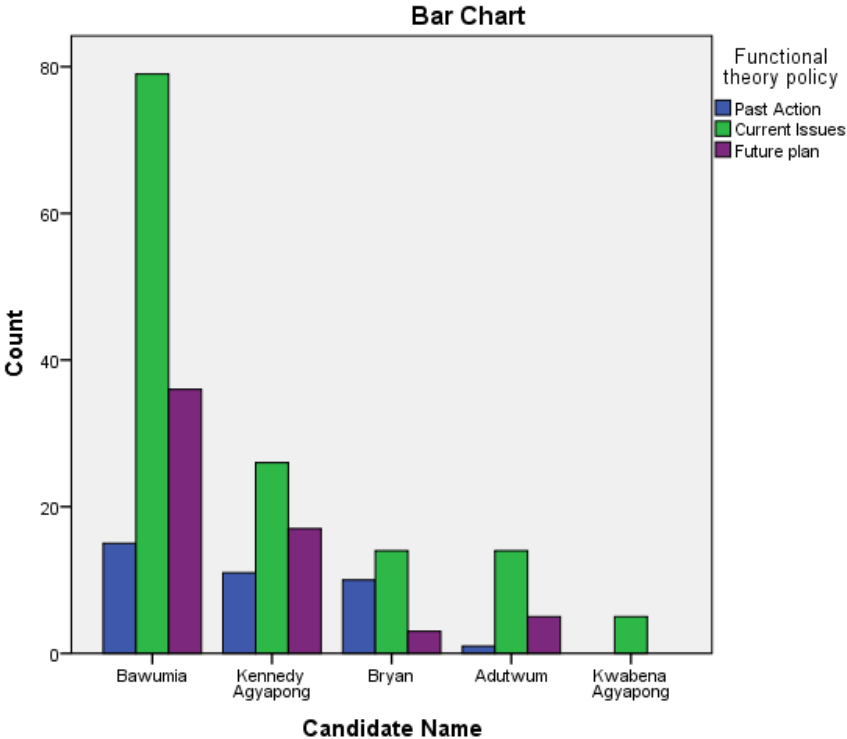
Bryan's coverage totals 27 items, with the largest share under **Political Strategy** (51.85%). He also appears in **Polling/Horse Race Frames** (14.81%), **Issue Frames** (18.52%), and **Personality Frames** (11.11%). Notably, he is one of the few candidates with coverage under the **Financial Frame** (3.7%), though this remains minimal. His profile is therefore primarily strategic, with some diversification into other frames.

Adutwum's coverage is smaller at 20 items but relatively diverse. He has 35% items under **Political Strategy**, 30% under **Issue Frames**, 20% under **Personality Frames**, 10% under **Polling/Horse Race Frames**, and 5% under the **Financial Frame**. This distribution suggests a multidimensional portrayal, though still dominated by strategy and issues. His presence across nearly all frames indicates a broader narrative scope compared to Bryan and Kennedy.

Kwabena Agyapong has the least coverage, with only 100% items, all under **Issue Frames**. This shows that his media presence is narrowly focused on substantive issues, without attention to strategy, personality, polling, or financial matters. His profile is therefore the most limited in terms of framing diversity.

In summary, the analysis reveals that **Political Strategy** is the dominant frame across all candidates, underscoring the media's focus on tactics and positioning. Bawumia is the most strategically framed figure, while Kennedy Agyapong stands out for his stronger emphasis on issues. Bryan and Adutwum show more balanced but smaller profiles, with Adutwum appearing across nearly all frames. Kwabena Agyapong, by contrast, is confined entirely to issue-based coverage. Overall, the framing patterns highlight how media narratives prioritize strategy and issues, with personality and polling playing secondary roles, and financial framing being almost absent.

Functions of political communication frames

Out of the total 236 items analyzed, the majority, Bawumia dominates the coverage with 130 items, more than half of the total. His profile is heavily centered on **current issues** (60.77%), reflecting a strong focus on his engagement with ongoing political and policy debates. He also has significant representation in **future plans** (27.69%), suggesting that his vision and proposals for the future are a notable part of his media portrayal. His **past actions** coverage (11.56%) is smaller but still present, indicating some recognition of his track record.

Kennedy Agyapong follows with 54 items. His coverage is also weighted toward **current issues** (48.15% but he has a relatively balanced distribution across **future plans** (31.48%) and **past actions** (20.37%). This suggests that his media narrative encompasses both his historical contributions and his forward-looking agenda, alongside his involvement in present debates.
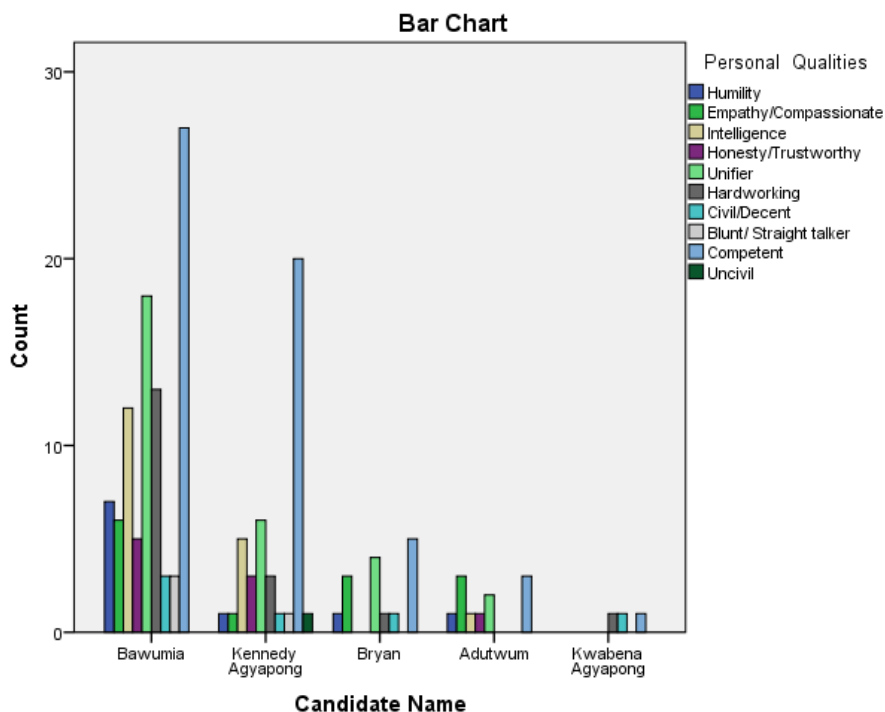
Bryan's coverage totals 27 items, with the largest share in **current issues** (51.85%). He also has 37.04% items under **past actions**, which is proportionally higher compared to his peers, and only 11.11% items under **future plans**. This indicates that his portrayal leans more toward his past record and present involvement, with limited emphasis on future-oriented proposals.

Adutwum's coverage is smaller at 20 items but relatively balanced. He has 70% items under **current issues**, 25% under **future plans**, and just 5% under **past actions**. This shows that his profile is primarily tied to present debates, with some attention to his forward-looking agenda, but little recognition of past achievements.

Kwabena Agyapong has the least coverage, with only 100% items, all under **current issues**. His media presence is therefore narrowly focused on present matters, with no attention to past actions or future plans. This reflects a limited and issue-specific portrayal.

The analysis reveals that **current issues dominate media coverage across all candidates**, underscoring the immediacy of political and policy debates in shaping narratives. Bawumia stands out for his extensive coverage, particularly in current issues and future plans, while Kennedy Agyapong shows a more balanced profile across all three categories. Bryan's coverage emphasizes past actions more than others, Adutwum is focused on current and future matters, and Kwabena Agyapong is confined entirely to present issues. Overall, the framing highlights how candidates are primarily evaluated on their engagement with ongoing challenges, with varying degrees of attention to their past records and future visions.

Personal Qualities/Character Frames

Out of the total 165 mentions, Bawumia stands out with the largest coverage of personal qualities, totaling 94 mentions. His strongest attributes are competence (28.72%) and unifier (19.15%) followed by hardworking (13.83%) and intelligence (12.77%). He is also noted for humility (7.45%), empathy (6.38%), honesty (5.32%), and smaller mentions of civility (3.19%) and bluntness. Importantly, he has no mentions under "uncivil," suggesting that his portrayal is overwhelmingly positive and centered on capability, unity, and diligence.

Kennedy Agyapong follows with 42 mentions. His profile is dominated by competence (47.62%), making up nearly half of his coverage. He is also described as a unifier (14.29%), intelligent (11.90%), hardworking (7.14%), and honest (7.14%). He has minor mentions of humility (2.38%), empathy (2.38%), civility (2.38%), and bluntness. Notably, he is the only candidate associated with the uncivil trait (2.38%), which slightly tempers his otherwise competence-driven portrayal.

Bryan's coverage totals 15 mentions, with his strongest qualities being competence (33.33%) and unifier (26.67%). He is also described as empathetic (20%), with minor mentions of humility (6.7%), hardworking (6.7%), and civility (6.7%). His profile is narrower compared to Bawumia and Kennedy, but still reflects positive traits, particularly around competence and unity.

Adutwum has 11 mentions, with competence (27.27%) and empathy (27.27%) as his leading traits. He is also noted for intelligence (9.09%), honesty (9.09%), humility (9.09%), and unifier (18.18%). His coverage is modest but balanced, highlighting both personal warmth and professional ability.
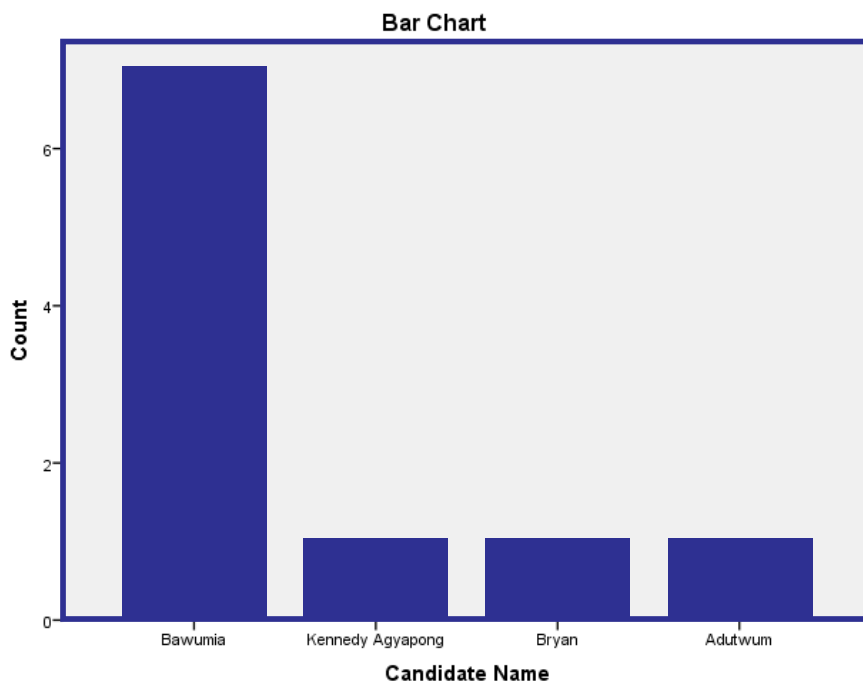
Kwabena Agyapong has the least coverage, with only 3 mentions. These are spread across hardworking (33.33%), civil/decent (3.33%), and competent (33.33%). His profile is minimal and lacks emphasis on broader personal qualities, reflecting limited media attention to his character traits.

In summary, the analysis shows that **competence is the dominant personal quality across all candidates**, followed by unifying ability and hardworking nature. Bawumia's portrayal

is the most extensive and multidimensional, emphasizing both professional and interpersonal strengths. Kennedy Agyapong is strongly associated with competence but also carries the only negative trait (uncivil). Bryan and Adutwum have smaller but positive profiles, while Kwabena Agyapong's presence is marginal. Overall, the framing of personal qualities is overwhelmingly positive, with competence and unity emerging as the central themes in candidate portrayals.
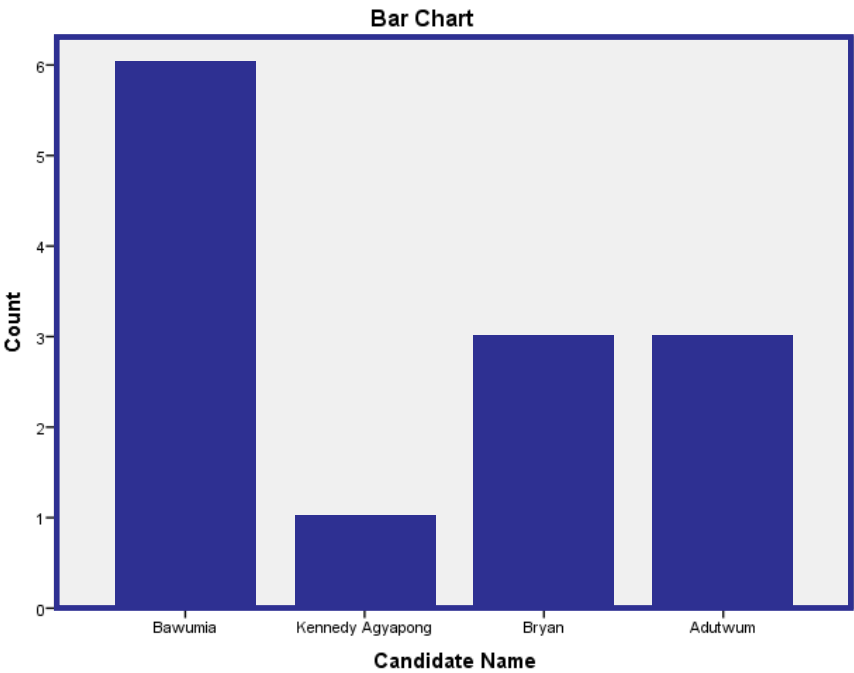
Personal Qualities: A breakdown.

Humility

Bawumia – 46.15%   Kennedy Agyapong   – 7.69%

Bryan – 23.08 %   Adutwum – 23.08%

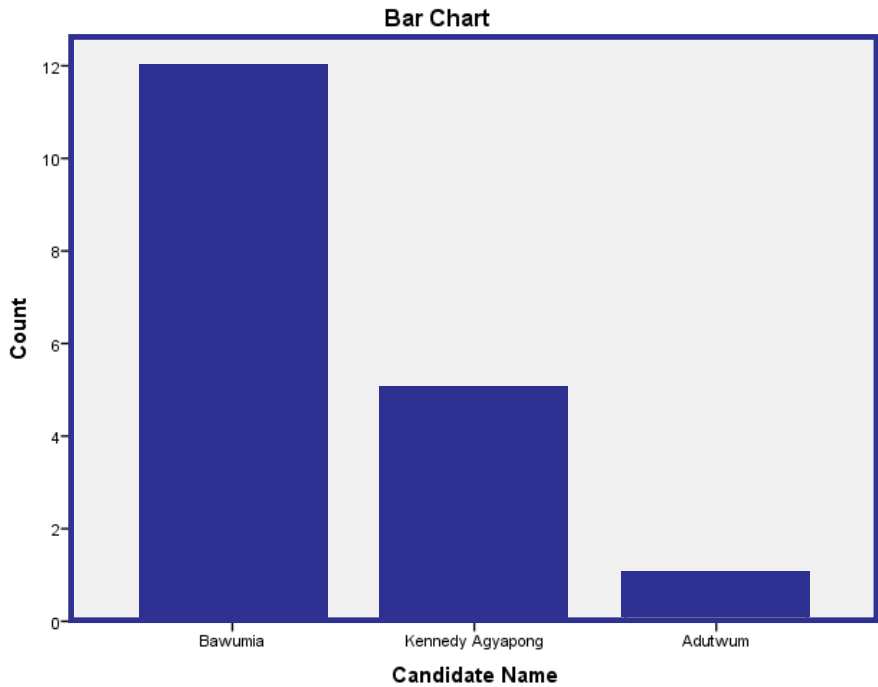## Empathy/Compassionate

Bawumiah – 46.2%

Kennedy – 7.7%

Bryan – 23.1%

Adutwum – 23.1%
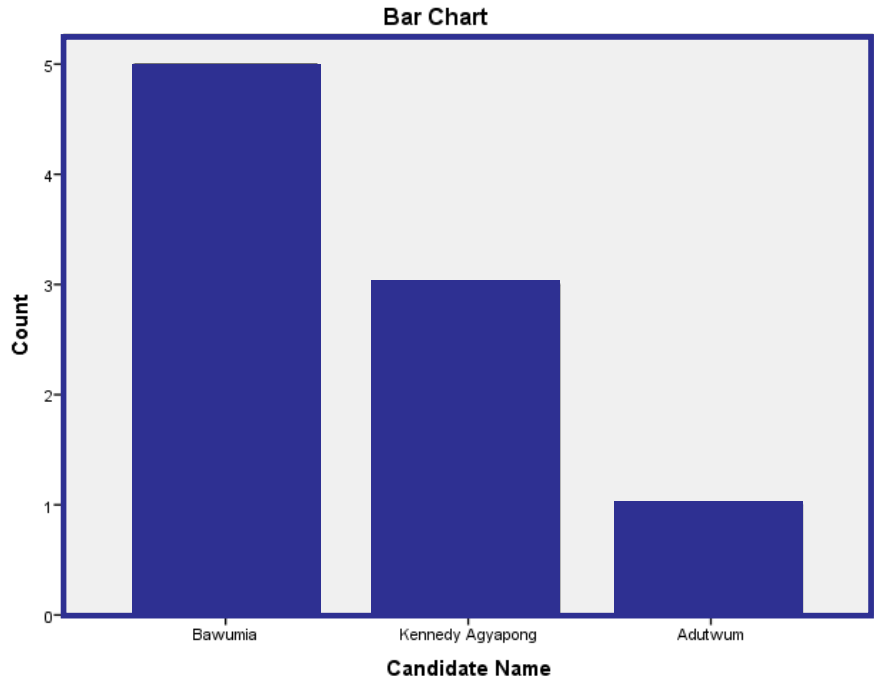
Intelligence

Bawumiah – 66.7%

Kennedy -27.8%
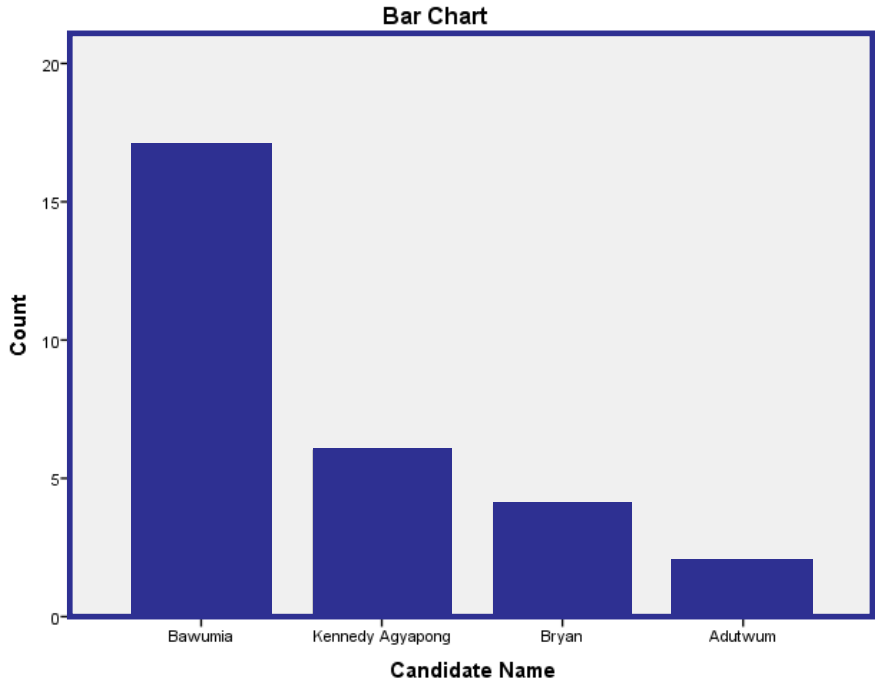
Adutwum- 5.6%

Honesty

Bawumiah – 55.6%

Kennedy – 33.3%
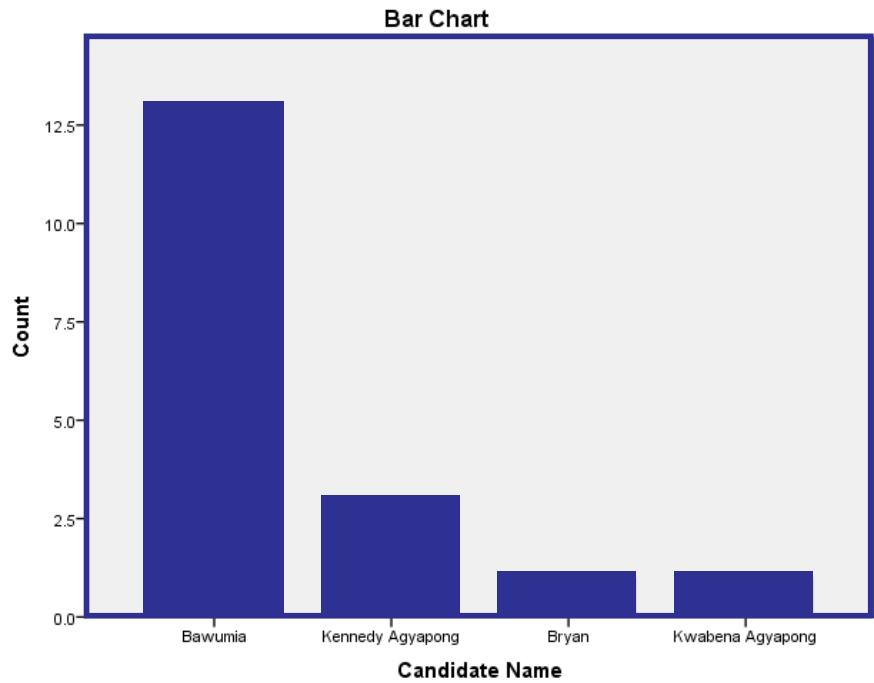
Adutwum – 11.1%

Unifier

Bawumiah – 58.6%

Kennedy – 20.7%

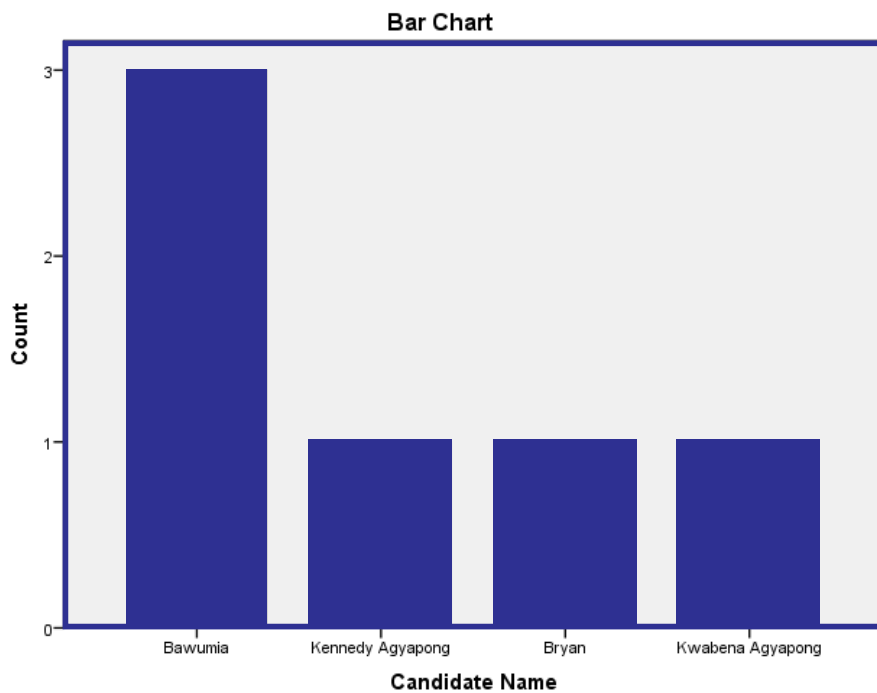Bryan – 13.8%

Adutwum – 6.9%

Hardworking

Bawumiah – 72.2%

Kennedy – 16.7%

Bryan – 5.6%
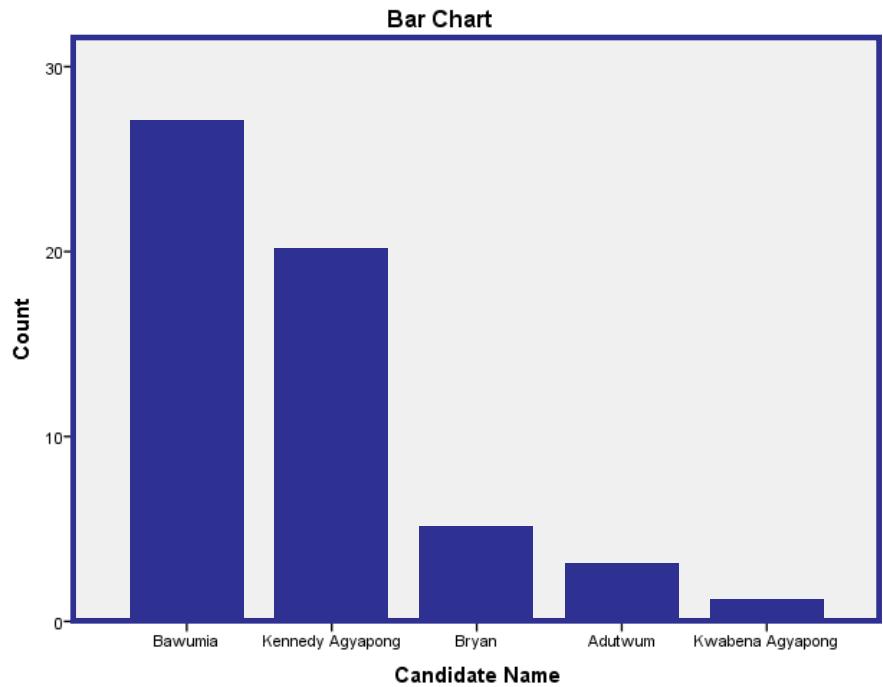
Kwabena Agyapong – 5.6%

Civil/Decent

Bawumiah – 50.0%

Kennedy Agyapong – 16.7%

Bryan – 16.7%

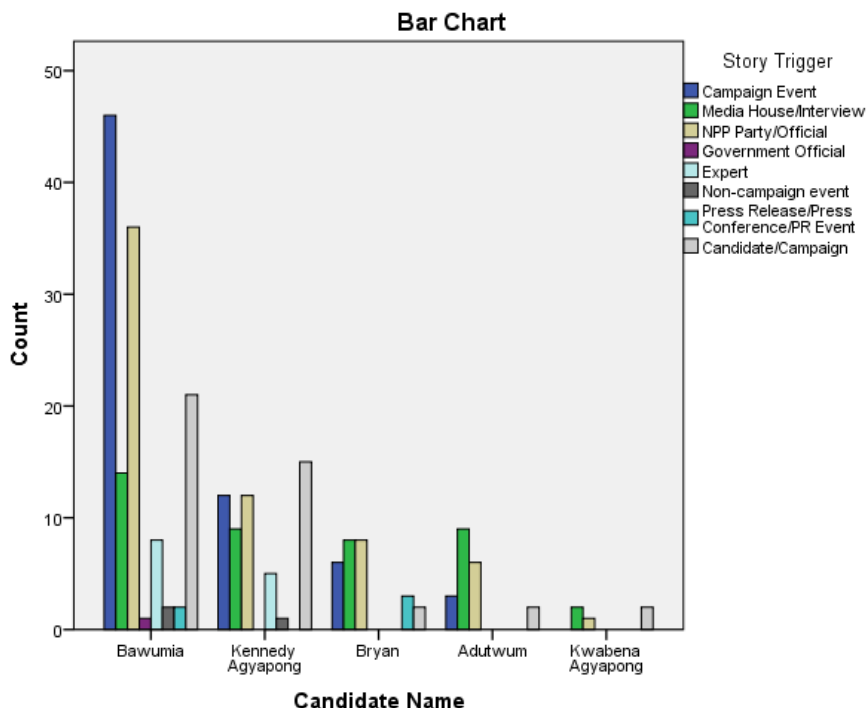Kwabena Agyapong – 16.7%

Competence

Bawumia – 48.2%

Kennedy Agyapong – 35.7%

Bryan – 8.9%

Adutwum- 5.4%

Kwabena Agyapong – 1.8%

What triggers a story? Story Triggers

Bar Chart

Out of the total 236 items analyzed, Bawumia dominates the coverage with 130 items, more than half of the total. His media presence is strongly tied to **campaign events** (35.83%) and **NPP party/official statements** (27.69%), reflecting both his active campaigning and the party's role in shaping narratives. He also has notable mentions from **candidate/campaign activities** (16.15%) and **media house interviews** (10.77%). Smaller contributions come from experts (6.15%), government officials (0.77%), non-campaign events (1.54%), and press releases (1.54%). This suggests that his coverage is multifaceted, but heavily anchored in campaign and party-driven triggers.

Kennedy Agyapong follows with 54 items. His coverage is also centered on **candidate/campaign activities** (27.78%), **campaign events** (22.22%), and **NPP party/official statements** (122.22%). He has a fair share of **media house interviews** (16.67%) and some expert-driven coverage (9.62%). Unlike Bawumia, he has no mentions tied to government officials or press releases. His profile reflects a mix of campaign activity and party narratives, with added visibility through interviews and expert commentary.

Bryan's coverage totals 27 items, with a relatively balanced distribution. He has 29.63% mentions each from **media house interviews** and **NPP party/official statements**, 22.22% from **campaign events**, and smaller contributions from press releases (11.11%) and candidate/campaign activities (7.41%). His coverage is narrower compared to Bawumia and Kennedy, but shows reliance on party communications and interviews as key triggers.

Adutwum's coverage is smaller at 20 items but notable for its emphasis on **media house interviews** (45%) and **NPP party/official statements** (30%). He also has 15% mentions from campaign events and 10% from candidate/campaign activities. His profile suggests that interviews and party communications are the primary drivers of his visibility, with limited campaign event coverage.

Kwabena Agyapong has the least coverage, with only 5 items. His mentions come from **media house interviews** (40%), **NPP party/official statements** (20%), and **candidate/campaign activities** (40%). This reflects a minimal and fragmented media

presence, with no coverage tied to campaign events, experts, or institutional sources.

In summary, the analysis shows that **campaign events and party communications are the dominant triggers of media coverage**, underscoring the centrality of organized political activity in shaping narratives. Bawumia's coverage is the most extensive and diverse, spanning nearly all triggers, while Kennedy Agyapong's profile is more balanced but narrower. Bryan and Adutwum rely heavily on interviews and party statements, and Kwabena Agyapong remains marginal. Overall, the framing highlights how candidates' visibility is largely driven by structured campaign activities and party machinery, with limited influence from external voices such as experts or government officials.

CONCLUSION

This study examines how Ghanaian mainstream online covered the 2026 New Patriotic Party (NPP) presidential primaries with particular attention to tone, subject matter and candidate messaging. The research sought to determine whether the media coverage was fair, balanced and reflective of the dynamics of the internal party contest.

Overall, the findings show that media coverage of the NPP Primaries was largely fair. Most of the stories avoided overtly negative framing and avoided embellishing the candidates and their campaigns. This suggests a conscious effort by the media to set professional standards in reporting a politically competitive race.

In terms of subject matter, the coverage was overwhelming political. Stories focused primarily on campaign activities, policy positions, internal party differences and electoral strategies. Economic, social, health and religious issues, while central to broader public discourse, featured minimally. This pattern reflects both the nature of party primaries and the candidates' own messaging.

In a highly charged political environment, the candidates largely focused on political arguments and avoided getting into non-core issues.

Applying Functional Theory of political communication, the study found that candidates spoke more about present issues than revisiting past events, including factors that led to the NPP's defeat in 2024.

Although future plans were discussed to a significant extent, they were less dominant than present-oriented arguments. This indicates a strategic emphasis on immediately important issues rather than past justifications or long-term plans.

The research also revealed that candidates were more likely to promote their competence than any other personal trait. Messages highlighting *experience, leadership ability and readiness for office were prominent*. Notably candidates also emphasised their capacity to unite the party if elected. This indicates awareness of the need for party unity after a contentious primary.

Traits such as *honesty, hard work, and empathy* also appeared with some frequency, reinforcing the candidates' attempts to be *relatable and credible*. This focus is important because it shows that candidates deliberately centred their political communication on ***perceived fitness for office and capacity to deliver, presenting these qualities as key selling points to primary voters. Media coverage, in turn, reflected and amplified these narratives.***

The study further found disparities in media attention among candidates. Coverage of Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia and Kennedy Agyapong was more extensive and *was largely driven by reports from their campaign tours and delegate engagements across the country. B*ryan Acheampong, Yaw Adutwum, and Kwabena Agyapong received comparatively less coverage. Media interviews also featured prominently, with most candidates, except Kwabena Agyapong, enjoying an appreciable share of such exposure.

Finally, this research highlights the importance of studying media coverage of political primaries. Such studies help the public understand the issues that resonate most with party members and the NPP's partisan voting base. They also provide insight into candidates' media strategies, highlighting areas where campaigns can refine weak points and consolidate strengths.

Beyond information dissemination, media coverage performs critical democratic functions. It confers status on candidates, shapes perceptions of viability, and can encourage bandwagon effects.

As gatekeepers, media organisations influence which candidates and issues dominate public discourse.