

A VISUAL HANDBOOK

# Katanomics

*How the fracture between politics and policy traps democracies  
in cycles of spectacular failure and forgotten lessons*

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## The First katanomists

Based on the work of Bright Simons, Alfred Appiah, Kofi Yeboah, and Isaac

Agyei

[Katanomics.org](http://Katanomics.org)

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# I

## Two Accountabilities

*Democracy is often measured by a single yardstick: can citizens vote leaders out? Katanomics introduces a second, equally vital dimension.*

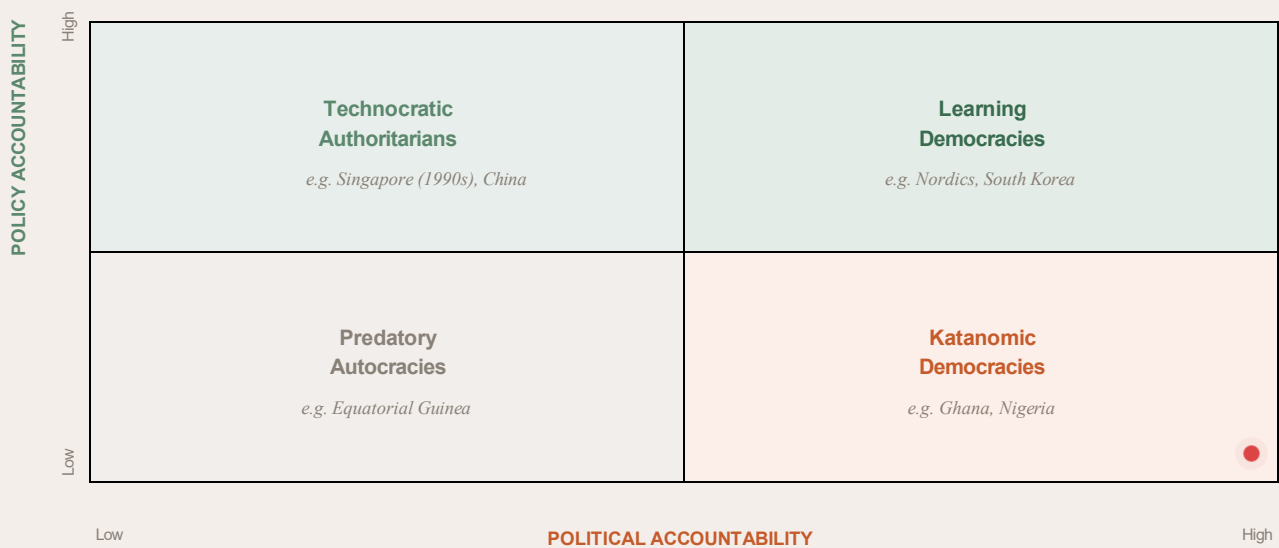
**Political accountability** captures the familiar democratic machinery: competitive elections, a free press, civic protest, and the power to punish or reward leaders at the ballot box. Across much of Africa, this dimension is vigorous. Ghana alone has had eight peaceful transitions since 1992.

**Policy accountability** measures something far more elusive: whether a society can compel its government to design technically sound programmes, monitor execution, iterate upon failure, and sustain analytical attention beyond a single election cycle. It probes whether the state can learn from its own mistakes.

The katanomic insight is that these two dimensions can diverge dramatically. A country may score highly on one whilst scoring abysmally on the other.

### Accountability Matrix

*Four governance archetypes defined by the intersection of political and policy accountability*



The bottom-right quadrant is the katanomic zone: high political voice paired with feeble policy traction. Citizens can change governments but cannot compel those governments to manage trade-offs, sustain programmes, or encode hard-won lessons into law. The electoral engine revs loudly; the policy transmission barely engages.

# III

## The Optical Prism

*Politics and policy process the same raw material — social problems — in fundamentally opposite directions.*

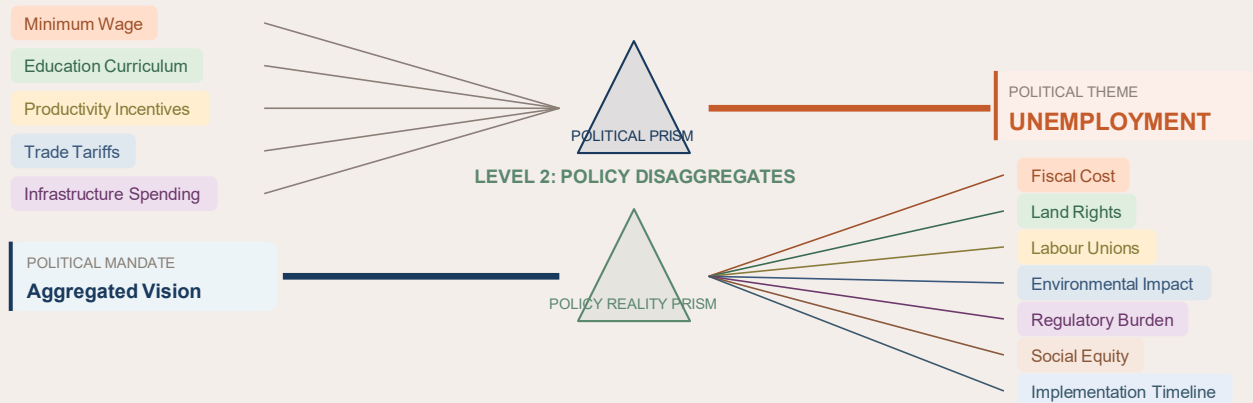
**Politics aggregates.** It takes dozens of competing concerns and compresses them into a single rallying theme. This is how coalitions form and elections are won. The political prism gathers many beams of light into one blinding beam.

**Policy disaggregates.** It takes the winning mandate and shatters it into painful, competing trade-offs. Which jobs? At whose expense? Subsidised for how long? The policy prism refracts the single beam into a spectrum of technical demands, each one requiring its own constituency of attention.

### Aggregation and Disaggregation

*How politics compresses and policy fractures the same social material*

#### LEVEL 1: POLITICS AGGREGATES



In learning democracies, robust intermediaries — think tanks, professional associations, specialised journalists, independent regulatory agencies — hold the policy prism steady. In katanomic democracies, these intermediaries are small, under-resourced, and overwhelmed. The spectrum scatters, and the political class retreats to the aggregated narrative.

## III

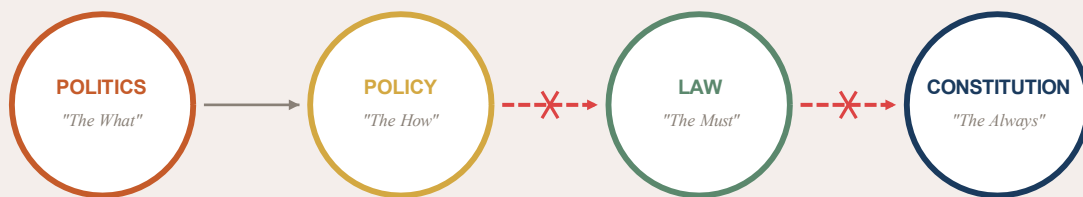
## The Norm Progression Chain

*A society learns through a four-link cycle. Katanomics occurs when the links crack.*

Every functioning polity connects four domains in a recursive loop. **Politics** sets goals. **Policy** designs pathways. **Law** gives those pathways binding force. **Constitution** crystallises the deepest lessons into enduring norms. National learning is the engine that drives material through this cycle.

### The Norm Progression Cycle

*How democracies convert experience into institutional memory — and where the fractures occur*



Centre: National Learning System | Red links indicate katanomic fracture points

When the cycle works, failure triggers reform, reform triggers institutionalisation, and institutionalisation yields a new equilibrium. Industrial accidents in OECD countries produced stringent environmental regimes over decades. Norway's early oil revenue mismanagement was transmuted, through sustained policy work, into one of the world's most disciplined sovereign wealth funds.

When the cycle breaks, the society performs the rituals of learning without absorbing the substance. Laws are passed with the tacit understanding that enforcement will be symbolic. Constitutional provisions are invoked rhetorically rather than treated as operating manuals. Each crisis yields headlines, a committee, and then collective amnesia.

The chain from political promise through policy detail, legal codification, and constitutional learning is severed. The state drifts: increasingly aesthetic in its democratic performance, increasingly hollow in its developmental capacity.

## IV

## Political *Dysphonia*

*In medicine, dysphonia means vocal cords straining to produce hoarse, unclear sound. In governance, it describes democracies drowning in noise but starved of signal.*

Katanomic democracies are loud. Radio phone-ins crackle with frustration. Social media erupts after each scandal. The citizenry speaks with extraordinary volume, and the political system, to its credit, listens attentively enough to change governments at regular intervals.

The disorder lies in what happens next. The institutional channels that should translate that civic volume into coherent policy pressure — specialist media, analytical civil society, professional regulatory bodies, parliamentary research capacity — are atrophied. The microphone works; the wiring behind it is frayed.

### The Dysphonia Gap

*Comparing political voice amplitude to policy signal strength in katanomic democracies*



*The voice is deafening. The signal is faint.*

A strange result flows from this asymmetry. Notwithstanding high levels of participatory democracy, a country can experience very low levels of policy accountability. Citizen preferences are not channelled into policy prescriptions and their implementation - not because of organised repression, but because the disorganised chaos within a katanomic social order disrupts the transmission of political commitments into the design and execution of policy.



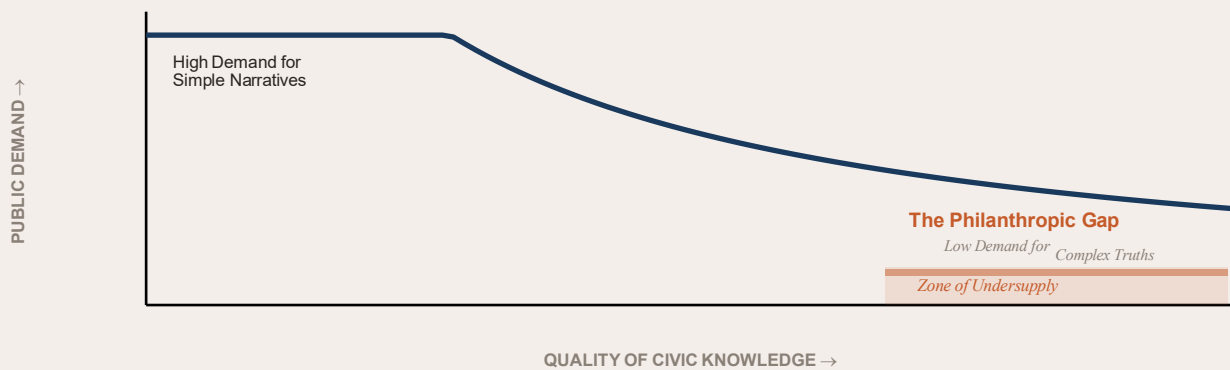
## The Civic Knowledge Curve

*In markets, higher quality typically draws higher demand. Civic knowledge inverts this logic entirely.*

Rigorous policy analysis, budget forensics, regulatory scrutiny, and legal-technical critique are the most valuable forms of civic knowledge. They are also the least consumed. As quality and complexity increase, the audience that can engage meaningfully shrinks. Simple narratives attract mass attention; nuanced policy work attracts almost none.

### The Civic Knowledge Economy

*The inverse relationship between knowledge quality and public demand, with the philanthropic gap highlighted*



This produces a chronic undersupply of precisely the knowledge that katanomic societies most urgently need. The theory calls this the **Philanthropic Gap**: the zone where high-value civic knowledge is naturally under-produced by market forces and requires deliberate investment - what the framework terms “patrons of rigour”.

The **Paradox of Essentialism** compounds this problem. Foundational governance capacities - procurement design, capacity planning, sequencing, stakeholder coordination - are essential for delivering health, education, and infrastructure. But because they do not visibly resemble service delivery, they are treated as dispensable overhead. By prioritising only what appears essential, the essential itself is undermined.

## A

## Case Study: *Pwalugu Dam*

*A dam that generated enormous political capital, zero durable learning, and a masterclass in how the politics-policy aggregation-disaggregation gap devours megaprojects.*

### Pwalugu Multipurpose Dam

Upper East Region, Ghana · Contract: \$993 million

#### THE POLITICAL PROMISE

- Hydroelectric power for an energy-deficient region
- Irrigation for drought-prone farmland
- Flood control along the White Volta
- Employment and regional transformation
- Flagship project of presidential ambition

#### THE POLICY REALITY

- World Bank identified at least 7 configurations
- Each option: radically different cost/ecological tradeoffs...
- Dam sizing and canal sustainability interdependent
- Multi-criteria optimisation required careful sequencing
- Key feasibility questions unresolved at contract signing

#### THE KATANOMIC OUTCOME

- Political promise raced ahead of policy analysis
- \$993m contract signed before trade-offs resolved
- Project stalled when funding and disputes surfaced
- No institutional lesson extracted; no law tightened
- No constitutional reflection on executive discretion

#### WHAT A LEARNING DEMOCRACY WOULD DO

- Independent technical review before contract signing
- Phased commitment tied to feasibility thresholds
- Post-failure inquiry feeding into procurement law
- Parliamentary oversight codified and enforced
- Institutional memory retained for future decisions

- **Katanomic Verdict: Spectacular political theatre, comprehensive policy failure, zero norm progression.**

## B

## Case Study: *UPPF - The Petroleum Levy*

*A price equalisation mechanism so loosely designed that basic accounting eluded its managers for years, culminating in a contested corruption probe.*

### Unified Petroleum Price Fund (UPPF)

Ghana · Alleged misappropriation: GHS 1.3 billion (~\$110m)

The UPPF was designed to smooth fuel prices across Ghana so that consumers in remote areas would not face punitive transport mark-ups. A classic public-interest levy: collect small amounts per litre at scale, redistribute by transparent rules. In practice, the fund evolved into a contested terrain of disputed accounting and obscure governance.

#### THE DESIGN INTENT

- Uniform fuel pricing across all regions
- Cross-subsidy from surplus to deficit zones
- Transparent rules, simple administration
- Consumer protection against transport mark-ups

#### WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

- Policy design disconnected from price uniformity goal
- Legal framework unclear on collection authority
- Fund accounting so opaque the 'missing' sum is disputed
- OSP charged officials; design flaws remain untouched

The deeper katanomic pathology: even if every corrupt actor were prosecuted, the policy architecture that made the UPPF vulnerable would survive intact. The scandal consumed all the oxygen; the design questions suffocated in silence. Corruption grabbed the headline. The broken policy architecture that enabled it remains unreformed.

- **Katanomic Verdict: Corruption consumed the oxygen. The broken architecture that enabled it remains unreformed.**



## Case Study: *Dangote and Nigeria's Industrial Policy*

*How Africa's richest industrialist adapted rationally to a katanomic environment - and what that adaptation reveals about the system.*

### Dangote Group and Import Substitution

Nigeria · Sectors: Oil & Gas, Cement, Sugar, Steel, Textiles, Fertilizers

Nigeria's post-independence history is dense with industrial ambition: indigenisation decrees, self-sufficiency roadmaps, backward integration mandates. The political goals were laudable and frequently sincere. Yet across eight major sectors, the pattern recurs: bold political commitment followed by erratic, half-implemented, and frequently abandoned policy execution.

#### THE POLITICAL AMBITION

- Sovereign control over oil refining and distribution
- Local manufacturing across strategic sectors
- Backward integration to build domestic value chains
- Import substitution to conserve foreign exchange

#### COMPARATIVE CONTRAST

- Norway: petroleum policy continuity across 12 govt departments
- South Korea: dedicated planning boards, multi-decade strategy
- Vietnam: doi moi reforms survived leadership changes
- Common thread: durable critical policy audiences

#### THE KATANOMIC REALITY

- Tariff incentives swung with each administration
- No sustained technical constituency for policy insulation...
- Dangote's vertical integration: rational adaptation
- Controversial practices are symptoms, not causes

#### THE INSIGHT

- Dangote did not create the katanomic environment
- Blaming the industrialist distracts from systemic failures
- Absent stable frameworks, actors adopt defensive strategies.
- Reform = building critical policy audiences

- **Katanomic Verdict: When policy shifts with every political wind, even billionaires become symptoms of the disease.**

## The chain can be repaired.

Katanomics is a diagnosis, but it is equally a call to build. Escaping the condition requires growing the critical policy audience, investing in the civic knowledge economy, and recognising that the invisible infrastructure of democratic learning is the foundation upon which every visible service depends.

*The volume of our politics must not be  
mistaken for the quality of our  
governance.*

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