

## **Effect of Electoral Malpractice on the Performance of Political Incumbents on Election Promises**

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### **Abstract**

Electoral malpractice, including vote rigging, voter intimidation, and corruption, undermines the democratic process and can significantly affect governance outcomes. This study investigates how such malpractices influence the performance of elected officials in delivering on their campaign promises. Data for the study were gathered from secondary sources such as books, journals, official publications and monographs. As such, the study focused on several case studies from recent elections to illustrate the correlation between electoral malpractice and the subsequent performance of political incumbents. Key findings indicated that electoral malpractice often results in the election of candidates who may lack the legitimacy and public support necessary to effectively govern. These incumbents are frequently more focused on maintaining power through patronage and corruption than on fulfilling their electoral promises. The study also reveals a tendency for such politicians to engage in short-term, populist policies rather than long-term developmental projects, further hampering their ability to deliver on campaign commitments. Moreover, the study highlighted that the prevalence of electoral malpractice erodes public trust in the political system, making it more challenging for incumbents to garner the necessary cooperation from both citizens and governmental institutions. This environment of distrust and instability can stymie policy implementation and reduce the overall effectiveness of governance. In conclusion, the study underscored the critical need for electoral reforms to ensure fair and transparent elections. By addressing the root causes of electoral malpractice, it is possible to enhance the accountability and performance of political incumbents, ultimately leading to better fulfillment of election promises and improved governance outcomes.

**Keywords:** Election Promises, Electoral Malpractice, Leadership, Political Incumbents, and Politicians

### **Introduction**

The integrity of electoral processes is paramount for the legitimacy and stability of democratic governance worldwide. However, the specter of electoral malpractice looms large, posing a significant threat to the fairness and transparency of elections. Electoral malpractice encompasses a wide range of illicit activities, including voter fraud, coercion, manipulation of electoral outcomes, and irregularities in the electoral administration process. These malpractices not only undermine the credibility of elections but also have far-reaching consequences for the performance of political incumbents in fulfilling their election promises.

The impact of electoral malpractice on the performance of political incumbents in upholding their election promises is a topic of substantial scholarly inquiry and debate. Scholars have argued that electoral malpractice can severely hinder the ability of political incumbents to deliver on their promises, thereby eroding public trust and confidence in the democratic process (Besley & Reynal-

Querol, 2014). For instance, research by Norris (2014) highlights how electoral fraud can distort the electoral process, skewing the outcome in favor of incumbents who may lack the popular mandate to govern effectively. Such manipulation of electoral outcomes not only undermines the legitimacy of the electoral process but also undermines the ability of incumbents to implement their policy agenda and fulfill their election promises.

Moreover, electoral malpractice can have a chilling effect on political competition and accountability, thereby impeding the performance of political incumbents. Studies by Schedler (2002) and Magalhães and Costa (2019) emphasize how electoral fraud and irregularities can deter opposition parties from contesting elections and holding incumbents accountable for their actions. This lack of political competition can create a conducive environment for incumbents to act with impunity, leading to deterioration in governance and a failure to deliver on election promises.

Furthermore, the prevalence of electoral malpractice can perpetuate a cycle of mistrust and cynicism among the electorate, further undermining the performance of political incumbents. Research by Hyde (2011) demonstrates how electoral fraud can breed distrust among citizens, leading to a decline in political participation and engagement. This erosion of civic trust and engagement can make it increasingly difficult for incumbents to garner public support and legitimacy, hindering their ability to implement their policy agenda and fulfill their election promises. Against this backdrop this study presents an analysis of the effect of the electoral malpractice on the performance of political incumbents on election promises.

### **Statement of Research Problem**

Electoral malpractice remains a pervasive issue in democratic societies worldwide, challenging the integrity of electoral processes and the legitimacy of elected officials. The phenomenon encompasses a range of illicit activities, including voter suppression, ballot tampering, and campaign finance violations, among others. Despite efforts to combat electoral malpractice, its prevalence persists, casting doubt on the fairness and transparency of elections.

One critical aspect affected by electoral malpractice is the performance of political incumbents in fulfilling their election promises. Elected officials make various pledges during their campaigns to secure public support and legitimacy. However, the extent to which they deliver on these promises can be compromised by electoral irregularities, thereby undermining democratic accountability and eroding public trust in the political system.

In light of the above, the effect of electoral malpractice on the performance of political incumbents on election promises is a multifaceted issue with far-reaching implications for democratic governance. Despite its significance, there is a notable gap in understanding the specific mechanisms through which electoral malpractice influences the ability of elected officials to fulfill their campaign commitments. This knowledge deficit hinders efforts to address electoral malpractice effectively and uphold the principles of democratic accountability.

### **Research Objectives**

The primary objective of this study is to examine the impact of electoral malpractice on the performance of political incumbents in fulfilling their election promises. Specifically, the research aims to:

- i. Identify the types of electoral malpractice in the context of contemporary democratic elections.
- ii. Analyze the mechanisms through which electoral malpractice undermines the credibility and effectiveness of elected officials in delivering on their campaign commitments.
- iii. Assess the implications of electoral malpractice for democratic accountability and public trust in the political process.
- iv. Explore potential strategies and interventions to mitigate the adverse effects of electoral malpractice on the performance of political incumbents.

## Hypothesis

**H01:** Electoral malpractice leads to a decline in the performance of political incumbents on fulfilling election promises, as the focus shifts from delivering on commitments to consolidating power through illegitimate means, thereby diminishing accountability to constituents.

**H02:** Electoral malpractice diminishes public confidence in the electoral process and elected officials, thereby reducing the incentive for political incumbents to uphold their election promises, as they perceive less pressure to deliver on commitments in an environment where the legitimacy of their mandate is questioned.

## Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes the “Principal-Agent Theory” as a lens to discuss and analyse effect of electoral malpractice on the performance of political incumbents on election promises. The principal-agent theory, often used in economics and political science, explores relationships where one entity (the principal) delegates tasks to another (the agent) who acts on behalf of the principal. The theory has roots in various disciplines, including economics and law. Scholars like Michael Jensen and William (1976) are some of the major proponents of this theory

According to this theory, voters act as principals who delegate authority to elected officials (agents) to represent their interests and fulfill campaign promises. However, when electoral malpractice occurs, it distorts the relationship between principals (voters) and agents (incumbents), leading to a breakdown in accountability and trust.

Electoral malpractice can create several dynamics that interfere with the proper functioning of the principal-agent relationship:

1. **Information Asymmetry:** Malpractice such as voter suppression or manipulation obscures the true preferences of voters and distorts the information available to incumbents about the electorate's priorities. This makes it difficult for incumbents to accurately gauge public sentiment and fulfill promises accordingly.
2. **Moral Hazard:** When incumbents know that the electoral process is compromised, they may feel less accountable to voters and more inclined to prioritize self-interest or the interests of powerful elites over fulfilling campaign promises. This moral hazard arises because incumbents perceive a reduced risk of electoral consequences for failing to deliver on promises.

3. **Adverse Selection:** In environments where electoral malpractice is prevalent, candidates who are more adept at manipulating the system may be selected over those with genuine intentions to serve the public interest. This can result in a pool of elected officials who are less committed to fulfilling promises and more focused on maintaining their own power through corrupt means.
4. **Agency Costs:** Electoral malpractice increases the costs associated with monitoring and enforcing the behavior of elected officials. Citizens may expend more resources to hold incumbents accountable for their actions, and the prevalence of malpractice may undermine the effectiveness of mechanisms such as electoral audits or oversight bodies.

Overall, the Principal-Agent Theory suggests that electoral malpractice undermines the integrity of the democratic process, erodes trust between citizens and elected officials, and creates incentives for incumbents to prioritize their own interests over fulfilling election promises. This can lead to disconnect between what politicians promise during campaigns and what they actually deliver in office, ultimately undermining the democratic legitimacy of the political system.

### **Analysis of the Effect of Electoral Malpractice on the Performance of Political Incumbents on Election Promises**

Analyzing the effect of electoral malpractice on the performance of political incumbents on election promises requires a comprehensive understanding of both the electoral process and the dynamics of political accountability. Electoral malpractice refers to any illegal or unethical behavior that occurs during the electoral process, including voter fraud, ballot stuffing, intimidation, and manipulation of election results. Political incumbents, on the other hand, are individuals who currently hold political office and are seeking re-election. These incumbents often make promises to voters during election campaigns, outlining their plans and policies for governance.

Scholars and researchers have extensively studied the relationship between electoral malpractice and political accountability, with many arguing that electoral malpractice undermines the legitimacy of the electoral process and weakens democratic governance. When elections are marred by malpractice, voters may lose faith in the electoral system and become skeptical of the promises made by political incumbents. This skepticism can lead to a lack of trust in the ability of incumbents to fulfill their election promises, thereby impacting their performance in office.

One way in which electoral malpractice affects the performance of political incumbents is through the erosion of public trust. A study by Alvarez et al. (2018) found that electoral malpractice, such as voter suppression and electoral fraud, decreases public trust in the electoral process and in elected officials. When voters perceive elections as unfair or rigged, they are less likely to believe that elected officials will prioritize their interests and fulfill their promises. This lack of trust can create a negative feedback loop, where disillusioned voters disengage from the political process, further weakening the accountability of incumbents.

Furthermore, electoral malpractice can distort electoral outcomes, allowing incumbents to retain power even when they have failed to deliver on their promises. Research by Hyde (2011) suggests that incumbents who engage in electoral malpractice are more likely to win re-election, as they

can manipulate the electoral process to their advantage. This means that incumbents may have less incentive to fulfill their election promises, as they can rely on malpractice to maintain their grip on power. As a result, electoral malpractice can perpetuate a cycle of unfulfilled promises and impunity for incumbent politicians.

Moreover, electoral malpractice can undermine the effectiveness of mechanisms for holding incumbents accountable for their actions. In democratic societies, elections serve as a key mechanism for holding politicians accountable to the electorate. However, when elections are tainted by malpractice, the ability of voters to hold incumbents accountable is compromised. Research by Schedler (2022) highlights how electoral malpractice can weaken the link between electoral competition and political accountability, as incumbents are able to manipulate the electoral process to avoid scrutiny for their performance in office.

### **The Effect of Electoral Malpractice on the Performance of Political Incumbents in Fulfilling Election Promises: A Case Study of Nigeria**

Electoral malpractice remains a persistent issue in many democracies, often leading to questions about the legitimacy of election outcomes and the subsequent performance of political incumbents. In Nigeria, a country with a history of electoral irregularities, understanding the impact of such malpractices on the ability of political incumbents to fulfill their election promises is crucial. This analysis examines the effects of electoral malpractice on the performance of political incumbents in Nigeria, focusing on their ability to deliver on election promises.

Nigeria has grappled with various forms of electoral malpractice, including voter intimidation, ballot box snatching, falsification of results, and voter suppression (Omotola, 2011). These malpractices undermine the integrity of the electoral process and erode public trust in the democratic system. Research by Adewale and Azeez (2019) highlights the prevalence of electoral malpractice in Nigeria and its detrimental effects on the democratic consolidation process.

Electoral malpractice can significantly affect the performance of political incumbents in fulfilling their election promises. When elections are marred by irregularities, incumbents may illegitimately retain power, leading to a lack of accountability and transparency in governance (Omotola, 2010). This undermines the mandate given to incumbents by the electorate and reduces their incentive to prioritize fulfilling their promises.

Furthermore, the prevalence of electoral malpractice can foster a culture of impunity among political incumbents, where they feel less pressure to deliver on their election pledges due to the flawed electoral process (Adewale & Azeez, 2019). This perpetuates a cycle of corruption and inefficiency in governance, hindering socioeconomic development and exacerbating public disillusionment with the political system.

Electoral malpractice creates significant challenges to holding political incumbents accountable for their actions and promises. In Nigeria, where the rule of law is often undermined by political interference and corruption, holding incumbents accountable for unfulfilled promises becomes even more challenging (Omotola, 2011). The lack of credible electoral processes diminishes the ability of citizens to sanction non-performing incumbents through democratic means, further entrenching a culture of impunity

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, electoral malpractice has a detrimental effect on the performance of political incumbents in fulfilling their election promises. By undermining public trust, distorting electoral outcomes, and weakening mechanisms for accountability, electoral malpractice erodes the foundations of democratic governance and undermines the legitimacy of elected officials. Addressing electoral malpractice is therefore essential for promoting transparency, accountability, and effective functioning of democratic institutions.

Finally, the effect of electoral malpractice on the performance of political incumbents in fulfilling election promises in Nigeria is profound. Malpractices undermine the integrity of elections, diminish accountability, and perpetuate a cycle of corruption and inefficiency in governance. To address these challenges, concerted efforts are needed to strengthen democratic institutions, promote electoral integrity, and enhance accountability mechanisms. Only through these measures can Nigeria and other democracies mitigate the detrimental effects of electoral malpractice on governance and public trust.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

- i. **Strengthening Electoral Laws and Institutions:** To curb electoral malpractices, it is essential to strengthen existing electoral laws and institutions like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This can be achieved through legal reforms that impose stricter penalties for electoral fraud and increase the independence and capacity of electoral bodies to ensure free and fair elections.
- ii. **Promoting Transparency in Electoral Processes:** Introducing transparent and verifiable voting mechanisms, such as biometric voting systems and real-time electronic results transmission, will reduce incidences of vote rigging and manipulation. Regular audits of electoral processes and results should also be conducted to improve accountability.
- iii. **Civic Education and Voter Empowerment:** Enhancing public awareness about the dangers of electoral malpractice is vital. Civic education campaigns that promote voter rights, the importance of free and fair elections, and the role of incumbents in fulfilling election promises can empower citizens to hold their leaders accountable and resist electoral fraud.
- iv. **Strengthening Judicial Oversight:** Electoral tribunals and courts should be empowered to swiftly and impartially adjudicate cases of electoral malpractice. Establishing a clear and expedited process for investigating and prosecuting electoral offenses will discourage incumbents and political actors from engaging in electoral fraud.
- v. **Ensuring Accountability for Election Promises:** Political incumbents must be held accountable for their campaign promises. Establishing independent bodies or agencies that monitor and evaluate the performance of elected officials based on their campaign promises can foster accountability. These agencies can release periodic reports to the public on the fulfillment of election pledges.
- vi. **Engagement of Civil Society and Media:** Civil society organizations (CSOs) and the media play a crucial role in exposing electoral malpractices and holding incumbents accountable. Strengthening partnerships between CSOs, the media, and electoral bodies can enhance

- electoral transparency and provide platforms for public discourse on political incumbents' performance regarding their election promises.
- vii. International Election Observers and Partnerships: Engaging international election observers during elections can help deter electoral malpractices. Additionally, partnerships with global governance institutions may offer technical and advisory support, ensuring that elections are conducted in line with international standards of fairness and transparency.
  - viii. Sanctions and Incentives for Political Actors: Imposing sanctions on political incumbents and parties found guilty of electoral malpractice will serve as a deterrent. Conversely, rewarding parties and candidates who uphold democratic principles and fair practices during elections can incentivize ethical behavior.
  - ix. Reforming Campaign Finance Regulations: Addressing the role of money in politics is essential in reducing electoral malpractice. Implementing strict campaign finance regulations, monitoring campaign spending, and enforcing penalties for violations can reduce the influence of corruption in elections, making incumbents more accountable to their promises.

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