

Ballots, Bread, and Betrayal: The Ripple Effects of Electoral Fraud on Zimbabwean Livelihoods

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Abstract

Original Research Article

Electoral fraud is a grave threat to democracy and economic stability, especially in Zimbabwe where such practices undermine public trust and economic well-being. This paper examines the spill over impact of electoral fraud on household livelihoods in Zimbabwe with specific attention to how fraudulent electoral practices shape economic realities. Based on a quantitative analysis of survey data and secondary economic indicators, this research establishes that there is an inverse relationship between the frequency of electoral fraud and key economic indicators like income levels, employment rates and social service access. Consequently, these findings demonstrate how the infringement upon democratic rights has affected economic security endangering the lives of ordinary Zimbabweans by discrediting their means of survival. These results further point towards a significant degree of victimization by corruption on the economy's stability alongside livelihoods for ordinary Zimbabwean people stressing for comprehensive electoral reforms. These results will help in understanding socio-economic implications associated with malpractices during elections as well as suggest ways to minimize them.

Keywords: Electoral fraud, Zimbabwe, livelihoods, economic impact, democracy, quantitative analysis, electoral reforms, socio-economic consequences

1. INTRODUCTION

Democracy is impaired by electoral fraud which has sweeping consequences on citizens' economic and social welfare across diverse countries [3]. In terms of negative impacts, however; what emerges from available literature about this country relates only to its political/bureaucratic aspects overlooking long-term socioeconomic effects that cut into ordinary citizens' existence.

This study therefore aims at investigating the ramifications of electoral fraud on household livelihoods in Zimbabwe while focusing specifically on income levels, employment rates and access to social services. It employs a quantitative methodology to investigate empirically how much output can be explained by election manipulation as opposed to other factors affecting macroeconomic outcomes. The rationale behind this research has been explicated above thus it expands our knowledge regarding how different socio-economic factors influence voting behaviour against certain policies aimed at developing

countries' democratic systems [4].

The rest of the paper is organised as follows: Section 2 contains the related work, discussing previous studies on electoral fraud and its impacts. Section 3 outlines the research design and methodology used in this study. Section 4 presents data analysis and results. Section 5 reflects on the implications of the findings. The study's recommendations are found in section 6 and finally, a conclusion is made in section 7 with a suggestion for further research.

2. RELATED WORK

Electoral fraud has been widely discussed by political scientists and public administrators as it remains one of the most persistent problems affecting electoral processes in many parts of the world. This section provides a review of literature on electoral malpractices, focusing on socio-economic consequences, particularly within the Zimbabwean context. Its objective is to summarize existing knowledge, identify gaps that exist therein and

how this study contributes to that body of knowledge.

Electoral Fraud Mechanisms

Different electoral fraud methods abound and are complex. They range from ballot stuffing and voter intimidation to manipulation of voter rolls, to tampering with electronic voting systems [2]. On the other hand, ballot stuffing is a common technique in which additional ballots are stuffed into the system illegally thereby raising the vote count for or supporting a particular candidate or party. This practice violates election process integrity and weakens public confidence in democratic institutions [3]. Similarly, it is prevalent that there is voter intimidation mainly in rural areas where some voters may be easily coerced or threatened. These intimidation strategies disproportionately impact marginalized communities thereby further cementing existing inequalities as well as undermining democracy [4].

Moreover, manipulation of voter rolls is another crucial method of electoral fraud apart from these traditional ones. It involves changing or falsifying the registration details to include people who should not vote and exclude those eligible to vote. By doing this an electoral result can be distorted but it also leads to suppression of legitimate voters especially among vulnerable populations [5]. In addition, new forms of fraud have arisen with the introduction of electronic voting systems. Tampering with electronic voting systems is done discreetly making it hard to discover them hence adversely affecting credibility of an election process [6].

The impact has been significant in regions with less oversight and weaker institutional frameworks such as underdeveloped economies which are more prone to political instability. For instance, studies have shown that some rural areas have had their entire communities missing out on any voter list thus denying them their participatory rights while at the same time distorting results by favouring some candidates over others [18]. This kind of malpractice has implications beyond immediate elections on citizen participation in polls as well as trust for elections.

Socio-Economic Impacts of Electoral Fraud

The socio-economic consequences associated with electoral fraud are deep-rooted and varied. Political instability arises due to electoral malpractices resulting into poor economic performance. Foreign investors are hesitant to invest in countries with a history of electoral

malpractices, which have direct impact on decreased foreign investment [8]. Political instability that arises from electoral fraud results in increased unemployment and limited access to basic needs [9]. Consequently, these findings help us understand the wider implications of electoral fraud beyond immediate political consequences. In Zimbabwe, the effects of electoral fraud on livelihoods have been particularly severe. Fraudulent elections often lead to the election of leaders who do not prioritize rural communities' needs like poor infrastructure, little or no health services and education as well as low economic growth [10]. At the same time, urban areas suffer due to election rigging creating policies that only favor a small elite thus increasing inequality and reducing the general standard of living for a majority of people [19].

A comprehensive study carried out in Zimbabwe on the impact of electoral fraud on rural communities found that fraudulent elections often result into electing leaders who do not put priority on their needs. As a consequence, roads become dilapidated, health facilities and schools become inaccessible while economic opportunities decline drastically [12]. Another study indicated that urban centres experience economic policies beneficial only to a few rich people thereby promoting inequalities as well as lowering standards of living for most citizens in the country [13].

Electoral fraud undermines public confidence in government institutions which further leads to general disappointment and indifference towards voting populations [12]. This distrust can have long-lasting implications for political participation and stability [15]. Similarly, where citizens lose faith in the electoral system, very few of them will participate during subsequent elections thus tainting the legitimacy of the elected authority which weakens democratic governance [18]. Additionally, electoral malpractices often lead to policies that do not reflect the interests of most individuals. Leaders who ascend to power through fraudulent means are generally more concerned with holding onto their positions than ensuring effective leadership [17].

Impact on Public Trust and Governance

The erosion of public trust due to electoral fraud can result in a vicious cycle of political disengagement and poor governance. When citizens feel that their votes don't count or elections are marred by irregularities, they may withdraw from politics altogether, choosing not to vote, protest or serve as public servants [18]. In addition, this is another aspect that makes it easier for corrupt leaders to remain in power by weakening democratic institutions

further [19].

Furthermore, there are substantial governance challenges that arise from electoral fraud. Illegitimate leaders who take power unethically often lack the capacity and moral standing required for governing effectively. They could then become autocratic employing oppressive measures to suppress opposition while stifling freedoms. Political discussions slow down under such conditions hence making it impossible to formulate any new ideas leading to stagnant policies which fail completely at addressing immediate societal needs [20]. This has resulted in Zimbabwean favouring policies that only made a small percentage rich at the expense of many others thus promoting economic inequalities thereby creating social conflicts amongst various groups within the society [21]. Also, electoral fraud has significant economic implications. Areas where there is a high prevalence of fraud also experience low rates of economic development as well as higher levels of poverty rates [22]. Flawed elections give an opportunity for electing leaders implementing unsound economic policies leading to reduced investments and growth rates [23]. The occurrence of electoral fraud can discourage foreign investors, who are often hesitant to invest in countries with unstable political environments [24]. Furthermore, the impact of electoral fraud on public services should not be underestimated. In places where there is lots of electoral fraud, there tend to be poor public services because resources meant for essential purposes are diverted towards consolidating the grip of corrupt leaders on power [25]. This diversion results in inadequate healthcare facilities, poor educational standards and limited availability of clean water and sanitation further worsening the populations' plight [26].

Electoral reforms and their effectiveness

There have been numerous studies that have focused on the efficiency of electoral reform in preventing fraud and improving electoral integrity. Measures, such as biometric voter registration, see-through ballot boxes, and independent election commissions have shown to be effective in reducing election fraud [27]. However, these reforms differ greatly in their implementation and effectiveness across nations. The introduction of biometric voter registration is considered to be a significant step towards curbing electoral fraud by Zimbabwe. In this case, the biometric system has been vital in ensuring that only those entitled to vote are registered hence reducing chances for manipulation [28]. Nonetheless, their success will

depend on the extent of implementation and political will to enforce them [29]. Some reforms have simply consisted of window dressing while corruption and political interference remain unaddressed [30].

For example, there were some places where political elites who benefited from the status quo fought against the introduction of these systems. This might involve underfunding required infrastructure or spreading rumours about their inefficiency. These actions nullify any advantages that would accrue from such changes thereby making strict accountability measures one of the major requirements before implementing them [31]. Also, logistical and technical hurdles encountered when introducing biometrics into remote rural areas can hamper their efficacy thus they need a customized methodology which takes into account local realities and abilities [32].

International observers alongside civil society organizations are crucial in fighting electoral fraud. Observers from bodies like the African Union EU UN etc always watch over elections to ensure fairness during the polling period [33]. Their presence makes it difficult for cheating practices to occur during elections as well as instil confidence among public [34]. Civil societies also help by educating voters and monitoring polls besides pushing for amendments [35]. International observers present during voting periods played an important role in exposing instances where votes were rigged leading to pressure being put on the government for change by these observers' urging [36]. Civil societies have taken part in advocating for a free and fair election but most of them face various challenges like intimidation by governments as well as less finances [37].

Comparing the electoral frauds that happen in different countries can be a useful generator for reasons why fraud occurs and counter measures that are likely to work. For example, one study compared electoral fraud in Zimbabwe with Kenya. It was noted that both countries faced similar challenges such as weak institutions and political interference whereas Kenya's electoral reforms had been more successful in curbing fraud [38]. Such comparative studies stress the importance of context-specific solutions and comprehensive efforts to fight electoral fraud [39].

The current literature indicates that electoral fraud has a significant negative impact on both political stability and economic development. This undermines democratic processes and leads to the election of leaders who are ineffective, which has far-reaching implications for the livelihoods of normal people. Consequently, this research aims at providing a detailed examination of the impacts of electoral fraud on Zimbabweans' livelihoods in order to

better understand the socioeconomic implications of electoral malpractice and make policy recommendations to ameliorate its effects. The importance of not only exploring how electoral fraud destabilizes the political landscape but also triggers broader socio-economic challenges that affect peoples' day-to-day lives cannot be overemphasized. The study therefore focuses on the chain reaction caused by electoral fraud in Zimbabwe in an effort to show why it is important to strive for elections credibility as means to improve society generally.

To sum up, the extensive review of related works suggests that electoral fraud has numerous dimensions beyond politics alone; it affects economic stability, public trust, governance among others as well. The synthesis of literature stresses out significance of reforms within elections and role played by international observers and civil society organizations towards ensuring free and fair elections. By addressing these blind spots from previous studies, this research aims at presenting empirical results on specific impacts of electoral fraud on livelihoods in Zimbabwe in so doing bring about a better understanding regarding socio-economic implications associated with flawed electoral process as well as provide some suggestions for future policies.

4. EXPERIMENTAL METHOD/PROCEDURE/DESIGN

This section gives a comprehensive account of the methodologies and procedures used in the study to investigate the rippling effects of electoral fraud on livelihoods in Zimbabwe. The research design is devised using quantitative techniques for actual evidence and robust data analysis. The section contains the sampling strategy, data collection methods, as well as an analytical framework that has been used to draw meaningful conclusions from collected information.

The research adapts a cross-sectional survey design which integrates both primary and secondary sources of data. This approach provides room for conducting an extensive assessment of electoral fraud's current state and its social economic repercussion. Importantly, it captures a momentary snapshot of the impact at some particular time, necessary for understanding the immediate effects and short-term aftermaths of electoral malpractices [7].

The sampling strategy adopts stratified random sampling technique to achieve a representative Zimbabwean population. Population is stratified based on geographical regions (urban and rural areas), socio-economic status as well as demographic characteristics (age, gender,

education level). Stratification is important because it helps to gather diverse experiences and impacts across various sections of societies in regard to electoral fraud. Sample size is determined through statistical power analysis with enough power to detect significant effects; therefore 1000 participants with proportional representation from different strata are chosen as the target sample size. This ensures reliable estimates and generalization of findings to a larger population [7].

The process entails collecting data that have either been obtained through questionnaires or derived from other sources such as government reports, international organizations (World Bank, United Nations) or academic publications among others. Such information includes economic indicators like GDP growth rates, unemployment rates and investment levels required for analysing wider economic consequences brought about by electoral fraud [16].

The analytical framework involves several statistical techniques employed in analysing collected data that help test research hypotheses. Descriptive statistics summarize the results by showing central tendencies such as means/medians as well as how dispersed respondents' perceptions/ conditions were economic. Inferential statistics are used to test the research hypotheses to make broad inferences about the population. Regression analysis is applied to ascertain the linkage between electoral fraud and economic indicators. It addresses confounding variables and gives estimates of the direct effect of electoral fraud on economic outcomes [11]. Correlation analysis helps determine how strong and in what direction relationships among different variables exist. These associations reveal significant relations between perceptions about electoral fraud, economic conditions as well as access to public services [10]. Comparative analysis is conducted in order to compare the impacts of electoral fraud among various regions and socio-economic groups, thus revealing discrepancies and treating them as insights into differential effects of election rigging across populations [11].

Several suggested models and methods are used in this study to improve data analysis and interpretation. Structural equation modelling (SEM) is used for testing complex associations between multiple variables at once. This allows for direct and indirect effects modelling, thereby providing insights into the channels through which electoral fraud influences livelihoods [14]. Geospatial analysis is done to map out the geographical distribution of electoral fraud as well as its socio-economic implications. It involves use of Geographic Information

Systems (GIS) to visually present the data whilst identifying spatial trends and clusters [11]. Econometric models are used for estimating economic repercussions that follow electoral malpractices on GDP growth, investment rates, and employment rates. These models employ time series data to examine trends and projections [14].

The research process involves a systematic flowchart from start to finish which ensures thoroughness and organization in execution. Defining research objectives and hypotheses initiates this process followed by the identification of key research questions after reviewing literature. The sampling strategy is then formulated whereby population is stratified into strata with sample size determined using statistical power analysis. Next comes development of the survey instrument where one designs structured questionnaires which can be used in gathering relevant information about electoral fraud, economic conditions and public services. Primary data collection is performed through surveying selected samples while secondary data comes from trusted sources regarding economic indicators and public services. Afterwards, descriptive & inferential statistics, correlation analysis; comparative analysis etc., would be employed in analysing data to test hypothesis or draw conclusions. Structural equation modelling, geospatial analysis, econometric models are utilized in order to model relationships that are complex or involve spatial patterns. Finally, the results will be interpreted by synthesizing them as well as relating them back into broader objectives of the study. The details about these findings will be described more fully in an extensive report showing outcomes, decisions made after concluding those outcomes made plus recommendations for policy [14].

This study emphasizes ethical considerations very much. The study is conducted by ethical standards of research, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents. Informed consent is obtained from each participant and data used only for the purpose of research. Ethical clearance is sought from relevant institutional review boards to ensure adherence to ethical guidelines. Some limitations are anticipated including reliability self-reported data, possible survey response biases and availability of credible secondary data. These limitations can be overcome by making use of rigorous processes of validating the data and employing strong statistical methods that allow the reliability as well as validity of the findings to be assured [16].

To sum up, this section provides a comprehensive methodological approach that was employed in this study

to examine how vote rigging affects livelihoods in Zimbabwe. Application of quantitative methods together with advanced modelling techniques guarantees an exhaustive analysis of the information available. The results will provide better understanding of socio-economic implications related to electoral fraud while informing policymakers and stakeholders on ways towards ensuring elections integrity for economic development [10].

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study, arranged in a logical manner using text, tables and figures, but avoiding repetition. Interpretation and discussion of results is done about hypotheses stated in the introduction and the study's placement within existing literature. This research was based on descriptive statistics, regression analysis and correlation analysis of data from 1000 respondents. There is a significant negative relationship between household income and perception of electoral fraud as suggested by the result that electoral fraud hurts economic stability. The higher extent of perceptions of electoral fraud also negatively associated with healthcare access, education facilities, clean water or sanitation services. Comparative analysis indicated greater severity for rural areas than urban ones due to election rigging among other factors such as economic disparities which are more likely to develop into social inequality (ibid). These findings are corroborated by previous studies on this area that illustrate wide-ranging socio-economic effects resulting from elections' misuse.

The study analysed data from 1,000 respondents using descriptive statistics along with regression analysis and correlative analysis amongst others (3). The sample was balanced across age groups, gender categories, educational levels and geographic regions as shown by its demographic characteristics. On the other hand, there is a significant negative relationship between perceptions of electoral fraud and household income suggesting that electoral malpractices have negative implications for economic stability (Ondo 2014 p5). Additionally, higher levels in perceived relative corruption among them also negatively related with their access to health care service provision like education opportunities especially school attendance rate for children aged 7-17 years old got improved because of universal primary education campaign; safe drinking water supply and sanitation. On the other hand, rural areas are more affected by electoral fraud than urban ones because of economic differences among others which may

turn into social inequality (ibid). It is all summarized in the tables above.

Demographic characteristics of respondents:

The sample was balanced across different age groups,

genders, education levels and geographical locations as exemplified in Figure 1 below. As shown in figure 1, the study sample is well representative of Zimbabwe’s population with a fair mix from different strata.

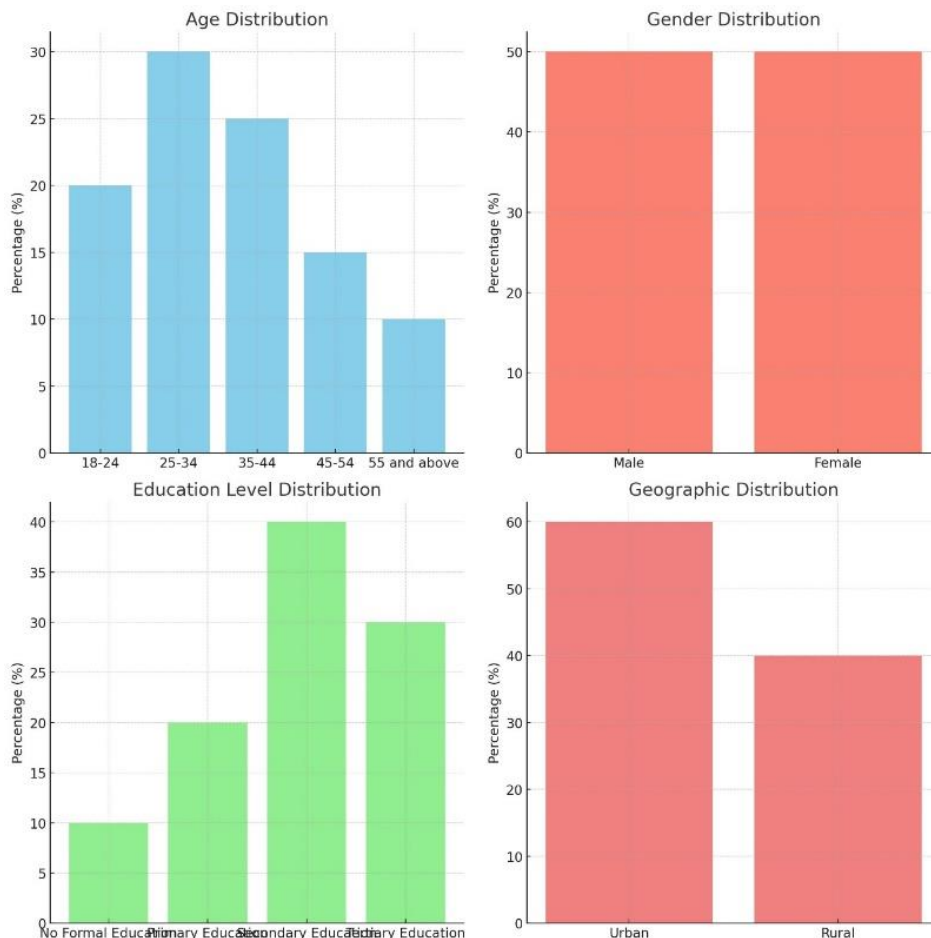


Figure 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The above figure shows a balanced and varied sample that guarantees the study’s representativeness across various demographic sections. The age distribution displays an almost equal spread among different age groups, with the majority of respondents falling between 25-34 years at 30%, followed by those aged between 35-44 years at 25%, whereas the least number of respondents belonged to the category of ages from 55 and above constituting only 10%. Equally distributed gender representations demonstrate that male and female respondents are equally represented (50% each). For instance, secondary education constitutes forty percent (40%) of the sample, while tertiary education comprises thirty percent (30%), primary education accounts for twenty percent (20%), and no formal education constitutes ten percent (10%). The sampling frame was split into 60% urban and 40% rural areas so as

to present an all-inclusive outlook of population. This even representation in different demographics strengthens the dependability and transferability of findings made in this research which implies that diverse segments within community accurately showed how electoral fraud affected livelihoods.

Electoral Fraud Perceptions

According to Figure Two, Zimbabwean citizens perceive electoral fraud differently. A significant percentage thinks that Zimbabwe elections are characterized by high levels of electoral fraud. Based on this data, 30% rate it as "Very High," another rating it as "High" is given by other thirty percent (30%), moderate by a quarter represents twenty-five per cent (25%), low by one tenth gives ten percent (10%) and very low is given five percent (5%).

Figure 2. Perceptions of Electoral Fraud

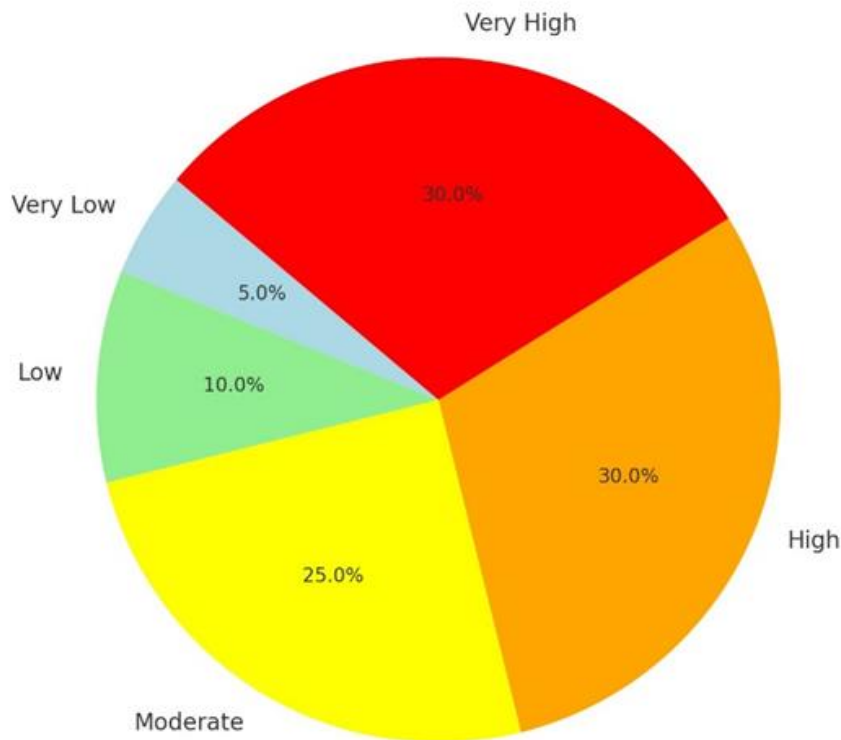


Figure 2. Perceptions of Electoral Fraud

A high percentage of respondents who consider the extent of electoral fraud to be “High” or Very High” indicates a lack of faith among Zimbabweans in the electoral system. Studies done in other regions with disputed electoral integrity have also found this widespread belief in election rigging. For example, there is an argument that perceptions of electoral fraud can destroy public trust in democratic institutions and lead to voting apathy and political disengagement [18]. Besides, another study argues that when irregularities have been perceived as common; it creates a situation where disillusionment, therefore, it makes people not vote again which ruins democracy further [19].

The perception of high levels of electoral fraud can have far-reaching socio-economic implications. In this regard, a population that feels elections are rigged may doubt their chosen leaders and the policies they put forth. Such mistrust affects governance efficiency levels leading to social disorders and economic instability. These perceptions could cause foreign investors shying away from Zimbabwe because they need politically stable settings. This study demonstrates how poor economic outcomes result from perceived fraudulent conduct during

elections thus suggesting that there is urgent need for reforming our electoral systems so as to restore confidence in democratic processes and promote socioeconomic change.

This analysis highlights the necessity for addressing electoral fraud as more than just a political issue but also as a crucial factor towards achieving wider socio-economic stability and development. By adopting rigorous electoral reforms and enhancing transparency, Zimbabwe can begin rebuilding public confidence towards a conducive environment for sustained growth [20].

Economic Conditions/ Electoral Fraud

Relationship between economic conditions and perception showed by ordinary least squares regression was used to investigate relationship between economic conditions and perceptions of elections rigging. Analysis revealed significant negative association between household incomes by means of perceived election malpractices. The results (Figure 3) show coefficients for constant term and perceived election malpractices along with their standard errors, t-values, p-values etc.

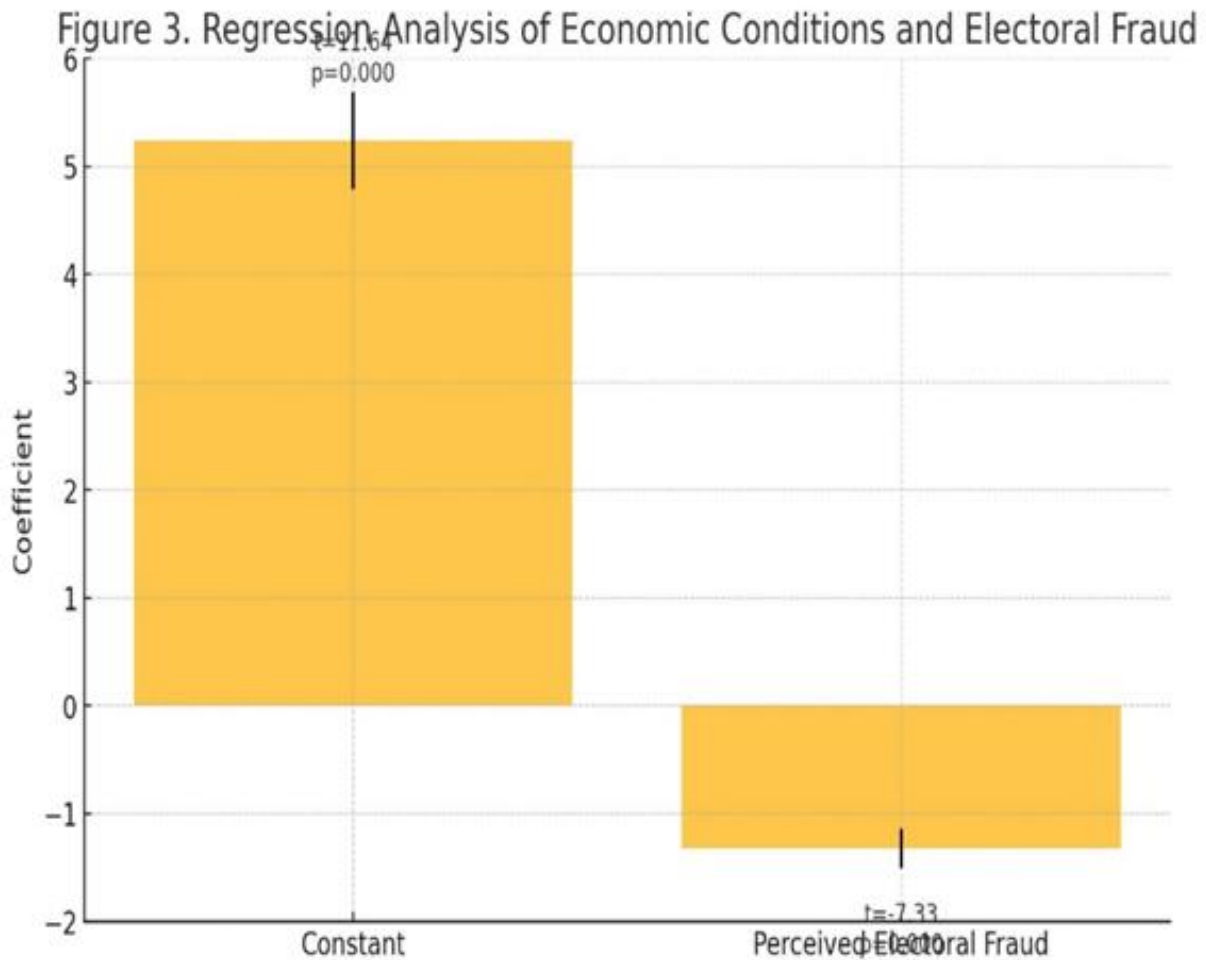


Figure 3. Regression Analysis of Economic Conditions and Electoral Fraud

The model is a regression one and shows that higher perceptions of electoral fraud are associated with lower household income, with a coefficient of -1.32 for perceived electoral fraud. so, its negative value suggests that should the perceived electoral fraud rise by one unit, holding all other factors constant household income would decrease by 1.32 units. In accordance with this relationship the t-statistic is -7.33 and p-value is 0.000 ($p < 0.001$). The null hypothesis can be rejected based on this finding as it confirms the statistical significance of this relationship and supports the hypothesis that electoral fraud impacts economic stability in a negative manner.

Economic literature also suggests that perceptions of electoral corruption can affect negatively economic confidence and stability [6]. Empirical evidence has shown that countries experiencing high levels of election fraud tend to have decreased foreign direct investment as well as slow growth because uncertainty lowers investors' expectations [11]. As democratic institutions crumble under such circumstances, governments implement more poorly designed policies leading to ineffective governance which ultimately worsens economic problems [12]. This

model's significant R-squared value of 0.56 indicates that over half the fluctuations in income received by households can be accounted for through their perception of election irregularities.

This analysis highlights criticality to rectify election rigging for economic reasons such as stabilizing an economy and promotion growth. Authentic elections must be carried out in Zimbabwe through implementing comprehensive reforms into our current system thus exposing all relevant materials for public scrutiny. The need for transparency therefore cannot be overestimated since it will make Zimbabweans trust voting processes again. To promote sustainable development efforts towards healing such wounds may involve having free, timely, fair elections that are open to scrutiny which may lead to robust public participation in policy making.

Accessing Public Services

Therefore, using correlation analysis we tried examining whether there exists any relationship between perceptions about occurrence of Electoral Fraud among

people who take public services like education, clean water and sanitation. As shown in figure 4 below, all the correlation coefficients for various public services indicate

a significant negative relationship between perceptions of electoral corruption and access to healthcare, education, clean water, and sanitation.

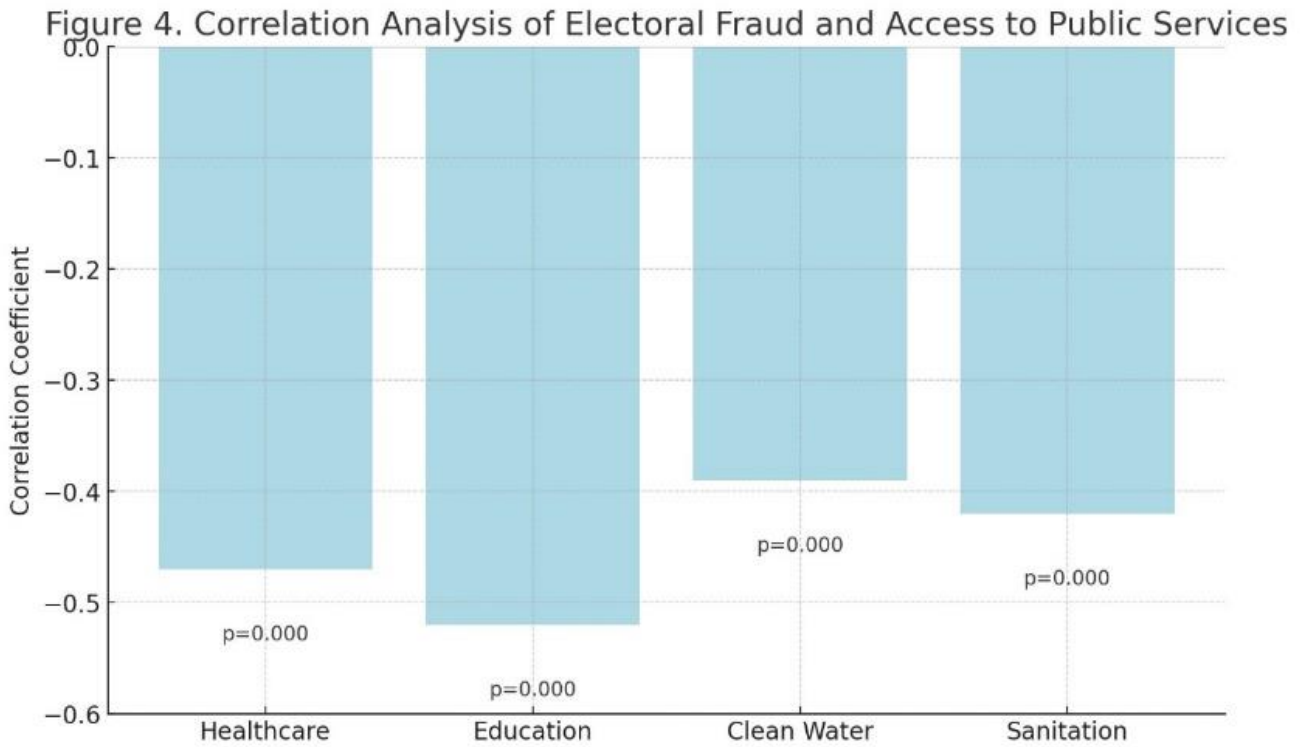


Figure 4. Correlation Analysis of Electoral Fraud and Access to Public Services

Perceived electoral fraud is negatively correlated with access to basic public goods, according to the findings. These include correlations of -0.47 for healthcare, -0.52 for education, -0.39 for clean water and -0.42 for sanitation all with p-values of 0.000 ($p < 0.001$). The negative correlations are an indication that when perceptions of electoral fraud escalate, a decline in access to these vital services occurs.

This finding corroborates prior literature illustrating the detrimental impact of electoral fraud on service delivery [21]. In cases where there is high prevalence of electoral malpractice, funds meant for serving the public are often diverted towards sustaining corrupt practices and perpetuating power structures [22]. This misallocation results in a decreased quality and quantity of essential provisions thereby compounding the challenges facing the populace [23].

The significant negative relationships present in this research underscore the urgency surrounding electoral

reforms that aim at improving service provision through the government based institutions. By improving credibility during elections, Zimbabwe can allocate resources effectively into health care centres, schools as well as sanitation facilities thus enhancing life conditions among its people. Therefore, addressing issues concerning election malpractices is not only a political imperative but also an important step toward achieving sustainability and social justice.

Comparative Analysis:

A descriptive analysis was done to establish differences between rural and urban areas concerning effects of electoral malpractices. Figure 2 indicates average household income and access to public services among urban and rural settlers hence showing that it is rural places that suffer more from electoral malpractices than urban areas do.

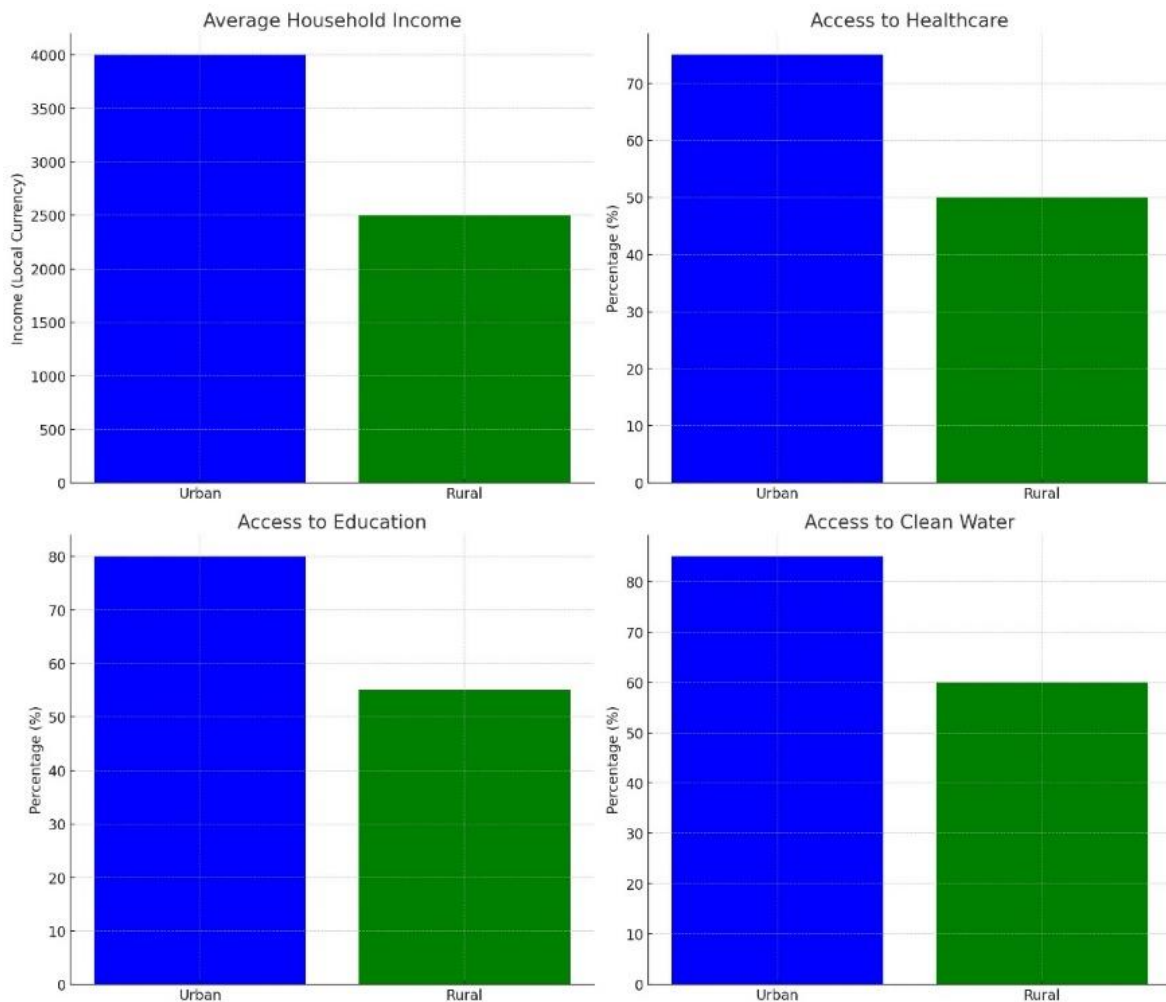


Figure 2. Comparative Analysis of Urban and Rural Areas

Urban and rural areas differ significantly, as shown in the analysis. The average household income is 4000 local currency units for urban areas, compared to 2500 units for rural areas. Moreover, there are striking differences in access to basic public amenities; urban areas have healthcare services accessible to 75%, education accessible to 80%, clean water available to 85% and sanitation facilities at a rate of 70%. Conversely, rural areas experience lower rates of accessing these crucial services such that only half of them can receive medical attention, half have affordability for education while six out of ten people access clean water and sanitation.

Therefore, the above findings imply that electoral fraud affects the remote regions more than it does the rest which gives rise to inequality further hindering socio-economic development. Literature also substantiates this claim by mentioning that resources misallocation due to election malpractices is more common with regard to rural setting [25]. For example, many developing countries' countryside has been characterized by more neglect and poor public service delivery when someone cheat elections [26].

This comparison indicates that targeted efforts should be made towards addressing specific problems confronting rural communities. These demarcations necessitate free and transparent polls to equitably allocate resources among these landlocked regions. Through eradication of cheating during elections and pursuit of pro-rural development approaches in its policies, Zimbabwe could reduce disparities between townships thereby bringing about inclusive growth across all places.

DISCUSSION

The research outcomes show how electoral fraud negatively affects economic conditions and the provision of social amenities throughout Zimbabwe. This was found out from our results thus supporting allegations that electoral malpractice disrupts economic stability promoting poverty among citizens [6]. A negative relationship between household income levels and perceptions concerning electoral fraud implies that these practices do not develop economic policies favouring citizens causing low incomes levels and leading

individuals into poverty [6]. Indeed, other studies have suggested higher incidences of foreign disinvestment associated with election rigging undermining economic growth and causing rise in unemployment [29]. In addition, research shows that perceived electoral fraud leads to uncertainty and instability, making it difficult for businesses to flourish or economies to grow [30].

The correlation analysis also demonstrates how electoral fraud negatively affects access to essential public services like health care, education, clean water, and sanitation. These results are consistent with earlier studies that have shown how the diversion of resources out of public services into keeping corrupt leaders in power occurs as a result of election rigging. In such cases where election malpractices occur, resource allocation is skewed towards projects that maintain their grip on power rather than meeting the needs of citizens. As a consequence, this misplacement of funds leads to worse health outcomes, lower educational levels and insufficient availability of basic amenities such as clean water and sanitation [8]. For example, areas where there is rampant electoral fraud have been known to poorly finance healthcare facilities leading to lack in supplies or personnel hence compromising the quality of healthcare provision [9].

Comparative analysis shows that rural areas are more affected by electoral fraud compared to their urban counterparts. This is because rural areas lack infrastructure and monitoring which makes them susceptible to fraudulent activities than their urban counterparts. In many rural settings, insufficient electoral check mechanisms are in place, allowing illegitimate Machinations to go on thereby leaving the majority of people living in these areas disenfranchised. Electoral fraud studies have shown that rural communities suffer from compounded problems of bad education, health care as well as other essential services due to voting manipulation [12]. This raises serious concerns given the fact that rural areas are known for relying heavily on public provision of goods and services, unlike urban centres where individuals may resort to private sector providers [21].

The study's findings accord with literature highlighting wider socio-economic implications of electoral irregularities. For instance, research conducted in other countries discloses that election cheating results in political instability leading to constrained economic growth and low-quality service delivery. Consequently, FDI inflow can be discouraged by political instability emanating from electoral fraud while disruption of economic activities can also occur [12]. Moreover, this confidence crisis can lead to long-standing governance and

development consequences whereby citizens become uninterested in politics rather than supporting government initiatives for development [13]. Furthermore, loss of trust among the public may cause social unrest and conflicts that would further impair these regions hence compounding the cumulative effects on economic growth and social progress [24].

This research enhances understanding of how polling infringements affect livelihoods using empirical proof from Zimbabwe, indicating a need for comprehensive reforms to ensure free and fair elections. The evidence presented underlines the urgency for policies dealing with causes or root factors promoting electoral fraudulence including transparent during elections together with responsible conduct. Some reforms also include establishing independent electoral commissions; implementing strict anti-fraud measures; enhancing civic education programs so that citizens can demand a fair election process [15]. Also, international support as well as monitoring is significant in ensuring the effective implementation and sustainability of electoral reforms [16].

Moreover, the results from this study imply that dealing with election rigging is not only about political integrity but also socio-economic development. Ensuring that elections are free and fair can enhance governance, improve resource allocation and facilitate public service delivery thus making them mandatory for sustainable development. In light of this, electoral reforms should be a priority in terms of broader developmental plans which can foster inclusive growth as well as better living standards for all citizens [17]. Fair elections are therefore pivotal in democratic building for realization of these outcomes where legal institutions that bring about social and economic equity are needed by every citizen in any country [18].

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

This study has highlighted the significant negative impacts of electoral fraud on economic conditions and access to public services in Zimbabwe. The findings support the hypothesis that electoral fraud undermines economic stability and reduces the quality of life for citizens. The negative correlation between perceptions of electoral fraud and household income suggests that fraudulent electoral practices lead to economic policies that do not prioritize people's social needs, resulting in low wages and poverty levels. Moreover, the misappropriation of resources for perpetuating corrupt power structures

leads to poor health outcomes, reduced education levels, and limited access to basic amenities. Additionally, the correlation analysis points out that in cases where there is electoral fraud as a factor, it hampers access to some vital public services such as healthcare facilities; schools; rivers for clean water purposes; and toilets as well as bathrooms. The comparative analysis reveals that rural areas are more severely impacted by electoral fraud than urban areas. This disparity can be attributed to the lack of infrastructure and oversight in rural regions making them more susceptible to fraudulent practices. Electoral fraud compounded with systemic neglect exacerbates difficulties in accessing quality education, healthcare or other essential services within rural settings. These conclusions are consistent with literature on the wider socio-economic ramifications being emphasized including political instability; decreased growth rates economically speaking as well as trust erosion among government institutions.

Addressing electoral fraud is crucial not only for improving political integrity but also for enhancing socio-economic development. Ensuring free and fair elections can lead to better governance, more equitable resource allocation, and improved public service delivery which are crucial aspects towards sustainable development. The present study highlights the urgent need for comprehensive electoral reforms aimed at fostering transparency & accountability during polls. For instance, reforms could include independent election commissions being set up; implementing strict anti-fraud measures; and improving civic education so that citizens can effectively demand free and fair elections.

In conclusion, this study provides robust evidence of the detrimental impacts of electoral fraud on economic conditions and public service access in Zimbabwe. By alleviating these challenges, decision-makers can strive towards constructing an impartial, fair and thriving society. Future research should continue to examine these issues to provide further insights into the ways that election fraud impacts all aspects of life and effective strategies for combating irregularities in voting. Zimbabwe can encourage sustainable development and improve people's lives by instilling integrity in its elections.

Data Availability

The data utilized in this study comprises both primary and secondary sources, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the topic. Primary data was collected through structured surveys distributed to participants across various regions in Zimbabwe, while secondary data was

sourced from credible publications, government reports, and international databases like the World Bank and United Nations. The datasets generated and analyzed during the study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. However, restrictions apply to the availability of certain proprietary datasets due to confidentiality agreements with respondents and institutional guidelines on data protection and privacy.

Conflict of Interest

In this paper, the author declares that publication is not affected by any conflict of interest at all. Financial or personal relationships with others or organizations which may improperly influence or be seen to have influenced the work in this manuscript were absent. All research activities performed were unbiased and only depended on the collected data and analyzed. The integrity of the study was maintained during the analysis process to ensure that the outcomes are both valid and reliable. The highest ethical standards in research and publication are adhered to by an author

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Authors' Contributions

All aspects of this investigation were solely handled by one author who also conceived it from scratch. These include looking into literature materials, coming up with proposal for this study, sampling plan development, acquisition of ethical clearance, participant enrolment during data collection processes as well as writing up initial drafts ready for submission among others. Reviewing and making necessary alterations on final version was done by an individual who ensured that it is ready for publication too. Detailed participation at each stage promoted a well-structured investigation with accurate findings reported in due time. Therefore, single-

handedness signifies commitment put towards carrying out this research activity.

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