



Evaluating the feasibility of legally binding election manifestos

Sharma S

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Abstract

The feasibility of making electoral manifestos legally enforceable is investigated in the study using a descriptive technique. The theoretical groundwork on election manifestos, constitutional law, and applicable legal frameworks is laid out with an comprehensive literature analysis. By analyzing comparative models and case studies from select democracies, the research assesses the practical and legal challenges inherent in enforcing manifesto commitments. Through a synthesis of global practices and referenced expert perspectives, the paper evaluates the potential for legally binding frameworks to enhance political accountability. Based on this analysis, the study ultimately argues against enforceability due to significant structural, practical, political and ethical limitations, proposing instead a reformed approach to manifesto transparency through voluntary and impartial review mechanisms, preferably outside the remit of the legislative majority.

Keywords

Election, Manifesto, Constitutional compliance, Formulations, Political agenda, Electoral system, Electoral reform, Transparency, Political accountability, Democracy

Samridhi Sharma, Dikshant International School, NH-22, Zirakpur-Panchkula-Kalka Highway, Dhakoli, Zirakpur, 160104, India. Sharma.samridhi2410@gmail.com

1. Introduction

In 2024, the world's biggest democracy held its 18th general election. To be elected to the lower house of India's parliament, the Lok Sabha, candidates need to win the popular vote in what is officially called the General Election or the Lok Sabha (The Peoples' house) Election in India. Various political groups and coalitions launched their platforms in the 2024 Lok Sabha Election with the hopes of getting their members elected. Political parties have traditionally unveiled these platforms – election manifestos – since the 2014 election. “Good days are on the horizon”, was the Bhartiya Janata Party's (BJP) campaign slogan at that time, while the ruling Indian National Congress (INC) also used a variety of political strategies to win over the electorate (1). The INC and the BJP would compete again in the general election of 2024. This time, the struggle would revolve around topics such as the Constitution Amendment Act, One Nation-One Election, the Women Reservation Bill, and the Unite India or Clean India campaign. However, as the election campaign progressed, other topics would emerge. It is necessary to assess the transparency of party platforms' claims regarding these issues, examining both successful implementations and unfulfilled promises.

A political party's platform, or election manifesto is the document it presents to voters in the lead-up to an election. Detailed in the manifesto are the plans, policies, and programs that the party intends to implement. Electors and party members alike can use it as a resource. Voters learn about the platforms of various political parties and what those groups intend to do if elected by comparing the substance of their manifestos. People are free to cast their ballots for

whatever political party's manifesto most closely aligns with their values and goals. Hence, in order for voters to make educated choices, it is important that they examine the manifestos thoroughly. The courts in India have deferred to popular will on the matter, hence election platform promises cannot be enforced by law.

A brief description of the manifestos of the two largest political parties as well as regional parties can serve as examples to understand the fine print.

The INC manifesto (Nyay Patra)

Under the umbrella of "Nyay Patra" (NP), the Congress Election Manifesto 2024 combines rural and urban development. The NP pledged to implement an urban employment program that would provide the city's low-income residents with jobs through infrastructure renovation and rebuilding. To further enhance municipal government, a council with executive, financial, and administrative responsibilities will be established, and the mayor/chairperson will be directly elected for a set five-year term (2).

The BJP manifesto (Sankalp Patra)

"Ease of Living in Cities" is a component of the BJP electoral platform, "Sankalp Patra" (SP). The party's platform includes initiatives to encourage sustainable lifestyles and build first-rate urban infrastructure. This includes making it easier to acquire a property by decreasing the down payments and streamlining approval processes, as well as shoring up the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act (RERA). It promotes the development of "new satellite townships near metro cities across India" as a second objective by means of legislative and reform measures. In addition to extending piped gas connections to all large cities, the manifesto

seeks to implement mixed-use and transit-oriented construction (3).

In their election platforms and manifestos, all of India's main political parties have called for more open government, more citizen participation, and an end to corruption. Nearly every party also promised to make the Right to Information (RTI) Act even stronger. The Aam Admi Party (AAP) devoted only one sentence to RTI in its election program (4). Mamata Banerjee, did not include any mention of RTI in her Trinamul party's manifesto and neither did the BJP. The Indian National Congress, which took pride in passing the RIT Act, left out any discussion of improving the current RTI system in their manifesto; instead choosing to 'Give utmost priority' to the enactment of four more anti-corruption laws. In their manifestos, the CPI and the CPI (M) paid lip service to enhance the RTI Act. Neither of these groups has yet specified how they intend to carry it out (5). A pattern that emerges is that manifestos are largely empty promises made to garner votes; those promises are so general and vague that their implementation is almost impossible to metricize; and novel and media-attention grabbing policies (such as formulating and promulgating new laws; without regard to the fact that similar existing ones exist that are not being enforced) are given preference over optimization of laws and policies that already exist, but are not being enforced or implemented.

Professional strategists now shoulder the heavy burden of fine-tuning campaign strategy, and social media marketing campaigns have largely supplanted door-to-door canvassing in Indian elections. One common denominator that has always been consistent with elections is the worrying trend of political parties making lofty promises in

their manifestos, and then, if elected, failing to deliver on those pledges. The Delhi High Court had previously ruled that election manifestos and their contents were not legally enforceable, and in 2015, the Supreme Court rejected an appeal from that ruling. This position allows political parties to distort voters' decision-making process by operating *carte blanche* in a legal vacuum regarding election promises (6).

In the US, electoral officials play no part with regard to election manifestos. In the UK, to ensure that election manifestos are realistic, parties are required to include a financial section and submit them to the Court of Audit, if one exists, which is why specific policy decisions and their financial consequences are included in the UK election platform. Manifestos and other campaign materials are subject to rules issued by the election administration. The Election Commission in Bhutan requires all political parties to submit their election manifestos before to the National Assembly Election. Issues raised in the Election Manifesto can be reviewed and excluded by the Election Commission. The Manifesto is made public after it has been accepted. Three weeks to election day, candidates in Bhutan can release their manifestos (7).

Some argue that an electoral manifesto should be enforceable in court to foster more transparency and trust in the democratic system. Manifestos currently represent a collection of pledges that political parties make to voters, yet their non-binding nature raises questions about accountability and transparency. Making manifesto commitments legally binding could, theoretically, ensure that parties remain focused on addressing the people's needs, as

legal enforceability would provide a stronger incentive to deliver on these promises.

Without legal ramifications, voters might become disillusioned with an election system that permits parties to make lofty but unenforceable promises. Binding manifestos would give voters a tangible way to hold parties accountable, potentially strengthening democratic integrity. In any system, parties risk losing public support if they do not fulfill their promises, but enforceability could formalize this accountability. With legal requirements, political parties might approach their pledges more cautiously, making realistic promises aligned with public needs, which would ultimately benefit governance and the electorate.

In a competitive political environment, parties would be more likely to honor their commitments to avoid ceding credibility to opponents. Therefore, the idea of a legally binding manifesto appears as a potential enhancement to the democratic fabric, introducing a level of responsibility beyond mere electoral promises.

Yet, the proposal to legally bind manifestos introduces ethical and pragmatic challenges. It risks turning democratic engagement into a transactional process, where campaign promises resemble contracts rather than policy. Similar to vote buying, enforceable pledges might reduce civic engagement to a checklist of deliverables. Additionally, parties might revise their language to avoid legal traps, resulting in vague or evasive manifestos. This shift could disproportionately benefit larger, well-funded parties with legal teams, disadvantaging smaller and independent candidates.

Given these complexities, legally binding manifestos could paradoxically lead to less transparency. They might shift focus from public interest to legal wrangling, distancing elected officials from voters and undermining the representative nature of democracy. As an alternative, independent and impartial frameworks for reviewing and assessing manifesto feasibility may provide a balanced approach, promoting transparency and accountability without the complications of legal enforceability.

Legal interpretation of select cases

An INC candidate running for the Karnataka state Assembly in 2023, pledged financial assistance to his constituents as part of his party's manifesto. A charge was brought against him in court on the basis that the platform manifesto represented *quid-pro-quo* bribery. The court dismissed the accusation, characterizing the pledges as policy predictions and thresholds rather than fraudulent conduct. The court also ruled that party manifestos may legitimately include promises that may result in monetary advantages for the public, either directly or indirectly. The decision has far-reaching implications for the interpretation of electoral pledges under Indian law.

The Indian Supreme Court ruled in 2013 that candidates' use of false campaign promises and gifts (freebies) undermined fair voting. However, it observed that making promises to give away freebies in election manifestos did not constitute a "corrupt practice" under Section 123 of the Representation of People Act (RP) (8). Products such as bicycles, smartphones, televisions, computers, and bill waivers have come to be accepted as common 'freebies'. The Supreme court also ruled that government poll promises and freebies cannot be compared with subsidies,

which are necessary for a government to meet peoples' needs and should not be included in such pledges.

2. Literature review

Le Pennec noted that unfortunately, politicians trying to win over people cannot always speak their minds. Taking a stand on issues that contradicts their party's ideology or goes against what they've already said could cost them substantial support. By using computational text analysis on 30,000 candidate manifestos from the two-round French elections, he demonstrated that politicians do in fact consider these costs when making strategic adjustments to their campaign messaging and advertising non-policy issues in order to appeal to a wider audience, as well as when they are strictly following their party's platform. This moderated electoral discourse may provide useful information to voters as it predicts greater performance in government, per the study's findings (9).

Palmqvist evaluated traces of Europeanization in Swedish election manifestos. In their national and European election platforms, Swedish parties address constitutional concerns and contextual circumstances, demonstrating that they politicize many aspects of the European Union's policies. Although the parties show indications of Europeanization, their vague language about the EU makes it harder to portray Swedish party platforms as having a strong European orientation. In order to better comprehend the EU content of Swedish political parties' election manifestos, this thesis explains how to take a qualitative approach to their discussions of the EU (10).

Söderberg noted that during their campaigns, candidates for the European Parliament often

made promises regarding larger EU or national concerns. For the EP to carry out its duties, a significant number of commitments needed to be under its purview. Based on the Dutch European election manifestos from 2014, researchers found that almost half of the promises were too vague or subjective for the European Parliament to implement. A quarter of the promises related to policy areas where the Parliament had limited authority or could only exert indirect influence. ~ 30% of the promises were about policy areas where the Parliament did have a significant impact on final decisions. The greatest pledge fulfillment ranged from 30% to 52%. The elections failed to establish a mandate as they did not reflect voter preferences in areas of policy where the EP possessed authority (11).

Kangis examined how reforms to the House of Lords were connected to promises made in manifestos, and it concluded that these promises fell short in achieving desired outcomes. Not all improvements were promised in manifestos, and some promises went unfulfilled (12).

Schwarzbözl et al. found that smaller parties were hardly covered in the news on issues they did not own, while large parties were especially covered on salient topics. This meant that smaller parties must have issue-rich and issue-varied manifestos in order to gain meaningful media coverage (13).

Austin and Leander demonstrated that the International Social Sciences praxis was limited by a focus on word counts and abstractions, rather than engaging with the whole range of material, aesthetic, and technical production. Their thesis argued for a data rich, quantitative manifesto content more grounded in reality (14).

Saleem explored the differences between Hindu nationalism and Hindu populism by analyzing election manifestos of Hindutva parties, including Hindu Mahasabha, Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), and the BJP. The analysis of one manifesto of Hindu Mahasabha, two of BJS, and four of the BJP found that Hindu nationalism was strong and visible in early Hindutva parties, while Hindu populism was weak and sporadic. Interestingly, for the BJP, there was a rise and then drop in Hindu nationalism, while Hindu populism consistently increased (15).

Dolezal et. al. explored the aspects of campaign platforms that had been overlooked, with a particular emphasis placed on the most urgent problems and positions on policy. Assaults on competitors, references to a party's previous performance, subjective and objective policy pledges, the visibility of party leaders, and literature on negative advertising, retroactive voting, party mandates, and customization were all analyzed via the framework of categories. The significance of these criteria was influenced by a number of factors, including the ideology of the party, its size, the relative popularity of its leaders, early elections, and its position in either the government or the opposition. A comprehensive examination of forty-six Austrian election platforms from 1986 to 2013 provided evidence that the projections were accurate. When conducting research based on manifestos, academics took into consideration the fact that the platforms of official parties and opposition parties were fundamentally different across all five dimensions (16).

Kumar et. al. examined the pattern of health-related promises made by India's National Political Parties (NPPs) in the run-up to the 16th Lok Sabha elections in 2014 (17). The

study found that promises made by all NPPs were quite progressive, inclusive, and comprehensive in nature; however, they did not figure in public debates or in election speeches.

Reuse explored the question of whether ideological splits that existed in national politics permeated down to a regional level. Two hundred local manifestos from the province of Flanders in Belgium were analyzed to ascertain whether there were significant ideological differences between the parties. Wordscores and a BERT-model were utilized in the research project to investigate the variance in left-right positions and the level of problem salience. According to the institutional isomorphism theory and the franchise party model, it was hypothesized that the ideological gap between different parties operating inside the same municipality would be greater than the ideological gap that existed between branches of the same party operating in different municipalities. Ideological struggle, rather than mere facts and harmony, was the driving force behind election politics at the municipality level (18).

The content and language of election manifestos hence have broader ramifications in their procedure to inform the electorate. They influence the extent of media coverage, the policy differences between individual member nations and the governing bloc (such as the EU), the ideological differences between contestants from the same party running in different constituencies and/or municipalities, the ability to portray the manifesto differently to diverse audiences across the political spectrum and the quantitative differentiation of aspects of policy from other parties.

3. Objectives

This work aims to examine existing constitutional and legal provisions related to election manifestos to understand their implications for making such manifestos legally binding. It aims to investigate the potential legal and practical challenges in aligning election manifestos with constitutional requirements and assess the feasibility of overcoming the challenges. It also explores alternative mechanisms for fostering transparency in manifesto commitments, considering frameworks that provide independent evaluations of promises without necessitating legal enforcement.

4. Methods

The methodology for this study, adopts a comprehensive descriptive approach. Initially, a literature review was conducted to establish background information and theoretical insight on election manifestos, constitutional law, and related legal frameworks. This review was followed by a detailed legal analysis of constitutional and statutory provisions to assess both the constraints and possibilities of implementing legally binding manifestos. To understand practical applications and outcomes, case studies from jurisdictions with existing practices or legal precedents for binding or accountable manifestos were examined. Additionally, a comparative analysis was conducted to evaluate international models and best practices in enhancing manifesto transparency and accountability, including non-binding review frameworks. The study synthesized these findings to evaluate the viability of legally binding manifestos while proposing recommendations for transparency-enhancing frameworks that align manifesto formulation with democratic principles and constitutional standards.

5. Background analysis of the regulations and policies

5.1 Regulatory mechanisms to prevent election malpractices in India.

Every election has a code of conduct that is publicized at least two weeks before the election. If violations occur, the Election Commission may impose harsh action against those responsible for the violation. If the allegations are true, the Election Commission has the authority to launch an inquiry and make a decision that is favorable to the party that has been wronged. It is possible for the Election Commission to erase the names of twenty million false registrants and create a fresh voter registration list if it so wishes. The Election Commission has the ability to recommend that law enforcement agencies provide adequate protection in their respective districts. Law enforcement agencies are required to provide adequate protection in their respective constituencies. The deployment of the central police force to crisis locations has the potential to prevent the loss of life in the event that local police are unable to do so as well.

5.2 Regulatory mechanisms addressing malpractices in manifesto promises

The United States has several regulatory mechanisms in place to prevent malpractices in elections. Each state has its own methods of voting, procedures for counting votes, and authorities for conducting elections. However, this decentralized system has led to controversies, as exemplified by Florida favoring certain candidates in the 2000 presidential election. There is no single national Election Commission responsible for conducting elections throughout the country. Instead, state and local election boards oversee elections, which can lead to inconsistencies and political influence in

some cases but prevent one bad actor from influencing a whole range of electoral results. Federal laws prohibit various forms of electoral fraud, such as voter intimidation, vote buying, and submitting multiple ballots. Convictions can result in imprisonment and/or fines. Nevertheless, the extent of enforcement depends on each state. Reform proposals from nonpartisan groups like the Bipartisan Policy Center and the Brennan Center for Justice advocate for uniformity in election integrity practices, such as instituting voter ID laws at national level, automatic registering of voters as well as post-election audits. Cases of suspected malpractices can be reported by citizens to state and local election officials and the Department of Justice in Washington DC.

In Russia, the regulatory mechanisms to prevent electoral malpractices are characterized by a combination of formal laws and practices that often favor the ruling party, United Russia. Manipulating the candidate registration process is one of the main methods used to suppress electoral competition. Opposition candidates are often disqualified because authorities have strict rules, such as rejecting applications due to minor errors in supporting documents thus making it possible for only government friendly aspirants to participate. The body that supervises elections in Russia, Electoral Commissions, is significantly influenced by the Kremlin. This kind of control can lead to bias which favors the ruling party thus undermining the autonomy of these bodies and their capacity to enforce equitable electioneering practices. Various coercive tactics such as voter intimidation and bribery are employed. Some reports indicate techniques like “carousel voting” where blocks of voters are mobilized for multiple votes or ballot stuffing during tabulation.

These methods though not open as before still contribute to creating a manipulated electoral environment. Stringent regulations including residency conditions which impact heavily on international connections have recently been enacted for candidates. Many potential candidates have essentially been barred from participating in elections through this means, thereby consolidating power within the ruling regime while stifling genuine political contestation.

There is limited publicly available information on regulatory mechanisms to prevent electoral malpractices in China, as China is a one-party state with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) maintaining a monopoly on political power. China does not hold direct elections for national leadership positions. The CCP selects its top leadership through an opaque process within the party. Indirect elections are held for lower-level positions, but the CCP vets all candidates. The CCP's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection is tasked with investigating corruption and misconduct by party members. However, the Commission lacks independence, and its actions are often politically motivated. China has laws prohibiting vote-buying and other electoral fraud, but enforcement is uneven and selective. Authorities have prosecuted some cases of vote-buying in village elections, but the laws are not applied to CCP leadership selection. China's state-controlled media outlets strictly censor coverage of elections and the political process. Independent monitoring and reporting on electoral issues is not permitted. China's legal system lacks independence, with courts and prosecutors controlled by the CCP. This makes it difficult for citizens to seek legal redress for electoral irregularities or malpractices.

6. Discussion

An election manifesto is an important element in the representation for a political party at a large scale. While manifestos are influenced by executive and judicial oversight, they remain largely non-binding.

Legislative majority and the feasibility of manifesto fulfillment

Empirical research suggests a robust correlation between legislative majority and the likelihood of fulfilling election manifesto promises. When a political party secures an absolute majority within the legislative assembly, it acquires substantial leverage over the policy making process, reducing legislative friction and enabling the enactment of promised policies with fewer obstacles. Studies have indicated that parties with a decisive legislative majority fulfill between 60-80% of their manifesto promises, demonstrating how majority institutional power directly supports accountability to the electorate.

Theoretical and empirical studies underscore this relationship, illustrating how legislative power enhances the feasibility of implementing manifesto commitments. Alesina (19), in his foundational work on political cycles, argued that majority control enabled parties to sustain policy continuity which were aligned with their electoral mandates; this is less feasible in coalition governments or minority rule. Similarly, Drazen contended that the political business cycle is moderated by majority governments, which are more likely to uphold pre-election promises due to stability in policy-making environments (20).

The Manifesto Project Database and other large-scale studies of political behavior support this linkage. In high-GDP nations, for

instance, majority-controlled governments exhibit greater policy adherence, as evidenced by the frequent completion of campaign pledges in economies with efficient bureaucratic structures. Persson and Tabellini (21) argued that governments with legislative stability can engage in credible policy-making, as the reduced likelihood of internal opposition facilitates policy implementation. This is particularly evident in developed economies where legislative power corresponds with administrative effectiveness and capacity, thereby reducing obstacles to fulfilling campaign promises.

Conversely, in nations with extensive informal economies or underdeveloped institutional frameworks, the correlation between legislative majority and manifesto delivery is often weaker. These countries face unique challenges, such as limited governmental reach and regulatory inefficiencies, which undermine even the most determined majority governments' ability to deliver on electoral promises. However, in countries with high legislative and administrative capacity, the majority effect is more pronounced, aligning with Rogoff's model of equilibrium political budget cycles, which links majority control with consistent fiscal policies that adhere to electoral commitments (22).

Although quantitative data directly tracking manifesto fulfillment remains limited, the reliance on legislative majority as a proxy provides significant insights. These findings align with theoretical models that propose competent and efficient governance frameworks as critical to policy adherence. Countries characterized by legislative stability, high party competence, and administrative efficiency display consistently higher levels of policy fulfillment,

substantiating the argument that majority control may influence the successful delivery of electoral promises.

7. Perspectives

This study, underscores the significant challenges involved in making campaign promises legally enforceable. While binding manifestos might appear to enhance political accountability by holding parties to their pledges, implementing such a framework presents substantial obstacles. Firstly, binding commitments legally would restrict a government's ability to adapt to unforeseen events or changing socio-economic conditions, introducing a rigidity that could compromise the flexibility necessary for responsive governance. For instance, economic downturns, natural disasters, or geopolitical shifts often require governments to pivot from initial commitments—an inflexibility that binding promises would complicate. Furthermore, enforcing manifesto promises legally would add considerable legal and bureaucratic complexity. It could lead to vagueness in manifesto language, as parties might phrase promises in cautious or ambiguous terms to avoid legal consequences. This would diminish the transparency that manifestos are intended to provide, making it harder for voters to assess a party's genuine commitments. Additionally, creating enforceable manifestos could favor larger, resource-rich parties with access to legal expertise, while smaller or emerging parties may struggle to formulate legally sound promises. This would inadvertently restrict political diversity and equity, undermining democratic inclusivity. Given these challenges, a legally binding framework for manifestos may not be practical or effective. Instead, alternative approaches could achieve similar levels of accountability without compromising political flexibility.

One promising alternative is the establishment of an independent review body — tentatively designated as the World Manifesto Review Committee (WMRC). This committee would serve as an impartial body tasked with assessing manifesto pledges before elections, offering voters a transparent, data-driven evaluation of each commitment's feasibility. Ultimately, achieving accountability through binding manifestos calls for a nuanced structure that balances enforcement with the adaptive needs of a multi-layered democratic system.

Ironically, the effectiveness of manifesto fulfillment as a direct function of legislative majority often leads to covert influence by the majority party over 'independent' electoral oversight institutions such as the Election Commissions; or equivalent bodies. This is because the administrative personnel in these institutions are often appointed by the head of the Executive branch of government. The establishment of global impartial review committees such as the WMRC is expected to circumvent such scenarios.

8. Proposed solutions

The research findings suggest that while legally binding election manifestos may not be the most practical or optimum approach, alternative mechanisms could still foster transparency, accountability, and political credibility. The following recommendations offer potential solutions for enhancing the role of election manifestos in democratic governance without imposing rigid legal mandates.

8.1 Establishment of a World Manifesto Review Committee (WMRC)

A promising alternative to legally binding manifestos is the establishment of a body

along the lines of a World Manifesto Review Committee (WMRC), an independent, global body of anonymous peer reviewers. This committee would consist of experts from 10 or more nations with similar GDP levels to the country where elections are being held, ensuring that each review is grounded in a relevant socio-economic context. Tasked with evaluating the feasibility of manifesto promises from various political parties, the WMRC would assess each action item in the manifestos, categorizing them as either “likely to be implemented and to meet with success” or “unlikely to be implemented and unlikely to meet with success”. This peer review process would culminate in a straightforward report for each party’s manifesto, presented in a bullet-point format for accessibility. In addition to this qualitative assessment, each manifesto could receive an aggregate score reflecting the overall feasibility and practicality of its promises. The WMRC could be anticipated to operate under the auspices of the United Nations. It would not be mandatory to have a manifesto scored by the WMRC; but parties that did so would have more legitimacy in the presentation of their manifesto as well as leverage against those parties that do not avail themselves of this opportunity for impartial expert scrutiny. This WMRC report and score could be incorporated into the manifesto publication process, making it available to the electorate before the elections, thus providing voters with impartial, data-driven insights into each party’s commitments. By overseeing manifesto reviews on a global scale, the WMRC would standardize this transparency-enhancing process, helping to establish accountability norms across diverse political systems. Such a system would empower voters with clear, unbiased feedback, supporting informed decision-making without

the need for legal enforcement of manifesto promises.

8.2 Strengthening the role of Election Commissions

Increasing the authority and responsibilities of national and regional Election Commissions could enhance manifesto credibility. Election Commissions could require parties to submit manifestos with specific, measurable commitments. In turn, these Commissions could conduct post-election audits to track the progress of key promises, holding parties accountable in a manner similar to financial audits. Additionally, Election Commissions could introduce guidelines for manifesto language, discouraging vague or overly ambitious pledges and encouraging clear, actionable commitments.

8.3 Increased manifesto specificity requirements

Another approach is to mandate that all political manifestos meet a minimum standard of specificity; which would also be a necessity for WMRC review. This would involve requiring parties to define measurable goals, timelines, and intended outcomes for major policy promises. By making manifesto content more quantifiable, political parties would be encouraged to create realistic agendas that align closely with achievable goals, reducing the risk of inflated or overly ambitious claims that can lead to voter disillusionment.

8.4 Publicly accessible progress trackers

To further enhance accountability, government bodies or independent organizations could develop online progress trackers for manifesto promises, perhaps also incorporating scores from the WMRC. These platforms would allow the public to monitor

the government's fulfillment of its commitments in real time. By making progress transparent and accessible, such a system would maintain pressure on elected officials to honor their promises and foster ongoing public engagement. Through these recommended solutions, political parties would be held to a higher standard of transparency and accountability, fostering a political environment where manifestos contribute to genuine democratic engagement. Implementing mechanisms like the WMRC, alongside strengthened Election Commissions and manifesto guidelines, offers a balanced approach to enhancing manifesto credibility without enforcing rigid legal bindings.

9. Conclusion

This study examined the feasibility of legally binding election manifestos, exploring the interplay between political accountability, constitutional law, and governance flexibility. While binding manifestos legally may seem to promote accountability, practical and legal challenges suggest that such an approach could compromise democratic responsiveness. Legal enforceability introduces a level of rigidity that may hinder governments from adapting to evolving socio-economic landscapes, potentially weakening the very responsiveness that democracy seeks to ensure. The findings indicate that alternative frameworks may offer a more effective path to accountability without the complexities of legal mandates. One promising solution is the creation of mechanisms that enhance the role of Election Commissions. By empowering these Commissions to set standards for manifesto specificity and conduct post-election audits, governments can foster greater transparency. This approach encourages political parties to

make clear, measurable commitments, allowing voters to hold them accountable based on progress assessments rather than rigid legal constraints.

Additionally, this study recommends establishing a body along the lines of a World Manifesto Review Committee (WMRC)—an impartial body of peer reviewers from nations with similar socio-economic profiles. The remit of the WMRC would be to evaluate manifesto promises for feasibility, publishing straightforward reports that help voters distinguish realistic commitments from aspirational ones. Alongside increased transparency, the WMRC would foster an informed electorate, promoting a culture of accountability that transcends legal enforcement.

Finally, further emphasis on public awareness and educational campaigns could empower voters to critically evaluate manifesto promises. By understanding the feasibility and potential impact of pledges, voters become active participants in the democratic process, able to make informed choices based on realistic expectations.

In summary, while legally binding manifestos present significant challenges, alternative mechanisms—such as empowered Election Commissions, an impartial global manifesto review committee, and enhanced voter education—provide a balanced approach. These solutions strengthen political accountability while respecting the flexibility and adaptability that are essential to effective governance. By promoting transparency through structured, non-binding evaluations, democratic systems can ensure that electoral promises serve as meaningful commitments to the public, fostering trust and engagement in the democratic process.

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