

Explaining the Fulfillment of Election Pledges: A Comparative Study on the Impact of Government Institutions

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Do parties keep the promises they make before elections? What explains why some governments fulfill more election promises than others? This article provides the first truly comparative analyses of parties' pledge fulfillment across many countries in order to address these questions. We study the fulfillment of 13,279 election pledges made in campaigns prior to the formation of forty-six governments in eleven countries: Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. This research design allows us to examine the effects of partisan control of executive office, power-sharing arrangements and economic conditions on pledge fulfillment. The results show that parties act according to their election pledges to a considerable extent. The conventional view of parties as pledge-breakers is thereby challenged. The results also show that the degree to which a given party controls policymaking affects pledge fulfillment: institutions matter. Economic conditions also affect the probability of pledge fulfillment for some, but not all, types of pledges.

Do parties keep the promises they make before elections? What explains why some governments fulfill more election promises than others? This article provides the first truly comparative analyses of parties' pledge fulfillment across many countries in order to address these questions. Our data comes from a comparative project—the Comparative Party Pledges Group—in which scholars have worked to test the reliability of different approaches, and to produce data that is comparable. This study merges some previously analyzed data (recoded so that it uses a common definition of pledge) along with hundreds of new party pledges not previously analyzed in order to test a set of hypotheses about parties' pledge fulfillment.

Political parties perform the important function of helping to link societal demands and government policy. In that role, parties formulate packages of policy proposals for governments to enact. If parties channel societal demands into government policy responses effectively, there should be a substantial level of congruence between election programs and subsequent government policies, at least for some parties. A strong program-to-policy linkage is central to the mandate theory of democracy and the responsible party model (APSA 1950; Downs 1957; Friedrich 1963; Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge 1994). For Mansbridge (2003, 515), “the idea that during campaigns representatives made promises to constituents, which they then kept or failed to keep” is the focus of the traditional model of democratic representation, also known as “promissory representation”.

In addition to the relevance of this topic to democratic theory, the fulfillment of election pledges is a prominent topic of political debate around the world. Party representatives often claim to hold a mandate to carry out their election platforms, notwithstanding the contestability of such claims (Grossback, Peterson and Stimson 2005). Research indicates that parties' election programs and specific election pledges receive considerable media attention (Krukones 1984; Costello and Thomson 2008). As an example, the Pulitzer Prize of 2009 was awarded to the web site Politifact.com for its Obameter, where US President Obama's election promises are tracked, and similar websites operate in other countries. Research also indicates that election promises have a significant effect on voters' choices on election day (Elinder, Jordahl and Putvaara 2008).

The question of whether parties keep their promises is also relevant to the widespread distrust of political parties. Citizens and experts generally hold negative views on the extent to which politicians keep their promises. The International Social Survey Programme conducted a survey in 33 democracies in 2006, containing an item that asked respondents whether they agree or disagree with the general statement that “People we elect as MPs try to keep the promises they have made during the election”.¹ Respondents had five substantive answer categories from strongly agree to strongly disagree. In 31 of the 33 countries covered, more respondents disagreed with the statement than agreed with it. For instance, in the United States, 58.0 percent of respondents disagreed or disagreed strongly with the statement while only 21.9 percent agreed or agreed strongly. In the United Kingdom, where research has found high rates of pledge fulfillment (Rose 1984; Rallings 1987; Royed 1996), 46.0 percent of respondents disagreed or disagreed strongly with the statement, while only 22.8 percent agreed or agreed strongly. Other comparative research also confirms that citizens hold negative views on pledge fulfillment (Naurin 2011; Thomson 2011). Such skeptical views are by no means confined to uninformed mass opinion. Manin (1997, 180) writes : “even assuming that voters choose to pay some attention to the candidates’ promises, they know, or should know, that the credibility of those promises is an open question. It is not reasonable on their part to suppose that candidates will necessarily honor their commitments”. Many other political scientists share Manin’s view. Schattschneider (1942, 567) wrote that “party platforms are fatuities; they persuade no one, deceive no one, and enlighten no one”; similar references to typical rejections of British election manifestoes are discussed by Rose (1984, 56; see also Finer 1975, 379). Our research examines whether and when such views reflect the reality of politics.

Parties’ election programs and the policy pledges they contain are important not only as appeals to voters, but also as appeals to internal party factions by setting out medium-term plans that commit the party leadership to a certain policies. Party leaderships must respond to and represent their factions so as to maintain internal support (Thomassen 1994, 256-8). Factions view their parties as vehicles through which they can attain their political goals and one way in which this can be done is to secure the

¹ The dataset, the Role of Government Survey IV, is available at <http://www.issp.org/>.

commitment of the party to specific policy initiatives in its manifesto. By formulating election programs with specific election pledges, parties attempt to unite distinct factions. Rose (1984, 56) writes: “the drafting of a manifesto is first of all a search for consensus within each of the parties. The resulting document is not so much a statement of what the voters want as it is a proclamation of what a party’s leadership agrees to want”. Election programs and the policy commitments they contain are also constraints placed on party leaders by members. In the absence of detailed election programs, party leaders may be undisciplined. With reference to Latin American parties, Mainwaring and Scully (1995, 25) note: “Unfettered by party platforms, [political leaders] make policy choices that tend to be short-term and erratic. They are more prone to demagoguery and populism, both of which have deleterious effects on democracy”.

Finally, promise making and keeping by parties has important inter-party functions in systems where power sharing is the norm. Coalition governments are typically formed after negotiations between prospective coalition partners based on each party’s election program (Strøm, Müller and Bergman 2010). These parties must therefore consider the effects of their electoral appeals on their standing as potential coalition partners. Parties’ campaign promises are relevant to theories of government formation since they are clear statements of parties’ policy positions. The ministerial portfolio allocation model of coalition formation, for instance, posits that “government policy outputs in any given policy area are best predicted by looking at the position of the party in control of the portfolio with jurisdiction over the policy area concerned” (Laver and Shepsle 1996, 42). In coalition governments, the extent to which each governing party’s policy proposals are turned into policies is a mark of its success and strength in the coalition.

Election pledge studies are sometimes compared to the so called saliency approach to the mandate model. The saliency approach was developed by the Manifestos Research Group (now known as the Comparative Manifestos Project). This approach is based on the saliency theory of party competition, according to which parties compete by selectively emphasizing and de-emphasizing different policy themes, rather than taking distinct policy positions on the same issues (Robertson 1976; Budge, Robertson and Hearl 1987). The program-to-policy linkage is then investigated by examining the

association between parties' *emphases on various policy themes* (in their manifestos) and subsequent *governments' spending* in related policy areas (Klingeman, Hofferbert and Budge 1994). Sulkin (2009) also looked at policy emphasis in campaigns, in this case, US Congressional candidates' emphases of different issues, and found that this emphasis was correlated with relevant legislative activity once in office. These findings regarding thematic or issue emphases are certainly relevant to the program-to-policy linkage. However, we would argue that investigating the fulfillment of specific pledges allows us a more fine-tuned analysis of this linkage; hence, this is the focus of our research.

The pledge approach is quite straightforward: we identify pledges in party manifestos and evaluate the extent to which these pledges are fulfilled (for reviews see Royed 1996; Mansergh and Thomson 2007; Naurin 2013). Election pledges are commitments in parties' platforms to carry out certain policies or achieve certain outcomes. These commitments are sufficiently detailed for researchers to test whether or not they were fulfilled after the election. In one of the earliest pledge studies Pomper (1968; Pomper and Lederman 1980) applied this approach to examine the fulfillment of election pledges made by US parties. Royed refined and extended this approach to more recent governments in the US and the UK (1996; see also Rose 1984; Rallings 1987). With various adaptations, this approach has also been applied to other countries in published research: Canada (Rallings 1987; Pétry 2002), Greece (Kalogeropoulou 1989), the Netherlands (Thomson 2001), Ireland (Mansergh 2004; Mansergh and Thomson 2007; Costello and Thomson 2008), Spain (Artés 2013; Artés and Bustos 2008), Sweden (Naurin 2011; 2013), Italy (Moury 2011) and Bulgaria (Kostadinova 2013).²

Our study takes the pledge approach forward with an integrated analysis of pledge fulfillment in eleven countries: Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. We bring together much of the existing research on pledge fulfillment, in some cases with not previously published cases, and add more countries to the analysis. Importantly, we introduce higher standards of comparability to the analysis of pledge making and

² Since the pledge approach focuses on the fulfillment of specific promises, it is also distinct from Stokes' (2001) important work on the congruence between campaign appeals and government policies in Latin America. Stokes provides a more abstract conception of campaign statements and government policies by focusing on the general direction of public policy, rather than the fulfillment of specific pledges.

fulfillment. Previous studies using the pledge approach also drew comparisons among countries, but with the exception of Royed (1996) and Thomson (2001), did this by using results of country studies done by different scholars, with no cooperation between scholars. The advantage of our integrated analysis is that it allows us to make comparable assessments of pledge fulfillment in different contexts and to control for pledge characteristics when examining variation in fulfillment. Such an analysis requires a large enough number of cases of each institutional context. Our country studies often include variation in government type, but often only one or a few examples of each type. Because of the labor-intensive nature of the work, it isn't generally possible for any one scholar to achieve a reasonable sample of multiple types of government. The country for which we have the most cases— Ireland – does includes examples of a variety of government types, but only a small number of each. A pooled analysis greatly increases the number of cases of institutional variation.

Institutional variation is defined by the level of control parties have over government office. Our cases include governments in which a single party controlled the executive branch, as well as governments consisting of coalitions of parties. They include cases in which the party or parties of the executive controlled legislative majorities, as well as governments that did not. We include the US presidential system along with parliamentary systems, and our cases encompass very different economic conditions.

THEORY

Our main concern is with describing and explaining variation in the fulfillment of pledges made by parties that obtain some degree of control over the government executive after the elections. Therefore, we focus on parties that entered single-party or coalition governments after elections in each of the ten parliamentary systems, while in the US presidential system we consider the party of the president after the election.³ We also present some aggregate results regarding the fulfillment of pledges made by parties that did not occupy executive office after elections: opposition parties in the parliamentary

³There is some disagreement in the literature about how to classify the Portuguese political system. Although it is widely recognized that the power of the president is far less extensive than those of the other semi-presidential systems, the norm today is to classify it in that way, although there is debate on this question. For our purposes here, we consider it with the other parliamentary systems, while recognizing that it is in some ways different.

systems and the non-presidential party in the US. Comparing the fulfillment of governing and opposition parties' pledges is relevant to assessing the mandate principle, according to which there is and should be a stronger program-to-policy linkage for governing parties than for opposition parties. The existing research in the pledge approach shows that there is indeed a higher likelihood of pledge fulfillment for governing parties than for opposition parties, although in some countries and periods the difference is small. The fulfillment of opposition parties' pledges can be explained at least in part by the fact that some of their pledges were also made by governing parties, or concerned uncontentious policies that any government would enact. Governing parties have also been known to implement and take credit for popular policies proposed by their opponents. Based on previous research, we begin with a number of expectations about the factors that affect pledge fulfillment across countries and time. Explanatory factors include institutional variation across and within countries, characteristics of pledges, and economic conditions.

Our main theoretical interest is in the institutional factors that affect pledge fulfillment, the underlying expectation being that the degree of an executive governing party's control over office positively affects the likelihood that its election pledges are fulfilled. We expect that parties holding executive power alone are more likely to fulfill their election pledges than executive parties compelled to share power. This institutionalist perspective implies that pledge fulfillment should be at its highest level for parties in single-party executives that have legislative majorities. With strong party discipline, such governing parties encounter little legislative opposition to carrying out their election programs. The UK is the quintessential example of single-party majoritarian government, notwithstanding its recent experience of coalition government, and all five of the British governments included in our study were of this type (Table 1). Our selected cases also include another six single-party executive governments that held legislative majorities in five countries: Bulgaria, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and the US. Overall, of the forty-six governments included in our study, we expect these eleven to achieve the highest levels of pledge fulfillment. We also consider how to operationalize different institutional context in the US presidential system below.

[Table 1 about here]

Governing parties that must share executive power in coalitions and those that do not have legislative majorities may be expected to fulfill fewer of their election pledges than parties in single-party majority governments. Our study includes sixteen governments in which a single party held executive office but did not control a majority of legislators. These governments are from six countries: Canada, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the US. The Swedish Social Democrat governments are perhaps the best-known example of single-party minority government; three such governments are included here. Although parties in single-party minority governments do not have to share power with other governing parties, they do require the cooperation of legislators from other parties to pass bills, which may limit their ability to fulfill their election pledges. Likewise, we expect that parties in governing coalitions, whether they are majority or minority coalitions, are less likely to fulfill their election pledges than parties in single-party majority governments. The governments we study include sixteen coalitions with legislative majorities (from Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden), and three minority coalitions (from Ireland and Italy). There are no strong *a priori* reasons to expect one type of power sharing to matter more than others, and we therefore explore the differences empirically. Intuitively, governing parties in minority coalitions might be expected to be in the weakest position to fulfill their election pledges, and we therefore use this category as the reference group against which to compare the other types.

Within governing coalitions, we expect the party of the chief executive or prime minister to have an advantage in terms of pledge fulfillment. According to models of coalition formation and policymaking in coalitions, the party of the chief executive has greater influence over policy than does its junior coalition partners. Several models focus on the proposal power of the party selected to initiate government formation (Austen-Smith and Banks 1988; Baron 1991; Diermeier and Feddersen 1998). Although these parties must obtain legislative majorities, their first-mover advantage puts them in a strong position relative to other coalition members. The party that leads the process of coalition formation is generally the largest party that goes on to control the chief executive. Other models of coalition politics also attribute considerable power to the largest party in the coalition. For Huber (1996), the vote of confidence procedure enables

the prime minister to raise the stakes in any legislative vote by making it a vote of confidence in the government. This limits the extent to which other coalition parties can shape policy outcomes. If a junior coalition member proposed a policy that the larger party disagreed with, the larger party could reject the proposal in the knowledge that the junior coalition partner would ultimately support it in a vote of confidence on the issue, or face an early election. Furthermore, more recently developed models show how the prime minister's party can shape policy outcomes by reconfiguring the jurisdictions of ministerial portfolios (Thies 2001; Dewan and Hortala-Vallve 2011). These arguments imply that the parties of chief executives have an advantage in policymaking, and we expect this to give them an advantage in terms of pledge fulfillment.

We also expect the allocation of ministerial portfolios to be relevant to pledge fulfillment by parties in coalition governments. In their model of coalition governance, Laver and Shepsle (1994; 1996) argue that policymaking in modern states is structured by the division of policy areas into ministerial jurisdictions, whereby parties have little say in policy areas over which they do not receive ministerial control. According to this model, parties will be persuaded to participate in a coalition only if they believe it to be credible in terms of policy, and the distribution of ministerial portfolios provides such credibility. In addition, models of ministerial drift posit that ministers may be tempted to push initiatives that differ from their government's common platform, possibly inflicting costs on some cabinet colleagues and their constituencies (Huber and Shipan 2002, 185; Martin and Vanberg 2004, 15-6). Norms of ministerial responsibility and non-interference in other ministers' portfolios, as well as information asymmetries, make ministerial drift possible. These arguments imply that pledges are more likely to be fulfilled if the party that made them went on to hold the relevant ministerial portfolio.

Pledge fulfillment may be different in the US presidential system than in the parliamentary systems we study. In order to include the US in the analysis, a decision had to be made as to how to categorize the system, and how to deal with instances of divided versus united government. The US presidential system is often considered a "majoritarian" system, because the president's party has complete control over the executive branch, and consequently over all government departments. However, when non-presidential parties hold majorities in one or both Houses of Congress, the system is

clearly quite different from the traditional Westminster majoritarian system. Existing research on the US contains mixed findings regarding the impact of divided government on legislative productivity. Mayhew (1991) found that an almost equal number of ‘important’ laws are passed under united and divided government. This might suggest that divided government has little impact. This conclusion has been challenged, however, by a number of scholars who, using alternative methods, find that divided government does lead to lower legislative productivity (Kelly 1993; Edwards et al. 1997; Binder 1999; Colement 1999; Jones 2001).

We believe there are good reasons to treat united and divided US government differently. It could be argued that the US under divided government resembles a coalition government, with both parties in the coalition, and no real opposition party (Fiorina 1992). As Budge and Hofferbert (1990, 120) suggest, “*both* parties may have an electoral mandate” under divided government (Budge and Hofferbert 1990 120). On the other hand, the US under divided government might be considered comparable to single-party governments in parliamentary systems that do not control legislative majorities. In such cases, the head of government must negotiate with opposition parties on each piece of legislation, as opposed to coalition governments, which have an ongoing cooperative arrangement, and which may have pre-negotiated compromises on a number of matters. We believe US divided government is more similar to single-party minority government than coalition government, and we treat it as such in the following analysis. United US governments are categorized as single-party majority governments. However, mindful of the fact that presidential systems are different from parliamentary, we also perform an additional analysis of the parliamentary systems alone, excluding the US case.

In addition to institutional factors, we expect other factors to matter, including resources, and the nature of pledges themselves. Pledges are more likely to be redeemed when governing parties have more resources at their disposal, both in terms of financial resources and time. Economic conditions and development are among the most important factors in explaining variation in public policy outputs (Huber and Stephens 2001). Economic growth provides government revenues, making it more likely, other things being equal, for governments to fulfill pledges that increase expenditure, such as promises to expand welfare programs, and that decrease income, such as promises to cut

particular taxes. Conversely, poor economic conditions will reduce the ability of governments to fulfill such pledges. Like revenue, time might be considered a resource which enhances the ability of governments to get things done; thus, when governments are short in duration, as is the case with several of the governing periods we examine, we anticipate lower levels of pledge fulfillment.

In addition to the institutional and economic contexts in which pledges are made, characteristics of the pledges themselves may affect whether they are redeemed. As just noted, pledges to expand programs or cut taxes might be easier to fulfill in some circumstances than others. Pledges to maintain the status quo may be easier to keep than pledges of policy change, given the incrementalism of large government in general. Pledges to raise taxes might be difficult to keep, given the relative unpopularity of taxes.

The relations among pledges made by different parties should also be considered. We expect agreement among parties on an election pledge to increase the likelihood of that pledge being fulfilled.

Our expectations regarding pledge fulfillment by parties that have a position in the governing executive after elections are summarized in the following propositions:

Institutional context

- 1) Parties that control the executive branch alone are more likely to fulfill their election pledges than parties in coalition governments.
- 2) Parties that hold executive power and have secure legislative majorities are more likely to fulfill their election pledges than parties with legislative minorities, and therefore:
- 3) Single-party governments with secure legislative majorities have the highest rates of pledge fulfillment.
- 4) In coalition governments, parties that receive a) the prime ministership and b) the relevant ministerial portfolio are more likely to fulfill their election pledges than other governing parties.

Resources

- 5) Governing parties are more likely to fulfill their election pledges a) in times of stronger economic growth and b) when they govern for longer periods.

- 6) The effect of economic growth is particularly strong for pledges to cut taxes and expand programs.

Characteristics of pledges

- 7) Pledges a) to maintain the status quo and b) that are supported by more than one party parties are more likely to be fulfilled than other pledges.

DATA AND METHODS

Identifying Elections Pledges and their Fulfillment

Campaign pledges are frequently discussed in the media and by the public at large; there is an assumption that we all know what a “pledge” is. For those doing research involving pledges, however, it is important to have a clear definition, and in a cross-national study such as this, it is important to know that all scholars are defining pledges the same way. Some of the scholars here have previously published work on pledge fulfillment in individual countries. All began with a common definition of a “pledge” as “a commitment to carry out some action or produce some outcome, where an objective estimation can be made as to whether or not the action was indeed taken or the outcome produced” (Royed 1996, 79). However, these studies were not part of a fully coordinated research endeavor, which limits the confidence we can have in conclusions drawn from comparing their findings, and makes it unwise to pool our data for statistical analysis. To address this limitation, we formed the Comparative Party Pledge Group (CPPG), with the goal of ensuring strict comparability and producing valid cross-national comparisons.

There are two steps to the CPPG pledge-testing approach: first, identifying pledges in election manifestos, and second, testing fulfillment.

In terms of identifying pledges, we begin with picking out potential pledges based on an initial evaluation of the wording. Pledges include language indicating commitment to some future action or outcome. Pledges include both firm commitment such as “we will” or “we promise to”, and more softly described intention, such as “we support” or “we favor”, as long as parties indicate that they support the action or outcome referred to. What determines whether a statement is categorized as a “pledge” is not the language of commitment (“hard” vs “soft” language), but what it is that is being committed *to*. A

pledge is a statement committing a party to an action or outcome that is *testable*—i.e., one can gather evidence and make an argument that the action/outcome was either accomplished or not. It is careful consideration of the testability of the potential pledge that leads to finalization of the coding decision. Many statements that begin with hard commitment language would be considered rhetoric, not pledges, because they don't meet the testability criteria—for example, “we will ensure that our government shows respect for families” or “we support fair treatment for all.” “Showing respect for families” and “supporting fair treatment” are not actions or outcomes that can be objectively shown to have occurred or not.

When previously used country-specific operationalizations of the concept of “election pledge” were discussed in CPPG workshops, it came to light that scholars have used somewhat different approaches to the notion of testability. Some scholars have a conceptualization of pledges as highly specific commitments. Thomson (2001,180) argues that a pledge is a statement in for which “the criteria used to judge the fulfilment of pledges are in principle provided by the writers of election programmes, not by the researcher.” This means that the statement must promise one specific course of action; pledges that could conceivably be fulfilled in multiple ways are excluded, as are pledges that might require interpretation on the part of the researcher in order to evaluate fulfillment. Some CPPG scholars have a broader conceptualization of what constitutes a pledge.⁴ What is important for our present purposes is that all agree that the highly precise commitments described here are certainly pledges. In other words, this conceptualization of “pledge” is a common denominator across all approaches, and it is therefore the one that we adopt here.⁵ That is, a pledge is *a statement committing a party to one specific action or outcome that can be clearly determined to have occurred or not.*

A reliability test was conducted with all authors using this particular definition of pledge. Nine researchers independently coded portions of the 2008 Canadian

⁴ Some of the authors of this paper include (in their country-specific studies) promises where there are two or more possible ways of fulfilling the pledge, as well as promises where there is room for interpretation about what a pledge means and what constitutes fulfillment. This finding—that the concept of “pledge” is open to different operationalizations—is not something that has been clear in existing pledge studies, and thus constitutes a significant theoretical contribution to pledge work and is important to future scholars within the field. Further discussion of this is thus provided in the supplemental appendix.

⁵ Scholars using a broader definition in their own work recoded their data to create a subcategory of precise pledges.

Conservative Party manifesto. To evaluate reliability we computed the simple percent agreement between each pair of coders. This was computed as x/n for each pair, where x = the number of statements on which there is agreement (i.e., agreement that it is a pledge, or that it is not) and n =the total number of statements that were counted as pledges by the entire group. The nine coders identified a total of 99 election pledges in the text. The average paired reliability for the exercise was 74 percent; only nine of the 36 coding pairs fell below 70 percent agreement. Bearing in mind all of the factors that might contribute to lower reliability in a cross-national test such as this, we believe the results suggest that we can have sufficient confidence in the reliability of our identification of the pledges we use here.⁶

When it comes to coding the fulfillment of pledges, most of the authors used three categories: “fully,” “partly,” or “not” fulfilled. Depending on the nature of the action or outcome referred to in the pledge, a variety of sources were consulted to test fulfillment, including legislation, ministerial decrees, budgetary or other data, and secondary sources. We carried out a reliability test of our evaluations of pledge fulfillment; a total of 40 pledges were randomly selected (five from eight of the countries examined here) and examined by seven researchers. The researcher primarily responsible for work on the country concerned provided the other scholars with the evidence he or she used to evaluate the fulfillment of each pledge without revealing his or her evaluation, and translated the relevant material into English if necessary. Each of the seven researchers then independently categorized each pledge as “fully”, “partly”, or “not” fulfilled. Across the 21 pairs of researchers, we found an average agreement rate of 93 percent.

In what follows, we include a comparative table showing the three categories of fulfillment across most countries. However, work done on Italy and Spain used the dichotomous categorization of “not fulfilled” and “at least partially fulfilled.” In order to maximize our number of cases, then, in our multivariate analyses the partly and fully fulfilled categories are merged, so that the dependent variable is a dichotomous one. However, the supplementary materials include a multivariate analysis with the three-

⁶ There are a number of inherent difficulties involved in evaluating manifestos that are not in one’s native language and that deal with matters that may be country-specific. Knowledge of recent policy debates may matter for coding of pledges; shorthand terms or specialized language may be used that make it difficult for the reader, particularly one who is not reading in their first language, to judge whether specific policies are being referenced.

category dependent variable, excluding Italy and Spain, which show that the findings are substantively similar to those we present here.

The Cases

The cases selected have considerable variation in the degree to which the executive governing parties controlled government office. The governments from the United Kingdom that are included in our selection offer examples of single-party majority government. The Westminster majoritarian system is often considered a point of comparison for other more consensus-based systems. The UK cases cover the period 1974-97, starting with the Labour Government 1974-79, followed by four Conservative Governments, 1979-97. For the 1974-79 Labour government, it is the second government, which was elected in October 1974 and won a small majority, which is included. The short-lived minority government of early 1974 is excluded.

The Canadian and Swedish cases provide examples of single-party minority governments. The three Canadian governments consist of the Liberal Party government that held office 2004-06 and the two Conservative governments, 2006-11. None of these governments lasted a full term. Minority governments are also common in Sweden; the Social Democratic Party has governed alone with legislative minorities for much of the post-War period. These minority governments were strong in the sense that the government could rely on one or two opposition parties to secure parliamentary majorities. In a departure from this practice, the center-right coalition The Alliance formed a majority government in 2006, after forming a pre-election pact with a common election program. The dataset includes all promises made by three recent Social Democratic minority governments (1994-2006) and all promises made in the joint manifesto of the center-right coalition of the Alliance (2006-10). In addition to the four manifestos of governing parties, this study also includes data on fulfillment of economic pledges given by the largest opposition party during the periods 2002 to 2006 (the Conservatives) and 2006 to 2010 (the Social Democrats).

The four Spanish and two Portuguese governments included in our study provide examples of single-party governments both with and without parliamentary majorities.

Spain includes pledges made by the single-party majority governments of the Social Democrats (PSOE; 1989-93) and the conservative Popular Party (PP; 2000-04), and the minority governments of the PSOE (1993-96) and PP (1996-2000). Likewise, the Portuguese cases include one single-party majority (2005-09) and one single party minority (1995-99) government, both controlled by the Socialist Party (PS).

The Bulgarian governments included in the selection offer an example of a single-party majority government and a majority coalition. Bulgaria's Union of Democratic Forces (ODS) governed as a single-party with a majority 1997-2001. The 2001 elections brought a major restructuring of the party system in Bulgaria with the entry of the former king, Simeon Saksoburggotski and his party, National Movement Simeon II (NDSV). The NDSV led a coalition with the Turkish minority party Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) that governed from 2001-05.

The German and Dutch cases are all examples of governing coalitions with legislative majorities. We include two German governments: first, the 2002-05 coalition of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) under the Chancellorship of Gerhard Schröder; and, second, the 2005-09 grand coalition of the SPD and the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), led by the CDU under the Chancellorship of Angela Merkel. The three Dutch governments, from the period 1986-1998, also include variation in partisan composition. After the 1986 Dutch election, the center-right coalition between the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) and the conservative Liberal Party (VVD) coalition that had governed since 1982 remained in office. A coalition consisting of the CDA and Labour Party (PvdA) was formed after the 1989 election. After the 1994 election, the so-called purple coalition, consisting of the PvdA, the small Democrats '66 (D66) and VVD was formed. This meant that for the first time since 1917, the governing coalition did not contain a Christian Democratic party (the CDA or one of its predecessors). This three-party coalition enjoyed relatively favorable economic conditions in comparison with previous years, which undoubtedly eased co-operation between the historical adversaries, the PvdA and the VVD.

The four Italian governments consist of three majority coalitions and one minority coalition. Two of the three majority coalitions were center-right governments led by Prime Minister Berlusconi (2001-06 and 2008-11), while the other was a center-left

government led by Prime Minister Prodi (2006-08). The minority coalition was a center-left government led by Prodi (1996-98). In all cases, the coalition parties released a joint manifesto before the elections. The joint manifestos of the governing parties are the only manifestos considered in the Italian cases.

The eleven Irish governments cover all four of the parliamentary types mentioned above: single-party and coalition governments with and without parliamentary majorities. We consider the main eight Irish parties over the entire time period of the present study, 1977-2011, although not all existed at the same time. The two largest parties are Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. One of these two parties has been in government throughout this period, but never together. Some of the minority governments in Ireland were particularly short-lived; two lasted just under a year. Irish governments in the early 1980s managed an economy with sluggish growth and strained public sector finances. By contrast, governments in the late 1990s and early 2000s had managed a booming economy. However, in 2008 and 2009 the economy crashed, reaching a low point in 2009 when the economy contracted by almost 7 percent.

The six administrations from the United States provide examples of single-party government executives with and without legislative majorities. We examine pledge fulfillment in six presidential terms, from 1977 to 2000. President Carter's Democrats had a majority of seats in both Houses of Congress during his entire term in office (1977-80). The other US cases involved at least some level of divided government. During President Reagan's first term (1981-84), the Democrats controlled the House and the Republicans the Senate. During Reagan's second term (1985-88) the Republicans held only the Senate during the 99th Congress (1985-87). President George H.W. Bush (1989-92) faced a Congress controlled by the opposing party throughout his entire term, as did President Clinton during his second term in office (1997-2000). During Clinton's first term in office (1993-96), his Democratic Party controlled both houses 1993-94, before the Republicans gained control of both.

There is some variance in the policy areas that are included in each country study. Most countries include all policy areas for all cases or all domestic policy areas; others focus on socioeconomic policy for all or some cases. The cases for Portugal, Italy, Bulgaria, Germany, Canada and most of Ireland and Sweden include all policy areas.

(Irish cases for 2002 include only socioeconomic policy, and Swedish opposition party pledges include only economic policy). The UK and US cases include all domestic policy pledges, excluding foreign policy. The Netherlands includes socioeconomic policy, and Spain includes economic policy (which includes some pledges that some have categorized as “social”). At this time, because we used slightly different conceptions of what constitutes “socioeconomic” or “economic” policy, it isn’t possible to reliably compare across only that subset of policy areas. However, those who have looked at all policy areas have not found consistent differences in fulfillment across policy types over time. In our robustness tests (discussed below), we find that our main findings hold even after controlling for country effects. Controlling for country effects in this case also means controlling for differences in policy types as well as any differences in coding that may not be captured by our adoption of a common operationalization of pledge.

ANALYSIS OF PLEDGE FULFILLMENT

The following analyses identify patterns in the fulfillment of thousands of election pledges, each of which has been the subject of detailed qualitative study. The pledges are heterogeneous in that they refer to different initiatives or policy outcomes, but have in common that they are important to at least some groups of citizens. Our cases collectively illustrate, in contrast to some of the skeptical views noted earlier, that parties do indeed pledge many highly specific and clearly significant policy changes in manifestos. Space precludes of course precludes a detailed discussion of the substance of pledges. To take just examples from just three countries in our data set, in the US, the Republicans under Reagan at least partially fulfilled pledges to cut certain taxes, enact deregulation, and tighten eligibility for food stamps. At the same time, the Republicans of that period failed to fulfill pledges to reduce certain other taxes, enact a youth minimum wage, and create tuition tax credits for private schools. In the UK, the Conservative Party’s fulfilled pledges included commitments to reduce taxes, particularly for high earners, to sell-off public housing, and to privatize certain public sector companies. In the Netherlands, Dutch parties’ pledges included promises to raise welfare payments in line with wage increases in the private sector (Labour Party, 1994, partly fulfilled), freeze

welfare benefits at their 1994 levels (Conservative Liberal Party, 1994, not fulfilled), and to reduce the top rate of income tax (D66, 1994, not fulfilled). In this study we take the importance of election pledges to the groups to which they are directed as given and focus on systematic variation in pledge fulfillment.

Figure 1 shows descriptive information relating to the fulfillment of pledges in the eleven countries included in our study. This is the first time it has been possible to compare this important aspect of the democratic process in such a broad range of countries using the same definition of election pledges. The figure includes pledges made by parties that went on to hold at least some position in the executive after the elections, as well as pledges made by parties that did not hold executive office where data are available. As expected, the highest rate of fulfillment for governing parties is found in the UK, where all five governments were single-party governments with parliamentary majorities. The lowest overall rate of pledge fulfillment for governing parties is in Italy and Ireland. As mentioned above, several of the Irish governments were short lived, coalitions and/or were minority governments. The Italian governments were large and quite broad coalitions. Although all three of the Dutch coalition governments had secure majorities, they fulfilled only a marginally higher percentage of their pledges than the Irish and Italian governing parties. US presidential parties fulfilled a higher percentage of their election pledges than governing parties in the Netherlands and Ireland, but less than governing parties in parliamentary systems where single-party governments are the norm, the UK, Sweden, Portugal, Spain and Canada.

[Figure 1 about here]

Governments in Sweden, three of which were single-party minority governments (1994-2006) and one of which was a majority coalition with a joint election manifesto (2006-10), also fulfilled a remarkably high percentage of their constituent parties' pledges. With 80 percent of Swedish governing parties' pledges at least partly fulfilled, this is almost as high as the percentage of pledge fulfillment in the UK's single-party majority governments (86 percent at least partly fulfilled). The high rate of pledge fulfillment in Sweden appears to be due to its single-party minority governments and to the fact that the investigated coalition issued a joint election election manifesto. The single-party minority governments that held office in Sweden between 1994 and 2006

fulfilled on average 87 percent (112 out of 129) of the Social Democrats' pledges at least partly. The majority coalition that held office between 2006 and 2010 fulfilled 72 percent of the pledges in its joint manifesto at least partly (83 out of 114).

While our main focus is the fulfillment of election pledges by parties that held executive office after elections, Figure 1 also contains information on the fulfillment of pledges made by non-governmental parties. Perhaps surprisingly, opposition parties' pledges have a reasonable likelihood of being fulfilled. In Germany, for instance, 45 percent of opposition parties' pledges were fulfilled at least partly. This would perhaps be expected of the grand coalition of CDU/CSU-SPD, 2005-09, during which time the opposition parties indeed saw 46 percent of their pledges (110 of 241) at least partly fulfilled. However, it is also true of the more ideologically compact SPD-Green coalition, 2002-05, during which time the opposition parties saw 44 percent of their pledges (97 of 223) at least partly fulfilled. Non-presidential parties in the US also saw a relatively high percentage of their pledges fulfilled. Of course, during some periods, non-presidential parties held congressional majorities. For example, during the presidency of George H.W. Bush (1988-92), when the Democrats held majorities in both the Senate and the House, 63 percent of the pledges (31 of 49) in the Democrats' 1988 platform were fulfilled compared to 64 percent (116 of 182) in the Republicans' 1998 platform. In the UK, pledges made by opposition parties are least likely to be fulfilled, compared to non-governing parties in other countries. This accords with the general view of the UK as a winner-takes-all majoritarian system. The fulfillment of opposition parties' pledges is partly explained by the fact that some of their pledges agree with those of governing parties. Although our main focus is on the fulfillment of pledges made by parties that go on to govern, we also include agreement with other parties, including opposition parties, as a possible explanatory variable. Such agreement indicates that the pledge has broad political support.

The multivariate analyses reported in Table 2 focus on pledges made by governing parties. The dependent variable in both models is whether the pledge in question was at least partly fulfilled. Model 1 applies to all cases in our dataset. Model 2 excludes the US case to focus exclusively on parliamentary systems. Model 3 is limited

to those coalition governments with variation in the allocation of the chief executive post and relevant ministerial portfolios across the pledge-making parties, as explained below.

[Table 2 about here]

The models in Table 2 allow us to examine the different rates of pledge fulfillment across the types of government we distinguished, single versus multiparty executives both with and without legislative majorities, while controlling for other relevant explanatory variables. With respect to government types, the headline finding is that single-party governments outperform coalitions on pledge fulfillment. Surprisingly, legislative majorities do not consistently and significantly lead to higher rates of pledge fulfillment, either for coalitions or for single-party executives. Single-party executives with secure majorities are not uniquely advantaged over other government types. In more detail, the exponentiated coefficients refer to odds ratios relative to the reference category. So values above 1 indicate a positive effect, while values below 1 indicate a negative effect of the relevant explanatory variable. In model 1, the odds ratio of 2.53 associated with the variable Single-party executives, is highly significant, indicating that pledges made by a party that subsequently governs alone without a legislative majority are over two and a half times more likely to be at least partly fulfilled than pledges made by a party that subsequently governs in a coalition with a legislative minority. The coefficient associated with the variable Legislative majorities falls short of conventional levels of significance in Models 1 and 2. This indicates that majority coalitions apparently do not enjoy a significant advantage over minority coalitions in terms of pledge fulfillment. The coefficient associated with the interaction between the variables Single-party executives and Legislative majorities is also insignificant. This lack of significance indicates that single-party majorities do not enjoy any significant advantage (or disadvantage) compared to single-party minority governments or majority coalitions.

The models in Table 2 also contain the variable Chief executive, which indicates whether the party that made the pledge controlled the chief executive (the prime minister or equivalent in the parliamentary systems or the President in the US). The relevant coefficients are consistently above one and significant, which indicates that the party of the chief executive has a significant advantage over other governing parties in terms of pledge fulfillment. For parties in single-party governments and US presidential parties,

the variable Chief executive always have a value of one. Therefore it is relevant to examine the effect of this variable in the sub-set of cases in which it varies: coalition governments composed of parties that put forward different election programs. Model 3 in Table 2 does this and includes cases from Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, and the Netherlands.⁷ The fact that the variable Chief executive is significant in this subset of cases implies that parties in governing coalitions are more likely to fulfill their election pledges if they hold the chief executive post than if they do not.

The coefficient associated with the variable Relevant portfolio is not statistically significant, contrary to our theoretical expectations. Model 3 is particularly relevant to assessing the effect of this variable since it refers to governments in which some pledges were supported by parties that controlled the relevant ministerial portfolio, while other pledges were not. Even in this subset of cases, the evidence does not support our expectation that holding the relevant ministerial portfolio increases the likelihood of pledge fulfillment.

In further robustness tests reported in the supplementary materials, we re-estimated Models 1 and 2 in Table 2 twice: first, without the variables Chief executive and Relevant portfolio; and, second, without the variable Single-party executives. We did so because the Chief executive and Relevant portfolio variables do not vary within the set of single-party executives. Unsurprisingly, when excluding the Chief executive and Relevant portfolio variables, the coefficient for Single-party executives remains significant, and becomes stronger. The fact that the variable for Single-party executives is significant even when controlling for the effects of Chief executive and Relevant portfolio indicates that the advantage held by single-party governments is not entirely due to the fact that they control the chief executive and all relevant portfolios. When the variable Single-party executives is excluded from Models 1 and 2, the variable Chief executive remains statistically significant and becomes somewhat stronger. The coefficient for the variable Relevant portfolio is then positive and significant (in Model 1 $\text{Exp}(b)=1.33$; $p=.02$). This indicates that holding the relevant portfolio is indeed an

⁷ We also exclude coalitions in Sweden and Italy for which we have identified pledges from common pre-election programs, because for these cases the variables Chief executive and Relevant portfolio are always positive.

advantage, but that this advantage is due to the fact that single-party governments hold all the executive posts.

Figure 2 depicts the results from the multivariate analysis as predicted probabilities.⁸ These illustrate that single-party executives, both with and without legislative majorities, are associated with significantly higher probabilities of pledge fulfillment. Moreover, there is no significant difference between majority and minority single-party executives in this respect. For instance, the probability of a single-party executive with a legislative majority fulfilling a pledge at least partly is .76 (95% confidence interval, CI: .69; .83). This is significantly and substantially higher than the same probability for the senior member of a majority coalition: .58 (95% CI: .51; .65). Note that the probabilities of pledge fulfillment are lower for parties in all four types of coalition situations. Furthermore, all four of the confidence intervals for coalition parties overlap considerably. So while the multivariate analysis suggest there is a significant effect of the variable Chief executive, the overlapping confidence intervals indicate that holding the Chief executive in fact offers a modest advantage.

[Figure 2 about here]

Two of the models include the variable Inter-party agreement, and this variable is associated with significant positive effects in both. The coalition model (Model 3, Table 2) controls for Inter-party agreement, since this is a salient feature of coalition politics. The exponentiated coefficient of 2.41 indicates that the odds of a pledge being at least partly fulfilled more than doubles if it is made by two or more parties, rather than just one. The model in Table 3, which includes more information on the types of pledges made, also includes the variable Inter-party agreement for a broader range of countries. That analysis also shows that pledges which are the subject of agreement are more likely to be fulfilled.

The evidence is mixed regarding our expectations on the effects of temporal and financial resources on pledge fulfillment. Short governments do not necessarily achieve a whole lot less than governments that complete a full term. The direction of the effect of the variable Short governments is as expected – the odds ratios are consistently less than one - indicating that pledges are less likely to be fulfilled when the government lasts less

⁸ These and other predicted probabilities were calculated with SPost (Long and Freese 2006).

than 30 months. However, in only one of the four models presented is it statistically significant (the parliamentary model, Model 2, Table 2). In that model, the odds ratio of .67 indicates that the odds of a pledge being at least partly fulfilled are 33 percent lower if the government falls 30 months or less after the election. One possible explanation of this is that governments who know that they might fall early have even stronger incentives to act fast – i.e. in contexts where short government periods are common, the incentives to fulfill pledges early on are very high.

In line with our expectations, the state of the economy affects pledge fulfillment, particularly for pledges that make demands on public finances. The models in Table 2 include the variable GDP growth as a control variable, which is the average of the yearly percentages of GDP growth over the lifetime of the government. This has a positive and significant effect in two of those models. However, our theory points to a conditional effect, which is tested in the model in Table 3 that distinguishes among different pledge types. Two points from this analysis are worth highlighting. First, there is remarkably little difference among different types of pledges with respect to the likelihood they are fulfilled. We distinguish among seven different types of pledges listed in Table 3. Apart from pledges to maintain the status quo on a particular policy, which are very likely to be fulfilled, there is little difference among pledges of other types in their likelihood of fulfillment. Figure 3 clearly illustrates this similarity with the predicted probabilities that pledges of each type made by parties in the same situation, including an average level of economic growth, are at least partly fulfilled. Second, economic growth has strong and significant effects on the likelihood that pledges to expand programs and to cut taxes are fulfilled. Figure 4 depicts this effect with the predicted probabilities of pledge fulfillment at different levels of growth. The values of growth on which we focus vary from one standard deviation below to one standard deviation above the average level in the sample of observations used in Table 3 (av. 2.11; s.d. 4.17; n=4,371). To illustrate, when the economy is contracting by 2.06 percent (one standard deviation below the average), the probability that a tax cut pledge is at least partly fulfilled is .27 (95% CI .14; .40). When the economy is growing by 6.28 percent (one standard deviation above the average), this increases to .68 (95% CI .56; .80).

[Figure 3 about here]

[Figure 4 about here]

In five sets of additional tests, on which we report in more detail in the supplementary information, we applied alternative specifications of the models presented here. The main inference we draw from these additional tests is that our main findings are robust. In the first set, mentioned above, we ran alternative specifications of Models 1 and 2 in Table 2, which took into account the fact that by definition single-party governments hold the chief executive and all relevant ministerial portfolios. In the second set, we added country effects to the models reported in Table 2. Although some of the country effects were significant, they did not alter that effects relating to our theoretical expectations. In the third set, we ran all of the models presented here with weighted observations that take into account the unequal numbers of cases from each country. Weighting each country equally in the analysis does not substantively change the findings. In the fourth set, we examined the model in Table 3 in each country separately, which allowed us to examine the effects of economic conditions in different subsets. These analyses show that it is in systems where the institutions are not conducive to high levels of pledge fulfillment that economic conditions have an important effect. In the fifth and final set, we applied the models in Table 2 with a three-category dependent variable, in the form of a multinomial logit, which gave substantively similar results. While there are theoretical and practical reasons to prefer the model specifications we present here, the fact that these additional tests give comparable results strengthens our confidence in the inferences we draw.

CONCLUSIONS

We have presented the first genuinely comparative study of the fulfillment of election pledges across a broad range of countries that includes pledges made by parties that went on to form governments of different types and in different economic conditions. The findings speak directly to the one of the central propositions of democratic theory: that parties make promises to voters during election campaigns and then fulfill those promises if they enter government office after elections. This model of “promissory representation” (Mansbridge (2003, 515) may not be the only one, and some argue it is not the most

justifiable or desirable one (Riker 1982). It is nonetheless central to mainstream democratic theory and popular ideas about how democracy should work. The evidence shows that parties act according to this principle to a considerable extent. Parties that hold executive office after elections generally fulfill substantial percentages, sometimes very high percentages, of their election pledges. Parties that do not hold executive office generally find lower percentages of their pledges being fulfilled, although sometimes the difference between executive and non-executive parties is not large.

These descriptive findings raise obvious questions that we could not address in this study. When such high percentages of pledges are fulfilled, why are citizens generally of the view that pledges go unfulfilled? Research is only just beginning to address this question (e.g. Naurin 2011; Thomson 2011). Part of the answer appears to be that citizens and political scientists are thinking of quite different things when they think of election pledges. Another unanswered question is why opposition parties' pledges are fulfilled at all. In some cases, parties that do not hold executive office may obtain concessions from the executive parties in return for supporting the executive's initiatives in the legislature. In other cases, parties with executive power may explicitly or silently agree with election pledges made by parties with which they do not share executive power. Clearly the difference in terms of pledge fulfillment between winning and losing an election varies across countries.

The fulfillment of pledges by governing executive parties also varies across governments in ways that partly reflect institutional differences. The main institutional effect distinguishes between single-party governments and coalitions, not between administrations with and without legislative majorities. We found the highest percentages of pledge fulfillment – from 86 to 69 percent at least partly fulfilled - in governments in the UK, Sweden, Portugal, Spain and Canada, almost all of which were single-party executives. We found lower percentages – from 63 to 45 percent at least partly fulfilled – in governments in Germany, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Italy and Ireland, most of which were coalitions. Pledge fulfillment by US presidential parties, at 62 percent, lies at the higher end of coalition governments. This suggests that US presidents are more constrained than governing parties single-party parliamentary systems, but less constrained than most governing parties in multiparty coalitions.

Governing executive parties with legislative majorities are not significantly more likely to fulfill their election pledges than similar parties with legislative minorities. Although this finding refutes our expectation, existing theoretical and empirical research provides precedents for it. Strøm (1990) developed a rational-choice model of the formation and functioning of minority governments, which predicted that minority governments can be effective. The quantitative and qualitative evidence presented by Strøm and others confirms that minority governments can work effectively, for instance in terms of legislative productivity and government duration. Similarly, research on divided government in the US indicates that such administrations can be as productive in terms of legislation as are administrations in which a single party controls the presidency and Houses of Congress (Mayhew 2005). Our study provides further evidence of the effectiveness of executive governing parties that do not hold legislative majorities.

The evidence supported our expectation that a party's pledges are more likely to be fulfilled if it holds the chief executive post after the election. While the chief executive post explains some of the variation in pledge fulfillment by governing parties, some of the evidence we presented suggested that the difference between holding and not holding this post is not always large. There is a considerable overlap in the probabilities that senior and junior coalition partners fulfill their election pledges. It is therefore remarkable that a growing body of sophisticated theoretical work predicts or implies that the party of the chief executive has a high level of control over policy (Austen-Smith and Banks 1988; Baron 1991; Huber 1996; Diermeier and Feddersen 1998; Thies 2001; Dewan and Hortala-Vallve 2011). Moreover, the evidence did not provide support for the expectation that a party's pledges are more likely to be fulfilled if it obtained the relevant ministerial portfolio after the election. This finding is also contrary to the predictions of some theoretical models (Laver and Shepsle 1994; 1996). The findings presented here may encourage theorists to further specify models in which the chief executive and relevant ministers feature prominently. The advantage of holding these positions may depend on the presence or absence of certain mechanisms for interministerial coordination or parliamentary control that make chief executives and ministers accountable (e.g. Martin and Vanberg 2004; Kassim 2013).

Strong economic growth is associated with relatively high probabilities that parties fulfill pledges to expand programs and cut taxes. Economic growth provides government revenues, making it possible to fulfill pledges that increase expenditure, such as promises to expand welfare programs, and that decrease income, such as promises to cut particular taxes. The effect of economic growth indicates that pledge fulfillment depends on factors that are not directly under governing parties' control. Similarly, comparative research on public policies, notably in the areas of welfare spending and taxation, concludes that the partisan composition of government does not affect policy outputs straightforwardly (Huber and Stephens 2001). Rather, such partisan effects depend on a range of social, political and economic contexts. The effect of economic growth also indicates that parties' responsiveness to changes in economic conditions is far from perfect (cf. King et al. 1993). If parties did respond accurately to levels of economic growth, they would make more modest commitments when the economy is weaker, so that the probability of pledge fulfillment would be the same, regardless of the state of the economy. The effect of economic growth on pledge fulfillment indicates that while parties may adjust their commitments somewhat to the state of the economy, they generally promise more than turns out to be prudent when they enter office during economic hard times.

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Tables and figures

Table 1. The eleven countries and forty-six governments included in the study

Legislative support	Single-party executives	Coalition executives
Majority	<p><i>Bulgaria</i> 1997-2001: ODS</p> <p><i>Ireland</i> 1977-81: Fianna Fáil</p> <p><i>Portugal</i> 2005-09: PS</p> <p><i>Spain</i> 1989-93: PSOE 2000-04: PP</p> <p><i>UK</i> 1974-79: Labour 1979-83: Conservative 1983-87: Conservative 1987-92: Conservative 1992-97: Conservative</p> <p><i>United States</i> 1977-81: Democrats</p>	<p><i>Bulgaria</i> 2001-05: NDSV/ DPS</p> <p><i>Germany</i> 2002-05: SPD/ Greens; 2005-09: CDU-CSU/ SPD</p> <p><i>Ireland</i> 1982-87: Fine Gael/Labour; 1989-92: Fianna Fáil/ Progressive Democrats; 1992-94: Fianna Fáil/ Labour; 1994-97: Fine Gael/Labour/Democratic Left; 2002-07: Fianna Fáil/ Progressive Democrats; 2007-11: Fianna Fáil/ Progressive Democrats/ Greens</p> <p><i>Italy</i> 2001-06: Berlusconi II's coalition (FI/ AN/ LN/ UDC/ NPSI/ PRI); 2006-08: Prodi II's coalition Unione (DS/ DL/ PRC/ RnP-PdCI/ IdV/ FdV/ UDEUR); 2008-11: Berlusconi IV's coalition (PdL/ LN/ MpA/ PID; 41 months)</p> <p><i>Netherlands</i> 1986-89: CDA/ VVD; 1989-94: CDA/ PvdA; 1994-98: PvdA / VVD/ D66</p> <p><i>Sweden</i> 2006-10: The Alliance (Moderate Party/ Centre Party/ Liberal Party/ Christian Democrats)</p>
Minority at least part of the time	<p><i>Canada</i> 2004-06: Liberals; 2006-08: Conservatives; 2008-11: Conservatives</p> <p><i>Ireland</i> 1982: Fianna Fáil 1987-89: Fianna Fáil</p> <p><i>Portugal</i> 1995-99: PS</p> <p><i>Spain</i> 1993-96: PSOE (35 months) 1996-2000: PP</p> <p><i>Sweden</i> 1994-98: Social Democrats</p>	<p><i>Ireland</i> 1981-82: Fine Gael/Labour 1997-02: Fianna Fáil/ Progressive Democrats</p> <p><i>Italy</i> 1996-98: Prodi I Ulivo coalition (PDS/ PPI/ RI/ FdV/ UD; 24 months)</p>

1998-2002: Social
Democrats
2002-06: Social
Democrats
United States
1981-85: Republican;
1985-89: Republican;
1989-93: Republican;
1993-97: Democrats;
1997-2001: Democrats

Table 2. Factors affecting governing executive parties' pledge fulfillment

	Model 1 All		Model 2 Parliamentary democracies		Model 3 Coalitions	
	Exp(b) (s.e.)	p	Exp(b) (s.e.)	p	Exp(b) (s.e.)	p
Single-party executives (=1; coalitions=0)	2.53 (.73)	.00	3.48 (.85)	.00		
Legislative majorities (=1; minorities=0)	1.61 (.44)	.09	1.47 (.38)	.13	1.39 (.54)	.40
Single-party executives * legislative majorities	.82 (.30)	.59	.66 (.21)	.19		
Chief executive	1.44 (.25)	.03	1.44 (.25)	.04	1.39 (.23)	.05
Relevant portfolio	1.09 (.13)	.49	1.11 (.14)	.42	1.11 (.12)	.35
Short governments (30 months or less)	.80 (.13)	.15	.67 (.11)	.01	.80 (.19)	.37
GDP growth	1.05 (.03)	.04	1.04 (.03)	.10	1.05 (.03)	.05
Inter-party agreement					2.41 (.25)	.00
Status quo	7.08 (1.61)	.00	7.49 (1.94)	.00	7.02 (2.34)	.00
Constant	.47 (.16)	.03	.54 (.18)	.06	.39 (.17)	.03
Log pseudolikelihood	-4449.25		-3995.04		-2424.28	
chi2 (p)	127.44 (.00)		177.03 (.00)		120.68 (.00)	
n pledges (programs)	7,087 (74)		6,414 (68)		3,798 (42)	

Note: Logit models with dependent variable partly/fully fulfilled=1 and not fulfilled=0. Standard errors clustered by election manifesto. Model 1 includes all manifestos by parties that entered government after elections in eleven countries in the sample. Model 2 includes ten parliamentary democracies (excludes the US). Model 3 includes only manifestos of parties that entered coalitions and for which there is variation in the variables Chief executive and Relevant portfolio (Netherlands, Ireland, Germany and Bulgaria).

Table 3 The effect of pledge type and economic conditions on fulfillment

	Exp(b) (s.e.)	p
Single-party executives (=1; coalitions=0)	2.30 (1.02)	.06
Legislative majorities (=1; minorities=0)	1.54 (.66)	.31
Single-party executives * legislative majorities	.70 (.38)	.51
Chief executive	1.47 (.33)	.09
Relevant portfolio	1.23 (.19)	.17
Short governments (30 months or less)	.89 (.17)	.54
GDP growth	1.02 (.03)	.51
Inter-party agreement	1.92 (.19)	.00
Pledge type (reference group=status quo pledges)		
Expand program	.17 (.05)	.00
Tax cut	.08 (.03)	.00
Tax increase	.16 (.08)	.00
Cut program	.16 (.05)	.00
Outcome pledge	.23 (.06)	.00
Other change	.12 (.03)	.00
Expand program * GDP growth	1.07 (.02)	.00
Tax cut * GDP growth	1.21 (.05)	.00
Constant	2.60 (1.37)	.07
Log pseudolikelihood	-2726.06	
chi2 (p)	218.63 (.00)	
n pledges (programs)	4,371 (50)	

Note: Logit models with dependent variable partly/fully fulfilled=1 and not fulfilled=0. Standard errors clustered by election manifesto. Includes only manifestos for which we have comparable coding of pledge type (US, UK, Ireland, Sweden, Bulgaria and Canada).

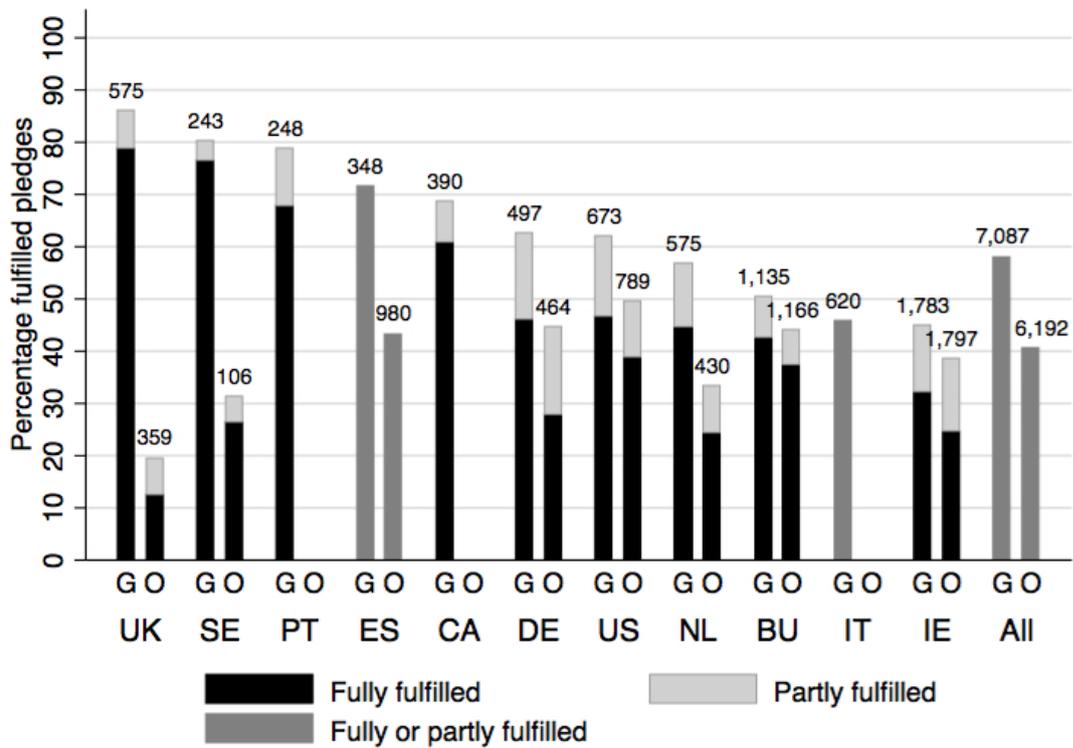


Figure 1. The fulfillment of election pledges in eleven countries.

Note: UK: United Kingdom; PT: Portugal; SE: Sweden; ES: Spain; CA: Canada; DE: Germany; US: United States; NL: The Netherlands; BU: Bulgaria; IT: Italy; IE: Ireland. G: Parties that entered government after the elections; O: Parties that entered the opposition after the elections. Numbers above bars refer to the total numbers of pledges tested for fulfillment. Studies of the Portugal, Canada and Italy do not include pledges made by opposition parties.

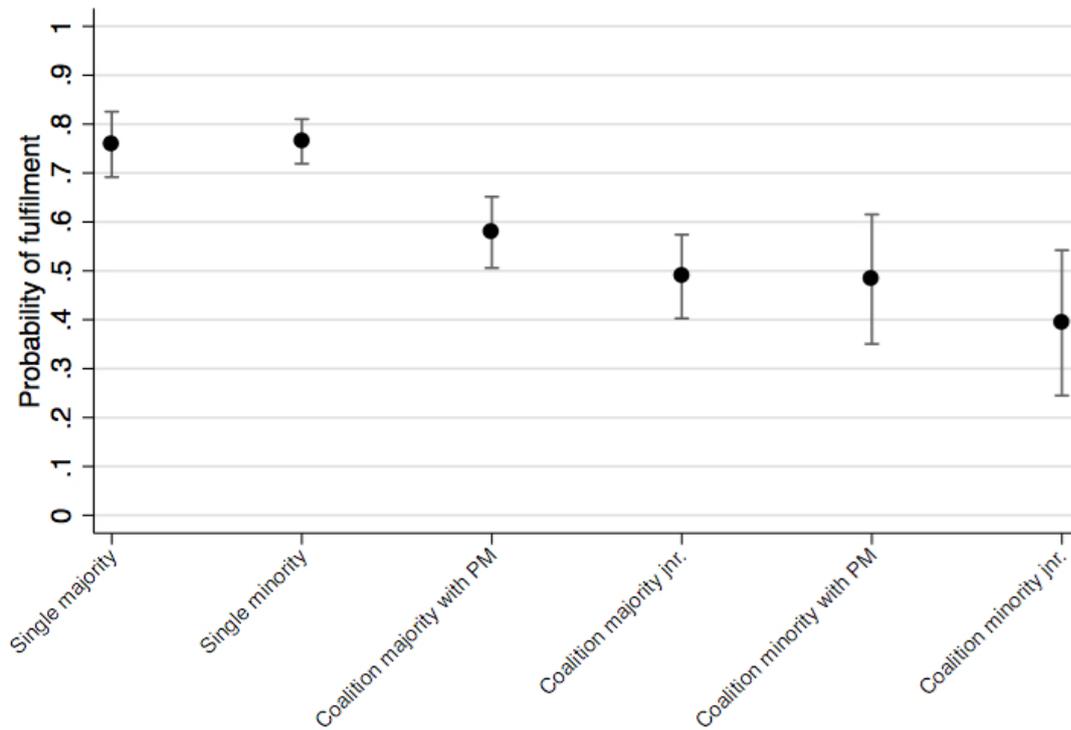


Figure 2. The probability of pledge fulfillment by government type in parliamentary democracies.

Note: Bars refer to the 95 percent confidence intervals that pledges are at least partly fulfilled. Derived from Model 2 in Table 2. Other variables held at their mode (for categorical variables) or mean (for scale variables) values.

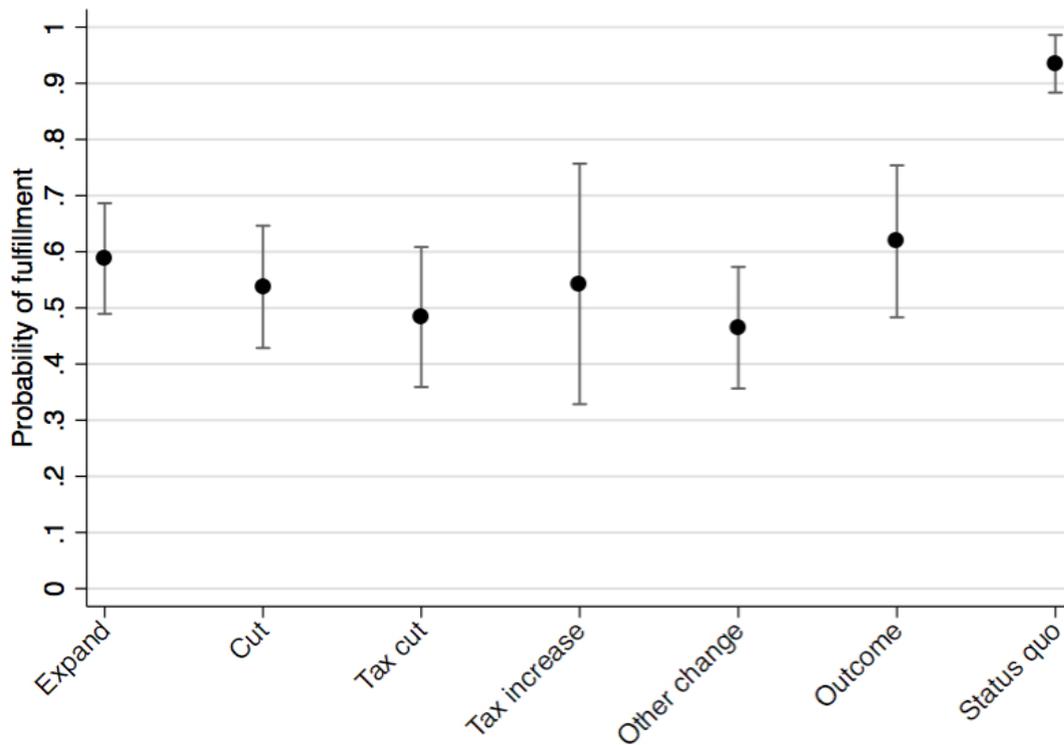


Figure 3. The probability of pledge fulfillment for different types of pledges.

Note: Bars refer to the 95 percent confidence intervals that pledges are at least partly fulfilled. Derived from Model 2 in Table 3. Assumes parties enter majority coalitions and hold the prime ministership and relevant portfolio. Other variables held at their mode (for categorical variables) or mean (for scale variables) values.

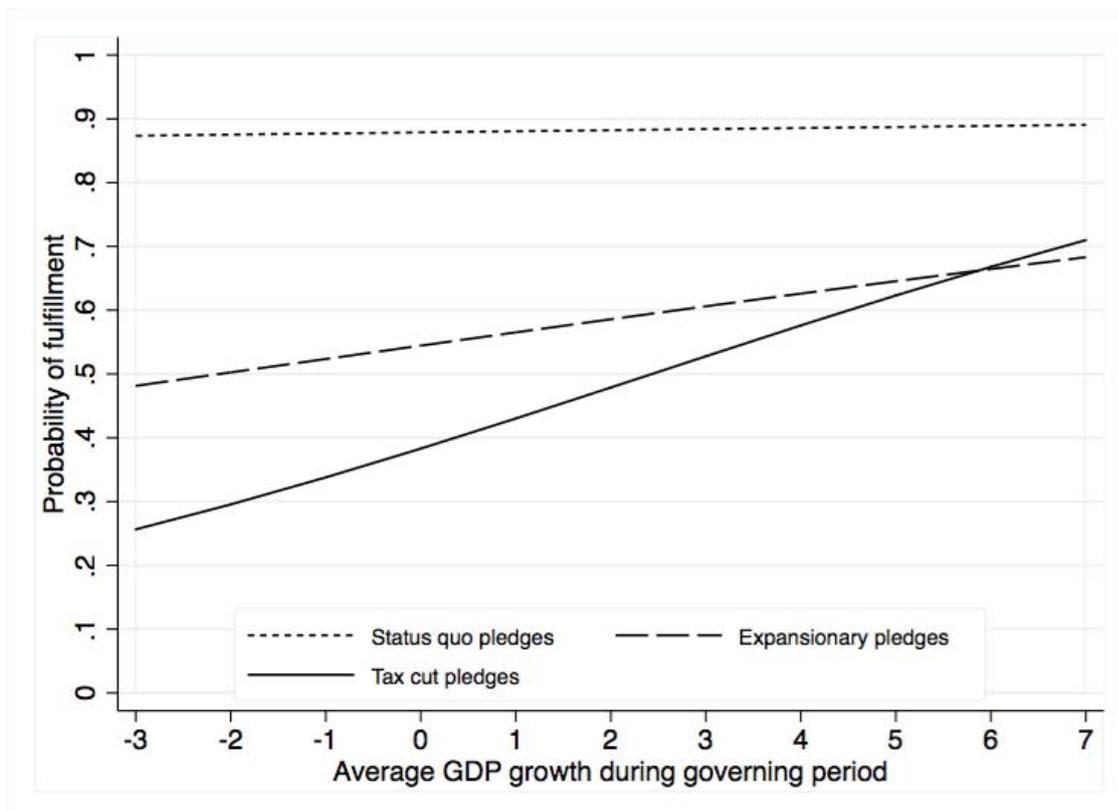


Figure 4. The effect of economic conditions on the fulfillment of different types of pledges

Note: Derived from model in Table 3. Assumes parties enter majority coalitions and hold the prime ministership and relevant portfolio. Other variables held at their mode (for categorical variables) or mean (for scale variables) values.