

Proposal for the ANES 2016 Pilot Study: Citizens' evaluations of the fulfillment of election pledges

1. Exact wording of proposed question(s) (including for questions that have been asked in previous ANES surveys). [Please note that the primary mandate of ANES is to explain vote choices and turnout. However, this mandate can be advanced in many different ways that incorporate insights from many different disciplines or approaches.]

Before the 2012 presidential election, the following promises were made in the Democratic Party Platform. For each of these, do you think the promise was fully kept, partially kept, or not kept at all? (answer categories: "fully kept", "partially kept", "not kept" and "don't know")

1. A promise to extend tax cuts for families who make less than \$250,000 a year.
2. A promise to substantially reduce the population at Guantánamo Bay.
3. A promise to raise and index the minimum wage to inflation.
4. A promise to make it illegal to fire someone based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.
5. A promise to significantly reduce the pollution that causes climate change.

2. An explicit argument about why the proposed question(s) merit inclusion in the ANES survey.

These questions will enable new international comparative analyses of research questions that are highly relevant to the theory and practice of modern democracy. Mainstream democratic theory posits that there should be a substantial degree of congruence between what political candidates promise voters during election campaigns and they subsequently do if they enter government office. The idea that governing politicians have a mandate to carry out the policies they advocated in the previous election campaign is also deeply ingrained in the practice of policymaking.

Despite the theoretical and practical relevance of this, ANES does not ask voters what they think about the fulfillment of specific election pledges.

The inclusion of these questions has become all the more compelling following the inclusion of similar question in four recent national election surveys (Ireland in 2007 contained four items, Sweden in 2010 contained seven items, the UK in 2015 contained 12 items, and Canada in the upcoming 2015 election will contain six items). The inclusion of these questions in ANES would therefore allow a direct cross-country comparison on opinion formation with respect to mandate fulfillment in very different institutional settings. The analyses of existing data in country-specific studies has already yielded insights into the causes and consequences of citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfillment, including the effects of party identification, trust and political knowledge on citizens' evaluations (published work by Thomson 2011 on Ireland; and ongoing work by Naurin and Öhberg 2013 on Sweden and Brandenburg and Thomson 2015 on the UK).

The five pledges referred to above contain variation in actual fulfillment (two were clearly fully fulfilled, two were partially fulfilled and one was partially fulfilled) as well as policy areas. These five items together offer in our view the best way of examining research questions concerning the impact of actual performance, issue salience and specific voter context on citizens' evaluations. Given the space constraints of ANES we recognize that five items may be a stretch. With that in mind we note that items 1 (tax cuts) and 3 (minimum wage) alone would yield data that would provide important insights into the impact of actual performance, as well as the basis for an international comparative study.

4. An explicit argument about the conceptual and theoretical foundations of the question(s).

The fulfillment of election pledges is a topic relevant to accountability, representation and disengagement, and is a central part of the mandate theory of democracy and the responsible party model. 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”. A considerable body of comparative research has emerged on the fulfillment of election pledges, and more is expected in the next few years (on the current work of the Comparative Party Pledges Group see Thomson et al. 2014). This research approach identifies the specific policy commitments made by parties and tracks their fulfillment. In the US, the landmark studies of Pomper (1968; Pomper and Lederman 1980) applied this approach to examine the fulfillment of election pledges made by US parties over several decades. 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), the Netherlands (Thomson 2001), Ireland (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).

In contrast to the ongoing work on the link between promises and actual performance, political scientists have only recently started to explore the citizens’ evaluations of pledge fulfillment. Research on citizens’ evaluations of pledge fulfillment has started with evidence from the abovementioned national election surveys in other countries (Thomson 2011 on Ireland; Naurin and Öhberg 2013 on Sweden; and Brandenburg and Thomson 2015 on the UK). Despite the greater attention given so far to actual pledge fulfillment, citizens’ evaluations of pledge fulfillment is arguably at least as important to democratic theory. Democratic theory posits that citizens should reward and punish parties according to their performance in government, and delivering or failing to deliver on electoral promises is an important part of performance. The evidence that would be gathered with these questions would put the relevant research community in a stronger position to assess this important part of democratic theory.

3. An explicit argument about the kinds and range of statistical analyses that the question(s) allows and the benefit of such analyses to science (and society). Clear presentations of modelling frameworks, power statistics, or analogous analytic concepts will make arguments more persuasive.

The proposed survey questions make possible analyses of citizens’ evaluations of pledge fulfillment as the dependent variable. The overarching question of theoretical

interest is the extent to which these evaluations are driven by actual policy performance (i.e. whether the pledges were in fact fulfilled) and individual-level characteristics (political knowledge, trust, party identification, and personal circumstances). Each of these explanatory variables is linked to theory of the way in which citizens formulate their evaluations.

The most obvious modeling framework for such analyses is a stacked dataset (with each respondent-question as the unit of analysis) and a hierarchical ordered logit or multinomial model.

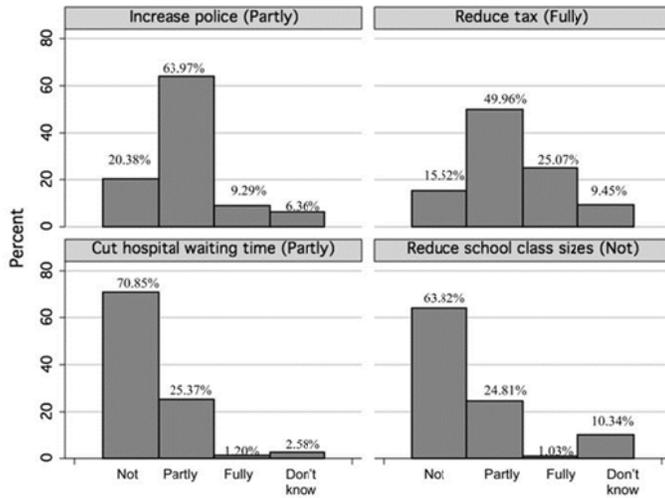
The benefit to science lies in the ability to shed new light on the mechanisms through which citizens evaluate policy performance in terms of the fulfillment of election pledges. Due to the lack of available evidence, this has not been possible in the US context, and has only recently become possible in a limited number of other countries. Until now, analyses of citizens' evaluation of policy performance has been confined to the general question of whether they believe politicians keep their pledges or to general evaluations of performance such as the state of the economy and other broad policy areas (Lewis-Beck, Nadeau and Elias 2008; Duch, Palmer and Anderson 2000; Evans and Andersen 2006; Marsh and Tilley 2010). Analyses that use our proposed pledge questions will benefit greatly from this previous work, particularly in terms of the concepts and theories that have been refined and tested in it. The question is whether the drivers of citizens' evaluations of general performance also explain their evaluations of the fulfillment of specific pledges.

The benefit to society consists of a deeper understanding of how modern democratic systems operate and the possibility of generating research findings that are of interest to the wider public as well as the profession. 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. We therefore have reason to believe that research using these proposed questions, if presented accessibly, will be of interest to a broad audience outside the academy.

5. Evidence about the empirical performance of such questions. Such evidence will make a proposal much more persuasive.

The fact that three national election surveys (Ireland, Sweden and the UK) have already included such questions and that a fourth (Canada) is committed to doing so indicates that these items are of relevance to political scientists. Moreover, the analyses of the available data indicates that these questions provide information that is relevant to answering research questions of theoretical significance. We illustrate the empirical performance of these data with the Irish study, because this has been completed (resulting in a peer-reviewed publication in a highly ranked journal). The analyses of the Swedish and UK data are ongoing, and these ongoing analyses are revealing some similar patterns to those found in Ireland as well as some intriguing differences.

The Irish National Election Study of 2007 contained four items referring to pledges that had been made in the previous 2002 elections. One of the pledges was fully fulfilled, one was unfulfilled and two were partially fulfilled. The following bar charts give the percentages of respondents in each category. This description shows a positive, albeit very imperfect, relationship between actual pledge fulfillment and citizens' evaluations. Most respondents (64%) correctly identified the unfulfilled pledge to reduce school class sizes as unfulfilled. The pledge to reduce tax (on those earning the minimum wage) was judged to be fulfilled by 25% of respondents, higher than any of the other three pledges. Nonetheless, there is a great deal of variation to be explained by factors other than actual policy performance, and much of the analyses were devoted to explaining that variation.



Note: Bars indicate percentages. In parentheses, actual pledge fulfillment based on primary sources. Number of respondents for the pledge on police numbers: 1,163; for the pledge on income tax: 1,153; for the pledge on hospital waiting times: 1,163; and for the pledge on school class sizes: 1,161. Source: Irish National Election Study 2002-2007.

	Probability that a respondent evaluates a pledge as:		
	Not fulfilled	Partly fulfilled	Fully fulfilled
<i>Actual pledge fulfillment</i>			
Not fulfilled	.69 (.66, .72)	.30 (.27, .33)	.01 (.00, .02)
Partly fulfilled	.45 (.43, .48)	.49 (.47, .52)	.05 (.04, .06)
Fully fulfilled	.14 (.12, .16)	.57 (.54, .61)	.29 (.25, .32)
<i>Respondent's party identification</i>			
Identification with opposition party	.51 (.46, .57)	.45 (.39, .50)	.04 (.02, .05)
No party identification	.45 (.43, .48)	.49 (.47, .52)	.05 (.04, .06)
Identification with governing party	.31 (.27, .36)	.58 (.53, .62)	.11 (.08, .14)
<i>Respondent's personal experience of pledge issue</i>			
No personal experience	.45 (.43, .48)	.49 (.47, .52)	.05 (.04, .06)
Has personal experience	.60 (.56, .63)	.37 (.33, .40)	.03 (.02, .04)

Source: Thomson (2011)

The table above contains predicted probabilities derived from a multinomial model with citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfillment as the dependent variable. The full model contains a range of explanatory variables: actual fulfillment, party identification, personal experience, trust, political knowledge and sociodemographic controls. The predicted probabilities reflect the key finding that actual pledge fulfillment has a significant and substantially important effect on citizens' evaluations after controlling for relevant individual-level characteristics. Party identification affects evaluations. Regardless of actual pledge fulfillment, those who identify with a governing (opposition) party have a more positive (negative) evaluation of pledge fulfillment than non-identifiers, regardless of actual fulfillment. Respondents' personal experience of the issue on which the pledge is made tend to give more

negative evaluations. The analyses also yielded significant effects associated with political knowledge and trust.

6. Evidence that the proposed way of asking the question(s) yields better data than obvious alternate ways of asking the same question(s).

The obvious alternative way of eliciting voters' views on the question of whether politicians deliver on their promises is to ask a more direct and general question. The problem with such a general question is that researchers are left wondering what the responses refer to. Several surveys include a general question on promise keeping, such as the International Social Survey Programme's (2006) item that asked respondents whether they agree or disagree with the general statement, "People we elect as MPs try to keep the promises they have made during the election". Unsurprisingly the responses are overwhelmingly negative, with most respondents disagreeing with the statement. The question is whether the negative responses represent a general distrust and resentment of politicians or an assessment of specific performance. By including specific examples of policy performance, we are able to examine the extent to which citizens' views are shaped by actual performance in addition to levels of trust.

7. If the proposal advocates asking a question that ANES has asked in the past, the proposal will be more persuasive if it includes explicit evidence about the breadth and depth of the question's previous usage and impact in the scholarly literature. Do not assume that readers already know about prior uses of the questions or will research prior uses on their own.

NA

8. Five keywords that we can use to identify the proposal in a search algorithm.

election pledges, political knowledge, performance

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