

Citizens' Evaluations of the Fulfillment of Election Pledges: Evidence from Ireland

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The linkage between what parties promise during election campaigns and what governments deliver afterward is central to democratic theory. Research on this linkage concludes that there is a higher level of congruence between campaign promises and government actions than suggested by the conventional wisdom. This study is the first to describe and explain citizens' evaluations of the fulfillment of election pledges in a way that is comparable with political scientists' evaluations. The explanation of variation in citizens' evaluations combines an objective factor, namely actual policy performance, and subjective factors, namely party identification, information resources, trust in political parties, and personal experience. The explanation is tested with panel data containing a unique set of questions on public opinion in Ireland. Actual policy performance is the most important factor affecting citizens' evaluations. However, subjective factors often cause citizens' evaluations to be more negative than actual policy performance suggests they should be.

To what extent do elected politicians keep the promises they made to voters during election campaigns? While a considerable amount of scholarship has been devoted to this question by comparing the detail of campaign statements with subsequent government policies, less attention has been given to citizens' views on this question. According to the responsible party principle, parties should carry out the policies they proposed during previous election campaigns if they entered government after those elections. The responsible party principle has a prominent, albeit contested place in democratic theory. It is a prominent feature of the mandate theory of democracy and the responsible party model (APSA 1950; Downs 1957; Friedrich 1963; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994). Liberal democratic theorists have been rightly skeptical of the proposition that elections provide clear signals to governments about policies. They argue that the main function of elections is to prevent those in power from abusing their positions, not to send signals about the desired direction of policy (e.g., Pennock 1979, 315–21; Riker 1982).¹

A seemingly fatal criticism of the responsible party principle from liberal democratic theory is that even if voters do vote for parties that reflect their

policy preferences best, election results generally give rather unclear expressions of “the will of the people” (Riker 1982). For instance, election results in multi-party systems usually support several alternative coalition governments, each with a different set of policy preferences. There are two main responses to this argument, both of which recognize its validity. The first response is that even if election results do not contain clear signals about policy, political elites regularly interpret them as such and adjust their behavior accordingly (e.g., Grossback, Peterson, and Stimson 2005). While there may be little to no justification for this interpretation on the part of political elites, it is a fact of political life that deserves political scientists' attention. The second main response is a reformulation of the responsible party principle in the form of the median mandate theory of democracy (McDonald and Budge 2005). In its original formulation, traditional mandate theory justified governing parties in acting on their preelection policy commitments, even if they received only minority electoral support. Median mandate theory extends the canonical median voter theorem to democratic politics by positing that the median voter's position holds the unique claim to be the truly democratically justifiable policy outcome. If the

¹An online appendix with supplementary material for this article is available at <http://journals.cambridge.org/JOP>. Full details of the INES, the dataset itself, and replication materials are available at: <http://www.tcd.ie/ines>.

electoral system is unbiased, the party that reflects the median voter's position best will secure a dominant position in government, enabling it to implement the policies it proposed. In short, despite the validity of liberal democratic theorists' criticisms of unrefined variants of mandate theory, the linkage between what parties promise during election campaigns and what governments do between elections is an important element of democratic performance, both in terms of popular political discourse and academic research.

Research on the congruence between parties' pre-election policy commitments and subsequent government policies generally concludes that there is a higher level of congruence than citizens commonly believe. Election pledges are policy commitments made during election campaigns, the fulfillment of which can be tested by referring to the subsequent government's policy performance. The first systematic study of pledge fulfillment examined the United States (Pomper 1968; Pomper and Lederman 1980). After finding that 79% of the pledges made by the party that won the presidential elections in the years 1944–66 were fulfilled at least partly, Pomper and Lederman concluded that this is a higher rate of pledge fulfillment than the conventional wisdom suggests (1980, 157). Subsequent research refined and extended the study of election pledges to more recent periods and other countries, including the United States (Royed 1996), the United Kingdom (Rallings 1987; Rose 1984; Royed 1996), Greece (Kalogeropoulou 1989), the Netherlands (Thomson 2001), Ireland (Mansergh 2005), Spain (Artés and Bustos 2007), and Sweden (Naurin 2011).² In general, these studies found that between 50 and 80% of governing parties' pledges are fulfilled at least partly. Variation in pledge fulfillment can be explained by economic conditions and various power-sharing arrangements. The overriding impression one gets from this body of research is that pledges are fulfilled to a greater degree than most citizens believe.

Alternative research approaches to the linkage between political candidates' electoral appeals and elected representatives' actions in office afterward also support this conclusion. Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge (1994), for instance, examined the congruence between the emphases parties place on different policy themes and the spending priorities of subsequent governments. They found significant patterns of congruence in countries with a range of institutional structures. Sulkin (2009) investigated U.S. Congressional candidates' emphases of different issues during

election campaigns and found that politicians' campaign appeals were followed by relevant legislative activity once in office.

"The responsible electorate," the counterpart to the responsible party, rewards governing parties for performing well and punishes them for performing poorly (Key 1966). This directs our attention to how citizens form their evaluations. No existing research examines citizens' evaluations of the fulfillment of specific policy commitments. Nonetheless, it seems plausible that they generally hold a negative view of pledge fulfillment. 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."³ 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% of respondents disagreed or disagreed strongly with the statement while only 21.9% agreed or agreed strongly. In Great Britain, where research has found high rates of pledge fulfillment (e.g., Royed 1996), 46.0% of respondents disagreed or disagreed strongly with the statement, while only 22.8% agreed or agreed strongly. In Ireland, the empirical focus of the present study, 51.9% disagreed or disagreed strongly, while 32.6% agreed or agreed strongly. The discrepancy between political science research on pledge fulfillment and citizens' responses to this item is striking. It may be the case that citizens are thinking about different campaign statements than the ones political scientists focus on. Citizens may be thinking about statements expressing parties' general hopes and aspirations that, although void of any specific policy commitments, nonetheless raised expectations that were not met. Until we ask citizens more pointed questions, we simply do not know.

The present study examines new evidence on citizens' evaluations of the fulfillment of election pledges. In 2007, the Irish National Election Study (INES) asked respondents to rate the fulfillment of four pledges that had been made in the 2002 election campaign by one or both of the parties that went on to form the governing coalition in the period 2002–2007. The pledges they were asked about covered four of the policy areas that citizens generally report as being the most important: taxation, health care,

²As well as these countries, research is ongoing on pledge fulfillment in Bulgaria, France, Germany, Italy, and New Zealand.

³This dataset, the Role of Government Survey IV, is available at <http://www.issp.org/>.

education, and crime. The four pledges differed from each other in terms of the government's actual performance: one was fully fulfilled, two were partly fulfilled, and one was not fulfilled. These data allow us to examine the extent to which citizens' evaluations are congruent with actual policy performance. In line with the definition of "testable" election pledges formulated by Pomper (1968) and later refined by others, the four pledges are specific commitments on which there can be little doubt about the government's record of performance. This makes for a far more direct assessment of the impact of policy performance on citizens' evaluations than their answers to a general question about whether politicians keep the promises they made during election campaigns.

The following analyses examine the extent to which citizens' evaluations are affected by both actual policy performance and subjective factors, including party identification. Similarly, research on economic voting highlights the impact of both objective conditions, such as growth, unemployment, and inflation (e.g., Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, and Elias 2008), and party identification (e.g., Duch, Palmer, and Anderson 2000; Evans and Andersen 2006). In line with recent research on citizens' evaluations of government performance by Marsh and Tilley (2010), the present study examines the effects of party identification on citizens' evaluations outside the area of economic policy. In comparison to these studies, I examine citizens' evaluations of the fulfillment of specific pledges and link their evaluations to indicators of policy performance on the same questions on which they were asked. In addition, as discussed below, the panel design of the INES allows the analysis to address the question of whether party identification is best conceived of as a perceptual lens or a running tally of performance.

Theory

The dependent variable in the present study is citizens' evaluations of specific election pledges as either "fully," "partly," or "not" fulfilled. My explanation posits that citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfillment depend on objective performance (i.e., whether the pledge was actually "fully," "partly," or "not" fulfilled), subjective factors such as partisanship and random error. By including subjective factors, the model is similar to Duch, Palmer, and Anderson's (2000) model of citizens' perceptions of national

economic conditions and Kramer's (1983) theory of citizens' perceptions of their personal financial situations. This model allows for systematic differences between citizens' perceptions and actual performance.

Actual performance. The responsible electorate described by V.O. Key (1966) rewards and punishes parties according to how those parties perform in government. This implies that voters' evaluations accurately reflect actual performance. From this perspective, there is only one correct answer to the question of whether a pledge was fully, partly, or not fulfilled. Asking citizens to evaluate pledge fulfillment is in this sense just another test of their knowledge about politics.

Research has not produced a consensus on citizens' abilities to respond accurately to policy performance. Some studies indicate that most voters know little about parties and their positions (e.g., Althaus 2003; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Milner 2001; Wattenberg 2007). Other studies suggest that citizens know enough to make evaluations and cast their votes in an informed manner (e.g., Dalton 1988; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2001; Inglehart 1977; Lodge, Steenbergen, and Brau 1995; Page and Shapiro 1992). To some extent, these different findings are a consequence of different levels of analysis. Studies that focus on the individual level identify random error in respondents' judgments, which leads to a negative view of citizens' abilities. By contrast, a common argument in macro level public opinion research is that while individuals' evaluations may not accurately reflect objective performance, at the aggregate level these errors cancel each other out (e.g., Page and Shapiro 1992; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2001; Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1995). If this is the case, then the electorate as a whole is savvier than its individual members. However, if evaluations differ from objective performance due to systematic errors caused by perceptual biases, as opposed to purely random error, then these errors will not necessarily be cancelled out during the aggregation process. Althaus also questions the "collective rationality" assumption, and his empirical analyses demonstrate that "information effects produce consistent patterns of ideological bias in collective opinions across a range of issues" (2003, 133; see also Bartels 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Since the present analysis focuses on citizens' evaluations at the individual level, we might expect the impact of actual performance on these evaluations to be of a modest magnitude at most.

Information resources. The amount of information held by citizens may also affect their evaluations of pledge fulfillment. Several studies have shown that

the opinions and voting behavior of well-informed citizens differ from those of poorly informed citizens. Bartel's (1996) study of voting behavior in U.S. presidential elections found significant effects of information in three of the six elections examined. Similarly, Althaus (1998) shows that variation in individuals' information resources produces distortions in U.S. public opinion at the aggregate level. Duch, Palmer, and Anderson (2000) find that U.S. citizens' information resources, as measured by respondents' attention to the media, affects their evaluations of economic performance. Blais et al. (2009) also report evidence that variation in citizens' information resources affected outcomes in three of the six Canadian elections they examine.

On average, I expect citizens who are well informed about politics to hold more positive evaluations of pledge fulfillment than poorly informed citizens. Poorly informed citizens tend to rely on stereotypes when answering challenging questions about politics (Kuklinski and Quirk 2000). If there is one stereotype that applies to the fulfillment of election pledges, it is that pledges are seldom fulfilled. Citizens with high levels of information resources need not rely on this stereotype and consequently form more positive evaluations of pledge fulfillment than poorly informed citizens.

In addition, citizens' with more information resources may be more responsive to actual policy performance when formulating evaluations of pledge fulfillment. This implies that well-informed citizens hold more negative evaluations of unfulfilled pledges than poorly informed citizens. However, if a pledge is fully (or partly) fulfilled, a well-informed citizen would be more likely to evaluate the pledge as fully (or partly) fulfilled than not fulfilled, compared to a poorly informed citizen. This expectation implies an interaction between citizens' information resources and actual policy performance.

Party identification. This is arguably the central concept in the study of electoral behavior and public opinion on partisan questions. Campbell et al. defined party identification as a lens affecting voters' perceptions of the political world: "Identification with a party raises a perceptual screen through which the individual tends to see what is favorable to his partisan orientation" (1960, 133; Belknap and Campbell 1952). Since then, many studies have applied this concept to explain variation in electoral behavior and public opinion (for a recent review and restatement of the concept see Johnston 2006). Campbell et al.'s formulation of the concept clearly conceives of party identification as the independent variable affecting

citizens' evaluations. According to this conception, citizens evaluate government performance more positively as a consequence of their identification with a governing party. Similarly, citizens who identify with an opposition party will evaluate government performance more negatively than others.

An alternative conception of party identification is that it is a consequence rather than a cause of citizens' evaluations of parties' policies and performance in government. According to this formulation, citizens' party identification is a "running tally" of present and past evaluations (Fiorina 1977, 1981). Because the dependent variable in the present study consists of citizens' evaluations, this alternative conception of party identification has a strong implication for the research design. The measure of party identification used should allow us to address the possibility that respondents' party identification is a consequence of their evaluations of pledge fulfillment. The present study uses a panel design that measures respondents' party identification as early as 2002, five years prior to their evaluations of pledge fulfillment in 2007.

Trust in political parties. Citizens who trust political parties are likely to evaluate pledge fulfillment more positively than citizens who do not trust political parties. One prominent definition of trust views trust as "encapsulated interest":

I trust you because I think it is in your interest to take my interests in the relevant matter seriously. . . . That is, you encapsulate my interests in your own interests. My interests might come into conflict with other interests you have that trump mine, and you might therefore not actually act in ways that fit my interests. Nevertheless, you at least have some interest in doing so. (Hardin 2002, 1)

Hardin goes on to note that trust is generally given by one individual by another with respect to the other's action: "A trusts B to do X" (9).⁴ In this context, citizens may trust or distrust their political representatives to keep the promises they made during election campaigns. A high level of trust implies that citizens believe it is in political representatives' interests to fulfill those commitments. As with party identification, citizens' trust in political parties may not only be a cause of, but also a consequence of their evaluations of government performance (Parry 1976, 136). In other words, it could be that citizens' trust increases as a consequence of observing political

⁴Maloy (2009) reviews the development of the concept of trust in political theory and empirical research.

parties fulfilling the pledges they made. Since my study is concerned with the impact of trust on evaluations, it uses a measure of citizens' trust that is independent of and prior to their evaluations of pledge fulfillment.

Personal experience. Individuals' personal experiences may also affect their evaluation of government performance (Duch, Palmer, and Anderson 2000, 638). Like party identification, personal experience may function as a heuristic that simplifies citizens' opinion formation on complex issues. Voters' evaluations of economic performance are influenced by their personal situation as well as by objective economic performance (Funk and Garcia-Monet 1997). In particular, voters perceive national economic conditions more negatively if they are experiencing personal financial troubles, such as unemployment.

While citizens who are personally affected by an election pledge are expected to differ in their evaluations of the fulfillment of that pledge from citizens who are not personally affected, the direction of the bias is unclear. On the one hand, personal experience gives citizens additional information on policy performance in relation to the pledge. Additional information means that citizens need not rely on the stereotype of the promise-breaking politician, and consequently form more positive evaluations of pledge fulfillment. Citizens with personal experience may be more strongly affected by actual performance than citizens who are not personally affected. In this respect, the effect of personal experience on evaluations may be similar to that of information resources.

On the other hand, it could be argued that personal experience results in more negative evaluations of pledge fulfillment regardless of actual performance. Election pledges generally relate to major societal problems, in the present study problems of poverty, crime and deficiencies in health care and education services. Even when governments make progress in fulfilling specific election pledges, the problems addressed by the pledges are likely to persist. Citizens with first-hand experience of these problems focus on the problems themselves, rather than the government policies designed to address the problems. Consequently, these citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfillment are likely to be more negative.

The following hypotheses summarize the model that explains variation in citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfillment:

- 1) Actual performance. Citizens rate the fulfillment of a pledge more positively, the higher the level of congruence between the pledge and actual policy performance.
- 2a) Information resources. Citizens rate the fulfillment of a pledge more positively, the more information they have about politics, regardless of the actual level of pledge fulfillment.
- 2b) Information resources. Citizens rate the fulfillment of a pledge more accurately, the more information they have about politics.
- 3a) Party identification. Citizens who identify with a governing party rate the fulfillment of a governing party's pledge more positively than citizens with no party identification, regardless of the actual level of pledge fulfillment.
- 3b) Party identification. Citizens who identify with an opposition party rate the fulfillment of a governing party's pledge more negatively than citizens with no party identification, regardless of the actual level of pledge fulfillment.
- 4) Trust in political parties. Citizens rate the fulfillment of a pledge more positively, the more trust they have in political parties, regardless of the actual level of pledge fulfillment.
- 5a) Personal experience. Citizens with personal experience of the issue on which a pledge is made differ from citizens without personal experience in their evaluations of the fulfillment of the pledge, regardless of the actual level of pledge fulfillment.
- 5b) Personal experience. Citizens with personal experience evaluate the fulfillment of the pledge more accurately than citizens without personal experience.

Research Design

The explanation is tested with information on Irish citizens' evaluations in 2007 regarding the fulfillment of four specific election pledges made prior to the 2002 national election. Between 2002 and 2007 the Irish government was a coalition of two parties, *Fianna Fáil* and the Progressive Democrats (PDs), in a Centre-Right government led by the *Taoiseach* (Prime Minister) Bertie Ahern. *Fianna Fáil* was by far the largest party. *Fianna Fáil* received 41.5% of the first-preference votes in the 2002 election, while the PDs received 4.0%.⁵ *Fianna Fáil* took 12 of the 14 ministerial posts as well as the post of Prime Minister. The *Fianna Fáil* /PD coalition controlled a parliamentary majority.

⁵Ireland uses the Single-Transferable Vote system of proportional representation (Sinnott 2005).

We should consider how the selection of this case might affect the results. The selection of the Irish case is arguably a relatively tough test of the proposition that citizens' evaluations are influenced by actual policy performance for two reasons. First, the Irish political class has been subject to charges of corruption, which has led to widespread cynicism among the public. Several high-profile tribunals have investigated charges of bribery and corruption in recent years. These even implicated the Prime Minister, forcing him to resign in May 2008. Second, politics in the Republic of Ireland is highly localized. Parliamentarians' chances of reelection depend at least as much on whether they have served their local constituencies well as they do on the government's national policy performance. The widespread public cynicism and the local nature of politics suggest that citizens may not pay much attention to actual policy performance when evaluating pledge fulfillment.

Previous research on the fulfillment of election pledges in Ireland indicates that there is substantial variation in governments' performance. In the 2002–2007 period examined here, Costello and Thomson (2008) found that 82 of 117 pledges (70%) made by *Fianna Fáil* and/or the PDs in 2002 were fulfilled at least partly. Of 284 pledges made by one or more of the opposition parties, 125 (44%) were at least partly fulfilled. Mansergh (2005) conducted a larger study of pledge fulfillment in the nine governments that were in office in Ireland between 1977 and 2002. Of the 1,143 pledges made by parties that entered government after the elections 573 (50.1%) were fulfilled at least partly, while there was considerable variation among governments.

The four pledges that citizens were asked to evaluate in the 2007 Irish National Election Study also reflect this variation in policy performance. One was fully fulfilled, two were partly fulfilled and one was not fulfilled. The four pledges were selected to cover four policy areas that citizens report as being the most important: crime, taxation, health care, and education. The focus is on pledges made by one or both of the governing parties. First, *Fianna Fáil* promised to increase the number of police officers by 2,000. This pledge was partly fulfilled. The number of police officers increased by the end of the period, but by 1,590. Second, both *Fianna Fáil* and the PDs pledged to take households that earn the minimum wage or less out of the income tax net. This pledge was fully fulfilled by the end of the government period. In the 2007 budget, the income tax threshold was raised, which exempted those on the minimum wage. Third, on health care both parties promised to end waiting

lists for hospital treatment. This pledge was partly fulfilled. During the 2002–2007 period there was a substantial reduction in the length of waiting lists. The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) reported that waiting times for the most common surgical procedures had fallen from five years in 2002 to between two and five months in 2006. However, the NTPF still reported lengthy waiting times of more than 12 months for some procedures. Fourth, *Fianna Fáil* promised to decrease class sizes in elementary schools. This pledge was not fulfilled. According to OECD figures and the government's own statistics, there was no notable change in class sizes during this period.

The Irish Election Study 2002–2007 is a post-election panel survey. The baseline sample in 2002 consists of 2,663 individuals from randomly selected households. These individuals were surveyed on four subsequent occasions, most recently after the 2007 national election. As part of this 2007 survey, respondents were asked the following question:

Before the 2002 General Election, the following promises were made by one or both of the parties who afterwards formed the government. For each of these, do you think the promise was fully met, partially met, or not met at all?

- 1) A Promise to increase the numbers of Gardai [police officers] by 2,000
- 2) A promise to take those on the minimum wage out of the income tax net
- 3) A promise to end waiting lists in our hospitals
- 4) A promise to ensure that the average size of classes for children under 9 is less than 20

Respondents were given four answer categories: “fully,” “partially,” “not,” and “don't know.”

These questions aim to elicit citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfillment, not to test the power of their instant-recall memories. Therefore, the question was posed as part of a self-completion questionnaire that was left with respondents after the face-to-face part of the survey. This gave respondents the opportunity to reflect on their evaluations and even to consult relevant information sources, although realistically it is unlikely that many went to the trouble of researching the pledges.

A total of 1,145 respondents answered at least one of the four questions. If we exclude the “don't know” responses, we have 4,307 responses containing citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfillment. With these observations we can examine the impact of variation in actual performance on citizens' evaluations. The number of observations is reduced to 4,145 responses

from 1,144 respondents if we exclude cases for which we miss information on one or more of the following explanatory variables: information resources, party identification, and personal experience. The number of observations is reduced to 2,916 from 804 respondents if we include the trust variable because, as will be explained below, fewer respondents answered the relevant survey question on trust.⁶

Respondents' information resources were measured by their answers to four factual questions about Irish politics in the 2007 survey, a measure comparable with that used in other studies (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Blais et al. 2009; Marsh and Tilley 2010; Zaller 1992). The questions referred to the largest area of government expenditure, the name of the minister of finance, the rate of inflation, and the percentage of female parliamentarians. Respondents could select a correct answer from a list of four alternatives. The questions were weighted equally and "Don't know" responses were coded as incorrect.⁷

Party identification works in much the same way in Ireland as it does in other countries (Marsh 2006). Therefore, the effects of party identification on citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfillment in Ireland may provide insights into these effects in other countries. There is evidence that the origins of Irish partisanship lie in early childhood socialization. Most partisans recall a parent voting in line with their partisan attachments. Partisans are also likely to vote according to their attachment, although are not certain to do so. Party identification is less wide-

spread in Ireland compared to other countries and time periods, with only around a quarter of Irish citizens reporting strong party identification compared to around half of citizens in other countries (Marsh et al. 2008, 62–64). However, the magnitude and direction of the effect of partisanship on citizens' evaluations is not necessarily affected by the size of the group of partisans. This group of partisans, although a smaller proportion than in other countries, is substantial. Given the association between partisanship and voting behavior, I also carried out additional analyses that control for voting behavior, which are reported in the online appendix. The impact of partisanship does not change when controlling for voting behavior.

Party identification was measured using respondents' answers to the question, "Do you usually think of yourself as close to any political party? [If so] Which party is that?" Responses to this question determined whether respondents were coded as identifying with a governing party or an opposition party. This operationalization is in line with Miller's (1991) view of party identification as a categorical rather than a continuous variable. It is also in line with previous operationalizations of party identification in Ireland (see Marsh and Tilley 2010; Marsh et al. 2008, chapter 4).⁸ Respondents' party identification was taken from the earliest available time point. For most (903 of the 1,144 respondents), this was the 2002 survey. To avoid discarding respondents who did not answer the 2002 questions, I used answers to later surveys where available for the remaining respondents. One supplementary analysis reported in the online appendix uses only the data on party identification from 2002; another uses only the data from 2004. The results are substantively the same.

Trust was measured by a 2002 question that asked about respondents' trust in political parties. Respondents were asked to rate their level of trust on a scale from 0 to 10, from low to high. The INES contains an item on trust in political parties in 2002 only. The timing of this question has the advantage that respondents' answers are clearly independent of their evaluations of pledge fulfillment five years later. It could, however, be argued that this measure cannot take into account the corruption issues that emerged after 2002. Including the trust variable also has the disadvantage of reducing the number of observations considerably to

⁶Table A.1 gives descriptive information on the observations included in the sub-sample of 4,145 observations from 1,144 respondents, on which we have information on most of the explanatory variables (excluding trust). With two exceptions, there are no significant differences between respondents and nonrespondents regarding the explanatory variables of interest. First, respondents are somewhat more likely to identify with an opposition party than nonrespondents (12% of respondents compared to 10% of nonrespondents, Chi-2 3.84, $p = .05$). Second, respondents had slightly less information resources than nonrespondents, as measured by a 0–10 scale of information resources (with a s.d. of 1.88, $n = 2,641$) using items from the 2002 and 2007 surveys. Respondents and nonrespondents differed by .70 on this scale (s.e. .07, $t = 9.63$, $p = .00$). Note that the measure of information resources used in the analyses is based on items from the 2007 survey only. These differences are obviously small, and Table A.1 shows there is ample variation in these variables in the subsample analyzed. We obtain substantively the same results if the analyses are performed on the observations from respondents who answered all four pledge questions. These results are reported in the online appendix.

⁷One factual question from the 2007 survey was not used because it concerned respondents' knowledge about the parties' pledges on taxation in 2007. Respondents' information on this item may not be independent of their evaluations of the 2002 pledge on taxation.

⁸If respondents answered no to the first question, they were asked the follow-up question, "Do you feel yourself a little closer to one of the political parties than the others?" Positive responses to this question were coded as nonidentifiers. In other words, the following analysis focuses on true identifiers only.

2,916 responses from 804 respondents. I therefore report the analysis including trust separately.

Personal experience was operationalized as a dichotomous variable using questions from the 2007 survey that indicate whether the respondent had personal experience of the issue on which the pledge was made. For the pledge on the number of police officers, respondents were coded as having personal experience if they responded positively to the question, "During the last 12 months, did you or a family member seek assistance from the authorities over a crime committed in your home, in your neighbourhood, or at work?" For the pledge to take minimum wage earners out of the income tax net, respondents were coded as having personal experience if their household income was below or at the level of the minimum wage. For the pledge to end waiting lists in hospitals, they were coded as having personal experience if they responded positively to the following question, "During the last 12 months, did you or a family member go on a waiting list for or receive hospital treatment?" For the pledge to reduce class sizes in elementary schools, respondents were coded as having personal experience if there were a child under 14 years of age in their household.⁹

Analysis

Figure 1 shows the distributions of respondents' evaluations of the fulfillment of the four pledges. Three points are worth noting. First, there is considerable variation in citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfillment even for the same pledge. This suggests that characteristics of the pledges themselves alone cannot explain all of the variation observed. Second, despite considerable variation, there appears to be a positive relationship at the aggregate level between actual pledge fulfillment and citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfillment. Of the four pledges, the one fully fulfilled pledge, on taxation, has the highest percentage of respondents who evaluated it as fully fulfilled. For the pledge that was not fulfilled, on class sizes, the clear majority of respondents also thought the pledge was not fulfilled. However, the pledge on hospital waiting times, which was partly fulfilled, was described as not fulfilled by the vast majority of respondents. Third, respondents tend to be quite negative about pledge fulfillment. Even for the pledge

that was fully fulfilled, a clear majority of respondents described it as either not or at best partly fulfilled.

Table 1 presents the results of the first set of analyses. Multinomial logit models are applied rather than ordered logit models because the data violate the parallel regression assumption of ordered logit.¹⁰ The first model includes only the actual performance indicators as explanatory variables and therefore can be applied to a larger sample of respondents. The second model includes the other explanatory variables, but not the trust variable. Model 2 is the relevant model to focus on presently. The first positive and significant coefficient in the column labeled "Partly vs. not" indicates that if a pledge is in fact partly fulfilled, respondents are significantly more likely to evaluate the pledge as partly fulfilled than not fulfilled, controlling for other individual-level characteristics. Table 2 illustrates the magnitude of the effects of actual performance on citizens' evaluations with the predicted probabilities of each type of evaluation at different levels of actual pledge fulfillment, holding the other explanatory variables constant.¹¹ If a pledge is in fact not fulfilled, the probability that a respondent will describe it as not fulfilled is .69. If a pledge is fully fulfilled, the probability that a respondent will describe it as not fulfilled is only .14. Similarly, the probability that a respondent will describe a pledge as fully fulfilled increases from almost zero (0.01) if the pledge is in fact not fulfilled to .29 if the pledge is in fact fully fulfilled. If respondents were simply guessing randomly, actual performance would not have such strong effects on their evaluations.

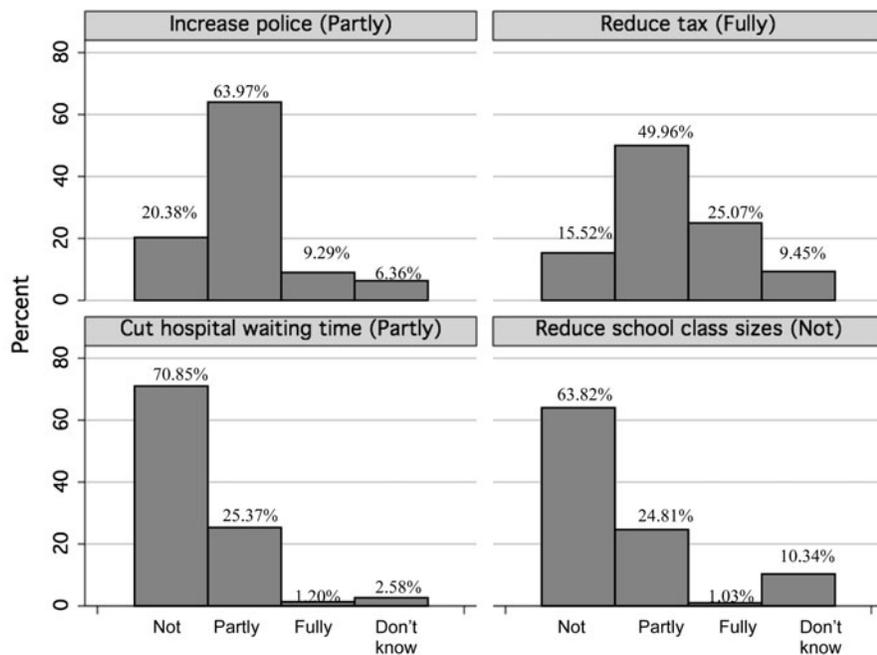
Respondents do not always evaluate partly fulfilled pledges more positively than unfulfilled pledges. In particular, there is no significant difference between respondents' evaluations of the partly fulfilled hospitals pledge and the unfulfilled schools pledge. The frequencies of responses depicted in Figure 1 show that respondents evaluated the fulfillment of these two pledges similarly. Moreover, the supplementary analyses reported in the online appendix confirm this. If the police pledge is excluded from Model 2 in Table 1, there is no significant difference between respondents' evaluations of the partly fulfilled and not fulfilled pledges after controlling for

⁹No survey item gave information specifically on the presence of children under nine years of age, as specified in the pledge.

¹⁰The Brant Test was applied to ordered logit version of Model 2 of Table 1, and this indicated that the parallel regression assumption was violated (Chi-2 for all coefficients together of 16.90, $p = .01$). The data do not violate the multinomial logit model's assumption of the Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives according to the Hausman tests.

¹¹All predicted probabilities are calculated using SPost (Long and Freese 2005).

FIGURE 1 Respondent’s evaluations of the fulfillment of four pledges.



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.

individual-level characteristics. However, respondents remain significantly more positive in their evaluations of the fully fulfilled pledge. The effect of actual performance is also significant after controlling for the effect of trust (Model 3, Table 1).

As expected, respondents’ information resources positively affect their evaluations of pledge fulfillment (Model 2 in Table 1). Regardless of actual policy performance, respondents with more information are more likely to evaluate pledges as partly fulfilled than not fulfilled. The effect of information on the probability that respondents evaluate a pledge as fully versus not fulfilled falls short of marginal statistical significance ($p=.11$). Holding the values of the other explanatory variables constant (the categorical variables at their modal values and trust at its mean), the predicted probability that a respondent with the lowest level of information evaluates a pledge as not fulfilled is .53 (95% C.I. .47, .60). This falls to .41 (95% C.I. .37, .45) for respondents with this highest level of information. The probability that a respondent evaluates a pledge as partly fulfilled is .43 (95% C.I. .36, .49) at the lowest level of information and .53 (95% C.I. .49, .57) at the highest level of information. Respondents with the lowest level of information

resources have a probability of .04 (95% C.I. 02, .06) of evaluating a pledge as fully fulfilled, while those with the highest level of information have a probability of .06 of answering “fully fulfilled” (95% C.I. 04, .08). The effects of information fall short of statistical significance when controlling for trust (Model 3, Table 1), which may be due to the fact that there are fewer observations in that analysis.

I also speculated that more informed voters differ from uninformed voters in the extent to which their evaluations are influenced by actual policy performance. In particular, it could be the case that informed voters hold more negative evaluations of unfulfilled pledges. There is no evidence for this conjecture. Table 3 examines the information on each pledge separately. The models in Table 3 are logit models with a dichotomous dependent variable coded “0” for respondents who answered that the pledge was not fulfilled and “1” for respondents who answered that the pledge was either partly or fully fulfilled. The reason for combining these two answer categories is that very few respondents evaluated either the hospitals or schools pledges as fully fulfilled (Figure 1). If it were the case that informed respondents’ evaluations were more accurate, the coefficient associated with information would be

TABLE 1 Factors Affecting Respondents' Evaluations of Pledge Fulfillment

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Partly vs. not	Fully vs. not	Partly vs. not	Fully vs. not	Partly vs. not	Fully vs. not
<i>Actual performance</i>						
Partly fulfilled	.92*** (.07)	1.96*** (.28)	.92*** (.07)	1.96*** (.29)	1.02*** (.09)	2.07*** (.35)
Fully fulfilled	2.11*** (.11)	4.60*** (.30)	2.26*** (.12)	4.84*** (.31)	2.51*** (.14)	5.01*** (.37)
(“Not fulfilled” is the reference category)						
Respondent’s information resources			.12** (.05)	.15 (.09)	.10 (.06)	.17 (.11)
<i>Respondent’s party identification</i>						
Identifies with governing party			.54*** (.11)	1.13*** (.18)	.35** (.14)	.97*** (.23)
Identifies with Opposition party			-.22* (.13)	-.49** (.25)	-.23 (.15)	-.55** (.29)
(“No party i.d.” is the reference category)						
Respondent’s trust in parties					.10*** (.02)	.08* (.05)
Respondent’s personal experience of the issue			-.57*** (.08)	-.76*** (.14)	-.61*** (.10)	-.77*** (.17)
Constant	-.95*** (.07)	-4.12*** (.29)	-1.14*** (.15)	-4.48*** (.44)	-1.58*** (.20)	-4.93*** (.56)
Wald chi2 (p-value)	732.94 (.00)		758.90 (.00)		581.28 (.00)	
Log pseudo-likelihood	-3633.06		-3406.53		-2360.01	
n	4,307		4,145		2,916	

Note: The dependent variable is the respondent’s evaluation of the pledge as either “not,” “partly,” or “fully” fulfilled. “Not” fulfilled is the base outcome in these multinomial logit models. Beta coefficients with standard errors clustered by respondents in parentheses. ***: p < .01; **: p < .05; *: p < .10. Model 1 has 1,145 respondents/clusters, Model 2 has 1,144, and Model 3 has 804.

negative and significant for the schools pledge that was unfulfilled. In fact, it is positive and insignificant. I also ran analyses with interaction terms between information and performance that are reported in the online appendix. None of the interaction terms are significant.

In line with the Michigan School’s definition of party identification (Campbell et al. 1960), respondents’ party identification colors their evaluations of pledge fulfillment. Respondents who identify with one of the governing parties hold more positive evaluations of governing parties’ pledge fulfillment than respondents with no party identification. Respondents who identify with an opposition party hold more negative evaluations of pledge fulfillment than nonidentifiers. Table 2 gives the predicted probabilities of different evaluations for different

types of respondents, holding constant the values of the other explanatory variables. The probability that a respondent evaluates a pledge by one of the governing parties as not fulfilled declines from .51 for opposition party identifiers to .45 for nonidentifiers to .31 for governing party identifiers. The effect of identification with a governing party appears to have a stronger effect than identification with an opposition party. The models in Table 3 show that the effect of identifying with a governing party has a positive and significant effect on respondents’ evaluations for each of the four pledges. The effect of identifying with an opposition party pledge is always negative, but it is insignificant for the hospitals and schools pledges. Additional analyses reported in the online appendix show that there are no significant interactions

TABLE 2 Predicted Probabilities of Respondents' Evaluations of Pledge Fulfillment at Different Values of Explanatory Variables

	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)

Note: Predicted probabilities calculated from Model 2 in Table 1, holding other independent variables at their mode (for categorical variables) or mean (for scale variable) values. 95% confidence intervals in parentheses.

between party identification and actual performance. In other words, party identifiers are not more or less affected by actual performance than nonidentifiers. Additional analyses reported in the online appendix applied alternative measures of party identification using only data from the 2002 and 2004 surveys, and controlling for respondents' voting behavior in 2002. These additional analyses confirm that governing party identifiers generally hold more positive evaluations and opposition party identifiers more negative evaluations than nonidentifiers.

Respondents' trust in political parties has a positive impact on their evaluations (Model 3, Table 1). Higher levels of trust in parties are associated with a higher probability of evaluating a pledge as partly or fully fulfilled as opposed to not fulfilled. Controlling for other factors, the predicted probability of evaluating a pledge as not fulfilled decreases from .55 (95% C.I. .49, .61) for respondents with the lowest level of trust in parties to .31 (95% C.I. .25, .36) for respondents with the highest level of trust in parties. The predicted probability of evaluating a pledge as partly fulfilled increases from .40 (95% C.I. .35, .45) for respondents with the lowest level of trust to .64 (95% C.I. .58, .69) for respondents with the highest level of trust. The predicted probability of evaluating a pledge as fully fulfilled is almost the same for respondents with different levels of trust (it increases from .05 to .06 from the lowest to the highest levels of trust).

Personal experience is associated with negative evaluations of pledge fulfillment (Models 2 and 3, Table 1). Table 2 contains the probabilities of different evaluations for respondents with and without personal experience. Respondents with personal experience have

a higher probability (.60) of evaluating a pledge as not fulfilled than respondents without personal experience (.45). Personal experience does not lead to more accurate evaluations of pledge fulfillment. If this were the case, we would find that personal experience is associated with more positive evaluations of pledges that were in fact fulfilled. The models in Table 3 show that this is not the case. In fact, respondents with personal experience held significantly more negative evaluations of the fully fulfilled tax pledge than those without personal experience. Additional analyses with interaction terms, which are reported in the online appendix, also support this conclusion. Respondents with personal experience respond negatively to actual performance when evaluating pledge fulfillment.

Conclusions

Citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfillment are affected by actual government performance. Although there are considerable discrepancies between parties' record of pledge fulfillment and citizens' perceptions, Irish citizens evaluate the fulfillment of a pledge more positively, the higher the congruence between actual policy performance and the pledge. Evidence of a strong linkage between citizens' evaluations and actual performance is particularly remarkable in the Irish case in the time period examined here. Widespread cynicism about the Irish political class and the highly localized nature of Irish politics make for a particularly demanding test of the impact of national government performance on citizens' evaluations. Therefore, the study of other countries and time

TABLE 3 Factors Affecting Respondents' Evaluations of Each Pledge Considered Separately

	Model 1 All four pledges	Model 2 Police pledge (Partly fulfilled)	Model 3 Tax pledge (Fully fulfilled)	Model 4 Hospitals pledge (Partly fulfilled)	Model 5 Schools pledge (Not fulfilled)
<i>Actual performance</i>					
Partly fulfilled	.99*** (.07)				
Fully fulfilled	2.63*** (.11)				
("Not fulfilled" is the reference category)					
Respondent's information resources	.12** (.05)	.12 (.09)	.25** (.10)	.15* (.09)	.10 (.09)
<i>Respondent's party identification</i>					
Identifies with governing party	.61*** (.11)	.54** (.23)	.73** (.31)	.89*** (.17)	.59*** (.18)
Identifies with Opposition party	-.25* (.13)	-.45** (.20)	-.55** (.24)	-.12 (.22)	-.20 (.23)
("No party i.d." is the reference category)					
Respondent's personal experience of the issue	-.59*** (.08)	-.18 (.21)	-.37* (.20)	-.19 (.14)	-.19 (.16)
Constant	-1.12*** (.15)	-1.00*** (.23)	-1.18*** (.28)	-1.44*** (.23)	-1.17*** (.24)
LR chi2 (p-value)	619.86 (.00)	15.88 (.00)	23.30 (.00)	34.50 (.00)	16.53 (.00)
Log likelihood	-2482.74	-562.09	-391.20	-644.70	-600.39
n	4,145	1,087	922	1,130	1,006

Note: The dependent variable is the respondent's evaluation of the pledge fulfillment dichotomized: 0 = "not" fulfilled and 1 = "partly" or "fully" fulfilled. Logit models. ***: p < .01; **: p < .05; *: p < .10. In the model of all four pledges, the standard errors are clustered by 1,144 respondents.

periods in which these factors are weaker or absent may reveal even stronger effects.

Citizens with more information about politics hold more positive evaluations of pledge fulfillment than citizens with less information, regardless of the actual level of pledge fulfillment. In other words, citizens respond to actual performance when forming their evaluations, but the strength of their response does not depend on their general knowledge about politics. The proposed mechanism behind the effect of information on citizens' evaluations is that information affects citizens' acceptance of the stereotype of the dishonest politician, which in turn affects their evaluations of pledge fulfillment. Informed citizens reject the stereotype of the dishonest politician as a heuristic when formulating their evaluations, while the uninformed rely on such stereotypes (Kuklinski and Quirk 2000).

Party identification influences citizens' evaluations in line with the Michigan School's definition of the concept by Campbell et al. (1960). Citizens who identify with a governing party hold more positive

evaluations of pledge fulfillment than nonidentifiers. Citizens who identify with an opposition party hold more negative evaluations of pledge fulfillment than nonidentifiers. These findings support the view of party identification as a perceptual lens through which citizens receive images of government performance. However, partisanship is only one of the explanations of citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfillment. Just as voters' economic perceptions are not determined by their partisanship (Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, and Elias 2008), citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfillment are only partly explained by their partisanship.

People who have personal experience of the problem addressed by a pledge rate the fulfillment of the pledge more negatively than people without personal experience. The impact of personal experience on citizens' evaluations of performance is also supported by other studies (Duch, Palmer, and Anderson 2000; Funk and Garcia-Monet 1997). The present study did not formulate a theoretical expectation about the direction of the effect, but the empirical analysis shows clearly that it is negative. In addition, as with citizens'

knowledge about politics, citizens' personal experience does not make them more responsive to actual performance when evaluating pledge fulfillment. The mechanism that might explain the effect of personal experience is that citizens with experience focus more on the problem addressed by the pledge than the pledge itself. Even if a pledge is fulfilled, the underlying problem that the pledge sought to address may persist.

Two points are worth noting regarding the discrepancy between research, which shows that election pledges are often fulfilled, and the conventional wisdom, which holds that parties do not keep their promises. First, citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfillment are not always negative. In line with V.O. Key's (1966) definition of the responsible electorate, citizens' evaluations are influenced by government performance, so that if a pledge is actually fulfilled, citizens are significantly more likely to evaluate the fulfillment of that pledge positively than if the pledge is unfulfilled. The electorate holds more nuanced views than suggested by their answers to general questions about whether politicians keep their promises. Second, citizens' evaluations are affected by subjective factors as well as actual performance, and these factors often lead to negative evaluations. This finding is also supported by research on other aspects of citizens' evaluations of government performance (Duch, Palmer, and Anderson 2000; Kramer 1983). We should not necessarily lament the impact of these subjective factors, because they play vital roles in the functioning of democracy.

Partisanship, for instance, is a valuable heuristic device that enables citizens to make sense of the complexity of politics. Distrust may depress evaluations of pledge fulfillment, but "in a perhaps strange and counterintuitive way, representative democracy and distrust go together in political theory" (Hardin 2002, 107). The findings presented here imply that citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfillment will always be more negative than political scientists' evaluations, since the latter are based solely on the cold comparison of promise and performance.

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TABLE A.1 Descriptive Statistics

<i>Categorical variables</i>					
	Pledge evaluation (dependent variable)		Actual pledge fulfillment		
	f	%		f	%
Not	1,916	46.22	Not	1,006	24.27
Partly	1,832	44.20	Partly	2,217	53.49
Fully	397	9.58	Fully	922	22.24
Party identification			Personal experience		
	f	%		f	%
None	2,958	71.36	No	2,994	72.23
With a governing party	665	16.04	Yes	1,151	27.77
With an opposition party	522	12.59			
<i>Scale variables</i>					
	Mean	s.d.	Min-max		
Information	2.49	.83	0-4		
Trust (n = 2,916)	4.54	2.23	0-10		

Note: f = frequency. n = 4,145. Subsample of observations included in Model 2 in Table 1 referring to 1,144 respondents. The trust variable is available for only 2,916 observations referring to 804 respondents (Model 3 in Table 1).

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