

# Electoral promises: should we care?

## (Seminar)

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Wednesdays 14:00-15:45

Room: AFL-E-020

The fulfillment of electoral promises is a key factor in modern democracies' legitimation. Do the pledges made by different parties differ, providing real alternatives on relevant topics? Do parties keep their pledges or are they just "cheap talk"? Are certain types of promises more likely to be fulfilled than others? With what consequences on policymaking and representation? This seminar will examine representative democracy through the lens of electoral promises. We will begin with normative expectations towards these promises and situate them in theories of representation. Then, we will discuss empirical studies of pledges, their characteristics, their role in party competition, the extent to which they are fulfilled and the conditions shaping fulfillment. Last but not least, we will turn to citizens' perceptions and responses. We will analyze why across most liberal democracies a majority of promises tends to be fulfilled but a majority of citizens believes that this is not the case – and pledge-keeping does not play any major role at elections. To deal with this pledge puzzle, we will examine pledge ambiguity and visibility, inequalities in the extent to which groups benefit from promise-keeping, voter biases, as well as tensions between promises and other expectations directed towards representatives.

### Learning outcomes

- (1) Insight into a central theory of representation (mandate or promissory model) and its positioning toward other theories
- (2) In-depth knowledge of empirical evidence on programmes, pledge fulfillment, and their impact on representation in a vast range of countries
- (3) Methodological skills: reflexive reading of a burgeoning literature, familiarization with a vast range of observational and experimental approaches
- (4) Improve academic writing and presentation skills

### Indicative module content

The class will cover the following topics: the "mandate" model of representation and its demarcation from other models; electoral programmes and their role in party competition; determinants of the realization of pledges; representation and political inequalities. It will combine the reading and collective discussion of core contributions to the literature on pledge and problem-based activities in small-groups.

**Readings** are all uploaded on OLAT. This is a reading-heavy and discussion-intensive course. Having read the required readings is vital to ensure that discussions and in-class exercises are fruitful. Required readings are marked with an asterisk (\*), while other readings are listed as suggestions for oral presentations and further exploration of the topic.

**Assessment:** 30% oral presentation on one text, 20% response memo on another of the readings, 50% written essay:

- You will give a **12-15 minutes impulse presentation** on one of the topics listed on the syllabus (topics will be distributed in the first session). This presentation should formulate a relevant research question, identify corresponding research designs and critically summarize the main findings and open questions.
- You will also draft a **response memo on one of the readings** (excluding those related to their oral presentation). Response memos are about 1 page-long. They must be sent by email in pdf format at latest at 5 pm before the session in which the text will be discussed. Please send your essay in PDF format and name your file according to the following pattern: Memo\_Name\_FirstName.pdf (for example: Memo\_Guinaudeau\_Isabelle.pdf). The structure of reaction memos should be based on the peer review process that scientific papers go through before publication<sup>1</sup>: summary of the argument, critical reflection on the significance of the subject, the plausibility/consistency of the argument, the adequacy of methodology, complemented with some reflections about its implications, issues to be discussed and potential avenues for further research.
- Last but not least, you will draft an **essay** on the subject of your choice related to electoral pledges. This seminar supports students in improving academic writing skills. Essays must (1) identify a clear and answerable research question and argue why this question is relevant, (2) develop an original and theoretically grounded argument, (3) review the most salient academic literature, (4) present an operational empirical strategy that can, but does not have to be implemented and (5) analyze findings or speculate about likely findings and conclusions. The essay should be about 5.000 words (exclusive of references, tables and figures). More details will be provided about the structure in class. To help you advance, I will ask you to:
  - o think about a topic and a question as early as possible in the semester. The question should be validated with the instructor before the 8<sup>th</sup> session.
  - o prepare a so-called *exposé*, i.e. a synopsis providing an overview of the project (at least 600 words + reference list). The *exposé* must be handed in before the 12<sup>th</sup> session. During the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> sessions, we will simulate poster presentations.
  - o finalize your complete essay by January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Please send your essay in PDF format and name your file according to the following pattern: Essay\_Name\_FirstName.pdf (for example: Essay\_Guinaudeau\_Isabelle.pdf).

**Deadlines** are strict. However, if you experience major constraints, please talk to me asap so that we can search for a solution.

### **Honor Code for Students Completing Official Assessments at the University of Zurich**

Please read the Honor Code carefully before you start the official assessment. With your confirmation, the University of Zurich assumes that you are aware of its content as well as the possible consequences of any academic misconduct.

- **Academic Misconduct:** Academic misconduct as laid out in the Framework Ordinance of your Faculty is constituted by fraudulent or dishonest action. Students at the University of Zurich are committed to upholding honesty and integrity. In particular, this means that you must comply with the following principles:

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<sup>1</sup> Information and recommendations on the peer review process in political science can be found in a Special Issue of the journal *The Political Methodologist* (Vol. 23, No. 1): <https://bit.ly/2CuPha0>.

- You may not claim someone else's work as your own.
- You may not use unauthorized aids or receive or provide inadmissible support when completing official assessments.
- Measures and Consequences
  - Please be aware that the University of Zurich may, according to the prevailing legal provisions, take organizational and technological measures to detect and document academic misconduct during official assessments.
  - Any academic misconduct during an official assessment will result in a failing grade.
  - Disciplinary proceedings may be initiated against you for academic misconduct. Disciplinary measures for academic misconduct may include temporary exclusion from the University of Zurich.
- Assignments should display the following confirmation: "I hereby confirm that I will complete this official assessment myself and will not receive any inadmissible support."

### **Hints on presentations and academic writing**

The following references are very helpful for learning how to prepare and present good presentations (all available on OLAT):

- Smith D.T. , Salmond R. (2011) Verbal Sticks and Rhetorical Stones: Improving Conference Presentations in Political Science. *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44 (3), 583-588.
- Salmond R., Smith D.T. (2011) Cheating Death-by-PowerPoint: Effective Use of Visual Aids at Professional Conferences. *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44(3): 589-596.
- Pole A., Parashar S. (2020) Am I Pretty? 10 Tips to Designing Visually Appealing Slideware Presentations. *PS: Political Science & Politics* 53(4): 757-762.

If you struggle with any problem or encounter difficulties, please don't hesitate to speak with me. I will be happy to help identifying helpful strategies!

## Introduction and theoretical foundations

### 20.09. Class 1: Introducing electoral promises

- Introduction into the seminar's topic
- Seminar outline and expectations
- Distribution of oral presentations

*No readings*

### 27.09. Class 2: Mandate (promissory) representation

- What is mandate representation?
- What role do electoral promises play in public policy and representation?
- Does mandate representation conflict with other models of representation?

#### *Readings*

- Mansbridge Jane (2003) Rethinking Representation. *American Political Science Review* 97(4): 515-528.\*
- Naurin Elin (2011) Election Promises in Representative Democratic Theory. In: *Election Promises, Party Behaviour and Voter Perceptions*. Palgrave Macmillan: 13-25.\*
- Manin Bernard, Przeworski Adam, and Susan C. Stokes (1999) Elections and Representation. In: Przeworski Adam, Stokes Susan C., and Bernard Manin (eds.) *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 29–54.
- Werner Annika (2019) Voters' preferences for party representation: Promise-keeping, responsiveness to public opinion or enacting the common good. *International Political Science Review* 40(4): 486-501.

## Part I: Pledges in electoral campaigns

### 04.10. Class 3: Campaigning with electoral promises

- How do campaigns use electoral promises?
- How can we measure electoral promises?
- What are the characteristics of electoral promises?

#### *Readings*

- Håkansson Nicklas, Naurin Elin (2016) Promising ever more: An empirical account of Swedish parties' pledge making during 20 years. *Party Politics*, 22(3), 393–404.\*
- Harmel Robert (2018) The how's and why's of party manifestos: Some guidance for a cross-national research agenda. *Party Politics* 24(3) 229–239.\*
- Fastenrath Fabian, Marx Paul (2023), Wann setzen sich linke Parteien für die Besteuerung hoher Einkommen und Vermögen ein? Lehren aus dem Bundestagswahlkampf von 2021, *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 64, 353–378.
- Adhikari Pankaj, Mariam Sania, Thomson Robert (2022) Election pledges in India: comparisons with Western democracies. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 60(3): 254-275.

#### 11.10. Class 4: The target groups of electoral promises

- Who is targeted by electoral promises and why?
- How to measure targeting?

##### Readings

- Huber Lena (2022) Beyond Policy: The Use of Social Group Appeals in Party Communication. *Political communication* 39(3): 293-310.\*
- Licht Hauke, Sczepanski Ronja: Who are they talking about? Detecting mentions of social groups in political texts with supervised learning. *Working paper*.\*
- Horn Alexander, Kevins Anthony, Jensen Carsten, van Kersbergen Kees (2021) Political parties and social groups: New perspectives and data on group and policy appeals. *Party Politics* 27(5): 983-995.
- Stuckelberger Simon, Tresch Anke (forthcoming) Group Appeals of Parties in Times of Economic and Identity Conflicts and Realignment. *Political Studies*.

#### 18.10. Class 5: Citizens' perceptions of pledges

- Do citizens know about election pledges?
- Which types of pledges are more likely to be perceived by citizens?
- How relevant are pledges to citizens' images of parties?

##### Readings

- Adams James, Ezrow Lawrence, Somer-Topcu Zeynep (2011) Is anybody listening? Evidence that voters do not respond to European Parties' policy statements during elections. *American Journal of Political Science* 55(2): 370–382.\*
- Krishnarajan Suthan, Jensen Carsten (2022) When Is A Pledge A Pledge? *British Journal of Political Science* 52: 1911-1922.\*
- Dupont Julia C., Bytze Evelyn, Steffens Melanie C., Schneider Frank M. (2019) Which kind of political campaign messages do people perceive as election pledges? *Electoral Studies* 57: 121-130.
- Duval Dominic, Pétry François (forthcoming) Citizens' awareness of electoral campaign pledges. *Party Politics*.

#### 25.10. Class 6: Prospective pledge voting

- Do electoral promises matter to the vote?

##### Readings

- Boggild Troels, Jensen Carsten (2023) A Theory and Test of Pledge-Based Voting: The Limited but Real Effects of Election Pledges on Citizens' Vote Choice. *Political Studies*, forthcoming.\*
- Elinder Mikael, Jordahl Henrik, Poutvaara Panu (2015) Promises, policies and pocketbook voting. *European Economic Review* 75: 177-194.\*
- Horiuchi Yusaku, Smith Daniel M., Yamamoto Teppei (2014) Measuring Voters' Multidimensional Policy Preferences with Conjoint Analysis: Application to Japan's 2014 Election. *Political Analysis* 26: 190-209.

## Part II: Pledges in policymaking

### 01.11. Class 7: Determinants of pledge fulfillment

- How often are pledges fulfilled?
- What makes pledges more likely to be fulfilled?
- What are the mechanisms linking pledges and policy?

#### Readings

- Thomson Robert et al. (2017) The Fulfillment of Parties' Election Pledges: A Comparative Study on the Impact of Power Sharing. *American Journal of Political Science* 61(3): 527–542.\*
- Guinaudeau Isabelle, Costa Olivier (2018) Who is the target? Conditions for the fulfillment of redistributive campaign promises and the 2008 minimum vieillesse reform. *Revue française de science politique* 68(2): 291-317.\*
- Praprotnik Katrin (2017) Jurisdiction, time, and money: The role of resources in pledge fulfillment. *Party Politics* 23(6): 848–859.
- Borgnino Giorgia (forthcoming) Do parties still shape policies in times of crisis? The impact of financial constraints on partisan policymaking in Italy (1996–2018). *Party Politics*.

### 08.11. Class 8: Do programmes and pledges matter to policy?

- How relevant are pledges to government policy?
- What conditions shape programme-to-policy linkages?

#### Readings

- Grossman Emiliano, Guinaudeau Isabelle (2021) Do elections (still) matter? Mandates, institutions, and policy in Western Europe, chapters 6 and 7, 113-162.\*
- Lundquist Sanna (forthcoming) Do Parties Matter for Environmental Policy Stringency? Exploring the Program-to-Policy Link for Environmental Issues in 28 Countries 1990-2015. *Political Studies*.\*
- Dietrich Simone, Milner Helen V., Slapin Jonathan B. (2020) From Text to Political Positions on Foreign Aid: Analysis of Aid Mentions in Party Manifestos from 1960 to 2015. *International Studies Quarterly* (2020) 64: 980–990.

## Part III: Voters' response to pledge fulfillment: disentangling the pledge puzzle

### 15.11. Class 9: Retrospective pledge voting

- Does pledge fulfillment matter to the vote?

#### Readings

- Matthieß Theres (2020) Retrospective pledge voting: A comparative study of the electoral consequences of government parties' pledge fulfilment. *European Journal of Political Research* 59: 774-796.\*
- Artés et al. 2022: Do actions speak louder than words? Evidence on voter behavior from Madrid Rio Park.\*
- Ellger Fabio, Klüver Heike, Alberto Anthea (forthcoming) The electoral consequences of policy-making in coalition governments. *Research & Politics*, forthcoming.

### **22.11. Class 10: Disentangling the pledge puzzle (I): citizens' biases**

- How accurate are citizens in judging pledge fulfillment?
- Are they prone to biases and of which nature?
- Do fulfilment evaluations and biases carry over to images of incumbents and votes?

#### *Readings*

- Naurin Elin, Soroka Stuart, Markwat Niels (2019) Asymmetric Accountability: An Experimental Investigation of Biases in Evaluations of Governments' Election Pledges. *Comparative Political Studies* 52(13-14): 2207–2234.\*
- Pétry François, Duval Dominic (2017) When heuristics go bad: Citizens' misevaluations of campaign pledge fulfilment. *Electoral Studies* 50 (2017): 116-127.\*
- Belchior Anna (2019) The effects of party identification on perceptions of pledge fulfilment: Evidence from Portugal. *International Political Science Review* 40(5): 627–642

### **29.11. Class 11: Disentangling the pledge puzzle (II): Pledge salience**

- Do all pledges count the same or does their perceived importance depend on their salience?
- How do the media report on pledge fulfilment?

#### *Readings*

- Müller Stefan (2020) Media Coverage of Campaign Promises Throughout the Electoral Cycle. *Political Communication* 37(5): 696-718.\*
- Mellon Jonathan, Prosser Christopher, Urban Jordan, Feldman Adam (2023) Which Promises Actually Matter? Election Pledge Centrality and Promissory Representation. *Political Studies* 71(3): 573-596.\*
- Duval Dominic (2019) Ringing the alarm: The media coverage of the fulfillment of electoral pledges. *Electoral Studies* 60: 102041.

### **06.12. Class 12: Disentangling the pledge puzzle (III): Ambiguous programme-to-policy linkages**

- How do pledges vary in the clarity vs. ambiguity of their formulation?
- Why are some pledges more ambiguous than others?
- What are the potential consequences of ambiguous mandates on citizens' perceptions of programme-to-policy linkages?
- Praprotnik Katrin (2017) Issue clarity in electoral competition. Insights from Austria. *Electoral Studies* 48: 121-130.\*
- Palier Bruno (2005) Ambiguous Agreement, Cumulative Change: French Social Policy in the 1990s. In: Streeck Wolfgang, Thelen Kathleen (eds.) *Beyond Continuity. Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 127-144.\*
- Dobber & de Vreese (forthcoming) Beyond manifestos: Exploring how political campaigns use online advertisements to communicate policy information and pledges. *Big Data & Society*.

## **Part IV: Mini-Poster conference on students' projects**

13.12. Class 13: Mini-Poster conference

20.12. Class 14: Mini-Poster conference