**Influential News: Impact of Print Media Reports on the Fulfillment of Election Promises**

#### To cite this article:

Petia Kostadinova (2019) Influential News: Impact of Print Media Reports on the Fulfillment of Election Promises,Political Communication, 36:3, 412-425, DOI: [10.1080/10584609.2018.1541032](https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2018.1541032)

Article available at https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10584609.2018.1541032

**Abstract.** Building on the mandate theory of democracy and literature on media coverage of elections, this article theorizes why information regarding party promises that is transmitted through the media could affect the former’s fulfillment. Utilizing a unique dataset composed of 2,676 promises issued by 14 legislative parties over a 15-year period in post-communist Bulgaria, the study is the first to longitudinally analyze the role of media in pledge fulfillment, while controlling for institutional and other explanations. The conclusions demonstrate that media reporting of election promises affects the fulfillment of pledges made by coalition parties, when more than one outlet has printed a promise, and under conditions of strong ideological divisions within the cabinet. Further, the impact of media reporting is greater for pledges that do not otherwise have a high likelihood of being fulfilled.

**Keywords:** election pledge fulfillment; media; post-communist parties; mandate theory of democracy; Bulgaria.

**Word Count: 6,865**

**Introduction**

Political parties are among the central institutions of representative democracy, and their linking of citizens’ preferences to government performance is an indicator of “democracy in action” (Powell, 2000, pp. 69–70). This ‘responsible party model’ (Downs, 1957; McDonald & Budge, 2005; Powell, 2000) is manifested through congruence between election manifestos and subsequent government actions. Whether such congruence is present is especially important in less consolidated democracies, where dictatorial legacies can make citizens suspicious of political parties and authority figures. These legacies can be amplified by citizens’ dissatisfaction with democracy and by faltering trust in political institutions. Understanding how well parties perform their representative functions, and what factors might favor this process, then becomes of central importance for scholars of democratic processes.

Recent strides in the literature on pledge fulfillment have demonstrated that institutional configurations matter greatly when understanding variations in the presence of democratic mandates (e.g. Thomson et al., 2017), yet substantial gaps remain. Most prominently, scholars rarely focus on the role that information, transmitted through the media, plays in the representation process, despite the rich literature on how media cover parties during election campaigns (e.g. Baumgartner & Bonafont, 2015; Boomgaarden, et al., 2013; Brandenburg, 2006; Hopmann et al., 2011; Konstantinidis, 2008; Schoenbach et al., 2001). Discussions of voter awareness of party positions, and the consequences of such knowledge, are notably lacking from assessments of mandate representation. If, as mandate theory stipulates, citizens are to cast a vote for the party closest to their preferences, they need information on party positions, and this knowledge does not come only from direct sources such as election platforms. Political information is often also obtained through the news media. Further, what media communicate to voters during elections can have lingering impacts, yet, studies on whether media might facilitate the fulfillment of election promises are lacking (Costello & Thomson, 2008 is an exception).

Bridging the literatures on media coverage of elections and on party pledges, this article assesses through a longitudinal study the impact of print media on the fulfillment of promises made by government parties. The article starts by arguing that pledges reported by news media can help hold parties accountable to their promises. This mechanism is more prominent for coalition governments, where voters have a harder time distinguishing among coalition partners, and in cabinets with strong ideological differences, both situations where parties have greater incentives to adhere to their policy commitments. The subsequent section describes the case selection and the original dataset used to evaluate these arguments. The analysis demonstrates that even when accounting for other factors that affect fulfillment, visibility in the media is a significant predictor. Further, it shows that media have a greater impact on those categories of pledges that are otherwise less likely to be fulfilled. The final section concludes, while the Appendix discusses the data, and contains reliability and robustness checks.

**Media and Mandate Fulfillment**

*Role of voter information for electoral accountability*

Voter ignorance of government performance is a significant concern for democratic theorists, and as Bentham (1843) has argued, greater transparency of information and increased public knowledge have a constraining effect and enable the electorate to sanction politicians. Thus, “good monitoring” by voters (Fearon, 1999, p. 83) can prevent elected officials from shirking and straying “from electoral mandates” (Arnold, 2012, p. 797). That greater information to voters helps dispel the “stereotype” of a shirking politician is substantiated by Thomson (2011, p. 198) in the case of Ireland, indicating that information matters for ASSESSMENTS OF pledge fulfillment. Other scholars also demonstrate that information available to voters enhances electoral accountability across developed (Back et al., 2011) and developing (Pandle, 2011) democracies. Voter uncertainly, on the other hand, can explain policy switching (Stokes, 1999).

Further, research suggests that *print* media is among the most important sources of voter information regarding parties (Andersen et al., 2005; Walgrave & de Swert, 2007), and as this piece argues, the visibility that media provide for some promises, has the potential to keep parties accountable to voters. While it is difficult to substantiate that parties consider some of their pledges more important than others, for as Schedler (1998) puts it, “*all campaign promises are equal*, be they of high or low profile” [italics in original] (p. 198), media selectively choose what priorities of parties to emphasize during election campaigns. Consequently, as Klingemann et al. (1994, p. 29) argue, those promises that are highlighted in the news “cannot be entirely ignored by any major party … [because] they have an actual or potential effect on the well–being of sizeable groups in the population.” Thus, the visibility in the media of some pledges but not others, makes it likely that those are the issues to *which voters would continue to pay attention after the elections, and that parties in power may be aware of this.* For example, Kostadinova & Kostadinova (2016) find that parties in post-communist countries are more likely to act on their pre-election policy priorities when voters were aware of the latter, even when controlling for the intensity of the government parties’ positions.

A collective memory of what has been promised is important for accountability, and media are among “the primary guarantors of electoral memory” (Schedler, 1998, p. 206). Without such a guarantor, political parties have strong incentives to “exploit ambiguity about what constitutes programmatic implementation, as well as information shortages among the electorate, to make convincing case for fulfillment even when they had not followed the priorities at all” (Klingemann et al., 1994, p. 31). To recap, by making some election pledges more visible than others, media outlets can facilitate the former’s fulfillment*, because those remain the issues that voters are more likely to remember, and because parties in the government may be aware that failing to fulfill commitments that remain in the electorate’s collective memory could hurt them at the next elections.*

H1: For governing parties, pledges reported in the media during election campaigns would be more likely to be subsequently fulfilled than pledges not reported in the news.

***Media Visibility of Pledges in Governing Coalitions***

Given recent evidence that pledge fulfillment varies across institutional arrangements (Thomson et al., 2017), it is likely that media’s impact also differs across types of governments. A single party government could enact its agenda with some degree of certainty, all the while maintaining ownership of its actions, to be judged subsequently by voters. Clarity of responsibility (Powell & Whitten, 1993) is blurred under power-sharing arrangements, and coalition partners need to consistently defend and explain their activities within the coalition (Martin & Vanberg, 2008). Further, parties in coalition governments often need to compromise on policies, which could blur their ideas (Mueller & Strom, 2000; Martin & Vanberg, 2011) making it harder for voters to distinguish among coalition members (Fortunato & Stevenson, 2013; Spoon & Kluever, 2017).

Evidence suggests that parties in coalition governments that compromise are less likely to be supported in subsequent elections (Fortunato, 2017), especially by their own electorate (Laver & Schofield, 1990), yet policy-making by consensus might not be an issue when coalition members are ideologically similar and thus draw support from similar constituency. Within ideologically distinct governments, though, parties reaching compromises would be perceived as betraying their principles. Greater ideological distinction within a coalition indicates that governing partners would have to compromise more than if they were more proximate. In such situations, parties would have to work harder to stay distinct from their partners and would have stronger incentives to “signal compliance with their election promises” (Spoon & Kluever, 2017, p. 118). Martin and Vanberg (2008) show that parties can signal to their electorate that they have not ‘strayed’ from promises via their floor speeches. Another way for parties to stay true to their ideological profile would be to fulfill those of their promises that were made more visible by the media, and are more likely to be remembered by voters.

Thus, in coalition governments the subsequent fulfillment of pledges printed in the news helps maintain the distinct post-election profile of individual parties, and the *fulfillment of election promises highlighted in the media reduces the disadvantage that parties face when they share power with others*. Parties taking part in coalition governments have stronger incentives to act on those promises highlighted in the media, and remaining in the public’s attention, than on pledges that were not published in the news. These incentives would be stronger when the ideological distance within the coalition is greater.

H2a: The positive effect of media coverage on the likelihood of pledge fulfilment is greater for pledges made by parties that form coalitions after elections than for pledges made by parties that form single-party governments.

H2b: Within coalition governments, pledges reported in the news would be more likely to be fulfilled when the ideological distance between the governing parties is greater.

**Research Design**

***Case Discussion***

Bulgaria is a newer member of the European Union (EU) that underwent a transition to democracy following decades of communist party rule. Constitutionally (art1 par. 1), the country is a parliamentary system, with a unicameral legislature, and a directly elected president.[[1]](#endnote-1) The latter, though, cannot initiate legislation, dismiss the assembly or the Prime Minister, or be involved in votes of no confidence (Shugart, 2005), aspects that make a study of pledge fulfillment in Bulgaria comparable to those of parliamentary democracies with a figure-head president.

The focus on the media visibility of election pledges in post–communist Bulgaria is driven by both theoretical and practical considerations. Analyzing media’s role in pledge fulfillment in a single country over a long period of time allows for inclusion of pledges made by a range of parties, such as successor communist, ethnic, agrarian, pro-market, environmental, and nationalist ones, while keeping political system and contextual variables constant. Bulgaria is an especially interesting case as a newer democracy, with declining media freedom. From among the Central and Eastern European countries, Bulgaria’s media system fits into an ‘eastern’ cluster, along with Hungary and Romania. These countries exhibit “the highest levels of political parallelism combined with the lowest investments in and the lowest audience of [public service broadcasting] PSB, … , and relatively high levels of foreign ownership (Herrero et al., 2017, p. 4810). This article then allows for assessing media’s role in pledge fulfillment in a situation where such impact is less likely than in established democracies with greater media freedom. Finally, due to the resource intensity of gathering pledge data, Bulgaria is the only case where longitudinal data exist on media reports of election promises.

This research focuses on the election pledges, their reporting by print media, and subsequent fulfillment, made by the parties that entered government after five elections in Bulgaria: 1994, 1997, 2001, 2005, and 2009).[[2]](#endnote-2) Table 1 lists all parties included in this analysis. These parties formed two single-party and three coalition governments. The single-party *majority* government by the *United Democratic Forces* (*ODS*) that formed following the 1997 elections was the first cabinet in Bulgaria to complete its term, lasting until 2001. After the 2009 vote, *Citizens for European Democratic Development of Bulgaria* (*GERB*) formed a single-party *minority* government, in power until 2013.

{Table 1 about here}

All three coalition governments in Table 1 controlled legislative *majorities*. Following the 1994 elections, the successor-communist *Bulgarian Socialist Party* (*BSP*) formed a coalition with the *People’s Union* (*NS*) that lasted two years. The 2001 elections marked the emergence of *National Movement, Simeon the Second* (*NDSV*), led by Bulgaria’s exiled king. After the elections, *NDSV* entered in a coalition with the ethnic-based *Movement for Rights and Freedoms* (*DPS*). This government went through several reshufflings but stayed in power until the next regularly scheduled elections in 2005. Following that vote, the largest legislative party (*BSP*) accounted for only 34% of the seats. After prolonged negotiations *BSP* formed a coalition government with *NDSV* and *DPS*, which completed its term in office in 2009. By including data from single-party majority, single-party minority, and coalition majority governments, spanning 15 years, the analysis allows for testing the expectations outlined above across an array of factors, while keeping contextual variables constant. Table 1 also lists the parties that remained in opposition during the respective government’s term in office, and pledges by these parties are included in the analysis for methodological reasons, as the reference category to test Hypothesis 1.

***Data***

Pledges are defined as “statements in which parties express unequivocal support for proposed government policy actions or non–actions that are testable” (Thomson, 2001, p 180). Election promises, by the parties listed in Table 1, made through original party manifestos issued during the respective election were included in the analysis. These parties made a total of 2,676 pledges during the respective election campaigns.[[3]](#endnote-3) Pledges across all policy categories, representing both actions and outcomes were collected, and examples of election promises include the following: ‘Our goal is … inflation rate of up to 10% by the end of our term’ (*ODS* 1997), ‘Passing a law for education lines of credit for university students’ (*BSP* 2005), and ‘Passing a law regulating lobbying’ (*GERB* 2009).[[4]](#endnote-4)

Dependent Variable

Fulfilled is a dichotomous measure, which takes the value of one (1), zero (0) otherwise, when the action or outcome that is the subject of the pledge has been accomplished *before the next elections took place*.[[5]](#endnote-5) Sources of information to determine if a pledge was fulfilled or not include the online information system of the Bulgarian government’s website, a database of the full texts of all legislation passed in the country since 1990, and data from the EU agency Eurostat.

Independent Variables

To capture media reporting of election pledges, the dataset used in this analysis includes news articles covering the length of each election campaign, up to four weeks, from the following newspapers:[[6]](#endnote-6) two national broadsheet dailies (*24 Chassa* and *Dneven Trud*), two economic news outlets (the daily *Pari* and the weekly *Kapital*), and two newspapers financed by political parties, *Duma* – the outlet of *BSP*, and *Demokratsia*–the now-defunct-newspaper published by *SDS* and its immediate successor *ODS*.[[7]](#endnote-7) News stories mentioning each of the elections were identified from each of the outlets, and read in full to determine if they mentioned specific election pledges as defined above. Following this process, the data specifies which of the 2,676 election pledges were reported by which of the six media outlets. The Media variable captures whether the same pledge was mentioned *by more than one* news outlet.[[8]](#endnote-8)

To test H2a, Media is interacted with a variable reflecting if a pledge was made by a party that subsequently entered a Coalition government.[[9]](#endnote-9) Accounting for the expectation (H2b) that internal coalition dynamics might play a role in pledge fulfillment, the analysis on subset of the data includes a variable for ideological differences and its interaction with Media. Ideology measures the absolute distance between the L-R scores of the parties in each coalition government, available from Thomson et al. (2017).[[10]](#endnote-10)

The main findings of the analysis are supported through the inclusion of two sets of variables that capture alternative explanations for fulfillment. The first group of controls concerns the types of pledges that are more likely to be reported, as the former could potentially impact their fulfillment. There is evidence that pledges on highly salient topics such as economic policy, in the Bulgarian context, are more likely to be published in the media (Kostadinova, 2017). Research also shows that some parties are more newsworthy than others, and that pledges by the parties that are more likely to win each election get more attention (Costello & Thomson, 2008; Kostadinova, 2017). When media report certain pledges in the news, fulfillment might be influenced because of the pledges’ salience or their relevance for voters’ choices. Two variables help account for whether pledges reported by the media were fulfilled because they were important during the election campaign: Econ Policy–for pledges on this topic, and Main Competitors–for the leading contenders in each election. Previous research (including on Bulgarian pledges) shows that both types of pledges are more likely to be reported, and both variables were interacted with the Media measure to account for the possibility that news reports of these types of more visible pledges might affect their fulfillment.

The second set of control variables concerns the factors most commonly accounted for in pledge research as institutional and resource availability explanations for fulfillment (Thomson et al., 2017). Govt Party reflects those pledges made by party(ies) classified as governing (Table 1), and this variable is also interacted with Media, for consistency across the analyses. Chief Executive equals one for pledges made by parties that subsequently controlled the chief executive, as research consistently shows that the party of the prime minister has an advantage in policy-making (e.g. Austen-Smith & Banks, 1988; Dewan & Hortala-Vallve, 2011). Econ growth captures the percentage of change in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over the preceding calendar year, accounting for fiscal resources that governments had at their disposal to implement election promises. The analyses also utilize the following dichotomous measures: Status quo–for pledges that called for *no* changes in the policy, outcome, etc. in question; Agree others–when pledges made by any party agreed with statements made by at least one other party during the same elections. Finally, two controls are included to reflect the time that parties had to implement their agendas and the scope of the work that they had set out to accomplish. Term accounts for whether or not the government completed its term in office, and the Number of pledges/10 is a count variable capturing pledges by all parties in a given election.[[11]](#endnote-11)

**Analysis**

Table 2 presents the results (as odds ratios) of several logistic regression analyses, and Figure 1 graphs the estimated coefficients and respective confidence intervals for the three models. Model one includes pledges made by all legislative parties, and of main interest is the distinction between pledges by subsequent government and opposition parties and their interaction with Media. Thus, the reference categories in model 1 are pledges by parties that were in opposition, and pledges by opposition parties that were reported in the news. Model two analyzes pledges by parties that subsequently entered government, differentiating between types of cabinets, with single-party governments (regardless of whether they controlled the legislature) in the reference category.[[12]](#endnote-12) Model three includes pledges by coalition governments only, including the variable for ideological distance.[[13]](#endnote-13) The first take away from the analysis is that at even when accounting for factors that extant research shows to impact fulfillment, whether or not a pledge was published by the media also matters, and its effect varies by type of party and government.

{Table 2 about here}

{Figure 1 about here}

News reports alone increase the odds of fulfillment 1.86 times but media do not have an additional effect for parties that entered government compared to those in opposition (model 1). Pledges by government parties that were reported in the news were not more likely to be fulfilled than those by the opposition that were also highlighted by the media. The interaction between media and subsequent participation in a government matters for coalition parties only (model 2). The odds of such promises being fulfilled is significantly higher than those of pledges made by members of single-party government also featured by the media.[[14]](#endnote-14) This conclusion is reinforced by the Media and Coalition Party variables not reaching statistical significance in this model. Thus, it did not matter which party made the pledge, or if a pledge was reported, but that a *pledge by a future coalition partner was mentioned in the media*.

Results from model 3 are suggestive of the mechanism behind the significance of the interaction between coalition status and media, as they show that reported pledges have greater odds of fulfillment when the ideological distance between cabinet members was greater. Overall, it is under the conditions of shared power, when coalition partners have to negotiate on policy priorities that electoral visibility in the media matters the most. In those circumstances, when media informed voters about the promises made by the (future) coalition members, parties were subsequently more likely to stick to such election pledges. Further, for pledges that were reported in the news, the greater the ideological distance between the governing partners, the greater the odds of fulfillment. These conclusions are substantiated by the lack of statistical significance for the variables capturing pledges made by the main election rivals and those on salient topics, when interacted with Media. The types of pledges that research shows were more likely to be featured in the news during elections, did not subsequently have higher odds of fulfillment because they were subjects to media reports. *The analysis confirms expectations that pledges in the news by coalition parties have greater odds of fulfillment because such parties might care about maintaining distinct profiles under conditions of deeper ideological distinctions between governing partners.*

To illustrate the substantive impact of media, it is worth considering the predicted probabilities for fulfillment when comparing different circumstances. For example, following estimations of model 1, pledges that were otherwise less likely to be acted upon were those on economic policy and when the government did not complete its term in office. An example of such promise is one by *DPS* (1994) to ‘increase import tariff on agricultural production’, and such pledges have a predicted probability of fulfillment of 0.244 (90% CI 0.10, 0.387) when reported in the news.[[15]](#endnote-15) Under the same conditions, pledges not published by the media, such as *BBB*’s (1994) to ‘lower taxes for new businesses’ have a lower predicted probability of fulfillment of 0.144 (90% CI 0.088, 0.206)

When pledges made by a future coalition partner were featured in the news (*NDSV*’ 2001 commitment to pass a law regulating bankruptcies of financial institutions), the predicted probabilities of fulfillment are 0.502 (90% CI 0.327, 0.678). Similar types of pledges, made also by a future coalition member but not reported in the media (*DPS*’s 2005 desire to ‘introduce mandatory deadlines for the length of criminal cases’) have predicted probabilities of fulfillment of 0.169 (90% CI 0.065, 0.273). Finally, under conditions of lesser ideological differences between coalition partners, such as between *NDSV* and *DPS* following the 2001 elections, the predicted probabilities of fulfillment for pledges in the news are 0.699 (90% CI 0.57, 0.827). Those increase to 0.802 (90% CI0 .754, 0.851) for reported pledges made by the parties that governed after the 2005 elections, when the ideological distance was greater.

Dynamics within two of the coalition governments included in model 3 provide context for the findings. Following the 2001 elections, *NDSV* formed a government with the participation of *DPS*, where the ideological distance between the two parties was minor. *NDSV* and its priorities dominated discussions of government formation, and *DPS* politicians noted that the government program was mostly based on the election platform of the senior coalition party. During the negotiations for coalition formation, *DPS* insisted that decisions be made through consensus but this language did not make it to the final version of the agreement. Subsequently, in this *NDSV*-dominated context, there was little need for the two partners to highlight their differentiation, for the sake of sending signals to their voters.

In contrast, after the 2005 elections, *BSP* formed a cabinet with the unlikeliest of partners: the party representing the ethnic minority that the communist regime repressed for decades (*DPS*), and the personalistic organization of the former monarch that the regime exiled (*NDSV*). Government formation between these ideologically rather distinct parties was tense and prolonged. As a result, the coalition was governed by a council, where each party had equal number of representatives, and it was indicated that all major decisions would be made through consensus. The government emphasized coordination among the three parties and shared control of policy areas. Under these conditions, of compromise between ideologically distinct partners, coalition members had greater incentive to fulfill promises that were featured by the media in an attempt to maintain their profile in the eyes of their electorate.

**Conclusions and Implications**

Free and independent media are instrumental for democracy, and they play a strong role in informing voters about the policy choices offered to them by political parties. That this information is important for the subsequent policy congruence of governing parties is implicit in the mandate theory of democracy, yet, studies testing this assumption are especially lacking in the growing literature on determinants of pledge fulfillment. This article, utilizing a unique dataset, presents the first longitudinal analysis of the conditions under which media reporting of election pledges impacts their subsequent fulfillment. The results confirm expectations that visibility in the media matter for pledge fulfillment, and that there are differences across institutional contexts. Media, a much-neglected aspect in the mandate theory of democracy, seems to enhance the incentives for parties to act on their commitments, and serves as an important accountability check on behalf of voters. Further, earlier section discussed the challenges that coalition partners face in terms of keeping distinct policy profiles, as well as the lower ability of voters to recognize the latter. A party’s weakness in both respects would negatively affect its re-election prospects, and thus parties have an incentive to maintain a policy profile different from their coalition partner(s). One way to accomplish this would be through the fulfillment of those election promises of which voters are more likely to be aware, thus maintaining the accomplishments of the party as distinct from others. While the analysis cannot speak directly to within-coalition negotiations with respect to pledge fulfillment, it indicates that collective ‘voter memory’, transmitted through the media, plays a role in cases where the governing mandate is less clear. In those situations, parties, perhaps aware that they might be held responsible for their publically transmitted promises, are more likely to fulfill them.

The analyses presented here underestimate the impact of the media, as the data include print coverage of elections exclusively, and considering that the coding utilizes a conservative estimate of media account, i.e. a pledge must be published at least once by a newspaper, while the former might be mentioned repeatedly in the same story. Put differently, if an account of a single mention of a pledge, even across different outlets, is demonstrated to have an impact on fulfillment, one would expect that repeated and continuous media coverage, through a variety of forums, would have an even stronger impact. That these results hold in a relatively new democracy, one with often suspect and declining media freedom, is especially encouraging, and speaks to the prominent role that media could play in government accountability in such a society.

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**Table 1**

List of governments included in the analysis.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Parties that took part in single-party governments* | *Opposition parties during each government’s term in office* |
| Legislative Majority: ODS (05/1997-07/2001) | BBB; BSP; EL; ONS |
| Legislative Minority: GERB (07/2009-05/2013) | Ataka; BSP; DPS; SK |
|  |  |
| *Parties that took part in a coalition government with a legislative majority* | ***Opposition parties during each government’s term in office*** |
| BSP, NS (01/1995-02/1997) | BBB; DPS; SDS |
| NDSV, DSP (06/2001-06/2005) | BSP; ODS |
| BSP, NDSV, DPS (06/2005-07/2009) | Ataka; BNS; DSB; ODS |

*Notes:* There are no coalition minority governments; Information from Political Data Yearbook Election Reports. The full names in the parties included in this study are as follows: Ataka; BBB (Bulgarian Business Bloc); BNS (Bulgarian People’s Union); BSP (Bulgarian Socialist Party); DPS (Movement for Rights and Freedoms); DSB (Democrats for Strong Bulgaria); EL (Euroleft); GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria); NDSV (National Movement Simeon II); NS (People’s Union); ODS (United Democratic Forces); ONS (United People’s Union); SDS; (Union of the Democratic Forces); SK (Blue Coalition).

**Table 2**

Likelihood of fulfillment, accounting for media influence and type of party, odds ratios.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Model 1  All parties | | Model 2  Govt parties | | Model 3 Coalition parties | |
| Media | 1.87\*\* | (0.56) | 0.87 | (0.21) | 0.54 | (0.52) |
| Govt Party x Media | 0.82 | (0.64) |  |  |  |  |
| Coalition Party x Media | |  | 5.87\*\*\* | (1.48) |  |  |
| Ideology x Media | |  |  |  | 5.63\* | (5.28) |
| Econ Policy x Media | 0.74 | (0.21) | 0.44\* | (0.19) |  |  |
| Main Competitors x Media | 1.02 | (0.79) |  |  |  |  |
| Govt Party | 1.65\*\*\* | (0.20) |  |  |  |  |
| Coalition Party | |  | 0.97 | (0.24) |  |  |
| Ideology |  |  |  |  | 0.61 | (0.24) |
| Econ Policy | 1.17 | (0.13) | 0.96 | (0.14) | 0.81 | (0.14) |
| Main Competitors | 1.36\*\* | (0.18) |  |  |  |  |
| Chief Executive | |  | 1.10 | (0.23) | 0.98 | (0.19) |
| Status Quo | 14.98\*\*\* | (4.57) | 9.17\*\*\* | (3.42) | 9.15\*\*\* | (3.50) |
| Agree Others | 1.78\*\*\* | (0.21) | 1.42\* | (0.27) | 1.20 | (0.23) |
| Econ Growth | 0.92 | (0.07) | 0.79\*\*\* | (0.06) |  |  |
| Term | 4.30\*\*\* | (2.27) | 13.19\*\*\* | (7.72) |  |  |
| N pledges/10 | 1.02 | (0.02) | 1.08\*\*\* | (0.02) | 1.09\*\* | (0.04) |
| Constant | 0.14 | (0.06) | 0.11 | (0.07) | 0.71 | (0.43) |
| N | 2676 | | 988 | | 678 | |
| Log pseudolikelihood | -3349641.30 | | -1285693.10 | | -886623.54 | |

*Notes*: Standard errors clustered by election manifesto. Election years weighted equally.

Standard errors in parentheses.

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1



**Figure 1**. Logit coefficients and their confidence intervals across the three models.

*Note:* 90% confidence intervals.

1. Most post-communist countries do not fit neatly into major classifications of democratic systems such as Lijphart’s *Patterns of Democracy* (Fortin, 2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Pledges made during the first two elections after the end of communism (1990 and 1991) are excluded from the analysis as those elections resulted in the same parties participating in two governments of different types before the next vote took place. This makes it more problematic to assign distinctions between parties in government and those in opposition. For example, after the 1991 elections, *SDS* first formed a short-lived single party government, and then it took part in a broader coalition with all legislative parties. Including pledges from the 1990 and 1991 elections does not affect the results but focusing on the elections of 1994 and afterwards makes for a more straightforward discussion of the analysis. Consistent with existing research, caretaker governments are also excluded from the analysis. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Reliability analysis was performed on identifying the pledges from party election platforms and on determining if a pledge was covered in the news. The Cronbach alpha values for agreement between the coders were .92 and .72, respectively. Further details are reported in the Appendix. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. The full dataset is available through the journal’s website, and the replication files are uploaded to Harvard University’s Dataverse site https://dataverse.harvard.edu/. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. More precisely, this variable reflects whether or not a pledge has been at *least partially fulfilled.* Some pledge researchers (e.g. Artes, 2013; Thomson, 2001; Naurin, 2011) analyze separately the shares of pledges that are fully and partly fulfilled. Such distinction would add additional nuance into the ability of parties to act on their election promises. Unfortunately, there are relatively few partially fulfilled pledges in the dataset. Further, only a small fraction of partially fulfilled pledges were previously reported by multiple media outlets, five pledges (full data) and three pledges (government parties subset), respectively, making it not feasible to compute interaction coefficients in these regressions. Consequently, the main text of the article presents the analysis with a dummy dependent variable and not an ordinal one. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The length of the election campaigns in the country drives the number of weeks prior to each election, for which data are analyzed. Campaign dates as defined by law and reported by international election monitors such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Media coverage for such a length of time is consistent with other research (Allern, 2007; Harris et al., 2006), and it should be noted that in parliamentary democracies parties do not issue election platforms outside of campaigning. Thus the pledge data (and its coverage by the media) include all promises made by parties in the course of an election. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. The six newspapers selected for this study were chosen to include the most widely read and prominent venues in their respective categories. *24 Chassa* and *Dneven Trud* are the dailies with the widest circulation in the country, and most consistently so for the length of period under study (per European Journalism Center and World Trends Data). These two newspapers are routinely included in comparative media studies such as the PIREDEU database on coverage of European Parliament elections. *Duma* and *Demokratsia* are the only two party-owned presses that to be considered as important among the country’s print media outlets. The same applies for the weekly *Kapital* and *Pari*, regarding coverage of economic news. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. This is a conservative way to estimate how often a pledge is published in the news, as the variable does not account for pledges being mentioned multiple times by the same story (and such data were not collected). It is unlikely that accounting for multiple mentions within the same story would change the main findings, and the results are presented with a more conservative account of a pledge mentioned at least once in a given story. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Analyses with a different version of this variable (Reported by the media), which reflects if a pledge was mentioned at least once by at least one outlet are reported in the Appendix. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. The data are available from <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/YJUIBI> [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Additional information on coding decisions and examples is provided in the Appendix. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Main Competitors is excluded from models 2, 3, and 4 due to collinearity with the variables of interest in these models. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. The measure for Ideology, which equals zero for single-party governments, is perfectly correlated with type of government (single or coalition), and thus this variable can only be included in the analysis for coalition pledges. Further, due to high levels of correlation with the main variables of interest in model 3, Econ Growth, Term, and Econ Policy x Media are excluded from the estimation. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. The interpretation of interaction coefficients of odds ratios requires multiplication of the relevant terms (UCLA Statistical Consulting Group). In the case of the results of Model 2, when the Media variable is at zero, the odds ratio for the impact of Coalition on fulfillment are .97. When the Media variable equals 1, the effect is derived by multiplying the odds for Coalition to the odds for the interaction term: 5.69 (5.87 x .97) [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Calculations are done using the *prvalue* command in Stata 14.0 following the respective logit estimations. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)