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3 To what extent are citizens able to distinguish between fulfilled and unfulfilled
4
5 election pledges? What explains variation in the extent to which citizens are able to
6
7 do so accurately? The answers to these questions are central to the idea of promissory
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9 representation (Mansbridge, 2003, p. 515), which is found in the responsible party
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11 model and the mandate theory of democracy (Downs, 1957; Klingemann, Hofferbert
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13 and Budge, 1994; Grossback, Peterson and Stimson, 2005; McDonald and Budge,
14
15 2005). Promissory representation holds that parties make commitments during
16
17 election campaigns and attempt to follow through on those commitments if they enter
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19 government after elections. Citizens' capacity to respond accurately to policy
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21 performance is as vital as parties' behaviour to ensuring a strong democratic chain of
22
23 command and control. Without such a capacity on the part of citizens, the responsible
24
25 party model would fail. For VO Key (1966), the responsible electorate, which rewards
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27 and punishes parties according to those parties' performance in government, is the
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29 counterpart to responsible parties. If voters are to respond in this way, they must be
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31 able to distinguish accurately between promises that were kept and those that were
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33 broken.
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37 Existing research on election pledges mainly describes and explains variation
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39 in actual fulfilment, rather than citizens' evaluations of fulfilment. The findings
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41 suggest a puzzle that we address. Generally speaking, well above 50 percent of
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43 pledges are fulfilled at least partially, and for some single-party governments the
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45 figure is above 80 percent (Pomper and Lederman, 1980; Rallings, 1987; Royed
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47 1996; Thomson *et al.*, 2017). However, in most countries the majority of citizens
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49 believe that parties break their promises. In the single-party governments that are
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51 typical of the United Kingdom, researchers typically find that above 70 percent of
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53 election pledges are fulfilled (Rallings, 1987; Royed, 1996). By contrast, only a
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3 minority of UK respondents agree with the statement “People we elect as MPs try to
4 keep the promises they have made during the election” (ISSP, 2008).¹
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7 Few studies have addressed this puzzle to date. Through in-depth interviews
8 with Swedish citizens, Naurin (2011) found that citizens’ generally hold a broad and
9 amorphous understanding of pledges. By contrast, published research on pledge
10 fulfilment is based on clear definitions of election pledges that distinguish these
11 statements from campaign rhetoric. Thomson’s (2011) study of citizens’ evaluations
12 of pledge fulfilment in Ireland and Naurin and Oscarsson’s (2017) study of Sweden
13 incorporated this insight. Rather than ask citizens general questions about the
14 fulfilment of pledges, which allow respondents to define pledges as they will, they
15 asked citizens to assess the fulfilment of specific pledges that had been made in a
16 previous election campaign. The headline findings were that citizens are able to
17 distinguish between pledges that were in fact fulfilled or unfulfilled, and that their
18 evaluations are also shaped by a range of individual-level characteristics. Given the
19 scarcity of research on this important topic for representative democracy, the new data
20 we present on British citizens’ evaluations of pledge fulfilment are welcome.
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37 We examine whether citizens’ trust in governing parties affects their
38 evaluations of the extent to which parties keep their promises. Following Lenard’s
39 (2008) distinction between the concepts of mistrust and distrust, we argue that distinct
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44 ¹ Other approaches have been used to examine the link between campaign statements
45 and subsequent government policies. These include comparisons of the general
46 direction of campaign commitments and subsequent policies (e.g. Stokes, 2001), and
47 of thematic emphases in election programs and subsequent public spending priorities
48 (e.g. Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge, 1994). The overall conclusion is that elected
49 representatives generally follow through on their commitments.
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3 aspects of trust refer firstly to a knowledge-based and vigilant responsiveness to
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5 actual government performance and, secondly, to a heuristic based on a general
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7 expectation about performance, which is at most weakly related to actual
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9 performance. Lenard (2008) defines mistrust as a healthy vigilance, which implies
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11 that mistrustful citizens are well informed and able to identify fulfilled pledges as
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13 fulfilled and unfulfilled pledges as unfulfilled. Following this line of reasoning, we
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15 examine and find evidence of an interaction between actual pledge fulfilment,
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17 citizens' knowledge about politics, and citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfilment.
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19 Actual performance, in terms of whether parties actually fulfilled their pledges, has
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21 the strongest effect on the evaluations of the most knowledgeable citizens, although it
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23 also impacts on the evaluations of the less knowledgeable.
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27 Distrust, by contrast, equates with cynicism and the expectation of betrayal
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29 and disappointment. Distrust is a negative heuristic that people use to inform their
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31 evaluations, which accords with recent research that treats trust as a heuristic
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33 (Hetherington, 2004; Rudolph and Evans, 2005). We use a survey experiment in the
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35 2014-17 British Election Study, which alters the salience of heuristic thinking based
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37 on citizens' pre-existing levels of distrust (BES; Fieldhouse, Green, Evans, Schmitt
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39 and Van der Eijk, 2015). When the salience of distrust-based heuristic thinking is
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41 raised (lowered), respondents' pre-existing levels of distrust have a stronger (weaker)
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43 effect on their evaluations of pledge fulfilment. We discuss how our research design
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45 and findings shed light on the intricate ways in which distinct aspects of trust impact
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47 on citizens' evaluations.
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3 **Two aspects of trust: The effects of healthy vigilance and heuristic thinking on**
4 **citizens' evaluations**
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9 The dependent variable is citizens' evaluations of the fulfilment of specific election
10 pledges. If citizens have a healthy mistrust of governing parties, which makes them
11 attentive to government performance when forming their assessments, then whether
12 or not the pledge was in fact fulfilled will be one of the most important factors
13 shaping their evaluations. Lenard (2008) argues that one component of trust, or rather
14 the lack of trust, is mistrust, which implies a healthy vigilance on the part of citizens
15 regarding the use and abuse of power by leaders. This idea is also found in the
16 argument that democracy thrives best when citizens are not overly trusting of their
17 leaders (see Maloy, 2009, for a review). This compels leaders to behave appropriately
18 and enables citizens to detect poor performance when it occurs.
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31 Actual policy performance in our study refers to whether or not the election
32 pledge was in fact fulfilled. Pledges are campaign statements that are specific enough
33 for people to make reasonably objective assessments of pledge fulfilment. For
34 example, one of the pledges we examine is a statement in the 2010 Liberal
35 Democrats' manifesto to raise the tax-free allowance on income to £10,000 in the
36 2011 tax year. The tax-free allowance was indeed raised to £10,000 within the
37 governing period following the 2010 election, although not yet in 2011, as stated in
38 the pledge, making it a partially fulfilled pledge.
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48 Citizens' information resources are relevant to their evaluations of pledge
49 fulfilment, and in particular to the extent to which their evaluations are affected by
50 actual performance. People who are more knowledgeable about politics hold a greater
51 amount and higher quality of factual information about politics and are better able to
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3 identify the relevance of new information. They are able to identify the relevance of
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5 current policy developments to parties' previous pledges. This implies that citizens
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7 with greater political knowledge make more accurate evaluations of pledge fulfilment.
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9 Similarly, Zaller's (1992) model of opinion formation posits that citizens with greater
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11 political awareness are more inclined to absorb new information about politics and
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13 policies.
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16 Existing research on citizens' information resources arrives at different
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18 conclusions regarding their ability to incorporate relevant facts about policies into
19
20 their evaluations, and therefore their ability to play the role of a vigilant citizenry
21
22 effectively. Some studies find that people are generally unaware of the most basic
23
24 facts about their political systems and representatives (e.g. Delli Carpini and Keeter,
25
26 1996; Milner, 2001; Althaus, 2003). This suggests we should not expect actual pledge
27
28 fulfilment to affect citizens' evaluations. Other studies find that while citizens forget
29
30 much detailed information, they have the cognitive capacities to make informed
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32 judgments (e.g. Inglehart, 1977; Dalton, 1988; Lodge, Steenbergen and Brau, 1995).
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34 Furthermore, studies based on macro models of public opinion often conclude that
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36 aggregate differences in public opinion are associated with meaningful differences in
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38 public mood and relevant policies (Page and Shapiro, 1992; Stimson, MacKuen and
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40 Erikson, 1995; Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson, 2001). At the aggregate level, public
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42 opinion is more responsive to actual performance than individuals' lack of knowledge
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44 suggests.
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48 Lenard (2008) defines as second aspect of trust in terms of distrust, which is
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50 distinct from "mistrust". Distrust equates with cynicism and the expectation of
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52 betrayal and disappointment. Distrustful citizens generally do not expect parties to
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54 perform well in government. Citizens who are distrustful of governing parties are
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3 likely to say that pledges are unfulfilled, regardless of what governments actually did.
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5 Likewise, according to this definition, trustful citizens are likely to say that pledges
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7 are fulfilled regardless of actual performance. This definition of trust understands the
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9 concept as a heuristic that people use to form their evaluations (Hetherington, 2004;
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11 Rudolph and Evans, 2005).
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14 Distrust affects citizens' evaluations through heuristic thinking, not through
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16 the absorption of information on actual performance. Distrustful citizens' evaluations
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18 are affected by the common stereotype of promise-breaking politicians. By contrast,
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20 people with high levels of trust generally expect election pledges to be carried out,
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22 because such behaviour corresponds to their positive expectations of governing
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24 parties' behaviour. One mechanism through which the trust heuristic affects citizens'
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26 evaluations is that it provides a cue in the context of limited information. Even well-
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28 informed citizens may lack the detailed information required to evaluate the
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30 fulfilment of specific election pledges. In the absence of factual information, trust or
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32 distrust in governing parties provides a guideline for making evaluations. Another
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34 mechanism concerns the inherent room for judgement in deciding whether or not a
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36 pledge is fulfilled. Although pledges are defined as statements that are specific
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38 enough for reliable evaluations of fulfilment to be made, some room for interpretation
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40 is inevitable. Again, the trust as distrust heuristic provides citizens with a means of
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42 making those interpretations. In the absence of complete and unambiguous
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44 information on pledge fulfilment, trusting citizens are more likely to evaluate
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46 promises as kept than are distrustful citizens.
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50 Priming people to think about parties' promises, as distinct from policy
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52 proposals in a more general sense, should raise the salience of heuristic thinking.
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54 When relying on heuristic thinking, distrustful citizens should evaluate pledges as
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3 unfulfilled, while trusting citizens should evaluate pledges as fulfilled, regardless of
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5 actual performance. To test this, we vary the wording of questions posed to
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7 respondents. This follows the classic structure of priming experiments as pioneered
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9 by Sniderman and Piazza (1993), in which question wording is used to raise or lower
10
11 the salience of a frame. The survey presents two groups of randomly selected
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13 respondents with different versions of similar questions. The first set of questions
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15 mentions “parties” and “promises”, and then goes on to give details of six specific
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17 election pledges. The second set of questions simply refers to “proposals” and then
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19 goes on to refer to the contents of the same six election pledges, but without stating
20
21 that these proposals were in fact parties’ election pledges. We expect the “party-
22
23 promise” version of the questions to prime citizens to use heuristic thinking when
24
25 making their evaluations. We therefore expect distrustful citizens who receive the
26
27 “party promise” treatment to give more negative evaluations compared to both more
28
29 trusting citizens who receive the same treatment and to other distrustful citizens who
30
31 receive the alternative “proposal” treatment. Varying the question wording is not
32
33 intended to alter respondents’ level of distrust. Rather, the question wording alters the
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35 salience of distrust as a heuristic for informing their evaluations.
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40 We focus on trust in governing parties, rather than government or politicians
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42 in general. Other researchers have defined the object of trust more broadly. For
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44 instance, according to Miller “[p]olitical trust can be thought of as a basic evaluative
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46 or affective orientation toward the government” (1974, p. 952; see also Rudolph and
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48 Popp, 2009, p. 335). Our narrower definition is appropriate given our interest in
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50 citizens’ evaluations of campaign commitments made by particular parties, rather than
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52 the government’s policy performance in general.
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3 Our main propositions concerning the effects of trust, defined in terms of
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5 mistrust and distrust, on citizens' evaluations are as follows.

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7 *Trust defined in terms of mistrust and healthy vigilance: Actual performance and*
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9 *political knowledge*

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11 H1a: Citizens are more likely to say that a pledge was fulfilled if the pledge was
12
13 actually fulfilled.

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15 H1b: The more knowledge citizens have about politics, the more their evaluations of
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17 pledge fulfilment are informed by whether or not the pledge was actually fulfilled.

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19 *Trust defined in terms of distrust and heuristic thinking: Question wording and*
20
21 *respondents' self-reported trust in governing parties.*

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23 H2a: Citizens are more likely to say that a pledge was fulfilled if they are presented
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25 with questions about the adoption of proposals rather than the keeping of promises
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27 by parties.

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29 H2b: The more citizens trust governing parties, the more likely they are to say that a
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31 pledge was fulfilled.

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33 H2c: This effect of citizens' trust in governing parties on their evaluations is
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35 significantly greater when they are presented with questions about the keeping of
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37 promises by parties than with questions about the adoption of proposals.

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41 While these propositions are our main theoretical interest, we recognise that
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43 other factors also matter, notably, party identification, personal circumstances and
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45 media attention. We control for these other explanations, but the available data do not
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47 support a detailed analysis of them all. Party identification is likely to affect citizens'
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49 evaluations of pledge fulfilment, whether defined in terms of the traditional or
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51 revisionist views that frame many recent studies of the concept (e.g. Bartels *et al.*,
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53 2011). According to the classical view, party identification is an affective bond
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3 between voters and their preferred parties that it is formed in childhood, and functions
4 as a perceptual screen through which voters view and interpret the political world
5 (Campbell *et al.*, 1960, p. 133). According to the revisionist view of party
6 identification, voters' party identification may change over time as a consequence of
7 their evaluations of their parties' policy performance (Fiorina, 1981). The observable
8 implications of these two views for citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfilment are the
9 same. Voters who identify with governing parties are more likely to give positive
10 evaluations of those parties' pledge fulfilment than non-identifiers, because this is
11 most consistent with their existing identifications. Likewise, for voters who identify
12 with opposition parties, their existing identifications are most consistent with negative
13 evaluations of governing parties' pledge fulfilment. The classical and revisionist
14 views differ with respect to the consequences of citizens' evaluations of policy
15 performance on their future levels of party identification, a topic that is beyond the
16 scope of our present study. Since our data are collected at one time point, we cannot
17 discount the possibility that at least some of the party identification we observe is a
18 consequence rather than a cause of citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfilment, as the
19 revisionist view would suggest. We therefore include party identification as a control
20 variable.

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22 Respondents' personal circumstances may be another set of explanatory
23 variables (Funk and Garcia-Monet, 1997; Duch, Palmer and Anderson, 2000, p. 638).
24 To the extent that personal circumstances are relevant to the pledges we examine,
25 these are associated with the demographic variables for which we control: occupation,
26 education, age and gender. We include pledge controls for each of the pledges, since
27 some of the pledges receives more media attention than others, which is likely to
28 affect respondents' evaluations.

Research design

Our data concern citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfilment during the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition that governed from 2010 to 2015, which was the first coalition government to have held office in the UK since 1945. We expect the British public to give negative evaluations of pledge fulfilment in this context. Coalition governments are relatively rare in the UK and are generally viewed with scepticism.² Data from the British Election Study show that a majority of respondents thought that coalition government "makes it harder to decide who to blame", is a "less efficient form of government than single party government", and is less "in tune with public opinion than single party government". Two thirds agreed with the statement that "parties cannot deliver on their promises when they govern in coalition" (Fieldhouse, Green, Evans, Schmitt and Van der Eijk, 2015).

The data we examine come from the British Election Study, 2014-17 (ibid.), and refer to British citizens' evaluations of the fulfilment of six specific election pledges that were made in the campaign prior to the 2010 British General Election.

² Ipsos-Mori has asked a question about whether respondents think it "will be a good thing or a bad thing for the country if no party achieves an overall majority" since 1978, and only briefly in 1987 and again in 2010 did the number of those considering it a "bad thing" drop below 50 percent. Usually between 55 and 65 percent see it as a "bad thing", while only a third or less think it might be a "good thing". By 2014, the number thinking no party winning an overall majority in the next election would be a "good thing" had dropped to 26 percent, the lowest figure since 1983 (Ipsos-Mori, 2011).

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3 Citizens' evaluations of the fulfilment of these pledges were measured in February-
4 March 2014 in the first wave of the British Election Study's Internet Panel. We
5 selected six election pledges from the 2010 election campaign to put to the public in
6 2014 to obtain their evaluations of fulfilment. Three of the pledges were made by the
7 Conservatives and four by the Liberal Democrats (one was made by both parties). The
8 selected pledges vary with respect to fulfilment: two were not fulfilled and four were
9 at least partially fulfilled (two of which fully and two partially fulfilled). The six
10 pledges were chosen to cover policy areas that respondents report as the most
11 important: economy, health, education, immigration, domestic security and pensions.³
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22 The first two pledges were unfulfilled. The first pledge is the Liberal
23 Democrats' promise to "scrap tuition fees" in higher education. As part of the
24 coalition agreement, the party dropped this manifesto promise and instead agreed with
25 the Conservatives to treble tuition fees to £9,000 per annum, which resulted in
26 widespread student demonstrations. Given the large amount of media attention given
27 to this unfulfilled pledge, including a public apology by the Liberal Democrats for
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38 ³ Details of the primary sources consulted (the election platforms and relevant
39 government actions) are reported in the Online Appendix. Our own assessment of the
40 fulfillment of these pledges follows the procedure of an established research group
41 that has assessed the reliability of coders' assessments of pledge fulfillment
42 comparatively (see Thomson *et al.*, 2017). We conducted a robustness test in which
43 we excluded the two pledges we code as partially fulfilled, since we acknowledge that
44 there is more room for interpretation in these cases than the other four pledges. The
45 test is reported in the Online Appendix and shows that our main findings hold without
46 these partially fulfilled pledges.
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3 breaking it, we expect the overwhelming majority of people to identify this pledge as
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5 unfulfilled.
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8 Second, we include the Conservatives unfulfilled pledge to “take steps to take
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10 net migration back to the levels of the 1990s – tens of thousands a year, not hundreds
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12 of thousands”. There was no systematic decline in net migration since 2010, but rather
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14 an increase over the course of the subsequent governing period as a whole. Net
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16 migration first declined from over 200,000 in 2010 to 150,000 in the middle of 2012,
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18 and then rose again to over 300,000 in 2014. A considerable amount of media
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20 attention was given to this issue and the Conservative Party’s promise on it.
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23 The third pledge is the fully fulfilled promise made separately by both parties
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25 in their 2010 manifestos, to “scrap ID cards and the next generation of biometric
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27 passports”. The introduction of ID cards was set out by the previous Labour
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29 administration in the Identity Cards Act 2006 but not carried out before 2010, and
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31 both Conservatives and Liberal Democrats pledged to scrap the plan entirely when in
32
33 office. They included this pledge in the coalition agreement and the Identity Card Act
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35 2006 was indeed repealed in 2010. Fourth, the Liberal Democrats pledged to “scrap
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37 compulsory retirement ages, allowing those who wish to continue in work to do so”.
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39 This election pledge was fulfilled, as default retirement ages were phased out by the
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41 end of September 2011.
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45 The fifth pledge is the Conservatives’ pledge “to increase health spending in
46
47 real terms every year”, which we code as partially fulfilled. Given the severe cuts to
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49 other departments, we consider the ring-fencing of Health spending and real increases
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51 in some years as a partial fulfilment of the pledge. Nonetheless, there is some room
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53 for debate on this pledge. In 2012 the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority wrote to
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55 the Health Secretary stating that a real-terms increase had not been achieved in 2011-
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3 12, and indeed that expenditure in 2011-12 had been lower than 2009-10, but that
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5 “given the small size of the changes and the uncertainties associated with them, it
6
7 might also be fair to say that real terms expenditure had changed little over this
8
9 period”. Sixth and finally, we selected the Liberal Democrats’ promise to raise the
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11 tax-free personal allowance to £10,000 for the start of the financial year 2011-2012.
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13 This is a partially fulfilled promise, because it took two years longer than stated to
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15 raise the tax-free allowance to the promised level. It was raised to £10,000 by the
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17 beginning of the new tax year in 2014.
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20 The British Election Study includes a survey experiment embedded in a split-
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22 sample design to elicit respondents’ evaluations of pledge fulfilment. Half of the
23
24 respondents received questions that referred to “parties” and “promises”, while the
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26 other half received questions that referred to “proposals”. As explained above, the
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28 different question wordings are intended to raise and lower the salience of distrust as
29
30 a heuristic when respondents give their evaluations. Since we only test for one
31
32 specific frame, we avoid the trap of many survey experiments that lack a control
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34 group (see Gaines, Kuklinski and Quirk, 2006).
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38 The “party-promise” questions in the survey experiment, which were put to just
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40 over 2,600 randomly selected respondents, read:

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42 *Before the 2010 General Election, the following promises were made by one or*
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44 *both of the parties that afterwards formed the government. For each of these, do*
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46 *you think the promise was fully kept, partially kept, or not kept at all?*
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- 48 1) A promise to increase health spending in real terms every year
- 49 2) A promise to scrap ID cards and the next generation of biometric passports
- 50 3) A promise to reduce net migration to less than 100,000 per year.
- 51 4) A promise to scrap compulsory retirement ages
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- 3 5) A promise to raise the tax-free personal allowance to £10,000 for the start of the
- 4 financial year 2011-2012
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- 7 6) A promise to scrap University tuition fees
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9 The “proposal” questions, which were also asked of just over 2,600 respondents, read:

10 *The following policy proposals were made in 2010. For each of these, do you*
11 *think the proposal was fully, partially or not adopted at all?*
12

- 13 1) A proposal to increase health spending in real terms every year
- 14
- 15 2) A proposal to scrap ID cards and the next generation of biometric passports
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- 17 3) A proposal to reduce net migration to less than 100,000 per year.
- 18
- 19 4) A proposal to scrap compulsory retirement ages
- 20
- 21 5) A proposal to raise the tax-free personal allowance to £10,000 for the start of the
- 22 financial year 2011-2012
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- 24 6) A proposal to scrap University tuition fees
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26 Each of the party promise-versions of the questions was answered by at least
27 1,892 respondents (excluding “don’t know” answers). Each of the proposal-versions
28 of questions was answered by at least 1,943 respondents. In total, we have 24,785
29 responses from 4,825 respondents with evaluations of pledge fulfilment. This reduces
30 to 16,448 responses from 3,175 respondents if we exclude cases for which we miss
31 information on one or more of our preferred measures of our explanatory or control
32 variables. Most of our analyses are performed on this “stacked” dataset of 16,448
33 observations. This is the most appropriate design, given that we are interested in the
34 effect of variation in actual pledge fulfilment on respondents’ evaluations, which
35 varies at the level of the respondent-item dyad. We apply sample weights in all of our
36 models to ensure that the sample is representative of the population.
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38 We measure respondents’ political knowledge with a set of twelve knowledge
39 questions. Respondents were first asked to identify their local MP, with randomized
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3 false candidate names offered together with the correct one. In other questions,
4 respondents were asked to match UK politicians and leaders of other countries to their
5 correct political offices. Given that these knowledge questions were spread across
6 waves 1-5, not all respondents received all twelve questions (although 90 percent
7 did). We constructed a standardised 0-10 knowledge scale ranging from 0 (no correct
8 answers) to 10 (all correct answers), regardless of the number of knowledge questions
9 received. “Don’t know” answers are counted the same as incorrect answers.
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17 To measure trust defined in terms of distrust and heuristic thinking we use a
18 variable to which the BES refers as “government trust”. Recall that our conceptual
19 definition of trust in relation to Lenard’s (2008) use of the term distrust is that it is a
20 general expectation on the part of a citizen that the party will meet his or her positive
21 expectations when governing. The relevant BES item asks: “How much would you
22 expect each of the following political parties to do a good job or a bad job if they are
23 in government after the General Election (either by themselves or as part of a
24 coalition)?”⁴ For each political party, respondents are asked to give a number from 1
25 (for “would do a bad job”) to 7 (for “would do a good job”). For the pledges made by
26 the Liberal Democrats, we match respondents’ trust in the Liberal Democrats, and
27 likewise for the Conservatives. For the pledge made by both parties we take the
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44 ⁴ Scholars of public opinion in the US commonly use the “do what is right” question
45 in the US National Election Study to measure trust, by which respondents are asked
46 how much of the time they thought they could trust the government in Washington to
47 do what is right (e.g. Rudolph and Popp, 2009, p. 339). The BES does not contain a
48 comparable instrument, but our measure is more in line with our concept of trust,
49 which focuses on trust in governing parties, rather than government as a whole.
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3 maximum values. We rescaled the values to range from 0-6, which facilitates the
4
5 interpretation of the interaction terms.
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7 The control variable for party identification uses respondents' answers to the
8
9 question, "Do you usually think of yourself as close to any political party? [If so]
10
11 Which party is that?" Responses to this question determined whether respondents
12
13 were coded as identifying with a governing party or an opposition party. This
14
15 operationalization is in line with Miller's (1991) view of party identification as a
16
17 categorical rather than a continuous variable. It is also in line with previous
18
19 operationalizations of party identification in the UK (Marsh and Tilley, 2010).
20
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22 The demographic control variables consist of age, gender, education and
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24 occupation. For education, we distinguish between those with and without college
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26 education. The variable for occupation is based on the categories defined in the
27
28 British Election Study, and distinguishes between higher (including professional and
29
30 supervisory roles), intermediate and lower (including routine jobs) occupations.
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33 In addition to our preferred model, which we present in the following section,
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35 we ran a series of robustness tests, which we also discuss at the end of the Analysis
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37 section and present in the Online Appendix. These robustness tests confirm the main
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39 findings from the model. They include a test using an alternative operationalisation of
40
41 trust that approximates Hardin's (2002) conception of trust as encapsulated interest.
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43 They also include models that examine the answers to each pledge question
44
45 separately, which are relevant given the differences between the pledges in, among
46
47 other things, the amount of media attention they received. We run a model excluding
48
49 the pledges we code as partially fulfilled, since there is arguably more ambiguity in
50
51 these cases. We also present a model without the control variables. None of these
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53 robustness tests give substantially different results to those we now present.
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Analysis

The distributions of respondents' answers to the twelve items about parties' election pledges suggests two noteworthy points (Figure 1). First, citizens' evaluations broadly reflect actual performance (Hypothesis 1a). This is true regardless of whether the pledges are presented as parties' promises or simply as proposals. We find that the overwhelming majority of respondents (80 percent) correctly identified the pledge on tuition fees as not fulfilled when they were asked if this promise was kept. This is unsurprising given the prominence of this broken promise in the media. Likewise, 61 percent of respondents correctly answered that the promise to reduce yearly immigration to under 100,000 was not kept. By contrast, people were more likely to say that pledges were at least partially fulfilled if they were in fact at least partially fulfilled. Majorities of respondents (54 and 60 percent) said that the promises to scrap compulsory retirement ages and ID cards were at least partially fulfilled. We coded these two pledges as fully fulfilled. For the pledge to raise the tax-free allowance, which we coded as partially fulfilled, the majority of respondents (54 percent) thought the pledge was either partially or fully fulfilled. Despite the obvious association between respondents' evaluations and actual performance, people give negative evaluations more readily than positive ones. For the pledge on health spending, which we coded as partially fulfilled, "not fulfilled" was the most common response category from the public, regardless of the question wording.

<Figure 1>

The second noteworthy point from Figure 1 is that people appear more inclined to say that pledges were fulfilled in response to questions that refer to the

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3 adoption of proposals than the fulfilment of parties' pledges (Hypothesis 2a). This is
4 the case for five of the six pledge topics. For instance, regarding the partially fulfilled
5 pledge to increase health spending each year, 48 percent of people who were asked
6 the party-promise version of the question said it was not fulfilled, compared to 38
7 percent of those who were asked the proposal version. The pledge to scrap ID cards
8 and biometric passports is a partial exception to this pattern, since the evaluations in
9 response to the party-promise question appear to be more positive than those in
10 response to the proposal question. It is possible that the two components of the pledge
11 – "ID cards" and "biometric passports" – had some distorting effect on the responses
12 in this case. While a considerable amount of attention was given to the issue of ID
13 cards in the media, less attention was given to biometric passports.
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17 We now turn to the multiple regression analysis. The data are stacked, so that
18 each row refers to a single respondent in relation to one of the twelve pledge items in
19 the survey. Each respondent appears in the dataset a maximum of six times if they
20 answered all six of the promise or proposal questions. This gives 16,448 observations
21 after accounting for missing values on our variables of interest. The dependent
22 variable in the main analysis presented here is coded 0 for respondents who answered
23 that the promise was not fulfilled or the proposal not adopted and 1 for respondents
24 who answered that the promise was partially or fully fulfilled or that the proposal was
25 partially or fully adopted. We exclude "don't know" answers. We analyse this
26 dichotomous dependent variable with a logit model, in which the standard errors are
27 clustered by respondent. We prefer the dichotomous dependent variable since some of
28 the answer categories are sparsely populated, particularly the "Fully fulfilled"
29 category in response to pledges that were not fulfilled. These robustness tests (see
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3 Online Appendix) include a multinomial model in which we use the three-category
4 indicator of evaluations, which gives the same results.
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7 The model in Table 1 indicates that people are more likely to say that a pledge
8 was fulfilled it is was in fact fulfilled (Hypothesis 1a). This is true even for people
9 who know very little about politics. However, the evaluations of more knowledgeable
10 respondents are significantly more accurate – i.e. are more strongly affected by actual
11 fulfilment - than are the evaluations of less knowledgeable citizens (Hypothesis 1b).
12
13 The first three coefficients in Table 1 are relevant here: those associated with the
14 variables Actual fulfilment, Knowledge, and the interaction between the two. The
15 coefficient associated with Actual fulfilment is positive (1.86) and significant ($p < .00$),
16 which indicates that Actual fulfilment has a positive effect on citizens' evaluations
17 when Knowledge has a value of zero. So even respondents who gave incorrect
18 answers to all of the knowledge questions are significantly more likely to give
19 positive evaluations for pledges that were at least partially fulfilled. The exponent of
20 the coefficient, 6.41, is the odds ratio and indicates that this is a large effect. The odds
21 of people with a knowledge score of zero giving a positive evaluation are 6.41 times
22 greater for pledges that were at least partially fulfilled than for pledges that were not
23 fulfilled.
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42 <Table 1>
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44 The level of political knowledge held by respondents strengthens the impact of
45 actual performance on their evaluations. The direct effect of Knowledge is negative
46 and significant, which indicates that for pledges that were in fact unfulfilled, the more
47 knowledgeable are less likely to say that those pledges were fulfilled. The exponent of
48 the coefficient, .88, indicates that for every one-point increase in respondents'
49 knowledge score (on the 0-10 scale), the odds that they give an “incorrect” positive
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3 evaluation of an unfulfilled pledge decreases by 12 percent. The significant
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5 interaction between the variables Actual fulfilment and Knowledge indicates that the
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7 more knowledgeable are more likely to give positive evaluations of fulfilled pledges
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9 than are the less knowledgeable. Respondents' knowledge has a positive effect on
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11 their evaluations of fulfilled pledges; combining the main and interaction effects of
12
13 the variable Knowledge gives a coefficient estimate of .07 ($=-.12+.19$), which is
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15 significant (s.e. .02, $p=.00$). The exponent of .07, which is 1.07, indicates that every
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17 one-point increase in respondents' knowledge score is associated with a 7 percent
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19 increase in the odds that they give a "correct" positive evaluation of a pledge that was
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21 in fact fulfilled at least partially.
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25 Figure 2 depicts the effects of the variables Actual fulfilment and Knowledge
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27 as predicted probabilities, holding other variables of interest constant at their means
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29 (for scale variables) or modes (for categorical variables). The downward sloping lines
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31 at the bottom of the figure give the probabilities (and relevant confidence intervals)
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33 that respondents with different levels of knowledge offer positive evaluations of
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35 unfulfilled pledges. As the variable Knowledge increases from its minimum value of
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37 0 to its maximum value of 10, the probability that a respondent gives an incorrect
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39 positive evaluation of an unfulfilled pledge decreases from .16 (95% confidence
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41 interval (CI): .08, .24) to .06 (95% CI: .04, .06). The ascending line indicates that as
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43 Knowledge increases from its minimum to its maximum, the probability that a
44
45 respondent gives a correct positive evaluation of a fulfilled pledge increases from .55
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47 (95% CI .46, .64) to .71 (95% CI .67, .75). The fact that these two sets of confidence
48
49 intervals do not overlap, even for citizens with low levels of knowledge, reinforces
50
51 the point that actual performance has a large effect on citizens' evaluations, even for
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53 those with low levels of political knowledge.
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<Figure 2>

The next three coefficients refer to our experimental treatment variable and respondents' trust in politicians. People are significantly more likely to say that pledges were fulfilled in response to the proposal wordings of the questions (Hypothesis 2a). Moreover, trust has a marked positive effect on people's evaluations (Hypothesis 2b), particularly when they are presented with questions about parties' promises (Hypothesis 2c). The coefficient associated with the variable Proposal treatment refers to the effect of the proposal treatment compared to the party-promise treatment on respondents with the lowest level of trust in governing parties. The odds of these respondents giving a positive evaluation are 98 percent greater ($p=.00$) when they are presented with the proposal version of the question than the party-promise version of the question.

Respondents' trust, which is defined in terms of distrust and heuristic thinking, affects their evaluations positively, particularly when they are presented with questions that refer to parties' promises. The coefficient associated with the variable Trust is positive and significant. The coefficient is .24, of which the exponent is 1.27, and this indicates that every one-unit increase in respondents' trust on the 0-6 scale increases the odds that they give a positive evaluation by 27 percent. The significant negative coefficient of -.12 associated with the interaction between the variables Trust and Proposal treatment indicates that the effect of trust is significantly lower when respondents are presented with the proposal versions of the questions than the party-promise versions. However, the net effect of trust is still positive at .12 ($=.24+(-.12)$) and significant (s.e. .02; $p=.00$). So the effect of trust on people's evaluations, while still positive and significant, is much weaker when the proposal treatment is given compared to the party-promise treatment. The significant negative interaction effect

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3 also indicates that the proposal treatment has a weaker effect on more trusting people.
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5 For respondents with relatively high levels of trust (or low levels of distrust), the
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7 proposal treatment has no effect.
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10 The effects of the variables Proposal treatment and Trust are depicted as
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12 predicted probabilities in Figure 3. Like the predicted probabilities in Figure 2, these
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14 hold other variables constant at their means or modes. Since four of our six pledges
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16 were at least partially fulfilled, these probabilities refer to respondents' evaluations of
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18 pledges that were at least partially fulfilled. The unbroken line that ascends most
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20 steeply from left to right gives the predicted probabilities that respondents with
21
22 different levels of trust offer positive evaluations in response to the party-promise
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24 questions. As trust increases from its minimum to its maximum values, the probability
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26 of a positive evaluation increases from .54 (95% CI .49, .59) to .83 (95%CI .80, .86).
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28 The flatter line refers to the effect of trust on the probability of a positive evaluation
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30 in response to the proposal versions of the questions. The effect is weaker, as the
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32 predicted probability increases from .70 (95% CI .66, .74) to .82 (95% CI .79, .86).
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34 The fact that the confidence intervals overlap at medium and high levels of trust
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36 indicates that the proposal treatment has no effect on respondents with medium and
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38 high levels of trust in politicians. For respondents with a score of 3 or higher on the
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40 variable Trust, the confidence intervals overlap. The bars, which show the distribution
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42 of observations, clearly show that many respondents have low levels of trust. In total
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44 50 percent of the observations have values of 0 to 2 on the 0-6 scale, at which points
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46 there are significant differences between respondents who receive the party-promise
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48 and proposal treatments.
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52 <Figure 3>
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3 Of the control variables, Party identification is worth mentioning. Regardless
4 of whether a pledge is actually fulfilled, people who identify with one of the
5 governing parties are more likely to say that pledges were fulfilled than people who
6 do not identify with a party. However, people who identify with an opposition party
7 are not less likely to give positive evaluations than people who do not identify with a
8 party. It could be that the non-identifiers tend to be more disengaged from politics
9 than identifiers and that this disengagement is associated with more negative
10 evaluations.
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20 We conducted a series of tests to check the robustness of the results, which are
21 detailed in the Online Appendix. Among these, we ran an additional analysis with an
22 alternative measure of trust as encapsulated interest, according to which “I trust you
23 because I think it is in your interest to take my interests in the relevant matter
24 seriously ... you encapsulate my interests in your own interests” (Harding 2002, 1).
25 Although based on a distinct definition and measure of trust, the results are very
26 similar. We also ran a model that explored whether there is an interaction between
27 trust and knowledge, which there is not. We ran a multinomial model with a three-
28 category dependent variable, which gave substantively the same results. Other
29 robustness tests involved separate analyses of subsets of the data: a model that
30 excluded the partially fulfilled pledges and models that examined each topic
31 separately. We ran separate analyses of each topic with an additional variable to
32 identify respondents who were personally affected by each pledge. We also ran a
33 model without the control variables. The findings of these robustness tests are
34 consistent with those presented here, although as would be expected not all
35 coefficients are statistically significant when we limit the analyses to relatively small
36 subsets of the data. Our key findings are therefore robust to different coding of
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3 citizens' evaluations and actual fulfilment, are not driven by the particular topics of
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5 the pledges we examine, and are robust to different model specifications.
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8 9 **Conclusions**

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13 The evidence shows that British citizens are able to give accurate evaluations of
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15 policy performance in terms of governing parties' fulfilment of specific pledges that
16
17 were made in previous election campaigns. The capacity to form evaluations based on
18
19 performance is part of the healthy vigilance that Lenard (2008) identifies in
20
21 mistrustful, critical citizens, who control their governments effectively. In line with
22
23 our expectations, the evidence shows that knowledge improves the accuracy of
24
25 citizens' evaluations. However, the level of knowledge required to make accurate
26
27 evaluations of pledge fulfilment is well within most people's grasp, and does not
28
29 require unrealistic demands of their cognitive capacities or interest in politics.
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33 This key finding, together with a growing body of evidence from related
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35 research, points to the relevance of promissory representation in the practice of
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37 democratic politics. Promissory representation holds that candidates make promises to
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39 voters during election campaigns and seek to keep those promises if they
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41 subsequently enter office (Mansbridge, 2003, p. 515). Existing research focuses
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43 mainly on the extent to which parties they keep their election pledges, and generally
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45 finds high rates of pledge fulfilment depending on institutional constraints and
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47 economic conditions (Pomper and Lederman, 1980; Rallings, 1987; Royed, 1996;
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49 Thomson *et al.*, 2017). Little attention has been given to citizens' evaluations of
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51 promise keeping and breaking by governing parties, despite the fact that a responsible
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53 electorate, which rewards and punishes parties for variation in performance is an
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3 essential counterpart to responsible parties (VO Key, 1966). Our key finding that
4 citizens' evaluations of promise keeping reflect actual performance in terms of
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6 promise keeping contrasts with their answers to general questions about the extent to
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8 which politicians keep their promises, which are generally overwhelmingly negative
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10 (e.g. ISSP, 2008). Our finding is, however, in line with the two previous studies that
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12 examined this topic, which focused on citizens' evaluations of pledge fulfilment in
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14 Ireland (Thomson 2011) and Sweden (Naurin and Oscarsson, 2017, p.9). This
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16 research indicates that people hold far more nuanced and accurate views on promise
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18 keeping and breaking than suggested by their responses to general questions. The
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20 discrepancy between citizens' responses to general questions about promise keeping
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22 and the results of pledge research by academics may be due to different definitions of
23
24 pledges. Citizens' may adhere at least implicitly to broader definitions of campaign
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26 promises than those used in research on pledge fulfilment (see also Naurin 2011).
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28 This is part of the explanation of the puzzle of the discrepancy between findings from
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30 research on pledge fulfilment and citizens' responses to general questions about
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32 promise breaking by politicians.
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38 Another part of the explanation of the puzzle is that citizens' evaluations are
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40 influenced not only by actual policy performance, in terms of whether promises were
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42 actually kept, but also individual characteristics, some of which lead them to make
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44 negative evaluations of promise keeping, even for promises that were kept. This
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46 conclusion resonates with research on citizens' evaluations of governments' general
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48 performance on the economy and other broad policy areas (Lewis-Beck, Nadeau and
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50 Elias, 2008; Duch, Palmer and Anderson, 2000; Evans and Andersen, 2006; Marsh
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52 and Tilley, 2010). Like Kramer (1983) and Duch, Palmer and Anderson (2000), our
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54 explanation of evaluations of pledge fulfilment combines actual performance with
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3 individual-level characteristics. Our study shows that this explanatory approach can
4
5 be extended beyond evaluations of policy performance to evaluations of promise
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7 keeping.

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9 Of these individual characteristics, we focused on trust as a heuristic, which
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11 Lenard (2008) defines as distrust or cynicism and the expectation of betrayal. When
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13 defined in these terms, trust is a heuristic for making evaluations in the context of
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15 incomplete information and ambiguity (Hetherington, 2004; Rudolph and Evans,
16
17 2005). We argued that the evaluations of untrusting citizens are more negative
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19 because they are informed by the stereotype of promise-breaking politicians. Our
20
21 survey experiment found evidence for this mechanism by changing the salience of
22
23 trust as relevant heuristic for respondents when they gave their assessments.
24
25 Respondents with low to average levels of trust in parties, and who were primed to
26
27 think about parties' promises when they answered, were more likely to say that
28
29 pledges were unfulfilled. Their answers were significantly more negative than similar
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31 respondents who were not primed to think about parties' promises when they
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33 answered. This significant difference indicates that respondents' evaluations of pledge
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35 fulfilment are affected by their pre-existing levels of trust or distrust, independently of
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37 whether or not the pledges were actually fulfilled.
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41 The effect of distrust, which appears to shape citizens' evaluations of
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43 performance irrespective of actual performance, is of great concern. Many scholars
44
45 see trust as a necessary component of the political culture that supports healthy
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47 democratic systems and lament declining levels of trust in recent decades (e.g.
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49 Diamond, 1998, p. 208). An alternative view is that "in perhaps a strange and
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51 counterintuitive way, representative democracy and distrust go together in political
52
53 theory" (Hardin, 2002, p. 107; see also Hart, 1978). While we recognise the
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3 importance of mistrust as healthy vigilance with respect to representative democracy,
4 we see no benefit of distrust as endemic cynicism. We found it useful to distinguish
5 between the normatively positive and negative aspects of trust and recommend this
6 approach to other researchers. We also look forward to future research on the
7 relations between these different aspects of trust as well as their causes and
8 consequences. For instance, while mistrustful citizens are able to detect broken and
9 kept promises, research is yet to identify the conditions under which they punish and
10 reward governing parties for their performance in this respect.
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Figures and tables

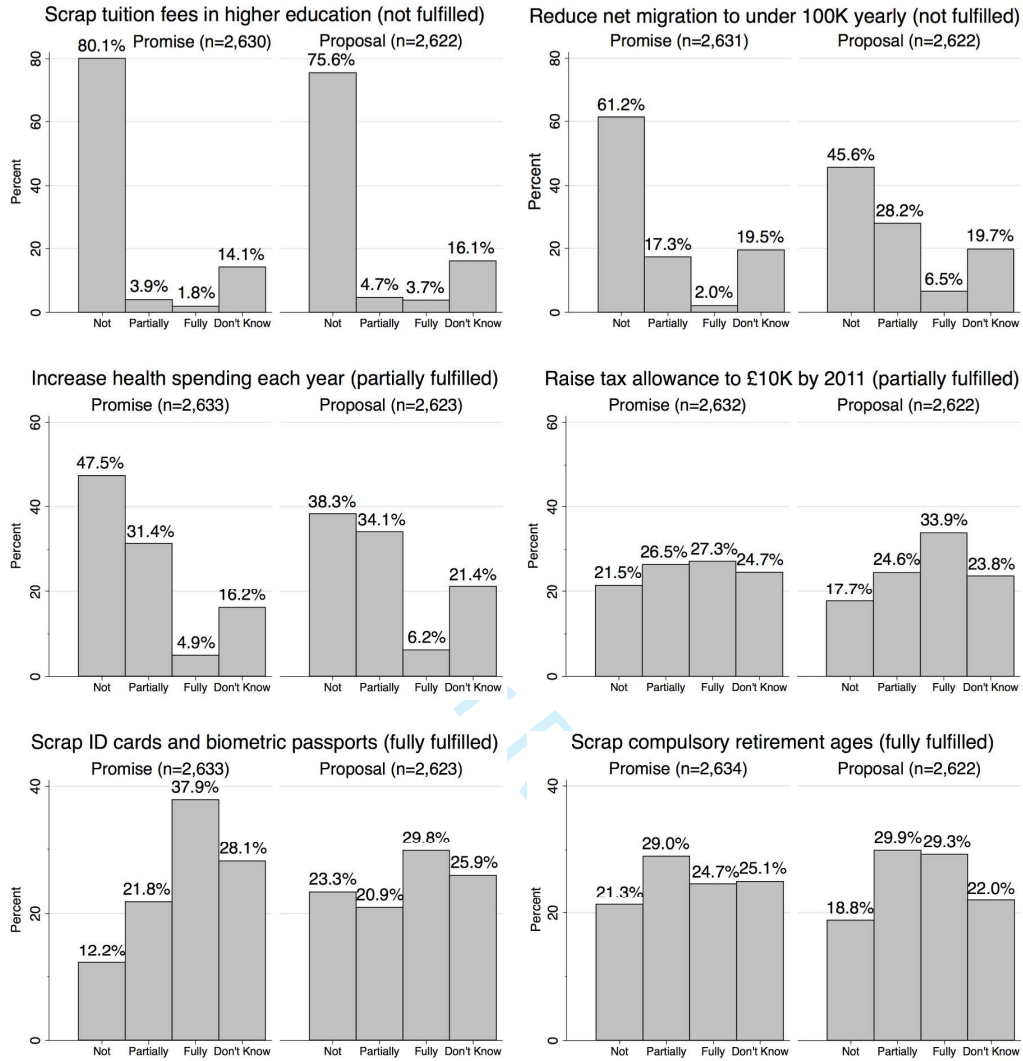


Figure 1. Citizens' evaluations of the fulfilment of six pledges

Source: British Election Study 2014-17. Note: "Promise" refers respondents' answers to question about the "fulfilment of parties' promises", while "Proposal" refers to respondents' answers to questions about the "adoption of proposals".

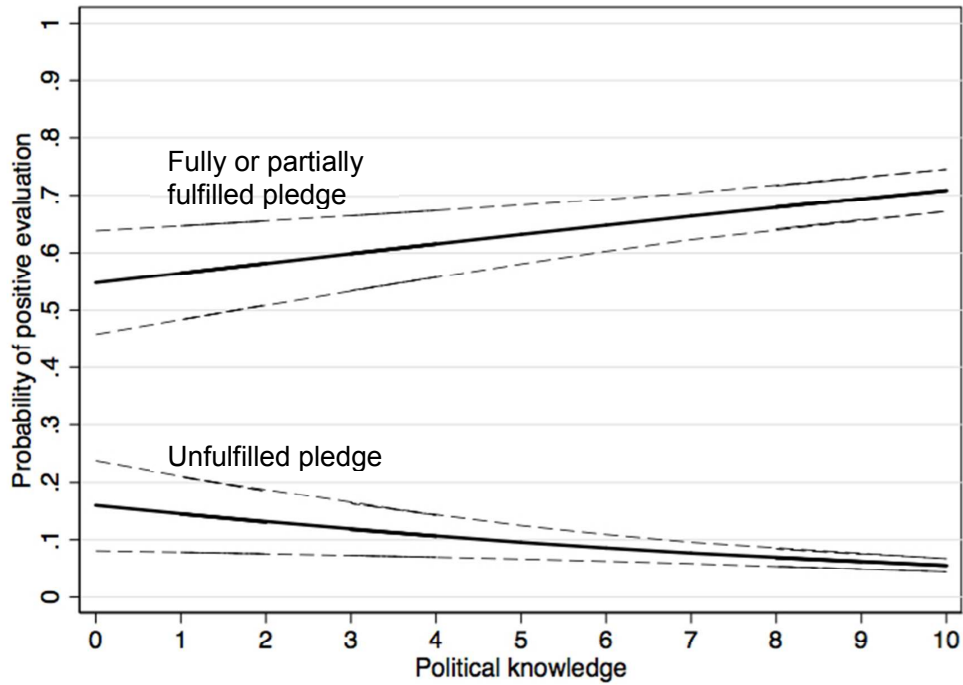


Figure 2. The effects of pledge fulfilment and knowledge on citizens' evaluations

Note: Unbroken lines are point estimates of the probability that a respondent evaluates a pledge as partially or fully fulfilled; broken lines are 95% confidence intervals.

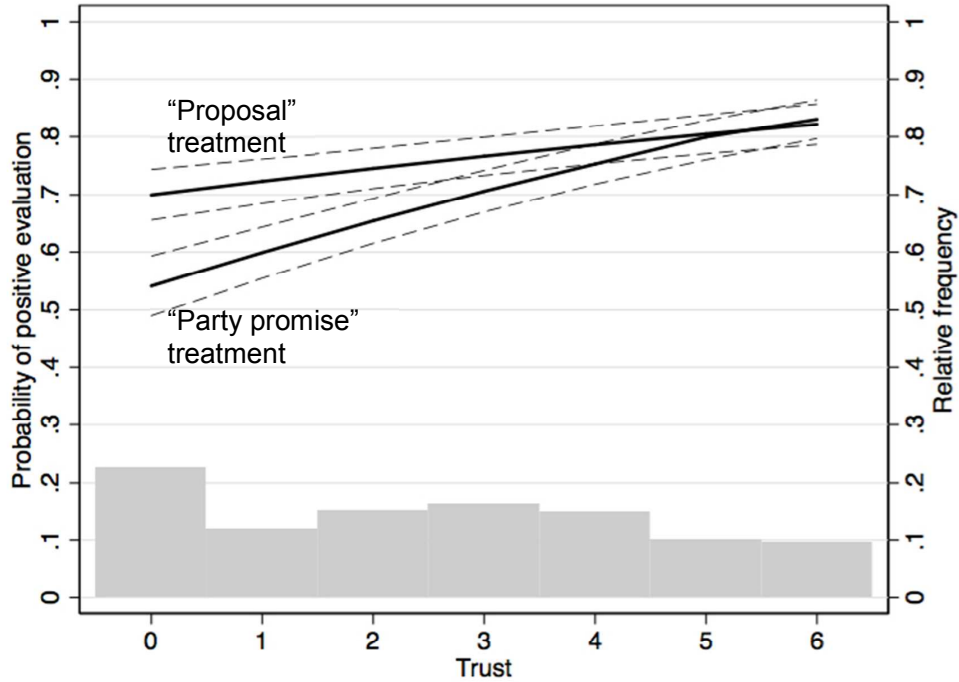


Figure 3. The effect of trust as a heuristic on citizens' evaluations

Note: Probability of a positive evaluation (i.e. evaluating a pledge as partially or fully fulfilled) of a pledge that was in fact at least partially fulfilled. Unbroken lines are point estimates; broken lines are 95% confidence intervals.

Table 1. Model of the causes of citizens' evaluations of promise keeping

	Exp(b)	b (s.e.)	p
<i>Trust defined as mistrust and healthy vigilance:</i>			
<i>Actual performance and political knowledge</i>			
Actual fulfilment (0=not; 1=partially/fully)	6.41	1.86 (.24)	.00
Knowledge	.89	-.12 (.03)	.00
Actual fulfilment × Knowledge	1.20	.19 (.03)	.00
<i>Trust defined as distrust and heuristic thinking:</i>			
<i>Question wording and self-reported trust in governing parties</i>			
Proposal treatment (0=party promise; 1=proposal treatment)	1.98	.68 (.10)	.00
Trust	1.27	.24 (.02)	.00
Proposal treatment × Trust	.88	-.12 (.03)	.00
<i>Control variables</i>			
Party identification (reference category=no party identification)			
Governing party identifiers	1.60	.47 (.08)	.00
Opposition party identifiers	1.00	.00 (.08)	.96
Occupation	.99	-.01 (.05)	.76
Age	1.00	.00 (.00)	.77
Gender (0=male; 1=female)	.83	-.18 (.07)	.01
Education (0=lower than college; 1=college or higher)	1.08	.07 (.06)	.24
Topics (reference category=tuition fees and ID cards)			
Immigration numbers	4.67	1.54 (.10)	.00
Health spending	.30	-1.19 (.08)	.00
Tax-free allowance	1.23	.21 (.08)	.01
Compulsory retirement ages	1.21	.19 (.08)	.02
Constant	.09	-2.38 (.32)	.00
Log pseudolikelihood	-9996.70		
Wald χ^2 (p)	2164.95		.00
n observations	16,448		
n respondents (clusters)	3,175		

Note: Logit model. Robust standard errors clustered by respondent. Dependent variable: whether respondents evaluate the pledge as “not” fulfilled (0) or “partially” or “fully” fulfilled (1). Adjusted for sample weights.