

An Indian-Australian research partnership

Project Title:

Representative democracy in India: The making, breaking and fulfilment of campaign promises

Project Number

HSS0763

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Research Clusters:

Research Themes:

Highlight which of the Academy's
CLUSTERS this project will address?

(Please nominate JUST **one**. For more information, see
www.iitbmonash.org)

Highlight which of the Academy's Theme(s) this
project will address?

(Feel free to nominate more than one. For more information, see
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1	Material Science/Engineering (including Nano, Metallurgy)	1	Advanced computational engineering, simulation and manufacture
2	Energy, Green Chem, Chemistry, Catalysis, Reaction Eng	2	Infrastructure Engineering
3	Math, CFD, Modelling, Manufacturing	3	Clean Energy
4	CSE, IT, Optimisation, Data, Sensors, Systems, Signal Processing, Control	4	Water
5	Earth Sciences and Civil Engineering (Geo, Water, Climate)	5	Nanotechnology
6	Bio, Stem Cells, Bio Chem, Pharma, Food	6	Biotechnology and Stem Cell Research
7	Semi-Conductors, Optics, Photonics, Networks, Telecomm, Power Eng		
8	HSS, Design, Management XXX		

The research problem

Campaign promises or “election pledges” loom large in the practice of representative democracy. Prominent examples from the last national Indian election in 2014 include the BJP’s promises to curb inflation by establishing special Courts to stop hoarding and black marketing and to set up a Price Stabilisation Fund. Likewise, significant policy changes in other countries have been preceded by promises, such as the UK Conservatives’ promise to hold a referendum on membership of the EU and US presidential candidates’ promises to expand health care in the form of Obamacare and subsequently to repeal it. Until now, comparative Political Science research has neglected this important aspect of democratic representation in non-Western democracies. This project will be the first time that researchers turn their attention to the fulfilment of election pledges in India, or indeed in any established non-Western democracy outside of Europe and North America.

This project aims to answer one of the central research questions for the theory and practice of Indian democracy: *Under what conditions do Indian parties keep or break the promises they make to voters during election campaigns?* In answering this question, we will add new evidence on Indian politics to an established and growing research program (the Comparative Party Pledges Project: CPPP). The proposed research also aims to introduce significant innovations to the field in terms of theory and methods, as described below.

In addition to its immediate relevance to the contemporary politics of India, this question has been of enduring concern to democratic theorists. “Promissory representation” holds that “during campaigns representatives made promises to constituents, which they then kept or failed to keep” (Mansbridge 2003: 515). This idea is also central to the mandate theory of democracy. Some scholars reject the idea of a mandate, while accepting that the fulfilment of parties’ campaign promises is an important part of the democratic process (Achen and Bartels 2016; Klingemann et al. 1994: 44-8).

Project aims

The overarching aim of this project is to develop knowledge of the fulfilment of campaign promises by Indian politicians, and to compare this with findings from previous and ongoing research on other countries. To achieve this, the project will pursue the following specific aims, which we describe in detail in the following pages:

Aim 1 (Evidence). Provide new evidence on the fulfilment of election pledges in India.

Aim 2 (Theory). Develop and test a micro-level explanation of pledge keeping and breaking that focuses on key characteristics of both pledges and relevant politicians.

Aim 3 (Methods). Improve existing methods for identifying and classifying election pledges.

Aim 1 (Evidence). Provide new evidence on the fulfilment of election pledges in India.

The CPPP has developed methods for gathering cross-national comparative evidence on the fulfilment of campaign promises. The 17 members of the CPPP from 13 countries have assembled a qualitative and quantitative dataset consisting of over 20,000 election pledges made by parties during 57 election campaigns in 12 countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. The

fulfilment of each of these pledges has been assessed through detailed qualitative research. The first major publications from this project are an article in the American Journal of Political Science (Thomson et al. 2017), which is the highest ranked journal in the discipline of Political Science, and a forthcoming edited volume with the University of Michigan Press (Naurin, Royed and Thomson eds. Forthcoming. 2018).

We will apply the CPPP approach to study pledges made in three recent Indian federal elections: 2009, 2014, and 2019. Indian parties and governments offer particularly insightful points of comparison for pledge fulfilment. Compared to the Western parties that have featured in previous research on pledge fulfilment, the main Indian parties are both broader coalitions and arguably have less clearly defined ideological positions in terms of their general orientation to the role of the state in governing society and the economy. Instead, Indian politics is animated by issues relating to caste, religion and region. Moreover, the federal nature of the Indian political system adds an important sub-national dimension to the making and breaking or fulfilment of campaign promises.

Based on an initial reading of the available manifestos and previous country studies, we expect to identify approximately 250 election pledges in each of the three federal election campaigns selected for study. We intend to identify all pledges made by the Bharatiya Jnata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) in each of the three elections. The main point of departure will be the official manifestos of the parties. As resources permit, we will expand the selection to include pledges from policy statements released by parties during the campaigns and in leaders' speeches, and could expand the study to include state-level elections in due course. We will compare the sets of pledges from the two main parties to assess the choice they offer to voters.

We will also examine how these campaign promises are portrayed in the media during the campaign, through analyses of newspapers and social media. We will identify pledges from media reports during the 2019 campaign, and then extend this to previous campaigns as resources permit. We will include reports from the main national newspapers to identify the frequency with which each pledge is featured. We will also include text from social media, in the form of the Twitter feed of each of the main parties and leaders. These media-based sources will enable us to identify the extent to which each of the parties' pledges received attention during the campaign, and the extent to which pledges emerged or developed during the course of the campaign.

Following the CPPP approach, we will assess the fulfilment of each of the pledges by referring to relevant legislation, executive orders, budgets and official statistics on outcomes. For example, a pledge to reduce the top rate of income tax would direct our attention to changes in the tax code, while a pledge to increase spending on defence would lead us to examine trends in public expenditure in this area.

Aim 2 (Theory). Develop and test a micro-level explanation of pledge keeping and breaking that focuses on key characteristics of both pledges and relevant politicians.

We will develop a theoretical explanation of promise keeping and breaking at the micro-level. This means that our theory will attend to the specific characteristics of the election pledges in question and the politicians involved in their fulfilment. This context-specific explanation is a significant departure from existing research, which focuses mainly on broad comparisons of aggregate rates of pledge fulfilment in different countries and settings (Thomson et al. 2017; see also Royed 1996; Thomson 2001; Naurin 2011). Due to the particular characteristics of Indian democracy mentioned above, this contextual explanation is particularly relevant to the Indian case.

Pledge salience will feature prominently in our explanation. The first step in developing our theory will be to conceptualise the various dimensions of pledge salience, which include the relevance of the pledge to achieving the party's goals of winning votes, entering government office, and realising certain broader policy objectives. Our conceptualisation and operationalisation of pledge salience will draw on previous research that has addressed the concept of salience, but we will need to move beyond previous research to develop appropriate concepts and measures that are specific enough for our needs.

Our theoretical explanation will also include characteristics of institutions and individual policymakers, who were in government after the elections at which the pledges were made. We break with the common assumption that parties are unitary actors, which is particularly necessary

in the Indian context; notwithstanding the pressures of party discipline, individual representatives differ in their abilities, incentives and opportunities to follow or deviate from the party line in terms of the policies they enact. We will include executive institutions, notably the allocation of ministerial portfolios and the centralization of the executive branch (Laver and Shepsle 1996; Bäck, Debus and Dumont 2011). We will also consider legislative institutions, such as the composition of parliamentary committees (Martin and Vanberg 2011). With respect to characteristics of individual policymakers, our theory will include policymakers' experience, involvement in and attitudes towards the pledges that were made. This part of the project draws on another international research project, the Selection and Deselection of Political Elites Research Network (SEDEPE; Dowding and Dumont eds. 2015), which has conceptualised and measured characteristics of political elites, including ministers and parliamentarians, including their ideological positions and relevant policy and political experience. We will use the concepts and measures from SEDEPE as a point of departure.

Aim 3 (Methods). Improve existing methods and develop new and effective methods for identifying and classifying pledges.

The CPPP has developed methods that facilitate the collection of comparable evidence on pledge making and fulfilment. These methods include common standards for coding election pledges and fulfilment, and for reporting reliability. Researchers read parties' manifestos or equivalent documents to identify statements that conform to the definition of election pledges by following a set of coding rules. Election pledges are "statements committing a party to an action or outcome that is testable", in the sense that researchers could gather evidence to ascertain whether or not the action or outcome was accomplished (Thomson et al. 2017: 532). The reliability of this procedure has been examined in individual country studies and comparatively by the CPPP. Reliability scores range from 74 to 94 percent with higher reliability generally found in when all coders have knowledge of the country concerned (ibid.: 533).

The first part of this project's methodological contribution will be to develop the CPPP coding procedure to incorporate a measure of the salience of specific pledges. A limitation of the current CPPP approach is that it implicitly assumes that all pledges are weighted equally. While existing country studies offer qualitative analyses of key pledges and occasionally quantitative analyses of subsets of prominent pledges, they have not yet developed a comparable measure of the salience of pledges. We propose to conceptualise, apply and compare a range of measures of pledge salience, as described above.

The second part of the proposed methodological contribution is the application of automated text analysis to identify election pledges (Grimmer and Stewart 2013). We aim to develop an algorithm that replicates the same judgements humans make when reading a manifesto or other text to extract commitments that are specific and testable enough to be considered election pledges. We will apply supervised machine learning based on labelled training documents. For the purposes of this project, these training documents are election manifestos and other texts that have previously been coded for election pledges by researchers following CPPP procedures. To test the machine-based procedure, once trained, the machine will identify pledges in previously uncoded texts. The lists of statements identified as pledges by the machine-based procedure will then be compared with those identified by human coding of the same documents. This automated procedure would enable a much larger amount of text to be coded systematically for election pledges with known levels of reliability. The success of the larger project does not depend on the success of this particular methodological innovation, but it would be particularly useful as the research is expanded to include pledges found in a large volume of text from traditional and social media during campaigns.

Expected outcomes

The expected outcomes are:

- New evidence and knowledge regarding a key stage of the democratic process in India.
- The enhancement of awareness and knowledge of Indian politics in networks of researchers involved in international comparative Political Science.
- Three or more international peer-reviewed publications on campaign promises in Indian

politics. The first will focus on the choice of lack thereof that Indian parties offer voters in terms of their campaign promises. The second will focus on pledge fulfilment in India compared to other countries. The third will focus on methodological innovation in identifying and classifying election pledges.

- A co-authored book chapter in a volume with a major university press. The CPPP is currently developing plans for a second volume that will include a chapter that compares pledge making and fulfilment in distinct political cultures.
- A Ph.D. thesis.

How will the project address the Goals of the above Themes?

The project is located in the Humanities and Social Sciences research cluster. Specifically, it is located in the area of comparative Political Science research. It does not relate directly to the themes mentioned above. It however deepens the understanding of democratisation process in India.

Capabilities and Degrees Required

List the ideal set of capabilities that a student should have for this project. Feel free to be as specific or as general as you like. These capabilities will be input into the online application form and students who opt for this project will be required to show that they can demonstrate these capabilities.

Students should ideally have an undergraduate and masters degree in a relevant Social Science discipline. A Political Science training, knowledge of Indian politics, and an affinity with quantitative and qualitative methods would also be advantageous. In terms of quantitative methods, the ideal candidate would have a familiarity with automated content analysis and econometric models with discrete dependent variables (since promises are usually coded as not fulfilled, partially fulfilled or fully fulfilled). In terms of qualitative methods, the ideal candidate will have experience of qualitative content analysis (human coding of election manifestos), intercoder reliability, and archival research (for assessing the evidence in relation to pledge fulfilment).

Potential Collaborators

Please visit the IITB website www.iitb.ac.in OR Monash Website www.monash.edu to highlight some potential collaborators that would be best suited for the area of research you are intending to float.

Prof. Robert Thomson, who initiated this project, is one of the co-founders and leaders of the Comparative Party Pledges Approach. Collaborators at Monash include colleagues with an interest in Indian society, politics, and policymaking. Some of these colleagues are affiliated with the Monash Asia Institute, such as Dr. Mridula Chakraborty, Associate Professor Dharma Arunachalam and Dr. Samanthi Gunawardana.

Dr. Suryakant Waghmore, Dr. Arun Iyer and Dr. Rowena Robinson are also involved as collaborators. Dr. Suryakant Waghmore is a political anthropologist and political commentator. His research has focussed on caste, party politics, civility and democracy in India. Dr. Arun Iyer is a Political Philosopher and Prof. Rowena Robinson researches on Anthropology of corruption, constitutional law, sociology of higher education, sociology of religion and kinship, conversion, Christianity in India.

Select up to **(4)** keywords from the Academy's approved keyword list (**available at www.iitbmonash.org**) relating to this project to make it easier for the students to apply.

Democracy, Politics, Election Pledges and Voting,