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# Do Spanish politicians keep their promises?

**Joaquín Artés**
Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain

**Abstract**
In this article we analyse the fulfilment of economic pledges contained in the electoral manifestoes of the two main Spanish parties, PP and PSOE during the four electoral cycles that took place between 1989 and 2004. Consistent with previous research on programme fulfilment, we find that most promises are fulfilled by the party in government. In addition we find much lower fulfilment rates for the parties in opposition. Surprisingly, we find no significant differences in fulfilment when the governing party enjoys absolute majority compared to minority governments. This is unexpected because coalition and minority governments constrain the capacity of the winning parties compared to absolute majority governments.

**Keywords**
electoral promises, Spain, minority governments

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## Introduction

In this article we analyse the fulfilment of economic pledges contained in the electoral manifestos of the two main Spanish parties, PP and PSOE during the four electoral cycles that took place between 1989 and 2004. We provide two main contributions. On the one hand, we test the mandate model for a country other than the US or Britain, which has scarcely been done to date. On the other hand, we provide evidence on

**Corresponding author:**
Departamento de Economía Aplicada IV, Facultad de Derecho, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Ciudad Universitaria S/N, Madrid, 28003, Spain.
Email: jartes@der.ucm.es

fulfilment rates for government structures other than absolute majorities or coalition governments, which is also rare in pledge research.

Consistent with previous research on programme fulfilment, we find that most promises are fulfilled by the party in government. In addition we find much lower fulfilment rates for the parties in opposition. Surprisingly, and contrary to Mansergh (2004) but in agreement with Naurin (2009), we find no significant differences in fulfilment when the governing party enjoys absolute majority compared to minority governments. This is unexpected because coalition and minority governments constrain the capacity of the winning parties compared to absolute majority governments. While differences in the economic situation, or ideological proximity of the governing parties with their parliamentary partners might explain high fulfilment during minority governments, we also explore to what extent missing data and methodological issues are behind this result.

The rest of the article is organized as follows. In the next section we discuss previous literature on pledge fulfilment. In Section 3 we present the methods and data. In Section 4 we discuss the main results. Finally the last section concludes our findings.

## Background

Previous research on electoral pledges finds that politicians fulfil most of their electoral promises when they are in power. Pomper and Lederman (1982) find that from 1944–1976, 79 percent of the pledges proposed by the winning party in the US were fulfilled. Rallings (1987) concludes that 64 of the British pledges from 1945 to 1979 were implemented. Royed (1996) studied British and US electoral pledges during the 1980s. She finds that the British Conservative party implemented more than eighty percent of its electoral pledges while in government. She also studied British parties in opposition and finds that they obtain much lower fulfilment rates. Only 15 and 32 percent of the pledges proposed by the Labour party in Britain in 1979 and 1983, respectively, were fulfilled. Royed (1996) also studied the US case during the 1980 and 1984 electoral cycles and found that even though the Democrats had a majority of seats in at least one of the houses during these years, the Reagan administration was able to act upon sixty percent of its electoral pledges. During those years the Democrats were able to fulfil 48 and 50 percent of their pledges.

Pledge research for countries other than the US or Britain were scarce until recently but also reach similar conclusions. Rallings (1987) analysed Canadian pledges from 1949 to 1979. He found that 71.5 percent of the pledges were acted upon. Kalogeropoulou (1989) studied the Greek case and finds that 70 percent of the PASOK promises were implemented in the legislature following the 1981 election.

None of the studies mentioned above study fulfilment in multiparty coalition governments. Thomson (2001) complemented the previous findings by studying the case of coalition governments in The Netherlands. He found that fulfilment, although significant, is much lower for coalitions than for single-party majority governments. In particular he found that the two parties forming the governing coalition in 1989 implemented 45 and 60 percent of their pledges while the parties in opposition fulfilled 44 and 29 percent of their proposals. For the 1994 election, he found that the three parties forming the governing coalition acted upon 63, 69 and 73 percent of their pledges,

while the opposition only implemented 52 percent of its pledges. Costello and Thomson (2008) reach similar conclusions for the Irish elections between 1977 and 2002.

Fulfilment in the case of minority governments was studied in Mansergh (2004) for Irish elections from 1977 to 2002, Naurin (2009) for the Swedish elections of 1994 and 1998, and in Artés (2004, 2008) and Artés and Bustos (2008) for the case of Spain from 1989 to 2004. Mansergh (2004) found that minority governments in Ireland were only able to implement 54 percent of their pledges while parties in opposition fulfilled 50 percent of their promises during the same years. Naurin (2009), on the other hand, found that 89 percent of the Social Democrats pledges of 1994 and 1998 were at least partially fulfilled. However, she does not include in her study, fulfilment of the same party while in opposition nor of the opposition parties during the 1994 and 1998 cycles. Artés and Bustos (2008) analyse programme fulfilment of parties that help to sustain the governing party in office. They find that CiU, the parliamentary partner of the parties that formed the minority governments of 1993 and 1996, was able to obtain fulfilment rates 20 percentage points greater than when it was in opposition. However, they do not study fulfilment rates of governing parties themselves but only of their parliamentary partners.

In this article we complement previous research on pledge fulfilment by looking specifically into pledge fulfilment of the governing parties during the minority governments that took place in Spain from 1989 –2004. In addition we also analyse fulfilment rates of the same parties while they are in opposition and when they form absolute majority governments, which allows us to compare program fulfilment under a variety of government structures. We are able to do so due to the fact that during the four elections that took place in Spain between 1989 and 2000, two absolute majority governments (a leftwing one in 1989 and a rightwing one in 2000) and two minority governments (leftwing in 1993 and rightwing in 1996) were formed. This variety provides an interesting set up to study pledge fulfilment under a wide range of government structures because it allows us to hold constant many factors related to the party system or the electoral rules.

## *Expectations regarding program fulfilment*

Our *a priori* expectations regarding the ability of political parties to fulfil their pledges under different institutional settings is derived from the theoretical propositions suggested by the mandate model and from previous empirical research on pledge fulfilment. The mandate model as stated by Downs (1957) suggests that politicians exhibit office-seeking motivations while voters are policy-seeking individuals. The goal of politicians is to win the election to enjoy the benefits of holding government offices. Voters will choose the candidate that offers policy proposals closer to the voter's preferred policies. If once elected, the candidate deviates from the policy programme advertised during the campaign, voters will punish the candidate and will elect a new candidate that promises policies closer to their preferences and that is believed to be committed to implementing them. The main implication of this model for the purposes of pledge fulfilment is straightforward: we would expect to see that most campaign pledges are

fulfilled by the parties in office. Similarly, due to the fact that opposition parties have little say on the implementation of policies, we would expect their programs to achieve much lower fulfilment rates.

Another implication of this model is that the ability of the government to fulfil its electoral pledges depends on the institutional setting. In multiparty systems, if the winning party is not able to form a single party majority government, it will have to negotiate the formation of the coalition or the single party minority government with other parties. This negotiation process is likely to restrict the capacity of the winning party to implement its policies because some of them are likely to be in conflict with the policies of the coalition or of the parliamentary partners. For this reason we would expect to see, as found in Thomson (2001), lower fulfilment rates of the parties that form a government coalition compared to fulfilment rates of single party majority governments.

According to this reasoning, parties that form single party minority governments would also be less likely to fulfil their promises compared to parties that form majority governments. Moreover, due to the fact that minority governments have to negotiate each policy proposal with their parliamentary partners, we would expect the parliamentary partners of minority governments to fulfil more of their promises, as obtained by Artés and Bustos (2008). Finally, given that a minority government can potentially negotiate the implementation of policy proposals with different parliamentary partners, we would expect to see that opposition parties, even if they are not a stable parliamentary partner of the governing party, fulfil more of their promises under minority governments. This would be the result of the governing party having to implement some of the policy proposals of the opposition parties in order to obtain approval to some of its own proposals.

This article focuses mainly on the predictions of the mandate model related to pledge fulfilment under minority governments although along the way we are also able to estimate some of the more general expectations. In particular, and summarizing the above discussion, the article focuses on the following three testable hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. Government parties fulfil more pledges than opposition parties.
Hypothesis 2: Majority government parties fulfil more pledges than minority government parties.
Hypothesis 3: Opposition parties under minority governments fulfil more pledges than opposition parties under majority governments.

## Spanish elections from 1989–2004

From 1989 until 2004 there have been four electoral cycles in Spain. The two main parties in Spain are the leftwing Socialist Party (PSOE) and the rightwing Popular Party (PP). In Table 1 we show the electoral results in Spanish general elections during these years. The Socialist Party won the elections in 1989 and 1993, obtaining 175 and 159 seats respectively, out of 350 seats. The Popular Party won in 1996 and 2000 with 156 and 183 seats. Other important actors of Spanish Politics are IU, CiU, and PNV. IU is situated to the left of the Socialist Party. CiU is a Catalan nationalist party and PNV

**Table 1.** Electoral results: Seats obtained by each party

| | 1989 | 1993 | 1996 | 2000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| PSOE | 175 | 159 | 141 | 125 |
| PP | 107 | 141 | 156 | 183 |
| CiU | 18 | 17 | 16 | 15 |
| IU | 17 | 18 | 21 | 8 |
| PNV | 5 | 5 | 5 | 7 |
| Other | 28 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| TOTAL | 350 | 350 | 350 | 350 |

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs

is a Basque nationalist party. These three parties are crucial actors when the winner of the election does not obtain an absolute majority of seats, as in 1993 and 1996.

The first period analysed in this article covers 1989–1993. During this time, the main leftwing party, the Socialist Party, obtained an absolute majority of the seats in the Parliament (175 out of 350 seats) for the third time in a row. The good results for PSOE in the 1989 election followed a period of strong economic growth (more than four percent on average during the four years preceding the 1989 elections) However during the 1989–1993 term the economic situation greatly deteriorated and Spain hit a recession in 1992. High unemployment rates of close to 20 percent and negative growth during these years were responsible for the decline of support to PSOE in the 1993 elections, which ended in the formation of the 1993 PSOE's minority government.

The electoral results of 1993 forced PSOE to negotiate with other parties. IU was *a priori* the most likely candidate to form a coalition with PSOE or to vote for PSOE to form a minority government. However, strong confrontation between IU and PSOE leaders during the campaign and the opposition of IU to the European Treaty made it impossible for both parties to reach an agreement. PSOE however was able to form a minority government with the support of CiU, PNV and another small regionalist party located in the Canary Islands (Coalicion Canaria). Strictly speaking, only CiU's support was needed to form the minority government. A coalition could have been formed instead but CiU considered that entering a coalition government would be detrimental for them in the regional elections as their nationalist electorate was opposed to too much implication in Spanish government. The minority government was formed and it was stable until the end of the legislature in 1996. During this cycle the economic situation recovered but corruption scandals among PSOE leaders deteriorated the image of PSOE, and they lost the election in 1996.

The Popular Party won the election in 1996 but did not obtain enough support to form an absolute majority government. A minority government was formed with the parliamentary support of CiU. CiU considered again that supporting the government without entering a coalition government would be optimal to obtain benefits in terms of policies without incurring the costs derived from sharing power at the national level. Contrary to the previous cycle though, a written agreement was signed between PP and CiU before CiU agreed to support the minority government. Proximity between the economic policies of both parties facilitated the agreement. The alliance during this term was very

stable. This period is characterized by a strong recovery of the Spanish economy and by internal divisions inside the Socialist party. These two factors explain the electoral success of PP in the 2000 election, after which an absolute majority government was formed.

The 2000–2004 electoral cycle is characterized by strong economic growth, decrease of unemployment, and, in general, good economic results. However the Iraq war and the strong support of the Popular Party to US military intervention made PP lose its electoral advantage. In 2004, the Socialist Party won the election, forming a new minority government.

## Methods

From the methodological point of view this article offers no novelty as it analyses parties manifestos using the same methodology followed by Artés (2004, 2008) and Artés and Bustos (2007), which follow the techniques described in Royed (1996) and Thomson (2001).The interested reader will find a very detailed description of the methods in those articles. Here we provide just a brief overview of the pledge coding techniques so that results presented later can be interpreted correctly.

We analysed a total of eight electoral manifestoes corresponding to the two main Spanish parties in each of the four electoral cycles mentioned above. Spanish electoral programs are lengthy and very detailed, with close to 300 pages in some cases. For this reason we restrict the analysis to the economic parts of the manifestos. We also adopt this decision to allow our results to be comparable with Artés and Bustos (2008) who study the electoral pledges of CiU, the party that helped PSOE and PP to stay in government after the 1993 and 1996 elections.

In order to determine what parts of the program are considered 'economic content' we use the following criterion. We only analyse the parts of the manifesto that refer to any of the following subject categories: economic policy in general, fiscal policy, commerce, transportation, labour market, agriculture, tourism, energy, industry, financial markets, telecommunications and housing. This is a more restrictive criterion than the one usually adopted in previous papers which also analyse other parts of the program related to socio-economic activity such as health and education policy e.g. Costello and Thomson (2009). We decided to limit the analysis to this subset of policies due to the greater length of Spanish manifestoes and the labor intensive nature of the methodology. Overall the subset of policies choosen for the analysis represent approximately half of the manifesto.[1]

Once the relevant parts of each manifesto were identified, we selected specific pledges. We define 'pledge' following Royed (1996:79): 'the commitment to carry out some action or produce some outcome, where an objective estimation can be made as to whether or not the action was indeed taken or the outcome produced'. That is, a pledge is a statement contained in the manifesto that is specific enough to allow for an objective evaluation of whether it was fulfilled or not. Vague statements such as 'it is important to recover investors confidence through a firm economic policy' were not considered as pledges. On the other hand, the promise 'to increase GDP in more than 3 percent during the first year' is clearly verifiable and specific enough and thus was included in the

database. Naurin (2009) and Artés and Bustos (2008) use the same definition. Other pledge scholars use slightly different definitions, see Thomson (2001), Mansergh (2004), or Costello and Thomson (2009).[2]

A total of 1237 economic pledges satisfy the above definition, 87 promises correspond to PSOE 1989's manifesto, 126 to PSOE's 1993, 224 to PSOE's 1996, and 146 to PSOE's 2000. For the Popular Party the number of pledges are 133 in 1989, 168 in 1993, 192 in 1996 and 161 in 2000.

We code each pledge according to its subject area, the type of pledge and whether it was fulfilled or not. We follow Artés and Bustos (2008) and classify each pledge in the most specific subject that would fit the promise. Regarding the type of pledge variable, we classify promises according to whether their fulfillment would imply an increase of the public sector (more taxes or more public spending), a decrease, a different legislative change with no clear implications for public finances, and finally another category called 'other' that includes promises to maintain the status quo. Regarding fulfillment, we distinguish between fulfilled, partially fulfilled and non fulfilled promises. The partially fulfilled category includes mainly pledges in which some action was taken in the direction suggested by the pledge but the full result was not attained.[3]

We evaluated the degree of fulfilment using many different sources such as the legislative record of the Government and the Parliament, the internet, each parties' annual reports when available, specialized books and journals, direct phone calls to different policy Departments and field experts, and several other sources. In those cases in which the information to verify fulfilment was provided by a third party (an expert or the person responsible for a policy Department), we asked for administrative or legislative documents that would confirm the information provided and we made our own assessment of fulfilment based on those documents.

Some pledges are particularly difficult to code. For example, in some pledges the action to be taken is clear but the outcome is not. In other promises a certain legal action is promised in order to attain a result (e.g. to pass a new law) but the result was attained after a different action was taken (change in several lower ranked legal norms). To determine fulfilment in those cases we follow the same criteria described in detail in Artés and Bustos (2008: 312). We were able to verify fulfilment in 88 percent of the pledges, with verification ranging between 83.92 percent for the PP's manifesto of 1993 and 98.75 for PP's 2000 manifesto.

## Results

### *Subject categories and type of pledge*

We start the description of the results with an overview of each manifesto's general goals. In Table 2 we show the results for PSOE while in Table 3 we show the results of PP. Manifestos differ widely depending on the ideology of the party. The categories that show the biggest differences between both parties are labor market and fiscal policy. The leftwing Socialist Party heavily emphasizes pledges related to labor market reforms with 29.89 percent of the economic pledges of the 1989 program related to this issue and 20.63, 21.43, and 24.66 percent in the 1993, 1996 and 2000 ones. Only 6.72 percent of

**Table 2.** Election pledges by economic field. PSOE.

| | PSOE | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1989 | | 1993 | | 1996 | | 2000 | |
| | Num. | % | Num. | % | Num. | % | Num. | % |
| Agriculture | 12 | 13.79 | 34 | 26.98 | 32 | 14.29 | 15 | 10.27 |
| Commerce | 5 | 5.75 | 10 | 7.94 | 6 | 2.68 | 2 | 1.37 |
| Energy | 3 | 3.45 | 2 | 1.59 | 15 | 6.7 | 2 | 1.37 |
| Industry | 0 | 0.00 | 3 | 2.38 | 14 | 6.25 | 2 | 1.37 |
| Labor Market | 26 | 29.89 | 26 | 20.63 | 48 | 21.43 | 36 | 24.66 |
| Economic Policy | 6 | 6.90 | 3 | 2.38 | 7 | 3.13 | 7 | 4.79 |
| Fiscal Policy | 5 | 5.75 | 10 | 7.94 | 22 | 9.82 | 19 | 13.01 |
| Transportation | 13 | 14.94 | 19 | 15.08 | 25 | 11.16 | 20 | 13.70 |
| Telecomm. | 2 | 2.30 | 7 | 5.56 | 12 | 5.36 | 6 | 4.11 |
| Financial System | 0 | 0.00 | 0 | 0.00 | 1 | 0.45 | 20 | 13.70 |
| Tourism | 0 | 0.00 | 5 | 3.97 | 11 | 4.91 | 2 | 1.37 |
| Housing | 15 | 17.24 | 7 | 5.56 | 22 | 9.82 | 11 | 7.53 |
| Other | 0 | 0.00 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 4.02 | 4 | 2.74 |
| TOTAL | 87 | 100 | 126 | 100 | 224 | 100 | 146 | 100 |

Note: Data for 1989 and 2000 have been compiled by authors. Data for 1993 and 1996 are taken from Artés and Bustos (2008)

**Table 3.** Election pledges by economic field. PP

| | PP | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1989 | | 1993 | | 1996 | | 2000 | |
| | Num. | % | Num. | % | Num. | % | Num. | % |
| Agriculture | 16 | 12.03 | 30 | 17.86 | 34 | 17.71 | 16 | 9.94 |
| Commerce | 2 | 1.50 | 3 | 1.79 | 2 | 1.04 | 4 | 2.48 |
| Energy | 9 | 6.77 | 7 | 4.17 | 6 | 3.13 | 4 | 2.48 |
| Industry | 6 | 4.51 | 4 | 2.38 | 1 | 0.52 | 10 | 6.21 |
| Labor Market | 3 | 2.26 | 19 | 11.31 | 10 | 5.21 | 12 | 7.45 |
| Economic Policy | 15 | 11.28 | 16 | 9.52 | 23 | 11.98 | 38 | 23.60 |
| Fiscal Policy | 24 | 18.05 | 33 | 19.64 | 57 | 29.69 | 31 | 19.25 |
| Transportation | 31 | 23.31 | 25 | 14.88 | 23 | 11.98 | 22 | 13.66 |
| Telecomm. | 3 | 2.26 | 4 | 2.38 | 8 | 4.17 | 15 | 9.32 |
| Financial System | | 0.00 | 2 | 1.19 | 6 | 3.13 | 5 | 3.11 |
| Tourism | 2 | 1.50 | 12 | 7.14 | 12 | 6.25 | 2 | 1.24 |
| Housing | 22 | 16.54 | 10 | 5.95 | 7 | 3.65 | 2 | 1.24 |
| Other | | 0.00 | 3 | 1.79 | 3 | 1.56 | | 0.00 |
| TOTAL | 133 | 100.00 | 168 | 100 | 192 | 100 | 161 | 100 |

Source: Data for years 1989 and 2000 have been compiled by authors. Data for years 1993 and 1993 are taken from Artés and Bustos (2008)

**Table 4.** Election pledges by type of pledge. PSOE

| | PSOE | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1989 | | 1993 | | 1996 | | 2000 | |
| | Num. | % | Num. | % | Num. | % | Num. | % |
| More Public Sector | 31 | 35.63 | 29 | 23.02 | 45 | 20.09 | 58 | 39.73 |
| Less Public Sector | 2 | 2.30 | 7 | 5.56 | 15 | 6.70 | 5 | 3.42 |
| Legislation | 53 | 60.92 | 83 | 65.87 | 154 | 68.75 | 78 | 53.42 |
| Other | 1 | 1.15 | 7 | 5.56 | 10 | 4.46 | 5 | 3.42 |
| TOTAL | 87 | 100 | 126 | 100 | 224 | 100 | 146 | 100 |

**Table 5.** Election pledges by instrument. PP

| | PP | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1989 | | 1993 | | 1996 | | 2000 | |
| | Num. | % | Num. | % | Num. | % | Num. | % |
| More Public Sector | 11 | 8.27 | 9 | 5.36 | 9 | 4.69 | 28 | 17.39 |
| Less Public Sector | 12 | 9.02 | 29 | 17.26 | 34 | 17.71 | 19 | 11.80 |
| Legislation | 91 | 68.42 | 106 | 63.10 | 129 | 67.19 | 109 | 67.70 |
| Other | 19 | 14.29 | 24 | 14.29 | 20 | 10.42 | 5 | 3.11 |
| TOTAL | 133 | 100 | 168 | 100 | 192 | 100 | 161 | 100 |

the total number of economic pledges of the Popular Party are related to labor market throughout the 1989-2000 period. However, the Popular Party emphasizes measures related to fiscal and general economic policy. More than 30 percent of the economic pledges contained in PP's manifestos refer to these two categories while for PSOE the percentage is below 15 percent.

Tables 4 and 5 show that the manifestos of both parties emphasize different types of pledges. The socialist party (Table 4) includes more than 30 percent of promises that require an increase of public spending while less than 10 percent of the PP manifestos (Table 5) imply an increase of the public sector. On average the PP includes around 15 percent of economic pledges whose fulfilment would require a tax or an expenditure decrease (less public sector) while the percentage is less than 5 percent in PSOEs manifestoes. Tables 4 and 5 are also consistent with the idea that independently of the party, manifestos that were written after periods of strong economic growth (1989 and 2000) include a higher percentage of pledges whose fulfilment implies an increase of the public sector while the opposite is true in periods of weaker economic performance during the preceding term (1993 and 1996).

**Table 6.** Fulfilment. PSOE

| | 1989 | | 1993 | | 1996 | | 2000 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % |
| Yes or Partially | 56 | 73.68 | 88 | 79.65 | 108 | 55.102 | 43 | 33.86 |
| No | 20 | 26.32 | 25 | 20.35 | 88 | 44.898 | 84 | 66.14 |
| Total | 76 | 100 | 113 | 100 | 196 | 100 | 127 | 100.00 |

**Table 7.** Fulfilment. PP

| | 1989 | | 1993 | | 1996 | | 2000 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % |
| Yes or Partially | 42 | 35.59 | 67 | 47.52 | 111 | 68.52 | 112 | 70.44 |
| No | 76 | 64.41 | 74 | 52.48 | 51 | 31.48 | 47 | 29.56 |
| Total | 118 | 100 | 141 | 100 | 162 | 100 | 159 | 100 |

The results in Tables 2 to 5 show that pledges are a good indicator of ideological differences between parties. Manifestos of Spanish parties seem very consistent across the years. Different parties show different political priorities and emphasize different types of pledges. In addition, priorities and types of pledges seem to be relatively stable over the years. This is an interesting result because rational choice theory e.g. Downs (1957), Hotelling (1929) predicts that parties' manifestos in bipartisan systems should converge to the ideology of the median voter. Spain has sometimes been categorized as an imperfect bipartisan system due to the fact that only PP or PSOE are in a position to obtain enough support to form a government. However manifestos of these two parties do not converge, which shows that the presence of other parties, especially IU whose ideology is to the left of PSOE, forces the PSOE to differentiate itself from the PP. It would be interesting for future studies to compare these two variables across different countries and different party systems to see if the differences can be attributed to the number of parties and the competition between them.

## *Fulfilment*

In Tables 6 and 7 we show fulfilment rates for PSOE and PP in each of the years. During the 1989 electoral cycle the PSOE enjoyed an absolute majority of seats and was able to act upon 73.68 percent of its economic electoral pledges. In 1993, PSOE formed a minority government that was sustained with the help the Catalan nationalist party CiU. During this term the PSOE was able to fulfil as much as 79.65 percent of its economic electoral pledges. In 1996 the PSOE was in opposition while the PP formed a minority government. During this term the PSOE was only able to act upon 55.1 percent of the pledges. Finally in 2000 the PSOE was again in opposition but this time PP formed an absolute majority government. The absolute majority government of the PP was detrimental for the PSOE's pledge fulfilment rates, that decreased to only 33.86 percent.

**Table 8.** Fulfilment by government structure

| | Absolute mayority | Minority government |
|---|---|---|
| Fulfilment of governing parties | 71.50% | 72.36% |
| Fulfilment of parties in opposition | 34.7 | 52% |

For the Popular Party the results are very similar. During the legislature of 1989 the PP was in opposition and was able to fulfil 35.59 percent of the pledges. From 1993–1996, during the minority government of PSOE, PP fulfilled 47.52 percent of its pledges. In 1996 the PP won the elections and formed a minority government with the parliamentary help of CiU. During this term PP acted upon 68.52 percent of its pledges. Finally during the period between 2000– 2004, in which PP enjoyed an absolute majority government, 74.5 percent of its pledges were fulfilled.

The results presented in Tables 6 and 7 show several stylized facts. First, the results confirm the mandate model for the Spanish case. Fulfilment rates of the governing parties in Spain are greater than 70 percent and similar to fulfilment rates of the governing parties in other countries. The fact that more than 70 percent of the electoral pledges of the governing parties in Spain are fulfilled shows that Spanish electoral programs seem to be a useful guide to understand and predict government actions, at least in the area of economic policy, which is the one analysed in this article.

Second, fulfilment rates of parties in opposition are significantly lower compared to fulfilment of governing parties. Fulfilment rates of parties in opposition differ however depending on the type of government. During the periods of minority governments fulfilment rates of parties in opposition are 15 to 20 percentage points higher than when the governing party enjoys absolute majority (see Table 8). This result is consistent with hypothesis 3.

Third, fulfilment rates during the minority governments of PSOE in 1993 and PP in 1996 are similar to fulfilment rates obtained in Spain during the absolute majority governments of PSOE and PP in 1989 and 2000 (see Table 8). Fulfilment rates of PSOE and PP during the minority government of 1993 and 1996 are also similar to the ones obtained by other researchers for other countries with no minority governments. Pomper and Lederman (1980), Royed (1996), Rallings (1987), or Kalogeropoulou (1989), show that the winning parties in the US, UK, Canada or Greece, obtained fulfilment rates of more than 70 percent. On the other hand, Thomson (2001) shows that coalition governments in The Netherlands obtained lower fulfilment rates. Minority governments constrain government actions, as coalitions do, because the governing parties have to negotiate the political agenda with their parliamentary partners. For this reason, lower fulfilment rates would be expected during minority governments compared to absolute majority periods, as stated in Hypothesis 2 above.

A possible explanation for these results is that PP and PSOE needed only the votes of a small and regionally concentrated party (CiU) to stay in government. Artés and Bustos (2008) show that during the minority governments of PP and PSOE, CiU was able to fulfil close to 60 percent of its electoral program. During the absolute majority governments of 1989 and 2000, CiU was in opposition and was able to implement only around 40

percent of its pledges. Therefore our results, together with the results of Artés and Bustos (2008), show that PP and PSOE exchanged overall support for their manifestoes for support to many CiU's pledges that would otherwise not be fulfilled. In many cases obtaining parliamentary support from other parties implies giving up part of one's own program. In the case of Spain the fact that CiU is regionally concentrated in Catalonia and much of its short run political agenda is related to cultural issues (eg increasing the use of the Catalan language) or to increasing Catalonia's political autonomy, made easy for PP and PSOE to attend many CiU requests without giving up much of their own economic program. In addition, the fact that CiU's economic program is considered to be somewhat in the middle between PP and PSOE facilitated the high fulfilment rates that we observe. Future work on the non-economic parts of the manifestos would be interesting to see if fulfilment rates of PSOE and PP are as high in areas as their programs and that of CiU differ sharply.

## *Robustness checks and caveats*

The fulfilment results presented in the previous section should be interpreted with caution. The coding of the manifestoes and the evaluation of the fulfilment of electoral pledges is innately subjective. We conducted several reliability checks to test to what extent the method is robust to different researchers' subjective evaluation of the pledges. To this end, several parts of the PPs 2000 manifesto were given to two research assistants independently. In our original coding the parts of the manifesto given to the assistants included exactly 50 pledges. The assistants were asked to select pledges using the definition provided by Royed (1996), which is the same one we used. They were also asked to code the pledges according to their subject area and the type of promise. Then, their coding was compared with our own original coding. The most problematic part of the reliability results was the selection of pledges. Only 81 percent of the pledges classified by us as such (37 pledges out of 50 for one coder and 44 out of 50 for the second coder) were selected by the research assistants as pledges. A detailed discussion of the coding with the assistants made it clear that the main difference was in the treatment of the so called 'soft promises' (those in which the language of the pledge is a soft promise like 'we want to', 'we will try to'). While our original categorization included those pledges, both assistants excluded some of them. However, out of the pledges selected both by the assistants and in our original coding, agreement on the coding according to subject category and type of pledge was quite high (more than 90 percent for both researchers).

While the rate of agreement in the number of pledges that satisfy Royed's definition is relatively low, fulfilment results are very similar in both the original sample of promises coded and the 81 percent of promises selected by the assistants within the same parts of the manifesto. In particular, fulfilment rate of the original sub-sample of promises was 78 percent (39 out of 50) while for the sub-sample selected by the research assistants it was 81 percent (31 out of 37 pledges for one researcher and 36 out of 44 for the other). This result is consistent with the differences in the selection of pledges not being correlated with the probability of the pledge being fulfilled or not, which is all we need for the particular sample of pledges analysed to lead to unbiased fulfilment results.

**Table 9.** Bounding excercise. Pesimistic estimate of Fulfilment by Government Structure

| | Absolute Mayority | Minority Government |
|---|---|---|
| Fulfilment of Governing Parties | 67.75% | 62.57% |
| Fulfilment of Parties in Opposition | 30.46% | 45% |

**Table 10.** Bounding excercise. Optimistic estimate of Fulfilment by Government Structure

| | Absolute Mayority | Minority Government |
|---|---|---|
| Fulfilment of Governing Parties | 72.98% | 76.10% |
| Fulfilment of Parties in Opposition | 42.65% | 59% |

Another problematic part concerning the reliability of the fulfilment results is that the number of pledges for which no information was found is different across different years, ranging from 15 percent to 2 percent depending on the manifesto.[4]This is troublesome because it is likely that the missing observations (pledges for which fulfilment could not be assessed) are correlated with the probability of fulfilment. In particular, it is reasonable to expect that the bulk of the missing values correspond to non fulfilled promises, as it is easier to find specific information on actions or results that took place than on actions or results that never happened. To evaluate to what extent the interpretation of the fulfilment results depends on the degree of non assessed promises, we performed a simple bounding exercise. First we treated all the pledges for which information on fulfilment was not found as non-fulfilled pledges and then we repeated the exercise treating missing values as fulfilled pledges.

Tables 9 and 10 show the results of the bounding exercise. These tables show that the main results presented in previous section would not qualitatively change if information had been found on more pledges. Fulfilment rates for PSOE during their years enjoying an absolute majority government range between 64.37 percent in the most pessimistic estimation to 77 percent in the most optimistic one. For PP results are similar ranging between 69 percent in the pessimistic estimate to 71 percent in the optimistic one for the 2000 election (the range is smaller for this election because there are very few pledges for which information was not found). Results are also consistent with the interpretation given in the previous section in the case of parties in opposition. Fulfilment rates of PSOE's 2000 electoral manifesto range between 29 to 42 percent, very far from fulfilment rates during the governing years. For the Popular Party the range of fulfilment of the 1989 manifesto ranges between 31 percent and 42 percent. The differences between the results presented in the previous sections and the ones obtained on the bounding exercise are bigger regarding the fulfilment of both governing and opposition parties during the minority government years. It is clear that fulfilment of opposition parties seems to be bigger during minority governments than during absolute majority terms: on average, the lower bound estimates of fulfilment of the 1993 PSOE's manifesto and the 1996 PP's manifesto, are greater than the upper bound average fulfilment of pledges for opposition parties during absolute majority governments.

It is more difficult however to interpret and compare fulfilment results of governing parties during the minority governments and absolute majority governments. The results of the bounding exercise show that whether fulfilment is greater in single party majority governments or in minority governments it is difficult to assess due to the percentage of missing values for some of the years. The optimistic estimates (Table 10) show that fulfilment rates of minority governments are higher on average than those during single party majority years but the pessimistic fulfilment estimates (Table 9) show that the opposite is true. If we accept the hypothesis that missing values correspond to a greater extent to non-fulfilled pledges, then the pessimistic estimate is more likely to be correct. In this case, the high number of non-assessed pledges for some of the minority government years would explain the unexpected result found in Table 8 that minority governments have higher fulfilment rates than absolute majority years. The main conclusion that both government structures exhibit similar fulfilment rates is unaltered though, because in each of the three estimates of fulfilment presented in Tables 8 to 10, the difference in fulfilment rates between absolute majority governments and minority governments is always less than 5 percent.

## Conclusions

In this article we have identified and studied specific economic pledges in Spanish electoral manifestos. We have focused on testing several hypothesis regarding the degree to which pledges were fulfilled. The article finds that the pledges contained in the manifestos are overwhelmingly acted upon. This result is in agreement with the increasing literature on this topic for other countries and party systems. Our results also confirm the expectation that opposition parties fulfil fewer promises than governing parties.

Our results also confirm a second theoretical expectation regarding pledge fulfilment: parties in opposition fulfil more pledges under minority governments than under single party majority governments. In the particular case of Spain we find that opposition parties attain fulfilment rates around 20 percent greater when the government structure is a minority government. This result is consistent with the expectation that opposition parties will benefit from a minority government in terms of policy implementation due to the necessity of the governing party to negotiate policy proposals with parliamentary partners.

The main contribution of the article to the previous body of knowledge on pledge fulfilment lies on the analysis of minority governments however. We find no significant differences in fulfilment in absolute majority periods compared to minority governments. In both cases pledge fulfilment of the governing parties was above 70 percent. The economic situation and the specificities of Spanish political system in which a regionally concentrated party is the key to form a minority government, may explain this unexpected outcome.

The results presented in this article leave many interesting questions unanswered. Regarding minority governments, future research should investigate further the theoretical reasons behind the result that governing parties under minority governments attain similar fulfilment rates than single party majority governments, and should extend the analysis to other countries to confirm the generalizability of that conclusion. In addition,

future research should also focus on the theoretical analysis of the links through which opposition parties benefit from minority governments in terms of programme fulfilment. Finally, and at a more general level, future research on pledge fulfilment should investigate further the disagreement between popular opinion regarding the irrelevance of electoral pledges, the differences in parties' ideology as shown in electoral pledges compared to their ideology according to other content analysis methods and compared to government actions, and the extent to which 'important' pledges as opposed to all pledges are acted upon. The role of opposition parties, mass media and interest groups on publicizing and magnifying non-fulfilled pledges may be the answer to many of these questions and should also be investigated.

## Notes

1. In terms of pages devoted to these categories.
2. The main difference between Thomson (2001) and Royed (1996) is that Thomson requires that manifesto itself, and not the researcher, provides the means to carry the objective estimation of whether the promise was fulfilled.
3. The distinction between fulfilled and partially fulfilled promises is typical in pledge research see Royed (1996: 80) or Thomson (2001: 180). When analysing and interpreting total fulfilment however researchers usually merge both categories. We will follow this latter approach and for clarity of exposition we will only show the total fulfilment results as one category including both fulfilled and partially fulfilled promises. Disaggregated results are available under request.
4. The number of pledges for which we were unable to determine fulfilment is the difference between the total number of promises for each party and year in Tables 2 and 3 and the row labelled total in Tables 6 and 7. For the 1989 election, the number of pledges for which we were unable to determine fulfilment is 11 for PSOE and 15 for PP. In 1993 the numbers are 13 and 17. In 1996, 28 and 30 and in 2000, 19 and 2.

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## Author Biography

**Joaquín Artés** is a Professor of Political Economy at Universidad Complutense de Madrid. He holds a PhD in Economics from University of California at Irvine and a PhD in Law from Universidad Complutense de Madrid.