A Tale of Two Perspectives: Election Promises and Government Actions in Canada

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Introduction

One of the 12 attributes of Canada's democratic performance discussed by LeDuc and Pammett in Chapter X of this volume is whether "those elected to parliament keep most of their promises". With a mean score of 5.0 on a scale of zero to 10, this is one of the attributes with which Canadians are least satisfied (only the "honesty" and "corruption" attributes receive lower mean scores). The Samara survey results on whether MPs keep their promises are consistent with those of a 2006 International Social Survey Program survey which found that 44 percent of Canadians disagree or disagree strongly with the statement that their Members of Parliament keep their election promises. And Canada is no exception here. In 31 out of 33 countries covered by the ISSP survey, more than half the respondents disagreed with the statement that their MPs keep their election promises. But how accurate is the portrait of politicians-as-promise breakers that is painted by so many Canadian citizens? Do Canadian politicians actually renege on most of their campaign promises?

Answering this question is important. Whether political parties keep their election promises is central to the quality of democratic responsiveness. Parties' campaign promises provide citizens with a basis for selecting representatives who share their priorities and policy preferences. If parties fail to keep their promises once they are in government, public policy may be less responsive to public preferences. Indeed, the claim that parties should carry out their election promises has been made repeatedly (Downs 1957, Friedrich 1963, Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge 1994, Manin 1997, Schedler 1998).

Inseparable from democratic responsiveness is informed public participation, or the requirement that citizens voice preferences that are "informed by what policy makers actually do" (Soroka and Wlezien 2010, 14). In an ideal democracy, a high level of policy responsiveness would find an echo in high quality public participation. There is an extensive body of literature about whether citizens are sufficiently informed and engaged to fulfill this democratic ideal (for a review see Gidengil et al. 2004). However, there is very little published research on citizens' awareness of politicians' promise-keeping performance. In his study of citizens' evaluations of election promises in Ireland, Thomson (2011) shows that citizens are able to use information shortcuts to arrive at a correct diagnostic as to whether politicians keep their promises. For example, citizens who have more trust in political parties rate the fulfillment of election promises more positively than citizens who do not trust political parties. Citizens identifying with the governing party rate the fulfillment of election promises differently from citizens with no party identification. Drawing on interviews in which Swedes were invited to explain what they mean when they say that politicians break their promises, Naurin (2011) argues that citizens form their perceptions of the promise-keeping performance of politicians based more on their daily experience and interactions with the broader political system than on an evaluation of what politicians actually say and do. Naurin's argument is reminiscent of Bastedo et al's findings in this volume which highlight the fact that many Canadian citizens focus on their daily

experiences, and not whether promises are fulfilled, in evaluating politicians' democratic performance.

Evaluating Politicians' Promise-Keeping Performance

The extent to which political parties keep their promises can be measured by comparing their campaign pledges with subsequent government policies (see Naurin 2011 for a review). Rallings (1987) found that Canadian parties kept their campaign promises 72 percent of the time between 1945 and 1979, and Monière (1988) found that the Mulroney government kept 74 percent of its promises between 1984 and 1988. Note, though, that there are important methodological questions about how political scientists and political practitioners arrive at their findings about promise-keeping, as well as the accuracy, validity and reliability of measures of pledge fulfillment (Petry and Collette 2009). More critically, the results on promise-keeping by federal politicians date back to the late-1980s. There is clearly a need for an up-to-date assessment given all of the changes in the Canadian party system since the Mulroney era (Carty, Cross and Young 2000, Bittner and Koop 2013). The need for an updated assessment is all the more pressing in light of the decline in satisfaction with the way that democracy works in Canada over the past two decades (see chapter XX in this volume).

The focus here will be on promise-keeping by the Conservative government under Stephen Harper following the party's 2011 victory. The Conservative Party's promises in the 2011 election were laid down in the party's platform, *Here for Canada. Stephen Harper's Low-Tax Plan for Jobs and Economic Growth*. The method for calculating how many promises have been kept consists in counting specific promises and then determining how many of these promises have been acted upon. With this type of analysis, there is a risk that subjective interpretation of what constitutes a promise and what action is needed to declare that the promise has been kept will undermine the reliability and validity of the data. Therefore it is important to clarify the method used to establish what constitutes a promise and, on what basis it is decided that it is fulfilled or not.

Following Royed (1996, 79) an election promise is defined as a commitment to carry out some action, where an objective estimation can be made as to whether or not the action was indeed taken. Promises, in other words, must contain explicit testability criteria that are set up by the platform writers, not by the researcher (see Thomson 2001, 31). As with previous scholarly research, three rules are followed when comparing election promises with subsequent government actions. First, to insure that the data analyzed are transparent and reliable, the focus is on promises contained in the officially sanctioned campaign platform of the party that wins the election. Second, to prevent bias in the analysis of government actions, the focus is on official archival sources of government actions rather than mediated sources. Mediated sources are not always a reliable basis for validating whether a promise has been followed by a matching government action. Whether election promises have been fulfilled is assessed based on content analyses of laws and regulations, throne speeches and budget speeches, and annual reports from government ministries and agencies. Third, the focus is on the decisions that policy makers make (outputs) rather than the effect of those policy decisions (outcomes). Promises on outputs are easier to identify and validate than promises on outcomes. There has been a recent tendency among federal political parties to frame their election promises in terms of measurable

government actions, and the Harper Conservatives have pushed this to a level never achieved before.

The method of scoring promises is similar to the method of scoring Barack Obama's campaign promises on Politifact (http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/). Each promise is rated as either "kept", "kept in part", "broken or stalled" or "too soon to tell". To be classified as "kept", a promise has to be followed by a subsequent government action (a law, a regulation, a treaty or an agreement) that has been passed or has reached second reading. For example, the promise to expedite deportation of foreign criminals is declared kept because the Faster Removal of Foreign Criminals Act had passed second reading at the time of the analysis (October 2012). A promise is rated "kept in part" when the corresponding action is a compromise (the action is completed but it does not go as far as what was promised) or when it is "in the works", that is, the promised action is not in force at the time of analysis (October 2012) but is expected to be in force before the next election. The promise to implement a national shipbuilding strategy is declared kept in part, and so is the promise to review the federal-provincial health accord in 2014. A promise is classified as "broken" when it is not followed by a government action, and there is little or no expectation that action will be taken any time soon. This chapter scores promises long before the end of Prime Minister Harper's term, certainly too soon into the term to declare with certainty that a promise is broken. It is more accurate in many cases to talk of "stalled promises", government actions that have been severely compromised (killed), sometimes by the Conservative government that initiated them in the first place. The promise to purchase the CF-35 for the Canadian Air Force is coded as "broken" because the purchase of the CF-35 has been stalled. Finally, promises with a long time frame, such as balancing the budget by 2015, are classified as "too soon to tell".

Election promises were classified and matched with government actions independently by the author and by a trained research assistant. Reliability tests were conducted at different stages of the coding. The first stage was deciding whether a platform statement was an election promise (coded) or a rhetorical statement (not coded); the second stage was deciding whether a statement was an action promise (coded) or an outcome promise (not coded); the third stage was classifying promised actions into policy issue categories; and the final stage was classifying promises into "promises kept", "promises broken or stalled", "promises kept in part", and promises that were "too soon to tell". We agreed 97 percent of the time on whether or not a platform statement was an election promise, 94 percent of the time on the policy issue category in which each promise fell, and 96 percent of the time on whether a promise was an action or an output. We agreed 85 percent of the time on which promises were "kept", "kept in part", "broken or stalled" or "too soon to tell". Cases where we initially disagreed were reconciled after a second round of coding. Twelve cases that remained unresolved after this second round were resolved with the help of experts.

Evaluating the Promise-Keeping Performance of the Harper Conservatives

We counted 148 promises of action in the 2011 Conservative platform. In addition, we counted 37 rhetorical statements and 16 outcome promises which are not part of the analysis. Table 1 classifies the 148 coded promises into eight policy categories that closely resemble the coding categories or groups of coding categories used by the Comparative Manifesto Project (https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu). Almost one third of the pledge content of the 2011 platform was devoted to the economy (31.1 percent of total), followed by law and order (19.6 percent),

welfare, health and education (14.2 percent) and government accountability (10.8 percent). The high saliency of the economy and welfare categories in the 2011 Conservative platform is to be expected: the economy and welfare have been among the top categories in all Canadian party platforms in recent elections (Petry forthcoming). The presence of law and order and government accountability among the four top categories is more unusual. The emphasis on law and order must be linked with the omnibus crime bill involving tougher sentences for many offenses involving sex and drug crimes. The emphasis on government accountability is linked to Harper's renewed accountability agenda (Accountability Act of 2006). The remaining policy categories are non-economic groups (families, older Canadians etc.) (8.1 percent), the political system (6.1 percent), defense and foreign affairs (5.4 percent), and the environment (4.7 percent). Note the low salience of defense and foreign affairs and the environment in the Conservative platform of 2011.

[Table 1 about here]

What do the measures of promise keeping by the Conservatives tell us? Table 2 displays the percent of promises in each policy domain which have been kept, kept in part, broken or stalled, or are "too soon to tell". The percentage in the third column is obtained by adding the percentage of promises that have been kept entirely and those that have been kept in part. According to our calculation, 96 of the 148 promises (65 percent) had been kept entirely or in part by October 2012, 19 percent had been broken or stalled, and 16 percent were too soon to tell. Looking at policy domains by decreasing order of percentage of promises kept or kept in part, we see welfare and the economy on top with 71.4 percent and 69.6 percent. Promises were kept more often than average in two additional categories: the political system (66.6 percent) and law and order (65.6 percent). The categories in which promises were kept less often than average are: defense and foreign affairs (62.5 percent), environment (57.1 percent), government accountability (56.2 percent) and non-economic groups (50 percent). Note the tendency to keep more promises in the policy categories that are more salient (the economy, welfare, law and order) than in the less salient policy categories.

[Table 2 about here]

Accounting for the Strong Promise-Keeping Record

Although lower than the 74 percent figure recorded for Brian Mulroney's first term in office (Monière 1988), the frequency of promises kept entirely or in part is certainly higher than expected judging by the negative public perception of how politicians in general, and the Harper government in particular, keep their promises. The 74 percent figure for the Mulroney government is based on a length of time in office of three years (1984-87) whereas the 65 percent figure for Harper is based on 18 months in office. To put things in context, preliminary results indicate pledge fulfillment scores of 67 percent in the first Harper government elected in 2006, and of 54 percent in the second Harper government elected in 2008. Both were minority governments. The 65 percent figure for the Harper government elected in 2011 is the same as the average percentage of pledges fulfilled reported by Naurin (2011) in her review of 14 studies in 11 countries. Again, it should be emphasized that the studies reported by Naurin look at entire terms in government, whereas the 2011 Harper government achieved its 65 percent score in 18 months. This is equivalent to a grade of C; and it is not unlikely that a performance equivalent to

a B+ will be achieved before the end of the current mandate in 2015. All this would require is that half the promises coded "too soon to tell" be fulfilled between now (October 2012) and then.

How can the high percentage of promise kept by the Harper government be explained? One possible explanation has to do with the unprecedented centralization of power in the hands of Stephen Harper in his capacity as party leader and Prime Minister. The centralization of power affects the elaboration of the party platform in a way that is conducive to more promises being kept. Many parties, including the Progressive Conservative Party and the Reform Party--the two parties from which Harper's Conservative Party was born--follow the traditional "bottom-up" model of platform elaboration, whereby the promises contained in the party's platform reflect to a large extent the wishes of party activists who democratically adopted it at the most recent national congress of the party. The wishes and preferences of party activists are often unrealistic in terms of the likelihood of being implemented by the party after an election.

The 2011 Conservative campaign platform was only remotely connected with the "Policy Declaration" that had been sanctioned by party activists' during the previous party convention. Instead it was written by a small team of policy advisers reporting directly to the party leader. These advisers were primarily concerned with what could realistically be done by a government rather than with the wishes of some party activists. The centralized process of campaigning and platform elaboration in Harper's Conservative Party must be linked to Harper's personality and his belief that a populist movement (part of the Conservative Party is still a populist movement) must be managed with a strong fist to avoid factionalism. Tom Flanagan (2010), Harper's former political advisor, claims that the centralized organization of the Conservative Party also has something to do with the state of "permanent campaign" that has existed in Canada since 2004. This necessitates an organizational model amounting to a virtual fusion of political party and campaign team. Whether the "permanent campaign" organization model will survive in a Conservative majority government context is an open question.

The effects of centralization that are felt at the stage of the elaboration of the Conservative platform of 2011 are also felt at the stage of its implementation as government policies. One key element of the Harper government is complete message control. This complete message control extends to the follow-up on campaign promises. The importance of message control in connection with keeping campaign promises is illustrated by the use of mandate letters. Mandate letters list the general duties that ministers are expected to perform and ask that they be faithfully executed. But as Lawrence Martin (2011, 61) notes, the nature of mandate letters has changed under Harper. He cites Harper's policy advisor, Mark Cameron who explained that, "…the mandate letters [have] tended to list every platform and Throne speech commitment affecting that department and dictating who you're supposed to work with and whether you were going to get any funding". The centralized manner in which election promises are being written and incorporated in the platform is echoed by the centralized manner in which promises are being implemented at the level of individual agencies and ministries.

Another reason why the Conservative Party of Stephen Harper has kept an unusually high proportion of its promises has to do with the style of platform writing. As with the Conservative platforms of 2006 and 2008, the pledges in the 2011 platform are very precise and detailed. Unlike the vague promises found in the party platforms of past elections, the promises of the 2011 Conservative platform provide criteria to judge whether a promise is broken or not. As a

former Conservative Party insider indicated to me, "…the focus is on planks that can be readily explained and communicated during an election campaign. We avoid fuzzy promises." Furthermore, several of the 2011 Conservative promises were already in the legislative "pipe-line". Many of the previous Harper government's policy initiatives had been stalled in committees or on the floor of the House because they could not gather the required majority support. This was the case, in particular, for the proposed Accountability Act, the plan to repeal the Gun Registry, and the Anti-Crime Agenda. All these initiatives were passed during the 2011-12 session of Parliament with the support of the Conservative majority. A final, more general explanation is that it is the rational thing for governments to fulfill as many campaign promises as soon as possible; a rational government leader will not wait until later to implement the party's campaign promises (Petry 2012).

Citizens' Perceptions of Politicians' Promise-Keeping Performance

Most scholars who study government fulfillment of election promises conclude that there is a high degree of congruence between promises and subsequent government actions. This is in sharp contrast with citizens' generally negative perceptions of the performance of politicians at keeping their promises. The discrepancy between popular perceptions and scholarly evidence could be explained by several factors. It is possible that the campaign promises that citizens focus on are different from the platform statements that scholars are studying. Rather than speculate on this question for which we have no data, let us examine some determinants of popular perceptions of politicians' promise-keeping performance based on data from the 2012 Samara Survey.

We begin with social background characteristics. We know that perceptions of politicians' performance may be affected by education, income, gender, age, and place of birth. As Ruderman demonstrates in this volume, satisfaction with MPs is related to both education and income. This is consistent with a large body of research linking education and income to a variety of political attitudes (Anderson and Gillory 1997). Gender has also been linked to differences in a variety of political attitudes (O'Neill and Gidengil 2006), though Ruderman does not uncover any gender differences in evaluations of MPs' performance. Differences in the political attitudes of young people compared to older ones have been extensively documented in the literature as well (Nevitte 1996). While we might expect a "decline in deference" among younger generations, Ruderman finds that younger Canadians actually seem to evaluate MPs' performance a little more positively. He also finds that foreign-born Canadians are significantly more satisfied with their MPs than those born in Canada. Based on prior research, we might expect age, gender, education, income, and place of birth to affect the perceptions of politicians' promise-keeping performance.

To test these expectations, the mean scores for all Canadians are compared with the mean scores for each of the socio-demographic categories just discussed. The results are displayed in Table 3. None of the social background characteristics tested here displays a statistically significant difference, with the exception of having an income of $80,000 or more. Affluent Canadians rate politicians higher on the promise-keeping scale on average than those with lower incomes. Age, education, gender, and place of birth do not seem to have a statistically significant effect on people's perception of the promise-keeping performance of politicians. The lack of impact of social background characteristics is not entirely surprising. Finding a link, as Ruderman does, between social background characteristics and people's overall satisfaction with MPs does not

necessarily imply a similar link with their perceptions of whether politicians keep their promises. Indeed, the correlation between people's satisfaction with MPs and their perception of politicians as promise-keepers is quite weak (0.13).

[Table 3 about here]

Although many Canadians perceive politicians to be promise-breakers, this negative perception is not concentrated disproportionately in particular socio-demographic groups in the population. The political system encourages all Canadians to express their views on whether politicians keep their promises. This may be good news from the point of view of inclusiveness. But it raises the question of what explains variations in people's perceptions of politicians' promise-keeping performance. We now turn to the task of answering this question.

One possible determinant of variation in people's perceptions of promise-keeping by politicians is the level of political information they possess. Ruderman in this volume finds that knowing the name of one's MP is not a predictor of evaluations of MPs' job performance. However, there is evidence that better informed citizens arrive at more accurate judgements of the performance of politicians (Althaus 2003, Gidengil et al. 2004). There is also the argument that poorly-informed citizens may be more inclined than better-informed citizens to resort to stereotypes when answering complex policy questions (Kuklinski and Quirk 2000). The stereotype that applies in our case is undeniably one that characterizes politicians as liars (Naurin 2011, Thompson 2011). Better-informed citizens may be aware of the number of promises made and kept, and will therefore arrive at a more positive evaluation of promise-keeping by politicians than poorly informed citizens. A positive correlation between political information and the perception that politicians keep their promises is therefore expected.

Another possible determinant of variation in perception of promise-keeping is media exposure. Ruderman in this volume present evidence that exposure to news media has a positive impact on people's satisfaction with politicians. This evidence is consistent with the "virtuous cycle" hypothesis which holds that consumption of news media reinforces political interest and results in more political engagement (Norris 2003). However, there is also evidence in the literature that media exposure may reinforce people's dissatisfaction with politicians (Patterson 1993; Nadeau and Giasson 2009). Sometimes the media have a tendency to focus on the negative side of politics, and this could contribute to political cynicism and disaffection with politics. However, as Bastedo et al. show in Chapter X, this may not be an entirely accurate charge: the media are not *always* or uniformly negative all the time.

Nevertheless, the issue of whether politicians renege on their promises may be a particularly fertile ground for negativity bias in media coverage. It is not so much that the media "frame" their stories around the politicians-as-liars theme. Rather the media in general tend to pick and "prime" more sensational stories at the expense of less sensational ones (Patterson 1993). And there is no doubt that stories about politicians reneging on their promises are more sensational than stories about politicians keeping their promises, especially if the promises are linked to issues that are salient in the public. Media reporting of promises kept is likely a relatively rare occurrence. In view of this, the expectation is that Canadians who consume more news media are more likely to perceive politicians as liars.

According to the Samara 2012 survey, only 36 percent of Canadians remember the name of their MP; only 26 percent know which party is in favour of tax cuts for people with high incomes, and only 20 percent know which party is in favour of funding public daycares. Being unaware of what parties have promised, citizens may make up for their lack of political information by drawing on a variety of easily obtained information shortcuts (heuristics) "that serve as second-best substitutes for harder to obtain kinds of data." (Popkin 1991). One possible shortcut is the nature of citizens' contacts with government offices. Bastedo et al. in this volume show that people who experience frustration in obtaining government benefits to which they are entitled tend to be more disengaged from politics than others. As Ruderman in this volume demonstrates, these negative experiences with government offices appear to function as an information shortcut that simplifies their evaluation of MPs' performance. These results dovetail with Naurin's (2011) finding that people use their daily experience and interactions with the broader political system as a shortcut to help them form their opinion on whether politicians keep their promises. Therefore, we expect that survey respondents with negative experiences with government offices will be more likely to rate the promise-keeping performance of MPs poorly than those who have positive experience or no experience at all.

Another shortcut is party identification. There is considerable evidence that partisanship is a central factor in explaining political attitudes (Campbell et al. 1960, Johnston 2006). According to a widely shared conception, citizens who identify with the governing party evaluate government performance more positively than those who identify with the opposition party. It is therefore expected that citizens who identify with the Conservative Party will have a more positive evaluation of the promise-keeping performance of the Harper government than those who identify with opposition parties. Note that an alternative conception is also possible: partisanship is a consequence rather than a cause of citizens' retrospective evaluation of government performance (Fiorina 1981). In the alternative conception, citizens' choose to support the Conservative Party based on their favourable evaluation of the promise-keeping performance of past Conservative governments.

To test these expectations, Table 4 reports citizens' mean ratings of promise-keeping according to their levels of political information and media exposure, their party identification, and whether they had a positive or negative contact with government offices. Political information is measured by asking respondents whether they know the name of their MP and that of the premier of their province, which party is in favour of tax cuts for people with high incomes, and which party is in favour of funding public daycare. Unsatisfactory government contact is measured with a question asking respondents to evaluate their contact with government offices with respect to 11 programs (including unemployment benefit, old age security, national child tax credit, social assistance payment, student benefit). Respondents who used one of these programs and reported a negative contact are coded "one", those who did not use these programs or reported a positive contact are coded "zero". Partisanship is measured by asking Canadians which party they would vote for if an election were held today.

From Table 4 we see that political information and media exposure are not strongly related to perceptions of politicians' promise-keeping performance. Answering policy questions correctly is not associated with more favourable perceptions of politicians as promise-keepers. Contrary to expectations, Canadians who remember the name of their MP are significantly less likely to declare that politicians keep their promises. The frequency of exposure to news on TV, on the

radio and in newspapers is not statistically associated with perceptions of promise-keeping. There is a statistically significant negative association for Canadians who never consume news on the internet (they have less favourable perceptions than other Canadians). As expected, citizens' evaluations of promise-keeping are strongly affected by an unsatisfactory experience with a government office. Respondents who declare unsatisfactory contact with government offices give politicians a very low rating on the promise-keeping scale (4.06). Finally, Conservative Party supporters have much more favourable perceptions of the promise-keeping performance of politicians (5.90) than opposition party supporters. Green Party and NDP supporters give significantly lower ratings on the promise-keeping scale than supporters of other parties (4.30 and 4.76, respectively).

[Table 4 about here]

In order to see how much independent effect each of these explanatory factors have on citizens' perceptions of promise-keeping, I ran a multiple regression model (see model 1 in the appendix for the detailed results). The results show that when the effects of other factors are taken into account, whatever impact political information and media exposure had on perceptions of promise-keeping in a bivariate setting, disappear in the multivariate analysis. However, our two information shortcuts continue to have a statistically significant impact: net of other factors, citizens' who support the Conservative Party are more likely to give politicians a higher rating on the promise-keeping scale than non-identifiers. Conversely, citizens who had unsatisfactory contacts with government offices give politicians significantly lower ratings on the scale than those who did not report unsatisfactory contacts.

Turning to the effects of citizens' perceptions of promise-keeping, we ask whether citizens who give politicians low ratings on the promise-keeping scale are more likely to be politically active. As Ruderman in this volume shows, while dissatisfaction with MPs' overall performance is unrelated to voter turnout, it may be contributing to a decline in more demanding party-based forms of political activity. Interestingly, though, there was no relationship between dissatisfaction with MPs' performance and elite-challenging forms of political engagement. Given the weak correlation between overall satisfaction with MPS' performance and their promise-keeping performance noted above, it is worth asking whether these patterns hold for the latter.

We also ask whether citizens' ratings on the promise-keeping scale have an effect on political trust. Political trust is measured by an index based on two dimensions of politicians' democratic performance in the Samara Poll: whether politicians "are held accountable for their actions" and whether they "are honest." These two dimensions reflect two conceptions of trust (Maloy 2009): trust as discretion (blind faith) and trust as accountability (conditional or fiduciary trust). It is expected that citizens who give politicians high ratings on the promise-keeping scale are more likely to trust politicians than those who give low ratings.

The results are reported in Table 5. Voting is associated with significantly higher mean ratings of politicians on the promise-keeping scale associated, but there is no association with political donations or persuading someone to vote. Lower ratings of politicians on the promise-keeping scale are associated with signing a petition more than once, but there is no significant relationship with participating in a protest or contacting an elected official. Turning to political trust, we see that citizens who give politicians high ratings on the promise-keeping scale are

significantly more likely than those who give politicians low ratings to believe that politicians are honest (mean rating=7.47) and are held accountable (mean rating=7.63).

So far we have considered trust to be a dependent variable, causally affected by perceptions of promise-keeping. But there is another conception of trust as causally prior to attitudes and perceptions. The conception of trust as an independent variable is found in studies of public attitudes toward foreign policy (Brewer 2004) and politicians' performance (Parry 1976). Thomson (2011) treats political trust as a shortcut that citizens use to arrive at their evaluation of whether politicians keep their promises. This suggests adding a political trust variable to our multivariate model of promise-keeping performance. When the political trust variable is added to the multivariate model, the effects of unsatisfactory contacts with government offices and partisanship remain statistically significant although their statistical power is reduced considerably (see model 2 in appendix for the detailed results).

[Table 5 about here]

These results suggest that many Canadians may lack the necessary political information to evaluate whether and to what extent MPs keep their promises. They appear to compensate for their lack of political information by relying on shortcuts that will allow them to arrive at a diagnosis on this question without the detailed knowledge of the fulfillment of specific promises. Three shortcuts emerge from the Samara Survey data. They are, in increasing order of statistical power, the nature of contacts with government offices, partisanship, and political trust. Based on the data in model 2 in the appendix, the predicted rating of politicians' promise-keeping performance almost doubles from 4.70 on a scale from zero to 10 for respondents who do not trust politicians, who have unsatisfying contacts with government offices, and who support an opposition party to 9.05 on a scale from 0 to 10 for respondents who trust politicians, have no unsatisfying contacts with government offices, and who support the Conservative Party. One caveat is in order here. We do not test directly whether and to what extent Canadians are able to evaluate the fulfillment of specific policy promises. To do this we would need data on citizens' evaluation of whether promises are kept or broken.

Conclusion

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Charles Dickens' famous quotation could apply to the tale of two clashing perspectives on politicians' promise-keeping performance that was reported in this chapter. When asked to evaluate whether their political leaders keep their promises, Canadians give them a bare passing grade. This low rating is illustrative of the larger point made in several chapters in this volume that Canadians have become fundamentally pessimistic about government responsiveness. The remarkable thing is that when political scientists and political practitioners are asked the very same question, they give politicians a much more favourable score.

How can the evaluation gap be explained? The analyses presented in this chapter suggest that political practitioners and citizens use different criteria to evaluate whether politicians keep their promises. First, political practitioners focus on a well-defined corpus of information related to specific promises. This allows them to make sophisticated distinctions related to the nature, the objective, and the stage of fulfillment of election promises. Citizens do not possess the level of political information necessary to make similarly detailed distinctions about exactly what

promise is made, when it is fulfilled, and by whom. Instead, they trust (or distrust) politicians to keep the promises they made during the last election campaign.

Second, unlike political practitioners who focus their attention on promise fulfillment as decisions (outputs), citizens may well think in terms of the effects policy promises have on them or on society (outcomes). As we have seen, some citizens evaluate policies based on their personal experience with government, and this experience comes exclusively as an outcome, not as an output. This point resonates with the arguments of Bastedo et al. and Ruderman in this volume that citizens' primary focus is on the impact of policies on their daily life.

Third, unlike political practitioners who focus attention on those promises that can be reasonably achieved (Royed 1996, Thomson 2001) citizens' expectations of what politicians can achieve are influenced by their partisanship. Citizens who identify with the NDP hold more negative expectations than non-partisans while those who identify with the Conservative Party in power have more positive expectations than non-partisans.

Another explanation of the gap between the perceptions of scholars and citizens may be that the Harper government has focused on keeping the promises written in its 2011 election platform while neglecting to fulfill the promises made during the campaign outside the platform. Whether promises in the platform are more likely to be kept than promises outside the platform is an open research question. However, Monière (1988) finds no difference in the fulfillment of promises found in the Progressive Conservative Party platform and those found in campaign speeches covered in national newspapers. Perhaps a more plausible explanation is that the promises that the Harper government has kept are not the ones that matter most to citizens, whereas the promises that matter to citizens were stalled or broken. In the absence of data on what matters to citizens and what does not, we can only speculate about this scenario.

How can we bridge the gap between citizens' perceptions and the extent to which platform promises are actually fulfilled? As this chapter shows, Canadians are not well politically informed, and this is especially true about election promises and their fulfillment. One path toward solving this problem is to improve the quality of the information on promise-keeping that is reported by political practitioners, academic scholars and by the media, and making it more accessible to the public. A step in this direction will be taken with the posting of the data used in this chapter on the Web site of the Poltext project www.poltext.org. The evidence used to assess the fulfillment of each campaign promise will be referenced with citations and URL links in a manner similar to those used by Politifact.com in their Obameter ratings. These data will serve as a source of information for citizens who wish to know whether and to what extent campaign promises are being fulfilled. It is possible that increased levels of citizens' knowledge about promise keeping might help to counter the stereotype that politicians are willing to lie to get elected, thereby increasing the public's trust and confidence in government.

Another approach consists in demanding more transparency and accountability in the operation of government to improve its responsiveness. Fulfilling campaign promise is a central element of democratic responsiveness but it is not a guarantee of democratic responsiveness. The 2011 Harper government has been adept at keeping its election promises in part because it has carefully avoided making unrealistic promises which it could not keep. But the focus on realist policy promises by the Harper government may have been at the expense of policy

responsiveness and accountability. As Table 2 indicates, government accountability occupies an important place in the Conservative Party platform and in the Conservative government agenda. It represents 17 percent of promises in the 2011 platform and 11 percent of promises kept entirely by the end October 2012. Some will argue that this is a remarkable achievement. However, the question remains: is the Harper government more accountable today than it was before the election?

The data presented in this chapter indicate that citizens' unfavourable evaluations of politicians as promise-keepers is linked to their dissatisfaction with government responsiveness in their day-to-day contacts with government offices. Perhaps the government could ameliorate its public image with respect to promise-keeping by improving contacts with citizens in need of government services.

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Table 1: Promises in the 2011 Conservative Party Platform

Categories	total	percent
Economy, taxes & job creation	46	31.1
Law & order	29	19.6
Welfare, education & health	21	14.2
Government accountability	16	10.8
Non-economic groups	12	8.1
Political system	9	6.1
Defence & foreign affairs	8	5.4
Environment	7	4.7
Total	148	100

Table 2: Fulfillment of 2011 Conservative Party Platform as of October 2012(percent)

Categories	Kept	Partially kept	Kept or partially kept	Broken	Too soon to tell	Total
Economy, taxes & job creation	45.6	23.9	69.6	19.6	10.9	100
Law & order	48.4	17.2	65.6	17.2	17.2	100
Welfare, education & health	42.8	28.6	71.4	23.8	4.8	100
Government accountability	31.2	25.0	56.2	18.8	25.0	100
Non-economic groups	33.3	16.7	50.0	25.0	25.0	100
Political system	44.4	22.2	66.6	11.2	22.2	100
Defence & foreign affairs	25.0	37.5	62.5	12.5	25.0	100
Environment	14.3	42.8	57.1	14.3	28.6	100
Average	40.6	24.3	64.9	18.9	16.2	100

Table 3: Perception of Politicians as Promise-Keepers
by Social Background Characteristics

	Mean Rating of Promise-Keeping
All	5.04
Social Background	
Education	
High school or less	5.10
Some university	5.03
University graduates	4.99
Income	
Under $40,000	5.15
$40,000 to $79,000	5.20
$80,000 and above	4.77*
Age	
18 to 34	5.32
35 to 54	4.82
55 and over	5.05
Gender	
Female	5.07
Place of birth	
Born in Canada	4.99
New Canadian	5.05
Ethnic background	
Visible minority	5.02
White	4.90

N=608

*= p<0.10; ** p<0.05; ***= p<0.01

Table 4: Perception of Politicians as Promise-Keepers by Political Information. Media Consumption, Contact with Government and Partisanship

	Mean Rating of Promise-Keeping
Political information	
Know name of premier in own province	5.03
Know which party is in favour of tax cuts for people with high income	5.05
Know which party is in favour of public funding for day care	5.02
Remember name of MP	4.83*
Media exposure	
TV news consumption	
Never	4.49
Three days a week	5.08
Every day	5.10
Radio news consumption	
Never	4.74
One to six days a week	5.24
Every day	4.90
Newspaper consumption	
Never	4.80
One to six days a week	5.21
Every day	5.02
Internet news consumption	
Never	4.45*
One to six days a week	5.11
Every day	5.33
Unsatisfactory contact with government offices	4.06**
Partisanship	
Conservative Party	5.90**
Liberal Party	4.88
Bloc	5.20*
NDP	4.76**
Green	4.30*

N=608

*= p<0.10; ** p<0.05; ***= p<0.01

Table 5: The Effects of Perception of Politicians as Promise-Keepers

	Mean Rating of Promise-Keeping
Electoral modes of political participation	
Voted	4.98*
Donated to party/candidate	5.39
Persuaded someone to vote	4.93
Extra-electoral modes of political participation	
Participated in a protest	
Never	5.14
Once	5.12
More than once	4.89
Signed a petition	
Never	5.14
Once	5.34
More than once	4.60**
Contacted elected official	
Never	5.08
Once	5.22
More than once	4.68
Political trust	
Politicians are held accountable	7.63**
Government officials are honest	7.47**

N=608

*= p<0.10; ** p<0.05; ***= p<0.01

Appendix: Determinants of Perception of Promise-Keeping Performance

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeff.	Std. Err.	Coeff.	Std. Err.
Level of political information index	-.177	.141	-.022	.071
Media exposure index	.088	.075	.042	.037
Unsatisfactory contact index	-1.04	.333***	-.383	.166**
Support for Conservative Party	1.154	.255**	.324	.128**
Political trust index			.840	.020***
Constant	4.86	.478***	.820	.256***
	Adj. R2=.05		Adj. R2=.76	

N=608
*= p<0.10; ** p<0.05; ***= p<0.01