

METHODOLOGY

ON THE EVALUATION
OF THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF
ELECTION PROMISES

SEPTEMBER 2024

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PËRSOJMËRIA NGA PËRVOJA E ZGJUAR

METHODOLOGY

on the evaluation of the accountability of election promises *(updated)*

Disclaimer

The methodology was implemented as part of the project "Increasing the financial accountability of the promises of political parties in the face of civil expertise" financially supported by the Small Grants Program of the Commission for Democracy of the US Embassy in Tirana.

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Aim of the updated methodology

Update of the terms and content of actual methodology for better quantifying economic analysis of electoral promises and political manifestos. The updated methodology aims to better interaction of the financial evaluations with the promises by determining from the data of the last four elections and some determinations on the budget financial cost range of each of the promises according to the division of the economic and government sectors.

By building a more advanced measurement mechanism than in the previous project, we aim to focus the analysis to explain the reports by showing the public a real threshold of the feasibility of the promises, starting from the government budget and the medium-term budget program and all the main macroeconomic documents for the future periods

ALTAX - Albanian Economic and Fiscal Center is a non-profit research and development center based in Albania. It analyzes Albanian internal and external economic and fiscal policy to provide a reliable source of expertise on the political, ideological, cultural, economic and historical factors influencing Albanian policies towards the Western Balkans and beyond. Cooperation with academics and experts helps to expand and create a comprehensive audience to help increase fiscal capacities in Albania and Kosovo and beyond.

We analyze the economy, the fiscal system, the accountability of politicians looking mainly at the national and regional level of macro and micro indicators, statistical data, the market, the government budget, labor market data and sectoral trends.

Although it is the citizens who ultimately determine the direction of the economy and society, governments also influence it through fiscal and monetary policy.

We provide donors, organizations and other parties with the right analysis of topics that are also interesting for future forecasts.

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- We carry out a preliminary analysis on economic policies
- Preparation of a model of expertise and policies
- We organize studies and reports based on partnerships with individuals and organizations
- Preparation of market analysis and influencing factors
- We analyze all data for proper political reflection

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Methodology can be read/download online në [ALTAX](#) and [POLIFAKT](#)

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INTRODUCTION

Political party [programs](#) communicate the values and concerns of a political party, as well as the ideas, policies it advocates, and the demands the party wants to implement. Party programs play a key role in democratic political systems as they shape voters' decisions during elections, serve as benchmarks to evaluate the performance of political parties, set policy agendas, and propose solutions to address societal challenges.

Moreover, they structure interactions between political forces and can significantly shape government policy (Van der Does and Statsch, 2016).

In the last decade, the leadership crisis as an accompanying part of the ongoing political crisis in the Albanian political environment has strengthened the importance of the analysis of election promises both from a quantitative and qualitative perspective.

Meanwhile, this point of view alone cannot demonstrate the inflation of election promises in the political campaigns of the parties in Albania, which is on average at the level of up to 60% unfulfilled or not included in the governing programs in cases where the parties have won the elections and received the mandate to govern.

Democratic culture and the cultivation of a leadership based on responsibility, through transparency and accountability regarding the level of fulfillment of election promises must after over 3 decades of coexistence with the political order based on the liberal principles of open and inclusive governance produce significant differences in the operationalization of responsible governance based on these principles.

The fulfillment of [election commitments](#) is at the heart of democratic accountability.

If parties respond to the demands of society, there must be a significant level of congruence between their governing policies and the promises found in their electoral programs.

Tasks and organization for the implementation of the methodology

For an NGO to perform this function, it is important to understand not only the technical aspects of cost, but also to have an understanding of key policy areas such as health and education. This requires personnel with the appropriate technical expertise and relevant specializations.

An NGO will also need to have public credibility in order for its findings to be carried by the media and accepted by political parties. Access to finance is also important.

Albania-based ALTAX conducted the analysis based on the resources it has organized for the implementation of the project at full capacity and with financial assistance from the Small Grants Program of the Commission for Democracy of the US Embassy in Tirana.

In 2024, the required resources that ALTAX has included approximately 9 individuals, at various levels of skill and effort and working relationship and cooperation. This included information gathering and processing workers, finance experts, as well as sector experts in areas such as, social policy, infrastructure, energy, education and health.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Our analysis involves counting specific promises in parties' campaign programs and then determining how many of them have been implemented by the party that has been elected to office in the last 4 elections (2009-2021).

Also, starting from the quantitative part estimated in value according to the type of promise, we compare it with the weight it holds in the state budget, confirming or not whether it is achievable starting from the weight that each of the sectoral promises holds in the budget in 15 the last few years.

With this type of analysis, there is a risk that subjective interpretation of what constitutes a promise and what action is required to declare that a promise has been kept can undermine the reliability and validity of the data. Therefore, it is important to clarify where we find election promises and what qualifies as a promise.

The documentary sources from which the promises are taken are the programs of the parties that come out during the election campaigns.

There are a number of documents containing party promises: speeches by party leaders, party pamphlets and leaflets, newspaper advertisements, speeches at party assemblies, which are not always comparable or highly representative of official party policy.

The use of party programs has the advantage of providing a well-defined and coherent body of officially sanctioned party documents.

It also has the disadvantage of ignoring election promises that are not in the party's program

In addition to the institutional structure in which promises are made, we examine whether characteristics of the promises themselves affect their likelihood of fulfillment.

All things being equal, given the growth of big government in general, it is expected that promises to maintain the status-quo are easier to keep than promises to change policy.

It is also expected that pledges to raise taxes may be difficult to keep, given the unpopularity of taxes in general.

What is the cost of election promises?

A practical and applicable definition of the term "cost of promises" is "the monetary value of resources (human, physical and financial) consumed to achieve a certain goal."

It is not uncommon for opposition parties to make campaign promises in opposition that they realize are unsustainable when they form government. Giving all parties the opportunity to commit to their policy platforms before elections can lead to better public policy.

This practice enables parties to develop clearer and more feasible election platforms. When these parties form government, they are also in a better position to implement more practical policies from the start.

Miscalculated electoral promises can also be a costly mistake. Governments may suffer reputational damage from increasing the price of an electoral promise after an election, but above all taxpaying citizens, as pressure to continue with an electoral promise despite a revised cost projection can result in significant overspends.

Verification of accountability by types of promises/commitments

Elections matter for the economy and public finances, but the economy and the state budget are likely to be particularly attuned to the current election cycle given the volatile fiscal trajectory.

There are two types of promises that are treated according to the methodology.

1. Promises that are included in government programs are divided into "fulfilled", "unfulfilled" and "partially fulfilled".

Whether election promises have been fulfilled is assessed based on content analysis of government press releases, laws and regulations, throne speeches and budget speeches, annual reports and budget plans from government ministries and agencies.

A program promise is rated "partially fulfilled" when the corresponding action is a compromise or the action is completed but does not go as far as promised.

For example, the promise to "legalize houses" is classified as partially fulfilled because some, but not all, have been fulfilled.

The promise is classified as "unfulfilled" when it is not followed by a government action or it is not possible to realize such a promise for reasons of time or funds.

A special type of excluded promises are general/relative promises, defined as promises where only the outcome is measurable and which do not specify what the party will do to achieve that outcome (eg if elected, we we will reduce unemployment).

Most generic promises clearly do not meet our testability criteria.

Therefore, they are excluded from analysis unless they specify the action a government will take to achieve the stated result, in which case, they are considered "non-general" promises.

2. Another classification that the methodology deals with is the promises made by political parties, in the form of the pre-election platform, where pledges of different natures are presented.

Table 1 classifies the pledges of political parties according to whether they promise to maintain the status quo or change policy.

Tab 1.

Promise Type	Decrease	Increase	Support	Change	Other
Budget promises					
Fiscal promises					
Economic promises					
Political change					

These promises are classified, as they are to date, into "true", "partially untrue" and "untrue"

Promises to change policy are further divided into promises proposing to "cut government spending" (or raise taxes), "expand government spending," "cut taxes," and to make policy changes unrelated to spending and taxes government ("other change").

Overall, only 12% of pledges are about maintaining the status-quo, with the remaining 88% advocating some sort of policy change.

Promises to change policy are mostly about changes that do not affect spending and taxes. Promises to expand budget spending are much more frequent than promises to cut government spending.

We begin the analysis based on the current methodology by addressing the main descriptive question raised by the analysis of past elections:

- To what extent do governments fulfill the parties' election promises?

In answer to this question it can be said that

We also examine whether there is a stronger program-policy link for governing parties than for opposition parties.

Functions of electoral political programs

Political programs have two main types of functions: improving electoral success and managing relations both within the party and outside the party with other political forces.

Election manifestos are designed to improve the party's performance during elections and their content is the result of a calculation aimed at winning votes.

We refer to a party as a "governing party" if it holds the executive post after the election and an "opposition party" if it fails to form part of the governing mandate, regardless of whether the party was in power during the election campaign in which it made the pledge.

The fulfillment of opposition parties' pledges can be at least partially explained by the fact that governing parties make the same or similar promises on some issues, or that the promises are about uncontested policies that any government would implement.

Governing parties can also endorse and gain credibility for popular policies proposed by their opponents.

Against this background, the ruling party can announce relatively modest election spending promises so far.

However, the scale of the pledges, how they are financed and how much they would cost, could be tempered by other changes in the public finance outlook over which neither side has control.

Election programs generally cover a wide range of political issues, strategically outlined, interpreted and emphasized by the party to express its distinctive ideological position on which a party contests elections.

Along these lines, Eder, Jenny and Müller (2016) distinguish between three functions that a political program can serve:

- ensure a party position;
- establish supremacy over other political positions of the same party and thus improve the party's campaign;
- to inform voters

The content of election programs

The content of political manifestos/programmes may vary depending on the emphasis, type and formulation of different principles and policies.

For example, not all statements in a manifesto may have the same value for a political party. Some statements may represent strong commitments to a particular policy, while others may be rhetorical in nature.

This differential weighting implies that not all content in a political program necessarily communicates a political position and that political engagements are often complemented by other types of texts (*Van der Does and Statsch, 2016*).

These supplementary texts can be the description of the party's achievements, financial statements, detailed information of the party's candidates, and so on.

Taking these factors into consideration when researching party programs will provide a more complete picture of the origin, nature and commitment of any pledges or policy statements made in them..

How should we measure political promises before and during the election campaign?

Party platform promises are usually offered to the electorate as policy options that must be based on reliable cost estimates.

However, in all the recent elections in Albania, the process of making promises has been left aside, reaching promises that do not need to be analyzed, since they are obviously unbelievable even for the citizen who does not possess an in-depth economic knowledge.

What we have been insisting for at least the last 5 years is that the process of assessing the cost of political promises can work effectively, but first there must be trust in the institution that conducts the cost analysis, since in itself these analyzes in the world are carried out by specialized institutes, and not by the government or opposition political staff.

What applies to the calculation of the costs of the promises is the necessity to clarify the voter on the level of inflation of the promises based on the fiscal and economic argument.

Introducing the costs of electoral platforms of political parties can also encourage the creation of practical positions between competing political parties.

This new way in Albania to become part of the political confrontation through economic analysis also helps level the playing field between the opposition parties and the government, contributing to a stronger democratic context.

Feasibility analysis of election promises

Feasibility analysis of political promises is used to predict the likely outcome of a proposed solution to a policy problem by examining the actors, events and environment involved in all stages of the policy-making process and can serve as an evaluative criterion in choosing between policy alternatives.

Political feasibility¹ is a measure of how well a solution to a policy problem will be accepted by a group of decision makers and the general public. For a policy to be adopted and implemented, it must be politically acceptable, or feasible.

¹ Feasibility is "the state or degree of being easily or conveniently accomplished." For example, A question that describes the feasibility analysis is: In this political climate, can the promise made by the party be fulfilled?

The lack of political feasibility of the policy alternative can often be attributed to a lack of political support or the result of controversy that may surround the issue the policy seeks to address.

Alternatively, a politically feasible alternative is the one that has the greatest probability of "getting enough political traction and support to be implemented" given any specific constraints.

When policy analysis generates policy alternatives, the political risks and costs associated with each may be important criteria for deciding between alternatives. A good policy alternative requires a certain amount of political feasibility, or policy implementation will be impossible.

However, it is important to note that feasibility alone does not make a "good" policy. Examination of all criteria is necessary for the implementation of socially responsible policy.

The first step for the policy analyst is to identify the dimension that encompasses the problem that the policy promise addresses. This dimension contains a wide range of policies, such as health policy or education policy, fiscal policy, etc. The analyst then defines the specific area of the policy issue.

Consistent with the example, the narrowest area of health policy issues is quality service.

Once this is done, the analyst can begin to identify the factors involved in this policy. Within this step, other factors are analyzed that should be included, such as: the level of public awareness of the proposed policy, the dynamics created by the timing of the policy proposal, and the concerns and voting patterns of different demographics.

The second step describes the political scenarios surrounding the proposed policy. The identification of the main stakeholders/groups of interest (factors) is a weighty moment to consider a proposed/promised policy.

In addition to political and economic parties, the main factors can also be organizations or civil alliances of citizens. Such factors are distinguished by their political positions.

However, each time these factors are analyzed, it must be kept in mind what motivates their behavior towards the promised policy. (political motives, ideological motives, financial motives, or other motives)

A very important reason is to identify the resources available to fulfill the promise made by political parties. The analysis of resources identified by experts/analysts should include physical, financial and human resources.

All this applies to gather the necessary information, considering both the influence of factors within the political climate, but also the inclusion of all fiscal and financial data of the state to serve in the comparative analysis between promises and opportunities for their realization.

Clarification of the resources that enable the fulfillment of the promise

The fulfillment of promises is conditioned by the availability of funds. A promise with a limited cost is obviously easier to keep than a promise with large budget implications. For example, promises of regulatory reform policies have more limited budgetary implications than redistributive policies of state budget funds. This budget constraint is particularly strong today because the economic slowdown affects the main budget objectives, which regardless of who will win the political elections are obliged to ensure balance of the state budget accounts.

The third step comes in the form of drafting the assessment of acceptable levels according to data processing, reaching a moment of analysis, where the facts compared with the political promise are in support/opposition of the proposed policy.

This involves identifying potential areas of political consensus and conflict, essentially determining what is needed for the policy to gain support for adoption and implementation.

At this final moment of the analysis comes the challenge of confronting the policies where it is necessary to consider what kind of combination of factors will be necessary to receive the relevant evaluation of each political promise.

In this case, starting from the specifics of the continuity of government for several terms in the last decade, we must also analyze the promises inspired by the initiatives that are already on the agenda before the elections and that are definitely more likely to be kept because often they are a continuation of the policies approved in the previous mandates.

Indeed, a promise whose operationalization has already been significantly advanced in practice, even though it is considered achievable for fulfillment, should be clarified in detail as it relates to dealing with deadlines and additional resources that may have been allocated.

Analysis of political programs about anti-corruption

Does the methodology deal with the analysis of party programs for such topics as: anti-corruption, transparency or (mis)use of public funds?

The analysis of anti-corruption measures included in political programs can be carried out in at least two ways:

- first, looking at the emphasis, position and open declarations of the political party on this issue, and
- secondly, how political parties construct specific understandings of corruption and anti-corruption and use these understandings as instruments to advance their objectives in political discourse.

The narrow focus of the election campaign on seemingly small spending promises by the main political parties risks triggering the biggest economic uncertainties the next government may need to face.

[Good practices](#) for anti-corruption in party programs depend greatly on the political party and the economic and social democratic context. However, there are recommendations and measures to ensure party engagement with internal accountability and transparency, particularly in relation to party funding.

In this regard, some main aspects that the methodology takes into account for the analysis of political parties' programs are the approach of:

- the political program,
- the context in which the program was created,
- management leadership and political structuring, and
- the content of the political program.

The research methodology used to analyze party programs in terms of a certain political field aims at content analysis and perspective analysis.

Content analysis quantifies patterns within the program in an objective, repeatable, and systematic manner. Analysis targets textual passages to identify a political party's position on a particular issue, as well as the relative emphasis the party places on it.

The analysis of the perspective presented by the program/platform enters into the qualitative methodological analysis, which provides a framework for a richer understanding of how meaning is constructed and interpreted in the economic and political debate about the trend and the future.

Analysis of political capacity

Some ongoing analyzes that we have done show us that the election cycle affects the government's capacity to keep its promises. In addition to the reforms that are already "in process", the beginning of a mandate favors the realization of promises, because the legitimacy of the democratic mandate derived from the elections is particularly strong at this time.

Research analyzes of mandated governments² in the last two decades point to a greater level of government activity and capacity to implement reforms in the months after taking power, at which time the energy and positivity of the reshuffled cabinet appears to the new government are favored by a considerable political charge.

But precisely the analysis also points to a decline in the popularity of governments over time, which reduces the political capacity of the government to keep its promises.

One of the reasons for this decline in popularity lies in the implementation of the will of the governing mandate, which is met with forms of resistance to the changes desired/expected by the citizens, which are found both within the party, but also within the public administration.

This resistance can take the form of silent resistances in the form of disobedience to public duties, media battles, sectoral opposition or political movements.

In any case, the reason why it is worth monitoring and measuring the accountability of the fulfillment of promises applies to the great popular jury (*whether citizens as a whole or a "mixed public from the ideological, political or social current"*).

Analyzes to date show us that the presence of institutional and political capacities to keep the word/promise does not guarantee that the promises will be respected.

² <https://polifakt.al/publikime/trainime/>

The incentive to keep some promises is internal (relating to the policy), for example, when the candidate or their party advocates a measure for ideological reasons.

Meanwhile, today ideology has largely become closer to pragmatism by making promises that are more important than others, for the voter, as well as for the future of the party instead of ideology based on traditional principles.

Policy programs under this approach are created to cover most areas of public action, but not every area receives the same level of attention, which necessarily produces different expectations.

In general, promises that are at the heart of the party's political project are more likely to be kept and come to fruition.

Incentives for the fulfillment of electoral commitments can also be related to the electoral strategies of the executive power (requesting votes).

Keeping one's promises can make it possible to unite and mobilize the electoral and party bases, or to build loyalty with an electoral base known to favor the party's camp, but whose support needs to be strengthened. At the same time, keeping certain commitments can sometimes hold back opposition parties if they are divided on the issue.

Meanwhile, the characteristics of the public are a potentially decisive parameter for the observance or not of electoral commitments. On the one hand, the most influential public may possess sufficient resources to express their demands and to remind the executive vocally of their electoral commitments, or even to contribute themselves to the definition of problems and solutions.

We have already mentioned this impact on the capacity of elected representatives to keep their promises.

On the other hand, policy positions can become priorities for government action if the groups that would benefit form a strategically important part of the electorate and are viewed positively by society.

If they are viewed positively, the public that is less mobilized and does not constitute a target population becomes the object of symbolic policies that allow the government to show that it cares, but without having to commit resources.

Incentives to make and keep promises can be part of a strategy aimed at taking power, especially in building a parliamentary majority and a coalition (the goal of entering office).

Electoral programs/Manifestos are not exclusively derived from proposals that correspond to the position represented by the party Chairman (or Prime Minister), but are also the result of numerous compromises, especially within the party and with potential coalition partners.

From this perspective, the origin of promises in manifestos/programmes should have an impact on their fate, as governments may feel less compelled to honor commitments made reluctantly as a result of concessions to minority groups in their party or to the parties in the coalition.

Governments face many competing pressures on their ability to implement policies. The reality of policymaking is that governments do not achieve all of their goals during their time in office.

Even if we look at the last four governments in Albania (2009 - 2025), they barely manage to fulfill up to [half of their commitments](#), a fact that the voters know.

To make meaningful choices when governments are understood to be unlikely to deliver on their entire agenda, voters need to know which promises have taken precedence over others.

So voters need to understand what promises actually were and are central to a party's offer.

Consequently, breaking promises that are perceived as important for a party's electoral platform should be understood as a threat to the democratic process.

This moment of understanding political dishonesty is worth more than breaking promises that are seen as fleeting, because voters actually face a larger gap between their expectations of what will happen if the party is elected and forms a new government and that that actually happens

A government that fulfills only a few of its promises and does not perfectly align its goals with what the voters believed.

But, she will still be considered to have performed well, since the circumstances of a dishonest political and media environment make her a candidate for government again, since she is also used to soften and keep a growing number of unengaged electorates who are satisfied with even a little achievement.

Therefore, this theory implies that a political system with honest parties, an impartial news media and a militant and critical civil society, as well as an attentive and well-informed and knowledgeable electorate is the premise for promising representation and democracy in general.

If this political environment has managed to exist, then it can be considered the reality that the parties have a moral duty to clearly communicate their policies and priorities to the voters.

If a party declared its priorities in a manifesto but campaigned publicly on issues it did not plan to include as a priority if it were to govern, then it would be very guilty of failing to represent promising low in the government.

Conversely, a party that made its best efforts to communicate its priorities but fails to do so because the media consistently mischaracterizes its position and priorities does not necessarily make it culpable for its failure to achieve representation of the promise, as the media will have to share a large part of the blame for the lack of representation of the promise.

THE IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL DEBATE ON PROMISES BASED ON THEIR COST

The promise constitutes the very principle of morality, to the extent that there would be no "ethics without the promise." The promise is, in particular, fundamental to democracy, where the functioning of representative democracy is effectively built on the link between electoral commitments and government policies. The act of defining alternative policies to be put to the vote, followed by the adoption of these policies by elected representatives in the form of actual public policies, are essential to the legitimacy of representative democratic systems.

In this context, representatives of political parties are considered responsible and must bear the consequences for their promises to those who elected them.

This [principle](#) is closely related to that of the "mandate" that citizens give to their representatives to fulfill a defined mission.

Electoral promises are presented to citizens as a means of real control over political decisions to come, and thus arouse high hopes, and correspondingly extreme disappointment when they are not kept, as has been the case for the entire period of the last three decades with the model democratic implemented until today by politicians.

By including in the political debates the economic cost of the election promises, it is an offer for the public to clarify their judgment on the political platform by influencing the political parties for an opportunity to think and improve their policy proposals before publishing them. and declare them.

In this new experience, it is also necessary for political parties (mainly for opposition parties) to carry out consultations with analysts and economic experts to systematize and address in a more clear financial way.

The cost of electoral platforms of political parties is still relatively rare and appears to operate in only a few OECD countries.

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