

Where Have All the Pledges Gone?

An Analysis of ČSSD and ODS Manifesto Promises since 2002 to 2013*

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Abstract

There are many studies analysing the ability of parties to enact their election pledges. Most of these focus on established Western democracies and conclude that pledges made by parties that enter the government after elections are more likely to be enacted than those made by parties stuck in opposition. As the ability to keep election promises has important consequences for the quality of democracy, it is important to extend the analyses to the Central and Eastern European countries. We find a lack of such studies, however. This article seeks to make a contribution in this area. In this paper we analyse the case of the Czech Republic from 2002 to the parliamentary elections in 2013. The analysis includes pledges given in electoral manifestos by the two main parties in that period, the Czech Social Democratic Party and the Civic Democratic Party, which alternated in coalition governments. Unlike other studies from this region, we focus on a longer period, not just the last elections, so the results reflect a longer term trend, and not just the current situation.

In the total sample of 1800 pledges made by the two parties in three elections we found that there is a larger success rate in keeping promises for the governing party; the ČSSD fulfilled fewer pledges when they were in power than the ODS. Surprisingly, the Social democrats had a greater percentage of enacted pledges while they were in opposition than in government. The analysis shows the shift in the composition of manifestos since the 2006 elections and the thematic composition of pledges and different success ratios among them.

Keywords: election pledges; manifesto analysis; mandate theory; program-to-policy linkage; Czech Republic

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1. Introduction

Elections are an integral part of representative democracy and campaigns are inherently associated with them. During a campaign, political parties representing different ideologies

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and intents meet and compete with each other. Free and fair elections permit the public to choose its representatives, and the campaigns leading up to election days are intended to enable voters to make these choices in a reasonable and informed manner (Kelley 1960). Politicians reach the public – not just during the campaign period – to an enormous extent by their talk: candidate debates, parliamentary word fights, press releases, speeches at all kinds of public events, etc. Thus it's not a surprise that the public sometimes have the impression that politics is mainly a battle of words and not substantive policy-making. In addition to this, manifestos are an integral part of the electoral fight, their role in politics is irreplaceable. Pledges included in these manifestos belong among the factors which influence voters during the process of decision making. Political parties can also make pledges in their short and catchy campaign slogans. But unlike the pledges in manifestos, there are only a few slogans during a campaign, so voters who are eager to familiarize themselves with a party's intentions might not be satisfied with only the campaign claims. In manifestos, one can get a complete picture of the policies a party wants to enact. While the effect of manifestos and pledges on voter decisions is widely discussed among scholars (Adams et al. 2006; Somer-Topcu 2009; Ezrow 2016), they remain a valuable source of information for both scholars and voters.

How strong the linkage is between political party statements during election campaigns and subsequent governmental action is the central question in many democratic theories. For the mandate theory of democracy, in particular, a strong linkage between election pledges and the actions of elected officials is one of the observable features of a well-functioning democracy (Mansergh, Thomson 2007). Despite the changing nature of electoral behaviour and party organization, the mandate theory is of enduring relevance to discussions of democracy (Budge, Newton 1997; Dahl, Stinebrickner 2002). Elections can be seen as an exchange between politicians and voters. Politicians provide pledges in exchange for voter support. To improve a party's chances of success in the next election, the government party has an incentive to enact the pledges it gave to the voters in the last elections, because voters judge the party not only on its present policies, but also on the enactment of its previous policy commitments (Downs 1957). In the past half of century, since its formulation, Downs's theory has had and still has to face criticism mainly for being naive (Robertson 1976; Riker 1982; Monroe 1991; Grogman et al. 1995). But elections are still perceived as an exchange process, where voters expect that the winning party will deliver the promises it gave to the electorate during the campaign – or at least some of them. Although campaigns are more and more important and have a bigger impact on voter decision making, electoral pledges still have a special place in voters' minds.

This paper analyses electoral manifestos of the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) and the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), both the most long-term strongest representative political parties in the Czech Republic.¹ The analysis focuses on the ability of these parties to enact their electoral pledges during the period of 2002 to 2013, when the last parliamentary elections took place. This analysis does not just give us information about the last elections, it also provides us with more comprehensive insight into the stability or changing ability of parties to fulfil their promises over time. Therefore, the aim of the analysis is to find out whether political parties are able to enact the electoral pledges they give to voters and how this ability changes over time. The analysis focuses on differences among various thematic pledges, as well.

2. Electoral Manifestos and Pledges

To introduce their values and policies, political parties develop a formal statement. This serves as a part of their effort to win elections. These manifestos² are crucial in the construction of debates, salient issues around which a variety of voices are able to express their points of view, and to make voters' decisions based on the issues (Laclau, Mouffe 1985; Mumby 1993). Manifestos are an important tool for distinguishing one party from another (Birch 1980). They can be seen as a draft contract between a party and its voters – they are often formulated as obligations to their voters and parties agree to accomplish them if elected (Laver, Hunt 1992).

Manifestos can perform different functions depending on who the audience is. According to Eibl (2010), a manifesto can play five roles. It can take a promotional role when it aims to reach out to voters and inform them about the attitudes and priorities of a party. Parties also can inform voters about product availability, usually when there is a new party. Manifestos can serve as profiling and agitation tools, through which a party can be clearly and visibly distinguished from its political competition and can emphasize its strengths and even topic proximity to particular voters. For the party, a manifesto provides a kind of operational base and ideological background from which it is also possible to engage in arguments, not only in the election campaign, but also in any future negotiation about a government, for example with coalition partners. A manifesto can communicate a party's identity to its members. It also provides a common ideological background which can unite party members and can define common objectives or how to achieve them. Electoral manifestos may also act as stimuli that encourage party members to become involved in party affairs, or they can legitimize member conduct at other levels of government (for example municipal, regional or even supra-national). Finally, for party leaders, a manifesto can serve as an instrument of power towards the other party members, typically during intra-party arguments among warring ideological fractions.³ For the purposes of this paper, the functions which a manifesto has in regard to voters and political competition are important.

Seeking to analyse manifestos, scholars have several approaches they can apply. One type of analysis is devoted to the space a particular policy has in a party's manifesto. The difficulty with this approach, widely used by Hofferbert and Budge (1992), is that there is no differentiation between positive and negative party attitudes toward issues. The Budge-Hofferbert method praises the selective emphasis methodology on the ground that stressing a particular priority implies an intent to take only positive action in the relevant policy domain. However, this is not always the case. A party may very well negatively emphasize a particular issue in its manifesto, and this may have an effect on policy. Therefore, there should be a differentiation between positive and negative emphases (Pétry, Collette 2008). Another approach is to count specific pledges in manifestos and then count how many of them were enacted through government actions. Royed and Borelli (1997; 1999) are strong advocates of this method, which, unlike the previous one, does not sacrifice the substance of policy. This is the reason why the method has been more widely used by a larger number of scholars. Another reason for the method's popularity is that it produces data in the form of percentages of pledges enacted, which are simpler to interpret (Pétry, Collette 2008).

Why should political parties try to enact their electoral promises? Besides normative moral motivation (Schedler 1988), there is still the mandate theory of elections. According to this theory, competing parties offer voters different governmental programs between which they can decide and choose. The party, which attracts the most votes on this basis, then forms the next government. The party is bound to carry through the program on which it was elected; in other words, party manifestos adequately signal to voters what parties would do if elected (Budge, Hofferbert 1990). The logic underlying this expectation is straightforward: the issues advocated by the party in government are the winning issues that contributed in getting the party elected in the first place. It is therefore rational for a utility-maximizing party to carry out its election promises. Another reason for keeping election promises is to avoid retaliation by disappointed voters at the next election (Pétry, Collette 2008). In other words, the party got votes according to its manifesto and pledges, so it should be interested in enacting them if it wants to be elected next time. Although nowadays we know that voter decisions are made on a broader range of factors (Evans 2004; Thomassen 2005; Chytilék et al. 2014; Dalton 2014), electoral pledges remain central to voter concerns.

The theoretical underpinnings of the mandate theory can be seen as summarized by Sullivan and O'Connor (1972). According to them, we can identify two conditions which focus on voters: a) voters perceive the issue positions of the parties, and b) voters cast ballots on the grounds of the issues. Civic control also requires that the parties fulfil two conditions: a) the opposing parties must differ on the issues, and b) the winning party will behave in accordance with its announced positions. Budge and Hofferbert focus most especially on the parties' follow-through by asking whether the winning party behaves in accordance with its announced positions. Given that party follow-through is a necessary condition, it surely is an important question in its own right (McDonald et al. 1999). Although the mandate theory (and its author's methodology) has been criticised several times (King, Laver 1993; Thome 1999), the mandate model is still widely used to analyse electoral pledges.

3. Analysing the Enactment of Pledges

What is our motivation to study pledge fulfilment and what can we learn from it? Parker (1989) found that the ability of politicians to keep pledges is salient to voters, they are sensitive to the degree politicians deliver campaign promises. A study suggests that promise keeping by elected officials affects overall levels of trust, mistrust and cynicism among citizens (Hibbing, Thiess-Morse 1995). Moreover, Parker (1989) found that citizens are generally pessimistic about the truthfulness of pledge fulfilment. According to his study, the personal trustworthiness of members of the U.S. Congress is among the most salient evaluative criteria for nearly twenty per cent of the electorate. Stimson, McKuen and Erikson (1995) claim that the quality of democratic government depends on the extent to which the policy choices of public officials reflect the interests of citizens; and elections are generally perceived as the most common institution through which voters can affect these choices. Finally, Craig et al. (1990) find that responses to questions about whether candidates try to

keep their campaign promises are highly correlated with responses to the more traditional measures of incumbent-based trust.

Since the second half of the 20th century, there have been many studies of election pledges which are not fully coordinated research, but there are signs of genuine progress. Different researchers use slightly different definitions and categorization schemes for the identification of pledges and their enactment. The core methodological question for pledge analysis is which statements should be considered a pledge (Mansergh, Thomson 2007). Royed distinguishes between two features of a statement. The first is its 'hardness'. It is formulated via direct commitment such as 'we promise' or 'we enact', or a softer intention, such as 'we support' or 'we are for'. The second feature is the statement's specificity – whether the statement refers to a definitive action that can be verified or to a vague general principle (Royed 1992; 1996). A similar view on pledges can be found in Thomson's analysis. He adds that it is important to consider 'soft' pledges, too, particularly in coalition systems (Thomson 1999; 2001).

The earliest systematic research on election pledges focused mainly on the United States and the United Kingdom (Royed 1992; 1996; Ringquist, Dasse 2004; Sulkin 2009; Pétry 2015) or Canada (Rallings 1987). Although some analyses have been written (Roberts 2009; Kostadinova 2013; Kačur 2015; Škvrňák 2015; Svačinová 2016) and the situation is getting better, there is still a gap in the research on the Central and Eastern European countries. The analyses often focus on a short time period (usually one term of government) or a certain thematic part of manifestos and electoral pledges. In light of the complexities of the electoral documents, it is an understandable and totally legitimate approach, especially when you focus on countries without a long history of democratic development. There was a gap in terms of analysis devoted to the fulfilment of pledges in coalition systems of government until the research on the Netherlands (Thomson 1999; 2001) and Ireland (Mansergh, Thomson 2007) was carried out. Due to the political systems, most above-mentioned analyses of Central and Eastern Europe region are built on this basis.

Pétry and Collette (2008) reviewed 18 journal articles and book chapters over the past forty years that reported quantitative measures of election promise fulfilment in North America and Europe. They found that parties fulfilled 67 per cent of their promises on average, with wide variation across time, countries, and regimes. These studies, however, usually focus on the United States, the United Kingdom and other developed, western democracies, but there is just a small number of studies focused on Central and Eastern European countries, as we already mentioned above. These studies represent a mosaic of different perspectives and methodologies analysing manifestos usually with a focus on the thematic composition of the programs and the fulfilment of pledges (compare Smith, Smith 2000). But these studies usually do not follow a long-term analysis to discover whether the percentage of enacted pledges is steady, growing, or decreasing.

Mandate theory states that pledges made by parties that enter government after elections are more likely to be enacted than pledges made by parties that remain in opposition. No matter whether parties are motivated by the material benefits of government office or the realization of particular policies, they will attempt to enact their election pledges if given the opportunity to do so (Mansergh, Thomson 2007). We can expect lower rates of pledge enactment in institutions that compel government parties to share power. Manifestos contain parties' expressed preferences, but with two or more prospective government political

parties it is inevitable that not all pledges are the same so not all of them can be enacted. Therefore, coalition governments lead to a less effective transmission of voters' policy preferences into government actions, as there are two or more ruling parties. Nevertheless, in these coalition systems, the same behavioural mechanisms that motivate governing parties to enact their pledges are present (Mansergh, Thomson 2007).

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Questions

- Do the Czech political parties ČSSD and ODS formulate concrete (rather than vague) electoral manifestos and pledges?
- Were ČSSD and ODS more successful in enacting pledges when they entered government in comparison with staying opposition?
- How does the percentage of enacted pledges change over time?
- What thematic pledges are parties most successful in enacting?

4.2. Cases, Period and Source Selection

There are already studies analysing long-term periods covering several elections, but these are only in developed western democracies. We can find studies covering some of the Central and Eastern Europe countries, but they usually analyse just one election or term. So, this study focuses on the Czech Republic as a case of a Central European post-communist country with the aim of closing the gap or, at least, approaching the state of the art in western countries. Another reason for selecting the Czech Republic is the author's knowledge of the Czech language; this is crucial for carrying out an analysis of pledge enactment.

For the purposes of the analysis the author decided to include the parliamentary elections in 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2013⁴ and focus on ČSSD and ODS manifestos. Although inclusion of previous elections might be seen as valuable, it would bring many complications. According to the number of pledges in every manifesto, it would be enormously difficult to include and analyse more elections. Furthermore, the period from 1998 to 2002 is an exceptional and deviant case in terms of alternating governments of social and civic democrats, because the ČSSD minority cabinet was supported by ODS which was supposed to be in opposition (Kopeček 2013; 2015). Finally, an analysis of earlier manifestos and parties' ability to fulfil their promises and, mainly, a comparison with the beginning of the 21st century might be problematic due to the Czech Republic's communist past and its subsequent reforms. According to Stokes (2004), politicians may break their election pledges out of a need to pursue economic reforms. This period took place in the Czech Republic in the 1990s (Roberts 2009; Ost 2009). Therefore, it is legitimate to expect that broken pledges would not be as common at the beginning of the 21st century, from the 2002 elections on, as they were during the 1990s period of transformation.

The choice of ČSSD and ODS was logical as these two parties represent the strongest political parties in the Czech Republic not just for the analysed period, but for the entire past two decades. The importance of the parties in the electoral system has been reflected during campaigns when these parties attacked each other more often than other parties (Matušková 2006; 2010; Gregor, Macková 2014). ČSSD and ODS had the strongest representation in the Parliament⁵ and every political prime minister (except the caretaker government PMs in 2009–2010 and 2013) was from one of these parties. Inclusion in the analysis of all political parties with parliamentary representation was not possible due to the number of parties, which vary from four in 2002 to seven in 2013, and the extent of their manifestos and number of pledges. But as ČSSD and ODS were the strongest parties in all political governments, it is important – and for the purposes of this analysis, sufficient – to analyse these two parties' pledge enactments.

The sources of electoral pledges are the electoral manifestos of ČSSD and ODS for the elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament from 2002 to 2013 accessible from parties' websites (www.cssd.cz; www.ods.cz). Analysis of every pledge enactment was made by two coders. If both of them found that the pledge was or was not enacted, it was coded according to their findings. In cases when they coded a pledge enactment differently, the coding was followed by a joint meeting and discussion between the coders. After this exchange, a consensus was reached. This procedure took time and therefore may be difficult to replicate, but it provided certainty that none of enacted pledges were missed.

4.3. Definition, Identification, and Enactment of Pledges

Several manifesto analyses are contained in – or at least use the methodology of – CMP, Comparative Manifesto Project (Manifesto Project undated; Mansfeldová 2003). CMP is a group which uses quantitative content analysis to analyse manifestos. It is based on coding of sentences, respectively meaningful sentence units (part of a sentence, a phrase, part of compound sentences). Each of the coded units should contain content that may be perceived as a political statement or pledge. A pledge is understood as a 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 (Royed 1996). There are some pledges repeated throughout the manifestos several times. These are included just once in the dataset.

This method is usually used to locate a political party on the political spectrum, differentiate it from the competition, create an index, etc. This kind of analysis makes it possible to compare political parties, track the development of political topics over time or identify differences in opinions on certain issues among political parties. However, CMP has been criticized by many scholars (Mikhaylov et al. 2008; Dinas, Gemenis 2010; Volkens et al. 2013). Moreover, none of the above-mentioned outputs are the aim of this article. The article focuses on the ability of the Czech political parties to enact their election pledges over time, so while CMP usage is limited, it can still provide us valuable information. For purpose of this article, CMP variables were slightly modified.

4.4. Variables

The dependent variable in this study is the fulfilment of pledges, which was evaluated at the end of the term of the respective government. Although the current term started in 2013, it ends in 2017 and a significant part of it has already passed, therefore it is not included. The government still has several months to enact its pledges, so results would be distorted and misleading. In the first step, consecutive manifestos were compared to identify any repeated pledges; these were then coded as *recurring*. The others were then analysed as to whether they were enacted or not. Unlike other analyses, this one also takes into account general or vague promises whose fulfilment it is not possible to determine objectively. However, in cases where there was a vague pledge and elsewhere in the same manifesto another one with the same message but which was rather specific, the specific one was included in the analysis. In cases in which a general pledge was given without any specific twin, it was included in the analysis and was coded as 'vague'. So the pledges were coded according to the categories *recurring*, *fully enacted*, *partly enacted*, *vague/not verifiable* or *not enacted*. This approach gives us the opportunity to get a clearer picture of what kind of pledges political parties formulate. Next, many sources were used to check whether a pledge was enacted. These especially included laws, government websites, newspaper articles, official OECD or Eurostat statistics, etc. Only pledges enacted into law, confirmed not only by the government but also by the Parliament, were coded as partly or fully enacted.⁶ The particular contribution of the party to the process of fulfilling the pledge was not taken into account – it did not matter who brought about the enactment of the pledge.

The first variable codes the topic of a pledge. The CMP gave us the basic approach for our analysis. However, CMP works with dozens of categories, which are broken down into subcategories. As the analysis of two parties' manifestos would be difficult with so many categories, these were merged according to the issues from the manifestos. For this purpose, manifestos were cursorily read. The most frequent issues were identified and fourteen concrete categories were coded in analysis: (1) *security*, (2) *taxes and debt*, (3) *transportation infrastructure*, (4) *European Union*, (5) *law and order*, (6) *culture and sport*, (7) *foreign relations* (excl. EU), (8) *economy and industry*, (9) *countryside and environment*, (10) *welfare state and living*, (11) *government and administration*, (12) *education and science*, (13) *employment and labour* and (14) *health care*. These categories were able to cover most of the pledges. Those topics which did not fall into any of these categories were coded as (15) *other*. An additional variable codes whether the party was in government – a pledge was coded one (1) if the party was in government and if party was in opposition, its pledges were coded zero (0).

Before we proceed to the analysis, it is necessary to point out one more thing. As the theoretical background, definition and methodological approaches vary among the analyses of pledges and manifestos, it is common that any two analyses focused on the same country, same time period and same manifestos find a slightly different amount of pledges (and their fulfilment). Mansergh and Thomson (2007) indirectly admit this reliability issue when they consider the average number of pledges when taking into account more studies of pledge fulfilment in one country. In doing so, scholars *de facto* accept that it is extremely difficult to determine the precise number of promises given in a manifesto that has several dozen

pages. Therefore, it is necessary to expect both more or less different numbers of pledges and slightly different enactment percentages in comparison with other studies focused on pledge enactment in the Czech Republic (e.g. Škvrňák 2015).

5. Analysis

5.1. ČSSD and ODS Electoral Manifesto Documents

ČSSD went to the 2002 elections as a governing party. Its manifesto had 34 pages and contained 132 pledges. Within the document, there were model examples of people the party was focused on and the pledge effects were demonstrated on benefits for these people. Beyond pledges, the end of the manifesto contained a list of election party leaders. For ODS, these elections were difficult and exceptional. As it had supported the ČSSD minority government since 1998, it could not frame itself as clear opposition critical of the ruling party. So the differentiation was made not by strict criticism of ČSSD, but mainly by focusing on different issues. However, criticism of Social democrats still became part of the Civic democrat's communication. And this was reflected in the manifesto, too. The document was 22 pages long, was divided into thematic chapters and contained 83 pledges. The submitted manifesto looked back at the previous period and partly criticised the ČSSD. In comparison with ČSSD and follow-up ODS manifestos, this one presented fewer promises and little vision for the future. We found generally worded phrases quite often (e.g. 'rule of law cannot be just a phrase').

The 2006 elections brought changes in the manifestos. Both parties introduced much longer and more comprehensive manifestos. ČSSD had a 78 page document which included 537 pledges. The structure of the manifesto differed from the previous one. A chapter devoted to the party's previous success was followed-up by eight by specific topic chapters. Although it was not an observed variable (and therefore we are not able to quantify it), when reading the manifesto one is able to notice a large number of repeated promises – across chapters, and sometimes even within the same chapter. ODS had a 69 page manifesto with 502 pledges. These were broken down into bullet points rather than continuous text. The party used many graphs, mainly introducing data from research made by the agency STEM in February 2006. All of 14 thematic chapters were introduced by the phrase 'PLUS for...' (in Czech *PLUS pro...*).

In 2010, the ČSSD manifesto had 36 pages, so while it resembled the 2002 manifesto in its size, this time the document contained 250 pledges. It was divided into 15 chapters. The form was similar to the previous (and follow-up) manifesto as it was written in continuous text, not in bullet points. The ODS manifesto took a similar form. It was written in continuous text and contained 296 pledges formulated on 52 pages. In 2010, ODS again used many graphs. Unlike the previous elections, this manifesto contained both a reminder and defence of government actions; the reason is obvious – ODS was a member of government since 2006. In this document, there is a chapter which cites the issues and promises party wants to avoid. This reflected the edgy, pre-election situation in which Civic democrats and Social democrats attacked each other in debates and used negative advertisements during the campaign.

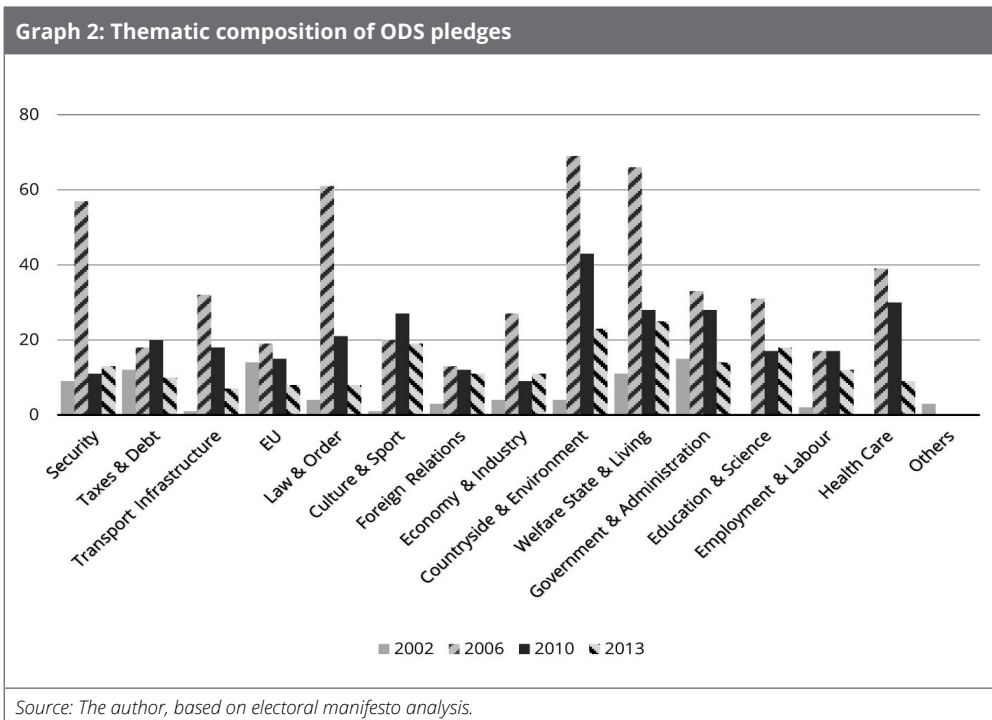
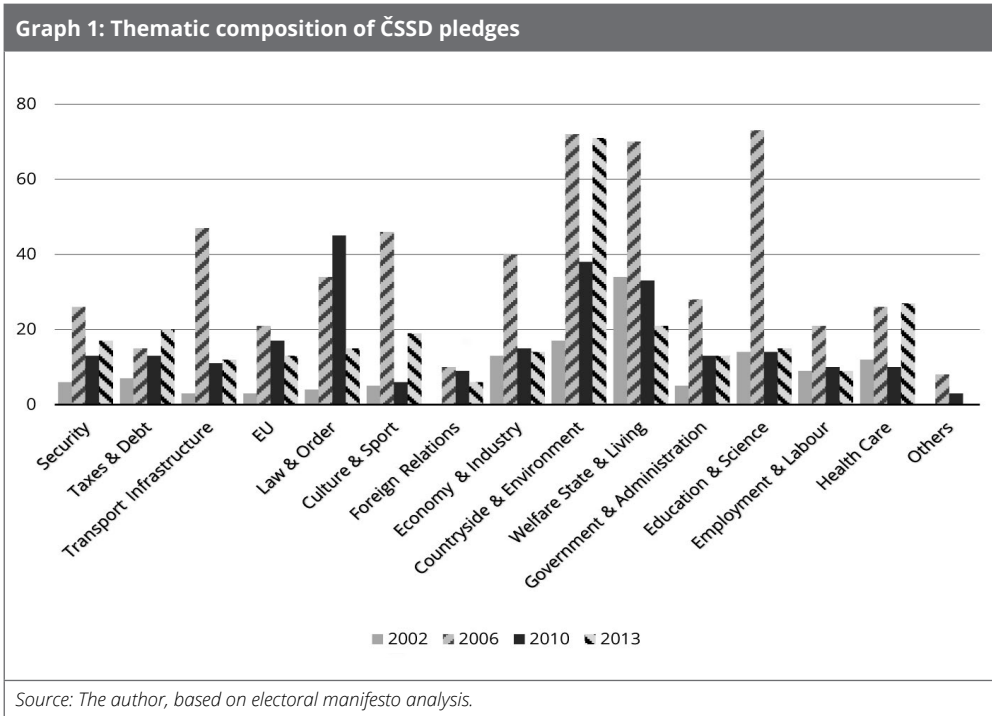
2013 brought nothing new in the form of manifestos. ČSSD had a 36 page document, which contained 281 pledges. The party went back to a bullet point format, but these usually formed entire paragraphs. ČSSD introduced election party leaders at the end of the document again. The ODS manifesto had 31 pages and contained 188 pledges. A form of the document was much simpler, excluded pictures, photos and graphs, and consisted, *de facto*, of only continuous text. Each paragraph typically corresponded to a specific pledge. The document reflected the fact that the party was a member of government, introduced enacted pledges and pointed to the fact that many pledges were not enacted because of the snap election in 2013.

5.2. ČSSD and ODS Pledges and Pledge Enactment

In his analyses, Thomson found that in countries with one party governments, pledges in manifestos are formulated clearly, while in countries with coalition government experience and practice, parties tend to formulate their pledges more vaguely. According to Thomson, this is caused by the need for coalition negotiation when forming a government (Thomson 1999; 2001). In the case of the two analysed Czech parties, we cannot confirm this thesis. ČSSD and ODS formulated their pledges in the 2002–2013 manifestos directly, many of them promising concrete numbers in growth, debt decrease, minimum wage, etc.

Pledges in the ČSSD manifesto in 2002 were focused mainly on the *welfare state and living* (26%), *countryside and environment* (13%), and *education and science* (11%). These thematic areas were most often mentioned in 2006, too, only the order was different – *education and science* (14%) and *countryside and environment* (13%). *Welfare state and living* (13%) lost its dominant role in the manifesto. In the 2010 elections, ČSSD pledges were mostly made on *law and order* (18%), *countryside and environment* (15%) and *welfare state and living* (13%). In the last elections included in the analysis, 2013, most of the pledges made by ČSSD were on *countryside and environment* (25%). This was followed by *health care* (10%), *welfare state and living* (10%), and *taxes and debt* (7%). In this election, we can see a more balanced distribution of pledges among the topics (with the exception of *countryside and environment*) so almost none of them is represented in more than ten per cent of the pledges. A clear shift of emphasis from the *welfare state and living* issues in 2002 to the *countryside and environment* pledges in 2013 can be seen.

The most salient issues for ODS in the 2002 elections according to the manifesto were *government and administration* (18%), *European Union* (17%) and *taxes and debt* (14%). In 2006, we can see greater emphasis on different issues: *countryside and environment* (14%), *welfare state and living* (13%) and *law and order* (12%) – issues, which were characteristic for Social democrats in 2002 and 2006. This might be caused by the role of ODS, which was in opposition before the 2006 elections so it had to respond to the government policies formed by ČSSD. *Countryside and environment* remained among the most salient issues in the 2010 election (15%). Others were *health care* (10%), *government and administration* and *welfare state and living*, each representing about 10% of all pledges. In the 2013 elections, the most pledges were made in the areas of *welfare state and living* (13%), *countryside and environment* (12%), *culture and sport* (10%) and *education and science* (10%).



Analysing pledge enactment, ČSSD was able to *fully enact* just a quarter (27%) of its pledges in 2002. More than half of them (55%) *recurred* in their 2006 manifesto. This is remarkable when we realize ČSSD was in government by that election period. The party was more successful even in opposition: from 2006 to 2010, two out of five pledges the party made in its manifesto were *fully enacted* and even from 2010 to 2013 it was every third pledge. It is a question why this situation occurred; one possible explanation could be that Social democratic pledges were similar to the governmental party's.⁷ The category of *not enacted* pledges then reflect the ČSSD position: there were less than 8% of unfulfilled pledges during the period 2002–2006 when ČSSD was in government, but over 20% of 2006 and 2010 manifesto pledges, when ČSSD was in opposition.

Table 1: ČSSD pledges enactment

	2002	2006	2010
Recurring	55.3%	29.4%	32.4%
Fully Enacted	27.3%	40.0%	34.4%
Partly Enacted	6.1%	4.8%	5.2%
Vague / Not Verifiable	3.8%	7.3%	5.2%
Not Enacted	7.6%	20.5%	22.8%

Source: The author, based on electoral manifesto analysis.

We can see a quite similar percentage of enacted pledges from the 2002 elections in the case of ODS. In the period from 2002 to 2006, ODS *fully enacted* almost 29% of the pledges it made to its voters. Although ODS was in opposition at that time, it was able to *fully enact* slightly more pledges than ČSSD. After the 2006 election, ODS was in government until the caretaker government took over in spring 2009. There were almost 40% of ODS pledges *fully enacted* by that time, which mirrored the situation from the previous period – although ODS was the ruling party and ČSSD was in opposition, Social democrats were able to *fully enact* somewhat more pledges than Civic democrats (see Table 1 and Table 2). It is not easy to explain this and data does not give us a clear answer. One possible explanation could lie in the caretaker government, which governed for one year; this was enough time to enact some policies and laws that could be closer to the Social democrats policies and pledges.

It is necessary to point out that not only party willingness and coalition negotiation have an impact on the ability to enact a party's pledges. Economic and foreign affairs events may also impact politicians' abilities to fulfil the pledges they have made (Royed 1996). If there is any crisis raised during an electoral period it can change the political and economic environment so the pledges given in the election may become unrealistic. This may be the case with the economic crisis after 2008. However, we can see a higher ratio of enacted pledges in the 2006 to 2010 period in comparison with the previous one. Although the crisis lasted several years, this should not affect a party's ability to enact pledges after the next elections; parties forming the government after the 2010 elections had enough time to adjust their manifestos to the crisis period.

Within the analysed period, 2010 to 2013 is the only time period which lasted only for three years; it was also the only period in which a governing party was able to enact more

pledges than the party in opposition. Almost half of the Civic democrats' pledges (47%) were *fully enacted*, in comparison with merely a third (34%) of those made by Social democrats.

Table 2: ODS pledges enactment

	2002	2006	2010
Recurring	36.1%	21.5%	22.6%
Fully Enacted	28.9%	38.8%	47.3%
Partly Enacted	2.4%	3.8%	4.4%
Vague / Not Verifiable	10.8%	8.6%	4.1%
Not Enacted	21.7%	27.3%	21.6%

Source: The author, based on electoral manifesto analysis.

ČSSD was most successful⁸ in enacting pledges on *taxes and debt* (54%), *security* (53%) and *employment and labour* (45%). Pledges on *education and science* (44%) and *health care* (42%) had an over 40% enactment rate, while others were below this point. ČSSD was least successful with pledges on *welfare state and living*, *countryside and environment* and *government and administration* – in all of these cases approximately a quarter of pledges were enacted. Pledges on *countryside and environment*, *the European Union* and *economy and industry* appeared repeatedly and *recurred* in one election manifesto to another. In contrast to successful enactment, pledges on *laws and order*, *foreign policy* and *welfare state and living* were *not enacted* nor did they recur in more than one quarter of cases.

Table 3: Thematic composition of ČSSD pledge enactment (in %)

	Recurring	Fully Enacted	Partly Enacted	Vague / Not Verifiable	Not Enacted
Security	33.3	53.3	2.0	2.0	8.9
Taxes & Debt	20.0	54.3	2.9	2.9	20.0
Transport Infrastructure	24.6	39.4	11.5	6.6	18.0
EU	41.5	34.1	2.4	4.9	17.1
Laws & Order	32.5	30.1	6.0	2.4	28.9
Culture & Sport	38.6	35.1	3.5	0.0	22.8
Foreign Relations	31.6	31.6	10.5	0.0	26.3
Economy & Industry	41.2	30.9	2.9	8.8	16.2
Countryside & Environment	44.9	27.6	3.9	6.3	17.3
Welfare State & Living	34.3	26.3	2.2	12.4	24.8
Government & Administration	37.0	28.3	8.7	8.7	17.4
Education & Science	22.8	43.6	5.9	8.9	18.8
Employment & Labour	32.5	45.0	10.0	0.0	12.5
Health Care	37.5	41.7	8.3	2.1	10.4
Others	0.0	63.6	0.0	18.2	18.2
Total	33.9	35.5	5.1	6.2	19.3

Source: The author, based on electoral manifesto analysis.

Civic democrats were most successful with pledges on *education* (50%), *the European Union* (48%), *economy and industry* (48%) and *countryside and environment* (46%). Most recurring pledges were on *employment and labour* (31%), *foreign relations* (29%) and *countryside and environment* (28%). ODS made most of its not enacted pledges on issues of *taxes and debt* (40%), *government and administration* (37%) and *transport infrastructure and employment and labour* (both 33%).

Table 4: Thematic composition of ODS pledge enactment (in %)

	Recurring	Fully Enacted	Partly Enacted	Vague / Not Verifiable	Not Enacted
Security	20.8	48.1	2.6	6.5	22.1
Taxes & Debt	16.0	36.0	4.0	4.0	40.0
Transport Infrastructure	23.5	35.3	5.9	2.0	33.3
EU	29.2	47.9	6.3	8.3	8.3
Laws & Order	12.8	43.0	3.5	10.5	30.2
Culture & Sport	25.0	37.5	4.2	8.3	25.0
Foreign Relations	28.6	39.3	0.0	17.9	14.3
Economy & Industry	20.0	47.5	2.5	10.0	20.0
Countryside & Environment	27.6	45.7	4.3	12.1	10.3
Welfare State & Living	23.8	40.0	3.8	7.6	24.8
Government & Administration	26.3	31.6	1.3	3.9	36.8
Education & Science	16.7	50.0	4.2	4.2	25.0
Employment & Labour	30.6	27.8	8.3	0.0	33.3
Health Care	29.0	33.3	4.3	2.9	30.4
Others	0.0	66.7	0.0	33.3	0.0
Total	23.3	40.7	3.9	7.3	24.9

Source: The author, based on electoral manifesto analysis.

In an overall comparison, ODS was more successful in enacting its promises, which is not so surprising as it was in government for two periods in comparison with just one in the case of ČSSD. This has affected how many pledges recurred: in the ČSSD case, it was every third pledge (34%), in the ODS case, merely every fourth pledge (23%). Surprisingly, there were more unfulfilled pledges in ODS manifestos – every fourth (25%) versus every fifth in the ČSSD manifestos (19%). The remainder of pledges was made up of partly enacted and vague or not verifiable pledges. On the distribution of pledges across policy areas and themes, the findings are consistent and unambiguous.

6. Conclusion

The first research question (whether ČSSD and ODS formulate concrete electoral manifestos rather than vague ones) can be clearly answered by the number of concrete pledges. Although there were duplicated pledges of which some were vague and others concrete

(and therefore the number could be misleading), most of the pledges can be seen as concrete, as can the manifestos. Moreover, the situation is getting better over time as can be seen in Tables 1 and 2. It is more difficult to answer the second research question. Despite the rhetoric of politicians during the campaign periods, the results of the analysis show that it is clearly not true that government party manifestos and pledges are transferred into policies while those of opposition parties are not. ODS was more successful in enacting pledges when it was in government, however, this was not the case of ČSSD – this party was surprisingly even more successful when it was in opposition. Part of the explanation for the enactment of opposition party pledges lies in their agreement with those of government parties. In other words, when a government redeems one of its constituent parties' pledges, it also redeems that of an opposition party. Another explanation could be that the governmental and oppositional parties have pledges in common, so there's no issue cleavage, but merely campaign rhetoric.

We can see differences between the 2002 elections and the later elections in manifesto and pledge enactment. In 2002, manifestos were shorter and contained a significantly lower number of pledges than the 2006 and 2010 manifestos. The 2013 program documents were somehow in the middle due to the early elections which took place. Political parties prepared and introduced documents which were shorter and contained fewer pledges than in the two previous elections. Another difference can be seen in party ability to enact their pledges. While in the election period from 2002 to 2006 parties were able to enact less than 30% of their pledges, in the subsequent two periods this number was much higher. After the 2006 election, 39% of ODS pledges and 40% of ČSSD pledges were enacted, after the 2010 election it was actually 34% of ČSSD and 47% of ODS pledges. So, we can observe the increasing ability to enact pledges, which is reflected in the decreasing number of recurring pledges.

ČSSD was most successful in enacting pledges on taxes and debt, security and employment and labour. Pledges on education and science and health care had an enacted ratio of over 40%, too. We could expect a higher ratio of pledge enactment in the categories of welfare state and living in case of the social democratic party. One could say the result is affected by the fact that ČSSD was only in government in the first period, when it had lowest number of given pledges. However, even during the period that the Social democrats were in government, just a quarter of welfare state and living pledges were enacted. Even in the period from 2010 to 2013, a higher percentage of these topic pledges was enacted – every third pledge. Civic democrats were most successful with pledges on education, the European Union and economy and industry. But, as we can see in Graph 2, although the EU category has a high ratio of pledge enactment, it was not one of the most common ODS pledges. On the other hand, countryside and environment had both – a high number of pledges made and enacted.

Future research on election pledges in the Czech Republic might move beyond manifestos as the sole source of election pledges. Manifestos are important documents, but it is a public secret that they are not widely read. It is assumed that their core messages are transferred during the election campaigns. Pledges from manifestos are likely to be filtered in some way through slogans, TV candidate debates, public speeches, etc. Furthermore, politicians are constantly pushed to become more specific about their plans for office and to respond directly to the proposals of their electoral opponents during election campaigns,

but after the elections comes coalition negotiation, so many campaign statements might be off the table. It is also quite possible that candidates make pledges during a campaign that are not contained in their party's manifesto. And these areas provide us a wide range for possible further studies and analysis.

Footnotes:

1. Either ČSSD or ODS has been in every government since the Czech Republic was established, except for caretaker governments.
2. Names vary; in the United States, for example, documents are referred to as platforms; another common term is program.
3. This typology can be applied to any kind of manifesto; however, electoral manifestos need not fulfill all of the above-mentioned roles. A common ideological background, for example, is typical purpose for long-term party manifestos (Fiala, Mareš 1998).
4. There were early elections in 2013, so the term 2010 to 2013 was shortened.
5. Except for the term from 2013 when ODS gained less than 8 per cent of votes (Volby.cz 2013).
6. The author is aware of the limits in defining *partly* and *fully enacted* pledges. We can consider a pledge to be fully enacted when its implementation is full in accordance with the manifesto. On the other hand, a partly enacted pledge has, compared to the manifesto, some deficiencies. A typical example of this could be taxes. If a party promises to reduce taxes by 10 per cent, but the reduction is only 5 per cent, it is considered to be a partly enacted pledge. However, according to the huge amount of pledges in this analysis and the variety of pledge topics, it is difficult to define *partly enacted* pledges with no room for doubts.
7. It was not just ODS; from 2006 it was a coalition consisting of ODS, KDU-ČSL (Christian party) and SZ (Green party). After the caretaker government formed and led by Jan Fischer, which ruled from 2009 to 2010, another coalition government was established in 2010. It consisted of ODS, TOP 09 and VV (Public Affairs). So it is possible that the enacted pledges of ČSSD were similar to some of the ruling party pledges.
8. Besides the category *others*. There were a small number of pledges in *others* and in the spirit of this category, there were no connecting elements among these pledges.

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