


**The Importance of Campaign Promises.** By Tabitha Bonilla.  
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For generations, scholars have been concerned with the connection between candidates' issue opinions and the resultant evaluations of them by the electorate. Sometimes cynically, these connections are shaded by the impression that voters allow for the possibility that those seeking public offices might pander to public opinion rather than telling possible constituents their honest opinions. In the face of such doubts, many candidates may find it desirable to make a campaign promise to pursue a particular issue objective to their utmost, as opposed to simply announcing a position, with the goal of convincing voters of their true intentions. Their immediate objective may be to make an apparently credible commitment to follow through if elected; however, they may also entertain the possibility that promises affect perceptions of candidates' character. Tabitha Bonilla's valuable new book, *The Importance of Campaign Promises*, sheds valuable new light on this topic by distinguishing campaign positions from promises; it also considers the effect of that difference on voters' evaluations of candidates, mostly through the use of clever survey experiments.

Part I of the book lays out Bonilla's research questions and the importance of those questions, reviews the relevant literature, and develops her theory. Chapter One is largely an attempt to distinguish her notion of a campaign statement, such as one might associate with the standard spatial model of elections where voters are said to evaluate candidates based on their issue statements, from a campaign promise, which might have a psychological effect on the voter in the sense that candidates may be attempting to establish the perception that they are honest or are personally committed to an issue. The key research questions that arise from this distinction are whether candidates make promises with any frequency; whether voters are aware of those promises; and their effects on candidate evaluations and elections.

Chapter Two presents the importance of Bonilla's research questions to political science as a discipline and to democratic practice. It also introduces her theory. Early pages in the chapter offer an excellent review of the literature on representation and why scholars should care about this topic, both normatively and empirically, and explore the small but important ways in which the literature on campaign promises has contributed to our understanding of this topic.

Bonilla goes on to explain that an important difference between earlier work on campaign compromises and her own is the latter's emphasis on connecting an issue statement to a commitment to action. According to Bonilla,

the importance of a promise is that it has possibly two effects. Building on past work, one role of a promise is to signal that candidates are credibly committed to policy positions that decrease voter uncertainty about their expected actions. At points in the book, Bonilla gives the impression that the reduction of uncertainty is a good thing and seems to downplay the possibility that candidates may find it electorally advantageous to equivocate. Perhaps more original, and more important in terms of the substantive findings reported in later chapters, is the author's claim that promises influence perceptions of a candidate's honesty, and that this might appeal to both voters who are inclined to agree with the substance of the policy position, as well as those who do not.

Part II of the book assesses the frequency of campaign promises in real-world elections and ordinary people's awareness of the difference between candidate statements and promises. Chapter Three looks at the number of promise and non-promise statements in presidential debates over time. It reports that there has been an over-time increase in the number of both types of statements, but the rise in promise statements occurred much faster. This is taken to be *prima facie* evidence of the perceived importance of presidential candidate promises in elections. Importantly, the chapters that follow are framed as local elections, and Bonilla argues that if presidential promises are perceived to be important in national elections, then the same should apply locally. The arguments on this claim are plausible; however, I would have liked to have seen some evidence from, say, *League of Women Voter Guides* that promises also occur with some frequency in local elections. (The appendix to Chapter Three provides a very nice summary of the properties of presidential debates over time.)

Most readers of this review would probably allow that a professional political scientist could differentiate a promise from a non-promise statement. Chapter Four offers a pair of experiments to show that lay-people can accomplish the same separation. The experiments, like all of those in this book, exclusively use the issue of gun control, and one must wonder whether the findings would be similar with a less salient issue. In any event, the experiments show conclusively on the issue of gun control that 1) there is agreement between Bonilla's notion of a promise and that of lay people; and 2) that subjects do perceive promises to be greater commitments on the part of candidates than non-promissory statements.

Part III presents a series of experiments over three chapters that assess the effect of promises on candidate evaluations and their possible role in elections. Chapter Five considers the effect of promises on respondents' evaluations of candidates. It finds that promises do have a positive influence on subjects' perceptions of candidates' commitment to an issue; however, the effect

of that perception has a small positive influence on like-minded subjects' evaluations of candidates and a large negative effect on subjects who disagree about the issue. Further, it reports that promises had a negative effect on perceptions of candidates' honesty. Overall, the chapter paints a picture in which campaign pledges have a negative effect on voter evaluations.

The last two empirical chapters provide increasingly nuanced survey experiments. Briefly, Chapter Six considers the effect on candidate evaluation of 1) candidates' agreement or disagreement with their party on gun control; and 2) the number of promises that candidates make on different issues. Chapter Seven addresses the consequences to candidates for failing to follow through on their campaign promises and whether the excuses they give for their actions ameliorates public concern about their actions. Chapter Eight concludes the work with an assessment of its relevance for the 2016 presidential election, a summary of its main findings, and its implications for normative and positive theory.

Overall, *The Importance of Campaign Promises* is a significant contribution to both psychological and rational choice studies of voter behavior with important implications for the study of candidates' campaign strategies. This is true both for the candidate-centered elections familiar in the United States that are the focus of the present work, as well as for campaigns featuring party manifestos common elsewhere in the world. At the same time, the book left me with one lingering question: If campaign pledges have, at best, an ambiguous effect on candidate evaluations, why are they used so often and, at least in well-funded presidential elections with expensive campaign consultants, at an increasing rate?

### Gendering the GOP: Intraparty Politics and Republican Women's Representation in Congress. By

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The number of Republican women elected to the US Congress nearly doubled in 2020, after taking a significant hit in 2018. Many of these gains were in the House, where Republican women proved particularly effective at flipping key seats and narrowing the Democratic majority. In spite of these recent successes, Republican women seem to face more electoral obstacles than their counterparts across the aisle. At present, Democratic women outnumber Republican women 2:1 in the Senate and about 3:1 in the House. This partisan asymmetry suggests that Republican women face distinct electoral challenges and once elected to office must navigate unique strategic contexts

within their own party to govern. To gain insights into the opportunities and obstacles facing Republican women serving in the US House, Catherine Wineinger uses a mixed-method approach featuring content analysis of floor speeches and in-depth case studies of congressional organizations and women in key leadership positions within the Republican House Conference. The resulting analysis offers a fresh perspective on the ways that institutional changes have altered both the way Republican women work together in Congress and the character of the representation they provide. Wineinger also sheds light on the mechanism behind the persistent underrepresentation of women in the GOP's congressional delegation, enabling us to better understand women's future in the Republican Party.

Wineinger's starting point is that Republican congresswomen face the unique challenge of crafting representational claims for women in a party culture that increasingly eschews explicit identity-based messaging. At the same time, Republican women face disadvantageous ideological stereotypes because of their gender, and thus must clear a higher hurdle when it comes to demonstrating party loyalty, particularly in a highly polarized Congress. To thread the needle, Wineinger argues that Republican women articulate a fused gender-partisan identity. In practice, this is accomplished by rejecting the stereotypical set of Democratic Party-aligned "women's issues" and instead framing Republican-owned issues through the lens of their own gendered life experiences. By emphasizing the ways that key Republican policies impact the lives of women broadly, Republican women differentiate themselves from Democratic women leaders and challenge the idea that the Democratic Party is better situated to represent women.

To demonstrate Republican congresswomen's adoption of a distinctly gendered rhetorical style, Wineinger presents a qualitative content analysis of floor speeches from the 103rd–104th congresses (1993–97) and 113th–114th congresses (2013–17). This analysis is supplemented with elite interviews and case studies of speeches in the most common policy areas for women-invoked rhetoric: abortion, health, and foreign policy. Wineinger finds that over time GOP women are consistent in the issues they speak to, but evolve in terms of the gendered frames they employ when speaking about them. She uncovers a shift away from broad representative claims (speaking on behalf of women generally) to more individualized claims based on women's personal experiences as mothers. These individualized appeals emphasize traditional roles for women and family values, aligning with a white, Christian construction of womanhood that fits neatly within the Republican platform. For instance, the case study on foreign affairs speeches highlights the development of messaging aimed at "security moms" as an example of this kind of partisan