

Promises are Promises? *A Study of Campaign Promise Fulfillment among South Korean Legislators, 2008–2012*

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Abstract

In democracies, campaign promises are considered important indicators that voters use to make voting decisions. Despite its normative and theoretical importance in elections and campaigns, breaking a campaign promise has been rather frequent among elected officials. What affects this tendency of legislators to break or keep their campaign promises? By using campaign promise data compiled by one of the largest NGOs in South Korea over the past four years (2008–2012), this article attempts to explain what factors lead South Korean legislators to more or less keep their promises. The findings suggest that legislative committees and policy issues promised in a campaign, along with an individual legislator's legislative action in the National Assembly, significantly affect the fulfillment of such promises.

Keywords: South Korea, campaign promise fulfillment, South Korean legislators, policy issues, legislative committee

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Introduction

Since its first democratic presidential election in 1988, South Korea has continued to maintain stable democratic institutions, developed an active civil society, and has established a voter base that is educated and sophisticated enough to hold elected officials accountable for their political actions. However, despite these developments in democracy, South Korean legislators have been frequently criticized for not following through with their campaign promises after winning an election. Skeptical views in the mass media describe campaign promises as “standard promotional materials” that are prepared just for an election or as “accessories to the politics of election” (Kim 2002, 201–207). These views are directly related to the mistrust of campaign promises among citizens. For example, as recent survey data suggests, the majority of young voters in South Korea acknowledge the importance of campaign promises in determining election results while 87% of the respondents were skeptical about the possibility of these promises being kept.¹ These results show that voters perceive promises as important voting cues but, on the other hand, demonstrate widespread cynicism about politicians and their truthfulness.

However, regardless of the pessimism toward candidates’ promises, promise keeping matters for several reasons. First, theoretically, the “chain of delegation” (Strøm 2000, 261–289) in contemporary democracies demonstrates a policy process, in which citizens are connected to the government by their respective role as “principals.” This means that governments are responsible (as “agents”) to their voters’ preferences by enacting policies

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1. The survey was conducted by The Good Law (Beomnyul sobija yeonmaeng), a legal justice NGO and one of the largest civic associations in South Korea. It provides various types of social services, including monitoring legislative activities, public education, and internship opportunities (For more on the organization, see: www.goodlaw.org). Among 6,174 undergraduate and graduate students regarding the national election of April 11, 2012, 91% of the respondents believed that campaign programs and promises would determine the election results, whereas 87% of the respondents remained negative about the probability of these promises being fulfilled. However, despite the skepticism about the fulfillment of the promises, 63.27% of the respondents said that they would make their voting choice based on campaign promises.

that they are elected for. This correspondence between voter preferences and government policies depends on the legislator's ability to be a *delegate*.² In this delegate model of representation, elected officials are responsible to carry through the programs for which they have been elected (Budge and Hofferbert 1990; Klingemann et al. 1994). In this regard, campaign promises and policy programs offered by competing parties are crucial in legitimizing the delegate (or agent) role of the government.

Second, normatively, the idea of breaking a campaign promise is considered a violation of a pact between voters and the candidate. When candidates make promises that describe policies and programs considered to be accomplished during their term, voters automatically expect candidates to keep their promises after being elected. Thus, a violation of this agreement would indicate a breach of trust between voters and the candidates. Moreover, while voters may forget or dismiss what may be considered an electoral betrayal, the quality of the campaign and the subsequent government formed by promise-breakers can degrade the quality of democratic practices. Simply put, the *democratic-ness* of the political process is negatively affected by broken campaign promises (Kenman 2002; Pennings 2005; Strøm 2000).

Third, fulfilling campaign promises relates to the level of citizens' overall satisfaction with democracy. Recent statistics show that voter turnout at elections has fallen, party membership is much lower, and people are less likely to identify themselves with a particular political party.³ Such evidence of citizen withdrawal from political participation and engagement is a rather widespread phenomenon observed not only among new democracies, but also among advanced industrial democracies (Dalton 2004). As Manin

2. As the classical principal-agent model of democratic theory suggests, representatives as agents are responsible for or bound to their electorates, an argument developed by Heinz Eulau and John Wahlke, *Legislative Behavior* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1959). In this model, electoral mandates are expected to be carried out without alteration. On the contrary, the trustee model formulated by Edmund Burke in his speech to the Electors in Bristol in 1774 illustrates representatives acting as free agents, using their own judgment in regards to what is good for the greater public.

3. As shown in the cores of satisfaction with democracy calculated based on the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) (<http://www.cses.org>).

(1997, 222–223) puts it, representative democracy may have been replaced by “audience democracy” in which voters tend to “respond” to what is presented to them on the political stage, rather than directly exercise influence in the political process. Lower levels of trust in government among citizens can explain a critical segment of this political disengagement. As mentioned previously, broken campaign promises may influence this overall decline in the levels of trust as cynicism heightens among citizens (Ringquist and Dasse 2004).

While the theoretical, normative, and practical implications of campaign promises are clear, the effort to systematically study promise keeping has been limited as far as explaining the conditions and incentives that make legislators more or less trustworthy. In this article, I first examine whether legislators vary substantially with regards to promise keeping and breaking. After demonstrating a substantial variation between the two, I then explore which of the extant theories of promise keeping best explains legislator behavior in South Korea. I am using an original data set covering promise keeping behavior of legislators serving in the 18th National Assembly of South Korea. This data was collected by The Good Law, a legal justice group and one of the largest and oldest NGOs operating in South Korea. While examining a single National Assembly has limitations in explaining South Korean legislative politics in general—as an attempt to establish some level of theoretical understanding—noting only a single case should not inhibit the ability to generalize about future elections and legislatures.

The findings suggest that, among many factors, legislative committees and the policy issues inherent in the promise are the most powerful influences on promise keeping in South Korea. According to my findings, powerful committees can influence whether a promise can be fulfilled or not. Also, certain policy issues are associated with a higher probability of promises being fulfilled. The next section will evaluate existing literature that relates to the study of campaign promise fulfillment.

Understanding the Study of Promise Fulfillment

The importance of campaign promises in elections in which kept promises indicate responsive governments—a fundamental function of democratic representation—is of little doubt (Dahl 1971; Powell 2004). More specifically, candidates who win an election are expected to follow through on their campaign promises by responding to voters' policy preferences (Budge and Hofferbert 1990; Gibbons 2000; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Petry 1988, 1991, 1995). If elected officials change course and abandon their campaign promises, they may face public condemnation and future electoral defeat (Johnson and Ryu 2010; Tavits 2007).

Despite its normative and theoretical significance, little empirical work has focused on the link between electoral mandates and policies. Several reasons may be noted for this lack of empirical attention. First, different ways of conceptualizing *promise-keeping* has complicated consistent research on the subject. Rather than directly focusing on promise fulfillment, most studies have focused on studying promise keeping within a broader theoretical context of democratic representation or responsiveness.⁴

Second, methodologically, the study of promise fulfillment poses profound challenges since measures of the connection between promises and their actual fulfillment are not consistent within the bulk of the literature.

4. The literature of partisan theory represents one approach in which promise keeping is perceived as the correlation between the partisan composition of government and its policies (e.g., Blais, Blake, and Dion 1996, 514–520; Boix 1997; Budge and Farlie 1983; Castles 1982; Hicks and Swank 1984; Iverson and Soskice 2006; Roubini and Sachs 1989). In this approach, policy outputs consistent with government ideology are considered as responsive government behavior. Another approach to promise keeping focuses on governments shifting their ideological position based on the shift in voter policy preferences (e.g., Adams et al. 2004; Adams and Merrill III 2005; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Ezrow 2007; Laver 2005; Merrill and Adams 2002; Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1995). This conceptualization is based on the understanding that government policies should reflect citizens' interest, which at times may change as public opinion changes. Similarly, governments implementing policies that address voters' priorities (i.e., salient issues) are also considered as promise keeping (Hobolt and Klemmensen 2007; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Wlezien. 2004). Dealing with the most important issue during an election implies responsiveness to voters' concerns and interests.

Different operationalizations of promise fulfillment have hampered consistent accumulation of knowledge in the field. For example, campaign promises can be measured through the analysis of electoral mandates, party manifestos and related official documents.⁵ Also, news reports on promises in the mass media or survey data are popular measures of promises in the literature (Johnson and Ryu 2010; Ringquist and Dasse 2004; Stokes 2001; Sulkin 2009). Measures of promise fulfillment vary as well, from matching promises with budget allocation (Budge and Hofferbert 1990; Gibbons 2000; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Petry 1988) to assessing actual bill introductions or roll-call votes (Ringquist and Dasse 2004; Sulkin 2009). While each measure may be justified in each study based on the context of research (e.g., cases and data availability), the relatively inconsistent way of operationalizing promise keeping has complicated the development of a comprehensive theoretical approach.

Third, aside from the normative and theoretical implications that promise keeping suggests, whether voters care about campaign promises in a practical sense is less clear. A recent survey in South Korea shows that 33.9% of the respondents believe that the party affiliation of candidates is the most significant factor influencing election outcomes; 26.8% of the respondents thought that the candidate's past achievements are most important, whereas the importance of policy promises were the third important factor (21.2%) that people believed to influence election outcomes.⁶ Given these results, voters may be less inclined to use policy promises in making their voting choice and instead use other indicators, such as party affiliation of the candidate, when making their voting decision.

Moreover, cynical voters may have little expectation regarding the fulfillment of promises of elected officials, and additionally, disappointment toward promise breakers may not last long enough to punish them in the next election. Broken promises may be easily forgotten as long as concrete progress is made. In both cases, whether promise keeping matters in the

5. For example, see Klingemann Hofferbert, and Budge (1994), Laver and Budge (1992), Marschall and McKee (2002), and Pennings (2005).

6. The survey was conducted by Trend Monitor (www.trendmonitor.co.kr), a professional market trend survey agency, in October 2011 with a sample of 1,000 Korean adults.

practical world of South Korean politics is unclear.

In this article, I will present a study of promise fulfillment among South Korean legislators from 2008 to 2012. While previous pledge studies have focused primarily on advanced democracies, such as the United States,⁷ Britain, Canada (Petry 1988; Rallings 1987), France (Petry 1991), and the Netherlands (Pennings 2005; Thomson 2001), little empirical work has focused on new democracies.⁸ Moreover, as Sulkin (2009) points out, textbook models of promise keeping tend to be party-centric⁹ and less applicable to countries with presidential systems. While party labels are important indicators for voting decisions, in candidate-centered campaigns, what individual legislators promise during a campaign may provide a more important voting cue (Ringquist and Dasse 2004). Thus, my approach to assess individual legislators' capacity to follow through their promises suggests a more useful framework of analysis for presidential systems. As mentioned earlier, examining multiple numbers of National Assemblies in Korea over a longer period of time would be most ideal, but the difficulties of accessing systematically collected data has prevented the investigation of multiple cases in this study. However, gaining in-depth knowledge of a single legislative period to broaden our understanding of the future political behavior of legislators is important.

The analysis I provide has two stages. The first stage investigates whether legislators have kept their campaign promises within their four-year term. By using data on the percentage of fulfilled promises compiled and calculated by The Good Law from 2008 to 2012, I will demonstrate that less than 20% of all legislators can be considered as promise keepers. In the second stage, I attempt to answer what factors explain the various degrees of promise fulfillment among the legislators. I will especially focus on structural, individual, and promise-specific factors to explain what makes legislators

7. For example, see Page (1978), Pomper (1980), Ringquist and Dasse (2004), and Royed (1996).

8. Latin America is a region that has received relatively more scholarly attention regarding incumbent governments and their behavior of promise keeping (e.g., Johnson and Ryu 2010; Stokes 2001).

9. For example, see Harrington (1993), Schattschneider (1942), and Schedler (1998).

more or less keep their promises. My findings suggest that the policy issues of the promise, along with the committee membership of the legislator are crucial factors influencing the probability of promise fulfillment among the legislators.

Regional Districts, Power Committees, Leadership, and Policy Issues

What are the factors related to promise-keeping among elected representatives? Several propositions can be made based on existing theories in the field of electoral studies. First, structural factors, such as the characteristics of the electoral district, can determine whether legislators are capable of fulfilling their campaign promises or not. South Korea is divided into regional districts determined by the size of the local population. These regional districts contain multiple electoral districts, whose number is determined by the size of population. Each electoral district has a district magnitude of one, meaning only the candidate with the highest vote share will obtain the seat in the electoral district. While campaign promises are made by targeting voters within the regional district the legislator is running for, legislators from crowded regional districts (i.e., regional districts with higher numbers of electoral districts) are more likely to not keep their promises. The understanding is that these candidates will be more tempted to break campaign promises as they can always assign responsibility for the promise to their competitor.¹⁰ This theoretical speculation is basically founded on the “clarity of responsibility” argument from economic voting theory in which Powell and Whitten (1993) claim that the degree of government accountability regarding economic performance is mitigated by a series of conditional factors that can determine culpability for weak economic performance.

10. South Korea is divided into 16 regional districts based on population. The largest regional district is Gyeonggi with 49 electoral districts, followed by the city of Seoul (48 electoral districts). The smallest regional district with the lowest number of electoral districts is the island of Jeju (3 electoral districts).

Thus, I suggest that crowded regional districts can motivate legislators to back out of promises because of the notion that someone else from the same regional district may follow through on the promise. In other words, accountability will be less clear within a regional district with more electoral districts. In this regard, I hypothesize that the higher the number of electoral districts within a regional district, the less likely the legislator is to keep a promise.

Second, legislators who are part of powerful legislative committees are expected to have more influence on decision making and therefore have a higher probability of keeping their campaign promises. A significant bulk of literature suggests that *power committees* determine important legislation and bill passages.¹¹ While this theoretical expectation has been mostly adopted in the U.S. political context, in South Korea as well, one can expect the committee to which a legislator is assigned significantly affect the decision making process. Some committees may allow members more access to resources and information that are crucial in translating a promise into policy, enabling legislators to be more responsive to their constituents regarding campaign promises.

Third, legislators who hold key leadership positions within the party, the National Assembly, or legislative committees are expected to be more likely to fulfill their campaign promises. The tangible and intangible powers of being in a chairmanship position within a given institution may enhance legislators' capabilities in keeping their promises. In South Korea, the two most powerful leadership positions a legislator can hold are the representative of the party (*dang daepyo*) and the representative of the party in the legislature (*wonnae daepyo*). Both positions are filled through intraparty primaries, where results are mostly determined by the amount of support within the party. In addition, chairmanship in a legislative committee allows more access to campaign funds and donations that are critical to the fulfillment of campaign promises.

Fourth, the policy area related to the promise should affect its proba-

11. For example, see Bendor and Moe (1986), Hedlund et al. (2009), Khmelko, Wise, and Brown (2010), and Shepsle and Weingast (1987).

bility of being fulfilled. Campaign promises reflect diverse political, economic, and social issues. In that sense, candidates who made promises across various policy issues will have to recognize that some promises are easier to keep than others. For example, a policy promise to develop a city into an international financial district in East Asia may be more difficult to fulfill compared to one that promises to build a public library in a neighborhood. Also, the amount of time and resources necessary to fulfill a promise varies across policy issues. Economic promises may be more difficult to keep as the policy outcome may depend upon many exogenous factors that are beyond direct control of the legislator who proposed them. On the other hand, building a library or a public park may require less extensive resources and time to accomplish. In other words, parochial promises of pork-barrel spending may be easier to keep due to tangible outcomes, unlike financial or economic promises that require broader efforts in order to fulfill them.

Data and Measurement

A Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this analysis is the campaign fulfillment rate of 220 legislators, expressed as a percentage. The Good Law, a legal justice group and one of the oldest and largest NGOs in South Korea has collected data on promise fulfillment from 220 legislators of the 18th National Assembly from 2008 to 2012.¹² The organization collected data by recording all official campaign promises reported to the National Election Commission of South Korea. Promise fulfillment was assessed by investigating documents from individual legislator's websites, legislative reports, and reports from the mass media. In addition, each legislator received an assessment in

12. Legislators elected through Proportional Representation are not included. Among 245 legislators directly elected from regional districts, 25 legislators who resigned or lost their seats were not included.

person to validate the process and results, as well as provide additional evidence of fulfillment if available.¹³ The following criteria listed in Table 1 were applied to determine the promise fulfillment score for each campaign promise.

Table 1. Assessment Criteria of Promise Fulfillment

Score	Details
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promise fulfilled. • Project has been completed.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget has been allocated. • Specific schedule for project has been determined or progress has been made.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget has been allocated. • Specific schedule has been determined or progress has been made; but project plan has been reduced or altered.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion has been carried out, but project's detailed schedule has not been determined.
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project has been carried out by a different agent (e.g., legislator of a nearby electoral district, or the mayor). • Internal or external conflict has occurred. • Respective legislator simply attended related events.
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project has not been launched. • Project has been entirely cancelled due to political or economic reasons. • Promise itself is considered to be vague, thus assessment is impossible. • Project has been completed prior to legislative election.

13. The number of evaluators who participated in the data collection process stood at 2,650. Each year, three evaluators were assigned per legislator to assess the promise fulfillment rate. A total of 2,305 promises were evaluated. The average number of campaign promises per legislator is 10.47. For more information please see: <http://www.goodlaw.org>. The organization's website includes a section in which reports are available to the public (*bodo hyeonhwang*). The report from February 21, 2012 has more detailed information about the data collection process and some descriptive summary data.

The Promise Fulfillment Rate (PRF) was calculated based on the following rule:

$$(\text{The sum of each promise's fulfillment score}) \div (\text{Number of promises made by individual legislator} \times 5 [\text{maximum score}]) \times 100 = \text{Promise Fulfillment Rate (PFR)}$$

For example, if legislator A made 5 promises, and scored 5 points for his first promise, 4 points for the second promise, 2 points for the third promise, 4 points for the fourth promises, and five points for the fifth promise, the PFR is calculated as “20 (= 5 + 4 + 2 + 4 + 5) ÷ 25 (= 5 × 5) × 100 = 80 percent.”

Independent Variables

To assess the effect of regional districts on PFR, I counted the number of electoral districts assigned to each regional district. The number of electoral districts varies from 49 (Gyeonggi region) to 3 (Jeju island). Based on the theoretical argument of “clarity of responsibility” (Powell and Whitten 1993) that I mentioned in the previous section, I expect legislators from Gyeonggi to have a lower rate of promise fulfillment compared to legislators who competed in Jeju.

I also created a dummy variable that accounts for the legislative committee of which each legislator is a member. This variable assesses the effect of members of *power committees*.¹⁴ While 17 legislative committees exist in the South Korean National Assembly, members of the Strategy and Finance Committee would be expected to have a higher rate of promise fulfillment. While determining exactly which committee would be most advantageous in fulfilling policy promises is difficult, according to the Charter of the Strategy and Finance Committee, the committee is responsible for “actually

14. Committee members are determined based on the list of preferences that legislators submit after being elected. All legislators are assigned to a different committee in their third year of term. My study includes the committee choice of the last two years of each legislator's term.

performing the National Assembly's decision-making function regarding finance and economic policies within the National Assembly."¹⁵

As I hypothesize legislators in leadership positions to be more effective in fulfilling campaign promises, I created a dummy variable that indicates "1," if legislator has served or is currently serving a chairmanship position within the party, National Assembly, or legislative committee, and "0" if otherwise.¹⁶

Table 2. Categorization of Policy Issues

Policy area	Specific issues
Economy	Economic ideology, tax policy, financial issues, trade/commercial issues, information technology and science, mid-size industry, venture industry, agriculture and cattle industry, general developmental issues of the locality
Living environment	Housing (reconstruction, redevelopment), infrastructure (traffic, swage, electricity, digitalization, etc.), environmental issues (public parks, improvement of designs, etc.)
Education	General education policy issues, school and library construction/inducement, education system (college entrance exams, faculty/staff, etc.)
Social welfare	Social welfare ideologies and systems, public health care, medical care, women, elderly issues, children, disabled, other minorities

15. For full details, see: <http://finance.na.go.kr>. Most promises require financial expenses and to an important degree relate to the economy of the country. Thus, this committee is more likely to provide resources for most promises in general, compared to more issue-specific committees, such as the Education, Science, and Technology Committee, and Tourism, Broadcasting, and Communications Committee.

16. Chairman positions include Committee Chair, Speaker of the National Assembly, party leader (primary representative), party secretary general, and so on.

The effect of *policy* on PFR is measured by creating variables for each policy area of the campaign promise. The promises were made along four policy domains: (1) economy, (2) living environment, (3) education, and (4) social welfare. Table 2 demonstrates the specifics. I calculated the percentage of promises in the respective policy area by using the total number of promises each legislator made and the number of promises in the specified policy area.

Control Variables

In addition to the variables of greatest interest, demographic factors, such as legislator's age and gender, may influence her ability to keep promises; thus, a count variable of the legislator's age, and a dummy variable that codes gender (1 = male, 0 = female) is also included.

The political experience of legislators' is also likely to influence PFR. Re-elected legislators may have a higher PFR compared to legislators who newly entered office, as repeated experience as a legislator may have given them more experience with politics. To account for the effect of political experience as a possible factor to explain PFR, I included a variable that counts how many times the legislator was elected. The expectation is that legislators who have been elected more than once as members of the National Assembly will have more political experience and thus more success in terms of fulfilling campaign promises. Having already established political and social networks with key actors in the government, these experienced legislators may have a better chance of keeping their promises. On the other hand, legislators who were elected for the first time may lack social capital within the political arena to effectively deliver their promises, possibly leading to lower PFR.¹⁷

17. The opposite can be expected as well, in which more experienced legislators will care less about promise fulfillment as their initial devotion and commitment to the promises may have worn out over time. In contrast, legislators who were just elected may be more enthusiastic about and dedicated to their jobs and thus more willing to keep what they promised during the election. The analysis will help understand which explanation is more plausible.

In addition, the probability of fulfilling promises being influenced by an individual legislator's participatory actions as a representative in the National Assembly is likely. Legislators who are more sincere and dedicated to their duties, as well as more enthusiastic about their job, should be more able to keep promises than legislators who are generally indifferent to their responsibilities as legislators. More specifically, a more actively participating legislator in terms of attending assembly sessions and committee meetings, as well as participating in assembly voting and introducing legislation, is more likely to keep her campaign promises. Therefore, I also test whether more actively participating legislators have a higher chance of fulfilling campaign promises. While directly assessing each legislator's activity in the National Assembly is almost impossible, I was able to use a proxy variable that comprehensively incorporates various legislative activities of individual legislators. Creating a dummy variable for the recipients of the National Legislative Politics Award assesses this effect.¹⁸ The award was granted to legislators who ranked within the top 22.5 percent in the following five areas: (1) attendance at the National Assembly general session, (2) attendance at committee meetings, (3) attendance at the executive questioning session, (4) participation at roll-call voting, and (5) initiations of legislation (e.g., policy proposal introductions).¹⁹

Lastly, I created a dummy variable for *ruling party* (1 = if the legislator is from the incumbent party, 0 = if otherwise) to take into account the possible effects of the status of the party to which each legislator is affiliated. Here, being affiliated with the incumbent party will grant legislators more power to influence policies and, hence, make them more likely to keep their promises.

18. The National Legislative Politics Award (Daehanminguk heonjeongsang) is an award established by the South Korean Legislative Politics Award Committee, which honors exemplary legislators of the 18th National Assembly. The award was granted in June 2011 to 48 legislators.

19. Assessing legislators' legislative participation/performance is a separate project conducted by The Good Law to monitor legislators' legislative activities from June 2008 to May 2011. More details on the award and the scoring of each dimension are available at <http://www.goodlaw.org>.

Analysis

Do South Korean legislators keep their promises? Based on the data assessment process and the method, the average PFR among 220 legislators is 59%.

Table 3. Distribution of PFR among Legislators

PFR range (%)	Number of legislators
90-99	3
80-89	39
70-79	43
60-69	53
50-59	27
40-49	21
30-39	13
20-29	16
10-19	7
0-9	2
Total	220

As Table 3 demonstrates, only three legislators scored within the 90-99% PFR range, and 22% of the total legislators scored less than 40% in PFR (48 legislators). While determining concrete cut-off points for promise keepers and promise breakers is difficult, legislators with a PFR of higher than 80 should be considered as relatively consistent in keeping promises. On the other hand, a PFR of lower than 40 may indicate consistent promise breaking. As to the majority of the legislators, most have scored in the 60-70 range of PFR (53 and 43 legislators, respectively).

Based on these results, drawing a definite conclusion regarding whether South Korean legislators are faithful in keeping their promises or not is a challenge. Especially with almost half of the legislators scoring in-between, one can argue that a more refined conception of promise keeping is necessary.

To explore the impact of various institutional, individual, and promise-specific factors on individual legislator's PFR, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression with robust standard errors was employed. Table 4 demonstrates the results.

Table 4. The Effect of Regional Districts, Committees, Leadership, and Policy Issues on PFR

Independent variables	Effect on PFR
Regional district	0.093 (0.314)
Strategy and finance committee	13.193*** (4.337)
Leadership	2.861 (3.612)
Economic promises (%)	0.097 (0.123)
Living environment promises (%)	0.202* (0.112)
Education promises (%)	0.080 (0.160)
Social promises (%)	0.100 (0.135)
Age	- 0.078 (0.210)
Gender (male)	1.858 (6.608)
Political experience	- 0.190 (1.570)
Award recipient	8.327** (3.171)
Ruling party	1.699 (2.746)
R ²	0.096
N	220

Note: The dependent variable is PFR.

* $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.005$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed test).

The results indicate that, among my theoretical expectations, legislative committees, policy issues, and individual legislator's legislative activities significantly affect the probability of promise fulfillment. Being on the Strategy and Finance Committee significantly explains PFR by suggesting that members on this committee, on average, score about 13 points above those who are on other legislative committees. Given the importance of the committee in

determining national strategy and coordinating the financial aspects of policies, this finding implies the importance of having access to financial resources to translate promises into policies.

As to the relevant policy issues regarding the promises, *living environment* issues have a significantly better chance of being fulfilled. For each one-unit increase in the percentage of promises on living environment issues, PFR increases by 0.2 of a point on average. Thus, the finding on the policy issues indicates that promises with regard to housing issues, traffic, basic services, and environmental issues seem relatively easier to keep, compared to promises on the economy, politics, international affairs, and education. As demonstrated in Table 2, issues related to living environment are more directly relevant to the constituents' immediate well-being and their day-to-day business than other policy issues. Such direct personal concerns, rather than macro-level issues, may motivate legislators to follow through on these promises more often than promises that target rather broad and intangible issues related to the nation as a whole. Moreover, these promises related to living environment have a shorter timeframe to complete. For example, projects to improve housing conditions or to build a public park for the community may take less time to complete than promises that focus on eradicating corruption or protecting domestic industries from foreign competition. In this sense, the policy issue each promise specifically addresses significantly influences the probability of these promises being fulfilled.

On the other hand, in contrast to my initial expectation, regional districts and the leadership roles of legislators did not affect PFR. Explanations are available for each of these results: as to the effect of regional district, the difference among policy issues across different regions is likely to complicate promise-keeping. Since each region has different characteristics, for example, urban versus rural areas, the policy issues candidates use to attract voters significantly differ. Policy issues might moderate the direct effect of regional districts on PFR. In other words, rather than directly affecting PFR, regional districts might interact with policy issues in affecting legislators' promise behavior. Another possibility is the problem of *overlapping jurisdiction*. As the assessment criteria of PFR in Table 1 demonstrate, another agent whose jurisdiction of responsibility overlaps with the elected

legislator could complete projects that had been promised. The assessment criteria rate such possibility as “1,” a rather low PFR score, which, however, might have occurred rather frequently among the promises examined in the sample. In such situations of overlapping jurisdiction, PFR was driven by other factors; overlapping jurisdiction *within* each region rather than the district itself drives PFR.

When it comes to the leadership positions, being the chair or leader of various institutions did not seem to affect PFR. Similarly, age, gender, political experience, or ruling party did not significantly affect PFR either. On the other hand, however, award recipients, on average, score about 8.3 percentage point higher than non-recipients. Given the way award recipients are measured by including comprehensive indicators of legislative action, this finding suggests that a significant portion of the explanation of promise keeping depends on how actively the legislator is engaged in legislative responsibilities.

Conclusion

Are South Korean legislators faithful in fulfilling campaign promises after entering office? What are the factors that influence promise keeping or breaking by South Korean legislators? With a history of almost three decades of democratic practices, South Korean political and civil society has been paying much closer attention to electoral mandates and the promises that competing parties and candidates make during a campaign. While normatively and theoretically important, relatively limited empirical work has been conducted on the issue of promise keeping among elected officials. With large-scale data provided by one of the largest civic NGOs in South Korea, The Good Law, this article has conducted a systematic analysis on promise keeping among 220 South Korean legislators.

The results of my analysis confirm three important findings. First, while only 17% of South Korean legislators can be considered as promise keepers, they have the potential to keep more promises since almost half of the legislators are fulfilling about 60–70% of their promises. However, this

interpretation may differ according to the observer's standpoint, depending on whether they have a more or less cynical perspective on South Korean politics. Second, individual and institutional factors have a significant influence on PFR. Results confirm that more participatory legislators have a higher chance of fulfilling their promises. Additionally, being on the Strategy and Finance Committee significantly enhances the chance to keep promises compared to other committees. Third, promise-specific factors, such as the policy area of the promise, matter. Promises regarding people's living environment have a higher chance of being kept compared to other issues, such as the economy, social policies, or education.

Overall, these findings have some implications toward both South Korean legislators and voters. As the results suggest, legislators should avoid making overly broad promises, but rather focus on more specific issues that directly appeal to the voters' living conditions. Regarding voters, one will have a greater chance of obtaining a faithful legislator representing their district if they know whether the candidate is a member of a powerful committee or has been actively involved in legislative activities. In a political context where regionalism and party labels seem to matter more than policy promises, focusing on candidates capable of fulfilling promises will help satisfy voters who want faithful legislators.²⁰

While some of the findings need further investigation, my attempt to explain the transition of campaign promises to policies based on a perspective focused on individual legislators not only broadens understanding of specific legislator behavior, but also the quality of democratic practices in general. As mentioned earlier, policy promises are important cues to voters with regard to elected representatives who are obligated to act in the

20. A recent survey shows that 33.9% of the respondents believe that the party affiliation of the candidates is the most significant factor influencing election outcomes. 26.8% of the respondents thought that the candidate's past achievements are most important, whereas the importance of policy promises came as a third important factor (21.2%) that people believed to influence election outcomes. The survey was conducted by Trend Monitor (www.trendmonitor.co.kr), a professional agency surveying market trends that sampled 1,000 Korean adults in October 2011. For a comprehensive understanding of regionalism in South Korea, see Kwon (2004).

best interest of the citizens. The more promise keepers people have in the legislature, the more likely it is that a citizen-driven democratic state becomes the norm.

Without doubt, South Korea is a consolidated democracy under the criteria suggested by Huntington (1991) or Linz and Stepan (1996). However, the electoral maturity of both legislators and voters remains questionable in terms of taking campaign promises seriously. While a perfect democracy may be a myth, given the normative importance of campaign promises, South Korea's democracy will continue to face major challenges until the connection between promises and policies is well established.

Appendix. Summary Statistics

Variable	Average	Range/number of ones
Promise fulfillment rate (%)	59.48	8–96
District magnitude	27.66	3–49
Award recipients		48
Strategy and planning committee		19
Leadership/chair		54
Political experience	2.10	1–6
Age	58.80	41–81
Gender (male)		214
Ruling party		141
Economic promises (%)	24.51	0–100
Living environment promises (%)	36.87	0–100
Education promises (%)	10.83	0–60
Social promises (%)	16.18	0–66

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