Chapter 15: Keeping Promises: VAAs and Political Representation

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Introduction

This chapter deals with a simple question: *To what extent does the post-electoral legislative behaviour of Members of Parliament (MPs) correspond to their pre-electoral campaign pledges?*

Among voters it is a popular belief that politicians take liberties with the truth, that they often tell lies to get elected and that they are not especially eager to keep their pre-electoral promises once elected. Such a behavioural pattern would raise severe challenges for a well-functioning democracy. It would foster an increasing alienation and abstention of citizens from parties and politics in general. But first and foremost it would undermine a cornerstone of modern representative democracies: political trust and effective control mechanisms of voters over politicians (Andeweg and Thomassen 2005).

According to the concept of promissory representation (Mansbridge 2003) voters are mainly forward-looking and use elections to steer future policy outcomes. This process of prospective voting (Powell 2000) includes the expectation that MPs act according to their pre-electoral promises. If voters cannot rely on this linkage to translate their preferences into policies, the foundation of representative democracy is undermined.

Thus it is not surprising that the reliability of pre-electoral promises has been central to numerous studies (for a brief overview see the following section). With this chapter we intend to add an additional perspective by using data from Voting Advice Applications (VAAs). Our analysis compares pre-electoral policy positions captured by VAAs and with post-electoral parliamentary voting. Our starting point forms the study by Schwarz et al. (2010) which we have subsequently extended and refined. Whereas Schwarz et al. solely focussed on pledge fulfilment in Switzerland we add the Netherlands as a second country. Both countries have in common some general characteristics like multi-party systems/governments and the extensive use of VAAs by parties and voters. But the two cases also differ in important respects, most notably regarding the electoral system, executive-legislative relations, and the degree of party discipline.

The party mandate

Political scientists often assert that congruence between the opinions and attitudes of voters and what actually happens in parliament and in government is an important measure for the quality of democratic representation (Schattschneider 1942; Powell 2000). According to the (party) mandate model,

the presentation of pre-electoral programmes from which voters can choose presents an important condition for the proper functioning of a promissory system of representation (Mansbridge 2003; Thomassen 1994). The degree to which parties and individual MPs fulfil their election mandates then is an important criterion for judging the quality of the system of representation.

The existing work on the (party) mandate can be divided into three approaches: the pledge approach, the saliency approach and the spatial approach (Royed 1996; Louwerse 2011b). Our approach is most similar to the pledge approach, which compares specific pre-electoral pledge in party manifestos or public speeches with governmental policy actions after the election (for an overview, see Petry and Collette 2009). Contrary to the oft-heard complaint that 'parties do not do what they promise' most of the studies in the field find a decent level of pledge fulfilment. The level of pledge fulfilment by government parties ranges from about 80% for single-party governments in Britain (Rallings 1987; Rose 1980; Royed 1996), to about 50% in the Irish coalition governments, with other coalition, minority cabinet or presidential systems somewhere in between (Mansergh and Thomson 2007).

The limitation of the pledge approach is that it looks at the mandate in terms of pledge that are actually made, making it vulnerable to selective pledge-making by parties and changes in the political agenda (Louwerse 2011b). By taking parties' positions in VAAs as an indicator of their pre-electoral policy stance, we are able to mitigate these problems. After all, VAAs force parties to indicate their policy position on all of the most relevant policy issues in an election. Our analysis does therefore not depend on the selection of issues parties choose to include in their manifestos.

Most studies of party mandate fulfilment have traditionally focused on the party mandate for government: how pre-electoral commitments relate to government policy. The studies ignore the parliamentary or representative mandate (Louwerse 2011b). This limits these studies effectively to the mandate of government parties. We should not expect that opposition parties are able to translate their election pledge into government policies. On the contrary, if there is real choice between competing 'mandates' at election time, opposition parties should be unable to fulfil their pledges after the elections (Mansergh and Thomson 2007). This leaves the question, however, how opposition parties act in parliament: to what degree does their (voting) behaviour relate to their pre-electoral commitments? This question is especially relevant to the functioning of representative democracy in more consensual political systems, in which the distinction between electoral winners and losers is vaguer.

Moreover, existing studies have not extensively looked at how different mechanisms of law making in legislative-executive relations impact on mandate fulfilment: how does what happens in parliament affect pledge fulfilment? Especially in political systems where individual politicians have a relatively strong position vis-à-vis their party and a personal electoral mandate, individual-level factors (incumbency, disagreement with party, district magnitude) as well as characteristics of the parliamentary vote (published or secret voting) have been shown to be relevant in explaining pledge fulfilment (Schwarz et al. 2010).

Therefore, we compare candidates' or parties' VAA positions with their voting behaviour in parliament.

Comparing the Netherlands and Switzerland

MPs, parties and VAAs do not act in a political vacuum but within a framework of formal and informal rules defined by political institutions and the prevailing political culture. Before we present our research design we name the key characteristics of the two countries included in our study.

The Netherlands

The Netherlands is characterized as a typical example of a consensus democracy (Lijphart 2012). We are studying voting behaviour in the directly elected first chamber ('Tweede Kamer') of its bicameral legislature, which is generally regarded as the most important chamber. The electoral system for the first chamber uses the proportional d'Hondt largest average method in (effectively) a single national district of 150 members with a very low 'natural' electoral threshold (0.67%). The Gallagher Index for the 2006 national election was just .9, which is very low in comparative terms (ParlGov, 2012).

It should come as no surprise that the highly proportional electoral system is accompanied by a relatively high number of political parties. Since the implementation of proportional representation in 1917 no party has achieved a majority in parliament. The effective number of parties in terms of seats was 5.5 in the 2006 election, which is a typical value for the last two decades (ParlGov, 2012). The fragmentation of parliament has made coalition government the norm. In recent years it was necessary to include at least three parties to secure a parliamentary majority. In every election since 2002 there has been a (partial) change in the government composition. In 2006 the outgoing government of CDA, VVD and D66 was replaced by a coalition of CDA, PvdA and Christian Union.

Probably as a result of the large number of parties as well as the system of coalition government, parliamentary parties act in a very unitary way (Andeweg and Thomassen, 2011). Most votes are by show of hands, recorded by party rather than by individual. Moreover, voting behaviour is substantially affected by voting along government-opposition lines (Otjes, 2011).

The Netherlands was the first country to introduce VAAs with a paper version appearing in 1989 and an online version in 1998. Since then usage numbers have increased to about one third of the electorate in 2010 (Louwerse and Rosema, 2011). StemWijzer was the first VAA to be developed and it is still the most popular tool. Kieskompas was launched in 2006 in a bid to provide more insight into the 'political landscape.' Contrary to their Swiss counterpart, both Dutch VAAs provide a national advice (not regional) for parties (not candidates).

Switzerland

The Swiss legislature consists of two symmetric, but non-congruent chambers (Lijphart, 2012: 199): the National Council ('Nationalrat') and the Council of States ('Ständerat'). Only the National Council keeps roll-call records, therefore we solely focus on this chamber in our analysis. The National Council consists of 200 members and is elected by a proportional system in 26 electoral districts (the Swiss cantons). Every canton is guaranteed one seat. Additional seats are assigned in proportion to population figures. Thus the number of seats per district ranges from 1 to 34, and subsequently also the electoral threshold differs strongly across electoral districts. The Gallagher Index for the 2011 national election was 3.6, which is four times higher compared to the Netherlands but still low compared to other countries (ParlGov, 2012).

The electoral system is not only fragmented into numerous electoral districts, it combines also party- and candidate-centred features. One way of voting in Switzerland is to cast a party list. Alternatively, voters can compose their own ballot. They receive as many votes as there are seats in the electoral district and by vote splitting they can vote for candidates from different parties. Additionally, voters can support their favourite candidates by giving them two votes instead of one (so-called cumulative voting).

Similar to the Netherlands the proportional electoral system leads to a high number of parties. The effective number of parties in terms of seats in the 2011 elections was 5.6 (ParlGov, 2012).

Due to the political fragmentation and decentralized structure of the country, candidates are selected by cantonal party sections, which enjoy considerable autonomy from the national level. It is thus not unusual if policy positions between the candidates of the same party differ, and national party leaders lack the power to prevent it.

The Swiss government is formed by a multi-party coalition. From 1959 to 2007 the four largest parties (CVP, FDP, SP and SVP) formed the government according to the so-called 'magic formula'. Since 2007 a fifth party is included. This government coalition combines more than 80% of all MPs. In contrast to coalitions in other countries there is no binding coalition agreement. The government is elected by parliament for a fixed four-year term (no possibility for a non-confidence vote or call for early elections). The effect is twofold: First, government parties can double-cross as government and opposition depending on the specific issue at stake. The shared responsibility for governmental actions leads to no responsibility in specific issues. Second, the need for government parties to enforce a strong discipline in parliament is lowered. Compared to 'genuine' parliamentary systems party discipline is somewhat weaker.

Switzerland was among the first countries where VAAs were operative. The Swiss VAA smartvote reflects the complexity and the particularities of the Swiss electoral system in its design. In contrast to most VAAs in other countries not the parties but the candidates directly are invited to answer the smartvote questionnaire.[1] Subsequently smartvote offers a voting advice for parties (lists)

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[1] In 2011 the response rate was 85% out of 3'500 candidates.

as well as for individual candidates. Voters appreciate the service: in 2011 about 15% of the voters used smartvote.

Data and Research Design

The paper's main focus is to explain incongruence between the pledges made during election campaigns and the later voting behaviour in parliament. The large institutional differences between our two cases entail that incongruence in the case of Switzerland is measured at the level of individual MPs and in the Dutch case at party level. This is why we conduct two separate case studies instead of one combined model. The research designs share the research question, the operationalization of the dependent variable, as well as a common core of explanatory variables.

Both case studies use VAA data. In Switzerland, this is the 2003 and 2007 versions of 'smartvote' (www.smartvote.ch) while for the Netherlands, the data base is formed by the two VAAs 'Stemwijzer' (www.stemwijzer.nl) and 'Kieskompas' (www.kieskompas.nl) in 2006. The chapter compares the answers given in the VAA surveys with (virtually) identical parliamentary votes: 34 in Switzerland and 49 for the Netherlands (see full list in the Annex). For the Dutch case, there were multiple cases in which we found multiple matching votes to a single VAA statement. In these cases, we took the modal voting behaviour into account and we calculated average values for the explanatory variables on the level of the parliamentary vote.

Contrary to previous studies we rely on VAA questionnaires rather than party manifesto data to identify pre-electoral pledges. This implies two restrictions: First, there is a distinction between explicit campaign pledges provided by party manifestos and the more general positions on a number of policy issues revealed by VAAs. Unlike manifestos, VAA questions are not drafted by parties but contain a whole range of issues which parties avoid on different grounds (because the topic is too hot or because they don't really care). However, parties and candidates answering VAA surveys reveal their general political values and positions – which should be approximately the same after the election no matter if they attached a pledge to it or not. Thus we think that VAA data is very suitable to serve the needs of our study.

A second restriction is the possibility that candidates and parties answer a VAA questionnaire strategically in order to present themselves in the most favourable manner. This could be especially true for countries with an extensive use of VAAs by voters, which subsequently could increase the instrumental use of VAAs for successful electoral campaigns. For both the Netherlands and Switzerland there is evidence indicating strategic behaviour of this kind. In the Netherlands, parties have openly admitted this practice and it has subsequently been broadly discussed in the media (Ladner and Fivaz 2012). In Switzerland as well, it is no secret that some parties provide their candidates with guidelines for answering the VAA questionnaire (Ladner et al. 2010).

However, receiving guidelines and following them are two different stories. Based on a comprehensive survey among Swiss candidates Ladner et al. (2008:

108-109) could show that only 10% of the candidates followed the instructions to a considerable extent, a further 45% did so at least partially regarding a few specific questions. From a representational point of view, strategic answers in a VAA questionnaire are only problematic if the post-electoral behaviour deviates from the pre-electoral policy positions, and this is exactly what we will analyse.

The dependent variable is a binary congruence measure for every matching pair of VAA item and parliamentary vote: It is 1 if the voting behaviour matches the VAA answer (positional congruence), otherwise it is 0 (positional incongruence). Since answer options in the VAA surveys and in parliamentary votes are not the same, we match (full) agreement in a VAA to a yes-vote and (full) disagreement to a no-vote. Neutral VAA positions as well as abstention or absenteeism in legislative votes are treated as missing values (for details see Appendix).

Table X.4: Number of MPs and MP Votes by Party (Swiss Case)

	Number of MPs	**Number of MP votes**	**Average number of votes per MP**
CVP	38	736	19.4
FDP	44	704	16.0
GPS	27	474	17.6
SP	62	1,301	21.0
SVP	61	1,243	20.3
Other parties	22	342	15.5
Total	254	4,800	18.9

Table X.5: Number of VAA Statements and Number of Votes by Party (Dutch Case)

	Number of VAA statements	**Number of votes**
CDA	45	116
ChristenUnie	44	112
D66	42	106
GroenLinks	48	123
PvdA	45	115
PvdD*	19	50
PVV	48	128
SGP	48	126
SP	45	123
VVD	49	129

Total	-	1,128

Note: This excludes statements for which parties provided neutral or neither answers.
* = PvdD not included in Kieskompas.

Hypotheses and Explanatory Variables

Common Explanatory Variables

Strength of political preference: MPs or parties that reveal strong preferences in the VAA survey are less likely to change their mind during parliamentary debates. Strong preference means that a straight yes/no answer (strongly agree/disagree) was given to an item, while the weakly agree/disagree option is taken as an indicator for weak preference structure[2].

Positional centrality (or policy extremism) of a party: Parties at both ends on the common left-right scale are more extreme in their standpoints (which is basically why they are located there), more ideology-driven and less willing to compromise with others. In contrast, parties more to the centre of the political system usually hold less stubborn views and thus are welcome partners in centre-left or centre-right coalitions (Netherlands), or in legislative alliances (Switzerland). We hypothesise that the more extreme (the less central) the party position is, the higher its positional congruence. For the Dutch case, we use the distance of individual parties' positions from the centre on the left-right scale, as measured by the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (2010). In the Swiss case, we use the average party success rates in parliamentary votes to measure the positional centrality of a party.

Party core issues/issue saliency: The salience approach postulates that party manifestos mainly highlight issues that are relevant and important to the party in question (Budge and Hofferbert 1990; Klingemann et al. 1994), whereas VAA questionnaires are composed of the full range of political areas. We assume that election pledges concerning issues, which are particularly important to an MP or a party, are more often respected than presumably irrelevant issues. We are using expert survey estimates of party issue saliency from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2010.[3] The survey uses a scale ranging from 0 to 10. For the Dutch case, the relevant saliency scales have been matched to the issue categories used in the two VAAs. We were able to find acceptable matches for all but three of the VAA categories (education, democratic reform and culture and media). In the Swiss case we first matched the issue areas from the Chapel Hill survey directly to the 34 selected items (see Appendix). In a second step, issues were defined salient for a party if the average expert score in the Chapel Hill survey reached 6 or above on the 10-point scale.[4]

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[2] As the Dutch Stemwijzer uses a three-point answer scale, we cannot measure the strength of the preferences from that VAA.

[3] We are using the 2010 edition, because this includes more relevant policy dimensions.

[4] We used this threshold approach to circumvent implausibility in the expert judgments.

Time span between VAA survey and legislative vote: Political contexts can and do change over time. Pre-election positions are sometimes overtaken by events, which should lead responsible MPs to change their mind, be it for the benefit of their voters or for the common good.

Swiss-Specific Variables

As an alternative to the positional centrality/policy extremism variable, we employ **party dummies** in order to estimate the effect of individual parties on the dependent variable (reference category = CVP). The inclusion of party dummies requires dropping party random effects levels.

Relevance of the vote: Not every vote is equally significant within the legislative process. Some votes may have a direct law-making effect (e.g. votes on amendments to government bills) while other votes merely charge the administration to consider some measures (parliamentary motions). Out of the 34 selected items 26 are government bills or parliamentary initiatives with high law-making relevance, 8 are parliamentary motions of low relevance.[5]

Positional incongruence with party group majority: Positional congruence by an MP is more likely if the party group takes up the same stance on the issue. If an MP finds out after the election that the majority of her fellow party members take another position there should be an increased propensity that she will eventually conform to the majority position (peer pressure). This variable is binary, analogically defined to the dependent variable[6].

District magnitude: Voting theory suggests that the electoral connection is closer in small districts because a lower number of MPs makes it easier to keep track of their legislative behaviour (Bowler and Farrel 1993; Carey and Shugart 1995; Cox 1997). We therefore expect that pre-election positions are more likely to be disregarded in larger districts. Because district magnitude is not expected to show a linear effect, we use two dummy variables which capture the smallest districts with up to 4 seats and the largest ones with 15 or more seats (reference category = medium-sized districts).

Incumbency: The effect of incumbency on pledge fulfilment is theoretically ambiguous: Incumbents know how the land lies. Unlike freshmen, they are more consolidated in their political positions. But incumbents also have gained self-confidence from the fact that they have been constantly re-elected, which could weaken the chain of delegation and broaden political leeway (Shugart et al. 2005; Tavits 2009).

Moreover, we control for the year of the vote, language (French- and Italian-speaking minorities), as well as MPs' age and sex.

Dutch-Specific Variables

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[5] As a large majority of the votes in the Dutch case concern motions, we only include this variable for the Swiss case.

[6] If there was no majority in the party group (e.g. if a tie occurred), any VAA answer was rated in line with the party group majority. MPs not member of a group are treated as missing values.

Government participation: In parliamentary systems like the Netherlands it is mainly up to the government coalition to fulfil their pledges. They are under tougher observation by the media than the opposition parties whose hands are tied and often struggle to get their core issues on the legislative agenda. However, the responsibility of government entails higher political flexibility, too: coalition negotiations as well as a changing external environment after the government has been formed almost inevitably lead to the abandoning of election pledges (Mansergh and Thomson 2007: 320). It thus seems easier for the opposition than for the government to stick adamantly to their pre-election positions in their parliamentary (voting behaviour).[7]

We control for party size (it might be easier for smaller, more cohesive parties to stick to their pre-electoral commitments), VAA source (Kieskompas or StemWijzer) and match certainty. The latter captures the quality of the match between the VAA statement and the parliamentary vote.[8]

Research Method

Given the clustered structure of the data, we will run a number of mixed-effects (multilevel) regression models to explain positional (in-)congruence in Switzerland and the Netherlands. While all models come with the same binary structure of the dependent variable, the statistical details of the models will vary according to the country under consideration (different definition of model levels and composition of covariates).[9]

In the Swiss case the hierarchical data structure features four levels: individual MP, electoral district (canton), national party, and the single vote/issue. These levels are not perfectly nested, the model specification thus has to deal with cross-classification (e.g. national parties appear in different cantons and every MP gives his or her opinion on a number of different votes). The cross-classification structure is simplified by the fact that 'empty model' estimations containing only random effects indicated that the contribution to the explained variance by the level of cantons is extremely small (results not reported here). We therefore dropped cross-classifications involving parties and cantons, but leaving those between votes/issues and MPs/parties.

In the Dutch case all data was recorded on the party level, therefore the individual and district level do not come into play. We took into account the party level as well as the issue category level.

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[7] Because legislative decision-making in Switzerland is not driven by the distinction between government and opposition parties (see e.g. Schwarz et al. 2011), we do not include this variable in the Swiss case.

[8] This is captured on a scale from 0 = not a good match at all to 100 = (near) perfect match. In practice, we only matched statements and proposals with a value of 50 (adequate match, but a somewhat different issue), 60 (adequate match), 70 (appropriate match, but issue is slightly different or a sub-issue), 80 (good match, although wording might be stronger/weaker), 90 (very good match) or 100 (near perfect match. This is not used in the Swiss case because the selection process only took into account issues representing good or very good matches.

[9] We used the 'glmer' function for generalized linear mixed-effects regression in R's 'lme4' package.

Explaining Positional (In-)Congruence

Empirical Analysis of the Dutch Case

We expected government participation to be of paramount importance in the voting behaviour of Dutch parliamentary parties. The difference between government and opposition parties is indeed marked: on average, opposition parties voted in a congruent way in about 82% of cases, while government parties did so in only 51% of the cases (see Table 6). This effect is in line with our expectations and indeed with earlier analyses of Dutch parliamentary behaviour (Louwerse 2011a, 2012).

The main driver of the government parties' behaviour seems to be the fact that they reject opposition parties' proposals even if they agree with the general message. For example, government party CDA positioned itself in favour of extending nuclear energy before the elections. In parliament, however, it rejected motions from the right-wing opposition, which asked for more nuclear power. At the same time, it also rejected motions from the left-wing opposition demanding a moratorium on new nuclear power plants. Instead it seemed to prefer to leave the matter up to the government entirely.

Table X.6: Government Participation and Congruent Behaviour

	Congruent behaviour	**N**
Government parties	51.0%	134
Opposition parties	81.6%	299
All parties	72.2%	433

Note: Difference of means test: $t(207.26) = 6.1703$, $p < .01$.

A multivariate analysis of the Dutch data confirms the importance of government participation. We ran five different models, the first of which is an 'empty model' including only random effects and an intercept. In model 2, which includes all explanatory variables, we find a strong effect for the variable government party. The odds ratio is 0.14 signalling that the odds of government parties to vote in line with their VAA position is 6 to 7 times lower than the odds of opposition parties. This strong effect remains, also if we control for party size and policy extremism. These factors do not have an effect on congruence, once we control for government participation.

Issue saliency is the second explanation for which we find support. Parties vote more in line with their pre-electoral position on issues that they find more important. The odds ratio is 1.32, which means that for an increase of one point on the saliency scale (ranging from 0 to 10), the odds of voting congruently increase moderately. This finding stands in contrast to Thomson's findings (2001), who observed that issue saliency, as measured by the Comparative Manifestos Project, did not affect the degree to which manifesto pledges were implemented by the government. Note, however, that we do not only use a different operationalization of issue saliency (expert survey vs. document

analysis), but also that our measurement of pledge fulfilment is different. Whereas Thomson studied pledge fulfilment by governments, we are looking at congruent parliamentary voting behaviour.

Because issue saliency is not observed for all cases, we also estimated models without saliency (model 3) and without saliency, but with the same cases as in model 2 (model 4). This does not affect our findings in substantively important ways, although the significance of some effect changes somewhat between specifications. Model 5 includes the effect of preference strength, which can only be observed for the Kieskompas statements. Preference strength does not seem to have an effect on the probability of congruent voting behaviour, nor does its inclusion change any of the other coefficients significantly.

In all models, the certainty of the match between VAA statement and parliamentary proposal, as estimated by the coder, did seem to have a small effect of congruence levels. If the match was more exact, the probability of congruent voting behaviour was higher. One the one hand this implies that we must be careful in matching votes with VAA proposals, because depending on the exact wording of a proposal, parties might take different positions. On the other hand, it also tells us something about changes in the political agenda: parties' voting behaviour is likely to become less predictable if the exact proposals that are voted on are very different from the proposals that were central during the election campaign.

All in all, the Dutch case provides strong evidence for both the influence of policy and office on pledge fulfilment. Government parties are less likely to vote in a congruent way, while parties are more likely to vote congruently on issues that they find important.

Table X.7: Logit Predictions for Positional Congruence between Pre- and Post-Election Sphere. Two-Level Cross-Classification Models (Parties, Issue Categories).

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
(Intercept)	1.06^{***}	-1.75	0.60	-0.29	$-3.95^{\dagger}$
	(0.28)	(1.26)	(0.91)	(1.10)	(2.28)
Government party		-1.90^{***}	-1.88^{***}	-2.20^{***}	-2.32^{**}
		(0.51)	(0.44)	(0.54)	(0.89)
Party size		0.00	0.02	0.02	0.00
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Policy extremism		-0.01	-0.08	-0.05	-0.02
		(0.18)	(0.15)	(0.18)	(0.32)
Saliency		0.24^{*}			$0.36^{\dagger}$
		(0.10)			(0.21)
VAA = StemWijzer		-0.37	$-0.46^{\dagger}$	-0.42	
		(0.28)	(0.24)	(0.27)	
Time span to vote		-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	0.00

		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Match certainty		0.03*	0.02†	0.03*	0.05*
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Preference strength					0.61
					(0.49)
Log Likelihood	-241.52	-187.54	-230.57	-190.32	-84.65
Num. obs.	433	373	433	373	196
Num. groups: Category	12	9	12	9	9
Num. groups: Party	10	10	10	10	9
Variance: Category (Int.)	0.07	0.28	0.15	0.23	0.61
Variance: Party (Intercept)	0.58	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.00

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, †p < 0.1 (standard errors in brackets)

Empirical analysis of the Swiss case

Table X.8 lists the average positional congruence of Swiss MPs by party. Overall congruent behaviour is 86.3% which means that legislative voting is in agreement with VAA statements in almost 9 out of 10 cases. However, the figures vary a lot across parties. As a general pattern, the longer the political distance from the political centre of the party system, the higher the congruence rates. The highest congruence with over 93% can be found among members of the Greens and the Social-democrats, while members of the Christian-democrats and Liberals come up with relatively low congruence of 80% and less.

Table X.8: Congruence of MP Positions (Averages by Party)

	Congruent behaviour	N
CVP	75.8%	736
FDP	80.3%	704
GPS	93.7%	474
SP	93,4%	1,301
SVP	86.6%	1,243
Other (small parties)	82.9%	342
All MPs	86.3%	4,800

Ideological and organisational aspects of parties seemingly account for some variation in positional congruence. For an in-depth study of the possible driving factors we ran four statistical models to predict positional congruence between VAA positions and voting behaviour in parliament (Table X.9). The first one is an 'empty' model with only random effects included. In the second model additionally a number of socio-demographic control variables are included.

Models 3 and 4 carry all fixed effects; they only differ in the way they capture the party effects (random level vs. dummy fixed effects).

The estimations in the 'full' models 3 and 4 largely confirm the results in Schwarz et al. (2010): By far the most important factor to explain positional incongruence between VAA answers and parliamentary voting is incongruence between an MP's VAA answer and the later majority position in her legislative party group. The logit coefficient close to -4 indicates that the odds to a positional change are about 500 times higher if the VAA position does not match the majority position in the party group.

Other highly significant factors in our models include party centrality (MPs from pivotal parties in the political centre are more likely to change their mind) and the newly introduced preference strength measure (stronger preferences produce higher positional congruence). Weakly significant are small electoral districts (MPs from small cantons with no more than four parliamentary seats show higher positional congruence).

To sum up, positional (in-)congruence in the Swiss case is attributable to a very small number of factors: the situation in the own party group after the election, the strength of own preferences in the VAA survey, ideological/structural aspects of the own party, and the smallness of the own electoral district.

Table X.9: Logit Predictions for Positional Congruence between Pre- and Post-Election Sphere. Three-level Cross-Classification Models (MPs, Parties, Issues)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
(Intercept)	1.86***	1.76***	2.98***	2.11***
	(0.22)	(0.35)	(0.57)	(0.58)
Minority language (F/I)		-0.05	0.00	-0.03
		(0.10)	(0.14)	(0.15)
Age		0.00	-0.00	0.00
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Sex: male		-0.01	-0.05	0.03
		(0.11)	(0.15)	(0.16)
Year of vote			0.04	0.04
			(0.06)	(0.06)
Time span to vote			-0.01	-0.01
			(0.01)	(0.01)
Incumbent			0.20	0.20
			(0.14)	(0.15)
Relevance of vote			0.02	0.02
			(0.24)	(0.24)

District ≤ 4			0.51[†]	0.51[†]
			(0.26)	(0.26)
District ≥ 15			-0.10	-0.13
			(0.14)	(0.14)
Preference strength			1.26***	1.26***
			(0.13)	(0.13)
Disagreement with party group			-3.98***	-3.96***
			(0.13)	(0.13)
Core issue			0.10	0.12
			(0.10)	(0.11)
Party centrality			-0.18**	
			(0.06)	
Party FDP				0.04
				(0.21)
Party GPS				0.71*
				(0.31)
Party SP				0.66**
				(0.23)
Party SVP				0.15
				(0.20)
Party small				-0.07
				(0.28)
Log Likelihood	-1782	-1782	-966	-962
Num. obs.	4800	4800	4744	4744
Num. groups: MP	254	254	250	250
Num. groups: Party	14	14	12	
Num. groups: Issue	34	34	34	34
Variance: MP (Intercept)	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.06
Variance: Party (Intercept)	0.37	0.37	0.00	
Variance: Issue (Intercept)	0.34	0.34	0.19	0.17

Notes: ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, [†]p < 0.1 (Standard errors in brackets)

Conclusions

While the Swiss and Dutch political systems are both characterized as consensual (Lijphart 2012), the way in which the party mandate works differs to

a great extent. In the Swiss candidate-centred electoral system the congruence between pre-electoral policy positions of candidates and their parliamentary voting behaviour is best explained by looking at disagreement with the party group, preference strength, government participation and party centrality. Those who disagree with the the party before the election are much more likely to change their position, as are those with weaker preferences. At the party level, smaller effects can be found: members of centre parties and government parties are more likely to display congruence between their pre-electoral and post-electoral positions. These effects are, however, considerably smaller than explanations that relate to an individual candidate's position on a specific statement.

In the Dutch case, we could not observe the individual-level factors that affect congruence in behaviour in the Swiss case. Parties rather than candidates are positioned on VAA statements and parliamentary voting usually is (de facto) performed and recorded by party. Government participation is the most important explanation of positional congruence: government parties are much more likely to take a different position in a vote than opposition parties. While government parties need to abandon some of their pre-electoral commitments during the coalition negotiations, opposition parties are free to stick to their pledges (Holzhacker 2002). Although one might expect opposition parties to oppose basically everything the government does, the relatively strong powers of the Dutch opposition parties provide them with the opportunity to forward their own agenda in parliament (Döring 1995, Louwerse 2012). A lot of what is voted on in parliament concerns motions from the opposition. Most of these are rejected, but at least it allows opposition parties to signal to their voters that they acted upon their electoral pledges. Other factors that affect congruence are the saliency of the political issue as well as the 'quality' of the match between the pre-electoral statement and the parliamentary votes.

It seems that MPs are in both cases deeply affected by the specific characteristics of the specific political and electoral systems: in the Netherlands the role as a government respectively oppositional party is the most important aspect, whereas in Switzerland government participation can be neglected (since this factor is rather weakly founded in theory). The finding that the most important factor is the average (majority) position of the own party is in line with our institutional expectations: During electoral campaigns the relatively weak position of parties and the candidate-centred voting system set clear incentives for candidates to stress their individual profile and to seek simultaneously for personal and party votes. But after the elections, MPs belonging to the same party have to work together and find as far as possible common positions in order to play an effective role in parliament and send coherent signals to the electorate. Thus, MPs have an incentive to give up at least some of their outlier positions and take over the positions of their fellows – particularly if issues are concerned to which they indicated weaker preferences in the VAA.

The two countries yet have some aspects in common. First of all the results confirm the observation from the previous study by Schwarz et al. (2010) that despite the often heard public belief of dishonest politicians, MPs are rather

reliable with regard to their pre-electoral policy positions. Previous studies using different sources of data and different approaches have drawn similar conclusions (Mansergh and Thomson 2007; Louwerse 2012). Moreover, in both systems congruence is most affected by the demands of effective implementation of the party mandate. The Swiss system provides incentives for MPs to act in unity in parliament to be able to implement the party policy agenda. In the Dutch system party unity almost seems taken for granted (Andeweg and Thomassen 2011). Here, the need to form government coalitions based on an elaborate coalition agreement requires government parties to abandon some of their pre-electoral commitments. Moreover, in both systems the degree of 'importance' of a statement also impacts upon the probability of congruent voting behaviour. In Switzerland, MPs are less likely to vote congruently if their preferences are weaker, while the analysis for the Netherlands demonstrated the impact of issue saliency on congruence. While these are arguably somewhat different indicators, they both refer to how central an issue seems to be to an individual candidate (Switzerland) or a party (Netherlands). This constitutes a new finding since earlier studies, which used a different operationalization of issue saliency (Thomson 2001; Louwerse 2011a) did not find such an effect. Essentially, our findings are 'good news' for mandate theory: Swiss and Dutch parties and MPs stick to their pre-electoral positions and even more so on the issues that matter most to them.

Our analysis also provides some insight concerning the informational reliability contained in VAAs. The question whether VAAs are a reliable source indicating how parties will behave after the election, is of crucial importance for VAAs. Both in Switzerland and the Netherlands the ratio of kept promises is relatively high, which suggests that VAAs provide generally a good indication of how parties will act upon those issues after elections. Two points of caution are, however, appropriate here. First, we have looked at how parliaments vote on bills, amendments and motions. Of course, congruent voting is in many cases a long way from actually implementing a specific policy. If parties or MPs are on the losing side of a parliamentary vote, they might keep their parliamentary mandate by voting in a manner that is congruent with their VAA position, but actual policy is unaffected. Second, our analysis shows that there is a high degree of congruence for VAA statements with a related parliament vote. Quite a few VAA statements are, however, not part of the legislative agenda, either because the agenda changes, party position change, or because the policy statement in the VAA was stated in a very broad manner. What we thus do not know from our analysis is whether the selection of VAA statements provides an accurate prediction of the totality of voting behaviour in parliament after the elections. This would be a very relevant topic for further research.

In general we could show the potential of VAA data outside the box of VAA research. VAA data comprise a useful alternative to party manifesto and survey data to capture party positions and electoral promises. However, there are important differences. Compared to party manifestos VAA data is only an indirect measure of electoral promises. Important is also the fact that the structure of manifesto data (e.g. the selection of the covered issues) is defined by

the parties, whereas VAAs force the parties to position themselves on issues which parties or candidates might find irrelevant.

For future research we see two major directions: First, in our analysis we identified electoral promises based on very specific VAA statements. Alternatively, using all VAA statements belonging to a certain policy area, one could also define more general and latent kind of electoral promises (e.g. "a position clearly in favour of environmental protection"). This would allow measuring the level of kept promises on grounds of entire policy areas and not on grounds of very specific and often technical single issues, which would probably move the analysis closer to how voters see and interpret politics. Second, while our analysis of two quite different systems leads us to expect that positional congruence is not limited to just these two countries, an earlier study by Skop (2010) found that the ratio of promises kept in the Czech republic is significantly lower than the ratios we found. It would be interesting to analyse Skop's hypothesis that the lower ratio in eastern European countries can be explained by the fact that they are young democracies in more detail. Future work that includes a larger number of countries with even more diverse democratic backgrounds would thus be very welcome.

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Appendix

Table X.2: Operationalization of the Dependent Variable (Congruence Between VAA Answer and Legislative Behaviour)

	Legislative behaviour	
	Yes	No
smartvote (SWI)		
Fully agree	1	0
Weakly agree	1	0
Weakly disagree	0	1
Fully disagree	0	1
StemWijzer (NL)		
Agree	1	0
Neither	-	-
Disagree	0	1
Kieskompas (NL)		
Fully agree	1	0
Agree	1	0
Neutral	-	-
Disagree	0	1
Fully disagree	0	1

Table X.3: Distribution in the Dependent Variable (Percentages in Brackets)

	Legislative behaviour		
	Yes	No	Total
smartvote (SWI)			
Fully agree	1,701 (35.9)	163 (3.4)	1,864 (39.3)
Weakly agree	394 (8.3)	226 (4.8)	620 (13.1)
Weakly disagree	146 (3.1)	337 (7.1)	483 (10.2)
Fully disagree	116 (2.4)	1,655 (34.9)	1,771 (37.4)
Total	2,357 (49.7)	2,381 (50.3)	4,738 (100)
StemWijzer (NL)			
Agree	67 (33.5)	34 (17.0)	101 (50.5)
Neither	3 (1.5)	0 (0.0)	3 (1.5)
Disagree	24 (12.0)	72 (36.0)	96 (48.0)
Total	106 (47.0)	94 (53.0)	200 (100)
Kieskompas (NL)			
Fully agree	41 (15.7)	8 (3.1)	49 (18.8)
Agree	40 (15.3)	33 (12.6)	73 (27.9)
Neutral	7 (2.7)	18 (6.9)	25 (9.6)
Disagree	14 (5.4)	64 (24.5)	78 (29.9)
Fully disagree	3 (1.1)	33 (12.6)	36 (13.7)
Total	105 (40.2)	156 (59.8)	261 (100)