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Campaign Promises to Public Policy: An Analysis of Promise Fulfillment during the
Presidencies of Donald Trump and Joe Biden

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Abstract

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By Kardelen Ergul

This thesis explores the fulfillment of campaign promises by U.S. Presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden and examines the mechanisms of promise fulfillment, with a focus on executive directives and traditional legislation-making processes. It adopts a comparative approach to evaluate the promise fulfillment rates of both presidents and investigates the influence of salience on promise fulfillment and fulfillment through traditional legislation-making. The thesis also examines the effects of various factors, including crises such as the pandemic, the number of Senate seats held, and the fixed effects of policy areas on promise fulfillment and fulfillment through traditional legislative means.

The findings reveal that Joe Biden achieved a higher rate of promise fulfillment (55.26%) compared to Donald Trump (42.10%), with a notable portion of Biden's promises (33.33%) being realized through traditional legislative means, in contrast to Trump's 18.75%. This outcome supports the hypothesis that Donald Trump fulfilled fewer promises compared to Joe Biden because he was not able to successfully navigate the traditional legislation-making processes. Despite similar Congressional compositions during their terms, our study does not support the hypothesis that a majority of the president's party in Congress significantly influences promise fulfillment rates. Furthermore, the research identifies a positive correlation between public opinion on the salience of issues and promise fulfillment. However, the study finds no statistically significant evidence that this relationship is strengthened when promises are fulfilled through traditional legislation. The thesis also suggests that promises related to crisis situations are more likely to be fulfilled,

though not necessarily through legislative action. Lastly, an exploration into policy areas deemed important by the public shows that Trump had more success in fulfilling promises in key areas compared to Biden; however, these promises were fulfilled primarily through executive directives.

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Dedicated to my dad,

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Introduction

When politicians run for elections, they make several promises on various issues. The promises that are uttered with the hopes that the voters will vote for the candidate can also show the direction the politician will take once she is elected. All the candidates running for positions at different levels of the government run on a platform that includes promises. As the presidential election campaigns gather the most national and international interest, the campaign promises of presidential candidates also attract significant public, media, and scholarly attention. As the voters look to the next four years of their lives, campaign promises serve as one of the indicators of what those four years might be like.

Fulfillment of campaign promises is also interrelated with the trust citizens have in politicians.¹ During the campaigning period, politicians aspire to give promises that will attract voters, and sometimes these promises can be given just to gather votes and be broken once elected to office.² Famous campaign promises, such as George H.W. Bush's "Read my lips, no new taxes," became highly popular as he broke his promise because of a failure to get support from Congress.³ Bush breaking his promise resulted in opposition candidates calling him a liar, voters questioning his trustworthiness and potentially causing him re-election.^{4 5} Even though President George H.W. Bush broke an important campaign promise, "about 75 percent of the promises made by presidents from Woodrow Wilson through Jimmy Carter were kept."⁶ As fulfillment of campaign promises and voters' trust in politicians are highly related, politicians, once elected, might feel an obligation to fulfill them even though there are no legal obligations.⁷ Fulfilling campaign promises and increasing knowledge of voters about the fulfillment of campaign promises can also help "increase public's trust and confidence" in politicians, thereby countering the stereotype that politicians lie⁸

Recently, President Biden's decision to forgive some student loans, which was a campaign promise that has stirred the debate on whether the presidents can fulfill their promises, and if yes which ones they choose to fulfill.⁹ As the 2024 presidential election closes on the U.S. citizens and a possibility of a rematch between Joe Biden and Donald Trump gets higher, each day¹⁰ voters have started to review each presidency and compare the promises that were kept and broken. For example,

Biden's reelection bid video has been criticized as it failed to mention what promises was able to fulfill during his term and news outlets published pieces on assessing how Biden's accomplishments stack up to the campaign promises he made.¹¹

Campaign promises are an important part of the electoral process, as they can influence how voters view and choose different candidates. These promises can also create a roadmap for elected officials, allowing citizens to understand and evaluate their performance. In addition to influencing elections and voter behavior, campaign promises can also provide a roadmap for a candidate once they are elected. This is particularly true when it comes to policy areas, as these promises can give voters an idea of what to expect from the candidate and can help to hold them accountable for their actions once in office. By creating a clear and well-defined set of promises, candidates can provide voters with a sense of direction and a standard by which to measure their performance. Then, a responsible electorate will hold political candidates accountable for the promises they make during elections, rewarding candidates that fulfill their promises and punishing those that break them¹². In order to do this effectively, voters must be able to distinguish between promises that were kept and those that were broken. This requires a thorough understanding of the promises made by each candidate, as well as a willingness to evaluate the candidate's performance based on those promises.¹³

With this idea in mind, the thesis focuses on understanding which president, Joe Biden or Donald Trump, kept more promises and analyzing the different factors that affect which promises get to be fulfilled. The thesis also looks at the method of taking actions either through executive directives or Congress legislation to see presidents' abilities to navigate traditional legislation-making processes. With this understanding of the campaign promises' prominence in shaping public policy and electoral behavior, the research paper takes on to answer the question: Do presidents keep their promises, and if so, do they achieve this through executive actions or by navigating the traditional legislation-making processes? The goal is to understand how the fulfillment of campaign promises differs between Donald Trump and Joe Biden, while looking at the effects of public opinion on the salience of issues, Senate share and crises such as the pandemic on promise fulfillment and fulfillment mechanisms.

Thesis Statement

H1. It is hypothesized that a president fulfilled fewer promises compared to others if he was less likely to navigate through traditional legislation-making processes and relied more on executive directives to fulfill promises. Even though reliance on executive directives allows extensive privileges to the presidents, because of their limited impact and a negative outlook the public tends to have about executive directives, heavy reliance on executive directives without the successful navigation of the traditional legislation-making processes should result in less promises being fulfilled.

H1a. It is hypothesized that Donald Trump fulfilled less promises compared to Joe Biden because he was not able to successfully navigate the traditional legislation-making processes. We should expect that Donald Trump fulfilled fewer promises compared to Joe if he was less likely to navigate through traditional legislation-making processes and relied more on executive directives to fulfill promises.

H2. It is hypothesized that presidents are more likely to fulfill their promises if they have the support of Congress with the president's party having a majority of seats in Congress. One of the most significant ways a president can fulfill their promises is by gaining the support of Congress to pass desired legislation; therefore, a larger share of the president's party in Congress should lead to a higher number of promises being fulfilled.

H2a. It is hypothesized that a president is more likely to fulfill his promises, compared to others, if his party has the higher number of Senate seats. Since the averaged House seat shares of both presidents are calculated to be 217,5, a larger share of the president's party in the Senate should lead to a higher number of promises being fulfilled.

H3. It is hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between public opinion on the salience of issues and promise fulfillment. Since presidents have an interest in being responsive to the public in order to get re-elected and have higher levels of approval, we should expect an increase in the probability of fulfilling a promise when the public assigns greater importance to it.

H4. It is hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between public opinion on the salience of issues and promise fulfillment through traditional legislation-making. As traditional

legislation-making offers a more legitimate and sustainable way of policy-making, we should expect an increase in the probability of fulfilling a promise through traditional legislation-making when the public assigns greater importance to it.

H5. It is hypothesized that promises in public policy areas the public deems important are more likely to be fulfilled. Looking at the top three policy areas the public deems important in the Gallup averages, we should see the same or similar policy areas to have the highest level of fulfillment percentage.

H6. It is hypothesized that promises that are related to crises such as the pandemic are more likely to be fulfilled. As crises open up new opportunities for presidents to take decisive, meaningful action with fewer constraints, we should expect to see that promises related to a crisis, such as the pandemic, should have a higher probability of getting fulfilled.

H7. It is hypothesized that that promises in policy areas that are deemed important by the public are more likely to be fulfilled through traditional legislation-making. Looking at the top three policy areas the public deems important in the Gallup averages, we should see the same or similar policy areas to have the highest level of fulfillment through traditional legislation-making percentage.

H8. It is hypothesized that promises related to crises such as the pandemic are more likely to be fulfilled through traditional legislation-making. Even though times of crises could offer an opportunity to the president to expand his authority through executive directives, we should expect to see the usage of traditional legislation-making if the president wants to find more long-lasting and supportive ways of fulfilling his promises.

Key Terms

Campaign Promises: Campaign promises are pledges made by a candidate during an election campaign to gather support from voters and create a roadmap for policy-making. Once a candidate takes office, the public may hold the public official accountable and expect them to fulfill those promises; however, those promises are not legally binding.

Executive Directives: Executive directives include executive orders, presidential memoranda, proclamations¹⁴ and any instructed departmental activity.¹⁵ They are issued by the President of the United States, and they are one form of legislation-making as allowed by the Constitution.

Traditional Legislative-Making Process: The legislative-making process, also known as the lawmaking process, is the process by which the legislative branch of the United States, Congress, proposes, discusses and passes/rejects legislation. Once a bill is passed in Congress, it is sent to the President for review and signature. This way of legislation-making is seen to be more legitimate as Congress passes bills through a democratic process while executive directives are issued only by the President.¹⁶

Campaign Promise Fulfillment: Campaign promise fulfillment refers to the extent to which a candidate who has been elected to office follows through on the promises they made during their election campaign. After being elected, a candidate may be expected to work towards fulfilling their campaign promises, either by passing executive directives or supporting legislative efforts in Congress.

Spending Bills: Spending bills, or appropriations bills, are introduced in Congress to allocate funding for specific programs, agencies, or activities of the federal government and are essential for keeping the federal government running.

Literature Review

Campaign promises as a scholarly topic enjoy a vast literature, as scholars from political science to psychology, from natural sciences to economics have conducted research on understanding them. Electoral behavior research especially focuses on the role campaign promises on various issues play when it comes to voting choices.¹⁷ While earlier prominent research on electoral behavior suggests that issue voting is not substantial in the United States¹⁸, later research discusses the importance of issue voting, especially in presidential elections.¹⁹ While some researchers chose to concentrate on understanding political reputations and credible commitment problems,²⁰ others

highlighted the relationship between fulfilling campaign promises and re-election potential.²¹ All the findings from these strengthen the fact that campaign promises are a vital part of elections, and they affect how voters view different candidates and cast their votes.

Apart from affecting elections and how voters behave, campaign promises, especially in different policy areas, can also create a roadmap for the candidate once he is elected. As the promissory representation theory holds that parties and candidates make campaign promises and attempt to fulfill these promises if they get elected,²² they can shed light on understanding which policy areas the president will focus on and help him set expectations. They can also serve as a tool for citizens to understand and rate the performance of the president.²³ Then, the responsible electorate will reward or punish parties according to promise fulfillment with the ability to distinguish between promises that were kept and broken.²⁴ As a result, it is crucial for an electorate to be able to learn what promises have been made during the election period and then assess whether the president is fulfilling those promises or breaking them. The electorate can signal their approval or disapproval resulting in accountability through sanctions, which can affect the president's approval ratings and overall policy choices.²⁵

As for fulfilling promises, there are various actions presidents can take through executive directives and working with Congress to pass legislation. Executive directives, including instructed departmental activities, executive orders, presidential memorandum, and proclamations²⁶ are issued by the President of the United States as the head of the executive branch.²⁷ Even though executive directives are not explicitly mentioned in the U.S. Constitution, the document calls the President to "take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed" which gives him the legal authority to take action.²⁸ An extensive literature focuses on the legitimacy of executive directives,²⁹ how they might go against the rule of law³⁰ and serve as a way for presidents to circumvent the traditional-legislation making process conducted in the legislative branch: the U.S. Congress.³¹ While the debate continues as to what actions presidents can take under their executive powers, many state that the contemporary trend among the U.S. presidents in using executive directives is an abuse of power.³² Even though executive directives are important tools of legislation-making, they do not enjoy the same levels of legitimacy and durability the traditional legislation-making processes do.³³ Executive directives are at

risk of being reversed by a new president or being overturned by the judicial system on the grounds that they are unconstitutional.

As for the traditional legislation-making process conducted in the U.S. Congress, there is a lengthier process than signing an executive directive. A bill needs to be created and sponsored by a member of Congress, assigned to and passed from a committee, passed on the House or Senate floor after being debated (and sometimes amended), and moved onto the other chamber of Congress. After the passage of the bill in both chambers, a conference committee made of House and Senate members finalizes the bill and sends it to be signed into law by the president.³⁴ While some bills require a simple majority, others, such as funding bills, require a two-thirds vote³⁵ for passage, often requiring bipartisan support. This lengthy process is oftentimes made more complicated, with many stakeholders involved through lobbying efforts, party politics, filibusters, and compromises. The Constitution vests all legislative power in Congress³⁶ with “the sole authority to enact legislation and declare war, the right to confirm or reject many Presidential appointments, and substantial investigative powers,”³⁷ making it the traditional legislation-making body. Legislation passed by Congress holds more legitimacy³⁸ as Congress is the designated legislative body responsible for making laws by the Constitution, represents the will of the people with democratically elected members, and gives an opportunity for discussion and public discourse. At the same time, the judicial review also applies to legislation passed by Congress, and courts can find pieces of legislation to be unconstitutional, Congress can still override some Supreme Court rulings.³⁹ Congress legislation also enjoys longer durability compared to executive directives as they cannot be reversed with the election of a new president, and changing or repealing an act in Congress takes a lot of time and effort.

When a president considers acting on his campaign promises he has three possible routes he can take: he can decide not to take action, he can take actions that is against his promise, or he can take action that will fulfill his promise or start the promise of fulfillment. If he decides to take no action on that regard for now, he might be fully taking off the promises from his action consideration or he might be delaying. In a way, not taking an action on a campaign promise would be considered breaking his promise as no action indicates a failure of fulfillment. Delaying an action can also prove to be detrimental for a president depending on the urgency of the matter. Showing no signs of intent

on working on fulfilling a promise might alert the public and give the sense that he is not taking the issue seriously.

The president can also choose to take actions that will go against his campaign promises. As campaign promises serve as a policy route map for presidents, it is unlikely that they would want to go against that promises. First of all, going against the promise might upset their bases especially the ones that have an interest in the broken promise and based their vote in part on that promise. Secondly, breaking a promise would hurt the trust the president has established with his voters and also damage his reputation; making it harder for him to offer reliable promises and gain the trust of his voters if he re-runs for the presidency. It would also take away the president's negotiating power, as other negotiators (members of the Congress or even foreign entities) might see the president as an unreliable partner and refrain from collaborating. Given that breaking a promise is highly costly, the president has little incentives to do so but sometimes it might be necessary to break promises. A president might choose to break his promise as a compromise with the opposing party, especially to get a better deal or fulfill one of his higher-priority promises. He might be willing to forgo and face the consequences of breaking one promise to get the benefits from fulfilling a higher priority one. He might also be forced to break his promise because of pressure from the opposing party, the voters or the interest groups. Unexpected events like market crashes, natural disasters or international turmoil can also force a president's hand and result in the president taking actions that are against his campaign promises.

Moreover, the president can choose to take actions that will allow him to start the process of fulfilling his promises. At that point, the president will need to decide the medium and ways he wants to take this action to fulfill his promises. There are mainly two routes the president can follow: he can use executive directives, or he can rely on the traditional legislative-making processes and influence the Congress to take action. If he chooses to use executive directives, he and the bureaucracy will need to make the necessary planning to take the necessary action and oversee the implementation process. Taking an executive directive would put the responsibility on the executive branch and most importantly the president. Through successful planning and implementation, executive directives can help a president fulfill his campaign promises without having to deal with the Congress. However,

executive directives also prove to be costly as it is easier for them to be overturned. The Congress can simply overturn an executive directive by putting contradictory legislation in place. Executive directives are also in danger of being overturned with the end of an administration, as the newly elected president can easily undo these directives. Additionally, the Supreme Court can find executive orders to be unconstitutional and invalidate them. Executive directives also enjoy less durability as the next president in the office can simply overturn them. Even though the president would be able to take action on that matter while he is in office, an overturned executive directive would make it harder for that action to be sustainable.

Lastly, the president can rely on the Congress to help him fulfill his promise. At this point, the control of both chambers of the Congress matter greatly to him as the control of both houses by his own party would greatly aid the president in taking desired actions and fulfilling his promises. Firstly, the president's State of the Union address plays an important agenda setting role and can allow the president to shape the Congress' future sessions and legislation. The president also enjoys an extensive command of the public as he is most likely to get media coverage and overall public attention. He can use this power as another way of agenda setting and bring the issues he wants to focus on in fulfilling his promises to the forefront of the public debate and signal the Congress to work on these issues. Most importantly, through a member of Congress, the president can introduce a piece of legislation or amendment he wants to see passed. While this process is complicated as the legislation would need to be introduced by a member of Congress first, discussed and passed through both chambers of Congress, it creates a more certain and sustainable action that can only be undone by the judicial review and nothing else. Lastly, the president can influence the Congress and shape legislation through a threat of a veto as he has the ability to veto any legislation that passes through the Congress and overriding a veto in Congress is a difficult task the members of the Congress would not want to overtake.

Several factors can motivate a president to take action and fulfill specific promises, with one key factor being the president's responsiveness to the public. Jeffrey E. Cohen's popular book *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-Making* finds that U.S. presidents are "responsive to the public in selecting issues to focus on," and they are more likely to focus on issues that garnered

great public interest.⁴⁰ Cohen emphasizes that public opinion plays an important role in agenda setting, acting as a guiding framework for presidents to establish their priorities. However, Cohen highlights that after choosing which issue to work on the responsiveness of the president to the public declines as the president “will try to maintain control over the details of policy.”⁴¹ This supports the hypothesis that public opinion on the salience of issues have a positive relationship with promise fulfillment but not with promise fulfillment through traditional legislation-making as presidents decide on details of policy without relying on the public.

Similarly, Dahl argues that democratic elections establish “mechanisms for inducing responsive representatives.” as elected officials that are unresponsive to the public face the danger of being removed from office.⁴² In a way this idea reinforces the belief that presidents have an interest in being responsive to the public in order to get re-elected. Rottinghaus, in *Rethinking Presidential Responsiveness* finds that there is “a high degree of responsiveness with 70 percent of the cases displaying a match between the president’s positions and the prior opinion of the majority of the public.”⁴³ Canes-Wrone and Shotts look at the policy congruence by policy areas and find that there is a 100% congruence in social security, 92% in health and crime, and 52% in education and they suggest that the president is more likely to be responsive to matters that are familiar to citizens in their daily lives.⁴⁵ In a way, it can be seen that presidents are more likely to be responsive to matters that are deemed more important by the public.

Additionally, crises are seen as moments that can present both challenges and opportunities for presidents, as the country turns to the president for the solution of the problem. For example, the “president’s ability to show sound judgment in a crisis is consistently ranked as the number one attitude the public seeks in a president.”⁴⁶ Moreover, crises “open up new opportunities for presidents to take decisive, meaningful action with fewer constraints⁴⁷”, leading to expansion of presidential powers. As a result, presidents have a higher incentive in times of crisis to take action and fulfill their campaign promises.

Seeing that a president has various incentives to fulfill a promise we turn to understand the decision-making behind fulfilling a promise in certain ways. As mentioned before, the two major ways a president can take action and fulfill his campaign promises are executive directives and

traditional legislation-making. Even though the U.S. Constitution does not mention executive orders, the power to use executive orders has been assumed as an aspect of presidential authority.⁴⁸ Shane and Bruff argue that “presidents use executive orders to implement their most important policy initiatives.”⁴⁹ Mayer argues that “while deciding whether to use executive orders or not presidents consider the reactions of their opponents, and costs and benefits of using executive orders instead of legislation.”⁵⁰ Many scholars also found that there is an inverse relationship between “presidential partisan strength in Congress” and executive order usage.⁵¹ Mayer also argues that presidents with lower approval-rates may resort to executive orders to “deliver on key promises made to constituents.”⁵² While there is an extensive debate on whether the usage of executive orders constitute an abuse of power by the president,⁵³ Jones finds that “if an executive order is salient to the public, presidents receive lower presidential approval ratings from persons of all political parties,”⁵⁴ enforcing the idea that the public opinion on the usage of executive orders is negative. The negative perception around executive orders, the unsustainability of actions taken through executive directives and the higher legitimacy legislation enjoys can direct a president to fulfill his promises through traditional legislation-making processes.

Methodology

For this thesis, I have gone through PolitiFact’s Trump-O-Meter⁵⁵ and Biden Promise Tracker⁵⁶ websites to review the promises and collect them in a document. In the first stage, I have sorted out the promises relating to personal matters, such as Donald Trump’s promise of not taking any vacations. After sorting the personal promises, I was left with seventy-five promises for Donald Trump and seventy-seven promises for Joe Biden, leaving me with one-hundred and two promises in total. Later on, I went through all the promises and decided on the number of promises I wanted to include in my paper. Going through each promise, I have decided whether to include them or not based on the importance that promise carried throughout the campaign process. Due to limitations, I have also opted not to include any promises related to defense and veteran affairs, inclusion of those

categories can help improve this research paper. Afterwards, I have decided to include seventy-six promises in total, thirty-eight for Donald Trump and thirty-eight for Joe Biden.

In the next step, I went through all the promises and created thirteen different categories to place each promise into. I have used the Comparative Agenda's⁵⁷ categories and codebook to make sure that my promise categories and salience categories aligned. While the Gallup's Most Important Problem dataset includes 25 (including other) policy areas⁵⁸, through matching the promises with the policy areas, I have decided to include these policy categories: *international affairs, foreign trade, education, social welfare, health, macroeconomics, labor, transportation, law & crime, immigration, environment, energy, and government operations (shortened as governmental)*.

Using the Gallup's Most Important Problem dataset codebook, I was able to see which subcategories belonged to which policy areas and placed each promise according to the codebook. However, there were some promises that might be included in two different categories. For example, Donald Trump's promises to **Cancel the Paris climate agreement**, and **Stop payments to U.N. global warming programs** could be categorized as *international affairs* and environment. Similarly, Joe Biden's promise to **Rejoin the Paris climate agreement** could be categorized as *international affairs* and environment. As these promises focused on matters related to the climate change at their core rather than international cooperation, I have decided to categorize them as environment. For promises, **Make no cuts to Medicare and Medicaid, Repeal Obamacare, and Improve Obamacare** they could be categorized as *social welfare* and *health*, however I have decided to categorize them as *health* as the main goal of the Medicare and Medicaid is improving public health. For the promise, **Award federal contracts to companies that make all products in the US**, I have decided to use the policy area *macroeconomics* instead of *labor* as the promise was more related to "Made in America" rules. For the promise, **Double number of immigration judges and staff**, categories *immigration* and *government operation* could both be suitable, but I have decided to use *immigration*, as Biden's promise focused on providing relief to immigrants that were involved with the judicial system. Lastly, for the promise **Give disadvantaged communities 40% of spending benefits related to clean energy**, I have decided to categorize it as energy rather than social welfare, as the promise focused more on the clear energy benefits. After every promise was sorted into policy

areas, the policy area categories for President Trump were *international affairs, foreign trade, education, social welfare, health, macroeconomics, labor, transportation, law & crime, immigration, environment, energy, governmental*; while the policy area categories for President Biden were *international affairs, education, health, macroeconomics, labor, law & crime, immigration, environment, energy, governmental*.

After the promise-selection step, I started going through various websites such as PolitiFact, White House, White House Archives, Congress.gov, Washington Post, the New York Times, and Politico to find executive directives or legislation related to those promises up until the midterms for each president. Then, I created two descriptions for fulfillment: fulfilled and unfulfilled. Fulfillment means the exact wording in the promise had been achieved either through executive directives or legislation passed by Congress. For example, the promise of “achieving complete energy independence” is considered unfulfilled even if the U.S. achieves 99% energy independence since the exact wording in the promise has not been fulfilled. A promise is also considered unfulfilled even though a president or Congress had taken significant action towards achieving it but did not fully complete it, for example when a Bill passes in the House but fails on the Senate floor. For categorization, the end result is what matters and this criterion even resulted in one promise being considered fulfilled even though the president took several actions to break his promise, but Congress took action against it.

After categorizing promises as fulfilled or unfulfilled, I have created a system of a **fulfillment success rate** which is basically the percentage of promises fulfilled in each category. [(the number of promises fulfilled in a specific category / the number of promises in a specific category) x 100] The success rate makes seeing the fulfillment of the presidents in each category easier to see for the reader. In the end, I have also used the success rate to determine the overall success of Donald Trump and Joe Biden in fulfilling their promises.

For the ways a promise was fulfilled, I have created two action categories for legislation-making: executive directives and Congress legislation referred as traditional legislation-making. Executive directives include executive orders, presidential memorandum, proclamations⁵⁹ and any departmental activity. Congress legislation consists of any bill at least introduced in the Senate or the

House of Representatives. For Congress legislation to be considered successful in fulfilling a promise, it needs to be passed in both chambers and signed into law by the president. For an executive directive to be successful in fulfilling a promise, it needs not to be facing any judicial block from courts. A promise is considered to be fulfilled through Congress legislation, even if it has one legislation focusing on it, in addition to executive orders. For example, if the president signed an executive order on an issue, and Congress also passed legislation, that promise is considered to be fulfilled through traditional legislation-making. Through this sorting, I had two categories of fulfillment, and I used the **traditional legislation-making success rate** in the form of $[(\text{the number of promises fulfilled through Congress legislation} / \text{the number of promises fulfilled}) \times 100]$ to see how successful each president was in navigating traditional legislative-making processes.

For understanding the effect of salience on promise fulfillment, I have decided to use Gallup's Most Important Problem Dataset from Policy Agendas Project.⁶⁰ The dataset uses Gallup opinion polls on what the most important the U.S. is facing right now with 25 different policy area categories and presents it in an annual format. The data aggregates the answers from the Gallup polls to show the relative importance of each policy category according to poll responders, making the total for the polls 100%. This allows us to understand the importance of each policy area according to the American public. As the data presents, yearly aggregate results in each category, I have decided to take the average of the three years each president was in the office except for the election years. So, for Donald Trump, I averaged the data from the years 2017, 2018, and 2019; for Joe Biden I averaged the data from the years 2021, 2022, and 2023 for each policy areas. These averages then have been used as the salience variable in our regressions for understanding the effect of public opinion on the salience of issues on promise fulfillment and the traditional legislation making.

While the main focus of the study has been salience, I have also decided to add "Pandemic," "Senate Share," and "Fixed Effects" as covariates. For the pandemic variable, I have coded the promises of Joe Biden on whether they were related to the pandemic or not. Out of the thirty-eight promises, four promises have been coded as pandemic related: **Rejoin the World Health Organization (WHO), Forgive student loan debt from public colleges and universities, Rebuild**

health stockpiles to be ready for crises, Improve Obamacare, Help state and local governments prevent budget shortfalls.

The make-up of Congress plays an import role in understanding whether the President has higher chances of passing his desired legislation or not. Surprisingly, both presidents had similar levels of party control in Congress. During Trump’s presidency, the 115th Congress consisted of 238 Republican Representatives, 197 Democrat Representatives, 51 Republican Senators, and 47 Democrat (plus 2 independent) Senators; ⁶¹allowing a unified Congress under Republican majority. The 116th Congress consisted of 197 Republican Representatives, 237 Democrat Representatives, 52 Republican Senators, and 46 Democrat (plus 2 independent) Senators; ⁶²resulting in a Democrat controlled House and a Republican controlled Senate. Similar to Trump, President Biden enjoyed a unified Congress under Democrat majority as the 117^h Congress consisted of 215 Republican Representatives, 222 Democrat Representatives, 50 Republican Senators, and 47 Democrat Senators (plus 3 independents and the tie-breaking vote of the Vice-President). ⁶³As of March 11, 2024, the 118th Congress consists of 219 Republican Representatives, 213 Democrat Representatives, 49 Republican Senators, and 48 Democrat (plus 3 independent) Senators. ⁶⁴Just like Donald Trump’s Congress after the midterms. Joe Biden is facing a divided Congress with a Republican controlled House and Democrat controlled Senate. To find the party shares during each presidency, I have averaged the number of seats each party controlled in the House and the Senate. During the Trump administration, the House Republican control was 217,5 Representatives, and the Senate Republican control was 51,5 Senators. During the Biden administration, the House Democrat control was 217,5 Representatives, and 50,5 Senators. Seeing that the numbers for House control were identical, I have decided to only include the Senate share as a covariable. However, it is worth noting that both presidents had very similar shares controlled by their parties which can support the idea that they were both in equal standing when it came to the ability to pass legislation.

Each policy area comes with its own set of challenges and tools the presidents can utilize to fulfill their promises. For example, the President draws power from the Constitution to conduct diplomacy and act as the commander-in-chief ⁶⁵which makes it easier for presidents to fulfill their promises in the policy area of *international affairs*. The fixed effect covariate allows us to take into

account how some categories by their nature might involve promises that are more likely to be fulfilled.

To understand the role of public opinion on the salience of issues in promise fulfillment, I have created three different regression models. *Model 1* is a linear probability model that uses **salience** as the main variable to see its effect on **promise fulfillment**. *Model 2* is a linear probability model that uses **salience** as the main variable, covariates **pandemic** and **Senate share** as the controls, to see salience's effect on **promise fulfillment**. *Model 3* is our last linear probability model that uses **salience** as the main variable, covariates **pandemic**, **Senate share**, and **fixed effects** as the controls, to see salience's effect on **promise fulfillment**.

Similarly, the three regression models are used to understand the role of public opinion on the salience of issues in traditional legislation making conditional on promise fulfillment. *Model 1* is a linear probability model that uses **salience** as the main variable to see its effect on **promise fulfillment through traditional legislation-making**. *Model 2* is a linear probability model that uses **salience** as the main variable, covariates **pandemic** and **Senate share** as the controls, to see salience's effect on **promise fulfillment through traditional legislation-making**. *Model 3* is our last linear probability model that uses **public opinion** as the main variable, covariates **pandemic**, **Senate share**, and **fixed effects** as the controls, to see salience's effect on **promise fulfillment through traditional legislation-making**.

Campaign Promises and Fulfillment

- Donald Trump

International Affairs

As a candidate, Donald Trump focused on reducing the burden on the shoulders of the U.S. when it came to international leadership and alliances. He promised changing the Obama era policies the U.S. had with countries like Israel and Cuba. An important emphasis was given to reducing

military involvement in places like the Middle East while defeating the Islamic State of Iran and Syria (ISIS) in 30 days.

Move U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (Fulfilled)

In his speech at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Candidate Trump stated: "We will move the American embassy to the eternal capital of the Jewish people, Jerusalem." He fulfilled his promise on 14 May 2018, when he announced in a recorded video message that the U.S. opened an embassy in Jerusalem.⁶⁶

Develop a plan to defeat ISIS in 30 days (Fulfilled)

At a campaign rally, Candidate Donald Trump vowed to defeat ISIS in 30 days and said that "he was expecting to have a thorough plan in his desk once elected to be the president."⁶⁷ Then, on 28 January, 2017 Trump issued a presidential memorandum" requesting a plan, and he met with his first defense secretary James Mattis to discuss the plans after a month."⁶⁸ Since the promise was to devise a plan and not actually defeat ISIS, the actions done by the Trump administration can be considered to fulfill his promise.

Reverse Barack Obama's Cuba Policy (Fulfilled)

On the campaign trail, Donald Trump repeatedly discussed undoing many Obama-era executive orders and reversing Cuba policies received a critical focus. The Trump administration put in place two significant restrictions in 2017, with one "prohibiting financial transactions to 180 Cuban entities" and the other barring Americans from visiting Cuba through "people to people " travels.⁶⁹ These actions reversed the freedoms given under the Obama administration for financial and cultural interactions.

Build a safe zone for Syrian refugees (Unfulfilled)

One of the things Donald Trump suggested regarding the U.S. involvement in Syria was the "formation of a safe zone for Syrian refugees on the Syrian land."⁷⁰ Not only did President Trump break his promise and not establish any safe zones in Syria, but he also talked many times about his plans for withdrawing the U.S. forces from the region.⁷¹

Renegotiate the Iran deal (Unfulfilled)

As a candidate, Trump promised that he would negotiate the nuclear agreement between Iran and five other countries, including the U.S.⁷² In May 2018, President Trump announced that the U.S. was withdrawing from the agreement⁷³ and later signed a presidential memorandum on 5 November 2018, to “impose a second round of sanctions.”⁷⁴ Even though an agreement can be reached in the future as of the 2020 midterms, President Trump was unable to fulfill his promise.

Foreign policy has been one of the prominent issue areas that have helped President Trump fulfill his campaign promises, as the executive branch holds significant authority over issues pertaining to foreign affairs. Out of the five promises examined, he was able to fulfill three of them, giving him a **fulfillment success rate of 60%**. All of the promises he fulfilled were achieved through executive directives (executive orders, presidential memorandum, and proclamations),⁷⁵ giving him a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 0%**. For fulfilling his promises, Trump relied heavily on executive directives rather than legislation passed by Congress.

Foreign Trade

When it came to foreign trade, Donald Trump's promises focused on reshaping America's trade relationships and prioritizing domestic interests. From withdrawing from multilateral agreements to renegotiating longstanding trade deals, Trump's administration pursued an agenda centered on protecting American workers and companies.

Stop the Trans-Pacific Partnership (Fulfilled)

Throughout his campaign, Donald Trump strongly opposed the free trade deal between the U.S. and 11 Asia-Pacific countries⁷⁶ called the Trans-Pacific Partnership. He put an emphasis on putting the American workers first and “ending a trade agreement that has not been approved by Congress.”⁷⁷ President Trump fulfilled his promise three days after his inauguration, when he signed a memorandum ordering the withdrawal from the TPP.⁷⁸

Renegotiate NAFTA (Fulfilled)

Similar to TPP, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has been a target of criticism during the Trump campaign. He promised that once elected, he would “negotiate better deals for American workers and companies,” and if the negotiations were not successful, he would

terminate NAFTA.⁷⁹ Before the midterms took place, President Trump was able to hold six negotiation talks and signed the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement as a replacement on January 29, 2020.⁸⁰

Raise tariffs on goods imported into the U.S. (Fulfilled)

Tariffs also held a significant place in Trump's agenda as a candidate as they related to putting America first. As a candidate, he was adamant about placing tariffs on Chinese products to boost the domestic economy and fight "currency manipulations" of China.⁸¹ He authorized "a 10% tariff on Chinese imports" in June 2018 in addition to "the 25% tariff imposed" also in June 2018.⁸² While the focus was primarily on China, Donald Trump also issued a proclamation in March 2018, "creating a 25% tariff on steel and 10% aluminum."⁸³

President Trump's most successful policy category has been foreign trade as he was able to fulfill all of the chosen promises, giving him a **fulfillment success rate of 100%**. Similar to the international affairs category all of the promises in this category were fulfilled through executive actions, giving him a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 0%**.

Education

Donald Trump ran on an education platform that focused on decreasing the federal government's effect on education policy, emphasizing school choice, ending Common Core, and scaling back the Department of Education with little mention of issues pertaining to higher education.^{84 85 86 87 88}

Ensure funding for historically black colleges (HBCUs) (Fulfilled)

In 2016, candidate Donald Trump announced in a statement that he was going to "ensure funding for historically black colleges and universities."⁸⁹ In his fiscal year 2019 budget proposal, President Trump preserved the same funding levels for HBCUs while the "Department of Education was projected to see a 10.5% cut."⁹⁰

Eliminate Common Core (Unfulfilled)

In line with many Republicans, Donald Trump ran on a platform that opposed Common Core and advocated for giving the states and local governments the ability to determine their own

curriculum. In April 2017, he signed the Executive Order 13791—Enforcing Statutory Prohibitions on Federal Control of Education⁹¹ which ordered “the Education secretary to review how the federal government can be interfering in local education programs” however, a report has not been published regarding this review and the Common Core has not been eliminated.

Dramatically scale back the U.S. Education Department (Unfulfilled)

Perhaps the most prominent education issue for Donald Trump during campaigning was removing or scaling back the Department of Education.⁹² To further stop the federal government from interfering with education issues and giving states and local governments more of a say, he advocated for eliminating or at least scaling the department to “stop the waste.”⁹³ Former president Barack Obama’s 2017 federal budget gave \$68.2 million dollars to the Department of Education in discretionary funding.⁹⁴ President Trump proposed in his 2018 federal budget that the department’s funding would be reduced by 13%⁹⁵; however, the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 (FY 2018 Bill) did not follow the president’s recommendation and “raised discretionary funding to \$70.8 billion.”⁹⁶ A similar thing happened with the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2019 (FY 2019 Bill).⁹⁷ In conclusion, Trump could not convince Congress to follow his budget proposal regarding the Department of Education and could not fulfill his promise to scale it back. As for eliminating the Department, on 21 June 2018, the White House announced a federal government reorganization plan that included a merger of the Department of Education and the Department of Labor⁹⁸ but Congress refused to include those provisions in the FY2019 bill.⁹⁹

Education did not draw much attention from Donald Trump and never became a focus of his campaign; however, when touched on education, he supported giving more power to the state and local governments and limiting the abilities of the federal government. Out of three education promises examined in this paper, President Trump was able to fulfill one of them by the 2018 midterms, with a **fulfillment success rate of 33.33%**. The promise he fulfilled was accomplished through his FY 2019 budget proposal and FY 2019 Budget Bill, but it can be concluded that the trend in Congress was to expand education funding and this measure would pass even without President Trump’s proposal. Two of his education promises focused on stopping federal government interventions, but for those measures to pass, President Trump needed to have the support of

Congress. For eliminating Common Core, President Trump once again needed the support of Congress, but a bill has never come to the floor, and a review he proposed did not get published. For his merger proposal of the Departments of Education and Labor, President Trump received a bipartisan backlash, and lawmakers wrote in a statement that “the conferees are perplexed as to why there was no notification or discussion with members of Congress and committees’ staffs on an action of this magnitude that crosses multiple subcommittees’ jurisdiction.”¹⁰⁰ Overall, President Trump received a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 0%** in this category. This further shows the president’s inability to form a meaningful relationship with Congress to support the passage of his proposals and use traditional channels of legislation-making.

Social Welfare

Contrary to other Republicans, Donald Trump promised not to make any cuts to Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security Programs. Additionally, he promised six weeks of paid maternity leave to any mother to further appeal to female voters.

Make no cuts to Social Security (Fulfilled)

Donald Trump’s presidential campaign announcement speech offered protections for Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security Programs. While he proposed policies that undermined three of those programs, the Social Security Program did not experience any cuts since Congress’s FY2019 spending bill did not include¹⁰¹ the provisions of the White House FY 2019 budget proposal that cut two disability programs under social security.¹⁰²

Guarantee 6-week paid leave (Unfulfilled)

Compared to other health issues, paid leaves received less attention from the Donald Trump Campaign, but he promised to “provide six weeks of paid maternity leave to any mother with a newborn child whose employer does not provide the benefit.”¹⁰³ Sen. Marco Rubio introduced the Economic Security for New Parents Act but the bill did not move further in Congress.¹⁰⁴ President Trump failed to support and ensure the passage of the bill.

Donald was able to fulfill one out of two promises examined in this paper, giving him a **fulfillment success rate of 50%**. The only promise he fulfilled was actually achieved because

Congress did not follow President Trump's FY2019 budget proposal for the FY2019 spending bill to cut some provisions of the Social Security Program. Even though it was against the President's budget proposal we can consider it fulfilled through Congress, giving President Trump a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 100%**.

Health

The biggest issue Donald Trump ran on when it came to healthcare, and welfare was repealing the Affordable Care Act, best known as Obamacare. The Healthcare Reform Plan Donald Trump proposed focused on repealing Obamacare and changing Medicaid funding to federal block grants, among other things.¹⁰⁵ Compared to the 2020 campaigns, abortion did not pose itself to be a prominent issue during the 2016 campaigns. Even though Donald Trump proposed conflicting views throughout his campaign, towards the end, he stated that he was pro-life and promised to defund Planned Parenthood which has been an ongoing effort from Republicans for some time.

Make no cuts to Medicare and Medicaid (Unfulfilled)

Protecting Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security was one of Trump's earliest campaign pledges as he pledged to "save those programs without any cuts in his presidential announcement speech."¹⁰⁶ However, after taking office, President Trump supported the American Health Care Act of 2017¹⁰⁷ that set out to repeal the Affordable Care Act with provisions that cap how much each state receives from the federal government per Medicaid enrollee.¹⁰⁸ Congressional Budget Office Predicts that the "passage of the Bill would result in 14 million fewer Medicaid enrollees and less federal spending on the program,"¹⁰⁹ essentially shrinking it. Even though the American Health Care Act of 2017 failed to pass in the Senate, President Trump, with his support for the bill, broke his promise. In addition, the White House budget proposal for FY2018 called for reforming the system by administering Medicaid through block grants, and the proposal already assumed the passage of the American Health Care Act of 2017.¹¹⁰ In January 2018, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services posted a new guideline that "authorized the states to ask for work requirements,"¹¹¹ which would place stricter qualifications resulting in fewer people being Medicaid enrollees. As for Medicare, the 2017 Tax Cut and Jobs Act which was President Trump's tax reform bill, "decreased

the amount of funding the Medicare's Hospital Insurance Trust Fund receives,"¹¹² resulting in the program losing three years of solvency.¹¹³ Overall, both Medicaid and Medicare programs shrunk in size during Donald Trump's presidency, and the president acted against these programs through executive orders and support for various Congress bills.

Defund Planned Parenthood (Fulfilled)

Donald Trump as a candidate had confusing rhetoric when it came to abortion, and the issue did not receive the spotlight on the campaign trail.¹¹⁴ However, in February 2016, he announced that he was pro-life and stated that "he would defund it [Planned Parenthood] because of the abortion factor."¹¹⁵ There have been several attempts in Congress to defund Planned Parenthood, such as attaching defunding provisions to the omnibus spending bill of 2018¹¹⁶ and Sen. Rand Paul's amendment to the FY 2019 spending bill failed to pass with 45-48 votes.¹¹⁷ On February 22, 2019 the Trump administration announced that "it will bar organizations that provide abortion referrals from receiving federal family planning money."¹¹⁸ One month before the regulation went in place, the Planned Parenthood chose to stop benefiting from Title X, essentially stopping them from getting funding from the federal government.¹¹⁹

Repeal Obamacare (Unfulfilled)

In a Republican fashion, Donald Trump ran a campaign that focused on repealing the Affordable Care Act or better known as Obamacare. He pledged to "repeal and replace the Act," but a more prominent emphasis was given to repealing it.¹²⁰ Even though The American Health Care Act of 2017 failed in Congress,¹²¹ spoiling Trump's plans for the repeal, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017" removed the individual mandate that placed a penalty on people that did not buy insurance even though they are able to do so."¹²² The bill also opened the door for various lawsuits with a Texas District Court lawsuit,¹²³ and a prospective Supreme Court case. While Trump could not fulfill his promise of repealing Obamacare, during his administration, Congress was able to get rid of one of the most unpopular provisions of the Act, and the judiciary gained the chance to decide on the future of the Act.

Health and welfare issues have always been important decision-makers for voters, and Donald Trump made sure to offer alternatives when he proposed to repeal Obamacare, however he was still

unable to repeal it. Out of the three promises examined, he was able to fulfill one promise giving him a **fulfillment success rate of 33.33%** While it is hard to fully attribute the Planned Parenthood's decision to stop getting payments from the federal government to the Trump administration, it is reasonable to accept this as a promise fulfilled. Two of his promises were unfulfilled because Congress did not pass legislation on repealing Obamacare or offering paid maternity leaves. Overall, President Trump received a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 0%** in this category.

Macroeconomics

One of the key issues during the 2016 presidential race was macroeconomics, and Donald Trump made sure to focus on economic issues during his campaign. Frequently referring to his business background, Trump promised to “Make America Great Again” and restore the economic power of the U.S. and its citizens. He promised to offer tax cuts to every citizen and corporates while making sure the U.S. economy grew every year.

Cut taxes for everyone (Fulfilled)

Early in his campaign, Donald Trump made sure everyone knew about his plans for tax cuts. “Everybody is getting a tax cut,” he announced on a CNN interview.¹²⁴ Perhaps the most significant achievement of Donald Trump’s presidency was his tax reform bill titled the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, which successfully passed Congress.¹²⁵ According to the analysis of Congress’s Joint Committee on Taxation,” the bill will allow every income group to pay fewer taxes on average”¹²⁶, indicating that Trump successfully fulfilled his promise. However, the same analysis also mentions that” by 2027 every income group that earns less than 75,000 dollars in a year will actually see a tax increase,” meaning that Donald Trump has been able to fulfill his promise in the short-run, but in the long-run, his policies will cause an increase in taxes.¹²⁷

Lower the corporate tax rate (Unfulfilled)

As a businessman himself, Donald Trump frequently mentioned the need to remove regulations and taxes that restrict businesses and create an obstacle in front of America’s growth. He promised to lower the corporate tax rate from 35% to 15%.¹²⁸ The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017

“lowered the corporate tax rate to 21%,” and even though it is a significant decrease, it was still not enough to allow Trump to fulfill his promise as he failed to convince Congress of a 15% decrease.

Grow the economy by 4 percent a year (Unfulfilled)

“Making America Great Again” oftentimes included increasing the economic growth of the United States, and Donald Trump promised to “increase the U.S.’s gross domestic product (GDP) by 4 percent at least and 5 or 6 percent if possible¹²⁹.” The GDP of the U.S. grew by 2.2 percent in 2017, by 2.9 percent in 2018, by 2.3% in 2019 and it shrank by 2.8% in 2020.¹³⁰ While the growth rates fell short of Trump’s campaign promise, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economy caused the country to experience a shrunk GDP for the first time in a decade. While there are a lot of factors that affect the GDP of a country, some economists stated that while Trump’s actions on reducing regulations and his The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 could have contributed to economic growth, “his stance on anti-trade and inaction on substantial economic policy changes restricted the growth of the country.”¹³¹

Eliminate the federal debt in 8 years (Unfulfilled)

Envisioning a two-term presidency, Donald Trump promised that he was going to “get rid of the then-19 trillion dollars debt.”¹³² He then changed his promise to “reducing the amount of debt while rebuilding the infrastructure of the country.”¹³³ However, the FY 2018 spending bill allowed “up to 1.5 billion dollars to be added to the debt limit” in order to offset provisions of Trump’s Tax Bill.¹³⁴¹³⁵ Not only did Trump fail to get Congress’s support for passing legislation that would decrease the debt limit, but his own Tax Bill caused Congress to take action in the opposing direction. In 2016 when Donald Trump took office, “the national debt was 19.573 billion dollars, then it saw an approximate 3.5% increase with 20.245 billion dollars in 2017, another approximate 6.2% increase with 21.516 billion dollars in 2018, another approximate 5.6% increase with 22.719 billion dollars in 2019, and another approximate 18.6% increase with 26.945 billion dollars in 2020.”¹³⁶

Donald Trump was able to fulfill one out of the four promises this paper examined, giving him a **fulfillment success rate of 25%**. He succeeded in achieving this promise through his most prominent legislative success, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, which cut taxes for every income group, giving him a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 100%** in this category.

Labor

Similar to his policies pertaining to macroeconomics, Trump followed his motto “Make American Great Again” when it came to labor policies. He promised to protect the interest of the U.S. citizens against foreign countries and immigrants and put American workers first.

Hire American workers first (Fulfilled)

One of the important slogans of the Donald Trump campaign was “America First,” which set out to decrease America’s involvement in the international sphere and prioritize the U.S. and its citizens. A lot of the rhetoric during the campaigning focused on giving Americans back their jobs by limiting immigration.¹³⁷ President Trump signed an executive order titled “Buy American and Hire American” that directs departments to “suggest reforms for the H-1B visa program” and only hire the most-skilled workers. A 31 March 2017 Memorandum¹³⁸ “instructed United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to deny H-1B petitions for many computer-related occupations.” The USCIS document titled H-1B RFE Standards¹³⁹ and other memos led to many requests of evidence and denials of H-1B visas, with FY2018 seeing a 24% denial rate while the standard was between 5-8% before the Trump administration.¹⁴⁰ All of these were significant executive orders that allowed Trump to fulfill his promise to some degree, but he was unable to help pass anything substantial in Congress.

Donald Trump was able to fulfill the one promise this paper examined, giving him a **fulfillment success rate of 100%**. He succeeded in achieving this promise through putting various restrictions on H-1B visa applications, giving him a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 0%** in this category.

Transportation

On infrastructure, Donald Trump promised that he would increase the investments in infrastructure and create additional funds for rebuilding America’s infrastructure system.

Invest \$550 billion in infrastructure and create an infrastructure fund (Unfulfilled)

"The Trump Administration seeks to invest \$550 billion to ensure we can export our goods and move our people faster and safer," stated the campaign website of Donald Trump.¹⁴¹ On 21

February 2018, the administration released its framework, “Rebuilding Infrastructure in America,” to Congress, which included 1.5 trillion dollars of new investments over ten years¹⁴²; however, Congress did not act on it, and no major infrastructure bill was passed during the Trump administration.

Unlike President Biden, Donald Trump was unable to pass a major infrastructure bill or take any executive action, leaving him with a **fulfillment success rate of 0% and a traditional legislation-making success rate of 0%** in this category.

Law and Crime

Regularly attacking the Obama administration because of the way they handled crime, Donald Trump promised to reverse Obama-era executive orders and provide security to Americans. He also followed a narrative that tied immigrants to crime and promised to take anti-immigration actions to improve security. As for guns, he followed the typical Republican policies that support eliminating gun-free zones.

Reverse Barack Obama's 2016 gun executive order (Fulfilled)

One of the Obama-era executive orders Trump vowed to reverse as a candidate was Obama’s 2016 executive order on gun control that implemented measures to increase background checks at its core.¹⁴³ On 28 February 2018, President Trump signed the House Joint Resolution 40, nullifying Obama's rule,¹⁴⁴ declaring that “this application of rule could endanger the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens.”¹⁴⁵

Impose death penalty for cop killers (Unfulfilled)

Referring to shootings of police officers such as the one in Dallas in 2015, Donald Trump supported “imposing the death penalty for people who kill police officers”.¹⁴⁶ However, he has been unable to take action on this issue because of the Supreme Court Case *Woodson v. North Carolina* (1976), which ruled the mandatory death penalty unconstitutional.¹⁴⁷

Eliminate gun-free zones at schools and military bases (Unfulfilled)

Perhaps the most considerable debate regarding gun policy amidst the rising number of school shootings has been gun-free zones.¹⁴⁸ Donald Trump, as a candidate, pledged to “get rid of gun-free zones on schools and military bases early in his campaign.”¹⁴⁹ On 3 January 2017, Representative

Thomas Massie introduced the Safe Students Act to repeal the Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990; however, the bill did not move in Congress.¹⁵⁰ Another legislative push was the Concealed Carry Reciprocity Act of 2017 that, would allow extended concealed carry freedoms; however, after its passage in the House, the bill got stuck in the Senate.¹⁵¹

Cancel all funding of sanctuary cities (Unfulfilled)

“Cities that refuse to cooperate with federal authorities will not receive taxpayer dollars, and we will work with Congress to pass legislation to protect those jurisdictions that do assist federal authorities,” said Donald Trump in a campaign rally.¹⁵² On 25 January, 2017, President Trump signed an executive order directing the Department of Justice to withhold federal grant money from sanctuary cities that protect undocumented immigrants.¹⁵³ Many federal judges ruled the executive order to be unconstitutional¹⁵⁴ as the Supreme Court case *South Dakota v. Dole* (1987) ruled that the federal government cannot threaten state and local governments with withholding funding.¹⁵⁵ On the legislative front, the No Sanctuary for Criminals Act passed the House on 29 June 2017, but got stuck in the Senate.¹⁵⁶

Even though Donald Trump put a strong emphasis on reducing crime, he was able to fulfill only one of his promises which gives him a **fulfillment success rate of 25%**. He was able to fulfill that promise through executive directives that reversed Obama-era executive orders. Two of his promises faced judicial block since the Supreme Court case *South Dakota v. Dole* (1987) prevented him from withholding funding from sanctuary cities and the Supreme Court Case *Woodson v. North Carolina* (1976) deterred him from imposing mandatory death penalty for people charged with killing police officers. His promise of eliminating gun-free zones in schools and military areas was left unfilled because Congress did not pass the necessary legislation. He received a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 0%** in this category.

Immigration

The issue of immigration became synonymous with the Donald Trump campaign, as many voters came to know him through his promises to regulate immigration and the promises of building a

wall on the Southern border. In addition to limiting immigration, Donald Trump promised to establish a “Muslim ban,” end birthright citizenship and remove undocumented immigrants.

Limit legal immigration (Fulfilled)

The biggest platform Donald Trump ran on was immigration, and he attracted many voters by promising to limit both legal and illegal immigration. In the last fiscal year of the Obama administration (2016), “the refugee cap was set at 85,000”; Donald Trump decreased it to “50,000 for 2017” and “30,000 for 2018 and 2019” which is “the lowest the cap has ever been since the 1980s.”

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Remove criminal undocumented immigrants (Unfulfilled)

Throughout his campaign, Donald Trump talked a lot about the connection between immigrants and crime and the need to provide security to Americans¹⁵⁸. In addition to his promise that he was going to stop illegal immigration, he also vowed to “deport undocumented immigrants with criminal records.”¹⁵⁹ The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement stated that in FY2017 the U.S.” deported more than 127,699 immigrants with criminal convictions while the number rose to 145,262 in FY2018”.¹⁶⁰ However, since he promised to deport “deport all criminal aliens” and fell short, he was unable to fulfill his promise.¹⁶¹

Establish a ban on Muslims entering the U.S. (Unfulfilled)

“Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what the hell is going on,” said Donald Trump early in his campaign.¹⁶² Once elected, Donald Trump signed several executive directives to limit people from Muslim countries entering to the U.S. Executive Order 13769 placed restrictions on “citizens of Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen”¹⁶³ but after protests and legal challenges the Executive Order 13780 removed Iraq.¹⁶⁴ Then, the Presidential Proclamation 9645 added Chad to the list while Sudan was removed.¹⁶⁵ All of these executive directives were labeled under the “Muslim bans.” The Supreme Court case *Trump, President of the United States v. Hawaii* (2017) ruled that “the administration was not discriminating based on religion,” and the Executive Order 13769 was constitutional.¹⁶⁶ While President Trump took significant steps to restrict people

from Muslim countries entering the U.S., he promised “the complete shutdown of Muslims entering the country” and failed to do that.

End birthright citizenship (Unfulfilled)

Donald Trump’s campaign website referred to birthright citizenship as “the biggest magnet or illegal immigration.”¹⁶⁷ Once elected, “you can definitely do it with an act of Congress, but now they’re saying I can do it just with an executive order,” Trump said in an October 2018 interview.¹⁶⁸ However, there haven’t been any executive directives on this issue by the 2018 midterms. Representative Steve King introduced the Birthright Citizenship Act of 2017 on 3 January 2017,¹⁶⁹ to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act¹⁷⁰ in a way that an individual would “only become a citizen if one of the parents was a U.S. citizen, lawful permanent resident or immigrant in active service in the U.S. armed forces.” With no executive directives and the failure of the bill to advance in Congress, this promise has been broken.

Build a wall, and make Mexico pay for it (Unfulfilled)

Perhaps the most well-known campaign promise of Donald Trump, building a wall took up a lot of space during the campaigning process as well as the presidency. He advocated for stronger border security on the southern border to decrease illegal immigration and drug trafficking. To prevent these activities, Donald Trump promised that he was going to “build a wall on the Mexico-U.S. border and make Mexico pay for the cost of that wall.”¹⁷¹ In March 2018, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 gave the federal government “1.57 billion dollars for barriers,” but the funding has not been available for the wall.¹⁷² Going into the midterms of 2018, President Trump said “he was going to refuse any spending bill that did not include funding for the wall,” threatening to shut down the government, however the Trump administration only managed to replace the barriers.¹⁷³ Overall, President Trump has been unable to fulfill his promise of building the wall and making Mexico pay for it.

While he put a lot of emphasis on immigration issues during campaigning, as a President, Donald Trump was able to fulfill one out of five promises which gives him a **fulfillment success rate of 20%**. He was able to fulfill this promise through executive directives that put the lowest refugee cap since the 1980s had been set. One of his promises was not fully fulfilled because President Trump

failed to achieve a “full shutdown of Muslims entering the U.S.,” even though he signed several executive orders toward fulfilling that promise. Two of his promises were left unfulfilled since Congress did not include funding in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 to be used for the wall on the Southern border and did not move the legislation on ending birthright citizenship, giving him a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 0%** in this category.

Environment

Generally following a rhetoric that focused on restoring jobs, improving the U.S. economy, and attacking international cooperation, Candidate Donald Trump did not include any promises to tackle climate change, something he did not believe existed. His promises generally concentrated on withdrawing from international institutions and agreements that focus on climate change. He also wanted to scale back the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Cancel the Paris climate agreement (Fulfilled)

While candidate Trump proposed various promises regarding climate change and environmental deregulations, pulling out from the Paris Climate Agreement has been one of the promises that garnered significant attention. In a campaign event in May 2016, he laid out his climate and environment policies and announced that he was “going to cancel the Paris Climate Agreement and stop all payments of U.S. tax dollars to U.N. global warming programs.”¹⁷⁴ On 1 June 2017, he was able to fulfill his promise of pulling the U.S. out of the Paris Agreement.¹⁷⁵

Stop payments to U.N. global warming programs (Unfulfilled)

As for the global warming payments, Donald Trump did not include them in his budget proposals; however, the Senate Appropriations Committee passed an amendment to continue contributions to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change despite the president’s decision to stop funding it.¹⁷⁶ Further showing Congress’ persistence in ignoring Trump's budget proposals and continuing to fund climate change programs.

Dramatically scale back the EPA (Unfulfilled)

On the campaign trail, Donald Trump often mentioned his disdain for the Department of Environmental Protection and shared his plans to “dramatically scale back it.”¹⁷⁷ In his FY2018

budget proposal, the agency funding would have been cut by 2.6 billion dollars (31% decrease), ending or reducing various EPA programs.¹⁷⁸ Additionally, the administration proposed cuts to the EPA budget in every fiscal year, but the budget nearly stayed the same every year as decided by Congress.¹⁷⁹

Donald Trump showed a low performance when it came to fulfilling his promises on climate and energy issues. He was able to fulfill only one promise, out of the three examined in this paper, giving him a **fulfillment success rate of 33.33%**. The single promise he succeeded in fulfilling was starting the process of withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement, which was done through an executive directive. Two of his promises were left unfilled as Congress did not include the requests made to scale back EPA and U.N. Climate Funds in President's FY2018 budget proposal. He received a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 0%** in this category.

Energy

On the campaign trail, Donald Trump focused on energy as a way of improving the American independence and economy. Similar to other Republicans, he also followed the rhetoric of "Coal Keeps the Light on," and went against the War on Coal.

Achieve energy independence (Unfulfilled)

"Complete American energy independence, complete complete," stated Donald Trump in a 2016 campaign event.¹⁸⁰ As the president, Donald Trump signed several executive directives to "auction 77 millions of acres for drilling", "rescind the Clean Power Plan", and "approve the Keystone XL pipeline."¹⁸¹ Even though these were prominent actions that will make it "easier in the long run to produce oil and natural gas,"¹⁸² they are unable to provide the "complete" energy independence Donald Trump promised.

Save the coal industry (Unfulfilled)

A key promise for Donald Trump's victory in states like Wyoming, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia was saving the coal industry and ensuring that miners did not go unemployed.¹⁸³ Trump with Congress (H.J. Res 38 on 16 February 2017)¹⁸⁴ was able to revoke the Stream Protection Rule that "restricts coal mining operations along rivers and streams."¹⁸⁵ An executive order passed in March

2017 started “dismantling the Clean Power Plant and lifted a ban on new coal leases.”¹⁸⁶ Since Donald Trump took office, 600 coal mining jobs have been created, and a slight increase in production. Even though President Trump made various efforts with Congress and through executive directives, he could not “save” the coal industry as was his promise.

He was unable to fulfill his promises of saving the coal industry and achieving energy independence, even though he took significant actions in the form of executive directives and Congress passed a resolution related to the Stream Protection Rule. As a result, he received a **fulfillment success rate of 0%** and a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 0%** in this category.

Government Operations

On the campaign trail, Donald Trump generally went against “the establishment” and advocated for a small government that included scaling back federal departments and fewer federal regulations. He also promised to nominate the next Supreme Court Justice to replace Justice Antonin Scalia.

Slash federal regulations (Fulfilled)

In line with his anti-establishment rhetoric, Donald Trump often mentioned his plans to “scale back federal regulations because they stop businesses from growing” and announced that he planned to “eliminate two existing regulations for every new one.”¹⁸⁷ On 30 January 2017, President Trump signed an executive order that “directed two regulations to be eliminated for every new one.”¹⁸⁸

Nominate someone from his list of justices to replace Antonin Scalia (Fulfilled)

With the death of the Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia before the presidential primaries and Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell’s announcement that the confirmation hearing would be set after the presidential elections, Donald Trump promised that he was going to “appoint someone similar to Scalia from his very own list.”¹⁸⁹ Within two weeks of his presidency Donald Trump nominated Judge Neil Gorsuch was confirmed as the 101st justice of the Supreme Court on 7 April 2017.¹⁹⁰

In fulfilling his promises regarding various governmental activities, President Trump has been successful in fulfilling two of his promises, giving him a **fulfillment success rate of 100%**. He had been able to fulfill his promise to nominate a new Supreme Court Justice, which is an authority given to the executive branch, and he signed an executive order to eliminate two existing regulations when a new one is signed. He received a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 0%** in this category.

- **Joe Biden**

International Affairs

Criticizing President Trump's actions that isolated the U.S. from various international institutions and treaties, restoring the American leadership in the international arena has been one of the most prominent promises of the Biden campaign. Joe Biden promised to rejoin the World Health Organization, restore relationships with Cuba and continue working with the U.S. allies on issues such as North Korea's denuclearization. He also wanted to restore the U.S.'s role in aiding other countries while aiming to end wars in the Middle East.

Rejoin the World Health Organization (WHO) (Fulfilled)

Donald Trump's state department announced on 6 July 2021, that the U.S. was going to end its relationship with the WHO amidst the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁹¹. On the campaign trail, Biden talked about the importance of the U.S. leadership in tackling the pandemic and collaboration through international organizations.¹⁹² Technically, the U.S. did not leave the WHO but just started the withdrawal process under former president Trump. On the first day of his presidency, Joe Biden sent a letter to the United Nations (UN) Secretary General stating that "the United States intends to remain a member of the World Health Organization."¹⁹³

End the war in Afghanistan (Fulfilled)

"Biden will bring the vast majority of our troops home from Afghanistan and narrowly focus our mission on Al-Qaeda and ISIS," stated Biden's campaign website.¹⁹⁴ Declaring that "the war in Afghanistan was over," President Biden ordered the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan

by 11 September 2021.¹⁹⁵ While the U.S. influence in the region ended, the Taliban returned to power after the U.S. withdrawal¹⁹⁶ and violated the human rights of many Afghans.¹⁹⁷ Even though this has been one of the most controversial actions of President Biden, he was still able to fulfill his promise of “ending the war in Afghanistan.”

Resume ties with the Palestinian Authority (Fulfilled)

As a candidate, Joe Biden promised to reverse the Trump-era decision of ceasing relations with the Palestinian Authority.¹⁹⁸ The UN representative Richard Mills announced in January 2021 that the administration would “restore credible U.S. engagement with Palestinians as well as Israelis.¹⁹⁹ Biden also resumed various forms of assistance such as “reducing food insecurity or 4G digital connectivity as well as funding.”²⁰⁰ Even though he failed to re-open the consulate in Jerusalem,²⁰¹ Biden achieved some progress in fulfilling his promise. Since the start of the war between Israel and Hamas on October 7th, 2023, the U.S. sent several envoys to Palestine to relay the message that the Palestinian Authority needs to be revamped and continued to have diplomatic ties with PA while mainly backing Israel.²⁰²

Restore Cuba engagement (Fulfilled)

The progress that was made during the Obama administration with Cuba had been set back under Trump’s presidency. As a candidate, Joe Biden promises that he would “in large part” go back to Obama-era policies.²⁰³ Some of the regulatory actions President Biden took to improve relationships with Cuba were” reinstating the Cuban Family Reunification Parole, resuming educational travels, removing the family remittances, and supporting Cuban entrepreneurs.”²⁰⁴

Provide assistance to Northern Triangle countries (Unfulfilled)

Seeing immigration as a spherical issue that results from a lot of people coming to the United States to escape the rough conditions in their own countries, Biden promised to get to the root of the problem and offer assistance to Northern Triangle countries which are Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. He promised “a four year 4-billion-dollar package of assistance to the region” to decrease levels of violence, improve the education systems and implement anti-corruption measures.²⁰⁵ The Biden-proposed immigration bill The U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021 included the promised 4 billion dollar assistance to Northern Triangle countries and other significant provisions to reform the

immigration system. However, the Bill had been referred to the Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship in July 2022, and no action had taken place after that day, leaving Joe Biden unable to fulfill his promise.

Rejoin Iran nuclear deal (Unfulfilled)

In 2016, then-candidate Donald Trump promised to “renegotiate the Iran nuclear deal” and then went on to withdraw from the agreement.²⁰⁶ In 2020, Joe Biden promised that he was going to “rejoin the agreement if Iran agreed to comply with the deal.”²⁰⁷ On 12 October 2022, the U.S. State Department announced that rejoining the deal was not a priority as Iran’s demands were unrealistic.²⁰⁸

Join allies to negotiate with North Korea on denuclearization (Unfulfilled)

With growing tensions between North Korea and the U.S., Biden promised to take coordinated action with allies to negotiate a denuclearization deal.²⁰⁹ However, the administration has decided to change course, and instead of seeking a deal, they decided to use the policy of “offering relief for particular steps.”²¹⁰

Similar to Donald Trump, President Biden also has been able to fulfill the majority of his foreign affairs promises since the president enjoys vast authority when it comes to setting foreign policy. President Biden fulfilled four of the seven promises the paper examined, giving him a **fulfillment success rate of 57.14%**. All of the promises he fulfilled were achieved through executive directives and his promises focused on withdrawing the U.S. troops from Afghanistan and resuming ties with Palestine, rejoining the WHO, and restoring engagement with Cuba, giving him **traditional legislation-making success rate of 0%** in this category.

Education

Joe Biden ran on an education platform that focused on accessibility and creating new opportunities for students to continue their education. He promised to make public colleges and universities tuition-free for low-income students in addition to doubling the maximum amount of Pell Grants. Perhaps the most important promise for many students in the country was the forgiveness of student debt from public colleges and universities.

Forgive student loan debt from public colleges and universities (Fulfilled)

Student debt attracted a lot of attention during the campaigning process as a lot of students found themselves unable to pay their loans because of the pandemic. In a March 2020 tweet, Biden stated that “we should forgive a minimum of \$10,000/person of federal student loans, as proposed by Senator Warren and colleagues.”²¹¹ On 24 August 2022, President Biden signed an executive order that “would waive \$10,000 of student loan debt for individuals earning less than \$125,000 or couples earning less than \$250,000.”²¹² However, the student debt relief program has been challenged in several courts, and ²¹³ the Supreme Court ruled that the president did not have the authority to cancel student loans in *Biden v. Nebraska* (2022) case in February 2023²¹⁴²¹⁵ On October 3rd, 2023, President Biden announced new initiatives that would bring “an additional \$9 billion in relief for 125,000 borrowers.”²¹⁶

Make public colleges and universities tuition-free for families who make less than \$125,000 (Unfulfilled)

Education had been an important policy area during Biden’s campaign, and he especially ran on making education more accessible. His campaign promised to “make public colleges and universities free for families with an income below 125,000 dollars” as part of his Build Back Better Plan.²¹⁷ During his presidency, Biden proposed the American Families Plan that included provisions of paid leave, free college and university education for low-income families, and lowered health insurance premiums.²¹⁸ The American Families Plan later turned into the Inflation Reduction Act,²¹⁹ however, Biden was unable to convince Congress to add the free college education provisions to the Bill, ultimately failing to fulfill his promise. In his 2024 fiscal year budget, a \$500 million investment in free community college was included but the Congress is yet to act on the matter.²²⁰

Double value of Pell Grants (Unfulfilled)

Pell Grants, “a subsidy provided generally to undergraduate students with financial needs,” had been included in Joe Biden’s Build Back Better Plan while campaigning.²²¹ The plan promised to “double the amount of Pell Grants and increase the number of students that are participating in the program.”²²² On 15 March 2022, President Biden signed the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022 that included the provision of “increasing the maximum Pell Grant with 400 dollars for the 2022-2023

school year,”²²³ which was the biggest increase since the 2009-2010 school year.²²⁴ Even though the Biden administration was able to sign into law one of the biggest increases, the maximum Pell grant now sits at “6,895 dollars for a school year” but doubling the maximum amount for the 2020-21 school year would be around 12,390 dollars. Additionally, Biden proposed an increase of 820 for Pell Grants in his 2024 fiscal year budget but even with that increase he falls short on fulfilling his promise.²²⁵

President Biden had been able to fulfill the same number of promises as Donald Trump by fulfilling one promise out of three, giving him a **fulfillment success rate of 33.33%**. He was able to fulfill his promise of canceling some amount of student debt through an executive order, giving him a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 0%** in this category. As for the other two promises, President Biden had been unable to convince Congress to include free tuition and Pell Grant increases in legislation such as the Inflation Reduction Act and the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022.

Health

Running for the presidency in the middle of a pandemic necessitated that Joe Biden focuses a lot on healthcare and welfare issues. Even though this paper does not include promises related to fighting COVID-19 specifically, President Biden focused on rebuilding stocks against supply chain disruptions. Showing his support for abortion even though he had conflicting views throughout his life, he promised to codify the landmark Supreme Court case *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and fund Planned Parenthood. He also advocated for improving Obamacare and guaranteeing paid sick leaves.

Rebuild health stockpiles to be ready for crises (Fulfilled)

Campaigning amidst a global pandemic, Joe Biden made various promises on healthcare issues. One of the promises under the Made in America Plan was making sure the U.S. was ready for future crises through “rebuilding critical health stockpiles.”²²⁶ The Biden administration took several actions in the form of executive orders to fulfill their promises. The Supply Chain Disruptions Task Force was created to “address short-term supply chain disruptions.”²²⁷ The executive order A Sustainable Public Health Supply Chain directed the “securing of necessary supplies for the COVID-19 pandemic.”²²⁸ Another executive order titled Ensuring the Future Is Made in All of America by All

of America’s Workers “tasked the federal government to provide assistance to American companies and established the Made in America Office.”²²⁹ Lastly, the executive order America’s Supply Chains “created a year-long review process for six different sectors” to find which products manufacturers rely on to be imported.²³⁰ All of these executive orders allowed the President to take significant steps toward fulfilling his promise.

Restore federal funding for Planned Parenthood (Fulfilled)

While former President Trump was unable to fulfill his promise of defunding Planned Parenthood by the 2018 midterms; he was able to defund it with a 2019 federal regulation.²³¹ On the campaigning trail, Biden promised to “reverse that decision and allow Planned Parenthood to receive Title X funds.”²³² On 7 October 2021, Biden issued a final rule to overturn former President Trump’s federal regulation.²³³ After receiving no Title X funds between 2020 and 2021, the organization received them in 2022, after the Biden administration lifted the restrictions.²³⁴

Improve Obamacare (Fulfilled)

As Barack Obama’s Vice President, Joe Biden supported the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) and found it to be a “big deal.”²³⁵ Since then, he has been against efforts to repeal it, and he announced in a campaign event that he was “not only going to restore it but also build on it.”²³⁶ On 11 March 2021, President Joe Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act into law, and the law includes several provisions related to Obamacare, such as “expanding healthcare coverage to middle-income Americans who did not qualify before and increasing aid for low-income Americans.”²³⁷

Guarantee 7 days of paid sick leave (Unfulfilled)

On the campaign trail, Biden showed support for the Healthy Families Act²³⁸ and promised to “make paid sick leave permanent.”²³⁹ 7-day paid leave was proposed in the Build Back Better Act; however, since the Act turned into the Inflation Reduction Act some provisions were left out, such as this promise.²⁴⁰ President Biden failed to convince Congress to include the seven days paid sick leave provision in the Inflation Reduction Act.

Work to codify Roe v. Wade (Unfulfilled)

Abortion has been one of the most important issues during the 2020 presidential election cycle. Even though Joe Biden had differing views on abortion throughout his political career,²⁴¹ he

promised to “codify the Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*.”²⁴² In September 2021, the House passed the Women's Health Protection Act; however, the Senate version of the bill failed to garner enough support from Republicans and failed.²⁴³ On 24 June 2022, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* (1973) with the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) decision.²⁴⁴

President Biden had been successful in fulfilling more than the majority of his promises related to healthcare and welfare as he fulfilled three promises out of five, giving him a **fulfillment success rate of 60%**. Two of the fulfilled promises were achieved through executive directives, as President Biden restored Title X funding to Planned Parenthood and created a Supply Chain Disruptions Task Force in addition to other measures to rebuild healthcare stocks. His promise to improve Obamacare was achieved when Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act, which includes expanding Obamacare coverage to many middle-income families. He was unable to fulfill two promises as Congress did not include the 7-day paid sick leave in the Inflation Reduction Act and failed to pass the Women's Health Protection Act to codify *Roe v. Wade*. As a result, he received a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 33.33%** in this category.

Macroeconomics

As the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted economic activities, the need for governmental support increased. In addition, the economy as an issue has always been important for voters so Joe Biden promised to take action on issues ranging from increasing government support to no tax increases. Joe Biden also emphasized “Made in America” rules and gave promises that would prioritize American products and materials.

Help state and local governments prevent budget shortfalls (Fulfilled)

During the pandemic, Democrats in Congress tried to pass a bill that would provide financial assistance to state and local governments, but Republicans, with their majority in the Senate, refused to act on this issue. As a result, candidate Joe Biden promised to “establish a renewable fund for state and local governments.”²⁴⁵ Congress passed the American Rescue Plan in March 2021, and the legislation included 195.3 billion dollars in funding to states and 130.2 billion dollars in funding to local governments in addition to territories and tribal governments.²⁴⁶

No tax increase for anyone making less than \$400,000 (Fulfilled)

While Donald Trump promised no new taxes for every income group, candidate Biden kept his promise limited to “anyone making less than 400,000 dollars per year.”²⁴⁷ No legislation was passed that would increase taxes for anyone with an income below 450,000. President Biden’s 2024 fiscal year budget includes a provision that would “lower after-tax incomes by an average of about \$2,300 next year,” allowing him to fulfill his promise when it comes to direct taxes.²⁴⁸

Award federal contracts to companies that make all products in US (Fulfilled)

As efforts to protect American industries became a significant concern with growing geopolitical dynamics and supply chain disruptions, candidate Joe Biden promised that “federal contracts would be given to American contractors that use American-made products.”²⁴⁹ The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (otherwise known as Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) that was passed in November 2021 “allowed many infrastructure projects to be created through federal grants targeted at American businesses.”²⁵⁰ President Biden also signed an executive order in his first week of the presidency that “aimed at reducing the loopholes that allow government agencies to buy foreign-made goods.”²⁵¹ Both the executive order and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law allowed Biden to fulfill his promise.

Tighten “Made in America” rules (Fulfilled)

Going against the previous 51% requirements for products to be considered “made in America,” Joe Biden promised to “tighten the requirements and increase the number of American materials and products used.”²⁵² The Build America Buy America Act, which requires “that all of the iron, steel, manufactured products, and construction materials used in infrastructure projects be produced in the United States,” has been passed as part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.²⁵³ In addition, the Federal Acquisition Regulatory Council stated on 7 March 2022, that “the requirement of 55% products being American will be increased to 60% in 2022 and 65% in 2024.”²⁵⁴ Both through legislation and departmental action, President Biden has been able to tighten Made in America rules and increase the requirements for American products and materials.

Raise corporate tax rate to 28% (Unfulfilled)

Highly criticizing Donald Trump for lowering the corporate tax rate to 21%, Biden promised to “raise it to 28%.”²⁵⁵ The Inflation Reduction act does not include any provisions with a corporate rate, but it imposes a “corporate alternative minimum tax” on businesses with more than 1 billion dollars in annual profit.²⁵⁶ President Biden’s FY2024 budget proposes an increase in the corporate tax from 21% to 28% and the House Ways and Means Committee will be holding a hearing about the FY2024 budget on March 10, 2024.²⁵⁷ Even though alternative minimum tax provisions were passed and the FY2024 budget includes the campaign promise, for now, President Biden failed to fulfill his goal of raising the corporate tax rate to 28%.

When it comes to promises related to the economy, President Biden had a successful run as he was able to fulfill four of the five promises examined in this paper, giving him a **fulfillment success rate of 80%**. All of the four promises Biden fulfilled had Congress action taken on them, in addition to two of them having executive orders related to them. The American Rescue Plan, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law were three significant pieces of legislation passed under the Biden administration to achieve the promises given on the campaign trail, giving him a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 100%** in this category.

Labor

On the campaign trail, Joe Biden showed support for the 15-dollar federal minimum wage, becoming one of his most popular promises.

Increasing the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour (Unfulfilled)

Minimum wage has been a point of debate for a long time, with many advocating for a 15-dollar federal minimum wage. Joe Biden also showed support for the 15-dollar federal minimum wage and included the provision under his American Rescue Plan.²⁵⁸ Senate Democrats decided to pass the American Rescue Plan under “budget reconciliation rules” in order to allow it to be passed with a simple majority;²⁵⁹ however, the Senate Parliament barred the federal minimum wage provision from being included as a budget reconciliation rule.²⁶⁰ In the end, the final version of the American Rescue Plan did not include anything about the federal minimum wage.

However, President Biden had been unable to pass one of the most popular promises since Congress did not include a federal minimum wage requirement provision in the American Rescue Plan, leaving him with a **fulfillment success rate of 0%** and a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 0%** in this category.

Law and Crime

Drawing attention to the U.S.'s gun violence epidemic, Joe Biden gave promises that would limit the usage of guns and ammunition in addition to strict background checks. In addition, he opposed the federal death penalty and supported decriminalizing marijuana.

Eliminate the federal death penalty (Unfulfilled)

As a candidate, Biden advocated for eliminating the death penalty at the federal level and mentioned that “over 160 individuals who received the death penalty have later been exonerated.”²⁶¹ After 13 people were executed during Trump’s presidency, Biden’s Attorney General issued a moratorium and withdrew several requests for the death penalty.²⁶² However, since that decision, the government has asked for the death penalty in a district court and a Supreme Court case.²⁶³ Not only did Biden fail to fulfill his promise, but he also broke his promise by asking for the death penalty to be implemented in several cases.

Ban the manufacture and sale of assault weapons and high-capacity magazines (Unfulfilled)

With school shootings on the rise and a growing debate on gun control, candidate Biden announced that he was going to “enact legislation to ban assault weapons” and “high capacity magazines.”²⁶⁴ While the Assault Weapons Ban of 2022 had been introduced in both chambers of Congress, it only managed to attract Democrat votes causing the bill to pass in the House but fail in the Senate.²⁶⁵ President Biden and Democrats failed to get support from Republicans and fulfill this promise. On February 15, 2024, President Biden urged the American public “to support his call to Congress to ban assault weapons,” after a deadly shooting occurred in a Super Bowl parade.²⁶⁶

Require background checks for all gun sales (Unfulfilled)

Another part of Biden’s gun safety plan included “requiring background checks for all gun sales to close the loopholes in the system.”²⁶⁷ In March 2021, the House passed the Bipartisan

Background Checks Act of 2021, which would “require background checks before someone buys or transfers a gun from a private seller.”²⁶⁸ Similar to the Assault Weapons Ban of 2022, the Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2021 did not receive passage from Congress as it never was voted on in the Senate. In March 2023, the President “signed an executive order to direct the Attorney General to strengthen the universal background checks”²⁶⁹ Even though several executive actions were passed by the administration, the Congress is yet to pass a substantial act requiring background checks for all gun sales.

Decriminalize marijuana (Unfulfilled)

While Joe Biden has been known to have a stricter view on the use of marijuana throughout his political career,²⁷⁰ his campaign website listed "decriminalize the use of cannabis" as one of his promises.²⁷¹ While the President has not taken any action to decriminalize marijuana at the federal level yet, on 6 October 2022, he announced that he would “pardon anyone with a federal conviction of simple possession of marijuana.”²⁷² While this is a step towards decriminalizing marijuana, he still fell short of fulfilling his promise.

Law and crime is a policy area President Biden failed to fulfill any promises in, giving him a **fulfillment success rate of 0%** and a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 0%** in this category. One of the promises could have been fulfilled through executive directives; however, Biden broke his own promise when the administration asked for the death penalty as a sentence in several cases. As for the other three promises, Biden failed to convince Congress to pass legislation that would decriminalize marijuana, ban the manufacture and sale of assault weapons, and stricter background checks since legislation such as the Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2021 and the Assault Weapons Ban of 2022 failed to get enough votes in the Senate.

Immigration

Criticizing many actions of former President Donald Trump, Joe Biden promised to reverse many of those “cruel policies.” He promised to rescind the highly controversial “Muslim bans” and reverse family separation policies. Joe Biden also promised to pass a comprehensive immigration reform that would create pathways to citizenship for many undocumented immigrants in the country.

He also wanted to increase the refugee cap and the number of immigration judges within the justice system.

Immediately rescind the “Muslim bans” (Fulfilled)

During the campaigning process, Biden promises to “immediately rescind the Muslim bans of Donald Trump²⁷³. On his first day of office, President Biden revoked Muslim ban executive directives that the Trump administration passed through a proclamation that removed the restrictions for Muslim countries.²⁷⁴

Reverse family separation policies (Fulfilled)

As a candidate, Biden often criticized Donald Trump’s family separation policies and “finding those actions to be cruel and senseless; he promised to reverse those policies.”²⁷⁵ With a 26 January 2021 memorandum, Biden’s Attorney General “rescinded the Trump-era zero-tolerance policy.”²⁷⁶

Increase refugee admissions (Fulfilled)

Biden promised to “set the annual refugee admissions at 125.000” in 2021 and aimed to raise it with time.²⁷⁷ On 8 October 2021, Biden signed a memorandum to “set the annual refugee admissions at up to 125.000”²⁷⁸ and on 27 September 2022, signed another memorandum to “set the cap to 125.000 once again for 2023.”²⁷⁹

Create a pathway to citizenship for nearly 11 million people (Unfulfilled)

While campaigning Joe Biden put an emphasis on passing immigration reform that will “allow 11 million undocumented immigrations living in the U.S. to have citizenship.”²⁸⁰ President Biden proposed the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021 on his first day in office and the bill was formally introduced in the House. The bill, if passed, would “offer an expedited three-year path to citizenship to some farmworkers, Dreamers and people who currently benefit from a Temporary Protected Status designation.²⁸¹ However, the Bill had been referred to the Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship in July 2022, and no action had taken place after that day, leaving Joe Biden unable to fulfill his promise.

Double the number of immigration judges and staff (Unfulfilled)

Stating that there is “a backlog of more than one million immigration cases,” Joe Biden promised to double the number of immigration judges and their staff.²⁸² When Biden became the President, there were roughly 500 immigration judges²⁸³; in the next year, 71 new immigration judges were seated²⁸⁴, and by 2023 that number was 634 which correlates to approximately 23% increase, Biden unable to fulfill his promise.²⁸⁵

President Biden had been able to fulfill three of his five promises related to immigration and citizenship, giving him a **fulfillment success rate of 60%**. All three promises were fulfilled thanks to executive directives that reversed the “Muslim bans,” increased the refugee cap and changed family separation policies. Even though he showed some effort, President Biden was unable to sit around 200 new immigration judges. As for immigration reforms, President Biden proposed the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021, but the bill had been unable to move in Congress. As a result, he received **traditional legislation-making success rate of 0%** in this category.

Environment

As a presidential candidate, Joe Biden emphasized the importance of restoring the U.S. leadership in tackling climate change by rejoining the Paris Climate Agreement and achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

Rejoin the Paris Climate Agreement (Fulfilled)

Similar to rejoining the World Health Organization, candidate Biden promised to rejoin the Paris Climate Agreement on the first day of his administration.²⁸⁶ The promise was another way of showing that Biden valued restoring the U.S.’s reputation in the international arena and willingness to be the leader in tackling climate change. On the first day of his presidency, President Biden signed the agreement that would make “the U.S. a party to the Paris Climate Agreement” once again.²⁸⁷

Put US on a course to net-zero emissions by 2050 (Fulfilled)

Seeing climate change as an existential threat, Biden often talked about enabling the U.S. leadership in leading the fight against it.²⁸⁸ He also promised to put the U.S. “on track to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.” President Biden achieved his goal of taking significant actions for net-zero emissions when the Inflation Reduction Act passed Congress and became a law. The Inflation

Reduction Act included “260 billion dollars in clean energy tax credits, cost covers, tax credits for electric vehicles and support for agriculture practices.”²⁸⁹ The director of Columbia University's Sabin Center for Climate Change Law stated that “with added EPA regulations and state, local and private action, the 50 to 52% reduction by 2030 is possible using existing technology, or technology that seems around the corner,” which is very important as the U.S. needs to hit the goal of reducing emissions by 50% by 2030 to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.²⁹⁰

Achieving all of his promises on energy and climate, President Biden fulfilled two promises out of the two examined in this paper, giving him a **fulfillment success rate of 100%**. The success of Joe Biden in fulfilling these promises, both executive directives and legislation passed by Congress. For executive directives, on the first day of his presidency, President Biden re-joined the Paris Climate Agreement, and The Inflation Reduction Act has several provisions that will put the U.S. on course to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. As a result, Biden received a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 50%** in this category.

Energy

As a candidate, Biden drew attention to achieving clean energy goals through equitable means and aiming for Justice40 initiatives. Joe Biden also promised not to allow any new fracking to occur on federal lands and to establish new fuel economy standards.

Give disadvantaged communities 40% of spending benefits related to clean energy (Fulfilled)

From the start of his campaign, Joe Biden put an emphasis on tackling climate change and making sure to make reducing inequality a big focus of it. On his campaign website, it was stated that “disadvantaged communities would get 40% of the overall benefits of spending in the areas of clean energy and energy efficiency.”²⁹¹ Through an executive order, the administration started implementing the Justice40 Initiative, that “transforms federal programs to adapt to the needs of disadvantaged communities. In addition, the Inflation Reduction Act,²⁹² Bipartisan Infrastructure Law²⁹³ and the American Rescue Plan²⁹⁴ all have provisions that focus on advancing environmental justice. The most significant legislation of Biden’s presidency, these three bills set out to achieve “just and equitable” clean energy reforms.²⁹⁵ In October 2022, the Federation of American Scientists

measured the federal agencies success in fulfilling Justice40 Initiative recommendations and reported that “tangible progress” has been made, making this promise fulfilled. ²⁹⁶

Establish new fuel economy standards (Fulfilled)

Another important issue within protecting the environment was fuel economy standards, and Biden promised to “establish ambitious fuel economy standards that save consumers money and cut air pollution.”²⁹⁷ The Environment Protection Agency (EPA) set new fuel efficiency standards by the end of 2021, and the final rule set “higher efficiency standards by 5% to 10%,”²⁹⁸ which were 1.5% under President Trump. ²⁹⁹ By establishing new standards ranging from 5% to 10%, President Biden fulfilled his promise.

Block new fracking on federal lands, but not ban all fracking (Unfulfilled)

Fracking has been an issue long discussed by politicians and environmental scientists; as a candidate Biden promised “not to allow any new fracking to occur on federal lands.”³⁰⁰ However, President Biden broke this promise when the Interior Department announced its “onshore lease sale of 144.000 acres for drilling that will also use fracking.”³⁰¹ This is one of the two promises President Biden broke in addition to the death penalty promise.

When it came to Energy, Biden was able to fulfill two out of the three promises examined in this paper, giving him a fulfillment **success rate of 66.66%**. In addition to IRA, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the American Rescue Plan had provisions that focus on achieving Justice40 initiatives. Additionally, the EPA had been successful in setting new fuel economy standards. The only promise President Biden could not fulfill and went to break happened when the Interior Department announced that they were going to lease 144.000 acres for drilling, which will also include fracking. Making Biden receive a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 50%** in this category.

Government Operations

After witnessing an unprecedented Supreme Court nominations period with Donald Trump nominating three Supreme Court justices in a single term, Joe Biden promised to create a bipartisan commission to consider reforms. He also has been able to promise a Supreme Court nomination, and

he vowed to nominate the first Black woman to the highest court of the country. As the debate around super PACs and campaigning spending grew heated, Joe Biden promised to increase transparency in election spending.

Create a bipartisan commission to consider reforms to the Supreme Court (Fulfilled)

While not promising to expand the Supreme Court or implement any other changes, candidate Biden promised to “create a bipartisan commission to review how to reform the court system and provide recommendations.”³⁰² In April 2021, President Biden signed an executive order to “form the Presidential Commission on the Supreme Court of the United States,”³⁰³ and on 7 December 2021; the Commission released its report to the President.³⁰⁴

Nominate the first Black woman to U.S. Supreme Court (Fulfilled)

During the Democratic Presidential debate, Joe Biden promised that if elected, he was “going to nominate the first Black woman to the Supreme Court.”³⁰⁵ On 30 June 2022, the Senate confirmed Ketanji Brown Jackson to the U.S. Supreme Court to replace Justice Stephen Breyer, making her the first Black Supreme Court justice.³⁰⁶

Increase transparency of election spending (Unfulfilled)

Pledging to take “dark money” out of politics, Joe Biden promised campaign finance law that would target online campaigning.³⁰⁷ The For the People Act of 2021 (also known as H.R.1) includes provisions that target online campaigning and transparency passed the House with no Republican support, but the Bill got stuck in the Senate since it did not get the 60 votes required.³⁰⁸ Additionally, Democrats have been unable to convince moderate Senators like Joe Manchin and Krysten Sinema to vote for removing the 60 votes needed for election-related bills.³⁰⁹ With the For the People Act of 2021 stuck in the Senate, and the Democratic party’s and its president’s inability to convince his own members resulted in this promise being unfulfilled.

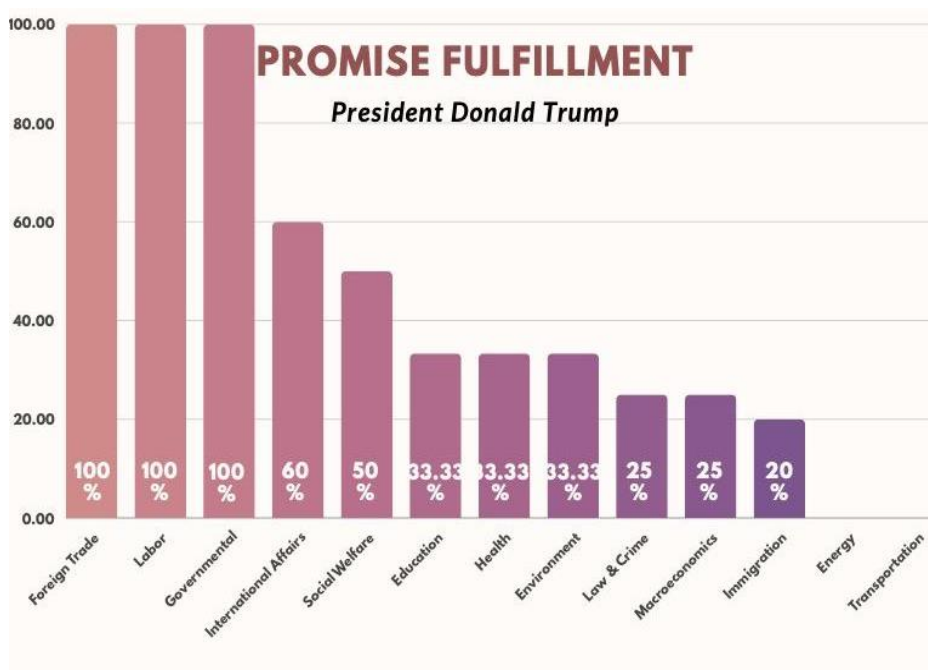
In fulfilling his promises regarding various governmental activities, President Biden had been successful in fulfilling two of his three promises, giving him a **fulfillment success rate of 66.67**. He has been able to fulfill promises regarding the Supreme Court by creating the commission and nominating Ketanji Brown Jackson to be the first Black woman Supreme Court justice. However, since The For the People Act of 2021 got stuck in the Senate, President Biden had been unable to

fulfill his promise of increasing election transparency. As a result, Biden received a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 0%** in this category.

Analysis and Discussion

Each presidency brings its own set of legislative challenges, political makeup, socio-economic environment, and both domestic and international crises. While the first two years of the Trump and Biden administrations have been affected by different events, one significant thing they had in common was their political party being the majority in both chambers of Congress. In the 115th session of Congress (2017-2019), Republicans were the majority in the House of Representatives with 241 to 194 and in the Senate with 52 to 46.³¹⁰ In the 117th session of Congress (2021-2023), Democrats were the majority in the House of Representatives with 222 to 213, and in the Senate with 50-50 with the additional Vice-President tie-breaking vote³¹¹. Even though Biden enjoyed a slimmer margin of majority, both presidents were fortunate to have their party control both chambers of Congress which made passing legislation relatively easier and allowed the presidents to face less opposition compared to divided or other-party-controlled Congress.

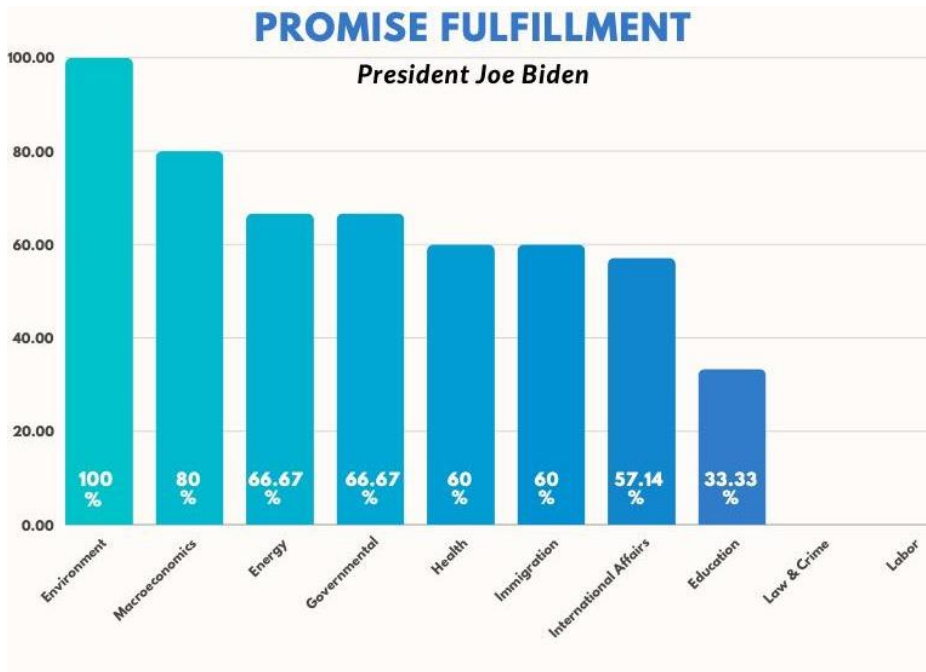
Table 1



In conclusion, during his presidency, President Trump had fulfilled sixteen promises out of thirty-eight examined in this paper, giving him an **overall fulfillment success rate of 41.1%**. His most successful categories were *foreign*

trade, labor, and governmental with 100%, followed by *international affairs* with 60%, *social welfare* with 50%, *education, health, and environment* with 33.33%, *law & crime* and *macroeconomics* with 25%, *immigration* with 20%, *energy and transportation* with 0%.

Table 2



In comparison, President Biden had been able to fulfill twenty-one promises out of thirty-eight examined in this paper giving him an **overall fulfillment success rate of 55.26%**.

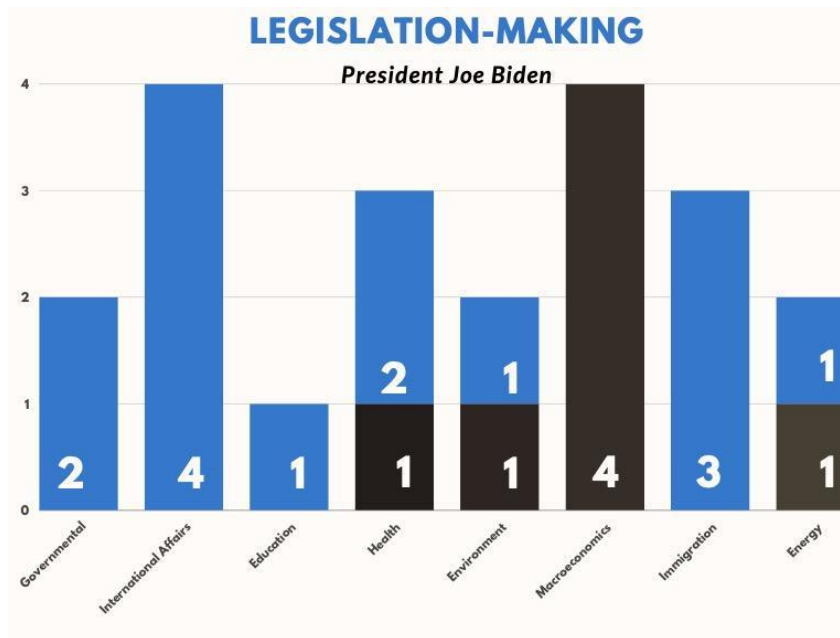
His most successful category was

environment with 100%,

followed by *macroeconomics* with 80%, *energy and governmental* with 66.67%, *health and immigration* with 60%, *international affairs* with 57.14, *education* with 33.33, *law & crime* and *labor* with 0%.

President Biden had been more successful in supporting Congress to pass legislation compared to President Trump and had a better performance navigating the traditional legislation-making process in addition to signing executive directives. Out of the twenty-one promises he was able to fulfill, seven of them were achieved through legislation passed in Congress with a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 33.33%**. He had been able to get the support of Congress in fulfilling his promises in four categories: *health, environment, macroeconomics, and energy*.

Table 3

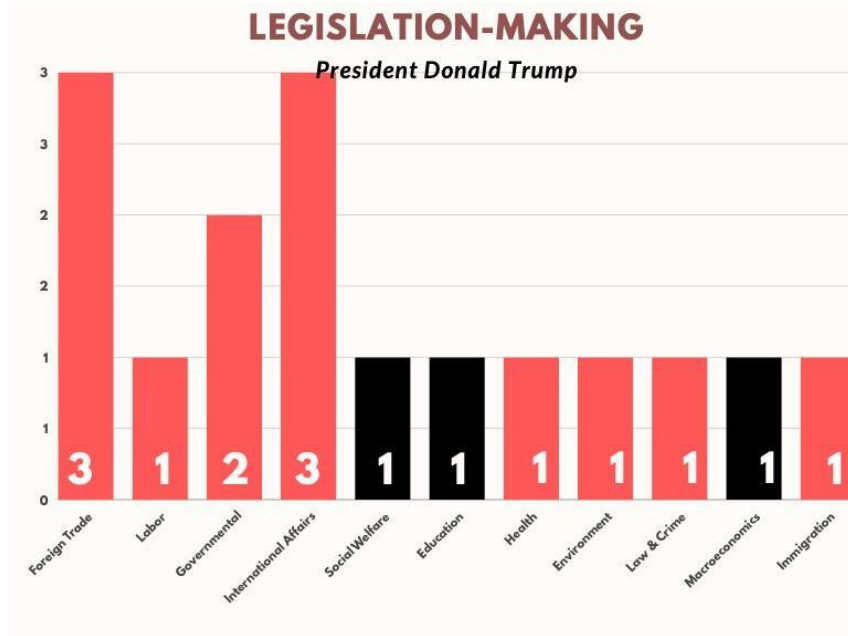


For health, the American Rescue Plan Act included several provisions related to Obamacare, such as “expanding healthcare coverage to middle-income Americans who did not qualify before and increasing aid for low-income Americans.”³¹² For

macroeconomics, the American Rescue Plan, the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law had been three significant pieces of legislation passed under the Biden administration to help state and local governments avoid budget shortfalls, make sure no tax increase was implemented for anyone making less than 400,000 dollars, tighten “Made in America” laws and award federal contracts to companies that make their products in the U.S. For environment and energy, the Inflation Reduction Act,³¹³ the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law³¹⁴ and the American Rescue Plan³¹⁵ helped advance environmental justice and put the U.S. on track to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

However, President Trump had been less successful in supporting Congress to pass legislation compared to President Biden and had to rely on executive orders for campaign fulfillment. Out of the sixteen promises he was able to fulfill, only three of them were achieved through legislation passed in Congress with a **traditional legislation-making success rate of 18.75%**. He had been able to get the support of Congress in fulfilling his promises in three categories: *social welfare*,

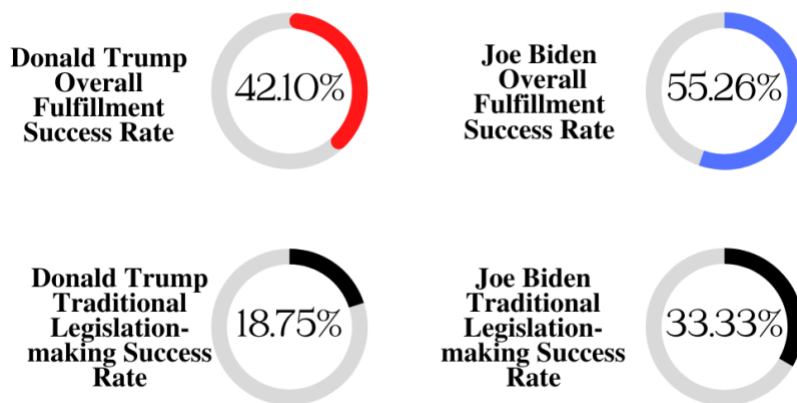
Table 4



education, and macroeconomics. For social welfare, against the President's wishes to break his own promise, Congress did not make any cuts to Social Security in the FY2019 spending bill.³¹⁶ For education, the FY2019 spending bill made no cuts

to the funding of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs).³¹⁷ For healthcare & welfare, for macroeconomics, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 allowed every income group to pay fewer taxes on average.³¹⁸

Table 5



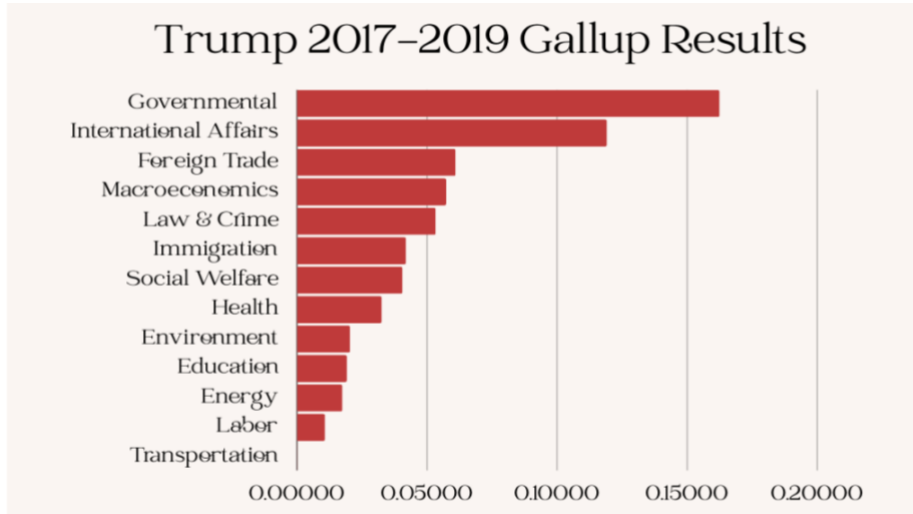
During the Trump administration, Congress failed to pass major bills, especially on important campaign issues such as infrastructure, healthcare, or immigration. The most significant achievement of the 115th Congress was the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of

2017. President Trump failed to pass his desired legislation in Congress because the White House has not shown enough support and guidance to Congress on the bills they want to see passed.³¹⁹ For example, the White House has failed to offer a comprehensive bill structure on infrastructure to

Congress for a long time.³²⁰ Republican leadership had also come to opposition with President Trump at times, for example, when President Trump failed to notify Congress about the cuts in his budget proposal regarding the Department of Education. Overall, “the president lacked a strategic plan of his own, had few substantive proposals, and demonstrated little skill in garnering support” when it came to his relationship with Congress.³²¹

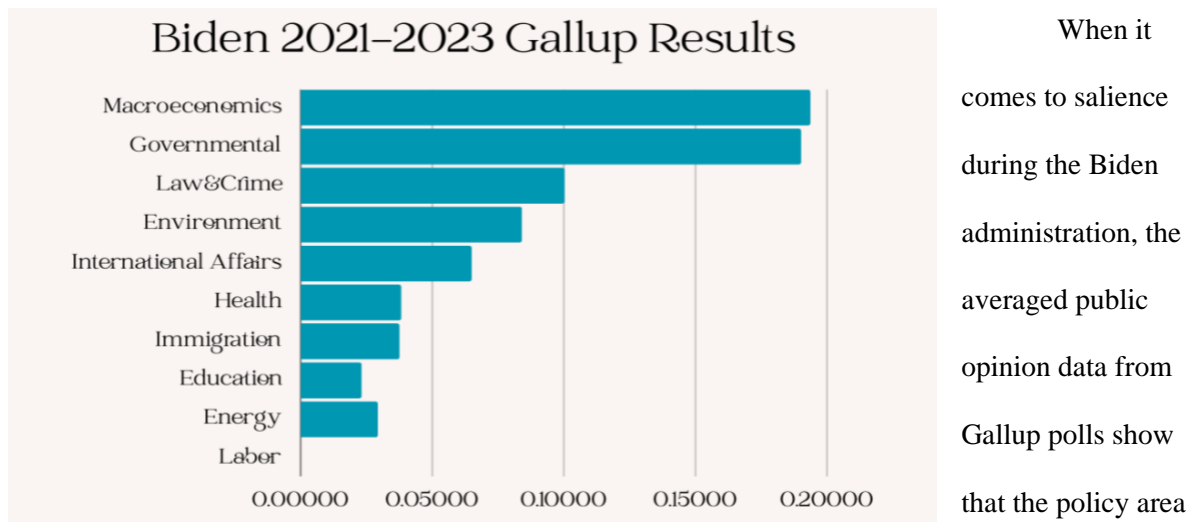
Failing to get support from Congress, Donald Trump turned to executive directives to fulfill his campaign promises. President Trump often resorted to signing executive orders with “great fanfare” when he was unable to reach a legislative agreement with Congress that would have a more significant and lasting impact.³²² Even though he was unable to navigate through the traditional legislation-making processes, he was still able to fulfill some of his promises, such as decreasing regulations, weakening federal agencies, and reshaping the judicial system will have long-lasting effects in the United States.³²³

Table 6



When it comes to salience during the Trump administration, the averaged public opinion data from Gallup polls show that the policy area that

was chosen to be the most important by the highest number of responders was *governmental* followed by *international affairs*, *foreign trade*, *macroeconomics*, *law crime*, *immigration*, *social welfare*, *health*, *environment*, *education*, *energy*, *labor* and *transportation*.

Table 7

When it comes to salience during the Biden administration, the averaged public opinion data from Gallup polls show that the policy area

that was chosen to be the most important by the highest number of responders was *macroeconomics*, followed by *governmental*, *law & crime*, *environment*, *international affairs*, *health*, *immigration*, *education*, *energy*, and *labor*. Assuming that our hypothesis is correct, we would expect both Donald Trump and Joe Biden to fulfill the greatest number of promises in policy areas that were deemed to be the most important by the poll responders.

Table 8**Models of Promise Fulfillment**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Salience	2.277 ** (0.952)	2.234** (0.979)	1.560 (2.386)
Senate Share		-0.002	-0.016
Pandemic		0.541*** (0.110)	(0.539)*** (0.153)
Fixed Effects			x

Table 9**Models of Traditional Legislation-making Conditional on Promise Fulfillment**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Salience	1.674	1.614	0.040

	(0.133)	(1.295)	(0.215)
Senate Share		-0.085	0.001
		(0.154)	(0.0713)
Pandemic		0.127	0.000`
		(0.235)	(0.193)
Fixed Effects			x

Notes: Significance codes are: * p< 0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.001, `: the coefficient for variable pandemic is reported at a very small scale; actual value is 0.0000765.

Lastly, looking at the three regression models allows us to see whether our hypotheses were correct or not. **Table 8 Models of Promise Fulfillment** looks at the statistical effect of public opinion on the salience of issues on promise fulfilment. The results from Model 2 show that there is a positive relationship between salience and promise fulfilment with the coefficient being 2.277. Model 1 also gives us a p value of 0.019 making the positive relationship between salience and promise fulfilment a statistically significant one. The results support the hypothesis that *there is a positive relationship between public opinion on the salience of issues and promise fulfilment*. Controlling for senate share and the pandemic variables, the results from Model 2 show there is a positive relationship between salience and promise fulfilment with the coefficient being 2.234. Model 2 also gives us a p value of 0.025 making the positive relationship between salience and promise fulfilment a statistically significant one controlling for the Senate share, and the pandemic.

Model 2 also indicates that there isn't a statistically significant relationship between the Senate share and the promise fulfilment, but it should be noted that there was only one Senator difference between the presidencies, making it harder to draw concrete conclusions. Lastly, Model 2 shows that a campaign promise being related to the pandemic leads to an approximately 54% increase in promise fulfilment; with the p value of 0 indicating a very significant statistic relationship between pandemic related promises and promise fulfilment. These results further support our hypothesis that *promises that are related to crises such as the pandemic are more likely to be fulfilled*. Lastly, Model

3 gives us results controlling for fixed effects, senate share, and the pandemic. Controlling for these variables, we see that there is a positive relationship between salience and promise fulfilment with a coefficient of 1.560 however, the relationship is not statistically significant. Similar to Model 2, results from Model 3 show that there isn't a statistically significant relationship between the Senate share and the promise fulfilment. Similar to Model 2, Model 3 shows that a campaign promise being related to the pandemic leads to an approximately 54% increase in promise fulfillment; with the p value of 0.001 indicating a very significant statistic relationship between pandemic related promises and promise fulfilment.

Table 10

25% and 75% Margins for Models of Promise Fulfillment

	Model 1	Model 2
Salience 25%	0.405	0.407
Salience 75%	0.541	0.540

To further understand the relationship between salience and promise fulfillment, we look at how much of a difference occurs in promise fulfillment when salience moves from 25% to 75%. In **Model 1**, we find that when we move from approximately three people (0.032) finding a policy issue salient to approximately nine people (0.092) finding a policy issue salient, the probability of a promise being fulfilled increases by approximately 14%. Similarly, in **Model 2** (controlling for Senate share and pandemic variables), we find that when we move from approximately three people (0.032) finding a policy issue salient to approximately nine people (0.092) finding a policy issue salient, the probability of a promise being fulfilled increases by approximately 14%.

Table 9 Models of Traditional Legislation-making Conditional on Promise Fulfillment

looks at the statistical effect of public opinion on the salience of issues on promise fulfillment through traditional legislation-making, employing the same three regression models and variables. The results

from **Model 1** show that there is a positive relationship between salience and promise fulfillment with the coefficient being 1.674. **Model 1** also gives us a p value of 0,221, making the positive relationship between salience and promise fulfilment through traditional legislation-making a statistically insignificant one. The results from the regression analysis, do not support the hypothesis that *there is a positive relationship between public opinion on the salience of issues and promise fulfillment through traditional legislation-making*. Controlling for senate share and the pandemic variables, the results from **Model 2** show that that there is a positive relationship between salience and promise fulfillment with the coefficient being 1.614. **Model 2** also gives us a p value of 0.222 making the positive relationship between salience and promise fulfilment through traditional legislation-making a statistically insignificant one. **Model 2** also indicates that there isn't a statistically significant relationship between the Senate share and the promise fulfilment through traditional legislation making. Lastly, **Model 2** shows that a campaign promise being related to the pandemic leads to an approximately 12% increase in promise fulfillment through traditional legislation-making, with the p value of 0.594 indicating an insignificant statistic relationship. The results do not support our hypothesis that *promises related to crises such as the pandemic are more likely to be fulfilled through traditional legislation-making*.

Lastly, **Model 3** gives us results controlling for fixed effects, senate share, and the pandemic. Controlling for these variables, we see that there is a positive relationship between salience and promise fulfilment through traditional legislation-making with a coefficient of 0.040 however, the relationship is not statistically significant. Similar to **Model 2**, results from **Model 3** show that there isn't a statistically significant relationship between the Senate share and the promise fulfilment. Lastly, **Model 3** shows that a campaign promise being related to the pandemic does not really lead to a significant increase in the promise being fulfilled through traditional legislation-making.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we find enough evidence to support our **H1a** that *Donald Trump fulfilled less promises compared to Joe Biden because he was not able to successfully navigate the traditional legislation-making processes*. During his administration, Donald Trump was able to fulfill 42.10% of

his promises, and 18.75% of the promises were fulfilled through traditional legislation-making. In comparison, during his administration, Joe Biden was able to fulfill 55.26% of his promises, and 33.33% of the promises were fulfilled through traditional legislation-making.

Due to the make-up of the Congress under both administrations being very similar, we do not find enough evidence to support **H2** that *presidents are more likely to fulfill their promises if they have the support of Congress with the president's party having a majority of seats in Congress*. Additionally, due to minimal differences in the Senate share variable between the presidencies, we do not find enough evidence to support **H2a** that *a president is more likely to fulfill his promises, compared to others, if his party has the higher number of Senate seats*.

Through our regression **Model 1** and **Model 2**, we find enough evidence to support **H3** that *there is a positive relationship between public opinion on the salience of issues and promise fulfillment*. However, using **Model 3** and controlling for the pandemic, senate share and the fixed effects, we do not find statistically significant evidence to support our hypothesis.

The regression **Model 1**, **Model 2**, and **Model 3** do not provide statistically significant evidence to support the **H4** that *there is a positive relationship between public opinion on the salience of issues and promise fulfillment through traditional legislation-making*.

The regression **Model 2**, provide enough evidence to support **H6** that *promises that are related to crises such as the pandemic are more likely to be fulfilled*. However, we do not find statistically significant evidence to support **H8** that *promises related to crises such as the pandemic are more likely to be fulfilled through traditional legislation-making*.

For Donald Trump, we find some evidence to support **H5** that *promises in public policy areas the public deems important are more likely to be fulfilled*. During his presidency the top three policy areas that were deemed to be the most important by the public were: 1. *Governmental*, 2. *International Affairs*, and 3. *Foreign Trade*. Donald Trump was able to fulfill 100% of his promises related to *governmental*, 60% of his promises related to *international affairs*, and 100% of his promises related to *foreign trade*. For Joe Biden, we find some evidence to support **H5** that *promises in public policy areas the public deems important are more likely to be fulfilled* but it is weaker compared to Donald Trump. During his presidency the top three policy areas that were deemed to be

the most important by the public were: 1. *Macroeconomics*, 2. *Governmental*, and 3. *Law & Crime*.

Joe Biden was able to fulfill 80% of his promises related to macroeconomics, 66.66% of his promises related to *governmental*, and 0% of his promises related to law & crime.

For Donald Trump, we do not find enough evidence to support **H7** that *promises in policy areas that are deemed important by the public are more likely to be fulfilled through traditional legislation-making*. During his presidency the top three policy areas that were deemed to be the most important by the public were: 1. *Governmental*, 2. *International Affairs*, and 3. *Foreign Trade*. However, none of the promises he fulfilled in these policy areas were through traditional legislation-making. For Joe Biden, we find some evidence to support **H7** that *promises in policy areas that are deemed important by the public are more likely to be fulfilled through traditional legislation-making*. During his presidency the top three policy areas that were deemed to be the most important by the public were: 1. *Macroeconomics*, 2. *Governmental*, and 3. *Law & Crime*. Four out of the four promises he fulfilled in *macroeconomics* were through traditional-legislation making; however, none of the promises he fulfilled in *governmental* was through traditional legislation-making and he failed to fulfill any promises in the *law & crime* policy area.

Limitations and Further Research

No presidency is the same. Each president leads the country through different times with various challenges, political atmospheres, and personal struggles. The uniqueness of each presidency makes it harder to level the playing field and compare the presidents to each other. Even though some efforts were made, such as removing personal promises it must be recognized that different problems require different solutions. Those circumstances can affect the fulfillment success rate or the traditional legislation-making rate, as a president finds himself unable to fulfill promises because of various crises or some issues that may require actions through executive directives.

Secondly, it must be noted that this research paper focuses on a set number of campaign promises (seventy-two in total) because of time and page limitations; however, adding more promises might change the overall result of this research paper. Looking at more promises can also offer the reader a better perspective and the change to learn more about each president's time in office. Because

of the time this paper has been written, actions taken after the end of 2023 were not included, potentially leading to skewed results as President Biden can potentially fulfill some of his promises in the last year of his term.

For further research, more promises, especially the ones pertaining to military and veterans' affairs, can be included to broaden the research perspective. This research project offers an incredible opportunity for expansion, both through adding more promises and more administrations. Further research can be conducted in a way that could add the presidencies of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama to create a better picture for the modern presidencies of this century. Adding more presidencies could also potentially allow us to learn the effects of various variances such as second term presidencies, Congress compositions and domestic and international crises. Adding more presidencies would also allow us to see how the public opinion on the importance of various policy areas changed throughout the administrations and see whether there are developing trends when it comes to parallels between promise fulfillment, traditional-legislative making, and salience.

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