



# UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK

O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

“Do Support Parties Extract More Policy Benefits Than Typical  
Opposition Parties Under Minority Governments?”

by

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Bachelor of Arts in Politics and Public Administration

A Final Year Project Presented

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to

The Department of Politics and Public Administration in fulfilment of  
the requirements for

the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Politics and Public Administration

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Date: 28th of February 2019

## Abstract:

While many perceive minority governments as inherently unstable and ineffective, research has proven this to be false. However, the success of such governments lies in their ability to forge deals with opposition parties to ensure a legislative majority to implement policy.

While some minority governments secure support on an ad hoc basis, others form support arrangements with opposition parties. This allows opposition parties to gain influence on policy, a frequent criticism of minority governments. This research paper adds to a growing body of literature on minority governments performance fulfilling election pledges. The aim is to investigate the effect an expressed confidence and supply agreement has on the rate of pledge fulfilment and analyse opposition party's fulfilment rate compared to those that go on and form support arrangements with minority governments. Research conducted elsewhere in Europe has found that support parties under minority governments have fulfilled a higher rate of election pledges when compared to typical opposition parties. However, an expressed confidence and supply agreement has never been seen before in Irish politics. By studying the fulfilment of election pledges found in the four largest political parties currently sitting in Dáil Éireann, this project aims to answer if Fianna Fáil have extracted more policy benefits than other opposition parties.

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## Acknowledgements:

I would like to begin by thanking my supervisor Dr. Rory Costello for his extremely useful feedback and advise on previous drafts of this project. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff of the Department of Politics and Public Administration, my classmates and friends for making my time in UL so enjoyable, both in and outside the classroom.

I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to my family, particularly my mother, who I dedicate this work to. An amazing mother and role model I cannot imagine my life without her positive influence.

Clear Eyes, Full Hearts. Can't Lose.

## Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is entirely my own work, in my own words, and that all sources used in researching it are fully acknowledged and all quotations properly identified and fully referenced both (in-text) and in my completed reference list / bibliography. This body of work has not been submitted, in whole or in part, by me or another person, for the purpose of obtaining any other credit / grade. I fully understand the ethical implications of my research, and this work meets the requirements of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter One – Introduction

A promise is understood as a commitment made by someone to do something or nothing.

Individuals worldwide make promises daily, some are kept, and some are not. However, very few have their promises scrutinised to the extent that politicians do. In the world of politics promises are part of the central role in the relationship between the electorate and elected officials. Election commitments form political parties mandate before elections, which gives voters the opportunity to influence policy in advance, setting the general direction for future action. Elections provide citizens a means of expressing policy preferences and seek representation for these views within the democratic process. This forms a clear connection between citizens desires and government actions, which is core to democracy in action.

The aim of such campaign promises is of course to attract voters. And while such promises are not legally binding, it reflects badly on representative whose commitments remain unfulfilled, or even worse broken. This has serious implications the next time voters are summoned to the polls. Of course, the most obvious distinction between a democracy and a dictatorship is a democracy offers voters the opportunity to remove elected officials from their post if they believe their performance is inadequate. Election promises such as “read my lips: no new taxes” or “Frankfurt's way or Labour's way” echo in voters mind, and if they believe promises were not kept, officials can be swiftly removed from office.

The outcome of the election should bring into office a coherent government committed to policies that correspond to the voter’s anticipations and capable of carrying them out. For a government to claim a mandate it must win a majority, failing to reach such a majority would seem to deprive the government of the essence of a democratic mandate. For this reason, implementing policy may seem problematic for a minority government. However, research has consistently shown that minority governments are just as successful as their majority counterparts of at fulfilling election pledges. This is because for a government to claim a mandate, allowing it to enact their election

pledges, they most secure majority of support in the legislature, not the electorate. Forming support arrangements with opposition parties allows minority governments to secure legislative majorities to ensure their survival. However, this gives opposition parties considerably more influence over government. The impact of such support arrangements on pledge fulfilment is central to this research.

It has become the norm in parliamentary democracies for political parties to publish a manifesto setting out their policy priorities for the period following an election. Manifestos are understood as the most definitive policy packages party puts to the voters at election time. When an election was called in Ireland on the 26th of February 2016, each of the four main political parties Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin and Labour, launched their respective manifestos in the weeks leading up to the election. While the governments application of austerity measures and the economy were the dominate themes of the election campaign, fulfilment of election pledges proved just as significant. Throughout the campaign both Fine Gael and Labour came under attack from opposition parties for breaking campaign commitments. Sinn Féin dedicated a full page in their manifesto to “Five years of Fine Gael and Labour chaos and broken promises” and both Sinn Féin and Fianna Fáil ran billboard campaigns featuring the theme of broken promises. Following the 2016 general election, the outgoing coalition of Fine Gael and Labour were roundly defeated yet no obvious alternative governments emerged. The election, which produced the most fragmented Dáil in the country’s history, made government formation much harder. After 70 days of negotiations a Fine Gael led minority government with the support of several independents was formed. To ensure a working majority in the legislature, Fine Gael formed a confidence and supply agreement with the largest opposition party, Fianna Fáil. While Fine Gael rely on their parliamentary allies to support the implementation of their campaign commitments previously made to the electorate, Fianna Fáil entered the deal hoping to influence policy from opposition benches. This post-election agreement can weaken the direct voter-government connection that is critical to the mandate control model. Although it might still leave room for substantial citizen impact on policy if the alliance is a strong

one and based on a similar policy stance. The effect this agreement will have on the fulfilment of election pledges is central to this research.

The remainder of this project will be structured as follows. The next chapter will consult the literature already available regarding minority governments and pledge fulfilment. Various scholars will be referred to, and we will also consider aspects unique to the Irish case such as the use of a distinctive voting system and lack of political cleavages. Following discussion on the literature already available, Chapter three focuses on the methodology used to conduct research for this project which asks: “do support parties extract more policy benefits than typical opposition parties under minority governments?” Sources, research methods and limitations to the study will be outlined in this section. The main findings of this research will be presented in chapter four. A breakdown of the rate of pledge fulfilment for the four main political parties currently sitting in the Dáil will be provided, as will explanations for the rate of pledge fulfilment. Following this, results will be compared to other governing periods, which will confirm the effect the confidence and supply agreement has had on the current governments ability to fulfil election pledges. The final chapter will draw together conclusions arising from the research findings and relevant literature.

## Chapter Two – Literature Review

### Minority Governments:

As this project contributes to a growing body of research on minority governments, election pledges and their fulfilment, it's important to position the research conducted in this project in context with the literature already available. It is widely accepted that minority governments are not part of the normative concept of democratic theory. Critics interpret minority governments as violating many basic assumptions of how parliamentary democracy works, as they breach the idea of representing the will of the majority, as they failed to secure such a majority. A majority of votes is the ultimate source of political legitimacy – for a government to claim a mandate it must win a majority.

However, this isn't always the case. The president of the United States may be elected on a minority of the popular vote because of the electoral college system. Likewise, the first past the post electoral system used in the United Kingdom has seen parties win overall majorities in parliament, despite only securing 35% of the popular vote. In fact, between 1945 and 2010, 33% of governments formed throughout Europe were minority governments (Andersson, et al., 2014). And while favouritism towards a majority government is valid when we consider how the stability of a minority government seems so obviously threatened, many grievances towards minority governments were debunked in Strøm's (1990) seminal work in this area. Minority governments effectiveness can be best exemplified in Denmark. 28 of the 32 governments since 1945 have lacked a majority. Lack of majority support is not viewed negatively and is believed to have contributed to the economy being managed so effectively – the so called "Danish Miracle" (Green-pedersen, 2001).

### Legislative Majorities in Minority Government:

Research has proven that minority governments can work effectively in terms of legislative productivity (Thomson, et al., 2017). The need for majority of support in the legislature has created two distinctive types of minority governments. A minority government sees the governing party with the highest proportion of seats in parliament yet falls short of an overall majority. If the government

has no official support arrangements with opposition parties, and receives support on an ad hoc basis, with different parties supporting different bills depending on how closely they align with their own mandate, the minority government is classified as unsupported. The second form of minority government is those with outside support, appropriately named supported government. While such governments do not have a legislative majority on their own, they can consistently rely on the backing of another party or parties which have agreed to keeping it in office (Strøm, 1990). The literature stresses the importance of support arrangement between minority governments and parties outside of cabinet, and research demonstrates that most minority governments have such support arrangements (Herman & Pope, 1973).

Minority governments with support arrangements, referred to as majority governments “in disguise”, have also received criticism from scholars, though the lack of operational definition of what a support agreement has contributed to this disapproval (Strøm, 1990). One such arrangement seen in Irish politics was the “Tallaght Strategy”. This approach, which was adopted 1987 following three general elections in 18 months and appalling economic circumstances, saw Fine Gael agree to support the government’s attempts at economic reform from opposition (Adshead & Tonge, 2009). While the merits and flaws with this policy are still being discussed today, this strategy dealt exclusively with economic reform, thus falling short of a “confidence and supply” deal. Such an arrangement ensures a legislative majority as the support party or parties must back the government on key confidence votes from opposition. Steiner and Crepaz (2007) use the term ‘contract parliamentarism’ to describe such a post-election inter-party collaboration that takes place between governing and supporting parties in minority government situations. These collaborations see the government provide support parties with veto powers and allows them to influence policy from opposition benches. The results of the 2016 general election produced the most fragmented Dáil in the history of the state. As neither Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil secured a majority of seats in parliament and were unwilling to form a coalition with one and other or another party, the only option was to form a minority government. After 70 days of negotiations a government composing

of Fine Gael and several independents was formed. A deal was also forged with Fianna Fáil stating the party would support Fine Gael and Independents on key confidence votes from opposition. Such an arrangement has never been seen before in Irish politics. Fianna Fáil envisaged a confidence and supply arrangement that would allow the party influence government policy in the Dáil while undertaking to abstain on key confidence votes including the vote on the budget. This deal should allow Fianna Fáil to enact more election pledges than other parties in opposition, which is central to this research.

The enactment of such a confidence and supply deal would suggest that in the process of governments formation, political parties are not motivated solely by office (power) considerations, but also to a significant extent by opportunities for policy influence (Strøm, 1990). Regardless of Fine Gael's position as a minority government, they still need to win majorities for the specific bills they propose. This puts them in a weaker position compared to majority government, as they must make bargains with opposition parties, which could potentially dilute their party campaign commitments (Huber, 1996). The suspension of water charges was a significant concession for Fine Gael, which will be discussed further later in this piece.

Little (2017) notes that while Fianna Fáil received its second worst general election results since 1920 and didn't receive the largest share in votes, they still effectively won the election. He forms this conclusion by observing the party's comeback, more than doubling its representation in the Dáil, results which were made more impressive given Fine Gael's failure. This theory that Fianna Fáil effectively won the election carries even more weight given the fragile state of the newly formed government and Fianna Fáil's position to express votes of no confidence. Typically, opposition parties struggle to bring forward legislation. Given Fianna Fáil's unique position in government, a higher rate of pledge fulfilment should be observed compared to typical opposition parties. Evidence from Portugal suggests that opposition-support parties extract more policy benefits under minority governments (Moury & Fernandes, 2016). Research from Spain also acknowledges the benefits of

opposition parties to cooperate with governing parties. A study into the minority governments formed following the 1993 and 1996 election showed that the Catalanian nationalist party: Convergència i Unió (CiU), who supported government from opposition, made relative gains when compared to other opposition parties (Artés & Bustos, 2008). Similar collaborations, where small parties negotiate agreements with bigger parties in return for policy outcomes, are common in European parliamentary states (Michael, et al., 2006). These studies illustrate the benefits of opposition parties supporting minority government, providing a rationale for such agreements. The research conducted in this study will focus on this question in the Irish context.

### Median Mandate Theory:

What is important to note is Fianna Fáil's ability to bring forward legislation. Allowing the opposition to push forward legislation is one reason why minority governments are criticised for allowing a serious threat to democratic stability. Median mandate theory recognises that a legislative majority will rarely exist and looks for an acceptable substitute in other cases. It suggests we abandon our traditional idea that elections determine which party holds office, elections instead can be used to specify the policy preference of the popular majority. During elections citizens form policy preferences, while political parties develop manifestos. After becoming informed of parties' various pledges or promises they will enact if elected, voters make their choice. These votes are then translated into seats, which determines the composition of parliament. Following the most recent general election, out of the 158 seats in the Dáil 49 were occupied by Fine Gael TDs. Removing the 44 seats that Fianna Fáil won and the 23 independent seats, which will not be included given the difficulties classifying them ideologically, the remaining 42 were distributed as follows, Sinn Féin 23 seats, Labour 7 seats, Solidarity–People Before Profit 6 seats, The Green Party 2 seats and the Social Democrats receiving 2 seats (Gallagher, 2016). With Fine Gaels 49 seats to the right and left leaning parties accounting for 42 seats, Fianna Fáil can be viewed as the centre or an anchor point for majority opinion. Mandate theory suggests the electoral system should, and often does, ensure that this party also contains the median member of the legislature—determining of public policy (Budge

& McDonald, 2005). No legislative majority that is ideologically coherent can form without the median party. Having a government close to the median is essential to having policy making close to the median. This can be explained using Black's Median Voter Theorem. This theorem demonstrates that when preferences are single-peaked, the median voters most preferred outcome beats any alternative (Shepsle & Bonchek, 1997). Mandate theory accepts Fianna Fáil's ability to influence government policy as a legislative majority must include the median party, or secure its abstention, to get policy through. Given its support to government is essential it can bargain to have its own, electorally endorsed policy accepted by the government and, if not, defeat the alternative proposed (Budge & McDonald, 2005).

Specifying policy preferences throughout election campaigns is recognised as the traditional model of representation, citing how it focuses on representatives making promises to voters. This is known as promissory representation. It follows the classic principal-agent format and is seen as one of the most important ways in which citizens influence political outcomes through their representatives. Voting for a candidate based on election promises is core to democratic theory (Mansbridge, 2003). For this reason, a government's legislative success is one of three indicators used to compare minority government performance to a majority government (Field, 2009). Identifying such promises and studying the rate of their fulfilment is not a new field of research, and the findings from this research will be contributing to a growing body of work in the area. Previous research has focused on the impact power sharing has on pledge fulfilment. In a study of over 20,000 pledges made in 57 election campaigns in 12 countries found that single party government, with or without legislative majority, have the highest fulfilment rates. This study concluded that majority and minority governments have similar rates of pledge fulfilment, however, it does not examine an Irish minority government with an expressed support agreement with an opposition party (Thomson, et al., 2017). And while we should expect to see a higher rate of pledge fulfilment from Fianna Fáil than a typical opposition party, at the expense of Fine Gael, other factors must be considered such as the ideological proximity of the two parties.

## The Irish Case:

To answer the research question, we examine the current Irish government, a minority government with an expressed support agreement with the main party in opposition. Such an arrangement has never been seen before in Irish politics and when comparing results found in this project to research done elsewhere aspects unique to the Irish political system are worth considering. Firstly, traditionally the Irish party system has been free of cleavages, which are understood as deep rooted social divisions such as rural/urban, church/state and class (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Out of the four main political parties in Ireland, only the Labour Party is instantly recognizable by Western European norms. The two main political parties are divided by the stances they took following the conclusion of the civil war, which is blamed for the lack of clear “left-right” political spectrum in Irish politics. This lack of correlation between electoral behaviour and socio economic characterises, can be understood given the dominant position of Fianna Fáil and the remarkable breadth of its appeal. Since the early 1930s it has been the republics most successful party and has drawn huge support in every region from all aspects of society regardless of gender, class, age or occupation, making it one of the most successful political parties in Western Europe. While the same can be said for Fine Gael, there support historically has been somewhat lower that for Fianna Fáil (Busteed, 1990). The lack of political cleavages is important to note as the literature suggests that parties with close ideological links operate better than those with conflicting policies, when governing together (Matthieß, 2019). Voters can also vote for more than one party. This is permitted using the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system of proportional representation, which is designed to allow voters to rank candidates. The voter places a number one beside their first preference candidate, two beside their second, and so on. This results in candidates of the same party to compete against each other, and voters the opportunity to switch between parties (Adshead & Tonge, 2009). The use of the distinctive electoral system gives us insight into the distribution of party preference. While the most loyal supports of any party will vote solely for that one party – a practice which is commonly referred to as plumping, these account for only 15 per cent of voters in the 2016 general election. The remainder expressed

preference for other parties. While 23 per cent of voters plumped Fianna Fáil (the highest level among any party), 20 per cent of voters who gave them first preference went on to give lower preference votes to their great rival, Fine Gael. This compared to 19 per cent of voters who gave Fine Gael their first preference vote with Fianna Fáil being their next preference party. We would assume that, as twin poles of alternative government, either party would have been mutually exclusive in electoral terms. While Fine Gael and Labour, who have successfully formed several governments together, most recently after the 2011 general election, receive only 12 per cent of mutual support (Cunningham, 2018). The reasoning behind this is puzzling. While localism, fostered by the Single Transferable Vote (STV) method of proportional representation, has contributed to this conundrum, the close ideological proximity of the two parties must be considered. With the party system being broadly centrist and coalition government being a common feature of the Irish political landscape, parties enjoy an unusual degree of ideological flexibility (Marsh, et al., 2008). Fianna Fáil entered the 2016 election campaign as the opposition party, when in the previous four elections they campaigned while holding office. During this time their appeal was their ability to govern, rather than ideology. While in opposition Fianna Fáil managed to position itself on the centre left, and during their election campaign their priorities were public spending while Fine Gael emphasised tax cuts. Despite Fianna Fáil repositioning itself to the left of Fine Gael in the most recent election, both remain centrist parties (Puirseil, 2016). Given their ideological proximity we should see a high volume of mutual or similar election pledges fulfilled. While this is worthwhile noting, this research aims to see which party fulfilled more pledges made exclusively by one party.

Given the fragile state of the current government, having to consider the support of several independent TDs and the main party in opposition, we should expect a lower rate of pledge fulfilment from Fine Gael, in pledges which were exclusively made by that party. Previous research concludes minority governments carry out just as many pledges as their majority counterparts, however opposition parties are also more likely to fulfil election pledges during minority government (Moury & Fernandes, 2016). Having established Fianna Fáil's position as the median party, and their

role as a support party, we should expect them to have a strong influence on policy decisions, therefore fulfilling a higher rate of pledges than opposition parties. Finally given Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil are both centrist parties we should expect to see a high level of similar pledges fulfilled.

## Chapter Three – Methodology

### Research Approach:

This section examines the actions taken to investigate the research question. Once these actions have been taken, it's important to justify the process selected. Brannick & Roche (1997, p. xii) discussion on research methodology provides the direction for this project. It states, "good research is purposeful, its goals are clearly defined and significant, the methodological procedures are defensible, evidence is systematically analysed, statistical techniques are correctly followed and the objectivity of the research is clearly evident". The methodology applied to this piece largely focuses on identifying party's pledges and verifying if the pledge has been fulfilled or not. Identifying electoral pledges and testing their fulfilment is not a new area of study, however, the methodology used can vary greatly.

Pledges will be identified using the parties' manifestos, which were released while campaigning for the 2016 general election. Due to the huge volume of pledges made by each party in their respective manifestos, this research will only consider pledges made in the executive summary. Pledges featured in executive summary come from a wide range of policy areas from housing, health, economy and growth, education and welfare. So, while not all pledges are studied, the pledges listed in the summary can be viewed as top priority pledges from key policy areas.

While it is highly unlikely the average voter would read various political parties' manifesto in dept, they provide the most definitive statement of policies offered to voter. Several studies have focused research on pledges reported in the media, arguing most voters see parties' pledges through the media. However, pledges reported in the media, debates and interviews are often soundbites of what has been already outlined in parties' manifestos. And while some parties more reported pledges do not feature in the manifesto's executive summary, such as Sinn Féin's pledge to abolish the Special Criminal Court, generally top priority pledges from manifestos summary represent parties' top commitments to the electorate.

## Independents supporting Minority Governments:

While this paper aims to establish policy benefits support parties can extract from a minority government, it also examines the effect such an arrangement has on governments ability to fulfil election pledges. However, when implementing policy Fine Gael must also consider several independent TDs also propping up the minority government. It is important we acknowledge the role independents play. Weeks (2014), understands independents as a politician running for office not affiliated with a political party. Independents have had much greater success in Ireland than anywhere else in Europe because of the single transferable vote method of proportional representation and political culture. In the 2016 general election a record number of 23 independents candidates were elected, beating the previous record of 16 independents in 1927. These independents went on to play a critical role in government formation, as they were more than willing to negotiate agreements with minority governments. Three independents were appointed to cabinet and another three became ministers of state. While several independents support the current government, this research does not examine their election pledges. Independent candidates tend to focus more on local issues compared to national parties. Even independents which formed alliances with one and other prior to the 2016 election such as the “Independent Alliance or the “Rural Alliance”, do not release manifestos comparable to those released by national parties. Research focusing on independents supporting minority government, shows that they have little to no influence on the effectiveness of such administrations (Kefford & Weeks, 2019), however this research does not consider rate of pledge fulfilment. While it has been acknowledged that holding relevant ministerial portfolio is of little static significance in pledge fulfilment, later research could examine this question in the context of independent TDs receiving cabinet positions (Thomson, et al., 2017).

The research conducted as part of this project will therefore only include pledges made by the four main political parties currently sitting in Dáil Éireann, Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin and Labour. Fine Gael pledge are studied as they are the current governing party. By studying Sinn Féin and

Labour pledge we can see pledge fulfilment from typical opposition parties compared to Fianna Fáil, a support party. While there are several smaller parties in the Dáil such as Solidarity–People Before Profit, Social Democrats, Green Party and the newly formed Aontú, the four parties studied are the largest political parties, with other parties currently holding six seats or less.

### Sources and Limitations:

When testing pledge fulfilment, a vast array of sources were consulted. These include relevant legislation, ministerial decisions, Dáil reports and reports from various departments. Responses to parliamentary questions and newspapers articles were also consulted. To ensure this project was as up to date as possible pledge fulfilment was monitored over an extend period, guaranteeing all statistics provided were as accurate as possible.

It's also important that the methodology acknowledges any limitations in the research conducted in this project. We have previously acknowledged limitations in the quantity of pledges studied but also that only the four main political parties' pledges are studied. Another such limitation is that this research is being carried out during the lifetime of the current government. While the confidence and supply agreement was originally thought to only last three budgets, the deal was extended to ensure political stability during the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union. The decision to extend the deal will be discussed later in this piece, however it is important to considered when comparing the findings of this research to results from other governing periods.

## Chapter Four – Findings

### Pledges Included in Research:

Between the four main political parties, 97 policy commitments were made in the summary of their respective manifestos. These can be broken down as follows: Fine Gael (27), Fianna Fáil (46), Labour (13) and Sinn Féin (11). While these statements relate to goals hoped to be achieved throughout the lifetime of the next government, not all constitute as pledges. To complete successful research, we must adopt a strict definition on what counts as a pledge. In line with previous studies in this area, a pledge is defined as a statement in a party's manifesto which implies the desire to carry out specific policy outcomes where an objective estimate can be made as to whether or not the action was indeed taken or the outcome produced (Royed, 1996). Examples of pledges include, "the establishment of a new €4billion "Future Jobs Investment Fund"" and "create a new National Mental Health Authority". By following this definition several pledges were excluded from this study. For example, Fine Gaels promise for, "A significant increase in investment in our health services" or Fianna Fáil's commitment to "enhance the quality and sustainability of the childcare sector". While improvements have been made to enhance the quality of childcare provision and spending for the Department of Health has increased during the lifetime of the 32nd Dáil, nowhere throughout either manifesto are exact policy outcomes specified. For this reason, such pledges are excluded from this study. Each manifesto contained such vague commitments as the two mentioned above. Others, although clearly defined such as Fine Gaels pledge to see "70,000 Irish emigrants returning home to work" or Labours commitment to create a "1,100 jobs a week", were also excluded from this research due to the lack of available data. By excluding commitments which are too vague to objectively test and pledges which are impossible to measure, a total of 85 pledges remain. These were broken down as follows: Fine Gael (24), Fianna Fáil (45), Labour (9) and Sinn Féin (7).

Once pledges are identified the next step involves testing fulfilment. As is standard in research involving pledge fulfilment, pledges can be categories into three separate categories depending on

their level of fulfilment. These categories encompass pledges that are fully fulfilled, not fulfilled and partially fulfilled. A pledge is considered partially fulfilled if there has been positive change in that direction, but total delivery has not been observed. Including pledges that are partially fulfilled is perhaps the most important category to mention. Rome wasn't built in a day and like that many policies are not implemented overnight. Many pledges seen in parties' manifestos give clear dates as to when these goals are to be achieved, usually the end of the government term. Pledges such as "deliver 150,000 new homes by 2021" seen in Fianna Fáil's manifesto or Fine Gael's commitments to "increases in the minimum wage to €10.50 over the 5-year period" will all fall into the category of partially fulfilled, as actions were taken to reach the proposed goal. Efforts have been made to achieve these proposed goals, however, these pledges are not yet fully fulfilled. The inclusion of the partially fulfilled category is particularly important in this research as it is being conducted midway through the government's lifetime. Only if a pledge corresponds to our definition outlined above will it be considered fully fulfilled. It is also important to note, that while we acknowledge some pledges are viewed as being more important than others, with certain pledges receiving more media attention, as we are only studying top priority pledges in each manifesto, therefore each pledge will be treated equally.

Of the 85 pledges studied, 25 were fully fulfilled. A further 28 were partially fulfilled while no action was taken on 32 pledges. Breakdown of results split by party can be seen in the below table.

**Table 1: Pledge Fulfilment Broken Down by Party**

Party	No Action	Partially Fulfilled	Fully Fulfilled	Total
Fine Gael	5 (20.8%)	12 (50%)	7 (29.2%)	24 (100%)
Fianna Fáil	19 (42.2%)	11 (24.5%)	15 (33.3%)	45 (100%)
Sinn Féin	3 (42.8%)	2 (28.6%)	2 (28.6%)	7 (100%)
Labour	5 (55.6%)	3 (33.3%)	1 (11.1%)	9 (100%)

## Explaining Pledge Fulfilment:

Leaving Sinn Féin and Labours pledges aside (as they are typical opposition parties with relatively little control over policy direction), if we look at Fianna Fáil's pledge fulfilment rate when compared to Fine Gaels. We have spoken at length of the confidence and supply agreement and how unlike typical opposition parties this arrangement has given Fianna Fáil the unique opportunity to influence government from the opposition benches. Of Fianna Fáil's 45 pledges studies 33.3% of them have been fully fulfilled. This is marginally better than Fine Gael who have fully fulfilled 29.2% of their pledges. Fine Gael however have achieved a greater number of partially fulfilled pledges and have significantly less pledges in which no action has been taken. If we examine pledges for the two party being at least partially fulfilled Fine Gael have done considerably better with 79.2% of pledges at least partially fulfilled, compared to 57.8% of Fianna Fáil's pledges. This suggests that while Fianna Fáil have benefited from the confidence and supply agreement, their gains have been minimal, especially if you consider their rate of at least partially fulfilled pledges compared to Sinn Féin.

Looking at the above table it is surprising to see Sinn Féin, an opposition party fully fulfil 28.6% of pledges, only slightly behind Fine Gaels 29.2%. At face value these numbers appear baffling.

While the small number of Sinn Féin pledges contribute to the high fulfilment rate another explanation is the number of commitments made which were in consensus with other parties. Table 2 studies the relationship between pledges made in one party's manifesto which agree with pledges made in other political parties' manifesto. Again, we will only study the four main political parties' top priority pledges. Each party promised voters reform of the widely unpopular Universal Social Charge (USC) in their manifesto. However, the exact reform measures differed, for example Fine Gaels commitments to "abolish of the USC over a 5-year period" compared to Fianna Fáil's pledge to "reduce and eliminate USC for low and middle-income workers up to €80,000". For this research pledges will be in consensus if the fulfilment of one pledge leads to the fulfilment, or at least partial fulfilment of another pledge. While pledges are not identical they are broadly similar, advocating policy changes in the same direction.

**Table 2: Relationship Between Pledges Made by Different Parties in There 2016**

**Manifestos:**

	Fine Gael	Fianna Fáil	Sinn Féin	Labour
In consensus with...				
Fine Gael		32.6%	27.3%	38.5%
Fianna Fáil	55.6%		45.5%	53.8%
Sinn Féin	14.8%	8.7%		30.8%
Labour	18.5%	13%	36.4%	
Program for Government	90%	80%	40%	80%

From the above table we can see that Fine Gael have more pledges in consensus with their previous coalition partner Labour than any other party. A close second is Fianna Fáil. Similarly, Fianna Fáil have more pledges in agreement with Fine Gael than any other party. Noting agreements between parties' pledges is important as it helps explain why some pledges are fulfilled while others are not. Looking at Sinn Féin while it appears they have achieved a lot during the lifetime of this government, their two fulfilled pledges, to "abolish water charges" and creating "250,000 extra jobs" are in consensus with pledges made by other parties. Of interest is the pledge to "abolish water charges". This is directly related to Fianna Fáil's commitment "to abolish Irish Water and water charges". While we cannot say for certain if this pledge would have been fulfilled had Fianna Fáil not gained such an influential role following government formation, as we would merely be examining the counterfactual, it is unlikely that they a Fine Gael led government would abolish water charges having fought so hard for its existence only a few years previously. This would suggest that Sinn Féin had no impact on this pledge being fulfilled, they merely benefited from having similar commitments

in their manifesto to Fianna Fáil. Thomson (2001) identifies three types of consensus. Typically pledges which are categories as being in consensus between governing parties and between governing and opposition parties experience greater likelihood of fulfilment than those which are in consensus between opposition parties. This theory clearly doesn't apply to a minority government with support arrangements, as proven by the suspension of water charges. This confirms Christiansen and Pedersen's theory that minority governments pay support parties with concessions (Christiansen & Pedersen, 2014).

The relationship between various pledges being in consensus with other parties is a key factor in their fulfilment. Agreements among parties regarding policy commitments increases the likelihood of pledge fulfilment, particularly for parties in opposition. This research therefore concludes that Sinn Féin and Labour pledges are only fulfilled or partially fulfilled if they agree with pledges made by Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael. There is one exception, Labour's pledge to "hold a referendum to repeal the 8th amendment". While none of the other three main political parties consider this a top priority pledge, it also featured in Sinn Féin's manifesto, however as it was absent from their manifesto summary, and therefore not included in this research. Following the establishment of a Citizens Assembly a referendum was held. Fine Gael, Labour, Sinn Féin and several smaller political groupings advocated a "yes" vote. Support was somewhat split in Fianna Fáil. Following a landslide referendum victory, this is something no doubt the current government advocate as one of their greatest achievements during their time in office, despite it not featuring in their manifesto. The fulfilment of this one Labour pledge gives them a fulfilment rate of 25% for pledges made exclusively by one party. As seen in the table below, Fine Gael have achieved the highest rate using this measure, as expected from the governing party. Fianna Fáil have significantly outperformed opposition parties. This proves Fianna Fáil have been able to extract a considerable amount of policy benefits as a support party.

**Table 3: Pledge Fulfilment Broken Down by Party Only Including Pledges Made Exclusively by One Party:**

	No Action	Partially Fulfilled	Fully Fulfilled	Total
Fine Gael	3 (37.5%)	1 (12.5%)	4 (50%)	8 (100%)
Fianna Fáil	11 (55%)	3 (15%)	6 (30%)	20 (100%)
Sinn Féin	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (0%)
Labour	3 (75%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)	4 (100%)

All promises made in Fine Gaels manifesto which agree with Fianna Fáil’s pledges, have been fully, or at least partially fulfilled. These include reducing Capital Gains Tax for entrepreneurs to ten per cent, creating extra jobs, building extra houses and reform of the USC, as discussed above. There is no example of a single pledge in agreement with both parties that no action was taken. It can be assumed once the two parties entered this unique arrangement these pledges became top priority as they represented common ground between the two parties.

While several pledges were found being in consensus, this means most pledges made by both parties were not in agreement with one and other. Yet, no examples were found that a pledge was in direct opposition to pledges made by other parties. Take the example of Fianna Fáil’s commitment to “ban zero-hour contracts”. This pledge was fully fulfilled when on the 25th of December 2018, the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2017 was signed into law, which outlaws the use of zero-hour contracts. Fine Gaels manifesto summary makes no reference to banning zero-hour contracts, nor does it advocate their existence. Future in their manifesto they state they will consider the University of Limerick (UL) Report on Zero Hour Contracts. This report which was commissioned by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in November 2014 with the goal of enabling Ministers to make evidence-based policy recommendations to Government considered necessary on foot of the study. This report makes several recommendations on dealing with employees on so

called “If and When” contracts, however it does not explicitly state zero-hour contracts should be banned (O’Sullivan, et al., 2015). Another pledge by Fianna Fáil was to “allow cities to hold plebiscites on directly elected mayors”. The government have agreed in principle to the holding of plebiscites on directly elected mayors with executive functions for Cork City Council, Limerick City and County Council, Waterford City and County Council, and Galway City Council and Galway County Council (in anticipation of a full merger of those two local authorities in 2021) on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May 2019. The issue of directly elected mayors for Dublin is to be referred to a Citizens Assembly for more detailed consideration. This is one of several initiatives outlined in the Fianna Fáil manifesto to give local authorities more control. Sub National Government reform featured significantly less throughout the Fine Gael manifesto, and throughout the entire manifesto there was no reference to directly elected mayors. The two above mentioned pledges on zero-hour contracts and directly elected mayors illustrate two examples of pledges that are neither in consensus, nor in agreement. While we cannot say for certain if the confidence and supply agreement influenced either of these government decisions, the enactment of such pledges despite not appearing in the Fine Gael manifesto would suggest these policies were negotiated as part of the current government arrangement.

The lack of pledges which are in direct disagreement with other pledges is somewhat puzzling. We would assume that rival political parties would advocate different policy directions. Parties entering the election campaign from the opposition would support change to the status quo, while governing parties should defend policies enacted to this point and what will be done in the future. Costello & Thomson (2008) also observed that voter choice is constrained, which makes it difficult to identify clear differences between parties and policies. This phenomenon has been named the “saliency theory of party competition” by political scientists. It suggests that parties compete with one and other indirectly, mainly by the extent in which they focus on various policy issues relative to each other. This is achieved by emphasising themes in which they believe they have an advantage over their opponents, rather than taking a direct stance against each other. And while this theory has

been disputed there is a strong agreement for it in the Irish case. The centrist nature of Irish politics and coalition governments being so common has fostered an environment where parties tend not to directly disagree with one and other. Instead, during the 2016 election campaign Fine Gael presented themselves as fiscally responsible, having returned the economy to growth, following the recession which Fianna Fáil had overseen during their last period in office. Fianna Fáil's narrative concentrated on the inequality of the austerity measures imposed by the government and that many had yet to feel the benefits of the recovery. While the "saliency theory of party competition" can be viewed as a weakness in our democratic system for not giving voters a clear picture of all policies, here voters should consult leaders debated where politicians can respond to policy commitments made in their parties' respective manifestos.

The relationship between pledges made by different parties is possibly the most important factor in determining whether a pledge is fulfilled or not, however several other factors also influence fulfilment. Status quo pledges are much easier to fulfil, as there is no real implementation, they simply aim to maintain the existing state of affairs. Status quo pledges such as Fine Gael's aim of "protecting our 12.5% rate of corporation tax" or Fianna Fáil's commitment to "protect and develop the free travel scheme" are significantly easier to fulfil than Sinn Féin's pledges to "unite Ireland". The exception to this is of course Sinn Féin and Fianna Fáil's pledge to abolish water charges, which we examined earlier. The two above examples are the only status quo pledges in the summary of the four main political parties' manifestos. While some researchers choose to exclude such pledges from studies, they were included in this research given the limited amount of pledges to feature in manifesto summaries. Previous research also highlights difference in pledge fulfilment depending on whether the party held the relevant ministerial post. Originally three independent ministers held ministerial posts. This could have a negative impact on the rate of pledge fulfilment, however, we have already outlined why independent TDs' pledges have been excluded in this research. Other pledges are fulfilled not through government policy but external factors such as economic conditions. Each party promised to create jobs in their manifestos, this was significantly easier to

achieve during the lifetime of the current government then the previous one as the economic conditions varied considerably (Costello & Thomson, 2016).

The final factor that influences pledge fulfilment examined is if the pledge features on the program for government. The current program for government, “A Programme for A Partnership Government”, can be viewed as the highest-level strategic document of the Executive, as it outlines what the government hope to achieve during its time in office and was implemented with Fine Gael working with several independent TDs. In keeping with the rest of the research conducted in this study, we will only examine the summary of the program for government. The executive summary spans six pages consisting of 1,670 words, however, like research into the fulfilment of manifesto pledges, we apply a strict definition. The summary focuses on themes such as advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights. Again, we exclude vague commitments such as “deliver a strong economy and a fair society”. The summary of the program contains ten testable pledges, six of which have been fully fulfilled and another three which have been partially fulfilled. The pledge “to reduce the percentage of patients waiting longer than six hours in emergency department from 32% currently to less the 7% by 2021” has remained unfulfilled. Despite significant investment into the Department of Health, the National Patient Experience Survey 2018 highlighted long wait times as an ongoing issue in hospitals across the country. It estimated 69% of people waited for more the six hours in emergency departments (HSE, 2018). While regression in this area is disappointing, this being the only pledge which remains unfulfilled, which confirms that inclusion of a pledge into the program for government increased the likelihood of pledge fulfilment, or at least partial fulfilment. Nine of these pledges examined also feature in the Fine Gael manifesto. The commitment to “support a new Cabinet level Minister and Department of Regional Development and Rural Affairs” does not feature anywhere throughout the manifesto. Nor does it feature in Fianna Fáils manifesto. This commitment may have been made to appease members of the Rural Alliance who went on to support government. This again confirms

one of minority governments greatest weakness of having other parties, or in this case independents, influence policy.

**Table 4: Pledges in the Program for Government:**

Pledges	10 (100%)
No Action	1 (10%)
Partially Fulfilled	3 (30%)
Fully Fulfilled	6 (60%)

The focus of this chapter has been on the identification and testing fulfilment of election pledges made in the Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, Labour and Sinn Féin manifestos, published prior to the 2016 general election. These findings were then discussed in detail. This research concludes that as a support party Fianna Fáil have extracted significantly more policy benefits under the current administration than opposition parties. They have also outperformed Fine Gael in terms of fully fulfilled pledge, however, the governing party achieve the greatest number of at least partially fulfilled pledges. Commitments made by both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil are more likely to be fulfilled, or at least partially fulfilled, than those made by just one party, with Fine Gael achieving the highest rate of fulfilment of pledges made exclusively made by one party. Labour and Sinn Féin pledges are usually only fulfilled if they are in agreement with one of the other two parties.

While Fine Gaels rate of fully fulfilled pledges is somewhat lower then what we would expect from a governing party, considering their high rate of partially fulfilled pledges produces an at least partial fulfilled rate of 79.2%, much higher than any opposition party, Fianna Fáil included. This discredits theory surrounding minority government's inability to implement policy, however the high rate of partially fulfilled pledge leads us to reflect on the fragile state of the current government. While high rates of partially fulfilled pledges are expected given the research is being conducted midway through the governments lifetime, depending on support from several independents and the main

opposition party has no doubt diluted campaign commitments. And while no actions taken on 20.8% of Fine Gael top priority pledges, this number is considerably higher for non-government parties.

It is unlikely that if the whole manifesto from each party was studied that these results would go unchanged. Many pledges which are made later in the party manifestos have been fulfilled but these are not considered in this study. However, this research can conclude that the confidence and supply agreement has had a positive impact on the rate of Fianna Fáil pledges fulfilled when compared to typical opposition parties, however, as governing party Fine Gael have still achieved the most policy benefits during the current administration.

## Chapter Five – Comparing Findings to Previous Research

The previous chapter analysed the fulfilment of election pledges of the current government, its support party and opposition parties. It confirmed that as a support Fianna Fáil extracted more policy benefits than other opposition parties. This chapter aims to compare these findings to previous research to see what effect minority government status has had on the rate of pledge fulfilment. Opposition parties pledge fulfilment will also be studied and compared to results from this project. The literature suggests that minority governments, when compared to majority governments, are not at a disadvantage in translating their election pledges into policy output (Thomson, et al., 2017), however, this theory has never been tested on a minority government in Ireland which relies on a support party. This chapter will also draw on research conducted elsewhere in Europe to examine if Fianna Fáil's gains were comparable to other support parties propping up minority governments.

### Fine Gael Labour Coalition 2011 -2016:

The first set of results we will compare the findings of this project too, are the rate of pledge fulfilment seen by the Fine Gael Labour coalition which served from 2011 to 2016. Their rate of pledge fulfilment can be seen in the table below.

**Table 5: Pledges Fulfilment Broken down by party: 2011 – 2016 Fine Gael Labour Coalition:**

	Fine Gael	Labour	Fianna Fáil	Sinn Féin
Fully Fulfilled	43%	43%	49%	19%
Partially Fulfilled	17%	19%	18%	19%
No Action	40%	38%	33%	63%

Fine Gaels rate of fully fulfilled pledges have been reduced under the current government, while the rate of partially fulfilled pledges have significantly increased. The high percentage of partially fulfilled

pledges has been attributed to the fragile state of the current Dáil and the support arrangement with the main opposition party. It is also important to note that under the current administration there has been a significant reduction in the number of pledges which no action has been taken. This is joint with the fact that with an at least partial fulfilment rate of 79.2% under the current administration, compared to its predecessors 60%, suggest single party minority governments are more effective than majority coalitions at pledge fulfilment. This is in line with previous research (Thomson, et al., 2017). Interestingly, Fianna Fáil achieved the highest rate of pledge fulfilment during the lifetime of the 2011-2016 government with an at least partially fulfilled rate 67%, higher than either governing party. Despite not being a governing party following two consecutive elections, Fianna Fáil have led the way in terms of fully fulfilled pledges. Previously this was explained as many Fianna Fáil pledges from their 2011 election manifesto featured in the National Recovery Plan – a document released while in government aimed to meet the conditions set by the European Union (EU) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) to address the huge gap in public finance (Costello, et al., 2016). This explanation is no longer relevant as Ireland have exited the bailout. Supporting a minority government explains these advances under the current administration.

#### Previous Minority Governments in Ireland:

There have been four minority governments in Ireland from 1977 to 2016 which our results can be compared to. Results discussed are presented in the table below (Costello & Thomson, 2016). While direct comparison can be fraught with difficulty given numerous variables that exist such as length of governing period, power sharing arrangements and number of seats held by the government, looking at previous research allows us to judge what effect the confidence and supply agreement has had on pledge fulfilment. The first government we will examine is the 1981 to 1982, Fine Gael Labour coalition that lasted only nine months. Only 18% of pledges made by governing parties were at least partially fulfilled compared to 28% of opposition parties. The next election in 1982 also produced a minority government this time led by Fianna Fáil. Using a strict definition only two

pledges were identified from the Fianna Fáil manifesto, both of which were fully fulfilled. During this time opposition parties partially fulfilled 55% of campaign commitments. Fianna Fáil have only achieved a slightly higher rate of at least partially fulfilled pledges during the current administration at 57.8%, which is a surprising development. This suggests that as a support party Fianna Fáil's advances in pledge fulfilment has been lower than expected. The two above case studies highlight minority governments greatest weaknesses: instability and allowing opposition parties to implement policy.

The 1987 – 1989 government is perhaps the most relevant to compare the findings of this project too. It was also a single party minority government formed by Fianna Fáil with the support of Fine Gael under the Tallaght Strategy. As governing party Fianna Fáil at least partially fulfilled 60% of pledges significantly higher than opposition parties 41%. Each party previously studied in this project has a higher rate of at least partially fulfilled pledges than opposition parties during the 1987 – 1989 government. Only Fine Gael produced a higher rate of fulfilment than the governing party. This reiterates previous research that forming minority governments does not curtail the possibility of delivering more pledges. This also suggests that as a support party Fianna Fáil's legislative gains have been minimal.

Before the 2016 general election a minority government hadn't occurred in Ireland since the Fianna Fáil Progressive Democrats 1997 - 2002 minority coalition. This government debunks the theory that minority governments are inherently unstable as it produced the second longest Dáil in history lasting 1,806 days. During their five years in office 68% of pledges were at least partially fulfilled, below what has been achieved by the current government, despite the shorter time frame. This suggests that single party minority governments with support arrangements are more effective than coalition minority governments. And while the Fianna Fáil Progressive Democrats coalition did extract more than opposition parties, these results were minimal with opposition parties averaging a 41% of fully fulfilled pledges.

**Table 6: Percentage of At Least Partially Fulfilled Pledges from Previous Minority Governments in Ireland and Opposition Parties.**

Government	Governing Party/Parties	Opposition Parties
1981 – 1982 (Fine Gael/ Labour)	18%	28%
1982 (Fianna Fáil)	100%	55%
1987 – 1989 (Fianna Fáil)	60%	41%
1997 – 2002 (Fianna Fáil/Progressive Democrats)	68%	60%

### Support Parties Throughout Europe:

Earlier we discussed studies from Portugal and Spain which concluded that under minority governments opposition parties have greater leverage to extract policy benefits. Taking a closer look at the Spanish case while propping up the government the CiUs average rate of pledge fulfilment increased from 36.5% to 54.74%. Despite achieving more than other opposition parties Fianna Fáil have gained substantially less than CiUs in similar circumstances (Artés & Bustos, 2008). Evidence from Portugal suggests that the ideological proximity of opposition parties can greatly alter their capacity to extract policy benefits when in minority governments situations (Moury & Fernandes, 2016). This would suggest that even if there was not an expressed confidence and supply deal between the two parties, we would still see Fianna Fáil achieve more policy benefits than other opposition parties as they are closer ideologically to any other party in opposition. While this theory carries some weight as we seen above in our findings several pledges made by Fianna Fáil were fulfilled despite not featuring in the Fine Gael manifesto.

While it is difficult to explain more precisely the variation found between parties in different contexts the findings from this project has formed several conclusions. Firstly, while we have seen approximately 14% less pledges fully fulfilled by Fine Gael during this governing period compared to

their last stint in office with Labour, with a far greater number of pledges partially fulfilled. It is easy to assume that minority government status has negatively impacted the rate of pledge fulfilment, however, the high rate of partially fulfilled pledges seen in the current government compared to the 2011 – 2016 administration suggests constraints in fully fulfilling these pledges such as diluting campaign promises to appease Fianna Fáil or independents support parties has effected the rate of pledge fulfilment more than being a minority government. By examining pledge fulfilment of the 1997-2002 minority coalition we also conclude that minority governments with support arrangements with parties outside of government have greater success than coalition minority governments. We also note that while Fianna Fáil have made legislative gains under the current administration, these have been much lower than other support parties elsewhere in Europe, despite both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil being centrist parties. While this appears surprising its worth mentioning that pledge fulfilment rates in Ireland tend to be lower than levels seen in Europe and elsewhere (Thomson, et al., 2017).

## Chapter Six – Conclusion

While minority governments have proven they can be equally successful in enacting election pledges when compared to their majority counterparts, the aim of this research was to establish if opposition parties that go on to support minority government extract more policy benefits than typical opposition parties. This question was answered by examining the current Irish governments levels of pledge fulfilment, its support party and the two largest opposition parties. By examining the four party's top priority pledges from their respective manifestos, this research has found Fianna Fáil has extracted a policy benefits from support a minority government. Sinn Féin and Labour pledges are typically only fulfilled if they are in consensus with Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil pledges.

If implementing their electoral program was Fianna Fáil's goal entering the confidence and supply agreement, this has been achieved, however their gains are lower than expected, especially when compared to other support parties throughout Europe. This is surprising given the ideological proximity of the two parties. The findings of this research also verifies that minority governments are just as likely to fulfil election pledges as majority government, however Fine Gael have achieved this through a far greater percentage of partially fulfilled pledges, with their support party achieving a greater number fulfilled pledges. While the government have been enacting election pledges relying on a support party and independent TDs has diluted campaign commitments.

Field (2009) uses three indications to gauge government success, when comparing minority government performance to a majority government. These are government duration, legislative success and the governing party's electoral success in the subsequent election. This paper has found that from a legislative perspective this government has been more successful than its predecessor, a majority coalition, in terms of at least partially fulfilled pledges. And while it is unlikely to serve its full term in office, the government has lasted much longer than expected, although Brexit is somewhat responsible for this. The final indicator, success in subsequent election, cannot yet be

determined. While opinion polls consistently show Fine Gael as the country's most popular party, local and European elections in May 2019 will be the first indication of what the electorate really think of the incumbent government's performance.

While the main body of this paper has focuses on the fulfilment of election pledges is does raise several other questions which require future research. The literature acknowledges the fragmentation of the Irish political system post crisis, particularly with the rise of independent TDs and the radical left. And while Ireland hasn't experienced the rise of far-right populist parties like elsewhere in Europe, Irish politics has been significantly destabilised by the financial crisis. While it is well beyond the scope of this research party to speculate the future of the Irish political system, the findings of this project will raise question if future cooperation between these two parties is enviable. This project also emphasized the role the role independent TDs play in government formation, however excluded them from research for reasons previously outlined. Independent TDs receiving ministerial portfolios is unique to the Irish case, nonetheless, it would be interesting to study pledge fulfilment rate broken down by department and investigate performance between departments held by government ministers compared to those held by independents. A study into allegations into quid pro quo arrangements would also be worthwhile.

Aside from rate of pledge fulfilment other issues have emerged during the lifetime of the current government. The fragile state of the newly elected Dáil was highlighted on serval occasions. The appointment of Máire Whelan to the Court of Appeal almost brought down the government and highlighted the cracks in the confidence and supply agreement. Likewise, the country stood on the brink of a general election in November 2017 when evidence from the Disclosers Tribunal led to Micheál Martin threatened a vote of no confidence in Tánaiste Francis Fitzgerald. Ultimately Fitzgerald resigned in national interest. "A Programme for A Partnership Government" emphasises that, "The 32nd Dáil is diverse but need not be divided", yet despite the government's best efforts, intergovernmental relationships were put to the test on numerous occasions. October 2018 saw

independent TD and Minister for Communications, Denis Naughtens inappropriate dining habits put the National Broadband Plan in jeopardy. Mr. Naughten swiftly resigned, vowing to continue to support the government on a case by case bases. Frequent gaffe by minister Shane Ross has also cause rifts within the cabinet. Despite all this, battered and bruised the government lives on.

When the confidence and supply agreement was first agreed to very few seen envisaged it lasting the agreed period of three years. As the deadline for the three years approached, the summer brought continuous speculation of what the future would hold. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil decided that until uncertainty surrounding the UKs departure from the European Union was resolved, the government should not be brought down. The decision to extend the agreement was met with mixed feelings. While many felt the decision was made in the national interest, several Fianna Fáil TDs expressed discontent with the extension of the agreement. Backbencher John McGuinness was particularly vocal with his discomfort of the renewal of what he dubbed the cowardice and surrender agreement. He described the deal as putting Fianna Fáil in a straightjacket, adding that the party can't act as a true opposition party. The last party leader who vowed to support the government from opposition in the national interest was Alan Dukes under the Tallaght Strategy. He was ousted as party leader soon after without ever becoming Taoiseach. Recent opinion polls show Micheál Martin could suffer the same fate. While scandals in health and housing touching on increasing sensitive fault lines in the agreement with Fianna Fáil, it's unlikely an election will be called until Brexit is resolved. And while the future of Irish politics remains unknown, perhaps the greatest success of the current government is Taoiseach Leo Varadkar being named one of Time Magazines most influential people of 2018, despite not being able to influence his own government without the support of the main opposition party.

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