

Campaigning in Poetry, Governing in Prose

Pre- and Post-Election Effects of Election Pledge Rhetoric

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Lindgren, E. (2017). Changing Policy with Words: How Persuasive Words in Election Pledges Influence Voters' Beliefs about Policies. Manuscript accepted for publication in *Mass Communication and Society* (30 October 2017).

Lindgren, E. & Naurin, E. (2017). Election Pledge Rhetoric: Selling Policy with Words. *International Journal of Communication*, 11, 22.

Lindgren, E. (2017). Making a Rod for Their Own Back? Post-Election Effects of Pre-Election Rhetoric. Unpublished manuscript.

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Abstract

In election campaigns, parties often use value-laden words such as freedom and competitiveness, to reach out to voters with their election pledges and policy proposals. While it is well known that the presence of such words in election pledges can impact voters' support for policy proposals, we know less about what makes these words effective. In her dissertation, Elina Lindgren presents and tests a linguistic explanation of how value-laden words can affect, not only the extent to which voters appreciate a policy proposal, but also how they perceive the actual content of the policy. Through a series of survey experiments, she shows that the presence of words such as freedom and competitiveness in election pledges can elicit substantive beliefs about policies that go beyond the actual content of the proposals outlined in the pledges. Through a series of survey experiments, she shows that the presence of words such as freedom and competitiveness in election pledges can elicit substantive beliefs about policies that go beyond the actual content of the proposals outlined in the pledges. This, in turn, may lead to (mis)interpretations of how the policies and their future outcomes align with the voters' policy preferences. Lindgren also shows how these interpretations can make it more difficult for politicians to meet the voters' expectations of the election pledges post-election, and how they may lead to perceptions that the pledges have been broken. These results raise questions about the well-being of a central part of a representative democracy. If value-laden words in election pledges can create expectations of policy proposals beyond what is actually being pledged, it may become more difficult for voters to predict which parties will best represent their policy preferences – something that is crucial to a representative democracy.

Key Words: persuasive words, election pledges, election pledge rhetoric, changing policy beliefs, policy support, evaluation of policy outcomes, perceived fulfilment of election pledges