

# WHO BELIEVES THAT POLITICAL PARTIES WILL KEEP THEIR WORD?

NIELS MARKWAT

## Abstract

Studies have shown that Swedish governments perform very well when it comes to fulfilling their promises. However, like in many other countries, a majority of the Swedish people believe that politicians do not even try to keep their word. Recent findings indicate that voters use information about broken promises to punish parties. How voters evaluate the performance of their government is likely contingent upon their expectations of this performance. In this context, an important hypothesis is that voters will punish their governments when the experienced performance is worse than expected – while they reward them when the experienced performance exceeds prior expectations. Therefore, it is interesting to explore the expectations of election promise fulfilment that exist in Swedish society, who holds which expectations, and what the sources of these varying expectations might be. This chapter documents the beginning of that exploration, concluding that the specific fulfilment expectations in Swedish society, while generally low, are more optimistic than the general notion that parties do not care about keeping their word. Also, indications are found that fulfilment expectations are connected to levels of political trust, and individuals' existing political preferences.

Many research areas across scientific disciplines are interested in studying how individuals evaluate goods and services. A dominant theory in explaining the psychology of evaluation in these research areas is the expectation confirmation theory (ECT) (Oliver, 1977; 1980), which poses that an individual's perceptions are changed by a lack of congruence between an individual's prior performance expectations, and the actual performance that that individual experienced. More specifically, if an individual has low performance expectations, and experiences good performance, that individual will provide a more positive evaluation. In turn, if an individual has high expectations, and experiences poor performance, that individual will provide a more negative evaluation.

After the theory was popularised by Richard L. Oliver, psychologist and consumer behaviourist, it has been tested extensively in the field of consumer research, where it functions as an important explanation of how consumers perceive and evaluate the goods they consume – as well as their suppliers (cf. Seyd, 2015). The theory has shown similar explanatory value in studies on evaluations of both public and private goods and services. In public administration research, the theory has proven

useful to explain how citizens evaluate the services provided to them by their administrations. However, in political science research, the ECT has been largely absent from the research areas studying how voters evaluate their government, and its performance. Nevertheless, a small number of studies have underlined the importance of voters' expectations for the way in which they evaluate their government's performance, and administer electoral rewards and punishments for good and poor performance (e.g., Kimball and Paterson, 1997; Malhotra and Margalit, 2014; Waterman et al., 2014).

One area of research in which the ECT may be of explanatory value is constituted by the small, but growing literature on the role of election promise fulfilment in accountability processes. Influential theories underline the important role of election promises in representative democracy. Election promises are a way for politicians to share their policy plans with the electorate. Voters can then use these varying policy plans to decide which party they want to vote for. Since research has shown that political parties generally take their promises to the voters very seriously (cf. Thomson et al., 2017), election promises provide a reliable prediction of how parties will behave once elected into office. Also, the pre-electoral commitments that parties make can function as shortcuts for voters to assess the credibility of the elected parties – the degree to which they keep their word and how well they perform on the mandate they received from the electorate.

Empirically, few studies have examined the influence of broken and fulfilled election promises on voter attitudes toward their government (cf. Naurin et al., 2017). However, this literature is growing, and in line with results from other studies on negativity biases (cf. Soroka, 2014) and electoral rewards and punishments (e.g., Dassonneville and Lewis-Beck, 2014), an important finding is that while voters punish their government for breaking its election promises, they do not seem to reward it for fulfilling them (Naurin et al., 2017). Such manifestations of asymmetric accountability provide an explanation for the 'cost of ruling', the seemingly inevitable tendency for governments to lose support over their time in office.

Departing from the findings of studies on expectation confirmation theory in other disciplines, the hypothesis of a currently ongoing study on this topic is that voters' responses to information about fulfilled and broken election promises are conditional upon the voters' prior expectations of fulfilment. For numerous reasons, voters can have varying perceptions of the extent to which the fulfilment of an election promise is realistic. For example, in times of economic hardship, it is to be expected that voters understand that budget goals may be harder to meet or promised tax cuts may be harder to justify. Similarly, voters may understand that minority or coalition governments may have a harder time to obtain a parliamentary majority for their proposals, and may thus have lower fulfilment expectations of their promises. Regardless of why the expectations may vary from pledge to pledge, from party to party, and/or from voter to voter, the logic of the argument

remains that if voters anticipate that a promise may be broken, they will likely be less disappointed upon learning that the promise has been broken. Reversely, voters convinced that a party will deliver on a certain promise will likely be very disappointed when confronted with the reality of a broken election promise.

It is known that, like the citizens of other countries, the Swedish people have a low esteem of the extent to which the Swedish political parties deliver on their promises (Markwat, 2015; Naurin, 2011), despite the consistently very high proportion of election promises fulfilled by subsequent Swedish governments (Naurin, 2014). Consequently, it can be assumed that in general, the Swedish voters have low prospective expectations of the fulfilment of election promises. However, discrepancies may exist between these general expectations, and more specific expectations of the fulfilment of individual promises. A similar pattern is observed in research on voters' knowledge of election promise fulfilment – while research on the “pledge puzzle”<sup>1</sup> (cf. Thomson et al., 2017) finds that voters are massively unaware that political parties deliver on the vast majority of their election promises, a study by Naurin and Oscarsson (2017) finds that voters are remarkably capable of assessing whether individual promises have been fulfilled or not, especially when the promises in question are specific and salient enough.

Operating under the assumption that voters' prior expectations of election promises fulfilment impact the way in which voters hold political parties to account for fulfilling and breaking their promises, it is interesting and important to study which expectations the Swedish population harbours with regard to the fulfilment of election promises. In addition, it is relevant to explore how these expectations vary across different societal groups, and which sources of expectations can be identified.

These are thus the aims of this chapter – to discuss which fulfilment expectations are prevalent among the Swedish people, who has which expectations, and where they might come from. In order to meet these aims, the respondents in the national SOM survey were presented five different election promises, made prior to the most recent parliamentary election in Sweden (2014). Three of the promises were made by the Social Democrats, and the two others by their coalition partner, the Green Party. The promises were selected from different policy areas, to ascertain that the findings are not exclusive to a certain policy domain. The selected five promises were: “increase the amount of female professors”, “make pre-school mandatory from six years of age”, and “criminalise the purchase of sex services abroad” (all Social Democrats); “forbid the prospecting and extraction of uranium, gas and oil”, and “implement a care guarantee for abuse victims” (both Green Party). For each of the promises, the respondents were asked “In your opinion, how probable is it that the government parties will fulfil the following election promises in the mandate period 2014-2018”. Four response alternatives were offered, ranging from “not at all probable” to “very probable”, in addition to a “no opinion” alternative<sup>2</sup>. The remainder of this chapter will first address the

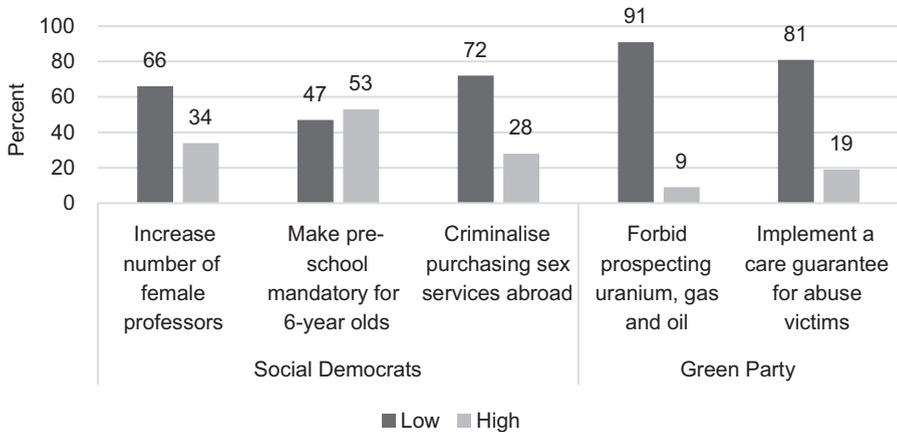
expectations found for the five different promises in the overall sample. Then, the expectations of various societal groups are analysed and compared. Finally, various potential sources of expectations are explored and discussed.

### **Fulfilment expectations in Swedish society**

In general, the respondents seem sceptical of the fulfilment of the five election promises they were presented with, even though their specific fulfilment expectations seem generally more optimistic than their general perception of parties' pledge fulfilment as documented in earlier work (cf. Markwat, 2015; Naurin, 2011). For four out of five promises, a substantial majority of the respondents indicated low to very low expectations of fulfilment. The only exception to this is constituted by the Social Democrats' promise to lower the starting age of mandatory education from seven to six years of age. For this promise, a small majority (53 percent) of the respondents indicated high (46 percent) to very high (7 percent) fulfilment expectations. Noteworthy is the difference between the fulfilment expectations regarding the promises made by the Social Democrats, Sweden's largest party with a long record of government participation, and those made by their coalition partner, the smaller and less reputed Green Party. While the fulfilment expectations across the board are relatively low (mean: 2.02 of 4), those for the Green Party's promises (1.74) are markedly lower than those for the Social Democrats' promises (2.22). Both included promises made by the Green Party were met with high levels of scepticism. Respectively, 91 percent and 81 percent of the respondents indicated low to very low fulfilment expectations for the promises to forbid the prospecting and extraction of uranium, gas and oil, and to guarantee care to the victims of abuse. For both these promises, only approximately two percent of the respondents indicated very high expectations of fulfilment. For the Social Democrats' promises, this percentage fluctuates from three percent for the promise to increase the amount of female professors, to 7 percent for the promise to lower the starting age for mandatory education. Figure 1 presents the percentages of respondents that indicated low to very low fulfilment expectations, versus high to very high fulfilment expectations, for each of the five included election promises.

The fulfilment expectations of the respondents vary not only by the party that made the promise and by the content of the policy, but also across various societal groups. Both for the promises made by the Social Democrats and the Green Party, women on average harbour somewhat more positive fulfilment expectations than men (significant,  $p < 0.05$ ). In both cases, this small difference is explained by a substantially larger number of men with low fulfilment expectations (8 and 4 percentage points more, respectively) – the number of respondents with high fulfilment expectations is nearly identical among men and women. These imbalances are in line with most existing research on gender differences in political trust, but are interestingly different from earlier findings on gender differences in general

**Figure 1 Fulfilment expectations per election promise, and party 2016 (percent)**



**Commentary:** Respondents were asked “In your opinion, how probable is it that the government parties will fulfil the following election promises in the mandate period 2014-2018” on a scale of 1-4 (not at all probable to very probable)<sup>2</sup> for five election promises; three made by the Social Democrats, and two made by the Green Party during the election campaign of 2014. Percentages calculated over the group of respondents providing a valid response to the question (77-82 percent per item), and divided up into low (1-2) and high (3-4) expectation respondents.

**Source:** The national SOM survey of 2016.

election promises fulfilment perceptions – where women were found to be slightly more negative than men (Markwat, 2015). This is likely largely explained by the fact that at that time, the Swedish government was formed by the four Alliance parties (more often supported by men), while now the Swedish government coalition consists of two parties on the left side of the political spectrum (more often supported by women). Table 1 contrasts the percentages of respondents that reported low and high fulfilment expectations of a subset of three promises made by the Social Democrats, and two promises made by the Green Party prior to the parliamentary elections of 2014.

Fulfilment expectations of the promises made by the Social Democrats are highly similar across age categories, and no interesting differences can be observed. For the promises made by the Green Party, however, respondents in the youngest age category (16-29) provide notably more optimistic fulfilment expectations than older respondents. While this could be ascribed to youthful optimism, the fact that this difference is not observed for the promises made by the Social Democrats, makes it more likely that the explanation lies either in the relatively young average age of the Green Party’s support base, or the higher average level of education among the (younger) Green Party supporters.

**Table 1** *Expectations of the fulfilment of election promises, 2016 (percent, mean)*

	Social Democrat promises				Green Party promises			
	Low	High	Diff.	Mean	Low	High	Diff.	Mean
Total	47	15	-32	2.22	83	5	-78	1.74
<b>Sex</b>								
Female	44	14	-30	2.26	81	5	-76	1.80
Male	52	15	-37	2.18	85	5	-80	1.68
<b>Age</b>								
16–29	44	12	-32	2.22	73	6	-67	1.84
30–49	47	16	-31	2.22	84	5	-79	1.73
50–64	50	15	-35	2.19	86	5	-81	1.71
65–85	47	15	-32	2.25	85	6	-79	1.72
<b>Education</b>								
Low	53	18	-35	2.21	78	10	-68	1.83
Medium low	48	12	-36	2.17	82	5	-78	1.75
Medium high	55	12	-43	2.16	88	3	-85	1.65
High	40	17	-23	2.30	84	4	-80	1.74
<b>Political interest</b>								
Very interested	42	20	-22	2.28	84	5	-79	1.68
Interested	48	14	-34	2.21	83	5	-78	1.74
Not interested	45	13	-32	2.21	84	5	-79	1.75
Not at all interested	64	9	-55	2.08	80	13	-67	1.84
<b>Trust in government</b>								
Very high	24	45	+21	2.74	58	15	-43	2.16
High	32	22	-10	2.41	78	6	-72	1.86
Low	57	9	-48	2.07	88	3	-85	1.61
Very low	70	6	-64	1.87	94	4	-90	1.44
<b>Ideology</b>								
Clearly left	33	24	-5	2.45	70	11	-59	2.02
Somewhat left	28	26	-2	2.48	78	5	-73	1.85
Not left, not right	51	13	-38	2.17	82	7	-75	1.78
Somewhat right	56	9	-47	2.10	90	2	-88	1.61
Clearly right	60	5	-55	1.95	90	4	-86	1.51

**Commentary:** Respondents were asked “*In your opinion, how probable is it that the government parties will fulfil the following election promises in the mandate period 2014-2018*” on a scale of 1-4 (not at all probable to very probable) for five election promises; three made by the Social Democrats, and two made by the Green Party during the election campaign of 2014. Summated rating scales of the items were constructed per party (Cronbach’s alpha: 0.59 for the Social Democrats’ promises; 0.63 for the Green Party). Average expectations equal to, or larger than 3 were considered high; expectations equal to, or lower than two were considered low. Percentages were calculated based on the group of respondents that provided a valid response (1-4) to all items in the respective party subcategories (67-74 percent).

**Source:** The national SOM survey of 2016.

The respondents with the highest completed level of education provide the most optimistic fulfilment expectations of the promises made by the Social Democrats. This is in line with the general understanding of the relationship between education level and political attitudes. However, a noteworthy observation is that the lowest educated group contains the largest share of respondents with high fulfilment expectations of the Social Democrat promises (18 percent), a considerably larger proportion than in the respondent groups with medium low, and medium high education (12 percent in both). At least part of this difference is likely explained by the higher average age of the Social Democrats' supporters, which is both generally associated with lower levels of education, and higher sympathy for the Social Democrats.

However, this observation extends into the analysis of the expectations of the Green Party's promises. For those promises, the lowest educated respondents are those to provide the most optimistic forecasts, significantly more positive even than the highest educated respondents (significant,  $p < 0.05$ ). The lowest fulfilment expectations were reported by the group of medium high educated respondents. These findings, robust to correction for the age of the respondents, are interesting in the light of the classic notion that lower educated people are more likely succumb to political cynicism (e.g., Agger et al., 1961), as well as the suggestion that lower education may be associated with scepticism of promise fulfilment (cf. Markwat, 2015). In case of the Green Party, the findings may be explained from the idea that lower educated people are likely to be less politically interested, and/or less likely to closely follow political developments. In that scenario, the lower educated respondents are the least likely respondents to be fully aware of the negative media coverage that has surrounded the Green Party throughout their government tenure, which may explain their more positive perceptions of the Green Party's capacity to live up to its promises than other respondents'.

In fact, a higher level of political interest itself is negatively associated with fulfilment expectations of the Green Party's promises, although the largest chunk of this effect appears reserved for the respondents reporting to be "not at all interested" in politics. For the Social Democrats' promises, the association has the opposite direction, which is more in line with conventional ideas about the relation between political interest and perceptions or expectations of government performance. The average reported fulfilment expectations of the respondents that are "not at all interested" in politics are 10 percent lower than those of the respondents claiming to be "very interested" in politics. Similar to for the subset of Green Party promises, the largest difference is found between the least interested respondents, and the other respondents – the differences between the other three categories are considerably smaller.

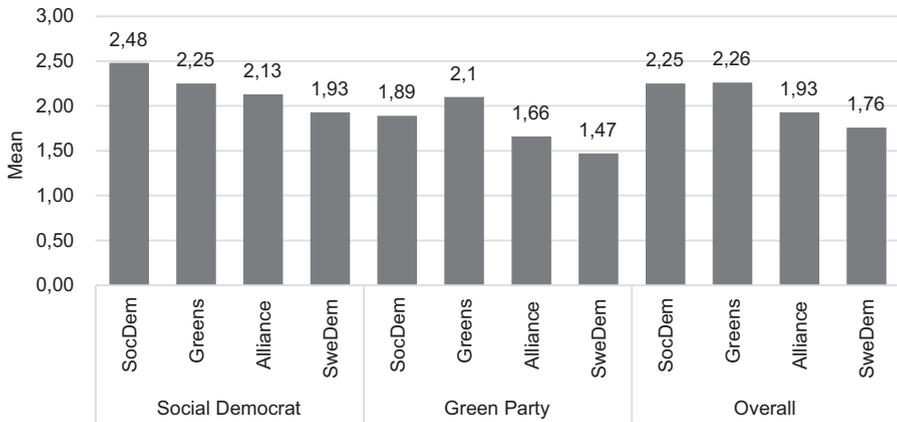
The largest differences in general, however, are observed when respondents are classified by their trust in the government. This is not all that surprising, given

the plausibility that expectations of government performance are closely related to levels of political trust, particularly trust in that very government. However, it is somewhat remarkable that the differences observed for respondents with different levels of trust in government are markedly larger than those for the respondents' self-reported left-right ideology. While there is a clear divide between left-wing respondents on the one hand (2.12), and right-wing respondents on the other (1.89), the difference between high trust respondents (2.24) and low trust respondents (1.79) is even clearer (both significant,  $p < 0.05$ ).

An interesting difference between the subsets of Social Democrat and Green Party promises is that for the promises made by the Social Democrats, respondents identifying themselves as "clearly left" and "somewhat left" report highly comparable fulfilment expectations, while for the Green Party's promises, those respondents considering themselves only "somewhat left" (1.85) are considerably less optimistic than the respondents of more outspoken left ideological nature (2.02). The fulfilment expectations of the Green Party's promises of the "somewhat left" respondents are therewith closer to those of the respondents that consider themselves neither left nor right, than to those of the respondents considering themselves "clearly left". For the Social Democrats' promises, the difference between the means of these two categories (0.31) represents the largest ideological difference in fulfilment expectations (significant,  $p < 0.05$ ). These differences are in line with the notion deriving from prior research on performance expectations and the expectation confirmation theory that individuals have higher expectations of the performance of providers perceived as credible, with which they feel affinity. In the case of election promise fulfilment and government performance in general, those trusted providers (of election promises) are the government parties, and affinity can be defined as the degree of ideological proximity between the voters and the parties.

Another explanation worth considering is the partisanship of the respondents. Indeed, many would argue that perceptions of a party's performance capacity and credibility are largely related to how one perceives that party in general. Translated to the set-up of this study, one may expect that supporters of the Social Democrats are more optimistic about the fulfilment of the promises made by the Social Democrats (as compared to the supporters of other parties), and that supporters of the Green Party are more optimistic about the fulfilment of the promises made by the Green Party. Figure 2 presents the average fulfilment expectations, per subset of promises made by the Social Democrats and Green Party, respectively, and overall, reported by the respondents that have indicated support for the Social Democrats, Green Party, Alliance parties, and Sweden Democrats.

**Figure 2** Fulfilment expectations for party subsets, and full set of promises, by party preferences 2016 (mean)



**Commentary:** Respondents were asked “In your opinion, how probable is it that the government parties will fulfil the following election promises in the mandate period 2014-2018” on a scale of 1-4 (not at all probable to very probable) for five election promises; three made by the Social Democrats, and two made by the Green Party during the election campaign of 2014. Summated rating scales of the items were constructed per party (Cronbach’s alpha: 0.59 for the Social Democrats’ promises; 0.63 for the Green Party; 0.70 for the overall set of promises). The means of these scales were calculated per group of respondents indicating the same party preference (Social Democrats; Green Party; any of the Alliance parties; Sweden Democrats).

**Source:** The national SOM survey of 2016.

Indeed, the most optimistic partisans regarding the fulfilment of the promises made by the Social Democrats are supporters of the Social Democrats (2.48), and regarding the promises made by the Green Party, the supporters of the Green Party (2.10). Not surprisingly, supporters of opposition parties have considerably less faith in the fulfilment of the promises made by the coalition partners. This applies both to supporters of the Alliance parties (1.93) and supporters of Sweden’s populist radical right party, the Sweden Democrats (1.76). Supporters of all parties, other than those of the Green Party, are more sceptical towards the fulfilment of the promises made by the Green Party, than of those made by the Social Democrats. Only 13 percent of the respondents has higher expectations of the fulfilment of the Green Party’s promises, than of the Social Democrats’ promises, while 66 percent is more optimistic about the Social Democrats’ promises. This underlines the need to separately analyse the fulfilment expectations per party that made them.

Noteworthy is also that the supporters of the Green Party appear to harbour relatively low performance expectations of their own party as well, with average expectations considerably below the cut-off point of 2.5, and 64 percent of this small subsample reporting low expectations (2 or lower) on average. While even

the Social Democrat supporters fail to reach this level of fulfilment expectations for the promises made by their own party, the difference is much larger for the Green Party (0.4) than for the Social Democrats (0.02), with 32 percent of its supporters reporting low expectations. Policy effects on the fulfilment expectations are apparent, with substantial differences in expectations from promise to promise (largest difference: 0.87), even within the party subsets (Social Democrat promises: 0.44; Green Party promises: 0.29).

### **Correlations and regression analysis fulfilment expectations**

At the same time, most of the fulfilment expectations within these subsets, as well as overall, are significantly correlated with each other. All correlation coefficients range between 0.25 and 0.46. Somewhat surprisingly, relatively stronger and weaker correlations were found both within and across the party subsets of promises. The weakest correlation (0.25) was found for the fulfilment expectations of the Social Democrats' promise to increase the proportion of female professors, and the Green Party's promise to forbid prospecting and extracting uranium, gas, and oil. However, a similar correlation (0.26) was observed between the fulfilment expectations of the Social Democrats' promises to increase the number of female professors, and to criminalise the purchase of sexual services abroad. Not surprising, the strongest correlations are found within the party subsets of promises. This applies most prominently to the Green Party's promises to forbid prospecting and extraction of uranium, gas, and oil, and to implement guaranteed care for abuse victims (0.46). Within the subset of Social Democrat promises, the strongest correlation is found for the promises to increase the number of female professors, and to lower the age for mandatory education (0.41).

For both the party subsets, and overall set of promises, simple summated rating scales of the expectations items, the same as used to calculate the means earlier in this chapter, are utilised as dependent variables. Thus, the respondents' answers provided to the various expectations items were averaged into one fulfilment expectation value per respondent. Provided that the items measure to a large extent the same dimension<sup>3</sup>, this increases the reliability of the expectations measures used for analysis<sup>4</sup>. Subsequently, an Ordinary Least Squares regression model was constructed to evaluate the relative contribution of various explanations for the varying levels of fulfilment expectations among the respondents.

The following explanations for the variation in respondents' fulfilment expectations of election promises are included in the analysis. The most important variables to include are those that revealed interesting variation in the respondents' expectations. Political interest is associated with lower fulfilment expectations of the Green Party's promises, and higher expectations of the Social Democrats' promises. The theoretical justification is that while political interest is generally associated with more positive and optimistic political attitudes, higher levels of political

interest likely also lead to a higher awareness among individuals of political news, including scandals, and criticism. Given the turbulent times that the Green Party has had, this may explain the negative correlation between political interest, and fulfilment expectations of the Green Party's promises. For the Social Democrats' promises, however, the relationship is likely positive. Given the findings of researchers studying the fulfilment of election promises (cf. Thomson et al., 2017), that contrary to popular belief, most parties keep the vast majority of their promises, it makes sense that higher levels of political interest (and therewith, information, knowledge, and awareness) are associated with higher fulfilment expectations, as they are likely more aware that parties take their promises seriously.

Another important explanation to include in the model is political trust. As discussed, different levels of respondents' trust in the government are associated with different levels of expectations regarding the fulfilment of election promises (see table 1). Also in a theoretical sense, it is arguable that trust is one of the most important sources and precursors of performance expectations. Indeed, despite the clear conceptual distinction, it can even be questioned to what degree the two are empirically distinct. Speaking in favour of the latter, however, is the observation that while high trust respondents report markedly higher levels of expectations than low trust respondents, even the expectations of the "very high trust" respondents are on average relatively low (2.74 out of 4).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, both partisanship and political ideology appear to be important predictors of respondents' fulfilment expectations. Regarding partisanship, roughly two potential theoretical mechanisms can be identified. First, individuals can be assumed to be affected by partisan bias in nearly any psychological process even remotely affiliated with politics, be it processing political news, evaluating governments, or formulating policy preferences (e.g., Bartels, 2002). From that perspective, it would be difficult to argue that the behaviour and results that individuals anticipate from a certain political party would not be affected by the same bias. However, the direction of the effect is not necessarily a given. All else equal, prior performance expectations are probably at least partly an expression of the individual's general attitude toward this party – i.e., preferred parties are likely assigned with higher esteem concerning credibility and capacity, than non-preferred parties. This ties into the second mechanism that can be hypothesised. Likely, at least some of the reasons that underlie the party support, and/or vote choice of an individual, overlap with the precursors of an individual's expectations of a party's performance. If one is convinced that a party lacks credibility, has limited capacity, or is unlikely to (successfully) govern, that person is less likely to remain a supporter of that party, or to vote for that party in a subsequent election. However, when fulfilment expectations are placed in an accountability setting, it could be argued that partisan bias leads individuals to hold non-preferred parties to a higher standard, and to be more understanding and forgiving toward a preferred party. At the same time, the effect of the latter will more strongly affect

normative performance expectations – an individual’s perception of how a party *should* act – than anticipatory performance expectations – an individual’s projection of how a party *will* act – the subject of this chapter.

The sex of the respondents is included, because the expectations of men and women significantly differ from one another (see table 1). Age is included because of its apparent role in the fulfilment expectations of the Green Party’s promises (table 1). For those of the variables for which the relationship with fulfilment expectations appears non-linear, the variable is included as a set of dummy variables. This applies to the variables age and education. Table 2 provides an overview of the tested model and the included explanations, and all relevant coefficients.

**Table 2** *Results of OLS regression analyses, fulfilment expectations Red-Green election promises 2016 (regression coefficients)*

Independent variables	Expectations
Political interest (1-4)	0.02 (0.02)
Age (ref, 16-29)	
(30-49)	-0.03
(50-64)	-0.07
(65-85)	-0.04
Education (ref, low)	
(medium low)	-0.04
(medium high)	-0.15**
(high)	-0.05
Ideology (1-5, left-right)	-0.07*** (0.02)
Sex (0 = female; 1 = male)	-0.05 (0.03)
SocDem (0-1)	0.06 (0.04)
Greens (0-1)	0.15 (0.08)
Trust Government (1-5, low-high)	0.14*** (0.02)
Constant	2.73*** (0.10)
N	1230
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.16

**Commentary:** Standard errors are reported in brackets; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001.

**Source:** The national SOM survey of 2016.

The results of the analyses indicate that when the effects of ideology, partisanship, trust, and political interest on fulfilment expectations of election promises are estimated simultaneously, only the effects of ideology and trust prevail. However, the respondents placing themselves one place further to the right on the left-right scale, present on average only 0.08 lower fulfilment expectations. The effect of higher trust in government is considerably stronger (0.14), but still relatively small. The effect of political interest is no longer significant, indicating that the earlier observed differences for respondents with varying levels of political trust are likely the result of covariance between political interest and other included explanations. The effect of partisanship is not significant in the overall model, however, when included in the same models for the party subsets of promises, both support for the Social Democrats (0.11) and the Green Party (0.25), respectively, have important explanatory power. Any earlier observed effects for the age and sex of the respondents cannot be reproduced in the overall model, due to correcting for the respondents' levels of trust (sex), political interest, and ideology (age). However, when analysing the expectations of the Green Party's subset of promises, it can be observed that women are more optimistic than men about the credibility of the Green Party. The most surprising finding from the analysis is that while respondents from various educational backgrounds do not seem to present notably different levels of fulfilment expectations, respondents with "medium high" education appear significantly more negative than all other respondents, most notably the respondents with "low" education.

The main take-aways from the results for future research are that fulfilment expectations of election promises seem at least to a certain extent an expression of the individuals' level of trust in government, and their political preferences (ideology and partisanship). While it may be empirically challenging to disentangle concepts as close as general trust in government, and expectations of government performance, at least theoretically the argument can be made that trust in specific government parties, or a government as a whole, impacts which performance individuals anticipate from those parties, and vice versa (cf. Seyd, 2015). Regarding political preferences, the sensible argument can be made that expectations of preferred parties are generally higher than those of non-preferred parties. However, more research will be needed to investigate the mechanisms at work. The findings presented in this chapter speak mostly to the input side of the expectation confirmation theory – how expectations are formed, and why individuals may harbour different expectations of the same performance. From that perspective, it is most interesting to observe that similar to studies of performance expectations in other fields, the results underline the importance of trust and (ideological) affinity in the formation of expectations. ECT wise, the next step of interest will be to study how these expectations are influenced by their confirmation/disconfirmation, e.g., how perceptions of government performance and other political attitudes are affected when respondents with high expectations of promise fulfilment are confronted

with information about broken election promises. Finally, the difference between the respondents with “medium high” education levels, and the other respondents, is somewhat of a mystery, especially since the model corrected for most of the potential confounding explanations. Here as well, more research will be needed to see if this difference is robust, and if so, what explanation there might be for this difference.

## Notes

- 1 The paradox that while most parties and politicians fulfil the vast majority of their election promises, the vast majority of voters believe that politicians do not even try to fulfil their promises (Naurin, 2011).
- 2 The original Swedish question wording was: “Enligt din bedömning, hur troligt är det att regeringspartierna kommer att uppfylla följande vallöften under mandatperioden 2014–2018?” The response alternatives were “Inte alls troligt”; “Inte särskilt troligt”; “Ganska troligt”; “Mycket troligt”; and “Ingen uppfattning”. The election promises were: “Öka andelen kvinnliga professorer”; “Göra förskoleklassen för sexåringar obligatorisk”; “Kriminalisera köp av sexuella tjänster utomlands”; “Förbjuda prospektering och utvinning av uran, olja och gas”; and “Införa en vårdgaranti inom missbruksvården”.
- 3 Exploratory factor analyses suggest a one-dimensional solution, where one factor accounts for virtually all of the common variance in the expectation items.
- 4 Cronbach’s alpha: 0.59 (Social Democrat promises); 0.63 (Green Party); 0.70 (all promises).

## References

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