More Said Than Done? Post-Election Effects of Pre-Election Rhetoric

Abstract
In election pledges, parties frequently appeal to voters with persuasive words such as freedom and justice. A vast interest has been paid to short-term effects of this rhetoric, and it is well known that it can influence opinion and muster policy support. As of yet, however, we know surprisingly little on possible consequences in a long-term scenario. Drawing on literature on linguistic semantics on persuasive words, this paper proposes a theory to account for post-election effects on voters’ perception of pledge fulfillment. The idea is, more precisely, that persuasive words in election pledges can influence voters’ substantial expectations on policies pre-election, and thereby open up for discrepancy between voters’ expectations and actual policy outcomes. Implications from a survey experiment on 1,796 Swedish citizens are that persuasive words can influence voters’ substantial expectations on policies, and that this, in turn, can increase perception of pledge breaking when policy outcomes are known. Since there are normative implications of unjustly raising voters’ policy expectations with campaign rhetoric, studies of how voters react on election pledge rhetoric in a post-election context should be of both normative and empirical interest for parties and scholars of the same.

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Election pledges serve a pivotal role in representative democracy by linking voters’ policy preferences to parties’ policy intentions (Royed, 1996; Budge, 2001; Mansbridge, 2003). They do, more precisely, serve as tools for voters to compare parties’ policy proposals before elections. In real world politics however, election pledges also serve as competitive tools to muster electoral support. In all times, therefore, parties have used rhetoric to make policies sound more appealing than they actually are. As Anthony Downs (1957, 28) puts it: “Parties formulate policies in order to win elections, rather than win elections in order to formulate policies.” A common example is to draw on voters’ core values (e.g., Feldman & Steenbergen, 2001; Lakoff, 2002; Clifford & Jerit, 2013) or, more precisely, to frame policies in value-laden terms such as “democracy,” “freedom,” and “equality.”

It is well known from research that this kind of rhetoric can influence opinion about a variety of political objects (see e.g., Kinder, 1998 for an overview). By, for example, evoking emotions, (see e.g., Lecheler, Bos, & Vliegenthart, 2015 for an overview) and activate citizens’ value orientations (e.g., Nelson & Garst, 2005; Clifford, Jerit, Rainey & Motyl, 2015), they serve as “heuristic cues” for making political decisions. It has also been shown that framing politics in value-laden terms can influence voters’ thoughts about the content of specific issues and policies (e.g., Brewer, 2002; Brewer & Gross, 2005; Nelson & Garst, 2005). Despite the vast research on the short-term effects on reactions to future-oriented policy proposals, post-election effects of using this kind of words in election pledges remain a surprisingly open question. Can pre-election rhetoric influence voters’ reactions to policy outcomes and governments’ policy performance, post-election? These are the questions that drive this paper.

Drawing on theory from the literature on philosophy of language and linguistic semantics on persuasive rhetoric (see e.g., Stevenson, 1944; Walton, 2006; Macagno & Walton, 2010), I acknowledge that the use of persuasive words—emotive and value-laden
words with flexible descriptive meaning—open up for substantial interpretation, or expectations, on policies that goes beyond factual information about policy content. Making use of this literature, I propose that persuasive words in election pledges can have negative effects on voters’ evaluation of governments’ policy performance post-election. The idea is, more precisely, that rhetoric-driven pre-election policy expectations can induce a perception of pledge breaking, due to an imbalance between voters’ pre-election anticipations on what should happen after election, and actual policy outcomes.

The hypotheses have implications for representative democracy. First, if voters have expectations on policies that do not hold after election, they are more likely to make negative evaluations of the governments’ policy performance in general (see Malhotra & Margalit, 2014). This, in turn, can have negative effects on the legitimacy of representative systems (e.g. Norris, 1999; Hetherington, 2005). Secondly, if voters’ substantial expectations on policy outcomes are influenced by persuasive words, not only by factual information, it becomes difficult to know whether what in elections manifest as the will of the people actually reflects the “true” public preferences (Chong & Druckman, 2007c, 637). This, in turn, makes it difficult for incumbents to know how to best respond to voters’ preferences (e.g., Zaller, 1992; Entman, 1993; Bartels, 2003).

The hypotheses are tested in a survey experiment. In a sequential experimental format, a sample of Swedish citizens first evaluates a fictive election pledge proposing more liberal labor migration policies. The respondents are then exposed to an intervention—a news article reporting about the policy outcomes—and asked to what extant the party has fulfilled the promise. Respondents see the same policies, either with or without persuasive words. Empirical findings imply that persuasive words can influence substantial expectations on policies, and that this, in turn, can increase perception of pledge breaking.
Points of Departure

The point of departure is that we know a lot about how election pledge rhetoric influence support for policies on the short term—when policies are presented as proposals of future actions—but we know much less about effects of such pre-implementation rhetoric on reactions to policies in a retrospective scenario when policy outcomes are known.

According to the mandate model of representation\(^1\)—also known as promissory representation (Mansbridge, 2003)—election pledges serve as statements of intents of parties’ future policy actions before elections, and as tools to hold governments accountable for their post-election actions (Royed, 1996, Schmitt & Thomassen, 1999, Budge, 2001; Mansbridge, 2003). Election pledges should, in other words, play crucial role both for voters’ expectations on future-oriented policies, and for their post-election—or retrospective—evaluations of governments’ policy performance and the outcomes.

With standpoint in classic theory that states that voters “seek policy” (e.g., Downs, 1957), we should expect that voters’ focus on what is actually proposed to do when they evaluate election pledges pre-election. We should also expect that they, when evaluating governments’ policy performance post-election, compare policy outcomes to what was actually proposed to do in the election pledges. However, while in theory voters’ attraction to policy pledges seem dependent on what policy is actually pledged, citizens have repeatedly been shown to be attracted to policies also depending on how political elites choose to present them.\(^2\) Can rhetoric-driven expectations on policies pre-election then also influence voters’

\(^1\) The mandate model is among the most used models of democratic representation in empirical research (Esaiasson & Holmberg, 1996, 3; Pierce, 1999, 10).

\(^2\) It has, for example, been shown that different framing of political issues influence attitudes to welfare policy (e.g., Shen & Edwards, 2005; Slothuus, 2008), private investments (Jerit, 2009), stem cell research (Clifford, Jerit, Rainey & Motyl, 2015) and immigration (Lecheler,
reactions to policy outcomes, post-election?

One of the most stable empirical findings on accountability representation, or retrospective voting, is that voters punish politicians for poor performance and reward them for good performance (e.g., Fiorina, 1981; Kramer, 1971; for a review, see Healy & Malhotra, 2013), and there is some evidence that voters’ expectations on policy performance can have consequences for retrospective voting (e.g., Kimball & Patterson 1997; Waterman, Jenkins-Smith, & Silva 1999). A study by Malhotra & Margalit (2014) have further shown that, when politicians make positive projections about future policy outcomes, voters’ punish the government retrospectively when the projected outcomes are not attained. There is, however, still surprisingly little research on how pre-election induced expectations on policies can influence voters’ evaluations of post-election policy performance (Malhotra & Margalit, 2014, 1000). By accounting for post-election effects of rhetoric-driven pre-election expectations, the paper thereby also contributes to the research field on accountability processes.

The paper makes use of literature on philosophy of language and linguistic semantics on persuasive words (e.g., Stevenson, 1944; Walton, 2006; Macagno & Walton, 2010) to make predictions of post-election effects of pre-election rhetoric. The reason is that persuasive words are particularly relevant as rhetorical tools in election pledge contexts, where a central aim is to “sell policies” and persuade voters about a cause.

Persuasion refers to fundamental changes in individuals’ beliefs—the cognitive, or evaluative, components that make up our understanding of the way things are (i.e. changes

Bos, & Vliegenthart, 2015). It has also been shown that consequence rhetoric, or “predictive appeals,” can shape public opinion by altering beliefs about the impact of a policy (Jerit, 2009).
in evaluative component)\(^3\) (Glynn et al., 2004, 120. See also Zaller, 1992; Nelson & Oxley, 1999), and the theory on persuasive words provides a framework for rhetoric that works particularly for this purpose. It conceptualizes an ideal-type of a communication strategy—a general theoretical model—of exact semantic characteristic that makes a message persuasive by changing believes.

According to the literature on linguistic semantics, persuasive words have two distinctive influences on individuals’ perception of objects. The first mediating effect is comparable to research on so called framing effects found under the label of “heuristics” (see, for example, Tversky & Kahneman, 1974; Schwarz, Bless, Wanke & Winkielman, 2003; Igartua & Cheng, 2009), and studies that shows that citizens routinely rely on their feelings when evaluating political stimuli (e.g., Clore & Isbell, 2002; De Steno et al., 2004; Marcus, Neuman & MacKuen, 2000). More precisely, by being rich in emotive and value-laden meaning, persuasive words trigger automatic emotions to objects.

Secondly, the theory predicts that persuasive words, by being vague and flexible in descriptive meaning, open up for substantial interpretation of objects that are not, necessarily, supported by factual information. Many have emphasized the importance that election pledges are formulated so that voters can easily grasp parties’ policy intentions—and

\(^3\) Compare here with for example “framing effects,” which, traditionally, refer to changes in “weight components” (Chong & Druckman, 2007a, 115). This means, more precisely, communication that emphasizes specific (already available) aspects or considerations about issues over others, which make individuals to assign these considerations greater weight in their overall attitude formation process (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997, 568-569; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Nelson & Oxley, 1999; Kinder, 2003, 359; Nelson & Willey, 2001, 256; Slothuus, 2008, 22).
thereby make accurate predictions of representatives’ future policy actions—in elections (e.g., Downs, 1957, 105-9). If voters’ interpretation of policies is influenced by words used in election pledges, not by factual content of the policies alone, voters can make “wrong” predictions of parties’ future policy actions. And if voters make wrong predictions of what parties aim to do after election, they can end up experiencing a discrepancy between the policy pledge and the policy outcomes.

Based on the above reasoning, I propose that persuasive words in election pledges can generate substantial expectations on policies that are not supported by factual information, which, in turn, can lead to a perception of pledge breaking. Next, I present the theory on persuasive words, and the predictions of the paper.

**Theory**

The literature on linguistic semantics distinguishes between rational (reason-driven) and persuasive (emotion-driven) argumentation (e.g., Stevenson 1944). Rational argumentation refers to processes when attitude change is driven by factual reason: a speaker gives a subjective judgment about something—“this is good” or “I approve of this”—and provides a factual reason for why the hearer should “do so as well” (ibid, 81–110, 111–38). Persuasive argumentation refers to processes when attitude change is driven by appeals to emotions (Stevenson, 1944, 139–40). Since I am interested in effects of rhetoric in election pledges that influence individuals’ beyond what is actually pledged to happen (factual reason), I focus on persuasive argumentation through appeals to emotions.

There are, according to the literature on linguistic semantics, three central characteristics that make words effective means for persuasion: Persuasive words have 1) value-laden connotations, 2) strong emotive meaning, and 3) vague and flexible descriptive meaning. Below I describe the characteristics, how they can be used as persuasive arguments
for policies, and why this, in turn, can lead to perception of policies as broken after election.

**Persuasive Words**

*Value-laden connotations.* That words are value-laden means that they appeal to values and norms that identify what is “good” and “bad” (e.g., Stevenson, 1944; Hare, 1952; Walton, 2003, 129–31; Walton, 2006, 220–1). Since persuasive words denote important values, they presuppose and trigger value judgments (Macagno, 2014, 104), which in turn makes the words imperative; they state what should or ought to be done (or not to be done) (Stevenson, 1944, 18–26). Examples of positive value-laden words are “freedom” and “justice,” whereas “dictatorship” and “racism” are examples of words with negative value-load.

Value-laden connotations make words persuasive to the extent that the audience agrees on the negative or positive spin on the value (i.e. they cherishes the positive ones, and detest the negative) (e.g., Walton, 2003, 141; Zarefsky, 2006, 402–3). Values are sensitive to individual differences and contexts, and the persuasiveness can therefore differ depending on place, circumstances and the preferences of the individual members in the context (Macagno, 2014, 114).

In election pledge contexts, values are often ideologically tainted and associated with either left or right politics (e.g., Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). Election campaigns tend to divide parties and voters in ideological groups or, more precisely, to either one or the other side of the ideological left-right divide (ibid). We can therefore assume that parties use ideological values to appeal to voters who share their ideological predispositions.4 In this

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4 Studies have shown that parties compete mainly along the left-right dimension in Europe (e.g. van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996; Budge et al., 2001), and that the vast majority of voters base their vote choice on parties they perceive as being closest to themselves on a left-right scale (e.g. Granberg & Holmberg, 1988; van der Eijk, Franklin, & van der Brug, 1999).
study, which takes place in an election pledge context, it therefore makes sense to make a
difference between persuasive words that are associated with left-laden ideological values,
and words associated with right-laden values.

The next two characteristics of persuasive words concern their “emotive” and
“descriptive” meaning. The emotive meaning refers to the emotive reactions a word evokes
(Stevenson, 1944, 60), whereas descriptive meaning refers to words substantial, or “core
factual,” connotations (Walton 2001, 118). The word “justice” for example, which typically
evokes positive emotions, also has a descriptive meaning, typically “the administration of law
according to prescribed and accepted principles.”

Strong emotive meaning. The second characteristic of persuasive words is that
they, because of their value-laden connotations, have strong emotive meaning (e.g.,
Stevenson, 1944; Walton, 2003; Macagno & Walton, 2010; Macagno, 2014, 104). The theory
also posits that the emotive meaning of persuasive words is stronger and, at least partly,
independent of their descriptive meaning. This means that the emotive meaning remains even
when the descriptive meaning of the words varies (e.g., Stevenson, 1944, 141). When
individuals are exposed to a persuasive word they therefore primarily react on its emotional
implications and reflect less on its descriptive ones (Stevenson 1944, 210–2; Walton 2001,
118–22).

Vague descriptive meaning. The descriptive, or factual, meaning of a word is
also known as the words “definition.” For most people, definitions means the “conventional
factual meaning” of words. More precisely, the descriptive account of a word you will find in
a lexicon (Walton, 2006, 246). A word can however also have a “local” or “temporary”
descriptive meaning, which differs from the conventional factual meaning (Stevenson, 1944,
208). This less common account of definition is called “stipulative definition.” If, for
example, the conventional definition of “justice” is “the administration of law according to
prescribed and accepted principles,” examples of stipulative definitions could be “if one kills another person, then one should be killed too,” or “everyone should have the right to a second chance.”

Most definitions are a mix of lexical and stipulative meaning; the lexical meaning is used as baseline whereas an individual development is added (Walton, 2006, 247). When a word has many stipulative definitions, its descriptive meaning becomes vague and flexible. Persuasive words are of this kind (Stevenson, 1944, 34–6). This means that persuasive words can be used referring to considerably different substance, and are applicable on diverse situations and issues virtually as “occasion requires” (Stevenson, 1944, 208; Zarefsky, 2006, 405).

Examples of persuasive words that are used in the literature—and which fits all of the three characteristics described above—are “humane,” “freedom,” and “democracy.”

Persuasive Words in Argumentation

Because of their emotional and value-laden character, persuasive words are frequently used in argumentative discourse. They tell a hearer that a speaker regards an object of discussion as “good” and “positive” and imply that the hearer should “do so as well” (Stevenson, 1944, 207). However, persuasive words in themselves do not provide a factual reason to why an object of discussion, according to a speaker, should be regarded as good. They simply inform the hearer about the speakers’ attitude or “point of view” on the issue (Stevenson, 1944, 206; Walton, 2006, 225–6). Therefore, the hearer should use them only as such information.

Despite this, hearers often react on persuasive words as if they where rational arguments for objects. The reason is, according to the theory, that the conventional factual

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5 Compare here with non-persuasive words, such as “tree,” and “shoe.” These words are value-neutral, non-emotive, and have a fixed descriptive meaning.
meaning of persuasive words look like factual information about the object. As Walton (2006, 218) puts it: the use of persuasive words "make it look like a simple statement of fact is being made." This mechanism increase the stronger the emotive meaning of a word is. It also increases if enforcing strategies are used. Examples of this is that same, or similar, persuasive words are repeated in the same message (Stevenson, 1944, 241), and that persuasive words are used in a deterministic way—an object is described as necessary or inevitable to realize the values the words denotes (Stevenson, 1944, 310–18).

Recall here that the conventional factual meaning of a persuasive word is one, out of many, alternative descriptive meanings (Stevenson, 1944, 247–8). This means that, unless the speaker specifies the descriptive meaning, the use of persuasive words bypass the factual reasoning that is associated with rational argumentation.  

Therefore, if hearers treat persuasive words as a factual reason for an object, the use of such words opens up for discrepancy between the hearers’ interpretation of the object and what the speaker actually means (ibid, 84–8).

Imagine, for example, that a party makes an election pledge in which they propose to introduce a summer school. They formulate the pledge using the persuasive words “fair conditions.” Say that the conventional meaning of “fair conditions” is that “people should be given resources according to their needs.” Since the conventional descriptive meaning of persuasive words looks like factual information, we can expect that voters use this meaning to predict what will happen if the summer school is implemented; students will be given resources according to their needs.

However, since persuasive words (here “fair conditions”) are linguistically flexible and can be defined in different ways, the party can have a stipulative definition, such

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6 Arguments are rational only when they provide factual information about an object, which can be objectively observed and evaluated (Stevenson, 1944, 81–110, 111–38).
as that “everyone should be given a second chance,” in mind. Say that this is the case, and that, after the election, the summer school simply give students the possibility to re-take exams and thereby get an opportunity to perform better on the tests. Voters that expected that students, after election, would be given resources according to their needs, will most likely experience a discrepancy between their pre-election anticipations on the summer school, and the actual outcomes.

In sum, a speaker who uses a persuasive word with a conventional factual meaning—especially when in conjunction with enforcing strategies—can induce a perception that an object will lead to certain outcomes, that is not, necessarily, supported by factual information. In cases when these outcomes are in line with the hearers’ wishes, this means that speakers can excite listeners using persuasive words, while without lying disguise less positive aspects of an object (e.g., Walton, 2006, 219–21).

My point is that this strategy can be useful for parties in election pledges, to muster policy support. More precisely, that it can help parties to trigger positive feelings towards future policies, while at the same time draw attention away from aspects of the policies that might be perceived more negatively. However, as voters eventually will be aware of the outcomes of the policies, this may come to a cost for parties in the long run, in terms of increased perception of pledge breaking.

Hypotheses

Drawing on the theoretical framework, I formulate four hypotheses about effects of using persuasive words in election pledges.

First I expect that persuasive words in election pledges can influence voters’ substantial expectations on what should happen after election (the policy outcomes). More precisely, I hypothesize that: H1) Persuasive words in election pledges can induce substantial
I base this expectation on the theoretical premise that the conventional factual meaning of persuasive words is easily mistaken for factual information about objects (e.g. Walton, 2006, 218), which in turn can change voters’ substantial interpretation of these objects. In an election pledge context, I expect that this can induce a perception that a policy will lead to certain outcomes that are not supported by factual information. This will, in the study, be seen in that respondents assign weights to aspects of policy outcomes that relates to persuasive words—but that is not supported by factual information—when they are asked to evaluate whether an election pledge has been fulfilled or not.

Secondly, I expect that substantial expectations on policy outcomes influence voters’ perception of pledge fulfillment: \textit{H2) Substantial expectations on policy outcomes influence perception of pledge fulfillment.} More precisely, I expect that voters, when they evaluate whether election pledges have been fulfilled or not, will compare the policy outcomes to what they perceived as being proposed to do in the pledges—one of the essential criterions for mandate models of representative democracy (see e.g., Mansbridge, 2003). In the study, this will be seen in that the weight individuals assign to different aspects of policy outcomes will have impact on their evaluation of whether a pledge is fulfilled or not.

Based on classic theory on democracy that states that voters “seek policy” (e.g., Downs, 1957), I also expect that expectations on policy outcomes that relate directly to the actual content of pledged policies, should have the largest impact on voters’ perception of pledge fulfillment, all else constant. A third hypothesis therefore stipulates: \textit{H3) Substantial expectations on policy outcomes that relate to the factual content of pledged policies, have larger effects on perception of pledge fulfillment relative to substantial expectations that goes beyond factual content (all else constant).} In the study, this will be seen in that individuals assign greater weight to aspects of policy outcomes that relates to the specific policy content
as proposed in election pledges, when rhetoric is held constant.

A fourth expectation is that persuasive words will have indirect influence on voters’ perception of pledge fulfillment, because they have impact on voters’ substantial expectations on policy outcomes. Recall that I predict that persuasive words can induce substantial expectations on policies that go beyond what is actually proposed to do in election pledges—the factual content of policies. If this is the case, voters can experience a discrepancy between their anticipations on what should happen after election, and policy outcomes, which in turn should increase the risk that they will perceive the pledges as broken, or partly broken. The fourth hypothesis thus stipulates: 

\[ H4 \] Persuasive words in election pledges increase perception of pledge breaking, because they evoke substantial expectations on policy outcomes that goes beyond factual information on the policy content.

In the study, this will be seen in that 1) individuals who are exposed to persuasive words in election pledges assign greater weight to aspects of a policy pledge that goes beyond the factual content of the actual pledged policies, and that 2) individuals who assign greater weight to aspects of a policy pledge that is induced by persuasive words, but not supported by factual information on the policy content, will show a greater perception of pledge breaking.

Figure 1 illustrates the predicted chain of effects of persuasive words in the formulation of election pledges. Pre-election, persuasive words open up for substantial expectations on policy outcomes that go beyond factual information about the policies. Post-election, this increase perception of pledge breaking, due to imbalance between voters’ anticipations on the policies, and the actual policy outcomes.\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{7} In comparison, neutral formulations of policy pledges should generate less difference in predictions of what should happen after election. This should, in turn, prevent perception of pledge breaking in a post-election scenario.
Figure 1. Predictions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-election</th>
<th>Post-election</th>
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<td>Information on policy outcomes</td>
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\[ Pledge \text{ rhetoric:} \]

Persuasive words ➔ Expectations on policy outcomes ➔ Perception pledge fulfillment

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The experimental study

**Proceedings**

The hypotheses are tested in a web-based survey experiment on 1,796 Swedish citizens. The experiment has a sequential design, with two measure points. Respondents are first exposed to an election pledge as treatment, after which they are asked some corresponding questions (round 1). They are then exposed to an intervention—a news article that reports about policy outcomes—after which they are asked to evaluate whether the pledge have been fulfilled or not (round 2).

**Treatments**

In the first round, all respondents were exposed to a fictive election pledge proposing more liberal rules concerning labor migration in Sweden. The policies were, more precisely, to 1) make employment contracts for migrant workers legally binding, and 2) increase the number of days a labor migrant have to find a new job in case their initial employment contract is cancelled. The pledge is fictive, and respondents are presented the policies in the form of a flyer. The respondents were randomly assigned to read one of three versions of the pledge. The specific policies are exactly the same in all treatment versions, whereas rhetoric varies. In
the control condition, the policies are described in neutral terms (i.e. without persuasive words). The two treatment texts describes the policies using either left- or right-laden persuasive words, but are formulated not to include any additional factual information on the policy content relative to the control version.\(^8\)

The left-laden treatment describe the policies with the following persuasive words; “equality,” “welfare,” “fair,” “solidarity,” “safe,” “respect,” and “no exploitation.” The right-laden treatment describes the policies with the words “economic growth,” “competitive,” “competence,” “free,” “flexibility,” “beneficial,” “effectiveness.”

To emphasize the importance of the persuasive words, enforcing strategies are used throughout the treatments. Some persuasive words are repeated (e.g., “equal” in the left-laden version, and “competitive” in the right-laden version of the pledge), and similar words are used to emphasize the importance of the persuasive words (e.g., “secure” to be compared with “safe” in the left-laden version, and “attractive” to be compared with “beneficial” in the right-laden version). The treatments also include deterministic words such as “require” and “necessary.” English translations of the treatments are presented in Appendix A.

To operationalize the treatment (i.e. left- and right-laden persuasive words), I made use of literature on left and right ideology. Examples of words that are typically associated with left ideology—and which fit the three conditions for persuasive words; value-laden, emotive and linguistically flexible—are “equality,” “progressive,” “solidarity,”

\(^8\) I note here that the design exclude variables that have previously been shown to moderate and limit effects of rhetoric, such as party label (e.g., Slothuus and de Vreese, 2010) and competing messages (e.g., Chong and Druckman, 2007b). The absence of these factors increase the internal validity of the experiment, but at the same time decrease the external validity of the results, as political messages in real life has a sender and is often contrasted to other information.

To make sure that the words conform to left-right ideology in Sweden, I calculated the frequency of these, and similar words, in the 2006 and 2010 election manifestos for the established political parties in Sweden. I also performed a small survey with 80 Swedish citizens, who were asked to place themselves on a left-right scale and indicate to what extent they liked these, or similar, words. The most clear-cut result on left-laden persuasive words in the pilot surveys—and which also concord with traditional left ideology—was “equality.” The most clear-cut result on the right-laden words was “competitiveness.” I made these words central in the treatments. The other words that are included are persuasive words that accord with values that are traditionally associated with left- or right ideology, and adjusted to fit the specific labor migration policy case.

9 Respondents were approached on a central train station and at larger entrances to the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

10 To test whether the experimental manipulation worked as intended, i.e. whether the persuasive words used in respective treatment denote left- and right-laden values, respondents were asked to place the policies on a left-right scale. Analyses showed that the left-laden treatment worked as intended—respondents in this treatment group placed the policies further to the left when compared to the control group. The analyses on the right-laden treatment group revealed that respondents, as expected, placed the policies further to the right. But in this case, the differences to the control group were not statistically significant. This means that the right-laden treatment is weaker, and less clear-cut in terms of its value-laden
**Intervention**

In the second round, participants were exposed to an intervention in the form of a news article reporting about the policy outcomes on the labor migration pledge. The media article format suits the context of the study, since it is through news media that we receive a large part of what we know of governmental performance (e.g., Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010, 576; Bennett & Entman, 2001). The news article interventions are fictive, and designed to provide “realistic” information about policy outcomes.

Before reading the article, respondents were told to imagine that the Party that made the election pledge won the election, and that three years have passed. There was no experimental variation of the intervention texts, meaning that all respondents saw exactly the same reports on the policy outcomes.

The article starts by reporting that the actual policies that were proposed in the pledge have been implemented: the government have made employment contracts for migrant workers legally binding, and increased the number of days a labor migrant have to find a new job in case their initial employment contract is cancelled. The article does, in other words, make clear that the party have acted upon its promise. This is in accordance with the situation in real life; research has shown that the majority of election pledges are fulfilled in Sweden (Naurin, 2011) as well as in other European countries (e.g., Thomson, 2001, 2011).

connotations. To test the external validity of the treatments, the respondents were also asked to indicate how realistic they found the pledged policies. The analyses showed that respondents in both treatment groups, as well as the control group, found the pledges to be medium realistic. Results of the manipulation checks are reported in appendix D.
The information that the policies have been implemented is followed by some negative information on the situation. More precisely, the article proceeds with interviews with experts who make critical comments about the policy outcomes. This is also in accordance with a real life situation; research point to a trend of growing negativity, or “negativity bias,” in news media’s reporting about politics, politicians and governmental performance (see e.g., Patterson, 1996; Farnsworth & Lichter, 2010; Soroka, 2014, 19).

The critic concerns issues that are related to the persuasive words that were used in the treatment versions of the policy pledge, but is formulated in different terms to not remind respondents of the exact wording of the treatments. There is, for example, an interview with an employment law attorney who states that many labor migrant workers still work under unsatisfactory conditions with low salaries and long working hours, and a representative from the business sector, who says that we cannot expect that more people will come to Sweden to work under current conditions.

The article ends with some comments from a governmental spokesperson, who ensure that the government is doing a good job, but that it takes time before one could see the kind of changes that the interviewed experts request. An English translation of the intervention text is presented in Appendix B.

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11 This is important, since re-exposure to the persuasive words in the intervention would obstruct possibilities to draw conclusions about whether respondents’ reactions to the policy outcomes are actually due to how the election pledge were formulated.
12 I note that respondents are exposed to information about policy outcomes in direct relation to exposure to the treatments, which is not the case in real life. This limitation should be taken into account when implications for real election contexts are discussed.
**Variables**

The dependent variable in the study is *Perception of pledge fulfillment*. The question was asked after exposure to the intervention text, with the exact formulation: “To what extent do you think that the Party has fulfilled its promises on labor migration?” The answer was measured on a 7-point scale with designated endpoints, 1 = ”Not fulfilled at all” and 7 = ”Completely fulfilled,” and a designated midpoint, 4 = “Partly fulfilled.”

The study also has a mediating variable: *Substantial expectations on the policy outcomes*. This variable is operationalized by measuring the weight that respondents assign to different aspects of the current situation on labor migration (as described in the intervention text), for their evaluation of whether the pledge is fulfilled or not. The question was asked after exposure to the intervention text, and the formulation of the question was: “What was important to you when you evaluated the degree to which the Party has fulfilled the promises on labor migration?”

The question was closed-ended with 8 items related to the situation on labor migration. Two items were formulated to relate only to the exact content of the policies as presented in the election pledge, two items measured outcomes related to the left-laden treatment, two items measured outcomes related to the right-laden treatment, and two items measured outcomes that where neither related to the exact policy content, nor to the two treatments. For each item, respondents answered to which degree they found the item important when they evaluated whether the Party had fulfilled their election pledge. The answers were measured on a 7-point scale with designated endpoints, 1 = ”Not important at all” and 7 = ”Very important,” and a designated midpoint, 4 = “Neither important nor unimportant.” The items are presented in Appendix C.
Sample Information and Randomization Control

The survey was employed between December 1, 2015 and January 4, 2016 in the Swedish Citizen Panel, an online University-based survey conducted by the Laboratory of Opinion Research (LORE) at the University of Gothenburg (see Martinsson, J. et al. 2016, for a technical report). The participants in the samples are opt-in with an overrepresentation of males, politically interested, and highly educated individuals. However, since the use of core values in the formation of political attitudes have been described as a “universal human trait” (Feldman & Steenbergen, 2001; Lakoff, 2002), I expect that effects of the treatment should not be overly dependent on demographic variables such as gender and education. Moreover, randomization checks were employed to ensure that the treatment groups were balanced with regard to demographic backgrounds. The randomization checks are reported in Appendix E.

Results

I start by investigating H1: that persuasive words in election pledges can induce substantial expectations on policy outcomes that are not supported by factual information.

Recall that I operationalize substantial expectations on policy outcomes by measuring the weight individuals assign to different aspects of the policy outcomes when they evaluate whether the pledge is fulfilled or not. To assess the effects of persuasive words on substantial expectations on policy outcomes, I ran a series of one-way ANOVA analyses on the closed-ended question asked after exposure to the intervention article, where respondents rated the importance of different aspects of the policy outcomes. The results are reported in Table 1.

Starting with the left-laden treatment group, we see that respondents rate three items as more important for their evaluation of fulfillment of the pledge, when compared to the control group. The first two items relate directly to persuasive words used in the left-laden
treatment. These items are “increased equality and less exploitation” ($M_{\text{left}} = 5.00$, $se = 1.59$: $M_{\text{control}} = 4.68$, $se = 1.86$, $p <= .01$), and “safe and fair working conditions” ($M_{\text{left}} = 5.41$, $se = 1.41$: $M_{\text{control}} = 5.18$, $se = 1.70$, $p <= .05$). These results are in accordance with H1. Since respondents exposed to the left-laden treatment assign greater weight to aspects of the policy outcomes on labor migration that relates to the persuasive words—but not directly to the actual policy content—than the control group, persuasive words seem to have have influenced their substantial expectations on the policy outcomes.

For the forthcoming analyses, I created an index of the two items, titled “left-related expectations on policy outcomes” (standardized scale ranging from 0-1). The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ is .83, thus above the acceptable level of .70. Analyses using the index show positive effects of the treatment in expected direction ($M_{\text{left}} = .70$, $se = .23$: $M_{\text{control}} = .66$, $se = .27$, $p <= .05$).

Moreover, the analyses show that respondents exposed to left-laden persuasive words assign greater weight to an item that relate directly to the actual policy content; “legally binding employment contracts” ($M_{\text{left}} = 5.40$, $se = 1.41$: $M_{\text{control}} = 5.14$, $se = 1.54$, $p <= .01$). A reason could possibly be that legally binding employment contracts comply well with respondents’ perception of what, for example, less exploitation and fair working conditions, should mean.

Moving on to the right-laden treatment group, we see that respondents do not emphasize any certain aspects of the policy outcomes as more important for their evaluation of pledge fulfillment, compared to respondents in the control group. The analyses of the right-laden treatment, therefore, do not support H1. In this case, persuasive words do not seem to influence individuals’ substantial expectations on the policy outcomes.

---

13 The alpha value for the two right-related items was 0.62, and thereby below the 0.7 acceptable level. I did therefore not create an index in this case.
Table 1. Substantial Expectations on Policy Outcomes: Effects of Persuasive Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy expectations</th>
<th>Treatment group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actual Policy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer time to find a new job</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legally binding employment contracts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased equality and less exploitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe and fair working conditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Index Left (scale 0-1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased competitiveness and competence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive and favorable working conditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well functioning integration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear and concrete working conditions</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Left</th>
<th>Right</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>F(df)</th>
<th>P &gt; F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actual Policy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer time to find a new job</td>
<td>4.93 (1.57)</td>
<td>5.01 (1.56)</td>
<td>5.11 (1.49)</td>
<td>2.01 (2, 1631)</td>
<td>.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legally binding employment contracts</td>
<td>5.40** (1.41)</td>
<td>5.16 (1.58)</td>
<td>5.14 (1.54)</td>
<td>5.21 (2, 1629)</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased equality and less exploitation</td>
<td>5.00** (1.59)</td>
<td>4.83 (1.74)</td>
<td>4.68 (1.86)</td>
<td>4.83 (2, 1619)</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe and fair working conditions</td>
<td>5.41* (1.41)</td>
<td>5.28 (1.62)</td>
<td>5.18 (1.70)</td>
<td>3.07 (2, 1629)</td>
<td>.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Index Left (scale 0-1)</td>
<td>.70* (.23)</td>
<td>.67 (.26)</td>
<td>.66 (.27)</td>
<td>4.39 (2, 1614)</td>
<td>.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased competitiveness and competence</td>
<td>4.41 (1.44)</td>
<td>4.50 (1.52)</td>
<td>4.40 (1.59)</td>
<td>.69 (2, 1617)</td>
<td>.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive and favorable working conditions</td>
<td>4.80 (1.48)</td>
<td>4.92 (1.56)</td>
<td>4.82 (1.64)</td>
<td>.87 (2, 1627)</td>
<td>.418</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well functioning integration</td>
<td>5.25 (1.59)</td>
<td>5.19 (1.70)</td>
<td>5.13 (1.75)</td>
<td>.75 (2, 1626)</td>
<td>.472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear and concrete working conditions</td>
<td>5.24 (1.41)</td>
<td>5.23 (1.49)</td>
<td>5.15 (1.55)</td>
<td>.60 (2, 1629)</td>
<td>.551</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. ***p <= .001, **p <= .01, *p <= .05. Entries are mean values, with standard deviations in parentheses. Asterisk after mean values indicate that a treatment group differ significantly from the control group. Policy expectations are measured on 7-point scales, ranging from 1 = "Not important at all" to 7 = "Very important."

To test H2—that substantial expectations on policy outcomes influence perception of pledge fulfillment—I use OLS regression. More precisely, I regress perception of pledge fulfillment on all items measuring respondents’ substantial expectations on the policy outcomes. To test H3—that expectations on policy outcomes that relate to specific policy content have larger effects on perception of pledge fulfillment relative to substantial expectations that goes beyond factual content, all else constant—I also included dummy variables for the treatments as control variables. Moreover, I also included individuals’ left-right predispositions as control variable, since left-right predispositions have proven to play important role for a variety of political opinion and attitude formation processes, in previous studies. The results
are presented in Table 2.

The analyses show effects of expectations on policy outcomes on perception of pledge fulfillment, for several items. If we look at the value and size of the effects, we can first see that as respondents assign weight to the actual policy content when they evaluate the fulfillment of the pledge, their perception of fulfillment increase ($p = .000$ in both cases). This makes sense, since the intervention make clear that the actual pledged policies have been implemented. In accordance with H3, the analyses also reveal that, when treatment is held constant, assigning weight to the actual policy content have larger effects on respondents’ perception of pledge fulfillment, than have other aspects of the policy outcomes.

If we look at effects of assigning weight to aspects of the policy outcomes that do not relate to the specific policy content, we can see that this have negative effects on perception of pledge fulfillment, in all cases. Also these results make sense, since the intervention article makes negative reports on the outcomes of the policies on all these aspects. The effects are significantly negative when expectations on the policy outcomes are related to the left-laden words (index including “safe and fair working conditions” and “increased equality and less exploitation”) ($p = .001$). Moreover, the analyses show significant negative effects on perception of pledge fulfillment when respondents assign weight to “attractive and favorable working conditions” ($p = .003$), and to “well functioning integration” ($p = .000$). The effects are neither significant for the two treatments, nor for individuals’ left-right predispositions.

In sum, the results indicate that substantial expectations on policy outcomes have effects on perception of pledge fulfillment (support for H2). The effects are also larger when the expectations concern the actual policy content, when treatment conditions are held constant (support for H3).
Table 2. Perception of Pledge Fulfillment: Effects of Substantial Expectations on Policy Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of pledge fulfillment B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.523</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Policy expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actual Policy</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Longer time to find a new job</td>
<td>.165</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legally binding employment contracts</td>
<td>.181</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Left

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index “left-related expectations”</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“left-related expectations”</td>
<td>-.132</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Right

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increased competitiveness and competence</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.019</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.510</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attractive and favorable working conditions</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.107</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.003</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Well functioning integration</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear and concrete working conditions</td>
<td>-.136</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual left-right predispositions</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left-laden treatment (ref=control)</td>
<td>-.010</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right-laden treatment (ref=control)</td>
<td>-.021</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adjusted $r^2$ | .19 |
N               | 1,583 |

Notes. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients (B), and standard errors (SE).

I move on to the fourth hypothesis, that persuasive words in election pledges increase perception of pledge breaking, because they evoke substantial expectations on policy outcomes that go beyond factual information on the policy content.

In the left-laden treatment case, the results on H1 revealed a positive significant relationship between the independent variable—persuasive words—and the mediator—substantial expectations on policy outcomes. The results on H2 also showed a significant relationship between the mediator and the outcome variable—perception of pledge fulfillment. This means that—although only in one of the two treatment cases: left-laden persuasive words—the analyses yield support for the two first requirements for a true mediation relationship: a significant relation between the independent variable and the mediator (condition 1), and a significant relation between the mediator and the outcome variable (condition 2) (see Baron & Kenny, 1986).

The analyses on H2 (see Table 2) revealed that, when individuals’ substantial
expectations on policy outcomes are held constant, neither the left- nor the right-laden treatment have significant effects on respondents’ perception of pledge fulfillment. However, since both condition 1 and 2 for mediation was fulfilled, persuasive words can still have indirect effects on perception of pledge fulfillment, but which will be visible only when the direct effects on the mediators are taken into account. I therefore proceed with mediation analyses to assess whether there are indirect effects of persuasive words on perception of pledge fulfillment, via substantial expectations on the policy outcomes.\(^\text{14}\)

To test H4, I use Hayes’ (2013) application PROCESS for SPSS, which uses bootstrap analyses for mediation. Since the analyses of H1 and H2 only showed support in the left-laden treatment case, not for the right-laden treatment, I will only employ the analyses on the left-laden treatment group.

I start by conducting three standard ordinary least square regression analyses, with treatment as independent variable. The first two models have substantial expectations on policy outcomes as dependent variable. The first model does, more precisely, use the index that measures left-related substantial expectations on policy outcomes as dependent variable, and the second model uses the item “legally binding employment contracts.” These variables measure the aspects to which respondents in the left-laden treatment group assigned greater weight when compared to the control group.

The third model use perception of pledge fulfillment as outcome variable, and include substantial expectations on policy outcomes as mediators. In this model, I also include all variables that measure substantial expectations on policy outcomes, as well as individuals’

\(^{14}\) According to Baron and Kennys’ (1986) recommendations, a relationship between X and Y is a condition for proceeding with mediation analysis. However, this requirement has been subject for critic by many (see e.g., Shrout & Bolger, 2002; Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Parlamis, Allred, & Block, 2010; Maguen et al., 2011).
left-right predispositions, as covariates. After running the OLS regressions, I proceed with analyses of the indirect effects of the left-laden persuasive words on perception of pledge fulfillment, using bootstrap analyses.

Results from the regression analyses are presented in Figure 2. The $a_1$ and $a_2$ paths in the figure show the direct effects of left-laden persuasive words on the two mediating variables. The coefficient for path $a_1$ shows a significant positive effect of left-laden persuasive words on the weight respondents assign to the left-related aspects of the policy outcomes ($b = .042, p \leq .001$). This corroborates the findings on H1; left-laden persuasive words influence substantial expectations on policy outcomes that go beyond factual information on the policy content. The $a_2$ path shows that left-laden persuasive words also have direct positive effects on the weight respondents assign to the outcome on the actual proposed policies; legally binding employment contracts ($b = .052, p \leq .001$). Also this result corroborates the previous findings on H1.

The $b_1$ and $b_2$ paths show the coefficients that predict perception of pledge fulfillment by the two mediating variables. The $b_1$ path shows a significant and negative effect of the first mediating variable on perception of pledge fulfillment ($b = -.133, p \leq .001$); the more weight individuals assign to the left-related aspects of the policy outcomes, the less fulfilled they perceive the pledge. The $b_2$ path shows a positive effect of the second mediating variable ($b = .180, p \leq .001$). This means that, the more weight respondents assign to whether legally binding employment contracts for labor migrants have been implemented, the more fulfilled they rate the policy pledge. The $c'$ path shows no direct effects of the left-laden treatment on respondents’ perception of pledge fulfillment ($b = .001, p > .1$).

In sum, the results on the regression analyses corroborate the findings on H1 and H2. There are significant relationships between the left-laden treatment and the mediators,
and between the mediators and perception of pledge fulfillment. But there is no significant direct effect of the treatment on respondents’ perception of pledge fulfillment.

Figure 2. Perception of Pledge Fulfillment: Effects of Left-Laden Persuasive Words and Substantial Expectations on Policy Outcomes

Notes. $N = 1,583$. ***$p \leq .001$, **$p \leq .01$, *$p \leq .05$. Entries are unstandardized beta coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. Produced with the SPSS PROCESS macro, model 4 (Hayes, 2013). Other items that measure substantial expectations on policy outcomes, as well as individuals’ left-right predispositions, were included as covariates.

The results of the analyses on indirect effects of the left-laden treatment on respondents’ perception of pledge fulfillment are presented in Table 3. The analyses reveal significant indirect effects of the left-laden treatment via both of the mediating variables. The indirect effects via assigning weight to the left-related aspects of the outcomes in the pledge fulfillment evaluation process are negative ($b = -.0055$). The confidence intervals do not cross zero (-0.0103–-0.0021), which indicates that the effects are statistically significant on a 95% confidence level (Hayes, 2013, 109). The indirect effects via assigning weight to outcomes on the actual policy content—legally binding employment contracts—are in the opposite direction: positive ($b = .0094$), and are also significant on a 95% confidence level (CI: 0.0051–0.0151).
The analyses do, in other words, lend support for a mediated relationship between left-laden persuasive words and respondents’ perception of pledge fulfillment. Since there is evidence of mediation, whereas the direct effect of persuasive words on perception of pledge fulfillment is non-significant (path c’ in Figure 2), we can infer full mediation. In other words, there seem to be effects of persuasive words on perception of pledge fulfillment, but all effect is transmitted through substantial expectations on policy outcomes.

The total indirect effects of persuasive words are the sum of the transmitted effects via the mediating variables. In Table 3, we see that the total indirect effect of persuasive words via the mediating variables is positive ($b = .0039$), but since the confidence intervals cross zero, we can consider the effects non-significant (-0.0021–0.0102). It seems likely that the fact that one of the indirect effects was positive, and the other one was negative, the two transmitted effects have taken out each other in this case.

Table 3. Perception of Pledge Fulfillment: Indirect Effects of Left-Laden Persuasive Words via Substantial Expectations on Policy Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of pledge fulfillment</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>bootSE</th>
<th>bootLL</th>
<th>bootUL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indirect effect of persuasive words</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total indirect effect</td>
<td>.0039</td>
<td>.0031</td>
<td>-.0021</td>
<td>.0102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Indirect effect via mediators</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left-related expectations</td>
<td>-.0055</td>
<td>.0021</td>
<td>-.0103</td>
<td>-.0021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy content related expectations</td>
<td>.0094</td>
<td>.0025</td>
<td>.0051</td>
<td>.0151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely standardized indirect effect of persuasive words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total indirect effect</td>
<td>.0079</td>
<td>.0062</td>
<td>-.0042</td>
<td>.0209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Indirect effect via mediators</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left-related expectations</td>
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<td>.0042</td>
<td>-.0208</td>
<td>-.0043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy content related expectations</td>
<td>.0192</td>
<td>.0051</td>
<td>.0105</td>
<td>.0310</td>
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</table>

*Notes.* Entries are beta coefficients (B), standard errors (SE) and bias-corrected confidence intervals at 95% confidence level (LL = lower level confidence interval, UL = upper level confidence interval). Produced with the SPSS PROCESS macro, model 4 (Hayes, 2013), using bootstrap analyses (5000 resamples).
Discussion

The point of departure was that we know a lot about how election pledge rhetoric influence voters’ reactions to future oriented policy proposals, but surprisingly little on its possible effects in a post-election scenario. I proposed that, while persuasive words in election pledges might be beneficial for pledge makers on the short term by helping muster policy support, it might also come to a cost on the long-term when policy outcomes are known. The idea was that persuasive words can influence how individuals interpret what proposed policies are really about, and that this open up for discrepancy between voters’ policy expectations and actual policy outcomes. I proposed that this, in turn, could increase individuals’ perception of pledge breaking in a post-election scenario.

The findings from an experimental study on Swedish citizens indicate that persuasive words can influence individuals’ substantial expectations on policy outcomes, and that this, in turn, can influence their perception of pledge fulfillment. However, the effects were only found for one treatment—when the persuasive words had left-laden connotations—not when the treatment included persuasive words with right-laden connotations.

In the left-laden treatment case, analyses also revealed support for indirect negative effects of persuasive words on perception of pledge fulfillment, when individuals assigned weight to policy outcomes that related to the persuasive words used in the treatment. However, the analyses also showed some un-expected effects; respondents exposed to left-laden persuasive words also assigned more weight to aspects of policy outcomes that related to the actual policy content when compared to a control group. Here, the effects were positive instead of negative, and in the end, this turned out to take out the negative effects of the treatment induced policy expectations. The findings did therefore not support the hypothesis that persuasive words should increase voters’ perception of pledge breaking.

There are some obvious caveats with the study that needs to be addressed. First,
the results are not robust, since I found effects only in one out of the two treatment cases. Secondly, the analyses on the left-laden treatment—for which the effects on substantial policy expectations were found—also revealed some unexpected effects on respondents’ substantial expectations on the policies; it increased the weight respondents assigned to the actual pledge policies in their pledge fulfillment evaluation process. This makes the results less clear-cut in terms of whether persuasive words have positive, or negative, effects on individuals’ perception of pledge fulfillment.

I believe, however, that the effects I find on respondents exposed to left-laden persuasive words indeed are interesting and provide important food for thought. The study do show that persuasive words in election pledges, at least in certain cases, can make voters’ perceive aspects of a policy pledge—that are not really supported by factual information on the policy content—as important when they evaluate whether the pledge is fulfilled. This has several implications for the representative chain when voters’ policy preferences are linked to parties’ policy intentions in election campaigns.

First, if voters’ substantial expectations on policy outcomes are influenced by persuasive words, not only by factual information, they will vote for “perceived” policies that may differ from the parties real intentions. If this is the case, it becomes difficult to know whether what in elections manifest as the will of the people actually reflects the “true” public preferences (Chong & Druckman, 2007c, 637), and this, in turn, makes it difficult for incumbents to know how to best respond to voters’ preferences (e.g., Zaller, 1992; Entman, 1993; Bartels, 2003). Secondly, since the effects of assigning weight to aspects of policy outcomes that related to the persuasive words also had significant negative effects on the respondents perception of pledge fulfillment, the study indicate that persuasive words can have negative effects on voters’ evaluation of governments policy performance post-election.

In conclusion, the study bring to light that pre-election rhetoric, at least in
certain cases, can have effects on voters’ post-election evaluations of governments policy performance. This emphasizes the importance to perform more systematic studies on this topic. This study should only be seen as a first step in the process to improve the understanding of when and how persuasive words can, and cannot, influence individuals’ reactions to policy outcomes post-election.

References

Communication, 43(4), 51-58.


Tavris, C., Aronson, Elliot. (2007). *Mistakes were made (but not by me): When we justify foolish beliefs, bad decisions, and hurtful acts.*


Appendices

Appendix A. English Translation of the Labor Migration Pledge Treatments

Introduction. “Imagine that a political party, let’s call it “The Party,” give the following election promises regarding labor migration in Sweden. We ask you to read the text carefully, and answer the questions that come afterward.”

Control

Labor migration.
The Swedish population is aging, while at the same time the number of persons in working age is decreasing drastically. This requires political measures that make more people to want to come here and work. Today it requires an employment contract to come here and work. If an employer breaks the contract, the labor migrant will only have two months to find a new job. If not, she or he will have to leave the country. The key to continuous labor migration is that those who come here stay for a long term. To create a reasonable chance for this, we promise to extend the time to find a new job, from two to four months. To make more people to want to come here and work, we also promise to make the employment contracts for migrant workers legally binding. We do this so that those who come here on an employment contract stay and establish.

Partiet
info@partiet.se

Left-laden

Labor migration without exploitation!
The Swedish population is aging, while at the same time the number of persons in working age is decreasing drastically. Our welfare requires political measures that make more people to want to come here and work and contribute under fair and safe conditions. Today it requires an employment contract to come here and work. If an employer breaks the contract, the labor migrant will only have two months to find a new job. If not, she or he will have to leave the country. The key to continuous labor migration is an equal and solidarity labor market. To create a reasonable chance for this, we promise to extend the time to find a new job, from two to four months. To make more people to want to come here and work, we also need safe and fair working conditions. We therefore also promise to make the employment contracts for migrant workers legally binding. A secure, equal and solidarity labor market, where people are being respected instead of exploited, is necessary if those who come here on an employment contract should stay and establish.

Partiet
info@partiet.se

Right-laden

Labor migration generates economic growth!
The Swedish population is aging, while at the same time the number of persons in working age is decreasing drastically. Our economic growth requires political measures that make more people to want to come here and work and contribute with competitiveness and competence. Today it requires an employment contract to come here and work. If an employer breaks the contract, the labor migrant will only have two months to find a new job. If not, she or he will have to leave the country. The key to continuous labor migration is a free and flexible labor market. To create a reasonable chance for this, we promise to extend the time to find a new job, from two to four months. To make more people to want to come here and work, we also need attractive and beneficial working conditions. We therefore also promise to make the employment contracts for migrant workers legally binding. An effective and competitive labor market, where people can contribute actively with their competence is necessary if those who come here on an employment contract should stay and establish.

Partiet
info@partiet.se
Appendix B. English Translation of Intervention

Introduction. “Imagine that The Party won the election, and that they now have been in office for three years. You will get to read a news story about what happened on the labor migration issue during the mandate period. We ask you to read the text carefully, and answer the questions that come afterward.”

Fewer expected to seek jobs in Sweden

The government receives tough critic

Low wages and long working hours means that fewer and fewer labor migrants are expected to move to Sweden. This despite the government's election promise to improve the conditions. This says both labor rights lawyers and entrepreneurs.

– The legally binding employment contracts have not made the conditions for labor migrants more appealing, says Jamila Malik, lawyer in employment law matters, in an interview on the Swedish National Television Channel.

In her profession, Malik has represented many people who have come to Sweden as labor migrants, and she points out that many still works under poor conditions with low wages and long working hours. The concern is also heard from the business sector.

– Under current conditions, we can definitely not expect that more people will seek jobs on the Swedish labor market, says Linda Dahl, Managing Director of Technology AB, a business that often needs to hire migrant workers on short contracts, to DN.

It was during the election campaign that the party promised to improve the conditions for migrant workers. Some changes have been implemented since the government took office. For example, the employment contracts have been made legally binding. The government has also increased the number of days a labor migrant can use to find a new job in case the first labor contract is cancelled.

But according to Jamila Malik, these changes are not sufficient. She also criticizes the government’s efforts when it comes to improve labor migrants possibilities to establish themselves on the labor market. To search for, and receive, a new job in Sweden, good knowledge in the Swedish language, and knowledge on how the society works, and the laws, is required. And this is difficult to achieve in a few months. It requires more substantial measures if a person who loses her employment contract should have a reasonable chance to get a new job, she says to a reporter for the Swedish National Television Channel.

The Party’s spokesperson for school issues, Jonathan Haag, responds to the criticism.

– The government is doing a good job on the labor migrant pledges. But we must understand that it takes time before one can see results of these kinds of changes, he says to the News Magazine.

Sara Hansen
sara.hansen@dn.se

Appendix C. Items That Measure Expectations on Policy Outcomes in the Labor Migration Pledge Case

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Original Swedish Version</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ökad konkurrenskraft och kompetens</td>
<td>Increased competitiveness and competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Attraktiva och gynnsamma arbetsvillkor</td>
<td>Attractive and favorable working conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ökad jämställdhet och mindre exploatering</td>
<td>Increased gender equality and less exploitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Längre tid för att hitta nytt jobb</td>
<td>Longer time to find a new job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Välfungerande integration</td>
<td>Well functioning integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Trygga och rättvisa arbetsvillkor</td>
<td>Safe and fair working conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Juridiskt bindande anställningsavtal</td>
<td>Legally binding employment contracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tydliga och konkreta arbetsvillkor</td>
<td>Clear and concrete working conditions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D. Manipulation Checks

To see whether the treatments, i.e. the left- and the right-laden persuasive words, worked as intended, respondents were asked to place the proposed policies on a left-right scale. The analyses revealed that respondents exposed to the right-laden treatment version placed the policies further to the right compared to the control group, whereas the group exposed to left-laden persuasive words placed it further to the left. However, only the left-laden treatment group placed the policies significantly different from the control group. This means that, whereas the persuasive words in the left-laden treatment seem to work as intended, it is less clear whether the persuasive words in the right-laden treatment are associated to right-laden ideology. This weakens the strength and validity of the right-laden treatment, and needs to be taken into account when conclusions of effects are drawn.

To test the external validity of the policy pledge, respondents were also asked to indicate how realistic they found the policies. The analyses reveal that respondents found the pledges to be medium realistic, and there where no significant differences between the treatment groups and the control group. The results are presented in Table D.

Table D. Manipulation Checks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group mean (Std.)</th>
<th>F(df)</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LABOR MIGRATION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pledge on left-right scale</td>
<td>4.10 (1.47)</td>
<td>4.45 (1.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pairwise comparisons</td>
<td>P &gt; t</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left vs Control</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right vs Control</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right vs Left</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pledge realistic</td>
<td>3.77 (1.57)</td>
<td>3.63 (1.54)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. Pledge on left-right scale is measured by the question: “It is sometimes said that policy proposals can be placed on a left-right scale. Where would you place the proposals on labor migration / the school on a political left-right scale?” The answers were measured on a 7-point scale with designated endpoints, 1 = “Far to the left” and 7 = “Far to the right,” and a designated midpoint, 4 = “Neither to the left nor to the right.” Pledge realistic is measured by the question: “How realistic do you find The Party’s pledges about labor migration / the school? The answers were measured on a 7-point scale with designated endpoints, 1 = ”Very unrealistic” and 7 = ” Very realistic,” and a designated midpoint, 4 = “Neither realistic nor unrealistic.”
### Appendix E. Randomization Checks by Treatment Group: Labor Migration Pledge

**Control variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>One-way anova</th>
<th></th>
<th>F(df)</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group mean (Std.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Left</strong></td>
<td><strong>Right</strong></td>
<td><strong>Control</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>50.25 (15.01)</td>
<td>50.13 (15.20)</td>
<td>48.99 (14.94)</td>
<td>1.25 (2, 1743)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left-right predispositions</td>
<td>4.95 (2.42)</td>
<td>4.68 (2.48)</td>
<td>4.75 (2.42)</td>
<td>1.91 (2, 1788)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest</td>
<td>1.64 (.63)</td>
<td>1.68 (.62)</td>
<td>1.67 (.62)</td>
<td>.81 (2, 1661)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in Politicians</td>
<td>2.70 (.78)</td>
<td>2.71 (.78)</td>
<td>2.67 (.81)</td>
<td>.51 (2, 1662)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chi$^2$ test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entries = frequency</th>
<th>Chi$^2$(df)</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Woman</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.31(4)</td>
<td>.679</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes.** *Left-right predispositions* ranges from 0 = “Far to the left” to 10 = “Far to the right,” with a designated endpoint 5 = “Neither to the left nor to the right.” *Political interest* ranges from 1 = “Very interested” to 4 = “Not interested at all.” *Political trust* ranges from 1 = “Very large” to 4 = “Very small.”