



2017/18

INTEREST AND CONFIDENCE IN FOCUS

VA Barometer 2017/18 – VA report 2017:3

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More information about the survey can be found at www.v-a.se/english-portal/

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These are some of the results of this year's VA Barometer:

- Slight fall in Swedes' confidence in researchers at universities.
- Confidence in research is high.
- Research is not a key issue for political parties in Sweden.
- Respondents' level of education is an important factor for understanding differences in responses.

The VA Barometer is based on around 1,000 telephone interviews with a randomised sample representative of the Swedish population aged 16–74. Only statistically significant comparisons between the response groups are highlighted. It is the 16th Barometer survey since VA was founded in 2002. Read more about survey on page 30.

LAST YEAR THROUGH SWEDISH EYES

The Swedish government decides that the **University of Dalarna** will continue to operate on two campuses in Borlänge and Falun, instead of merging the two campuses into one.

The Syrian regime takes back **Aleppo** after over four years of civil war.

Ole Petter Ottersen appointed new **Vice-Chancellor of Karolinska Institute**.

SpaceX makes history by successfully launching a reused rocket into orbit.

Terrorist attack in the centre of Stockholm.

Physician, professor and public educator **Hans Rosling** dies.

March for Science organised in over 600 cities across the globe in support of science. VA coordinates the Stockholm march.

The Minister of Research announces that Sweden will develop a new **space strategy**.

Donald Trump's administration **withdraws America from the Paris Agreement** aimed at mitigating climate change caused by human activity.

In the **Human Pathology Atlas** project, Swedish researchers map all human genes in 17 common types of cancer.

The **VA Barometer interviews** are conducted.

Hurricane Irma sweeps across the Caribbean causing great devastation.

Nov Dec 2017 Jan Feb March April May June July Aug Sept Oct

Donald Trump wins the US presidential election.

Bob Dylan is awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

The term **alternative facts** is coined by Donald Trump's adviser Kellyanne Conway whilst defending statements on attendance numbers at the US presidential inauguration.

A **Swedish inquiry on research misconduct presents its final report** on a "New scheme to promote good practice and to manage misconduct in research".

One of Hungary's leading universities, the **Central European University** in Budapest, is **threatened with closure** due to a new law.

Anders Söderholm is appointed as the new Director General of the **Swedish Higher Education Authority**.

Former Vice-Chancellor of University of Gothenburg **Pam Fredman** is appointed to lead an inquiry into **resource allocation and the governance of Swedish universities**.

Emmanuel Macron takes over as President of France.

A **cyber attack** affects 230,000 computers in 150 countries. It is the largest cyber attack to date.

The **Swedish Transport Agency's** poor handling of sensitive IT systems and data results in two ministerial resignations.

North Korea carries out a nuclear test in the north of the country causing an earthquake of magnitude 6.3 on the Richter scale. North Korea's test is estimated to be eight times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

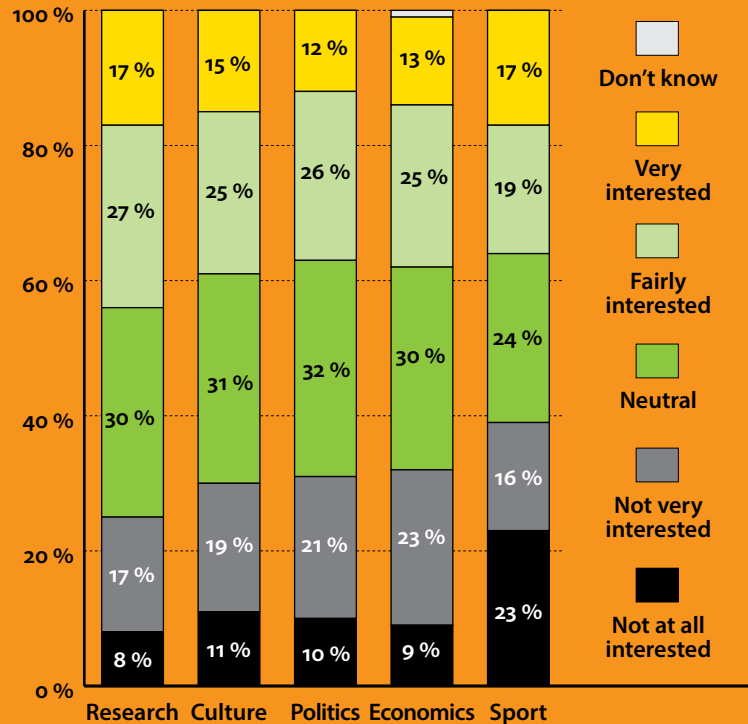
RESEARCH IS OF INTEREST

Our first question was about interest in different subjects: *research, culture, politics, economics* and *sport*. Research comes top with 44 percent who are *very* or *fairly* interested. Together with research, sport is the subject with the highest proportion of *very* interested (17 percent), but also the one that most are *not at all* interested in (23 percent).

There is a connection between level of education and interest in research, culture and politics; those with tertiary education are to a greater extent *very* or *fairly* interested in these subjects (53, 51 and 46 percent respectively). There is no difference for sport and economics. Women are more interested in culture, men in sport and economics. There are no gender differences for research and politics.

*The graph shows the **interest** in research, culture, politics, economics and sport respectively. (Five-point scale: Very interested, fairly interested, neutral, not very interested, not at all interested.)*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,021



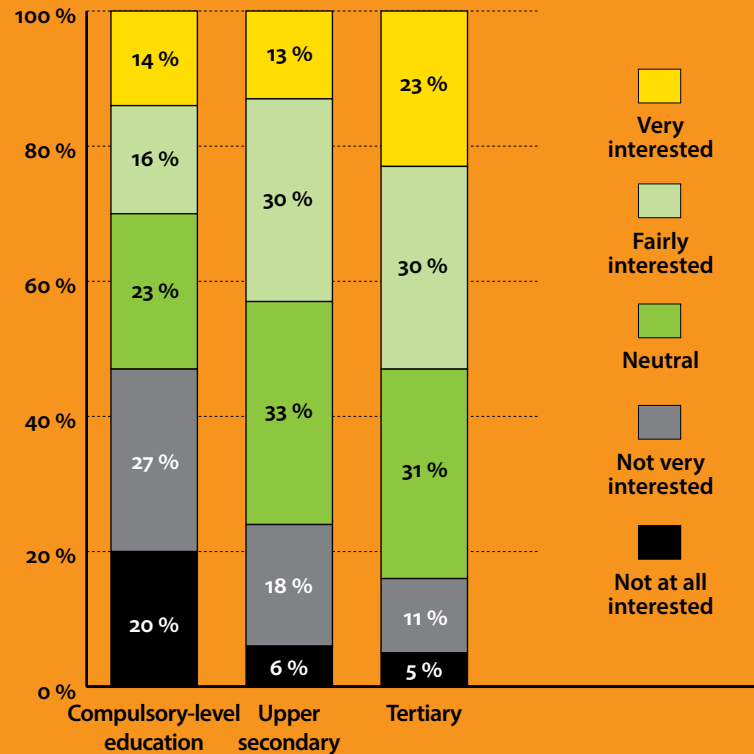
HIGHLY EDUCATED MORE INTERESTED

Almost half (44 percent) of Swedes are *very* or *fairly* interested in research. At the same time, a quarter are *not at all* or *not very* interested. Level of education is a key differentiating factor, as shown in the graph. More than half (53 percent) of those with tertiary education are *very* or *fairly* interested in research, compared to 30 percent of those with only compulsory-level education. In the latter group, 47 percent are *not at all* or *not very* interested in research (the average is 25 percent).

Age is also a factor; younger people (16–29 years old) are not as interested in research (36 compared to the average of 44 percent select the options *very* or *fairly* interested).

*The graph shows the **interest** in research, according to level of education. (Five-point scale: Very interested, fairly interested, neutral, not very interested, not at all interested.)*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,021



HIGH CONFIDENCE IN RESEARCH

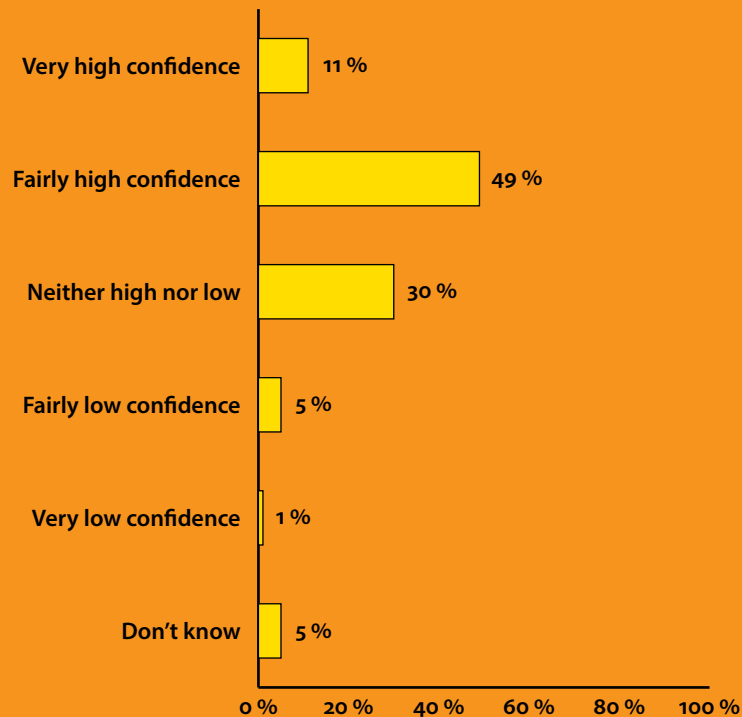
For 16 years, the VA Barometer has been measuring Swedes' confidence in researchers. This year, we also asked about confidence in *research*. The majority (60 percent) has *very high* or *fairly high* confidence in research, and only six percent have *very* or *fairly low* confidence.

Highly educated people have higher confidence in research than people with a lower level of education. People with only compulsory-level education are instead neutral about research (44 percent answer *neither high nor low*, and 43 percent select *very* or *fairly high* confidence).

Similarly, confidence in research is higher among people living in larger cities than residents of smaller towns and rural areas.

*The graph shows the answers to the question **Generally speaking, how much confidence do you have in research?***

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,021



WHAT AFFECTS CONFIDENCE?

As a follow-up to the question about confidence in research, we also asked about the reason behind the response given. The most common answer was *no particular reason*. This proportion is greater amongst people with high confidence in research than among those with low confidence.

Common reasons for having high confidence is that it is important to conduct research and it is therefore *necessary* to trust it, as well as references to researchers' *personal characteristics* (such as them being serious and knowledgeable). Common reasons for having low confidence in research is the perception that research is governed by different *economic interests* and *hidden agendas*, as well as respondents feeling that they themselves have *insufficient knowledge about research*.

The table shows the most common reasons for particular levels of confidence being chosen. Some answers have been clustered.

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 968 (VERY + FAIRLY HIGH = 643; NEITHER/NOR = 277; VERY + FAIRLY LOW = 48)

Very high + Fairly high confidence	Percentage
No particular reason	37 %
Necessary to trust research	7 %
Researchers' personal characteristics	7 %
Research develops society	6 %
Research is serious and fact-based	6 %

Neither high nor low confidence	Percentage
No particular reason	43 %
Fluctuating quality in research	14 %
Governed too much by money	8 %
Research governed by different agendas	7 %
Important to be sceptical	5 %

Very low + Fairly low confidence	Percentage
No particular reason	26 %
Insufficient personal knowledge	18 %
Governed too much by money	17 %
Research governed by different agendas	11 %
Important to be skeptical	7 %

PERCEPTIONS OF MEDICINE DOMINATE

Respondents were asked to say what comes to mind when they hear the term *research* (the other half were asked about the term *researchers*, see pages 18–19). A quarter of respondents mentioned something relating to the medical field, for example *medical research*, *pharmaceutical development* and *illnesses*. Other common responses were grouped in the categories *scientific method* and *new things/findings*. Positive words such as a *better world*, *knowledge seeking* and *development* were also frequent. One in seven had no particular association with the term *research*.

*The word cloud shows the respondents' associations to research. The option **nothing in particular** is excluded, as it is over dominant. Responses have been slightly reworded and grouped together to create the word cloud.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 514



CONFIDENCE IN RESEARCHERS FALLS

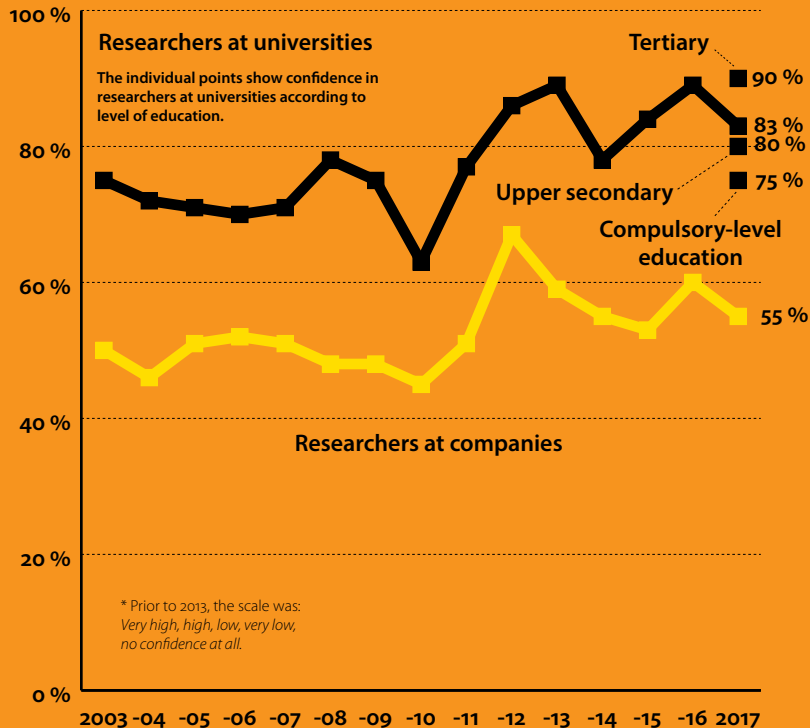
Confidence in researchers at *universities* has decreased compared to last year, from 89 to 83 percent (*very* and *fairly high* confidence).

Level of education (see graph) and gender are important factors in understanding the differences in responses. The difference in confidence between men and women this year (13 percent) is the largest since the survey was first conducted. The proportion of women who have *very* or *fairly high* confidence has fallen from 91 to 76 percent while men remain just below 90 percent.

The fall in confidence in researchers in *companies* (60 to 55 percent) is not statistically significant.

*The graph shows the proportion that has very or fairly high confidence in researchers. (Four point scale: Very high, fairly high, fairly low, very low. *)*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 507



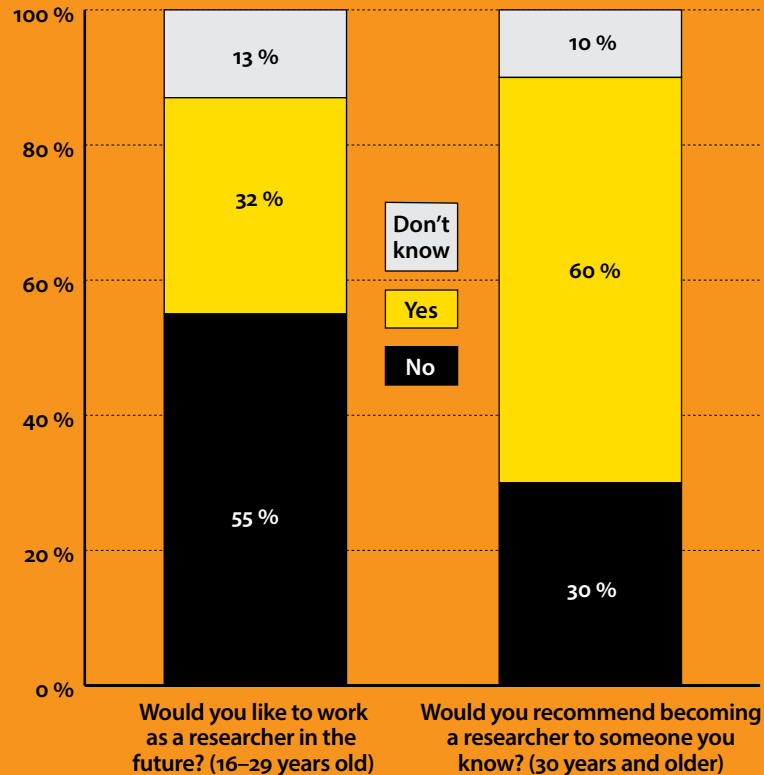
MORE MEN WANT TO BE RESEARCHERS

One third of the respondents between the ages of 16 and 29 say that they would like to work as a researcher in the future while a majority respond *no* to the question. The proportion of men who want to work as researchers in the future is twice as high (44 percent) as the proportion of women (22 percent).

Those aged 30 years and older were asked if they would recommend becoming a researcher to someone they know. 60 percent would. A third of them would not, and a tenth of respondents *don't know*. Highly educated people are more likely to recommend the research profession than those with a lower level of education.

*The graph shows the answers to the question **Would you like to work as a researcher in the future?** asked to people aged between 16 and 29, as well as the answers to the question **Would you recommend becoming a researcher to someone you know?** asked to people aged 30 and older.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 16–29 YEARS = 280; 30 YEARS AND OLDER = 741



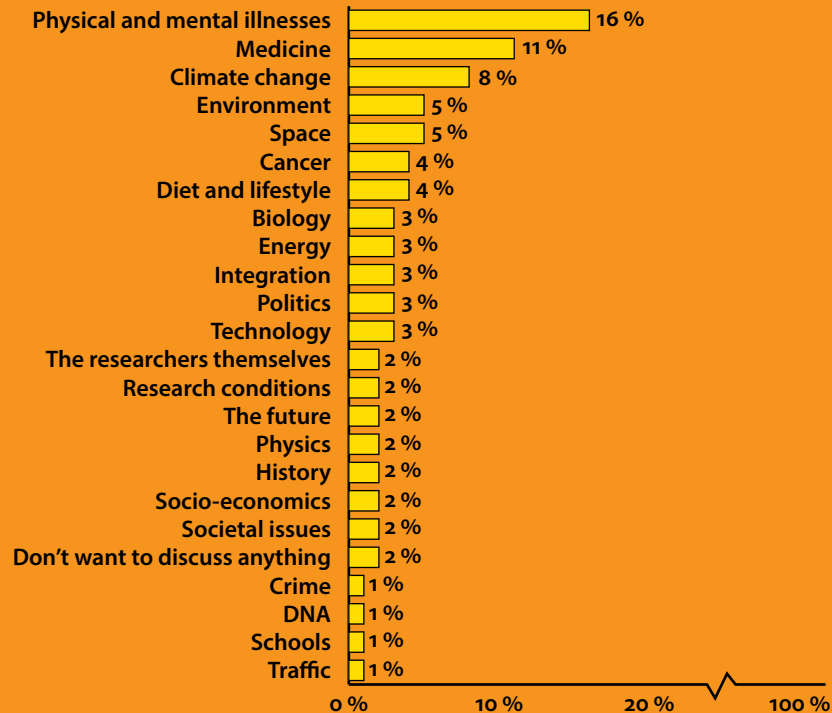
TOPICS TO TALK TO RESEARCHERS ABOUT

Interest in research is high in Sweden. To better understand this interest we asked what the public would like to talk to a researcher about if they had the chance. The answers were broad, but many would talk about illnesses. A large number would especially like to discuss *cancer*. *Climate change*, *the environment* and *space* are also high on the Swedes' list of subjects to discuss with researchers.

Many were interested in the researchers themselves and would like to ask, for example, "Why did you become a researcher?" and "What does your job involve?" Questions about the conditions of research also came up, such as scientific methods and the allocation of grants.

*The graph shows responses to the question **If you had the opportunity to talk to a researcher, what would you like to talk about?** The proportion that doesn't know (21 percent) is not included in the graph, as well as subjects that got less than one percent.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,021



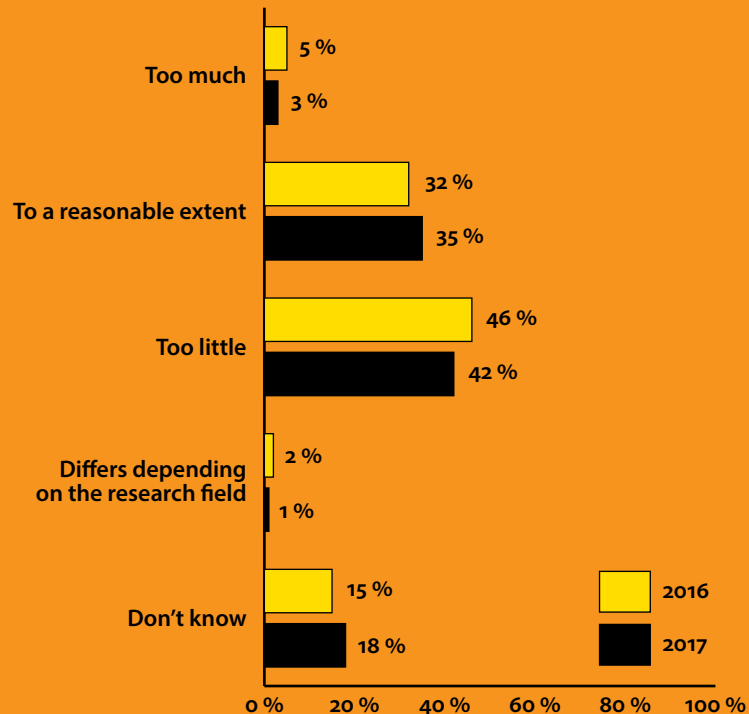
MORE RESEARCH IN POLICY-MAKING

More than four out of ten Swedes believe that politicians should take research more into account in their decision-making, while one third feel that the level is reasonable (similar to last year's results).

Those with tertiary education believe to a greater extent that research needs to be taken into account more (48 percent compared to an average of 42). The corresponding figure for those with only compulsory-level education is 36 percent. A third of those with tertiary education consider that reasonable account is taken; a figure that corresponds to 42 percent of people with only compulsory-level education. This figure is 47 percent for 16–29 year olds and 25 percent for people aged 30–44.

*The figure shows the answers to the question **To what extent do you think research is taken into account when political decisions are made in Sweden?***

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,021



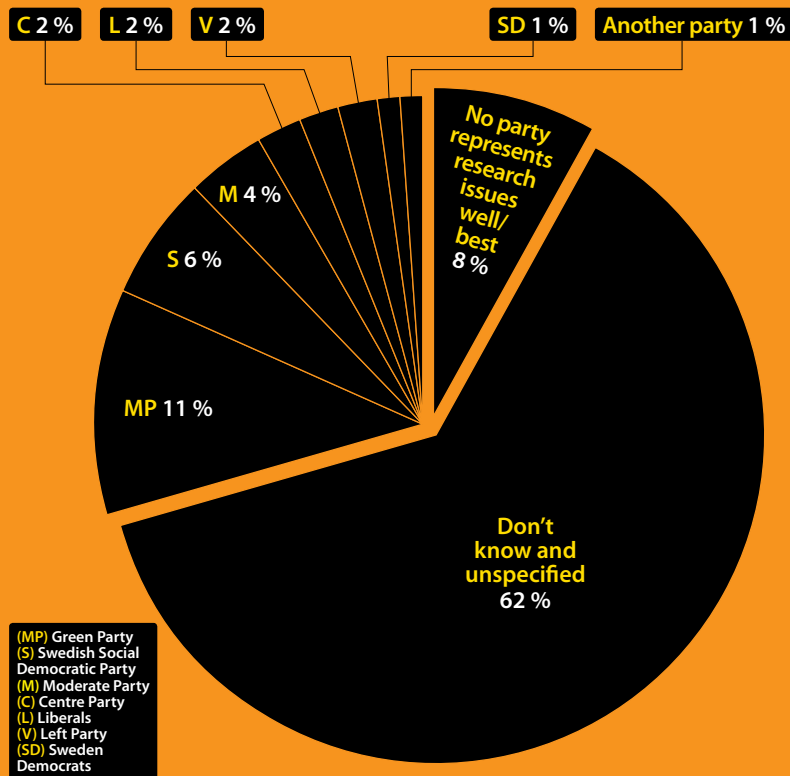
PARTIES UNCLEAR ON RESEARCH

Sweden's next general election will be held in 2018. We therefore asked which of the country's political parties best represent research issues. Obviously this is not clear, with six out of ten respondents saying they *don't know*. A lower proportion of people aged 30–44 and those with tertiary education respond that they *don't know* (48 and 50 percent respectively). The response that no party represents research issues well is more common among men (eleven compared to five percent women) and those with a tertiary education (ten compared to four percent of people with only compulsory-level education).

The third that did select a party had a clear favourite. The Green Party was selected by one third of those who named a party, which corresponds to eleven percent of the total number of responses.

The graph shows responses to the question Which political party do you think best represents research issues?

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,021



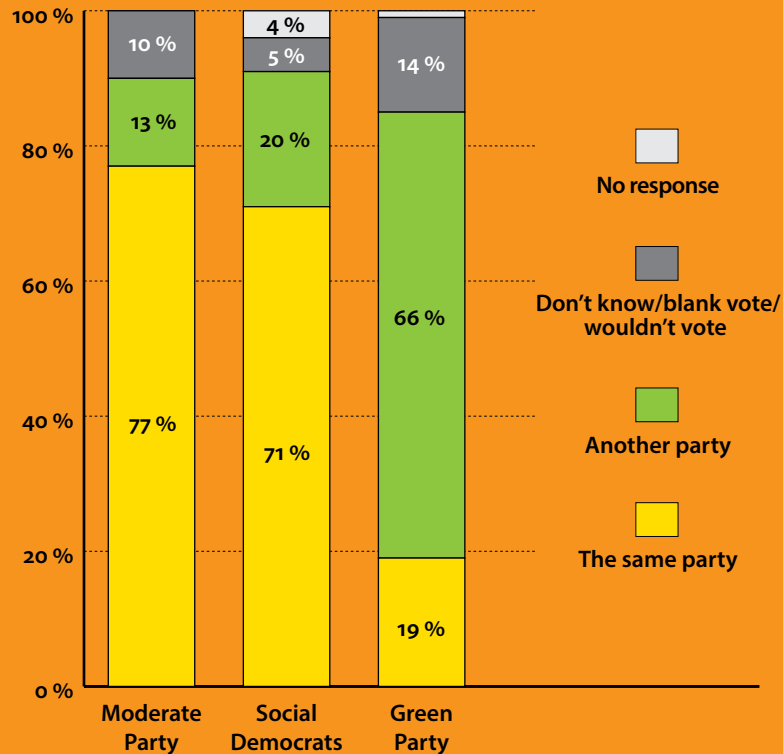
RESEARCH PROFILE VS. PARTY SUPPORT

Out of those who believe that the Green Party best represents research issues, the majority would not vote for the Green Party, but for another party, such as the Social Democrats (26 percent) and the Moderate Party (10 percent). Only 19 percent of those who think that the Green Party best represents research issues would also vote for the Green Party in an election.

By comparison, 77 per cent of those who think that the Moderate Party best represents research issues would also vote for this party. The corresponding figure for the Social Democrats is 71 percent.

The graph shows how people who think the Moderate Party, the Social Democrats or the Green Party best represent research issues would vote in an election today. For other parties, the number of respondents becomes too low to be able to draw any reliable conclusions.

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: MODERATE PARTY = 46; SOCIAL DEMOCRATS = 55; GREEN PARTY = 121



ABOUT THE SURVEY

The VA Barometer has been conducted annually since 2002. The survey is conducted via telephone interviews with a stratified random sample of the Swedish population, around 1,000 people (this year 1,021), aged between 16 and 74 years old. The response rate in this year's survey was 51 percent. Respondents are representative in terms of gender, age and place of residence. The results have been weighted retrospectively to ensure representativeness in terms of level of education.

Interviews are conducted annually over two weeks during September/October and are completed before the yearly announcement of the Nobel Prize winners so the media attention does not affect the results. This year the field period ran from 11 September to 1 October 2017.

Exquiro Market Research has carried out the interviews since 2012. A reference group with expertise in survey methodology helps to develop the questionnaire. The questionnaire can be downloaded at www.v-a.se/english-portal/ alongside the digital version of this year's VA Barometer. All questions were asked in Swedish.

VA (Public & Science) promotes dialogue and openness between researchers and the public, especially young people. The organisation works to create new and engaging forms of dialogue about research. VA is also developing new knowledge on the relationship between research and society through surveys and studies. Its members consist of some 80 organisations, authorities, companies and associations. In addition, it has a number of individual members.



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