The Possible Unemployment Cost of Average Inflation below a Credible Target
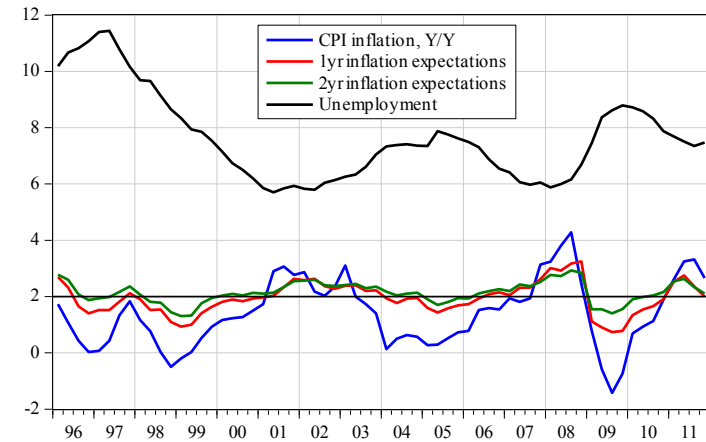
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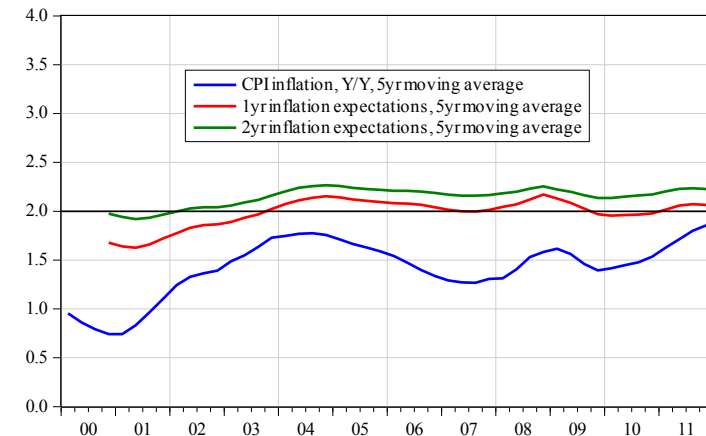
October 22, 2014

Issue

- Average inflation below target in Sweden 1997-2011
- Average inflation expectations (Prospera) close to target 1997-2011

Questions to be answered:

- If inflation expectations stuck at target when average inflation deviates from target, non-vertical long-run Phillips curve?
- If lower average inflation, higher average unemployment?
- If estimates of sustainable unemployment rate based on historical averages, bias?
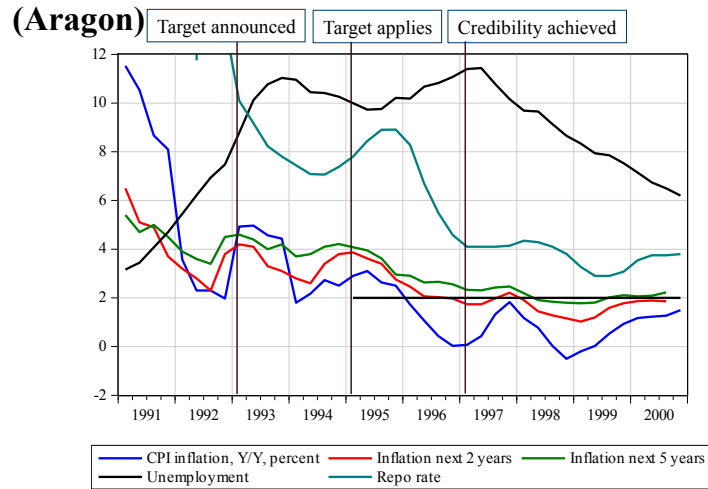- Policy conclusions for the future?

The data:
Unemployment, CPI inflation, and CPI inflation expectations (Prospera) 1996-2011

5-year moving averages:
CPI inflation expectations close to 2 %,
CPI inflation below 2 %

Before 1996: High CPI inflation expectations (Aragon)
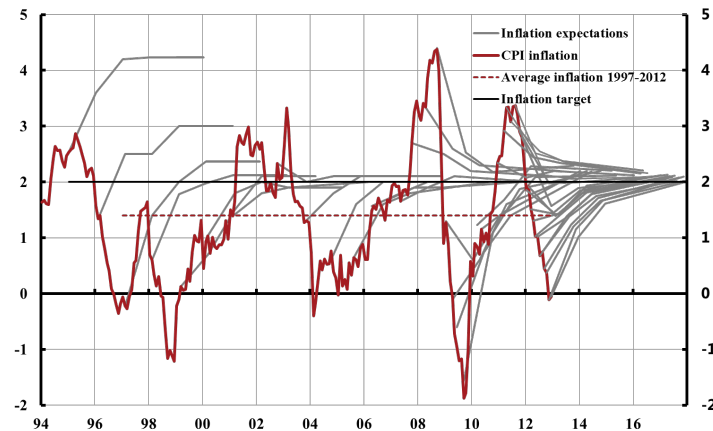
| Target announced | Target applies | Credibility achieved |

Legend: CPI inflation, Y/Y, percent — Inflation next 2 years — Inflation next 5 years — Unemployment — Repo rate

Average inflation in some countries

Country	Target	Index	Period	Average	Deviation
Sweden	**2 (1995-)**	**CPI**	**1997-2011**	**1.4**	**- 0.6**
	2 (1995-)	CPI	1997-2007	1.3	- 0.7
Australia	2-3 (1993-)	CPI	1997-2011	2.7	0.2
Canada	2 (1995-)	CPI	1997-2011	2.0	0.0
UK	2.5 (1992-2003)	RPIX	1997-2003	2.4	- 0.1
	2 (2004-)	CPI	2004-2007	2.0	0.0
	2 (2004-)	CPI	2008-2011	3.4	1.4
Euro zone	(< 2) (1999-)	HICP	2000-2011	2.1	
US	($\leq$ 2) (2000-)	core CPI	2000-2011	2.0	
		core PCE	2000-2011	1.9	

Riksbank graph: "Inflation target crecible"

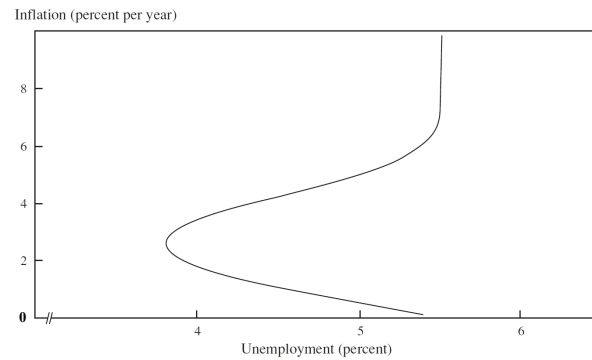Legend: Inflation expectations — CPI inflation — Average inflation 1997-2012 — Inflation target

Non-rational inflation expectations

- Prospera inflation expectations not rational (Jonsson and Österholm 2012)

- "Near-rational" inflation expectations?

- Akerlof-Dickens-Perry (2000): For average inflation close to zero, a significant fraction of agents disregard inflation; behave as if inflation expectations are zero

Near-rational rational inflation expectations

Figure 1. A Hypothetical Long-Run Phillips Curve

Inflation (percent per year)

Unemployment (percent)

Source: Authors' calculations from calibration of the theoretical model.
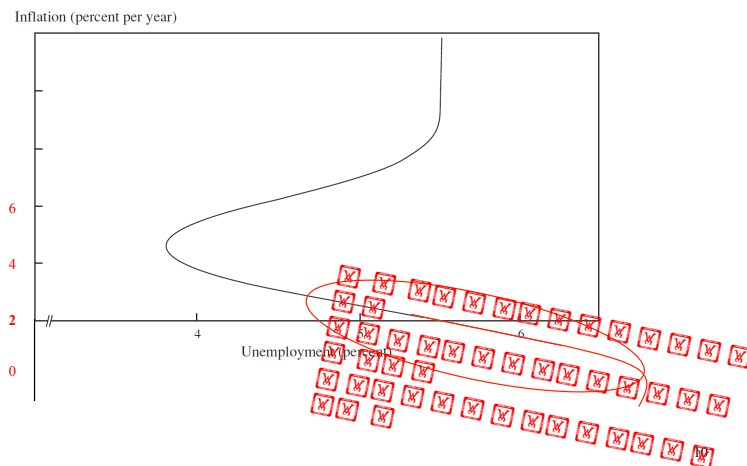
Non-rational inflation expectations

- Here, for average inflation close to 2 %, a significant fraction of agents disregard deviation from 2 %; behave as if inflation expectations are 2 %
- Non-vertical Phillips curve applies for average inflation not too fare from 2 % (± 1 %?)

Near-rational rational inflation expectations

Figure 1. A Hypothetical Long-Run Phillips Curve

Inflation (percent per year)

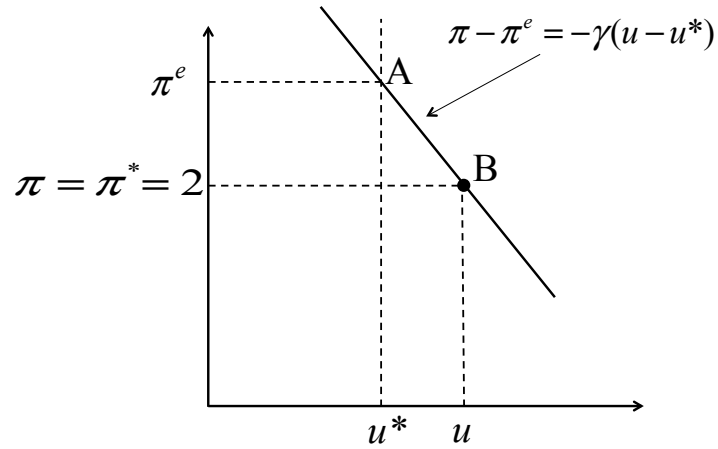

Unemployment (percent)

Wage settlements: What inflation expectations?

- Central wage settlements guide wage setting in Sweden, more so from around 2000
- The Industrial Cooperation and Negotiation Agreement 1997: Wage setting in manufacturing industry guides other wage setting
- The Trade Union Confederation (LO)

    "During the years 1995-2008 the CPI has on average increased by 1.4 percent… That the price increase has fallen short of the inflation target should not be the starting point for a future assessment. Instead, the reference point for wage formation should be that the Riksbank will attain the inflation target of 2 percent… (Morin 2009, p. 15, translated from Swedish)

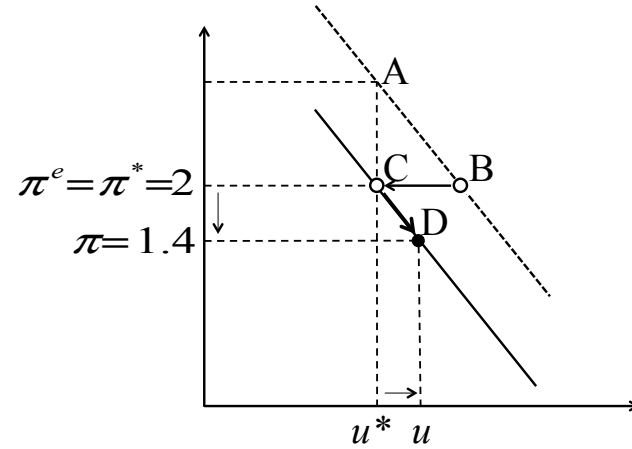- Wage-setting with inflation expectations equal to 2 percent

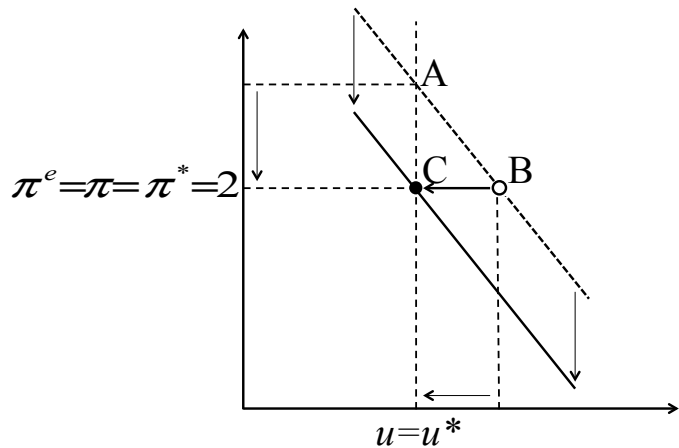**Before 1996: Inflation target not credible, tight monetary policy, and high unemployment**

$$\pi - \pi^e = -\gamma(u - u^*)$$

A

π^e

B

$\pi = \pi^* = 2$

u^* u

From 1997: Inflation expectations stuck at 2 %, but monetary policy still tight: Inflation too low, and unemployment too high

A

C   B

$\pi^e = \pi^* = 2$
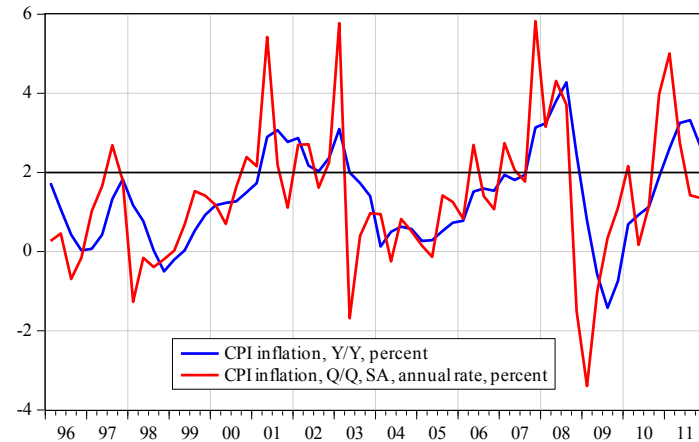
D

$\pi = 1.4$

u^* u

1996: Inflation target gradually becomes credible

A

C   B

$\pi^e = \pi = \pi^* = 2$

$u = u^*$

Quarterly CPI inflation, annual rate, seasonally adjusted

CPI inflation, Y/Y, percent
CPI inflation, Q/Q, SA, annual rate, percent

96 97 98 99 00 01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 11

Estimate (1) short-run Phillips curve

$$\pi_t = \gamma_0 - \gamma_1(u_t - u_{t-1}) - \gamma u_{t-1} + \varepsilon_t$$

Sample 1997Q4-2011Q4

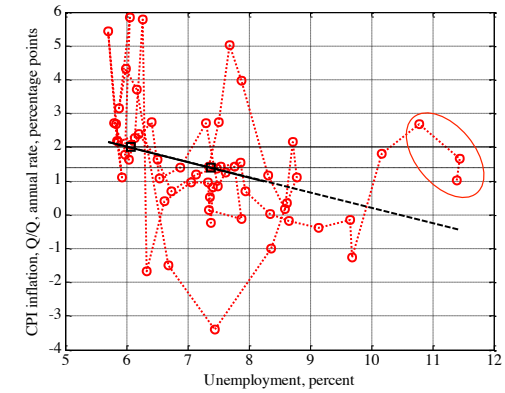| Coefficient	Estimate	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
γ_0	7.19	1.36	5.29	0.0000
γ_1	2.70	0.72	3.73	0.0005
γ	0.81	0.19	4.33	0.0001

Note: OLS, $R^2 = 0.30$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.27$, S.E. = 1.53, DW = 1.77.

Coefficients on lagged inflation not significant: "Level" Phillips curve instead of "acceleration" Phillips curve

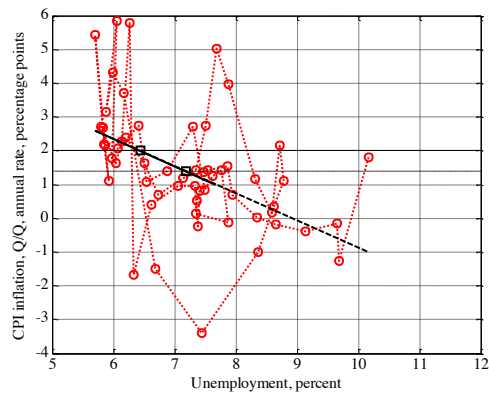### (2) Long-run Phillips curve

$$\pi = \gamma_0 - \gamma u$$

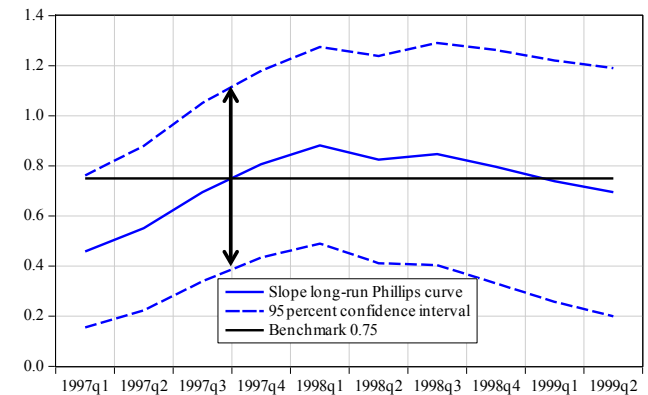## The long-run Phillips curve, 1997Q1-2011Q4

The long-run Phillips curve, 1997Q4-2011Q4

The slope of the long-run Phillips curve
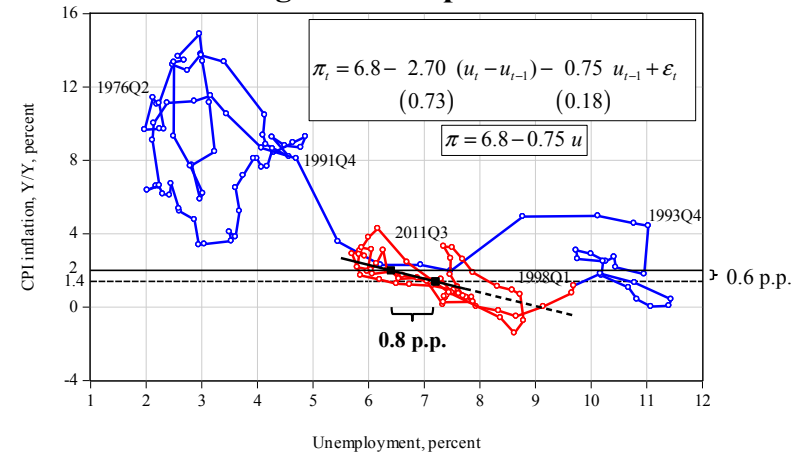## Sample starts from 1997Q1 to 1999Q2

The unemployment cost of average inflation below a credible target

- 1997-2011 average CPI inflation 1.4 %
- Average inflation expectations about 2 %, at inflation target
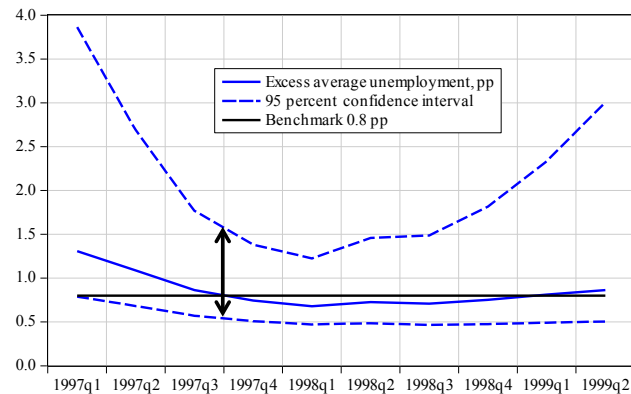- 0.6 p.p. lower inflation gives $0.6/\boxed{x} = 0.6/0.75 = 0.8$ p.p. higher unemployment on average during 1997-2011

▶

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CPI inflation and unemployment 1976-2012, and benchmark long-run Phillips curve 1997-2011
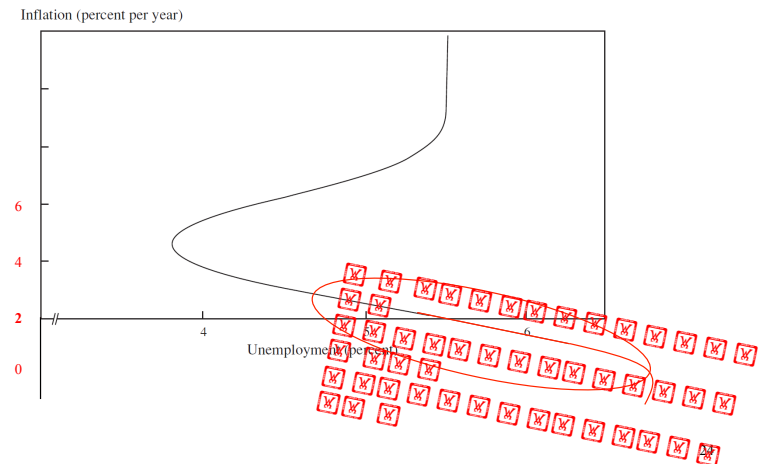
$$\pi_t = 6.8 - \underset{(0.73)}{2.70}\ (u_t - u_{t-1}) - \underset{(0.18)}{0.75}\ u_{t-1} + \varepsilon_t$$

$$\pi = 6.8 - 0.75\,u$$

CPI inflation, Y/Y, percent

1976Q2
1991Q4
1993Q4
2011Q3
1998Q1
0.6 p.p.

0.8 p.p.

Unemployment, percent

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Excess average unemployment
Sample start from 1997Q1 to 199Q2

- Excess average unemployment, pp
- - - 95 percent confidence interval
- Benchmark 0.8 pp

1997q1 1997q2 1997q3 1997q4 1998q1 1998q2 1998q3 1998q4 1999q1 1999q2

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Near-rational rational inflation expectations

Figure 1. A Hypothetical Long-Run Phillips Curve

Inflation (percent per year)

Unemployment (percent)

Some robustness tests

Table 2. Estimates of the short-run Phillips curve, 1997Q4-2011Q4

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Constant	**7.192** **(1.360)** **[0.0000]**	8.230 (1.771) [0.0000]	8.758 (2.267) [0.0003]	6.638 (1.220) [0.0000]	5.227 (1.393) [0.0004]
$u_t - u_{t-1}$	**-2.700** **(0.723)** **[0.0005]**	-2.156 (0.936) [0.0253]	-2.678 (0.725) [0.0005]		
u_{t-1}	**-0.807** **(0.186)** **[0.0001]**	-0.826 (0.188) [0.0001]	-0.917 (0.226) [0.0002]		-0.516 (0.177) [0.0050]
u_t				-0.715 (0.167) [0.0001]	
π^{e1}_{t-4}		-0.456 (0.498) [0.3638]			
π^{e1}_{t-1}			-0.386 (0.447) [0.3913]		
R^2	**0.30**	0.31	0.31	0.20	0.12
Adjusted R^2	**0.27**	0.27	0.27	0.18	0.10
S.E.	**1.53**	1.54	1.54	1.63	1.71
DW	**1.77**	1.74	1.71	1.47	1.34

Note: Ordinary least squares. The dependent variable is π_t, quarterly inflation at an annual rate in quarter t. u_t denotes the unemployment rate in quarter t, and π^{e1}_{t-1} and π^{e1}_{t-4} denote expectations in quarter t-1 and t-4, respectively, of annual inflation 1 year ahead. Stand errors within parenthesis; p-values within brackets.
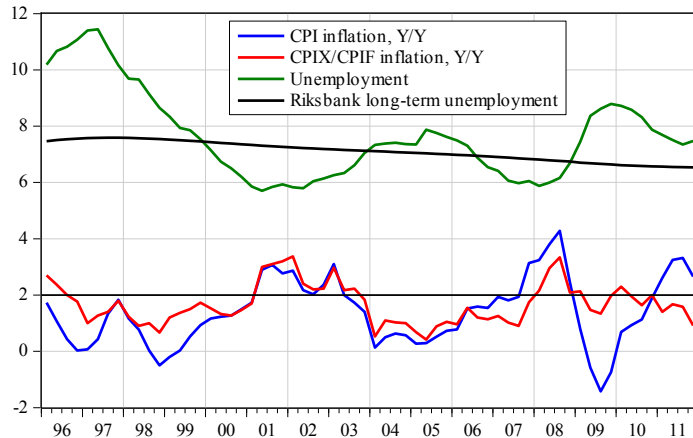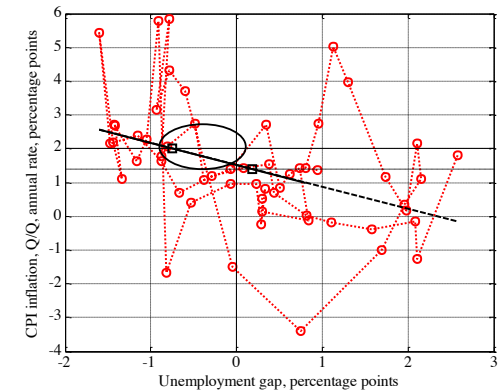
Consider (1) CPIXF inflation instead of CPI inflation and (2) unemployment gap to Riksbank long-term unemployment

(1) With CPIXF inflation, 1997Q4-2011Q4
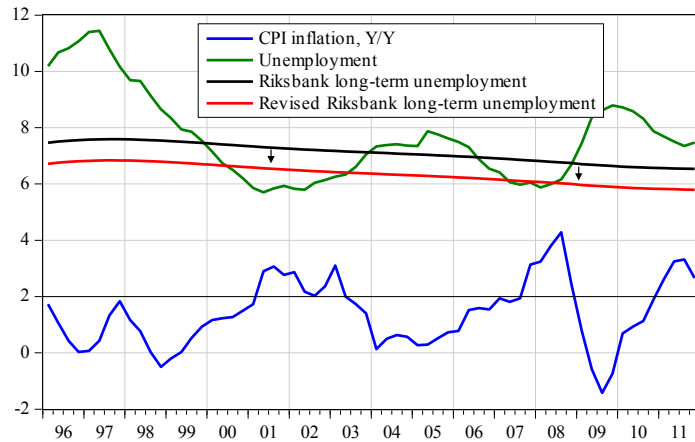## Flatter curve, higher unemployment cost, less precision

(2) With Riksbank unemployment gap, flatter curve, higher unemployment cost,
bias of estimated long-term unemployment?

Revised Riksbank long-term unemployment gap,

Legend:
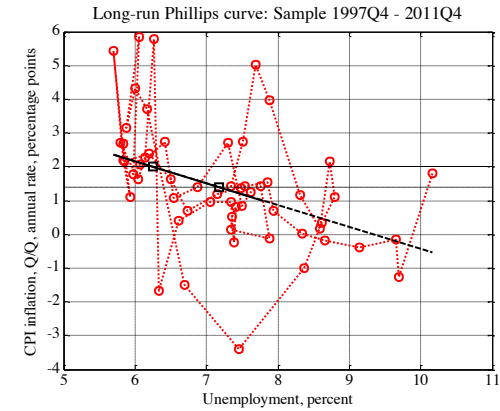- CPI inflation, Y/Y
- Unemployment
- Riksbank long-term unemployment
- Revised Riksbank long-term unemployment

Simultaneity? With lagged unemployment, flatter curve, higher unemployment cost (Also 2SLS estimation)
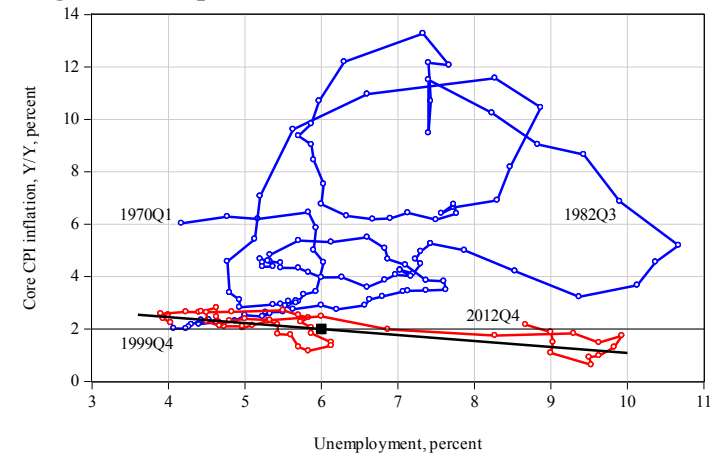

Long-run Phillips curve: Sample 1997Q4 - 2011Q4

Average unemployment as an estimate of long-run natural rate (long-run sustainable rate of unemployment, LSRU): Bias?

- Average unemployment biased estimate of LSRU?
- Bias:
  (Average inflation expectations - average inflation)/0.75
- Riksbank July 2012 estimate: 6.25% (midpoint)
- My correction: 5.5%, **bias 0.75 p.p.** (appendix July 2012 minutes)

US, unemployment and core CPI, Y/Y, 1970-2012
Average inflation 2000-2011 2 %
Long-run Phillips curve 2000Q1-2011Q2
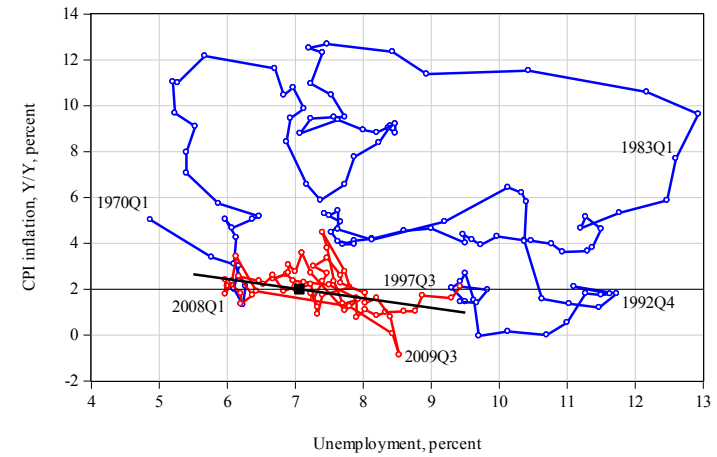
US, unemployment and core CPI, Q/Q AR, 2000-2012
Long-run Phillips curve 2000Q1-2011Q2
Fuhrer (2011)

$$\pi_t = 4.50 - 0.33\ \pi_{t-4} - 0.30\ u_{t-1} + \varepsilon_t$$
$$(0.10) \qquad (0.04)$$

$\pi = 3.38 - 0.23\,u$

Core CPI inflation, Q/Q, annual rate, percent

Unemployment, percent

2000Q4
2012Q4
2008Q4
2010Q1

Canada, unemployment and CPI, Y/Y,1970-2012
Average inflation on target 1997-2011, 2 %

CPI inflation, Y/Y, percent

Unemployment, percent
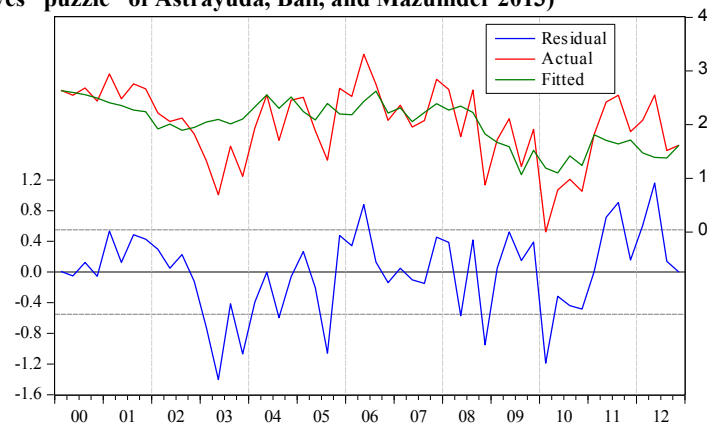
1970Q1
1983Q1
1997Q3
1992Q4
2008Q1
2009Q3

US, short-run Phillips curve 2000Q1-2012Q2:
Residuals and actual and fitted values
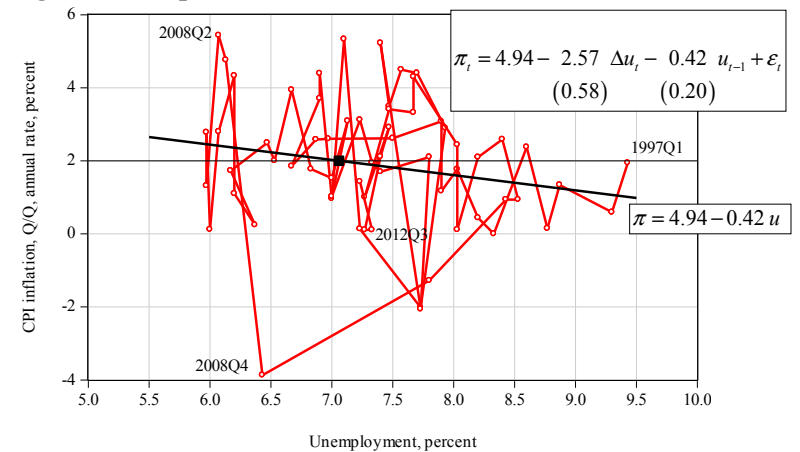**"Level" Phillips curve fits better than "acceleration" Phillips curve**
(solves "puzzle" of Astrayuda, Ball, and Mazumder 2013)

Residual
Actual
Fitted

Canada, unemployment and CPI, Q/Q AR,1997-2012
Long-run Phillips curve 1997-2012

CPI inflation, Q/Q, annual rate, percent

Unemployment, percent

$$\pi_t = 4.94 - 2.57\ \Delta u_t - 0.42\ u_{t-1} + \varepsilon_t$$
$$(0.58) \qquad (0.20)$$

$\pi = 4.94 - 0.42\,u$

2008Q2
1997Q1
2012Q3
2008Q4

Conclusions for the future?

- Swedish (Prospera) inflation expectations not rational
- "Near rational"? Stuck at target of 2 % for average inflation not too far from target?
- Note that anchoring of inflation expectations at target is good: Easier to stabilize unemployment without too much variation in inflation

Policy conclusions for the future?

- Important to hold average inflation close to target
- Too low average inflation can entail large real economic costs
- Better with price-level targeting, average-inflation targeting over a longer period?
- Bias in estimates of long-run sustainable rate of unemployment (long-run natural rate)

Reasons for undershooting the target?

- Does not matter for average unemployment cost
- Asymmetric objective? (Ceiling?)
- Overestimated inflation pressure?
  - Overestimated long-run natural rate? (Mirror image of Orphanides)
  - Overestimated imported inflation?
  - Underestimated productivity growth?
- Different objective: Restricting household debt?
  - Tighter policy because of concerns about household debt
  - Giavazzi-Mishkin, since 2005?
  - Definitely now

A1. Wage-setting with inflation expectations equal to the inflation target

- Target real wage $\tilde{w}^*$, for target employment,
- Nominal wage set in advance to achieve target real wage
$$w_t = \tilde{w}^* + p_t^e = \tilde{w}^* + p_{t-1} + \pi_t^e$$
- Actual real wage

$$\tilde{w}_t \equiv w_t - p_t = (\tilde{w}^* + p_{t-1} + \pi_t^e) - (p_{t-1} + \pi_t) = \tilde{w}^* + \pi_t^e - \pi_t$$

- Inflation below inflation expectations and target implies actual real wage above target real wage

$$\tilde{w}_t - \tilde{w}^* = \pi_t^e - \pi_t = \pi^* - \pi_t$$

A2. The average unemployment cost of average inflation below the target is independent of the reasons for missing the target

Short-run Phillips curve; assume structural:
$$\pi_t = \gamma_0 - \gamma_1(u_t - u_{t-1}) - \gamma u_{t-1} + \varepsilon_t$$
Sample averages:
$$\bar{\pi} = \gamma_0 - \gamma \bar{u} + \bar{\varepsilon}$$
Average unemployment consistent w/ average inflation on target:
$$\pi^* \equiv \gamma_0 - \gamma \bar{u}^0 + \bar{\varepsilon}$$
Average unemployment cost of undershooting the target:
$$\bar{u} - \bar{u}^0 = (\pi^* - \bar{\pi})/\gamma$$
$\bar{u} - \bar{u}^0$ is independent of $\bar{\varepsilon}$, the sample average of the shocks
Natural rate:
$$0 \equiv \gamma_0 - \gamma u^*$$

Note that $\bar{u}^0 \neq u^*$ if $\bar{\varepsilon} \neq 0$

▶

A3. Steady state: Ad hoc AD relation

Phillips curve: $\pi_t - \pi_t^e = -\gamma(u_t - u^*) + \varepsilon_t$
SS: $\pi - \pi^e = -\gamma(u - u^*)$

AD relation: $u_t - u^* = \sigma(r_t - r_t^*)$
SS: $u - u^* = \sigma(r - r^*)$

Policy rule: $r_t - r_t^* = \alpha(\pi_t - \pi^0)$
SS: $r - r^* = \alpha(\pi - \pi^0)$

$$\pi - \pi^e = -\gamma\sigma\alpha(\pi - \pi^0) = -\gamma\sigma\alpha(\pi - \pi^e + \pi^e - \pi^0)$$
$$\pi - \pi^e = -\frac{\gamma\sigma\alpha}{1 + \gamma\sigma\alpha}(\pi^e - \pi^0)$$

$$\pi^0 < \pi^* = \pi^e \implies$$

$$\pi^0 < \pi < \pi^e = \pi^*, \ u > u^*, \ r > r^*$$

A3. Steady state: New Keynesian AD relation

Phillips curve: $\pi_t - \pi_t^e = -\gamma(u_t - u^*) + \varepsilon_t$
SS: $\pi - \pi^e = -\gamma(u - u^*)$
AD relation: $u_t - u^* = E_t(u_{t+1} - u^*) + \sigma(r_t - r_t^*)$
SS: $r = r^*$

Policy rule: $r_t - r_t^* = \alpha(\pi_t - \pi^0)$
SS: $\pi = \pi^0$

$$\pi^0 < \pi^* = \pi^e \implies$$
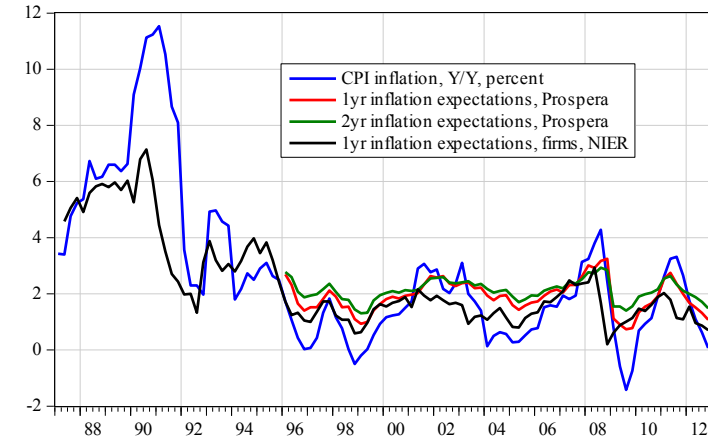
$$\pi^0 = \pi < \pi^e = \pi^*, \ u > u^*, \ r = r^*$$

Example: A New-Classical Phillips curve

$$w_t - p_t = -\gamma l_t$$
$$w_t - p_t^e = -\gamma l^*$$
$$p_t^e = p_{t-1} + \pi^*$$
$$p_t \equiv p_{t-1} + \pi_t$$
$$p_t - p_t^e = \gamma(l_t - l^*) = -\gamma(u_t - u^*)$$
$$\pi_t - \pi_t^e = -\gamma(u_t - u^*)$$
$$\Delta w_t = \Delta p_t^e = \Delta p_{t-1} = \pi_{t-1}$$

$$(w_t - p_t) - (w_t - p_t^e) = -(p_t - p_t^e) = -(\pi_t - \pi_t^e) = \gamma(u_t - u^*)$$

▶

NIER firm inflation expectations

- CPI inflation, Y/Y, percent
- 1yr inflation expectations, Prospera
- 2yr inflation expectations, Prospera
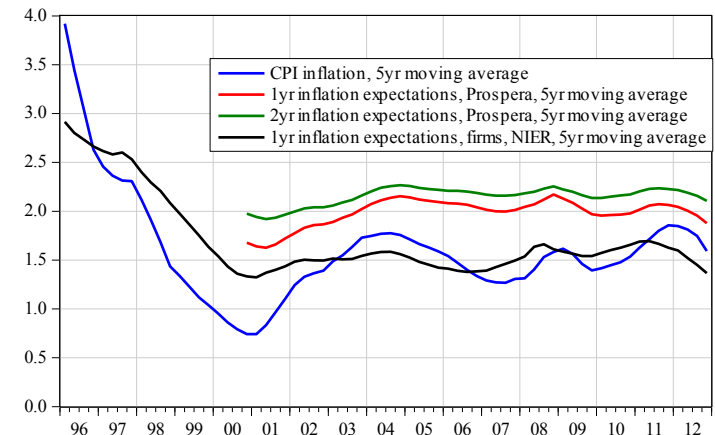- 1yr inflation expectations, firms, NIER

Riksbank's mandate: Price stability and highest sustainable employment

- Riksbank Act (Ch. 1, art. 2): "The objective of the Riksbank activities shall be to **maintain price stability**."
- Government bill (1997/98:40, p. 1):
  "**without prejudice to the objective of price stability**, [the Riksbank] should support the objectives of general economic policy with the purpose of achieving sustainable growth and **high employment**."
- Mandate: Price stability and highest sustainable employment
- Without prejudice to the objective of price stability:
  Keep average inflation over longer period on target
- Highest sustainable employment = Lowest sustainable unemployment

NIER firm inflation expectations
5-yr moving averages

- CPI inflation, 5yr moving average
- 1yr inflation expectations, Prospera, 5yr moving average
- 2yr inflation expectations, Prospera, 5yr moving average
- 1yr inflation expectations, firms, NIER, 5yr moving average

Avtalsrörelsen.

"Vi sänker våra lönekrav på grund av konjunkturläget"

Industrifackens avtalskrav. Ökade reallöner samt fortsatt utbyggnad av föräldralönen och systemet för arbetstidsförkortning. Det är de viktigaste punkterna när industrifacken i dag, måndag, presenterar sina krav inför avtalsförhandlingarna. Men lönekraven är lägre än förra året, skriver **företrädare för förbunden.**

(Swedish newspaper body text illegible at this resolution)

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Wage settlements: What inflation expectations?

- The Industrial Trade Unions (Facken inom industrin) (Dagens Nyheter Nov 12, 2012) (Also Facken inom industrin 2011):

"Riksbankens inflationsmål är i dag ankaret för den ekonomiska politiken och en självklar utgångspunkt för vårt agerande.

Parterna har ett ansvar för att löneavtalen inte kommer i konflikt med inflationsmålet. För höga och för låga löneökningar kan leda till onödigt hög arbetslöshet. *Kortsiktiga variationer i inflationen bör inte påverka parternas agerande. Skulle parterna börja jaga tillfälliga prisrörelser upp och ner skulle det bidra till ökad instabilitet och försvåra Riksbankens arbete.*

Parterna bör utgå från att Riksbanken gör sitt jobb och att inflationen hamnar runt två procent. Det bidrar till att inflationsförväntningarna håller sig i närheten av inflationsmålet."

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Two interpretations

- The inflation target has been credible, the relevant inflation expectations are sticky (anchored) at the target, and there has been a substantial average unemployment cost of average inflation below the target

- The inflation target has not been credible, average inflation expectations are close to average inflation and not anchored at the target, and there has not been any average unemployment cost of average inflation below the target

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More robustness tests

Table 3. Some robustness tests, 1997Q4-2011Q4

Dependent variable	(1) CPI Q/Q AR	(2) CPI Q/Q AR	(3) GDP deflator Q/Q AR	(4) GDP deflator Q/Q AR	(5) CPI Q/Q AR Revised
Constant	7.344 (1.462) [0.0000]	8.255 (-3.070) [0.0096]	5.665 (1.691) 0.0015	6.812 (1.732) 0.0002	7.278 (1.415) [0.0000]
$u_t - u_{t-1}$	-2.909 (1.030) [0.0066]	-3.533 (1.071) [0.0017]	-1.137 (0.899) [0.2116]	-1.621 (0.854) [0.0634]	-2.538 (0.753) [0.0014]
u_{t-1}	-0.829 (0.202) [0.0001]	-0.929 (-0.296) [0.0028]	-0.579 (0.232) [0.0155]	-0.722 (0.225) [0.0023]	-0.830 (0.194) [0.0001]
π_t^{e1}		-0.112 0.583 [0.8483]			
π_{t-1}^{GDP}				-0.349 (0.129) [0.009]	
π_{t-3}^{GDP}				0.259 (0.125) [0.043]	
R^2	0.30	0.27	0.10	0.26	0.28
Adjusted R^2	0.27	0.23	0.07	0.20	0.26
S.E.	1.54	1.58	1.91	1.77	1.60
DW	1.78	1.79	2.59	1.94	1.79

Note: u_t denotes the unemployment rate in quarter t. π_t^{e1} denotes expectations in quarter t of annual inflation 1 year ahead, and π_t^{GDP} denotes quarterly GDP-deflator inflation at an annual rate. Column (1): 2SLS, instruments u_{t-1}, u_{t-2}, and u_{t-3}. Column (2): 2SLS, instruments u_{t-1}, u_{t-2}, u_{t-3}, π_{t-1}^{e1}, and π_{t-1} (quarterly CPI inflation at an annual rate). Column (3)-(5): OLS.

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