Understanding local politicians' positions about contentious Car restrictive measures: public protest and ways to build support for them

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Definition contentious measures

- Urban transport policy measure which prioritizes users of one mode of transport at the expense of other(s), e.g. in relation to cost or access, and may cause disputes and division between policy actors and/or inhabitants.

    - A measure that makes private car travel slower, less convenient and/or more expensive by **reducing the space available for parked or moving private cars** and/or **by charging for road use or parking** where there was no charge, or a lower charge, before.

    - The key factor is that the cost (including travel time cost) of travel by private car is increased and/or space for private car, either moving or parked, on the public road, is decreased.

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Implementation of goals about sustainable transport. Two kinds of measures to be used:

Push measures (parking fees, reducing road capacity, the number of parking, restricting speed)

Pull measures (improving conditions for public transport, walking, cycling)

1. Without measures to decrease car traffic, the promotion of walking, cycling, and public transport is liable to have little impact on the modal split.

2. Measures for reduced car traffic are potentially contentious and therefore often experience implementation problems

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Implementation of contentious measures, requires understanding of how local politicians situate themselves in transport policy formulation and implementation

- how do local politicians' ideological positions influence their perception of contentious measures and the 'right' way achieve societal change processes?

- how do local politicians' interpretations and expectations of citizens reactions influence their support of contentious measures?

- how do politicians think that contentious measures should be implemented/communicated?

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Method and data

Qualitative methodology.

- Interviews used to **provide an understanding of politician's self-understanding** regarding their role in the transition towards sustainable transport and how this is woven together with perceptions of public attitudes, and ways to implement contentious measures.

- Empirically, analysis based on interviews with local Spanish and Swedish politicians (12 in total)

- All interviewees have a designated responsibility for transport or land use planning in their local government either now or in recent past

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Results
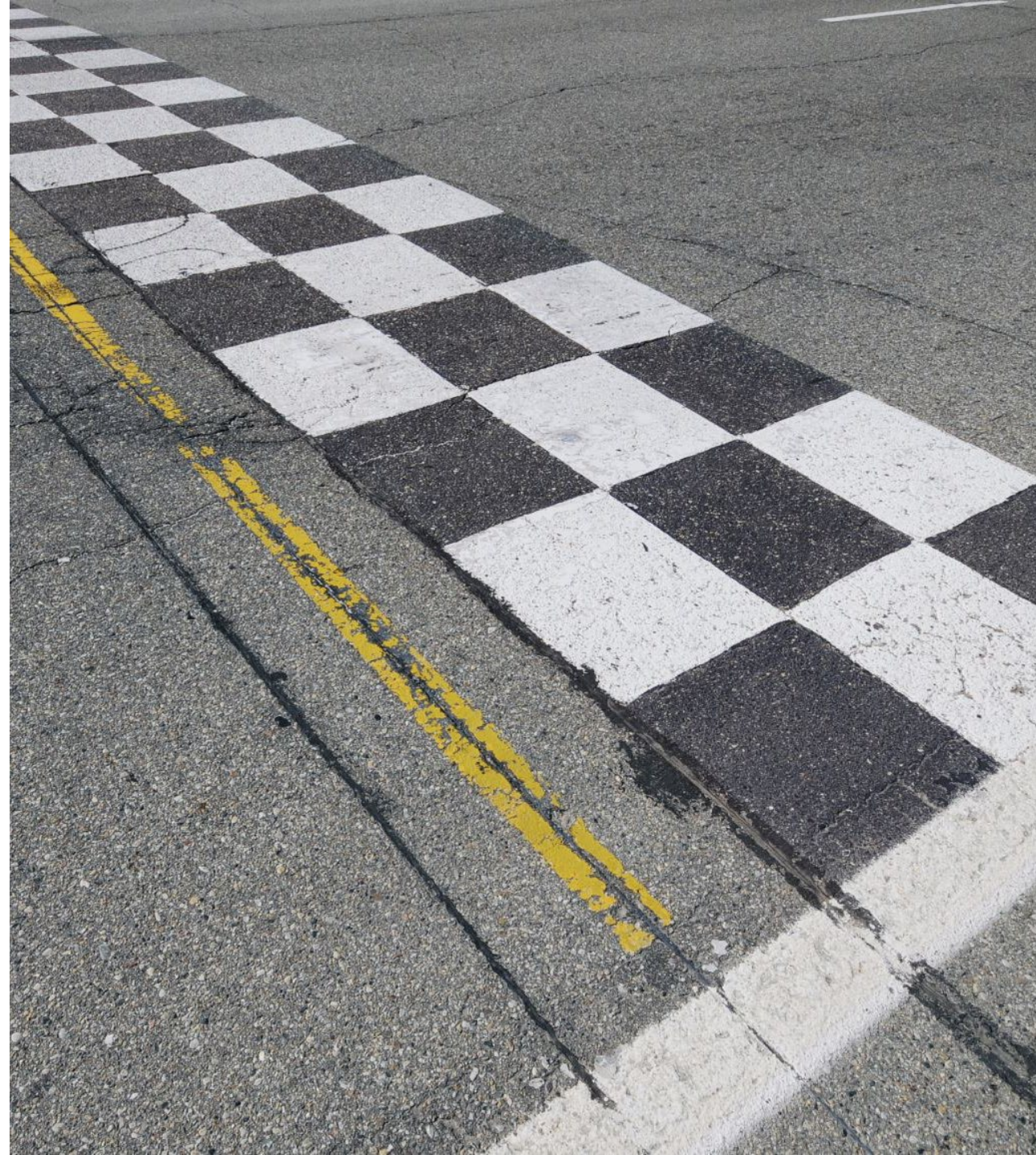
Politicians' positions can be categorized roughly into three groups

1. Politicians who do not want to use contentious measures when trying to implement goals about sustainable transport.

- These politicians represent parties that <mark>emphasize individual freedom of choice</mark>, and <mark>expect little support from their constituents for contentious measures.</mark>

- Instead, want measures to offer car users alternatives to the car, e.g. better public transport.

- Believe that pace of change towards sustainable transport systems should be determined by the acceptance of potential measures by voters.

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Example of category 1 politician

My party affiliation and my ideological beliefs affect how I look at whether people should be 'forced' to do things. We have worked very hard according to the motto: **'it should be easy to do the right thing'**. Citizens must be encouraged and made to make the right choice. For many, the car is a necessity in order to make the puzzle of life come together […].

If we do not get the acceptance of the citizens, we will not get all the way. **I would not feel comfortable ideologically with implementing more coercive measures**. Instead, it is necessary to build a well-functioning, attractive public transport, with frequent trips, fast journeys, which makes it possible to make it possible to the greatest extent possible for those who want to use other modes of transport.

(interview Conservative party politician)

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The results show that politicians' positions roughly can be categorized into three groups

2. Politicians who are more positive towards political steering of people's behavior

- These politicians want to implement contentious measures, **but they believe that reduced car use should be achieved step by step taking the acceptance of measures among the inhabitants into consideration** when choosing whether to use contentious measures as well as about the pace of this change.

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Example of category 2 politician

A difficulty is knowing when to go ahead and when to wait. It's about having tact and sensitivity, both as a politician and as an officer. An example where the city went ahead and in the wrong position is [name of project]. There we set a low parking standard while residents had 1 km to the bus stop. There I think we acted incorrectly and too quickly. There were no **alternatives** to the car.

(interview, Social democratic politician)

Example of category 2 politician

We cannot force people. People will want a car, and as long as public transport does not work 100% well, families with children and others will need a car. [...] You have to respect the fact that people want to make their life's puzzle fit together, e.g. families with children and grocery bags. **We try to make a balance. What is possible and do we have the people of the city of Lund with us**?

(interview Liberal party politician)

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The results show that politicians' positions roughly can be categorized into three groups

3. Politicians who support a more radical policy leading to faster implementation of goals about sustainable transport, even in the face of resistance from the public that risks reducing the party's voter support.

- These politicians represent parties that perceive climate change of being such a severe threat that behavior of inhabitants must be changed fast.

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Example of category 3 politician

We have set the goal **of climate neutrality** in 2030. **If we are to reach that goal, we need measures that make it more difficult to drive**. But we **lost quite a few voters** in the last election, and I think it is, among other things, about us actually saying what we say. It's not super popular because it's about stepping in and controlling what people do for choices in everyday life. Had we not pursued this, we would have had greater [voter] support. But we have an obligation to do something about private cars. **Those who actually vote for us expect it**.

We also want to implement more positive things such as **summer streets**. Then you just remove the cars from the streets in summer, which I think is perceived as more positive.

(interview Green party politician)

How should contentious measures be communicated to increase acceptance?

- Politicians that want to implement contentious measures try to build acceptance of contentious measures by communicating the positive effects for the urban environment if implemented.

"Address the problem from a comprehensive, urban and mobility vision…An exhibition was in the middle of the public space for a month explaining, "This is the [city] centre we want."

(interview, left/green politician)

"You won't win any elections on parking. It is important to distinguish between ends and means. Parking is a tool. It is a means."

(interview, Social democratic politician)

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How should contentious measures be implemented?

- Experimental implementation, willingness to modify e.g changes in streetspace

"We're going to do it. You'll see that it's going to go well and if it doesn't go well we'll change it,"

(interview, left/green politician)

- Using tactical urbanism, because more can be done, faster

"But then, we don't have enough money to change the city in the structural way, because it's like one, 10. If the tactical actions are costing us €50 per square metre, while the structural measures are costing us €500 per square metre"

(interview, left/green politician)

- Sometimes – just more slowly than anticipated...

"It's like the Superblocks project. It was planned now, this 500 Superblocks now in the mobility plan in 2013. Then, after the first Superblock in 2016, it was really feared that it was really controversial".

(interview, left/green politician)

By talking and convincing people

First, we did a media campaign in the press about how the project was going to turn out and what the benefits were. Then we did for a month or so, more than a month, meetings almost every week with the different associations, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, explaining to the residents directly how the whole area was going to look. This was the way to, first, prevent messages that are not true or fake news from being generated.

(interview, social democrat politician)

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How politicians deal with protests and personal attacks

Dealing with protest

- *We had this controversy. What I tried to do is to try to explain always every day, every minute, in every press, with the people, with meetings… that we were experiencing in the city with all this controversy, it's what happens everywhere in the world, and I was showing examples, studies, and all that. Also, because we started very early to do it, so we could afford to resist all the controversy, all the criticism.*
  (interview, left/green politician)

- *So, the new squares that we had with this tactical urbanism were becoming full of people, kids playing and we were trying to have pictures, videos, to show and we were selling publicly all the results.*
   (interview, left/green politician)

- *Above all, rather than not implementing, we have surely reduced the initial idea and softened many measures that were planned in another way.*
  (Social democrat politician)

Personal attacks (all quotes from different left/green politicians)

- *Well, if Twitter was a reality, I would have committed suicide some years ago… [But] I think that it's [Twitter] really bad for the information of the population, and for the feeling the politicians get… Yeah, the role of social media is really, really, really important.*

- *It was very, as you know, hate on social media is very strong. So, it's anonymous also, and you can't – usually, not that I get upset, I'm used to it. [At least] I can defend myself. So, this criticism, this hate, should not be present in our society, but I've experienced it, yes.*

- *Two people on social media threatened to kill me, because of the bike lane. I rang them up for a chat.*

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Conclusions

Which strategies should be used to when implementing contentious measures/goals about sustainable cities?

Strategy 1: should politicians and planners develop a radical policy leading to fast implementation of goals about sustainable cities (for example **by implementing car restrictive measures**), maybe even **in the face of resistance** from the public?, or:

Strategy 2: should the strategy be to focus on **long-term change creating** public **support** for car restrictive and potentially controversial measures?

Conclusions

- Theoretically, **politicians' positions are shaped by ideological stances about societal change processes**, which in turn influence the measures seen as appropriate or inappropriate to use when implementing goals about sustainable transport

- Vision that places transport **within a wider vision of how the future city will look and function is critical**.
  - Based on politicians' experience, contentious measures need to be communicated as a means to for **achieving urban development**, and not as an end or as transport measures.

  - **Experimentation** can be way to demonstrate this vision e.g. tactical urbanism

The end.

Thanks for listening