DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

HOW NICHE PARTIES CAN CHANGE MAINSTREAM PARTY STRATEGIES

A quantitative content analysis of local parties

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Report no: xx (not to be filled in by the student/students)

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to analyse how niche parties influence mainstream parties' strategies on the local level. The municipal election of Gothenburg 2018 is used as the case for the study. As material, the thesis used budget directives presented in the city council and opinion articles.

Theory: The position, saliency, and ownership theory.

Method: Quantitative Content Analysis.

Result: The thesis found evidence that suggests that local parties influence mainstream parties. These results are similar to those on the national level. However, these effects seem to depend on the issue and on the party itself. While valence issues elicit "accommodating" responses, reactions of mainstream parties on positional issues tend to be muted.

Foreword

I would like to thank my supervisor for his help. Even though there has been a pandemic during this thesis, he has given me the best possible support.

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Introduction

In recent years, more and more niche parties have entered the political stage and successfully challenged traditional mainstream parties (Wagner 2011). Their entrance, as well as their actions, has reshaped both politics and the mainstream parties themselves. By reshaping politics, niche parties have been able to make specific issues such as the environment and immigration more salient in the political debate (Dahlström and Sundell 2012). Their success has also forced the mainstream parties to change positions on specific policies, essentially changing party strategy (Meguid 2008, 236). Niche parties has thus widened the debate in politics.

At the same time, these actors also represent a new type of citizen, as their voters usually have different values compared to those voting for mainstream parties (Dalton 2014; Ford and Jennings 2020). As such, these niche parties can be viewed as a driver of change in society.

Research on mainstream parties' reaction towards niche parties is not new but as I argue below mostly focuses on the national level. There are some studies concerning second-order elections – such as the elections to the European Parliament – but at the local level similar research is practically non-existent. This is an unfortunate lapse in the literature since niche parties operate at both levels and frequently their success at the subnational level may even spill over to the national (Meijers 2017; Otjes 2020). In addition, the local lever is where the voter first encounter politics (Gross and Jankowski 2020), and some of the most important challenges of our time (e.g., regarding climate change or healthcare) cannot be addressed without successful engagement with political and societal actors at the local level.

In this thesis I contribute to research on party competition and more specifically on niche party success and mainstream party reaction. In the 2018 municipal election in Gothenburg, the niche party the Democrats managed to gain almost 17% of the vote (Valmyndigheten 2018). Created in 2017, the Democrats campaigned on issues that were unconventional, mainly infrastructure and changes to public administration (Andersson et al 2018; Wannholt et al 2017). The party managed to rewrite the political map in the city of Gothenburg, a city that historically has been dominated by the mainstream parties (Gunnarsson 2011; Valmyndigheten 2020). Do mainstream parties at the local level react to niche parties and change their strategies accordingly? If they do, when are these changes visible and what shape do they take? Using the local elections of 2018 in Gothenburg municipality as a case study, I answer these questions by testing previously established theories that have been applied to the national level. This is done through a quantitative content analysis of budget proposals as outlined in the method section below.

I present evidence that suggests that local niche parties influence mainstream parties' issue saliency. These results are similar to those obtained by studies done at the national level. However, as I discuss

in the final sections of the thesis, these effects seem to depend on the issue itself. While valence issues elicit "accommodating" responses, reactions of mainstream parties on more "positional" issues tend to be more muted.

The thesis starts with a literature review in which I present the findings of previous studies. This is followed by a section that introduces the thesis' theory, its case, and hypotheses. Afterwards, the methodology is introduced, in this case a quantitative content analysis. In the same section I'll also discuss the material and codes. This is followed by the results. The final sections of the thesis consist of the discussion and conclusion. In the conclusion, I will also discuss the limitations of the thesis, and give advice on future studies.

Background and previous research

Research dealing with parties' policy shifts has a long tradition (Downs 1957; Enelow and Hinich 1984). Parties shift policy positions for two main external reasons. The first is to respond to shifts in public opinion (Spoon and Klüver 2014; Pereira 2019; Ford and Jennings 2020). From a spatial competition perspective, public opinion has a strong influence over political parties' policy positions. Parties adapt to the opinion climate and move along different policy dimensions in ways that can be electorally advantageous. In the second case, parties switch or alter their positions in order to respond to their rivals, i.e., other parties in the political system. Research in this field has a long history and has focused on many different parts of competition. Early studies focused on how parties positioned themselves on policy issues. These studies used theories based on spatial competition (Meguid 2008, 14; Austen-Smith 2011, 811). Today, studies focus on how parties persuade voters to vote for them, usually through direct proposals and promises (Wren and McElwain 2009, 371).

A concept developed inside this field is the notion of party-system agenda. That is, the hierarchy of issues that is the most important at a given time. The party-system agenda doesn't simply put focus on internal structures of a specific party (e.g., ideology and/or organisation). It also focuses on the behaviour of its competitors (Abou-Chadi et al 2020, 751). As Abou-Chadi and his colleagues writes:

> *"The notion of a party-system agenda highlights how the actions of an individual party cannot merely be explained by studying the party itself and the electorate; it is also necessary to consider the behaviour of the other parties in the party system"* (Abou-Chadi et al 2020, 751).

This factor will be the focal point of this study and the object of review in this section. More specifically, I'm interested in how new or "niche" entrants in the political competition affect the positioning of "mainstream" parties and their implications.

Party strategy vis a vis other parties

Parties shift their stances in response to policy movements done by rival parties. As an example, research finds that parties respond to electoral outcomes and adopt similar positions on the issues of the winning party (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009). Parties also react towards their closest rivals, as it's common for parties that are in the same ideological families to follow the movements of their "neighbours" in the policy space, i.e. when a social democratic party changes position, a leftist party will follow (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009, 826, 842; Abou-Chadi and Stoetzer 2020, 944). A large part of this research focuses on parties that are of equal size and have a long history. Called "mainstream parties", these

parties are known to the voter and have been involved in day-to-day politics for a long time. Regardless of their dominant position in politics, mainstream parties are today facing new contenders that position themselves on issues not easily classified along the traditional Left-Right scale.

These so called "niche" parties compete on issues that are sometimes named "New Politics" (compared to the "Old Politics" championed by the mainstream parties), which go beyond policy disagreements on the socialism-liberalism axis (Dalton 2014 ,179; Ford and Jennings 2020, 307 – 308)[1]. Instead, these parties focus on non-economic issues, such as immigration, minority rights or the climate (Dalton 2014, 143). Furthermore, niche parties are newer, smaller, and more extreme in their opinions compared to mainstream parties. (Wagner 2011 ,860). During the last decades, niche parties have emerged on the political stage across the world, creating a "niche party phenomenon" (Wagner 2011, 860). Not only has this created a renewed interest in the literature regarding the definition and classification of this new party family, but it has also created a desire to understand how mainstream parties faced with new and successful contenders react (for example, Abou-Chadi 2016; Bale et al 2010; Rooduijn et al 2014). Especially since the electoral future of niche parties depend to a great extent on mainstream parties' strategies vis a vis that success.

Research has shown that mainstream parties are influenced by the success of niche parties (Rooduijn et al 2014; Heinze 2018). It's also widely understood that: "Niche party fortunes are, in many respects, the by-products of competition between mainstream parties" (Meguid 2008, 22). However, mainstream parties are not simply "copycats" that adopt the exact same position as the niche party. Depending on the situation and context, mainstream parties can use different strategies toward niche parties.

In general, mainstream parties can deploy three different strategies when dealing with a niche party: An *accommodative strategy*; an *adversarial strategy*; and a *dismissive strategy* (Meguid 2005; Meguid 2008). Mainstream parties use an accommodative strategy when they try to *draw* voters from the new party by incorporating a similar position on the issue and "converging" towards the challenger's position (Meguid 2008, 24). The second strategy developed is the opposite of policy convergence. This is an *adversarial strategy*, meaning that a mainstream party takes a rival stance on the issue compared to the

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[1] Whereas traditional issues are often placed on an economic dimension, the new issues concern issues that are non-economic. These shifts in the dimensionality of electoral competition are driven by structural changes: Increased educational levels among the population; Increased ethnic diversity as a result of mass migration; Deeper generational divides as a result of an aging population; and increased polarization between major cities and rural towns (Ford and Jennings 2020, 307 – 308). While these are important elements in the study of party competition it's not the focal point of this thesis.

niche party. The third strategy, called a *dismissive strategy,* is one in which the mainstream party simply tries to ignore the issues of the niche party (Meguid 2008, 24). Instead of focusing and communicating their stance on the same issues as the niche party, the mainstream party puts its focus on a completely different issue.

These strategies can be used differently by mainstream parties (Bale et al 2010; Rooduijn et al 2014). There is no "default position" that can be adopted by mainstream parties. Instead, these strategies are often based on what issue is more salient in a given election.

Thus, the mainstream party's response is dependent on what *kind* of niche party it's facing and what issue the niche party is campaigning on (Schumacher and van Kersbergen 2016, 309; Akkerman 2015, 63). For example, these responses – i.e., the strategies – are different if the niche party is green or radical right. When reacting towards radical right parties, mainstream parties tend to be more anti-immigrant and culturally protectionist, deploying an accommodative strategy (Abou-Chadi and Werner 2018, 843). When the niche party is a Green party, the reaction is different. Instead of trying to draw voters away from the niche party by emphasizing the same issues, the mainstream party de-emphasize the environmental issue, using a dismissive strategy (Abou-Chadi 2014, 433).

These choices are also contextual. For example, it's more common for the mainstream parties in Sweden to disengage from the niche party, whereas in Norway it's more common to engage (Heinze 2018, 303). This highlights the importance of the context the parties act inside. One of the reasons behind this difference in response is the culture of a unified strategy amongst the Swedish mainstream parties towards niche parties (Heinze 2018, 303). In Norway, this culture was absent. Furthermore, in Sweden issues favouring the mainstream parties were more salient compared to those in Norway (Heinze 2018, 303).

These actions further bolster niche parties' appeals. If a mainstream party tries to adopt a similar policy position as a niche party, this carries positive implications for the legitimacy and perceived competence of these actors (Down and Han 2020, 1406). The actions of mainstream parties also influence policy. In the long run, mainstream party reactions towards niche parties can influence specific policy outcomes, such as trade policy (Camyar 2012 ,403).

At the same time, the strategies used by mainstream parties affects the levels of electoral support for the niche parties (Meguid 2005, 357). The kind of strategy used by the mainstream party can either facilitate or disrupt electoral success for the niche party. Evidence suggests that if a mainstream party takes a tough stance towards immigration it facilitates success for anti-immigration parties (Dahlström and Sundell 2012, 361). By taking a tougher stance on the issue, the mainstream parties send a signal towards

the voters that the niche party is right in their stance on the issue, which makes it "easier" for the voter to vote for the original "owners" of the issue. This facilitates short-term support for the niche party.

When do mainstream parties change their positions

As shown mainstream parties have a variety of strategies at their disposal as they respond to niche parties. But when do they do it? Parties are usually reactive, meaning they act *after* an election. This notion is contested, as some authors argue that the effect coming from niche parties are immediate (Schumacher and van Kersbergen 2016 ,309). Even so, several studies point towards that parties change position after the results of an election is known (Somer-Topcu 2009; Fagerholm 2016, 504; Abou-Chadi and Stoetzer 2020, 944). These studies highlight the need for information. In an uncertain environment, political parties rely on cues coming from the public opinion. Perhaps the most accurate source of information comes from elections, and past election results (Somer-Topcu 2009, 246). This includes a temporal dimension, as it's almost impossible for parties to act upon election results until after the election. Thus, it becomes possible to analyse any changes in policy positions first after an election (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009, 690).

Another source of information for political parties is opinion polls. Research shows that parties are also prone to the attitudes of the public opinion as they use opinion polls during campaigns to assess what the voters think about their policies (Pereira 2019, 84; Schumacher and Öhberg 2020, 5). However, opinion polls are always shifting as citizens change their views on what they deem important when conducting the opinion surveys. Therefore, elections serve as a more secure source of information for mainstream parties (Van Der Velden et al 2018 ,408).

The strategical reasons behind a shift in policy for political parties are several. One major argument behind why a party should shift policy is that a loss in electoral support is an indication that the public opinion favours other issues (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009, 690). It's hard to believe that a party that has campaigned on a certain issue and who lost a significant number of votes in the same election would stick with the same strategy after the election. Recent papers support this statement and have found that political parties are sensitive to voter volatility and dealignment: If you lose votes due to your issue not being perceived as important by the electorate, you will change your strategy and what issues you prioritize (Dassonneville 2018 ,822: Spoon and Klüver 2014, 48). These results are also visible when a niche party has gained a lot of votes in an election at the same time as a mainstream party has lost votes, which indicates a desire for the mainstream party politicians to change their policies in accordance with the public (Butler et al 2017, 1975).

Mainstream Party Strategy in Second-order elections

The literature above concerns cases on the national level. However, niche parties also compete in second-order elections, such as the elections for the European parliament. Research shows that the same results witnessed on the national level are also visible in second-order elections. For example, if Eurosceptic parties are successful in the European elections, it will influence mainstream parties, making them more sceptical towards the European Union (Meijers 2017 ,420). Voters might use second-order elections as a tool to get the attention of the mainstream parties. Studies find that voters might vote for parties in second-order elections to give cues to mainstream parties about the issues salient to them Lindstam 2019, 10). This is done by voters that don't feel adequately represented on specific issues by the mainstream parties. At the same time, parties also use second-order elections – such as the European elections – to evaluate and change their policy platforms on the national level (Somer-Topcu and Zar 2014, 893). As the literature above shows, even though they are called "second-order", elections on levels other than the national are important for political parties in many ways.

While previous studies have focused on how parties compete on the national and European levels, little is known about electoral competition on the local level, and how mainstream parties react to niche parties' competition. In some regions in Italy for example, the number of non-partisan parties has increased in the last couple of years (Vampa 2016, 593). Local politics play an important role in the lives of citizens. It's the first type of politics the citizens approach, be it legislative, administrative or in local issues such as infrastructure or education. Nevertheless, the scientific study of political parties' policy position change at the local level is sparse. Compared to the national level, it's often hard to find material and data on the positions of local parties (Gross and Jankowski 2020), and the methods used on the national level aren't always suitable for the local arena. In the latter case, the politics aren't the same. For example, there is no foreign policy being debated on the local level. Instead, other issues are more important, such as education, policing or infrastructure.

At the same time, local politics get more and more politicized, further increasing the need for academic focus on the subject (Gross and Jankowski 2020). Some scientists believe that the increased support for independent local parties can spill over to the national arena, leading to a decline in support for the established parties as the different options for the voters increase (Otjes 2020, 105 – 106).

The reasons behind the emergence of parties like these are many. Some scientists believe that distrust towards established parties makes voters seek for a new alternative (Otjes 2018, 322), others believe that local activism can be triggered by resurfacing conflicts between the local community and the state (Åberg and Ahlberger 2015, 818). Independent parties on the local level – that is, parties that are not part of an ideological family, such as Left or Right – also introduce new conflict lines to the voters,

which might give them an advantage when debating local issues compared to their mainstream counterparts (Boogers and Voerman 2010, 88). Localness also matters for a candidate running for higher office, as it works as a cue for voters who lack other forms of influential information (Jankowski 2016, 81).

Electoral competition therefore is not exclusive to the national level. It also occurs on the local level. The increased politization of local politics has made the local elections more competitive, as it has increased the number of issues the parties campaign and debate on. Studies that analyse how mainstream parties cope with these changes and new contenders at the local level are needed. Is there a shift visible in the positions taken by the mainstream parties? What kind of strategies do they use when coping with a new competitor on the local level? This thesis aims to fill the aforementioned gap in local party strategies by exploring these questions through a case study of the 2018 local election in the Gothenburg municipality.

Theory and hypotheses

This section will develop the hypotheses on the thesis. These will be based on the literature above and will concern two different topics: 1) The timing of the shifts in policy positions, and 2) what type of strategy is used during this shift.

Election results and changes in strategy

As mentioned above, these switches in policy usually come after an election. Election results give the parties secure information about the preferences of the public (Somer-Topcu 2009; Fagerholm 2016, 504; Abou-Chadi and Stoetzer 2020, 944). In this sense, political parties are backward looking actors that evaluate past performances in elections (Van Der Velden et al 2018 ,408). It's implausible that political parties will stick to a strategy that made them loose votes in an election ((Dassonneville 2018 ,822: Spoon and Klüver 2014, 48). Furthermore, niche parties usually gain votes when mainstream parties loose votes (Butler et al 2017, 1975), which gives strategical weight behind a change in strategy for the mainstream parties.

After the results of an election is known, and if the party lost votes compared to the previous election, there is a likelihood that the losing party will shift positions on certain issues. Elections thereby play an important part when parties change their strategies. The first expectation coming from this thesis is that parties on the local level are also influenced by the election results, and that eventual changes in strategy will come after an election. Thus, the first hypothesis of the thesis is:

- *H1: Mainstream parties, faced with a successful challenger at the local level will adjust their policy positions – i.e., develop a new strategy – after an election.*

To understand not only *when* but also how mainstream parties might react, a theory focusing on party strategy is needed. One such theory can be found in Meguid's "position, saliency and ownership theory" (PSO) (Meguid 2008, 22). I explore expectations coming from this theory in the next section.

The position, saliency and ownership theory

Early theories of party behaviour argued that the political party adapted itself to the preferences of the citizens (Wren and McElwain 2009, 371). Thus, the changes in party policies are influenced by the median voter. Meguid expands this understanding by including other parties in the influencing-process.

When faced with competitors who campaigns on new issue dimensions, mainstream parties must make decisions whether to enter on this dimension and compete for voters (Meguid 2008, 28).

First of the strategies is the *accommodative strategy*. It explains how mainstream parties tries to draw voters from the niche party by moving closer to their policy positions. This is sometimes called policy convergence (Meguid 2008, 24). The second strategy is the opposite of the first. An *adversarial strategy* is applied by a party that wants to move away from its contender. This is sometimes referred to as policy divergence (Meguid 2008, 24).

The difference between an adversarial or accommodative strategy is whether the party wants to adopt the same policies as the competitor. With an accommodative strategy, the mainstream party converge on the issue with the niche party, essentially trying to take the policy positions on the issue dimension. An example would be that if a niche party wins a lot of support by advocating for reduced taxes, the mainstream party adopts this position with an accommodative strategy by also calling for lower taxes. By doing so, the mainstream party tries to undermine the niche party on the issue. With an adversarial strategy, the mainstream party tries to take a position that is the opposite of the niche party. Reusing the example about taxes, with an adversarial strategy, the mainstream party would instead call for higher taxes, thus taking a position that is the direct opposite of the niche party.

The two strategies above come with an increase in saliency for a specific issue. When mainstream parties decide to compete on a new issue dimension – regardless if it's with an accommodative or adversarial strategy – they decide to make the issue more salient by communicating a position on the issue. In the British election period of 1977 – 1979, the saliency of the decentralization issue, put forward by the Scottish National Party (SNP), increased when the mainstream parties Labour and the Conservatives deployed an accommodative and adversarial strategy respectively (Meguid 2008, 236).

However, mainstream parties can also decide to focus on other issues, taking a decision not to compete on the new issue dimension. The third strategy developed in the PSO-theory is called a *dismissive strategy* (Meguid 2008, 28). In a dismissive strategy, the mainstream party simply tries to ignore the issues of the niche party. By not competing on the issue, the mainstream party tries to defuse the issue favoured by the niche party, signalling to the voters that the issue is not important. This is usually done by not communicating any position on the issue at all. The mainstream party communicates instead their positions on other issues. Once again reusing the example with taxes, instead of taking any position on the issue, with a dismissive strategy the mainstream party would instead try to highlight another issue, for example climate change.

Through a dismissive strategy, the issue becomes less salient. This is because the mainstream party doesn't compete on the dimension due to strategical reasons. When a mainstream party uses a dismissive

strategy, the issue usually drops in importance for the public opinion. This was seen in the British electoral cycle of 1970 – 1973, when the Labour and Conservative parties both used dismissive strategies, effectively reducing the national interest in the previous mentioned decentralization issue (Meguid 2008, 232).

In the cases with the British elections above, the choices behind accommodative, adversarial or dismissive strategies were based on the perceived threat of the niche party. When the niche party in these cases, the SNP, were perceived as a threat, the mainstream parties used accommodative or adversarial strategies to try to counter its success. When the SNP were viewed not to be a contender for votes (as in the period 1970 – 1973), the mainstream parties used dismissive strategies (Meguid 2008, 246). Consequently, the issue of decentralization (which the SNP campaigned on) decreased in saliency with the dismissive strategies (Meguid 2008, 232) and increased with the accommodative and adversarial strategies (Meguid 2008, 236).

How the theory will be used

The part relevant for this thesis is the one about issue saliency. When faced with a new contender, mainstream parties need to decide how to deal with it. As mentioned above, they can apply an accommodative, adversarial or dismissive strategy. With an accommodative or adversarial strategy, the mainstream parties put more emphasis on the issue. With a dismissive, the mainstream party puts less emphasis on the issue.

In this study, it will be difficult to analyse the different positions of the parties, and whether the strategies are accommodative or adversarial. There are various reasons for doing so. First, there are time constrains. A study that analyses differences in tone (essentially accommodative or dismissive tone) towards an issue requires more time compared to one that analyses whether a party engages or not with the issue.

More importantly though, when analysing differences in tone, there are reliability concerns that come into play. This problem occurs when the coder needs to interpret different arguments as negative or positive towards a proposal. Not only does this add to the time problem by increasing the amount of time needed for the coding, but it also increases the chances of coding inconsistently. To avoid problems like these, one can apply a statistical reliability test. As this thesis only has one coder, it becomes impossible to conduct statistical reliability tests. To avoid these problems described above, this thesis has made the decision to focus on whether the mainstream parties engage on an issue conflict or not, i.e., if they make the issue more or less salient.

However, as I will show, one of the issues "owned" by the niche party, potentially lends itself in a more detailed analysis that can differentiate between accommodative or adversarial strategies by mainstream parties. In the results section I proceed with caution in such an analysis that does produce some interesting findings.

To decide whether a party has engaged or not in an issue, the dismissive strategy from the PSO-theory, together with what I term here as an *engagement strategy* will be used. The engagement strategy is the accommodative and adversarial strategy put into one. If a mainstream party puts more emphasis on an issue campaigned on by the niche party, they have used the *engagement strategy*, essentially taking a position (for or against) the issue. This also means that the amount of policy proposals and saliency of specific issues increased since the last election

On the other hand, if the amount of policy proposals instead has decreased, the mainstream party has used a dismissive strategy. As explained in the methodology section, by analysing the budget proposals by the parties, the study is going to count and categorize different policy proposals alongside selected issues. Thus, the theory will explain the eventual shifts in policy focus among the mainstream parties.

The table below summarizes the different strategies.

Table 1: Mainstream party strategies

Engagement strategy	More salience is put on the issue after the election, the mainstream party tries to compete with the niche party on the issue by either converging on or diverging from the niche party's position.
Dismissive strategy	Less salience is put on the issue after the election, the mainstream party tries to ignore the issue.

The above sets up two competitive expectations regarding the behaviour of mainstream parties:

- *H2A: Mainstream parties on the local level will respond to the success of niche parties by engaging with the issue emphasized by the niche parties on their policy proposals.*

The other strategy is dismissive, meaning the mainstream party tries to limit support for the niche party by making the issue *less* visible. The literature tells us that new and upcoming Green parties often face this type of strategy. The competing expectation, therefore, is that niche parties on the local level will face this type of strategy as well. The second hypothesis of the thesis is:

- *H2B: Mainstream parties on the local level will respond to the success of niche parties by dismissing the issues emphasized by the niche parties in their policy proposals.*

The case

The context

On a national level in 2018, the two biggest parties the Social Democrats and the Moderate Party both lost votes. This resulted in that for the first time in Swedish history they didn't gather more than half of the total vote (Aylott and Bolin 2018, 1513).

The national results were somewhat reflected in the local election in Gothenburg. The Social Democrats and the Moderate Party lost votes compared to the election before, especially the Moderates. The clear winner of the election was a newfound party, *the Democrats*, that gained almost 17% of the vote in their first election (Valmyndigheten 2018). This election – the local election in Gothenburg 2018 – is the selected case for this thesis. The newly founded Democrats managed to persuade the voters and enter the city council.

In Sweden there have been cases of new challengers on the local level that forces the established parties to change their strategies (Dahlström and Esaiasson 2011; Dahlström and Sundell 2012). However, these parties have mainly campaigned on reduced immigration. Leading up to the election, the public opinion in Gothenburg found the infrastructure to be the most important question. It has been an issue that has been in the centre in the city's politics for some time (Andersson et al 2018, 132). This was partly based on the opposition to a national infrastructure agreement called *Västlänken* or *The West Link Project*. According to some political analysts, it was the single most important issue in the election (Näslund 2019; Dahlström 2017). In 2018, the attitudes were almost the same: The infrastructure remained the most important issue for the public. Apart from infrastructure, integration, public health, law and order, social issues and education were the highest ranked issues for the public in Gothenburg 2018 (SOM 2019, 20).

At the same time, confidence in politicians has declined in Sweden for the recent years This is also visible in Gothenburg with a majority of the population in Gothenburg that has little confidence in politicians. Compared to the national level, the trust towards politicians in Gothenburg is lower (SOM 2019, 20; SOM 2019; Andersson et al 2018, 134). This context could indicate an environment in which established politicians are rejected by the citizenry. Instead, the citizens might look for new alternatives like the Democrats. Thus, the reduced trust in politicians, together with the infrastructure issue and the preferences of the public opinion created an election campaign that focused on local issues.

The Democrats

To this backdrop, the Democrats were formed in 2017 with an outspoken goal to stop *The West Link Project* (Wannholt et al 2017). Their stance on the issue was unconventional compared to the other parties as no mainstream party was against the project (Dahlström 2017). Instead, the Democrats represented a clear option against the continuation of the agreement, and seemingly had the public opinion on their side.

Another issue the Democrats campaigned on, and that made it different compared to other parties, was its position on public administration. Apart from putting a stop to the *Västlänken*-project, the Democrats wanted to restructure the public administration of Gothenburg, and to improve its governance. Furthermore, they wanted to reduce the local corruption and change the bureaucratic system (Andersson et al 2018, 129). The party also wanted to streamline the public organisation and redistribute 1.4 million Swedish kronor in the municipal administration (SVT Nyheter 2018). During a public questioning days before the election, the party leader Martin Wannholt said that the politicians in the city "didn't do their job" and therefore, a streamlining of the organisation was needed (Rogsten 2018). The party also wanted to remove the role of political secretary for the political parties in the city (Wannholt et al 2018).

After the election, as the party was unable to stop the *West Link Project*, the efficiency of the public administration has gained more focus for the Democrats (Herold 2019). In a debate article in 2018, the party outlined a plan for a restructuring of the civil service and public administration of Gothenburg (Wannholt et al 2018). Thus, the party takes a unique position on the issue of public administration. As a questionnaire from the Swedish public service shows, going into the election the mainstream parties focused on completely different issues (SVT Nyheter 2018).

Due to their stances on policy issues, notably on infrastructure and public administration, the Democrats are viewed to be an adequate case for a thesis that wants to understand how niche party success affects mainstream party strategies. Given their immediate success, the Democrats become a suitable choice for a case-study (Esaiasson et al 2017, 109). Furthermore, the Democrats reach the criteria set up by Wagner when he writes that niche parties:

> *"...can be defined as parties that compete primarily on a small number of non-economic issues, a definition that has the virtues of parsimony and measurability"* (Wagner 2011 ,860).

Following the concept put forward by Wagner, the Democrats are a niche party that primarily focuses on non-economic issues such as the infrastructure and the public administration. One might argue against this understanding, and instead advocate the position that public administration and infrastructure are economic issues. This is true to some degree. However, while these issues have an economic dimension to them, they´re not "typical" in the sense that they concern division on issues of

redistribution or privatisation. Instead, they concern the functioning of the local government and its structure and the continuation of an infrastructure agreement and its benefits on the city. Thus, these issues are understood as having a greater focus on the "restructuring sphere" of the public administration, and whether to continue with *The West Link Project*.

The reduced trust in politicians, together with the infrastructure issue campaigned on by the Democrats and the public opinion created an election in which the Democrats could benefit by taking different positions on infrastructure and putting the issue of public administration in the agenda. This is also the focus of this study, as these issues will make up the arguments behind the selection of codes later in the thesis.

The mainstream parties

Moving on to the mainstream parties. The Moderate Party and the Social Democrats were chosen due to their dominance in Swedish politics. As Gunnarsson writes, they are part of the "pole parties" in Swedish politics, essentially passing the ruling power between themselves (Gunnarsson 2011, 85). Historically, the two parties have enjoyed the most votes in almost every national election since 1910 (Statistics Sweden 2020). Regarding the Social Democrats, some academics go as far to argue that they have established a hegemony in the Swedish society (Möller 2015, 310). The two parties also represent different types of voters, were the Social Democrats are viewed as a *mass party* and the Moderates as an *elite party* (Norén Bretzer 2014, 82). Hence, the two parties give a good representation of Swedish politics.

The same goes for the city of Gothenburg. For several years, the Moderates and Social Democrats have been the two largest parties (Valmyndigheten 2020), with the Social Democrats holding executive power for 24 years leading up to the election of 2018. Afterwards, the Moderates were able to create a coalition – the Alliance – and take control over the city. However, their losses in the election have made their coalition weak. In the 2018 election the support for the two mainstream parties declined, especially for the Moderates, who lost 7,8%, making the Democrats the second largest party.

The results from the previous elections are covered in the table below.

Figure 1: Election results from the municipal elections in Gothenburg from 1998 up until 2018. All numbers are displayed in percentages. The results are taken from the Swedish Election Authority (Valmyndigheten.se).
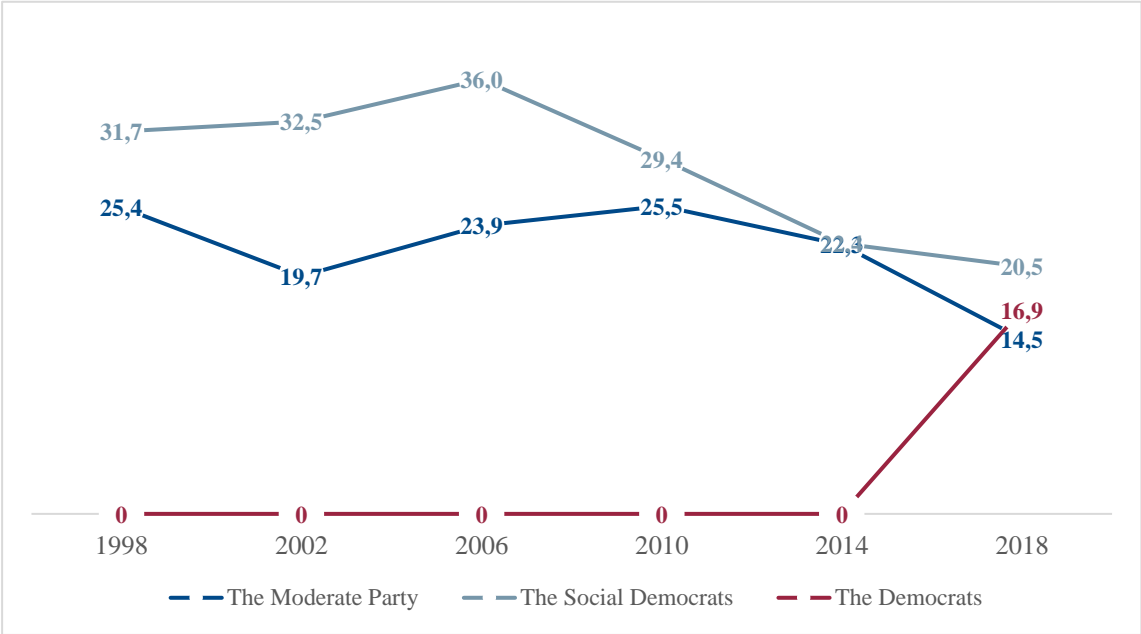
The historical dominant position of the Moderates and Social Democrats makes them interesting to study. Especially after the rise of the Democrats and the decline in support for the mainstream parties. In Gothenburg, it's fair to say that the political map has been rewritten: There's a new major player in town. Even if it's too early to say whether the Democrats will remain in their current position (they might lose some of their support in the upcoming election) it's still relevant to see whether their success has affected the other key actors in the local politics.

Methodology and codebook

The material: political parties and their texts

As Gunnarsson writes, political parties are a premise for a functional democracy. Without them, it becomes hard to imagine a modern democratic system. Perhaps the most important function of political parties is to design, propose and implement policy (Gunnarsson 2019, 5). Parties usually communicate their policy positions through their political and electoral manifestos. These are written with a strategic purpose: to win votes in elections.

A strength when analysing party proposals such as manifestos is that they give a valid and reliable understanding of a party's policy positions (Gunnarsson 2019, 91). For a study that has the ambition to analyse policy positions across time, manifestos (or equivalent documents as I will argue below) become a suitable fit. Furthermore, it's plausible to assume that if a party finds a specific issue important, they will put a lot of emphasis on this issue in their manifestos. According to the saliency-theory (Gunnarsson 2019, 96; Meguid 2008, 25), if a party finds an issue important, they want to campaign on that issue and make it salient for the voters. This means they are going to communicate their policy positions on this issue more frequently compared to other issues. As such, political manifestos work as credible source of information when analysing policy positions.

It's important to point out that this thesis doesn't use political manifestos created for electoral campaigns. Instead, due to the lack of finding electoral documents for the local parties (for more, see Gross and Jankowski 2020), the thesis will use the budget directives put forward by political parties in the local parliament[2]. The budget directives in the city of Gothenburg doesn't simply state how much money goes where, they also work as general plans for the coming years. The budget is the general and superior regulatory document for the city of Gothenburg, for its publicly owned companies and for its committees (Gothenburg City, 2020). On the webpage of the City of Gothenburg, one can read that:

> *"The role of the budget is to state the municipal council's prioritized goals and orientations within the financial framework and current legislation. Plans, programs, guidelines and policies adopted by the City Council must be followed and implemented, but are subordinate to the budget"* (Gothenburg City 2020).

Much like a political manifesto, the budget directives specify what the political parties want to accomplish during their mandate. Hence, a budget directive reflects salient political priorities for parties.

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[2] There will be an exception to this which regards the year 2018 for the Democrats. This will be discussed further below.

As the quote above illustrates, it specifies political policies, plans, programs, and guidelines. Furthermore, it specifies which kind of issues – or policies –are important to the party. Much in line with the arguing of Gunnarsson, the budget directives thus work as strategic documents that prioritize goals and policies for the political parties. It's a premiss for this study that the budget directives – just like a political manifesto – are strategical documents designed to communicate, among others, policy priorities (Gunnarsson 2019, 95). Thus, this thesis argues that the budget directives are a sufficient compensation for the lack of electoral manifestos.

With a quantitative content analysis applied to budget directives it becomes possible to analyse what issues political parties find the most important. By including several directives across time, it becomes possible to track shifts in saliency of various issues.

Much like the electoral arena (Gunnarsson 2019, 10), budget directives in the city of Gothenburg are only put forward once a year (Gothenburg City 2020). One budget is presented each year by each party. This makes the collection and narrowing of material easy. The budgets are collected from the official webpage of Gothenburg City (Gothenburg City 2020). The budgets collected were all the ones available, starting with the budget of 2013 and ending with the budget from 2020. This gives a good time span for the thesis: It covers two elections as well as time before, between and after the elections.

There will be an exception to this. To cover for the year 2018 for the Democrats, opinion articles written by the party have been collected. These articles have been included so that the thesis also can cover the campaign for the Democrats[3], and what issues the party focuses on.

The opinion articles have all been published in the local newspaper *Göteborgs-Posten*, which is one of the largest newspapers in Sweden. They can be found on the webpage of the Democrats, and are published between the 1st of January until the 8th of September, which is the day before the election. Other forms of material were considered. On the Democrat's webpage, they also present a "living document", which essentially is a document they constantly revise. In this document they outline their major political goals. However, as it's a "living" document, it's impossible to know the exact date of when a policy was written and included in the document. Therefore, it's unsuitable as material for this thesis. Because of this, the opinion articles are a more suitable choice, as the Democrats argue for specific policies through them.

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[3] Because they weren't elected to the city council until 2018, they have no directive that covers this year.

Göteborgs-Posten was chosen because the Democrats published their major debate articles there. It's one of the largest newspapers in Sweden, and the largest in Gothenburg. This makes it a relevant source for information (Kantar Sifo 2020).

The table below shows details for the budget directives. The letter "X" means that a directive is available, whereas the "- " means that it's missing.

Table 2: Available budget directes

	Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Party									
Dems		-	-	-	-	-	-	X	X
Soc.Dem		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mod.Par		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Quantitative content analysis

This thesis has opted for the choice of a quantitative content analysis. As Esaiasson et al (2017) writes, quantitative content analysis is the study of some form of content – in this case, textual content – which can be quantified. Furthermore, it's a useful tool when asking questions about the frequency of different categories in a vast amount of material (Esaiasson et al 2017, 198). This makes a quantitative content analysis a useful tool for this thesis, as proposals can be quantified. As this is central to both the method and the thesis, it becomes possible through a content analysis to study questions about saliency in budget directives.

There are several ways of analysing text material. Today, it's common to use computer assisted programmes to analyse policy positions through speeches and political documents (Klemmensen et al 2009; Debus and Navarette 2020). These programmes help the researcher to analyse large amounts of data and decide what position a political party takes on issues. They are also useful for studies analysing social media (Hatipoğlu et al 2019).

These studies place political parties along conflict dimension based on their position on policies. By analysing text, it's possible to understand what a party wants and how it communicates its stances on issues. This thesis has a similar ambition. Quantitative content analysis has been used when analysing

is the method of choice for many research programmes, more prominently the Comparative Manifesto Project Database (CMP). CMP uses a special form of content analysis, using "quasi-sentences" as its code of analysis, it analyses statements and messages in political texts (Werner, Lacewell and Volkens 2015, 6). In this thesis I use the methodology developed by the CMP project in order to quantify issue salience and test my hypotheses.

Analysing, unitising and coding

The analytical process of these types of studies is divided into two parts. First, the researcher needs to unitise the text, essentially finding out how many unique statements the party makes in its manifesto[4]. The second part consists of coding the statements (Werner, Lacewell and Volkens 2015, 5). Except for the chapters and sections headings, introductory remarks, statistics, and different kinds of tables of content, every textual part of the document must be coded (Werner, Lacewell and Volkens 2015, 6).

The coding unit –unit of analysis – of the thesis is the quasi-sentence. A quasi-sentence consists of a "message" communicated by the political party. A basic rule of thumb is that one sentence equals one quasi-sentence. Sometimes, parties make several statements in one sentence, forcing the coder to cut multiple quasi-sentences (Werner, Lacewell and Volkens 2015, 6; Esaiasson et al 2017, 48). The CMP-handbook gives the following example when to cut sentences:

> *"We need to address our close ties with our neighbours (107) / as well as the unique challenges facing small business owners in this time of economic hardship. (402)"* (Werner, Lacewell and Volkens 2015, 6).

In the example, two different issues are discussed, creating two different quasi-sentences that need to be "cut" – meaning, separated from the sentence and coded – by the coder. If the example would only include one issue – such as only addressing the economic hardships for small businesses – it would only include one quasi-sentence. The coder therefore wouldn't need to cut the sentence. For example:

> *"We need to address the unique challenges facing small business owners in this time of economic hardship. (402)"*

It's important that a sentence includes a statement. If it doesn't, it will not be cut or coded as a quasi-sentence. For example, a sentence will not be cut into a quasi-sentence if it simply calls out for a better-run school: It need to include how, favourably specifying some factor of the school that needs to improve

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[4] Or in this case, budget directives.

(such as better school lunch or working environment for the teachers) (Werner, Lacewell and Volkens 2015, 7).

To understand what code to use when coding, the coder must be as systematic as possible. Test runs were conducted before the actual coding started with the purpose of training so that I would be comfortable with the codes and understand them properly. When the actual analysis was conducted it was done in two steps. The first step consisted of reading the budget and cutting all the quasi-sentences. In the second step, the actual coding began. During the second step, I reread the directive and coded the relevant quasi-sentence.

When assigning a code to a quasi-sentence, the coder sometimes needs to interpret what the message of the actor is. This puts a lot of responsibility on the coder as he needs to fully understand the statements (Werner, Lacewell and Volkens 2015, 9; Esaiasson et al 2017, 199). To achieve a reliable thesis, the author has constantly backtracked during the coding process so that a systematic coding structure was created (Esaiasson et al 2017, 64). I should note that budget directives are straightforward documents when it comes to their proposals. When interpretation was needed, only the manifest message was interpreted. No deeper interpretation was conducted. I did not try to understand and code the latent message of the directives. The analysis only concerns the manifest message, and the visible policy proposals.

The upcoming section will discuss the codes and why they are relevant for this thesis.

Variables: reasoning and introduction

As earlier noted, niche parties usually advocate unconventional issues. As mentioned above, the Democrats in Gothenburg are primarily focusing on two issues: infrastructure and public administration (see below the result section). In this section, the codes for these issues will be presented, together with the codes for the issues found most important by the public opinion at the time of the election and will form part of my analysis. These issues are infrastructure, education, public administration, welfare and law and order.

The issues are chosen on two different grounds. First, these issues reflect the public opinions most important questions at that moment in time (Andersson et al 2018, 132). This is with one exception as the integration issue is not coded here (see below). Second, the infrastructure issue and public administration were key topics for the Democrats and as a whole during the election (Näslund 2019). As I show at the start of the results section these are indeed two flagship issues which the Democrats campaigned on and will be the ones used in order to test my hypotheses. The remaining three (education,

welfare and law and order) form part of my analysis but mainly serve descriptive purposes. They also add important clues to the validity and reliability of this analysis as any alarming or counterintuitive findings on these could be cause for concern and help adjust the coding strategy.

The issues together with their codes will be presented in the upcoming section.

The codes

In Gothenburg, the traffic issue together with infrastructure is of great local importance (Andersson et al 2018, 132). Having a local history, the issue was in the centre of attention with the announcement that the newly formed local party "Democrats" campaigned on the promise of stopping the national infrastructure project of *Västlänken* (ibid 129; Wannholt et al 2017). The codes used in this thesis are similar to the ones used by the CMP (Werner, Lacewell and Volkens 2015, 8). The first variable introduced in the codebook is:

- Infrastructure: Positive (code number 411).
- Importance of modernisation of industry and updated methods of transport and communication. May include:
  - Calls for public spending on infrastructure such as roads and bridges.

Code 411 will analyse quasi-sentences focusing on the willingness of public spending on infrastructure. In this thesis, "Positive" means that the actor writing the text is in favour of spending money on a specific policy. By gathering data on the number of proposals and messages containing a positive view on infrastructure, it becomes possible to analyse whether these have declined after the electoral success of the Democrats in 2018. Furthermore, this code also includes public spending on urban development. As an issue that has increasingly gained traction over time in Gothenburg, with several projects such as "Linbanan" and "Skeppsbron" being controversial, it needs to be included (Näslund 2020). Hereon, this code will be referred to as *InfraPos.*

However, code 411 will not be sufficient to answer the questions asked in this thesis. What's lacking from the codebook given by CMP is a code which captures negative proposals and policies concerning infrastructure. Therefore, this thesis has created its own code to achieve this purpose. The code –named 411x – will be defined as an opposite of code 411. It will focus solely on infrastructure, as it was one of the most important questions amongst the citizens of Gothenburg 2018. Thus, the second code is defined as:

- Infrastructure: Negative (code number 411x).
  - Calls for reduced public spending on infrastructure, such as roads and bridges.

From here on, this code will be referred to as *InfraNeg.*

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The third code introduced regards the municipal administration of Gothenburg. Apart from putting a stop to the *Västlänken*-project, the Democrats wanted to restructure the public administration of Gothenburg, and to improve its governance. Furthermore, they wanted to reduce the local corruption and develop the bureaucratic system (Andersson et al 2018, 129). Another reason for including this variable is introduced due to the diminishing trust towards politicians seen in the Swedish society at large (Andersson et al 2018, 133). This makes it interesting to see whether the mainstream parties have changed their position on an issue advocated by the Democrats regarding the public administration and their governance. The definition of the second variable is as follows:

- Governmental and Administrative Efficiency (code number 303).
  - Need for efficiency and economy in government and administration and/or the general appeal to make the process of government and administration cheaper and more efficient. May include:
  - Restructuring the civil service.
  - Cutting down on the civil service.
  - Improving bureaucratic procedures.

Code 303 will try to answer the questions regarding the policy positions of the Moderates and Social Democrats on the issue regarding the governance of the public administration. This code will be referred to as *Admin*.

The fourth code regards the expansion of the welfare state, a key strategic goal for the Democrats up to the election of 2022. In their budget directive for 2019, the Democrats write that they want to redistribute 1,4 billion Swedish kronor to the welfare sector (The Democrats budget directive 2019, 7; Rogsten 2017). For the people living in Gothenburg the issue is also important (Andersson et al 2018, 132). This gives reason to include the code in the thesis. The definition of the third code is:

- Welfare State Expansion (code number 504).
  - Favourable mentions of need to introduce, maintain or expand any public social service or social security scheme. This includes, for example, government funding of:
  - Health care.
  - Child care.
  - Elder care and pensions.
  - Social housing.

From here on, this code will be referred to as *Welfare*.

Code 504 outlined above excludes education. Therefore, a code including education is needed to capture all the statements and quasi-sentences concerning the welfare sector. Thus, the fifth code is:

- Education Expansion (code number 506).
  - Need to expand and/or improve educational provision at all levels.

This code will be referred to as *Education*.

Another issue outlined as important by the Democrats is expanding the police force (The Democrats budget directive 2019, 7, 20). They have argued for the importance of more police in society, for example calling for the reestablishment of a "neighbourhood police" (De Vivo 2017). Issues regarding integration and social questions are also important for the people in Gothenburg (Andersson et al 2018, 132), giving reason to include this code). Hence, the sixth code is:

- Law and Order General: Positive (code number 605.1).
  - Favourable mentions of strict law enforcement, and tougher actions against domestic crime. Only refers to the enforcement of the status quo of the manifesto country's law code. May include:
  - Increasing support and resources for the police.
  - Tougher attitudes in courts.
  - Importance of internal security.

This code will be referred to as *Law*.

As is stated several times above, the reason behind including these specific codes is twofold. First, the Democrats favour these issues in their directives, giving them a lot of saliency. Second, these issues were important for the voters living in Gothenburg during the 2018 election. The six codes above were all among the five most important issues for the voters living in Gothenburg 2018 (Andersson et al 2018, 132). All the codes are listed in table 3 below.

Table 3: Summary of the codes. The table also shows examples of each code.

303: Governmental and Administrative Efficiency.	Need for efficiency and economy in government and administration and/or the general appeal to make the process of government and administration cheaper and more efficient. May include: Restructuring the civil service. Cutting down on the civil service. Improving bureaucratic procedures /|*"The respective boards and companies must conduct active efficiency work and evaluate ambition levels and opportunities for increased revenues"* /|**(10-303)** (The Democrats directive 2020) .
411: Infrastructure: Positive.	Importance of modernisation of industry and updated methods of transport and communication. May include: Calls for public spending on infrastructure such as roads and bridges. /| *"We want to develop and strengthen the Oslo-Gothenburg-Copenhagen collaboration with a high-speed line for trains"* /|**24(411)** (The Moderate Party budget directive 2013).
411x : Infrastructure: Negative	Calls for reduced public spending on infrastructure, such as roads and bridges. /|*"The congestion tax will be phased out based on the reduced content in the West Sweden package"* /|**(11-411x)** (The Democrats budget directive 2019).
504: Welfare State Expansion.	Favourable mentions of need to introduce, maintain or expand any public social service or social security scheme. This includes, for example, government funding of: Health care. Child care. Elder care and pensions. Social housing. /|*"Parental support is of great importance and needs to increase in socio-economically vulnerable districts"* /|**29(504)** (The Social Democrats budget directive 2014).

506: Education Expansion.	Need to expand and/or improve educational provision at all levels.
	/❙"The expansion of the preschool will continue to strengthen the quality, especially through reduced size of the children's groups"/❙**110(506)** (The Social Democrats budget directive 2016).
605.1: Law and Order General: Positive.	Favourable mentions of strict law enforcement, and tougher actions against domestic crime. Only refers to the enforcement of the status quo of the manifesto country's law code. May include: Increasing support and resources for the police. Tougher attitudes in courts. Importance of internal security.
	/❙ *"Insecurity and fear of moving freely in the city must never prevail"* /❙ **(168(605.1)** (The Moderate Party budget directive 2018).

A dataset on the coded sentences has been created in order to facilitate the analytical process and also allow for more transparency. The data will be shared upon request. Examples of the coded documents, the raw data, will be included in the appendix for further clarification of how the analysis proceeded.

Discussion of the codes

The codes *Admin, InfraPos* and *InfraNeg* are the ones that will be used to test the hypotheses. These were chosen after a reading of various sorts of material such as news articles, academic articles and political documents. I chose these two issues as the focal point of the study because I believe they were the main focus of the Democrats going into the 2018 election. As mentioned above, the Democats argues for a restructuring of the civil service in Gothenburg and for a stop to the *West Link Project*. As such, they are chosen due to their relevance for the Democrats.

The other three codes – education, welfare and law and order – were chosen due to their relevance for the public opinion at that time. In 2017, the public opinion in Gothenburg put infrastructure as its most important topic (at 26%), education at second (at 24%), healthcare at third (22%), social issues at fifth

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(18%), and law and order at sixth (13%) (Andersson et al 2018, 132)[5]. *Welfare*, *Education* and *Law* are included to give more substance to the analysis, and to include issues that would be applicable for all parties examined.

Reliability and validity

Before moving on, the question of reliability and validity needs to be addressed. Good reliability means that there are no random mistakes happening during the coding of the variables and that sentences including the same content are coded the same way (Esaiasson et al 2017, 64). It's hard for a scientist to guarantee full reliability. When it comes to quantitative content analyses with multiple coders involved in the coding, it's often the case that difference in the coding occur between the coders. To overcome this problem and test the reliability of the study, it's possible to apply statistical tests. However, because there's only one coder in this thesis, this is not possible. To avoid random mistakes and miscoding, the material has been reread multiple times, both during and after the coding. The author has backtracked to previously coded material to check that the same, or similar, proposals have been coded the same way. Furthermore, the data has also been scrutinized in its dataset-format, checking for misspelling and alike. Hence, the material and data has been checked several times for mistakes made by the author to minimise reliability concerns.

The notion of validity is also essential to any academic inquiry and basically means that the scientists' measuring what she says she will measure, i.e., how she operationalises her theoretical concepts (Esaiasson et al 2017, 58). I argue that the validity comes from using the codes developed by the CMP project. As a renown and tested methodology and codebook, the approach has been frequently used by academics throughout the years. Hence, it comes with an established codebook that lets me capture and code the necessary sentences from the material.

Validity also comes from the chosen material. As I've argued above, the material chosen for this thesis is the best available option. This is true for both the directives and the complementary material for the Democrats 2018. The material captures proposals presented by the Democrats between the years 2018 and 2020. Thus, it will help me test my hypotheses and eventually draw support for them. There is room

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[5] At number four is integration at 23%. However, the responsibility of integration lies at the hand of the Swedish Public Employment Service, as it's a centralized issue in Sweden (Wiesbrock 2013, 13). Because of this, it's unlikely that the local parties will put forward any proposals concerning integration in their budget directives. As such, this issue has been ruled out of this thesis. Instead, law and order has been included.

for improvements, as there always is. Nevertheless, I argue that the material chosen for this thesis – together with the codes and methodology – is adequate and gives this thesis the validity it needs.

Summary

To summarize: This thesis aims to analyse quasi-sentences using a quantitative content analysis. The coding unit is quasi-sentences, and the codes constructed for this thesis are in line with the ones developed by the CMP. There are six codes in total. Due to the lack of electoral manifestos, budget directives put forward in the local parliament in Gothenburg will work as the material. As argued above, these directives are a suitable choice for the study. They specify both the goals and priorities for the parties, essentially working as strategical political documents. The time-period covered in this thesis is between 2013 and 2020 (for the mainstream parties), covering the two elections of 2014 and 2018. This gives a good analytical scope that is not too wide and not too small. The budgets are publicly available on the official webpage of Gothenburg City, making them available for anyone who wants to replicate this study. There is a total of 18 budgets, 2 for the Democrats from 2019 and 2020, 8 each for the Moderates and Social Democrats covering the years from 2013 to 2020. Because the Democrats were first elected to the municipal parliament in 2018 there are no directives prior to 2019. Instead, this thesis uses opinion articles published in 2018 to cover for the campaign. These are available at the Democrats webpage (Demokraterna 2020).

Results

This section will describe and go through the empirical results and decide whether the hypotheses are supported. This will be done in three steps. The first step concerns the Democrats, the second the Moderate Party and the third the Social Democrats.

The Democrats

Table 4: Results for the Democrats

Total number of QS as numbers and percentage									
Party and year	Issues	Other	Admin	InfraPos	Welfare	Education	InfraNeg	Law	Total amount
The Democrats		**28,6%** **270**	**30,7%** **284**	**8,6%** **91**	**11,4%** **108**	**13,9%** **124**	**3,3%** **55**	**3,5%** **32**	**100,0%** **964**
2018		22,4% 19	16,5% 14	17,6% 15	9,4% 8	2,4% 2	30,6% 26	1,2% 1	100% 85
2019		28,5% 94	30,9% 102	8,8% 29	14,2% 47	8,2% 27	5,2% 17	4,2% 14	100,0% 330
2020		28,6% 157	30,6% 168	8,6% 47	9,7% 53	17,3% 95	2,2% 12	3,1% 17	100,0% 549

The table above shows the results from the Democrats budget directives and their opinion articles. The table shows the results in both percentages and total amount. This is to enable a better understanding of the data. To see how much saliency an issue is given, the data needs to be converted into percentages. At the same time, it's important to know how frequent a certain code appears in the material, i.e., how many times a proposal is put forward. If a material has more quasi-sentences it will probably be more text and a longer read. As the table shows, the 2020 directive has more quasi-sentences compared to the 2019 directive, being a longer text.

The Democrats have two budget directives available for analysis as well as nine opinion articles between the 1st of January to the 8th of September. As mentioned above, the codes in the table were included due

to their relevance for the Democrats and the public. The *Other*[6] category consists of codes not relevant for this thesis. Therefore, they will not be thoroughly discussed in this thesis.

In 2018, going into the campaign, most of the QS were coded as *InfraNeg,* followed by *Other*, *InfraPos* and *Admin*. 30,6% of the QS were coded as *InfraNeg*, 22,4% as *Other*, 17,6% as *InfraPos*, 16,5% as *Admin*, 9,4% as *Welfare*, 2,4% as *Education,* and 1,2% as *Law*. In 2018, almost a third of the QS were coded as *InfraNeg*, making it the largest category that year. It's followed by *Other* as the second largest, *InfraPos* as the third, *Admin* as the fourth, *Welfare* as the fifth. *Education* and *Law* are the smallest categories.

It's possible to see that the infrastructure and public administration issues are the focus of the party in 2018. Especially *InfraNeg* is salient, but also *InfraPos* and *Admin*. Thus, - as argued above – the two topics where the most important for the Democrats during the election of 2018.

In 2019 and 2020, most of the QS were either *Other* or coded as *Admin*. In 2019, 28,5% of the QS are coded as *Other* and 30,9% are coded as *Admin*. For the rest of the codes in 2019, 8,8% are coded as *InfraPos*, 5,2% as *InfraNeg*, 14,2% as *Welfare*, 8,2% as *Education,* and 4,2% as *Law*. In the table above, almost a third of the QS was coded as *Admin*. The second largest category is *Other*. The third largest category consisted of *Welfare*. The fourth largest category is *InfraPos*. The fifth largest is *Education*. The sixth largest is *InfraNeg*. The smallest category is *Law*.

Whereas *InfraPos* and *InfraNeg* drops in saliency in 2019 compared to 2018, *Admin* increases to encompass almost a third of all the proposals. This was expected, as it's shown above that the Democrats have moved away from the infrastructure issue to focus more on public administration. The drop could also be due to a fulfilment of the party's goals, or that they failed to reach them. Either way, the party has clearly shifted their focus away from infrastructure towards public administration.

In 2020, the results were mostly the same, where 28,6% of the QS are coded as *Other* and 30,6% coded as *Admin*. 8,6% of the codes are coded as *InfraPos*, 9,7% as *Welfare*, 17,3 as *Education*, 2,2 as *InfraNeg* and 3,1 as *Law*. Hence, the largest category in 2020 is *Admin*. The second largest is *Other*. The third largest is *Education*. The fourth largest is *Welfare*. The fifth largest is *InfraPos*. The sixth is *Law*. The smallest category is *InfraNeg*.

A similar trend compared to the one between 2018 and 2019 is visible in 2020. The party's focus has switched from infrastructure towards public administration as *Admin* remains stable on a high level. The

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[6] This category includes sentences and proposals that concerns issues not relevant for this thesis. These issues could for example be democracy, migration, or labour issues.

main difference comes from *InfraNeg*, which continues to decline in importance for the party. This could be due to the factors mentioned above: Either a fulfilment of the party's goals or a failure to achieve them.

Summary of the Democrats

Figure 2: Time-series graph over the codes.
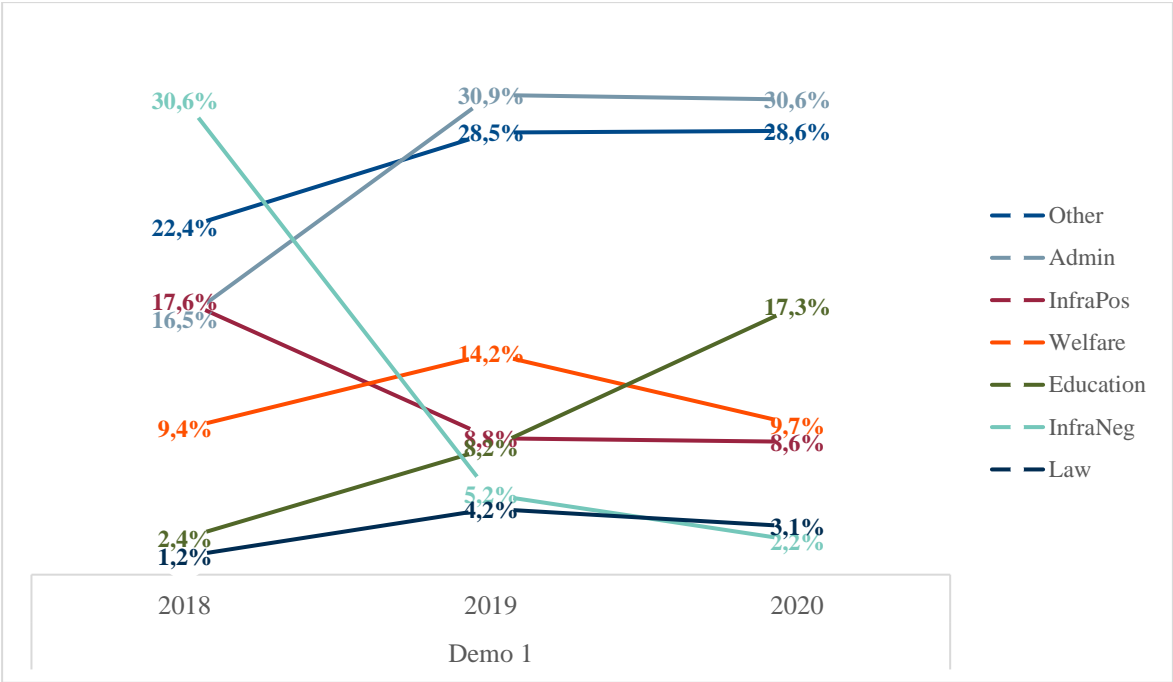
There is significant difference between the three recorded years. In 2018, going into the campaign, the Democrats emphasized infrastructure the most, shown in *InfraNeg* and *InfraPos*. In 2018, these two categories consisted of 48,2% of the coded QS. Much focus was also laid on *Admin*, as shown in the graph above. As discussed in the section above, this could be due to either a fulfilment of the party's goals or a failure to achieve them. It could also be because infrastructure was mainly a "campaign issue", meaning it's an issue the Democrats mainly tried to attract voters with through an unconventional position. After the election, they could have dropped their position in order to be regarded as a more conventional party. Regardless, the two issues argued to be the most important for the thesis are the ones the Democrats focused on in 2018. This gives weight to the purpose of the thesis.

In 2019, welfare issues were the third largest category. In 2020, it's the fourth largest. Issues focusing on education took its place, moving from being the fourth largest category in 2019 to the third largest in 2020. The percentage for *Education* in 2020 also surpassed the percentage for *Welfare* in 2019,

essentially taking more space inside the directive. This space comes from a decline in focus in the *InfraNeg* and *Law* from 2019 to 2020, as they decline from 5,2% and 4,2% to 2,2% and 3,1% respectively. *InfraPos* also declined 0,2% from 8,8 % in 2019 to 8,6% 2020. There is also a difference in the total amount of QS in the two directives. In 2019, 330 QS were coded. In 2020, there were 549 QS coded, an increase with 219 from 2019. This shows that the 2020 directive was a longer text compared to the 2019 directive.

As seen in the results, *Admin* increases from 2018 to 2020, while *InfraNeg* and *InfraPos* declines. At the same time, other codes such as *Other* and *Education* increases throughout the recorded years. This could be due to the Democrats trying to become a more "conventional" party by presenting a more complete policy platform. If this is true, the widening of policy positions can be understood as a tool to gather more votes in future elections.

Regardless, it's clear that the two main focuses of the party from 2018 to 2020 is infrastructure and public administration. These two has changed places as the most salient issue for the party. I will explore which one of the above hypotheses draws support by focusing on the reactions of the mainstream parties on mainly these two issues.

Evidence for the hypotheses

How do the mainstream parties respond to the Democrats on these issues? In this section I draw from their budget directives in order to explore which of my hypotheses seems to draw support. In the case of both the infrastructure and the public administration issues, increases in those codes will signify an engagement strategy (H2A) while decreases a dismissive strategy (H2B). However, in the case of the issue of infrastructure I try to go beyond this simple dichotomy since the separate coding of the tone (positive versus negative) provides an opportunity to get a more refined picture in the cases where mainstream parties have chosen to engage with the niche party in some way. Table 5 describes those options only for the issue of infrastructure. As mentioned before, increases in both negative and/or positive mentions will signify some engagement with the issue (upper left cell) while decreases in both a dismissing strategy (lower right cell). However, if the mainstream parties would increase positive mentions to infrastructure (at expense of negative) it could signify a more *adversarial* strategy. On the

other hand, if the Moderates and/or the Social Democrats were to increase their negative mentions to infrastructure (at the expense of positive) then this would hint towards a more *accommodative* strategy[7]

Table 5: Adversarial or accommodative combination on the issue of infrastructure.

	Increase Positive	Decrease Positive
Increase Negative	Engagement	Accommodative
Decrease Negative	Adversarial	Dismissive

Furthermore, if H1 is to be supported these changes should be clear on or shortly after the election of 2018. Thus, it's expected that the changes the mainstream parties do are going to be visible between 2018 and 2020.

To summarize: It's expected that the mainstream parties will react upon the success of the niche party in either of two ways. They are an increase the saliency by increasing the number of proposals in their directives effectively engaging with the niche party on the issue. Or they can decrease the number of proposals for a specific issue, making it less salient trying to shift the competition to issues that the Democrats have less ownership of. It's expected that these changes in strategy will come after the election in 2018. In addition, as described in table 5 one could potentially differentiate between two subtypes of engagement (accommodative or adversarial).

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[7] Table 5 is a stylised depiction of the possible combinations which are not exhaustive. Positive or negative mentions on infrastructure could also remain stable/constant when one of the two increases. However, the focus here is on the actual increase (positive/negative) and interpretation of these "changes" in policy would be the same.

The Moderate Party – summary and findings

Table 6: Results for the Moderate Party. [8]

Total number of QS as numbers and percentage									
Party and year	**Issues**	**Other**	**Admin**	**InfraPos**	**Welfare**	**Education**	**InfraNeg**	**Law**	**Total amount**
The Moderates		**41,4%** **2075**	**5,6%** **281**	**9,0%** **451**	**24,0%** **1203**	**17,0%** **850**	**0,0%** **0**	**3,0%** **148**	**100,0%** **5008**
2013		43,0% 174	4,7% 19	9,4% 38	20,0% 81	20,7% 84	0,0% 0	2,2% 9	100,0% 405
2014		41,7% 180	3,2% 14	10,2% 44	22,9% 99	19,4% 84	0,0% 0	2,5% 11	100,0% 432
2015		33,9% 134	3,8% 15	8,9% 35	30,6% 121	20,0% 79	0,0% 0	2,8% 11	100,0% 395
2016		37,9% 200	5,5% 29	8,7% 46	27,8% 147	17,0% 90	0,0% 0	3,0% 16	100,0% 528
2017		36,0% 215	4,0% 24	9,4% 56	28,8% 172	18,6% 111	0,0% 0	3,2% 19	100,0% 597
2018		39,7% 277	3,6% 25	10,3% 72	25,9% 181	16,6% 116	0,0% 0	3,9% 27	100,0% 698
2019		41,1% 324	3,6% 28	10,2% 80	25,1% 198	17,0% 134	0,0% 0	3,0% 24	100,0% 788
2020		49,0% 571	10,9% 127	6,9% 80	17,5% 204	13,0% 152	0,0% 0	2,7% 31	100,0% 1165

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[8] A detailed overview of the results is to be found in the Appendix.

Figure 3: Time-series graph over the codes.[9]
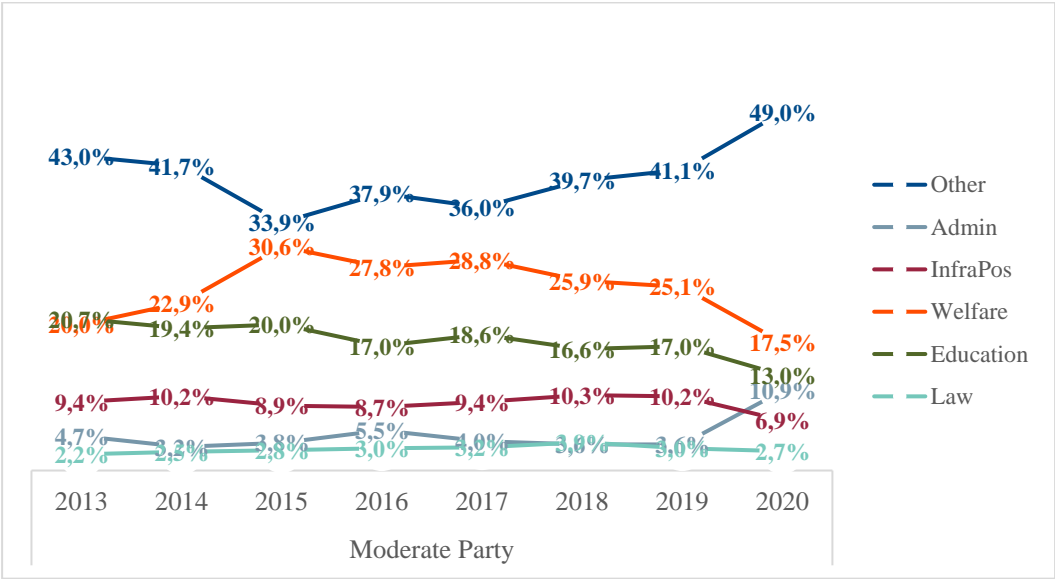
Throughout the eight directives, the *Other* category remains the largest category for the Moderate Party. *Welfare* and *Education* are the second and third largest categories across all directives. The size of these three categories varies across the directives. For the *Other* category, it starts at 43% in 2013, goes to 33,9% in 2015 which is its lowest point, and reaches 49% in 2020 at its highest. *Welfare* starts at 20% in 2013 and ends in 2020 with 17,5%, its lowest point in the data. It reaches its highest point in 2015 at 30,6%. *Education* had 20,7% in 2013, its highest number in the data. It ended with 13 % in 2020, its lowest number. Together, these three codes make up 79,5% of the QS in 2020. *Admin* is the fourth largest code in 2020, with 10,9% of the total amount of QS. It's the highest percentage point recorded for the code which has been hovering around the 3-5 percentage mark between 2013 and 2019. *InfraPos* starts at 9,4% in 2013, records its highest point in 2018 with 10,3% and ends with 6,9% in 2020. *Law* starts at its lowest percentage point at 2,2% in 2013 and ends with 2,7%. Its highest point is in 2018 at 3,9%. There are no QS in the Moderate Party's budget directives that are coded with *InfraNeg*.

The total amount of QS increases for almost every directive. There's an exception in 2015, where a decrease in the number of QS occurs. Except for this decrease, the increase in QS shows that the total length of the directives increases for every year.

Results show that the Moderates have deployed an engagement strategy regarding the public administration. The average value between 2013 and 2019 is 4,1%, which is a relatively low and stable

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[9] The increase in *Other* from 2015 and onward could be explained by the dominance of the immigration issue starting in 2015.

result. In 2020, as the table and graph show above, the code jumps to 10,9%, which is more than a double compared to the average value between 2013 and 2019. *In the case of Admin, the data seems to provide support for H2A.*

Regarding *InfraPos*, it's possible to witness a slight decrease in proposals concerning the issue. The average value between 2013 and 2019 is 9,6%. In 2020, it's at 6,9%. It's hard to decide what kind of strategy the Moderates deploy towards the Democrats on the issue through a quantitative content analysis. As the theory stays, a decline in salience indicates a dismissive strategy. At the same time, the position of the Democrats going into the election was to reduce spending on infrastructure projects. Thus, the decrease in proposals concerning *InfraPos*, for some, could indicate an accommodative strategy as the Moderates could move closer on the issue (by moderating their support for new infrastructure in their budget proposals). The code *InfraNeg* codes negative proposals, but as the table and graphs above shows, no proposals for *InfraNeg* were recorded. Thus, *InfraPos* serves as the main indicator for a shift in strategy. The lack of any movement in the *InfraNeg* code though, at a minimum, suggests that the Moderates are unwilling to show that they are in any way accommodating the concerns of the Democrats regarding large scale project in the Gothenburg municipality. So, the Moderates are not clearly adversarial neither clearly accommodative. Taken together, these results (the decrease in *InfraPos* and no mentions of *InfraNeg*), points towards a more *dismissive (H2B)* strategy on the issue of infrastructure from the sides of the Moderates.

Both changes are visible after the election of 2018. The increase in proposals concerning the public administration as well as the decrease in proposals concerning infrastructure both occur between the years 2019 and 2020. *Hence, the findings provide support for H1 regarding the timing of the effects.* Furthermore, the strategy seems to be based on the type of the issue, as the Moderates adopt different strategies towards different issues.

The Social Democrats – summary and findings

Table 7: Results for the Social Democrats.[10]

Total number of QS as numbers and percentage									
Party and year	**Issues**	**Other**	**Admin**	**InfraPos**	**Welfare**	**Education**	**InfraNeg**	**Law**	**Total amount**
The Social Democrats		**54,1%** **2298**	**9,0%** **381**	**7,5%** **318**	**18,4%** **780**	**10,3%** **438**	**0,0%** **0**	**0,8%** **33**	**100,0%** **4248**
2013		56,6% 219	5,2% 20	4,9% 19	22,2% 86	11,1% 43	0,0% 0	0,0% 0	100,0% 387
2014		53,0% 265	8,6% 43	7,4% 37	21,2% 106	9,8% 49	0,0% 0	0,0% 0	100,0% 500
2015		53,4% 301	8,3% 47	7,8% 44	22,0% 124	8,5% 48	0,0% 0	0,0% 0	100,0% 564
2016		52,0% 260	8,4% 42	8,2% 41	21,2% 106	10,2% 51	0,0% 0	0,0% 0	100,0% 500
2017		57,1% 295	8,7% 45	7,2% 37	17,6% 91	9,5% 49	0,0% 0	0,0% 0	100,0% 517
2018		56,7% 341	7,7% 46	7,5% 45	17,6% 106	10,5% 63	0,0% 0	0,0% 0	100,0% 601
2019		56,1% 345	6,3% 39	7,6% 47	15,0% 92	11,2% 69	0,0% 0	3,7% 23	100,0% 615
2020		48,2% 272	17,6% 99	8,5% 48	12,2% 69	11,7% 66	0,0% 0	1,8% 10	100,0% 564

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[10] A detailed overview of the results is to be found in the Appendix.

Figure 4: Time-series graph over the codes.
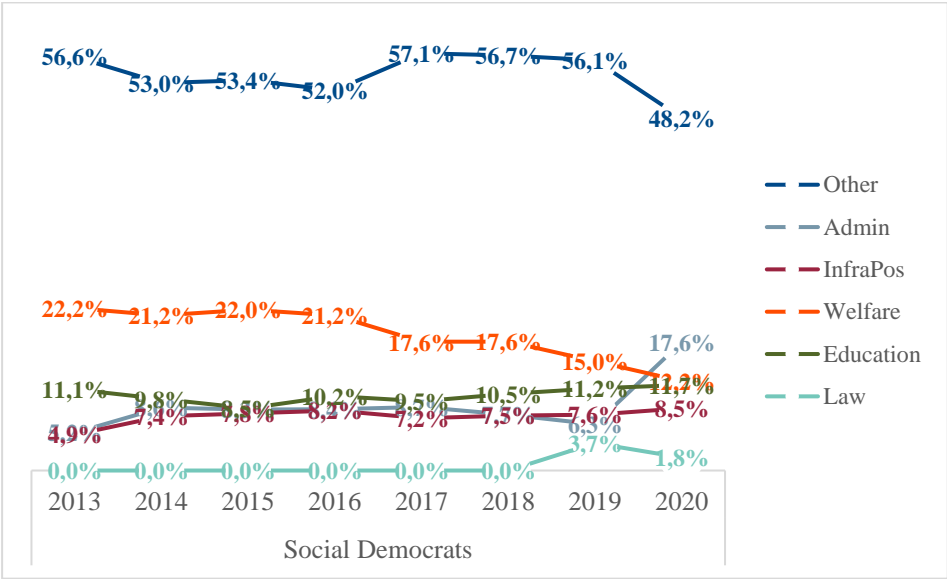
While the *Other* category remains the largest category throughout the eight directives for the Social Democrats – starting at its highest point in 2013 at 56,6% and ending at its lowest in 2020 at 48,2% - the second-place changes between codes. *Welfare* is the second largest category up until 2020, when it's overtaken by *Admin*. *Welfare* has its highest percentage point in 2013 with 22,2% and its lowest in 2020 at 12,2%. *Admin* is at its lowest in 2013 at 5,2% and its highest in 2020 at 17,6%. There are small differences in *Education* and *InfraPos*. *InfraPos* starts at 4,9%, its lowest point, and ends at 8,5%, its highest point. *Education* starts at its highest point, 11,1% in 2013, hits its lowest point in 2015 at 8,5%, and ends at its highest point in 2020 at 11,7%. *Law* is the smallest category for the Social Democrats throughout all directives. It records it first numbers in 2019, which is also its highest point at 3,7%. It ends at 1,8% in 2020.

Unlike the Moderate Party, the number of QS per directive doesn't increase with every directive for the Social Democrats. Instead, it depends on the year. The lowest number is recorded in 2013, at 387, and increases until 2016, where a drop in numbers occurs. From 2016, it increases once again until 2020, where another decrease is recorded. The highest number of QS are found in the 2019 directive.

The results above show that the Social Democrats have also adopted to an engagement strategy regarding the *Admin*. Probably even more so than the Moderates since *Admin* seems to be the second issue in terms of overall salience in their 2020 budget proposal. The average value between 2013 and 2019 is 7,6%. In 2020, it's 17,6%, which is more than a double compared to the average value between 2013 and 2019. *Like the Moderate Party, data support H2A for the Social Democrats on Admin*.

Regarding *InfraPos*, the average value for the Social Democrats between 2013 and 2019 is 7,2%. In 2020, it increases to 8,5%, an increase of 1,3%. Even though this is a small increase, it can be viewed as a continuation of the previous policy for the Social Democrats. Compared to the Moderates they don't reduce their relative number of proposals arguing for more spending on infrastructure. Instead, they slightly increase the number of proposals for *InfraPos*. As such, one can argue that the Social Democrats deploys an engagement strategy on the issue by continuing with their previous policy. However, there is not sufficient evidence to argue for a meaningful change. Instead, it seems that the Social Democrats keeps their old strategy on the issue. Again, as is the case for the Moderates there seem to be no *InfraNeg* codes in the budget proposals of the Social Democrats. Overall, there is no evidence for either hypotheses in the case of the issue of infrastructure. *We do observe, though, a somewhat unwillingness from the side of the Social Democrats to engage with one of the niche party's flagship campaign issues in the same way they did for Admin.*

The changes visible in the increased saliency for *Admin* occurs after 2019. Meaning, after the 2018 election, and after the first budget directive presented by the Democrats, the Social Democrats has changed strategy. *Thus, the data finds support H1 for the Social Democrats.*

The following section will discuss the results further and connect it with previous literature.

Discussion

As shown in the results above, three hypotheses seem to be supported. This section will discuss the results and connect it to previous literature.

Discussion of the results

As shown, the focus on *Admin* coming from the Democrats made the Social Democrats and the Moderates to increase their focus on the issue, in the end making it more salient in their budget directives. The question arises to why the mainstream parties adopted an engagement strategy on *Admin* and not on *InfraPos/InfraNeg*. The answer can possibly be found inside the issues themselves. Where public administration seems to be more of a valence issue, an issue everyone agrees on (Evans and Chzhen 2016; Sanders et al 2011)[11], infrastructure in Gothenburg is more of a positional issue (there can be a range of opinion for or against). This means that it's easier for the mainstream parties to advocate for a more efficient and better-managed public administration, because the risk of losing voters to competitors is small. It's difficult to see how even a small minority of the public opinion can be against these proposals.

On the other hand, on the positional issue infrastructure, the risk of losing voters is higher, as the issue at that given time (yes or no towards the *West Link Project* and other major infrastructure agreements) consisted of a clear choice for or against something. This made the potential costs of choosing a new (possibly more accommodative towards the Democrats) position much higher. Furthermore, this could also be due to the fact that the issue is settled, meaning that the continuation of the *West Link Project* has removed the issue from political debate. Thus, any new positioning on the issue might be interpreted as irrelevant.

Furthermore, the change of strategy could also be due to what kind of "threat" the mainstream parties perceive the Democrats to be. The mainstream parties' decision to use an engagement strategy on *Admin* could be based on fear of losing more votes in upcoming elections. To not lose more votes, the mainstream parties might believe they need to revise their policy positions on specific issues, in this case public administration, and adopt similar positions as the Democrats. If this is true, the Democrats have managed to influence the political agenda of the mainstream parties.

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[11] An example of a valence issue is economy. Everyone agrees on that a country needs a good and stable economy to thrive. Essentially, it's an issue with a broad consensus on. This makes positioning on the issue easy for a political party, as the risk of losing votes is small.

It's also possible to see in the results that the Social Democrats and the Moderates didn't always adopt the same strategy. On the issue of public administration, both parties adopted an engagement strategy, but on infrastructure the Moderates seem to use a dismissive strategy while the Social Democrats seemed to keep their old positions on the issue. As scientists have shown before (for example, Bale et al 2010 and Rooduijn et al 2014), mainstream parties differ in their responses. Even though they are influenced by their competitors they can still act on their own. This could be due to internal factors coming into play. As this thesis was not able – and didn't have the ambition – to analyse what lies behind these changes, this could be something for future studies to continue with.

Through the results it's also possible to see that these changes occur between the years 2018 and 2020. As expected, elections work as a reliable resource for information about the voter's preferences. As such, changes in party strategy are visible after some time, as the election result must be processed and analysed, and strategies developed based on the result (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009). It's implausible to assume that a party changes its strategy the day after it loses an election. It takes time to gather knowledge and conduct the needed election analysis before the party decides to change its strategies. As the results show, time – usually years – is needed for change to happen in politics, as political actors are strategical actors that act and react upon their surroundings.

Conclusion, limitations, and future research

As noted in the literature review, little interest has been shown with the regard to how mainstream parties and niche parties behave on the local level. This thesis has contributed by exploring the actions of mainstream parties on the local level and showing that they resemble those on the national level. Mainstream parties react and act upon the strategies of other contenders. Like parties on the national level, parties on the local level tend to adopt strategies and policy positions that are similar to their successful competitors.

This thesis makes a number of contributions. First, it contributes and widens the understanding of how mainstream parties react towards niche parties. As shown in this study, mainstream parties react differently depending on the issue at hand. Many different factors could be the reason for this, such as what type of issue is in the limelight, what type of ideological family the mainstream party belongs to, or the characteristics of the niche party.

Second, the thesis contributes to the literature on niche parties by analysing a party that focuses on issues other than immigration and the environment. The Democrats focus on infrastructure and public administration, issues that haven't received as much attention in previous research. They are also more "local" in the sense that they focus on the infrastructure and public administration in Gothenburg. Thus, this thesis has contributed by studying niche parties that focuses on more unconventional issues.

This brings us to the last and third area of contribution for this thesis: The local level. One of the main premises for this thesis was that not enough literature existed of how mainstream parties react towards niche parties on the local level. This thesis has started to fill this gap by exploring how mainstream parties resemble their national counterparts. Much like national parties, local mainstream parties are influenced by successful local niche parties. Local politicians are – like national politicians – strategic actors who evaluate and act upon changes in their environment.

However, any inferences from this study should take into account various limitations. An obvious limitation with the thesis is that it can't establish any causal relationship that shows that the niche party in question is the main agent of change for the mainstream parties. It can simply support the hypotheses through quantification and comparisons across years. More in-depth analyses that possibly combine quantitative and qualitative methodologies would be needed in order to support more robust causal claims. Unfortunately, this can't be done in this thesis, but could be something for future research to do.

A second limitation comes from the fact that the author was the only coder for the thesis. Because of this, no statistical reliability test can be conducted on the codes to ensure good reliability. For this thesis,

this is a difficult problem to solve. However, one needs to keep in mind when reading this thesis that mistakes may have been made. As I argue in the methodology section, I've done my best to avoid these mistakes.

A third limitation is that it hasn't been able to analyse contextual effects on policy shifts. This is somewhat related to the abovementioned limitation regarding causality. For example, the decrease in saliency for infrastructure proposals in the Moderates' directives could be due to realistic factors, such as a continuation of the *West Link Project*. The issue might be considered to be somewhat settled. Indeed, even the Democrats seem to feature that issue less in their budget between 2018 and 2020. This would result in the issue being "dead", which would mean a loss for the Democrats. As this thesis hasn't been able to include any analysis of this, it's an obvious weakness. Instead, this thesis has focused on how this change has taken place and across what issues. Regardless, if one wants to isolate and pinpoint a single factor that fully explains this change, one needs to look close into the actual post-election context.

Future studies could dig deeper into the Democrats as a party and try to understand them more as an organization, as well as trying to understand why the mainstream parties changed in these strategies. As noted in the previous section, this thesis doesn't analyse the intra-party processes that drives a change in strategy vis a vis a successful competitor. Future scientists could analyse these internal factors and gather knowledge on what made the mainstream parties change.

As noted in the literature section, political parties usually change their strategies in accordance with their party family. A topic for future studies could be to decide what party family the Democrats belong to. In the end, this could also be a factor behind the different responses from the Social Democrats and the Moderates.

Finally, future studies should follow the Democrats in upcoming elections and see how and if their strategies changes and what kind of implication it has on the mainstream parties. In the long run, the mainstream party's decision to change strategy could result in further strengthening the Democrats. As shown above in the literature review, if a mainstream party tries to adopt a similar policy position as a niche party, it could result as a further indication of competence and legitimisation of the niche party's policy proposals (Down and Han 2020; (Dahlström and Sundell 2012). By increasing their proposals for *Admin*¸ the Social Democrats and the Moderates could send a signal towards the voters that tells them that the Democrats are right in their critique towards the public administration. This could result in more voters leaving the mainstream parties for the Democrats, as their early position on the issue makes them look more competent. This is something for future studies to investigate and analyse.

Future studies can analyse this understanding in future elections. This will give a better understanding of how niche parties can change politics and political competition, as well as what consequences they bring to their mainstream party rivals.

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Appendix

Examples of coded material

The Moderate Party's' budget directive 2014, page 10.

Göteborgs Universitet och Chalmers Tekniska Högskola är två av landets ledande lärosäten med runt 60 000 studenter. Av dem är runt hälften inflyttade till Göteborg från andra delar av landet eller utomlands. Samtidigt finns endast 10 000 studentbostäder att tillgå. /|Utöver att bygga fler studentbostäder vill vi stimulera till att fler studenter ska välja Göteborg genom att/|35(504)[12]/| bland annat införa studentrabatt i kollektivtrafiken/|36(411[13])/| och erbjuda bättre möjligheter till praktik- och examensarbeten inom stadens bolag och förvaltningar/|37.

Den stora gruppen studenter är en möjlighet för Göteborg, som måste vara en så attraktiv stad att leva, arbeta och bilda familj i att studenterna stannar kvar efter avslutade studier. Idag sker en stor utflyttning efter studierna på grund av bostadsbrist och att det finns för litet utbud på arbetsmarknaden. Statistik för flyttningsnetton för Göteborg visar att staden haft en nettoutflyttning på sammanlagt 7937 personer i åldrarna 30-39 år mellan 2007-2011. /| Samverkan med näringslivet måste bli bättre på alla nivåer inom skolan så att den långsiktiga matchningen mellan jobb och utbildning blir bättre/|38.

UTBILDNING MINSKAR UTSATTHETEN

Personer med hög utbildningsnivå jobbar i större utsträckning och har lättare att klara en lågkonjunktur. /| Därför måste Göteborg fortsätta att satsa på att utvecklas till en stark kunskapsstad med Chalmers och Göteborgs Universitet i spetsen, /|39(506)/|samtidigt som insatserna måste intensifieras för att komma till rätta med kvalitetsbristerna i grundskolan/|40(506). Skolinspektionens kritik mot grundskolan i Göteborg innefattade bland annat att fler än var fjärde elev i stadens grundskolor inte når kunskapskraven i alla ämnen. Skolinspektionens granskningar visar också på anmärkningsvärt stora skillnader i kunskapsresultat mellan de kommunala grundskolorna i Göteborg, både inom och mellan stadsdelarna. I två stadsdelar saknade över 30 procent av avgångseleverna i grundskolan gymnasiebehörighet. Dessa unga löper särskilt stor risk att hamna i

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[12] This quasi-sentence is understood as advocating for more housing, which categorizes it as *Welfare* (504). One could argue that this sentence should be categorised as *Education* (506), but as the CMP handbook clarifies, it's the actual proposal – or "how" the improvement is going to happen – that should be coded (in this case, houses for students) (Werner, Lacewell and Volkens 2015, 7).

[13] This quasi-sentence is understood as advocating for an expanded infrastructure with its call for student discount. In this sentence, the proposal for improvement is the price reduction for students. Because it's an reduction in the price for public transport, it's understood as an expansion of the public infrastructure.

långvarig arbetslöshet. /| För att vända utvecklingen krävs snabba och omfattande åtgärder inom grundskolan/|**41(506)**. Det är

The Social Democrats budget directive 2020, page 12.

lagstadgad skyldighet att värna om de mest sårbara individerna och grupperna i samhället, som våldsutsatta kvinnor, hotade hbtq-personer och människor med missbruksproblem/|**24(504)**. Verksamheten ska vara en trygg, säker och medmänsklig del i dessa människors liv och i möjligaste mån bidra till deras aktiva deltagande i samhällslivet. /| Nämnden har ansvar för stora tunga verksamhetsområden såsom boende och stöd för personer med samsjuklighet, inom missbruk och hemlöshet. Inom dessa områden är det särskilt stora problem med att säkerställa kompetensförsörjning och en god arbetsmiljö/|**25(504)**. /| Det trygghetsskapande och brottsförebyggande arbetet, inklusive avhopparverksamheten, ska förstärkas och utvecklas och få en bättre samordning/|**26(605.1)**./| Arbetet mot våldsbejakande extremism och hedersförtryck ska vara högt prioriterat/|**27**.

Social resursnämnd

Uppdrag

» En återkommande stadenövergripande trygghetsundersökning ska införas i samverkan med stadsdelsnämnderna/|**28(605.1)**.

» Lokala trygghetsvärdar ska anställas i samverkan med AB Framtiden/|**29(605.1)**.

 » Ordningsvakter ska erbjudas en fördjupad utbildning med fokus på trygghetsskapande och brottsförebyggande arbete/|**30(605.1)**.

» Insatser ska genomföras för ökad samordning av uppsökande verksamhet riktad till vårdnadshavare/|**31(504)**.

» Utökade insatser ska göras för att påverka ungas attityder till narkotika/|**32(504)**.

The Democrats opinion article published 2018-06-25

Byt Västlänken mot snabbtåg till Oslo

När Västlänken stoppas kan 15 miljarder kronor i statlig finansiering omfördelas till nytt dubbelspår till Oslo. Folket har redan sagt nej till att skövla vår stad/**|1(411x)**.

Nu kan göteborgarna också säga ja till att halvera restiden till Norges huvudstad, skriver bland andra Martin Wannholt (D).

Det här är en debattartikel. Syftet med texten är att påverka och åsikterna är skribentens egna.

Under mer än 25 års tid har utredningar och samarbetsgrupper avlöst varandra. Olika försök har gjorts för att få till en modern tågförbindelse mellan Göteborg och Oslo. Men ännu finns ingen finansiering.

I dag tar de dryga 30 milen med tåg från Göteborg till Oslo hela fyra timmar. Med en utbyggnad på delsträckan mellan Trollhättan och Halden och vidare i Norge kan restiden halveras till cirka två timmar med vanliga snabbtåg/**|2(411)**.

Detta skapar helt nya möjligheter för göteborgarna och alla som arbetspendlar men också för hela näringslivet. Möjligheten till dagsturer mellan städerna gynnar turismens utveckling och ett utbyggt dubbelspår stärker Göteborgs hamn som Skandinaviens nav för godstransporter/**|3**.

Det är därför göteborgarnas demokratiska rättighet att välja bort Västlänken och i stället säga ja till sträckan Göteborg-Oslo/**|4(411x)**.

Tidiga kostnadsberäkningar för utbyggnad på den svenska sidan ligger på cirka 15 miljarder kronor, och på den norska sidan finns redan utbyggnadsplaner för delen mellan Oslo och Halden.

När avtalen om Västlänken hävs kan vi omfördela tågtunnelns investeringsmedel som finns avsatta i den nationella infrastrukturplanen. Dysterkvistar kommer snabbt påstå att det minsann inte går. Men självklart går det att byta ut en dålig investering mot en riktigt bra. Västlänken förlänger restiden för många medan ett nytt dubbelspår i stället halverar resans tid till Norges huvudstad. För oss i Demokraterna är valet enkelt.

Västlänken det mest olönsamma projektet

Västlänken är Sveriges mest olönsamma projekt. För göteborgarna innebär det en söndergrävd och skövlad stad. Enligt miljöförvaltningen ger tågtunneln inte heller någon mätbar förbättring av trafiksituationen i Göteborg. Men inte minst så saknar Västlänken folkligt stöd.

Det är därför göteborgarnas demokratiska rättighet att välja bort Västlänken och i stället säga ja till sträckan Göteborg-Oslo/**|5(411x)**.

Den 9 september får alla boende i Göteborg och Västra Götaland möjlighet att välja: Vill vi åka snabbtåg till Oslo eller i en omvägstunnel i leran under vår fina stad? Valet är ditt.

Results explained in detail for the mainstream parties

Result for the Moderates

The Moderates has eight budget directives available for analysis. The first directive of 2013 consists of 405 QS. 43% of them were *Other*, 4,7% coded as *Public*, 9,4% as *InfraPos*, 20% as *Welfare*, 20,7% as *Education* and 2,2% as *Law*. There are no QS coded as *InfraNeg*. Thus, the largest category of codes is *Other*. The second largest is *Education*. The third largest is *Welfare*. The fourth largest is *InfraNeg*. The fifth *Public*, while the smallest category is *Law*.

In 2014, 432 QS were coded. 41,7% were *Other*, 3,2% as *Public*, 10,2% as *InfraPos*, 22,9% as *Welfare*, 19,4% as *Education*, and 2,5% as *Law*. Once again, there are no QS coded as *InfraNeg*. The *Other* category is the largest category in 2017. The second largest are again *Welfare*. The third largest *Education*. The fourth largest *InfraPos*. The fifth largest is *Public*. The smallest category is *Law*.

In 2015, 395 QS were coded. 33,9% of the QS were *Other*. 3,8% coded as *Public*, 8,9% as *InfraPos*, 30,6% as *Welfare*, 20% as *Education* and 2,8% as *Law*. No QS was coded as *InfraNeg*. The largest category once again consists of *Other*. The second largest is *Welfare*. The third largest is *Education*. The fourth largest is *InfraPos*. The fifth largest is *Public*. The smallest category is *Law*.

In 2016, 528 QS were coded. 37,9% of these were *Other*. 5,5% were coded as *Public*, 8,7% as *InfraPos*, 27,8% as *Welfare*, 17% as *Education* and 3% as *Law*. No QS were coded as *InfraNeg*. Thus, the largest category was *Other*. The second largest is *Welfare*. The third largest is *Education*. The fourth largest is *InfraPos*. The fifth largest category is *Public*. The smallest category is *Law*.

In 2017, 597 QS were coded from the material. 36% of the QS were *Other*. 4% were coded as *Public*, 9,4% as *InfraPos*, 28,8% as *Welfare*, 18,6% as *Education*, and 3,2% as *Law*. No QS were coded as *InfraNeg*. The largest category in 2017 consists of *Other*. The second largest is again *Welfare*. The third is *Education*. The fourth *InfraPos*. The fifth *Public*. Again, the smallest category is *Law*.

In 2018 directive, 698 QS were coded. 39,7% of these were *Other*. 3,6% were coded as *Public*, 10,3% as *InfraPos*, 25,9% as *Welfare*, 16,6% as *Education* and 3,9% as *Law*. No QS were coded as *InfraNeg*. The largest category of codes consists of *Other*. The second largest is *Welfare*. The third largest is *Education*. The fourth largest is *InfraPos*. The fifth largest is *Law*. In 2018, the smallest category of codes is *Public*.

In 2019, 788 QS were coded. 41% of these were *Other*. 3,6% were coded as *Public*, 10,2% as *InfraPos*, 25,1% as *Welfare*, 17% as *Education* and 3% as *Law*. No QS were coded as *InfraNeg*. In

2019, the largest category of QS remains *Other*. The second largest is *Welfare*. The third largest is *Education*. The fourth largest is *InfraPos*. The fifth largest is *Public*. The smallest category is *Law*.

In 2020, 1165 QS were coded. 49% of the QS were *Other*. 10,9% of the QS were coded as *Public*, 6,9% as *InfraPos*, 17,5% as *Welfare*, 13% as *Education* and 2,7% as *Law*. In 2020, no QS were coded as *InfraNeg*. The largest category consists of *Other*. The second largest is *Welfare*. The third largest is *Education*. The fourth largest is *Public*. The fifth largest is *InfraPos*. The smallest category in 2020 is *Law*.

Result for the Social Democrats

Just like the Moderate Party, the Social Democrats has eight budget directives accessible for the analysis. The first directive of 2013 has 387 QS. Of these, 56,6% were coded as *Other*. 5,2% of the remaining QS were coded as *Public*, 4,9% as *InfraPos*, 22,2% as *Welfare* and 11,1% as *Education*. No QS were coded as *InfraNeg* or *Law*. The largest category of codes is *Other*. The second largest is *Welfare*. The third largest is *Education*. The fourth largest is *Public*. The smallest code is *InfraPos*.

In 2014, 500 QS were coded. 53% of the QS was *Other*. 8,6% of the QS were coded as *Public*, 7,4% as *InfraPos*, 21,2% as *Welfare*, 9,8% as *Education*. No QS were coded as *InfraNeg* or *Law*. The largest category of QS in the directive is *Other*. The second largest is *Welfare*. The third largest is *Education*. The fourth largest is *Public*. The smallest category is *InfraPos*.

In 2015, 564 QS were coded as *Other*. 54,4% of the coded QS were coded as *Other*. 8,3% are coded as *Public*, 7,8% as *InfraPos*, 22% as *Welfare*, and 8,5% as *Education*. No QS were coded as *InfraNeg* or *Law*. The largest category in 2015 is *Other*. The second largest is *Welfare*. The third largest is *Education*. The fourth largest is *Public*. The smallest category is *InfraPos*.

In 2016, 500 QS were coded. Of the coded QS, 52% were coded as *Other*. 8,4% were coded as *Public*, 8,2% as *InfraPos*, 21,2% as *Welfare*, 10,2% as *Education*. No QS were coded as *InfraNeg* or *Law*. The largest category in 2016 consists of *Other*. The second largest is *Welfare*. The third largest is *Education*. The fourth largest is *Public*. The smallest category is *InfraPos*.

In 2017, 517 QS were coded. 57,1% of these were coded as *Other*. 8,7% are coded as *Public*, 7,2% as *InfraPos*, 17,6% as *Welfare*, and 9,5% as *Education*. None of the QS were coded as *InfraNeg* or *Law*. In 2017, the largest category of QS is *Other*. The second largest is *Welfare*. The third largest is *Education*. The fourth largest is *Public*. The smallest category is *InfraPos*.

In 2018, 601 QS were coded. 56,7% of the coded QS were codes as *Other*. 7,7% were coded as *Public*, 7,5% as *InfraPos*, 17,6% as *Welfare* and 10,5% as *Education*. None of the QS were coded as *InfraNeg* or *Law*. The largest category of QS in 2018 is *Other*. The second largest is *Welfare*. The third largest is *Education*. The fourth largest is *Public*. The smallest category of codes is *InfraPos*.

In 2019, 615 QS were coded. 56,1% of the QS were coded as *Other*. 6,3% were coded as *Public*, 7,6% as *InfraPos*, 15% as *Welfare*, 11,2% as *Education* and 3,7% as *Law*. None of the QS were coded as *InfraNeg*. In 2019, the largest category of QS were coded as *Other*. The second largest category is *Welfare*. The third largest is *Education*. The fourth largest is *InfraPos*. The fifth largest category is *Public*. The smallest category is *Law*.

In 2020, 564 QS were coded. 48,2% of these were *Other*. 17,6% of the QS were coded as *Public*, 8,5% as *InfraPos*, 12,2% as *Welfare*, 11,7% as *Education* and 1,8% as *Law*. None of the QS were coded *InfraNeg*. The largest category in 2020 consists of *Other*. The second largest consists of QS coded as *Public*. The third largest is *Welfare*. The fourth is *Education*. The fifth largest category is *InfraPos*. The smallest category is *Law*.