# Case studies on social movement

As a part of the PaCE report D1.1. Historical and political development of populism in Europe

WP1 – Historical and comparative analysis

**Populism and Civic Engagement**

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# 1. Social Movement case studies

## 1.1. Political Movement vs Social Movement

The Covid19 pandemic has exposed both general and localised vulnerabilities that some argue, is a result of neo liberal economics and global capitalism. These vulnerabilities are well documented from a macroeconomic perspective, see (Piketty, 2014)[1] but how they appear in localised contexts and how they relate to social movements such as the *Pots and Pans* (PP) movement is a matter of more research. Of particular interest is the locus linking populist discourse with social movements and if social movements could signal deeper and more serious issues in society given certain conditions, e.g., social, and economic weaknesses that is then exploited by political movements. A step towards better understanding social movements is to create a hierarchy and typology of such movements that situates them in different contexts and that differentiates them as units of analysis (Nulman & Schlembach, 2018)[2]. It is useful to distinguish between different types and levels of social movements but equally it is important to distinguish a social movement from a political movement.

A ***political movement*** is a social group that operates to reach a political objective, on a local, regional, national, or international level. The main goal of the political movement is to imprint an impact on the policy and political sphere or even machining some social changes Political movements develop and coordinate plans and strategies that are intended to achieve and instantiate the political vision of the political movement (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_movement). In a political party, a political organization and structure seeks to influence, or control, government policy, usually by nominating their representatives and situating those representatives in politics and governmental offices.[3]

A ***social movement*** on the other hand is organized around a single issue or set of issues, or around shared concerns of a social group. Social movements are defined by (Diani, 1992:2)[4] as "a process whereby several different actors […] come to elaborate […] a shared definition of themselves as being part of the same side in a social conflict". Social movements are often perceived by scholars as potential catalysts of social change that includes:
  – a change in the perception, structuring and prioritising of social issues
  – the social movement could be a preamble for a political party
  – collective identity of an urban social movement that is considered radical
  – collective claims and social identity

[1] Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the Twenty First Century*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
[2] Nulman, E., & Schlembach, R. (2018). Advances in social movement theory since the global financial crisis. *European Journal of Social Theory*, *21*(3), 376–390. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431017714213
[3] Mc Donald, Neil (1963). *The Study of Political Parties*. New York.
[4] Diani, M. (1992). The concept of social movement. *The Sociological Review*, *40*(1), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1992.tb02943.x

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The distinction between a social movement and a political movement can appear fuzzy. However, a political movement includes targeted change-oriented policy objectives and a strategy on how to get there which includes political, relational, organisational, and structural elements. A social movement on the other hand is usually the catalyst of change but not the instrument of actual implementation. Still many social movements evolve to become mainstream politics or significantly influence political thinking, see (Jezierska & Polanska, 2018[5]) on the impact of the Polish tenants movement (Caren et al., 2020[6]; Koopmans & Statham, 1999[7]) on how protest movements challenge political discourse and (McVeigh et al., 2014)[8] on the longitudinal political impact of radical social movements. Generally, we observe that social movements have very different diffusion and impact trajectories. Some run their course and fade away with little overall impact. Others, e.g., the *MeToo* movement leave a deep and enduring footprint. However, no movement appears to really threaten neo liberal economics and global capitalism as the dominant economic model (Nulman & Schlembach, 2018)[9]. As mentioned earlier, social movements as units of analysis vary in terms of objectives, span and scope, structure, organisation, participation, and impact. They also emerge and evolve in often very different historical, social, and economic contexts. Nulman & Schlembach (2018) provide a classification of social movements that illustrates how social movements may be studied at different levels and units of analysis (Table 30) .

*Table 1*. Classification of social movement after Nulman & Schlembach (2018)

| Level | Type | Example |
|---|---|---|
| **Micro level** | – *Examining social movements with the unit and focus of analysis on social movement organizations and groups.* | *Pots and pans*<br>*Arab Spring?*<br>*QAnon?* |
| **Meso level** | – *A network of social movements within the boundaries of a state or a social issue.*<br>– *Larger span of social space and places*<br>– *More complex institutions made up of a larger body of organizations and actors as the central unit of analysis.*<br>– *Focus on the interactions between the state and social movements and the interactions between otherwise separate social movements.* | *Fridays for future*<br>*Velvet revolution*<br>*Gilets Jaunes* |
| **Macro level** | – *Social movements from the perspective of large-scale changes that expand beyond states and cross-movement interactions.*<br>– *Changes are large enough in scope that they may produce changes to otherwise unrelated social movements and occur beyond the scope of any individual state.* | *MeToo*<br>*Greta Thunberg phenomenon*<br>*Black Lives Matter* |

[5] Jezierska, K., & Polanska, D. V. (2018). Social Movements Seen as Radical Political Actors: The Case of the Polish Tenants' Movement. *Voluntas*, *29*(4), 683–696. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-017-9917-2

[6] Caren, N., Andrews, K. T., & Lu, T. (2020). Contemporary social movements in a hybrid media environment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *46*, 443–465. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054627

[7] Koopmans, R., & Statham, P. (1999). Political Claims Analysis: Integrating Protest Event and Political Discourse Approaches. In *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* (Vol. 4, Issue 2). https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.4.2.d759337060716756

[8] McVeigh, R., Cunningham, D., & Farrell, J. (2014). Political Polarization as a Social Movement Outcome: 1960s Klan Activism and Its Enduring Impact on Political Realignment in Southern Counties, 1960 to 2000. *American Sociological Review*, *79*(6), 1144–1171. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122414555885

[9] Nulman, E., & Schlembach, R. (2018). Advances in social movement theory since the global financial crisis. *European Journal of Social Theory*, *21*(3), 376–390. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431017714213

# 2. QAnon

## 2.1. Introduction

Although there are a 'lack of theoretical frameworks in [the] young area of research studying the crossover between populism and conspiracy theories'[10], investigating the QAnon phenomena can usefully inform us about the dynamics of populist politics and their manifestation beyond and adjacent to populist parties. It can do so for the following reasons:

i) Investigating QAnon shows how populist attitudes may find different political expression if the causal mechanisms for a successful populist party, laid out in PaCE D4.1 and D4.2, are not in place or are atypical in a given context. For example, evidence from a study that entered survey data into a structural equation model to ascertain the correlation between populist attitudes (defined as 'anti-elitism') and 'generic conspiracy belief', suggests that some people who support populist parties could be particularly susceptible to conspiracy theories built on the accusation of some kind of abuse of power by elites.[11] This susceptibility can find expression in 'populist conspiracy theories' like QAnon.

ii) QAnon gives insight into what may emerge in the place of populist parties with a rapid change to a given 'structural conditions'.[12] For example, the 'antagonism between the populist world-view and scientific evidence'[13] has been identified as the source of some populists' climate change denial[14] and vaccine scepticism.[15] This becomes important when scientific authority underpins controversial policy decisions, such as in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.[16] Indeed, a recent study has shown that support for conspiracy theories are rising as support for populist parties falls during the ongoing pandemic[17].

iii) It illuminates the way in which 'politico-social' conspiracy theories like QAnon operate in a way that is adjacent to populist parties, voters and causes. QAnon is a political conspiracy theory insofar as it seeks to explain public and global events, unlike non-political conspiracy theories like, for example, the theory that Elvis Presley is still alive.[18] QAnon is a social conspiracy theory insofar as it encourages participation, articulates inter-group antagonism and offers a way to resolve or address the conspiracy that is being promoted through

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[10] Goreis, A., Voracek, M., 2019, 'A systematic review and meta-analysis of psychological research on conspiracy beliefs: field characteristics, measurement instruments, and associations with personality traits'. February 2019., 10(205): 1-13
https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00205/full
[11] Castanho, B., Vegetti, F., Littvay, L., 2017, 'The elite is up to something: Exploring the relationship between populism and belief in conspiracy theories'. *Swiss Political Science Review* 23(4): 423–443
https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/spsr.12270
[12] PaCE. 2021, Deliverable D4.2. 'Theoretical model of causes of populism'. P10
[13] Erbal, J., Huber, R., A., Greussing, E., 2019. 'From Populism to the 'Plandemic': Why populists believe in COVID-19 conspiracies'. Forthcoming. p4
[14] Fraune, C., Knodt M., 2018, 'Sustainable energy transformations in an age of populism, post-truth politics, and local resistance' *Energy Research & Social Science*, 43:1
[15] Kennedy,. 2019 "Populist politics and vaccine hesitancy in Western Europe: an analysis of national-level data." *European Journal of Public Health* 29: 512–516.
[16] Erbal, J., Huber, R., A., Greussing, E., 2019. 'From Populism to the 'Plandemic': Why populists believe in COVID-19 conspiracies'. Forthcoming. p4
[17] Henley, J., Duncan, P., October 2020, 'European support for populist beliefs falls, YouGov survey suggests' *Guardian* https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/26/european-support-for-populist-beliefs-falls-yougov-survey-suggests
[18] J. Räikkä, 2014. On the Epistemic Acceptability of Conspiracy Theories in *Social Justice in Practice*, 61 - 75. Springer. New York.

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participatory action. This inter-group antagonism component of QAnon is distinguishable from personally held conspiracy theory types, which have a more psychological explanation,[19] such as those claiming the moon landings were faked or the existence of aliens is being covered up by authorities. This type of politico-social conspiracy theory can be mapped through online relationships, discourses and by QAnon tropes 'parasitically' attaching to local populist issues.[20]

iv) Studying QAnon also provides insight into the *global* nature and spread of populism. The main focus of PaCE is at the level of the nation and the political party. However, insofar as QAnon and its followers believe that the actions of global elites are intent on creating a new world order, the conspiracy spans nation states and by its nature precludes a single national political party platform.

v) It may provide novel insights into populist developments in an era of participatory media and extensive social media use.

## 2.2. QAnon

QAnon is a wide-ranging conspiracy theory movement featuring many traits and tendencies of populist movements and parties. For example, it is premised on an extreme polarisation of society, framing 'evil' global elites as acting against the people's interests. The origins of the QAnon conspiracy theory can be traced back to the first 'Q-drop' on 28th October 2017 on the 4Chan online discussion forum [21]. Purporting to be an US security service insider, a forum participant 'Q' leaves coded messages alluding to the deep state, a cabal of elites trafficking children across the globe and to 'the storm', which involves, in one version, Donald Trump arresting or somehow 'bringing down' the conspiracy of globalists who, for many QAnon followers, represent something approximating pure evil.[22] This last aspect of the theory is in disarray amongst QAnon followers following Joe Biden's election and inauguration.

The origins of the movement are American, but QAnon is now spreading in Europe.[23] The theory is being picked up by local populist causes, movements and parties in EU member states on online platforms, and often involves interpreting local antagonisms and resentments through a QAnon worldview; a worldview that includes conspiracies of the 'deep state' acting against elected officials[24]. One example of the way a local populist cause is being influenced by QAnon is the way that child sexual abuse is being exploited by some far-right groups as a way to recruit people and spread their message by linking local incidents of abuse to the malign intent of global actors.[25] The theory is malleable to local political concerns insofar as it has a global (or globalist) worldview and

[19] Van Prooijen, J., Douglas, K, M., 2018, 'Belief in conspiracy theories: Basic principles of an emerging research domain', *European Journal of Social Psychology,* December; 48(7): 897–908.

[20] Mezzofiore, G., et al. October 7, 2020, ''It's like a parasite' How a dangerous virtual cult is going global', CNN, accessible at: https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/07/tech/qanon-europe-cult-intl/index.html

[21] Gallagher, A., Davey, J., Hart, M., 2020. The genesis of a conspiracy theory: Key trends in QAnon activity since 2017. *Institute for strategic dialogue.* London. Accessible at: https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Genesis-of-a-Conspiracy-Theory.pdf

[22] LaFrance, A., June 2020. The prophecies of Q. American conspiracy theories are entering a dangerous new phase. *Atlantic.* Accessible at: https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/

[23] Scott, M., October 23, 2020, QAnon goes European: Populists, protesters, conspiracy theorists: How Europe is embracing America's latest export. *Politico.* Accesible at: https://www.politico.eu/article/qanon-europe-coronavirus-protests/

[24] Ibid

[25] Lavigueue, N., 17 September, 2020 ''We're not conspiracy theorists' says leader of Huddersfield Freedom For the Children Group', *YorkshireLive* Accessible at: https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/west-yorkshire-news/were-not-conspiracy-theorists-says-18950834

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develops not through any hierarchical or national organisation but by people contributing to it from across the world and expanding the 'theory'. With globalists running the show and having a hand in all national affairs, as QAnon followers claim, any national or local grievance can also be explained through this prism no matter which country it is in. [26]

This appears to be most prominent in the UK and Germany, but with followers in other European countries, notably France.[27] For example, in Germany, a platform dedicated to QAnon conspiracy theories and populated by far right supporters called QGlobal has seen a fourfold increase in less than a year, up to more than 100,000 followers until it was shut down by Google on 15 October 2020.[28] In France, Qactus.fr, a local website voicing QAnon tropes and talking points jumped to be ranked 314 most popular website, having languished well outside the top 1000 in the preceding years.[29]  The upsurge in popularity correlates with the timeframe of the COVID-19 pandemic, and many QAnon groups have crossover with anti-lockdown and anti-vaccination protests and sentiments.

The details of the 'theory', such as it is, are also flexible and open to constant change and renewal. However, it is based around a core element, which is that global elites are controlling the world to the detriment of 'the people'. Moreover, an unsettling element of this theory, believed by some adherents, is that the elites are doing so in order to harvest a certain hormone from children.[30] This extreme personification of evil in a set of shadowy people appears to be more mode of thinking and disposition towards politics itself rather than it is a fully fledged and worked out theory. This is one way that QAnon is distinct from more 'mainstream' populist accounts (or conventional political explanations of) elites. A standard account of elites is that they are culturally separate from 'the people' and interested in pursuing money and power. With QAnon, the pursuit of money and power is not accepted as the end of the story, but instead, money and power must be being accumulated for even more malign ends, whether that finds expression in satanic or occult explanations, or the most evil acts that internet participants can collectively draw from their own imagination – the abuse, murder and harvesting of children's organs and hormones.

The QAnon theory is not a set of established narratives or alternative facts, but rather, it is a participatory environment of conspiracism, into which participants can take or leave many aspects of it. Indeed, many QAnon participants do not even know about, let alone believe, the details of the intricate theory that exists in some QAnon forums.[31] Rather, QAnon followers are encouraged to 'do their own research' and join the dots of wide ranging and unconnected world events, along with national and political events such as elections, terrorist attacks, the death of Jeffrey Epstein and the COVID-19 pandemic. It is this participatory aspect, open to rapid

[26] Author unknown, 06, October, 2020, QAnon conspiracies go global in pandemic 'perfect storm', *France24, Accessible at:* https://www.france24.com/en/20201006-qanon-conspiracies-go-global-in-pandemic-perfect-storm

[27] Gallagher, A., Davey, J., Hart, M., 2020. The genesis of a conspiracy theory: Key trends in QAnon activity since 2017. *Institute for strategic dialogue.* London. Accessible at: https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Genesis-of-a-Conspiracy-Theory.pdf

[28] Scott, M., October 23, 2020, QAnon goes European: Populists, protesters, conspiracy theorists: How Europe is embracing America's latest export. *Politico.* Accesible at: https://www.politico.eu/article/qanon-europe-coronavirus-protests/

[29] Ibid

[30] Gallagher, A., Davey, J., Hart, M., 2020. The genesis of a conspiracy theory: Key trends in QAnon activity since 2017. *Institute for strategic dialogue.* London. Accessible at: https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Genesis-of-a-Conspiracy-Theory.pdf

[31] Edleman, G., 06, June, 2020, QAnon Supporters Aren't Quite Who You Think They Are:
Only a fraction of them believe the conspiracy theory's most outlandish claims, according to new polling, *Wired,* Accesible at: https://www.wired.com/story/qanon-supporters-arent-quite-who-you-think-they-are/

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growth of followers in different locales, and one which urges participants to also take some kind of action and which is responsive to populist leaders – as we saw recently on Capitol Hill, Washington DC[32] - that makes QAnon a movement with social and political features important to populism research.

## 2.3. Ideology, Policy and Beliefs

QAnon has no policy positions or defined ideology as such. However, it does have a set of beliefs, traits and an identifiable worldview. It is a worldview that is extreme and grounded in polarisation, one in which, as mentioned, global elites are pitted against 'the people'. In this view, the elites are all powerful 'deep state' actors acting against the people's interests. The flip side to this extreme worldview is the coming restoration of 'goodness' through the implementation of 'the storm' or 'the plan', which will bring down this shadowy cabal and give America (and the world) back to its people. This has been interpreted through a religious lens by some.[33] However, given that many QAnon participants are not aware of this intricate and outlandish theory, a wider range of ideologies are relevant to the movement.

For example, QAnon adherents espouse a broad and deep suspicion of all elites, mistrust of established authorities, representative democracy and a distrust of science. Unlike with many populist parties, however, this suspicion of elites does not express itself in a specific political programme for change, but rather it produces a more unfocussed and unrestrained range of inflated fears and antagonisms.

The ideology and beliefs of QAnon inspired or associated followers often do not mention QAnon by name, but use the same associated tropes and worldview. This is becoming particularly pronounced around the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in the UK a group called 'Citizens Unite UK - #wakeup' – refer to global elites, paedophile rings and a plot to use the pandemic to permanently restrict people's rights, but without specific mention of QAnon. In the Netherlands, online social media accounts linked to Geert Wilders, a far-right politician, have 'borrowed heavily' from QAnon tropes and worldview.[34] QAnon sits adjacent to many populist parties and causes in this way, and represents a more extreme and paranoid version of the ideologies found in those parties and causes. QAnon's relationship with nativist parties, figures and movements is more ambiguous. While on the one hand, there may be a shared commitment to a polarised worldview between globalist elites and the people, and the self-identification of the far right as chivalrous defenders of family and nation finds resonance with QAnon's obsession with child abuse, on the other hand, QAnon is seen as a PR problem for serious far right parties, many of whom also view QAnon as a distraction and not focussed enough on racism and demographics. Other tensions exist, for example in the British far-right, the accusation that the House of Windsor are paedophilic Satanists is off putting for many far right and nativist activists.[35]

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[32] https://www.cnet.com/news/qanon-followers-led-the-charge-on-capitol-hill-what-you-need-to-know/
[33] Sharlot, J., November 20, 2020, 'The Ancient Heresy That Helps Us Understand QAnon' *OnTheMedia podcast.* Accessible at: https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/otm/segments/ancient-heresy-helps-us-understand-qanon-on-the-media
[34] Scott, M., October 23, 2020, QAnon goes European: Populists, protesters, conspiracy theorists: How Europe is embracing America's latest export. *Politico.* Accesible at: https://www.politico.eu/article/qanon-europe-coronavirus-protests/
[35] Lawrence, D, Davis, G., October, 2020, QAnon in the UK: The growth of a movement, *Hope not Hate,* accessible at: https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2020/10/22/qanon-and-the-uk-radical-and-far-right/

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## 2.4. Leadership and Organisation

There is no 'organisation' of QAnon in the conventional sense, but there are identifiable methods through which the 'theory' is promulgated, observable ways it grows and coherent methods through which people can participate in the conspiracy theory. It is worth considering how QAnon spreads to get insight into any relevant organisational features.

QAnon growth and activity is driven by two factors. The first (and original) factor driving QAnon activity are the 'Q drops'. Q drops are opaque messages from an unknown source posted online at 4Chan and later 8Chan. The author, Q, claims to be working inside the government, and Q's messages often appear riddle-like, but with the same QAnon monikers and tropes re-appearing.[36]

These often bizarre and obscure online communiques produce increased activities as QAnon 'bakers' strive to decipher, interpret and re-interpret their meaning, continuing to develop the conspiracy theory.[37] Bakers are the name given to QAnon 'researchers' – the idea behind the label being that they are picking up crumbs of the conspiracy theory to bake them together to create the truth (bread). The author of these Q-Drops is a mystery – the identity itself being the subject of many theories. That these opaque communiques act as clues for QAnon followers – they are open to interpretation, they never give all the information necessary and they encourage participants to research themselves – have been interpreted by some through the lens of alternative reality games (ARGs), due to the striking similarities, and the prominence of 'do your own research' refrain, common to many ARGs.[383940] While this gamification aspect is interesting, what seems more relevant for the study of populism is the other main driver of QAnon activity, which is real world political events being interpreted through the polarising lens of the QAnon 'conspiracy-sphere' - elections, statements by Donald Trump, the arrest of Jeffry Epstein and immigration.[41]

The main form of participation in the QAnon movement is online. People engage in QAnon research and discussion through forums, Facebook pages and comment boards.[42] They also participate through what could be termed 'gateway' interest communities, such as the 'wellness' community[43], and what has come to be known as the 'cosmic right'[44] - which is far right or alt-right communities that are invested in magic, the occult and

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[36] LaFrance, A., June 2020. The prophecies of Q. American conspiracy theories are entering a dangerous new phase. *Atlantic.* Accessible at: https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/

[37] Zuckerman, E., July 15, 2019. 'QAnon and the emergence of the unreal'. *Journal of Design and Science*, MIT media lab, https://doi.org/10.21428/7808da6b.6b8a82b9 https://jods.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/tliexqdu/release/4

[38] Thompson, C., 22, September, 2020., QAnon Is Like a Game—a Most Dangerous Game
The conspiracy theory has the best attributes of a multiplatform game, except that it can cause harm in the real world, *Wired,* Accessible at:
 https://www.wired.com/story/qanon-most-dangerous-multiplatform-game/

[39] Berkowitz, R., 30, September, 2020, A Game Designer's Analysis Of QAnon:
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 https://medium.com/curiouserinstitute/a-game-designers-analysis-of-qanon-580972548be5

[40] Hon, A., 02, August, 2020., What ARGs Can Teach Us About QAnon, *MSSV,* Accessible at:
https://mssv.net/2020/08/02/what-args-can-teach-us-about-qanon/

[41] Gallagher, A., Davey, J., Hart, M., 2020. The genesis of a conspiracy theory: Key trends in QAnon activity since 2017. *Institute for strategic dialogue.* London. Accessible at: https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Genesis-of-a-Conspiracy-Theory.pdf

[42] Ibid.

[43] Breland, A., 15, April, 2020., Wellness Influencers Are Spreading QAnon Conspiracies About the Coronavirus, *Mother Jones,* Acccessible at:  https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2020/04/wellness-qanon-coronavirus/

[44] Gilbert, J., Davis, G., 13, August, 2020., (Podcast), Erik Davis on the Cosmic Right, *Novara Media*

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sometime psychedelic drugs. There appears to be large contingent of women in the movement as well, many of whom are drawn to QAnon through its apparent concern for child kidnap and child trafficking. Versions of the hashtag #savethechildren, originally used for an NGO of the same name, draws people into the QAnon orbit through concern with missing children and child welfare, undermining the fight against child exploitation by bona fide charities and NGOs.[45] Women also feature prominently in what has been termed 'Pastel Q Anon'. This refers to lifestyle influencers, including 'mummy bloggers', wellness coaches and lifestyle gurus, who use 'pastel colours' and 'feminine aesthetics' to promote QAnon content on platforms like Instagram.[46]

Another way QAnon is sanitised is through many QAnon adherents deliberately hiding the fact they are believers in QAnon and who often perform a more innocent sounding role in discussions online. Obscuring one's adherence to the QAnon theory was specifically encouraged by one Q drop.[47] Along with the encouragement to 'do your own research',[48] these types of sentiments, which obscure and cleanse QAnon of its wilder aspects, defines much of the organisational spirit and tendency of QAnon participation. This deliberate tactic of obscurity makes the growth, spread and observation of the sprawling QAnon movement difficult to pin down comprehensively.

QAnon also appears in the 'real world' and in crossover with populist leaders and causes, with QAnon banners appearing at election rallies for Donald Trump[49] and on anti-lockdown protests across Europe.[50] Online, participation in QAnon tropes is also becoming embedded in local populist discourse, Facebook groups and chatrooms. While not often explicitly shared by populist parties or their leaders – although with exceptions, such as former UKIP leader Gerard Batten[51] - these are often adjacent to or linked to local populist parties and their grievances and located online where followers of other populist parties congregate[52] QAnon supporters were also highly visible and prominent amongst the rioters who broke into the U.S. Capitol Building in January 2020 in support of Donald Trump, incited by a desire to 'stop the steal' and prevent certification of the US presidential election results.[53]

https://novaramedia.com/2020/08/13/microdose-erik-davis-on-the-cosmic-right/

[45] Roose, K., 12, August, 2020., QAnon Followers Are Hijacking the #SaveTheChildren Movement, *New York Times,* Accessible at: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/12/technology/qanon-save-the-children-trafficking.html

[46] Gillespie, E., 30, September, 2020, 'Pastel QAnon': The female lifestyle bloggers and influencers spreading conspiracy theories through Instagram, https://www.sbs.com.au/news/the-feed/pastel-qanon-the-female-lifestyle-bloggers-and-influencers-spreading-conspiracy-theories-through-instagram

[47]29, December, 2019., Will They Be Forced To Ask The Q? | Latest Q Drops, *Woke Societies's Podcast* https://podcasts.google.com/feed/aHR0cHM6Ly9mZWVkcy5idXp6c3Byb3V0LmNvbS83MzA3MzAucnNz/episode/QnV6enNwcm91dC0yMzY3MjEy?sa=X&ved=0CAcQuIEEahcKEwjI8IPrwYTuAhUAAAAAHQAAAAAQAg

[48] Mamic, A., 15, December, 2020., What It Means to 'Do Your Own Research': How the digital age enables extremist thinking, *Illumination,* Accessible at: https://medium.com/illumination-curated/what-it-means-to-do-your-own-research-c00cf5c25056

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[52] Scott, M., October 23, 2020, QAnon goes European: Populists, protesters, conspiracy theorists: How Europe is embracing America's latest export. *Politico.* Accesible at: https://www.politico.eu/article/qanon-europe-coronavirus-protests/

[53] Scoppia, G., 09, January, 2021., What role did QAnon play in the Capitol riot?, *Independent,* Accessible at: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-election-2020/qanon-capitol-congress-riot-trump-b1784460.html

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## 2.5. Successes, Performances and Impacts

The 'success' of conspiracy theories or social movements are not simple to define in the same way as populist parties, given they do not contest elections. And unlike other populist social movements, such as the GJ, QAnon does not appear to have any policy platform against which success could be measured. Moreover, one major problem with QAnon data is that, as mentioned above, followers often deliberately hide their belief or support for the QAnon movement, obfuscating their beliefs inside more innocent sounding language, hashtags or causes.

In the case of QAnon, however, there are direct electoral indicators from the US that may give a forewarning for Europe. As many as 27 congressional candidates in the 2020 US elections have 'endorsed or given credence' to QAnon.[54] One Republican candidate, Marjorie Taylor Greene, a full throated supporter of the QAnon conspiracy theory, won a house seat in Gorgia.[55] However, the open primary system and the relative lack of central control by the Republican party in the US may make it particularly susceptible to infiltration by QAnon extremists in a way that does not translate to European populist parties,[56] particularly those with strong leadership and hierarchical organisation, like many nativist parties.

If success can be defined in terms of growth of 'followers' or discussion of QAnon some measure of 'success' of the spread of QAnon can also be discerned across a variety of social media platforms. The most 'striking' increase in QAnon activity is related to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, according to a study by the *Institute for Strategic Dialogue,* which analysed key trends in QAnon activity since 2017, the number of Facebook users 'engaging in QAnon conversation' increased from an 'average of 344 unique users per day between March 2 and 8, to 898 between March 22 and 29', Twitter users grew from 37,302 to 89,338 over the same period and Facebook group membership and engagement rates within those Facebook groups increased by 120% and engagement rates increased by 91% in the same month.[57] This type of activity can create an extreme political shadow within democracies, eroding institutional and scientific authority during crises like COVID-19.

Although populist parties themselves may suffer a drop-in support as a result of large complex events like the Covid-19 pandemic, conspiracy theory populism may (and seems to be) proliferating as a correlate to this decline, as mentioned above. As complex events move past standard populist framings of 'the will of people' set against a national elite, populist conspiracy theories like QAnon, which provide simplified but extreme explanations for complex or large events on a global level, may spread.

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[54] Kaplan, A, 09, October, 2020, Here are the QAnon supporters running for Congress in 2020, *MediaMatters.* Accessible at: https://www.mediamatters.org/qanon-conspiracy-theory/here-are-qanon-supporters-running-congress-2020
[55] Rosenberg, M., 03, November, 2020., A QAnon Supporter Is Headed to Congress, *New York Times,* Accessible at:https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/03/us/politics/qanon-candidates-marjorie-taylor-greene.html
[56] Margulies**,** B., 08, October, 2020., Even if it wanted to, the Republican Party can't stop the spread of QAnon conspiracies and the candidates which support them, *Blogs LSE,* Accessible at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2020/10/08/even-if-it-wanted-to-the-republican-party-cant-stop-the-spread-of-qanon-conspiracies-and-candidates-which-support-them/
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# 3. Gilets Jaunes in France

## 3.1. Introduction

Studying a populist (popular) social movement like the Gilets Jaunes (GJ) is challenging in the first instance because 'social movement' is a term that can defy unified description, and secondly, because the GJ are a movement that demonstrate unexpected or somewhat contradictory political and ideological tendencies and beliefs, discussed in detail below.

Some scholars maintain that social movements can be characterised by two essential features, however they have an 'orientation towards social change' and have a 'non-institutional or outsider status'[58]. Others add the necessity of joint or collective action to define a social movement[59] and some researchers concentrate on the 'nature' of the movement – sorting them into different categories depending on their purpose, such as 'social reform' or 'self-help'[60]. The GJ mirrors some of these categorisations and can be defined as a movement of political 'outsiders' engaging in collective action towards social and political change.

Interestingly, in an environment of declining confidence in existing democratic and liberal systems in France, this strong 'populist' movement has emerged in a political context that already has two established populist parties – Marine Le Pen's FN and Jean-luc Melenchon, representing far right and far left populist parties respectively. This makes it an intriguing case to consider, given that it offers a situation to observe in which voters may be not only tired of 'democracy without choices'[61] but also may be frustrated with the inability of populist parties to either offer genuine alternatives, or who fail to make successful electoral breakthroughs.

## 3.2. The Gilets Jaunes

The GJ movement's origins can be traced to an online petition posted in May 2018 by small business owners - Priscillia Ludosky and Eric Drouet - in a South East suburb of Paris calling for lower taxes on essential goods, followed in October by a Facebook page calling for people to wear a yellow vest – a garment that motorists are required by law to keep in their vehicles to be worn in case of emergencies - and block roads in protest against a recently implemented fuel tax.[62]

This second call is what appears to have ignited what became known as theGJ, turning an online expression of discontent into a protest movement, which involved the most prolonged and sustained episodes of direct action in France's recent history.[63] By November 2018 the first mass public demonstrations had taken place, attracting

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[58] Burstein, P. et al. (1995) 'The Success of Political Movements: A Bargaining Perspective', in Jenkins, J. C. & Kalndermans, B. (eds.) The Politics of Social Protest. UCL Press. London. p227.

[59] Snow, D. A. et al. (2004) 'Mapping the Terrain' in Snow, D. A., Soule, S. A. & Kriesi, H. (eds.) The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing) at p. 6.

[60] Saeed, R., 2009. Conceptualising success and failure for social movements. Law, Social Justice & Global Development.

[61] PaCE. 2021. Deliverable D4.2, 'Theoretical Model of Causes of Populism' p37

[62] Fear of a Yellow Planet The Gilets Jaunes and the End of the Modern World-System.pdf

[63] Royall, F., 2020, The Gilets Jaunes protests: mobilisation without third-party support, *Modern and contemporary France,* Volume 28, issue 1. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09639489.2019.1676217

over 300,000 people across France, depending on reports.[64] Subsequent weekly demonstrations took place – called 'Acts' – across the whole of France, with a weekly Saturday demonstration in Paris. Other prominent activities by the GJ were the regular blockading of junctions and roundabouts. Participant estimates vary, from lows of 90,000 to highs of 1.3 million people.[65] These weekly events continued until the last Act, staged on March 14, 2020, amidst the onset of widespread and severe COVID-19 restrictions in France, including the banning of gatherings in public places of more than 100 people.[66] The GJ continues to be very active online, with multiple Facebook groups and a popular online GJ magazine.[67]

## 3.3. Ideology, Policy and Beliefs

Given the varied nature of the GJ participants and its demands, a specific ideology is difficult to isolate to a single belief system. However, there are ideological tendencies and policy positions that can be identified. The ideology and policy positions of the GJ can be captured usefully in two primary ways. The first way is how participants express their political views beyond the protest movement – through what political tendency they themselves claim they identify with, and which political parties they actually vote for. Second is in the long list of demands (or 'directives'), which were horizontally agreed upon by GJ online over a number of years, the achievement of which are seen as core to their movement (see appendix 1 below). This set of demands is not dissimilar to that which would be produced in a political party's manifesto.

Firstly, according to one major opinion poll a small majority of the GJ *self-identify* with the left or far left (58%), while 18% identified with the right or far right.[68] In another poll, only 2% expressed anti-immigrant sentiment, challenging any idea that the GJ are a far right or nativist movement.[69] However, this is complicated by another study by the *Foundation Jean Jaures'* in which 50% of those who had actually participated in GJ protests said they believed in a 'global Zionist conspiracy'.[70]

More complicated still are the voting patterns of the GJ. In an opinion poll investigating voting patterns in the May 2017 presidential election carried out by the Elabe Institute, 36% of participants in the GJ voted for the far-right candidate Marine Le Pen, whereas only 28% voted for Jean-Luc Melenchon, the candidate of the far left.[71] The discrepancy between self-identification with the far left and relatively small voting patterns for a far-left candidate could be a sign of the lack of faith in the political parties mentioned above, or it may demonstrate a case of strategic voting of the type identified in PaCE D4.2.

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Lem, W. (2020) Notes on militant populism in contemporary France: contextualizing the gilets jaunes. *Dialectical Anthropology* **44,** 397–413 December 2020). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-020-09595-1
https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10624-020-09595-1

[66] Yellow Vests defy coronavirus measures to protest in Paris on eve of local elections
https://www.france24.com/en/20200314-french-yellow-vests-defy-coronavirus-measures-to-demonstrate-in-paris-on-eve-of-elections

[67] Lem, W. (2020) Notes on militant populism in contemporary France: contextualizing the gilets jaunes. *Dialectical Anthropology* **44,** 397–413 December 2020). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-020-09595-1

[68] Wilkin, Peter. (2020). Fear of a Yellow Planet The Gilets Jaunes and the End of the Modern World-System. 10.5195/JWSR..

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ifop pour la Fondation Jean-Jaurès et Conspiracy Watch Enquête sur le complotisme – Vague 2 < Janvier 2019 https://jean-jaures.org/sites/default/files/redac/commun/productions/2019/0220/rapport_complot.pdf In Lem, W. Notes on militant populism in contemporary France: contextualizing the gilets jaunes. *Dialect Anthropol* **44,** 397–413 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-020-09595-1

[71] Rose, M., Baker, L., 06, December, 2018. No leader, lots of anger: can France's 'yellow vests' become a political force? *Reuters*, Accessible at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-protests-future/no-leader-lots-of-anger-can-frances-yellow-vests-become-a-political-force-idUSKBN1O51ON

The content of their directives also implies a more far-left ideology. For example, a study by Le Monde Journalists of the GJ 'forty-two directives' concluded that two thirds could be considered 'very close' to the radical left, whereas just under half were 'compatible with' the position of the far right. However, all directives were 'very far removed' from the economically liberal policies and ideology of Emmanuel Macron, the French president.[72] The GJ also hold disdain or mistrust of representative democracy in its current form. This is demonstrated by the GJ demand to create a citizen's referendum 'as a forum for popular sovereignty', transcending liberal democratic institutions.[73]

## 3.4. Organisation

The GJ movement is actively hostile to any form of leadership or structure, any commitment to a single ideology and vigorously opposes hierarchy of any kind, considering it anathema to the movement.[74] This does not mean, however, that it has no organisation. Committees and assemblies are at the core of the GJ organisational structure, organised horizontally. Local committees convene to organise local gatherings and actions, and declarations have been decided and announced through a federation of assemblies. What became known as the 'assembly of assemblies' was first organised in Commercy, a small town in north-eastern France in January 2019. A local group put a callout on social media platforms and delegations from approximately seventy groups then met in the village of Sorcy-Saint-Martin and approved a set of demands and principles.[75] It seems no accident that the first 'assembly of assemblies' was organised in Commercy. Commercy has an interesting history and continued presence of 'social-libertarian' organising in the area. Militants from this tradition were involved in the local group in Commercy, the presence of whom can be traced in the implementation of direct democracy through the practice of a federation of autonomous communes, which draws directly from this 'social-libertarian' tradition.[76]

Online organisation is also key. Facebook groups centred around local grievances have been key to the growth of GJ, where protests are announced, and issues discussed. Indeed, the rapid spread of the GJ can be partially explained through Facebook itself. In January 2018 a change in Facebook's algorithm, designed ostensibly to prevent the spread of fake news and promote trust, began pushing posts onto user's feeds from Facebook 'friends' rather than media organisations. Quite rapidly, GJ posts – which were emotive, engaging and from local accounts rather than media organisations – started filling up people's Facebook feeds across parts of France, being prioritised above news organisations and other media outlets.[77]

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[72] Damgé, M., Durand, A., Vaudano, M., ; Baruch, J., Breteau, P., 04, December, 2018, Sur un axe de Mélenchon à Le Pen, où se situent les revendications des gilets jaunes, *Le Monde*, Accessible at: https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2018/12/04/sur-un-axe-de-melenchon-a-le-pen-ou-se-situent-les-revendications-des-gilets-jaunes_5392592_4355770.html

[73] Lem, W. (2020), Notes on militant populism in contemporary France: contextualizing the gilets jaunes. *Dialectical Anthropolology* 44, 397–413, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-020-09595-1

[74] Royall, F., (2020) The *Gilets Jaunes* protests: mobilisation without third-party support, *Modern & Contemporary France*, 28:1, 99-118, 10.1080/09639489.2019.1676217

[75] Kouvelakis, S., (March - June 2019), The French Insurgency. Political Economy of the Gilets Jaunes *New Left Review*. 116/117.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Bock, P., 06, December, 2018, How Facebook fuelled France's violent gilets jaunes protests, *Wired*, https://www.wired.co.uk/article/les-gilet-jaunes-yellow-vest-protests-in-france-facebook

## 3.5. Successes, Performances and Impacts

Success of social movements cannot be measured in the same terms as populist parties, by the counting of votes or the volume of its elected officials. However, successes of social movements are sometimes characterised through policy impacts. While this is also a limited viewpoint to comprehensively assess the success of a social movement – cultural, social or attitudinal change are also sometimes the goals of social movements – focussing on policy impacts does provide a quantifiable way to think about populist movements.[78]

The GJ have had some direct policy victories. The fuel tax, for example, opposition to which was widely seen as the birth of the movement's demands, was reversed by Macron.[79] In an apparent attempt to appease the French public in the wake of the early GJ Acts, Macron also held a series of Town Hall meetings.[80] This shows a certain level of influence being leveraged by the GJ, however it could interpreted as an attempt by Macron to recuperate some of the GJ demands while circumventing them, rather than a victory of any sought for the GJ. In Gamson's ground-breaking and original study into social movements (the origin of social movement theory), he devised a four-part outcome model for assessing the success of social movements. The case of Macron's town hall meetings could be defined under this model as a case of 'pre-emption' – when social movements make
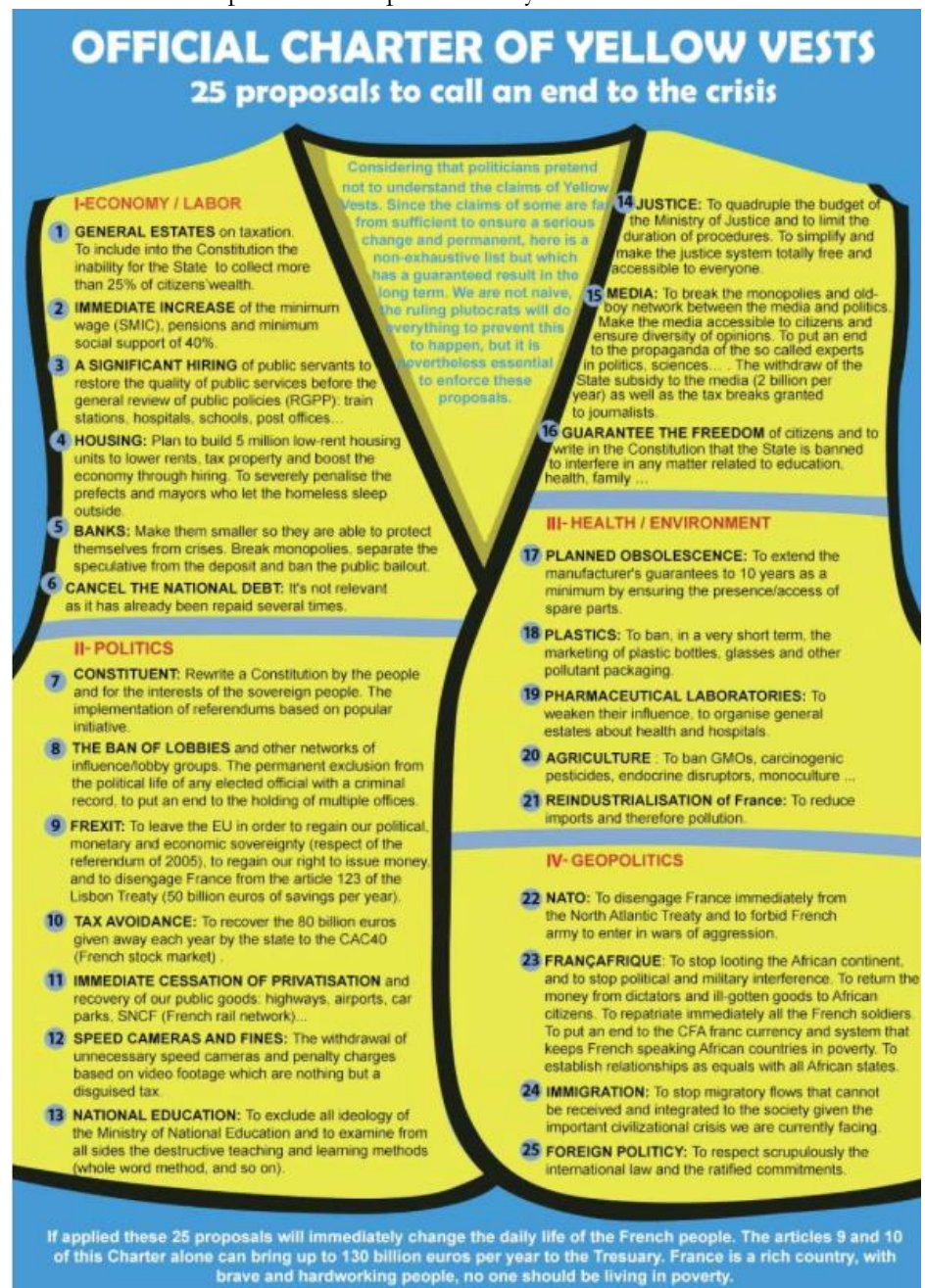


*Figure 1*. Official charter of yellow vest.

[78] Amenta, E., Caren, N., Chiarello, E,. Su, Y., (2010) The Political Consequences of Social Movements *Annual Review of Sociology* 36: 287-307, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-070308-120029

[79] Wilsher, K., 05, December, 2018, Macron scraps fuel tax rise in face of gilets jaunes protests, *Guardian,* Accessible at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/05/france-wealth-tax-changes-gilets-jaunes-protests-president-macron

[80] With a town-hall tour, Emmanuel Macron tries to win France back. 09, February, 2019, *Economist,* https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/02/09/with-a-town-hall-tour-emmanuel-macron-tries-to-win-france-back

'gains without recognition'.[81] The other three social movement outcomes on Gamson's model are 'complete success', 'recognition without gains' and 'collapse'. The GJ received recognition from the public without gains, certainly in the earlier stages of the movement[82], but whether a complete collapse has been produced by the COVID-19 pandemic radically altering the political terrain on which the movement is based, remains to be seen.

*Table 2*. Key Gilets Jaunes demands for social and economic justice (*Source; Dianara, 2018*)

| |
|---|
| Strongly progressive taxation |
| Better public transport and services |
| Abolition of the senate |
| Better pay for workers |
| Citizens Referendum Initiative |
| A 6th Republic |
| An end to homelessness in France |
| MPs to earn the national average as a salary |
| Universal social security |
| Mass investment in sustainable transport |
| Creation of and environmentally sustainable society |
| The end of austerity policies |
| Increased support for the disabled |
| Increased welfare for the needy |
| Introduction of a maximum wage of €15000 per month |
| Rent control |
| Immediate end to closure of public infrastructural services e.g. post offices, train lines, schools and nurseries |

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[81] Gamson, W.A. (1989), Reflections on 'The Strategy of Social Protest', *Social Forum* 4**,** 455–467, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01115022

[82] Statista Research Department,  12, May, 2020, Breakdown of public opinion on the 'yellow vests' movement in France from November 2018 to March 2019, *Statista,* Accessible at: https://www.statista.com/statistics/945415/gilets-jaunes-approval-ratings-france/

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# 4. Pots and Pans Revolution in Iceland

## 4.1. Introduction

This case study recounts the Pots and Pans movement that occurred during the global financial crisis and which at the time constituted the Icelandic public´s reaction to the crisis which devastated Iceland´s financial system. Iceland´s Pots and Pans movement had an enduring effect on Iceland´s political landscape. The movement both empowered and endorsed mass public protest as a way of holding the political system to account and in a way normalised mass public protest in Iceland as a way of communicating and enforcing the will of the people. This case study describes the pots and pans movement as it has been documented and studied by academics and those that observed it at the time. The report sets out by distinguishing between political and social movements before describing the pots and pans movement, the events led to its emergence and the lasting political and social impact of the movement on Icelandic society and its political landscape. This section relies heavily upon the previously published work of in particular (Bernburg, 2010, 2015, 2019).

## 4.2. The Pots and Pans Protest Movement

The global economic crisis in 2008 had a huge impact in European countries that led to protests against **economic inequality**, **flawed democracy** and **austerity** (Bernburg, 2019)[83]. In Iceland the *Pots and Pans* (PP) protest movement emerged as an effort to hold the Icelandic government to account in wake of the credit crunch and subsequent meltdown of Iceland´s financial system in 2008 and it is considered as the largest protest in the history of Iceland. The economic crisis triggered bankruptcies, massive layoffs, unemployment, inflation, welfare cuts, fiscal crisis, and meltdown of the country´s financial system including a crisis at the Icelandic central bank. Bernburg identified factors that mobilized individuals to protest:

   a.  " *…focusing on economic strain… when crises end long periods of rising prosperity, feelings of shattered expectations and blocked goals (relative deprivation) may lead individuals to experience injustice and frustration, mobilizing them to participate in rebellious action (Bernburg, 2015, p.232).* "[84]
   b.  " *…political and cultural processes that may mobilize individuals in protest by appealing their political attitudes (Bernburg, 2015, p.232)* "

## 4.3. Ideology, Policy and Beliefs

The Icelandic protest was a *"cascading social crisis"* (Bernburg, 2019) triggered by the global financial crisis that triggered the meltdown of the Icelandic financial system *cascading* to a recession that triggered a political response and severe austerity measures and a crisis of trust in government that to this day remains fragile (Erlingsson et

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[83] Bernburg, J. G. (2019). The cascading crisis and the changing base of popular protest: The case of Iceland. *Current Sociology*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392119833104

[84] Bernburg, J. G. (2015). Economic crisis and popular protest in Iceland, january 2009: The role of perceived economic loss and political attitudes in protest participation and support. *Mobilization*, *20*(2), 231–252. https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671x-20-2-231

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al., 2016[85]; Vilhelmsdóttir & Kristinsson, 2018[86]). As a result of the failure of the Icelandic government and bank representatives to negotiate financial aid from UK and Netherlands, the crisis unfolded and escalated (Bernburg, 2016, p.9, 13, 47)[87]. This led to mass protest and civil unrest that initially included and was initiated by well-known intellectuals, critics, activist, academics, teachers, writers, musicians, that contested the integrity of the political leadership not reflecting the interest of the Icelandic public and tarnished by *"…corruption and blind faith in market forces (Bernburg, 2016, p.14)"*. The scale of the protests and the perseverance of the protesters resulted in the resignation of the of the government and the Prime Minster (PM) and the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank and the Director of the Financial Supervisory Authority. The protest signalled the end of the partnership of the Independence Party and the Social Democratic Alliance and a left-wing collation government was formed in the next days with the promise that the new election will be organised on the spring 2009 (Bernburg, 2016)[88].

The PP movement as such dissipated once the government resigned and it can be considered to have successfully achieved its objective. The PP protest movement is no more but its imprint can still be seen in Icelandic society in a population that demands transparency, reform and accountability from the political class and from institutions and it is also evidenced in an ongoing debate on political trust. Based on Nulman & Schlembach´s 2018[89] social movement classification system (p.378) we situate the PP movement at the micro level as a localised protest / social movement organisation, fairly representive of the Icelandic population and with a popular mandate to achieve a specific objective.The procedural legitimacy of these objectives s and actions has been the subject of research (Önnudóttir, 2016)[90].

The PP movement has been extensively documented and researched locally, see (Bernburg, 2015[91], 2019; Jonsson, 2012[92]; Ólafsson, 2014[93]; Önnudóttir, 2016)[94] and internationally (Berg, 2012[95]; Durrenberger, P, E., Palsson, 2015[96]; Kvalnes & Nordal, 2018[97]). These academics have sought to document and understand the

[85] Erlingsson, G. O., Linde, J., & Öhrvall, R. (2016). Distrust in Utopia? Public perceptions of corruption and political support in Iceland before and after the financial crisis of 2008. In *Government and Opposition* (Vol. 51, Issue 4, pp. 553–579). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2014.46

[86] Vilhelmsdóttir, S., & Kristinsson, G. H. (2018). Political trust in Iceland: Performance or politics? *Veftímaritið Stjórnmál Og Stjórnsýsla*, *14*(1), 211–234. https://doi.org/10.13177/irpa.a.2018.14.1.10

[87] Bernburg J. G. (2016). Political opportunity, framing, and mobilization in Iceland´s post-crash protests. *Research gate.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306119930 based on the following reference: Jón Gunnar Bernburg and Anna Soffía Víkingsdóttir (2016). Political opportunity, framing, and mobilization in Iceland's post-crash protests. Pp. 81-102 in: Valur Ingimundarson, Phillippe Urfalino, and Irma Erlingsdóttir (eds), Iceland's Financial Crisis: The Politics of Blame, Protest, and Reconstitution. London and New York: Routledge.

[88] Bernburg J.G . (2016) Economic crisis and mass protest: The pots and Pans revolutions in Iceland. *Oxon and New York*, Routledge. 2016. *Research Gate.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299485242

[89] Nulman, E., & Schlembach, R. (2018). Advances in social movement theory since the global financial crisis. *European Journal of Social Theory*, *21*(3), 376–390. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431017714213

[90] Önnudóttir, E. H. (2016). The "Pots and Pans" protests and requirements for responsiveness of the authorities. *Veftímaritið Stjórnmál Og Stjórnsýsla*, *12*(2), 195. https://doi.org/10.13177/irpa.a.2016.12.2.1

[91] Bernburg, J. G. (2015). Economic crisis and popular protest in Iceland, january 2009: The role of perceived economic loss and political attitudes in protest participation and support. *Mobilization*, *20*(2), 231–252. https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671x-20-2-231

[92] Jonsson, I. (2012). Explaining the Crisis of Iceland. *Journal of Critical Realism*, *11*(1), 5–39. https://doi.org/10.1558/jcr.v11i1.5

[93] Ólafsson, J. (2014). *Democratic experiments. Iceland in collapse and renaissance_Jon Olafsson.*

[94] This section relies heavily upon the previously published work of (Bernburg, 2010, 2015, 2019)

[95] Berg, C. (2012). *From Crisis to Direct Democracy ? – The Case of Iceland* (Issue January).

[96] Durrenberger, P, E., Palsson, G. (2015). *Gambling Debt: Icelands Rise and Fall in the Global Economy* (G. Durrenberger, P, E., Palsson (ed.)). University Press of Colorado.

[97] Kvalnes, Ø., & Nordal, S. (2018). Normalization of Questionable Behavior: An Ethical Root of the Financial Crisis in Iceland. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *159*(3), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-3803-8

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social and political context, procedural legitimacy, dynamics and motivations behind the PP movement and how the global crisis ignited popular protests but also how these events instigated a critical review of the fundamental pillars of Icelandic society and Iceland´s system of government and governance including its constitution (Gylfason & Meuwese, 2016[98]; Landemore, 2015[99])

## 4.4. Organisation and Symbols

### 4.4.1. Background and development

The historical background to the PP movement is an environment of system wide neoliberal reforms that saw the privatisation of Icelandic banks and the uncontrolled growth and internationalisation of the country's financial sector with the state underdeveloped, under resourced and underequipped to regulate and supervise the sector. Kvalnes & Nordal (2018)[100] studied the *"normalisation of questionable behaviour"* in the Icelandic financial sector finding that the sector had evolved to practice and justify excessive risk taking, greed and disregard for institutions and the wellbeing of society and citizens. The result was a rapid rise in economic inequality, a novelty in a largely classless, historically close knit and relatively equal society. Table 2 from (Bernburg, 2019)[101], shows the developmental trajectory of social and political protest themes in Iceland, ultimately traced to the neo liberal transformation of the Icelandic economy around the turn of the century.

*Table 3.* Evolving background of social / political and protest in Iceland

| *1999-2003* | *2004-2007* | *2008-2009* | *2010-2015* | *2016* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Privatisation of finance, trust in politics, relative economic equality, protest inspired mostly by new movement but also by labour agendas | Economic growth; rapid rise in economic inequality. | Financial crisis; loss across income groups; distrust in established politics, emergence of economic injustice protests as well as opportunities for pre-existing (i.e., new movements protest agendas) | Recession; welfare system cutbacks, recovery amidst ongoing political legitimacy crisis | Corruption / privilege scandal Huge protest narrowly directed at economic injustice and flawed democracy |

Preceding Iceland´s financial crisis and the PP movement, was an almost unparalleled era of growth and consumerism in Iceland, fuelled by easy access to loan capital and credit. When the edifice collapsed in 2008 in wake of the global credit crunch, the Icelandic population was shell shocked, experiencing mass bankruptcies, redundancies, unemployment, and a serious breakdown of trust in political leadership. Households that were heavily in debt experienced severe economic difficulties, many lost their income, their lifesavings and their homes creating widespread panic and anger. The concept of *relative deprivation* (Davies, 1962)[102] was invoked in

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[98] Gylfason, T., & Meuwese, A. (2016). Digital tools and the derailment of Iceland's new constitution. In *CESifo 2: Public Choice* (No. 5997). https://doi.org/10.4337/9781785363962.00020

[99] Landemore, H. (2015). Inclusive Constitution-Making: The Icelandic Experiment. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, *23*(2), 166–191. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12032

[100] Kvalnes, Ø., & Nordal, S. (2018). Normalization of Questionable Behavior: An Ethical Root of the Financial Crisis in Iceland. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *159*(3), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-3803-8

[101] Bernburg, J. G. (2019). The cascading crisis and the changing base of popular protest: The case of Iceland. *Current Sociology*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392119833104

[102] Davies, J. C. (1962). Toward a Theory of Revolution. *American Sociological Association*, *27*(1), 5–19.

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(Bernburg, 2015)[103] to explain how perceived economic loss, relative to the perceived loss of others predicted protest behaviour.

The PP protests broke out in a large-scale event on January 20th, 2009 and research suggests that 25% of Reykjavik´s adult population actually participated in the protests with 57% supporting the actions (Bernburg, 2019)[104]. Despite Iceland´s relatively weak protest tradition, public participation was widespread as was the level of public support. About one quarter of adults in the Reykjavík area attended the PP protests and a good majority (57%) supported the actions of protesters (Bernburg, 2019). Even if the PP movement is known as a peaceful movement some individuals engaged in vandalism and had physical skirmishes with riot police. As the protests escalated in intensity it became clear that the government´s position was no longer tenable and in January 2009 the Prime Minister (PM) announced his resignation and the dissolution of his government. The ousted PM was subsequently accused of gross misconduct in a special *National Court* that was established in 1905 but mobilised for the first time in the PMs case. The PM was acquitted of all but one charge *"for not addressing the banks' problems or their conceivable effect on the Icelandic State"* (Bragadóttir, 2017:357[105]). The PP movement should probably be regarded as a protest / social movement with a main and immediate objective of removing what was widely seen as incompetent political leadership and inept institutions. The diagram *(Figure 20)* maps the PP protest in Iceland building on[106] (Bernburg, 2019:4).
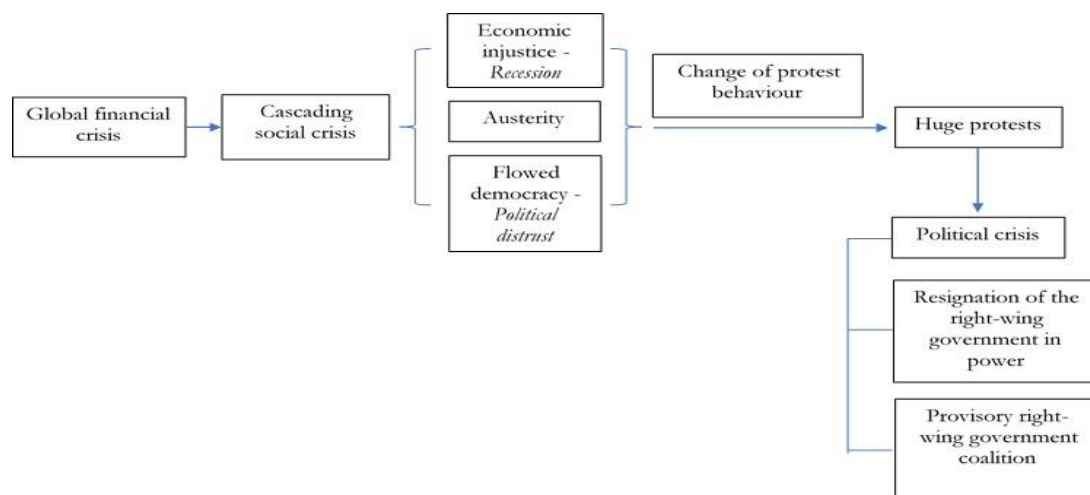


*Figure 2.* Maps of the Pots and Pans revolutions based on Bernburg (2019:4)

From the outset the movement did not have a strategic vision or policy agenda of wider political or institutional reform although there was a precursor to the events in criticism from academics, citizens, and social activists. The movement was in that sense reactive but later led to a call for a review of the Icelandic constitution and eventually to the creation of a constitutional council that submitted a draft of a new constitution to the parliament in 2011 (Hannah Fillmore-Patrick Sarajevo, 2013[107]).

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[103] Bernburg, J. G. (2015). Economic crisis and popular protest in Iceland, january 2009: The role of perceived economic loss and political attitudes in protest participation and support. *Mobilization*, *20*(2), 231–252. https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671x-20-2-231
[104] Bernburg, J. G. (2019). The cascading crisis and the changing base of popular protest: The case of Iceland. *Current Sociology*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392119833104
[105] Bragadóttir, R. (2017). "Criminal Law and the Financial Crisis: The Proceedings Against Iceland's Former Prime Minister Geir H. Haarde". In Z. F (Ed.), *Criminal Liability of Political Decision-Makers*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-52051-3_22
[106] The diagram has been created by the City of Reykjavík based on the research of Bernburg, 2014.
[107] Hannah Fillmore-Patrick Sarajevo,  by. (2013). *The Iceland Experiment (2009-2013): A Participatory Approach to Constitutional Reform: A report from Democratization Policy Council (DPC)* (Issue August). www.democratizationpolicy.orgwww.democratizationpolicy.org

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The movement was characterised by the mobilisation of different actors that brought together intellectuals, activists, artists, citizens, academics and political pretenders, in a cross section of Icelandic society that were united in a common cause to hold the government to account and to demand political and institutional reform. The narrative was the people against a corrupt political system, inept government and system of governance and malfunctioning regulatory and supervisory institutions. The main catalysts for the protests were perceived inequality and injustice, perceived political corruption and a political system seen as tilted to favouring the wealthy (Bernburg, 2019)[108].

> *During the crisis, protest behaviour expanded to the political centre. Before the crisis only leftists were more likely to protest than other groups, but after the crisis struck both leftists and centrists protest more than rightists. That popular protest has become more politically mainstream may reflect how concerns about flawed democracy go beyond the political left. It may also reflect how protest behaviour has become more commonplace than before.*
> *(Bernburg, 2019:17)*

Bernburg underlines and finds support for factors that might be the trigger of protest behaviour such as perceived (own) economic loss relative to others and belief in extended corruption but also that leftist leanings are more likely to trigger protest behaviours.

> *Protest participation is almost five times as common among those who strongly believe in the reality of corruption than among those who do not, and it is about four times as common among those having low trust in politicians compared to those high on trust. (Bernburg, 2015:245[109])*

In this context it is interesting to consider how latent opinions and inclination to protest is reflected in private in the ballot box given the perceived social cost of participating publicly in street protests that outweighs shared grievances. For social psychological insights (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013[110]).

### 4.4.2. Symbols

The PP movement is symbolised by the display of everyday nonviolent objects that are also used elsewhere e.g., the current Myanmar protests[111]. Everyday objects such as kitchen utensils, colourful flags, umbrellas, keys, face masks and so forth have defined significant moments in history, see (Glenn, 1999[112]) for the example of the Velvet revolution. Banging pots and pans is a form of protest which has been used in several protests across the world and it is considered *"not just an instrument",* but a protest tradition dating back centuries that began in medieval times used by French revolutionaries, Algerian paramilitaries and more recently in Latin American countries known as *"cancerolazo[113]".* The symbol of pots and pans has been used in Montreal, as a symbol of

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[108] Bernburg, J. G. (2019). The cascading crisis and the changing base of popular protest: The case of Iceland. *Current Sociology*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392119833104

[109] Bernburg, J. G. (2015). Economic crisis and popular protest in Iceland, january 2009: The role of perceived economic loss and political attitudes in protest participation and support. *Mobilization*, *20*(2), 231–252. https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671x-20-2-231

[110] van Stekelenburg, J., & Klandermans, B. (2013). The social psychology of protest. *Current Sociology*, *61*(5–6), 886–905. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392113479314

[111] https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/02/04/pots-pans-protests-myanmar-coup/

[112] Glenn, J. K. (1999). Competing challengers and contested outcomes to state breakdown: The velvet revolution in Czechoslovakia. *Social Forces*, *78*(1), 187–212. https://doi.org/10.2307/3005794

[113] A **cacerolaz**, **cacerolada** or **casserole,** a Spanish concept, is a form of popular protest which consists of a group of people making noise by banging pots, pans, and other utensils in order to call for attention. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cacerolazo)

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protest to the government´s austerity plans (The Tyee source)[114] and Argentina, as a symbol of hunger, political protest, economic uncertainty (source Educational Media Review Online and Ezequiel Adamovsky, p.422)[115]. In 1960´s the conservatives, church leaders, housewives used pots and pans as a symbol of their anger against the government. In 1970 in Chile, a conservative woman´s protest to oppose the election of Marxist President Salvador Allende in Chile (source of Washington Post)[116] the protesters used pots and pans, foodstuffs and other consumer goods symbolising the lack of food availability and the growth of the black market and empty pots symbolising the struggle.

## 4.5. Successes, Performances and Impacts

The PP protest movement and the financial crisis in Iceland has been thoroughly documented and researched and it is an interesting case of how protest movements emerge based on public perception of injustice, incompetence, political corruption, and institutional failings. (Bernburg and Vikingsdottir, 2016[117]). As noted Bernburg (2015, 2019) has studied the preamble to the protests from the perspective of perceived economic loss *(relative deprivation)* and political attitudes as the catalyst for protest participation and support and (Önnudóttir, 2016[118]) has studied how the severity of the situation and popular support for the PP protests affected the dynamics of political decision making concluding that the PP movement satisfied the principle of *procedural equality* with the movement enjoying wide support in Iceland. What makes the movement particularly interesting is how it evolved into a wider national narrative of societal values, norms and principles leading to a persistent demand for political, institutional, and even constitutional reforms. The Iceland case is interesting because it is still crisp in the minds of both those that observed and those that participated and it has been documented, studied extensively.

### 4.5.1. The political impact of the Pots and Pans revolution

The financial crisis has legitimized the public's questioning of political philosophies, of economic policies and of the role and responsibilities of the political class. It has led to increased calls for a referendum approach to deciding on difficult issues e.g., the constitution issue, a demand for increased transparency and separation of politics from industry including robust analysis of conflicting interests. Again Önnudóttir (2016[119]) studied the

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The first documented protests of this style occurred in France in the 1830s, at the beginning of the July Monarchy, by opponents of the regime of Louis Philippe I of France. According to the historian Emmanuel Fureix, the protesters took from the tradition of the charivari the use of noise to express disapproval, and beat saucepans to make noise against government politicians. This way of showing discontent became popular in 1832, taking place mainly at night and sometimes with the participation of thousands of people (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cacerolazo).

[114] The Tyee source - https://thetyee.ca/Video/2012/05/27/Montreal-Pots-Pans/?utm_source=mondayheadlines&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=280512

[115] Adamovsky E. Pots, Pand and Popular Power: the neighbourhood assemblies of Buenos Aires. english translation by Propato Romina.

[116] Washington Post source - https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/02/04/pots-pans-protests-myanmar-coup/

[117] Bernburg J. G. (2016). Political opportunity, framing, and mobilization in Iceland´s post-crash protests. *Research gate.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306119930 based on the following reference: Jón Gunnar Bernburg and Anna Soffía Víkingsdóttir (2016). Political opportunity, framing, and mobilization in Iceland's post-crash protests. Pp. 81-102 in: Valur Ingimundarson, Phillippe Urfalino, and Irma Erlingsdóttir (eds), Iceland's Financial Crisis: The Politics of Blame, Protest, and Reconstitution. London and New York: Routledge.

[118] Önnudóttir, E. H. (2016). The "Pots and Pans" protests and requirements for responsiveness of the authorities. *Veftímaritið Stjórnmál Og Stjórnsýsla, 12*(2), 195. https://doi.org/10.13177/irpa.a.2016.12.2.1

[119] Önnudóttir, E. H. (2016). The "Pots and Pans" protests and requirements for responsiveness of the authorities. *Veftímaritið Stjórnmál Og Stjórnsýsla, 12*(2), 195. https://doi.org/10.13177/irpa.a.2016.12.2.1

procedural legitimacy of the PP movement concluding that the seriousness of the situation endorsed the movement and its demands, and this feeling lingers in Icelandic society. At the time of the crisis, events moved quickly with a hastily organised election following the ousting of the PM and his government. Fledgling political parties had little time to organise internally and externally but by 2013 the electoral landscape included 15 parties (Ómarsdóttir & Valgarðsson, 2020[120]). Iceland's political landscape remains fragmented in the aftermath of these events with elections in 2009, 2013 and snap elections in 2016 following political furore surrounding the Panama paper scandal and again in 2017 because of the public pardoning of a sex offender that had connections to ministers, and which led to the termination of the government coalition instigated by the *Bright Future* party.

The state as sovereign continues to be challenged by cyber activists / freedom technologists come politicians that have entered mainstream politics and parliament in the shape of the Pirate Party. Before the financial crisis the Icelandic political landscape had consisted of four dominant parties, a farmer's party, the independence/conservative party, the social democrats, and a socialist party (Ómarsdóttir & Valgarðsson, 2020). The current landscape counts 15 political parties with 8 of those currently represented in the Icelandic parliament. The Pirate Party, with a hard core of cyber activists / freedom technologists is the most successful of these and has become a permanent part of Iceland´s political landscape popular amongst liberal urbanites. This landscape shows little sign of political consolidation or integration of political parties (Ómarsdóttir & Valgarðsson, 2020) although Iceland´s current government is a curious coalition of Socialists, rural interests and Conservatives. The current national narrative at times suggests direct democracy as a way of deciding on issues of fundamental national importance but in reality deliberative democracy is widely accepted and is regarded as the most socially constructive way forward, for details see (Árnason, 2018[121]). Finally, an interesting view is how collective remembering and imaging can ignite a sense of unfairness, injustice and relative deprivation (Power, 2020[122]). This is an interesting perspective considering Iceland´s tumultuous history of subjugation and exploitation. This is not within the scope of this report but for a rendition of Iceland's journey to nationhood see (Hálfdanarson, 2006[123]).

### 4.5.2. The social impact of the Pots and Pans revolution

Today, social media, especially Facebook is all but ubiquitous in Iceland. An interesting angle of research is the impact and *cascading* effect of social media and fast evolving media ecologies in general, see (Treré & Mattoni, 2016[124]) for a review on media ecologies and protest movements and (Postill, 2014[125]) for insights on the Icelandic case that recounts the role of *"freedom technologists",* a heterogeneous social group that believes in and is committed to the transformational power of technology. The vision of freedom technologists instantiates in the

[120] Ómarsdóttir, S. B., & Valgarðsson, V. O. (2020). Anarchy in Iceland? The global left, pirates and socialists in post-crash Icelandic politics. *Globalizations*, *17*(5), 840–853. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2020.1722496

[121] Árnason, V. (2018). Icelandic politics in light of normative models of democracy. *Veftímaritið Stjórnmál Og Stjórnsýsla*, *14*(1), 35–60. https://doi.org/10.13177/irpa.a.2018.14.1.2

[122] Power, S. A. (2020). Why a Richer World Will Have More Civic Discontent: The Infinity Theory of Social Movements. *Review of General Psychology*, *24*(2), 118–133. https://doi.org/10.1177/1089268020907326

[123] Hálfdanarson, G. (2006). Severing the ties - Iceland's journey from a union with Denmark to a nation-state. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, *31*(3–4), 237–254. https://doi.org/10.1080/03468750600930878

[124] Treré, E., & Mattoni, A. (2016). Media ecologies and protest movements: main perspectives and key lessons. *Information Communication and Society*, *19*(3), 290–306. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1109699

[125] Postill, J. (2014). Freedom technologists and the new protest movements: A theory of protest formulas. *Convergence*, *20*(4), 402–418. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856514541350

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Wikileaks phenomenon, The *International Modern Media Institute*, and related forms of cyber-activism with similar agendas of political, institutional, and social reforms.

> *The IMMI resolution [is] that Iceland become a…haven for journalism, freedom of expression and freedom of information, has already garnered great support and respect around the world. Many nations have already viewed IMMI as a benchmark when reviewing their legislation holistically to prepare for the 21st century and the borderless reality every nation now faces up to with the advent of the Internet. https://en.immi.is/*

The reach of social media makes an ideal low-cost tool to spread information and for the crude mobilising and organising of protests. In 2008 social media was in its infancy and social media was not the instrument for the development of the protest. The catalyst for the protest was down to the enterprise of well-known individuals: intellectuals, activists, academics, teachers, musicians, writers, artists. Mainstream media also played a decisive role in publicising the protests but the emergence and evolution of the protests can be attributed to the determination of well-known activists and individuals in Icelandic society that kept the fires going so to speak as the movement gathered momentum and eventually developed the critical mass that enabled it to achieve the objective of the removing incompetent political leaders.

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# 5. Conclusion and comparison

Three case studies of three very different 'social movements' that have arisen in western democracies in recent years are included in this report: The GJ in France, The PP 'revolution' in Iceland and the QAnon conspiracy theory, mainly centred in the USA but now a worldwide phenomenon. In considering these cases we aim to expand knowledge about ways in which political phenomena can play out in atypical ways following crisis events and in environments in which populist parties may also thrive. This can teach us more about why and in what circumstances populism and populist parties flourish and in what circumstances they do not.

One of the central questions driving the PaCE project is how people are led to vote for populist parties; what are the mechanisms and causal chains that guide and induce this political act? PaCE D4.1 and D4.2, for example, analysed a crisis's impact on the macro-level (social, economic and political mechanisms) and micro-level (individual psychological mechanisms). In doing so this analysis focussed on the neglected role that feelings and emotions play in developing populist attitudes that may in turn be activated towards voting for a political party. Anger has been a central feature of this analysis, which is linked to blame attribution and a manichean worldview. Anger is activated through a variety of complex causal mechanisms to produce support for populist parties (D4.1, D4.2). This activation process is contingent on both certain attitudes, which lead to a readiness to act, and on certain circumstances, such as media performing crises and the role of a charismatic populist leader successfully deploying populist inflected narratives to activate voters. The success of this activation process is itself contingent on background conditions and different factors in the environment or country in question. The history and strength of liberal institutions, media environment and party system of a country are all important.

What we have discovered in these case studies is that social movements arise in their own way in response to different crises that in other circumstances activate voting for populist parties. *Voting* and *parties* are also not the only way populist attitudes, beliefs and tendencies become active in a country. It may also be the case that the background conditions of the country under question gives rise to different expressions of fear, anger and suspicion of governing elites, due to history and circumstance.

Such attitudes and emotions (such as feelings of frustration, shame, anxiety, disappointment, worries, regrets, in turn transferred into fear and anger and blame of others and elites) are often produced or fomented by social and economic crises, such as a rapid rise in inequality, economic shocks and longer-term changes to one's social position, such as changes to 'positional deprivation'. What the case studies show us, in very different ways, is how crises and trigger events, and in turn attitudes and beliefs associated with populism can often find an alternative political expression in the absence of the necessary causal mechanisms that enable support for a populist party as outlined in D4.1 and D4.2.

This comparative outline considers five relevant factors for understanding how the emotions, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours produced in society by trigger events and crises can manifest in alternate political ways, namely, in social movements or conspiracy theories. This outline will be structured around these five factors, which influence how political attitudes and beliefs manifest in different contexts. These are outlined in the following sections.

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## 5.1. Causes' - Crises, Triggers and Shocks

This section will give an overview of the causes or triggers for the movements being considered. This will show how events and crises that are commonly (but mistakenly) thought to be the *causes* of populism - such as economic crises or crises of democratic representation – can produce alternative political manifestations given a different context or set of background pre-conditions. The real causes of populist support comes not only from trigger events and background factors, but from how successfully a political leader or party can exploit crises, which is in turn dependent on a range of contextual political, social and historic pre-conditions. For example, if the party system is hostile to populist parties or there is no successful or charismatic leader capable of convincing the electorate.

The trigger event for the Icelandic protest movement was "cascading social crises"[126] produced by the global financial crash of 2008. The financial collapse was particularly acute in Iceland, given the way the Icelandic financial system was leveraged. What is especially important to note is that this crash occurred following a long rise in economic prosperity, beginning in 2001, alongside a rapid rise in economic inequality from 2004 onwards.[127] This crash caused a recession, which in turn produced austerity, as a political response. As a result of the negotiation failure of the Icelandic government and bank representatives in requesting financial aid from UK and Netherlands, the crisis has unfolded attracting a growing number of individuals.[128] This combined to generate a severe crisis of trust in the government[129]

Thousands of people took to the streets within weeks in mass protests. These protests directly challenged the leaders of Iceland, accusing them of being slavish to the market and in some cases outright corruption.[130] This trigger or crisis event is the type of crisis often associated with producing populist parties and their success. Not so in Iceland, however. In providing a radical but non-populist counter-response to this economic crisis the PP social movement is proof that populism is in not an inevitable outcome of such crises.

When the financial system collapsed in 2008 the Icelandic population were left "shell shocked, experiencing mass bankruptcies, redundancies, unemployment, and an almost complete breakdown of trust in political leadership."[131] Indebted households suffered severe economic shock, many lost their income, lifesavings and homes. The result, in such a small country, was widespread panic and anger. In a close-knit society of relative equality but, as mentioned above, recently increased levels of inequality, the concept of 'relative deprivation',[132]

[126] Bernburg, J. G. (2019). The cascading crisis and the changing base of popular protest: The case of Iceland. *Current Sociology*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392119833104

[127] Wade R.H. and Sigurgeirsdottir. Icelands´meltdown: the rise and fall of international banking in the North Atlantic. Brazilian Journal of Political Economy, vol. 31 n. 5 (125), pp. 648-697, Special edition 2011

[128] Bernburg J. G. (2016). Political opportunity, framing, and mobilization in Iceland´s post-crash protests. *Research gate*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306119930 based on the following reference: Jón Gunnar Bernburg and Anna Soffía Víkingsdóttir (2016). Political opportunity, framing, and mobilization in Iceland's post-crash protests. Pp.9, 13, 47, 81-102 in: Valur Ingimundarson, Phillippe Urfalino, and Irma Erlingsdóttir (eds), Iceland's Financial Crisis: The Politics of Blame, Protest, and Reconstitution. London and New York: Routledge.

[129] Erlingsson, G. O., Linde, J., & Öhrvall, R. (2016). Distrust in Utopia? Public perceptions of corruption and political support in Iceland before and after the financial crisis of 2008. In *Government and Opposition* (Vol. 51, Issue 4, pp. 553–579). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2014.46

[130] Bernburg J.G . (2016) Economic crisis and mass protest: The pots and Pans revolutions in Iceland. *Oxon and New York*, Routledge. 2016. *Research Gate.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299485242

[131] Pots and Pans case study below, p*ref*).

[132] Davies, J. C. (1962). Toward a Theory of Revolution. *American Sociological Association*, *27*(1), 5–19.

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which explains how perceived economic loss, relative to the perceived loss of others, can explain some of the motivation for people participating in the in the PP movement.

In a context such as this, anger is sometimes directed against 'others' within society, as populist leaders will try to do, but in Iceland, it was directed directly at the governing class, seen as distinct and aloof from society. While the main catalysts for the protests were perceived inequality and injustice, a belief that the government were corrupt and a lack of trust in them was also a key indicator for participation in the protests[133] as was the view that the political system was seen to be favouring the wealthy.[134]

The GJ protest movement was spawned in a very different way, and seemed to be triggered by a long build-up of simmering discontent with the political system and economic policies, rather than, as in the case of Iceland, a direct and catastrophic economic shock. The movement originated in an online petition posted by two small business owners in a Parisian suburb calling for lower taxes on essential goods. Five months later, in October 2018, a Facebook page called for people to wear a yellow vest and block roads to protest against a controversial and recently imposed fuel tax.[135]

By November 2018 a mass public demonstration had taken place, attracting over 300,000 people across France.[136] From then on what had been simmering online discontent, turned into the largest and most continuous mass movement France has seen in recent years, which became known as the GJ. It involved weekly mass demonstrations in Paris and widespread direct action against transport infrastructure, such as blocking roads, toll booths and roundabouts across small town and rural France, as well as other mass protests across other cities of France.[137]

QAnon's origins are more opaque and do not seem to be linked to a direct trigger or crisis event. Instead, QAnon originated with obscure 'Q-drops' on messaging boards, while participation in the QAnon 'conspiracy-spere' grew in correlation with Donald Trump's political prominence, whether to explain attacks on him by the media or to explain seemingly unconnected events claimed to be within his control. There is less to say about any external events that caused QAnon to flourish, in part due to a lack of data of the opinions of QAnon adherents.

## 5.2. Background Factors and Conditions

Background factors and conditions, such as political history, societal conditions or party system are all important for the success of populist parties. Alternative background conditions can manifest different political outcomes, and this is demonstrated by these case studies. The 'background' factor of importance for QAnon is the prominence of the internet enabling participation in the movement and its growth. The other two case studies

[133] Bernburg J.G . (2016), Economic crisis and mass protest: The pots and Pans revolutions in Iceland. *Oxon and New York*, Routledge. 2016. *Research Gate.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299485242

[134] Bernburg J.G . (2016) Economic crisis and mass protest: The pots and Pans revolutions in Iceland. *Oxon and New York*, Routledge. 2016. *Research Gate.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299485242

[135] Fear of a Yellow Planet The Gilets Jaunes and the End of the Modern World-System.pdf

[136] Ibid.

[137] Royall, F., 2020, The Gilets Jaunes protests: mobilisation without third-party support, *Modern and contemporary France,* Volume 28, issue 1.
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09639489.2019.1676217

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demonstrate how the particular history and political tradition of each country – Iceland and France – plays out differently. France has a strong street protest tradition, which influences how citizens may express discontent, whereas Iceland has none of this tradition but has traditionally been a largely classless and equal society, leading to expression of political anger and discontent being focused on elites and government, rather than other groups in society.

As detailed in the PP case study, and alluded to in the section above, the particularly small and tight knit nation of Iceland is an important background factor explaining events there. The 'normalisation of questionable behaviour' in the Icelandic financial sector, for example,[138] and apparent disregard for Icelandic institutions and the wellbeing of society and citizens not only produced a novel and moral shock to a historically close-knit society, but led to rapid rise in inequality in a previously relatively equal and largely classless society. Explanations for this shock from those most likely to participate in protests was that the governing authorities were corrupt. Whether this distrust is warranted due to the government's behaviour and decision making, and whether it could be interpreted as the beginnings of a populist style distrust of elites more broadly, is an open question.

The primary role played by the internet and the online world of communication is an important background condition to consider with QAnon. The main form of participation in the QAnon movement is online, with people engaging with QAnon research and discussion through forums, Facebook pages and comment boards.[139] The monetisation of polarising and extreme views on various online platforms also drives traffic to this conspiracy theory, amplifying its reach and impact in ways impossible prior to such algorithmically driven communication platforms. People also come to participate through what could be termed 'gateway' interest communities, covered extensively in the case study below, such as the 'wellness' community[140], and what has been termed the 'cosmic right'.[141] The cosmic right are far right or alt-right tendencies that articulate their politics through magic and the occult and often within the culture surrounding the use of psychedelic drugs and 'self help' worldviews.

Events external to the QAnon world, such as concern for child welfare – which itself may indicate other anxieties relevant to populism, such as fear of societal change or breakdown of communities – are 'gateway concerns' that are used to draw people into the QAnon world. These concerns then rapidly turned into severe distrust and contempt of elites amongst participants. For example, versions of the hashtag #savethechildren, originally used for an NGO of the same name, draws people into the QAnon orbit through concern with missing children. Not only does this undermine the fight against child exploitation by bona fide charities,[142] it also feeds the fear and suspicion of elites. The outlandish theory at the heart of the QAnon conspiracy to explain missing children is that elite figures and globalists are involved in their kidnap. The opaque, dispersed yet

[138] Bernburg J.G . (2016) Economic crisis and mass protest: The pots and Pans revolutions in Iceland. *Oxon and New York*, Routledge. 2016. *Research Gate.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299485242
[139] Ibid.
[140] Breland, A., 15, April, 2020., Wellness Influencers Are Spreading QAnon Conspiracies About the Coronavirus, *Mother Jones,* Acccessible at:  https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2020/04/wellness-qanon-coronavirus/
[141] Gilbert, J., Davis, G., 13, August, 2020., (Podcast), Erik Davis on the Cosmic Right, *Novara Media* https://novaramedia.com/2020/08/13/microdose-erik-davis-on-the-cosmic-right/
[142] Roose, K., 12, August, 2020., QAnon Followers Are Hijacking the #SaveTheChildren Movement, *New York Times,* Accessible at: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/12/technology/qanon-save-the-children-trafficking.html

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participatory background condition of internet communication platforms is vital for the way in which the QAnon conspiracy spreads.

Three types of background conditions are important for the particular growth and spread of the Gilets Jaunes. The first relevant background condition is a 'democracy without choices' situation identified in PaCE D4.1 and D4.2. Second is the tradition of street protests and local organising in France, and third, similarly to QAnon, is the role the internet plays in organisation.

In an environment of declining confidence in existing democratic and liberal systems in France, this populist movement has emerged in a political context that already has two established populist parties – Marine Le Pen's FN of the far right, and Jean-luc Melenchon, representing the far left. The GJ case study shows us what voters may do when they are not only tired of 'democracy without choices'[143] but also may be frustrated with the inability of populist parties to either offer genuine alternatives, or make successful electoral breakthroughs in their countries. This in turn may be down to France's voting system, in which populists sometimes make it through the first round of voting but are then defeated by a coalition of voters.

The history of France's protest tradition is also an important background condition for the growth of the GJ. For example, as outlined in the GJ case study below, the 'assembly of assemblies' for the GJ was organised by a local group on social media platforms, at which delegations from approximately seventy groups then met in the village of Sorcy-Saint-Martin and approved a set of demands and principles.[144] It is no accident that this first 'assembly of assemblies' was organised in Commercy, however. Commercy has a political history of 'social-libertarian' organising in the area. Militants from this tradition were directly involved in the local group in Commercy, the presence of whom can be traced to the implementation of direct democracy and the practice of a federation of autonomous communes. This draws directly from this 'social-libertarian' tradition.[145]

Online organisation was also key to GJ and an important background condition to consider. Facebook groups centred around local grievances, where protests are announced and issues discussed, were at the centre of organising and vital to the growth of GJ's message. Indeed, the rapid growth of the GJ can be partially explained by a change to the workings of Facebook itself. In January 2018 Facebook altered its algorithm to ostensibly prevent the spread of fake news on its platform. To do this, the algorithm began pushing posts onto user's feeds from other Facebook 'friends' rather than from established media organisations. Quite rapidly, GJ posts – which were emotive, engaging and from accounts local to the user rather than frm national media organisations – started filling up people's Facebook feeds promoting local grievances and protests across all parts of France. The prioritisation of this local messaging above national media organisation's message was seen as vital to the rapid growth of GJ.[146]

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[143] PaCE. 2021. Deliverable D4.2, 'Theoretical Model of Causes of Populism' p37
[144] Kouvelakis, S., (March - June 2019), The French Insurgency. Political Economy of the Gilets Jaunes
*New Left Review*. 116/117.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Bock, P., 06, December, 2018, How Facebook fuelled France's violent gilet jaunes protests, *Wired,*
https://www.wired.co.uk/article/les-gilet-jaunes-yellow-vest-protests-in-france-facebook

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## 5.3. Belief Systems and Ideologies

The belief systems and ideologies of social movements are not as tightly defined as they are with hierarchical and policy oriented political parties. This again shows how emotions, attitudes and beliefs that may be susceptible to populism can find different political expressions, sometimes in a more extreme and outlandish way, as is the case with QAnon, and alternatively in a more forward looking and novel way, as with the PP constitutional reform programme.

The PP movement was characterised by the mobilisation of a range of different actors - intellectuals, activists, artists, citizens, academics - in a cross section of Icelandic society, united against the government and in favour of institutional reform. The narrative was the people against a corrupt political system, a populist characteristic, and against an inept and possibly corrupt government and system of malfunctioning regulatory institutions. Originally, participants in the protest movement came most prominently from people identified as left wing. However, during the ongoing crisis, protest behaviour expanded to the political centre. Protest participation has now become more generally accepted in Icelandic society since the crisis.[147] While initially the PP movement did not have a strategic vision or policy agenda of wider political or institutional reform it later led to a call for a review of the Icelandic constitution and developed a 'constitutional council', which submitted a draft of a new constitution to the parliament in 2011.[148]

A correlation between populist attitudes (defined as 'anti-elitism') and 'generic conspiracy belief', suggests that some people who support populist parties could be particularly susceptible to conspiracy theories built on the accusation of some kind of abuse of power by elites.[149] This susceptibility of a person's belief system finds expression in 'populist conspiracy theories' like QAnon. While QAnon has no policy positions or defined ideology as such, it does express a manichean worldview in common with populist parties and it does have a set of beliefs, traits and a worldview proximate to a populist outlook. It is a worldview that is extreme and grounded in profound polarisation, one in which global elites are pitted against 'the people', and in which QAnon adherents espouse a broad and deep suspicion of all elites, mistrust of established authorities and a distrust of science. Unlike with many populist parties, however, this suspicion of elites does not express itself in a specific political programme for change, but rather it produces a more unfocussed and unrestrained range of inflated fears and antagonisms. For example, the 'antagonism between the populist world-view and scientific evidence'[150] has been identified as the source of some populists' climate change denial[151] and vaccine scepticism.[152] This has particular import in today's times, as scientific authority is underpinning controversial policy decisions related to

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[147] Bernburg, J. G. (2019). The cascading crisis and the changing base of popular protest: The case of Iceland. *Current Sociology*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392119833104

[148] Hannah Fillmore-Patrick Sarajevo, by. (2013). *The Iceland Experiment (2009-2013): A Participatory Approach to Constitutional Reform: A report from Democratization Policy Council (DPC)* (Issue August). www.democratizationpolicy.orgwww.democratizationpolicy.org

[149] Castanho, B., Vegetti, F., Littvay, L., 2017, 'The elite is up to something: Exploring the relationship between populism and belief in conspiracy theories'. *Swiss Political Science Review* 23(4): 423–443
https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/spsr.12270

[150] Erbal, J., Huber, R., A., Greussing, E., 2019. 'From Populism to the 'Plandemic': Why populists believe in COVID-19 conspiracies'. Forthcoming. p4

[151] Fraune, C., Knodt M., 2018, 'Sustainable energy transformations in an age of populism, post-truth politics, and local resistance' *Energy Research & Social Science*, 43:1

[152] Kennedy, 2019 "Populist politics and vaccine hesitancy in Western Europe: an analysis of national-level data." *European Journal of Public Health* 29: 512–516.

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the COVID-19 pandemic.[153] Research is interestingly showing that while support for populist parties may be declining during the Covid-19 pandemic, support for conspiracy theories are on the rise.[154]

Participants in the GJ movement have a more complex and diverse set of political beliefs and ideologies. According to one major opinion poll included in the case study below a small majority of the GJ self-identify with the left or far left (58%), while 18% identified with the right or far right.[155] Another poll showed that only 2% expressed anti-immigrant sentiment, challenging any idea that the GJ are a far right or nativist movement.[156] However, this is complicated by another study by the *Foundation Jean Jaures'*. In this study, 50% of those who had actually participated in GJ protests, rather than those who said they supported it, said they believed in a 'global Zionist conspiracy'.[157]

More complicated still are the voting patterns of the GJ. In an opinion poll investigating voting patterns in the May 2017 presidential election carried out by the Elabe Institute, 36% of participants in the GJ voted for the far-right candidate Marine Le Pen, whereas only 28% voted for Jean-Luc Melenchon, the candidate of the far left.[158] This discrepancy, between the self-identification of being far left with relatively small voting patterns for a far-left candidate could be a sign of the lack of faith in the political parties mentioned above, or it may demonstrate a case of strategic voting of the type identified in PaCE D4.2.

The content of the GJ directives also implies an ideology more akin to the far-left. For example, a study by Le Monde journalists of the GJ 'forty-two directives' concluded that two thirds could be considered 'very close' to the radical left, whereas just under half were 'compatible with' the position of the far right. However, all directives were 'very far removed' from the economically liberal policies and ideology of Emmanuel Macron, the French president.[159] The GJ also appears disdainful of representative democracy in its current form, demonstrated by the GJ demand to create a citizen's referendum 'as a forum for popular sovereignty', transcending liberal democratic institutions.[160] The GJ may be a case that demonstrates that in a political system that excludes populist parties successfully, like France, populist voters desire for radical change of liberal democratic institutions does not simply go away, but may end up elsewhere, such as on the streets.

[153] Erbal, J., Huber, R., A., Greussing, E., 2019. 'From Populism to the 'Plandemic': Why populists believe in COVID-19 conspiracies'. Forthcoming. p4

[154] Henley, J., Duncan, P., October 2020, 'European support for populist beliefs falls, YouGov survey suggests' *Guardian* https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/26/european-support-for-populist-beliefs-falls-yougov-survey-suggests

[155] Wilkin, Peter. (2020). Fear of a Yellow Planet The Gilets Jaunes and the End of the Modern World-System. 10.5195/JWSR..

[156] Ibid.

[157] Ifop pour la Fondation Jean-Jaurès et Conspiracy Watch Enquête sur le complotisme – Vague 2 □ Janvier 2019 https://jean-jaures.org/sites/default/files/redac/commun/productions/2019/0220/rapport_complot.pdf In Lem, W. Notes on militant populism in contemporary France: contextualizing the gilets jaunes. *Dialect Anthropol* **44,** 397–413 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-020-09595-1

[158] Rose, M., Baker, L., 06, December, 2018. No leader, lots of anger: can France's 'yellow vests' become a political force? *Reuters*, Accessible at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-protests-future/no-leader-lots-of-anger-can-frances-yellow-vests-become-a-political-force-idUSKBN1O51ON

[159] Damgé, M., Durand, A., Vaudano, M., ; Baruch, J., Breteau, P., 04, December, 2018, Sur un axe de Mélenchon à Le Pen, où se situent les revendications des gilets jaunes, *Le Monde*, Accessible at: https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2018/12/04/sur-un-axe-de-melenchon-a-le-pen-ou-se-situent-les-revendications-des-gilets-jaunes_5392592_4355770.html

[160] Lem, W. (2020), Notes on militant populism in contemporary France: contextualizing the gilets jaunes. *Dialectical Anthropolology* 44, 397–413, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-020-09595-1

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## 5.4. Political Factors - Leadership and Organisation

Political factors, including leadership, political narratives and organisation play a key role in how crises and public attitudes form and find political expression. Studying social movements and atypical populist examples like QAnon shows how attitudes may find alternative political expression if the causal mechanisms are different in a given context. Political factors include leadership and political organisation. These three case studies consider the organisation and leadership (or lack of leadership) of each movement to show these alternatives. The success of populist parties is heavily contingent on good leadership, and while questions of leadership are less striking for social movements, the questions of how the movement is organised, often in the absence of leadership, plays a key role in considering social movements and their success. Whether or not the movement has a leadership, how this operates, or how the movement is organised will be considered in this section.

From the outset, as mentioned above, the PP movement was initially informally led by well known local activists and intellectuals but it did not did not seem to have a longer-term strategic vision, although some of the criticisms of the government were laid out prior to the movement from academics, citizens, and social activists. While initially the movement was in this sense reactive to events, the lack of clear leadership did not prevent it from leading to the creation of a constitutional council. While not directly representative of the PP movement or speaking on its behalf, a draft of a new constitution, as mentioned above, was submitted to the parliament in 2011.[161] Later, as discussed below, the varied nature of the PP produced an array of new political parties.

There is no 'organisation' of QAnon in the conventional sense, but there are identifiable methods through which the 'theory' is promulgated and coherent methods through which people can participate in the conspiracy theory. QAnon's organisation is participatory and leaderless and its growth and activity is driven by two factors. The first factor driving QAnon activity are the 'Q drops'. Q drops are opaque messages from an unknown source posted online at 4Chan and later 8Chan. The author, Q, claims to be working inside the government, and Q's messages often appear riddle-like, but with the same QAnon-style tropes and messages re-appearing.[162] These opaque communiques act as clues for QAnon followers. The clues are open to interpretation, never giving away all the information necessary, and they encourage participants to research themselves. Given the easy accessibility of conspiracy-related content online, any searches for terms mentioned in the drops will lead to an existing reservoir of supportive content. However, the Q-Drops also link directly in with another main driver of QAnon activity, which is real world political events being interpreted through the polarising lens of the QAnon 'conspiracy-sphere', such as elections (or claims of electoral fraud), statements by Donald Trump, the arrest of Jeffry Epstein and immigration 'events', such as the 'migrant caravan' that travelled through central America to Mexico.[163]

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[161] Hannah Fillmore-Patrick Sarajevo, by. (2013). *The Iceland Experiment (2009-2013): A Participatory Approach to Constitutional Reform: A report from Democratization Policy Council (DPC)* (Issue August). www.democratizationpolicy.orgwww.democratizationpolicy.org
[162] LaFrance, A., June 2020. The prophecies of Q. American conspiracy theories are entering a dangerous new phase. *Atlantic*. Accessible at: https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/
[163] Gallagher, A., Davey, J., Hart, M., 2020. The genesis of a conspiracy theory: Key trends in QAnon activity since 2017. *Institute for strategic dialogue*. London. Accessible at: https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Genesis-of-a-Conspiracy-Theory.pdf

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The GJ movement is actively hostile to any form of leadership or structure, or any commitment to a single ideology. The GJ also vigorously opposes hierarchy of any kind, considering it anathema to the movement.[164] The GJ does, however, still have a recognisably organised form. Committees and assemblies are at the core of the GJ organisational structure, organised horizontally. Local committees convene to organise protests, gatherings and actions, and declarations are often decided and announced through a federation of assemblies. What became known as the 'assembly of assemblies' was first organised, as discussed above, in Commercy, a small town in north-eastern France in January 2019.

## 5.5. Impact and Outcomes

The success or failure of populist parties can be accurately measured by counting votes at elections and policy outcomes achieved. Social movements are a little different. In this section the cultural, social and political impacts – both positive and negative – are considered. Social movements do not necessarily have a policy programme (although some, like GJ, do). They can, however, contribute to significant political and societal outcomes. The outcomes of each case will be considered below. GJ, for example, could be considered to have had a policy win through the reversal of the fuel tax, which sparked the initial GJ protests. PP achieved constitutional change in Iceland, and QAnon, in a completely different way, appears to have embedded a deep distrust of authorities and media in a significant minority of Americans, and to a lesser degree Europeans, polarising and degrading public debate. In the context of the current pandemic, this is having an impact on support for public health measures and vaccine hesitancy.

In Iceland there is more willingness to engage in protest and politics more broadly following the PP 'revolution'. However, a significant change in the political landscape, which correlates with the success of the PP movement, is the rapid rise in the number of new political parties have been set up and contested elections. Before the financial crisis the Icelandic political landscape consisted of four dominant parties, a farmer's party, the independence/conservative party, the social democrats, and a socialist party. By 2013 the electoral landscape included 15 parties.[165], with 8 of those currently represented in the Icelandic parliament. The Pirate Party, with a hard core of cyber activists / freedom technologists is the most successful of these and has become a permanent part of Iceland´s political landscape popular amongst liberal urbanites.[166] As a result Iceland's political landscape is fragmented, with elections in 2009, 2013 and snap elections in 2016 following a political scandal produced by revelations found in the Panama papers and another scandal in 2017 due to the public pardoning of a sex offender with ministerial connections (see PP case study above). The extent to which the causation can be traced to the PP movement, the shock of the financial crash, the consequent austerity measures introduced following this or ongoing political scandals is an open question beyond the analysis in this report.

In the case of QAnon there are direct electoral indicators from the US that may give a forewarning for Europe. As many as 27 congressional candidates in the 2020 US elections have 'endorsed or given credence' to

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[164] Royall, F., (2020) The *Gilets Jaunes* protests: mobilisation without third-party support, *Modern & Contemporary France*, 28:1, 99-118, 10.1080/09639489.2019.1676217

[165] Ómarsdóttir, S. B., & Valgarðsson, V. O. (2020). Anarchy in Iceland? The global left, pirates and socialists in post-crash Icelandic politics. *Globalizations*, *17*(5), 840–853. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2020.1722496

[166] Ómarsdóttir, S. B., & Valgarðsson, V. O. (2020). Anarchy in Iceland? The global left, pirates and socialists in post-crash Icelandic politics. *Globalizations*, *17*(5), 840–853. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2020.1722496

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QAnon.[167] One Republican candidate, Marjorie Taylor Greene, a full-throated supporter of the QAnon conspiracy theory, won a house seat in Georgia.[168] However, a vital consideration for the likely impact of QAnon in each country relates to the nature of background conditions located there. Some countries are more susceptible to breakthroughs in parties or the electoral system. The open primary system in the US and the relative lack of central control by the Republican party, for example, makes it particularly susceptible to infiltration by QAnon extremists in a way that does not translate to many European populist parties or countries.[169]

The most 'striking' increase in QAnon activity online is related to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, according to a study by the *Institute for Strategic Dialogue,* covered below, which analysed key trends in QAnon activity since 2017, the number of Facebook users 'engaging in QAnon conversation' increased from an 'average of 344 unique users per day between March 2 and 8, to 898 between March 22 and 29', Twitter users grew from 37,302 to 89,338 over the same period and Facebook group membership and engagement rates within those Facebook groups increased by 120% and engagement rates increased by 91% in the same month.[170] This type of activity can create an extreme political shadow within democracies, lurking in online information sharing and discussions and eroding institutional and scientific authority during crises like COVID-19.

The GJ have had some direct policy victories. The fuel tax, for example, opposition to which was widely seen as the birth of the movement's demands, was reversed by Macron following mass GJ protests.[171] In an apparent attempt to appease the French public in the wake of the early GJ Acts, Macron also held a series of Town Hall meetings.[172] While support and attendance on demonstrations was waning prior to the Covid-19 crisis, the lasting impact of GJ is unclear as its raison d'etre of large and continued street mobilisations was effectively ended with the lockdown measures in France to deal with the pandemic.

## 5.6. Concluding Remarks

Studying these social movement case studies confirms in some ways the causal models set out on PaCE D4.1 and D4.2. It does so, however, by demonstrating that populist parties themselves do not have to be successful for populist politics to have impacts within a society.

There is evidence in these case studies that populist tendencies, attitudes and demands made against liberal and democratic institutions can come from sources other than populist parties. The conditions that produce social

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[167] Kaplan, A, 09, October, 2020, Here are the QAnon supporters running for Congress in 2020, *MediaMatters*. Accessible at: https://www.mediamatters.org/qanon-conspiracy-theory/here-are-qanon-supporters-running-congress-2020

[168] Rosenberg, M., 03, November, 2020., A QAnon Supporter Is Headed to Congress, *New York Times,* Accessible at:https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/03/us/politics/qanon-candidates-marjorie-taylor-greene.html

[169] Margulies, B., 08, October, 2020., Even if it wanted to, the Republican Party can't stop the spread of QAnon conspiracies and the candidates which support them, *Blogs LSE,* Accessible at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2020/10/08/even-if-it-wanted-to-the-republican-party-cant-stop-the-spread-of-qanon-conspiracies-and-candidates-which-support-them/

[170] Gallagher, A., Davey, J., Hart, M., 2020. The genesis of a conspiracy theory: Key trends in QAnon activity since 2017. *Institute for strategic dialogue.* London. Accessible at: https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Genesis-of-a-Conspiracy-Theory.pdf

[171] Wilsher, K., 05, December, 2018, Macron scraps fuel tax rise in face of gilets jaunes protests, *Guardian,* Accessible at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/05/france-wealth-tax-changes-gilets-jaunes-protests-president-macron

[172] With a town-hall tour, Emmanuel Macron tries to win France back. 09, February, 2019, *Economist,* https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/02/09/with-a-town-hall-tour-emmanuel-macron-tries-to-win-france-back

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movements in the place of (or alongside) populist parties in effect show a different path for the causal models used in PaCE if different conditions pertain. It is difficult to predict in which direction certain crises and attitudes will go, something task 4.4 is attempting to understand with foresight modelling. Social movements and conspiracy theories that influence public debate and online discourse are important components to consider in this foresight planning, as these are likely given different circumstances now and in the future. However, these case studies demonstrate for us now that society and politics can be pulled in different directions as a result of crises and triggers that elsewhere produce support for populist parties. This reinforces much of PaCE's findings in other work packages and points to contingency and context as key to understanding whether a populist party will gain power in a particular country.