Eder-Ramsauer | Kim | Knott | Prentoulis [Eds.]

Populism, Protest, and New Forms of Political Organisation

Nomos

This series publishes contributions to populism research and encompasses a wide range of theoretical, intellectual-historical, and empirical approaches. In addition to publications documenting the workshops and conferences of the DVPW Populism Group, the series features monographs, edited volumes, and academic essays that reflect the entire spectrum of the growing field of populism research. Authors can submit complete manuscripts or short abstracts with an outline and timetable to populismus@dvpw.de. Manuscript submissions undergo an internal review process conducted by the series editors and the advisory board.

Schriften der Themengruppe Populismus in der DVPW

edited by

Dr. Daniela Caterina
Nina Elena Eggers
Dr. Seongcheol Kim
PD Dr. Kolja Möller
PD Dr. Veith Selk

Scientific Advisory Board

Brigitte Bargetz (Kiel), **Paula Diehl** (Kiel),
Federico Finchelstein (New York), **Mareike Gebhardt** (Münster),
Dirk Jörke (Darmstadt), **Jan-Werner Müller** (Princeton),
Martin Nonhoff (Bremen), **Birgit Sauer** (Wien),
Jasmin Siri (München), **Gabriele Wilde** (Münster)

Volume 2

Andreas Eder-Ramsauer | Seongcheol Kim
Andy Knott | Marina Prentoulis [Eds.]

Populism, Protest, and New Forms of Political Organisation

Nomos

Onlineversion
Nomos eLibrary

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

Andreas Eder-Ramsauer, Seongcheol Kim, Andy Knott & Marina Prentoulis
June 2022

Introduction

Andreas Eder-Ramsauer, Seongcheol Kim, Andy Knott & Marina Prentoulis

Ten years after an intense wave of protests erupted around the globe and fundamentally placed existing political orders in question, this volume aims to look back and ask: what has come of it? The "movements of the squares" kicked off with the onset of the "Arab Spring", followed by such diverse displays of popular upheaval as the 15-M in Spain, Aganaktismenoi in Greece, Occupy Wall Street in the United States, Gezi Park in Turkey, Euromaidan in Ukraine, and – toward the end of the past ten years – Yellow Vests in France or, indeed, Querdenken in Germany. Part of the challenge ten years on is to grapple with the sheer diversity of new forms of contentious politics of the past decade that share certain features – such as a repertoire of public square assemblies or occupations, the lack of centralised organisation, the claim to "real democracy" against the existing system in the name of a vaguely defined whole – but may radically differ in the specific character of their demands, the demographic profile of their participants, or indeed the political forces that seek to channel them in various directions. In this vein, the intersections between populism – a term whose meteoric career as a buzzword inside and outside academia has coincided with the past decade inaugurated by the movements of the squares – protest, and political organisation offer an especially relevant entry point for reflections on the broader implications of the post-2010 protest wave. Having their roots in a perceived "crisis of representative democracy" (Tormey 2015; Flesher Fominaya 2017) – or autocracy in some contexts – the squares protests expressed a deep dissatisfaction with existing structures of representation and spawned wide-ranging experimentation with new forms of political participation and organisation, whether in the protest encampments themselves with their "horizontal assemblies" on the squares (Hardt/Negri 2012; Prentoulis/Thomassen 2013; Sitrin/Azzellini 2014) or in the form of political parties vying to channel the mobilisational energies unleashed by these movements into novel forms of organisational practices, from "movement parties" to "digital parties" (Della Porta et al. 2017; Gerbaudo 2018; Kim 2020). These forms of protest and political organisation, in turn, took on a populist character to the extent that they interpellated "the people", "the citizenry", or "the 99%"

against a power bloc of "the elite", "the caste", or the top "1%" (Gerbaudo 2017a; Mouffe 2018; Katsambekis/Kioupkiolis 2019). The question, then, is how to evaluate and trace the developmental trajectories of not only the protest mobilisations themselves, but also their organisational aftermath – not least in relation to populism and party politics. These questions are all the more urgent against the background of a global pandemic that has been interpreted by some as a final blow to the neoliberal hegemony of the past decades (Gerbaudo 2021) or an "end of the end of history" (Hochuli/Hoare/Cunliffe 2021). The ups and downs in the fate of new party-political contenders and protest movements alike leave the future of the political landscapes of many countries highly uncertain. We aim to offer some reflections on what was and what might come.

This volume is based on contributions to the international confe-rence "Populism, Protest, and New Forms of Political Organisation: Ten Years after the Movements of the Squares", which was held at the Freie Universität Berlin in September 2021 and jointly organised by the Popu-lism Groups of the German Political Science Association (DVPW) and the Political Studies Association (PSA). The conference brought together scholars from around the globe – from Germany and the United Kingdom to India and Brazil. The collected chapters reflect this diversity and draw on theoretical inspirations as well as empirical cases encompassing a wide range of contexts from Western and Eastern Europe to Latin America. In a similar vein, they reflect the variety of approaches to grappling with the intersections between populism, protest, and political organisation – from psychoanalytic or postcolonial perspectives to the established ideatio-nal and discursive approaches to populism of Mudde (2004) and Laclau (2005), respectively, to Colliot-Thélène's (2011) democratic theory. All contributions have in common an overarching interest in populism in relation to protest and new forms of political organisation in the past decade. In the following, we discuss these intersections in turn, followed by an overview of the volume.

1. Populism and Protest

There has been a notable deficit in the established scholarship on popu-lism when it comes to reflections on the relationship between populism and protest – at least until more recent studies in the context of the move-ments of the squares. While Laclau (2005) as well as Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) draw on examples such as the Chartist movement or Occupy Wall Street, respectively, in their influential works on theorising

populism, the discursive and ideational literatures spawned by them did not initially have much to say about the role of populism in protest movements. Even more problematically, certain established paradigms such as Kurt Weyland's (2001) political-strategic approach to populism are arguably even blind to the potential intersections between populist and protest politics on a conceptual level.

Weyland's approach, which continues to enjoy widely recognised status in the literature as an established "school" of populism research,[1] defines populism "as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers" (Weyland 2001: 14). This bestows agency to the leader and his or her purely instrumental quest for office, whereas the followers are blind to the leader's intentions and the extent of their agency is to execute the leader's office-seeking designs. An uncharitable reading of Weyland's political-strategic approach would designate followers of populist movements as the willing dupes of the ambitious, ill-principled leader, presupposing in turn a questionable distinction between instrumental-strategic forms of politics such as populism and those that are based on deeper ideological coherence or principles. Protest movements, however, are deeply principled affairs and exemplary exercises in collective agency that defy a straightforwardly instrumental understanding of political mobilisation. In this vein, Weyland's approach makes it difficult to conceive of populism as intersecting with protest mobilisations from below, even when the latter fundamentally reject existing constellations of power and put forth demands for an alternative vision of society in the name of an unredeemed "people". According to Weyland's definition, these alternative visons and manifestations of bottom-up collective agency have no place within how populism should be understood, as the political-strategic approach forecloses the collective agency of "the followers" in favour of the top-down mobilisational calculus of "the leader".[2]

---

1 This is notably the case in recent handbooks that enshrine Weyland's political-strategic approach as an established paradigm alongside Mudde's ideational one, even where they oddly leave out introductory treatments of Laclau's influential discursive approach (Rovira Kaltwasser et al. 2017; de la Torre 2019).

2 The definitional fixation on unmediated leader-centrism is also problematic insofar as it would mean classifying as "populist" those groupings that have little to do with pitting a "people" against an "elite": for example, leader-centred religious or millenarian movements (Rueda 2021).

The post-2010 movements of the squares, if anything, have accentuated the need for a more dynamic and nuanced understanding of populism, not least for understanding the intersections between two phenomena that have seen a veritable explosion in the past decade: protest movements and populist politics. Recent contributions toward this endeavour include Aslanidis (2016, 2017) and Gerbaudo (2017a, 2017b), who have shed light on populism as a central feature of the post-2010 movements of the squares. Aslanidis (2016), for instance, develops an understanding of populism as collective action frame, drawing on frame analysis as an established method from social movement research to identify instances of populist constructions of "the people" against "the elite" in protest movements such as 15-M and Occupy Wall Street. On a conceptual level, Aslanidis (2017) rejects both extremes of understanding populism as either a top-down, leader-centric mode of politics (as was the case with Weyland) or an inherently bottom-up political form; instead, he investigates the dynamic interactions between the two poles, exploring the possibility "that party system populism occasionally emerges as a corollary of its bottom-up incarnation" (Aslanidis 2017: 305). Gerbaudo (2017a), in his influential work, has identified a distinct form of "leaderless populism" in movements of the squares such as the Tahrir Square protests, 15-M, Occupy Wall Street, and Nuit debout, suggesting an empirical concentration of bottom-up varieties of populism in the specific context of the post-2010 protest conjuncture. Drawing on Laclau's (2005) theory of populism, Gerbaudo (2017a: 7) understands populism as a dynamic discursive resource that cross-fertilised with anarchist and horizontalist forms of movement politics on the squares, giving rise to "citizenism" as a synthesis between "the neoanarchist method of *horizontality* and the populist demand for *sovereignty*". He thus also identifies a notable shift in the theoretical and political reference points of protest movements themselves: from the radical biopolitical autonomism of 1990s alter-globalisation movements and subcultures with their "Temporary Autonomous Zones" to the squares protests' counter-hegemonic claim to constitute a majoritarian popular identity as performatively enacted on mainstream digital platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Gerbaudo 2017c).

Gerbaudo's work has catalysed a growing body of literature drawing on Laclau's discursive approach in particular for examining populism in protest movements. Kioupkiolis (2019), for instance, speaks of "populism 2.0" in the movements of the squares as a productive synthesis between a politics of "the common" and of popular hegemony – likewise combining in this vein theories of biopolitics and hegemony, which had been widely considered polar opposites rather than potential bedfellows in ear-

lier debates within radical democratic theory on the post-2010 protest conjuncture (Lorey 2012; Kioupkiolis/Katsambekis 2014; Errejón/Mouffe 2015). Gerbaudo's discussion of citizenism has also opened up avenues for examining intersections not only between populism and protest, but also between populism, protest, and political organisation, especially in relation to the possibilities and limitations of combining a "horizontalist" politics of protest with populism – a question to which the following section now turns.

2. *Populism, Protest, and Political Organisation*

Gerbaudo's (2017a) idea of "citizenism" raises the question to what extent protest movements can indeed be horizontalist in their organisation and, at the same time, populist in their rhetoric. It has been noted that a defining feature of the post-2010 movements of the squares was their use of open, decentralised "horizontal assemblies" built on consensus-based forms of decision-making (Hardt/Negri 2012; Prentoulis/Thomassen 2013; Sitrin/Azzellini 2014). As Gerbaudo (2017b) has argued, such practices were grounded in – and performatively enacted – a distinctly populist and anti-oligarchical understanding of citizenship, according to which a broad mass of ordinary citizens, with their everyday practices of prefigurative politics on the squares, reclaims its rightful sovereignty from a corrupt establishment of political and economic elites. With the ebbing of these protest mobilisations and democratic experiments, however, voices such as Mouffe (2018: 65) called for going beyond "a purely horizontalist conception of radical democracy" and linking a project of radicalising democracy with left-wing populist party politics on the terrain of electoral and parliamentary politics. Indeed, the academic focus in recent years has arguably shifted toward an interest in how novel forms of party organisation take up the squares protests' calls for real democracy and participation, often in conjunction with populism. While the literature on movement parties (Kitschelt 2006; Della Porta et al. 2017; Prentoulis/Thomassen 2019) has keyed in on political parties' adoption of contentious frames from the protest arena in their discourses – taking up a similar line of research to that of Aslanidis – Gerbaudo's (2018) work on "digital parties" foregrounds the organisational dimension, pointing to direct linkages between populism and new forms of organisation in the wake of the post-2010 protest conjuncture.

Digital parties, following Gerbaudo, display a certain affinity to populist politics insofar as they are predicated on mechanisms of participation

geared toward a broad mass of atomised, politically non-organised citizens in the digital age – what Iglesias (2015) had referred to as "the people of the television" as the target audience of Podemos. With their "free membership model" (akin to that of social media platforms), digital parties break down traditional barriers to party membership by opening up the latter for anyone registered online and willing to take part in internal referenda with the click of a button. Kim (2022) has proposed here the overlapping concept of the "people's party of a new type" – an amalgamation of the mass *Volkspartei* in a digitalised guise and the Leninist "party of the new type" rallied around a vanguard-like leadership – with its affinities to a populist logic of representation, interpellating a broad, undifferentiated popular underdog linked via plebiscitary channels to a centralised leadership as the representative subject within the party. A still unresolved question in the literature concerns the precise intersections between this party type and "movement parties", of which Podemos has likewise been cited as a case in point: Prentoulis and Thomassen (2019), for instance, maintain an expansive understanding of movement parties (from Syriza to Corbyn's Labour) as a party form that synthesises – and lives off the productive tension between – horizontal movement-based politics and a vertical logic of hegemony, whereas Kim (2022) understands movement parties as a narrower party type privileging horizontal autonomy over vertical representation. A related question pertains to the extent to which lines of continuity can be drawn between the likes of Podemos and 15-M – a point that is often assumed in discussions of Podemos as a party that "emerged from" the 15-M protests – or whether Podemos ought to be understood as a specific form of populist entrepreneurship that relied heavily on a media-savvy leadership's rhetorical gestures toward the mobilisational energies of 15-M in the absence of a party organisation built around movement structures (de Nadal 2021).

3. Overview of the Volume

The present volume explores these intersections between populism, protest, and new forms of organisation in and after the post-2010 protest conjuncture in diverse ways. A first cluster of chapters opens the volume with focused discussions of party types that have emerged in the wake of the movements of the squares. *Lluis de Nadal* examines to what extent the example of Podemos, considered a paradigmatic case in digital party research, actually corresponds to the digital party model as understood by Gerbaudo (2018). He finds that the party has gradually moved away

from the ideal type in an effort to ensure longer-term survival and concludes that the case of Podemos offers little indication that the digital party model is becoming a preferred or sustainable path for political parties seeking to reinvigorate civic participation via novel organisational structures. The following chapter by *Seongcheol Kim* develops a distinction between "movement parties" and "people's parties of a new type" based on considerations on the relationship between populism and radical democracy drawing on readings of the radical democratic theories of Claude Lefort, Jacques Rancière, Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe. He thus proposes the beginnings of a typology of party types emerging from protest conjunctures, with "movement parties" and "people's parties of a new type" constituting two poles of a continuum between horizontal autonomy and vertical representation (as found in prototypical fashion in radical democracy and populism, respectively).

The next cluster of chapters examines the extent to which protest movements such as the anti-austerity protests in the UK or the Yellow Vests in France spawned new forms of (populist) popular identity and organisational practice. *Marina Prentoulis* analyses the post-2010 anti-austerity movement in the British context as a failed "populist moment" of the left in the sense of Mouffe (2018), whereby protest mobilisations such as the People's Assembly Against Austerity fell short of creating a transversal mass popular subjectivity in the mould of 15-M or Aganaktismenoi – in contrast to Brexit as a successful populist moment of the right, which was able to fall back on established nationalist understandings of sovereignty *qua* separation from the EU. In the following chapter, *Thomás Zicman de Barros* examines the possibilities and limitations of the collective identity of the Yellow Vests movement intersecting with an ethics of radical democracy based on openness for the Other. Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis as well as Eugênio Bucci's work on communication and aesthetics, Zicman de Barros identifies tensions between conflicting moments of openness and closure in the "people" as understood by Yellow Vests protesters interviewed as part of his field work. In a similar vein, *Céline Righi* keys in on the tensions between an inclusive collective identity and in/out-group dynamics in the Yellow Vests movement, drawing on Catherine Colliot-Thélène's democratic theory and an extended analysis of the Yellow Vests' organisational practices of community-building around self-built shacks and assemblies. Critiquing approaches that apply an ideational understanding of populism to the Yellow Vests, Righi argues that the complex dynamics and fundamental tensions characterising the movement's collective identity point to a lack of symbolic mediation that also permeated its attempts at organisation-building on the roundabouts.

The next cluster of chapters examines the various aesthetic, organisational, and representational practices of populist parties in their quest for governmental power as well as their appeals to protest mobilisations. *Morgane Belhadi*, building on the France focus in the previous chapters, analyses populist visual representation in the presidential campaign posters of the Left Front and then La France Insoumise on the one hand and the Front National and then the Rassemblement National on the other. Her analysis points to notable shifts in the visual self-presentations of competing populist forces of the left and far right in the context of party re-brandings as well as shifting appeals to protest politics (such as the Left Front slogan "*Place au peuple!*" in the early 2010s). *Hector Rios-Jara's* chapter examines the Corbyn experience – the period of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party, displaying certain left-wing populist characteristics – from the angle of party-movement interactions, especially the post-2010 student protests against rising tuition fees. He identifies a variety of positions taken by student activists toward Corbyn's Labour and concludes that a logic of subordinate incorporation characterised movement-party interactions, whereby movement activists entered the party with the aim of supporting Corbyn's leadership without developing new forms of organisation within it. *Florian Skelton* analyses shifts in the left-wing populist discourse of Syriza following the party's entry into government in 2015, including shifting constructions of "crisis" as an element that originally catapulted Syriza to power, a growing distance between "the people" and the figure of Alexis Tsipras, and the suspension of a dichotomous representation of the discursive field. Skelton calls for greater attention to the role of government from the angle of Essex School discourse analysis, drawing not least on psychoanalytic categories to trace shifting constellations of collective identities.

The final cluster of chapters explores the relationship between exclusionary forms of far-right populism and counter-protest movements from below. *Étienne Levac*, *Marwan Attalah*, and *Willames Sousa Borari* examine the construction of the indigenous Other in recent right-wing or far-right populisms in Brazil, such as that of incumbent President Jair Bolsonaro. Their analysis raises much-needed attention to the exclusionary in/out-group dynamics underlying established understandings of "the people" in the context of settler-colonial societies such as Brazil and the intensification of such dynamics by far-right populist entrepreneurs such as Bolsonaro. The chapter notably features a section written by indigenous activist Willames Sousa Borari offering a first-hand perspective on the day-to-day struggles of indigenous peoples in defence of their land. Finally, *Marieluise Mühe* examines the challenges for progressive civil society actors in Berlin

organising local counter-protests against the anti-lockdown Querdenken movement and its populist appeal to "the people" against extensions of the state's authority in the context of COVID-19 restrictions. Based on interviews conducted by the author, the analysis points to the unique organisational challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic – but also by the relatively ambivalent and diffuse character of Querdenken compared to overtly far-right or neo-fascist movements – for established civil society actors even in a context of deeply rooted structures such as in Berlin.

References

Aslanidis, Paris 2016: "Populist Social Movements of the Great Recession". In: Mobilization: An International Quarterly, 21 (3), pp. 301–321.

Aslanidis, Paris 2017: "Populism and Social Movements". In: Rovira Kaltwasser, Cristóbal et al. (Eds.): The Oxford Handbook of Populism. Oxford, pp. 305–325.

Colliot-Thélène, Catherine 2011: Democracy and Subjective Rights: Democracy without Demos. Hamburg.

De la Torre, Carlos 2019: Routledge Handbook of Global Populism. London/New York.

De Nadal, Lluis 2021: "On Populism and Social Movements: From the Indignados to Podemos". In: Social Movement Studies, 20 (1), pp. 36–56.

Della Porta, Donatella et al. 2017: Movement Parties against Austerity. Cambridge.

Errejón, Íñigo / *Mouffe*, Chantal 2015: Construir pueblo: Hegemonía y radicalización de la democracia. Barcelona.

Flesher Fominaya, Cristina 2017: "European Anti-Austerity and Pro-Democracy Protests in the Wake of the Global Financial Crisis". In: Social Movement Studies, 16 (1), pp. 1–20.

Gerbaudo, Paolo 2017a: The Mask and the Flag: Populism, Citizenism and Global Protest. Oxford.

Gerbaudo, Paolo 2017b: "The Indignant Citizen: Anti-Austerity Movements in Southern Europe and the Anti-Oligarchic Reclaiming of Citizenship". In: Social Movement Studies, 16 (1), pp. 36–50.

Gerbaudo, Paolo 2017c: "From Cyber-Autonomism to Cyber-Populism: An Ideological History of Digital Activism". In: tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique, 15 (2), pp. 477–489.

Gerbaudo, Paolo 2018: The Digital Party: Political Organisation and Online Democracy. London.

Gerbaudo, Paolo 2021: The Great Recoil: Politics After Populism and Pandemic. London/New York.

Hardt, Michael / *Negri*, Antonio 2012: Declaration.

Hochuli, Alex / *Hoare*, George / *Cunliffe*, Philip 2021: The End of the End of History: Politics in the Twenty-First Century. Winchester/Washington.

Iglesias, Pablo 2015: "Understanding Podemos". In: New Left Review, 93, pp. 7–22.

Katsambekis, Giorgos / *Kioupkiolis*, Alexandros (Eds.) 2019: The Populist Radical Left in Europe. Abingdon.

Kim, Seongcheol 2020: "Radical Democracy and Left Populism after the Squares: Social Movement (Ukraine), Podemos (Spain), and the Question of Organization". In: Contemporary Political Theory, 19 (2), pp. 211–232.

Kim, Seongcheol 2022: "Between Autonomy and Representation: Toward a Post-Foundational Discourse Analytic Framework for the Study of Horizontality and Verticality". In: Critical Discourse Studies, DOI: 10.1080/17405904.2022.2077397.

Kioupkiolis, Alexandros / *Katsambekis*, Giorgos (Eds.) 2014: Radical Democracy and Collective Movements Today: The Biopolitics of the Multitude versus the Hegemony of the People. Farnham.

Kioupkiolis, Alexandros 2019: "Populism 2.0: New Movements towards Progressive Populism". In: Katsambekis, Giorgos / Kioupkiolis, Alexandros (Eds.): The Populist Radical Left in Europe. Abingdon, pp. 168–193.

Kitschelt, Herbert 2006: "Movement Parties". In: Katz, Richard / Crotty, William (Eds.): Handbook of Party Politics. London, pp. 278–290.

Laclau, Ernesto 2005: On Populist Reason. London.

Lorey, Isabell 2012: "Demokratie statt Repräsentation: Zur konstituierenden Macht der Besetzungsbewegungen". In: Lorey, Isabell et al. (Eds.): Occupy! Die aktuellen Kämpfe um die Besetzung des Politischen. Wien, pp. 7–49.

Mouffe, Chantal 2018: For a Left Populism. London.

Mudde, Cas 2004: "The Populist Zeitgeist". In: Government and Opposition, 39 (4), pp. 541–563.

Mudde, Cas / *Rovira Kaltwasser*, Cristóbal 2017: Populism: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford.

Prentoulis, Marina / *Thomassen*, Lasse 2013: "Political Theory in the Square: Protest, Representation and Subjectification". In: Contemporary Political Theory, 12 (3), pp. 166–184.

Prentoulis, Marina / *Thomassen*, Lasse 2019: "Movement Parties: A New Hybrid Form of Politics?". In: Flesher Fominaya, Cristina / Feenstra, Ramón (Eds.): Routledge Handbook of Contemporary European Social Movements. London, pp. 343–356.

Rovira Kaltwasser, Cristóbal et al. 2017: The Oxford Handbook of Populism. Oxford.

Rueda, Daniel 2021: "Is Populism a Political Strategy? A Critique of an Enduring Approach". In: Political Studies, 69 (2), pp. 167–184.

Sitrin, Marina / *Azzellini*, Dario 2014: They Can't Represent Us! Reinventing Democracy from Greece to Occupy. London.

Tormey, Simon 2015: The End of Representative Politics. Cambridge/Malden.

Weyland, Kurt 2001: "Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics". In: Comparative Politics, 34 (1), pp. 1–22.

The Digital Party and the Case of Podemos: Flash in the Pan or Inescapable Destiny?

Lluis de Nadal

1. Introduction

Since the dawn of the internet age, the digitalisation of political parties has been a major topic of research in political science and communication studies. A subject of ongoing debate in the literature is whether the process of digitalisation will converge onto a single "ideal type" or rather produce substantial differences among political parties. The first position is most famously defended by Paolo Gerbaudo (2019), who argues that a new ideal type of party he calls "digital party" has the capacity to meet the participatory preferences of younger generations much more effectively than its predecessors and is thus set to become the hegemonic form of political organisation in the years to come. Others, on the other hand, contend that even if we are certainly witnessing a generalised tendency among political parties to digitalise their organisation, we should not expect all parties to transition to the digital world to the same degree or in the same direction (Barberà et al. 2021).

This chapter contributes to this debate through a case study of Podemos, which Gerbaudo (2019: 9) considers to be one of the most "impressive" digital parties. In his widely cited book *The Digital Party*, he uses Podemos' rapid growth, both organisational and electoral, as evidence for his claim that the twenty-first century is the century of the digital party, just like the previous century was that of the mass membership party. Gerbaudo (2019: 190) predicts that the early success of Podemos and other digital parties is likely to result in a process of contagion that will "reshape" mainstream parties, which will integrate elements of this ideal type "in order not to slide into irrelevance".

If this prediction is correct, we should expect not only mainstream parties to become digital parties, but also digital parties to continue to conform to this ideal type as they mature. To date, however, the literature has mostly focused on digital parties' formative stages, when the effects of their pioneering innovations had not yet been fully felt. As a result, we still know little about the challenges that digital parties may encounter