# Democratic Innovations and their Consequences for Spanish Political Parties

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Constitution-making
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**Abstract**

The literature on deliberation and, more specifically, the research strand on democratic innovations has been somewhat disconnected form party politics. This paper tries to contribute to an emerging scholarly debate form an empirical perspective. The aim of the paper is to qualitatively assess the main consequences of several democratic innovations introduced by the Spanish parties since the mid-2010s. We argue and test whether deliberative or mixed forms of Internal Party Democracy will foster more meaningful arguments, equality and diversity than the plebiscitary ones, and that offline involvement will promote wider participation and more meaningful arguments, equality and diversity than the online one. The main results suggest that the normative distinction between plebiscitary and deliberative modes of involvement is more complex than is generally exposed by the theory, and that ICTs might be playing an important role in softening their differences.

**Keywords**

political parties, deliberation, intra-party democracy, mixed forms

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**Introduction**

The scholarly research on democratic innovations has grown during the last two decades but, for different reasons, it has not properly addressed problems related to political parties (e.g. Johnson, 2006; Van Biezen and Saward, 2008). So far, only a small strand of contemporary democratic theorists have been actively engaged in analysing or proposing democratic reforms in political parties (e.g. Teorell, 1999; Hendriks, Dryzek and Hunold, 2007; Rosenblum, 2008; Wolkenstein, 2016, 2018; Invernizzi-Accetti and Wolkenstein, 2017).

On the other hand, during the last decades a growing number of political parties have tried to face their erosion of political support and legitimacy by implementing internal reforms (e.g. Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000). The empirical literature on political parties has indeed documented the most relevant democratic innovations and problems tackled by several party families such as the Greens or the new radical left (Poguntke, 1987; March and Mudde, 2005; Frankland, Lucardie and Rihoux, 2008; March, 2011). Some of these innovations have actually been inspired by the deliberative turn of contemporary democratic theory (e.g Dryzek, 2000), but in most cases political parties have opted for other ways to extend intra party democracy. Hence, the comparative literature on political parties has extensively analysed the trend toward inclusive candidate and leadership selection methods while other changes in policy-making and policy development have received less attentions (Cross and Katz, 2013). The latter are the research strands where deliberative theory has suggested normative improvements for political parties (Teorell, 1999; Wolkenstein, 2016).

This paper tries to enhance the dialogue between contemporary democratic theorists and the comparative study of political parties from an empirical perspective. In this respect, the paper analyses a trend toward new democratic decision-making procedures in policy issues or policy development that have received little attention from either the empirical and normative research on political parties. Interestingly, some of these new organizational arrangements are in line with new perspectives on democratic innovations beyond parties (e.g. Geissel and Joas, 2013; Hendriks, 2019). More precisely, the aim of the paper is to conduct a first qualitative assessment of the main consequences of different democratic innovations in some Spanish parties. On the one hand, the paper tries to present some empirical evidences of the main impacts and expectations suggested by contemporary democratic theories on political parties (Scarrow, 2015; Wolkenstein, 2016; Invernizzi-Accetti and Wolkenstein, 2017). On the other one, the paper is willing to contribute to the development of empirically based theories on the outcomes of several democratic innovations inside political parties.

Spain's political, economic and institutional crisis since the late 2000s constitutes a fertile research ground. After several decades of stability, the swift transformation of the Spanish party system has led not only to the emergence of new parties at the national and regional level, but to dramatic organizational changes in the mainstream ones. Most Spanish parties not only have embraced party primaries, but also adopted new and highly inclusive decision-making procedures such as membership ballots on policy issues or cooperative modes of policy development.

The rest of the paper is devoted, first, to build a theoretical framework suggesting how these different democratic innovations might have different internal party consequences and what role could play the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). After a short section on the case selection and methods, the main part of the paper will provide evidences of the outcomes of different modes of involvement on the Spanish parties. The last part of the paper will discuss the theoretical implications of the Spanish data and conclude.

## Democratic party innovations, new technologies and their consequences

The comparative literature on Internal Party Democracy (IPD) has documented several areas in which parties have innovated during the last decades (Kittilson and Scarrow, 2003; Cross and Katz, 2013). The main attention of this research strand has been focused on the democratization of candidate and leadership selection methods (e.g. Hazan and Rahat, 2010; Pilet and Cross, 2014; Sandri, Seddone and Venturino, 2015). These kind of processes, based on vote-centric modes of involvement, are also known as plebiscitary or aggregative forms of IPD due to the fact that the party leadership's might possess a high control of the preference formation mechanisms (framing the questions, timing, etc.) (Wolkenstein, 2016; von dem Berge and Poguntke, 2017). This plebiscitary logic might also be extended to policy development through party referenda and direct ballots on policy issues, although this has received less attention by the scholarly research (Scarrow, 2015; Nemčok and Spáč, 2019).

Most of the IPD empirical literature has been criticised by contemporary democratic theorists for its restrictive conception of democracy (Wolkenstein, 2016; Invernizzi-Accetti and Wolkenstein, 2017). Instead, they have suggested the need to redefine IPD through broad definitions of deliberation as collective discussions organized through several preference-formation procedures in which the merits of competing arguments are weighed (e.g. Fishkin, 2009, p. 33). Deliberative modes of IPD emphasize the use of preference-formation mechanisms as a complement to the plebiscitary ones, and as a transformative force in order

to (re)connect the party members with the main policy decisions (Teorell, 1999; Wolkenstein, 2016). So far, the academy has been able to identify several examples of deliberative modes of involvement. Some of them get back to the Greens' efforts to democratise intra-party decision making in the 1980s and 1990s (Poguntke, 1987; Burchell, 2001). This trend has also reach several Anglo-Saxon parties trying to extend the way they engage with party members, supporters, academics and civil society group in their process of policy making (Gauja, 2013, 2015). Other more recent examples might be also found in Europe where several deliberative practices in candidate selection, coalition behaviour or decision making led by new and mainstream parties have been identified by the literature (Barberà and Rodríguez-Teruel, 2020; Gad, 2020; Gherghina and Stoiciu, 2020; Gherghina, Soare and Jacquet, 2020; Vodová and Voda, 2020)

The democratic innovations literature has theorized and provided some preliminary findings on the (expected) outcomes of different modes of involvement and decision-making: Deliberative modes are estimated to increase, amongst others, meaningful arguments and the equality and diversity of viewpoints, while plebiscitary logics are better in order to promote wider participation of the party members. This research strand has also pointed out that deliberation might best be conceptualized as a continuum (not a dichotomy) and that more complex and emerging modes of innovation beyond plebiscites and deliberation have to be taken into account (Geissel and Joas, no date; Thomas Zittel and Fuchs, 2007; Fishkin, 2009; Smith, 2009; Geissel and Newton, 2012). In this respect, Hendricks has recently identified new and mixed forms of democratic innovations that might present shared features of both plebiscitary and deliberative modes of involvement (Hendriks, 2019). However, these impacts have scarcely been tested by the empirical research on political parties (but see, von dem Berge and Poguntke, 2017). That is why it seems convenient to formulate them as our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Deliberative or mixed forms of IPD will foster more meaningful arguments, equality and diversity than the Plebiscitary ones.

On the other hand, contemporary politics is becoming deeply dependent on the use of ICTs. That is indeed changing the way democratic innovations are conceived and implemented (e.g. Smith, 2009; Geissel and Joas, 2013). That said, so far technology still appears as a supplemental and not a key feature (Thomas Zittel and Fuchs, 2007; Cross and Katz, 2013).

Strictly speaking, most recent democratic innovations in political parties have not yet required ICTs in their implementation. Highly inclusive candidate and party leadership selection methods are still happening in ballot boxes and many deliberative experiments and practices have been applied offline (Kingdom *et al.*, no date; Hazan and Rahat, 2010; Gauja, 2013). Of course, by the late 1999s, the rise of the ICTs suggested high expectations of intra party organizational change and behaviour that afterwards have been somewhat moderated (Gibson and Ward, 1999; Ward and Gibson, 2009). In a seminal comparative research, Scarrow ( 2014, pp. 181–5) has recently highlighted that online procedures have generally less participation than their offline counterparts, particularly when the latter are implemented at the local level. Although Scarrow' findings have been somewhat contested (Romanos and Sádaba, 2016; Bennett, Segerberg and Knüpfer, 2018), we might state that:

Hypothesis 2: Offline involvement will promote wider participation and more meaningful arguments, equality and diversity than the online one.

**Case selection and methods**

Between the late 1980s and the early 2010s, the Spanish party system remained stable. Mainstream political parties successfully competed through catch-all strategies and had little incentives to drive organizational reforms. Intra party politics was channelled through representative party agencies where the role of party members was limited (e.g. Méndez, Morales and Ramiro, 2004; Verge, 2007). The socio-economic and political crisis fostered by the Great Recession of the late 2000s favoured dramatic changes on the party system. By the mid 2010s, new political parties emerged at both the regional and the national level promoting democratic innovations while mainstream parties also embraced IPD reforms. So far, that has indeed transformed Spanish politics into a dynamic arena to analyse highly inclusive and innovative experiences mostly only in candidate and party leadership selection methods, but eventually also in policy development and policy issues (Barberà, Lisi and Rodríguez-Teruel, 2015; Romanos and Sádaba, 2015, 2016; Borge and Santamarina, 2016; Astudillo and Detterbeck, 2018; Mikola, 2018).

As stated in the introduction, we are using the Spanish case as way to qualitatively assess some of the main consequences of intra party democratic innovations pointed out by the normative scholarly research, and to help building new empirically informed theory in an under-researched area.  In this respect, we are using a most similar systems design in order to

control for other potential variables that could be shaping our dependent variables. Having that in mind, the case selection has only considered democratic innovations on policy development and policy issues (not on personnel) driven by Spanish political parties at both the regional and national level. The political parties included in this study are the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Workers' Socialist Party, PSOE), Podemos (We can), Compromís (Committement), Partit Demòcrata Europeu de Catalunya (Catalan European Democratic Party, PDeCAT).

The paper is going to analyse two different kinds of democratic innovations. First it will focus on the PSOE and Podemos' membership ballots on coalition behaviour implemented during 2015 as examples of plebiscitary modes of engagement. Then it is going the paper will deal with three mixed experiences half way between clear cut deliberation and plebiscitary models such as Podemos' cooperative efforts to draft the party manifesto for the 2014 European Elections, Compromís decision on coalition behaviour for the 2015 general elections and the PDeCAT process to determine its name. Although not all the innovations were formally binding, they were in practice because of their democratic legitimacy. ICTs played a role in most of these processes. Some of them were conducted exclusively online (Podemos), others combined multi-staged online and offline methods (Compromís, PDeCAT), and only the PSOE's and the CUP's ones were exclusively developed offline.

As has been stated in the theoretical framework, scholarly research assessing democratic innovations is still scarce and has rarely been applied to political parties. However, two broad type of impacts generally stem from this literature. In this paper participation is measured both as the turnout and the agenda setting options of the participants. Turnout is a classical indicator linked to inclusiveness of the selectorate and the latter might be taken as a pointer of meaningful arguments. On the other hand, there are several relevant dimensions that might be connected to deliberative impacts. In his study of deliberation on several European party local branches, Wolkenstein has recently argued for their links to the diversity and equality dimensions. The former, basically refers to the existence of different viewpoints inside the party. The later, assesses to what extent all the participants enjoy equal standing in the process (Wolkenstein, 2018).


**Participatory and mixed democratic innovations in Contemporary Spanish parties.**

This section is devoted to analyse two different kind of democratic innovations implemented by the Spanish parties since 2014. Each type is illustrated through several case studies in order

to show similar trends and, eventually, some differences between them. Data comes from direct sources such as party statues, party websites and press releases and secondary ones such as academic books, articles or the press.

*Plebiscitary innovations*

Podemos is a radical left state-wide new party born in 2014. The party made its first breakthrough at the 2014 European elections, which sparked high levels of media attention and support. The EU results consolidated the ascendancy of Pablo Iglesias as party leader.  His power was clearly stated during Podemos first conference, where the party shifted its horizontal and ideologically-led procedures towards a top-down and electorally oriented approach. In addition, Podemos breakthrough at the 2015 regional elections consolidated its electoral advantage over one of the party's main competitors on the left, Izquierda Unida (United Left, IU). After the regional elections, the IU's party leadership tried to promote an electoral agreement with Podemos and other parties for the 2015 general elections. That began a debate within Podemos, where some of its party officials openly supported the initiative while Iglesias and the party executive rejected it. IU's proposal was supported by prominent figures on the left, such as film director Pedro Almodovar, and collected around 25.000 signatures.  In this context, the party leadership quickly called for a binding internal referendum on Podemos' coalition behaviour. However, instead of inquiring on IU's proposal, Iglesias suggested an alternative coalition with regional partners[1]. Hence, saying yes to the internal referendum implied saying no to a Podemos agreement with IU (El País 2015a). The membership ballot was held online between July the 18th and 22th 2016.

The PSOE is a state-wide social democratic party that contested the 2015 general election with a newly elected party leader, Pedro Sánchez. The 2015 general election didn't provide a clear-cut winner, which led to a PP caretaker government and opened a complex bargaining process. In the 2015 election the PSOE declined in votes and seats, but it remained as the second party in Congress and still had three main alternatives to form a viable minority government (Simón, 2016). That opened up a debate inside the party with different regional party leaders and other key figures arguing the pros and cons of the different alternatives. The uncertainty of the situation, were the PSOE's preferences also had to match other parties'

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[1] The question was: "Do you accept that Podemos' Council, in order to further a popular and citizen's electoral candidature, set an agreement with different political actors and the civil society if: a) they are limited to a regional setting; b) they keep Podemos' name and logo in the ballot papers?"

requirements, favoured that would-be party leaders also positioned themselves in the debates as way to undermine the party leader authority (Correa, Barberà and Rodríguez-Teruel, 2018).

To prevent the risks of a failed or questioned deal, the party leader negotiated with all the regional leaders non-binding internal referenda to each agreement reached with other parties. Although the PSOE opened up negotiations with all the main potential partners, by late February 2016 a first agreement was reached with Ciudadanos (Citizens, Cs). However, that was insufficient to guarantee the investiture vote and upset other alternative partners. In this context, the PSOE decided to organized it very first internal referenda. Following the rules set up by the highest representative internal agency, the party executive decided to ask its members the vague question: "Do you support these agreements to form a progressive and reformist government?". The membership ballot was held offline and, for the first time, online between February 26$^{th}$ and 27$^{th}$ 2016.

Both Podemos' and PSOE's internal referenda were among the first ones ever held in contemporary Spanish politics. As a consequence, and regardless their online or offline procedures, both parties were able to mobilise large numbers of party members (Table 1): around 45.000 in Podemos and around 94.000 in the PSOE. The turnout figures were quite different, though (Table 1). Podemos very inclusive conception of the membership (no fees and close to social media followers) meant that only around 12% of the party voted, while for the mainstream PSOE, the turnout was close to the 45%. In both parties there were limited deliberation procedures to set up the rules of the internal consultations (Table 1).

In the PSOE, the deliberation concerned the party executive and the highest representative agency. In Podemos that was approved along with all the other content of the 2014 party statutes. So, in terms of equality, all members were able to vote but only a small minority of the party representatives (PSOE) or the party executive (Podemos) were truly able to fix the rules of the internal referenda, and an even less inclusive groups such as the party executive (PSOE) and the party leader and his closest aides (Podemos) decided the timing and framed the question to be voted (Table 1). In both parties the public debate was largely dominated by the party leaders' clear stance on a particular outcome of the consultation. Hence, their proposals were supported by a very large share of the members.

Despite that, some regional party leaders and other prominent figures of both parties eventually voiced their concerns, but they mostly keep a low profile to avoid undermining the party leadership (Table 1). In Podemos, the low turnout figures were interpreted as a protest of the minority faction for the lack of a proper internal deliberation (El País 2015b). In the PSOE,

the lowest turnout and vote shares in favour were registered in those places where regional party leaders openly disagreed with the party leadership (El País 2015c). On the other hand, the openly vague and confusing questions could mislead the party members on the future implications of their voting, since that was openly discussed by the national media (Table 1): If they had alternative coalition preferences, people were somewhat forced to choose between them and their loyalty to the party leadership, which definitely undermined the rationality of the arguments. Overall, none of the two processes lead to serious disagreements and have been replicated by several other leftist parties in the following years (Table 1).

**Table 1. Summary of democratic innovations and their consequences in Spanish parties**

| | | PSOE | Podemos'15 | Podemos'14 | Compromís (The Block) | PDeCAT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Main factors** | | | | | | |
| Mode of involvement | | Plebiscitary | Plebiscitary | Mixed | Mixed | Mixed |
| Technology | | Offline (& online) | Online | Mixed | Online (& offline) | Mixed |
| **Organizational factors** | | | | | | |
| Size | | State-Wide | State-Wide | State-Wide | Regional | Regional |
| Leadership | | Weakened | Strong | Strong | Collective | Weakened |
| Time (approximately) | | 2 months | 1 week | 3 months | 3 months | 8 months |
| **Consequences** | | | | | | |
| Participation | | | | | | |
| | People | 94.000 | 45.000 | n.a. | 1.200 | 14.000 |
| | Highest Turnout | 45% | 12% | 100% | 40% | 53% |
| Deliberation | | | | | | |
| Arguments | Rationality | High | Medium | High | Medium | Low |
| | Implications | Clear | Clear | Clear | Clear | Blurred |
| | Rule-making | Low | Very Low | Very Low | Medium | Medium |
| Equality | Framing | Low | Very Low | Medium | High | High |
| | Timing | Very Low | Very Low | Low | Medium | Medium |
| Diversity | | Medium | Very Low | Medium | High | Medium |

*Mixed innovations*

Podemos' candidates and the party platform for the 2014 European elections were selected and drafted through a combination of online and offline mix of democratic innovations. By mid-January, Pablo Iglesias and the other promoters demanded the online support of 50.000 people through its newly launched website, which they achieved in just one day. Then, they

sponsored online and local support groups so-called Circles (Círculos). By early March 2014, Podemos opened up a very inclusive online process to select its candidates for the elections. Around 200 circles endorsed 150 candidates that were voted between March 27th and April 2nd by more than 33000 supporters. On the other hand, the party platform was drafted following a three-step procedure: first, the party asked its supporters to send their ideas through the party website; then, the local Circles made proposals and comments; and finally, an online binding consultation was called to ratify the final document[2]. This mix of deliberative and plebiscitary procedures along with the savvy use of the social media and Iglesias' knowledge was considered instrumental for Podemos' breakthrough in the elections and was then adapted for the party first assembly (e.g. Borge and Santamarina, 2016; della Porta *et al.*, 2017).

Compromís is an alliance of radical left and Valencian regionalist parties that made its regional breakthrough in 2011. El Bloc (The Block) is a key party of the alliance that has the majority of its party members and mayors. The leadership is, however, in the hands of *Mónica Oltra*, from a minority party of the alliance. Compromís got very good results in the 2015 regional elections, became the third most voted party, and was instrumental to form a new coalition government. After the regional elections, Oltra suggested the need to form an electoral coalition in the general elections with the state-wide Podemos.

That became a controversial issue for the Bloc because several party members and minority factions preferred to avoid such a coalition, which in turn risked to upset Oltra and break the alliance. In this context the party executive opted to call for an online non-binding referendum. The consultation took place in the middle of the summer holidays, between August the 6th and 12th 2015[3], which favoured very low media coverage and an even lower turnout (772 members, 26% of the census). Although the party executive's proposal was accepted, some members of a minority faction led by some mayors and a former party leader collected, in parallel, more than 1800 signatures of party members and supporters calling for a second and binding referendum rejecting any coalition with state-wide parties. After a heated debate at the Bloc's National Council (the highest representative party agency), a new online and offline referendum was called between September 12th and 19th 2015[4]. This time, half of the

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[2] Neither the dates or the participation and turnout figures of this consultation were released.
[3] The consultation didn't directly ask for a coalition with Podemos and was based on three conditions: the formation of a caucus in the Congress; the Compromís leadership of the candidature; and a common program.
[4] The members were forced to choose between two proposals: contest just as Compromís or build a coalition with Podemos and other state-wide parties.

party members voted and an overwhelming majority of them rejected a coalition with Podemos.

The results indeed disturbed Oltra that insinuated the breakdown of Compromís. The next four weeks an in-depth discussion took place, with qualified voices arguing its pros and cons in the regional media (Levante 2015). By early November, the Block's National Council approved, after hours of heated debate, a third online binding referendum proposed by the party executive for November the 3rd 2015[5]. This time, most of the main figures of the Block openly supported an electoral coalition and overshadowed all internal resistance. In less than 24h, more than 40% of around 3000 party members voted and three quarters accepted the coalition. Once and agreement was reached, it was ratified by the Block's National Council through a last online voting.

Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya (Catalonia's Democratic Convergence, CDC) was, a centre-right regionalist party that ruled Catalonia for decades. At the 2015 elections the party changed its main strategy and its coalition partner but felt short of an absolute majority. That is why, after the elections, the incumbent regional prime minister, Artur Mas, had to unwillingly resign as candidate to the investiture in order to secure the government for the coalition. Mas then focused on relaunching CDC, largely damaged by corruption scandals, swift strategy changes and the harsh implementation of austerity policies. In order to do that, CDC's organized between February and May 2016 a deliberative procedure so called Open Turn where party members and sympathisers gathered in local branches to respond a questionnaire on ideology, organization and strategy, and to discuss it with trained coaches in charge of channel their results to the party executive. As a consequence of the deliberative process, the party executive announced in early April the call of an offline binding referendum, on May the 21th 2016, on whether the party had to be renewed or fully relaunched.

In the meantime, neither the party executive or the public officials did not publicly support any of the two options. The voting day, around 14000 members (53% turnout) and sympathisers showed up, which resulted in a clear majority in favour of relaunching the party. Shortly afterwards, the party executive called the founding assembly of a new party aimed to be ideologically and organizationally different from CDC. The assembly was opened to all the party members although only those registered for the event and up to date with their fees

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[5] Two options were confronted: to keep the name of the alliance and form a coalition with Podemos and other left parties; to contest as the Block.

were able to vote. In this transformation the rebranding and, more particularly, the name of the new party became a key issue intertwined with the politics of the party leadership. After contacting a PR firm, in July 2016 the party executive suggested two names to the assembly that were openly criticised and refused by the party members (El País 2016a). That forced to set up a committee in charge of suggesting three alternative names that were finally voted by the whole assembly.

The new name, Partit Demòcrata Català (Catalan Democratic Party, PDC), upset a newly formed party with a close brand which alleged against its registration at the Home Office. Some months afterwards, by September 2016, the Home Office rejected the name and forced a new internal deliberation process restricted to representative party agencies. Finally, in October the party executive was able to register the final name the Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català (Catalan European Democratic Party, PDeCAT) and called a new binding online and offline referendum between October 21$^{st}$ and 22$^{nd}$ 2016 to ratify it. Around 3600 party members voted, most of them online, which represented a turnout around 33% of the total membership. This time, the party members overwhelmingly supported the decision.

The previous paragraphs have shown that mixed democratic innovations were able to mobilize large figures of party members and supporters (Table 1): more than 33.000 members voted in the state-wide Podemos, half of that figure in the regionalist CDC, and less prominent numbers in Compromís. In all three cases, the technology indeed allowed for quicker and cheaper decision-making procedures, but ICTs have been mostly used to support voting procedures, not deliberative ones. Podemos is indeed the main exception in this regard.

In all three cases, the party figures and the turnout oscillated due to the lengthy time-periods, different stages and several party agencies involved in each process (Table 1). In Podemos and Compromís the debates were clearly articulated and focused on policy demands or the pros and cons of each coalition arrangement. In the PDeCAT, the debates on the party name were more emotionally charged and involved other purposes such as undermining the authority of the party leadership. In all three parties all the party members enjoyed formal equal rights to vote. In Compromís and the PDeCAT the supporters also had a say on some stages of the decision-making process (that was unnecessary on Podemos). That said, the party members influence over the other aspects of the process differed substantially (Table 1). In Podemos all the main decisions on the rules of the process and the timing were left to the main promoters.

This was not the case in Compromís and the PDeCAT where the party members were able to change their respective party executives' timing, rules and even reframing the main debates. That was possible because in all three parties the diversity of viewpoints was substantially respected and protected (Table 1). In Compromís and the PDeCAT prominent figures of the party were even able to publicly argue and campaign against the party executive positions. In both parties, it is difficult to assert whether the democratic innovations undermined the party cohesion or just reflected previous internal differences. On the other hand, Podemos was clearly reinforced by such procedures and that is probably why in the first party assembly were included in the party statutes. Other left political parties such as the state-wide Equo, or regionalist parties such as the Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (Popular Unity Candidature, CUP) have also implemented similar democratic innovations.

**Discussion**

The revision of the scholarly debates on the main consequences of democratic innovations on political parties has pointed out the lack of comparative empirical evidences. That is why, based on the wider research on democratic innovations, this paper has formulated two main hypotheses linking the impacts that different modes of involvement and the use of ICTs have on the quantity and quality of the internal participation and deliberation. The first hypothesis was that deliberative or mixed forms of IPD will foster more meaningful arguments, equality and diversity than plebiscitary ones (H1). The second one, stated that the offline involvement will foster more wide and meaningful arguments, equality and diversity than the online one (H2).

In order to assess the relevance of our hypotheses and to suggest new intervenient factors that might help to understand the results, Table 1 presents a brief account of the main features described in the previous section. Regarding our first hypothesis, the comparison between the two examples of plebiscitary modes of involvement (PSOE and Podemos 2015) and the three cases of mixed ones (Podemos 2014, Compromís and the PDeCAT) does not seem to suggest different impacts on the arguments discussed. In all five cases the debates were mostly focused on the pros and cons and the implications of the different options. The PDeCAT might be the only case where de debates were more emotionally charged and the implications were more blurred due to their connection with other internal affairs. On the other hand, the modes of involvement do seem to have marked a difference on the equality. Key features of the PSOE's and Podemos's 2015 internal referenda were highly controlled by

either the party leadership or quite exclusive party agencies: they decided the rules of the consultation, framed the question and the moment where the consultation took place.

However, that was not the case of Compromís and the PDeCAT where the party members were able to change some of the rules, the timing and even reframe the debates. Podemos 2014 stands half way between the other four cases. Their supporters were not able to control the timing and the rules of the process, but were allowed to have a significant say on the content of the party platform. Finally, there are very mixed evidences regarding the impact of the modes of involvement on the diversity. Podemos 2015 and Compromís stand as very opposite examples supporting the hypothesis, but the other three case studies stand half way between them. In the PDeCAT, prominent figures as the party leader refrained to openly position themselves in the debates. In the PSOE, the party leader stood in one side, but several regional party leaders were also able to make their points through the mass media. Overall, the patchy evidences seem to support most of Hypothesis 1, although the differences between the modes of participation do not seem as clear cut as the literature seems to suggest.

The second hypothesis is also difficult to assess due to the mixed use of online and offline technologies in most of the cases analysed in this paper. The PDeCAT and the PSOE stand as examples that offline procedures might promote quite high participation figures and turnout. In the PDeCAT the first offline procedure mobilized more people and high turnout than the second one, but then this also has to do with the lower relevance of the online vote. In the PSOE, the use of online voting was quite accessory to the overall results. However, the evidences from Podemos and Compromís seem to suggest that participation depends more on the relevance and uncertainty of the voting than on the technology (see also Rodríguez-Teruel, Barrio and Barberà, 2016; della Porta *et al.*, 2017).

As also happened with the previous hypothesis, technology does not seem to be linked with the kind of arguments used in the debates. On the other hand, technology indeed seems to favour equality and diversity when combined with mixed modes of involvement. In Podemos 2014, the ICTs allowed party members to contribute to drafting the party manifesto. In the PDeCAT and Compromís, ICTs might have been a key way to organize dissent and to balance the arguments of the party leadership promoting higher equality in the way the debates were framed. Overall, the second hypothesis seems to contribute to higher deliberative impacts but does not seem quite related with the participation.

The comparative cases analysed on this paper also allow to inductively suggest the relevance that other organizational factors might play in shaping the results of these

democratic innovations.  The first one is the size of the party (Table 1).  As Gauja's seminal study has highlighted, size is a key factor that shapes most of the formal opportunities for participation because is far easier to facilitate membership involvement and access in parties with fewer members (Gauja, 2013). In the paper, size was linked to the state-wide (PSOE, Podemos) and non state-wide (Compromís, PDeCAT) nature of the different parties, which somewhat seems to support Gauja's observation: smaller parties offer higher participation and access than the state-wides. However, Podemos's bottom-up procedures and its intensive and use of the ICTs in 2014 proved that this divide might somewhat be overcome through organizational design and technology (e.g. Romanos and Sádaba, 2015, 2016).

The role of the party leadership also might appear as a key element shaping democratic innovations (Table 1). Depending on its powers and influence, the party leader might use them as an additional source of legitimation instead of as proper way to enhance participation and deliberation. Heavily top-down procedures have the potential risk to be used to dictate preferences instead of promoting preference formulation and/or aggregation (Gauja, 2013). When this happens, such practices generally become votes of confidence on the party leadership regardless of the questions at stake. In any of the selected cases of this paper the party leadership openly framed the procedure as a vote of confidence. The closer one was Podemos 2015, but this was never openly stated (something that did happened later on in time). However, as has been stated before, on the two plebiscitary cases both party leaders did take clear sides on the debate, as it happened at the end with Compromís. Finally, time appears to be highly intermingled with the different modes of involvement (Table 1). Plebiscitary forms took much less time to implement than mixed procedures. The clear opposites in this paper are, indeed, Podemos 2015 consultation that was set up in one week and the PDeCAT mixed procedure that involved around 8 months.

**Conclusions**

The aim of this paper has been to assess two main hypotheses linking several democratic innovations and the use of new technologies by political parties with different results in terms of internal participation and deliberation. For that purpose, the paper has focused on Spain, where most of its political parties have experienced with several democratic innovations since the mid 2010s. More specifically, the paper has qualitatively analysed five innovations from four Spanish political parties (PSOE, Podemos, Compromís, PDeCAT) combining diverse modes of involvement and uses of the ICTs.

The comparative empirical results point out, in line with recent developments in this research strand (Geissel and Joas, no date; Geissel and Newton, 2012; Hendriks, 2019), that the traditional normative distinction between Plebiscitary and Deliberative modes of involvement is blurring, and that ICTs might have an important role in this trend. For example, the analysis has not been able to present relevant differences in terms of the arguments used. Furthermore, participation figures and turnout seem more closely linked with the uncertainty and relevance of the consultation than on the modes of involvement. On the other hand, the different modes of involvement do seem to produce different results in terms of the equality and diversity of the participation that might eventually be reinforced by the use of the technology. However, such differences also depend on other organizational features already suggested by the literature such as newness, party size or party leadership and the length of the process (e.g. Gauja, 2013; Gherghina, Soare and Jacquet, 2020).

Overall, this study has shown the efforts of several Spanish political parties to increase their legitimacy and support through democratic innovations. In this respect, the study has found that the more clear-cut modes of involvement (Podemos 2015 vs. Compromís or PDeCAT) lead to different internal consequences in terms of participation, equality or rationality, although such processes were also shaped by other factors like the role played by the party leadership. Interestingly, the close examination of Spain's case studies has also point out the blurring difference between some Plebiscitary and Deliberative (or mixed) practices.

Our conclusions suggest that new ways to conceptualize such intra party democratic innovations might have to be developed. This is indeed in line with the efforts made by the normative and comparative literature to rethink the way deliberation plays a role within political parties (e.g. Wolkenstein, 2016; Ebeling and Wolkenstein, 2018). In addition, our paper has mostly focused on how such democratic innovations have been implemented, not on the wider effects for the party or the political system. This is also a very relevant research strand that has just starting to be developed by the comparative literature on deliberation inside political parties (see Gherghina, Soare and Jacquet, 2020). In this respect, it is quite important to discuss whether such new practices are a one-off solution that might also bear unexpected consequences or becomes embedded in the organizational culture of the parties or the party system. Closely linked to that are the electoral or wider implications of such democratic innovations: do democratic innovations actually lead parties to better electoral results or, in the long term, restore their legitimacy or bring more people in? Very pertinent questions that indeed call for more research in this field.

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