

# Political Parties and Deliberative Democracy in Europe

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A Convenient Relationship?

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## Chapter 13

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### **Conditions and features of party deliberation**

An analysis of four initiatives in Spain

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# 13 Conditions and features of party deliberation

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### Introduction

The deliberative function of political parties has been often stressed as contradictory to their competitive logic, as it entails collective discussion and the acceptance of dissension in search of common goods (Chambers, 2003). However, several scholars have argued for a more flexible concept of deliberation in which the procedural standards defined by normative theory are adapted to the real conditions of parties (Esau et al., 2021). Other authors have paved the way for a comparative approach to party deliberative processes by identifying a diversity of deliberative formats or arenas (Wolkenstein, 2016) and classifying deliberative procedures based on issues or goals (Gherghina and Jacquet, 2023).

This chapter contributes to the development of a comparative approach to party deliberative processes by exploring the conditions that make them possible and the organisational features that characterise them. In this regard, our work deploys the broad definition of party deliberation developed through this book (see the Introduction of this book) and examines several dimensions that have already been contemplated in the literature, but in a more systematic way. The conditions and features that will be discussed and compared here are: i) Timing: in relation to when, and in which context, parties decide to conduct deliberative processes; ii) Issues: which topics or issues they choose to deliberate on; iii) Location and arenas: where (in which arenas) they organise them; iv) Participants: who participates in them; and v) Implementation: how (in which format) they are developed. To the best of our knowledge, this has not been done before in a research strand which has mostly focused so far on assessing the deliberative qualities and impacts of such processes and centred on one-party case studies (Borge and Santamarina, 2016; Gherghina and Stoiciu, 2020; Barberà and Rodríguez-Teruel, 2020a; Vodová and Voda, 2020).

The empirical part of this chapter focuses on exploring four deliberative experiences in Spain that took place in the early years after the Great Recession. All four were selected because of their innovative decision-making

processes, their political relevance, and the media attention they received. However, they also presented differences in their ideology and organisation that introduced variations in their deliberative approaches, its consequences, and continuity. Overall, the comparative evidence from the Spanish cases indicates that deliberation is mostly introduced in critical moments, amidst crises, or to make hard choices, but never during elections. The deliberative formats might differ between parties, but in all cases, several arenas are combined following a bottom-up process. Some parties develop permanent deliberative structures, but this is not a general trend. Openness to the citizenry defines the scope and inclusivity of deliberation, but a passive role by the elites can effectively promote members' capacity to decide. Finally, the actual impact of deliberation is not only delimited by the use of membership ballots to decide on the issues discussed, but also by the elites' adoption of members' proposals and amendments. Although some of these deliberative experiences have been exceptional, and in some cases have revealed factional divisions within the party, they have also favoured inclusivity and promoted the internal exchange of ideas, paving the way for further innovations in internal decision-making.

The chapter is structured as follows: first, we address the debates on deliberation within political parties with reference to the most influential frameworks used in the literature and then we introduce the five conditions and organisational features we will tackle in the empirical analysis. Second, we conduct the analysis of our comparative case selection which is structured according to a brief presentation of each party and the five dimensions. Finally, we conclude the chapter with a discussion and characterisation of the case selection.

### **Deliberative processes in political parties: conditions and features**

Normative theories of democracy have shown general scepticism towards political parties' possibilities of being deliberative, due to their inherent orientation towards electoral competition (Sartori, 1987; Chambers, 2003). In addition, the Habermasian ideal restricts its practical application to procedural and rationality standards that can hardly be applied, not just in the context of parties, but also to mass political engagements of any kind. This restriction has substantially constrained what can be understood as deliberation to formal spheres and small groups of individuals (Esau et al., 2021). That said, in collective action environments such as political parties, several scholars have defended a more pragmatic and realistic conceptualisation of deliberation (the so-called Type II deliberation) (Esau et al., 2021). This broader definition includes alternative forms of communication (e.g., rhetoric and emotional, discourse, storytelling, testimony) located within formal but also informal settings (Bächtiger et al., 2010; Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012), to actively engage members with enough expertise and formation

(Wolkenstein, 2016) and provide linkages between different competing issues and different structures within the party (Teorell, 1999). In this regard, the introduction of internal deliberation represents an incentive for society's reconnection with political parties (Invernizzi-Accetti and Wolkenstein, 2017).

In acknowledging parties' potential as deliberative spheres, Wolkenstein (2016) pointed out three arenas in which deliberative decision-making can be structured within political parties. First, the general conference or the party congress is the main expected area of internal debate, ideally gathering all members to decide on a party's most important priorities. Second, problem-oriented forums can work as *ad hoc* arenas for the discussion of specific issues among all members, or a representative delegation of them. Third, parties can also build partisan deliberative networks of small assemblies and forums (e.g., at the local level), so that every branch or party group can decide on its preferred priorities and escalate decision-making.

Gherghina and Jacquet (2023) have also developed an analytical framework for the classification of party deliberative initiatives, which divides these processes according to issues and goals. Regarding the issue of the deliberative procedure, parties can promote deliberation as a way of selecting leaders or candidates, opening up spaces for deliberation sometime before the more established vote-oriented procedures (mainly primaries) take place. That said, a more common way to promote deliberation is through the elaboration of party manifestos and political programmes, where members and citizens can take an active role in deciding the content of the proposals. In terms of goals, there are two types of main objectives which parties seek through deliberation: strategic and normative motivations. Strategic goals connect deliberation with vote-seeking, office-seeking, or policy-seeking party objectives (Ström, 1990). Normative motivations are embedded in the civic role of parties as arenas of participation, representation, and political socialisation, and they might hold an intrinsic value *per se* or be instrumental in achieving other goals (Wolkenstein, 2016, 2018; Bialle and Ottonelli, 2019).

Besides these theoretical developments, the most common framework used to empirically assess deliberation encompasses three relevant components of deliberation: the input, that refers to the institutional design that enables and fosters deliberation; the communicative throughput, that focuses on the deliberative quality of the communication process; and the outcomes, that are the expected results of deliberation (Friess and Eilders, 2015). While several studies have explored the institutional design and the results of deliberations, this research strand generally focuses on measuring the deliberative quality of such communicative process.

Bridging these three strands of the literature (the identification of intra-party deliberative arenas, the type of issues encompassed by the party deliberative initiatives, and the analysis of the deliberative design and implementation of the process), we have selected five key conditions and organisational features that should help in a comparison of deliberative processes in political

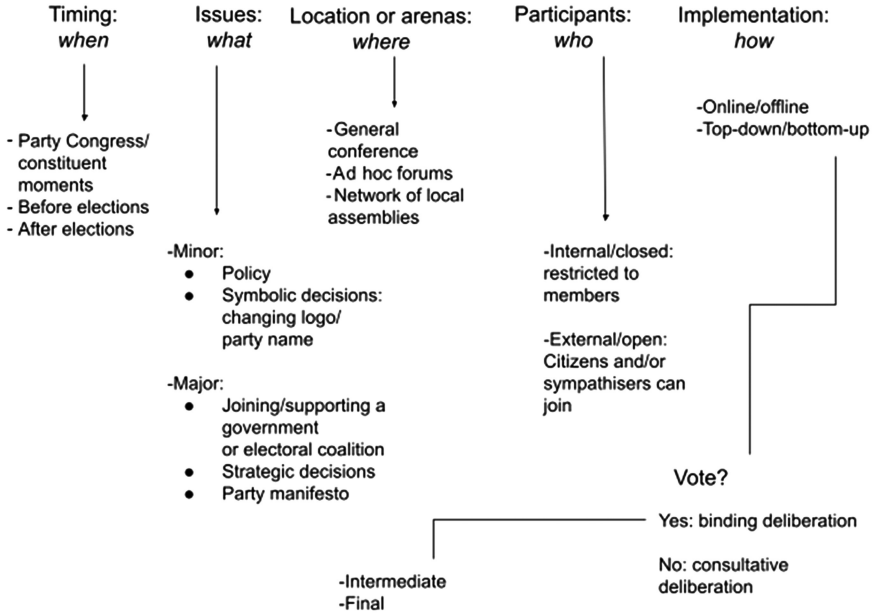


Figure 13.1 Five dimensions comparing deliberative processes in political parties.

parties beyond their deliberative qualities. Thus, our next step is to identify and discuss their relevance and main characteristics (see also Figure 13.1):

*Timing:* It seems unlikely that parties will be able to maintain permanent deliberative structures to take all their internal decisions. Collective deliberation seems particularly unfeasible in moments such as electoral campaigns due to the usual requirements of fast decision-making, top-down implementation instructions, and party discipline. That said, parties might promote deliberative processes before elections (e.g., to elaborate the party manifesto), but also after elections (e.g., to support a vote of confidence). Beyond the electoral cycle, political parties may also promote deliberative initiatives in connection with party conferences, constituent or foundational moments, or to make hard choices (e.g., to support a budget).

*Issues:* Parties might want to engage with their members or the citizenry to discuss minor or major issues. Major issues include those connected to key features of the party organisation or its political strategy. These commonly include the party manifesto, the party vision, and other organisational or political strategy documents (Gherghina and Jacquet, 2023). Other major issues may include strategic decisions such as supporting a vote of (no) confidence, entering a coalition government, approving a budget, deciding on a very controversial law or government initiative, and so on. Minor issues may relate to symbolic initiatives or less pressing

organisational or ideological measures such as changing the name or logo of the party or deciding on minor policy decisions.

*Location and arenas:* Traditionally, the local scale has been considered the main ground for party deliberation. Debates and the sharing of opinions appear quite naturally in a local party branch where all members can gather together in a room, or even a pub, see each other around the neighbourhood, and get to know each other (Teorell, 1999; Invernizzi-Accetti and Wolkenstein, 2017). Party assemblies open to all party members might also be considered an arena for deliberation, particularly for small parties, regional branches, or ancillary organisations (Wolkenstein, 2016). A highly pertinent but challenging question relates to the extent to which political parties, like other institutions, can be considered deliberative systems (Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012; Elstub et al., 2019). This should involve deliberation initiatives reaching beyond a specific party agency (e.g., a party congress) or at a particular level (e.g., local), but involving several agencies and different levels. In such cases, deliberative processes are far more complex to implement through top-down approaches and are probably not fully controlled by the party leadership. They are likely to become the unintended outcome of a specific critical juncture, where bottom-up initiatives from the party membership or specific party groups blend with top-down processes initiated by the central office.

*Participants:* Since the late 20th century, more and more political parties have transformed their internal procedures to allow their members and even the wider citizenry a more formal role in internal decision-making (Katz, 2001). Such transformations are brought by new affiliation models, where party participation does not always require formal membership (Scarrow, 2014). These innovations might also blur the division between internal and external deliberation, allowing parties to engage non-member citizens in their internal decision-making.

*Implementation:* The spread of social media platforms and party digital tools has conferred party deliberation with new potential (Borge and Santamarina, 2016; Bennet et al., 2018; Deseriis, 2020). Online Participatory Platforms (OPPs) might facilitate more direct interaction between members, supporters, and leaders through different territorial levels or ancillary groups. That said, the uptake of party OPPs has certainly been overshadowed by a different model of internal democracy focused on promoting the participation of party members through online voting. This plebiscitary turn emphasises the use of digital tools for membership ballots to select candidates and leaders or hold internal consultations, but hardly engages with members in collective deliberative initiatives or decision-making (Bennet et al., 2018; Gerbaudo, 2019; Vittori, 2020). By indistinctly engaging large masses of citizens in plebiscitarian processes without the adequate preference formation, they do not have the ability to overcome party elites' pre-established decisions (Wolkenstein, 2016). However, we should not expect a dichotomy between plebiscitarian and

deliberative approaches (Chambers and Warren, 2023). As Rodríguez-Teruel and Barberà suggest in another chapter of this book, the uptake of intra-party democracy initiatives forces political parties to strike a balance between three essential conceptions of democracy: representative, plebiscitarian, and deliberative. In practice, most intra-party democratic initiatives might combine elements from different models of democracy. This might be the case, for example, with deliberative processes (both offline and online) that are combined with a (digital) vote from the party membership or the citizenry.

### **Selected deliberative experiences in Spain**

Over the next few pages, we will analyse four-party deliberative experiences in Spain. All of them happened within a similar timeframe (by the mid-2010s) and have been selected for their innovative methods, their political significance, and the media attention they received. While each initiative presents some specificities, all four fit the broader definition of party deliberation developed throughout this book (see the Introduction of this book). Our case selection includes parties with different ideological backgrounds, sizes, and organisational structures, each facing a problem in a certain political context. This selection also covers most of the few intra-party deliberative experiences in Spain which have been studied before, mostly via case studies (Culla, 2017; Barberà, 2017; Borge and Santamarina, 2016). Our contribution is to approach them from a comparative perspective in which we aim to find common patterns and different applications of our analysis framework. Therefore, all the case studies are structured according to the main conditions and organisational features explained in the previous section. The discussion section provides a comparative analysis of the different case studies following this common framework.

#### ***The CUP and the 2015 vote of non-confidence***

The Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP, in Catalan) is a small far-left Catalan independentist party that made its breakthrough at the Catalan parliament in 2012. The party by then had a very loosely organisational structure formed by a mix of affiliated civil society organisations and local branches. The CUP was strongly committed to a grassroots democracy ideal (Poguntke, 1987), and it publicly promoted collective decision-making as a way to differentiate itself from other Catalan parties. Since 2012, it has experienced very fast electoral growth, becoming a key veto player during the 2015–2017 term in the Catalan parliament (Barberà, 2017; Culla, 2017).

The deliberative initiative promoted by the CUP leadership was launched after the 2015 Catalan elections to solve a hard choice for the party. The 2015 elections allowed the CUP to support a coalition government comprising two other pro-independentist parties. However, the CUP actively campaigned against a vote of confidence in the future regional prime minister, who had been tainted

by corruption scandals. The party had to decide whether or not to reject the vote of confidence. The two options had important pros (stand firm in its fight against corruption) and cons (be blamed for not enabling a pro-independence government), and the party leadership was internally divided on how to proceed (Barberà, 2017; Culla, 2017).

The first part of the CUP's deliberative initiative unfolded at the local level where the local branches, but also the affiliated organisations, held their own debates over several weeks in an explosion of loosely regulated small deliberative processes that did not reach significant conclusions. Then, the party leadership opted to organise two one-day in-person party assemblies in November and December 2015. The first assembly gathered around 1,200 people. More than 3,500 people, almost all the party's members, participated in the second (El Periódico, 2015). Both assemblies allowed plenty of time to discuss the pros and cons of the issue and reach an agreement; however, the second assembly concluded in a stalemate, showing how divided the membership was on the issue. After the second assembly, the party leadership decentralised the decision-making again, opening a new series of local assemblies. However, the final determination was made in a joint session of the party executive board and the newly created Parliamentary Action Group, a sort of committee formed by the MPs, local branch representatives, and the leaders of several affiliated organisations. In the end, the CUP decided not to support the vote of confidence, which led to the election of a new independentist prime minister. The CUP's decision had helped to preserve party unity, at the cost of an important electoral setback in 2017.

This deliberative process has since been followed by a gradual institutionalisation process which has transformed the party from a local activist party into a parliamentary force, whose parliamentary staff and Parliamentary Action Group have partially replaced the General Assembly's centrality (Barberà, 2017). However, this relative centralisation has not changed the CUP's organisational culture of grassroots democracy marked by the non-professionalisation of its representatives, the mandatory rotation of public office, and the key role in main decisions of the General Assembly, which has continued to be the backbone of the party's deliberative decision-making (Culla, 2017).

### ***Podemos' foundational assembly (2014) and the role of Plaza Podemos***

In Spanish politics, Podemos (We Can, in Spanish) represents the rise of radical-left parties that introduced digital platforms for decision-making and tried to structure a direct interaction between citizens and the party through the internet (Bennett et al., 2018). In its origins, activities were coordinated through online participatory platforms. There were no membership requirements and the platforms were open to any supporter who wished to register (Borge and Santamarina, 2016; Barberà and Rodríguez-Teruel, 2020b). The party achieved its first electoral breakthrough at the 2014 European elections, and shortly after began a consolidation process that led to the 1st Citizen Assembly in November 2014.



The first assembly was preceded by face-to-face debates held by the circles (which resembled local branches). However, the central role was given to the digital platform (Plaza Podemos), a mass online asynchronous gathering where any citizen could discuss any issue online. The platform was also used during the 1st Citizen Assembly to vote on the foundational programme of the party, and to select the first party executive board (Borge and Santamarina, 2016). In November 2014, Plaza Podemos received 280,000 unique visitors and had 2,720 threads leading to conversations (Borge and Santamarina, 2016). The platform allowed the party leadership to share its documents, programmes, and proposals with the public, receive comments, and engage in several debates.<sup>1</sup> Any citizen was allowed to raise questions and their own proposals, and to debate them with others. The first Assembly may have reached more than half million registered people through a multichannel deliberation initiative. It was also the first massive party deliberative experiment ever carried out in Spain with a crucial role played by online mechanisms.

Even though it was highly inclusive and transparent, this initiative did not have continuity beyond 2019. During its early years, Podemos's weak partisan structures and broad membership definition (which did not include levying membership fees) emphasised the key role of the online platform as a deliberative forum. Its open character and the lack of intermediary structures were supposed to confer a horizontal functioning on Podemos and decisively innovate in the understanding of political parties (Bennett et al., 2018). However, the party breakthrough at the national and regional levels favoured a more top-down and centralised process, especially after forming a governmental coalition with the PSOE in 2019 (Barberà and Barrio, 2019). That led to changes in Podemos's online participatory platform, which was mostly used for plebiscitarian purposes (Gerbaudo, 2019). The ability of any citizen to initiate proposals was removed in the organisational document approved by the last Citizen Assembly in 2020. Thus, the party has gradually redefined or suppressed many of its democratic innovations (Meloni and Lupato, 2023). However, regardless of their short-term continuity, we should acknowledge that platform parties such as Podemos managed to reengage a new mass of disenfranchised citizens in politics, influencing a whole generation of voters. Podemos's irruption in Spanish politics has also had deep consequences for the party system, and paved the way for further democratic and digital innovations in its competitors, mainly the PSOE.

### *PSOE's deliberative making of the 2015 electoral manifesto*

The Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE, in its Spanish initials) is a social democratic party that emerged in the late 19th century and is one of the oldest parties in Spain. After the restoration of democracy in Spain in the late 1970s, the PSOE became the largest party on the left, and it has been in government for different periods of time. By 2011, it suffered a considerable setback and lost the government due to the effects of the financial crisis. Between 2012 and

2016, the party implemented internal changes amid calls for more internal democracy and in the context of further electoral defeats, electoral decline, and rising competition from new parties such as Podemos (Barberà and Rodríguez-Teruel, 2020b). During this period, media attention was focused on the PSOE's first primaries to select a new party leader (2014) and the 2016 referendum to form a coalition government (Barberà and Rodríguez-Teruel, 2020a). However, the party also promoted other important innovations, such as the 2015 process to decide the content of the party manifesto through a series of problem-oriented forums.

The main innovation of drafting the 2015 party manifesto was not the internal debate of ideas, which is common in other parties and elections, but how the whole process was organised through different forums and assemblies with an important role given to the party's multi-level divisions (Giménez, 2018). First, the Federal Executive Committee elaborated a frame proposal that was then delegated to several "working groups" divided by topics (such as foreign policy, social policy, etc.). These groups contained a mixed presence of party officials and external experts, and they were responsible for presenting a final proposal to the party board. Additionally, an expert group appointed by the party leader assessed the whole process. Although the party board played a watchdog role and had the final say over the programme, most of the working groups' contributions were apparently respected. In parallel to the working groups' activities, the party also sought members' involvement through an online platform (miPSOE), mimicking *Plaza Podemos* (but open only to affiliated members) and aiming to facilitate access to the documents and to receive feedback and comments. However, only the information filtered and selected by party officials made it through to the drafts (Giménez, 2018). All this feedback informed a second and more detailed proposal approved by the party board, which then started formal consultations with the different party agencies: first, the local branches discussed and voted on the amendments; then, regional commissions (composed by local delegates) voted on which of the amendments would be escalated to the federal level; and finally, a general conference discussed and voted on the remaining amendments passed on by the regional commissions. This general conference included not only party officers, but also delegates chosen by the regional federations, and non-partisan delegates appointed by the party leadership.

The first stage, mostly monitored by the working groups, was certainly not very inclusive, which probably confers their deliberation high rationality standards but also a low representativeness of party members. The role of the online platform seemed to be merely informative and party-centred. The second stage partially solved this bias by including the wider party membership, but the gradual escalation from the local to the federal level may have filtered their proposals. In sum, the elaboration of the party manifesto was considerably decentralised and deliberative within the party structures, giving these problem-oriented forums a networked character too. To some extent, this could be seen as an attempt to involve the different party agencies and territorial levels in a

single deliberative initiative, hence transforming the party into a deliberative system for a period of time. Nonetheless, the new party leadership retained active control of the process, and it did not get a lot of media attention or achieve a great connection with the citizenry, nor did it improve the PSOE's electoral performance (Barberà and Rodríguez-Teruel, 2020a). This well-structured and multi-level deliberative initiative has not been repeated, partly because several snap elections have been called recently in Spain, but mostly because the PSOE entered government again in 2018. A more long-term impact of the initiative might also be seen in other parties trying to develop democratic innovations as a way to attract media attention and supporters. This could be the case with Sumar's workshops, that substantially informed its party manifesto in the 2023 general election.

### *The transformation of CDC into the PDeCat (2015–2016)*

The Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC, in Catalan) was a Catalan centre-right non-statewide party born during the restoration of democracy in the mid-1970s. The party formed a long-term coalition agreement with a minor Catalan Christian democratic party and both contested elections under the brand Convergence and Union (CiU, in Catalan) for several decades. From 1980 until 2003 CiU led the Catalan Government, and it returned to power in 2010 (Barberà and Barrio, 2017). By the mid-2010s the Catalan party system had been substantially transformed by the effects of the Great Recession, and by important territorial tensions between the centre and the periphery. In this context, the CiU coalition was dissolved and the CDC contested and won the 2015 elections with a new coalition agreement. After the elections, the CDC party leader lost a vote of confidence amid allegations of corruption (see the CUP section) (Culla, 2017). That event triggered a complex internal process that transformed CDC into a new party.

The first step in the CDC's transformation was announced shortly after the 2015 Catalan elections, and was mostly intended to be a rebranding process through an ordinary party congress controlled by the party leadership. However, losing the vote of no confidence, intensified media attention on the CDC's corruption scandals, and a new round of Spanish national elections together forced the party leadership to redefine the whole process. From February to May 2016, the party launched a deliberative initiative called Open Turn. The aim was to promote the participation and voice of the party members in defining a new collective vision and establishing whether the party had to be rebranded or transformed into a new organisation.

The Open Turn process consisted of four phases. First, members and sympathisers gathered in local branches to discuss a questionnaire distributed by the party's central office about its ideology, political strategy, and internal democracy. These branch-level deliberations were coordinated by *couches* who channelled the results to the party executive board. Second, by the end of May 2016 the party called for a binding consultation on whether it had only to be

renewed, or fully relaunched. The consultation achieved a 53% turnout and around 67% of the membership decided to promote a new party. Then, CDC's final party congress and the first congress of the new party were jointly celebrated. The new party allowed all members the right to participate in debates and vote on proposals, but they had to register first, which led to a steep decline in the membership figures of the new party. One of the issues that attracted media attention and caused internal conflicts was the name of the new organisation. During the party congress that issue was finally resolved through two votes open to all party members. However, the name approved by the membership did not pass official registration and had to be changed. Some months later the members were called to vote again on a second consultation to approve the final name *Catalan European Democratic Party* (PDeCat) and the assembly's agreements. While the name was approved by 86% of the votes, the turnout of this consultation decreased to 33% (Barberà and Rodríguez-Teruel, 2020b).

The complex internal and external environment in which the CDC was transformed into the PDeCat probably facilitated an unprecedented and highly deliberative approach. PDeCat's experience was characterised by the passive role adopted by a questioned party leadership unable to strongly control the process. That favoured the participation of the local branches and party members, who were able to influence the timing and rules of the process. What started with a top-down initiative soon became highly influenced by bottom-up demands. More importantly, all of the party agencies and levels became involved in it, once again turning the CDC into a body close to a deliberative system for a while. Eventually, the CDC and the PDeCat turned to voting, but that was seriously conditioned by the result of previous deliberations, which effectively decided the content of the internal consultations.

Regarding the long-term consequences, the extent to which the PDeCat's emphasis on internal democracy and deliberative decision-making was successful is difficult to judge. It certainly was not enough to keep the party united: by 2017, the tensions over the secessionist issue had profoundly divided the party. The minority faction remained within the party and maintained a more conservative orientation focused on the socioeconomic cleavage, while the majority faction formed a more independence-oriented party called Together for Catalonia (Junts per Catalunya in Catalan) (Culla, 2017). Nevertheless, the deliberative experience of 2016 is a very interesting example of inclusiveness and member involvement as a way to handle a legitimacy crisis and the refoundation of a party.

## **Discussion**

A quick overview of these Spanish cases shows how several political parties from different ideological backgrounds, and of varying sizes and territorial reach, embraced deliberation at key moments of their political evolution (see Table 13.1). All these deliberative initiatives happened in a wider context of turmoil caused by the socio-political impacts of the Great Recession. Most of

Table 13.1 Deliberative initiatives in Spain: conditions and organisational features

Dimensions	<i>CUP</i>	<i>Podemos</i>	<i>PSOE</i>	<i>CDC/PDeCaT</i>
<b>Timing</b>	Great Recession After elections	Great Recession Party Congress After elections	Great Recession Before elections	Great Recession After elections
<b>Issues</b>	Vote of confidence (Major issue)	Party vision, organisation and executive board (Major issue)	Party manifesto (Major issue)	Rebranding/transformation of the party (Major issue)
<b>Location and arenas</b>	Local assemblies and general assembly Networked arenas	Online platform, local assemblies and final conference Networked arenas	Deliberative forums, online platform, and multi-level assemblies Networked arenas	Local assemblies and general conference Networked arenas
<b>Participants</b>	All members from associated organisations and branches Inclusive (Semi-open)	Citizens registered on the platform Inclusive (Open)	Only members and expert guests Inclusive (Restricted)	Only members Inclusive (Restricted)
<b>Implementation</b>	<i>ICTs</i> <i>Vote</i> Offline Yes (Intermediate)	Online/offline Yes (final)	Mostly offline No	Offline Yes (Intermediate and final)

them were initiated after an electoral contest. That said, they were not truly connected to electoral setbacks, but to the fact that, after the elections, most of the parties faced hard choices. The CUP needed to decide whether to support a vote of investiture; Podemos had to develop its programmatic vision and select their executive; and the CDC sought to rebrand itself. The PSOE is the main exception, as its deliberative initiative was probably an attempt by the newly selected leadership to do things differently from the past. Interestingly, they all decided to open deliberative initiatives to address major issues (and face hard choices). The CDC could have been an exception, since at the beginning its process was mostly focused on rebranding the party, but it soon became clear that it needed to address further problems that led to more substantial change. In all cases, the willingness to face major issues with inclusive and deliberative formulas led to developing rather complex initiatives that required considerable time and resources.

Despite some similarities, most of these parties embraced alternative approaches towards intra-party deliberation, with varying degrees of inclusiveness, and variations in the intervention capacity of the membership, the use of technology, arenas, and complementary voting (Table 13.1). All those processes were inclusive in the sense that, at some point, they potentially involved the whole party membership. That said, there were also some important differences regarding their openness to the citizenry and the intervention capacity of the party members, which are not necessarily intertwined. On the one hand, those parties with more flexible and even blurred membership definitions (i.e., the CUP and Podemos), were highly inclusive in their decision-making and conferred significant intervention powers on party members. The CUP managed to maintain deliberation afterwards, probably due to its decentralised character and the importance of its deliberative networks, which were less easily dominated by any central power. That was not the case in Podemos, which quickly emerged as a very centralised organisation. Moreover, the contained electoral ambition of the CUP differed from the vote-seeking attitude of Podemos, which probably again related to its increasingly top-down and centralised functioning and banishment of dissidence. On the other hand, the PSOE and the CDC/PdeCat shared an inward-looking approach and limited participation of their members. However, the latter was much more inclusive in terms of members' capacity to control the process, while the socialist elites were more interventionist, probably because their legitimacy was not as weakened, or at least, was not facing such a deep crisis as the CDC. These contrasts demonstrate the importance of the factors of design, organisational culture, and strategic motivations, beyond merely who intervenes in deliberation.

Differences in design included the formats or arenas where deliberation took place. In this regard, the CUP was notable by its small and decentralised network of deliberative assemblies, which contrasted with Podemos' general conference and its online and heavily centralised participatory model. The CDC structured the process in a bottom-up escalation from local partisan gatherings to the general assembly, while the PSOE combined all possible

formats: multi-level assemblies concluding in a federal assembly, and its deliberative *ad hoc* forums, which were already a sort of network due to their sectoralisation. Another difference lies in the use of technology, delimiting diverse approaches towards digitalisation. While neither the CUP nor the CDC/PDeCat made any use of online deliberative tools, Podemos and the PSOE used them with very different intensities and objectives. Podemos practised a digitalisation by default which was congruent with its character and the PSOE conducted a selective digitalisation aiming to complement preferably face-to-face procedures (Thuermer, 2021), in line with its recruitment strategies. While Podemos needed a digital structure to engage citizens in an open deliberation, the PSOE did not need any open platform as its process was oriented inwards.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that not all of the parties examined here combined their deliberative initiatives with internal consultations. This aspect is connected to several notions of intra-party democracy, but might also be interpreted as an indication of the respective party leaderships' varying commitment to the results of the deliberation initiative. On the one hand, voting might be read as a way to *bind* the outcome of a truly participative process through popular legitimacy; on the other hand, it could also be interpreted as a way for the party leadership to disregard the voice of the members and impose their ideas by plebiscite. In our selected cases, the PSOE's deliberative initiative without membership ballots might have been perceived as more informative than truly binding. Alternatively, the deliberations of the CUP, the PDeCat and Podemos were *binding* because they were voted on, unravelling a complex interaction and also a complementarity between plebiscitarian and deliberative modes of democracy (see Rodríguez-Teruel and Barberà in this book).

## Conclusions

In this chapter, we have used Spanish party cases to inquire into the main conditions and organisational features that characterise deliberation. Regarding the timing, what the Spanish experiences reveal is that deliberation is mainly used in key moments, especially in both constituent ones, but also when the risk of an electoral setback and internal divisions can be counterbalanced with a specific outcome, whether that is the qualitative value of participatory decision-making, the collective distribution of responsibility, or the need to relaunch a party due to damage to its image. This excludes electoral campaigns, but not hard choices on issues such as important policies and foundational decisions. These insights are in line with previous findings about deliberative parties such as the Czech Pirates and the Romanian Demos (Vodová and Voda, 2020; Stoiciu and Gherghina, 2021). Other important features which we also considered in this chapter were the implementation design, the arenas for deliberation, the openness to the citizenry, the elites' attitudes and behaviour, and the use of voting throughout the process.

These Spanish case studies also show that most of the initiatives were conducted at a decisive and exceptional point in time. After this deliberative momentum, parties tended to rely on or reinforce their representative mechanisms, and daily decision-making was (and is) mainly controlled by the executive bodies and not the party assembly. The exception here is the CUP, a radical-left wing, grassroots-democracy party that has continued to use deliberation, even though it has tended to strengthen the role of its representative bodies.

We do not believe that the findings outlined here will be a peculiarity of Spain; rather, they are likely to represent a common trend found beyond the usual targets of party deliberation (i.e., small policy-seeking parties such as the CUP and other parties studied in this book). Further research could replicate the conditions and organisational features framework we have used to examine other cases and test these insights. In that sense, more empirical analyses will help to develop a proper comparative theory and a more refined framework analysis of what drives parties' deliberative processes.

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### Note

1 One of the most popular sections in Plaza Podemos was the “Citizen Proposals”, where citizens were able to present and debate any kind of proposal or initiative that could be submitted to a binding referendum depending on the number of endorsements it attracted. However, in order to be voted on in a referendum, the proposals had to be approved in successive steps by 0.2%, 2%, and 10% of registered members. This requirement made it practically impossible for proposals to pass the three thresholds due to the hundreds of thousands of registered members.

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