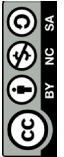# Openness as a New Communication Strategy for Political Parties. A Comparison Between Spanish and Portuguese Websites

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Spanish and Portuguese political parties are highly distrusted by citizens and need significant democratic regeneration. The promotion of transparency and citizen participation by political organizations might be a useful communication strategy. However, previous academic studies have not paid much attention to political parties in assessing openness, transparency, and accountability. Rather, they have focused on administrations. This article not only explores transparency but also the rest of the open government principles, these being participation and collaboration, as performed by political organizations, and as new communication strategies. The paper will argue that political parties should implement these ideas because of their public role but also to demonstrate honesty and integrity to the electorate. The implementation of transparency, accountability, deliberation, decision-making and collaboration by Spanish and Portuguese political parties has been analysed through a detailed study of the information available on their websites. The results of this analysis show that political parties are still far from being open and should focus especially on developing principles that involve citizen interaction. Although transparency was the most developed aspect, further promotion of participation and collaboration would imply a paradigm shift in how parties communicate with the electorate.

Keywords: *political parties, political communication, transparency, open government, accountability.*

Political parties have received little attention in studies on transparency and openness despite the fact that they require a great deal of modernization, for their opacity can lead to reactions of distrust (Fazendeiro and Razzuoli, 2016). The purpose of this article is to research the openness of Spanish and Por-

tuguese political parties in terms of transparency, participation and collaboration as new communication strategies and to establish a comparison between them.

There are many reasons why it is somewhat appropriate to compare political parties in Portugal and Spain. Not only are they neighbouring countries with similar cultures, but their recent political history is also similar. Both states are young democracies that emerged from long dictatorships —Franco's in Spain and Salazar's in Portugal. Furthermore, their transitions into democracy also happened at a similar time. The convergence between the histories of Spain and Portugal is not only comparable in terms of their political systems, but both countries have also severely suffered the effects of the 2008 financial crisis. On top of that, in both countries the political parties largely depend on public funding (Biezen, 2000). However, there are also differences in terms of ideology, territorial fragmentation or digitisation (Rivas-de-Roca et al., 2022), which make them very interesting to study. Despite this, there are few comparative studies, so this article may be useful for future research on transparency and political openness in both countries.

In terms of trust, there are notable differences between the two countries —in the case of Spain, distrust is much higher. Spain is one of the top three countries showing the lowest levels of trust in political parties in the European Union, according to the 2019 Eurobarometer. Only 7% of the Spanish population trust their political parties whilst in Portugal figures rise to 22%, slightly higher than the European average of 19%. It is therefore pertinent to assess the reasons for this difference in terms of the unequal implementation of transparency in each of the countries.

The Internet provides new possibilities to address the deteriorated image of political parties (Villoria, 2015) through new communication strategies whereby transparency and participation would seem the ideal targets in order to improve the political parties' image. Because of this, scope of this study includes assessing the level of openness in the websites of political organizations, as well as the implementation of their transparency, accountability, deliberation, decision-making and collaboration with citizens.

This study stems from the enormous relevance that political parties have in society and the deterioration of their political health. According to Manin (1997), the political party system tries to better represent society. However, the consolidation of mass parties has turned them into an elite far removed from society. We are facing an unprecedented context, influenced by new social movements, from which movement-parties emerge, which can make use of the Internet to develop new forms of interaction (Sousa-Santos, 2015). In this regard, the role of political parties is very changeable and evolves according to the needs of the moment.

The values of openness discussed in this article have experienced a strong flourishing in recent years. There is an important demand for increased transparency. Thus, numerous users have appeared who use this information in many different ways, as highlighted by Gascó-Hernández et al. (2018). Thus, it is not only interesting for public officials, individual programmers and developers, established businesses, researchers, journalists and activists. It also allows

citizens to stay informed, hold their governments accountable, and engage in participation processes. For this reason, social demand for greater openness of institutions has increased.

The article is structured as follows. The first section will define the openness of political parties through a theoretical framework, first outlining the principles of open government and its implementation by political organizations as a communication strategy, then exploring the implementation of transparency of the Spanish and Portuguese political parties in their websites. The methodology used to analyse the openness of the main political organisations in Spain and Portugal will be explained next —which is fundamentally quantitative, although including some qualitative aspects. The conclusions will aim to outline the levels of openness in both countries and highlight comparisons between their respective political parties.

THEORICAL FRAMEWORK

Political Parties' Duty with Openness

The promotion of transparency in the academic realm has been complemented with a simultaneous evolution in the political field (Cahlikova and Mabillard, 2020). Its consequences are also related to the practical effects of open government, which is based on the implementation of transparency, participation and collaboration thanks to digital tools (Lathrop and Ruma, 2010). Open Government principles may also be used to implement better communication with the public, whilst openness policies can be seen as a novel formula to communicate effectively with the electorate, both internally and externally (Ismail, 2020).

> Such communication must be two-way, as governments must demonstrate that they are willing and able to listen to citizens as well as incorporate their needs and preferences into policy processes (Ismail, 2020, p. 4).

The development of open government research has had four stages, according to a literature review by Matheus and Janssen (2020). The first phase can be located prior to 2009, when there was little information about transparency or openness. After Barack Obama's *Memorandum for transparency and open government* in 2009, the second period began, which especially focused on transparency. The third stage, which these authors call *the hype phase*, discussed the practical consequences that the opening of many transparency portals may have had. The fourth phase began in 2014 and brought realism to research. Scholars began pointing out that open data does not necessarily imply greater transparency, as it can lead to a "strategically opaque transparency" by releasing certain datasets but not others (Ruijer et al., 2020). Matheus et al. (2020) argue that open data, in addition to technical barriers, offers a limited view of government activity. They point out that open data alone is insufficient to achieve transparency and may be unsuitable for creating accountability. It is also intended to highlight the role of

openness as a communication technique, which is a point of view that has been little explored to date.

The governments' motivation to develop openness practices is driven by the desire to break the ever-increasing gap between citizens and politicians (Cahlikova and Mabillard, 2020). There is an assumed asymmetry between the information that governments provide to citizens and its level of transparency. This is the gap that needs to be closed (Matheus and Janssen, 2020).

This article focuses on political parties, which stand between the citizenry and the administration. They can take the interests of the public to the level of the State and hold the power to make the voices of the citizens heard (Amtiram and Angi, 2019).

Political parties are therefore extremely important institutions and, although they are not governmental organizations, they participate both directly and indirectly in political decision-making (Amtiram and Angi, 2019).

The funding of political parties largely depends on the state, as they perform a public service which makes them institutions with an indispensable value for today's democracies (Biezen, 2004; Bartolini and Mair, 2001). This makes the principles of open government valid for these organizations so that, once they are adapted to them, they can use them to communicate with citizens in an innovative way.

The accountability and transparency of political parties are essential so that citizens can choose who to vote for. Their openness refers to showing their activity to the people who vote them (Frank and Oztoprak, 2015). Political organizations have an interest in increasing their transparency because of its possible positive effects: accountability, increase in trust and credibility, increased participation, efficiency, governance, decrease in corruption and ending information asymmetries (Matheus and Janssen, 2020).

Political parties can be transparent or they can go one step further and adapt to the openness that is generally assumed for governments and public institutions. This implies that their activity is based on the principles of transparency, participation and collaboration. The disaffection of political parties has led organizations to further explore technology and the Internet, in part to connect with digital natives (Serra-Silva et al., 2018). Their openness through the Internet is an opportunity for them to rebuild trust and improve their image. However, it seems difficult for transparency to lead to greater trust without institutions and organizations implementing other types of reforms, such as the regulation of lobbying and measures against opacity, among others, as stated by Villoria (2021). Moreover, this link between trust and transparency is only possible when transparency is embedded in a policy of accountability, according to this author.

Openness and transparency are usually associated to the effectiveness of politics and a better government performance (Cucciniello et al., 2017). By making information public, politicians tend to behave better and respond more accordingly to the public's interests (Frank and Oztoprak, 2015). Cucciniello et al. (2017) also highlights its importance for democratic improvement and good governance.

This access to information, the participatory processes that it involves and the openness of institutions are generally possible due to the existence of the internet, especially in terms of transparency, as it offers free access to millions of databases. This has prompted many institutions to promote access to their information to enable it to be shared and monitored (Davies and Bawa, 2012). Transparency, however, requires equal opportunities for people to access information (Brunswicker et al., 2018). Regarding citizen participation, Carpentier et al. (2019) reflect that it implies a redistribution of power. Participation can not only be applied to public institutions, but also to other types of dimensions and levels. From a political perspective, based on democratic theory, these authors claim that it has an ethical nature.

Political parties' websites are the suited source to assess and communicate the principles of transparency, participation and collaboration. These sites allow for an interactive and collaborative communication with a more durable approach than other digital tools and allows. Ramazan Aslan (2022) affirms that political parties should consider websites as a central base that citizens can access anytime. The websites of political organizations can incorporate activities with a broad vision (whether centralized or decentralized) that are inclusive. These platforms can serve to offer functions of information, participation, and delivery.

However, there are several barriers to digital openness such as access problems, culture of transparency, privacy issues, unprepared institutions, the fear of losing control and the cost of transparency (Meijer, 2015). It can also lead to a decrease in privacy (Meijer et al., 2014).

Transparency is necessary for accountability to be effective, but it is not the only necessary requirement (Fox, 2007). These principles —transparency, participation and collaboration— are useless in their most practical form if the deepest and most intrinsic values, such as public duty, political commitment, legacy and honesty, are not assumed.

It is necessary to clarify that open data and transparency are not the same thing. Open data intends to increase transparency and accountability through the publication of raw data, which would allow people to process that information, use it, and reach their own conclusions (Yu and Robinson, 2012). However, transparency permits external actors to scrutinize and monitor an institution's information. It is a more philosophical concept that comprises other epistemic aspects (Cahlikova and Mabillard, 2020).

Open data enables civic innovation, granting citizens the capacity to use information and to create software tools and content addressing their concerns (Brunswicker et al., 2018). Due to this reason, data needs to be reusable, without copyright restrictions, control mechanisms or patents (Meijer et al., 2014).

There is fear of information overload caused by open datasets, but for Meijer et al. (2014) what is truly dangerous is that this concern leads to less valuable information being shared and that parties can independently consider what is (or is not) worth sharing. Matheus and Janssen (2020) also point out that when data is opened up, the government loses control, which can also result in a decline in confidence.

Paradoxically, transparency can also be opaque and not imply true accountability. Therefore, the information must be clear and updated and its structure must be comprehensible. There are multiple communication tools that allow the data to meet the necessary characteristics to render accounts (Park and Gil-García, 2020).

Spanish and Portuguese Transparency Development

The availability of data on the Internet has recently been institutionalized in most Western democracies through access to information laws (Shepherd, 2015). These advances in the culture of transparency have especially occurred in Europe and the United States, starting with the Obama Administration. Many of these standards even include the value of open data for commercial reuse or otherwise (Meijer et al., 2014).

This study, which focuses on the transparency of the Spanish and Portuguese political organizations, is even more urgent if we take into account that the analysis of the political parties' online communication has usually been neglected (Serra-Silva et al., 2018). Transparency is considered to be part of this strategy. As a matter of fact, Fazendeiro and Razzuoli (2016) discuss the need to explore the transparency of the Spanish and Portuguese political parties through their websites with the aim of understanding their functioning and their de-institutionalization.

As mentioned above, the party organizations of both countries hold very low levels of citizen trust (Fazendeiro and Razzuoli, 2016). Promoting a culture of transparency is therefore an important task for them in order to improve their image and their communicative approach.

In Spain this culture of transparency is very scarce, as demonstrated by the recent approval of the law which regulates it: the Law 19/2013 on transparency, access to public information and good governance. These regulations establish two levels of transparency —an active and a passive one. Active transparency consists of the voluntary publication of data by the obligated subjects on their webpages. Passive transparency allows citizens to access data by making requests for information.

The Spanish 19/2013 Law includes political parties as subjects obligated to comply with its mandates. However, political organizations are only obliged to comply with part of the active transparency dimension and not with the passive one.

In addition to this regulation, there exists in Spain the Organic Law 8/2007, of July 4, about the financing of political parties, and the Law 9/2017, of November 8, on Public Sector Contracts. The former reiterates some principles present in the transparency law and the obligation to publish data such as the audit report of the Court of Auditors, the balance sheet, the profit and loss account and the amount of credits pending amortization, among others, on the web. The latter obliges political parties to publish their contracting instructions.

Portugal possesses the Organic Law 2/2003 on Political Parties, which was reformed in 2018 and has a section devoted to the principle of transparency.

Specifically, it obligates them to publish their statutes, the identity of the holders of the organs, the declarations of principles and programs, and general activities. Furthermore, it also demands the communication of these matters to the Constitutional Court, as well as the regulation of the funds of the political parties through the Law of Financing of the Political Parties and the Electoral Campaigns.

Both Spain and Portugal possess laws that oblige political parties to publish certain data on their websites, whilst both require little from political organizations, although in the Portuguese case it is even less. There is therefore a need to explore not only the political parties' transparency, but also how they comply with the principles of participation and collaboration. This study will therefore examine the concept of open political parties, which refers to the adaptation of open government principles to political parties. The following definition was determined on the basis of input from 20 experts in a Delphi study:

> Open political parties are those that are transparent and publish up-to-date and accessible information, are accountable to citizens, encourage debate among the electorate, allow users to participate in their decision-making process, and carry out collaborative activities with citizens (Díez-Garrido, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

In order to carry out this study, a quantitative content analysis, including some qualitative aspects, of the websites of the main Portuguese and Spanish political parties has been carried out. Political party websites, rather than other social platforms, have been investigated for several reasons. To begin with, the regulations on transparency state that the disclosure of information must be made on their websites. Moreover, unlike social networks, websites are stable communication tools. They have not disappeared, despite the development of new channels. Likewise, it is possible to link all the platforms held by a political party on its website, so that none of them ceases to be investigated. Finally, the websites have an arranged structure that facilitates the study and exercise of the openness[1] of political parties:

Selected are the five political parties with the largest number of representatives in the Spanish Congress of Deputies[2] and in the Assembly of the Portuguese Republic (Table 1).

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1   Hereafter, the word "openness" refers to the performance of open government principles by political parties.

2   In the Spanish case, I have selected those parties that ran in the elections at a national and not a regional level, since the intention of this study is to analyze the national state of affairs.

Table 1. Spanish and Portuguese political parties chosen for the study

Spanish Political Parties	Portuguese Political Parties
Partido Socialista (PSOE)	Partido Socialista (PS)
Partido Popular (PP)	Partido Social Demcrata (PSD)
VOX	Bloco Esquerda
Unidas Podemos (UP)	Partido Comunista Português (PCP)
Ciudadanos (Cs)	CDS-Partido Popular (CDS-PP)

Source: Own elaboration.

This article aims to answer the following research questions:

Q1. Are Spanish and Portuguese political organizations open political parties?

Q2. Are there any differences in the way Spanish and Portuguese political parties promote openness?

Q3. Is it possible to perceive innovative communication strategies in the parties' promotion of transparency, participation and collaboration?

To answer these questions, the methodology used is based on a previous analysis of Spanish political parties (Díez-Garrido, 2020), which itself was designed based on the ideas of 20 experts collected for a Delphi study. It has then been updated and adapted for the Portuguese political organizations. The methodology aims to study the values of Open Government (transparency, participation and collaboration) in the context of political parties.

In the absence of studies addressing the performance of open political parties in terms of transparency, participation and collaboration, this methodology was proposed to fit these criteria. However, this methodology is inspired by studies that address political parties' transparency through content analysis, such as the one conducted by Fazendeiro and Razzuoli (2016), who also analysed and compared the disclosure of information by Portuguese and Spanish organizations in their websites. In addition, Vaccari has conducted several studies (2008, 2013) on the use of digital tools by political parties from different countries on their websites by performing content analysis. Therefore, content analysis was considered to be the methodology that would allow to monitor the information about transparency, participation and collaboration available in political parties' websites. This would enable to meet the objectives and evaluate their level of openness.

The formulated methodology has 306 indicators organized around three levels of openness: a) Transparency, with 105 indicators; b) Deliberation, with 18 indicators; and c) Decision-making and Collaboration[3], with 20 indicators.

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3   The principles of open government (transparency, participation and collaboration) were divided this way (transparency, deliberation and decision-making and collaboration), as it better suited the involvement of citizens in such actions. This was supported by the experts who participated in the Delphi study.

Reaching 65% of the passing score is considered a positive result, while 50% a sufficient score. In addition, for the results to be positive all levels (transparency, deliberation, and decision making and collaboration) require passing scores.

The data was collected between December 2020 and January 2021[4]. The different levels analysed in the study will be explained below:

Level a) Transparency

The study considers that the first step toward political openness is related to information, therefore the basis of this analysis is the political parties' transparency. It became pertinent to analyse whether the organizations had passive transparency systems, that is, whether there were channels for requesting information. Their active publicity, i.e. information that is published voluntarily, have also been analysed. This section had 82 indicators divided into the following categories:

- Basic requirements of transparency: basic aspects present in the Spanish and Portuguese legislation
- Institutional information of the organizations
- Procedures and internal organization of the political parties
- Data related to their corporate communication and their media coverage
- Accounts and economic information

Some aspects related to the open data published by the political parties have been subsequently assessed. In particular, the existence of advanced search engines on their websites, the presence of simple and understandable language, the platform's accessibility and, above all, the publication of data in reusable formats and the updating of content have been given great importance.

Regarding accountability, it was valued that political parties provide on their websites a scrutiny of their electoral program, as well as a summary of the proposals made in Parliament and in other institutions, and other aspects such as the correct publication of financial information. It has also been appreciated when parties mention their commitment to transparency.

Level b) Deliberation

The next step toward the opening of political parties is deliberation, that is, the promotion of debate among the citizenry. In this study, the fact that this commitment is mentioned in the parties' statutes, as well as the existence of norms for its practical regulation have been assessed.

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4   In case of doubt with Portuguese language, translation resources were used and a native speaker was consulted.

The existence of deliberative initiatives such as debate forums, platforms for proposals, chats with members of the party, virtual assistants that function with artificial intelligence, instant messaging dissemination channels, e-mail contact, and face-to-face events for debate, among others within political organizations was then examined.

Level c) Decision Making and Collaboration

The last step toward openness consists of two separate but similar concepts: decision-making and collaboration. The former consists on the citizens' capacity to take part in the running of some aspects of the party. The latter refers to cooperation with the party.

This analysis has also taken into account the parties' acknowledgement of these rights in their statutes as well as whether they are regulated.

- Level c1) Decision-making. It has been analysed whether the parties include mechanisms of internal democracy and decision-making initiatives such as citizen consultations, signature gathering, participation applications and other proposals that the parties could make.
- Level c2) Collaboration. At this last level the promotion of collaboration initiatives such as the joint elaboration of electoral programs, the sending of materials, fundraising, crowdsourcing, collaboration in electoral campaigns and social networks, social actions, and some face-to-face events, among others, have been valued.

RESULTS

Political Parties' Transparency

If we were to view openness as a ladder which we are aiming to climb, transparency is the first step on this ladder toward making political parties open. Without transparency (the first rung of the ladder), it is impossible to develop deliberation, decision-making or collaboration. Political parties, however, have many shortcomings with respect to their transparency, with an overall average of 43.98%, far below the desired level. Significant differences were found between the Spanish political parties, that hardly passed with 54.12%, and the Portuguese ones, with an insufficient 33.93%

In the case of the Spanish political parties, Partido Socialista (64.42%) is the most transparent —also in the total computation— followed by Podemos (61.05%), Partido Popular (54.39%) and Ciudadanos (50.66%). VOX is the only Spanish party that has failed the test (39.61%).

The level of transparency achieved by the Portuguese political parties is lower, whereby only the Partido Social Democrata (52.19%) passed. The rest have obtained poor results: Partido Comunista (35.22%), Bloco Esquerda (32.11%), Partido Socialista from Portugal (29.34%) and CDS-PP (20.79%).

None of the analysed political parties possess a system of requests for information, neither any channel that resembles passive transparency, which should have response deadlines as well as a simple, free and electronic system.

Active publicity was more developed than passive, and again Spanish political parties (63.9%) have achieved a better result than the Portuguese (37.44%). The political parties that voluntarily share the most information are PSOE (76.8%), Podemos (71.9%), Partido Popular (62.8%), Partido Social Democrata (60.9%) and Ciudadanos (60.9%). Conversely, we find VOX (46.9%), Bloco Esquerda (36.5%), PCP (35.3%), Partido Socialista from Portugal (30.4%) and CDS-PP (23.7%).

The most developed section by all the political parties in this study was the institutional information, which gathers data on the party, followed by the basic demands of transparency. However, there is a notable difference between the Portuguese and Spanish parties in terms of party accounts. This is the section most developed by the Spanish and the least developed by the Portuguese parties. This could be due to the demanding Spanish Law 8/2007 on the financing of political parties.

Political parties shall improve the information they publish about procedures and internal organization, as well as the data relating to their corporate communication. Below is a table with the results of each political party in each of the active transparency sections[5].

Table 2. Implementation of active transparency by political parties

	Basic demands	Institutional data	Procedures and Organization	Corporate communication	Economic accounts	Active transparency
Partido Socialista Spain	85,71%	71,42%	58,33%	76,47%	88,88%	**76,83%**
Partido Popular	64,28%	71,42%	33,33%	44,11%	94,44%	**62,80%**
VOX	42,85%	52,38%	16,66%	26,47%	83,33%	**46,95%**
Podemos	92,85%	71,42%	66,66%	47,05%	86%	**71,95%**
Ciudadanos	53,57%	62%	45,83%	41,17%	94,44%	**60,98%**
Partido Socialista Portugal	25%	54,76%	25%	41,17%	0	**30,49%**

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5   The percentages were obtained by calculating the number of information items published in each section by each political party out of the total number of possible information items considered in the methodology.

	Basic demands	Institutional data	Procedures and Organization	Corporate communication	Economic accounts	Active transparency
Partido Social Democrata	60,71%	66,66%%	33,33%	55,88%	77,77%	**60,98%**
Bloco Esquerda	35,71%	57,14%	50%	41,17%	0	**36,59%**
Partido Comunista Portugal	21,42%	66,66%	33,33%	47,05%	0	**35,37%**
CDS-PP	21,42%	57,14%	25%	8,82%	0	**23,78%**
Total Spain	67,85%	65,71%	44,16%	47,05%	89,44%	**63,90%**
Total Portugal	32,85%	60,47%	33,33%	38,82%	15,50%	**37,44%**
Total	50,35%	63,05%	38,75%	42,94%	52,50%	**50,67%**

Source: Own elaboration.

It is not only necessary for political parties to publish data, but also to do this in a clear way. Citizens shall be able to find and understand updated information without difficulty.

While almost all of the political parties have a search engine on their websites, these are far too simple and most of them only allow word searches. Partido Popular in Spain stands out for offering an advanced search engine that allows not only to search according to dates, but also according to the type of content (news, videos, documents, images), subject (education, employment, family, etc.) or location (Senate, Congress, Europe, etc.). They also offer a venue search engine and a party member search engine.

One of the most disappointing aspects of this analysis relates the updating of the contents, especially in the case of Spanish organizations. Curiously, the Spanish Partido Socialista and Podemos, which publish the most data, are the ones that include the most outdated information. In the case of Podemos, there is data even belonging to 2018 —over two years outdated. No Spanish party passes in terms of upgradability, while in Portugal only the Bloco Esquerda and the CDS-PP fail.

In terms of the understandability of the contents, all the parties use simple language, although none have tools such as text boxes to expand information and to make it more comprehensible, whereas Podemos offers very interesting visualizations, especially with regard to the economic information. The Portuguese PSD also includes some remarkable visualizations in its website as, for example, a chronology of the party's history that makes it more appealing.

Another very unsatisfactory aspect is the accessibility of the contents, since the political parties hardly promote the reuse of their data, publishing too many

documents in PDF format and very few in formats that facilitate the recycling of their contents by the citizenry. The only political party that comes close to this is Podemos, although it does not pass either.

Organizations are aware that the consumption of information on cell phones is growing without control, so all websites are adaptive. However, none is accessible or has any accessibility modules for people with disabilities. In Spain, only Podemos and Ciudadanos offer information in the other official languages of Spain, and the former also in English, while in Portugal only the Communist Party does so.

Interestingly, although Portuguese parties share less data, their accountability is better than in Spain. All Portuguese organizations make a summary of the proposals made in the Assembly of the Republic, categorized by the type of initiative. In addition, there are other interesting elements: first, the Portuguese Socialist Party conducts a scrutiny of its previous electoral program. Second, the Communist Party publishes on the website of the coalition with which it ran for the election an attractive assessment of its parliamentary activity and the progress of the initiatives proposed.

Regarding the commitment to transparency, only Spanish political parties post a declaration of compromise with transparency on their websites, evidencing their need for an overhaul.

Political Parties' Deliberation

After transparency, the next step on the openness ladder is deliberation. This is less developed than transparency in most political parties. In fact, only the Portuguese PSD is advanced in this sense, being the only party to pass with 66.66%. Regarding the comparison between countries, on this occasion the Portuguese are ahead, with an average of 43.33% compared to 36.66% for the Spanish.

Thus, with the exception of the PSD, the rest of the parties fail in their level of deliberation and the result is as follows, in descending order: Podemos (47.36%), PSOE (44.70%), Portuguese Partido Socialista (44.44%), PCP (44.44%), Spanish Partido Popular (39.47%), Bloco Esquerda (36.11%), CDS-PP (25%), VOX (22.22%) and Ciudadanos (21.05%).

The Portuguese parties make a bigger reference to deliberation and are more committed to encouraging debate among citizens than the Spanish ones, except for CDS-PP. In Spain only Podemos is advanced in this sense. There is however a significant lack of regulation in both countries, in fact, one of VOX's regulatory standards states: "Deliberations will be held behind closed doors and will be conducted under absolute secrecy"[6]. Not surprisingly, this party is the second worst in terms of deliberation.

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6   VOX (2020). Reglamento interno del procedimiento de actuación del CG (RIPACG). https://www.voxespana.es/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/RIPACG-28-12-2020.pdf

The deliberation initiatives proposed by the political parties are not particularly innovative. Only the Portuguese Partido Socialista has conversations with supporters.

None of them have an advanced proposal platform, debate forums, chatbots or virtual assistants, which would have placed them at the vanguard of technology. Only Podemos participates in platforms like Reddit and Osoigo, a portal where politicians answer questions from citizens. In addition, the Portuguese socialists have a channel[7] on their website called Talk2Us for the reception of ideas.

The parties, moreover, have developed some initiatives related to communication with the electorate such as the option to share content and broadcast channels through instant messaging applications (e.g.: WhatsApp and Telegram). They all establish some basic elements such as a subscription channel or RSS and contact through e-mail.

With regards to the celebration of encounters, this is obviously a difficult time to hold political offline events due to the COVID pandemic. Therefore, all online events are taken into account for this study as a replacement of face-to-face ones. In this sense, the Portuguese Partido Socialista and PSD are the parties which have offered more, holding round tables, information days, assemblies and congresses.

Political Parties' Decision-making and Collaboration

For an optimal level of openness, political parties shall climb one last rung of the ladder. This one comprises of decision-making and collaboration. The commitment to this level can be clearly questioned, as none of the political parties pass. The average compliance of all organizations is 26.75%.

The results for the Spanish organizations are slightly higher than those of the Portuguese, although both obtain very low results (32% and 21.50%). Only PSOE and Podemos come close to passing this level, both with 45%. They are followed by Ciudadanos (30%), the Portuguese Partido Socialista (30%), the PSD (25%), Bloco Esquerda (22.50%), the Spanish PP (20%), VOX (20%), CDS-PP (17.50%) and the PCP (12.50%).

In Spain, these two concepts are mentioned in a more comprehensive way in the statuses of the two main leftist parties, PSOE and Podemos, while in Portugal the concepts are equally spread and developed among parties with differing ideologies such as Partido Socialista, PSD and PCP. In addition, Portuguese parties have more specific regulations on this type of processes.

As mentioned above, this level consists of two parts: decision-making and collaboration. With respect to the former, political organizations with progressive tendencies have more internal democratic processes than conservative parties. In this regard Spanish political parties include more processes for choosing

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7   Partido Socialista (2015). Talk2Us. https://ps.pt/participe/#Talk2Us

candidates, or at least they share this information better than the Portuguese ones.

The decision-making scenario is dismal, as there is barely any party that carries out citizen consultations. Bloco Esquerda does have a mechanism for holding internal referendums[8] and Podemos once had a platform that allowed for consultations on proposals with sufficient support, but this procedure changed and the platform no longer exists. In addition, no organization collects signatures or uses digital participation applications.

Podemos possesses another initiative, the Vamos Channel (https://vamos.podemos.info), which aims to promote spaces for participation and collective action, though after 2017 no initiative can be found. It has therefore only been partially valued for this article.

Remarkable initiatives have been found in the collaboration section, the drafting of electoral programs being a very interesting issue for this methodology. The Portuguese Partido Socialista points out on its website that its latest electoral program, for 2019, was the result of a broad debate[9]. For its part, Podemos offers its members the opportunity to accept or reject the electoral program. No other party allows citizen collaboration in the drafting of their programs.

Interestingly, both socialist parties (Spanish and Portuguese) have suggestion boxes where they receive ideas, proposals and/or criticism from citizens.

Most of the parties have enabled channels to receive economic donations except for the Portuguese Partido Socialista, which does not have any, and Bloco Esquerda, which only has one for a specific campaign. Regarding collaboration in electoral campaigns, Podemos and Bloco Esquerda —parties with similar ideologies— include some initiatives.

Most Spanish parties encourage the electorate to use hashtags or corporate elements in social media networks such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. In contrast, no Portuguese organization does so, hence evidencing the importance that the Spanish parties attach to these platforms.

The political parties' projects to promote social action are also considered. In this respect PSOE has an Ecological Transformation Plan developed through citizen contributions; Podemos fosters its IMPULSA program, through which it donates the organization's surplus public funds to social projects; the youth section of Ciudadanos publicizes some of the volunteer actions that they carry out in conjunct with organizations such as the Red Cross or the Spanish Federation of Food Banks.

Neither organization develops any other interesting proposals as could be the submission of material, polls, crowdsourcing or wiki tools, nor do they disclose citizen tools that have reused party data. Regarding other extra initiatives

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8   Bloco de Esquerda (2021). Estatutos. https://www.bloco.org/o-bloco/estatutos.html

9   Partido Socialista (2019). Programa Eleitoral do PS – 2019. https://gabinetedeestudos.ps.pt/index.php/2019/07/programa-eleitoral-do-ps-2019/

developed by the political parties, the VOX Volunteer Network stands out (although they do not specify the type of volunteer work) as well as a section in which PSOE promotes employment in the party.

CONCLUSIONS

Spanish and Portuguese political parties are far from being open. Although three political parties have obtained a score above 50% —PSOE (59.84%), Podemos (57.63%) and the PSD (50.33%)— none of the organizations pass the three levels of openness —a) Transparency, b) Deliberation and c) Decision-making and Collaboration— which is an indispensable requirement for a party to be considered open. Having one of the principles highly developed while ignoring the rest is not enough, as it does not demonstrate an open and innovative attitude. This is the case of PSOE, which has a good outcome only in transparency, while the PSD does in terms of deliberation. Therefore, not even parties with relatively good results are open. In addition, the rest of the political parties have obtained negative results, as seen in Table 3. In this sense, no political party websites have been found to represent a model to be imitated.

Table 3. Political parties' implementation of each level of openness

Spain	Partido Socialista	Partido Popular	VOX	Podemos	Ciudadanos
Transparency	64.42%	54.39%	39.61%	61.05%	50.66%
Deliberation	44.70%	39.47%	22.22%	47.36%	21.05%
Decision-making and Collaboration	45%	20%	20%	45%	30%
Total	59.84%	48.36%	34.97%	57.63%	44.57%

Portugal	Partido Socialista	Partido Social Democrata	Bloco de esquerda	PCP	CDS
Transparency	29.34%	52.19%	32.11%	35.22%	20.79%
Deliberation	44.44%	66.66%	36.11%	44.44%	25.00%
Decision-making and Collaboration	30%	25%	22.50%	12.50%	17.50%
Total	31.22%	50.33%	31.32%	33.32%	20.86%

Source: Own elaboration.

The most developed level of openness is Transparency, which is considered the most basic and essential in this paper. While transparency has nowadays reached basic status in the communication of political parties, developing the three levels would be enormously interesting for innovating their political communicative strategies.

All the same, the average in terms of transparency is far below the desirable level in all of the parties, only reaching 43.98% of compliance. There are many aspects that need to be improved:

- No party has organized free, electronic systems of information requests (passive transparency).
- Updating is very limited. Information shall be kept up to date, especially to combat disinformation. This was already emphasized by Fazendeiro and Razzuoli (2016) in the aforementioned study, but the situation has not improved over the years.
- Political parties do not share data in an accessible and reusable way.

The least developed levels of openness are Deliberation, with an average of 40%, and Decision-making and Collaboration, with 26.75%. This shows the scarce interest of political parties in promoting debate among the electorate, in allowing internal processes that take supporters into account or in developing initiatives in collaboration with the citizens.

The results are insufficient indeed, considering that political parties are often promoting transparency in their speeches and public appearances. Podemos for example, which is internationally renowned in terms of its transparency, does not obtain outstanding results and their absence of updated information is remarkable. This analysis suggests that, paradoxically, when parties boast about being transparent and insist on the increasing of openness, their websites unfortunately do not show any progression in this arena.

When comparing these two countries, the results of the Spanish organizations is superior (49.08%) than the Portuguese (33.41%), though both are low (Table 4). The Spanish political parties only pass the level of Transparency, with 54.12%. However, Deliberation and Decision-making and Collaboration are very low (34.73% and 32%). The Portuguese achieve their highest result in the second level, Deliberation, with 43.33%. Transparency and Decision-making and Collaboration have worse results, with 33.93% and 21.50%, respectively.

Table 4. Results of the political parties in each country

	Spanish Political Parties	Portuguese Political Parties	Total
Transparency	54.12%	33.93%	43.98%
Deliberation	36.66%	43.33%	40.00%
Decision-Making and Collaboration	32.00%	21.50%	26.75%
Total	49.08%	33.41%	41.24%

Source: Own elaboration.

The serious cases of corruption and the terrible lack of confidence in the political parties in Spain may have prompted the approval of regulations related to transparency: the Law 19/2013 on transparency and the Law 8/2007 on the financing of political parties. In the analysis carried out, it has been demonstrated that the aspects dealt with in these norms are the most developed ones on the Spanish political parties' websites. The poor level of confidence in Spain, which is lower than in Portugal, has resulted in the high level of exigency of the rules approved, precisely in order to fight citizen disaffection and to put an end to corruption. In fact, the preambles of these laws refer to this situation. Therefore, not only are the rules more demanding, but political parties also seek to improve their image through digital communication tools.

This is not the case in Portugal, where the Law on Political Parties is much less strict. This may be the reason why Portuguese political parties publish less content on their websites.

It is paradoxical that the Spanish political parties have had better results than the Portuguese ones considering the fact that the latter arouse more trust among citizens. Undoubtedly, these results question the possible relationship between political openness and the improvement of trust. One possible reason could be that understanding the advantages of transparency, participation and collaboration takes some time. However, given the doubts surrounding this issue, the relationship of transparency and openness policies with trust and legitimacy should be addressed in future research, as already suggested by Brandsma and Meijer (2020) and Grimmelikhuijsen et al. (2020).

The results of this study do not show great differences between the parties depending on their different ideologies. While left-wing parties in Spain are more open, a right-wing party has had the best results in Portugal. Hence, ideology does not seem to be a decisive element for a political party to be more open. It is not enough to comply with the rules; assuming these principles as the appropriate way to work with and relate to citizens, with activities based on transparency, participation and collaboration, is the pending task of political parties. It is, therefore, a matter of attitude towards innovation in communication through digital tools.

Only a few examples in which the parties performed discussion with the electorate could be found. The parties organize assemblies and meetings with collectives to promote deliberation. In addition, there are few projects for citizens to contribute to party activities. They organize social action and volunteering activities and have also created platforms for suggestions.

Hence, political parties do not use websites with a broad and open perspective for interaction and cooperation with the electorate. Spanish and Portuguese political organizations are missing the opportunity to innovate in their efforts to communicate with the electorate and improve their deteriorated image through transparency, deliberation, decision-making and collaboration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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