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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# FACTORS FOR THE DIGITALISATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN PORTUGAL AND SPAIN: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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**ABSTRACT:** This investigation stems from the need to better comprehend the digitalisation of the Iberian parties and, especially, to understand the lack of scientific knowledge surrounding the digitalisation of political actors in Portugal. The principal objective of this investigation is the betterment of knowledge of the factors that intervene in the digitalisation of political parties. Taking various theoretical premises into account, we will analyse the relation between the age of the parties, the ideology and the stability of the party system, and the adoption of digital instruments for the purposes of contact, participation, deliberation, and mobilisation of financial resources between political parties with parliamentary representation in Portugal and Spain. To answer these questions the investigation used a data matrix taken from six qualitative variables applied to each of the analysed political parties. The results show a tendency towards a greater level of digitalisation in political parties located on the left of the ideological spectrum that were founded after the year 2008. Furthermore, the stability of the party system and a lower competitive capacity could partially explain the lower level of digitalisation in political parties in Portugal.

**KEYWORDS:** Digitalisation, participation, political parties, Portugal, Spain

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## 1. Introduction:

The digitalisation of political parties that was originated with the change of the millennium has shown an acceleration in the last decade because of various reasons. On one hand, we must note an increment, as time passes, of the digital functions and applications available for political organisations. Nevertheless, and from the viewpoint of specialised literature, many factors have been analysed with the intention of explaining the digitalisation of political parties. The first of the factors, noted by Ward and Gibson (2009), points to the level of general digitalisation of societies as an incentivising element for the adoption of these types of instruments on behalf of organisations to connect with their sympathisers and their electorate. The second of the factors analyses the age of the political parties to explain the differing degree of intensity in their adoption of digital innovations (Raniolo and Tarditi, 2020; Mosca and Quaranta, 2017). A third factor that was studied is related to the values and the ideology of parties and their relation to digitalisation. In this sense, various investigations study the disposition of digital instruments in relation to a materialist/post-materialist value scale (Grusell and Nord, 2016; Norris, 2001) and to a left/right scale (Blasio and Viviani, 2020; Raniolo and Tarditi, 2020; Chadwick and Stromer, 2016). Recently, there have also been studies on the relation between populism and the adoption of digital mechanisms through a very determined organisational morphology: platform-parties (Gerbaudo, 2021; Deseriis, 2020). In this respect, the analyses oriented towards determining the impact of digital technologies on the functioning and structure of parties have highlighted their increasing organisational hybridisation (Bennet, Segerberg, and Knüpfer, 2018; Chadwick and Stromer, 2016) or the emergence of decentralised network parties (Deseriis, 2020). Beyond these considerations, as a fourth factor, we must point out the influence of electoral competition and institutional isomorphism as an explicative factor of the digitalisation of parties (Barberá, 2019).

Together with the reasons that explain the asymmetrical digitalisation of political parties, various investigations have focused their attention on the functionality that informational and communicative technology gives to organisations regarding a higher efficiency in terms of time and space. Thus, some academic studies choose to centre their efforts on the utility that digital instruments have to political parties as a means of interacting with their social base, formed by voters and sympathisers (Dommet, Kefford and Power, 2020; Gerbaudo, 2018; Mosca and Quaranta, 2017; Chadwick and Stromer-Galley, 2016). The increasing interactive digitalisation can answer to different motivations. On one hand, the direct connection between the party's elite and their base enables the use of various digital instruments for direct, plebiscitary and legitimising connections regarding decisions adopted by the party's leadership (de Nadal, 2021; Gerbaudo, 2021). Beyond these plebiscitary (and potentially negative) dynamics, digitalisation satisfies, in a cheaper fashion, the demand for participation and deliberation on behalf of social bases through polls, primaries, forums and different participatory formulas (Lioy, Del Valle and Gottlieb, 2019; Barberá, 2019), as well as enabling the mobilisation of resources and participatory funding through initiatives such as micro-credits and crowdfunding (González-Cacheda and Vázquez-Refojos, 2020). As Barberá (2019) points out, informational and communicational technology would enable an increase in participation and political deliberation, in contact and information channels, in the autonomy of actors when mobilising resources and in transparency and accountability.

The present investigation attempts to increase the understanding of the digitalisation of political parties in the Iberian Peninsula, analysed very scarcely up until now. For this, using original data, we will present the degree of digitalisation of political parties in Spain and Portugal based on six studied items: micro-donations, micro-credits, internal elections, e-mail, participatory programs and discussion forums. Following this, as a central element in our investigation, we will analyse the factors that explain the similarities and differences in the degree of digital adoption in political parties from Spain and Portugal. With that end in mind, we will

use comparisons focused on the specific context of each state. In the next section, and from a theoretical perspective, we will delve into factors that can explain the digitalisation of parties. We will also analyse the functions and instruments that shape the digitalisation of political parties in the present.

## 2. The digitalisation of political parties: factors, functions, and instruments

In the first part of this section we will address the diverse factors that encourage or hinder the digitalisation of political parties. In the second part, we will explore the main digital tools introduced by political formations for interaction, mobilisation, participation, and deliberation

### 2.1. Key factors for digitalisation

In the first place, following Ward and Gibson (2009), we must point out the specific configuration, and the social and technological development of each country as a possible explanatory element of the different digitalisation levels. Therefore, political parties from highly digitalised societies might have more incentives when incorporating technological and digital tools into their structures.

**Table 1 - Digital adoption index (DAI) in Spain and Portugal**

	<i>Digital Adoption Index</i>	<i>DAI Business</i>	<i>DAI People</i>	<i>DAI Government</i>
Spain	0,76	0,78	0,67	0,84
Portugal	0,78	0,75	0,72	0,82

**Source.** World Bank, 2019. Digital Adoption Index (DAI). Index constructed on a scale from 0 to 1 that measures the level of digitalisation. DAI Business: average % of businesses with a website, amount of safe servers, download speed and 3G coverage; DAI People: average % of access to mobile cellular data and internet at home; DAI Government: average % of basic administrative systems, public services on line and digital identification systems.

In this respect, and as we can see in Table 1, the variable related to the level of digitalisation in the countries studied is of a similar number in both cases. The data gathered by the digital adoption index for Spain and Portugal presents a notable degree of use of these types of communicative channels for diverse social, economic, and institutional spheres, similar to that of countries characterised by a high development. This data lets us discard this variable as an explanatory element of the asymmetricities in the digitalisation of political parties between these two countries.

In second place, we must take into account the appearance of new actors and the stability of party systems. As Ward and Gibson (2009) point out, the party systems characterised by higher institutionalisation and stability rates can give way to a lower degree of innovation and digitalisation of the structures of its political parties. The conclusions of the investigation conducted by Raniolo and Tarditi (2020) point towards this idea. In this manner, new parties make more intense and radical use of digital tools through the introduction of disruptive innovations. On the other hand, traditional parties introduce these new technologies in a more gradual and progressive manner, giving way to a sustainable innovation model (Raniolo and Tarditi, 2020).

In the same direction, Mosca and Quaranta (2017) point out the importance of digital channels for new parties that do not have access to traditional means of communication. Furthermore, they highlight the relevance of the use of communications and information technologies in order to connect and interact with the section of their party base that comes from social movements. According to Chadwick and Stromer-

Galley (2016), when considering digitalisation of political parties, it's important to consider their relation to social movements. The authors emphasise how parties that come from social movements play a central role in the adoption of digital instruments through the absorption of innovations produced in the social sphere. As an example, and as a means of overcoming the lack of financial resources and the dependency on private economic funding, González-Cacheda and Vázquez-Refojos (2020) highlight the introduction of alternative funding mechanisms, such as crowdfunding or microcredits.

The irruption of new political parties after the 2008 recession is very dissimilar in Portugal and Spain. Beyond the possible link between parties and movements as a key to digitalisation, various investigations relate the adoption of ITs according to the degree of age of the organisations inside the party system (Raniolo and Tarditi, 2020; Mosca and Quaranta, 2017). Similarly, Ward and Gibson (2009) point to the organisational age as a key variable for digitalisation. More specifically, they highlight a higher tendency towards digitalisation in those formations native to the digital space, born in the decade of the 90s. On the contrary, the older organisations show a higher level of resistance to change (Barberá, 2019; Gibson and Ward, 2009).

As we understand it, the synthesis of contributions by Ward and Gibson (2009), Raniolo and Tarditi (2020), Mosca and Quaranta (2017), Bennet, Segerberg and Knüpfer (2018) and Chadwick and Stromer-Galley (2016) enables us to affirm, provisionally, that parties born after the 2008 recession would show more proclivity towards the introduction of digital innovations of a disruptive nature. As Barberá (2019) points out, traditional parties' lower dependency on social bases would discourage the implementation of digital instruments, while, contrarily, new formations would present more of a link with and a higher dependency on civil society, a fact that when added to the limited development of organisational structures and a restricted access to conventional means of communication and funding, would incentivise digitalisation of their structures. Thus, the costs saved in coordination and resource mobilisation associated to digital tools would incentivise the establishment of these mechanisms in organisations with fewer resources. Furthermore, the growing demand for political participation on behalf of protest movements and new party bases would incentivise the adoption of digital instruments (Lioy, Del Valle, and Gottlieb, 2019; Romanos and Sádaba, 2015).

In third place, we will approach the influence of ideology and values as a key for party digitalisation. For this we must take into account the ideological tenets of the organisations, social configurations, and the values of a party's social base made up of militants and sympathisers. Even though the first investigations that took place at the beginning of the century showed no conclusive results (Norris, 2001), some confirmed indications can be extracted from more recent publications. Thus, the green parties in the 90s were the ones who benefited most intensely from the emergent digital tools for communication and coordination. Likewise, Grusell and Nord's (2016) findings in their analysis of political party digitalisation in Sweden show the Green Party as the most digitalised.

The explanation of this phenomenon, according to Norris (2001), is related to the characteristics of the members of this family of parties, who belong, in hegemonic fashion, to professional, highly educated classes and are, thus, intensely digitalised. Another important factor is related to the values that shape ecologist and green parties. The expansion of post-materialist values, opposed to the idea of hierarchy and bureaucratic organisational forms, would encourage the establishment of various participatory formulas oriented towards a more horizontal model (Tranter and Western, 2009).

Regarding the left-right axis, the first investigations on party digitalisation did not show substantial differences between parties on both ideological spectrums (Norris, 2001). In the same vein, in relation to Sweden, Grusell and Nord (2016) present a similar digitalisation index for parties on both the left and the right. The works of Raniolo and Tarditi (2020), Blasio and Viviani (2020), and Chadwick and Stromer

(2016) oppose these findings, showing a higher level of digitalisation in parties on the left. In the case of Spain, Raniolo and Tarditi (2020) find a higher degree of digitalisation in Podemos, Ciudadanos, and Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), opposing a scarcely digitalised Partido Popular.

We consider, then, after reviewing the existing publications, that the question continues to be unanswered. Furthermore, the results in relation to digitalisation on the left-right axis are susceptible to conditioning by the political culture specific to each country. However, from a theoretical viewpoint, the establishment of participatory channels of a digital nature seems more plausible for parties on the left. According to Alcántara (2008), the political left is more prone to the development of formulas of a participatory nature, while the right usually defends traditional representative structures. In the same vein, Raniolo and Tarditi (2020) suggest that the parties on the left have a higher degree of sensibility towards the establishment and towards internal democratic procedure, opposing parties on the right that prioritise hierarchical organisational control. This matter would see itself reflected in the degree of innovation when introducing digital mechanisms for participation into party structures. Finally, we must not forget the influence of party members (Barberá, 2019). In this respect, because of the motives exposed earlier, it seems plausible that left-wing parties would experience a greater pressure to develop digitally.

Continuing with the ideological factor, we cannot omit those investigations that link the ideas of digitalisation and populism. We understand populism as a form of political action based on a rhetorical style that opposes the people's will and the corrupt, selfish elites. Furthermore, populism attempts to overcome representative political structures, adopting plebiscitary formulas that enable direct relations between the people and their leaders (Norris, 2020). In this sense, the characteristics of the digital tools have the capacity to enable direct interaction between a populist party's leadership and its audience, thus eliminating party intermediation (de Nadal, 2021). In another sense, ITs enable party organisations to connect with sympathetic social bases that feel distanced and at odds with the representative system, progressively more individualised and socially fragmented (Gerbaudo, 2018).

Of the parties associated to the different variants of new populism born after the 2008 recession, participatory digitalisation was more intense in parties related to social movements and social protest (De Blasio and Viviani, 2020). According to the classification created by Deseriis (2020), organisations with populist traits like Podemos or Movimento 5 Stelle would fit into the so-called digital platform parties, characterised by a high degree of centralisation, a hyper-leadership model, an important social base, the decline of cadres and intermediate instances, and reactive, plebiscitary participatory models. Agreeing with this idea, Gerbaudo (2021) points out that participatory platforms are used by Podemos and M5S so that the party's social base can ratify decision made beforehand by the party's leadership. The platforms are also used for digital financing, constructed around an anti-establishment message (González-Cacheda and Vázquez-Refojos, 2020). Contrarily, pirate family parties are included within the online digital party type and are constructed around horizontal, decentralised structures, open to deliberation and participation on behalf of the totality of the social base that forms the party (Deseriis, 2020).

In fourth and last place we must consider the effects the level of competition has on the digitalisation of new and traditional parties. In accordance with the theoretical premises of Barberá (2019) and Raniolo and Tarditi (2020), the electoral success of new political parties in Spain should promote greater digitalisation in traditional formations, causing a greater digitalisation of the party system overall. We can affirm this due to two reasons. First, and as a consequence of institutional isomorphism, traditional parties adopt a growing repertoire of digital applications in imitation of new competitors. Second, as a result of the electoral erosion caused by the emergence of new actors, traditional parties will tend to adapt and renew their structures by introducing digital mechanisms to improve their competitiveness, either to attract resources, spread their message in new spaces or to improve the connection and interaction with their social bases (Barbera, 2019).

## 2.2. The digitalisation of political parties: instruments and functions

Having pointed out the key factors for digitalisation, we will focus on the main components of digitalisation aimed at mobilizing financial resources, coordinating, participating and deliberating and, ultimately, improving the interaction of political organizations with their closest context, mainly formed by supporters and activists. As Dommet, Kefford and Power (2020) point out, the digitization of parties would be giving rise to hybrid-type organizations (Chironi and Fittipaldi, 2017). These organizational changes would result in more porous and interactive political parties with organizations and people around them. Among the main functions of digital instruments in the field of political parties, Barberá (2019) points out three differentiated dimensions. Firstly, the potentiality of ICTs for recruitment and grassroots activism through creation of contact channels, participation and deliberation. Secondly, digital channels enable the involvement of the party's bases in decision-making. Thirdly, Barberá (2019) points to ICTs as an instrument to improve transparency and accountability. To these three dimensions, we will add a fourth, related to the possibility that digitalisation offers for the mobilization of financial resources (Gibson and Ward, 2009).

The analysis of the digitalisation of political parties performed in this research will be organized around three of the four aforementioned dimensions, excluding the third (transparency and accountability) due to its non-interactive nature. Thus, we will pay attention to the provision of contact mechanisms on the websites of the parties that facilitate interaction between the organizational structure and its bases through mailboxes or suggestion boxes. In addition, and within the channels for participation and deliberation, we will include digital platforms for the participatory development of programs and forums for debate and discussion. Finally, we will analyse digital participatory funding, including microcredits and crowdfunding. Next, we will specify the characteristics of each of the studied digital instruments.

-Electronic vote: even though the first experiences of electronic voting date back to the first years of the 21st century, the expansion in the use of electronic voting on behalf of political parties grew strong from the second decade of the 2000s onwards. According to Barrat (2019), internet voting should be understood as a procedure mediated by an application in the ICTs sphere that comprehends the emission of votes and their consideration through counting. Electronic voting adopts three differentiated functionalities: the selection of leading cadres from the party's bodies of leadership, the celebration of primary elections for the configuration of electoral candidacies, and the execution of internal enquiries aimed towards the party's social base (Martínez-Dalmau, 2019).

-Mailbox: a service of digital messaging that enables ubiquitous communication from a multiplicity of digital devices such as computers, mobile phones, or tablets. In the political sphere it facilitates contact between citizens and organisations as it works in an open manner, enabling the formulation of petitions, demands, and complaints, as well as requesting a wide range of different information.

-Discussion forums: discussion forums are constructed as deliberative spaces of an open, digital nature, open to the participation of a party's social base. They include the possibility of encouraging (and participating in) debates. Themes are usually diverse and can be related to internal party issues or to propositions of a political nature oriented towards political or institutional action. The design of the procedure can influence the degree of inclusion or exclusion of the initiatives proposed (Pérez-Moneo, 2019). One of the more popular platforms for discussion and deliberation is Reddit. This application enables interaction through sharing of textual, visual or hyperlinked material, and positions can be taken through commenting. There is also the possibility of voicing an opinion on proposals and discussed issues through the emission of a vote (Ardanuy and Labuske, 2015).

-Participatory program: participatory programs differ from discussion forums on the level of concision of their fundamental objective. Here, proposals suggested, discussed and adopted by members that form the

social base of the party adhere exclusively to the creation of a programmatic document related to a specific electoral appointment. According to its characteristics, the processes of digital programmatic creation can substitute or complement traditional mechanisms of programmatic creation and approval.

-Microdonations: this digital model of financial resource mobilisation can adopt two different formats. Firstly, we understand crowdfunding as a model of digital funding of a finalist nature built around campaigns with a preestablished objective and duration (González-Cacheda and Cancela, 2021; Jovanovic, 2019). Thus, through small donations, militants and sympathisers can fund material elements or party activities (González-Cacheda, 2018). In second place, we identify microdonations of a non-finalist character oriented towards funding ordinary party and campaign costs. Relevant examples are the funding obtained by Howard Dean, candidate in the Democratic primary election in 2004 (Kreiss, 2009), and the 121 million dollars obtained by Barack Obama during the 2008 presidential campaign

-Microcredits: digitally managed microcredits are usually oriented towards funding electoral campaigns and processes. The quantities established vary according to guides established by the parties. The reimbursement of quantities donated by sympathisers and members appears in some occasions linked to the collection of electoral subsidies derived from an election's results. Civil electronic funding formulas enable specific parties to stress not only their anti-establishment discourse, but also their autonomy from large economic groups and finance entities (González-Cacheda and Vázquez-Refojos, 2020).

### **3. Specific context: causes, consequences and characteristics of the evolution of the party systems in Spain and Portugal**

As we explain in the section beforehand, political apathy greatly impacted the party systems in the south of Europe. The institutionalisation of party systems was weakened notably through the decline of the principal centre-left and centre-right parties, as well as with the entry of new parties that brought along an increase in polarisation and a rupture with traditional models of centripetal competence of Southern European countries (Lisi and Tsatsanis, 2020). In Spain, the 2015 election and the entry of Podemos and Ciudadanos with 34,6% of the votes marked an inflexion point on the two-party system that had been working with stability since the democratic transition period (Orriols and Cordero, 2016).

According to Vidal (2017), the transformations to the party system in Spain appear in relation to a crisis of representation and dissatisfaction with how the majority parties managed the recession. Therefore, the increase in the electorate of Podemos, characterised ideologically as a left-populist party because of its defence of the interests of the people against the interests of the elites and the establishment (Mudde and Rovira, 2019), had corruption and the political crisis as underlying causes. Support came mainly from sectors located ideologically on the left who were unhappy with the political system and with traditional, left-wing parties. On the contrary, Ciudadanos' rise comes in relation to the defence of an agenda of democratic regeneration and of confronting peripheral nationalist movements (Orriols and Cordero, 2016). In both cases, one can observe an important level of electoral support coming from a series of groups from the younger electorate (Vidal, 2017).

The second point of interest is related to the irruption of Vox in the April 2019 election with 10% of the vote. In the new general election held in November of 2019, Vox was able to improve its results obtaining the third place with 15% of the vote, once again altering the configuration of the party system in Spain. Vox's entry brought with it an increase in fragmentation and competences in the conservative political space, and also in the polarization of the system as a whole. Vox's ideological traits, according to Ferreira (2019), are related to ultranationalism, nativism, authoritarianism, and traditionalism. According to Arroyo (2020), Vox's growth can be explained fundamentally by the support of social sectors with a Spanish nationalist

sensibility worried about the situation in Catalunya and who are unhappy about the management of the conflict by Partido Popular, perceived as too soft.

On the other hand, the stability of the Portuguese party system represents an exception in the south of Europe (Freire, 2021). As De Giorgi and Santana-Pereira point out (2020), in Portugal there have been no significant changes in the party system, and confidence in the political system recovered far more rapidly. Concerning main actors, the Partido Socialista (PS) continued its hegemony on the centre-left. During the austerity period, unhappiness with fiscal adjustment policies were capitalized on mainly by traditional organisations such as Partido Comunista Português (PCP) or Bloco de Esquerda (BE). In contrast to the case of Spain, the importance of new actors on the left populist space was limited (Lisi and Borghetto, 2019). The entry of the Livre party in the house of representatives, related to demonstration and protest movements, was anecdotal (Accornero and Ramos, 2015). For the left, the main change of this period came in relation to the alliance formed by PS, PCP and BE in order to form government, presided by Antonio Costa (Serra-Silva et al., 2019).

On the right, these transformations also registered on a less abrupt level than in other southern European states. Up until the legislative election of 2019, the nativist and authoritarian far-right hadn't been able to obtain political representation (Quintas, 2018). The entry of Chega into parliament with a sole representative hasn't posed a threat to PSD's centre-right hegemony. According to Heyne and Manucci (2021), Chega's propositions could be classed as nativist, authoritarian, and traditionalist, opposing and combatting immigration, feminist ideology, and the right to abortion.

The differences here emphasised between the Spanish and Portuguese cases are explained from different viewpoints in academic literature. Fishman (2021) identifies the origin of the democratic processes in the decade of the 70s as the underlying cause. The different nature of the democratic transitions in Spain and Portugal created different patterns of political culture that gave way to a less inclusive democracy for the Spanish working classes. The author exemplifies these asymmetries in the answer that each country's institutional system gave regarding the economic and financial recession. He also mentions, as an example, how the Catalanian crisis was handled in Spain. A higher level of inclusion in the Portuguese political system regarding the working classes would explain greater levels of satisfaction with the democratic system among the people. On the contrary, the higher levels of elitism in Spain's political system would have originated a higher level of apathy expressed in the erosion of the traditional actors and in the emergence of anti-establishment parties like Podemos (Fishman, 2021).

In the same way, Fernandes (2017) points out that the impact of the austerity measures in Portugal was far less severe than in other countries in the south of Europe because of decisions made by the government and by the Constitutional Court. In addition, and in the context of social protests, the institutions and the actors that constitute the political system in Portugal showed a higher level of political openness and receptivity to the demands of unhappy social groups. On the contrary, Fishman (2021) points out that in Spain the main actors, PSOE included, attempted to delegitimise the activities and demands of the 15M movement.

From a different point of view, the lesser impact that the social and economic context originated in the Portuguese party system could be explained by the strategy put into place by the government in the period between 2015 and 2019. In this sense, De Giorgi and Santana-Pereira (2020) explain a part of the executive government's success through the idea of austerity by stealth developed by Moury, De Giorgi and Pita (2020):

Austerity by stealth, as they define it, means fiscal contraction that is less visible and not highlighted in the government's public speeches, and that, in the case of the first Costa government, was implicitly supported by the left-wing parties in exchange for the approval of more visible anti-austerity measures. Their argument is backed by a quantitative analysis of revenue and expenditure data (showing that although the government



reverted many austerity policies, there was no inversion of the fiscal contraction in practice since the Great Recession (p. 143).

Beyond the underlying causes that can explain the different transformation of the party systems and the erosion of their traditional components, what's certain is that the impact of the recorded changes is substantially different in Portugal and in Spain. With the traits of the main actors and party systems in both countries outlined, we must point out the analytical importance of the changes observed in relation to the object of this study. Even though the digitalisation of political parties starts before the 2008 recession, it's true that in posteriority this process suffers a notable acceleration. Some of the factors that can ease digitalisation appear associated in specific literature to some of the questions identified above. In this manner, traditional and older parties would have a higher level of resistance to change and to the introduction of innovation. Furthermore, the modification of competence patterns caused by the entry of new actors could facilitate the adoption of new tools and instruments on behalf of traditional parties.

Having identified the main contextual, theoretical and conceptual elements related to the factors and instruments for participatory digitalisation, in the next sections of this work we will attempt to answer the following questions:

-What factors can explain the likenesses and differences in the degree of digitalisation of the analysed political parties?

-Do differences in the characteristics and in the degree of digitalisation exist in the political parties of Portugal and Spain? If so, what factors could explain this?

#### 4. Methodology, data, and statistical analysis techniques

To answer research questions related to digitalisation of political parties in Portugal and Spain, we elaborated a category matrix, integrated by the main digital instruments used for contact, participation, deliberation, and funding. During January and February 2021, we classified and compiled information from the websites of political parties with parliamentary representation in Portugal and Spain<sup>1</sup>. Later, in order to complete the data matrix with the lacking information related to various categories, we emailed the parties Eukal Herria Bildu, Partido Regionalista de Cantabria and En Comú. While EH Bildu provided a satisfactory response, the other two parties sent no reply. For the preparation of the matrix, the founding date of the parties was considered, taking 2008 as a reference. Also taken into account was the ideology of the parties articulated on the left-right axis.

**Table 2 - Observation units**

	<i>Political Parties (webs)</i>
Spain	23
Portugal	10
Total	33

**Source.** Elaborated by the authors.

<sup>1</sup>In the process of collecting information through the websites of political parties, the links to other resources and digital spaces were examined. Thus, related spaces that were formally non-adjacent to party structure were discarded, such as the Podemos-affiliated Instituto 25M. Likewise, Esquerda.net was also discarded, in this case because of its informative and disseminative nature, with a lack of participatory channels.

In order to reduce the possibility of error in the collection of information during fieldwork, the data collection was performed by three researchers. The collected data was verified through a comparison. The sample obtained, as can be seen in Table 2, comprised a total of 33 political parties, 23 in the case of Spain and 10 in Portugal<sup>2</sup>.

The grouping of parties on the left-right axis was done following the historical-analytical model, enabling classification of parties according to their characteristics derived from their political proposals and declarations done by their leaders (González and Queirolo, 2013). From this model, each of the three researches participating in this study classified the parties with parliamentary representation in Portugal and Spain following the criteria established by Alcántara (2008)<sup>3</sup>. Finally, a synthesis of the three codifications was carried out through a discussion of results. Of all the parties only Teruel Existe was excluded, as their proposals only revolve around a centre-periphery axis.

**Table 3 - Study variables**

	<i>Spain</i>	<i>Portugal</i>
Micro-donations	Yes/No	Yes/No
Microcredits	Yes/No	Yes/No
Electronic voting	Yes/No	Yes/No
Mailbox	Yes/No	Yes/No
Participatory program	Yes/No	Yes/No
Discussion forum	Yes/No	Yes/No

**Source.** Information obtained from the websites of the analysed political parties

The six study variables used to collect and compile the information obtained from the web pages of all the parties mentioned in Table 2, are categorical and qualitative, as can be seen in Table 3. The study variables show the presence or absence of digital instruments among the political parties represented in the parliaments of Spain and Portugal.

We must take into account that the field work and the data gathering through political parties' websites took place at the same time as the presidential elections in Portugal. This fact did not interfere with our investigation, the main objective of which comprised gathering evidence of stable digital tools and structures. Ad hoc communicative channels and instruments, including those established temporarily for the electoral campaign, were omitted from our study. In the first place, and from a theoretical viewpoint, because of our understanding that participation goes beyond purely electoral processes; and in second place, and from an instrumental and methodological viewpoint, with the goal of enabling comparisons without the distortion electoral campaigns can have on the level of digitalisation in political parties.

For the statistical analysis of the data obtained, we first synthesised them for simple and clear presentation through the elaboration of descriptive statistics (Rendón-Macias et al., 2016) based on the proportions or percentages of the different study variables. Regarding inferential statistics tests, after dismissing Pearson's Chi-square test due to the characteristics of the expected results<sup>4</sup>, we adopted Fisher's exact test, which is effective for the analysis of small samples. The aim of this test was to check the association of the study

2 In the case of Spanish political parties, Ciudadanos, founded in 2006 in the Catalanian sphere, was considered in the present investigation as a newly created party as it was consolidated on a national level from 2015 onwards.

3 For the classification of parties on the right-left axis, a total of six criteria established by Alcántara (2008) were used: freedom vs. equality, monoculture vs. multiculturalism, unsustainable development vs. ecologism, clericalism vs. laicism, market vs. state and representation vs. participation.

4 The expected values were lower than 5 in more than 20% of the cells of the contingency table (Pértega and Gallina, 2004).

variables and the probability of asymmetry among the studied population based on the result of the p-value ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Pértega and Pita, 2004).

Because of the reduced sample size as a consequence of the limited number of analysed cases, the findings will be interpreted with caution, as it is difficult to establish generalisations in these types of studies. In any case, we consider that the data gathered and analysed statistically is of useful in understanding the digitalisation of political parties in Portugal and Spain, as well as in approaching the possible explicative factors from an approximative focus.

## 5. Results

In this section we will present the results of the research into the web pages of the political parties with parliamentary representation in Spain and Portugal. First, we will show the individual data regarding the digitalisation of the political parties under study in both states. Next, we will analyse the aggregated data for each variable based on the founding year and ideology of the different political parties. We will finish this section by examining the aggregated results of parties' digitalisation according to each of the countries.

**Table 4 - Digitalisation among political parties in Portugal**

	<i>Micro-donations</i>	<i>Microcredits</i>	<i>Electronic voting</i>	<i>Mailbox</i>	<i>Participatory program</i>	<i>Discussion forum</i>
PS	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
PSD	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
BE	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
PCP- CDU	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
CDS-PP	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
PAN	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
PEV	No	No	No	No	No	No
CH	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
IL	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
L	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

**Note.** PS: Partido Socialista; PSD: Partido Social Demócrata; BE: Bloco de Esquerda; PCP-CDU: Partido Comunista Português; CDS-PP: Partido Popular; PAN: Pessoas-Animais-Natureza; PEV: Os Verdes; CH: Chega!; IL: Iniciativa Liberal; L: Livre.

As we can see in Table 4, the Portuguese political parties with the greatest digital development are Iniciativa Liberal (IL) and Livre (L), which have microfunding, contact, electronic voting and program development tools. Next, we find Partido Socialista (PS), which makes use of the aforementioned tools with the exception of micro-donations and electronic voting. Furthermore, Pessoas-Animais-Natureza (PAN) presents a space on its website for microfunding and contact through a suggestion box. The rest of the political parties represented in the Portuguese Assembleia da República show only one of the characteristics observed, the most common possibility being contact through the suggestion box.

**Table 5 - Digitalisation among political parties in Spain**

	<i>Micro-donations</i>	<i>Microcredits</i>	<i>Electronic voting</i>	<i>Mailbox</i>	<i>Participatory program</i>	<i>Discussion forum</i>
PSOE	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
PP	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Vox	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Cs	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Ps	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
IU	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
EC	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
ERC	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
PDeCAT	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
JxCAT	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
PNV	No	No	No	No	No	No
+P	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
EQUO	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
BILDU	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
CUP	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
C	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
CC	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
NC	No	No	No	No	No	No
BNG	No	No	No	No	No	No
UPN	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
PRC	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
TE	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
FA	No	No	No	Yes	No	No

**Note.** PSOE: Partido Socialista Obrero Español; PP: Partido Popular; VOX: Vox; Cs: Ciudadanos; Ps: Podemos; IU: Izquierda Unida; EC: En Comú; ERC: Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya; PDeCAT: Partido Demòcrata Europeu Català; JxCAT: Junts per Catalunya; PNV: Partido Nacionalista Vasco; +P: Más País; EQUO: Equo; BILDU: EH Bildu; CUP: Candidatura d'Unitat Popular; C: Compromís; CC: Coalición Canaria; NC: Nueva Canarias; BNG: Bloque Nacionalista Galego; UPN: Unión del Pueblo Navarro; PRC: Partido Regionalista de Cantabria; TE: Teruel Existe; FA: Foro Asturias.

In Spain, according to Table 5, the most digitalized party is Podemos (Ps), as it presents 5 of the 6 items observed. The PSOE, BILDU and EQUO also present a significant level of digitalisation, fulfilling 4 of the 6 established characteristics. In next place, there is a large group (formed by Cs, EC, ERC, PDeCAT, JxC, +P and the CUP), adopting 3 of the 6 digital instruments analysed. On the other hand, the PNV, BNG and NC do not present any of the digital instruments mentioned (see Table 5).

**Table 6 - Analysis of the percentages (Fisher's test) of the different variables related to digitalisation in Spain according to the founding year of the political parties**

	<i>Before 2008</i>	<i>After 2008</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Micro-donations	54,55	83,33	0,19
Microcredits	0	16,67	0,47
Electronic voting	9,09	58,33	<0,05
Mailbox	45,45	91,67	<0,05
Participatory program	9,09	25	0,59
Discussion forum	9,09	25	0,59

**Note.** Political parties founded before 2008: PSOE: Partido Socialista Obrero Español; PP: Partido Popular; IU: Izquierda Unida; ERC: Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya; PNV: Partido Nacionalista Vasco; CC: Coalición Canaria; NC: Nueva Canarias; BNG: Bloque Nacionalista Galego; UPN: Unión del Pueblo Navarro; PRC: Partido Regionalista de Cantabria; TE: Teruel Existe. Political parties founded after 2008: VOX: Vox; Ps: Podemos; CS: Ciudadanos; EC: En Comú; PDeCAT: Partido Demòcrata Europeu Català; JxCAT: Junts per Catalunya; +P: Más Pais; EQUO: Equo; BILDU: EH Bildu; CUP: Candidatura d'Unitat Popular; C: Compromís; FA: Foro Asturias.

**Note.** Statistical significance  $p < 0.05$

According to Table 6, the variables that collect information in an aggregate way for each of the digital instruments show a higher level of digitalisation among the political parties founded after 2008. In relation to the provision of channels for online funding, we found for the micro-donations variable a proportion of 83.33% among the parties created after 2008, compared to 54.55% in the case of the political parties founded before 2008. This tendency is the same for the microcredits variable, with a result of 16.67% for the post-2008 parties, and the non-existence of this instrument among the pre-2008 formations.

Regarding the existence of mechanisms for digital voting, we once again observed a higher proportion among newly created parties (58.33% versus 9.09%). In this case the association between variables is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) (see Table 6). Regarding the provision of contact instruments, such as the mailbox, we once again found that they were more present in the post-2008 parties (91.67%) compared to the pre-2008 parties (45.45%) and a statistically significant association between variables. The presence of mechanisms for the participatory elaboration of programmatic proposals through digital channels also has a higher level among the post-2008 parties (25% compared to 9.09%). Finally, and with the same difference level, post-2008 parties made up a higher proportion (25% as opposed to 9.09%) of those that enabled deliberation among their party base through the implementation of digital forums (see Table 6).

**Table 7 - Analysis of the percentages (Fisher's test) of the different variables related to digitalisation in Portugal according to the founding year of the political parties**

	<i>Before 2008</i>	<i>After 2008</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Micro-donations	16.67	100	<0.05
Microcredits	0	0	-
Electronic voting	0	25	0.4
Mailbox	75	66.67	1
Participatory program	16.67	50	0.5
Discussion forum	0	0	-

**Note.** Political parties founded before 2008: PS: Partido Socialista; PSD: Partido Social Demócrata; BE: Bloco de Esquerda; PCP-CDU: Partido Comunista Português; CDS-PP: Partido Popular; PEV: Os Verdes. Political parties founded after 2008: PAN: Pessoas-Animais-Natureza; CH: Chega!; IL: Iniciativa Liberal; L: Livre.

Note. Statistical significance  $p < 0.05$

In the Portuguese case, we can observe positive values related to digitalisation in 4 of the 6 variables analysed. Thus, microcredits and discussion forums are not part of the digital repertoire of any of the formations with parliamentary representation. In the remaining variables, we can find a greater implementation degree of digital mechanisms among political parties that emerged after the 2008 crisis. Furthermore, the channels for financing through micro-donations are used by 100% of the post-2008 parties. In contrast, the proportion reaches 16.67% among the pre-2008 parties. The association for the variable micro-donations is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) (see Table 7). On the other hand, the provision of contact mechanisms, such as the mailbox, showed a higher level among the pre-2008 parties, with 75% compared to 66.67% in the post-2008 parties. Also the use of electronic voting. Finally, in relation to the participatory elaboration of the electoral program, we once again register a higher degree among the more recently founded parties (50% versus 16.67%) (see Table 7).

**Table 8 - Analysis of the percentages (Fisher's test) of the different variables relative to the digitalisation in Spain according to each political party's ideology.**

	<i>Left</i>	<i>Right</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Microdonations	75	60	0,75
Microcredits	16,67	0	0,57
Electronic voting	50	20	0,26
Mailboxes	66,67	70	1
Participatory programs	33,33	0	0,16
Discussion forums	25	10	0,66

**Note.** Left Political Parties: PSOE: Partido Socialista Obrero Español; IU: Izquierda Unida; ERC: Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya; Nueva Canarias; BNG: Bloque Nacionalista Galego; Ps: Podemos; EC: En Comú; +P: Más Pais; EQUO: Equo; BILDU: EH Bildu; CUP: Candidatura d'Unitat Popular; C: Compromís; Right Political Parties: PP: Partido Popular; CS: Ciudadanos; PNV: Partido Nacionalista Vasco; CC: Coalición Canaria; UPN: Unión del Pueblo Navarro; PRC: Partido Regionalista de Cantabria; VOX: Vox; PDeCAT: Partido Demòcrata Europeu Català; JxCAT: Junts per Catalunya; FA: Foro Asturias.

Note. Statistical significance  $p < 0.05$

On the relationship between ideology and participatory digitalisation in political parties in Spain, the results do not show a significant relation between any of the variables that conform this analysis. However, in 5 of the 6 variables, political parties on the left have a higher usage percentage; the usage of mailboxes as a means to establish contact with citizens is very similar, albeit slightly higher in parties on the right. As you can see in Table 8, the variables that show a higher difference in percentages are the ones that reflect the level of adoption of digital instruments for electronic voting and for establishing a party's political programme.

**Table 9 - Analysis of the percentages (Fisher's test) of the different variables relative to digitalisation in Portugal according to each political party's ideology.**

	<i>Left</i>	<i>Right</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Micro-donations	33,33	75	0,52
Microcredits	0	0	-
Electronic voting	16,67	0	1
Mailbox	83,33	50	0,50
Participatory programs	33,33	25	1
Discussion forums	0	0	-

**Note.** Parties on the left: PS: Partido Socialista; BE: Bloco de Esquerda; PCP-CDU: Partido Comunista Português; PEV: Os Verdes; PAN: Pessoas-Animais-Natureza; L: Livre. Parties on the right: PSD: Partido Social Democrata; CDS-PP: Partido Popular; CH: Chega!; IL: Iniciativa Liberal.

**Note.** Statistical significance  $p < 0.05$

On the contrary, the data relating ideology and digitalisation in political parties in Portugal show less clear tendencies than in Spain. In 3 of the 6 variables the values show a severely lacking level of adoption of digital mechanisms in parties on both sides of the ideological spectrum (see Table 9). In the remaining 3, parties on the right show a higher degree of digitalisation when establishing mechanisms to obtain microdonations. Finally, as can be seen in Table 9, parties on the left present a higher percentage in the adoption of digital instruments oriented towards the elaboration of the political programme and the disposition of an mailbox.

**Table 10 - Analysis of the percentages (Fisher's test) of the different variables related to the digitalisation of political parties according to each party's country.**

	<i>Portugal</i>	<i>Spain</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Micro-donations	50	69.57	0.43
Microcredits	0	8.70	1
Electronic voting	10	34.78	0.07
Mailboxes	70	69.57	1
Participatory program	30	17.39	0.64
Discussion forums	0	17.39	0.28

Note. Political parties Portugal: PS: Partido Socialista; PSD: Partido Social Democrata; BE: Bloco de Esquerda; PCP-CDU: Partido Comunista Português; CDS-PP: Partido Popular; PAN: Pessoas-Animais-Natureza; PEV: Os Verdes; CH: Chega!; IL: Iniciativa Liberal; L: Livre. Political parties Spain: PSOE: Partido Socialista Obrero Español; PP: Partido

Popular; VOX: Vox; Cs: Ciudadanos; Ps: Podemos; IU: Izquierda Unida; EC: En Comú; ERC: Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya; PDeCAT: Partido Demòcrata Europeu Català; JxCAT: Junts per Catalunya; PNV: Partido Nacionalista Vasco; +P: Más País; EQUO: Equo; BILDU: EH Bildu; CUP: Candidatura d'Unitat Popular; C: Compromís; CC: Coalición Canaria; NC: Nueva Canarias; BNG: Bloque Nacionalista Galego; UPN: Unión del Pueblo Navarro; PRC: Partido Regionalista de Cantabria; TE: Teruel Existe; FA: Foro Asturias.

Note. Statistical significance  $p < 0.05$ .

At the aggregate level by country, although no statistically significant association are observed in any of the variables related to the digitalisation of political parties, we can see higher percentages among the parties in the Spanish State in 4 of the 6 variables. Conversely, the data show a higher level in the case of the Portuguese parties in only one of the variables, and the remaining variables present balanced values. Thus, the political parties in Spain register a proportion of 69.57% in micro-donations, 8.70% in microcredits, 34.78% in electronic voting and 17.39% in discussion forums. Compared with these data, the Portuguese parties do not make use of the microcredit systems and discussion forum, and they have a percentage of 50% for the micro-donations variable. Regarding contact mechanisms such as the mailbox, we observe even levels, with a proportion of 70% in the variable that aggregates the Portuguese parties and 69.57% in the Spanish case. In contrast, the variable that explains the provision of a mechanism for the collaborative elaboration of the electoral program presents a higher level in the case of the Portuguese parties (30% versus 17.39%) (see Table 10).

## 6. Discussion

In this investigation we attempted to better comprehend the key factors in the digitalisation of political parties. With that end in mind, we recollected information relative to the different variables that show the usage of digital mechanisms for contacting, information, participation, deliberation, and financing in political parties in Portugal and Spain. To answer the questions the investigation poses, we analysed the gathered data on the base of various theoretical premises that attempt to explain the processes of innovation and digitalisation in political parties. Furthermore, with the gathered data, we can now attempt to give new information regarding the characteristics, similarities, and differences in the digitalisation of political parties in Portugal and Spain.

With the first of the theoretical factors (regarding the level of digitalisation of each country in general) discarded, the data referencing the foundation of the parties shows positive differences in the degree of digitalisation in parties that emerged after 2008. This tendency we observed acquires a higher intensity in the Spanish case. Thus, in the totality of the observed variables, new parties demonstrate higher levels of digitalisation, the association between the year of foundation and the use of electronic voting and mailboxes being of statistical significance. In the case of Portugal, we can observe a weaker, albeit similar tendency. Thus, political parties founded after 2008 present a higher degree of digitalisation in 4 of the 6 variables observed, with the relation between the time of foundation and the establishment of channels for microdonations being of statistical significance.

These findings agree with the affirmation of Raniolo and Tarditi (2020), in which they point out that new parties tend towards a higher proclivity when adopting digital instruments and innovations of a disruptive character. According to Ward and Gibson (2009), organisations that are native to the digital sphere demonstrate a higher predisposition towards digitalisation. On the contrary, as Barberá (2019) points out, traditional political parties present a higher resistance to change. Furthermore, and regarding the specific context of the representation crisis that followed the 2008 recession, political parties close to social



movements against austerity present a higher degree of digitalisation. This phenomenon can be explained as a consequence of the need new parties have to mobilise low-cost resources, of their higher dependency on allied and close-by social bases, and of the lower access to traditional means of funding and communication. Furthermore, parties born from civil society present a higher need to connect sympathisers through new channels that satisfy a greater participatory sensibility (Lioy, Del Valle and Gottlieb, 2019; Barberá, 2019; Mosca and Quaranta, 2017; Chadwick and Stromer-Galley, 2016).

In Spain, Podemos and Equo are examples of highly digitalised, newly created parties closely related to the origins of social movements. Podemos shows positive values in five of the six variables analysed. Equo does so in four of the six digital instruments, as does leftist, sovereignty-seeking EH Bildu. Contrarily, Vox appears to be digitalised in two of the six studied variables. In Portugal, the most similar case to Spain's would be Livre. This small organisation, born from the 2008 recession and close to Portuguese protest movements, uses four of the six analysed digital elements. As well as in Livre's case, the highest level of digitalisation in Portugal also belongs to another small formation founded after 2008 called Iniciativa Liberal. The opposite example is represented by Chega, hardly digitalised at all. In Spain, political formations of a traditional nature and long history like PP, PNV, BNG or IU show a lower degree of digitalisation. The exception in the older parties is PSOE, digitalised in four of six studied dimensions. In Portugal, traditional political formations show low digitalisation indexes. The more relevant examples we can cite are PSD, CDS-PP, BE, PCP-CDU or PEV.

The influence ideologies organised on the left-right axis have on the levels of digitalisation of the different examined variables present a lower percentual difference. In Spain, parties on the left show a higher degree of digitalisation in five of the six variables. In no case does the statistically conducted test demonstrate a significant level of association. Parties on the right obtain only one higher level in the use of mailboxes. In Portugal, we can observe the same tendency, albeit in a weaker sense. Thus, in three of the six analysed categories, parties on the left present higher values. On the contrary, parties on the right demonstrate a higher degree of digitalisation in the variable that registers the percentage of parties that obtain micro-donations. These results do not agree with the first studies carried out between ideology and digitalisation (Norris, 2001). They do not agree, either, with the findings presented by Grusell and Nord (2016) in which they suggest a similar level of digitalisation in parties on both the right and the left.

On the contrary, the higher usage of participatory digital instruments by parties on the left appears related to the affirmations presented in the works of Raniolo and Tarditi (2020), Blasio and Viviani (2020), and Chadwick and Stromer (2016). This tendency coincides with the ideas of Alcántara (2008) regarding the left's higher sensibility towards political participation. In the same vein, Raniolo and Tarditi (2020) state that political parties on the left show a higher proclivity towards establishing internal, democratic, participatory formulas. From the analysed cases on the left of the ideological spectrum, Podemos' intense usage of digital instruments stands out. In this case it is necessary to mention the positive relation between their populist traits and their digitalisation. Podemos, defined as a platform party by various authors (Deseriis, 2020; Gerbaudo, 2018), uses surveys and digital elections to connect with social bases that are fragmented and unhappy with the representative system (Gerbaudo, 2018). The result would give way to direct, plebiscitary action between leaders and the party's social base, eliminating, thusly, any instance of party intermediation. Another example that connects anti-establishment discourse and digitalisation is associated to the disposition of funding mechanisms such as micro-donations and microcredits. Campaign messages and discursive frameworks for digital funding pivoted, heavily, on Podemos' independence from large donors and financial institutions (González-Cacheda and Vázquez-Refojos, 2020).

Contrarily, parties on the right would prioritise traditional structures and representative models oriented towards hierarchical control of their organisations (Raniolo and Tarditi, 2020; Alcántara, 2008).

Furthermore, pressure to develop participatory formulas on behalf of sympathisers and party members of parties on the left would be much more intense than that of party bases on the right. Thus, new nationalist, nativist, and authoritarian formations such as Vox or Chega represent examples of low digitalisation similarly to traditional formations such as PP in Spain and PSD and CDS-PP in Portugal. As an exception we can highlight IL in Portugal. In Spain, Ciudadanos, albeit moderately, also uses a higher number of digital mechanisms than other right-wing formations. In this case the explanation could reside in its regenerationist and renovationist spirit, as well as in a younger social base and electorate.

To end with the ideological factor, we must observe the possible relation between the predominance of post-materialist values and the establishment of digital participatory tools. The opposition of these hierarchical, bureaucratic structures and the closeness to participatory values would promote the introduction of digital innovations (Tranter and Western, 2009). In this respect, Norris (2001) points out how green family parties were the most digitalised during the 90s. In the same vein, and more recently, Grusell and Nord (2016) point towards the Green Party of Sweden as the most digitalised. However, the data handled in this investigation does not enable us to corroborate these affirmations. Even though in Spain Equo presents an important level of incorporation of digital channels into its structures, including participatory elaboration of the political programme and digital electoral mechanisms, in the case of Portugal, strictly post-materialist formations such as PEV or PAN register very low levels of digitalisation.

In order to understand the asymmetries between the levels of digitalisation in parties in Spain and Portugal, we must observe the recorded modifications in the party systems in each country after the 2008 recession. In Portugal, as various authors agree (Freire, 2021; De Giorgi and Santana-Pereira, 2020; Lisi and Borghetto, 2019), the party system suffered no substantial modifications beyond the introduction of new parties with scarce representation; parties that were ultimately unable to alter traditional competition patterns. However, in the case of Spain these parties represent an important example of altering the party system, as well as altering the competition patterns between actors. The strong irruption of Ciudadanos and Vox on the right, as well as Podemos on the left, substantially modified the model that had been working since the Transition period (Vidal, 2017; Orriols and Cordero, 2016). According to Barberá (2019) and Raniolo and Tarditi (2020), the introduction of new, innovative actors and the increase in competition would incentivise digitalisation in traditional parties as a consequence of institutional isomorphism, of the necessity to introduce mechanisms that improve communicative competitiveness, and in order to mobilise resources. Our viewpoint is that this phenomenon appears perfectly exemplified in the centre-left field in Spain. The intense digitalisation PSOE has gone through would be a consequence of the strong irruption of a platform party like Podemos, supported by unhappy sectors coming from the leftist sphere. This fact, together with a strong process of electoral erosion, can explain the increase in digital capacities exhibited by PSOE in an attempt to improve competitiveness against Podemos. It is of importance to note that the usage of digital applications on behalf of PSOE is significantly higher than those presented by other traditional formations in Portugal and Spain.

On a final note, we will present, in a synthetic manner, the main tendencies observed regarding the factors that enable or hinder digitalisation in parties. The next affirmations must be considered in relation the limitations posed by the sample size and the data handled in this investigation:

-The age of the parties enables or hinders the adoption of channels and instruments of a digital nature for information, participation, deliberation, and funding purposes. In this manner, parties founded after 2008 in Spain and Portugal show a higher level of digitalisation in most of the observed variables.

-The ideology affects the degree of digitalisation of political parties. Thus, in Spain and Portugal, parties on the left show a higher tendency towards the usage of the digital mechanisms observed in this investigation.

-The stability of the party system and of change patterns in party competence guidelines affect the degree innovation and digitalisation of political parties. The higher electoral strength and the higher degree of digitalisation in new parties born in Spain after 2008 partially incentivise (on the left's spectrum) digitalisation of traditional parties. The sum of these elements manifest as superior values in Spain in four of the six analysed variables.

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