

Digital Intra-Party Democracy: an exploratory analysis of Podemos and Labour Party

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DIGITAL INTRA-PARTY DEMOCRACY: AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF PODEMOS AND THE LABOUR PARTY

The role of technology is growing in intra-party democracy (IPD) processes. This article presents a proposal for analysing digital IPD, by applying empirical democratic theory dimensions. To test our methodology, we analyse two different types of parties, a new digital one, Podemos, and a traditional one undergoing reform, the Labour Party. Our analysis shows, firstly, that the application of technology is not neutral, with a differential impact depending on the specific democratic dimension considered and, secondly, that - due to convergent developments - new and established parties are closer in their digital IPD than expected. These results point out the relevance, for the ongoing debate on the quality of IPD, of considering the impact of digital on different democratic dimensions and its evolution over time.

Keywords: Digital democracy, Intra-Party Democracy, Online Participatory Platform, Podemos, Political parties, the Labour Party

1. Introduction

New and established parties have recently drawn upon Intra-Party Democracy (IPD) to overcome their crisis of legitimacy within the political system, their members and society as a whole (von dem Berge and Poguntke, 2017; Borz and Janda 2020). As Scarrow (1999) argued, IPD is one of the most common strategies for bringing citizens back into the political arena, whether as an authentic democratic goal or just as a tool for political elites to strengthen (or legitimate) their power (Ignazi, 2020). Although the democratic crisis and the crisis of political parties are profoundly intertwined, there is little communication and ‘cross-fertilization’

between democratic theorists and party scholars (van Biezen and Saward, 2008). Among the analyses of the relation between IPD and democratic theory, scholars have been studying for more than two decades the impact of technology and social media on democracy, with differing views, moving “from optimism (if not euphoria) to pessimism (if not despair)” (Diamond, 2019, p. 20). As technopolitics, cyberdemocracy and e-government have flooded democracy, parties have also widely adopted digital tools for adapting to the new digital age (Gibson and Ward, 2009), and especially to enhance their IPD (Deseeris and Vittori, 2019). This is true for new parties, *e.g.* cyber, platform or digital parties (Lioy et al., 2019; Gerbaudo, 2019), as well as - but often less analysed - established parties undergoing reform. However, just recently the digital dimension has come to be regarded as a key element in intraparty politics.

What is the role of digital technologies for IPD? Do digital initiatives develop all the possible democratic dimensions or just some of them? And, applying the same concepts and dimensions traditionally used in empirical democratic theory, do new digital procedures allow a higher quality of IPD? To answer these questions, this article develops and tests a more comprehensive way of studying the role and impact of digital within IPD, considering the relevance of democratic theory and the empirical democratic dimensions. In this sense, we refer to digital IPD as established or new IPD processes and tools that are implemented using digital technologies to a certain degree. The article is divided into three sections. Firstly, we will deal with the current debate on IPD, its links with new party models, and the role of empirical dimensions of democracy to analyse digital IPD, formulating two hypotheses. Then, we will set out our scheme for analysing digital IPD by applying the democratic principles summarized by the Varieties of Democracy project (VoD)¹ to parties. Later, we will offer an exploratory analysis of the role of digital in IPD in Podemos and the UK Labour Party to propose and test our scheme. Finally, a discussion and a conclusion will be presented.

¹ www.v-dem.net.

2. IPD: from aggregation to deliberation

Recently, a great amount of theoretical and empirical analysis on IPD has been carried out. Observing how certain parties have put in place new mechanisms and procedures for fostering IPD, the so-called aggregative procedures have emerged as the most visible and studied initiatives. The term expresses “a conception of democracy that sees the aggregation of individual preferences as the essence of democratic activity” (Invernizzi-Acetti and Wolkenstein, 2017, p. 101), *e.g.* party primaries and candidate selection (Sandri et al., 2015), with less focus on debate and preferences’ formation. These changes have rarely brought about an overall enhancement of internal party democracy in the medium term. On the contrary, the growing role of intra-party competition has tended to respond to the requirement for internal legitimacy of the party leadership. Aggregative procedures include even the use of referenda or other binary types of specific voting mechanisms in a party’s decision-making processes, which require members to take a position on a specific issue. Even though it is an extremely important and evolving process in recent years, its democratic consequences are far from satisfactory. Often it ends up merely enhancing leadership control over the party decision-making process (Katz and Mair, 1995, pp. 20-21), without empowering members to express their preferences between real alternatives.

Other theoretical developments have focused on different types and principles of (internal party) democracy. They are based on a more complex and qualitative concept of IPD that does not consider voting as a sufficient condition for democracy within a party. Among others, Ignazi has distinguished four dimensions - inclusion, deliberation, diffusion and pluralism - which together compose the “quadrille of the intra-party democracy’s knights” (2020, p. 14). Freedom of dissent and deliberative procedures that move from mere plebiscitary

involvement, or the re-empowerment of party delegates, play a key role in producing a more in-depth conceptualisation of IPD.

The current and growing debate on IPD shows the importance of analysing party democracy in light of the principles of democratic theory. Different scholars explicitly recognise the link between democratic theory and IPD that, even with relevant differences, may provide a fruitful avenue. As Borz and Janda (2020, p. 6) claimed, “[d]emocratic theory has made significant empirical advances (Varieties of Democracy, 2017), and IPD should follow similar systematic empirical routes”. If we apply the empirical discussion on democracy to IPD, we can evaluate the quality of democracy of a party and not just whether it is democratic or not (Rahat and Shapira, 2017, p. 5). The connexion between the empirical analysis of state-level democratic theory and IPD can help us to understand better the impact that digital IPD initiatives have, not only on the way democracy is developed within parties, but also on their possible differential impact and consequences for the quality of IPD.

3. Linking democratic theory and digital IPD

One of the core arguments of this article is to point out the lack of structured connections between the discussion of IPD and democratic theory and its principles (*cf.* Rahat and Shapira, 2017), with particular reference to its digital evolution. Putting democratic theory back into IPD can help to evaluate better the impact of different IPD processes, methodologies, and initiatives within the internal party organisation. In particular, the discussions that are found at the heart of the Varieties of Democracy index (Coppedge et al., 2019) offer important tools and parameters applicable to IPD. They distinguished five dimensions used to evaluate state-level democracy: electoral, liberal, deliberative, participatory, and egalitarian principles. We consider that they can be related to digital IPD as well, with the necessary distinctions and related adaptations, moving from democracy as a regime, to democracy within parties. Each

principle can be pursued using digital technologies, notably with the development of Online Participatory Platforms (OPP), which are the infrastructure that supports members' participation (Lioy et al., 2019), including, among other uses, voting, deliberation forum, e-learning, and access to internal information, allowing different levels of interaction.

Applying these dimensions can be useful in two different ways. Firstly, it can help to identify what dimensions of democracy are enhanced with the adoption of certain digital measures. Secondly, it can facilitate the study of the differential impact that digital technologies can have on different party processes and IPD (see Lanzone and Tronconi, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2019). Overall, digital technologies can help, with different degrees of intensity, to promote democratic procedures within the party which affect the five principles of democracy, and consequently have a deep impact on IPD. However, different procedures are more easily digitalised than others - for instance, OPPs reduced the costs of voting online (Deseeris and Vittori, 2019, p. 5699), and party leadership may be more disposed to use or develop certain dimensions instead of others. Therefore, we can hypothesise that digital technologies may have a differential impact on IPD and, while it can foster some democratic dimensions, it may also unleash negative consequences for IPD per se. More specifically, we can expect a high use of, and impact on, aggregative procedures, which are the electoral and participatory dimensions. In contrast, in the liberal and egalitarian dimensions - whose practices are more difficult or costly to digitalise and can imply certain limits to party leadership - we expect a slower pace of digital IPD. Finally, the deliberative dimension can be easily digitalised but, as Ivernizzi-Acetti and Wolkenstein argued (2017, p. 104), the results of meaningful online deliberation are mixed. Thus, we expect a more strategic use of digital IPD - implying the activation but also de-activation of deliberative procedures – in line with the party leadership strategies.

4. Technology, party models and digital IPD

The technological context is one of the key factors, jointly with organisational complexity, time, and social environment, for analysing party models and their evolution (Gunther and Diamond 2003, p. 173). The role of digital technologies and procedures in IPD is intertwined with recent discussions on the emergence of digital parties as a new party model (Gerbaudo, 2019; Deseeris and Vittori, 2019, Dommet et al. 2020). The impact of ICTs for political parties has been mostly analysed regarding inter-party competition - electoral campaigns, communication and social media - while the initial intra-party impact has been rather limited (Gibson and Ward, 2009). The discussion has been framed around two contrasting theses: the normalization and innovation-equalization hypotheses (see Jacobs and Spierings 2016, pp. 27-34). According to the first, politics shapes the usage of new technologies and, consequently, online uses tend to mirror the offline world, benefiting established parties and leaders to the detriment of minority groups (Larsson, 2013, p. 73-74). In contrast, supporters of the innovation-equalization hypothesis highlight the positive impact of digital technologies for generating new ways of communication and campaigning, benefiting previously disadvantaged parties. The two hypotheses may not be necessarily exclusive, but rather dependent on the diffusion process and broad societal use of technologies, together with party ideology and size (Jacobs and Spierings 2016, p. 99-100).

In a different way to inter-party dynamics, the normalization-innovation thesis applied to IPD has to consider a greater level of party choice. Factors such as the party's history, ideology, status, type of voters and members are relevant but, in the end, there is less external pressure for adopting certain measures. The internal impact of technology is a key component in the ongoing debate on digital parties, emphasising the role of technology for fostering democracy within this new type of organisation and in opposition to more bureaucratic and traditional ones. This new category complements and updates other categories theorised in recent times, such as party-movement (Kitschelt, 2006), techno-populist movement (Bickerton

and Invernizzi-Acetti, 2018), or platform politics (Lioy et al. 2019). Among them, Gerbaudo (2019, p. 13) pointed out a distinction between “traditional parties” that tend to use technologies “only in their relationship with the outside world”, and digital parties that organise “the entire life of the party” around the use of digital technology as a tool for democratisation, delegating part of their decision-making to digital tools and platforms. However, even with different purposes and reasoning, traditional parties also try to adapt and innovate in the new technological environment, by pursuing new strategies for regaining internal - and external - legitimacy.

We would like to contribute to such a debate by developing our second hypothesis: the digital convergence one. It is based on the idea that new parties, which have developed and implemented a wide range of digital IPD processes, may reduce their digital impetus by downgrading or directly cancelling certain procedures due to different factors - institutionalisation, leadership strategy, or internal impact - while established parties may develop new digital actions. Contrary to the innovation hypothesis, laggards do not catch up with the level of more innovative parties but, rather, there is a convergence at an intermediate point. Moreover, and different to the normalisation hypothesis, both digital and traditional parties are involved in the process, with different possible benefits.

To test both the differential impact and digital convergence hypothesis, in the next section we will measure the impact of the digital dimension on the IPD of two specific parties.

5. Case selection

Our case selection covers two comparable but genetically different cases, a digital and a traditional party undergoing reform, Podemos and the Labour Party. The cases belong to two markedly different countries, backgrounds and regulations, Spain and the UK. Despite their differences in terms of context, history, and political system, they share important similarities:

both organisations are left-wing parties with a strong commitment to participation and IPD. For our exploratory purposes, selecting two parties that publicly defend IPD procedures helps us to understand better their practices, potential, and limitations as they may also apply to parties less committed to enhancing (digital) IPD. Since it was founded in March 2014, Podemos has pinpointed participation as one of the principal features of its identity and commitment to democracy. Accordingly, “political mobilisation is a distinctive feature of Podemos’ organisation” (Vittori, 2017, p. 151) and it is considered a “grass-roots democracy ‘movement’” (Scarrow et al., 2017, p. 4). Podemos’ ideology combines a traditional leftist program with anti-establishment stances linked to the claims for the deepening of democracy and the renewal of the representative system, in opposition to the unresponsive political elite historically embodied by PSOE and the Partido Popular (Lisi, 2018). Further, they declare a strong commitment to internal party democracy including “an unprecedented participatory political logic in the political parties of our country” (Podemos, 2017, p. 6). As one of the most analysed digital parties, technology is a constitutive element in the quest for internal democracy (Raniolo and Tarditi 2020, p. 241).

In contrast, the Labour Party is a traditional organisation with a century of political representation and governmental experience, self-defined as a “democratic socialist party” (Labour, 2019, Clause IV). Factionalism has marked Labour’s history, coming from ideological divisions (Finlayson, 2013) and different visions on party democracy (Dommett, 2018), traditionally linked with the type of leadership, such as the shift from a formal model of membership to a model of supporters’ networks (see Avril, 2013), particularly promoted by Tony Blair’s mandate. In 2003, *Big Conversation* was the first consultation exercise with digital support launched by the party. Other similar initiatives followed – “Let’s Talk”, “Fresh Ideas” and “Your Britain” (Gauja, 2015) - without notable results in terms of internal democratization. Recently, it has undergone political changes and internal reforms, including

a lively debate on how the party should organise and be open to society. This transformation took place particularly from the 2015 leadership contest when the party applied for the first time the principle of “one person, one vote” and opened participation to “supporters²” (Russell, 2016). Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership strengthened the shift of the IPD model, much more oriented towards party membership to the detriment of MPs and Trade Unions - especially with the support of both recently-active single members and groups like the Momentum organisation.

6. Methodology

Scholars have discussed in depth about how to measure and compare parties’ organisations, structures, and degrees of democratic functioning. In recent years, interest in internal party organisation and IPD has gained momentum with different proposals to empirically assess and compare them, creating specific indexes (Poguntke et al., 2016; Rahat and Shapira, 2017; von dem Berge et al., 2013). Distinct strategies have been deployed. Among them, Poguntke et al. (2016) and Rahat and Shapira (2017) used a similar one for assigning qualitative values to different items. Poguntke et al. (2016, p. 32) assigned values to “closed or open answers to questions”, on a scale from 0 to 1, while Rahat and Shapira (2017) distinguished five key and weighted dimensions and assigned different points to each one (up to 100), including participation (30), representation (20), competition (20), responsiveness (15) and transparency (15).

In this preliminary study, we have followed a similar strategy for analysing the role of digital technologies in Podemos and the Labour. The time frame includes the evolution during the last five years since Podemos’ foundation and the beginning of Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership, and we present data from two different moments: T¹, the 2016 Labour Party Conference in

² Who paid at least £3 per month to the Labour Party.

September 2016 and the second Podemos congress in February 2017 (*Asamblea Ciudadana Estatal*); and T², our data collection in September 2019³. We have selected each party's tools and initiatives, qualitatively linking them to a particular democratic principle specifically focusing on the role of digital. We have assigned one point for each democratic dimension. In contrast to Rahat and Shapira (2017), we do not make any distinction or provide greater weight to any one dimension. Given that our purpose is to assess how digital possibilities impact IPD, we consider each dimension of democracy as equally important at this stage.

Applying our framework, we have analysed and measured different digital uses, linking them to the different democratic dimensions, which we have disaggregated into different items. In each one we have given ascending values on three scales, depending on the importance of digital for the rationale and implementation of each selected procedure (no relevance, mixed and great relevance). Our analysis is based on different sources: firstly, both parties' official documents, notably the party statutes but also more specific internal documents regarding the functioning of specific process – such as regulations on members and representatives in Podemos or the Labour Party's Democracy Review or National Policy Forum Reports. Secondly, we have analysed the parties' websites, especially the sections that support the procedures under study, and their OPPs, such as *Participa* or *Labour Policy Forum*. We have also used secondary sources on the use, potential and limitations of certain digital IPD procedures, including both academic articles and newspaper coverage. Finally, some of our insights have been observed through participatory research in the field.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

7. The role of digital in intra-party democracy in Podemos and the Labour

³ Since then, Podemos has approved new party statutes and the Labour has elected a new leadership.

In Table 2 we compare different processes and initiatives of IPD in both parties at two different moments to test our scheme and to draw some exploratory conclusions. Linking their initiatives with the principles of democracy and the role of digital in each process, we have ranked the role of digital according to our scale. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, taking into account our purpose, we present a comparative table for observing the use of digital in both parties and its consequences for IPD.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

We can highlight different aspects regarding the comparison between the two parties. All five dimensions of democracy are subject to being digitalised, showing the importance of considering ICTs' impact in a comprehensive way rather than on just one-dimensional or aggregative procedures. Their impact, however, is different according to the specific dimension or party. As expected in our differential impact hypothesis, aggregative dimensions score higher on our index considering both parties, while the liberal and egalitarian dimensions are less digitalised and the deliberative one has been subject to a noteworthy variation, due to the setback in Podemos.

The comparison shows also that, considering multiple dimensions of intra-party democracy, our total index, at the moment of the analysis (T^2), is closer than expected to digital party studies. Being a digitally native party, Podemos should use digital technologies in a wider and more in-depth way than a traditional party, which has a long and established (and offline) organisational tradition and culture - as is shown in the total index at the T^1 moment. Evolution over time, during the party's institutionalisation, could offer us some clues on how and why parties develop or downgrade certain digital IPD processes. Leadership control, lack of interest, pluralism, and membership criticism towards the party leadership can make certain processes less functional for the party's leadership. It makes sense, therefore, to maintain and enhance

the electoral and participatory dimensions, especially regarding votes, but also downplaying or eliminating much more demanding and ambitious processes that include real members' deliberation, decision-making, and bottom-up control. This agrees with our second hypothesis regarding digital convergence. While Labour has steadily increased its digital IPD, Podemos has experienced a major setback in the deliberative dimension. Our analysis shows how both parties tend to convergence in a middle ground in the use of technology, providing a good example of the logic of convergence. Following, we present the empirical analysis separately for each case.

7.1 Podemos: digital aggregative IPD and democratic setbacks

Since its foundation, Podemos has made intensive use of digital technologies for IPD and have claimed a commitment to citizens' participation, combining both digital and certain postmaterialist tendencies (Jacobs and Spierrings 2016, p. 100). This is especially true regarding the electoral and participatory dimensions. All the processes for selecting the party's internal and external representatives – at the state, regional and local levels – are organised through the party's digital platform *Participa*, integrated until 2019 with the open source voting software *Agora voting*. In this case, the use of digital facilitates the election of the party's representatives. Furthermore, by applying it to all party levels, including the local ones, it implies that digital tools also help to enhance this selection procedure. Similarly, some participatory tools have also been (and still are) relevant beyond electoral processes: especially the *Consultas Ciudadanas* (Citizens' Consultations), a key feature of the Podemos decision-making process, using the *Participa* platform. The employment of this tool is diverse: for procedural questions, ratification of leadership decisions, or strategic uses⁴, by asking for the

⁴ For example, in July 2019 Podemos called a vote for a Citizens Consultation on a hypothetical coalition government with the PSOE without a formalised proposal.

registered users' positions on a given issue, and even as a plebiscitary tool⁵. A total of 16 national consultations have been carried out up to September 2019, with an average participation of 25.21% of the members and with overwhelming support for the leadership position of 86.92%⁶. However, procedures focusing on other democratic dimensions have lost their importance or have been directly replaced or suspended by the party (e.g. *Plaza Podemos – 2.0* and *Impulsa*). For instance, the drafting of their first electoral programmes was made in open and collaborative ways. This was true for the 2014 European manifesto that included online debates, amendments, and an online referendum; or the 2015 general election manifesto, with more than 10,000 people participating online in *Plaza Podemos*, more than 3,000 face to face assemblies and 15,000 members in the final online vote (Podemos, 2015, p. 10). However, this innovative way of using digital tools was not replicated in subsequent electoral programmes.

The problems regarding digital possibilities are more visible in the deliberative dimension over the years, affecting their landmark digital deliberation platform, *Plaza Podemos*. It started as a community actively promoted by the party on the online platform Reddit, for supporting open discussions, information sharing, and proposals (Fenoll and Sánchez-Castillo, 2016). In 2014, the CEO of Reddit, Erik Martin, declared that Podemos was “the first party in the world that officially uses Reddit to listen to the citizens” (Eldiario, 12 August 2014). Then, it was moved to the *Consul* platform - managed by the party - and renamed *Plaza Podemos 2.0*. Criticism towards its role grew as it showed increasing ineffectiveness both in terms of participation⁷ and decision-making power, leaving great room for manoeuvre by the party leadership. In its second version, it also included an open seat section (*Escaño*

⁵ For instance, in May 2018 a Citizens Consultation was organised to vote on Pablo Iglesias and Irene Montero's continuity or not as party leaders, after buying a detached house for more than 600,000€ It was the vote with the highest participation.

⁶ Our own elaboration, based on Podemos' official data and secondary sources for missing consultations.

⁷ The average of the votes for proposal passed from 198,3 of the first year of the initiative to 17,6 in 2018, authors' elaboration.

Abierto), through which members and citizens could raise questions to Podemos' representatives. However, on 14 July 2019, this deliberative platform was replaced by the newly created Territorial Support Office. This is a one-stop-shop that offers help and advice on organisational, discursive, procedural or financial issues to all members of the organisation, from citizens and members to party officials. Even if it may be further developed, this is a top-down initiative, controlled by the party's leadership and that does not include, at least for the moment, any type of deliberative tools. Regarding the liberal dimension, Podemos' transparency portal *Transparencia Podemos* offers another example. The portal includes web access to data on budgets, incomes and expenses of the party, the parliamentary groups, coalitions, other entities related to the party, electoral campaigns and foundations. Moreover, it holds sections for every elected member who receives any economic compensation for her/his office. Even though they claim their commitment to transparency to be a key feature, the party's financial data has not been periodically and carefully updated. These setbacks show the tensions and conflicts that deliberative tools and other initiatives - related to other dimensions of democracy apart from the aggregative ones - can generate for the party leadership, as well as internal party cohesiveness when they reveal divergences from the official party line or simply expose limitations of party policy. Finally, the egalitarian dimension of Podemos' digital practices is mainly linked to voting and campaigning. On one side, the so-called Zipper system⁸ is used to promote gender equality in online voting. On the other side, Podemos provides digital training events for members that are mainly focused on e-campaigning.

Overall, as expected, Podemos' use of digital IPD is especially focused on aggregative dimensions while being less developed on the others. Evolution over time shows also the

⁸ Candidates list with alternation between men and women.

potential limits and internal conflicts that certain democratic procedures can have on the party, producing important setbacks that reduce our digital IPD score.

7.2 The Labour: new leadership and new (digital) IPD strategy

The Labour Party generally adopted digital tools in a more limited way, even if their application is gradually growing. Jeremy Corbyn's leadership set out to change Labour's IPD also through the use of digital. The reform intent was supported by the 2017-2018 multichannel process aimed at democratising the party, by empowering the membership through expansion and was synthesized into the document "Labour Party Democracy Review" (2018). Many of the recommendations included the use of technologies, particularly for their democratisation potentialities, impacting all the democratic dimensions.

However, the real implementation of these proposals has been slower and more partial than expected. Compared with Podemos, the electoral dimension shows the greatest gap in terms of digital IPD. A mixed-method (online and ballot paper) has been adopted for the leadership election but only partially in other internal processes, partly due to the specific characteristics of the party and the British electoral system⁹. We can highlight two processes where digital tools are very relevant, especially in terms of deliberative and participative dimensions. The first one is the *Labour Policy Forum*, an online process supported by a specific party platform aimed at developing and elaborating policy proposals and ideas, especially those oriented towards the party programme. The proposals are submitted to the National Policy Forum (NPF) - the party body delegated to decide the Labour's political line - and its eight Policy Commissions. The process is open to Labour Party members, supporters, and policy stakeholders, who can submit policy ideas, commenting on, and replying to, other proposals. The platform allows people also to consult NPF documents, stay updated on other policy updates and consultations, and access training webinars and online contents. The *Labour Policy*

⁹ In particular, small constituencies and the relations between representatives and voters linked to it.

Forum platform substituted the *Your Britain* website - active from November 2012 to September 2016 - and it was developed as a relaunch of the deliberative process scarcely used and little considered within the party's policymaking. However, despite initial emphasis and enthusiasm, the way this initiative was implemented discouraged deliberation. It allowed short submissions, of up to 600 words, comments and facultative votes for each proposal that were not taken into account in the offline discussion and were conceived of as "a way of sharing views with other users"¹⁰. Consequently, there is no evidence of the role of bottom-up inputs; for instance, in the NPF Report 2018, *Labour Policy Forum* is mentioned only 12 times, mostly to thank an unspecified contribution. Thus, the deliberative functions were limited and, instead, the process seems to foster the individualization of politics (Gauja 2015).

The second one is Labour's "new bespoke digital organising system", *Achieve*, launched in 2018 (Dommett et al., 2020, p. 5). The digital software is centrally designed to support different types of local activists' actions by providing specific tools and apps. In particular, they are: *Organise*, a "volunteer management tool" that replaced the Nationbuilder services; *Doorstep App*, an app for managing canvassing data by mobile devices; *Promote*, a "platform for enabling targeted messaging on Facebook"; *Insight*, a "platform for data analysis"; and WordPress Network, a "website creation tool" (Dommett et al., 2020, p. 5). Moreover, *Achieve* is also the Labour's e-learning platform, which contains explanatory videos and allows each member to create his/her learning pathways. Contents are still limited and focused on tools for election campaigns. The Labour *Democracy Review* showed a widespread demand for more training in different domains, e.g. social media, political education or specific training for Young Labour, BAME and disabled candidates. In other dimensions, Labour only moderately uses digital tools, usually to facilitate ongoing procedures. In terms of the liberal

¹⁰ From the section "Get Involved" of the *Labour Policy Forum* website. See <https://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/about/get-involved>,

dimension, the economic and financial transparency data of the party is published online on the institutional website of the Electoral Commission, as is mandatory for all parties in the UK. Basic data on party bodies and leadership is published on the party website that includes a search engine to find the contact of the closest Labour MP or candidate even if, in the UK, the public platform *Write To Them*¹¹ already offers at the institutional level a channel for every citizen to contact their representatives. The leadership activity is reported especially on social media, but there are not tools and channels to communicate directly with the leadership. Finally, regarding the egalitarian dimension, for the first time, at the 2019 annual conference, it was possible to elect a disabled representative to the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC), by online voting.

The debate on new digital IPD initiatives is still open, showing its relevance for the party. The *Democracy Review* pointed out different proposals where digital technologies could be crucial and may impact all democratic principles. For instance, regarding the electoral dimension, the document suggested that online voting should be gradually deployed for the selection of party bodies and that Labour should develop “secure online voting systems to make it easy and cheap to hold online ballots” (Labour, 2018, p. 88). Considering the liberal and the participatory dimensions, “on-line platforms, live streaming and video-conferencing” were encouraged to inform and involve members especially at the local level (Labour, 2018, p. 35) and to promote e-participation in national initiatives and conferences. In respect of deliberative dimension, the *Review* recommended the use of technologies for supporting the Labour policymaking process, with particular reference to the Annual Conference (Labour, 2018, p. 87). Lastly, concerning the egalitarian dimension, the document focused on accessibility of digital democracy, suggesting to the party measures for reducing the digital divide and simplifying digital participation, with particular attention to rural areas (Labour, 2018, p. 41).

¹¹ <https://www.writetothem.com/>

Overall, the digital impact on the Labour Party IPD is growing, within a leadership strategy for regaining legitimacy and transforming the party. Nevertheless, the actual processes tend to make an advisory and organisational use of digital tools. The relevance of digital IPD seems to be acknowledged and further developments could be expected if the strategy is still supported by the new leadership.

8. Discussion

Analysing the digital dimension of IPD in Podemos and Labour through the lens of democratic theory and its dimensions, presents a complex scenario that challenges the expected results from the comparison of two parties with different origins and characteristics, depicting a broader image of the impact and consequences of digital IPD. Our evidence shows that technologies are not neutral in their impact on democratic dimensions. While aggregative procedures are highly salient and the most used to promote internal democracy, they are just one part of the story. Scholars studying digital parties have critically assessed the impact of technology on IPD, highlighting the difference between the claims and the reality of digital democracy (Gerbaudo 2019, p. 185), the continuing existence of the gap between voters and members despite new forms of membership (Gomez and Ramiro, 2017), and, even if adopting disruptive innovations, the limits for solving the erosion of legitimacy of parties (Raniolo and Tarditi, 2020). Continuing with this debate, our analysis points out another two relevant insights. Firstly, the non-aggregative dimensions are tendentially less developed by digital IPD, showing the validity of the hypothesis on the differential impact of technologies on the democratic dimension. Indeed, minimal definitions of (internal) democracy are reinforced, rather than more deliberative or egalitarian ones, fostering plebiscitary leadership, as Ignazi (2020, p. 16) argued. Focusing on the different dimensions of democracy - as proposed in our methodology - can provide diverse insights into the quality of digital IPD. As in empirical

democratic theory, voting is just one, albeit crucial, part of democracy, but democratic quality is based on several additional dimensions. Considering them may allow a better understanding and definition of how to define or measure the quality of digital IPD.

Secondly, we provide arguments to sustain the digital convergence hypothesis that implies a double movement: a digital party like Podemos increases the plebiscitary outcomes and takes steps back in terms of digital IPD, and a traditional party like Labour develops (or discusses) new digital initiatives on various dimensions of democracy, with similar objectives to digital parties. Consequently, within the discussion on the possible emergence of a new digital party model, our exploratory analysis shows that we are possibly witnessing more of a trend rather than the formation of a single category. This does not preclude that digital IPD will be less relevant. On the contrary, as more parties use technology in their internal processes, digital IPD can gain even more relevance, potentially for all types of parties.

Finally, we have to consider the relationship and impacts of digital IPD within the general IPD framework. Having diverse digital internal processes, or not, does not automatically preclude that one party is more internally democratic than another. As new and established parties try to regain legitimacy towards citizens, both can also rely on digital technologies for changing and renewing their organisation. But, in any case, the traditional IPD structures and processes are as valid and democratic as much as the online ones are and, in many cases, ICTs may complement better rather than substitute offline interaction (Ivernizzi-Acetti and Wolkenstein, 2017, p. 104). Thus, more digital does not mean more democratic. It can provide new mechanisms for participation, accountability, and so forth, but, as we have discussed, it can reinforce those same trends, such as the primacy of the party in public office, that these new mechanisms were supposed to reduce, or reinforce other phenomena, such as the individualisation of politics (Gauja, 2015). Furthermore, our cases show that, differently from core IPD processes that normally require congress approval for changing them, digital

democratic procedures tend to be conceived of more as tools rather than substantive processes facilitating their development but also their elimination - especially the non-aggregative ones - without internal debate or a formal process.

9. Conclusions

The model that we have presented provides different arguments and offers a tool for analysing some of the problems that are currently being studied regarding digital within parties and the quest for more and better IPD. Our evidences suggests that the impact of digital technologies on IPD is nuanced, in line with different scholars and contrary to some overoptimistic technological utopians. We have presented two hypotheses, the differential impact and the digital convergence ones, and we have tested them by applying our scheme for analysing digital IPD. Our preliminary results firstly showed that digital technologies can more easily impact aggregative procedures, but their impact on other dimensions of democracy is less obvious. This can affect the quality of internal party democracy as is currently deployed. Some technologies can harm democratic processes by further empowering party leadership, reducing delegative institutions, and restricting representation of minority and opposition groups within parties. Secondly, preliminary results of our comparison suggests that the digital convergence hypothesis may explain the erosion of the digital IPD score between a digital and a traditional party in a reforming phase. Is this true for other parties? Are digital parties generally reducing their digital IPD procedures and traditional parties developing new ones, or are some other factors at play? Does it vary according to the type, ideology, or governmental status of the party? To what extent is it leadership dependent? Other in-depth analyses of different digital IPD procedures over a broader number of parties are needed. Moreover, it is important to include the role of time in every analysis of digital IPD. As we have noted, steps taken forward

are not irreversible: digital IPD initiatives can be successful or can fail, and their evaluation can respond to different interests within parties.

In conclusion, whether the increasing claims and initiatives of digital IPD will imply a real change for party internal and external legitimacy with its members and society, or whether they are merely supporting tools, remains an open question for further research.

Table 1 Measuring the impact of the digital dimension in IPD

Principles	Dimensions	Scale
Electoral	Digital voting on party contests	0.00: Just offline votes
		0.50: Offline and online votes
		1.00: Just online votes
Liberal	1) Accountability and transparency	0.00: No online reporting of economic and party activities.
		0.25: Online reporting of economic <i>or</i> party activities
		0.50: Online reporting of <i>both</i> activities
	2) Participation of minority groups in the party website	0.00: No online sections/processes for minority groups/factions.
		0.25: Online sections for minority groups/factions
		0.50: Online processes for minority groups/factions
Deliberative	1) Existence of a deliberative online platform and its type, uses and relevance	0.00: No deliberative online platform
		0.50: Deliberative platform for consultation purposes
		1.00: Deliberative platform with decision-making capacity
Participatory	1) Digital activism	0.00: No digital activism
		0.25: Unbound digital activism
		0.50: Coordinated digital activism
	2) Decision-making process	0.00: Absence of decision-making processes
		0.25: Top-down, elite-controlled, processes
		0.50: Presence of bottom-up mechanism also
Egalitarian		0.00: Absence of quotas

1) Online votes per quotas	0.25: Some online votes per quotas 0.50: All online votes per quotas
2) Training activities for reducing the digital divide	0.00: No initiatives 0.25: Sporadic digital training activities 0.50: Structured digital programmes

Table 2 Digital tools and IPD: a comparison of Podemos and the Labour party

Principles	Podemos	Digital role		Labour	Digital role	
		T ¹	T ²		T ¹	T ²
Electoral	Online voting is mandatory. All votes are online on the Podemos platform <i>Participa</i> ¹² .	1.00	1.00	Online voting is not explicitly regulated. The procedural decisions are delegated to the National Executive Committee, case by case. At the national level, online voting is generally possible and encouraged within a mixed method.	0.50	0.50
Liberal	Specific and informative website, <i>Transparencia Podemos</i> ¹³ (data available until 2018). Open Seat section in Podemos deliberative tool <i>Plaza Podemos</i> . In July 2019, it was replaced by the <i>Territorial Support Office</i> ¹⁴ .	0.25	0.25	Transparency data online on the institutional website of the Electoral Commission ¹⁵ . <i>Labour Party Rule Book</i> ¹⁶ , updated yearly. Basic data on party bodies online. No channels or processes to communicate with leadership. Party representatives' mailing lists, website or blog (poorly updated and coordinated).	0.25	0.25
	The voting (online) system recognises minimum representation for list over 5% and 15% of votes.	0.25	0.25	Links to minority groups' websites. Recognition in the website of Affiliated Trade Unions and Socialist Societies. Commitment to BAME ¹⁷ and other groups.	0.25	0.25

¹² <https://participa.podemos.info/es>.

¹³ <https://transparencia.podemos.info/>.

¹⁴ <https://podemos.info/organizacion/oficina-de-soporte-territorial/>.

¹⁵ <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk>.

¹⁶ <http://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Rule-Book-2019.pdf>.

¹⁷ *I.e.* Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

Deliberative	Plaza Podemos (from October 2015 to July 2019). Replaced by Territorial Support Office.	1.00	0.00	From 2016 the <i>Labour Policy Forum</i> ¹⁸ online platform substituted the <i>Your Britain</i> website.	0.50	0.50
	WhatsApp and Telegram dedicated groups: Digital volunteers. <i>Vamos!</i> ¹⁹ ('Let's go!'). Initiative for opening the party to civil society (not updated). <i>Territorial support office</i> .	0.50	0.50	From October 2018, digital and traditional activism promoted by the OPP <i>Achieve</i> . Numerous mailing lists. Gamification for citizens' engagement (<i>e.g. Corbyn run</i>).	0.25	0.50
Participatory	The OPP <i>Participa</i> : Citizens' Consultation, online voting for especially relevant decisions (top-down).	0.25	0.25	The OPP <i>Achieve</i> does not support online referenda, even if there are member requests and internal group initiatives (see Momentum).	0.00	0.00
	Gender equality in online voting through "Zipper system". At least 50% of women.	0.25	0.25	In 2019, for the first time, the possibility of online voting for selecting a disabled representative for the Conference Arrangements Committee.	0.00	0.25
Egalitarian	Accessibility policies, training for overcoming the digital divide.	0.25	0.25	Sporadic training initiatives and support of <i>Achieve</i> , Labour's e-learning platform ²⁰ .	0.25	0.25

	PODEMOS		LABOUR	
	T1	T2	T1	T2
Electoral	1.00	1.00	0.50	0.50
Liberal	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50
Deliberative	1.00	0.00	0.50	0.50
Participatory	0.75	0.75	0.25	0.50
Egalitarian	0.50	0.50	0.25	0.50
TOTAL	3.75	2.75	2.00	2.50

¹⁸ <https://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/>.

¹⁹ <https://vamos.podemos.info/>.

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