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Digital models for the selection of party organs and election candidates in Spanish political parties: the impact of intraparty democracy

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Processes for selecting party officials and election candidates are key aspects of the internal democracy of political parties. This is not only because they reveal who is appointed, but also because they provide insight into intra-party dynamics and the levels of internal democracy within the parties. The aim of this article is to offer a general overview of the internal selection models used by Spanish political parties with representation in the Congress of Deputies, in order to determine whether online procedures are as widespread as is often believed, and, whether they have any real impact on intra-party democracy. We look into whether political parties are making widespread use of digital tools to promote new selection processes, whether the establishment of online selection mechanisms impacts the internal democracy of political parties and what types of parties are primarily using these tools. For this purpose we have conducted a taxonomy of the selection processes in Spanish political parties represented in the Congress of Deputies, based on the development of a model of indicators drawing on some previous studies.

KEYWORDS

candidate selection, party position selection, primary elections, political parties, internal democracy index

1 Introduction

The selection of party officials or election of candidates is one of the most important decisions that can be made by members of a political organization (Gallagher, 1988; Katz, 2001; Cross and Katx, 2013; Detterbeck, 2005; Rahat et al., 2008; Scarrow, 2015).¹ These processes are considered crucial for intra-party democracy (Cross and Katx, 2013) Firstly, because they reveal who is appointed (Gallagher, 1988; Morgenstern and Siavclis, 2004; Hazan and Rahat, 2006) and, secondly, because they provide insight into intra-party dynamics (Gallagher, 1988; Rabat and Hazan, 2001; Billie, 2001; Ware, 2004; Detterbeck, 2005; Cross and Blais, 2012a, 2012b) and levels of internal democracy (Detterbeck, 2005; Rahat et al., 2008; Scarrow, 2015).

¹ It should be noted that party officials are those who make decisions and guide the direction of the party, while candidates represent the party to the electorate and are, therefore, responsible for exercising governance or opposition, once the elections are over.

It is for these reasons, that a study of these processes is important. However, it is true that experts in the field have focused primarily on studying the selection of candidates (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Hazan and Rahat, 2010) having relegated research on the selection of party leaders. As a result, research on the latter is relatively recent, and in most cases, it covers only a single country or even a single case study, with comparative analyses being scarce (Marsh, 1993; LeDuc, 2001; Kenig, 2009; Cross and Blais, 2012b; Cross and Pilet, 2015; Kenig et al., 2015). This may be due to the influence of American Political Science on European studies, where party leadership is less relevant. Additionally, the process is quite opaque, making it difficult to access the core information. Furthermore, these processes are often guided by both formal and informal practices (Bjarnegard, 2013; Kenig et al., 2013; Bjarnegard and Kenny, 2015, 2016; Bjarnegard and Zetterberg, 2019; Kenny and Verge, 2016; Aldrich, 2020; Caiani et al., 2021) and vary from one party to another (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988), thus further complicating the analysis of party leadership and candidate selection.

Therefore, this paper aims to contribute to the understanding of these very procedures by undertaking a comprehensive analysis of both the selection of party officials and the candidates for elections. The goal is to provide a general overview of the selection models used by Spanish political parties represented in the Congress of Deputies and to determine whether online procedures are actually as widespread as often believed, and whether they have an impact on intra-party democracy. Consequently, we have asked whether political parties are making widespread use of digital tools to promote new selection processes, whether the establishment of online selection mechanisms affects the internal democracy of political parties, and what types of parties are primarily using these tools. This inquiry is made particularly relevant given the current trend to assume that the use of the internet enhances and promotes internal democracy within parties. Indeed, some democracy and digital technology theorists have even advocated for a harmonious integration of both (Barber, 1984; Becker and Slaton, 2000; Davies and Chandler, 2012; Gastil, 2016). Conversely, cyber-pessimists argue that digital tools do not necessarily empower party members but rather give them the illusion of influence over decision-making processes within their organizations, a phenomenon Pateman (1970) referred to as “pseudo-participation.” To address these questions, we have developed a model of indicators based on previous studies (Hazan, 2002; Hazan and Rahat, 2010; Pennings and Hazan, 2001; Lundell, 2004; Freidenberg and Dosek, 2016) in order to measure the various characteristics of these selection processes, as well as attempting to reflect on how to determine their impact on intra-party democracy.

2 The democratization of candidate and leader selection in political parties: an analytical model

The candidate selection process can be defined as the set of processes that lead to an individual heading or being part of a party's electoral list, while the election of party officials involves a process for selecting individuals who will occupy the highest positions within the political formation. Typically, both procedures are regulated by the parties' own rules, sometimes including specific regulations. However, in some countries, these processes are determined by state legislation

(Villaplana Jiménez, 2023). As Kenig et al. (2013) point out, an issue being the lack of uniformity in these processes, with similarities and differences arising between different political parties and across different countries. This further complicates verifying their impact on intra-party democracy. For instance, some selection processes involve multiple stages, as in the case of the British Conservatives, while others are conducted in a single stage. Candidacies can be presented individually by interested parties or proposed by the party itself. The requirements for submitting candidacies also vary among political forces. The electorate in candidate selection can be classified into five types (the leader, the party elite, party delegates, members, and the electorate). Within the leader selection, six types can be identified by adding the category of parliamentarians in between the elite and the delegates. The degree of decentralization can also vary depending on the decision-making power of regional or local levels within these procedures. Similarly, voting systems also vary, such as direct appointment systems, mixed appointment and voting and pure voting systems.

These processes have often been dominated by party leadership. However, an increasing number of parties have promoted the participation of party members in these processes (Cross and Katx, 2013; Cross et al., 2016; Hazan and Rahat, 2010). For example, Kenig et al. (2013) conclude that participation levels have increased in 22 of the 44 parties analyzed between 1975 and 2012 and Cross et al. (2016) estimate that between 1/4 and 1/3 of parties in Western democracies use primaries for candidate selection, and between 1/3 and 1/2 use them for selecting party leaders (see also Billie, 2001; Kittilson and Scarrow, 2003). Thus, parties have gradually incorporated more inclusive methods for selecting both candidates and leaders for varying reasons.

This necessitates working on the establishment of an analytical framework to clarify the different ways in which political parties select their candidates and leaders. It is important to note that, initially, the introduction of more inclusive systems, such as primaries or digital innovations has contributed to increasing intra-party democracy. However, as observed in case studies (Allern et al., 2016; Jedenastik and Müller, 2014; Pilet and Cross, 2014; Kenig et al., 2015), many of these selections have already been decided by the leadership before the process reaches the electorate, which means that the formal decision often amounts to the “coronation” of a single candidate. On the other hand, many argue (Gerbaudo, 2019) that digital innovations in political parties have actually led to a type of “reactive democracy,” which only reinforces the control of leaders over the party's decision-making process (Katz and Mair, 2018).

Clearly, for this reason alone, it is worth establishing a framework to measure the democracy in selection mechanisms. However, it is also true that several interesting proposals have been developed to measure various aspects of candidate and party leader selection processes (Gallagher, 1988; Pennings and Hazan, 2001; Freidenberg, 2003; Morgenstern and Siauclis, 2004; Lundell, 2004; Rahat, 2013; Freidenberg and Dosek, 2016, etc.). Building on these previous studies, this paper develops an index that, not only serves to present the characteristics of this process in different political parties, thereby establishing a map of models in this regard, but also to operationalize the different dimensions in determining their impact on intra-party democracy. This index focuses on the following dimensions: inclusiveness, competitiveness, and decentralization.

2.1 Inclusivity

The level of inclusion of political actors is one of the most commonly used criteria to analyze differences in candidate and party leader selection (Rahat, 2013; Rabat and Hazan, 2001; Taylor, 2000). Inclusion can be analyzed, as Rabat and Hazan (2001) have established, in two ways: (a) regarding who can be a candidate (the right to run for a position) and the requirements imposed on them, and (b) concerning who selects the candidate (a single person, all members of the organization, or the electorate, “selectorate”). Additionally, another relevant aspect is the procedure itself, as it is necessary to determine, who participates, how they participate, and the nature of the procedure. This allows the level of openness in these procedures to be analyzed. Indeed, this was initially the reason why some parties opted to democratize their selection processes from the very beginning (Cross, 1996; Scarrow, 1999).

In Table 1 we attempt to identify who constitutes the selectorate. If all members, supporters, and citizens participate, the process will be more inclusive than with only congress delegates participating. Additionally, inclusion is affected by requirements for this selectorate to participate. The same applies to the requirements for presenting candidacies; more inclusive processes are those that do not impose any requirements. Finally, the procedure can be considered more democratic if it allows more active participation. Thus, merely being able to vote on the presented options is less inclusive than being able to offer opinions or other alternatives.

2.2 Competitiveness

Competitiveness is another criterion for analyzing selection processes in political parties. For this purpose, the following variables have been chosen: competition, type of competition, and level of uncertainty (see Tables 2, 3).

Firstly, regarding competitiveness, the following indicators have been used which positions can be elected through these procedures to determine whether they are the most relevant—that is, those where the real decisions are made within the parties—or whether they are supplementary positions. Additionally, the type of election system is considered, with open primaries being regarded as the most competitive, and the number of options presented in these processes is also looked at, in order to analyze whether genuine competition actually occurs.

Secondly, regarding the type of competition, we have chosen to analyze whether there are any internal recruitment mechanisms, which would facilitate the participation of party members in these

processes. Additionally, the involvement of factions in these processes is used as an indicator to assess the level and type of competitiveness within the organization. This is primarily because when all segments of the party can participate, the processes will not only be more democratic, but will also reveal intra-party conflicts. Lastly, the electoral rules governing these processes are considered, as they help to determine basic operational aspects and identify the chances of victory for minorities or unorganized members.

Thirdly, to measure the level of uncertainty, we refer to the type of voting, the percentage of winning options, and the differences between the first and second options. Thus, the level of uncertainty indicates how competitive the process is. While a high number of candidates does not guarantee competition or a high level of competitiveness, the actual chances each candidate has of winning a nomination is a more precise measure (Freidenberg and Dosek, 2016, p. 371). Therefore, it is as important to have several candidates (with a certain margin of difference between them) as it is to have multiple candidates (if not all) with real chances of winning the nomination (Freidenberg and Dosek, 2016, p. 371). Moreover, the type of vote determines the voters’ ability to choose from various options beyond those set by party leaders. For example, in an appointment system, candidates are appointed without the need of approval from any party body, except the nominating body itself.

2.3 Decentralization

The final dimension used in analyzing candidate and party official selection processes, is decentralization (Rabat and Hazan, 2001; Lundell, 2004; Langston, 2001). For this purpose, variables such as the definition of nomination, the institutional levels involved in the nomination, and the territorial level where the nomination is defined, are used to obtain information on the degree of decentralization in nominations (see Table 4).

The degree of centralization in selection mechanisms, as outlined in party statutes (Pennings and Hazan, 2001; Rabat and Hazan, 2001) reflects how decisions are made (formally) within an organization. This is because these procedures are usually regulated by rules developed and approved by party leadership. Additionally, it is important to know who defines the candidacies, because the lesser the role of national leaders in selecting candidates, the greater the decentralization in the nomination process. Thus, knowing the bodies involved in nominations, and the territorial levels where they are decided, is also relevant. If more than one body or regional and/or local bodies participate in the nomination process, greater decentralization is suggested. Notably, higher levels of decentralization correspond with greater intra-party democracy (Rabat and Hazan, 2001).

TABLE 1 Inclusiveness in internal elections of party bodies and candidate elections.

Variables	Indicators
Electorate	Who can be in the electorate?
	What requirements are needed to participate?
Candidacy	What are the requirements to be a candidate?
	Endorsements
	Level of participation

Source: Rabat and Hazan (2001) and Freidenberg and Dosek (2016).

3 Method and data

3.1 Objective and case selection

The objective of this study is to analyze the online procedures for selecting candidates and party officials in Spanish political parties currently represented in the Congress of Deputies, in order to determine their impact on intra-party democracy. This includes both established parties and new political organizations with different levels

TABLE 2 Competitiveness in internal elections of party bodies.

Variables	Indicators
Competition	Which bodies are elected?
	How many options are presented?
Types of competition	Are there internal recruitment mechanisms?
	Can factions compete in this process?
	Type of candidacy (lists or individuals)
	Parity
	Electoral formula
Level of uncertainty in the process	Types of votes (pure, by designation, by designation with correction)
	What percentage does the winning option achieve?
	What is the margin between the 1st and 2nd options?

Source: Rabat and Hazan (2001) and Freidenberg and Dosek (2016).

TABLE 3 Competitiveness in primary elections.

Variables	Indicators
Competition	Election system
	How many options are presented?
Types of competition	Are there internal recruitment mechanisms?
	Can factions compete in this process?
	Type of candidacy (lists or individuals)
	Parity
	Electoral formula
Level of uncertainty in the process	Types of votes (by appointment, by appointment with voting, by voting)
	What percentage does the winning option achieve?
	What is the margin between the 1st and 2nd options?

Source: Rabat and Hazan (2001) and Freidenberg and Dosek (2016).

TABLE 4 Decentralization in internal elections of party bodies and candidates.

Dimension	Variables	Indicators
Decentralization	Definition of the Nomination	Who establishes the procedural rules?
		Who defines the candidacies?
	Institutional Levels Involved	Number of stages
	Territorial Level Where the Nomination is Defined	Type of party body involved in the nomination

Source: Rabat and Hazan (2001) and Freidenberg and Dosek (2016).

of parliamentary representation belonging to different political families. By analyzing and comparing these 12 case studies, we develop a model of digitalization in the selection of party organs and election candidates in Spanish political parties. We have, therefore, posed the following research questions: Do parties use digital tools in their selection processes? Has the establishment of online selection mechanisms had an impact on the internal democracy of political parties? Which parties make the most use of these tools?

3.2 Hypothesis

We have formulated the following hypotheses:

H1. Although digital technology ostensibly makes such procedures and consultations less costly and more inclusive, few Spanish parties have digitalized these processes, and when they do, they often take on a plebiscitary character. As Gibson and Ward (2009) indicate, party systems characterized by higher levels of institutionalization and stability may experience a lower degree of innovation and digitalization within their political structures.

H2. Digital decision-making processes have a positive impact on intra-party democracy, but they tend to be more plebiscitary than assembly-based. This is because granting formal powers to party members may lead to a new empowerment of party leaders (Katz and Mair, 1995; Carty, 2004; Bolleyer, 2008).

H3. New parties make more intensive and radical use of digital tools compared to traditional parties. Traditional parties adopt new technologies gradually and progressively, leading to a model of sustainable innovation (Raniolo and Tarditi, 2020), whereas new parties favor disruptive innovations. The absence of pre-existing organizational structures or elites in new parties supports innovations that impact internal organization (Barberá et al., 2021).

H4. Left-wing parties exhibit a higher level of digitalization compared to right-wing parties. The former are generally more inclined toward developing participatory formulas, while the latter often defend traditional representative structures. Raniolo and Tarditi (2020) suggest that left-wing parties show greater sensitivity to the establishment and internal democratic procedures, whereas right-wing parties tend to prioritize hierarchical organizational control.

3.3 Data collection

An index has been constructed to measure the internal democracy of these processes, while also allowing us to present a taxonomy of them. To avoid potential bias, we analyzed 12 parties using 24 indicators across the three dimensions described in the previous section: competitiveness, centralization, and decentralization. Each proposed indicator was assigned a set of conditions to which numerical values were attributed. The complete list of these indicators and values can be found in the

Supplementary material. A value of 1 is assigned when the process is fully democratic, 0.5 when it is partially democratic, and 0 when it is not democratic. This index primarily serves to determine whether the process is minimally democratic. Thus, if all indicators within a dimension are met, the process is considered fully democratic. Conversely, if only some indicators are met, the degree of democracy of the process can be assessed based on the conditions fulfilled and their context. If none of the indicators are met, the process is deemed non-democratic. Therefore, selection processes with high levels of inclusivity, competitiveness, and decentralization will exhibit greater internal democracy than those with low levels in all these indicators (Freidenberg and Dosek, 2016, p. 10). Subsequently, the scores obtained in each dimension by the parties will be totaled, allowing for a value that can be compared with those of other political forces and which can be used for identifying which dimensions show the greatest democratic development. Clearly, the higher the score obtained, the greater the internal democracy of the selection process.

To assess each indicator we drew on the party regulations governing these processes, existing literature on the subject, and the procedures conducted by each party, through a thorough analysis of journals, official party websites, digital platforms, and other relevant sources. Additionally, to strengthen our analysis, we utilized the Party Politics Database (PPDB) released in February 2022. This version covers the structures and practices of 186 political parties worldwide. As noted by this database is a collaborative data collection project providing information on the organizational characteristics, statutes, resources, and decision-making procedures of parties represented in the lower house. However, this analysis does bear challenges, as these processes often lack specific regulations, and, typically operational rules are only loosely defined in the statutes. Moreover, data on all processes conducted by these parties are not always available so we have chosen to analyze the most recent process undertaken by each political organization.

To enhance the analysis, we initially categorized the selection processes of Spanish political parties into fully centralized, partially centralized, and online participatory procedures. This approach not only created a map of selection models within Spanish political parties, but also allowed for an in-depth examination of fully and partially centralized processes, which were then contrasted with online participatory ones. Subsequently, we conducted a study of the online participatory selection processes for party officials and candidates in Spanish political parties in order to assess the impact of these processes on internal democracy.

Additionally, to avoid errors in coding the data for each indicator, a coding guide was developed following the criteria established in the [Supplementary material](#). However, this coding process involved several steps. First, we familiarized ourselves with the data, which included reading the regulations and journalistic references for each event, viewing videos and transcriptions related to these processes, and analyzing the parties' digital platforms. It is worth noting that the dataset focused solely on current processes and digital tools, covering the period from 2021 to 2024. The sample can be reviewed in the [Supplementary material](#). During this process, an initial coding was generated, which involved identifying significant segments in the data and labelling them. This was followed by a secondary coding based on the established criteria, with the results being compared to those obtained in the initial

coding. In cases of divergence, a third analysis was conducted, leading to a new coding of those indicators.

To determine the ideology of the parties under study, we employed the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, and in establishing whether they were traditional parties, we considered political forces' founding dates (Table 5).

4 The selection processes for party officials and candidates in Spanish political parties

First and foremost, Table 6 has been created to present the map of the selection process for party officials and candidates. From this table, it can be observed that not all political parties have a participatory selection process.

For example, UPN and PNV do not have a participatory process for selecting party officials; PP, BNG, PSOE, and CC have a partially participatory process but do not use digital platforms for this purpose, whereas VOX, SUMAR, ERC, JxC, EHB, and Podemos do employ digital platforms. Regarding the candidate selection process, it is highly centralized in PP, VOX, SUMAR, and PNV, and partially centralized in BNG, CC, and PSOE, although it can only be considered participatory in ERC, JxC, EH, and Podemos. Additionally, only a few of these procedures are regulated by specific regulations, such as those of PSOE, VOX, SUMAR, ERC, JxC, PNV, and Podemos, which may indicate a higher degree of transparency.

Additionally, as shown in Graph 1, the degree of inclusivity in the process of selecting party officials also varies among different political forces, regardless of whether the procedures are online or not. For instance, a significant number of Spanish parties still do not have a participatory procedure for selecting their party officials. For example, in UPN, PNV, and CC, only delegates to the party congresses can participate. In contrast, some parties have opened this process to all their members, such as VOX, SUMAR, ERC, JxC, EHB, and BNG, while only Podemos has also extended participation to supporters (Graph 1).

TABLE 5 Ideological classification of political parties.

Party	Scale	Ideology	Foundation year
PP	8,06	Right	1976
PSOE	3,06	Left	1879
VOX	9,71	Far-Right	2013
SUMAR	1,92	Far-Left	2023
ERC	3,2	Left	1993
JxC	6,66	Center-Right	2018
EHB	1,28	Far-Left	2012
UPN	7,6	Right	1979
BNG	3,14	Left	1982
PNV	6,00	Center-Right	1895
Podemos	1,93	Far-Left	2014
CC	7,2	Center-Right	1993

Source: Own elaboration.

TABLE 6 Selection processes of political parties with representation in the congress of deputies in 2024.

Party	Online party elite selection procedure	Online party procedure for candidates	Digital platform	Statutes	Specific regulation
PP			X	X	
PSOE			X		X
VOX	X		X		X
SUMAR	X		X		X
ERC	X	X	X		X
JxC	X	X	X		X
EHB	X	X	X	X	
UPN				X	
BNG				X	
PNV			X		X
Podemos	X	X	X		X
CC				X	

PP, Partido Popular; PSOE, Partido Socialista Obrero Español; VOX, SUMA; ERC, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya; JxC, Junts per Catalunya; EHB, Euskal Herria Bildu; PNV, Partido Nacionalista Vasco; UPN, Unión del Pueblo Navarro; BNG, Bloque Nacionalista Gallego; Podemos, Unidas Podemos; CC, Coalición Canarias.

A similar situation occurs with the candidate selection process and electoral lists. For instance, in PP, VOX, SUMAR, UPN, and PNV, the responsibility for selecting candidates lies with the party elite. The situation worsens when it comes to creating electoral lists, as the national organs of PP, PSOE, VOX, SUMAR, UPV, BNG, PNV, and CC, with jurisdiction over this matter, are in charge of them. However, this procedure is more inclusive in PSOE, ERC, JxC, EHB, BNG, Podemos, and CC for the selection of the party’s electoral candidate. Moreover, ERC, JxC, EHB, and Podemos also maintain this openness when choosing their electoral candidates (Graph 2).

4.1 Process of completely centralized party officials and candidates

The two parties, with a completely centralized selection process for both candidates and the party elite, are PNV and UPN.

In the case of PNV, candidates and party leadership bodies are selected by the delegates of the National Assembly.² This body selects candidates for national or international public positions, based on the proposal from the Euzkadi Buru Batzar³ (Article 42.1.g, Statutes, 2020). Additionally, the delegates of the National Assembly elect the President of the Euzkadi Buru Batzar and eight of its burukides (leaders, in Basque) within the General Assembly (art.42.2. Statutes, 2020). To do so, municipal organizations must convene and hold Municipal Assemblies⁴ to discuss and make decisions that their representatives must defend in the General Assembly,⁵ in relation to

the election of internal positions and candidates for public office. In contrast, the selection of municipal public officials (mayors and councilors) is the responsibility of the Municipal Assemblies, based on the proposal from the respective Municipal Board,⁶ or InterJuntas,⁷ if in existence, and, in the capitals of the territory, at the proposal of the Municipal Board or InterJuntas, if in existence together with the Territorial Council. Territorial public positions are elected by the Territorial Assemblies, based on proposals from the Territorial Councils.⁸ However, these are drafted with the utmost respect for the will of the majority, as expressed by the territorial organizations. The issue being that these Assemblies are not open to all members, but only to representatives of the membership.

In the case of UPN, it is the General Assembly⁹ that decides who holds the party presidency and other corresponding positions. However, unlike PNV, all members who are up to date with their membership fees, and not under suspension, have the right to vote (art. 11 of the UPN Statutes, 2024). Voting is, however, conducted in person using traditional ballots. Closed lists are used for one member positions (President, Vice President, and Secretary General) and open

performance or reformulates its political project, but also elects the party’s president.

6 The municipal councils (Uri Buru Batzararak) are the executive bodies of EAJ-PNV in each municipal organisation (art. 50, Statutes, 2020).

7 Interjuntas is responsible for bringing together, promoting and controlling the political action of Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea-Basque National Party, in those functions and aims for which it was created, in its sphere of action (art. 21.1.3. Statutes, 2020).

8 The territorial councils are the executive bodies of the territorial organisation (Art. 50, Statute, 2020).

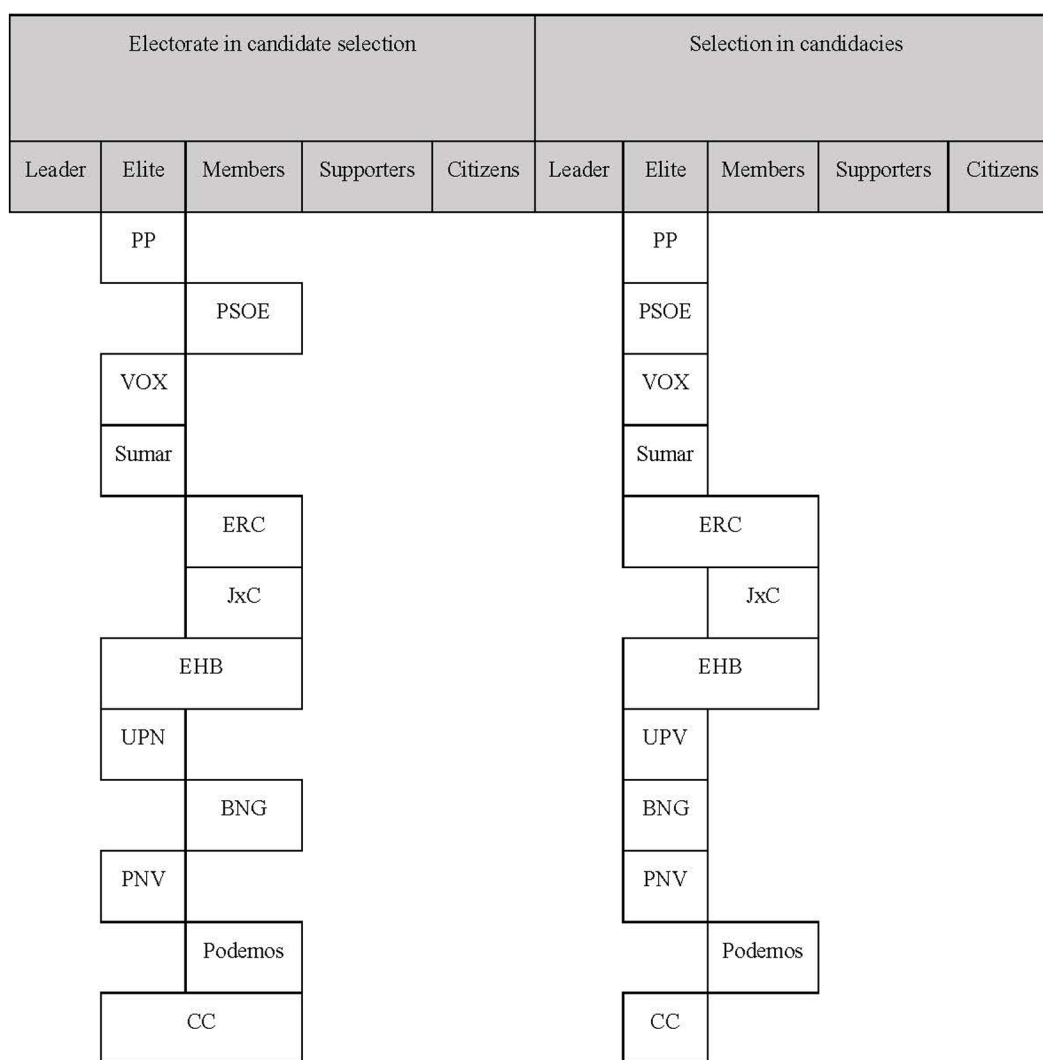
9 The General Assembly is the supreme body of the party, and holds the highest deliberative and decision-making function, with its resolutions being binding for the other bodies and for its membership as a whole (art. 10. Statute of the UPN, 2024).

2 This is the highest organ of the national party organisation.

3 This is the National Council which is the national executive body of the party in which the highest authority, delegated by the National Assembly, resides.

4 This is the highest body of the party’s municipal organisation.

5 This is a body which is made up of the different territorial levels of the party and which not only carries out the party’s assessment of the party’s political



GRAPH 1
 Electorate in the candidate selection processes of political forces with representation in the congress of deputies in 2024.

lists for Executive Committee Seats,¹⁰ the Political Council,¹¹ the Committee of Guarantees and Discipline, and the Accounts Committee. Furthermore, in selecting candidates, the party has allowed for the possibility of any UPN affiliate to stand as a candidate on the party lists. However, the Political Council ratifies the proposal made by the Committee of Lists by a simple majority, which makes the process less accessible to candidates from grassroots membership. Moreover, this particular committee is composed of the party’s top leadership.

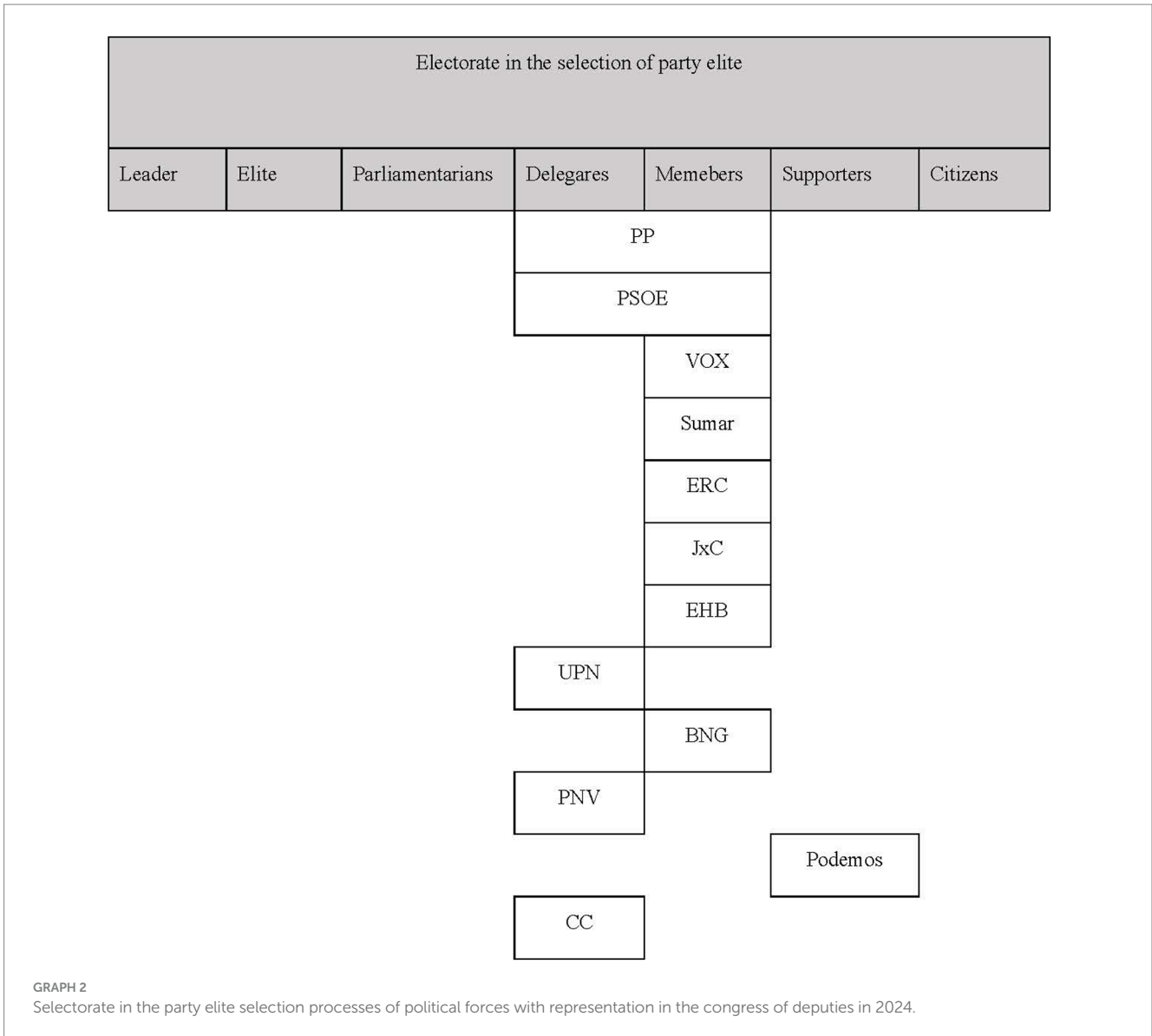
There is also a completely centralized process for candidate selection in the PP, VOX, and SUMAR. In all cases, a party body is

responsible for drafting electoral lists, whose final approval always falls to the party’s executive body. For example, in the PP the candidate for the presidency of the national government is appointed by the party president, while the electoral lists are determined by the Electoral Committee. In VOX, candidates for elections are proposed by the National Executive Committee.¹² In Sumar, the electoral lists follow a distribution of positions determined by the leadership structure, composed of the various political formations that make up this movement. Similarly, there is a completely centralized system for selecting candidates in CC. It is the National Congress that nominates the Secretary General, the National Organizational Secretariat, the

10 The Executive Committee is the governing and administrative body of the party (art. 53. UPN Statute, 2024).

11 The Political Council is an organ of political expression and control of the party’s Executive Committee, and is made up of *ex officio* members and directly elected members (art. 36. UPN Statute, 2024).

12 The National Executive Committee is the governing body of the party (Art. 15c. VOX Statute).



elected members of the National Political Council¹³ and the Executive Committee,¹⁴ however, this process is not open to all party members.

4.2 Process of party positions and partially centralized candidates

Parties with a partially centralized system for the selection of the party elite include PP, BNG, PSOE, and for the candidate selection, BNG, CC, PSOE.

In the BNG, all party members who have been active for least 2 months and are up-to-date with their dues, have the right to directly participate in the National Assembly,¹⁵ which is the body where the national leadership organs of the organization are elected.

13 The National Council is the body for debate and decision-making on political issues of importance at the national, state, European and international levels. It is in charge of controlling the action of the National Executive Committee (art. 22. CC Statute, 2021). 60% of the members of the National Political Council will be elected by the National Congress of Coalición Canaria, the other 40% will be elected by the Insular Political Councils or the organisation of Coalición Canaria abroad, in the case of this 40%, the election of members will take place according to a proportional system of closed lists.

14 The National Executive Committee is the collegiate management body of Coalición Canaria, responsible for the management of the present, coordination between the management structure elected at the National Congress and the island and CC organizations abroad (art. 29.1. CC Statute, 2021). It is made up of the persons holding the General Secretariat, the Secretariat of Organisation, the 6 Island Secretariats, the Island Secretariat or

equivalent of AHI, the Presidency of the PNC, the General Secretariat or equivalent of Jóvenes Nacionalistas, as well as the General Secretariat or equivalent of the Organisation in Venezuela (art.31. Statute of CC, 2021).

15 The National Assembly is the highest body and holder of the organisation's sovereignty (art. 3. Statutes BNG, 2021).

Specifically, this National Assembly elects the 50 members of the National Council, the Executive Committee,¹⁶ and the National Spokesperson. However, those 50 National Council members are proposed by the respective regional assemblies of the party, from among those occupying top positions on the lists elected by the regional assembly, to form part of the Regional Council. Therefore, there is strong party apparatus control over this procedure. However, the candidate for the presidency of the Galician Government is chosen through a closed primary system, although the National Council¹⁷ is responsible for designating the rest of the candidates on any electoral list.

The candidate for the presidency of the Government of the Canary Islands (CC) is chosen by the National Political Council, the proposal being made with at least 20% of its members' support. Additionally, it is responsible for approving the electoral list proposals presented by the Executive Committee. However, the party's statutes state that consultations with party bases may be conducted, either directly or through their delegates in the National and Island Congress, to choose individuals for internal party positions or those leading electoral candidacies. In this regard, primaries have been held on some occasions, for example, to designate the candidate leading the list for the Las Palmas de Gran Canaria mayoral race in the 2023 autonomous and municipal elections, however, it is not a common practice in this political formation. However, it is also true that previously this process was more centralized, as the person holding the General Secretariat and the 20 members of the National Executive Committee were elected solely by the delegates at the National Congress.

In PP, a pseudo-primary system was established in 2018 to elect the party president through a two-round election. In the first round, all party affiliates who are up to date with payment of fees and registered at one of the party's offices, vote among the different candidates. Any affiliate who is paid up and has been a member for at least 12 months, and has the support of at least 100 members, can run in this process. In the second round, only delegates at the National Congress choose the new party leader from the two candidates having the most votes in the first round. A second round is only required if none of the candidates achieves at least 50% of the votes in the first round. Thus, this is a mixed selection process or multi-stage method (Kenig et al., 2015), with two selectorates employed in each phase: affiliates first, and delegates if necessary. The Congress elects the party president, as well as the members of the Executive Committee¹⁸ and the Board of Directors,¹⁹ through a closed list system. Prior to this, the selection of these bodies was solely the responsibility of National Congress delegates.

In the PSOE, the election of the Secretary General, the top executive body, is conducted through a two-round primary system. In the first round, the candidate receiving more than 50% of valid votes is elected as Secretary General. If no candidate achieves this

percentage, a second round is held between the two candidates having the most votes, with the successful candidate being elected as Secretary General. Any fully paid up member can be a candidate, but they must also secure the following support percentages from the census: (i) 3% from national-level members and direct affiliates; (ii) 6% from regional, national, or autonomous level members and direct affiliates; and (iii) 12% from provincial or island-level members (art. 5.1.b.i. PSOE Statutes, 2021). The Federal Committee²⁰ and Executive Committee,²¹ proposed by the Secretary General, are elected by delegates to the Federal Congress. Since 2014, the selection of the candidate for the presidency of the national government has also been conducted through a two-round primary system, with any paid up affiliate eligible to vote. This was the procedure followed in the 2014 primaries to designate Pedro Sánchez as candidate for the 2016 general elections, where this position was first contested by Eduardo Madina, José Antonio Pérez Tapias, and Pedro Sánchez, and later by Pedro Sánchez and Patxi López. However, it should be noted that this process was not conducted for subsequent elections, in April and November 2019 and July 2023, as the party's executive decided to support Pedro Sánchez again as a candidate for the presidency of the Government of Spain, having held this position since June 2018, after the successful motion of no confidence against the PP led by Mariano Rajoy. Similarly, this primary system can be used to designate party candidates for autonomous elections, although this was not the case in the most recent regional elections in May 2023.

4.3 Online participatory procedures for the selection of party positions and candidates

According to the data in Table 6, the only parties that have established a selection process for candidates and party elites, through online participatory methods, are ERC, JxC, EH, and Podemos. Meanwhile, Vox and Sumar have only implemented such processes for selecting the members of party bodies. These online selection processes have democratizing potential (Barnea and Rahat, 2007), primarily because they can alter the internal dynamics of parties and power relations (Sandri et al., 2015).

5 The digital model of party position and candidate selection in Spanish political parties

In this section, we analyze the degree of democratization within the selection of candidates and party elites, in Spanish political parties through digital platforms.

16 The Executive Committee is the ordinary management body of the BNG (art. 6. Statutes BNG, 2021).

17 The National Council is the highest body for governance, representation, debate, and decision-making of the party (Art. 5, BNG Statutes, 2021).

18 The executive committees are the governing and administrative bodies (art. 39.1. Statute of the PB, 2018).

19 The Board of Directors is the highest governing body of the party (Art. 36.1. Statute of the PP, 2018).

20 The Federal Committee is the highest body between congresses (art.27.1. Statute of the PSOE, 2021).

21 The Federal Executive Committee is the body in charge of implementing and directing party policy (art.31. PSOE Statute, 2021).

5.1 Internal elections for party positions

Of the 12 parties under study, only VOX, ERC, JxC, EHB, Sumar, and Podemos have implemented online selection system for party elites. However, they do demonstrate certain deficiencies which prevent these from being appropriately considered as processes fully promoting democratization. According to Table 7, no party has managed to surpass the 50% mark, and only two, EHB and Podemos, have established a selection process with certain democratic features, however, that is still controlled in all aspects by the party apparatus.

Firstly, none of these parties have established a truly inclusive process. At best, these procedures have been opened to all fully paid-up members, who meet a specific seniority requirement, and register to participate in the process. For example, VOX requires a 9 months membership, while EHB requires 1 year. The same applies when putting forward candidates. In principle, any party member can become a candidate, however, there are requirements which effectively hinder this. For instance, in some cases candidates are required to obtain endorsements, in the case of VOX, the threshold is exceptionally high. Specifically, any candidate must secure 10% of the eligible voting membership, which translates to a minimum of 6,600 endorsements. This figure is beyond the reach of those who do not have the backing of the party's leadership who established these rules following the party assembly, held in March 2020, to create a more hierarchical organization. Additionally, parties with a two-round system, such as ERC and JxC, the party leadership can also facilitate control over this process. Furthermore, the leadership often establishes regulations allowing it to maintain control, especially when congress meetings occur in two phases. This practice helps to settle debates and approve rules for a second phase, which means that much of the grassroots membership loses interest, once the leadership is elected. As a result, compliance with indicators of inclusivity can be said to be medium to low, primarily because participation is allowed without considering the form of participation.

Another issue is competitiveness, which is inevitably linked to the previous dimension. This confirms the earlier finding: among the six parties under study, only one has witnessed an alternative candidacy presented to compete for the highest decision-making body of the party. Even in ERC, where there was a critical faction, no alternative candidacy was put forward to challenge, or even compete with, the candidate supported by the party apparatus. For example, again in ERC, to prevent such dissent, the vote to elect the new national leadership was set for November 6, 2023, while the National Congress took place on January 28, 2024. Obviously, Oriol Junqueras' (President) and Marta Rovira's (Secretary General) strategy was to prevent other candidates coming forward but, more importantly, to show unity and cohesion at congress.²² Thus, the only submitted candidacy was backed by 87% of the membership, a unity later reflected in the overwhelming approval of the party's motions by the membership, with a decisive 96.78%.²³ This agreement serves as an emergency measure to calm internally conflicting factions, at least temporarily. However, the internal power

struggle between the so-called "reformers" and supporters of Oriol Junqueras' continues. This situation is not new to ERC, where power struggles have previously arisen. The last significant conflict occurred over the party's presidency, a battle after which Junqueras emerged intent on calming tensions. Since becoming party president in 2011, the Barcelona politician has exerted strong control over the party.

ERC is not the only party to employ such practices, however. For example, during the National Congress held by JxC, the President of the Parliament, Laura Borrà, and the party's Secretary General, Jordi Turull, reached an agreement to head a joint candidacy and share the roles of President and Secretary General. This manoeuvre prevented the continuous power struggle between differing factions within the party from surfacing at the Congress, particularly those formerly affiliated to "Convergència" and voices of independent members.²⁴ Thus, once the party's national leadership was decided, the second congress phase was restricted solely to debating the motion. Within some other parties, measures go even further. For example, some have raised the percentage of endorsements required for potential candidates to prevent the emergence of alternative candidates, as seen in VOX, where endorsements were increased to 10%. Furthermore, if only one candidacy is presented, the membership vote is sometimes skipped, eliminating any tally of possible dissenting votes. Others have opted to hold the General Assembly virtually. This is a more inclusive format than being face to face, and digital voting is permitted in the case of SUMAR. This undoubtedly prevents full membership participation. For instance, at the General Assembly held on March 23, 2024, only 11.6% of the total membership roll voted for Yolanda Díaz's to lead this movement, although she had received 81.5% of the registered votes (6,671).²⁵ Additionally, Podemos has moved from opening these processes to the general public via web registration, to restricting them to members who are up to date with their membership payments.

Even in cases where more than one candidate has come forward to lead the organization, uncertainty as to the outcome remains low or nonexistent. For example, in the IV Citizen Assembly, Ione Belarra was elected Secretary General of Podemos with 45,753 of the 53,443 votes cast by party members, representing 85.6% of valid votes. Her list for the Citizen Council, the top governing body, was also chosen.²⁶

All these cases demonstrate a high level of party leader influence in determining the party elite. This is because they generally possess, not only the resources needed to present their candidacies, but also the means to secure their victory. Based on survey data from Kenig et al. (2015, p. 60) there is considerable stability in the selection processes for party leaders. This does not mean that there are no power struggles; rather, that such struggles occur well before candidacies are presented. In order to avoid confrontation, leaders and various factions negotiate potential agreements in what constitutes one of the most clandestine aspects of internal party politics. In such a scenario, the identity of the electorate and the rules governing the selection process become irrelevant, as the electorate is limited to crowning or confirming,

24 See: <https://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20220510/8255391/acuerdo-borras-turull-candidatura-unica-congreso-junts.html>

25 See: <https://www.elindependiente.com/espana/2024/03/23/yolanda-diaz-se-impone-en-la-asamblea-de-sumar-tras-una-raquitica-participacion-del-11/>

26 See: https://www.eldiario.es/politica/ione-belarra-elegida-secretaria-general_1_8031967.html

22 See: <https://www.heraldo.es/noticias/nacional/2022/11/06/bases-reeligen-tandem-junqueras-rovira-seguir-liderando-erc-1610654.html>

23 See: <https://www.publico.es/politica/erc-certifica-apuesta-referendum-pactado-congreso-marcado-tensa-negociacion-presupuestos.html>

TABLE 7 Inclusivity, competitiveness, and decentralization in primary elections.

Dimension	Variables	Indicators	VOX	ERC	JxC	EHB	Sumar	Podemos
Inclusivity	Selectorate	Who can be selected?	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5
		What are the participation requirements?	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Candidacy	What are the candidacy requirements?	0	0,5	0	0	0,5	0,5
		Endorsements	0	1	1	1	1	1
	Procedure	Level of participation	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total			0,5 10%	2 40%	1,5 30%	1,5 30%	2 40%	2,5 45%
Competitiveness	Competition	Election system	1	1	1	1	1	1
		How many options are presented?	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Type of competition	Is there any online recruitment mechanism for internal bodies?	0	0	0,5	0	0,5	0
		Can factions compete in this process?	0	0	0,5	0	0	0,5
		Type of candidates (lists or individuals)	1	0	1	1	0	0,5
		Parity	0	1	1	1	1	1
		Electoral formula	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Degree of uncertainty	Types of votes (by appointment, by appointment with voting only voting)	1	1	1	1	1	1
		Margin of victory for the winner?	0	0	0	0	0	0
		What is the margin between the 1st and 2nd?	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total			3 30%	3 30%	5 50%	4 40%	3,5 35%	6 60%
Decentralization	Nomination Definition	Who establishes the procedure rules?	0	0	0	1	0	0
		Who defines the candidacies?	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Institutional levels involved in nomination	Number of steps	0	0	0	0,5	0	0
	Territorial level where the nomination is defined	Type of party organ participating in the nomination	0,25	0	0	0,75	0	0

(Continued)

TABLE 7 (Continued)

Dimension	Variables	Indicators	VOX	ERC	JxC	EHB	Sumar	Podemos
Total			0,25 6,25%	0 0%	0 0%	2,25 56,2%	0 0%	0 0%
TOTAL			3,75 19,7%	5 26,3%	6,5 34%	7,75 40,8%	5,5 28,9%	8,5 44,7%

Consequently, only JxC and Sumar have provided a bulletin board to inform affiliates of candidacies presented at the Congress. However, there is no space for members to give their opinion of candidacies, or seek out other affiliates to form a slate. Furthermore, the participation of factions is possible only in JxC and Podemos, and, even in these cases, the factions are not strongly organized. Indeed, candidacies are individual rather than list-based, which ostensibly promotes the participation of other candidates, much like the selection by vote rather than by appointment. The issue is that the other measures previously mentioned counteract these options. Consequently, the level of uncertainty in all parties is extremely low, leaving almost no chance for the potential victory of alternative candidacies. This is primarily because, as noted, such alternative candidacies rarely emerge, and when they do, their chances of success are minimal.

The level of decentralization is virtually nonexistent. The selection process for the party elite is highly controlled by the party apparatus. In all cases, except for EHB, the definition of nominations falls to the party's competent body, typically the Guarantee Committees or the Congress Board. Additionally, it should be noted that members of these bodies are appointed by the party leader, ensuring their adherence to the national leadership. Consequently, the nomination process involves only one body, with the exception of EHB, where two bodies are involved: the territorial organs propose candidates to the national body, who has the final say. The rules governing these procedures are crafted by the executive committees, although they are approved by the party members participating in the party conclaves. However, their ability to propose successful amendments is almost nonexistent, with the exception of EHB.

5.2 Primary elections for selecting electoral candidates

In the case of primary elections, for parties having established this procedure electronically, it is even more limited than that of elections to select party positions. Only ERC, JxC, EHB, and Podemos have established an online primary system to select candidates for various elections.

The primary processes conducted by these political parties demonstrate particularities that depend on the candidacies who can be selected through this procedure or the voting method. While in Podemos and JxC it is entirely telematic, in ERC and EHB, voting can be done both in-person and online. While Podemos has a set of Primary Regulations, ERC, JxC, and EHB approve their own for each individual procedure. Although in Podemos, ERC, and EHB, the members choose the lead candidate and the rest of the list members, in EHB, the leadership proposes 50% of that list.

The data from Table 8 shows that all parties fall below the 50% threshold, reflecting a medium-low level of democratization. This can be explained by the low level of inclusivity achieved by all parties in

this dimension. None of the parties have opted to open participation to all citizens, limiting it instead to fully paid up members and generally requiring registration to be able to participate. Although there have been instances where participation was extended to supporters and affiliates, such as ERC, or Podemos, where the primaries were initially open to all citizens. Furthermore, their level of participation is limited solely to voting, leaving them with no opportunity to express opinions on the proposals presented to them, or to make any modifications. This approach leans more toward a plebiscitary rather than a deliberative process. This undoubtedly negatively impacts the number of members participating in these processes. For example, in the last primary elections to establish the candidate list for the European elections, only 36,054, of a total membership of 55,000 Podemos members voted.²⁷ However, it should be noted that the implementation of online procedures also presents challenges for some members. While online participation may initially seem easier, there are individuals with basic or no technological skills who encounter difficulties in engaging with these processes, a phenomenon known as the “digital divide” (Gibson and Cantijoch, 2013). However, perhaps the most significant barriers to inclusivity are the requirements to be able to present a candidacy. For example, in ERC, a candidacy for the European parliamentary elections requires the following endorsements: 5% of the party's membership, 1/3 of the National Executive members, and ¼ of the National Council members. These requirements make it nearly impossible for any member who is not close to the party apparatus, or is lacking its approval, to be a candidate. Additionally, the selection of the rest of the electoral list members is the responsibility of the corresponding local congresses. In JxC, however, to be a candidate, one must obtain the endorsement of a minimum number of full-rights members in the corresponding territory and be up to date with membership payments. In Podemos, lead candidates must have been registered in the relevant local area for at least 3 months, be fully paid up, and provide a brief paragraph explaining their political, professional, or personal relationship with the constituency. Additionally, these candidates must obtain additional endorsements: from 0.025% or more of the total registered Podemos members (rounded down) in the constituency in which they are running. Endorsement requirements are between 5 and 150. Secondly, in the case of the European Parliamentary elections, an endorsement by a collegiate body, which can be either the National Citizens Council, The National Coordination Council, the General Secretariat, or at least 10 Circles.²⁸ In the case of autonomous community

27 Results of the vote count for the 185,003-Primaries to the European Parliament, 2024. Check them at: <https://procesos2024.podemos.info/wp-content/uploads/185003.results.pdf>

28 The “Circles” are the basic Party Unit.

TABLE 8 Inclusivity, competitiveness, and decentralization in primary elections.

Dimension	Variables	Indicators	ERC	JxC	EHB	Podemos
Inclusivity	Selectorate	Who can be selected?	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5
		What are the participation requirements?	0	0	0	0
	Candidacy	What are the candidacy requirements?	0	0	0,5	0,5
		Endorsements	1	0,5	0	1
	Procedure	Level of participation	0	0	0	0
Total			1,5 37,5%	1 20%	1 20%	1,5 37,5%
Competitiveness	Competition	Election system	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5
		How many options are presented?	1	1	1	1
	Type of competition	Is there any online recruitment mechanism for internal bodies?	0	0	0	0
		Can factions compete in this process?	0	0	0	0,5
		Type of candidates (lists or individuals)	1	1	1	0,5
		Parity	1	1	1	1
		Electoral formula	0	0	0	1
	Degree of uncertainty	Types of votes (by appointment, by appointment with voting only voting)	1	1	1	1
		Margin of victory for the winner?	0	0	0	0
		What is the margin between the 1st and 2nd?	0	0	0	0
Total			4,5 45%	4,5 45%	4,5 45%	5,5 55%
Decentralization Dimension Inclusivity	Nomination Definition	Who establishes the procedure rules?	0	0	1	0
		Who defines the candidacies?	0	0	0	0
	Variables	Indicators	1	0,5	0,5	0
	Selectorate	Who can be selected?	0,25	1	0,75	0
Total			1,25 31,25%	1,5 37,5%	2,25 56,2%	0 25%
TOTAL			7,25 38,15%	7 36,8%	7,75 40,7%	7 36,8%

elections, endorsement by the Citizens Council of the Autonomous Community, the Autonomous Community Council, at least three Municipal organs from within the autonomous community (Circles Council or Plenary), or at least 20% of Circles (rounded up), or at least three Active Podemos Circles in the thematic area within the autonomous community, or at last 20% of these (rounded up).

EHB is perhaps the most interesting case, as it is the only party with a mixed system for proposing candidates for electoral contests.

This involves the Party Board²⁹ designating 50% of the candidates for the main institutions (European Parliament, Spanish Congress and

29 The Party Table is the representative body of the member parties of EH Bildu. This body's approval is mandatory for the adoption of certain decisions (Art. 19.1. EH Bildu Statute, 2021).

Senate, Gasteiz and Iruñea Parliaments, and General Assemblies of Araba, Bizkaia, and Gipuzkoa). However, these candidates must be endorsed by all fully paid up members. (Art. 13.1. EHB Statutes, 2021). For example, candidates for the European Parliament elections are chosen through the General Assembly.³⁰ The other 50% (including the head of the list) are individually elected or endorsed by affiliates through participatory procedures and, where applicable, all those expressly registered for this purpose. This results in a very low degree of inclusivity, with only 17% of the indicators fulfilled.

The level of competitiveness is medium-low in all parties with the exception of Podemos, which exceeds 50%. The most significant deficiencies being the lack of space for members to recruit others to form their candidacies, which undoubtedly hinders the presentation of candidacies by rank and file members. While all these political parties allow competition amongst candidates, and indeed more than one candidate does usually run in these procedures, they are usually members with positions of responsibility within the organization, rather than rank and file members. Furthermore, when a majoritarian electoral system is established and candidacies in lists or factions are prohibited, this becomes more apparent. For instance, in ERC, candidacies are individual, but establishing a majoritarian electoral system helps ensure greater control by the party apparatus. This severely affects competitiveness, leading to a low level of uncertainty, since official candidates win these processes with little discussion. This is especially so considering that the presentation of candidacies led by opposing factions is nearly impossible due to the number, or percentage of, endorsements required. For example, in ERC's European Parliament primaries, the leadership's candidate, Toni Comín, gained 77% of the votes compared to the 9% obtained by the other candidate, Joan Josep Florense.³¹ In EHB, the Party Board's list proposal for the European elections was endorsed by 96.22%, with only 1.98% voting against it.³² In UP's European election primaries, Irene Montero Gil emerged victorious with 84% of the votes, 82 points ahead of the second candidate, Alba Blanco Cabrero.³³ Moreover, in UP, the electoral system was modified in 2017 with the introduction of a new system called the "DesBorda system," which has been used for all subsequent party primaries. This introduced a points ranking system for each candidate (the possibility of selecting and voting for a complete list). It has been perceived as the most controversial and significant regulatory change. Critics argue that this system tends to over-represent the winning list at the expense of the smaller ones, and its implementation has been seen as a betrayal of the expectations given Podemos's claims of openness and participation.

30 The General Assembly is the highest body of EH Bildu between Congresses and ensures compliance with the resolutions approved therein (Art. 16.1. EH Bildu Statute, 2021), and all members attend with the right to speak and vote.

31 *Diario El Punt Avui+*, el 10/04/2024. See: <https://www.elpuntavui.cat/politica/article/17-politica/2405327-toni-comin-sera-el-candidat-de-junts-a-les-europees.html>

32 See: <https://ehbildu.eus/es/noticias/las-bases-de-eh-bildu-refrendan-la-lista-para-las-elecciones-europeas-que-encabezara-fernando-barrena>

33 See: https://procesos2024.podemos.info/wp-content/uploads/185003_results.pdf

The degree of decentralization across most parties is medium-low, with the exception of ERC and Podemos. However, it is true that political parties have opted to involve territorial units in decision-making, especially when they tend to align with the national party apparatus. Additionally, all members in these parties have the right to participate in the organizations-congresses, where the rules governing the party's functioning are approved. Thus, through amendments or deliberation, they can influence these rules. However, proposing regulations is down to the competent national body. In practice, the definition of candidacies falls within the responsibility of the corresponding party body, which is typically aligned with party leadership. Exceptions exist, such as EHB. Here, members at congresses can suggest the agenda, present proposals, partial amendments, or alternative papers on subjects of any nature, whether included in the draft paper or not. Still, they must obtain a minimum of 15% support from attendees in pre-Congress debates, which is, nonetheless, extremely challenging. This again ensures the party apparatus controls this process, which is reinforced by the types of bodies involved in nominations. Usually, national bodies define candidacies, except in cases where candidate selection falls under other territorial areas, in which case subnational bodies are responsible, with the exception of ERC. The decision-making power of national bodies, is however ever counteracted even if only two bodies are participating as candidates. In the case of ERC, three phases or bodies are involved in defining candidacies, the lead candidate being designated by the Guarantees Commission, with the remainder of the list corresponding to territorial congresses. However, the regulation may provide for the reservation of a percentage of list spots for individuals proposed by the Presidency and approved by the National Executive, as well as the inclusion of individuals proposed by the sectorial commissions. Nevertheless, this does not imply that the national leadership loses control over the definition of candidacies.

6 General discussion

The results obtained clearly verify the first hypothesis. Only six out of the 12 parties studied have established an online system for selecting party elites (VOX, ERC, JxC, EHB, Sumar, and Podemos), and four have established an online primary system (ERC, JxC, EHB, and Podemos). Furthermore, the use of the internet in selection processes is intertwined with a general movement towards inclusivity in party decision-making (Faucher, 2015; Gauja, 2015). Therefore, it is possible for parties to establish more inclusive selection processes without conducting them online. This is the case in the selection of party elites for PP, BNG, PSOE and in the selection of candidates for BNG, CC, PSOE. However, it is also true that there is still a highly centralized system in place for the drawing up of electoral lists, in such parties as PNV and UPN, together with PP, VOX, and Sumar.

The reason for this, as Gerbaudo (2019) points out, is that emerging parties like Podemos personify a new type of party organization, replacing historical party models such as the mass party, the catch-all party, and the cartel party. However, as

previous studies indicate (Gibson and Römmele, 2001; Randall and Svasand, 2002; Vaccari, 2013), as these political forces become institutionalized, there is a tendency to weaken innovations, and genuinely participatory channels are reduced. Hence, Podemos has established new barriers preventing all citizens from potentially participating in these selection processes, as was initially the case. However, there are exceptions to this trend, such as the case of SUMAR which is still far from the level of digitization seen in Podemos. It should, however, be noted that, although Sumar is a political movement, it is made up of a series of parties, some of which are already institutionalized. Traditional parties like PNV and UPN have well-established bureaucratic structures and communication channels, which are in no need of change, they remain intact as institutional inertia prevails. Conversely, PP and PSOE have found themselves needing to make changes in order to make their organizations more accessible to members and to more effectively compete with new political forces (e.g., Podemos, Vox, Ciudadanos which have been drawing electoral support away from them). However, these innovations, usually a result of the “contagion effect,” tend to be minimal and are aimed at increasing their competitive advantage (H3). This is the reason why neither party has transferred these processes to the digital realm. Traditional parties introduce these new technologies more gradually and progressively (Raniolo and Tarditi, 2020). Furthermore, traditional parties show strong resistance to change, which is why PNV continues to rely on a highly centralized selection procedure.

On the other hand, based on the results obtained, EHB and Podemos have achieved the highest percentage in the selection of party elites, while EHB and ERC have obtained the best percentage in primaries. Additionally, of the six parties having established some online selection procedure, only four are left-wing (H4), and three of them are new political formations (H3). This corroborates a fact already pointed out by a significant portion of the specialized literature; left-wing political parties have always been more receptive to democratizing their internal functioning (Baras et al., 2012; Vaccari, 2013; Gauja, 2013; Scarrow, 2005; Bolin et al., 2017, etc.). Amongst these, movement-parties (Kitschelt, 2006) are especially receptive, because, as Chadwick and Stromer-Galley (2016) indicate, parties originating from social movements play a central role in the adoption of digital tools. Moreover, the age of political parties, can help explain the varying degree of intensity in their adoption of digital innovations (Gibson and Ward, 2009; Raniolo and Tarditi, 2020; Mosca and Quaranta, 2017).

Despite the significant changes occurring, one must ask to what extent online selection processes have truly impacted intra-party democracy. It is true that some of these parties have modified their process for selecting candidates and party elites, although others have only transferred existing procedures to the digital realm. This is primarily due to the fact that previously the election system was restricted to voting by delegates in party conclaves. Therefore, the primary system and other types of voting represent an innovation aimed at achieving unmediated decisions *a priori* (Scarrow et al., 2017; Wuttke et al., 2019), favoring internal democracy. Moreover, these processes tend to encourage the growing participation of members in decision-making processes, and they achieve a positive impact by promoting inclusivity. However, based on the results obtained here, the

decisions made are not always the result of the will of the rank-and-file members, but rather that of the party leadership. It is due to the fact that both processes establish certain barriers to full participation, so much so that there are more or less rigid requirements for both the electorate and the presentation of candidacies, that the entire membership is prevented from meaningfully participating in the process. Moreover, no mechanisms are articulated to allow grassroots members to form candidacies thus overcoming these prerequisites, and, this is also difficult for party factions. The participation of grassroots members is limited to exercising their vote, but their opinions or proposals have no place in these processes. Similarly, the electoral rules established in these processes tend to favor candidacies supported by the party apparatus, which are usually the majority. Furthermore, given that the drafting of regulations governing these procedures and the definition of candidacies are the responsibility of national bodies, even territorial organizations often have little influence in them, meaning that control by the party apparatus is practically guaranteed.

Thus, from the perspective of intra-party democracy, the question remains whether such consultations provide members with a genuine opportunity to choose, or whether their participation merely serves to validate the position of the party elite. Based on the previous observations, these processes have often functioned primarily to allow members to endorse the decisions made by the party leaders. Consequently, these decisions are made elsewhere, and prior to the selection process by the membership. Moreover, the bodies responsible for drafting candidacies and electoral lists are aligned with the proposals made by the party leadership. Therefore, these parties follow a plebiscitary and centralized logic, which is less conducive to fostering genuine intra-party democracy. Although it is a significant development, and can even be considered one of the most transformative processes experienced by some political formations, even surpassing delegate or representative systems, its democratic outcomes are far from satisfactory.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/[Supplementary material](#), further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

GS: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2024.1442331/full#supplementary-material>

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