Open political parties: applying the principles of Open Government to Spanish political affiliations[1]

Los partidos políticos abiertos: aplicación de los principios del gobierno abierto a las formaciones políticas españolas

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Abstract:

Open government has experienced strong development in the political arena as well as in academic studies. This article explores the possibility of adapting the foundations of open government (transparency, participation and collaboration) to political parties. In Spain, such parties have experienced great mistrust from citizens, which goes hand in hand with the high level of public contributions in their financing. These factors have made it necessary to develop the concept of open political parties. This study is based on a conceptual approach using the Delphi methodology in which 20 experts from the fields of Communication, Law and Political Science have contributed their knowledge in two rounds of questionnaires. The results were used to draft a Guide to Best Practice for Open Political Parties, which was used later to evaluate these organisations. The analysis shows that parties still have not developed the foundations mentioned above, especially with regard to their involvement and interaction with citizens.

Resumen:

El gobierno abierto ha experimentado un fuerte auge en el escenario político y en los estudios académicos. Este artículo reflexiona sobre la adaptación de los pilares del gobierno abierto (transparencia, participación y colaboración) a los partidos políticos. Estas formaciones en España sufren una gran desconfianza ciudadana, que se suma al alto porcentaje de aportaciones públicas en su financiación. Todo ello hace necesario desarrollar el concepto de partidos políticos abiertos. El estudio parte de una aproximación conceptual, realizada con la metodología Delphi, en el que 20 expertos de los campos de la Comunicación, el Derecho y las Ciencias Políticas han aportado sus conocimientos en dos rondas de cuestionarios. Los resultados sirvieron para redactar una Guía de buenas prácticas para partidos políticos abiertos, que posteriormente se ha utilizado para evaluar a las formaciones. El análisis muestra que los partidos aún deben desarrollar los pilares, especialmente su implicación e interacción de la ciudadanía.

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1. Introduction

Open government has the capability of improving public services, empowering citizens, and developing more efficient measures (Abu-Shamab, 2015). This is why scholars, politicians and citizens trust in the open strategies of institutions, which must be based on transparency, participation and collaboration.

Open government has been studied and seen as positive for the administration, and has focused primarily on its application to state and local governments (Ruijer et al., 2019; Bvuma and Joseph, 2019). Research has also been carried out regarding the application of open government foundations in the case of the media (Porlezza and Splendore, 2019) and from the perspective of citizens (Wirtz et al., 2019).

However, no references have been found from the point of view of political parties. This study poses the possibility of extending this type of research not only to public institutions, but to political parties as well, so that the latter can promote the principles of Open government with the aim of getting closer to citizens and becoming more efficient, more transparent, making legitimate decisions, and communicating their policies more effectively.

Therefore, this research aims to define the concept of open political parties and to evaluate their degree of implementation in Spain. As pointed out by Sierra (2018), there are already several organizations that periodically measure the transparency of political parties, nearly all of which have similar instruments that consist of checking compliance with various indicators and applying criteria from a descriptive and quantitative point of view. The definition of open political parties requires a new methodology to assess the degree of openness of these Spanish political organisations.

1.1. The Open Government model

Interest in open government began as early as the last century, but the concept has received much greater attention over the last decade. This rise has several explanations. On the one hand, when Barack Obama became president of the United States in 2009, he signed the well-known Memorandum for Transparency and Open Government, in which he committed himself to promoting access to information, as well as citizen participation and collaboration. On the other hand, various administrations have understood and accepted the technological changes and are adapting their services to them (Ruvalcaba-Gómez, Sandoval-Almazán, Criado and Valle-Cruz, 2019) through the implementation of transparency and open government web portals along with different plans and measures. The fight against corruption has also encouraged this trend toward open government because of the fact that even though it is not the solution, transparency is believed to discourage this type of fraud (Attard, Orlandi, Scerri and Auer, 2015).

In the academic field, interest in this area has also been significant, with a large number of publications of scientific articles, books and communications on open government, transparency and e-government around the world, especially focused on Anglo-Saxon countries.

In practice, the openness of administrations has resulted in the publication of documents and data sets on the Internet. However, as Meijer, Curtin and Hillebrandt (2012) explain, this diminishes the value of open government, which is not only about the dissemination of information, but about relations with citizens as well, and these should not be neglected.

Thus, open government goes beyond transparency and it must be differentiated from e-government, which refers to the adaptation of institutions to new technologies. Open government, on the other hand, is linked to the renewal of democracy and is based on the principles of transparency, participation and collaboration (Abu-Shamab, 2015). According to McDermott (2012), an open government must do the following:

– Offer transparency and provide information to citizens on measures being taken by institutions, and promote accountability. A distinction must also be made between active transparency (Rubio, 2011), which involves the voluntary publication of data, and passive transparency, which involves the dissemination of information resulting from a request. Moreover, the latter must be properly regulated (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012).

– Encourage citizen participation, as administrations can benefit from people's knowledge, and commitment from citizens improves the effectiveness and quality of decisions as well.

– Develop innovative initiatives and tools in order for citizens to cooperate with institutions

While it is true that all three values are indispensable for an open government to function properly, it must be acknowledged that transparency is the foundational principle, and the most important for opening up institutions. If administrations expect to understand the needs of citizens and allow them to participate and collaborate, it absolutely essential that effective communication with citizens be established (Abu-Shamab, 2015). This is also the reason why an open government is so strongly linked to the development of technology, as the success of such governments depends on effective communication with citizens, so they must take advantage of digital tools for this purpose.

Abu-Shamab (2015) points out that certain dilemmas arise in the development of open governments, such as information privacy as well as the quality and accessibility of data, among others. Nevertheless, the beneficial consequences should be highlighted as well. Along these lines, Janssen, Charalabidis, and Zuiderwijk (2012) stress the use of collective intelligence, as deliberation allows for the exploitation of citizen knowledge, and the resulting decisions legitimise the measures implemented. Communication between institutions also improves, resulting in more efficient services and enhanced competitiveness. All of this can increase and restore citizen confidence in administrations and empower the population.

The same authors also affirm that open data as a consequence of open government procedures entails the development of innovative initiatives, the re-use of information, the introduction of new points of view among administrations, and economic growth.

In Spain, which is the focus of this research, the central government has been promoting various initiatives within the framework of the open government action plans since it became a member of the international body known as the Open Government Partnership in 2011. To date, Action Plan I was carried out between 2014 and 2016; the Action Plan II was implemented between 2012 and 2014; and the Action Plan III was executed between 2015 and 2018.

The IV Spanish Open Government Action Plan is being developed, and will continue to be developed, between 2019 and 2021. Its main objectives are to promote citizen participation in decision-making, to continue developing transparency

and open data, to strengthen ethical values and public trust, and to raise awareness in society and in the civil service sector of the values of open government[2].

1.2. Political parties: from transparency to openness

The publication of information has not only been studied and developed in public administrations, but the private sector has been influenced by transparency as well. Spanish political parties started to offer a section on their websites dedicated to transparency in 2011, as pointed out by Dader, Campos and Quintana (2011).

The activity carried out by various organisations dedicated to promoting openness of information, such as Transparency International[3], the *Fundación Compromiso y Transparencia[4]* (Foundation for Commitment and Transparency), and Dyntra[5], has also contributed to this situation. These organisations put pressure on political parties by publishing evaluations regarding their transparency, although the lack of a methodological consensus makes it necessary to reinforce these assessments and evaluate not only active publicity, but other aspects of the openness of political parties as well.

Political parties have been forced to comply with several active transparency obligations since the approval of Law 19/2013 of 9 December on Transparency, Access to Public Information and Good Governance. However, this regulation is insufficient due to certain shortcomings, such as the low standards required for active publicity and the absence of sanctions for non-compliance (Cotino, 2014). It is therefore necessary for political parties to strive to be more transparent and open than the rule itself requires, thereby demonstrating an exemplary model of democracy.

Political parties should not be transparent only because they are bound to do so by the Law on Transparency, Access to Public Information and Good Governance (*LTABG*). Transparency is a concept linked to the efficiency and honesty of any political activity, and although it is not the solution, it is the basis for restoring citizen confidence in the political class.

It should be highlighted that according to the Centre for Sociological Research (*CIS*), 45.3% of the Spanish population believe that political parties are one of the main problems at the present time. It also bears mentioning that political parties in Spain receive more than 75% of their funding from public sources (Gavilanes, Andrés and Belmonte, 2016). Therefore, political parties must be held accountable to citizens, who provide a large part of the income of such parties and are the ones who the parties want to govern.

All of these reasons reinforce the idea that political parties should not only promote transparency, but participation and collaboration as well, in order to allow access to their information and encourage debate, decision-making and collaboration with citizens. By strengthening these measures, the parties will be held accountable by citizens, as they will have to provide the citizenry with information regarding the ways in which they will have used their financial contributions, thereby strengthening both democracy and the democratisation of their processes.

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2   Government of Spain (2019). IV Open Government Plan.

3   Source: https://www.transparencia.org.es/evaluacion-partidos-politicos/ (Consultation: 09/03/2020).

4   Source: https://www.compromisoytransparencia.com/categorias-informes/partidos-politicos (Consultation: 09/03/2020).

5   Source: https://www.dyntra.org/indices/partidos-politicos/partidos-politicos-elecciones-generales/ (Consultation: 09/03/2020).

2. Objectives and methodology

The main objective of this work is to assess whether open political parties promote the principles of open government. To this end, the first aim was to draw up a guide to best practice regarding the initiatives that political parties must follow in order to be considered open. The second objective was to check whether the country's main political parties, which are the *PP* or *Partido Popular*, *PSOE* or *Partido Socialista* (Socialist Party)*, Unidas Podemos*, and *Ciudadanos* or *Cs*, comply with these principles[6]. Therefore, this work has two distinct sections, for which different methodologies were applied:

1. Development of the Best Practice Guide for Open Political Parties
2. Evaluation of political parties based on the initiatives in the Guide.

The absence of previous academic studies of this concept was taken into account in the preparation of the Best Practice Guide for Open Political Parties. The Delphi methodology was chosen precisely because one of its functions is to find answers to complex problems. The Delphi method consists of rounds of questionnaires carried out with people who are specialists in a certain field (Astigarraga, 2003).

The first step was to define the subject of study and select a panel of experts from different disciplines (Law, Political Science, and Communication) in the areas of transparency, citizen participation and collaboration, who were then asked to participate in the study. In the end, 20 people participated in the two rounds of questionnaires. The list of people who took part in the Delphi study is available in the annexes of this article.

The first questionnaire was aimed at defining the principles of open political parties. The second survey defined specific initiatives in addition to allowing the experts to evaluate their own responses.

When the results of the questionnaires were obtained, the criteria of Fomin et al. (2008) were followed in which the answers were combined with the international literature consulted and the criteria of the author of the study herein to produce the Best Practice Guide for Open Political Parties. A website was then created (www.partidospoliticosabiertos.com) to promote the transparency of the process, from which suggestions and comments could be obtained to further develop the guide.

The second part of this methodology consisted of assessing whether the political parties mentioned complied with the Guide on their websites, for which an analysis sheet was created. The items on the sheet were each of the principles recommended above. As the analysis sheet was based on the Guide –which is explained under later headings – it had three differentiated sections: Section I, Transparency; Section II, Deliberation; and Section III, Decision-making and Collaboration. Apart from exceptional cases, the items were rated with score of 2 in the case of compliance, 1 in the case of partial compliance, and 0 in the case of non-compliance.

The sections of the analysis are briefly explained below:

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6   Those parties that were represented in the Spanish Parliament during the 12th Legislature were selected. Only those parties that were participating at the national level were chosen.

1. Transparency. This section took into account the elements published by the political parties as active publicity based on relevant academic studies (Dader et al., 2014; Vaccari, 2011; Larrondo-Urieta, 2016; Pérez et al., 2013), as well as well-known transparency indexes (Transparency International, the Foundation of Commitment and Transparency, and Dyntra). The evaluation of active publicity included the following categories:

    a. Requirements of the Transparency Law (14 elements)
    b. Institutional information (22).
    c. Procedures and internal organisation (9).
    d. Data related to organisational communication (18).
    e. Accounts of the political parties, obligations related to the Law on Political Party Financing, and information on contracting (18).
    f. In addition, other elements were also analysed, such as the availability of tools for requesting information, the use of plain language, the updating of information, utilising re-usable formats, and data accessibility.

2. Deliberation. The second section was devoted to encouraging debate among the electorate, and therefore, consideration was given as to whether this is present in the party statutes and whether there is a code of conduct regarding this aspect. The existence of deliberative initiatives was also assessed, which will be explained in the next section.

3. Decision-making and Collaboration. In the last section we analysed whether the concepts of decision-making and collaboration are present in the party statutes and whether codes of conduct exist, as in the previous case. Subsequently, lists of decisive and collaborative initiatives were drawn up and it was verified whether the political parties have these.

The analysis had a maximum score of 292 points, of which the Transparency Section accumulated 212 (72.6% of the total): the Deliberation Section had 38 (13.01%); and the Decision-making and Collaboration Section had 42 (14.38%). In this sense, a result above 50% was considered to be "acceptable", above 65 was considered "good", and above 85% was seen as "optimal".
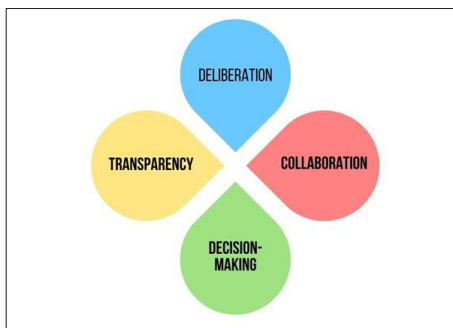
3. Results

3.1. Best Practice Guide for Open Political Parties

The Best Practice Guide for Open Political Parties shows the initiatives that such organisations should encourage in their internal and external openness. Precisely with the aim of promoting transparency, the recommendations are published on a digital platform, which can be found at the following link: www.partidospoliticosabiertos.com.

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

In this Best Practice Guide there are three sections, as mentioned above, which are Transparency, Deliberation, and Decision-Making/Collaboration. The experts had to evaluate the inclusion of the indications in the Guide from by giving a score of 1 to 5. The averages obtained regarding the recommendations are described in detail in the following paragraphs.

Figure 1: The foundations of open political parties

Source: Prepared by the author based on the results of the Delphi study

Section I. Transparency

The first section is dedicated to transparency. The experts who participated in the Delphi study rated the need for transparency among political parties to be very high (4.69 on a scale of 1 to 5). To keep citizens informed, parties must also publish information on their digital portals through active publicity. In this sense, they must publish the following information:

– Institutional information: data relating to the political party, such as statutes, ideological values, code of ethics, history of the party, and others.

– Internal procedures and organisation: information on the functioning and internal and external organisation of the party, such as the organigram, the curriculum vitae of party members, the functions of senior officials, internal regulations, electoral lists, etc.

– Data related to corporate communication: those data that are especially useful for journalists and the media, but also for interested citizens, such as the calendar of activities, the agenda of the main party officials, a news section with graphic and audio-visual elements, parliamentary information, links to social networks, and others.

– Party accounts and the requirements of the Law on the Financing of Political Parties and contracting: they must publicly disclose the requirements of the Law on Financing Political Parties and the contracting data of the political party as well (instructions and contracts undertaken).

With regard to the Law on Transparency, Access to Public Information, and Good Governance, political parties are considered to be subjects obliged to comply with active publicity, yet they are not obliged to comply with access to

information. In this sense, with a score of 4.05, the experts considered that the parties should create a system of regulated information requests with established response times through a system that is easy-to-use and free of charge.

The web portals of political parties must have an advanced search engine in order to allow the user to search for information according to the topic and date.

All of the information published must be updated at least once every six months, although it would be useful to have the information updated monthly, with the exception of news and similar content, which have different intervals. Clear and uncomplicated language should be used with a minimum of technical terms, and if technical language is used, it should be explained clearly.

One of the aspects most frequently highlighted by the experts (4.94) was the need for the web portal to be accessible for all types of people, and for the data to be useful and re-usable. For this reason, the data must be disseminated in appropriate formats and the publication of PDF files must be avoided.

One of the objectives of political parties must be accountability to the public (4.27). This implies that they must take responsibility for their decisions, fulfil their promises, and submit their activities to public scrutiny. An example of accountability supported by the experts (4.0) consists of publishing information and adhering to their electoral programme.

Section II. Deliberation

The second section of the Guide refers to the promotion of deliberation. For the experts who participated in the Delphi study, deliberation means that parties encourage debate among the electorate. The parties must be highly involved so that deliberation will be free, pluralistic and based on transparent processes (4.83). This involvement must result in the implementation of resources for debate along with their inclusion in the party's statutes (3.55), and the creation of a code of conduct or a regulation governing the processes (4.44).

According to the experts, deliberation entails a close relationship between the political class and the citizenry along with the proposal of new ideas, renewal of agendas, and increased efficiency. It should be pointed out that deliberation should not only take place on digital platforms, but also face to face (4.88), though all processes should be publicised to increase their promotion, effectiveness and guarantee of transparency.

Political parties can promote deliberation with various initiatives, namely the following:

Table 1: Deliberative initiatives for open political parties

Deliberative initiatives	Average rating by the experts (1 to 5)
Chats, debates and questions to party members.	4.06
Web platform for proposals. Here users can send ideas they consider necessary to other supporters and can debate them. This requires a moderator who guarantees plurality and respect.	4.33
Debate forums	4.13
Comment sections	3.4
Option of sharing content	3.0
Notifications	
Telegram	3.07
WhatsApp	2.7
E-mail	2.6
Contact by e-mail	3.06
Applications such as Reddit	3.8
Offline events ▪ Periodic meetings between leaders and supporters. ▪ Round table discussions. ▪ Debate fórums. ▪ Work groups. ▪ Open days for information ▪ Congresses	4.46

Source: Prepared by the author based on the results of the Delphi study

Section III. Decision-making and Collaboration

The last section is composed of two different concepts. According to the experts, decision-making is seen from the classic point of view of participation in which citizens are able to choose proposals. By contrast, with collaboration they can take part in the activities, or in other words, they can work jointly with the political parties. Both concepts require transparency as well as a deliberative process.

Decision-making

Decision-making allows citizens to participate actively in the measures taken by political parties. Regulated processes are necessary, as well as the identification and protection of users. Furthermore, these actions should not only be carried out through the Internet, but in person as well (3.88).

An open party must have internal democratic procedures. The following initiatives are also considered to enable decision-making:

Table 2: Decision-making initiatives for open political parties

Decision-making initiatives	Average ratings by the experts (from 1-5)
Citizen consultations: this is a classic form of participation in which citizens can vote *yes* or *no* to the party's proposals, choose among various options (such as a list of candidates), etc. It should also be made available in person, as mentioned above.	4.6
Collection of signatures through the appropriate means	3.2
Digital applications that allow active participation in decision making.	3.8

Source: Prepared by the author based on the results of the Delphi study

Collaboration

During the Delphi study, the experts pointed out that parties can promote initiatives in order to allow citizens to help them in the implementation and execution of different activities. Again, these can be digital or non-digital (4.38). Collaboration allows parties to benefit from the knowledge of users and supporters, establish bonds with them, and involve them in party activities.

Table 3: Collaborative initiatives of open political parties

Collaborative initiatives	Average rating by the experts (1-5)
Collaboration in the development of electoral programmes.	4.71
Box for complaints and suggestions.	3.33
Surveys.	3.7
Sending materials.	2.53
Online fundraising / Donations.	3.85
Crowdsourcing or tools for task distribution.	4.3
Link to applications or tools that have re-used party data.	3.76
Collaboration in election campaigns	4.14
Offline events: innovative laboratories and workshops, among others	4.71
Wiki tools.	3.84
Social activism.	4.16
Collaborative campaigns using social networks.	3.64
Movilisation campaigns	3.85

Source: Prepared by the author based on the results of the Delphi study

3.2. Assessing the openness of political parties

Once the Best Practice Guide for Open Political Parties was written, the websites of the four selected parties were analysed: *Partido Popular* (PP), *Partido Socialista* (PSOE), *Unidas Podemos*, and *Ciudadanos* (Cs). This analysis was carried out between the months of April and May of 2019, and therefore coincided with the Municipal, Regional and European elections, as well as the General elections, which were moved ahead (they were scheduled to take place in June of 2020). This may have been a factor in favour of political parties, which carry out more activities related to communication during the election campaign that bring the parties closer to the electorate.

Ciudadanos was the only party that failed the overall evaluation of openness for political parties. It only obtained 49.37% (144.15 points), with only the first section (Transparency) approved, and it only obtained a ranking of *acceptable* with 57.08% (122.15). Regarding Deliberation and Decision-making/Collaboration, both levels were very poor, with 26.31% (10) and 28.57% (12), respectively.

The *PP* fared somewhat better than *Cs* with an overall count considered to be a passing mark of 54.35% (158.7) with regard to the aspects analysed. It only failed the third section (Decision-making and Collaboration), but with a scant mark of 16.6% (7), while in Transparency it reached 62.59% (132.7), and in Deliberation, a borderline 50% (19). Even so, the *PP* did not achieve a positive or optimal result at any level according to the assessment valuation of the methodology.

With regard to the *PSOE*, it had an overall result of 63.53% (185.52). The transparency section was positive at 69.58% (148.52), followed by an acceptable level in Deliberation at 57.89% (22). However, the mark for the Decision-making and Collaboration section was insufficient at 25.71% (15).

Unidas Podemos was the only party that received a passing mark for all the sections, and was also the party with the best overall result, with 66.74% (194.89). Thus, the levels of Transparency and Deliberation were positive, with 69.28% (146.89) and 65.78% (25), respectively. However, in Decision-making and Collaboration they only achieved 54.76% (23). Nevertheless, the effort made by this group is noteworthy, as it was the only party with an acceptable score in the final section.

Table 4: Final analysis results of political party openness

|	*Partido Popular*		*Partido Socialista*		*Podemos*		*Ciudadanos*	
Transparency (212)	132.7	62.59%	148.52	69.58%	146.89	69.28%	122.15	57.08%
Deliberation (38)	19	50.00%	22	57.89%	25	65.78%	10	26.31%
Decision-making and collaboration (42)	7	16.60%	15	35.71%	23	54.76%	12	28.57%
Total (292)	158.7	54.35%	185.52	63.53%	194.89	66.74%	144.15	49.37%

Source: Prepared by the author

The results of the levels of openness of the political parties are explained in the following paragraphs:

Section I. Transparency

The transparency section was the most influential factor in this analysis of the political parties' digital platforms. It was also the section in which all of the parties obtained the best scores, and in which all of them had satisfactory scores, although the *PSOE* and *Unidas Podemos* attained scores that were higher than the others.

The *PSOE* scored 69.58% (148.52 points out of 212), which was nearly a draw with *Unidas Podemos* at 69.28% (146.89). These were followed by the *PP* at 62.59% (132.7), and *Ciudadanos* with 57.08% (122.15). All parties were above 50%, yet *PSOE* and *Unidas Podemos* were above 65%, so their results were considered positive. Thus, an effort by the parties can be observed in the development of this pillar of openness.

Graph 1: Results of Section I (Transparency)
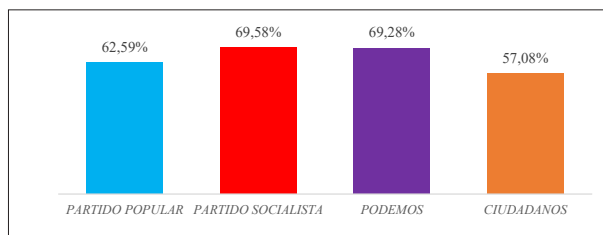
Source: Prepared by the author

In order to analyse transparency, the different types of published information that the political parties must disseminate, as mentioned above, was verified. In this regard, the publication of the requirements of the Law on Transparency, Access to Public Information, and Good Governance had a positive average of 69.64%, although it was very irregular because *Ciudadanos* and the *PP* only published 53.57% of the items requested. By contrast, *Unidas Podemos* disseminated practically all of the requests (92.85%), and the *PSOE* diffused 78.57%.

The main shortcomings consisted of the absence of contracts and agreements with Public Administration, as well as annual programmes and the degree of compliance, an aspect that would help to ensure that the parties are held accountable to the public.

The institutional information section received a more unanimous and positive result, with an average of 79.54%, and very similar scores by all of the parties: *PP*, 86.3%; *PSOE*, 77.27%; *Unidas Podemos*, 79.54%; and *Cs*, 75%. The task of the parties along this line was highly valued, although the absence of some elements, such as the publication of the history of the party by *Unidas Podemos,* is striking. The way in which the *PP* publishes its position on certain issues or measures stands out, as it has its own section called 'Issues', in which publications, documents and clarifications on various topics are grouped together.

Figure 2: Positions related to gender equality by the *Partido Popular (PP)*

Source: http://www.pp.es

The publication of information on procedures and internal organisation was lower with an average of 56.94%, with irregular results from the parties. *Unidas Podemos* published 66.66% of the items; the *PSOE*, 51.11%; *Ciudadanos*, 55.55%; and *PP* received a failing mark at 44.44%. One striking detail was that *Unidas Podemos* did not publish a calendar of political party events, yet it did publish the agenda of the president, Pablo Iglesias. The same occurred with Albert Rivera of *Ciudadanos*, although the update by both parties was rather deficient, while the *PSOE* and *PP* did not publish the agendas of their respective leaders.

The publication of information related to organisational communications was also assessed, with an average of 59.72%. The party with the best results was the *PSOE*, with 77.77%, followed by *Unidas Podemos* at 61.11%, the *PP* at 52.77%, and *Ciudadano* at 47.22%.

The *PSOE*'s current affairs section is noteworthy in this regard. Despite several shortcomings, it contained an interesting news section, an archive of past publications, a photographic and audio-visual gallery, streaming events, and audio archives. All of this not only brings the political parties closer to an attentive public, but is also especially useful for the media and journalists due to the resources they have to carry out their work.

The last section of active publicity was the one related to the party accounts, in which all the parties obtained the best result of the analysis, with the exception of *Unidas Podemos*. The average was 85.41%, with the *PP* leading at 94.44%, followed by the *PSOE* at 88.88%, *Ciudadanos* with 83.33%, and *Unidas Podemos* at 75%. The main shortcoming was related to information on contracting since all parties except *Unidas Podemos* published internal instructions on contracting, yet none of the parties reported on the contracts that were made, and only the *PSOE* and *PP* disseminated the bases of such contracts

Table 5: Results of the active publicity

	Partido Popular	Partido Socialista	Podemos	Ciudadanos
Requirements of the Transparency Law	53.57%	78.57%	92.85%	53.57%
Institutional information	86.36%	77.27%	79.54%	75%
Internal procedures and organisation	44.44%	61.11%	66.66%	55.55%
Information related to organisational communication	52.77%	77.77%	61.11%	47.22%
Party accounts	94.44%	88.88%	75%	83.33%

Source: Prepared by the author

Contrary to what happened with active publicity, shortcomings were found in terms of access to information, as none of the parties had a system for requests for information with response times and a regulated system. The only option available for this purpose was the various email accounts to which users could write if they wanted some information. However, as there is no established system with rules and response periods, citizens might not receive a response, or may receive one too late.

The quality of the search engines on these websites was taken into account and the most advanced was that of the *PP*, as it allowed for information searches according to subject and date. It was striking that *Ciudadanos* did not even have a search engine, which nowadays is considered essential. As for updating, this is also an element that must be improved by the political parties, since only *Unidas Podemos* included the date on which the information had been updated in some of the content, and even so, these dates were somewhat distant (even a year before the date on which the analysis was carried out). It is necessary for the parties to further update their content and to indicate this in their web portals.

The use of easily understood, non-technical language was followed by all the parties, although none of them had a specific tool for clarifying specific terms (for example, pop-up text boxes).

Re-using information was one of the weak points of the political parties, although *Unidas Podemos* stood out as the exception with the use of Tableau software for the visualisation of data in a more dynamic way. In spite of this, however, this software was only available on the Transparency Portal and not on the rest of the website.

As far as accessibility is concerned, the websites of *Ciudadanos* and *Unidas Podemos* were the only ones that published in languages other than Spanish, with the latter being the only party to publish in English as well.

An assessment was also made as to whether the political parties express their commitment to transparency by publishing the results of rankings or agreements on this subject, which was carried out only by the *PSOE* and *Ciudadanos. Unidas Podemos* mentioned compliance with the Transparency Law in its 'Straightforward Accounts" section, while the PSOE had a small section on its website in which it defended the improvements required by the law. Accountability is one of the pending obligations of political parties, as none of the parties published the degree of compliance with their electoral

programme, nor with other political plans. This could be highly relevant, as such actions would clearly display the degree of implementation of their promises, and by publishing this information, this could lead to greater effectiveness and compliance.

Section II. Deliberation

The second phase of this analysis concerns the debate between the electorate and the political parties. In this section, many differences between the parties can be observed. The average score was 50%, or in other words, a mark that is barely passing. The fact is that the score for *Unidas Podemos*, at 65.78% of the elements fulfilled (25 points), was double that of *Ciudadanos*, which stood at 26.31% (10). The *PSOE* obtained 57.89% (22) and the *PP* had 50% (19).

Graph 2: Results of Section II (Deliberation)
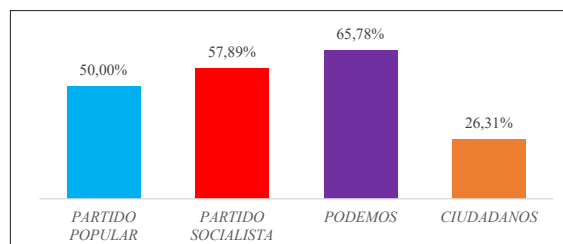
Source: Prepared by the author

The presence of deliberation in the party statutes was irregular. Thus, with regard to the *Ciudadanos p*arty, there was no mention of it whatsoever, while the statutes of the *PP* only noted the importance of members showing their opinions and participating. The *PSOE* also mentioned deliberation as both a right and a duty for members. *Unidas Podemos* defined deliberation as one of the general principles of their political party.

None of the parties had specific rules for deliberative initiatives. However, both the *PSOE* and *Unidas Podemos* did in fact have internal regulations that mentioned some of these measures, though in a very subtle way.

In order to analyse the presence of deliberative initiatives, as well as those related to decision-making and collaboration (third level), it was necessary to register on the participation platforms of the political parties. In this way, it was possible to observe the tools available within the *MiPSOE,* the *Espacio Socialista* website, *Plaza Podemos 2.0,* and *Espacio Naranja de Ciudadanos.* The *Partido Popular* did not have a platform of this type.

Details regarding the deliberative initiatives considered in methodology of this study are explained in the following paragraphs:

Neither the *PP* nor the *PSOE* had chats or platforms for users to ask questions of party members. *Ciudadanos* had done so years ago at party events, and *Unidas Podemos* had the most interesting platform. Known as *Escaño Abierto: tu voz en el parlamento (Open Seat: Your Voice in Parliament)*, this tool gives citizens some of the questions that *Unidas Podemos* asks in the Madrid Assembly, so that these questions are answered by the Madrid Parliament. Even though this is not exactly a question and answer platform, and it only affects Madrid, it was included in this section because of its innovation. It

would be ground-breaking if the parties decided to follow this path and took an interest in the concerns and ideas of citizens.

Unidas Podemos was the only party with tools to make proposals. Specifically, they had two. One was called *Iniciativas Ciudadanas* (Citizen Initiatives), and the other, *Iniciativas Ciudadanas Populares* (Popular Citizen Initiatives). The first was replaced by the second, although the archive remains on the participation platform. The functioning has remained the same: those registered can make proposals, and if they have enough support, they can go on to debate them in a binding referendum. In addition, those registered can comment on the initiatives proposed by others.

All of the political parties, with the exception of *Ciudadanos*, offered the possibility of sharing content on various social networks in most of their sections (*Cs* only did so in the *Actualidad* -News section), yet none of the parties allowed comments on the sections. This research has also investigated possible technological innovations that political parties might be able to apply to deliberation. For this reason, the existence of chatbots or virtual assistants was verified (Campos-Domínguez and García-Orosa, 2018), yet none of the parties provided these services. The use of these services would mean a great technological advance and a step forward in the relationship between transparency and robotics.

The tools that all the parties did have were the notification services through Telegram and WhatsApp, so it can be confirmed that these instruments are widespread among Spanish political parties. Even so, it should be noted that in the case of *Cs*, its WhatsApp channel was not mentioned on its website, but instead this information appeared in one of the party's Facebook posts. Similarly, all of the parties except *Ciudadanos* had a notification service by email or an RSS system. The group led by Albert Rivera only offered to send information about the party to people who became supporters. As expected, the four parties made contact available to citizens via e-mail or through a comparable contact form.

With regard to digital discussion platforms, *Unidas Podemos* was the only party to have one on Reddit (https://www.reddit.com/r/podemos/), where users can post messages on different topics, comment on other publications, and vote for or against them.

Face-to-face deliberative events were also taken into account, as the debate is not only on the Internet. The websites showed that the *PP* and *PSOE* held regular meetings with supporters and various other groups, as well as various information days. The *PSOE* also held face-to-face debate forums as well. All of the parties, except for *Ciudadanos*, had held conferences before the analysis was carried out and information related to such meetings was available on the website. Furthermore, as this analysis was carried out during the election campaign, political rallies held at the time were also taken into account.

These results confirm that all parties must continue to strengthen deliberation, especially the *Partido Popular*, and above all, *Ciudadanos*, as they did not obtain satisfactory results. It must not be forgotten that deliberation is the basis of any participatory debate, and therefore, initiatives must be developed to promote debate in which citizens are involved.

Section III. Decision-making and Collaboration

The last section, which studied the participatory and collaborative measures of the political parties, was the part for which all parties received the worst scores. The average of all four was 33.92% was a fail. Only *Unidas Podemos* reached an

acceptable level at 53.76% (15 points), which is a barely passing score. The *PSOE* obtained 35.71% of the aspects possible (15); *Ciudadanos*, 28.57% (12); and the *PP*, 16.6% (7). Even though the score for *Unidas Podemos* was not very high, it managed to triple the mark of the *PP*, which shows the lack of commitment by parties in this area.

Graph 3: Results of Section III (Decision-making and Collaboration)
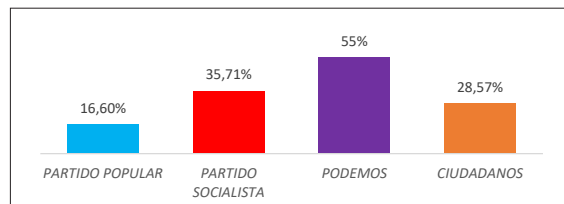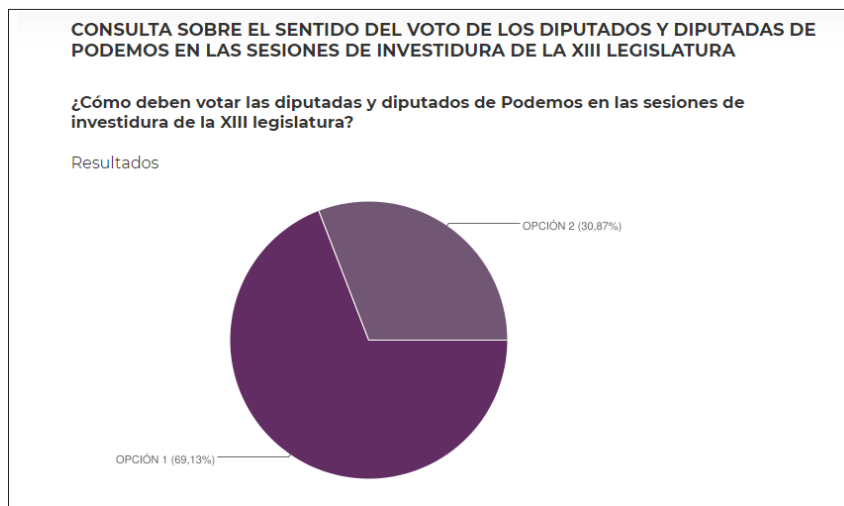

Source: Prepared by the author

As in the previous section, the presence of decision-making and collaboration in the statutes of the political parties was also reviewed. The *PSOE*, *Unidas Podemos* and *Ciudadanos* made mention this aspect. As all three parties have internal democratic processes, they mention this feature in their statutes. With regard to collaborative systems, the possibility of participating in election campaigns, as well as involvement in fundraising and other activities, was also mentioned. At the same time, the *PP* did mention the process of internal democracy created to elect the candidate for President of the Government (a process applied on only one occasion), as well as to elect those of the members who will collaborate in the election campaigns, and the option of allowing different experts to contribute their knowledge.

All of the parties have regulations for these internal democratic systems, but none of them had specific regulations for the collaborative processes.

As mentioned above, the existence of regulated procedures of internal party democracy was valued as an essential part of decision-making, which is something that the *PSOE*, *Unidas Podemos*, and *Cs* counted on, both for the President of the Government as well as for local and regional procedures. By contrast, the *PP* only had this system for selecting the candidate for President of the Government, which was established at the 18th People's Congress in February 2017.

With regard to the decision-making initiatives investigated, neither the *PP* nor the *Ciudadanos* party carried out any citizen consultations, while the *PSOE* had recently performed this task, but it was only a potential consultation. On the other hand, *Unidas Podemos* does have a system for consulting its members, which they use with some frequency on their participation portal.

Figure 3: Results of a consultation of *Unidas Podemos*

CONSULTA SOBRE EL SENTIDO DEL VOTO DE LOS DIPUTADOS Y DIPUTADAS DE PODEMOS EN LAS SESIONES DE INVESTIDURA DE LA XIII LEGISLATURA

¿Cómo deben votar las diputadas y diputados de Podemos en las sesiones de investidura de la XIII legislatura?

Resultados

OPCIÓN 2 (30,87%)

OPCIÓN 1 (69,13%)

Source: https://podemos.info/consulta-estatal-voto-podemos-xiii-legislatura/ (Consultation: 09/03/2020)

On the other hand, the collection of signatures from political parties to propose Popular Legislative Initiatives was not found. As for digital applications, *Unidas Podemos* was the only party that used nVotes for some consultations and a free software called Consul.

After analysing the decision-making initiatives, those related to collaboration were taken into account:

In this regard, none of the parties offered citizens or supporters a tool for proposing electoral programme measures, although *Unidas Podemos* did have a system for registered users to vote for or against the programme proposed by the party.

Only the *PSOE* had a system for making complaints or suggestions on its participation platform, while the other parties only allowed this to be done by email.

Figure 4: *PSOE* **tool to make complaints or suggestions**

Source: https://mipsoe.es/SitePages/Sugerencias.aspx (Consultation: 09/03/2020)

A space dedicated to surveys was found only in the case of the *PSOE,* although the party had last used this tool in 2014.

None of the parties had a means for sending materials, wiki tools, or crowdsourcing, which would allow them to benefit from the volition and knowledge of citizens.

Unidas Podemos was the only party to publicise collaborative efforts in face-to-face election campaigns on its website. For their part, the *PSOE, Unidas Podemos* and *Cs* had networks that were developed for the purpose of promoting messages on social networks. The *PP* only disseminated the tags used on the networks.

Once again, *Unidas Podemos* was the only political party that offered a system for users to collaborate in social movement campaigns. This was the *IMPULSA* programme, which finances innovative social projects using the surplus from the party's public expense accounts. This initiative enables non-profit organisations as well as Citizens' Groups and Councils to apply for funding to develop social movements[7].

Finally, none of the parties promoted face-to-face collaborative initiatives, such as workshops, laboratories and similar events.

4. Conclusions and discussion

This work represents an initial approach to the concept of open political parties, which until now has not been present in any academic study. As such, the objective is to continue evaluating the openness of political parties from time to time so that there is a record of their degree of development over the years.

After carrying out the Delphi study for the purpose of creating the Guide to Best Practice for Open Political Parties, a definition was reached as to what characteristics must be fulfilled by political organizations in order to be considered

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7   Source: https://impulsa.podemos.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Bases_Impulsa_Versión_170629.pdf

open parties. According to the experts, an open political party is one that demonstrates an attitude of openness toward the citizenry in its external and internal processes. To this end, they are transparent with respect to their information and accountable to the citizens. They also encourage deliberation, and therefore provide sufficient information to the population so that the stated discussion is based on knowledge of the issues being debated. Open parties give citizens the power to make some of the party's decisions and they promote collaboration with diverse types of groups. This openness leads to greater democratisation of the processes of political parties and a closer relationship with citizens.

In the case under study, even though the percentage of openness of the political parties is above 50% of total openness (at 58.49% except in the case of *Ciudadanos*), they have important deficiencies in the Deliberation Section as well as in that of Decision-making and Collaboration, where they obtained an average of 50% and 33.92%, respectively.

Unidas Podemos was the only party that received a passing mark all three sections, with a final average of 66.74%, followed by the *PSOE* with 63.53%, *the Partido Popular* with 54.35%, and *Ciudadanos* with 49.37%. The effort that parties have made to improve transparency in recent years, which must continue to be developed, must also be evident in their participatory and collaborative processes. Thus, it is necessary for this openness to consist not only of the formal fulfilment of the indicators proposed in this research, but also of the commitment to become closer to citizens and be accountable to them based on the three pillars of open government.

With regard to transparency, which was the most developed section for all the parties, it is noteworthy that the section on active publicity related to the requirements of the Transparency Law did not obtain the best results, but instead, the highest numbers were related to the party's accounts at 85.41%. This may be due to the requirements of the Political Party Financing Act having been included in the latter analysis. This regulation, unlike the LTABG, has a procedure for giving sanctions, which explains why the latter was not as developed. It is therefore clear that sanctions must be included in the LTABG in the event of non-compliance.

Table 6: Total results in the sections of active publicity

Active publicity	Total
Requirements of the Transparency Law	69.64%
Institutional information	79.54%
Internal procedures and organisation	56.94%
Data related to organisational communication	59.72%
Party accounts	85.41%

Source: Prepared by the author

There are certainly issues that need to be addressed. The absence of procedures for making requests for information from political parties stands out. It would be very interesting if the Political Party Financing Act included such procedures in the chapter on Access to Information in order to encourage this practice. Accessibility of the data published by the parties also needs to be improved, as the information must be published in re-usable formats (avoiding PDFs), and better

search engines need to be used as well, especially in the case of *Unidas Podemos*, which has a tool that is too simple, and *Ciudadanos,* which does not even have one.

One of the ideas proposed by this research, which none of the parties does at the present time, is to publish the extent of compliance and execution of electoral programmes, which would guarantee the accountability of these programmes and encourage politicians to take responsibility for the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of their campaign promises. This type of initiative is necessary in order to make electoral programmes more realistic and to compel political parties to focus more on the proposals they make.

Even though the Deliberation and Decision-making/Collaboration sections had shortcomings, some interesting initiatives carried out by the parties should be highlighted:

The *Unidas Podemos* platform where users can present initiatives and discuss them with other users.

Citizen consultation for certain decisions. *Unidas Podemos* uses this tool more often than the others, although the *PSOE* has also used this mechanism in the past.

Networks of followers to promote the party on social networks, which is something that the *PSOE, Unidas Podemos*, and *Ciudadanos* all have.

The platform for making complaints and suggestions of the PSOE, which allows the party to gain knowledge regarding their mistakes and possible improvements.

The initiative to support social causes of *Unidas Podemos*, entitled *Impu*lsa, which promotes this type of action.

Political parties still need to further develop their openness and should provide incentives to do so. Not only must they encourage transparency in compliance with Law 19/2013 (which has yet to reach full compliance), but it is also necessary to strengthen initiatives related to the interaction of citizens in their processes. This will bring political parties closer to the people and allow them to benefit from collective knowledge. The opening of political parties must go hand in hand with technology, and therefore, digital innovation must be encouraged for this purpose.

A new path is being opened at the academic level in the study of political parties and their openness, which until now has focused more on their active publicity than other aspects. New facets are arising that need to be addressed, especially in collaboration with citizens, which is the issue that is least developed by the parties. Investigating processes such as those related to cooperation in the development of electoral programmes and citizen laboratories would be a highly interesting area study in future research.

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6. Annexes

Participants in the Delphi study

Name of the participant	Professional profile
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