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Birds of a feather flock together: influence of ideology in the implementation of participation

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ABSTRACT


The global spread of participatory budgeting (PB) has facilitated its adoption by ideologically diverse political parties. Nowadays, we can easily find conservative, social democratic and leftist parties as promoters of PB. Hence the question arises: how does party ideology influence the implementation of citizen participation mechanisms? In this article, we study PB processes in nine different Spanish municipalities. Our aim is to analyse three dimensions that can be influenced by ideology: PB's participatory design, the reasons different parties have to launch and maintain PB, and the possible instrumental reasons politicians refer to when speaking in favour of or against PB. According to our findings PB initiatives implemented by conservative, social democratic and radical left parties are quite different from one another: from a managerial way of understanding participation (conservative), which views participants as consumers to understanding PB as an educational process aimed to empower citizens (radical left). Nevertheless, arguments vary depending on whether politicians are in office or in the opposition, the former being more inclined to support citizen participation.

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KEYWORDS Citizen participation; participatory budgeting (PB); ideology; conservative; social democratic; radical left

Introduction

The multiple crises of representative democracy have fuelled a growing interest on citizen's involvement in institutional decision-making. Within this context, participation holds the promise of enhancing the responsiveness of public administrations, increasing the acceptability of political decisions, improving the provision of public goods and the legitimacy of public policies.¹ Thus, several reports from international organizations show the global efforts aimed at promoting participation: the Committee of Ministers of Council of Europe in 2001 urging the expansion of participatory processes, or assessing the need to incorporate deliberative processes in 2023; the

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Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) claiming for participation in 2000 and in favour of deliberation in 2020; as well as the role played by the World Bank in the diffusion and globalization of Participatory Budgeting (PB, henceforth).² All of them show the importance given to participation as a substantial piece in sustaining representative democracies.

This pro-citizen participation trend has sought to neutralize the traditional ideological nature of participatory procedures, detaching them from exclusively progressive frameworks. The standardization of participatory institutions has fostered their adoption across diverse contexts.³ While participation was a procedure originally associated with left-wing governments concerned with mitigating power imbalances between citizens and their representatives, the standardization of procedures by international agencies has led to their adoption by conservative governments over the years. Recent research confirms this trend, particularly concerning participatory processes at the state and regional levels. Scholars such as Ramirez and Welp or Pogrebinski claim that the left-wing has lost the monopoly on participatory promotion in Latin America.⁴ Also, Sintomer, Premat or Ganuza and Francés point out to the growing prominence in Europe of conservative governments in promoting participatory initiatives.⁵ Does this mean that ideology no longer matters in the promotion of participatory procedures?

The standardization of participatory procedures does not imply that ideology has become irrelevant. When discussing citizen participation, it is essential to consider not only whether a government organizes participatory processes, but also how it does so. At this point, an in-depth analysis of participatory initiatives reveals that participation tends to be less influential the more conservative the government promoter is.⁶

The objective of this article is to better understand the influence of ideology on the implementation of concrete participatory processes. To address this issue, we will focus on the specific case of Participatory Budgeting (PB) for two reasons. The first is the universalization of PB. As PB initiatives are found in all regions, it is easy to undertake the analysis of a participatory experience that has been the subject of considerable scholar attention. In the second place, the universalization of PB has facilitated its standardization and later adoption by different parties from the ideological spectrum, so we can easily find conservative, social democratic and radical left parties as promoters of PB. The combination of both elements allows us to address the influence of ideology on participation. Are the participatory procedures (within PB) developed by conservative governments comparable to those used by the left-wing ones? Are these procedures informed by the same political objective?

The article relies on research about the details of participatory processes in nine different Spanish municipalities and interviews with government and opposition politicians in their city councils. The aim is to analyse three dimensions that may be influenced by ideology: (1) PB's participatory design; (2) the reasons different parties have to launch and maintain PB from their ideological positions; and (3) the possible instrumental reasons that politicians voice when speaking in favour or against PB. The literature has highlighted that, when discussing participation, it is not the same to speak as an incumbent as part of the opposition. Our research will analyse these intersecting positions given that all the parties in the nine municipalities considered are in one of the following situations: (1) majority government; (2) minority government; (3) main opposition party.

Our main finding is that ideology still matters. Not all politicians see participatory procedures in the same way, not all of them implement participatory processes similarly. According to our research, PB initiatives implemented by conservative, social

democratic and radical left parties are quite different from one another: from a managerial way of understanding citizen participation (conservative), which views participants as consumers, to an ambiguous model in which representative and participatory rationales coexist (social democrat); to finally understanding participation as an educational process aimed to empower citizens (radical left).

Participation as an ideological framework

Between the 1990s and the first decade of the new century democratic innovations spread globally, especially at the local level.⁷ Although radical left parties were the most enthusiastic promoters of participatory mechanisms,⁸ their current expansion seems to indicate that political ideology has ceased to be a relevant factor in their development.⁹ In this sense, centre and right-wing parties have apparently ended the left's monopoly on participatory initiatives.¹⁰

However, from an ideological perspective, differences among the party families' views on the role and impact of citizen participation were to be expected. Historically, the left's leaning towards the values of equality and collective autonomy¹¹ has made radical left parties prone to participatory experiences aimed at reducing power asymmetries between citizens and their representatives. In particular, the crisis of capitalist democracies in the 1970s led new social movements and left-wing parties to embrace the theoretical model of participatory democracy.¹² Challenging an elitist model of democracy that regarded citizens as passive spectators of the decisions taken by politicians, participatory democracy updated the Greek ideal of direct democracy to the context of modern societies, proposing new ways to engage citizens in the daily decisions-making process.¹³

By contrast, the democratic right – especially liberal and conservative parties – has been traditionally reluctant to broaden the scope of citizen participation beyond electoral mechanisms. As compared with the idealization of civic virtues in the left's participatory model, the right tends to be sceptical about the ability of the average citizen to develop an enlightened judgment on politics.¹⁴ Thus, right-wing parties tend to be suspicious of participatory democracy because it would mean empowering ill-informed citizens who might make bad – or even dangerous – decisions.¹⁵ While the left devotes itself to the “politics of faith,” that is, an optimistic view of the ability of collective action to improve the living conditions of the majority, the right leans towards the “politics of scepticism,” that is, the fear of an unrestricted collective power that, in the name of ideals such as equality, could curtail individual liberties.¹⁶ In this sense, the democratic right tends to support political representation as a fair balance between, on the one hand, the autonomy of politicians to take expert decisions, and, on the other hand, the accountability exerted by citizens via elections.¹⁷

Nevertheless, the rise at the end of the 1970s of the New Public Management (NPM) theories in the United Kingdom and elsewhere created a window of opportunity for a neoliberal approach to citizen participation.¹⁸ Unlike the radical transformation proposed by the participatory-democracy model, the NPM aims to increase the efficiency of public policies by applying private sector market-oriented incentives to public decision-making.¹⁹ This approach regards citizens as clients who should be allowed to assess the quality of public services, which requires the development of innovative channels to collect their views. Far from the leftist goal of “democratizing” representative democracy, this managerial approach casts citizens' engagement as a technical solution aimed at providing officials with valuable information to improve the

provision of public goods. It is, therefore, an instrumental and technocratic view of citizen participation that responds to a consumerist, service-led model.²⁰

Hence, the debate about democratic innovations would no longer be a matter of promoting or rejecting participatory institutions, but rather a discussion regarding the type of participatory mechanisms that are developed and their place in the representative system. On the one hand, we could expect right-wing parties, closer to the NPM model, to promote a more technocratic style of participation in which the main role of citizens is to provide information and feedback to public officials. Following this rationale, the participatory mechanisms promoted by right-wing parties would be an additional way to get quality inputs to improve policy-making. By contrast with the left's model of citizens' empowerment, the final say would remain in the hands of politicians and public officials. On the other hand, left-wing parties would foster more ambitious innovations closer to the model of participatory democracy and therefore, aimed at counterbalancing the elitism of political representation. Since they aim to achieve social justice and citizen empowerment, these mechanisms would entail more citizen control over the participatory process and, also, over its binding nature.

The debate about different participatory models became more widespread following the collapse of communism in the early 1990s. The victory of liberal democracy and the market economy over "real socialism"²¹ fostered a political convergence between centre-left and centre – right parties. Following the dictates of the *Third Way*,²² social democrats discarded the most leftist elements of their ideology and accepted citizen participation as a means to increase responsiveness to social demands and the legitimacy of decisions but, unlike radical left parties, accepting market economy approaches and representative democracy.²³ Thus, both social democratic and liberal parties within the right converged on a less radical view of citizen participation, focused on improving the efficiency of public policies without challenging the underlying structures. This new paradigm, often referred to as "New Public Governance,"²⁴ casts citizens as active partners in the process of formulating and implementing public policies.²⁵

Therefore, the global spread of participatory mechanisms since the 1990s seems to show a cross-cutting consensus among centre-right and centre-left parties. As participatory governance turns into "good practice" recommended by experts, academics, and international organizations (UNDP, World Bank, OECD, Council of Europe) these innovations are increasingly framed as a technical resource that improves the relationship between government and civil society. From this viewpoint, for example, the implementation of participatory institutions would depend more on the size of the municipality, than on the mayor's political orientation.²⁶

The case of PB illustrates this evolution. The first PB process, implemented in the early 1990s in Porto Alegre (Brazil) by the Workers' Party (radical left), was a paradigm of the left's values associated with participation.²⁷ This innovation was aimed at empowering the most disadvantaged social groups through an assembly-based democracy giving them direct decision-making powers on the municipal budget. Hence, social justice, economic redistribution and citizen empowerment were egalitarian values linked to PB.²⁸ However, the global expansion of PB has run parallel to the stripping of its original empowerment dimension, so the mechanism has become acceptable to social democrats and, more recently, even to liberal and conservative parties.²⁹ For example, by 2010, conservative parties had promoted 14% of PB initiatives in Spain.³⁰ In Italy, during the 2009 wave of PB initiatives, the ideology of the mayors that implemented them was no longer the deciding factor.³¹

As ideological differences fade away, strategic considerations of the struggle for power may arise as a driving factor in the implementation of participatory initiatives. Thus, the pressure from social allies, the support of other regional, national or supranational administrations, or the political position of the promoter – whether in office or in the opposition – can be instrumental explanatory factors rather than the ideological ones. In this sense, Navarro has shown that a “participatory bias” is a structural dynamic due to electoral competition: local governments tend to narrow their participatory offer to those associations that do not suppose a potential threat to their electoral success.³² By now, it can be said that despite their values and political ideology, it is self-interest that systematically influences politicians’ attitudes about changing, or not, political institutions. Incumbents tend to become attached to the rules and institutions that made them winners, whereas opposition candidates are more open to changing them.³³

What is the current situation then? Our thesis is that, nowadays, most parties support citizen participation but they can do it for different reasons – ideology, international pressure, power struggles – and based on different conceptual models of participation. In this picture, the radical left – those parties to the left of social democracy³⁴ – still adhere to a highly ideological rationale for citizen participation. Challenging the centripetal consensus, radical left parties still stand for the original model of participatory democracy as a way to “democratize” representative democracy by empowering citizens and social movements against the elites.³⁵ Thus, ideology would play a key role in the participatory proposals of these parties, understood as a tool for socio-political transformation. On the other hand, liberal-conservative parties would embrace participatory innovations from a more technocratic rationale, as part of the pressure from international organizations like the United Nations or the World Bank to implement “best practices” that improve public policies.³⁶ However, when implementing them, liberal-conservative parties will tend to follow a NPM framework compatible with the representative model. In turn, social democratic parties would find themselves in a more ambiguous situation: a republican rhetoric sympathetic to participatory democracy is combined with a more liberal praxis not so far from the NPM approach. Hence, these parties would combine ideological reasons with the international pressure to implement “best practices” in policymaking. Nevertheless, as previously stated, power struggles could be an additional reason for implementing participatory institutions. Thus, electoral competition and being part of the government or opposition could explain these decisions, no matter the party family involved.³⁷

In addition, the aims, design and impact of democratic innovations can be differently understood ranging, for instance, from assigning citizens a merely consultative role in a minor local experience (proposing names for a new sport centre, for instance), to giving them full control over the design and implementation of an ambitious urban project.³⁸ Hence, it could well be that some politicians (arguably, conservative) have accepted the “participatory wave” as a *fait accompli* despite their ideological reservations. In fact, frequently newly elected mayors frequently inherit participatory mechanisms – advisory councils, PB, citizen juries – set up by former governments; or they implement them following the path established by international institutions. In any case, even if sceptical about their performance, suppressing them could be very unpopular. Here, ideological differences might appear not so much in the adoption or suppression of the participatory institution, but in the reframing of its role and expected impact regarding citizen empowerment.

To address this issue, the analytical section of this article will focus on PB as a study case: can PB be conceived differently and, thus, implemented, according to the ideology of its promoters? In addition, does the position of a given party in government or in the opposition change its discourse on PB?

Data and methodology

In this article, we intend to study citizen participation through Participatory Budgeting mechanisms. The sample of cases has been selected following two steps. First, an online survey was conducted among local councils of municipalities of over 1000 inhabitants ($n = 699$) in two of Spain's most populated regions: Andalusia and Madrid. This survey was addressed to mayors and citizen participation officials and asked whether the local administration was organizing PB or had done so in the past. Thus, our initial sample comprised the total number of municipalities that claimed to have implemented PB in 2020.

We chose Andalusia and Madrid because they are two paradigmatic regions in the study of participation. Andalusia has been a region historically governed by social democracy and, eventually, by the radical left, while Madrid by the conservatives. Andalusia has always been a pioneering participatory region in Spain; the first participation regulations in Spain were created there in the early 80s and the first PB of the Spanish state took place in the city of Córdoba. Madrid has been a region that has always lagged behind participatory advances in the state. The capital of Madrid started the PB 12 years later than the capital of Andalusia, although we also find cities, such as Getafe, historically committed to participation. In short, both regions offer different political traditions, with complementary trajectories, which are ideal for observing how the rulers of different parties understand participation and the procedures to implement it.

We segregated this initial sample by identifying the political party in government (with an absolute majority or in a coalition) and the leading opposition party in the municipality. We looked for municipalities where the three main political families at the local level in Spain are present (conservative, social democratic and radical left, excluding far right because in the legislature studied there was no presence of VOX in almost any local government) governing either with an overall majority, or in a minority government (but in charge of implementing participation) and, last, as the main party of the opposition in the municipal council. The goal was, on the one hand, to check differences within the same political party according to its position within the political administration; and, on the other hand, to contrast the actual implementation of PB among parties of different political traditions. As the literature points out,³⁹ the fact of being in the opposition or in government can introduce an instrumental logic in the desirability of participation. We also expected to find differences in the arguments of the opposition depending on which party led the municipal government. The table below describes the final sample [Table 1](#).

Our first analysis compared the participatory processes actually implemented in each municipality. To do so, we analysed information from two sources. First, the PB regulations prepared by the municipality, in addition to other documentary sources such as web information, public budget or publicity about the PB itself; and second, the interview with the technical officer responsible for participation issues in the municipality. Both sources allow us to compare the scope and objectives of

Table 1. Case studies and interviews.

	Conservative (Popular Party)	Social democracy (Socialist Party)	Radical left (United Left, Podemos)
Municipality 1	Minority government	Opposition	
Municipality 2	Majority government	Opposition	
Municipality 3	Majority government	Opposition	
Municipality 4		Minority government	Opposition
Municipality 5	Opposition	Minority government	
Municipality 6	Opposition	Minority government	
Municipality 7	Opposition	Majority government	
Municipality 8	Opposition		Minority government
Municipality 9		Opposition	Majority government

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

each PB process aside from political discourses. We compared the quality of the participatory processes understood as the possibility they offer citizens to influence public policies (empowerment). In other words, to see to what extent citizen proposals become policies through the actions taken by governments.⁴⁰

Then we conducted two interviews in each of the municipalities. One with the politician in charge of citizen participation, the other with the leader of the political opposition. In the sample we find conservative politicians who implement PB with a majority government (M3) or in a minority one (M1, M2), as well as others who express their opinions while in the opposition in the municipalities where PB is underway (M5, M6, M7 and M8). The same is true for representatives of social democratic and radical left parties.

The difference in the number of interviews with each of the parties mirrors the representativeness of each of the three parties in the Spanish municipalities. A total of 26 interviews were conducted, because in one of the municipalities the conservative politicians repeatedly ignored our invitation to an interview. The profiles of the interviewees can be found in the appendices.

The interview guide has four sections. The first is based on a biographic profile of the interviewee, in which we ask for an overview of the person's political trajectory. The second section is related to the interviewee's general perception of citizen participation (what it is done for, whether people are willing or ready, etc.), as well as the specific trajectory of participation in the municipality. The third section addresses the implementation of PB, asking for an overview, as well as a more detailed analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the participatory process. The last section focuses on the contextual and political relations among the local parties and their positions on the concrete PB implemented in their municipalities. In the interviews we ask ad-hoc follow-up questions when we require more details from the interviewee.

Results

PB's empowerment criteria applied by party families

Speaking of PB, research has always identified different procedures in their implementation. Sintomer and his colleagues, in their traditional study of PB in Europe, proposed five different models that ranged from inviting citizens to decide on part of the budget to holding a consultation with no link to decision-making. The most ambitious processes were promoted by the radical left. In Spain, for example, the initiatives promoted by conservatives were characterized by a lower impact of citizen decisions and greater control of

participation by the administration.⁴¹ Focusing on the quality of the PB processes, the differences among them could be significant when considering the ideology of the promoters.

Usually, one of the basic elements for assessing the quality of participation is the possibility of influencing public policies (empowerment) given to citizens. Within its limits, each participatory process affords its promoters a wide margin of manoeuvre since this influence can be consultative or binding, it can cover a small part of public policies, or be more ambitious. This margin can provide information about the type of participation and the extent to which ideology influences the models implemented. Baiocchi and Ganuza proposed four criteria to distinguish participatory processes according to their empowerment quality.⁴²

Considering the foregoing, the first step was to know what is being done in those municipalities. Participation rules, public documents about the participatory experience were analysed. Also, interviews with the technical officers responsible for citizen participation were consulted to settle doubts about the process. The four empowerment quality criteria were applied to identify implementation differences:

- (1) the primacy of participatory forums in the decision-making process. The criterion is met (1 Yes/0 No) to the extent that the decisions adopted by the government on small investments (objective of PB) are proposed in the participatory process.
- (2) the share of the budget (how much is directly allocated by citizens). This criterion reflects the percentage of the municipality's investment budget over which the participatory process can exert its influence. The share is calculated based on the percentage of the investment budget earmarked for participatory budgeting, extracted from the municipal budget data for the last year for which this data is available. If there is no budget at all, the experience would be near "0%," and when the entire investment budget is invested, "100%" applies.
- (3) the degree of power granted to PB (whether authorities retain discretion in implementing the projects). This criterion shows the impact of the participatory process on the municipality's general public policies. At one end (1) there are the processes that collect proposals, but it is the government that decides which ones are implemented. At the other end (3) the proposals are developed, debated and prioritized only by the citizens. In between there are processes in which citizens only vote, they do not submit proposals (2).
- (4) the self-regulation of PB. This criterion shows whether the rules of the process are defined by the participants (1) or by the government (0).

As can be seen in [Table 2](#), although the nine participatory processes are labelled as participatory budgeting, when closely examined they are very different. The criteria applied show a significant difference among the processes organized by the conservative, social democratic and radical left parties. In general, almost every municipality governed by the social democrats and the radical left earmarks a bigger share of the budget and the process has a greater influence on the municipality's activities. Two of them, M4 and M9, also allow citizens to participate in the drafting of the rules of procedure. Nevertheless, PB initiatives implemented by radical left parties stand out for their commitment to empowerment, especially M9. In this municipality, there are participatory forums, 100% of the investment budget is subject to PB, citizens can not only propose and vote, but also debate. Moreover, in this municipality, the rules governing the process are defined by the participants.

Table 2. Summary of the criteria applied to the case studies.

Municipality	Political Commissioner	Empower Dimension			
		Participatory forums	Scope of the budget	Role of citizenry	Self-regulation
Municipality 1	PP minority	0	0	1	0
Municipality 2	PP majority	0	0	1	0
Municipality 3	PP majority	0	1%	1	0
Municipality 4	PSOE minority	0	30%	3	1
Municipality 5	PSOE minority	0	3.6%	3	0
Municipality 6	PSOE minority	0	37%	2	0
Municipality 7	PSOE majority	0	1%	2	0
Municipality 8	RL minority	0	6.8%	3	0
Municipality 9	RL majority	1	100%	3	1

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Regarding the social democratic PB practices they are the most heterogeneous among them. When governing in minority, social democratic politicians develop more empowered PB initiatives than when leading a majority government. Although none of them are committed to participatory forums, two of the cases (M4 and M5) include debate among participants as a phase of the process. Moreover, M4 even includes participants in the definition of the rules. However, the amount of investment budget dedicate to PB varies greatly from one municipality to another.

In municipalities ruled by conservative parties, there is no guarantee that proposals will be implemented by the government. The processes implemented also avoid establishing mechanisms for debate. Hence, in these cases, the promoter retains a discretionary power regarding the implementation of proposals. As will be seen below, this means the conservative government decides which proposals are carried out, relegating participation to a plebiscite on the government's proposals or to making suggestions that the government may, or may not, implement later.

Thus, a pattern is established following the empowerment dimension of participatory processes. As already noted, only one municipality, that is governed by a radical left party, has managed to fully apply the criteria of citizen empowerment. On the opposite side, none of the three conservative PB initiatives studied achieved any of the chosen indicators. As for the social democratic municipalities, they find themselves navigating in the middle of the other two party families. Some have more empowering PB proposals, while others are less empowering and closer to the conservatives.

These differences among processes demonstrate that ideology is not a neutral element since it influences the organization of participation. PB initiatives may have become standardized so that any government can implement them, but the ideology of the political promoter influences the structure and substance of the processes. Next, we shall examine what different politicians understand by participation, and how they conceive the PB process in the municipalities in which they govern or lead the political opposition.

Conceptions of participatory democracy behind the mechanisms implemented

Although highly different, conservative, social democratic and radical left parties implement PB initiatives in Spanish municipalities. In the discourses of most of the promoters interviewed, citizen participation is an instrument that makes it possible

to connect representatives with citizens. In other words, a consensus has been reached so nobody questions that citizen participation is a democratic key in the political arena. So, a certain idea of citizen participation is desirable for every politician interviewee regardless their political affiliation. Nevertheless, the importance they attach to innovative participatory mechanisms compared to other forms of participation such as voting and representative democracy may differ between politicians from different party families. Thus, the dilemma arises when it comes to justifying what is actually done in the name of participation.

The discourses of elected political representatives allow us to discern a common political thread. According to it, participation is understood as the political involvement of citizens in decision-making. All interviewees, except one from the radical left, define participation in an instrumental way as an active listening process. The justification for this is the idea of “knowledge of use” that individuals have of their own municipalities. Nez and Sintomer defined “knowledge of use” (*savoir d’usage*), as the idea that participants know what their interests are better than anyone else. This typical justification for citizen participation inspired by the New Public Management model helps us to understand why citizen participation is a cross-cutting issue for all the political parties analysed.⁴³

However, the actual reality of the idea of “knowledge of use” is diverse. The political focus placed on civil society in modern democracies may be associated with both consumers and citizens. Viewing individuals as consumers means they are assigned a more restricted role in politics than viewed as citizens.⁴⁴ The role that politicians assign to individuals (consumers vs citizens) is associated with a specific political management model (representative vs participatory democracy).

Conservative interviewees, underline the importance of complaining as an instrument to make the administration aware of individuals’ concerns. This is the logic of consumer complaints. Citizens not active in any formal structure can complain informally and whether they are listened to, or not, will depend on the willingness of the political representatives.⁴⁵

This results in a model in which participation is not self-regulating, as can be seen in the analysis of the processes. There is no empowerment, citizens cannot define the rules governing their own participation. For conservatives, participation is first and foremost the selection of representatives. PB is thus a subordinate way of complementing participation, whereas elections are, of course, the main participatory resource. This reflects a hierarchical and non-binding model, one in which the politicians in government actively listen to the citizens’ suggestions and demands but keeping the final decision as “managers.” This is justified adding a sociological angle that downplays the importance of citizen participation, considering citizens as falling far short of the virtuous citizen idea in the radical left ideology. Generally speaking, people are not ready to participate. They are selfish and ask for things they want, but not necessarily things that are appropriate for the entire municipality:

I believe that citizens can participate actively on a day-to-day basis, to submit complaints/demands, proposals as well, but not to take decisions (M2, conservative, majority government).

The parties in the town council have been elected by the neighbours. The ballot box is the most important way of participating there can be. Then there are many neighbours who do not want

to participate, who are not interested in the day-to-day running of the municipality, they understand that they are duly represented by those they elected and if they don't do as expected, they will vote for someone else in the next elections. I think they should be given their rightful place. Never replace the councillors (M5, conservative, opposition).

If you don't control it well, participation can be a perversion as well and you can decide things that are not fair and don't benefit all citizens. That's why in the end you must listen, and you must seek participation, but the government team is always there to govern. There must be a balance between participation and the common sense of the government team, which has a vision, a more global assessment than a certain group or sector (M1, conservative, minority government).

The conservatives' position must be understood bearing in mind that, in the cases studied, the party is currently in government, and is implementing PB processes that were previously established by social democratic or radical left parties. Therefore, from their position they continue to implement a public policy devised by their political opponents. Nevertheless, even when conservatives are the promoters of PB initiatives, they declare themselves to be "sceptical" or say they implement PB differently from radical left parties. Compared to other politicians, conservative politicians see themselves as better and more efficient managers, as they consider that they achieve better results and greater participation (conservative managerial model). Moreover, they differentiate between their way of understanding and implementing PBs and that of other representatives. They decide not to include assemblies in their PB in which the process is explained and proposals are debated, as they believe this to be a source of manipulation, a "joke":

We have totally changed the methodology [...]. We give more objective, technical information to the neighbours, rather than ideological information, debate, speeches and so on, which can be muddled, confusing, and lead to nothing. I believe that we have made participatory budgeting more professional, so neighbours are free to comment, follow proceedings, decide for themselves and have a freer and more objective opinion about the situation (M1, conservative, minority government).

For their part, social democrats and radical leftists do include non-organized civil society as a political actor involved in the participatory process. Thus, participation makes it possible to structure local initiatives so that what citizens want will be certainly listened to. This is a significant departure from the conservative managerial model.

Specifically, in the social democratic discourse, participation always implies going beyond the purely representative model, shaping a more participatory one. For social democrats, this does not mean questioning the hierarchy of elections and the role of elected representatives, but accepting that citizens can play a politically active role given their "knowledge of use" about a reality that escapes the elected representatives. Thus, according to this view, participation and decision-making are separate areas that coexist. As already pointed out, the social democratic discourse does not completely discard the need for steering by governing politicians.

I am not very much in favour of direct democracy. It means that any participatory body must be a decision-making body. I believe in participatory, representative democracy. There are participatory bodies and there are decision-making bodies. But in this specific case, I take it that the participatory budget is, first, the right to participate ... But it doesn't mean that something has to be done just because a person, a neighbour, has proposed it (M5, social democrat, minority government).

In addition, they claim that citizens are ready to participate. As for citizens' motivations to participate, they consider that these are mainly of an individualistic nature. Nonetheless, they argue that institutions hold assemblies or workshops to explain the process's aims and rules and to achieve a more collective participation. In other words, while recognizing that participation is based on the individual's decision, they advocate for placing value on the community.

Well, one cannot see into each person's mind but I gather that society, that citizens as members of a collective group are prepared. There are all sorts of things. There are proposals that say that what this person wants is to fix the doorway of his house. They haven't realized that the participatory budget is an opportunity for you to participate, to make proposals and improvements that benefit the community, whether in your neighbourhood or in your city. So, are people prepared? I think that on average they are reasonably prepared, yes. Here we hold neighbourhood assemblies, we have committees to make things dynamic, we explain the process. This process has been going on here for years (M5, social democrat, minority government).

Conservatives and social democrats both embrace the terms "citizens" or "neighbours," while the radical left parties speak of "people" as a collective subject that manifests itself homogeneously through PB. It could be taken as a reflection of the model of participation proposed by each party and the different expectations they have when it comes to participatory mechanisms. Hence it is understandable why the radical left includes participatory forums and deliberation in the participatory process. According to the ideological differences stated in the theoretical section, radical left promoters suggest a model in which political representation is replaced by the participatory model. While for social democrats, elections remain the key pillar of political dynamics, the radical left supports more horizontal political relations, which, in some cases, might definitively blur the political hierarchy derived from representative elections. Moreover, in their discourse participatory processes are seen as a way for civil society to communicate its priorities but also as a means to educate citizens. It increases the effectiveness of the municipality's public policies.

We began to understand what granting power to the people implied in politics. In other words, relinquishing authority, surrendering some of the power that you have as a public representative [...]. That the neighbours are co-participants not only in taking decisions, but also in the management of those decisions (M9, radical left, majority government).

Nevertheless, we identify an instrumental divergence among radical left politicians regarding the main goals of citizen participation. When in a majority government the radical left discourse highlights the pedagogical capacity of PB. It points out that people first learn how the administration and institutional policies work and this is what makes the participatory initiative useful. This is an example of the empowerment dimension of PB, in which the participatory experience is considered as a platform for learning.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, radical left promoters in a minority government identify "knowledge of use" as the main aim of participation, so it seems that in the different discourses of these promoters there is a certain ambivalence that works as a double-edged sword.

Understanding everything from a pedagogical point of view, so that people know what happens; why things happen, why things are managed in a certain way, what resources there are, where they come from, where they go, how far we can go (M9, radical left, majority government).

In the following graph, we show the two axes along which the party families interpret participation and its democratic meaning [Figure 1](#).

Explaining diversity among party families themselves

Until now we have seen what promoters think about participation and PB regarding their political ideologies. Nevertheless, there are also heterogeneous positions among the party families themselves. These not so drastic but relevant nuances can be explained by considering instrumental reasons as well.

Given the fact that all the politicians interviewed are in one way or another related to and in tune with citizen participation, the fact that they are currently governing or leading the opposition helps to better explain their approach to participatory mechanisms.

When conservative promoters are in the opposition, the discourse is different than the one exposed in the previous section. If when in government they are no enthusiastic participatory supporters, when in the opposition conservatives state they do not support PB implemented by their political antagonists in the context of their municipality because citizen participation is seized by organized civil society or ideologically biased citizens:

But I tell you, not even their grassroots, not even their members in the neighbourhood are mobilized to participate in these meaningless assemblies that they put on to pretend they are very participatory and active listeners, and then they do the opposite. They don't listen to anyone, and they don't do what the people ask them to do (M8, conservative, opposition).

By contrast with PP representatives, who are equally critical of social democratic or radical left participatory initiatives, PSOE representatives have different opinions depending on which party is in the opposition in the local arena. When the opposition party is Izquierda Unida or Podemos/Ganemos (radical left), social democrats emphasize that they have similar points of view, but mention some nuances to illustrate a less

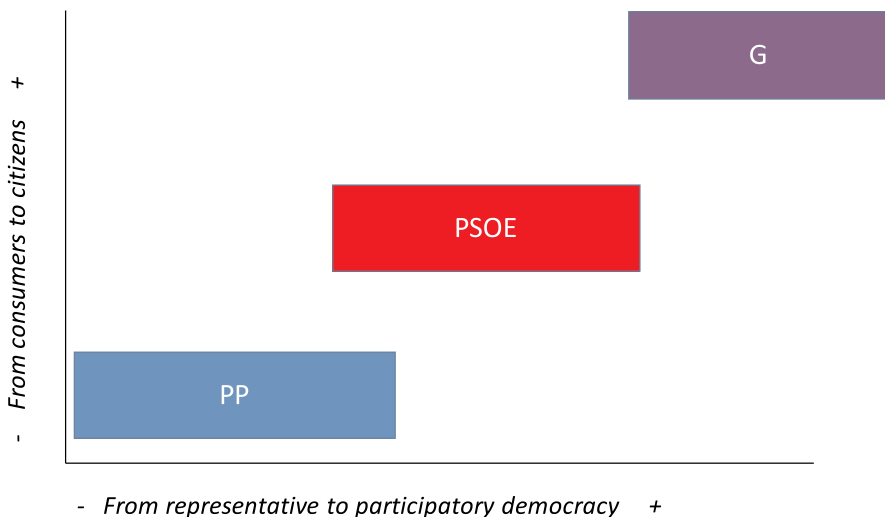


Figure 1. Summary of the positions of conservatives (PP), social democrats (PSOE) and radical left (Ganemos, Podemos, IU) about perception of civil society and democracy model priorities.

radical ideological position. However, when the party in government is the PP, PB initiatives implemented are harshly criticized and labelled “suggestions box” and “pure marketing” (M2, social democrat, opposition). Here social democracy used to call for more radical participatory policies.

Radical left interviewees focus almost exclusively on the PSOE, because when they lead the opposition, the government is usually social democratic. After stating categorically that the PP is not interested in citizen participation, they argue that, while the moderate left, represented by the PSOE, conceives participation as a mere complement to its electoral offer, for them, citizen participation constitutes the core and cross-cutting objective of all their political action. This is intrinsically connected with the radical left theoretical conception of participatory democracy as a counterbalance to the elitism of political representation and an opportunity to increase social justice and citizen empowerment. The criticism levelled at the social democrats is that they maintain PB as a political strategy, that is, they are more concerned with showing a favourable attitude to participatory initiatives than truly convinced by the model.

This firm commitment to participation leads the radical left to grant autonomy to citizens, giving them the responsibility of managing and controlling PB implementation. For this reason, the discourse is critical of other parties’ watered-down vision of PB, including that of the social democrats. They are criticized for not supporting a model that entrusts the final decision to the people, something that is attributed to a fear of renouncing the classical elements of political representation. This criticism is particularly clear when voiced while in the opposition. Thus, when comparing a social democratic PB with that of the previous radical left council, the interviewee states:

It is a matter for government teams to think about, what extending participatory budgeting means, so that it doesn’t start on such and such a date and ends on such and such another. But continues throughout the year and that it is what it is a right of the citizens [...] That it should be ongoing that it should not be an isolated thing [Speaking of the PSOE government]. Last year they cut back, they reduced the amount of money made available to the people. Let’s say that they have continued to do it a bit out of inertia, a bit because they understood that abolishing it wasn’t going to be very popular (M4, radical left, opposition).

Eurovision participation. I send a little message, I press a little button and I have already participated (M4, radical left, opposition).

As we can see, the instrumental use of participation varies according to the position of the political party in the municipal council. However, this instrumentalization is in line with the party’s ideological framework. Thus, the conservative party in the opposition tries to differentiate itself from the left, both social democrat and radical, and participatory policies that it considers a deception, while in government it tends to implement consultative participatory procedures, far from the ideological motivations of the left. In the case of PSOE, this party adapts its discourse according to its position in the municipal chamber, showing a more radical rhetoric when the conservative party is in government than in the case of a radical left government. As for the radical left, it seems to maintain a similar rhetoric in government and in opposition.

Discussion

Citizen involvement is a universal reality, with examples of Participatory Budgeting being implemented across very different party families. In Spain, we have seen participatory processes developed by conservatives, social democratic as well as radical

left parties. Nevertheless, although the New Public Management model has homogenized participatory public policies, ideology still influences them. The debate about democratic innovations no longer seems to be a matter of promoting or rejecting participatory institutions, but rather a discussion on the type of participatory mechanisms that are developed and their place within the representative system.

Our aim in this article was to better understand the influence of ideology on the implementation of concrete participatory processes. As was to be expected from the literature, our analysis has identified three different kinds of PB processes (and ways of understanding citizen participation). Conservatives, closer to the New Public Management model, implement processes in which participants provide information and feedback to public officials. In other words, participants are expected to act like consumers of public policies. As for social democrats, on the one hand, they provide an ambiguous picture in which both models, representative and participatory, coexist. Although they do not relinquish the NPM concept of participation, they do not see citizens as mere consumers. The radical left, on the other hand, rejects the NPM model of participation, understanding citizen participation and democratic innovation mechanisms as an opportunity to achieve social justice and citizen empowerment. Their aim is to counterbalance the elitism of political representation, and to replace it with participatory democracy. Thus, three different approaches to citizen participation lead to three distinct ways of implementing participatory mechanisms such as PB. While the PB initiatives of radical left and some social democratic parties are more likely to develop empowerment dimensions, the remaining social democrats and the conservatives in government are not. Our results are in line with a previous study comparing cases of PB in Germany, France and United Kingdom. The authors also differentiated between more empowering models of citizen participation (the first two) and more managerial participation procedures, which are present in the latter case.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, depending on whether in government or in opposition, politicians can modify their rhetoric on participation due to instrumental reasons, although within the party's ideological framework. Conservatives especially, but also social democrats, change their participatory discourse depending on the position they occupy in the municipal council. In the opposition there seems to be a more open defence of the principles of the party's ideological framework, except for the social democratic opposition to a radical left government.

Our work faces some limitations. Firstly, in order to study discourses on citizen participation, we used the proxy of Participatory Budgeting. Although this mechanism has been chosen because of the enormous number of PB initiatives carried out by very different party families around the world, the results might have been more or less pronounced if another democratic innovation had been used. Second, our analysed cases are from the regions of Andalusia and Madrid. Although we do not consider that there are sharp differences regarding citizen participation, we must be cautious when extrapolating these results to the rest of Spain. Third, we are looking at the conservative, social democratic and radical left party families. In other national contexts, where the party families are different, positions on citizen participation may differ. In addition, we are studying ideological conceptions of citizen participation at the local level, but we do not consider regional and national political arenas.

Regarding future implications, the entry in 2023 of a fourth political family, the far right, in many Spanish local governments is changing the scenario. The effect of other parties governing, such as VOX, in this new local legislature and in the ones to come,

may have consequences on the discourses and mechanisms implemented. Furthermore, more studies are needed on how ideology influences other characteristics such as the amount of resources available for citizen participation or the continuity of these mechanisms over time.

Notes

1. Warren, *Governance-Driven Democratization*.
2. Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, *Recommendation Rec (2001)*; *Recommendation Rec (2023)*; OECD, *Citizens as Partners*; *Catching the Deliberative Wave*; Goldfrank, "The World Bank and PB".
3. Peck and Theodore, *Fast Policy*.
4. Pogrebinschi, *Innovating Democracy?*; Ramirez and Welp, *Nuevas instituciones participativas en América Latina*.
5. Sintomer et al., "Transnational Models of Citizen Participation"; Premat, "Participatory Democracy in French Communes"; Ganuza and Francés, *El círculo virtuoso de la democracia*.
6. See notes 4 and 5 above.
7. Smith, *Democratic Innovations*; Font, Della Porta and Sintomer, *Participatory Democracy in Southern Europe*.
8. Geissel and Newton, *Evaluating Democratic Innovations*; Heinelt, "Councillors and Democracy".
9. Baiocchi and Ganuza, "Participatory Budgeting as if Emancipation Mattered"; Allegretti and Stortone, "Participatory Budgets in Italy"; Welp, *Populism and Citizen Participation in Latin America*.
10. Ramirez and Welp, "Nuevas instituciones participativas y democráticas en América Latina".
11. Bobbio, *Left and Right*; Rousseau, "On the Social Contract".
12. Barber, *Strong Democracy*; Hilmer, "The State of Participatory Democracy Theory".
13. Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*; Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy*.
14. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*.
15. Sartori, "En defensa de la representación política".
16. Oakeshott, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Skepticism*.
17. Heinelt, "Councillors and Democracy"; Vallbé and Iglesias, "Determinants of Spanish Mayors' Notions of Democracy".
18. Cavalcante, "Trends in Public Administration after Hegemony of the NGP".
19. Osborne, "Reinventing Government".
20. Rowe and Shepherd, "Public Participation in the New NHS," 278.
21. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*.
22. Giddens, *The Third Way*.
23. Charalambous and Lamprianou, "The (non) Particularities of West European Radical Left Party Supporters".
24. Waheduzzaman, "Challenges in Transitioning From NGP to New Public Governance".
25. See note 18 above, 211.
26. Premat, "The Implementation Of Participatory Democracy in French Communes"; Borge, Colombo and Welp, "Online and Offline Participation at the Local Level".
27. Baiocchi, *Militants and Citizens*; Goldfrank, *Deepening Local Democracy in Latin America*.
28. Sintomer et al., *Transnational Models of Citizen Participation*.
29. Baiocchi and Ganuza, "Participatory Budgeting as if Emancipation Mattered".
30. Ganuza and Francés, *El círculo virtuoso de la democracia: los presupuestos participativos a debate*.
31. Allegretti and Stortone, "Participatory Budgets in Italy".
32. Navarro, *El sesgo participativo*.
33. Donovan, Bowler and Karp, "Why Politicians Like Electoral Institutions," 444.
34. March and Keith, *Europe's Radical Left*.
35. Vick, "Participatory versus Radical Democracy in the 21st Century," 206.
36. Goldfrank, "The World Bank and PB"; De Oliveira, *International Policy Diffusion and Participatory Budgeting*.

37. Font and Blanco, ¿*Qué hay detrás de la oferta de participación?*; Schneider and Welp, *Diseños institucionales y (des)equilibrios de poder*; Welp, *Populism and Citizen Participation in Latin America*.
38. Del Pino and Colino, *Democracia participativa en el nivel local*.
39. See note 33 above.
40. Fung and Wright, “Deepening Democracy”.
41. Sintomer, Röcke and Herzberg, *Participatory Budgeting in Europe Democracy*, 61–71.
42. Baiocchi and Ganuza, *Popular Democracy*, 149.
43. Nez and Sintomer, “Qualifier les savoirs citoyens dans l’urbanisme participatif”.
44. Held, *Modelos de democracia*, 154.
45. Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti, *Politics in the Supermarket*.
46. See note 29 above.
47. Röcke, *Framing Citizen Participation*.

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Appendices

Table A1. Profiles of the conservative interviewees.

	Gender	Age	Region	Formal education	Party affiliation	Self-ideological perception	Relation with citizen participation
M1, minority government	Male	57 years	Andalusia	Degree in Law	Popular Party (PP) for 32 years	Neither left-wing nor right-wing, at the local level it does not matter	Current PB promoter in the municipality
M3, majority government	Male	41 years	Madrid	Degree in Law	PP for 15 years	Centrist, liberal	Current PB promoter in the municipality
M5, opposition	Female	51 years	Madrid	Degree in Law	PP	Centre-right	They have a women's association, "Women in Equality"
M6, opposition	Female	42 years	Madrid	Degree in Law	PP for 25 years	Liberal	The PP has not governed in the municipality
M7, opposition	Female	56 years	Madrid	Degree in Sociology	PP for 10 years	The ideology of her party	She declares to carry the PBs in the electoral programme
M8, opposition	Male	36 years	Madrid	Degree in Law	PP	Centre-right, reformist and liberal	He declares not to believe in citizen participation

Source: Own elaboration.

Table A2. Profiles of the social democrat interviewees.

	Gender	Age	Region	Formal education	Party affiliation	Self-ideological perception	Relation with citizen participation
M1, opposition	Male	55 years	Andalusia	Degree in Political Science and Sociology	Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE) for 32 years	If his party is left-wing, he claims to be from the left wing of his party	When they governed in 2015, they were the first PB promoters in the municipality
M2, opposition	Male	45 years	Madrid	Industrial design	PSOE	Social democrat and progressist	When they governed, they implemented Advisory Councils
M3, opposition	Female	33 years	Madrid	PhD in Biology	PSOE for 10 years	Centre-left, social democrat	The PBs in the municipality are implemented thanks to a motion they tabled
M4, minority government	Male	50 years	Andalusia	Journalist	PSOE for 4 years	Social democrat, left-wing	Current PB promoter in the municipality
M5, minority government	Male	??	Madrid	Degree in Law and Social Work	PSOE for 21 years	The ideology of his party	Current PB promoter in the municipality

(Continued)

Table A2. Continued.

	Gender	Age	Region	Formal education	Party affiliation	Self-ideological perception	Relation with citizen participation
M6, minority government	Male	41 years	Madrid	Worker in a metallurgy company	PSOE for 25 years	Left-wing	Current PB promoter in the municipality
M7, majority government	Male	40 years	Madrid	Degree in Political Science	PSOE for 21 years	Socialist	Current PB promoter in the municipality
M9, opposition	Male	35 years	Andalusia	Degree in Law and Political Science	PSOE	Social democrat	He was part of the PB motor group and also participated the PB self-regulation's discussion

Source: Own elaboration.

Table A3. Profiles of the radical-left interviewees.

	Gender	Age	Region	Formal education	Party affiliation	Self-ideological perception	Relation with citizen participation
M4, opposition	Female	More than 60 years	Andalusia	Retired teacher	United Left (IU) – Spanish Communist Party (PCE)	No data	When they governed, they were the first PB promoters in the municipality
M8, minority government	Male	48 years	Madrid	No formal training	Podemos and Alianza Verde	Eco-socialist – Ecologist left	Current PB promoter in the municipality
M9, majority government	Male	50 years	Andalusia	No formal training (self-declared self-taught)	Ganemos Peligros	No data	Current PB promoter in the municipality

Source: Own elaboration.