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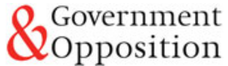

ARTICLE

Dealing with the Facts of Life: The Management of Intra-Party Factionalism in the Iberian Radical Left Parties

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Abstract
Factionalism is an important element in parties' internal life, affecting their policies, strategies, electoral performance and even survival. Yet little is known about how parties manage factionalism. This study examines how radical left parties (RLPs) manage factionalism, drawing on a comparative case study of four RLPs – the Spanish Podemos and United Left (IU), and the Portuguese Left Bloc (BE) and Communist Party (PCP) – from 2010 to 2019. Drawing on original data collection, we find that parties adopt both formal and informal mechanisms to address factionalism. However, their approaches differ significantly. We identify two main approaches towards factionalism: a *permissive* approach, which allows internal pluralism, in the BE and IU; and a *prohibitionist* approach, which actively fights factionalism, in Podemos and the PCP, with *competitive* prohibitionism in the former and *pre-emptive* prohibitionism in the latter. These approaches strongly correlate with parties' origins and political orientation, but neither fully prevents intra-party conflict or splintering.

Keywords: radical left parties; factionalism; party organization; party management; intra-party politics; far left

Factions are 'a fact of life' for most parties (Harmel et al. 1995: 7). Yet there is relatively little research on how parties manage these 'facts of life' that constitute a central element of parties' internal politics (Katz 2002: 87).

This is also true for European radical left parties (RLPs). While RLPs have received renewed attention since the 2008 economic crisis (e.g. Charalambous and Ioannou 2020; March and Keith 2016), some areas remain underexplored. One of these is their intra-party dynamics, not least in terms of managing factionalism (Lourenço 2021; March 2013). This article thus seeks to answer the following research question: how do radical left parties manage intra-party factionalism?

Factionalism is not unique to RLPs nor necessarily more prevalent in these than in other party families. However, RLPs constitute a relevant context in which to

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assess how parties deal with factionalism, for three reasons. First, RLPs are often associated with high levels of factionalism in the literature (see Roder 2017; Ştefuriuc and Verge 2008). Second, RLPs' internal life is seen as playing a decisive role in their fate, be it their electoral success (March 2016: 36–38) or ultimate decline (e.g. the Italian Party of Communist Refoundation or the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova). Third, RLPs have increasingly participated in government arrangements (e.g. Greece, Iceland, Portugal, Spain) whose stability depends on the 'effective management of factions' and 'intra-party disputes' (Chambers and Croissant 2010: 4).

The contribution of this article is threefold. First, it identifies mechanisms by which parties exercise control over party factions and deal with internal dissent. Second, by analysing informal intra-party dynamics, it goes beyond the mere study of parties' formal structures and shows how party organizations work in practice. Finally, by looking into the 'black box' of radical left organization, it offers an innovative contribution on a neglected dimension of this party family. In doing so, it extends our broader understanding of the empirically under-researched issue of how parties manage factionalism, and it advances the more specific literature of RLPs, in terms of their internal dynamics and organization.

Empirically, the article draws on a comparative case study of the four main RLPs in the two Iberian countries from 2010 to 2019: the Spanish Izquierda Unida (IU – United Left) and Podemos (We Can); and the Partido Comunista Português (PCP – Portuguese Communist Party) and Bloco de Esquerda (BE – Left Bloc). Given that parties are fairly 'secretive organizations' (March 2011: 184), we carry out an in-depth qualitative comparison approach based on the analysis of 26 semi-structured interviews with party and faction elites, as well as party documents and media sources.

Factionalism and intra-party dynamics

Far from being unitary actors, parties often contain different factions that seek to influence internal decision-making (Ceron 2019: 1). These structure intra-party competition and can influence parties' goals, strategies and policies (Budge et al. 2010; Harmel and Tan 2003), constituting a potential 'organizational constraint' on party leadership (Müller and Strøm 1999: 294–295). For instance, the manifestation of internal divisions can affect parties' participation in government (Benoit and Giannetti 2009: 231), make them appear as unreliable coalition partners (Bäck 2008) or damage their public image (Greene and Haber 2015). Factions may thus act as internal veto players (Sartori 1976: 80), forcing parties to look inward when considering their strategies and programmatic positions (Ceron 2019; Harmel 2018).

While the word largely carries a negative connotation, factionalism is not necessarily negative. Factions can cooperate in party building (Boucek 2009). Likewise, drawing on Albert Hirschman's (1970) typology, factionalism can serve as an internal 'voice' mechanism, with intra-party competition strengthening internal democracy (Boucek 2009; Close and Gherghina 2019). Yet this constructive effect is not far removed from less positive ones, such as party splits and defections ('exit'). As Caroline Close and Sergiu Gherghina (2019) note, 'voice' and 'exit' are associated, with party splits more likely in factionalized parties. Alternatively,

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party factions may remain together through private incentives, with internal clientelism and pork-barrel politics keeping the factions under the same tent but paralysing decision-making and fostering corruption, in what Françoise Boucek (2009) terms 'degenerative' factionalism. These various dynamics highlight the existence of both inter-faction competition and cooperation within political parties (Belloni and Beller 1976).

The literature identifies the task of managing factionalism as resting primarily with the party leadership (Ceron 2019: 10–11). Leaders are responsible for balancing parties' different goals and ensuring a certain degree of intra-party coherence (Harmel and Janda 1994; Müller and Strøm 1999). To that end, leaders can resort to various instruments. The intra-party debate arena allows the leadership to set the agenda, enable consensus and address divisive issues. In this arena, compromises can be reached, decisions postponed or referenda called to resolve disagreements and legitimize decisions (Lynch and Whitaker 2013). Internal unity can also be promoted through the distribution of spoils, by heeding factional demands for resources and positions in parliament and intra-party bodies ('carrot' approach), or by denying them to those that consistently fail to cooperate ('stick') (Boucek 2009; Chambers and Croissant 2010; Kam 2009; Lynch and Whitaker 2013).

The public expression of dissent may be tolerated – if it comes at a low cost for the party – or it may lead to the application of party discipline, through sanctions or expulsion of members (formal discipline), or through more informal mechanisms (e.g. peer pressure, threats) (Kam 2009; Lynch and Whitaker 2013). It can also lead to changes in organizational rules (e.g. in party statutes) to promote internal cohesion or consensus (Ceron 2019: 185; Ştefuriuc 2009: 91).

These instruments can be used in different ways. Based on a country study, Paul Chambers and Aurel Croissant (2010) identify three different styles of managing factionalism by party leaderships. The first is excluding rival factions, which they dub 'monopolizing party control'. The second is seeking continuous consensus with other factions ('mutualized consensus'). And finally, leveraging short-term and shifting alliances with different factions ('muddling through').

Factionalism can be driven by both external and internal factors or threats to party unity. One significant external factor is the emergence of 'wedge' issues in the political system, which divide a party internally. Examples include Brexit in the UK or the EU migrant crisis in Germany (Ceron 2019: 2–5). A second (and often related) external factor is the growth of 'new parties' (Boucek 2009: 468), especially if these occupy a similar political space. As for internal factors that can activate intra-party conflict, we can note the party's involvement in scandals (Budge et al. 2010: 792), election results that are perceived as disappointing internally, participation in coalitions, and significant shifts in the party's strategy or programmatic position (often by new party leaders) (Basedau and Köllner 2005: 18–21; Ceron 2019: 2–5).

RLPs are seen as being prone to factionalism (March 2016), a pattern evidenced in studies of individual parties (e.g. Chazel and Fernández-Vázquez 2020; Nikolakakis 2017; Roder 2017). Luke March (2011: 27, 196–197) identifies intra-party factional dynamics, leadership and internal organizational rules, which he terms the 'intra-party balance', as a key supply-side variable in explaining RLPs' electoral success. Yet factionalism in RLPs has received scant attention. Some

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studies address the topic. Tània Verge and Raúl Gómez (2012) assess how multilevel settings interact with factionalism in four Spanish parties, one of which is the RLP United Left. Surveying how the United Left became a governing partner in Spain's multilevel system, Irina Ştefuriuc and Tània Verge (2008) also examine how its high levels of factionalism played a role. However, there does not appear to be an in-depth, comparative study that specifically focuses on how RLPs manage their intra-party balance.

Methodology

We adopt a comparative case study design, assessing the four main RLPs of Spain and Portugal. This allows us to control several institutional and contextual features with potential impact on factionalism. As Verge and Gómez (2012: 669) note, in assessing factionalism it is important to control for external factors such as 'formal institutions, party system characteristics, socio-economic, cultural and political features'.

The two countries are among the few EU member states to hold elections with a closed-list proportional representation electoral system, a potentially important element in party factionalism (Basedau and Köllner 2005: 18; Ceron 2019: 184–185). They also share several historical similarities (e.g. timing of democratization, experience with conservative right-wing authoritarian regimes) and have consolidated party systems around centre-right versus centre-left parties that frayed in the second half of the 2010s, enabling RLPs into positions of potential government support or entry.

The two countries also have some differences, most notably regarding their internal structure. Spain is a multinational country, with a quasi-federal political system. This contrasts with Portugal, the oldest nation state in Europe, which has a unitary political system. We control for this variation by selecting two parties from each country, enabling a pairwise comparison within the same political system, thus keeping all external factors constant, while providing a broader comparison of the four cases. Given this objective of controlling external factors by comparing across and within countries, Portugal and Spain emerge as the best available cases. The only other European countries with two relevant RLPs in the 2010s were Greece and Moldova. Neither of these would appear to generate greater control of external factors than the Iberian countries.

This case selection also provides a substantial amount of ideological and organizational variety in the analysed parties. The four parties selected present distinct leadership models and represent different subtypes of RLPs: conservative communist (PCP), reform communist (IU), democratic socialist (BE) and democratic socialist with a prominent populist nature (Podemos) (see Keith and March 2016: 8–11). Moreover, all four faced several 'critical' (and potentially divisive) moments during the period under analysis (2010–2019), when factionalism could potentially emerge – government participation or support, leadership changes and electoral fluctuations – allowing us to assess how RLPs deal with factionalism in diverse internal (e.g. leadership, intra-party balance) and external (e.g. electoral outcomes) political contexts. Within this framework, we follow a qualitative descriptive approach, providing a comprehensive account of a phenomenon (Sandelowski 2000), based on

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extensive semi-structured elite interviews and the complementary analysis of official party documents and press news.

The study of parties' internal life is not easy (Mudde 2007: 267) and all the more so when assessing how they manage factionalism. Moreover, parties are 'secretive organizations' (March 2011: 184), particularly regarding aspects that can blemish their external image such as factionalism. Like March (2011: 184), we consider 'in-depth qualitative comparison' the best method to assess these internal dynamics. By interviewing a wide set of current and former party and faction members at different hierarchical levels, we offer a privileged insight into the strategies and mechanisms by which factionalism is managed internally. Similar theory-building and hypothesis-generating approaches have been adopted in other studies dealing with RLPs (viz. Bale and Dunphy 2011; Keith 2018; Ştefuriuc and Verge 2008).

A total of 26 interviews – lasting on average 76 minutes – were conducted (face to face or online) and recorded between February and October 2020, almost evenly spread across the four parties (for a complete list, see the Supplementary Material). Non-probabilistic sampling was used to select respondents directly involved in the party leadership and main internal factions (Tansey 2007). These elites provided detailed information on several aspects of the internal functioning of RLPs, such as internal distribution of power, factional dynamics or the different strategies used in managing factionalism. To ensure research transparency, a detailed explanation of our empirical strategy and interview process is provided in the online Supplementary Material, as recommended by Erik Bleich and Robert Pekkanen (2013). The anonymity of the interviewees was guaranteed as this is a sensitive topic and many still hold important positions within their parties.

Managing party factionalism in Iberian RLPs

This section examines how factionalism is internally managed by the RLPs of Spain and Portugal. The first four subsections examine each party, providing a brief historical and organizational background, detailing factional dynamics in the 2010–2019 period, examining how the party views factions, and the mechanisms used to deal with factionalism. In the final subsection, we assess their strategies comparatively. We begin with the oldest existing RLP, the Portuguese PCP. To facilitate within-country comparison, we then assess the Portuguese BE, before examining the two Spanish RLPs.

Partido Comunista Português (PCP – Portuguese Communist Party)

The PCP is one of the last relevant conservative communist parties (Keith and March 2016) in Western Europe. The party never abandoned its ideological commitment to Marxism–Leninism and Leninist internal organization based on democratic centralism.

The party statutes clearly state the 'inadmissibility of fractions – understood as the formation of organized groups or tendencies' (PCP 2012), even if this has not prevented factionalism from emerging in the past. Since the late 1980s, the PCP has suffered at least three waves of internal dissidence, with the emergence of informal factions that unsuccessfully advocated for ideological and

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organizational renewal (Keith 2011). With the defeat of the 'renovators' reformist wing in the early 2000s – and the abandonment and expulsion of many prominent dissidents – the party strengthened its traditional Marxist-Leninist orientation and has maintained 'an environment of significant internal unity' (PCP2)[1] and ideological cohesion (PCP4).

Factional management is based on two closely intertwined pillars: organizational rules and party discipline. Regarding the first, the party's constitution stipulates that it must follow a unitary political orientation without external dissonance (PCP 2012). Following democratic centralism, its members are formally encouraged to express their opinions internally and 'contribute to the formation of such orientation'; but, once set, it 'must be put into practice by everyone' (PCP2). Once the party's position is defined, dissenting views should not be publicly expressed, nor can they organize collectively outside the party's internal structures. Factionalism is more than formally prohibited; it is 'actively fought internally' (PCP2) by the party leadership and organization. Failure to comply can lead to the application of party discipline.

The second pillar, party discipline, occurs primarily in the context of public expression of criticism – particularly when it has not been expressed internally (PCP4, PCP6, PCP7) – or other serious violations of the statutes, for example, 'situations of organized internal contestation to the leadership' (PCP2). In the case of public dissent, management mainly takes place at the regional or local levels, with the preferential approach being an informal conversation with dissenters (PCP3, PCP4, PCP6). Only 'in extreme cases' (PCP6), or when a 'permanent, repeated and systematic deceit' is maintained (PCP4), is formal discipline applied through the party's jurisdiction body, such as suspension or expulsion of members.

All interviewees refer to internal debate as the main instrument for building and maintaining intra-party cohesion. Internal freedom of expression and respect for divergent opinions are seen as fundamental to prevent factionalism. As several PCP members explain, democratic centralism only works if members are free to express their opinions internally and influence the party's political processes. Thus, party elites stress the 'great effort' (PCP1) put into deepening internal debate to accommodate different views in party positions. For example, on internally divisive issues (e.g. euthanasia) there is additional effort to define the party's position, sometimes even delaying a final decision (PCP2, PCP3, PCP6).

According to a former senior party cadre, this strategy results from a 'long historical experience in addressing these issues' (PCP1), which seems to benefit from the strong loyalty and discipline within its ranks. This may also explain why external factors such as electoral results seem to have little impact on intra-party cohesion (PCP4, PCP6, PCP7).

This is not to say that the party is immune to dissent. However, the party leadership actively seeks to limit its emergence and impact. This is best evidenced in the issue of the party's parliamentary support for a minority Socialist Party (PS) government in the 2015–2019 legislature (Jalali et al. 2020), in an arrangement also involving the BE, known as the 'contraption'.

The 'contraption' did not have universal support in the PCP. Much of the internal opposition to it was anonymous, notably through a blog (Que Fazer? – What Is to Be Done?)[2] created in 2016. Public dissent was limited. In 2018, a sacked

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party employee claimed he was persecuted due to his internal criticism of the 'contraption'; the party claimed that his dismissal resulted from his refusal to accept new responsibilities (Reis 2019). In 2019, a former local party official in a suburb of Lisbon said he was expelled from the party because of his criticism of the 'contraption'; the party alleges he embezzled party funds (*Diário de Notícias* 2019). Also in 2019, some 40 militants from the Viseu district were reported to have written a letter to the Central Committee claiming they had not been consulted about the 'contraption' (Ribeiro 2019).

While these instances of opposition attracted media interest, their internal expression appears to be very limited. Our interviewees stated that they had little impact within the party (PCP1–3, PCP7). This assessment is consistent with the enduring anonymous nature of the Que Fazer? blog, and the fact that public dissent involved very secondary party figures or militants from peripheral party structures. Yet, while this dissent is not very salient, it is nevertheless openly opposed by the party leadership. The Central Committee's communiqué of 8 October 2019, assessing the 2019 legislative election results, notes as one of the factors behind the results the 'prolonged and systematic attack' against the PCP, in which 'some former and current Party members have been a part'. The strategy is, therefore, to oppose dissent as soon as it emerges, even if it is not very significant.

Overall, the party appears to fit the monopolizing party control style identified by Chambers and Croissant (2010). The management of factionalism in the PCP is reflected at different organizational levels and enforced by strict rules. The party's leadership seeks to prevent the emergence of centrifugal dynamics through party discipline and the internal debate mechanisms provided by the Leninist organizational model. With the departure of the 'renovators' reformist wing from the party, this style faces little internal pushback.

Bloco de Esquerda (BE – Left Bloc)

The Left Bloc (BE) is a democratic socialist party (Keith and March 2016). Formed in 1999, it resulted from the merger of two small political parties, the former Maoist Popular Democratic Union (UDP) and the Trotskyist Revolutionary Socialist Party (PSR), and a platform of communist dissidents, Política XXI, giving it a more pluralistic but also more factionalized nature (Freire and Lisi 2016: 261). The first decade of the BE was marked by a largely cooperative dynamic (March 2011: 108), aided by the party's consistent electoral growth.

However, the first half of the 2010s saw internal conflict escalate in the party. The 2011 electoral setback, when the BE lost half of its parliamentary group, and a leadership change, with its historic party coordinator Francisco Louçã leaving the office in 2012, were followed by an 'explosion of internal divergences' (Lisi 2015: 64). First, Ruptura/FER, a Trotskyist-inspired current, left in 2011 to form a new political party. In 2013 and 2014, a new factional structure emerged. A new Tendência Socialismo (TS – Socialism Tendency) faction was created in 2013, congregating much of the former PSR group as well as some other internal groups, with the hegemonic objective of supplanting the party's original factions (Dinis 2014). However, this was not well received by the UDP group – excluded from the TS faction – which considered that the TS weakened the party's 'essential

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pluralism', leading to the formation of the Tendência Esquerda Alternativa (TEA – Alternative Left Tendency) in 2014 (BE4; Dinis 2014). Following a poor showing in the 2014 European elections, Fórum Manifesto, Política XXI's factional heir, also split due to the BE's unwillingness to cooperate with other left-wing parties (*Expresso* 2014).

This period culminated in an intense and divisive dispute between the TEA and TS at the 2014 Convention. The solution to the impasse, resulting from the tie between these two in the election for the party's main national body, the Mesa Nacional – and to the prevailing climate of conflict – was the informal adoption of a new leadership model, with the creation of a six-member Permanent Committee (Comissão Permanente), not foreseen in the party statutes, composed of two representatives each from the TEA and TS, and one from two other minority factions (Motion R and Motion B). This had the aim of 'bringing everybody on board' (BE5) and restoring 'bonds of trust' (BE3).

Good results in the 2015 legislative elections, with the party more than doubling its parliamentary group, and internal consensus over parliamentary support for the PS government as part of the 'contraption', would lead to a 'rapprochement' between the TEA and TS[3] (BE1, BE5). By the 2016 Convention, stable cooperation between these two groups had established a new dominant coalition that sustained the party leadership and ran together in internal elections, often with the inclusion of some smaller factions, while maintaining a competitive dynamic towards others (e.g. Motion R, critical of the 'contraption' deal) (BE1–5, BE7). The previous Permanent Committee was disbanded, with leadership centralized around party coordinator Catarina Martins and the party's inner circle, consisting of senior leaders from both the TEA and TS (BE1, BE5, BE7).

Interviewees valued internal pluralism and considered it a political asset of the party (BE1, BE3, BE6). In the words of a minority faction leader, 'the tradition of a collective and shared leadership … cooperative between factions, is what best describes the reality of the Left Bloc' (BE7). Yet, members affiliated with minor factions also claim that the hegemonic status of the new dominant coalition since 2016 has put this 'tradition' under threat (BE5, BE7), as it often leads to the exclusion of smaller groups from decision-making processes.

Factionalism management in the BE lies essentially in negotiation, power-sharing and spoils-sharing between its main factions, through formal and informal mechanisms. Party statutes were amended in 2014 to establish the proportional election of the Political Committee (BE 2014), extending the representation of political minorities to the party's main executive body. Moreover, Party Convention rules state that no motion can exceed more than two-thirds of the overall speaking time (BE3, BE7). Candidate lists for external elections also tend to respect a careful (but informal) distribution of seats through prior negotiation among factions, though essentially among those that compose the dominant coalition of the moment (BE1, BE5, BE7). Furthermore, internal electoral processes are usually preceded by informal contacts between faction representatives to build inclusive joint lists (BE2, BE5, BE6), to 'avoid a competitive dynamic' (BE3).

Faction leaders and informality play a central role in these processes: 'The BE works on the basis of informality … there is always a good deal of backroom mediation' (BE5). The 'intra-factional channel' allows faction leaders to discipline

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members of their own groups (BE1), while inter-faction 'mediation' allows them to settle internal disputes and prevent their emergence. For example, an informal 'prior facilitation' (BE1) before meetings of the party's executive bodies minimizes the divisive potential of certain issues (also BE2, BE6). However, this is at the exclusion of smaller factions (BE5, BE7), which can lead to party splits (Lopes 2019). Formal party discipline is rarely used to deal with factionalism.[4] Dissent and public criticism are rather met with internal criticism (BE7) or informal discipline (e.g. a phone call) (BE5) when coming from members with executive responsibilities in the party (BE4).

Overall, the BE fits the mutualized consensus style of managing factionalism. Its two major factions have a stable cooperation and power-sharing relationship. This is largely facilitated by the party's formal rules, such as proportionality in executive bodies, and informal mechanisms such as prior negotiation and seat-sharing for elected offices. At the same time, the BE highlights the limits of this style. The mutualized consensus essentially revolves around the two main factions. Smaller factions are integrated only if their positions do not challenge the dominant TS–TEA group. For instance, a new faction emerged in 2018 (Via Esquerda, Left Lane), opposing the BE's continued cooperation with the Socialist Party in the 'contraption' (Botelho 2019). While this included some prominent party members (including one of the members of the 2014–2016 Permanent Committee), the pattern has been one of the dominant TS–TEA coalition excluding rather than cooperating with this new faction, denying it spoils by excluding it from the 2019 parliamentary lists. This, as well as the defections and splits from the party (not least from the Fórum Manifesto tendency, one of the party's founding groups), shows the limits to the minority 'voice' within the party.

There remain two open questions regarding this mutualized consensus. The first is its resistance to electoral setbacks. The good performance in the 2015 and 2019 elections helped consolidate cooperation between the TS and TEA. However, the BE had its worst result in 20 years in the January 2022 snap election. Early signs point to a potential resurgence of centrifugal dynamics (*Diário de Notícias* 2022), which may test the party's mutualized consensus. The second pertains to its resilience to shifts in the internal balance of power. The cooperation between the TS and TEA arose as a solution to the deadlock in the 2014 Convention. The question that remains is whether cooperation would have emerged if one of the factions had prevailed in this vote, creating a majority-versus-minority factional competition. As the case of the IU below shows, cooperation between factions may be weakened when one of the contending sides gains internal strength. This scenario is consistent with the relationship between the dominant TS–TEA coalition and dissenting smaller factions and groups in the BE.

Izquierda Unida (IU – United Left)

The IU started as an electoral coalition led by the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) in 1986, evolving in 1992 into a federation that integrates ideologically diverse political organizations. The IU 'works as a conventional party' with an organization that resembles 'that of a party with well-structured factions, with the small parties within IU … operating as the functional equivalents of factions' (Ramiro 2016:

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313). Its internal life has been characterized by high levels of factionalism and conflict that have led to major party splits and defections (Ramiro 2016; Verge and Gómez 2012).

During the last decade, the IU has faced distinct periods of factional cooperation and competition. Between 2010 and 2013 we find a more cooperative phase. This derived from the resolution of factional tensions in 2008. The party was 'quite divided' (IU3) after a disastrous electoral result (3.8%) in the 2008 general election, especially over ideological renewal and support for the centre-left Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) government (Ramiro 2016; Verge 2010). The elections for the party leadership and national executive committee, contested by five factional candidacies, resulted in a deadlock. Although the PCE faction's candidate (Cayo Lara) received the most votes (43% of the delegates' votes in the Federal Assembly), he did not win a majority. A month-long negotiation between the factions resolved this by establishing a plural executive that included members of all five candidacies, with Lara as federal coordinator (Verge 2010: 101). This initiated a process of cooperation within the party that culminated in Lara's re-election in 2012 on the first unitary internal list in the IU since 1994, incorporating different factions (IU3, IU4).

Underlying this apparent unity was an agreement between the two main factions of the PCE, the *conservadores* (led by Lara and then PCE secretary-general, José Luis Centella) and the *renovadores* (of Centella's successor since 2018, Enrique Santiago), to carry out an organizational 're-foundation' of the IU (IU4–6; Verge 2010), with the aim of 'opening up' the party (IU5) and strengthening its 'participatory and environmental linkages' (Tarditi 2015: 226). This reflected a growing tension between 'classical' party structures and the horizontal organization models of emerging social movements such as the Indignados. However, the competitive dynamic was reignited soon after, in 2013, as the *conservadores* resisted implementing participatory mechanisms, such as open primaries in the 2014 European elections (IU1, IU4–6), or a rapprochement with the newcomer Podemos (Ramiro 2016).

The subsequent electoral success of Podemos and declining IU vote in the 2015 elections undermined party unity as well as support for the *conservadores*. Consequently, Lara did not contest the 2016 internal elections for the party leadership. The *conservadores* list he supported was heavily defeated by the *renovadores* list, headed by Alberto Garzón, which won 74% of the votes in the first open primaries for the election of the party's executive bodies. The new leadership's strategy – which culminated in the formation of the electoral coalition Unidos Podemos in 2016 – nevertheless continued to divide the party and cause internal contestation, leading to a split with some internal opposition groups, such as the Izquierda Abierta (IAb – Open Left) of former party leader Gaspar Llamazares in 2019 (IU1, IU3, IU5, IU7).

Factionalism occurs at both the national and regional levels, reflecting the regionalization of Spanish politics. In line with other works (e.g. Ştefuriuc and Verge 2008), data from our interviews (IU5–7) support the idea that the regional–national-level interplay is relevant in the internal balance of power. The regional level can serve as a bulwark for minority factions, including enabling these to win office. Two interviewees illustrated this with the case of Valencia,

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where a more orthodox faction of the PCE defeated the party leadership's candidate in the primaries for the 2019 legislative elections (IU2, IU7). This makes the regional level a significant arena for factional competition, as exemplified in the open competition between *conservadores* and *renovadores* in the Madrid regional branch from 2012, where the latter sought to win power in order to pressure the party leadership to implement organizational reform ('re-foundation'), presaging the national tension between the two (IU5, IU6).

Like the BE, the IU also embraces pluralism in its statutes and allows the existence of parties and factions in the organization (IU 2016). Internal diversity and cooperation between factions is 'common' and seen as something 'natural' in the party (IU2, IU6). The party's collegial bodies are elected by proportional representation, and the Political and Social Assembly (PSA) (until 2016, the Federal Political Council) – the IU's main federal body – reserves a quota of its seats for representatives of the regional party branches ('federations'). Following organizational reform in 2016, the federations' quota increased from 30% to 40%, and all parties and *corrientes* (i.e. internally recognized factions) gained formal representation in the IU's main collegial bodies (IU 2012, 2016). The PSA must now include two representatives of each *corriente* and at least three of each party, while the Federal Coordination body (Coordinadora Federal) has two representatives of each party and one of each *corriente* (IU 2016). This endows the IU's statutory rules with broader formal power-sharing mechanisms than those of the BE.

These are complemented by informal mechanisms for cooperation, which include the integration of political minorities in executive responsibilities by the winning list, a common practice (IU1, IU2, IU4–7). It also includes informal spoils-sharing between factions in defining party electoral lists, to reflect diversity and preserve the party's internal balance (IU2, IU3, IU6).

Informal mediation between regional and faction leaders and the party leader is also common (IU1–7). The party leader is often assisted by his secretary of organization, whom 'in the IU we call … the plumber, who puts pressure on the pipes, identifies the leaks and tries to negotiate' (IU6). The PCE and its leadership emerge as key actors in this context (IU4–5, IU7); and a key counter-power when not in tune with the IU leadership (IU6, IU7).

However, the interviews also highlight the limits to this cooperation. As a major faction member recognizes, these mechanisms do not necessarily translate into an effective power-sharing between major and minor factions, with minority factions relegated to less consequential roles in the party's executive bodies (IU4). Moreover, the introduction of internal primaries to select IU candidates in late 2014 has increased factional competition in candidate selection (IU1, IU7).

Cooperation between factions appears to hinge on internal balances of power, as well as internal and external pressures (e.g. electoral results, the success of new competitors) (IU4, IU7). Lara's leadership (2008–2016) had a weak majority, requiring greater cooperation with the different factions and federations (IU4, IU5). Yet, when the leadership enjoyed a larger majority and the support of a dominant faction – under Garzón – external threats (e.g. Podemos) and strategic disagreements led to a less cooperative approach towards dissenting factions (IU5, IU7), resulting in disciplinary proceedings (e.g. against IAb) and the termination of the agreement with Esquerra Unida i Alternativa (EUiA – United and

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Alternative Left), the IU's Catalonian counterpart. To legitimize decisions or settle factional conflicts – for example, to approve electoral coalitions or the government agreement with PSOE in 2019 – the leadership has resorted to mechanisms such as referenda and direct consultation of the rank and file (IU2–5, IU7).

Like the BE, the IU allows internal pluralism and seeks to manage it through formal and informal power-sharing mechanisms. Internal dissent is allowed, and factions have often expressed their disagreement publicly. However, when facing a challenging external context, particularly with the emergence of Podemos in 2014, and growing centrifugal tendencies, the party has increasingly resorted to intra-party discipline and less cooperative instruments to settle internal conflicts. The experience of the IU suggests the potential limits to power-sharing in moments of crisis when one faction holds greater internal power. Overall, the evolving and often unstable internal coalitions – also stemming from the party's multilevel factionalism – arguably place the IU closer to the muddling through than the mutualized consensus type.

Podemos (We Can)

Podemos emerged in 2014 as a radical left populist formation after the confluence of a group of left-wing academics (led by Pablo Iglesias and Iñigo Errejón), activists linked to the 15-M protest movement, and a former IU faction – Izquierda Anticapitalista (IA – Anticapitalist Left) (Lisi 2019). The party's 'hybrid' organizational model features 'an odd mixture of direct democracy … and a plebiscitary leadership' (Lisi 2019: 15), in which party centralization and weak internal and territorial structures leave few internal checks and balances on the party leadership (Mikola 2018; Ramiro 2016; P2–4, P6). What at first was an electoral strategy designed to capitalize on Iglesias's popularity soon translated into an increasing concentration of power and decision-making in the hands of the secretary-general and his closest ally group (P1–4, P6), despite its decentralized participatory mechanisms (e.g. local circles).

During its short existence, the party has been characterized by a strongly competitive intra-party dynamic, with severe factional infighting and party splits. After a brief period of initial cooperation, the three main factions of Podemos – Pablistas, Errejonistas and the smaller IA faction, Anticapitalistas (see Mikola 2017) – fought for control of the party apparatus (P3–5). The competition between Anticapitalistas and the Claro que Podemos bloc – led by Iglesias and Errejón – resulted in a heavy defeat of the former at the first party congress in 2014 (Vistalegre I) and their dismissal from the party's main decision-making spheres (P1, P4, P5). Later, the cooperation between Iglesias and Errejón would also come to an end in Vistalegre II (February 2017), with the defeat of the Errejonistas and their virtual exclusion from the party leadership (P5, P6; Chazel and Fernandéz-Vázquez 2020). In January 2019, the 'Declaration of Toledo' brought together a set of regional leaders to pacify hostilities between the party's main factions (Bravo 2019), but this effort was largely ignored and met with hostility by the leadership (P3). Podemos's internal power then crystallized around the secretary-general, Iglesias – who remained the party's undisputed leader (P4, P6) – with Errejón (in 2019) and the Anticapitalistas eventually leaving the party over strategic

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differences (e.g. cooperation with the PSOE) and amid accusations of there being 'little space for collective pluralist work' (Anticapitalistas 2020).

These internal dynamics can potentially be better understood if we delve into how factions were perceived within Podemos. Understanding conflict between antagonistic blocs as an essential aspect of politics and a feature that reinforces – rather than weakens – democracy, Podemos was born with 'hegemonic and state aspirations' (Errejón and Mouffe 2016: 120). It aimed to reach power by building and mobilizing a counter-hegemonic notion of the 'people' against the 'caste' (Errejón and Mouffe 2016; Franzé 2018; P2). As Pablo Iglesias (2015) put it, factions were thus entities that could hijack the party, isolate it from the people and threaten the hegemonic construct. Hence, not only were they not allowed to organize formally, but their informal existence was also treated with hostility (P2, P5, P6).

Podemos's intra-party democracy works de facto in an agonistic manner (see Franzé 2018), with factionalism being managed in a way that leaves little room for negotiation and consensus-building (P4, P6). The first mechanism to promote party unity is statutory: the non-recognition of factions and the prohibition of members of party bodies to maintain competing political affiliations (P2, P5). This marks a clear break with an IU-like structure and forced the Anticapitalistas faction to dissolve into a political association (EFE 2015) – which, nevertheless, operated always as 'an organization within the organization' (P2; similar sentiments were also expressed in P3, P4).

Another 'unwritten directive' is to avoid the establishment of 'local baronets' (P2) – that is, territorially anchored factionalism (as in the IU) – by centralizing the party in Madrid. As a result, the autonomy of the party's regional branches is substantially limited (P2, P3), with the selection of parliamentary candidates being effectively decided unilaterally by the central leadership (P4), despite being formally elected through open primaries at the regional level. Nevertheless, opposition factions can benefit from the Spanish quasi-federal political system and avoid complete marginalization if they secure regional-level representation within (e.g. the leadership of regional party branches) and outside the party structure (e.g. in the autonomic regional parliaments), as was the case of Anticapitalistas in Andalucía. This enabled the Anticapitalistas to negotiate with the Pablistas for a place in the party executive (Consejo de Coordinación), occupying the Secretariat for Europe, in exchange for support in ousting the Errejonistas (P1). However, shortly afterwards, the Anticapitalistas faced greater internal hostility (P1; Torres 2018) and their representative in the executive was demoted (Riveiro 2019).

Dissent in Podemos is resolved in a predominantly confrontational manner. Most interviewees stress the lack of substantial and constructive debate in intra-party bodies (P1–3, P5). Political divergence tends to be settled by choosing between competing alternatives, through confrontation in internal electoral processes and majoritarian 'winner-takes-all' mechanisms (e.g. primaries, referenda) that – with rare exceptions – tend to be won by the secretary-general's supported candidates in a 'climate of civil war' (P3; also P1–6):

> It's enough to say: 'well, the procedure is completely formal, open and democratic. Present your proposal, we are not going to negotiate … we'll measure it in the open primaries.' But, of course, … [with] a selectorate composed of tens

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of thousands of people whose only reality they know about Podemos is that they see Pablo on TV … that has [an] inevitable result. (P4)

Candidate selection for internal and external elections follows a highly disproportional voting system (DesBorda) that works against minority factions (P1, P4–5). Party members do publicly express their dissent, with clashes between factions often occurring aggressively in the media (P1–4; see also *elDiario.es* 2016). But internal criticism and opposition to the party leadership can be poorly tolerated (P2) and come at a heavy cost. Several internal critics appear to have been 'punished' with loss of funding (P1, P5); lack of public support during campaigns (P1, P3, P5); removal from intra-party positions (Carvajal 2017); exclusion from the media (García 2017); or targeted for disciplinary proceedings and even expulsion (P4, P5; Riveiro 2018).

Podemos thus fits the monopolizing control style of managing factionalism. Unlike the BE or IU, in Podemos there seems to be no real effort to establish consensus-building and power-sharing mechanisms that counteract centrifugal tendencies. Rather, factional confrontation is largely settled through 'winner-takes-all' internal mechanisms that reflect an eminently adversarial view of politics. The centralization of the party, the presidentialization of its leadership (see Ramiro 2016) and the lack of internal 'mediation' mechanisms have contributed to a situation where the dominant internal group holds sway.

Comparative findings

Table 1 summarizes the main findings of the four cases. The analysis suggests two distinct approaches. In the BE and IU, factionalism is an accepted part of internal party life (a *permissive* approach), requiring factions to coexist. In the PCP and Podemos, factions are formally forbidden and actively opposed (a *prohibitionist* approach). In the latter we find what Chambers and Croissant (2010) characterize as a monopolizing party control style of managing factionalism. The permissive approach of the BE and IU tends towards mutualized consensus, with attempts to reach stable consensus between factions; or, when unable to do so, short-term compromises and alliances between them, which Chambers and Croissant (2010) term as muddling through.

These approaches reflect distinct ideological and genetic characteristics. Albeit different from each other, the agonism of Podemos and the Leninist democratic centralism of the PCP help explain their prohibitionist approach. In these two RLPs, factions are seen as an undesirable manifestation in the unitary orientation of the 'vanguard party' (PCP) and the hegemonic representation of the 'people' (Podemos). The IU and BE, on the other hand, emerged as federations of various left-wing parties and groups, precluding a uniform political orientation and setting the stage for a more permissive approach. Hence, their intra-party models tend to function in a more pluralist way. In these RLPs, factions are seen as a natural part of intra-party life.

While the PCP and Podemos share a prohibitionist view and a monopolizing control management style, they do so in distinct ways. In the PCP, it is asserted through democratic centralism, which does not allow public dissent or the use

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Table 1. Management of Intra-Party Factionalism (2010–2019)

	PCP	BE	IU	Podemos
Understanding of intra-party democracy	Democratic centralism	Pluralism	Pluralism	Agonistic
Approach to factionalism	Prohibitionist	Permissive	Permissive	Prohibitionist
Prevailing factional dynamic	Not significant	Cooperative–competitive	Cooperative–competitive	Competitive
Management style	Monopolized	Mutualized consensus	Muddle-through/mutualized consensus	Monopolized
Party management instruments and mechanisms	Organizational rules; party discipline; intra-party debate	Negotiation and power-sharing; internal and external representation in party bodies and candidate lists; informal mediation between factions	Power-sharing; informal mediation; majoritarian-friendly instruments (e.g. referenda); party discipline towards parties/regional federations	Plebiscitary/leadership imposition (e.g. referenda); majoritarian voting system (internal and external elections); party discipline

of internal elections to settle disputes. The party seeks to deal with factionalism in an ex-ante manner, avoiding its organization and expression, using formal disciplinary mechanisms against recalcitrant party members when the initial informal mechanisms are unsuccessful. In the case of Podemos, factionalism is dealt with in an ex-post manner. Dissent is not blocked and is often very public, with little attempt at finding common ground between different positions. Instead, the party settles dissent through competitive, winner-takes-all internal votes, generating competitive prohibitionism as opposed to the pre-emptive prohibitionism of the PCP. These different mechanisms nevertheless generate fairly similar outcomes, with the internal opposition unable to endure in the main party bodies or to access resources.

The permissive approach is reflected in the statutes of the IU and BE. Not only do they formally permit factions, they also adopt elements of power-sharing (notably, the proportional election of party bodies). However, these parties fall short of having a formal power-sharing model (e.g. with minority faction veto or statutory faction quotas in party lists for external elections). This makes informal mediation, negotiation and distribution of spoils crucial for internal power-sharing.

These two parties' experiences in 2008 and 2014 highlight how the management of factionalism involves the interaction between formal mechanisms and informal practices. In both, the adoption of proportional representation for the election of their executive bodies led to an internal deadlock between factions, forcing them to find informal solutions, such as the creation of a power-sharing Permanent Committee in the BE that was not foreseen in the statutes; or the establishment of a plural executive in the IU.

The management of factionalism also interacts with the broader political system. We find no significant role for factions at the subnational level in the Portuguese RLPs, consistent with the country's unitary political system. This contrasts with the two Spanish parties, where the quasi-federal political system plays an important role (see Verge and Gómez 2012). In the case of the prohibitionist Podemos, holding power at the subnational level can provide a (temporary) buffer for smaller opposition factions against the dominant internal group. In the case of the more permissive IU, the high autonomy of the party's regional federations generates a multilevel interaction of factional dynamics that potentially fosters a muddle-through management of factionalism.

Neither approach fully contains intra-party conflict. In the case of the prohibitionist approach, interdiction does not preclude factionalism. Rather, it can lead to internal competition between factions, in a majoritarian winner-takes-all logic, with the losing side being marginalized and often leaving the party, as Podemos illustrates. While the PCP avoided significant factional divides in this period, it faced waves of internal conflict between the late 1980s and early 2000s; and its lack of factionalism since 2010 arguably reflects the earlier departure of dissenting factions.

The more permissive approach of the BE and IU also does not preclude intra-party competition and factional exit. Both parties appear to be more prone to internal competition between factions in the aftermath of major strategic decisions or poor electoral results. In both we also find instances where the initial deadlock provoked by greater factionalism was finally resolved through greater power-

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sharing, as evidenced in the IU in 2008 and the BE in 2014. Arguably, this power-sharing prevented internal competition from becoming 'degenerative'. However, this adaptability also has its limits. Internal power-sharing is concentrated in the main factions, with some minority factions in both the BE and the IU choosing to exit the party after perceiving they had an insufficient internal voice. Moreover, shifts in the internal balance of power, with one faction becoming stronger, can give way to less consensual internal dynamics, as is the case of the IU since the mid-2010s.

This outcome also raises a relevant question: how can RLPs then avoid the negative effects of factionalism? While beyond the direct scope of our study, the findings do suggest some potential avenues for future research on this question. In the permissive parties, we find that internal cooperation emerges when there is balance between factions. However, in the BE and IU, this cooperation is largely informal. As the case of the IU suggests, informality makes this cooperation potentially less resilient to shifts in the internal balance of power. This raises the question of whether formal power-sharing mechanisms may be more stable in sustaining long-term cooperation and mutualized consensus. As for prohibitionist parties, the case of the PCP suggests that this strategy reduces internal factionalism in the long run by driving out adversarial factions, thus producing greater internal homogeneity. It will be interesting to assess if this result is replicated in Podemos in the coming years. And the open question is whether this strategy comes with electoral costs.

Conclusions

Factionalism is an important feature of political parties. However, little is known about how parties address it internally. This study sheds light on how RLPs manage factionalism, assessing the four RLPs of Spain and Portugal.

The Iberian RLPs manage factionalism in very different ways. While some are permissive of internal pluralism (IU, BE), others (Podemos, PCP) adopt a prohibitionist perspective and a monopolizing control style, seeing factionalism as a phenomenon to be avoided or actively fought. These different approaches reflect parties' origins and political orientation. The Marxism-Leninism of the PCP and the hegemonic representation of the 'people' of Podemos contributed to their prohibitionist approach to factionalism. In the case of the BE and IU, their origin as federations of various parties and groups underpins a permissive approach.

However, these similar approaches can be sustained through very different mechanisms and generate distinct styles of managing factionalism. The PCP engages in a pre-emptive and ex-ante prohibitionism that seeks to avoid dissent from being organized. In contrast, Podemos has a competitive ex-post prohibitionism, using internal votes to settle dissenting views. Likewise, we find a distinction between the mutualized consensus style of the BE, with stable cooperation between its main factions; and the less stable internal alliances of the IU, more akin to a muddle-through style. These findings show how the distinctive characteristics of RLPs are associated with different strategies and instruments for dealing with factionalism, with potential implications more broadly across party types. They also demonstrate how the management of factionalism involves a combination of formal mechanisms and informal practices, echoing the findings of Andrea Ceron (2019).

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This study constitutes, to the best of our knowledge, the first attempt to study the management of factionalism from a party family perspective. It sheds light on an opaque aspect of parties' internal life, generating hypotheses that merit further research. Future studies may consider if these findings hold more generally across RLPs, especially when studying other radical left populist (e.g. La France Insoumise), Marxist-Leninist (e.g. Communist Party of Greece – KKE) or democratic socialist parties (e.g. the German Die Linke) embedded in different political, cultural and historical contexts. Similarly, it raises the question of whether these findings translate more broadly to other party families and types, or about factionalism's wider impact on cross-party cooperation and government formation. Factionalism may be a fact of life; but it is also one that merits renewed scrutiny.

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Notes

1 References to interviews are given thus, with the party initials and the interview number. More detail on the interviews is given in the Supplementary Material.

2 Currently available at https://quefazerquefazer.wixsite.com/info.

3 The TS dissolved in 2015 and was largely succeeded by the Rede Anticapitalista (RA – Anticapitalist Network) from 2016. Between 2014 and 2018, the TS (and then RA) operated largely under the umbrella of the Plataforma Unitária (Unitary Platform), which included other smaller groups. For ease of reading, we use its original acronym for the remainder of the section.

4 An exception occurred when a small Trotskyist group (Revolutionary Socialism) was accused of illegal 'infiltration' and expelled from the party (Claro 2017).

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