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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Mini-Publics and Party Ideology: Who Commissioned the Deliberative Wave in Europe?

Rodrigo Ramis-Moyano\*, Graham Smith†, Ernesto Ganuza‡ and Thamy Pogrebinschi§

The increasing implementation of deliberative mini-publics (DMPs) such as Citizens' Assemblies and Citizens' Juries led the OECD to identify a 'deliberative wave'. The burgeoning scholarship on DMPs has increased understanding of how they operate and their impact, but less attention has been paid to the drivers behind this diffusion. Existing research on democratic innovations has underlined the role of the governing party's ideology as a relevant variable in the study of the adoption of other procedures such as participatory budgeting, placing left-wing parties as a prominent actor in this process. Unlike this previous literature, we have little understanding of whether mini-publics appeal equally across the ideological spectrum. This paper draws on the large-N OECD database to analyse the impact of governing party affiliation on the commissioning of DMPs in Europe across the last four decades. Our analysis finds the ideological pattern of adoption is less clear cut compared to other democratic innovations such as participatory budgeting. But stronger ideological differentiation emerges when we pay close attention to the design features of DMPs implemented.

**Keywords:** deliberative mini-publics; political parties; ideology; Europe; citizens' assemblies

## Introduction

Democratic innovations have expanded globally over the last thirty years, becoming a recognised practice of public administrations at different levels of the polity. The multiple crises facing representative democracy have triggered growing interest in these procedures, not least because of the ways in which they can expand the number and diversity of voices heard in political decision-making, open new channels of citizen influence and foster democratic skills of citizens (Geissel & Newton 2012; Smith 2009). These procedures, with their many democratic potentials, promise to increase the responsiveness of public administrations, cushion resistance to controversial policy decisions, improve the provision of services and, consequently, increase the legitimacy of public policies (Warren 2009).

The worldwide diffusion of democratic innovations has occurred in overlapping waves, which can be related to different models (and theories) of democracy. Around

the turn of the century, for example, we saw the global expansion of participatory budgeting (PB) (Sintomer et al. 2016), which was strongly associated with the ideas of participatory democracy. In the last decade, we have witnessed the diffusion of deliberative mini-publics (DMPs), which has been closely connected to principles of deliberative democracy (Smith & Setälä 2018). The rapid expansion of DMPs, mostly across highly industrialized nations, has led the OECD (2020) to identify an ongoing 'deliberative wave'. While a significant amount of research has been undertaken on the potential and limits of DMPs (e.g., Grönlund et al. 2014; Reuchamps et al. 2023), we have scant knowledge of the actors who promote them and, most importantly, on the influence different political parties may have on the commissioning of deliberative procedures (Gherghina & Jacquet 2022).

The role political parties play in the expansion of DMPs is crucial to understand whether the 'deliberative wave' is the product of a particular ideological orientation. Political parties with distinct ideological affiliations – and consequently different values and interpretations of democracy (Heywood 2012) – represent different understandings of what citizen participation is, its democratic purposes and its centrality to the functioning of representative democracy (e.g., Kittilson & Scarrow 2003; Verge 2007). Left-wing parties have traditionally been associated with advocating a greater connection of political decision-making with the citizenry (Fung & Wright 2001), an idea that is reinforced by evidence that

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leftist politicians have a more favourable attitude towards deliberative procedures than right-wing ones (e.g., Jacquet et al. 2022; Junius et al. 2020; Rangoni et al. 2021). Yet, with the exception of a few studies (Kübler et al. 2020; Saradín et al. 2022), the influence of party ideology on the actual commissioning of DMPs has been largely overlooked.

The importance of this variable in the diffusion of democratic innovations, however, has been confirmed in the expansion of PB. Research on PB shows that the leftist ideology of the governing party was crucial in its emergence and initial expansion, but became less relevant as the procedure diffused across the globe and became standardised (Pogrebinschi 2023; Ramírez & Welp 2011). Although the importance of party ideology seems to fade over time, ideology has continued to influence the characteristics of PBs in terms of design (Ganuza & Francés 2012; Sintomer et al. 2016). Where commissioners are left-wing parties, the procedures tend to have an institutional design that fosters greater deliberative quality and a greater capacity to empower participants. Identifying the effects of party ideology on DMPs thus appears crucial for enhancing our understanding of the development of the 'deliberative wave'. It also provides valuable insights into how political actors interact with deliberative procedures and, more broadly, democratic innovations.

This article investigates the influence of governing party's ideology in the commissioning of deliberative mini-publics. Are political parties with particular ideological affiliations more involved in the commissioning of DMPs? Does the institutional design of DMPs vary according to the ideology of governing parties? To begin to answer these questions, we briefly review the existing literature on party ideology and democratic innovations, before moving to an analysis of the OECD dataset of all known DMPs commissioned by public authorities in Europe over the last four decades. Our results, which provide the first descriptive insights of a large-N dataset of DMPs, show that the ideological pattern of adoption is less clear cut compared to other democratic innovations such as participatory budgeting. But stronger ideological differentiation emerges when we pay close attention to the design features of DMPs implemented.

### Does Ideology Matter?

The political will of public officials often comes to the fore when the causal factors explaining the promotion of democratic innovations are discussed (e.g., Kübler et al. 2020; Ryan 2021). Although it is often suggested that politicians have strong reasons not to adopt these procedures or, at the very least, to distrust them (Thompson 2019), the literature on political representatives' attitudes towards DMPs has shown that they are not all equally reluctant: left-wing politicians are more willing to launch these procedures, while those on the right are more reluctant to do so (e.g., Jacquet et al. 2022; Junius et al. 2020; Rangoni et al. 2021). This seems not only related to ideological self-placement. Research analysing party discourses has found equivalent results, with left-wing parties being the most vocal about increasing the means

for citizen participation in policy-making (e.g., Kittilson & Scarrow 2003; Verge 2007). Leftist parties tend to emphasise the potential beneficial effects that these procedures could have on democratic goods such as inclusiveness, popular control and considered judgement – in contrast to the efficiency or legitimacy, which are more emphasised by right-wing parties. Despite this evidence, very few studies have investigated the extent to which the ideology of political parties influences actual commissioning of deliberative mini-publics. Rare examples include Kübler and colleagues (2020) who found no relationship between Left/Green vote share in Switzerland and DMP commissioning. They show that the prevalence of DMPs is higher in contexts with greater party fragmentation. In Prague (Czech Republic), Saradín et al. (2022) find that the commissioning of democratic innovations (including among them DMPs) is more related to the differences between traditional and new parties than to their ideology.

The results of these studies seem to suggest the lack of influence of party ideology on the commissioning of DMPs. However, these are very particular contexts. What would the results of a more comprehensive analysis look like? Furthermore, the main vein of scholarship around the diffusion of democratic innovations – focussed on the study of PBs – has shown the influence of the ideology of governing parties rather than electoral vote share. Drawing on the PB literature allows us to build some hypotheses about what we may find for the case of the commissioning of DMPs by ideologically different governing parties, while being aware of the potential differences that exist between different 'families' of democratic innovations (Smith 2009) and the potential complexities of the relationship between party ideology and the commissioning of these procedures that PB scholarship exposes.

The most well-studied set of PB procedures is those in Brazil. Several scholars demonstrate that the leftist *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers' Party, PT) played a crucial role in increasing the adoption of the PB at the local level (e.g., Avritzer & Wampler 2008; Spada 2014). The relationship between leftist parties and the commissioning of PB has also proved relevant in other Latin-American countries (Dias 2014). However, over a number of years, administrations affiliated to other ideologies increasingly responded to the diffusion of PB. According to both Ramirez and Welp (2011) and Pogrebinschi (2023), the left has lost the 'monopoly' of participatory democracy in Latin America. They show how, since the 2000s, an increasing number of political parties from the centre to the right (and without major distinctions between Neoconservatives and Liberals) have adopted various democratic innovations in the course of their administrations. While ideological commitment to participation is certainly not meaningless, time plays a moderating role on this relationship. International agencies and experts gradually joined the 'PB wave', standardising criteria for the implementation of these procedures and promoting them across governments of all ideological persuasions. Toolkits and professionals who design and implement these procedures enabled

widespread adoption. In such a context where participation is widely facilitated by laws, international agencies and participatory consultants, the dissemination of procedures may surpass ideological commitments (Baiocchi & Ganuza 2017). In Latin America, the relevance of left-wing parties is therefore more evident in the initial stages of PB diffusion.

The adoption of participatory budgeting in Europe shows a similar pattern. In most European countries, the first steps in the diffusion of PB tended to be led by left-leaning parties. This is the case for Spain, Italy, and France, for example, where mostly leftist local authorities introduced PB (Sintomer et al. 2016). Once established, ideology gradually ceases to be important. In Italy, left-wing parties conducted the introduction of PB in the early 2000s. As they lost the subsequent municipal elections, PB almost disappeared, but by 2009 the ideology of municipal governments was no longer a decisive factor (Allegretti & Stortone 2014). A similar trend can be found in Spain, where leftist parties introduced PB in the early 2000s, and slowly conservative parties followed in their wake (Ganuza & Francés 2012). Exceptions to the general trend exist. Germany is an outlier: both Conservative and Liberal local governments were early adopters (Röcke 2014). Translating these findings to the case of deliberative mini-publics, and considering the existing research that suggests more positive attitudes of left-wing politicians to these procedures (e.g., Jacquet et al. 2022; Junius et al. 2020; Rangoni et al. 2021), we expect to find a comparable situation: that left-wing governments will have a greater presence in the early adoption of these procedures.

Literature on PB also shows us that it is not enough to simply look at the ideological position of the parties driving diffusion of a named democratic innovation; it is also necessary to look at the specific institutional design characteristics of commissioned procedures. Even with increasing standardisation of implementation (Baiocchi & Ganuza 2017), Sintomer and colleagues (2016) highlight differences in the PB models implemented in Europe and the differential role that political families have had in their commissioning. They identify six 'ideal-types', each of which differ in terms of origin, the organisation of meetings, the nature of deliberation and the weight of civil society in the procedure. In their analysis, they find that the 'participatory democracy' model is clearly linked to left-wing governments, both Social-Democratic and New Left. This model is characterised by openness to all citizens, with a strong role for them in decision-making and an emphasis on good-quality deliberation. The model aims to build links between conventional and non-conventional politics to enhance political impact and to help build a strong and autonomous civil society. The remaining models have been implemented almost equally among the different political families. These tend to have a more 'administrative' vocation – citizens are conceived of as consumers and participation as a way of scoping their preferences, with little opportunity to mobilise civil society. Hence, beyond its influence on the greater or lesser adoption of democratic innovations, the ideology of governing party can also influence the design characteristics of the procedures implemented.

This is crucial in terms of the democratic goods of these procedures and for analysing DMPs' potential impact on the functioning of our democracies. Unlike in the case of PB, no studies exist that have addressed how ideology influences the democratic characteristics of implemented DMPs.

Overall, we can thus say that the left seems more inclined to experiment with new procedures such as PB, while parties on the right of the political spectrum tend to replicate those (successful) democratic innovations. Once a given democratic innovation is established and its relative success makes it an attractive governance option, its adoption tends to be less influenced by ideological positions. As for the features of democratic innovations, following the evidence from PB research, the left appears to be more focussed on those procedures that have a high deliberative quality and a clearer impact on public policies; on those procedures that realise the democratic goods of considered judgement and popular control (Smith 2009).

Given the paucity of existing knowledge, this paper takes the significant step of offering the first large-N study on the influence of governing party's ideology in the commissioning and institutional design of DMPs. Departing from the insights provided by the scholarship on PB, and aware of differences in context and design of the two democratic innovations, we seek to explore whether left-leaning parties across Europe influence DMPs' commissioning, at least in the first stage of its diffusion, and whether party ideology affects the features of European deliberative procedures.

## Data and Methodological Approach

To examine the role party ideology plays in the commissioning of deliberative mini-publics, we draw on data from the OECD's 'DelibWave' database – updated in November 2021. This dataset has been used to inform the influential report *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave* (OECD 2020) and subsequent OECD publications. This is the most comprehensive empirical repository of DMPs commissioned by public authorities, providing comparative data since 1979 for all OECD countries.<sup>1</sup> As defined by the OECD (2020), a DMP (or 'representative deliberative process') is:

A randomly selected group of people who are broadly representative of a community spending significant time learning and collaborating through facilitated deliberation to form collective recommendations for policy makers. (OECD 2020: Reader's guide)

Three criteria define a case in the OECD study reflecting broader definitions of DMPs (Escobar & Elstub 2017; Smith & Setälä 2018):

1. Deliberation: through a long, careful, and facilitated discussion over, at least, one full day.
2. Representativeness: through 'sortition' as recruitment process and demographic stratification.

3. Impact: being commissioned by a public authority, thus excluding academic, experimental, or civil society commissioned procedures.

The OECD report shows that public authorities around the world are increasingly using deliberative procedures to involve citizens at all government levels and on diverse policy questions. For our purpose, we will look only at European cases, as it is the single region where most DMPs have been implemented (OECD 2020); until 2005, indeed, almost all mini-publics gathered in the dataset were commissioned in Europe (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, this sample of countries is much more comparable in cultural, economic, and political terms than the whole universe of cases, and it enables us to more confidently identify the ideological positions of political parties with a degree of certainty that allows for comparative analysis.

### Operationalisation of party ideology

To the data available in the 'DelibWave' database we added information on party ideology. The ideological affiliation of political parties was identified through a web search for the governing party or the largest party in a coalition of the government at the level commissioning each of the European cases in the OECD dataset. To code the political ideology of the governing party we rely on the widely used Manifesto Project dataset (Volkens et al. 2021), one of the most recognised datasets on this subject. Five main party families emerge from this coding (Table 1): Social-Democrats and Christian-Democrats (both with around 70% of the cases in our sample), Liberal, Conservatives, and New-Left/Greens.<sup>3</sup> Hereafter we present the analysis of our results based on these categories.

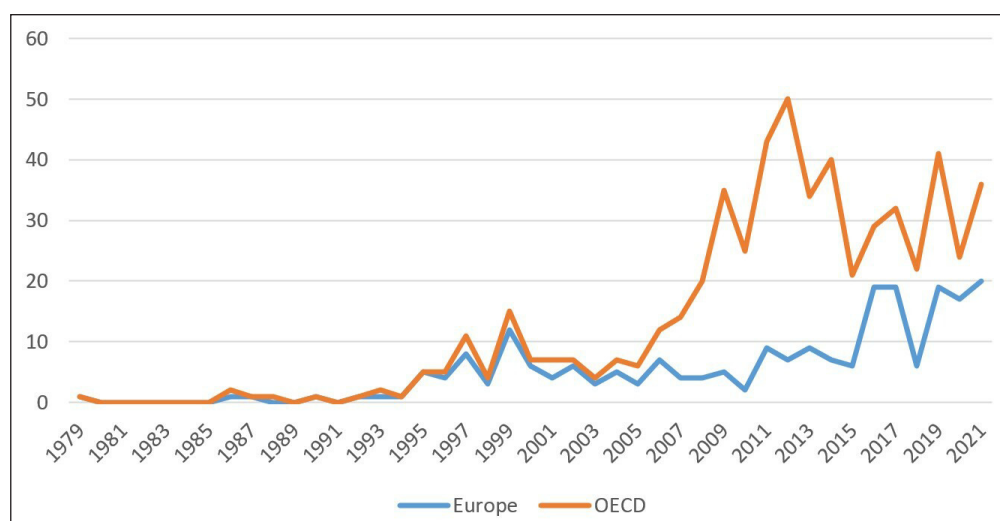
Our operationalisation of political ideology has limitations. First, we code only the largest governing party. We cannot capture differences in ideological complexions of coalitions as such data does not exist systematically for the period under consideration across all countries

at all relevant governing levels. Second, methodological difficulties remain in differentiating between left and right-wing parties using the party family approach. The notion of the party 'family' can present shortcomings for a comparative and longitudinal analysis. Although party families can be positioned in aggregate terms on the left-right continuum (Klingemann et al. 2006), disparities may appear as we look more granularly. Even though it is the most common approach, it assumes cross-party similarities that are not necessarily formally structured or could be refined with further characterisation. Parties labelled as Liberals can be nearer to some Conservative parties and others to Christian-Democratic or Social-Democratic parties, and ideological party changes appear over time (Mair & Mudde 1998). Again, an approach primarily created to identify nation-wide parties, may lose some of its relevance when coding local parties. That said, the left-right continuum is evenly distributed in Europe, and party families across governance levels have historically related to it in a relatively homogeneous way (Camia & Caramani 2009). The political family remains the best proxy we have

**Table 1:** Number of DMPs commissioned in Europe by party family (1979–2021).

Party family	Number of DMPs	%
<b>Social-Democrats</b>	95	42.04
<b>Christian-Democrats</b>	69	30.53
<b>Liberal</b>	37	16.37
<b>Conservatives</b>	15	6.64
<b>New-Left/Greens</b>	10	4.42
<b>Total</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Own elaboration with data from OECD Database of Representative Deliberative Processes and Institutions (2021) and from Manifesto Project dataset (2021).



**Figure 1:** Time evolution of DMPs commissioning (OECD vs. Europe).

Source: Own elaboration with data from OECD Database of Representative Deliberative Processes and Institutions (2021).



for competing ideological justifications (Guth & Nelsen 2019; Keman & Pennings 2006).

### **Specifying deliberative mini-publics**

We adopt an exploratory approach to address our two research questions. First, we pay particular attention to how the involvement of different political families in the commissioning of DMPs has evolved over the last forty years in Europe. Since differences in individual countries can be diluted by aggregating cases from several countries, we complement this account by detailing what has happened in four of them: Germany, Denmark, Austria and the United Kingdom. These are the countries that concentrate most of the DMPs in our database, with more than thirty cases each. Second, we move on to analyse how party ideology has influenced the institutional design of European deliberative procedures. Although the procedures labelled as DMPs share core characteristics (sortition and deliberation), family resemblances obscure differences in institutional design between cases, making possible identification of different sub-types according to the number of citizens that participate, the amount of days spent together, and their output (Escobar & Elstub 2017; Smith & Setälä 2018). The OECD (2020) identified as many as twelve models around the world.<sup>4</sup> To take these design differences into account in our analysis of ideological differences, and given the diversity of existing sub-types, we adopt two complimentary strategies here.

The first of these strategies has been to rely on the OECD's distinction of the purpose of these institutions between DMPs designed to generate 'Informed citizen recommendations on policy questions' and those designed to generate 'Citizen opinion on policy questions' (OECD 2020) (see **Table 2**). The first group of procedures – informed citizen recommendations – tend to last longer, giving more space and resources to participants to produce detailed and considered recommendations on complex

issues. This model is the most prevalent in Europe, with 149 cases registered (out of the total 226 cases). Procedures in the second group – citizen opinion – tend to take less time and result in less detailed outputs than those in the first group, as they are primarily intended to provide decision-makers with a taste of citizens' considered opinions on a given issue. Citizens are not expected to collaborate on producing well defined recommendations. The distinction established by the OECD is very useful for our analysis, as it provides a theory-driven classification that helps us to identify – in a parsimonious way – DMPs with a different procedural nature.

Classifying these procedures based on the name adopted by commissioners – as the OECD distinction does – has its limitations, not least that the same name is often used for procedures with different features because of national idiosyncrasies or changing trends. For example, originally the term Citizens' Assembly was used for significant national procedures that tackled major constitutional issues such as the Citizens' Assemblies on Electoral Reform in British Columbia and Ontario in the first decade of the century (Smith 2009) and then the Irish Citizens' Assembly 2016–2018 that famously dealt with the constitutional status of abortion (Farrell et al. 2019). The success of the Irish Assembly meant that the term Citizens' Assembly tended to be appropriated by a number of different DMP designs. As previous work has shown, actual experiences tend to deviate from the 'ideal' model (Dryzek & Tucker 2008) or overlap with the characteristics of other models (Vrydagh et al. 2020). Nomenclature is far from stable.

Recognising this diversity of use, instead of relying solely on our first strategy, we also consider two other variables that capture key design features of deliberative procedures and underlie the OECD's categorisation: the number of participants and time spent together (Smith & Setälä 2018) (**Table 3**). For advocates of DMPs, larger numbers are often

**Table 2:** Models of Deliberative Mini-Publics.<sup>5</sup>

			Average N° of participants per panel	Average length of meetings	Number of European cases	Results
<b>Purpose</b>	Informed citizen recommendations	<i>Citizens' Assembly</i>	90	18.8 days	20	Detailed collective recommendations
		<i>Citizens' Jury</i>	34	4.1 days	55	Collective recommendations
		<i>Consensus Conference</i>	16	4 days	20	Collective recommendations
		<i>Planning Cell</i>	24	3.2 days	54	Collective position/ citizens' report
	Citizen opinion	<i>G1000</i>	346	1.7 days	12	Votes on proposals
		<i>Citizens' Council</i>	15	1.7 days	32	Collective recommendations
		<i>Citizens' Dialogues</i>	148	2.1 days	28	Broad ideas/ recommendations
		<i>Deliberative Poll</i>	226	1.6 days	5	Survey opinions and opinion changes

Source: Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave (Chapter 2) (OECD 2020) (N = 226).

deemed important to help secure descriptive representation and/or political salience in the eyes of decision-makers or the general public. We capture size distinctions between smaller, medium and large-sized DMPs. Time is a critical factor in enabling deeper learning and deliberation, along with collaborative writing of recommendations. The duration distinction we make captures the difference between those procedures that run for more or less than one weekend. Longer procedures provide the necessary time for higher-quality deliberation (Smith & Setälä 2018).

To a certain extent, these two dimensions can be mapped onto the above-mentioned OECD categories of purpose and their distinct procedural nature. DMPs created to generate citizen opinion tend to prioritise number of participants. And large numbers of participants mean that it is more difficult to organise procedures over a large number of days. Large DMPs tend to be one or two days. Where time to deliberate is deemed significant, procedures tend to involve smaller numbers. These are tendencies as there are DMP models that buck these trends. For example, small Planning Cells have been run in series or parallel so that the entire project involves large

numbers of participants. Similarly, Citizens' Assemblies of between 100–150 people have been run at national level over a number of weekends.

The two strategies described here are complementary and allow us to contrast how party ideology influences the institutional design of DMPs. In order to highlight any potential ideological differences, we run Z-tests to identify any statistically significant differences (at the 0.05 level or below) in the relationship between political families and design characteristics of DMPs.

## Results

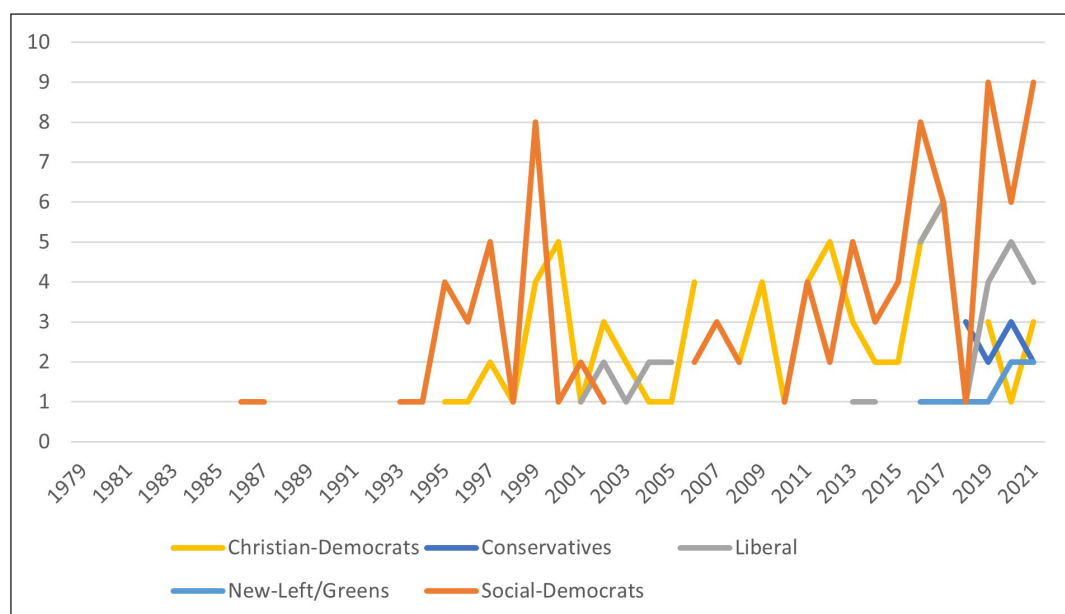
### Party ideology and time

How has the commissioning of deliberative mini-publics been influenced by party ideology over time? **Figure 2** provides a general descriptive picture. Not only have most of these procedures been commissioned – in aggregate terms – under Social-Democratic governments (as also seen in **Table 1**), but early commissioning also appears to be influenced by governing party. Until the 2000s, most DMPs were clearly developed under Social-Democratic governments (26 against the 16 developed by Christian-

**Table 3:** Number of DMPs commissioned in Europe by its features.

		Duration of meetings (in days)		
		2 days or less	3 days or more	Total
Number of participants	50 and below	40	67	107
	Between 51 and 200	28	53	81
	Above 200	12	12	24
	<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>212</b>

Source: Own elaboration with data from OECD Database of Representative Deliberative Processes and Institutions (2021).



**Figure 2:** Commissioning of DMPs in Europe by party family and year.

Source: Own elaboration with data from OECD Database of Representative Deliberative Processes and Institutions (2021) (N = 226).

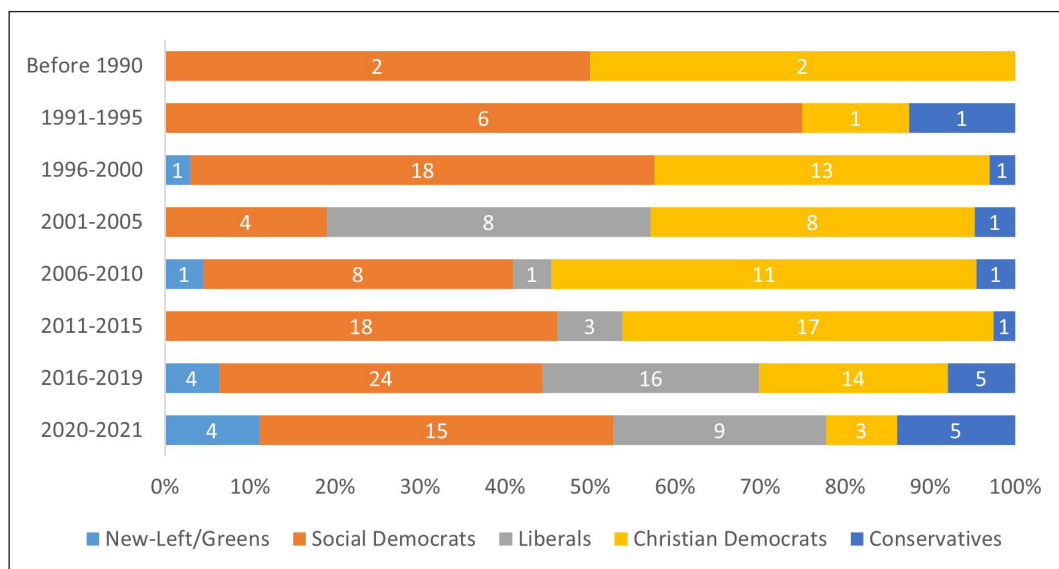
Democrats), even more than the sum of all other political families. While a large number of DMPs have also been commissioned under Christian-Democratic governments, in most years their number is lower compared to that of Social-Democrats. The exception lies in the period 2001–2010 (**Figure 3**). This relative increase of Christian-Democrats cases appears to be more related to a lack of commissioning on the part of the Social-Democrats than to an increase by Christian-Democratic governments.

**Figure 3** suggests three main periods of commissioning of DMPs in relation to party ideology.<sup>6</sup> First, between 1979 and 2000, Social-Democratic governments in particular and Christian-Democratic ones to a lesser extent dominate the field of activity, with almost all DMPs commissioned under their rule. Second, between 2001 and 2015, Social-Democrats lose weight in relative terms, with the appearance of the Liberals (with most cases concentrated between 2001 and 2005). Finally, from 2016 onwards, Social-Democrats gain weight again, but with Liberals surpassing Christian-Democrats as the second highest party family and cases under New-Left/Green and Conservative rule growing from a low base.

### Party ideology and time: Country specificities

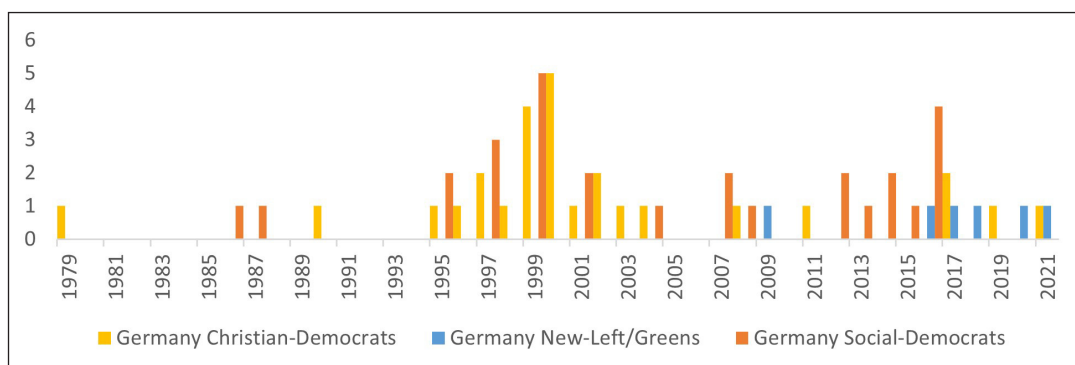
But a closer look at the country level reveals the particularities of the diffusion process in different contexts. We show this by focusing on four countries: Germany, Denmark, Austria and the United Kingdom. Both Germany and Denmark took the lead in the first European ‘wave’ of commissioning (1979–2005, **Figure 1**), with 37 and 14 (out of 68) cases, respectively. Austria and the UK both developed DMPs at a later stage. Deliberative procedures have not been developed at the same pace or at the same time everywhere. To interrogate these national patterns and how they are influenced by party ideology, we look in more detail at these four countries.<sup>7</sup>

In Germany (**Figure 4**), we find a mixed picture, with almost the same number of DMPs developed under both Social-Democratic and Christian-Democratic governments (28 vs. 27 respectively). Before 2005, commissioning was higher among Christian-Democratic governments (21 cases) compared to Social-Democrats (15). All these cases are Planning Cells, designed by sociologist Peter Dienel at the University of Wuppertal (Hendriks 2005). After 2005, the numbers are inverted, as most DMPs were



**Figure 3:** Evolution of DMPs commissioning (party family relative weight by 5-year periods).

Source: Own elaboration with data from OECD Database of Representative Deliberative Processes and Institutions (2021) (N = 226).



**Figure 4:** DMPs commissioning per year and party family: Germany (N = 61).



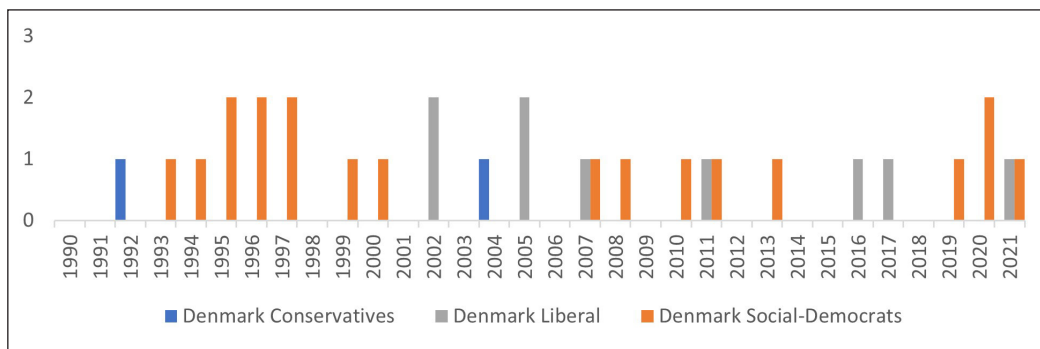
commissioned by Social-Democrats, with New-Left/Green governments commissioning equal numbers to Christian-Democrats (6). During the entire period analysed, all DMPs commissioned under Social-Democratic rule were Planning Cells, while Christian-Democrats experimented with other models after 2005 (e.g., Citizens' Dialogues and Citizens' Assemblies). New-Left/Greens have also experimented with diverse designs (e.g., Citizens' Juries and Planning Cells). Nonetheless, most DMPs developed in Germany were Planning Cells (53 out of 61), despite some diversification in the second period.

The other early adopter, Denmark, shows a clear influence of Social-Democrat commissioning. This is true when considering early-commissioning and the whole period studied (19 cases, 63%) (**Figure 5**). Liberals are present throughout but with less weight. The Danish case is similar to the German in that almost all procedures commissioned before 2005 correspond to a specific DMP model developed in that country: in this case, the

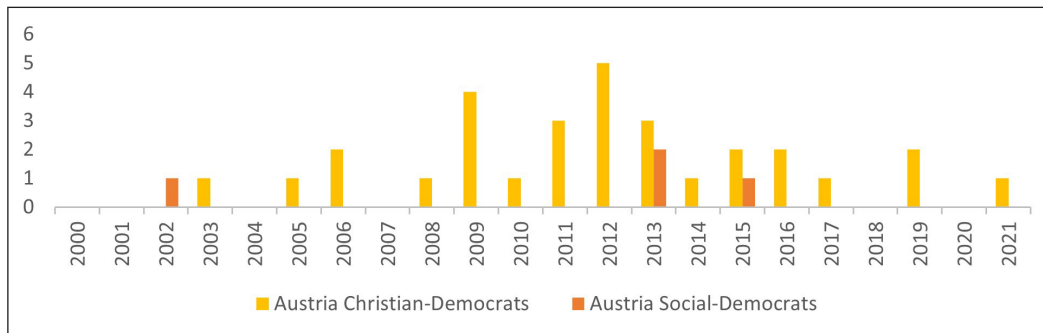
Consensus Conference invented by the Danish Board of Technology (Hendriks 2005). Most Consensus Conferences have been commissioned under Social-Democratic rule (10 out of 14). After that period, Citizens' Dialogues gained more presence, with Liberal governments behind early cases of this sub-type of DMP. Conservative ruling parties are related to only one Consensus Conference and one Citizens' Dialogue, but in both cases, they represent the first adoption of each model in Denmark.

In Austria (**Figure 6**), a different pattern of adoption emerges, with Christian-Democratic governments commissioning the majority of DMPs during the entire period. The most frequent model implemented in the country is Citizens' Councils (28 out of 30) – a model also known as Wisdom Councils, which were developed by Jim Rough in the US and then exported to Austria (Asenbaum 2016).

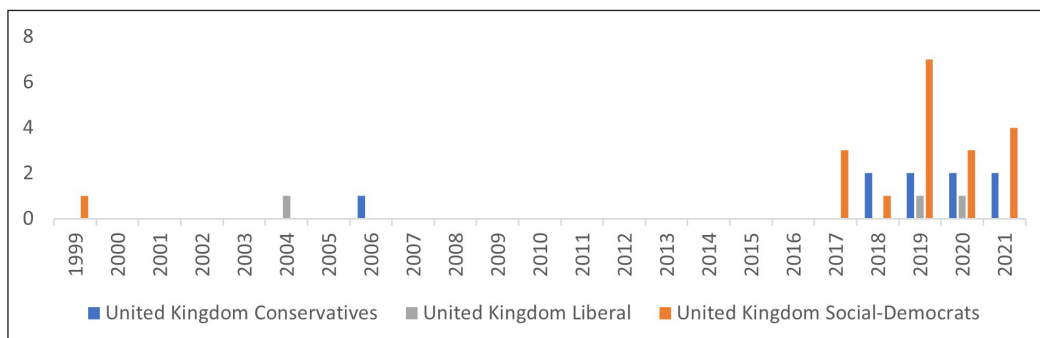
The UK is a late adopter (**Figure 7**). Although three DMPs were commissioned under different governing parties between 1999 and 2006, almost all procedures have



**Figure 5:** DMPs commissioning per year and party family: Denmark (N = 30).



**Figure 6:** DMPs commissioning per year and party family: Austria (N = 34).



**Figure 7:** DMPs commissioning per year and party family: United Kingdom (N = 31).

been developed from 2017 onwards. Social-Democratic governments are major adopters, with almost two-thirds of total cases commissioned under their rule (19 cases, 61%). Four different models make up those cases, with Citizens' Juries (9) and Citizens' Assemblies (7) being the most common. Conservative and Liberal governments make up the remaining cases.

In addition to these four countries, and among the countries that developed at least 10 DMPs, only France presents a clear party influencing early adoption and commissioning of such deliberative procedures: Social-Democratic governments, which have commissioned 63% of all DMPs.

#### **Party ideology and types of DMPs**

We now move to the exploration of the relationship between party ideology and design choices when implementing DMPs. To do so, we first adopt the OECD distinction between DMPs designed to generate informed citizen recommendations and those designed to generate citizen opinion. In **Table 4**, cells in bold indicate statistically significant differences with other cells of the same row based on Z-Tests (column proportions comparisons). The superscript letters indicate which cell is statistically different for each case. Our analysis shows that Christian-Democratic governments alone are statistically more likely to be related to the commissioning of DMPs designed to generate citizen opinion on policy questions (shorter DMPs with less detailed results) as compared to Social-Democratic or Conservative ones, which are more prone to commission longer DMPs aimed at generating informed citizen recommendations. Deliberative quality

seems to be affected by ideological affiliation of the ruling party.

We need to treat these findings with some care as the name adopted by commissioners – on which this distinction is based – is not always a reliable indicator of institutional design. Thus, we complement this analysis with consideration of two key design features of DMPs that underlie the OECD's distinction: number of participants and time spent together. To what extent do we find ideological preferences across these two critical dimensions of DMP practice? Analysis of the dimensions treated individually indicates that Christian-Democratic, Liberal and New-Left/Green governments are statistically more likely than Social-Democrats to commission larger procedures (over 200 participants) (**Table 5**). Social-Democratic and Conservative rule is statistically more likely to be related with longer procedures than Christian-Democratic (**Table 6**).

Combining these dimensions allows us to check the results from the OECD categorisation of models of DMPs. **Table 7** shows the Z-Test for the party families according to six categories that combine number of participants and duration of meetings. The results are in line with those obtained in the analyses conducted for each variable in isolation but generate some interesting nuances. Christian-Democratic rule stands out in the commissioning of small-short cases (2 days or less and 50 participants or less). Their proportion of cases is significantly higher than that of Social-Democrats and Liberals.

Turning to small and longer procedures (50 or less participants together for 3 days or more), Christian-Democrats show a lower proportion of cases than

**Table 4:** Z-Test of party family most likely to commission DMPs relating to each purpose.

		Ideology of governing party				
		<i>New-Left/ Greens</i>	<i>Social- Democrats</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Christian- Democrats</i>	<i>Conservatives</i>
		<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>E</i>
<b>Purpose of deliberative model</b>	Informed citizen recommendations	70% (7)	<b>80% (76)<sup>D</sup></b>	59.5% (22)	44.9% (31)	<b>86.7% (13)<sup>D</sup></b>
	Citizen opinion	30% (3)	20% (19)	40.5% (15)	<b>55.1% (38)<sup>B,E</sup></b>	13.3% (2)

Source: Own elaboration with data from OECD Database of Representative Deliberative Processes and Institutions (2021). N for each cell in brackets. (N = 226).

**Table 5:** Z-Test of DMPs' number of participants by party family.

		Ideology of governing party				
		<i>New-Left/ Greens</i>	<i>Social- Democrats</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Christian- Democrats</i>	<i>Conservatives</i>
		<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>E</i>
<b>Number of participants</b>	<i>50 and below</i>	50% (5)	54.3% (50)	40.5% (15)	52.2% (36)	53.3% (8)
	<i>Between 51 and 200</i>	30% (3)	44.6% (41)	37.8% (14)	29% (20)	46.7% (7)
	<i>Above 200</i>	<b>20% (2)<sup>B</sup></b>	1.1% (1)	<b>21.6% (8)<sup>B</sup></b>	<b>18.8% (13)<sup>B</sup></b>	0% (0)

Source: Own elaboration with data from OECD Database of Representative Deliberative Processes and Institutions (2021). N for each cell in brackets. (N = 223).

**Table 6:** Z-Test of DMPs' duration by party family.

		Ideology of governing party				
		<i>New-Left/ Greens</i>	<i>Social- Democrats</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Christian- Democrats</i>	<i>Conservatives</i>
		<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>E</i>
<b>Duration of meetings (in days)</b>	<i>2 or less</i>	20% (2)	28.4% (25)	45.2% (14)	<b>54.4% (37)<sup>B,E</sup></b>	13.3% (2)
	<i>3 or more</i>	80% (8)	<b>71.6% (63)<sup>D</sup></b>	54.8% (17)	45.6% (31)	<b>86.7% (13)<sup>D</sup></b>

Source: Own elaboration with data from OECD Database of Representative Deliberative Processes and Institutions (2021). N for each cell in brackets. (N = 212).

**Table 7:** Z-test of DMPs' characteristics (merged) by party family.

	Ideology of governing party				
	<i>New-Left/ Greens</i>	<i>Social- Democrats</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Christian- Democrats</i>	<i>Conservatives</i>
	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>E</i>
<b>2 days or less and 50 participants or less</b>	10% (1)	8% (7)	6.5% (2)	<b>44.1% (30)<sup>B,C</sup></b>	0% (0)
<b>2 days or less and between 51 and 200 participants</b>	0% (0)	<b>19.3% (17)<sup>D</sup></b>	19.4% (6)	4.4% (3)	13.3% (2)
<b>2 days or less and above 200 participants</b>	10% (1)	1.1% (1)	<b>19.4% (6)<sup>B</sup></b>	5.9% (4)	0% (0)
<b>3 days or more and 50 participants or less</b>	40% (4)	<b>45.5% (40)<sup>D</sup></b>	29% (9)	8.8% (6)	<b>53.3% (8)<sup>D</sup></b>
<b>3 days or more and between 51 and 200 participants</b>	30% (3)	26.1% (23)	19.4% (6)	23.5% (16)	33.3% (5)
<b>3 days or more and above 200 participants</b>	10% (1)	0% (0)	6.5% (2)	13.2% (9)	0% (0)

Source: Own elaboration with data from OECD Database of Representative Deliberative Processes and Institutions (2021). N for each cell in brackets. (N = 212).<sup>8</sup>

Social-Democrats and Conservatives (both statistically significant) and New-Left/Greens and Liberals (although not statistically significant). In general, then, Christian-Democrats differ the most from other party families in terms of the short duration of procedures commissioned under their rule. This reinforces the evidence from the OECD classifications that Christian-Democrats commission DMPs aimed at generating citizen opinion; designs with less space for learning, deliberation and collaborative recommendation writing. Liberal governments also commission a greater percentage of short DMPs, but in this case they are in a larger format than Christian-Democrats (over 200 participants).

DMPs commissioned under Social-Democratic rule are statistically differentiated from those under Christian-Democrats in two ways. First, the largest category of DMPs commissioned is designed to include smaller numbers (50 and below), but they are longer procedures (3 days or more). These are designs that enable higher deliberative quality, where more time is available for participants to develop recommendations. Second, when they commission shorter procedures, these involve more participants (51–200) than those commissioned under Christian-Democratic governments.

This left-right distinction is potentially destabilised by the evidence that Conservative governments follow Social-Democrat practice. Conservatives are statistically significantly more likely to commission procedures that

are small but run over three days or more compared to Christian-Democrats. This finding needs to be treated with care given that Conservative governments have only commissioned fifteen procedures across Europe and much of their practice is based in the UK where the models of Citizens' Assemblies and Citizens' Juries dominate, both of which tend to be longer in nature. It may be national rather than ideological peculiarities that are driving Conservative governments to display this pattern.

## Discussion

This paper offers the first large-N insights into how the ideological affiliation of governing parties influences the commissioning of DMPs, contributing to the emerging body of research on the influence of political parties on the implementation of deliberative procedures (Gherghina & Jacquet 2022). In particular, we have explored two types of influences: first, whether left-leaning parties across Europe are more involved in the commissioning of DMPs than other parties, at least in the initial stage of their diffusion; second, whether party ideology affects the design characteristics of European deliberative procedures.

In terms of diffusion of DMPs in general, we find that governments ruled by parties along all points of the ideological spectrum have, to a greater or lesser extent, commissioned DMPs. In aggregate terms, most procedures in Europe have been developed under Social-Democratic

governments and they were the early adopters across the continent. At this level of generality, the influence of party ideology on the 'deliberative wave' is similar to that found for other democratic innovations – particularly for PB, for which we have most evidence. But as with other studies of the characteristics of the commissioning of democratic innovations (Baiocchi & Ganuza 2017; Dryzek & Tucker 2008), national context plays a mediating role.

Our results show that the diffusion of DMPs in Europe takes very different national forms when it comes to the influence of ideology. Denmark, the UK, and France reinforce the Social-Democratic prevalence – although not in all cases as early adopter. But Germany and Austria display a different pattern. In Germany, Christian-Democrats were a significant player alongside Social-Democrats, particularly in the early diffusion of the procedure. In Austria, Christian-Democratic rule has dominated the field. The status of Germany as an outlier has some resonance with PB diffusion, where Christian-Democrats were a leading adopter, running against the general trends across Europe (Sintomer et al. 2016). Compared to the diffusion of PB, we find less comprehensive ideological trends for early commissioning of DMPs in each country. The 'deliberative wave' has not been instigated everywhere by left-wing parties, which helps to understand why previous studies on DMPs diffusion have shown that the influence of ideology is limited (Kübler et al. 2020; Saradín et al. 2022). Our country-level analysis also helps illustrate the notable contribution that particular policy entrepreneurs have made to the dissemination of these procedures. For instance, the practice of DMPs in Germany was driven by the creation and diffusion of Planning Cells by Peter Dienel; in Denmark by Consensus Conferences developed and popularised by the Danish Board of Technology (Hendriks 2005). Future studies will need to address the role of these entrepreneurs in the country-specific patterns of commissioning of deliberative procedures, as well as that of other elements such as civil society mobilisation (e.g., Felicetti 2023) or previous participatory traditions (e.g., Röcke 2014). This would help to contextualise the patterns found here and to better understand when and why the ruling party's ideology is influential.

Unlike in the expansion of PB, where New-Left/Green parties played a prominent role both as governing parties and as members of coalitions alongside Social-Democrats (Sintomer et al. 2016), we do not find that they influenced the 'deliberative wave' in the same way. This finding may be determined by three limitations of the data we use. First, we code party ideology based on the main political party in each jurisdiction. Lack of available data means we cannot know whether these parties were governing in coalition and with whom. It may be, for example, that the role of New-Left/Green parties is larger than we found if we were able to consider coalition partners. Second, a constraining factor of the OECD definition of DMPs is the application of sortition. It may well be that, under New-Left/Green governments, deliberative procedures are commissioned, but not ones that recruit participants using democratic lottery; instead, they could opt for reaching more vulnerable or usually under-represented social

groups through other strategies. Third, the data collection for the OECD database ends in 2021. That only captures the beginning of a significant wave of climate citizens' assemblies across Europe (Smith 2024). It is a reasonable assumption that many of these more recent assemblies have been promoted by New-Left/Green governments, whether as the main party or as coalition partner.

Beyond adoption and subsequent diffusion, we find a strong ideological pattern relating to DMPs' institutional design. Using the OECD (2020) categorisation of purpose, which helps us to differentiate between DMPs with different procedural characteristics, we find that Social-Democratic governments are statistically more likely than Christian-Democratic ones to be involved in the commissioning of procedures that aim to generate informed citizen recommendations. This finding is confirmed by our analysis of size and length of DMPs. Under Social-Democratic rule, procedures with a higher deliberative quality that produce citizen-authored recommendations are more likely. In contrast, Christian-Democratic governments are more involved in the organisation of small and short procedures of a lower deliberative quality that aim to elicit opinions and preferences rather than crafted recommendations.

Our results reaffirm the idea that ideological orientation influences parties' conceptions of citizen participation (e.g., Kittilson & Scarrow 2003; Verge 2007). More than that, they help to show its influence on political practice and underline that the study of party ideology is fundamental to understand the different democratic capacities of DMPs in particular, and of democratic innovations in general. Indeed, this left-right split in deliberative practice again resonates with the experience of PB where more empowered and deliberative designs tend to be related to left-of-centre governments across Europe (Ganuza & Francés 2012; Sintomer et al. 2016), although here we only find evidence regarding the deliberative component of the procedures. This simple narrative, however, is disrupted by the Conservative pattern, which follows the Social-Democratic trend: small but longer procedures as compared to Christian-Democrats. Whether this unexpected finding holds over time (given the small number of cases related to Conservative ruling parties and their more extensive presence in the UK) will only come to light as further DMPs are commissioned across Europe.

Finally, our analysis highlights the need to address the variations in the institutional design of deliberative procedures. The sheer diversity of these procedures calls for large-N approaches to comprehend how and under what conditions their designs differ. The OECD's (2020) distinction between DMPs that aim to elicit informed citizen recommendations and those that elicit citizen opinion represents a potentially valuable starting point for categorising the deliberative quality of DMP designs, as we have shown. Nevertheless, as PB scholarship cautions, it is crucial to approach the study of institutional design with care, avoiding reliance on self-ascription of the name of democratic innovations (Sintomer et al. 2016). This type of analysis needs to be complemented with more 'objective' criteria, such as our application of the number



of participants and the duration of the procedure. Future research may introduce additional internal or even external design features (Boswell et al. 2023), thereby expanding the scope of analysis, helping to refine DMP classifications in terms of their institutional design and allowing for the detection of ideological patterns that may not be discernible relying on currently available categorisations.

## Conclusion

Does party ideology matter in commissioning democratic innovations? Extensive scholarship on the diffusion of participatory budgeting tells us that it does – both in terms of the ideological persuasion of governments that are early adopters and the way that PB is enacted. The ideological characteristics of the European ‘deliberative wave’ resonate to a degree with the earlier diffusion of PB across Europe. We find a left-wing disposition towards DMPs. Under Social-Democratic governments we find more early adoption as well as a higher amount of overall deliberative procedures. Furthermore, those procedures of higher deliberative quality are more likely to be found under Social-Democratic compared to Christian-Democratic rule. As with PB, we also find national peculiarities in the diffusion of DMPs, especially when it comes to early adoption. For example, Christian-Democratic governments play a leading role in the adoption and diffusion of deliberative procedures in Germany and Austria. Our findings need to be treated with care. Compared to PB, less DMPs have been commissioned. And our data does not allow us to investigate the ideological complexion of governing coalitions. In both cases, this may lead to an underestimation of the impact New-Left/Green and Conservative governing parties. Even with these caveats, our analysis is an important first step in understanding the importance of the ideological character of the ‘deliberative wave’.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For more details on the dataset, see both the Methodology subsection under ‘Reader’s guide’ and Annexe B in the full OECD report (2020). Several reasons justify the selection of this dataset over other alternatives. The Doing Mini-publics dataset is more extensive, capturing all known DMPs including those organised by non-state actors, but it does not include data on the design of DMPs that we use within this paper to distinguish types of procedure (see <https://www.sfb1265.de/en/subprojects/doing-mini-publics-the-translocalisation-of-politics/>). The Politicize dataset includes details of design features of DMPs but is not as extensive as the OECD dataset (see <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/Z7X6GT>). The Participedia dataset relies on crowdsourcing and is not as reliable or complete (see <https://participedia.net/>).

<sup>2</sup> For OECD, N = 566, including 24 OECD countries that were members in 2021 plus the European Union. For Europe, n = 226, including 15 countries in the

European Union plus Norway, Switzerland and United Kingdom, which have many ties with the EU and share geographic, economic, cultural and political traits with the rest of the countries included.

<sup>3</sup> This category merges five cases belonging to Ecologists, and five to Socialist or other Left.

<sup>4</sup> All these models have been used at least once in Europe, a further argument for the analytical relevance of this region. Although the OECD identifies 12 models world-wide, four are excluded from our analysis, which in total excludes five cases from our dataset. One of the models is a transnational event (WWViews), which means its commissioning cannot be attributed to any specific government. Another, Citizens’ Initiative Review, does not fall within either of the two OECD categories that we utilise. Instead, its purpose is ‘informed citizen evaluation of ballot measures’. The City Observatory and Ostebelgien Model are classified as ‘permanent representative deliberative models’. This means that they are categorically different from the rest of the cases we study which are one-off processes. The fact that there are only two examples, also means that no significant trends could be ascertained. For all these reasons, these five cases are excluded from the analysis.

<sup>5</sup> Despite the complete OECD dataset included up to 261 European cases, we will work here with an n of 226 after removing the four single cases of DMP models and missing cases. Some government parties could not be found (6 cases) and the ideology of some parties was not available in the Manifesto database, as they were very specific local parties (11 cases). We also discarded 14 cases relating to Ethno-regionalist parties due to the difficulties in classifying these parties along the left-right continuum (Mair & Mudde 1998).

<sup>6</sup> The periods follow the approach taken by the OECD. All are five-year periods apart from the first (before 1990) and last (2020–2021).

<sup>7</sup> **Figures 4 to 7** do not share the same time axes for the sake of visualisation.

<sup>8</sup> By party families, our n is: Social-Democrats (N = 88), Christian-Democrats (N = 68), Liberals (N = 31), Conservatives (N = 15) and New-Left/Greens (N = 10).

## Additional File

The additional file for this article can be found as follows:

• **Appendix 1.** Mini Publics Database. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16997/jdd.1559.s1>

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The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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