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# THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF INTERNAL PARTY DEMOCRACY

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## 1.  Introduction*

Citizens elect for office that party whose promises are closer to their own political preferences and they want the elected government to be democratically accountable and politically capable. Such a government would provide information about its actions, answer for them at election time, and be able to implement its promises. I shall discuss the influence of the party in office on both the accountability and the capacity of the incumbent government. The clearest case will be that of a government that betrays electoral promises and needs to provide explanations to its party and the electorate. Only parliamentary democracies will be examined: the reason is not that parties are different under presidentialism and parliamentarism, but that the relationship of the governing party with the executive is not the same.

My purpose is to explore whether democracy within the incumbent party can help citizens to monitor the government, that is, if the internal accountability of party leaders facilitates their external accountability as public office holders. On the one hand, voters might reward parties where internal monitoring provides information needed to control ruling politicians. On the other hand, internal partisan debates may carry too much noise for citizens and entail costs for the political capacity of the government. Voters might, in this case, reward disciplined parties and punish undisciplined ones; they would reinforce the position of leaders at the expense of critical activists. External electoral considerations would then be detrimental to the internal accountability within the party.

Let us start with some clarifications on who's who. Two groups of actors within a party will appear in different occasions. The first group are the public or party office-holders. They share common interests: both to stay in office and to carry out ideological policies. Their differences stem from the varying positions in a hierarchy of power, and from their longer or shorter political time horizons. They are all part of the party *nomenklatura*, but some of them will be the potential "political heirs" of the rest. The second group are the party

members. Their common interest lies in ideological policies, which constitute the *raison d'être* of their political commitment; however, they are not indifferent to power as a means to implement such policies. Their internal differences will be expressed in different degrees of activism, related to the intensity of their policy preferences: only if these are strong will party members accept the costs of greater political activism. It is thus possible to distinguish between rank and file members and activists: even though both share a long term political horizon and believe the party is an instrument for policy ideals, activists have a greater potential for criticism of their government.

Incumbents expect their party to fulfil two tasks. On the one hand, to serve as an early warning instrument. That is, to provide information on electoral risks. This early warning requires internal democracy: it can only be reliable under conditions of freedom of expression and if no reprisals are feared. On the other hand, incumbents expect party members to defend the government and its policies. This task requires unity in the face of external attacks or political crises, rather than internal democracy. If a party is to persuade voters that the government is acting on their behalf even when it betrays electoral promises, what is needed is internal cohesion. "Democratic centralism" was an attempt to combine diversity of opinions (and the task of early warning) with discipline once a decision was adopted. But both tasks, early warning *via* democracy and support *via* unity, may be hardly compatible.

Some conceptual definitions are now needed. I shall understand that a party is democratic when it is internally accountable: that is, when members have information about their leaders' actions and can throw them out of party office. This type of accountability is vertical: leaders respond to party members. But parties are also polycentric organizations, with their own systems of checks and balances. Different institutions within the party may monitor the government: internal accountability can also be horizontal. A party is democratic when the control of its leaders in office is both vertical and horizontal. I shall similarly understand that governments are accountable when voters can punish or reward them at election time on the grounds of their previous actions. As Key (1996: 10) puts it, "the fear of loss of popular support powerfully disciplines the actions of governments." Governments are representative when they act in the interest of citizens under the constraints of elections and

checks and balances. That is, when incumbent politicians are controlled both by voters and by other horizontal institutions of the state.

But for *ex post* electoral sanctions to be consequential, and thus to induce *ex ante* representation, citizens must have information about the actions of incumbents. They must be able to monitor what the government does, and to establish causal relationships between actions (or non-actions) and outcomes. Voters in search of information about what a government is doing can turn to many sources: the opposition, the press, but also those activists of the party in office who care about policies. On the grounds of this information citizens will judge whether politicians are consistent with their campaign promises, and whether they act in the best interest of voters when they switch from their announced policies. In the first case, voters will need information on policies; in the second, on outcomes (Stokes, 2001: 9-20, 186-90). The crucial information refers to whether the government is representative, rather than responsive –i.e. whether it acts on behalf of the voters, rather than in accordance with their immediate demands (Manin, Przeworski, Stokes, 1999).

Information and monitoring depend on institutional conditions. It has thus been argued that under presidential systems with term limits the control of incumbents becomes more difficult because the dissuasive effect of future elections on the shirking of politicians will not operate. Also, if mandates are rigid, incompetent and discredited presidents can survive in office. And because their electoral support is independent from that of parliamentary majorities, parties cannot control presidents. Cheibub and Przeworski (1999: 231-5) have shown that, of 70 peaceful changes of presidents between 1950 and 1990, only four (4.7%) were due to the removal by the party and interim replacements. On the contrary, under parliamentarism, of 310 peaceful changes of prime ministers, 148 (47.7%) were due to internal party politics or the collapse of the ruling coalition. Thus, "in about one half of cases it is not voters who sanction the incumbent prime ministers but politicians" (Cheibub and Przeworski, 1999: 232).

Powell and Whitten (1993: 391-414) have also concluded that institutional conditions influence the capacity of voters to attribute responsibility for economic outcomes. Blame can be shifted to others when the policies of a minority government depend on the support of

other parties in parliament (Strøm, 1990). And responsibilities become blurred when several parties share decisions in a coalition. The threat of electoral sanctions is not credible if coalitions can survive a loss of votes by simply co-opting new members. In Rosenstone's words (1995: 9), "when a single party governs alone, voters can more easily hold it accountable electorally than when several parties comprise a governing coalition". In parliamentary democracies with proportional representation and fragmented party systems no relationship may exist between election results and government formation. A party in opposition may lose seats, but enter the government; a party in power may win seats, but be thrown out of the coalition. Private negotiations within coalitions and internecine struggles within parties often turn politics into an opaque affair for voters.

We know that party systems, parliaments, and the structure of governments influence democratic accountability. However, we know much less about whether parties as institutions can help or hinder the capacity of voters to control politicians. Party politics, and internal party democracy, have been segregated over a long time from democratic theory. Writing about parties, Sartori (1987: 151) stated that "no matter how oligarchic… the result of the competition between them is, on the aggregate, democracy". This segregation cannot stand if the internal politics of parties are relevant for the monitoring of governments and the information of voters. Internal debates and disputes are greater, by definition, in democratic parties: activists and competing politicians can demand information from the leadership and discuss alternative strategies.[1] Whether explanations are accepted or not is irrelevant: what matters here is that useful information flows within the party under conditions of internal democracy.

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[1] The 2002 Labour Party conference provides a good example. In September, the Labour government was defending two unpopular policies. On the international front, 65% of British voters opposed a unilateral military attack by the UK and the US against Irak, even if Sadam Husein rejected inspections by the United Nations of his suspected sites of production of chemical and nuclear weapons. On Saturday 29 September, 350,000 people demonstrated in the streets against the possibility of war. In the party conference, held in the same days, 40.2% of delegates rejected an attack against Irak regardless of the UN Security Council. On the domestic front, the Labour government was proposing to increase private finance of public provision of education and health. This was strongly opposed by public sector unions, was disliked by Labour voters, and was rejected by the conference. Blair was forced to use his speech to the conference on 1 October to provide an array of reasons for military pressure on Irak and for welfare reform. Information, and rhetoric, reached not only delegates and party members, but voters at large. See *The Guardian*, 30 September, 1 and 2 October 2002.

Let us now turn to the political capacity of a government to take decisions and implement them. If citizens want to control the incumbent, it is in order for the latter to carry out the policies for which it was elected or, if it has switched from policy promises, in order to ensure that the reason was to improve their welfare. But policies are carried out not just because citizens control the government and this induces its "political will". They also depend on the political capacity to transform this will into decisions and outcomes. Thus, the support of a voter for the policy position of the government will be displaced by a factor that depends on the capacity of the latter. This capacity can be limited by conditions which are external or internal to the government and its party. The external conditions include the opposition in parliament, resistance in society, international difficulties. I do not intend to dwell on these in this paper.

My concern here are the internal conditions that can influence the political capacity of a government; more particularly, the role of the party in office. To pose the problem in stark terms: a monolithical party, oligarchic and disciplined, can increase the political capacity of its government; a democratic party, with internal debates and disputes over policy, can limit this capacity. But whereas the first can reduce voters' information on what the government does, the second can facilitate it.[2] The political capacity of a government and the information of voters may therefore involve trade offs. This can conflict with the interests of citizens, who want both a controlled and a capable government.

For trade offs to exist, rather than sheer incompatibility between information and capacity, open internal debates and challenges to the leadership must not prevent electoral success. Parties in office must be able to debate polity switches and survive if the reasons provided by the government are considered to be satisfactory. Examples exist: the British Labour government of Harold Wilson and the Spanish socialist government of Felipe González won popular referenda in 1975 and 1986 on membership in the European Community and in NATO after internal discussions in the parties. If voters see internal debates as a source of information on a justifiable policy switch, the electoral prospects of a

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[2] It is obvious that the median voter will prefer a united party, with a single policy position, to a divided party with multiple positions. The distance with the median voter's ideal position will be easier to assess in the first case, and behaviour in office will be more predictable. However, the problem here is different: the party is already in office and the median voter has incomplete information on the actions of the government.

party in government need not be harmed. On the contrary, they will be if no reasons are provided for such switch by an internally disciplined and externally opaque party; or if debates are a source of noise, rather than information, and express paralysing internal struggles.

Thus, voters face trade offs over internal party politics, between information and political capacity. They may choose different combinations. They may prefer open lists of parliamentary candidates, rather than closed and blocked ones, and yet support a more centralized party with closed lists because its political capacity will not be questioned in office. They may think that a party leader is more informative and responsive, but vote for another with more authority to keep the party together and avoid confrontations in government.[3] Voters may have to make choices between more authority and capacity, or more democracy and information.

Governments in parliamentary democracies depend on the party in office and on voters. Cabinets must be tolerated not just by the electorate, but by a parliamentary majority. Prime ministers must cope with the party at large: otherwise, unpopularity within the party is eventually reflected in party congresses and in the parliamentary group. Ramsay MacDonald is a nightmare for prime ministers and parties in parliamentary democracies. We have thus an agent, the government, with two principals: the party, and the electorate.

## 2. A triangular agency relationship

If democratic representation is seen as a principal-agent relationship, the risk of agency losses exists if the government has interests different from those of its supporters and if information is asymmetrical. In the relationship of the government with both party and

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[3] In Spain, a survey of Demoscopia (*Barometro de Primavera*, 1992) revealed that a majority of citizens preferred open to closed lists. Yet they did not alter the party list in elections to the Senate where lists were open. In the United Kingdom, voters saw Neil Kinnock as more concerned than Margaret Thatcher about the interests of all groups in society (29.3% against 20.6%), and Thatcher as more likely to get things done (59.9% against 20.3%). The outcome was that 42.9% voted for Thatcher and only 29.6% for Kinnock (Anthony Heath, Roger Jowell, and John Curtice, *British Election Study*, 1992).

voters, it may be that the latter can increase their information about their agent looking at what happens between the government and the party.

This is a peculiar agency relationship. For one, the two principals are not competing for the agent, although both the party and the electorate want the government to give priority to their respective interests if in contradiction with those of the other principal. For two, the party and the voters stand in different positions *vis-à-vis* the agent. The instrument of enforcement of voters is, obviously, electoral sanctions and rewards. If the government is not a good agent, it will be thrown out of public office. The instrument of enforcement of the party is sanctions and rewards in internal elections to the leadership of the party or in the nomination of party candidates for public office. Thus, the party previously selects whom voters can choose as their agent.

Voters delegate power to the government in elections, but this delegation to some extent benefits the party, the other principal. Such benefits do not just consist of an array of political appointments that can only benefit a small proportion of party members. They basically involve the implementation of policies on which the party hopes to have some influence. So it is because party activists have preferences regarding particular policies that they want the government to be in office. Their preferences on policies may be different from the voters'; they will also be more intensive. While voters can always replace the government by the opposition, party activists will have a much stronger interest in their candidate remaining in power. There is however a threshold to this interest if activists were to believe that the government is not carrying out their policy preferences and is therefore shirking as their agent. When the threshold is reached, the party will be indifferent about its agent surviving in power. It will only want to remain in office replacing the party leader. In Germany, SPD members were largely indifferent about Helmut Schmidt surviving as Federal Chancellor in the 1982 elections: the party thought that a period in opposition would give new strength to the party's policy preferences after many years of subordination to those of the electorate.[4] Activists will also want to replace the incumbent, whatever their views on the policies being implemented, if their value of office is high and the electoral popularity of the

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[4] Personal interviews with the Executive Committee of the SPD, 17-20 May 1982. Of course SPD members could not foresee that, after Schmidt, they would be in opposition for 16 years.

government is falling. However, as Cheibub and Przeworski have shown (1999: 232-2), only 30% of new leaders who replace incumbents win the next elections. John Major is an exception, not the rule.

The government thus faces demands from two principals, and needs the support of both to stay in office. Figure 1 represents the positions of a government, its party, an opposition, and an electorate in a single dimension space, a simple left-right scale. It is based on Spanish survey data from the mid-1980s, used for illustrative purposes. Here, the ideal policy position of the median activist of the party in office is $X_1$; that of the median voter is $X_2$; that of the voters of the government, $X_3$; that of the opposition median activist, $X_4$; that of the voters of the opposition, $X_5$. As Cotta (1999:10) puts it, "Finding a balance between the preservation of the identity of the party (as required by the rank-and-file) and adapting it to the needs of the national political game is one of the crucial tasks of the party elite. To put it differently: the party elite will pursue the maximization of its goals to the extent that it does not endanger its position within the party". The distance between $X_1$ and $X_3$ represents the concessions of the party for the sake of electoralism. What we see in the Spanish case is an overlapping between $X_2$ and $X_3$: the government was sitting comfortably with an absolute majority, with the opposition far away from $X_2$, the median voter. González only needed to justify the concessions away from $X_1$, and stick to his electoral program.

Figure 2 represents a similar distribution of preferences, regarding now the role of the government in redistributing income.[5] The data refer to the United Kingdom in 1998: that is, Labour was in office with Tony Blair as prime minister, and the opposition was the Conservative Party under William Hague. The range of preferences goes from 1 to 5: from strong agreement with the proposition that the government should redistribute income between the rich and the poor, to strong disagreement. Positions $X_1$, $X_2$, $X_3$, $X_4$, and $X_5$ represent the same preferences as in Figure 1. Labour Party activists hold more extreme positions than voters. Demands from the electorate are different from demands within the party.

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[5] Note that, in Figures 1 and 2, the distributions of preferences of both party members and the electorate can be considered as exogenous, and, on the contrary, the distribution of preferences of government voters as endogenous. That is, the latter would not be static, but dependent on the policies carried out by the government.

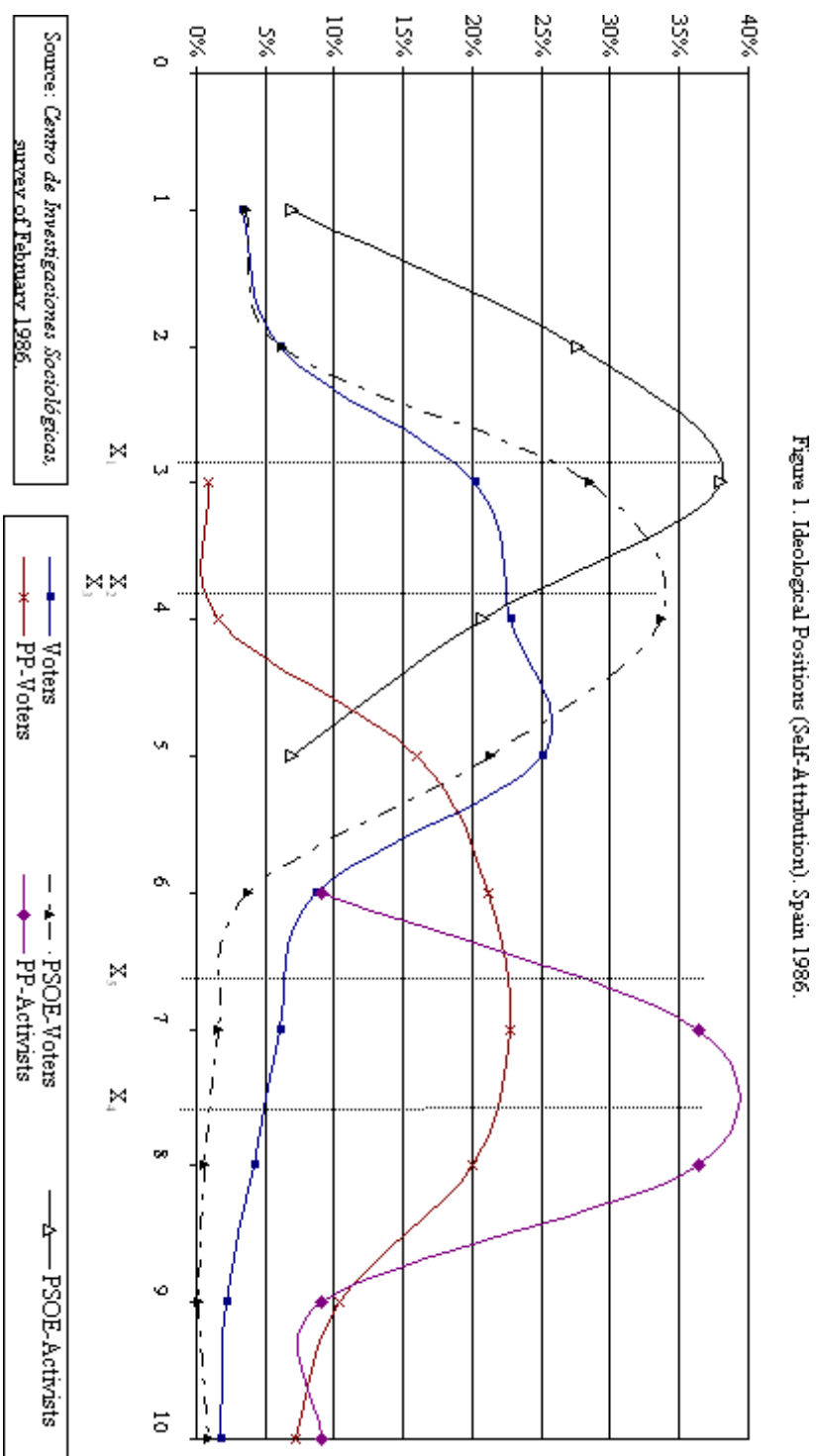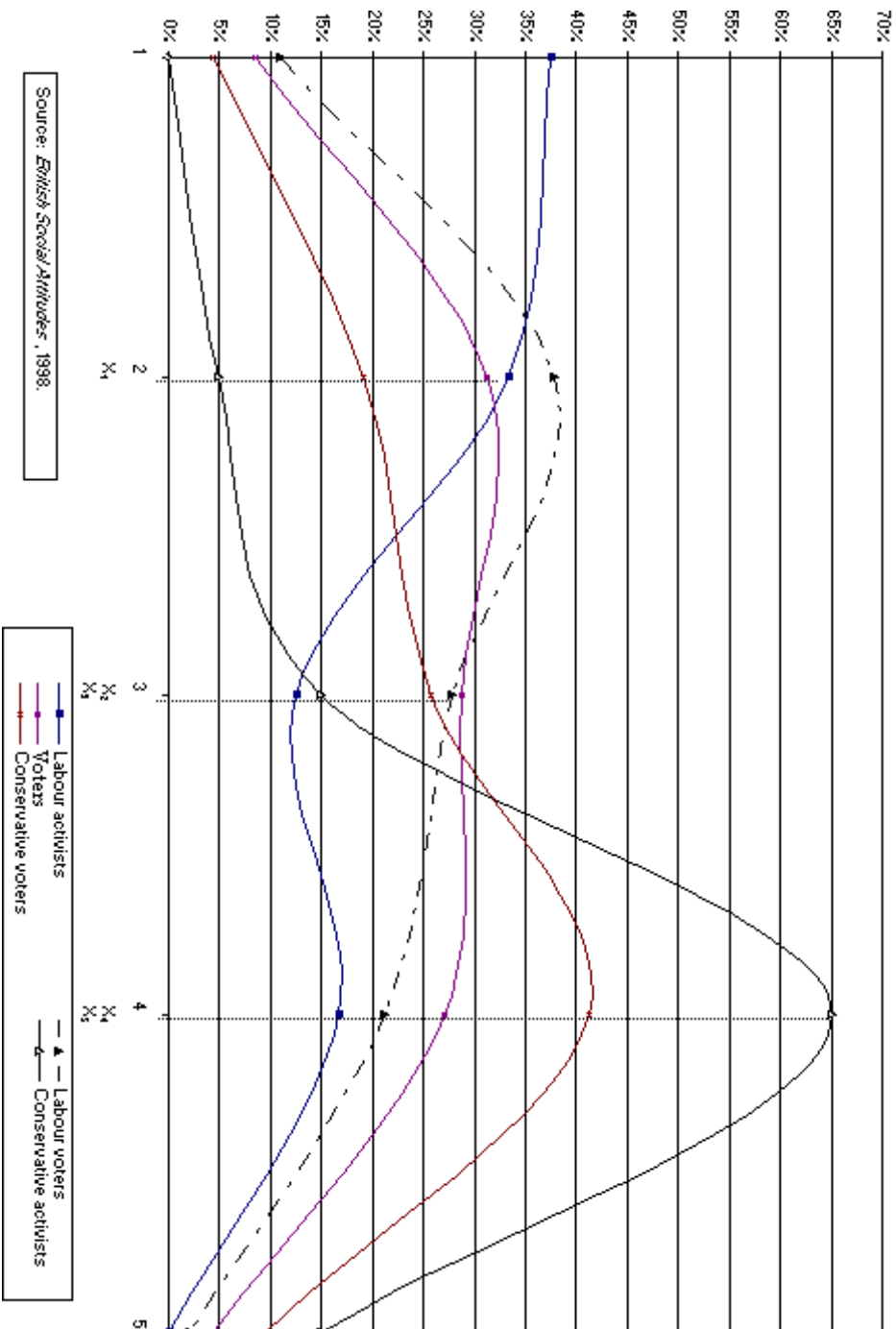Figure 1. Ideological Positions (Self-Attribution). Spain 1986.

Source: *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas,* survey of February 1986.

Figure 2. Policy Positions on Redistribution, Great Britain 1998.

Source: *British Social Attitudes*, 1998.

The utility of the government depends on the value it attaches to policies and office. The higher the value of policies relative to the value of office, the less likely the policies of the government will converge with the median voter preferences,[6] while the contrary will happen the higher the value of office is. If information is asymmetrical between the agent and the two principals, the government will truthfully report its actions if it is behaving as a good agent for both. If it is not behaving as such, it will mislead them: either both simultaneously, or only one of them if their policy preferences differ, and the government is acting on behalf of one rather than the other. If we regard the party as principal, governments will deploy strategies of concealment if the party does not have information on actions that it would sanction (such as corruption in the executive). If this information exists and concealment is not an available option, governments will turn to strategies of electoralist excuses if the party cares about office; and of party unity if party activists hold a polarized view of political competition. Thus, party unity can be the result of the government acting or not acting on behalf of the party, and furthermore on that of the voters.

Table 1 shows the polarised view of politics that party activists can have. The illustration comes from survey data on Spanish politics.

**Table 1.** *Ideological positions and distances (Spain)*

|  | Self-assigned position | Ideological position of the PSOE (diff.) | | Ideological position of the PP (diff.) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| According to: |  |  |  |  |  |
| Non-PSOE voters | 5.23 | 3.87 | (1.36) | 8.27 | (3.04) |
| PSOE voters | 3.89 | 3.69 | (.20) | 8.64 | (4.75) |
| PSOE activists | 2.93 | 3.14 | (.21) | 8.74 | (5.81) |

Source: *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, survey of February 1986 (N = 2,454).

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[6] This argument rests on several assumptions. Among them, that the government is perfectly informed about the preferences of voters, and that the latter are not distributed over the whole space of political competition in multiparty systems.

If party activists were to disagree with the policies of the socialist government, their polarized view of the opposition (the Popular Party–PP) would restrain them. Thus, the threshold of tolerance of the party can be manipulated by the government depending on the political polarization and the electoral support of the opposition. The political space is malleable: distances between their own position and that of the opposition are wider for party activists. If they care about office, it is due to the value that they attribute to the policies of their government compared to those of the ideologically distant opposition.

## 3. The control of governments by parties

A first argument of why parties control governments goes as follows. Parties provide a "brand name" that facilitates information to voters: judgements about how present leaders behave in office can use as clues past performances of previous leaders. Ever since Downs (1957: 109-11) it has been argued that party labels help voters to summarize past governmental records. Organizational reputations serve as informational shortcuts for retrospective voting (Key, 1966; Fiorina, 1981; Alt, 1984; Popkin, 1991; Kiewiet and McCubbins, 1991; Achen, 1992). A second argument is this: because parties compete in a political market, they must respond to public demand, offer good products and replace bad ones. Parties therefore reduce the scope for opportunism by politicians. For this second argument to stand, parties must have a longer time horizon than politicians. This is a reasonable assumption. Table 2 provides information on the average years in office for both heads of government and parties in 38 democracies that lasted over the period 1975-1995,[7] with observations for 775 country/years.[8] Parties always lasted longer in office than individual politicians, but particularly so in parliamentary systems. If the main difference between both systems affects parties, rather than individual office-holders, then the absence

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[7] The countries are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bahamas, Barbados, Botswana, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Luxembourg, Malta, Mauritius, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Trinidad, United Kingdom, United States, Vanuatu, and Venezuela.

[8] I have excluded those years in which the government was led by an independent, with no party affiliation. Two cases were Cyprus in 1989-93, and Portugal in 1978-9.

of term limits does not provide a sufficient explanation for such greater longevity of incumbents under parliamentarism. Note that years refer to uninterrupted office: leaders could come back after a period in opposition.

**Table 2.** *Average period in office. Democracies between 1975 and 1995 (years/months)*

|  | Total | Parliamentary systems | Presidential systems |
|---|---|---|---|
| Heads of government | 4/7 | 4/8 | 4/2 |
| Parties | 7/6 | 8/1 | 5/0 |
| N | 775 | 636 | 139 |

Parties might therefore constrain incumbent politicians, in order "to uphold the party's reputation so that the party's candidates will continue to win in the future" (Wittman, 1995: 10). Because different generations coexist in a party, party politicians have different time horizons: those with the longer ones prevent shirking by the present incumbents. This argument relates to the "overlapping generations" model[9] of Alesina and Speer (1988). Out of office, the politicians' declared ideal policy position is the median voter's; once in office, the positions will not diverge if party members who anticipate running for office in the future want the party to remain credible. In Wittman's (1995: 21) terms, "other members of the party have strong incentives to maintain the reputation of the party since the brand name is valuable in attracting votes". If this model were to fit party politics, internal democracy would serve the interests of voters.

The model, however, faces problems. For one, this internal party democracy is oligarchical: the aspiring "political heirs" are a restricted elite. If the party is to control

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[9] The basic "overlapping generations" model was due to Samuelson (1958): it was a discrete-time model of an infinite-horizon economy, in which individuals lived two periods and then died, and a new generation was born in each period. At any point in time, the population consisted of only two generations, those born at the beginning of the current period (the "young") and at the beginning of the previous period (the "old").

incumbent politicians so that they will respond to the interests of voters, the internal monitoring and enforcement must be run by the "political heirs", not the activists. For two, the successive generations of politicians must not collude. However, some conditions provide incentives for collusion. Thus, if the incumbent shirks and only the "political heirs" know, they will have no incentives to inform voters unless concealment becomes costly for them. Only if voters are informed by other means, incentives for the "political heirs" to react will exist.

An alternative interpretation is that the external accountability of the government depends on party activists, rather than on aspiring leaders. If we accept that party activists are hardly in politics for the perks of office, then they must have a strong commitment for policies and think that there is some probability that they will influence the policies of the government. The costs of activism are indeed much higher than those of voting: activists must participate in demanding debates, run activities in the local branches, distribute party propaganda, contact potential voters, and so on. Thus, the probability of influence and the party differential (the value attributed to the implementation of the policies of the government compared to those of the opposition) must have a considerable weight in the activists' political commitments. It is therefore plausible to assume that activists will want to monitor the actions of the government as their agent. And, also, that the greater the involvement of activists, the stronger their demands of control of the leaders: there will be different degrees of activism among party members.

Electoral programs are a trade-off for party activists between policies and power: the party will make concessions regarding its ideal policy position (in figures 1 and 2, the distance between $X_1$ and $X_3$) if they increase electoral possibilities. Voters seldom read political programs; on the contrary, activists debate and scrutinize them intensely, because they represent the *raison d'être* of their efforts. In Stokes' words (1999: 261), "Activists may use party manifestos as a contract between themselves and party leaders, a common understanding of the position they were able to get candidates to adopt in exchange for a quietening of voice". These concessions will be greater if activists fear a victory of the opposition and see the latter as strongly polarised.

Democratic representation may conflict therefore with internal party democracy if the preferences of party members are different and more extreme than those of voters. If the value of policies relative to that of office is greater for activists than for leaders, they will defend policies with less regard to their electoral attraction: contrary to the centripetal influence of the median voter,[10] that of party activists will be centrifugal. If the government tries to be responsive regarding the median voter, it will antagonize the party. This divergence of interests between leaders and activists corresponds to what May (1973: 133-51) called "the law of curvilinear disparity". According to this interpretation, if parties control governments it is no longer in order to protect the interests of voters and the future electoral prospects of party candidates. The reason is to defend the interests of activists from total subordination to the voters'. Thus, whenever the political influence of activists decreases (and internal party democracy becomes limited), on the one hand the chances of electoral victory augment and, on the other, governments become more responsive to voters.

The policy positions of party members are usually more extreme than those of party voters'. Remember the illustrations of figures 1 and 2, and table 1. Iversen (1994a, 1994b), however, contradicts this diagnosis with evidence on voters in seven countries and on delegates to congresses of 37 parties in these countries. He shows that both leaders and delegates to party congresses, on the left as well as on the right, have more radical political views than their voters. And he does not find any disparity between the policy positions of leaders and the middle-level elites (the delegates to the congresses). "The overwhelming impression is one of intraparty coherence" (Iversen, 1994a: 175). Thus, because no internal differences exist within parties *vis-à-vis* voters, Iversen indicates that "there does not seem to be any dilemma between internal party democracy and external representation" (Iversen, 1994a: 172).

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[10] This argument rests on assumptions about available information on the ideal policy position of the median voter. But if there is uncertainty about this position, the information of the government differs from that of the opposition, and parties are pure office-seekers (Ferejohn and Noll, 1978), the government is not necessarily drawn to convergence with the opposition and away from party activists. Also, in multiparty systems where the voters' ideal positions are spread across the policy space, the positions of parties will be dispersed in this space and not be attracted to the median voter position (Cox, 1987, 1990; Shepsle and Cohen, 1990). Under ordinary plurality and proportional representation, the spread of positions will increase with the number of parties (Cox, 1990).

This evidence is not very convincing. Delegates at party congresses, as middle-level elites, can be typical "political heirs" of the incumbent. That is, their interests may correspond to the "overlapping generations" model. In order to protect their own future electability, they will want the incumbent to be responsive to voters. Were these delegates to be one of the two principals, their interests would be to defend those of the other principal, the median voter.

A problem therefore lies in the definition of the party. The control of the incumbent by the party depends on who are the delegates to party congresses. If rank-and-file militants attend them, we can expect their value of being in office to be different than if the delegates come from the party *nomenklatura*. So, internal elections to the organs that monitor party leaders and enforce sanctions are important not just for party democracy but for the responsiveness of the government. If we look at Spanish politics, 67% of delegates to the 1990 congress of the Socialist Party (PSOE), when this party was in government, held public office. Internal elections for delegates were ruled by a majoritarian principle and bloc voting procedures, which resulted in strongly oligarchical congresses where the policies of the government were generally backed by over 80% of delegates. The proportion of office-holders among delegates to the 2002 congress of the Popular Party (PP), when it was also in government, was 60% (*ABC*, 25 January 2002). The control of this congress by the leadership was overwhelming.

The participation of rank-and-file activists in the election of the leadership and in the formulation of policies depends on party institutions. Parties competing in single-member constituencies, selecting their candidates through primaries, and with decentralized campaign resources are likely to have more active internal politics and a polycentric distribution of power; they may also become confederations of powerful and independent barons. On the contrary, parties competing in multi-member constituencies, with closed lists and unified campaign resources, will tend to have a powerful central organization and their internal politics will be much more restricted. The extra-parliamentary layer is dominant in mass integration parties; it is much less important in catch-all, cartel, or cadre parties.

Muller (2000: 319) writes that "despite the transformation of European parties in the post-war period, party representatives in public office ultimately remain the agents of the extra-parliamentary party organization". There are important variations, however, in the internal party politics of parliamentary democracies, due to organizational differences. There was a clear contrast, for example, between the British Conservative Party and the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) in the 1980's and 1990's. The first consisted of a confederation of notables, with an opaque circle of power, and its candidates competed in single-member districts. The second was run by a strong centre that tightly controlled the party; this centre had the final decision on the candidates to be included in closed lists, running in multi-member districts. This difference in the control over the party may explain the different end of the incumbency of Felipe González and Margaret Thatcher. Both led long-lasting governments that overlapped very much in time. But while the decline in popularity of González was much more evident, he was never internally challenged and led the party to the electoral defeat of 1996. Thatcher, on the contrary, was replaced by John Major following an internal conspiracy: although she was the incumbent prime minister, party notables believed she had become an electoral handicap.

Internecine party struggles can be due to attempts to reinforce or weaken information, monitoring, and enforcement devices of activists. Formulas for a closer control by rank-and-file members, however, are not very clear. For instance, Katz and Mair (1995) have persuasively argued that individual voting may produce greater fragmentation within the party, disorganization of internal opposition, and easier manipulation of activists by leaders. In any case, public office is typically used by incumbents to avoid control by the party. Leaders always demand unity and discipline on the grounds that this is what citizens expect and what competitors try to undermine; they require loyalty, so that any eventual criticism is made internally and "the dirty linen is not washed in public;" they claim that incumbents of public office must always govern for the citizens, not the party; and they dramatize differences with the opposition. If they succeed, dissent between party members and leaders will be very limited when the party is in office: only a minority of strongly involved, critical activists will use voice. As table 3 shows,[11] members of the Spanish Socialist Party were

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[11] In the three logit regression models of table 3, the dependent variable has values of 0 bad, 1 good. The independent variables were coded as follows. (i) PSOE members 1, voters 0. (ii) PSOE members 1, PSOE voters 0. (iii) Ideology on a left-right scale of 1 to 10.

more likely to support their government than voters in general, and also than voters of the government. Such support extended to the unemployment record, which increased from 16.3% to 21.2% between 1982 and 1986 (*Economie Europeenne*, 60, 1996: 102). Only a small fraction of party members were critical activists: their strongest support was reached in the 1988 congress of the PSOE, when *Izquierda Socialista* had 7% of the delegates and obtained 22.5% of the congress votes (*El País*, 25 January 1988).

**Table 3.** *Evaluation of the performance of the government (González government in Spain)*

| | Evaluation of general performance of the government (1986) (1) | | Evaluation of governmental performance on unemployment (1993) (2) (3) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Logit coeffs. | SE | Logit coeffs. | SE | Logit coeffs. | SE |
| Constant | 3.808(***) | 0.209 | 0.758(***) | 0.180 | 0.314 | 0.288 |
| Activists/total voters | 1.695(**) | 1.026 | 1.275(**) | 0.575 | - | - |
| Activists/PSOE voters | - | - | - | - | 1.003(*) | 0.622 |
| Ideology | -0.680(***) | 0.042 | -0.245(***) | 0.041 | -0.185 | 0.081 |
| Chi$^2$ | 413.735(***) | | 46.870(***) | | 8.582(**) | |
| -2 log likelihood | 1575.805 | | 1010.052 | | 55.095 | |
| Number of cases | 1539 | | 1278 | | 489 | |

\*    Significant at 10%.
\*\*   Significant at 5%.
\*\*\* Significant at 1% or less.

Sources:  *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, February 1986
          *DATA S.A.*, May-June 1993.

Partisanship induces optimism on future economic performance and exoneration of present policies that are unpopular by non-partisan voters. Table 4 shows how views of the world varied in Great Britain according to partisanship.[12] The stronger the Conservative

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[12] The values of the independent variables were as follows. (i) Partisanship: 1-conservative partisan. 2-conservative sympathizer. 3-conservative residual identifier. 4-other. (ii) Education: 1-completed continuous full time education at 19 years of age or more. 2-at 18. 3-at 17. 4-at 16. 5-at 15 years of age or less. (iii) Income: 1-lives comfortably on present income. 2-can cope. 3-finds it difficult. 4-finds it very difficult. As for the dependent variables the values were: (i) Inflation a year from now: 0-will go down (a lot, a little). 1-will go up (a lot, a little) or stay the same. (ii) Unemployment a year from now: same values as inflation. (iii) Industrial performance a year from now: 0-improve (a lot, a little). 1-decline (a lot, a little) or stay the same. (iv) Satisfaction with National Health Service: 0-satisfied (very, quite). 1-dissatisfied (very, quite) or neither. Other answers (DK, NA) were excluded.

partisanship, the more likely the optimism about future inflation, unemployment, and industrial performance, and the greater the satisfaction about the National Health Service (which was under widespread criticism in this final period of the Thatcher government). When education increased, optimism about future inflation went up, but views on future industrial performance became more pessimistic and satisfaction with the NHS was less likely. Income differences had no statistically significant effects.

**Table 4.** *Partisanship and policy evaluations (Thatcher government in Great Britain)*

| | Inflation a year from now (1990) (1) | | Unemployment a year from now (1990) (2) | | Industrial performance a year from now (1990) (3) | | Satisfaction with NHS (1990) (4) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Logit coeffs. | SE | Logit coeffs. | SE | Logit coeffs. | SE | Logit coeffs. | SE |
| Constant | 1.382(***) | 0.302 | 0.844(***) | 0.208 | 0.725(***) | 0.198 | -0.013 | 0.166 |
| Income | 0.111 | 0.115 | 0.101 | 0.072 | 0.060 | 0.068 | 0.023 | 0.055 |
| Education | 0.108(*) | 0.059 | -0.047 | 0.040 | -0.069(*) | 0.038 | -0.113(***) | 0.032 |
| Partisanship | 0.263(***) | 0.064 | 0.247(***) | 0.042 | 0.261(***) | 0.040 | 0.316(***) | 0.034 |
| Chi$^2$ | 26.577(***) | | 44.567(***) | | 52.714(***) | | 106.331(***) | |
| -2 log likelihood | 1057.570 | | 2073.098 | | 2241.434 | | 2982.555 | |
| Number of cases | 2797 | | 2797 | | 2797 | | 2797 | |

\* Significant at 10%.
\*\*\* Significant at 1% or less.
Source: *British Social Attitudes*, 1990.

That party members, who have strong policy preferences and consider the electoral program as just a transaction, judge their government's policies more favourably than voters is paradoxical. This can be explained by their polarized view of the opposition (Table 1). As a reaction to the threat of the opposition, they defend their government. But if party members see the world with ideological blinkers, and the voice of critical activists is limited, the information that parties will provide to voters in order to control the government will be very weak. There are, of course, endless examples of leaders trying to increase their control over critical voice. I shall briefly examine, for illustrative purpose, the experiences of the British Labour Party, particularly following its electoral defeat in 1979 and until 1997, and of the

Spanish PSOE, both in opposition and in government from 1979 to 1996. The two institutional settings were very different: on the one hand, a majoritarian system, with single-member electoral districts; on the other, a system of proportional representation, with closed lists of candidates competing in multi-member districts. In the British system, the political position of members of parliament is much stronger, depending on their personal support by voters; a considerable political symbiosis also exists between the Parliamentary Party and the government, so that members of cabinet must be sitting MPs or, occasionally, members of the House of Lords. In the Spanish system, members of parliament are much more dependent on the party; the cabinet is also less connected to the parliamentary group.

## 4. Conflict over control

Leaders think that voters punish undisciplined and divided parties; they must therefore control their party if they want to hold public office. Activists want to control leaders in order to ensure their faithfulness to the party program. Thus, an important part of politics in parliamentary democracies consists of struggles within parties. Such struggles involve demands for internal party democracy as it has been defined at the beginning of the paper: accountability of the leaders and capacity of the party members to replace them if they dislike their policies or do not trust their electoral prospects.

In the British Labour Party, according to internal rules, the annual conference of delegates is the supreme policy-making authority. In Clement Attlee's words (1937: 93), the conference "lays down the policy of the Party and issues instructions which must be carried out by the Executive, the affiliated organizations and its representatives in Parliament." Delegates cast their votes in accordance with the prior mandates of the affiliated organizations represented in the conference. Many years later, the opening words of the 1973 programme declared that "In the Labour Party policy is made by the members." Over a long time, conflict between the party and the government, the conference and the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP), was avoided: the party was simply an instrument of the government, helping with apologies, propaganda, and electoral mobilization. It hardly acted as a

monitoring agency. The conference followed the indications of the National Executive Committee (NEC), which in turn obeyed those of the parliamentary leadership. This was the pattern of internal party politics under the Attlee government; and from 1948 to 1960 the official platform was undefeated in the conference.[13] Thus, no conflict existed as long as the party did not question the leadership.

That there were limits to internal democracy was repeatedly indicated by Labour leaders. Sidney Webb described the party branches (the constituency parties) as "unrepresentative groups of nonentities dominated by fanatics and cranks, and extremists."[14] Three episodes revealed this hidden conflict over internal democracy. Two of them followed electoral defeats; the other one was with Labour in office.

The first case was the confrontation between the party conference and Hugh Gaitskell, the party leader, following the overwhelming electoral defeat in 1959. In order to improve Labour's chances in future elections, Gaitskell tried to drop the traditional party program of economic nationalizations and to stop a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament in the 1960 Scarborough conference. When he failed, he rejected the verdict of the conference and defended the autonomy of the PLP over policy:

> "It is not in dispute that the vast majority of Labour Members of Parliament are utterly opposed to unilateralism and neutralism. So what do you expect them to do? (…) I do not believe that the Labour MPs are prepared to act as time servers. I do not believe they will do this, and I will tell you why: because they are men of conscience (…) What sort of people do you think we are? Do you think we can simply accept a decision of this kind? (…) How wrong can you be? As wrong as you are about the attitude of the British people (…) There are some of us, Mr. Chairman, who will fight and fight and fight again to save the party we love."

Gaitskell eventually managed to change the party's position the following year. The party's electoral appeal improved: from June 1962 onwards, Labour won successive by-elections until the party came back to office in 1964. But the party leadership accepted conference decisions only as far as they reflected its own preferences.

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[13] With the exception of a minor vote in the 1950 annual conference.

[14] According to Beatrice Webb's *Diaries* (18 May 1930: 53-4).

The autonomy of leaders *vis-à-vis* the party has been defended in the name of democracy. McKenzie has thus argued that party organs cannot supplant the legislature: "oligarchical control by the party leaders of the party organization is indispensable for the well-being of a democratic polity (…) intra-party democracy, strictly interpreted, is incompatible with democratic government" (1982: 195). And, having stated a few years earlier that "the extra-parliamentary party… (was) the final authority on policy issues" (*The New Statesman*, 30 June 1961), Crossman wrote: "since these militants tended to be 'extremists', a constitution was needed which maintained their enthusiam by apparently creating a full party democracy while excluding them from effective power" (1961; 1963: 41-2).

The second episode was under the Labour governments of Harold Wilson. Between 1964 and 1969, the government suffered twelve defeats in conferences (Howell, 1976: 246; Minkin and Seyd, 1977: 142 fn.65). The policies on which the party voted against the government covered employment, prices and incomes limits, pit closures, prescription charges in the National Health Service, the Vietnam war, military deployment East of Suez, and the reaction to the military coup in Greece. Two cases were of particular importance: one was the rejection of the White Paper *In Place of Strife*;[15] the other, the growing opposition to Britain joining the European Community.[16] Both issues became central in the experience of the Labour governments. Industrial relations and economic policy eventually ended the trade unions-Labour traditional cooperation in the "Winter of Discontent" of 1979, helping Thatcher's electoral victory and the long period of Conservative rule. As for membership in the European Community, it increasingly divided the party. In its spell in opposition from 1970 to 1974, Labour had opposed membership under the terms achieved by the Conservative government of Edward Heath; it promised to renegotiate them, and to submit the result to a referendum. Back in office, the Labour government fulfilled both promises: the party, however, rejected the new membership conditions in a special conference held in April 1975. No party discipline existed in the referendum: Labour, as well as Conservatives,

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[15] The White Paper *In Place of Strife* regulated procedures of negotiation and compromise for trade unions. The National Executive Committee voted 16 to 5 against legislation based on the document. 57 MPs voted against the document in a House of Commons debate in March 1969.

[16] While the leadership supported application for membership to the European Community, 35 MPs voted against it in a Commons debate in May 1967.

campaigned both for a "no" and for a "yes" vote –the latter supported by a majority of Labour leaders, including the Prime Minister. Debate inside the party on the conditions of membership in the European Community supplied voters with abundant information. The final vote eventually accepted the new conditions of entry.

Thus, in the 1960s and 1970s Labour became an increasingly divided party over policies. Either in government or in opposition, the leadership no longer had its former tight control over the party. The traditional system of internal organization was deeply transformed. The selection of parliamentary candidates had always been closely supervised by the leadership; sitting MPs were not to be replaced as candidates by the constituency parties; intra-party factions were banned. From the mid-1960s, however, factions were allowed to operate; discipline became much less rigid. The *Campaign for Labour Party Democracy*, and later the *Rank and File Mobilising Committee*, were organized to transfer power away from the parliamentary leadership to the party: the key issues were the election of the party leader and the capacity of the constituency parties to remove as candidates sitting MPs.[17] Therefore, when Labour was in office, activists attempted to win a greater control of politicians by the party.

The third episode of the struggle started with the 1979 elections. The left of the party interpreted the defeat as due to the uncontrolled autonomy of the leadership, to the lack of accountability towards the rank and file. Demands for greater internal democracy were eventually successful in the 1980 Blackpool conference. Sitting MPs became subject of mandatory reselection as candidates by the constituency parties; the leader and deputy leader of the party were to be elected by a wider franchise.[18] Activists in the local constituency parties won a much greater political influence.

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[17] Between 1973 and 1976 the local constituency parties rejected as candidates several sitting MPs: Dick Taverne in Lincoln, Eddie Griffiths in Sheffield Brightside, Reg Prentice in Newham North East, Frank Tomney in Hammersmith North.

[18] The leader of the party was so far elected by the Parliamentary Labour Party. A special conference held in January 1981 changed the rules: an electoral college elected the leader and deputy leader. In such college unions were attributed 40% of the votes, the PLP 30%, and the constituency parties 30%.

These reforms in the internal rules were associated with a radicalisation of the party's program. At the time of the 1983 general election, 58% of voters saw the Labour Party as divided; only 12% as moderate; 30% as extreme.[19] The electoral results were disastrous: Labour won only 27.6% of the vote, its lowest share since 1918. Organizational changes and more radical policy proposals did not attract working class votes: Labour's share of votes among workers declined from 64% in 1974 to 49% in 1983 (Richards, 1997).

The defeat marked the end of this episode.[20] Neil Kinnock, the new party leader, gradually restored authority and discipline within the party. The Parliamentary Labour Party recovered supremacy over policy; the party became again an instrument of support of the leadership. The 1986 conference expelled from the party the Militant Tendency. But the electoral recovery took a long time: in the elections of 1987, Labour's share of the vote increased only 3.2 percentage points. The strategy of greater control by the leadership and moderation of policies continued. On the one hand, Kinnock launched in September 1987 the Policy Review, trimming down the more radical proposals of the program. On the other, the leadership was reinforced, against the influence of critical activists, by the introduction of direct balloting and the formula of "one-member-one-vote." Mair (1997: 150) has argued that "democratisation on paper may (…) actually coexist with powerful elite influence in practice." And, from the left of the party, Ken Livingstone complained that "the methods used inside the Labour Party (…) have been completely Stalinist (*The Guardian*, 24 March 1990). Yet only 15% of party members agreed with the statement that "A problem with the Labour Party today is that the leader is too powerful;" 71% disagreed (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992: 51). Such reforms eventually concluded with the transformation of Labour under Tony Blair and its return to office in the 1997 general election. According to a MORI survey in September 1997, only 3% of voters saw Labour as extreme, and 8% as divided.

The conclusion of the three episodes of the struggle over internal democracy in the Labour Party is paradoxical. For one, direct democracy eventually reinforced the authority of the leaders at the cost of the more demanding activists. This was the result of direct balloting

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[19] According to a MORI survey: htto://www.mori.com/polls/trends/party-img-lab.html.

[20] In this narrative I rely extensively on Richards (1997).

of grass-roots members, who supported the leadership against the critical activists. For two, while the reforms that gave power to the latter were presented as an example of organizational democracy (Benn 1992), voters punished the party for its internal disputes and factionalism.

The Spanish *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE) had a long history of factionalism. Internal divisions had been particularly dramatic over the 1934 revolutionary uprising in Asturias and the alliance with the republicans between September 1933 and November 1934. These divisions weakened the democratic experience in the 1930s. The Civil War and Francoism almost destroyed the party, which could only survive in exile and in small, protected enclaves. In the last years of the dictatorship the PSOE had only 2,000 members inside Spain. However, after a new leadership with Felipe González took over the party in 1974, the number of members increased rapidly: it reached 8,000 in 1976 and 101,000 in 1979. In the first elections of the new democracy, the party won 29.3% of the vote, second only to the *Unión de Centro Democrático* (UCD), the party of the prime minister, Adolfo Suárez.

The expansion of the PSOE absorbed other groups of the left.[21] This contributed very much to internal pluralism in the party over several years. But the main organizational concern of PSOE leaders was the unity of the party: an obsession to avoid the fratricidal struggles of the past. Moreover, UCD collapsed due to internecine disputes. Two episodes expressed the conflict between internal democracy and discipline: one with the PSOE in opposition; the other, in government.

The first started in 1979. The PSOE lost again the general elections: its share of the vote hardly changed. The ideological definition of the PSOE as a Marxist party, adopted in 1976, appeared to damage its electoral attraction. But a proposal by González to moderate this ideological rhetoric was rejected by the congress of the party, two months after the election. González then refused to stand for re-election as general secretary of the party. In

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[21] Former members of the *Partido Comunista de España* (PCE), *Convergencia Socialista*, *Partido Socialista Popular* (PSP), *Federación de Partidos Socialistas* (FPS), *Frente de Liberación Popular* (FLP).

his speech he claimed that the resolutions adopted by congress would not appeal to a majority of voters, and that he would not lead the party in a direction that he disagreed with.

> "This congress has shown that any Executive Committee, any person whatever his or her position, can lose a democratic debate (…) In this congress Felipe González has suffered a defeat. I have never been a rush pliable by the wind in whichever direction it blows (…). This is a democratic party that wants to transform society. It must therefore count on the support of a majority. (Many men and women) must get from the socialists an answer to their problems (…). The comrades that will have the responsibility of leading the party will not be able to carry out some of the resolutions of this congress."

The congress, however, accepted a reform of the internal rules of the party that increased very much the control of the leadership over the organization. The election of delegates to party congresses changed to a majoritarian, winner-takes-all rule. Delegates no longer represented local branches, but the much larger provincial organizations. Moreover, this representation was increasingly absorbed by the 17 regional parties. Due to block-voting, delegates of the different organizations had only one voice, that of the regional general secretary.[22] Individual protest votes were thus prevented. The outcome of national congresses became predictable: it was simply the result of oligarchical pacts following the regional congresses. The small executive organ (the *Comisión Ejecutiva Federal* –CEF) accumulated vast resources for rewards and sanctions, including the control of closed and blocked lists of electoral candidates (Maravall, 1991).

Felipe González was re-elected general secretary of a party that was now much more disciplined. The PSOE won the next election in 1982, and remained in office for 14 years. According to the director of *El País*, the main Spanish newspaper, the socialists were in power not due to "a better program, but to the greater discipline in their ranks and the stability that they represent" (Cebrián, 1989: 9-10). This discipline was a great help for the government when it faced difficult conflicts –over industrial reconversion, educational reforms, or general strikes. Yet in order to use the party as an instrument for social persuasion, the government had to supply the activists with reasons. This was particularly

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[22] There were exceptions to these rules. The "political resolution" of congress and part of the members of the Federal Committee of the party (which supervised the politics of the CEF) were voted by individual delegates.

necessary when a policy appeared to be a *volte-face* from the electoral program. Thus, when the government switched from an earlier position of the party in opposition over NATO membership, González used the 1984 congress of the party to start providing explanations in order first to persuade activists, and only later voters in a referendum. He achieved both; and the PSOE won the 1986 general elections with a majority of seats in parliament.

However internal pluralism became gradually more restricted, debates more inhibited, criticism increasingly irrelevant. The deputy leader of the party, Alfonso Guerra, controlled the organization very tightly, with the help of an informal, closely-knit network that operated like a party within the party. Weak internal voice meant little monitoring, a poor system of early warning, and growing policy inertias. This first episode consisted, therefore, of a trend towards greater discipline in the party: it started with an internal crisis, and followed with an electoral victory and a long period in government. This discipline was initially helpful in winning elections and in governing. The consequences of the weaker monitoring and warning system were revealed in the second period, which started with the PSOE in government, included scandals and internal divisions, and ended with the socialists in opposition.

Successive scandals emerged from 1990 onwards, provoking demands for political accountability.[23] These demands were expressed within the party's *nomenklatura*: the members were silent, shocked, and uninformed. The reaction to such demands consisted of political reprisals by Guerra,[24] which fuelled internal conflict and factionalism. As an editorial of *El País*, sympathetic with the socialists, put it: "That no external explanations have to be given is the main characteristic of the present system of power in the Socialist Party. What is known as *guerrismo*, which served to guarantee the unity of the party when it was valuable, has simultaneously blocked the possibility of internal renovation (…). Its main standard-bearers no longer believe in themselves and in their discourse. This has accentuated their authoritarian traits (…) even at the peril of recklessly destroying everything ("La prueba del nueve", 19 April 1990). Guerra eventually became an electoral liability: he was forced to

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[23] One of these scandals was the accumulation of wealth by the brother of the deputy leader –the Juan Guerra affair. The other was an illegal system of financing, hidden to the official organs of the party –the Filesa affair.

leave the government in 1991, but tried to increase his control over the party. To quote from an internal document written to González,[25]

> "Internal power is often used ruthlessly (…). We are ditching a spectacular number of people, generally people that do not belong to the party's machinery and do not accept submission – which is quite different from loyalty (…). Nobody, however minoritarian, should be afraid of personal political consequences for dissenting. This is not to defend divisions inside the party: only that internal cohesion can only be the result of debates and of accountability."

The combination of scandals and authoritarianism led to further internal struggles. Whereas in 1990 66.1% of people believed that the PSOE was a united party, the percentage fell to 14.2% in 1994.[26] Demands for accountability were dismissed as threats against unity, discipline, and solidarity;[27] their proponents were accused of treason and disloyalty. But although the PSOE was torn by internecine confrontations, González managed to keep vast support: this enabled the party to win the 1993 elections. The new victory did not change the pattern of reaction to the scandals: no explanations were provided either to voters or to party members. The following elections in 1996 brought the years of socialist rule to an end.

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[24] The two more relevant cases of reprisals were José Rodríguez de la Borbolla, president of the regional government of Andalucía and general secretary of the PSOE in the region (who lost both jobs), and Joaquín Leguina, who had the same positions in Madrid (who remained president of the regional government).

[25] This document is part of a series written by the author to Felipe González while a member of the Cabinet (1982-8) and of the CEF (1979-84, 1988-94). This one is dated 15 September 1990.

[26] *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, surveys of November 1990 and February 1994 (N = 2,492 and 2,499). Percentages are calculated excluding people who did not know or did not answer (which represented 23.6% and 21.2% of the respective samples). The questions were worded differently in the two surveys: in 1990 people were asked whether the PSOE was united or divided; in 1994, whether divisions existed between the leaders.

[27] A debate in the executive organ of the PSOE (the *Comisión Ejecutiva Federal* –CEF) may be illustrative. It took place on 12 May 1992. Discussing the Filesa affair of illegal financing, some members attributed to external and internal enemies the fabrication of the scandal, demanded solidarity, and made threats. This was the answer from another member of the CEF: "To react like an ostrich is unacceptable. Nobody must seek refuge in the party to avoid responsibilities at the party's cost. Filesa is not the product of a lack of internal cohesion. Solidarity is a very noble word in socialism, and no abuse or manipulation should be made of it. What solidarity requires is that everyone of us knows, first, what is Filesa, what has happened, who decided it; second, why we seem to put obstacles to the investigation, and whether this is an attempt to put the party beyond the law or to evade personal responsibilities; third, what personal profits have been extracted at the expense of the law and at the expense of the party (…). Only if we accept political responsibilities shall we be able to recover ground. The alternative is rejection by vast segments of society and a fratricidal struggle. Some should look at the bottom of this well, because it is a well from which it is difficult to get out."

This second episode of the PSOE has two conclusions. One is that internal demands for accountability were mostly of elitist origin. Party members contemplated the string of scandals with disbelief, dismay, and political paralysis. They hardly received information relevant to the facts, were manipulated against alleged external and internal enemies, and were eventually drafted into one of the warring factions. The other conclusion has to do with the typical dilemma faced by party leaders when hidden actions are revealed: either to resist or to react. To resist means imposing internal silence and stifling voice; to react, providing explanations and accepting political responsibilities. Both entail political risks, electoral and partisan. To react may indeed split the party. But in the Spanish experience, the outcome of silence was division and defeat.

In the experiences of both Labour and the PSOE the rules of representation at the parties' conference and congress were crucial for the control of the leadership. The struggles over accountability hardly involved party members at large. These either supported the incumbent leaders against the more ideological activists (in the case of Labour), or were silent and paralysed in the middle of a political crisis (in the case of the PSOE). The struggle over the party opposed incumbent leaders either to critical activists or to other members of the party elite. In the first case, such struggle was motivated by disputes over the fulfilment of the program, and can be explained by the "law of curvilinear disparity;" in the second, by the discovery of hidden actions that were an electoral liability, and fits well with the "overlapping generations model." The "political heirs" were more likely to be successful in their struggle than the critical activists. In the disputes over the program, the leaders (Gaitskell, Kinnock, González) tried to bring the party closer to voters: they found support for this strategy from the less committed party members and from the elite of "political heirs." The contrast of both cases shows a difference: Kinnock used his support among grass-roots members in his struggle against the critical militants; González controlled the party using a more oligarchical organization, added to his immense personal support among grass-roots members.

## 5. Party democracy and electoral accountability

Voters will be interested in internal party politics if they can extract information on whether the government is a trustworthy agent. Citizens need information to guide their vote at election time. If information and monitoring are costly and if governmental politics are opaque, they will turn to indirect sources. Aldrich (1995: 166) points out that "voters can reasonably assume that nominees will be typical of their parties in platforms, views, and values". On this assumption, voters may use this identity between politicians and parties for informational short-cuts. They will consider that the programs and documents discussed by the party will reveal, at least partly, the preferences and actions of the government, their common agent.

If voters see the party as a "delegated monitor" (Caillaud and Tirole, 1997), this is because they believe that it has more information on the government than they do. This is a rational belief: because the costs of political participation are for activists much higher than for voters, and the agency losses potentially much greater, activists will want to know as well as possible what benefits do they draw from their political commitment. In their case "benefits" mean basically "policies". The preferences of voters and activists may differ, but voters can assume that the electoral program was an acceptable compromise for the party. It preserved policies above a threshold of acceptability, while winning electoral support. Thus, voters can conclude that, if the party shows acquiescence towards the government, this is because the electoral program is being faithfully implemented. And if the government respects electoral promises, it will defend voters' interests. Otherwise, the government will have to provide good reasons for U-turns in policies. As has been argued, this monitoring by the party requires that its political time horizon be longer than that of the government. When the party cares about the future, in which it will go on competing, it will protect its "reputational capital" with voters. Disagreements within the party about the performance of the government may provide information to voters about what is it that the government is doing. If, after discussions and explanations, a large fraction of the party ends up rejecting the actions of the government, voters may become suspicious of the agent. In such a case, politicians are no longer a reflection of their parties; the government appears unable to

preserve the confidence of its closest supporters. If incumbents do not inspire confidence to their own, why should voters trust them?

Voters appear to react in this way following internal disputes of the party in office, or after a confrontation between a government and a trade union that was supposed to support the former´s policies. This is why union strikes damage governments of the left, but not necessarily conservative ones. For instance, in Great Britain, strikes at the beginning of 1979 put the Conservative Party ahead of the Labour government of James Callaghan by 18-19 percentage points in only eight weeks. At the same time, hostility towards unions was widespread: 85% of people favoured a legal ban on picketing and 68% agreed that troops should be used to maintain essential services in vital industries (Holmes, 1985: 152). In France, a vast wave of strikes at the end of 1988 caused a fall of nine percentage points in the popularity of the socialist prime minister, Michel Rocard. Public opinion was also very critical of the *Conféderation Générale du Travail*–CGT, the trade union that provoked the strikes.[28] In Spain, the general strike called by trade unions against the socialist government of Felipe González in December 1988 caused a drop of eight percentage points over three months in the vote intention to the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* –PSOE.[29] Contrary to the British and French cases, public opinion sympathised with the unions: only 10% attributed to them the responsibility of the confrontation, and 54% thought that the government had to change its policies and reach an agreement with the unions.[30] Fratricidal confrontations erode the credibility of governments as trustworthy agents.

Voters search for signals that might reveal what their agent is doing. Voters will rationally assume that errors are inevitable in their observations of the policies of the government, and that they will not be able to assess such errors. If voters believe that activists are more informed about the actions of the government, they will listen to what they say, scrutinize party congresses, and so on. In Spain, 49% and 40% of voters knew about the 1990

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[28] Surveys of IPSOS–*Le Point* and *Figaro*–SOFRES. See *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 1-7 and 8-14 December 1988.

[29] Monthly surveys of the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS) from July to December 1988.

[30] *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, survey of November 1988 (N = 3,371).

and 1994 congresses of the PSOE, then in government.[31] They will listen to statements by activists, in party congresses or elsewhere, about the policy performance of the government, considering that these will be less vulnerable to observation errors and report more accurately on the capacity of the agent. Yet can signals from party congresses be credible? The policy preferences of voters and activists are likely to differ. Public statements from the party about policies will attempt to maximize its own preferences: the degree to which information from activists will accurately report on the interests of voters will vary. If the results of the political process do not reflect the preferences of the party, the latter will have an incentive to misrepresent, and its reports about the government will not be credible. We also know from deductive models (Lohmann, 1998; Grossman and Helpman, 2001: 87-95) that, with imperfect information about policy positions, the incumbent will favour the principal that is more informed and has greater monitoring capacity.

Consider two kinds of party. In the first, delegates to party congresses belong to the *nomenklatura*. If they are interested in their political careers and learn of hidden actions by the government that would produce electoral sanctions by voters, they will have two options. One is to cover up, and perhaps protect their careers; the other, to denounce, and probably damage them. They will only denounce (i.e. dissent) if the costs of silence are greater. Parties do not generally police their ranks to deter rent-seeking; at best, when they find out about it, they react with internal sanctions of which voters may never learn. The costs of silence will however increase if outside actors (media, judges, the opposition parties) reveal the actions, and voters care and punish. Thus, in an oligarchic party collusion between the party and the government means that no information will reach voters except if stimulated by external actors. 41% of voters that followed the 1990 congress of the Spanish PSOE, held in the middle of a considerable political scandal, thought that it had been a pure propaganda exercise.

Think now of a non-oligarchical party whose activists care about policies but are not indifferent about office. Party candidates for office will not depend on whether they are a

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[31]Surveys of *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, November 1990 and February 1994 (N=2,492 and 2,499). When these congresses were organized, two political scandals had a deep impact on public opinion: the Juan Guerra and Luis Roldán affairs of corruption, involving the brother of the vice-president and a high official of the Ministry of Interior.

clone of the median activist, but on whether the latter sees them as electable. That is, on how the party interprets the electorate: the expected popularity of a government with the voters influences the support that it will get from the party. Thus, politicians in office may manipulate the party on the grounds of their popularity with voters, as long as activists care about both policies and office.

Support for a leader depends on a utility function of activists that combines electoral prospects and the proximity of policy preferences (Stone and Abramowitz, 1984; Abramowitz, 1989). The government will try to preserve the support of the party not just with the attraction of its program, but with the argument of its popularity with voters. This helps to explain the strategy of Gaitskell and González regarding their parties. Manipulation by a popular leader often echoes Michels' words (1962: 82-3): "Whenever an obstacle is encountered, the leaders are apt to offer to resign, professing that they are weary of office, but really aiming to show to the dissentients the indispensability of their own leadership (…) The leaders are extremely careful never to admit that the true aim of their threat to resign is the reinforcement of their power over the rank and file. They declare, on the contrary, that their conduct is determined by the purest democratic spirit, that it is a striking proof of their fineness of feeling, of their sense of personal dignity." Only if the political fanaticism of activists makes office irrelevant will such a strategy become useless. Otherwise, the party in general will offer voters little information about the government, due to their shared interests with the incumbent and to the strategies of the latter.

Debates in party congresses may show public acquiescence or dissent with the policies of the government. But the reasons for such acquiescence or dissent may be obscure for voters. Acquiescence (i.e. a united party) may be due to (i) the government's faithful implementation of the electoral program or, if it has deviated, its offer of good justifications; (ii) the ignorance by the party of actions of the government, or its acceptance of misleading justifications; (iii) the internal discipline of the party even if the government has shirked. Discipline and collusion have the same negative effect on voters' information. When dissent rather than acquiescence exists within a party, expressed by a fraction either of the *nomenklatura* or of the activists, the information that voters may extract about the actions of the government will also be difficult to interpret. Dissent may be due to (i) the government

shirking from the electoral program beyond a threshold of tolerance of the party; (ii) factional disputes led by purists, with radical demands about the direction of the party; (iii) political opportunism (i.e. personal ambitions of different party leaders).

Let us examine the last possibility first: i.e. political opportunism. Table 5 provides evidence from two Spanish surveys of 1990 and 1994.[32] The dates correspond to the last two congresses of the PSOE before losing the 1996 general elections. As I have argued, until 1990 disputes within the party were muted, basically due to the strong leadership of González. They became public in 1990, and increased between the two congresses: political scandals provoked an internal reaction against silence and discipline, imposed by Guerra, the deputy leader with a tight control over the party. Yet voters mostly believed that the increase in disputes was due to personal ambitions, and that party democracy had declined. Even in politically turbulent times, when voters were concerned about opaque affairs, internal disputes did not provide them with information. Confrontations were mostly seen as expressions of political opportunism, and unrelated to such affairs.

**Table 5.** *Reasons for internal disputes within the Spanish PSOE*

|                                              | 1990 (%) | 1994 (%) |
| -------------------------------------------- | -------- | -------- |
| (i) Due to the personal ambitions of leaders |          |          |
|     A lot                 | 39       | 68       |
|     A little              | 31       | 10       |
|     Not at all            | 6        | 2        |
|     DNK/DNA               | 24       | 20       |
| (ii) Due to internal democracy               |          |          |
|     A lot                 | 40       | 28       |
|     A little              | 22       | 27       |
|     Not at all            | 8        | 11       |
|     DNK/DNA               | 30       | 34       |

Source: *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, surveys of November 1990 (N: 2,492) and February 1994 (N: 2,499).

Let us now turn to examine another possibility: factional disputes by purists. These are activists with more intense political preferences and lower interest in office than the rest.

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[32] The surveys are those of fn. 26.

Thus they can prevent collusion between the party and the government (Wildavsky, 1965). As Aldrich (1995: 193) puts it, "policy-motivated partisan activists are freer than patronage-motivated activists to offer or withhold their support". It may be that, in normal times, only a purist fraction of the party may provide information to voters about shirking by the government. If this is the case, then the interests of voters are better protected by the monitoring of the more ideological activists.

Strategies of voice and exit by ideological activists may provide voters with information about the government. This will be the case if the government betrays the electoral program –what the purists see as the threshold of an acceptable trade off between policies and office. But there are serious limits to such strategies of dissent. For one, the purists are likely to be the more dedicated activists: if they have invested great efforts in the party, then the eventual costs of exit may be very high. For two, the purists are probably the activists more ideologically distant from the voters. We know from formal models that information is credible only if the interests of sender and receiver do not diverge (Austen-Smith, 1990: 145; Grossman and Helpman, 2001: 195-99, 212-15). Because of the ideological distance between the purists and voters, the government may present their eventual exit as proof that the interests of voters are being taken well care of. Besides, the result of exit may consist in a reduction in the number of those activists more vigilant of the actions of the government, to the benefit of the more disciplined ones. Thus the government may prefer exit to voice, and achieve a greater discipline within the party.

Thus, potentially informative debates will happen only in special circumstances: first, when silence may be electorally costly to members of the party's oligarchy; second, when criticism by purist activists cannot be dismissed by the leadership. The British and Spanish stories have illustrated both cases. In such debates incumbents may produce convincing reasons for their actions. However, voters want to control the government because they wish some policies to be implemented or outcomes to be achieved: that is, they care about the capacity of the government to carry out its electoral program or improve their welfare. Internal party debates will interest voters if they are a source of information about what the government is doing, but not to the point that such debates undermine its capacity. This capacity requires internal unity, absence of splits and of paralysing factionalism. Thus,

internal party democracy implies for voters a trade off between debates and capacity. If internal debates do not produce clear information on the fulfilment of electoral promises, then voters will want to preserve the capacity of the government –that is, the unity of the party. They will support discipline against voice. If disunity is the only indication about what the government is doing, either something is wrong about policies or the capacity of the government is weak.

Table 6 shows the effect of different variables on the likelihood of voting for the incumbent. The logit regressions refer to the socialist and conservative governments in Spain and the UK. The dependent variable is support for the government. The independent variables are, in the Spanish case, past vote, and views of responsiveness, corruption, and party unity.[33] All these variables are statistically significant and have the expected sign. Past vote had a very powerful effect on vote intention; perceptions of non-responsiveness (no sensitivity to the needs of people), corruption, and lack of unity of the party decreased the probability of voting for the government.

If we turn to the British case, over a long time voters saw the Conservative and Labour parties in very different terms. In 1983, 52% of voters thought the Conservatives were united; the percentage for Labour was only 27%. In 1992 the difference had grown: 67% against 30%.[34] Yet Margaret Thatcher had been replaced as party leader and prime minister by a conspiracy of Conservative "barons" in November 1990, while Neil Kinnock had imposed discipline within the Labour Party. These views of the two parties changed rapidly after the 1992 general election. In July 1993, the Conservatives were seen as divided by 30% of voters; Labour, by 26%; in April 1997, the percentages were 50% and 12%.[35] In table 6, the dependent variable is party support. The independent variables are views on whether the government should redistribute income between rich and poor, whether public expenditure in

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[33] The variables were coded as follows. Vote intention and past vote: 0 any other party, 1 PSOE. Responsiveness: 1 yes, 0 no. Corruption: 1 yes, 0 no. Internal unity: 1 yes, 0 no. Interviewees who did not know or did not answer were excluded from the analyses.

[34] From A. Heath *et al.*, *British Election Study 1983* (N = 1,085); A. Heath *et al.*, *British General Election Cross-Section Survey 1992* (N = 5,232).

[35] MORI surveys: Conservative and Labour parties' image trends. http://www.mori.com/polls/trends/party-img-lab.shtml

the National Health Service should be cut down, and whether the Conservative Party was united or divided.[36] Opposition to income redistribution and approval of cuts in the NHS increased the probabilities of support for the Conservatives; views of the party as internally divided reduced them.

**Table 6.** *The effect of internal unity on support for the incumbent party*

|  | Spain (González government) 1990 | | United Kingdom (Thatcher government) 1990 | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Logit coeffs. | SE | Logit coeffs. | SE |
| Constant | -1.712(**) | 0.784 | -1.719(***) | 0.422 |
| Past vote | 4.305(***) | 0.331 | - | - |
| Non-responsiveness | -1.090(***) | 0.235 | - | - |
| No corruption | 0.662(**) | 0.265 | - | - |
| Support cuts in public health | - | - | 0.801(***) | 0.132 |
| Rejection of income redistribution | - | - | 0.891(***) | 0.084 |
| Internal division of party | -0.828(**) | 0.275 | -1.156(***) | 0.182 |
| Chi$^2$ | 826.499(***) | | 282.617(***) | |
| -2 log likelihood | 637.049 | | 996.923 | |
| Number of cases | 1,056 | | 970 | |

  **   Significant at 5%.
***  Significant at 1%.
Sources: *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, survey of November 1990.
*British Social Attitudes*, 1990.

Thus, voters reward party unity and punish internal dissent. In addition, they tend to see voice as division, not as a source of information. If the party in office is internally monolithic, the government will have more political capacity, but voters will not receive information from the party about whether the government is carrying out its electoral program or acting on their behalf. That is, the party will not improve by any means the

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[36] Support for the government was 0 no, 1 yes (other answers were eliminated from the analysis). Opposition to redistribution of income by the government and acceptance of cuts in public expenditure on the NHS had values of 0 (no opposition, no acceptance) and 1 (opposition, acceptance). Views on the internal unity of the Conservative Party were coded as 1 (united) and 2 (divided). In all these variables those who did not know or did not give an answer were excluded from the analysis.

accountability of the government. Paradoxically, voters will limit the contribution that party politics could provide to monitoring.

The government will know that voters punish dissent in the party. Therefore it will attempt to discipline the party through strategies of persuasion and institutions. The first will rely on the risk of an electoral defeat in the hands of a polarised opposition. As Cotta (1999: 7) writes, "Only when the government seems bound to lose the ensuing election can the parliamentary party regain some autonomy; otherwise loyalty is the rational strategy for the parliamentary party". The government will present party loyalty as the key for electoral success.

Institutions can facilitate the control of the party by the government, and also the probability that the latter will survive in office. If resources are decentralised, internal dissent can increase. If politicians have their own local bases of support, their political future will not depend on the sympathy of the centre. If individuals with a strong public profile are not filtered out of party lists, the chances of voice inside the party will be greater.[37] Systems of proportional representation with closed lists, on the contrary, favour anonymous candidates obedient to the party leadership. In such systems, the party brand-name is what matters, not the popularity of candidates in their constituencies. Closed lists "preclude candidates who have not been prioritised by their party from getting elected" (Muller, 2000: 327). Party unity may therefore be reinforced.

Table 7 shows that parties survive longer in office under PR with closed lists, compared both with plurality systems and PR with open lists.[38] If PR is the electoral rule, a party that competes with closed lists will enjoy on average a period in office 68% longer than with open lists. Prime ministers will be indifferent to open or closed lists; only in plurality systems will their average period be 12.2% longer. So, closed lists benefit the incumbent

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[37] An example is the crisis of the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan in the 1990's. The autonomy of politicians *vis-à-vis* the centre appears to explain both voice and exit. See Kato (1998).

[38] The countries are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

party and the "political heirs". Internal party discipline and duration in office are connected; conditions for internal debate run against both.

**Table 7.** *Average period in office (years/months). Parliamentary democracies (1975-95)*

|  | Prime minister | Party | (N= years) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Plurality | 4/1 | 5/6 | (95) |
| PR with open lists | 3/7 | 4/9 | (105) |
| PR with closed lists | 3/7 | 9/4 | (246) |

Institutions also influence the predictability of losing office. Table 8[39] assesses variations in the effect of economic growth, parliamentary majorities, coalitions, and decentralization of candidate selection on the probability that prime ministers will be replaced in government by a politician of another or the same party, in plurality or PR systems with open or closed lists. The dependent variable is a survival time indicator in years. Regressions are a hazard function; negative values of the coefficients mean that as the value of the predictor variable increases, the risk of losing office decreases.

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[39] Table 8 shows the estimates of a proportional hazard Cox regression model for time-constant variables. It is based on time-to-event data, and the censored cases are years for which the event has not yet occurred. The hazard function is the loss of office at time t: i.e., how likely is it to happen, given that the prime minister and the party have survived to that time. If $X_1$, $X_2$, $X_3$, and $X_4$ are covariates (yearly GNP growth, parliamentary majorities, coalition governments, and decentralized selection of parliamentary candidates), the general model is $h(t) = [h_o(t)]e(B_1X_1 + B_2X_2 + B_3X_3 + B_4X_4)$. In this model, h(t) is the hazard function: an estimate of the potential for a prime minister losing power per unit time at a particular instant, given that he/she has survived until that instant. A high hazard function indicates a high rate of defeat. As for $h_o(t)$, it is the baseline hazard function without the effect of the covariates. $B_1$, $B_2$, $B_3$, $B_4$ are the regression coefficients, and e is the base of the natural logarithm. The countries are those of fn. 38.

**Table 8.** *Likelihood of the prime minister losing office*[40]
(Cox regressions of partial likelihood)
Parliamentary democracies (1975-95)

|  | Plurality | | PR with open lists | | PR with closed lists | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Event | 81 | | 92 | | 214 | |
| Censored | 14 | | 13 | | 34 | |
| Total | 95 | | 105 | | 248 | |
|  | Coeff. | SE | Coeff. | SE | Coeff. | SE |
| Yearly GNP growth | -0.094(*) | 0.048 | 0.005 | 0.043 | -0.005 | 0.035 |
| Majority | -0.790 | 1.032 | 0.210 | 0.300 | -0.651(***) | 0.196 |
| Coalition | 0.107 | 0.275 | -0.332(*) | 0.186 | 0.236(**) | 0.092 |
| Decentralization of candidates | -1.201 | 0.143 | 0.072 | 0.104 | -0.180(***) | 0.048 |
| Chi$^2$ | 8.383(*) | | 4.625 | | 21.637(***) | |
| -2 log likelihood | 581.273 | | 699.723 | | 1992.056 | |

\*    Significant at 10%.
\*\*   Significant at 5%.
\*\*\* Significant at 1%.

If PR with open lists leads on average to shorter periods in office for parties, any reason can make prime ministers vulnerable. As can be seen in table 8, the statistical model is not significant. The lack of parliamentary majorities, bad economic performance or decentralization of candidate selection offer no explanations. With open lists, alternative variables are not statistically significant either: whether fractionalization of the opposition or the ratio of party activists to party voters. So, with open lists, besides shorter political lives, no apparent reasons explain the loss of office.

Plurality systems lead to parties and prime ministers staying longer in office; also, the fate of the latter is somewhat more predictable. Here, economic growth reduces the risk of the prime minister losing power. PR with closed lists leads to longer periods in office by parties,

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[40] Data on yearly GNP growth are from OECD, *Economic Outlook*. Paris: OECD, 1992 and 2000. Majority was coded as 0: minority of seats in Parliament, 1: majority of seats. Coalition was coded as 0: single party in government (fractionalization of .00), 1: fractionalization between .01 and .050, 2: fractionalization above .050. The correlation coefficient between majority and coalition was .078, statistically not significant. The degree of centralized candidate selection is a scale that uses information from Ranney (1981: 75-106), Bille (2001: 366), Mair and van Biezen (2001: 5-21). The scale is as follows: 1= complete control by national organs; 2= subnational organs propose and national ones decide; 3= national organs propose and subnational ones decide; 4= subnational organs decide and national ones ratify; 5= subnational organs decide; 6= direct vote of party members on candidates.

and to greater predictability for prime ministers. Coalitions increase their political risks; parliamentary majorities and decentralized candidate selection help prime ministers to survive. In the latter case, a party may better adapt to the different preferences of constituencies. Apparently, the optimal degree of party unity is the combination of closed lists and a decentralized selection of parliamentary candidates.

Contrary to its effect in plurality systems, economic performance is irrelevant for the likelihood of prime ministers losing office in PR systems, either with open or closed lists. Prime ministers seem to be more vulnerable to voters' sanctions if economic conditions are bad in plurality systems; to weak support in parliament, fragmented governments, or centralized selection of parliamentary candidates in PR systems with closed lists; to circumstances unrelated to the former ones in PR systems with open lists.

Voters tend to interpret internal discussions in governing parties as signs that something is wrong with the actions of the incumbent, or that its capacity to lead is limited. Such signs will undermine their trust on the agent. Institutions can facilitate party discipline, as is the case with closed lists. The result in this case is that parties survive longer in office and the prime ministers' future is less uncertain.

## 6. Conclusion

Internal party politics may be relevant for democracy if they can contribute to voters' information. The government is an agent with two principals (the party and the electorate), one of which has more information on the agent's actions. The two principals share an interest in the fulfilment of the electoral program. Discussions between party activists and leaders in public office might inform voters on the reasons for policy switches or on hidden actions of the government.

Activists strongly committed to policies will want to monitor the government and so will members of the *nomenklatura* interested in the electoral future of the party. In the first

case, political control will be vertical; in the second, horizontal, based on polycentricism and the existence of autonomous positions of power within the party. Incumbents will want their party to inform them on the evolution of public opinion and to serve as an early warning instrument reporting on the costs of unpopular policies. They will also want to control the party in order to keep it close to voters' preferences; and in order to avoid potentially damaging information or an external image of disunity. These objectives of the leaders are not easy to combine: they require either internal democracy or discipline. In exceptional occasions such combination may be achieved: for instance, when a party is about to win power, or in "honeymoons" that may last for a while between leaders, activists and voters once power has been won. But one objective means control over the government; the other, control over the party. This is why internal partisan struggles are a regular feature of democratic politics.

Voters will be interested in the internal politics of the party in office if they provide information and do not damage the political capacity of the government. In the trade off between information and capacity, an optimum point may exist: a party that discusses openly the government's policies and actions, a government that contributes with plausible explanations, and a result that is a coherent and united party backing the government. However, discussions within the party may not provide credible information on issues relevant to voters and they can undermine the capacity of the government. In such case, voters will interpret the discussions as a negative signal on the agent. Incumbents will then opt for a party that serves as a disciplined instrument of persuasion, rather than for a democratic organization where voice is an early warning instrument.

This is the conclusion of the paper. Dahl (1970: 5) was right: "If the main reason we need political parties at all is in order for them to facilitate democracy in the *government of the country*, then might not parties that are internally oligarchic serve that purpose just as well as, or maybe better than, parties that are internally more or less democratic?" Voters prefer party unity to internal debates and disputes. They interpret such debates not as expressions of democracy, but as opportunistic factionalism, as weak political capacity, or as indication that something is wrong with policies. And because divided parties are punished, incumbent politicians, their "political heirs," and the majority of party members that support them, will

introduce discipline. If the party is then seen as united, electoral support will increase. If, in order to promote discipline, closed lists operate, parties will stay longer in office and the future of prime ministers will be more predictable. Voters can therefore reject "good" agents with parties where voice is actively used, and reward "bad" agents with a disciplined party.

Critical activists are the victims. They may only be able to generate incentives for the government to be a good agent when the threat of an internal split is credible (Caillaud and Tirole, 1997). The government can then think that such split is a serious electoral risk. This happens when the dissidents cannot be presented as opportunists or as radicals, distant from the political preferences of voters.

If this is so, parties that can be informative to voters about the actions of the government that they back will be seen as reducing its political capacity; hence, they will increase the probability of losing office. The recipe of a party that facilitates the accountability of its government is likely to be a recipe for electoral defeat.

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