

STUDY on POLITICAL PARTIES with SUCCESSFUL experiences

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1. Empirical analysis

This study covers six cases of analysis:

- American Democratic Party
- British Labour Party
- Scottish SNP
- Germany Green Party
- Spanish PSOE
- Uruguayan Broad Front

On studying them it is intended to observe their tension resolution practices, permitting organizational success (internal) and/or social success (external: development of public policies associated with their electoral programme).

2. Parties and actors

There are four types of actors linked to all political parties, with different profiles, preferences and interests¹:

- *The professionals*: members with positions of political representation inside and/or outside the party, which represent their main source of economic remuneration and the centre of their professional life.
- *The members*: affiliated to a political party to which they devote part of their time and/or a portion of their income (as fees), in exchange for being able to contribute in some way to the (organizational and grammatical) decision-making.

¹ A classical view of this interrelation can be found in Steven J. Brams (1978): "Los partidos políticos, monstruos con tres cabezas" (trans. in *Lecturas de teoría política positiva*, Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Fiscales, 1991). Brams, however, only distinguishes three actors without including the supporters, an increasingly key element.

- *The supporters*: non-members close to the ideas of the political party who, unlike its voters, accept some different degree of involvement between elections, whether through specific donations, or specific direct or indirect participation (creation of opinion, etc.) in the generation of decisions. Unlike the members, they are not subject to any organizational discipline.
- *The voters*: citizens who opt with their vote for a specific political party.

Each of these types of actor will tend to act in accordance with the logic of their position in relation to the political party and, therefore, in different ways. They have sometimes been represented as successive rings of involvement, with the professionals at the core and the voters in the outer ring, but this representation can lead to confusion if it does not take into account the different casuistry on the proportions that each of these groups represent in relation to the others (for example, a very similar number of members to that of professionals – and, therefore, with coinciding circles -, or a very small number of supporters in relation to the members, etc.).

The image of a population pyramid therefore appears to be more effective, with the voters at the base and professionals at the upper vertex which, like those for generations, can show us more clearly the different proportions between groups.

2.1. Conflict resolution paths

The key to the success of a political party can be summarized as the possibility of bringing professionals, members and voters into line (and thus confronting in the best conditions the organizational and defining tensions mentioned above). In other words, to get these three actors to work for the party with the maximum agreement (the supporters are the only element not strictly linked to the existence of a party although their importance in certain contexts is obvious). The more aligned these vertices of tension are, the more possibilities are opened up for the party. It is not, however, simple to achieve this.

Incentives are needed for the members to situate themselves in the position of the voters, overcoming the cognitive discord, the emotionality, the internal logic, or the priority search for shares of power within the party structure. These may take, for example, the form of a "position" and, therefore, an honorary or monetary benefit which brings the member closer to the logic of the professional.

In the professional-member-voter alignment logic we can initially distinguish certain possible situations:

2.2. Voter = member

On some occasions, professionals and members (and voters) can go hand in hand when winning votes involves radicalizing the public discourse, and this makes it possible to access a segment of voters lost due to demobilization or abstention. In these situations the potential gain from recovering this electorate is considered greater than opening up to new "market segments".

This may have occurred with voters with profiles close to those of the members which makes them inclined to abstain (they do not choose another party but rather decide to punish), or in a system of parties with two very close groups on a key axis which favours the volatility of a specific part of the electorate.

Danger or limit: In these situations there is no option in favour of moving closer to the median voter and, therefore, it is assumed from the outset that they will not win the election, although the maximum exploitation of a limited segment can be achieved, allowing a sufficient number of seats to be obtained to influence the government through a coalition or parliamentary support.

2.3. Professional + supporter = voter

Another option, which involves reducing the resistance of the members in search of the median voter, is that of opening up the party's decision-making to the supporters. One example of this strategy applied by different political parties in the world is the choice of their candidates by primaries in which the supporters (registered on lists, not members) can participate.

Danger or limit: This option may involve the progressive discouragement of the members who do not have any benefits from continuing to be so if the prerogatives of being a member and paying fees are reduced.

The question to be asked, then, is: can a party without members survive? This will depend on the system of financial support and the degree of professionalization of its structure. Without fees from the members, opening up to the supporters may weaken the structure of the party (loss of financing and voluntary work), although, at the same time, it may bring the party closer to the median voter. In the future, the extension of shares of power (more public financing and new donations from the supporters) may offset the reduction. It is obvious that accessing power and the leading role of the supporters helps the professionals to address the voter.

Having said this, it should not be forgotten that a party without members is a party with difficulties of territorial organization, which reduces its social strength and programmatical independence. (An example of this loss of autonomy can occur in the case of the unions, organizations in which the low weight of the members in relation to the voters and the public subsidies have had a very negative impact on their strength as organizations).

3. Decisive supporters?

Those who take on fewer costs in this process are the voters who only express their preferences on choosing the ballot paper on the day of the elections.

With a degree of involvement which is greater, but very variable depending on the organizational models and countries, the figure of the supporter is half way between the members and the voters. In this respect they can be considered as a figure which can alter or influence the tension between the preferences of the members and the professionals.

The supporter does not have much emotional profile, and does not invest as much (psychologically speaking). They have not gone through the process of psychological selection of the member: they do not have an unbreakable identification with the party, and they have not been modelled by its traditions (we could say that they are not as conditioned by a specific cognitive framework). The supporter can thus be more diverse than the member: less taken from the same mould. They may resemble the voter of the party more, given its bigger social base and, therefore, closer to the median voter in society as a whole.

In any case, they seek more involvement than the voter in the shaping of the party, either to influence its positioning or the appointment of candidates, or maybe to be considered, in the future, for the designation of possible positions of public representation not covered by the members. They prefer, though, not to form part of it. There can also be numerous reasons and they can be associated with different levels of involvement: either they do not have free time (professional profiles), their prestige in relation to the party does not arise from their active participation in it (social prestige) or they do not want to come under the discipline of the organization.

This is thus a third logic, different from that of the member and from that of the professional, which can also play a significant role on resolving tensions.

Theoretical notes

Comparison of logics of action between the member and the professional

In general (see, for example, Brams, 1978), members are considered to have more extreme ideological positions (further from the social ideological centre or, which amounts to the same, from the median voter²) than the professionals and the majority of voters.

From the theory of rational choice (which conceives the actions of individuals as the result of a certain cost-benefit relationship for the individual) this extremism (or "radicalism" in the philosophical sense) can be understood as the logical consequence of the type of "investment" made by the member: anyone who has accepted a high cost (putting up posters, staying up at night, participating in never-ending meetings, etc.) without this implying any "remuneration" as a position (whether or not desired) will be less willing to compromise (accept new costs, in this case of negotiation), so their only or main "benefit" arises from obtaining representation in the ideological terrain.

This ideological representation can actually have two different forms or levels: a public and explicit positioning by the political party on a series of questions (ideal-expressive sphere), or the attainment of a public policy (real-practical sphere), as close as possible to ideological approaches (neither of them necessarily implies the other).

The logic of the professionals, on the other hand, is determined more by the benefit of maintaining the position either through the strength which arises from winning elections, or from that which arises from controlling the party in the sense of ensuring continuity in an internally designated position. (Of course we assume that holding this position is motivated, ultimately, by the same desire to influence the public space in accordance with an ideology as the member). Their actions will be determined (or at least framed) by this dual need which tends to have different directions: to win internal votes (which guarantee their selection as a candidate) it will be necessary to come closer to the position of the party's median member; to win votes from the general electorate, on the other hand, it will be necessary to approach the median voter.

From a less rational viewpoint we can also confirm the existence of two logics at the heart of a party as a result of different human characters and profiles. The professional politicians are more accustomed to negotiation, to transaction (indeed, this is the basis of their day-to-day professional

² The median voter (in accordance with the definition of the statistical term "median"; not to be confused with average) is that which ideally would be situated right in the middle of all the voters ordered ideologically on an axis in accordance with their respective positions. In other words, they would have as many voters to their (ideological) right as to their left.

activity), which is not the case of the members, with very different professions.

The strength of the members

On the other hand, the non-existence or the secondary role of pragmatic motivations in the case of the members (unlike those who can or want to devote themselves to politics professionally) is counteracted by the strength of motivations of an emotional nature which are often associated with the construction of a personal identity. In many cases of membership personal identification with an organization or with a model of country is a basic element of personal identity, which gives it an important emotional component.

Like any organization, certain models could be identified which act as an implicit entry selection filter and which, together with the shared identity culture, strengthen a certain cognitive framework (a shared series of concepts, symbols, ways of understanding things from which reality is judged). When this becomes too important, reducing the individual capacity to see things with different perspectives, and when the different aspects of the life of a member end up revolving around this identification with the party or a very specific ideological definition, we find what popular language has christened a "freak". The freak or extreme member would be the one moved by an emotional motivation with a very strong party identity culture for whom the expression and defence of coherence with these ideological traits have an identity function which makes any modification of positioning for pragmatic reasons very costly.

These ideological traits thus lose their instrumental character as guidelines of action for the preparation of public policies and a government action which will have to represent the whole of society (and not an ideological subgroup). The "overinvestment" of this type of membership moreover gives it great strength within the party so it is in a position to defend its "purist" positionings with "kamikaze" postures (they do not have anything to lose from the practical point of view, and a lot to win from the point of view of personal reaffirmation). We could call it "the strength of emotionality".

In some cases, another force with which the members struggle to oppose the professionals is that of having more time dedicated to the party (especially when the party positions have to combine this task with public positions). In this case we could talk about the strength of "chronocracy" which we can view in the age profile of members (not professionals) of many political parties: young or retired.

The influence of a long history as a member and, therefore, of a high "investment" in the party may lead to resources as social capital (contacts, knowledge, informal networks) which over time the members with the longest tradition have gradually developed and acquired. This can strengthen the feeling of legitimacy of one's own positions (guaranteeing the orthodoxy and the coherence with the historical path) which again

influences the “inwards” strengthening (toward the median member and not toward the median voter) of certain militant positions. It can perhaps be concluded that “the bigger the investment” (without the reward of a position) the greater the tendency to show the logic typical of the member linked to the extreme idealism on the second axis of conflict (defining axis).

From an organizational point of view, the assembly mechanisms (or those with the maximum horizontalness on the first axis) strengthen the importance and capacity for influence of this logic compared with that of the professionals.

Sometimes this confrontation of logics is expressed in the face of the possibility of negotiating with other political parties in order to participate in a government. The “coherent-member” logic would be: “Better in the opposition than in government if we have to abandon our programme”. The “pragmatic-professional” logic would be: “Better in the government than in opposition if we can somehow influence government action”³.

It is not easy to harmonize the two logics. If the professionals in search of the median member move away from the median voter it is more difficult for them to win elections. If they seek to interpret the preferences of the median voter in order to come closer to them, they may not win the selection process led by the members.

Two axes of tension

What do we want to examine? Political parties or groups which have demonstrated some degree of success on confronting the problems arising from the tensions characteristic of and inherent in these organizations, and which are basically triggered along two axes:

a) Organizational axis

The decision-making and the selection of members for positions can be carried out paying attention to different mechanisms which move between two extremes: maximum horizontality and the participation without distinction of all the members in all the decisions, and maximum verticality and hierarchical structuring with decisions taken by small nuclei chosen by the members. The following concepts and situations can be positioned around these two axes:

³ We are always talking about logics, ideal types, or trends which can be counteracted or surpassed depending on the determinants which arise from a specific context (like the law of gravity can be surpassed by a rocket taking off).

Horizontality	Verticality
Participatory logic	Representative logic
Coordination different preferences	Generation common preference
Assembly system	Hierarchical mediation

b) *Defining axis*

When it comes to shaping the contents of the policies that the party will defend and its public positioning we find, again, two divergent poles which are under mutual tension: maximum respect for a desired model of country and of policies to implement, with everything that this represents, on the one hand, and the maximum opening to exchange and transactions with other political forces in order to influence and participate, as far as possible (however little this may be), in the collective parliamentary or government decisions:

Idealism	Pragmatism
Radicalism	Pactism
Coherence of approaches	Realism of approaches
Negotiating inflexibility	Tolerance of modifications

One axis depends on the other but conceptually we can distinguish them: one makes us focus on the organizational mechanisms and has a more internal logic, and the other on the contents defended with a much more external impact.

The good operation of a political party can possibly be analyzed as a case of success in the search for an efficient balance between these poles of tension.

In conflict resolution it is important to realize that there are four different types of actors involved in the dynamics of political parties which present different logics on seeking a solution to these inherent tensions.