

PARTY MODERATION AND POLITICIANS' IDEOLOGICAL RIGIDITY

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ABSTRACT

Parties that in the past have defended radical positions sometimes decide to moderate, moving towards the median position. Moderation, however, is not the automatic response to electoral defeat. Some parties resist moderation for long periods of time. I suggest that in order to explain moderation (or lack of it), it is necessary to introduce some degree of ideological rigidity into the utility function of parties. Once we have ideological rigidity, several results follow. First, convergence to the median position cannot be an equilibrium even with complete information. Second, moderation is more likely the less the degree of ideological rigidity, the greater the ideological distance between the parties, and the smaller the distance between the moderating party and the median voter. Normally, when moderation is observed, it is due to the fact that the party tempers its ideological rigidity through organizational reforms or leadership renovation.

KEY WORDS ■ party competition ■ policy preferences ■ spatial models

Introduction

Sometimes parties do moderate. They announce to the electorate that in the event they win elections, their policies will be moderate even if in the past they have defended radical platforms. This announcement implies ideological change and the jettisoning of some of the party's fundamental political principles and aspirations. Moderation typically takes place through extraordinary congresses of the parties concerned. Some outstanding examples from the left are the abandonment of Marxism both by the SPD (German Social Democratic Party) in the Extraordinary Congress at Bad Godesberg in 1959 and by the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) in its 1979 Extraordinary Congress, and the metamorphosis of the PCI

(Italian Communist Party) into the PDS (Democratic Party of the Left) in the 1991 XX Congress. There are cases where moderation is the outcome of a slow evolution, without the drama of extraordinary congresses, as in the gradual change of the British Labour Party between its 1983 radical platform and its winning 1997 moderate one.

Ideological moderation tends to be a traumatic process, often accompanied by splits and fierce internal party conflicts. Some parties resist moderation for quite considerable periods, even if this implies losing election after election. Why would moderation trigger conflict if a party is in opposition? And if moderation is key to winning elections, why is it not the automatic response to electoral defeat?

I argue in this article that in order to explain the moderation dilemma facing political parties, the usual assumptions about their preferences, either that parties seek power or that they have policy preferences, are of little help. Parties' behaviour in political competition only starts to make sense if, as John Roemer (2001) has argued, we allow for some degree of ideological rigidity in their utility function. I present a novel and simple utility function that deviates somewhat from Roemer's proposal in which parties value the policy that is being carried out, but they also attach some importance to their party's ideological stance. A party in opposition could consider that the improvement in policy that would be achieved if it moderates, wins the elections and makes a moderate policy closer to its ideal point than the policy currently made by the incumbent, would not be sufficient to compensate for the ideological sacrifice moderation implies. Moderation generates a trade-off between gains in policy and losses in ideological principles.

If parties hold preferences with some degree of dogmatism or ideological rigidity, moderation is not always the automatic response to electoral defeat. Defeated parties have to determine whether moderation is the best strategy or not. Since not all politicians within a party have the same degree of ideological rigidity, proposals to moderate will be supported by some but rejected by others – hence the conflictive nature of party moderation. Once the conflict arises, the party as a collective actor has to make a choice. The party must decide whether to moderate or not. If the party decides not to moderate, the result may be a long period out of office.

Using a utility function with ideological rigidity, I elaborate an extremely simple calculus of the decision to moderate for two parties competing in a single dimension with complete information. It is shown that the likelihood of moderation depends on; (i) the ideological rigidity of the party, (ii) the distance between the parties, and (iii) the distance between the median voter and the party considering the possibility of moderation. Moreover, it is proved that convergence to the median position cannot be an equilibrium for any positive degree of ideological rigidity.

According to the results of the calculus of moderation, a party may under certain circumstances remain in opposition for a long time if the payoff of moderation is not attractive enough. This is consistent with the empirical

record of some parties. But more interestingly, it suggests that under these circumstances the only chance for moderation is some shock that alters the degree of ideological rigidity of the party: for instance, a transformation of the rules of the party that modifies the internal balance of power between the more dogmatic and the more pragmatic members, or a generational change led by party cadres of a more pragmatic persuasion.

In Section 1 I present the discussion on ideological rigidity and the ways of modelling the utility function of politicians. In Section 2 I develop the calculus of moderation. Finally, in Section 3 I examine briefly the case of some European left parties that underwent processes of ideological moderation after a long period in opposition, showing the importance of organizational and leadership changes in the ideological rigidity of these parties.

1. Ideological Rigidity in the Preferences of Politicians

Party moderation can be understood as just another name for convergence to the position of the median voter. We know that convergence is a poor prediction: parties are always distinguishable (Stokes, 1999: 258). And convergence, as a theoretical result, only follows under very stringent assumptions. As Roemer (2001) shows, the two most important assumptions are that competition takes place in a single dimension and that parties are certain about the position of the median voter. When some of these assumptions are modified, divergence can be an equilibrium.

The formal literature on political competition has contemplated many other factors that could lead to divergence (for a general critique of this literature, see Green and Shapiro, 1994: Ch. 7). For example, parties may have incentives not to move to the median if there is rational abstention (Downs, 1957: 118), if they want to avert the entry of new parties (Palfrey, 1984), if party activists restrict the ideological mobility of parties (Aldrich, 1983; Robertson, 1976), if parties are considered as 'informative brands' to voters (Snyder and Ting, 2002), or if voters are biased towards different parties (Adams, 2001).

Given this abundance of formal models drawing on such different factors, it may seem that the proposal of yet another factor is simply redundant. Nevertheless, I think there are sound empirical reasons to consider that a more thorough analysis of the preferences of parties is justified. Divergence can be easily explained if a more sophisticated but also more realistic modelling of such preferences is incorporated in the argument.

It is important to make clear that the relevant actor here is the party, not the politician. In the context of party competition, the actor that presents a platform is the party. Obviously, the party is a collective actor, populated by politicians, but here the main focus is on the organization as such, except when we deal with internal party conflicts. The relationship between the

features of the organization and the features of its members is left unspecified. Different forms of aggregation are possible. Thus, the ideological stance of the party could be that of the median politician in a fully democratic party, that of the general secretary in an autocratic party, or that of the bargaining solution point in an internally divided party in which various factions fight with each other.¹

The formal literature, with the important exception of Roemer (2001), makes a crude distinction between office-seeking and policy-seeking parties. The former are interested in power and the benefits associated with exercising it (Downs, 1957), the latter are interested in the policies that are made (Wittman, 1973, 1983). For office-seekers, policies are mere instruments to win elections, whereas for policy-seekers, policies are valued in themselves. In a one-dimensional space, the equilibrium is convergence when there is certainty about the distribution of voters' preferences regardless of the preferences of the parties. Motivations only make a difference when there is uncertainty: with office-seeking parties, convergence is still the equilibrium, while with policy-seeking ones divergence can be an equilibrium (Alesina and Roshental, 1995: 18; Roemer, 2001: 72).

The non-formal literature on parties has adopted a richer view of motivations, which is often embodied in typologies or in ideal-types. Some examples include: office-seekers/benefit-seekers (Schlesinger, 1975); careerists/believers (Panebianco, 1988); vote-seekers/office-seekers/policy-seekers (Müller and Strøm, 1999; Strøm, 1990); and vote-maximizers/office-maximizers/policy-ideology advocates/intra-party democracy maximizers (Harmel and Janda, 1994). These classifications can be taken as developments of the basic distinction between office- and policy-seeking parties.

I argue that the distinction between office- and policy-seeking parties is not precise enough to understand how parties make decisions. However, the solution is not to add new categories of parties, but to refine the idea of policy preferences. Instead of presenting a typology of motivations, I construct a utility function that allows for a continuum of parties (and politicians).

According to the standard model of policy preferences, the utility of the party is a function of the distance between its ideal policy point and the policy made by the government. The greater this distance, the less utility. If x is some policy outcome and x^* is the ideal policy of some party, typically a quadratic function (risk-aversion) is used to represent the utility:

$$U(x) = - (x - x^*)^2$$

This specification is not inconsequential. It presupposes that a party will agree to change its platform as much as required if by doing so this change brings about a new policy closer to its ideal point than the actual policy. This is what drives policy-oriented parties to the median position when parties know the position of the median voter. Parties are not constrained

when they transform their platforms, provided that these transformations produce a more preferred policy.

This assumption does not always make sense. There are many cases in which parties are not ready to exchange certain ideological principles for a more preferred policy outcome. Parties are not always willing to sacrifice their ideological principles in order to make sure that policy outcomes are somehow better than those produced by the incumbent. Their willingness to do so depends on the price to be paid in ideological terms for the policy improvement.

Let me present a couple of examples taken from the case of the moderation of the Spanish Socialists. In 1977, in the first democratic elections after Franco's death in 1975, the PSOE won an impressive 29.3 percent of the vote standing on a radical platform (the party had defined itself as a Marxist mass party). In 1978, a smaller, rival socialist party with a share of around 5 percent of the vote joined the PSOE. Yet, one year later, in the 1979 elections, the party stagnated, as it won a 30.5 percent share of the vote. The General Secretary, Felipe González, concluded that unless the party moderated, it could not win elections. Thus, in the XXVIII Congress in 1979 he proposed that the PSOE should renounce Marxism. Surprisingly, the proposal was defeated: 61 percent of the delegates in the Congress voted against it. One of the leading opponents of the plan to renounce Marxism, Pablo Castellano, declared that the party:

should abandon the electoralist line, (. . .) the use of opinion surveys as political guides, (. . .) and return to class analysis and behavior. The party must return to being a party of workers' struggle and not of populist representation.

(Quoted in Gillespie, 1989: 342)

And another important opponent, Luis Gómez Llorente, stated very clearly that increased electoral support would not compensate for the ideological sacrifice:

It is not a matter of taking away two million votes from the UCD [the incumbent right-wing party] through populist means or by distorting the socialist message.

(Quoted in Santesmases, 1985: 68)

What these two quotations have in common is that their authors consider that an electoral victory is of no value if it implies distorting 'the socialist message'. The outcome of this distortion might be a policy closer to the ideal point of the party, but this gain is insufficient to offset the sacrifice of some basic principles of socialism. Thus, these politicians were not ready to exchange an electoral victory for the dilution of ideological principles. This kind of reasoning does not make much sense in terms of policy preferences as defined above. According to standard policy preferences, as long as there is a gain with regard to the policy outcome, the party should implement the ideological changes required to achieve such a gain.

We therefore have to consider the possibility that parties derive utility not only from policy, but also from the defence and maintenance of certain ideological principles. A party may want to be faithful to its constitutive ideological principles, even if by doing so it forgoes the gains of a more preferred policy.

There are two possible explanations for this attitude. First, parties might consider, against the Downsian logic, that voters' preferences are not exogenous, but rather a function of the very activities of parties (Iversen, 1994; Kalyvas, 1996; Przeworski and Sprague, 1986). If the party has the capacity to mould voters' preferences in the long run, it might hope to attract progressively more and more votes without renouncing its basic ideological tenets.

Second, and more provocatively, a party could derive expressive utility from defending certain principles. A party would value the defence of these principles for their own sake. While expressive utility has become a commonplace with regard to voters (Aldrich, 1997; Brennan and Lomasky, 1993; Fiorina, 1976; Riker and Ordeshook, 1968; Schuessler, 2000), the idea has not been applied to politicians or parties. Yet, the behaviour of dogmatic parties (in those countries where they exist) seems to fit the expressive hypothesis. There are parties that seem to exist in order to defend certain principles, regardless of policy outcomes.

In the first story, the party is fully instrumental and, in a sense, office-seeking. It acts under a very long time horizon, so that it pays to wait as much as is necessary to win elections without having to sacrifice any ideological baggage, but the final goal is winning after all. In the second story, the party does not care about electoral outcomes: its main concern is that certain ideological positions find a voice in the system. The first alternative looks more plausible, particularly for big parties, if only because big parties, no matter how dogmatic, are sensitive to electoral failures, as I show later on in the discussion.

Be this as it may, the implication of a party valuing its ideological position is that some degree of ideological rigidity has to be introduced in the party's utility function. In the standard utility function with policy preferences, the only source of value for the party is the policy made by the incumbent. Here, I suppose that the party also values the distance between its platform and its ideal point in the ideological axis. Utility has two arguments: the distance between the policy made by the incumbent and the party's ideal policy, and the distance between the party's policy platform and its ideal policy. This implies that moderation is always costly, since it entails a loss of ideological purity.

We can measure the degree of ideological rigidity with some weight w , where $0 \leq w \leq 1$. The greater w , the more rigidity, that is, the more important the distance between the ideal policy point and the announced policy point, and the less important the distance between the ideal policy point and the policy made.² There are two extreme possibilities that define two

ideal party types, the pure dogmatic and the pure pragmatic, that correspond to Roemer's (2001) militants and reformists, respectively. The pure dogmatic party has $w = 1$: it does not care about policy, and is only concerned with the defence of some ideological principles. It takes an uncompromising attitude towards electoral politics. The pure pragmatic has $w = 0$. This is equivalent to the standard case of the policy preference model. Needless to say, most parties (and most politicians) will lie somewhere between these two extremes. Pure office-seeking parties (or 'opportunists' in Roemer's terminology) are not considered in this continuum of types.

Moderation triggers internal conflicts within parties because of the simultaneous presence of dogmatic and pragmatic politicians. In some cases the conflict may end in a split, as happened in the transformation of the Italian PCI into a social democratic party, the new PDS. Only a few days after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the General Secretary, Achille Occhetto, proposed changing the name and nature of the party. This proposal attracted sufficient support and was put into practice in the XIX and XX Congresses (held in 1990 and 1991, respectively). Not everyone agreed with the party renouncing its Communist ideology. The more dogmatic party members abandoned the party and created a new one, *Rifondazione Comunista*. Ignazi (1992: 150) interviewed delegates to the XIX Congress. When asked about the future strategy of the party, 21 percent of the delegates chose the answer 'my party should always be faithful to its principles and goals, even if this leads to a loss of votes'. These are the more dogmatic party members. In contrast, 44 percent preferred the statement 'my party should try to obtain votes and to represent the interests of the greater number of groups and voters'. These, obviously, are the more pragmatic members.

In the PSOE's battle over the rejection of Marxism, the division between pragmatists and dogmatists was also clear. According to Joaquín Almunia, one of the participants in that struggle and later General Secretary of the party from 1997 to 2000:

... lined up against those who thought that the ideas of the party and our concept of socialism should be adapted to the present situation, *to win the confidence of electors and to govern*, were the defenders of the essential socialist principles. (...) The critics considered that the rejection of Marxism would turn PSOE into a mere manager of the status quo, and in those circumstances *they were indifferent to winning power or not*.

(Almunia, 2001: 97, my italics)

Almunia uses the term 'critics' to refer to the dogmatic faction in the party, the faction that was not ready to exchange ideology for power. The pragmatists, including Almunia himself, were willing to jettison Marxism if that was necessary to win elections.

No matter how internally divided the party is among dogmatists and pragmatists, the party will have to make some decision whether to moderate

or not. In a one-dimensional space, the general utility function of a party can be constructed in the following way. A party P values two things: its loyalty to its ideological principles and the policy made by the government. That policy will be represented by an x in the ideological left–right axis. The ideal point of the party is x_P^* and its electoral platform, x_P . Given the degree of ideological rigidity, w , the utility function is:

$$U_P(x_P, x) = -(w_P(x_P, -x_P^*))^2 + (1 - w_P)(x - x_P^*)^2 \quad (1)$$

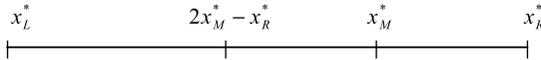
Utility depends on the electoral platform and on the policy made. The electoral platform can coincide with the ideal point ($x_P = x_P^*$), in which case the party does not moderate. But it can be different, as when the party decides to moderate in order to win elections. With regard to policy, party P may be in government or in opposition. If it is in government, it makes policy according to the platform presented in the electoral campaign ($x = x_P$) and therefore the function collapses to the standard form of policy models; if it is in opposition, policy is made by the rival party according to its announced platform. The maximum of this function is reached when the party wins elections without jettisoning any ideological principles, that is, when it makes a policy that coincides with its ideal point. The minimum corresponds to the situation in which the party moderates, loses elections, and policy is made by the rival. I will now analyze the calculus of moderation.

2. The Calculus of Party Moderation

There are two parties, L , a left party, and R , a right party, that compete in a single dimension, the left–right axis. Suppose that the initial positions of the parties in the axis are determined by Nature (or rather by History). Suppose further that History has made R the incumbent, whereas L is in the opposition. R is closer to the median voter, M , than L . This specification about L and R is, obviously, inconsequential, but it fits the empirical cases of left-wing parties that I use in this article.

The situation is one of complete information. Both the parties and the median voter know the locations on the left–right axis of all of them. The assumption of complete information is not restrictive at all in the present context. The hardest point to prove is that a party may refuse to moderate even when it is certain that moderation would bring electoral victory.³ As we have seen before, models of divergence with policy preferences require uncertainty. Here I show that divergence is possible even with complete information.

I start by showing that if we keep the ideological position of the incumbent fixed, under some conditions the left party in opposition may refuse to moderate. The aim is to prove in a very simple way that moderation is



x_L^* = ideal point of L , the left party
 x_M^* = ideal point of the median voter
 x_R^* = ideal point of R , the right party

Figure 1. The spatial position of parties and the median voter

not always the best response to losing elections even if moderation is believed to guarantee electoral victory. Again, the assumption of a fixed incumbent is not restrictive, since it constitutes the most favourable condition for moderation of the opposition party. If the incumbent can moderate, too, in response to the moderation of the opposition party, the decision to moderate to a winning position becomes more costly, as it requires a greater ideological sacrifice.

Let x_L^* , x_R^* and x_M^* be the ideal points of L , R and M , respectively. The utility the median voter gets when policy is made at point x is simply:

$$U_M(x) = -(x - x_M^*)^2 \tag{2}$$

The original situation is this: the right party R is in power because its ideal point is closer to the ideal point of the median voter than the ideal point of the left party L . Therefore, policy is made by R and corresponds to its ideal point, $x = x_R^*$. This situation is depicted in Figure 1 and can be summarized in the following way: $x_L^* < x_M^* < x_R^*$ and $2x_M^* - x_R^* > x_L^*$.

L must decide what to do. From a purely logical point of view, four results are possible: L does not moderate and wins elections, L moderates and wins elections, L does not moderate and loses elections, and L moderates and loses elections. The first result, however, is not feasible under present circumstances, since the median is closer to R . The fourth result is easily avoided with complete information: L understands that moderation only pays if it produces a winning position. Therefore, in equilibrium it will never moderate by moving to a losing position. More specifically, if L decides to moderate, it will choose some point in the winning interval $(2x_M^* - x_R^*, x_M^*)$. Given that the median voter only has spatial preferences and that R 's position is fixed, any point in this interval guarantees an electoral victory for L . For any value of w_L , L will move to the point of this interval closest to its ideal point x_L^* , that is, it will move to $x_L = 2x_M^* - x_R^*$.⁴ This leaves us with two results: L does not moderate and loses elections, and L moderates and wins elections. In order to find out what the party will do,

we must compare the utility of these two results. The utility of non-moderating is:

$$U_L(x_L^*, x_R^*) = -(w_L(x_L^* - x_L^*))^2 + (1 - w_L)(x_R^* - x_L^*)^2 = -(1 - w_L)(x_R^* - x_L^*)^2 \quad (3)$$

In (3), L is loyal to its ideological principles, and policy is made by R . There is no loss of ideological purity, but the policy made is very distant from L 's ideal point.

On the other hand, the utility of moderating to the minimal winning position $x_L = 2x_M^* - x_R^*$ is:

$$U_L(x_L, x_L) = -(w_L(x_L - x_L^*))^2 + (1 - w_L)(x_L - x_L^*)^2 = -(x_L - x_L^*)^2 \quad (4)$$

In (4) the party moderates, wins elections and makes a moderate policy. There is a loss of ideological purity, but the policy made is closer to its ideal point than the policy that R would have made.

Party L moderates when (4) is greater than or equal to (3). With no loss of generality, I will set $x_L^* = 0$ to simplify the calculations. Solving for w_L , (4) is greater than or equal to (3) when:

$$w_L \leq \frac{(x_R^*)^2 - (x_L^*)^2}{(x_R^*)^2} \quad (5)$$

Substituting $x_L = 2x_M^* - x_R^*$, the minimum amount of moderation that wins elections, the inequality is this:

$$w_L \leq \frac{4x_M^*(x_R^* - x_M^*)}{(x_R^*)^2} = w_L^* \quad (6)$$

Whenever inequality (6) is satisfied, L moderates. Several conclusions follow from (6). First, moderation is not an automatic response to electoral defeat. A party may resist moderation when the loss of ideological purity is greater than the gain in policy. Second, the decision regarding moderation is a function of three parameters: the degree of ideological rigidity, the distance between the ideal point of the party and the median voter, and the distance between the ideal point of the party and the position of the incumbent. Obviously, the greater the degree of ideological rigidity, while everything else remains constant, the less likely it is that (6) holds, that is, the less likely it is that moderation will be observed. With regard to the other two parameters, x_M^* and x_R^* , partial derivatives help to see their effect in (6). The derivative for the position of the median is:

$$\frac{\partial w_L^*}{\partial x_M^*} = \frac{4(x_R^* - 2x_M^*)}{(x_R^*)^2} \quad (7)$$

This derivative is negative when $2x_M^* > x_R^*$. This inequality always holds, since it is one of the assumptions of the model. If $2x_M^* < x_R^*$, the median voter is better off voting for L than for R and therefore L does not face the decision to moderate. The greater the distance between L and the median voter, the less likely it is that moderation will occur. The explanation is simple. When the median voter is far away from L , L has to travel a great ideological distance to reach a moderate winning position: hence, the cost of moderating in ideological terms is greater than when this ideological distance is small.

The derivative for the position of the incumbent is:

$$\frac{\partial w_L^*}{\partial x_R^*} = \frac{4x_M^*(2x_M^* - x_R^*)}{(x_R^*)^3} \quad (8)$$

This derivative is positive when $2x_M^* > x_R^*$. A positive derivative means that the opportunity cost of maintaining ideological purity increases with the distance between the two parties. The greater this distance, the greater the cost of being out of power. Thus, moderation is more likely when parties are polarized.

These two effects go, therefore, in opposite directions. Greater distance from the median makes moderation less likely, greater distance from the rival party makes moderation more likely.

It is also possible to express the likelihood of moderation in terms of the distance between these two parameters, x_M^* and x_R^* . Thus, what (8) shows is that the greater the distance between R and M , the more likely is moderation. If we reverse this relationship, the idea is that the closer R is to M , the less likely is moderation. The reason is easy to understand: as R gets closer to M , the policy gain for L of moderating becomes smaller; moreover, as R gets closer to M , the amount of moderation needed to win elections increases (since $x_L = 2x_M^* - x_R^*$) and therefore the costs of moderation in ideological terms increase.

A limiting case is that in which the median and the right-wing party have the same ideal points, $x_M^* = x_R^*$. Now the distances of the left-wing party to the median and to the rival party are the same. Simple inspection of (6) reveals that in such a case moderation never pays if there is some positive degree of ideological rigidity, since $w_L^* = 0$. But this implies that convergence cannot be an equilibrium. If R is at the median position, L does not have any reason to move to the median. Likewise, if both parties are at the median, any of them is better off if it moves to its ideal point. When parties have some degree of ideological rigidity, convergence cannot be sustained as an equilibrium position.⁵

To summarize: if any party has some degree of ideological rigidity, convergence cannot be an equilibrium. As for moderation itself, moderation is more likely the lower the degree of ideological rigidity, the smaller the distance to the median, and the greater the distance to the incumbent.

Alternatively, moderation is more likely the greater the distance between the median and the incumbent. Thus, under some circumstances, a party may rationally refuse moderation even if the party is certain that if it moderates it will win elections.

3. Discussion

These results, even if they are based on a highly stylized situation, help to explain the long periods in which opposition parties remain out of power, losing election after election. Just to refer to the examples I mentioned at the beginning of this article, the British Labour Party lost every national election between 1979 and 1997; the German SPD was out of office between 1949 and 1966, the year in which it entered into the Grand Coalition with the CDU;⁶ and the Italian Communists, first under the name of PCI and later in their reincarnation as the PDS, only won power in 1996, after almost five decades in opposition. These parties were the main opposition party in their respective countries. Obviously, a small party that survives in a proportional system with no hope of winning elections has few incentives to moderate. But these were parties that aspired to win and make policy.

That parties in opposition were aware of how ideological radicalism hindered their electoral chances is clear. In 1981 a survey showed that 69 percent of the British electorate considered that the Labour Party was 'moving too much to the left' (Richards, 1997: 20). The disastrous electoral performance in 1983 (27.6 percent of the vote) was a direct consequence of this radicalism (the party manifesto included withdrawal from the European Community, unilateral nuclear disarmament and greater state intervention in the economy). The party was aware that it was too far away from the bulk of moderate voters, but nonetheless preferred to remain close to its ideological ideal point. In 1983 and again in 1987 around 50 percent of those asked in surveys stated that the Labour Party was extreme (Heath and Jowell, 1994: 202).

During the 1950s, a new generation of German socialists realized that a substantial part of the electorate saw the SPD as uncommitted to the market economy and the Federal institutions. Many in particular considered that the legacy of Marxism and the first post-war leader, Kurt Schumacher, a politician strongly associated with Weimar, represented a heavy burden that hindered electoral victory (Parness, 1991).

In the Italian case, the leaders of the PCI were also aware that many voters considered the party to be radical and anti-systemic. Even though the Communists tried to play an extremely prudent role in Italian politics in the 1970s, supporting the Christian Democrat government without receiving any portfolio in a bid to obtain 'a certificate of legitimacy' (D'Alimonte, 1999), the strategy of the 'historic compromise' proved unsuccessful: the party failed to attract new voters and alienated some of its traditional

followers. The reasons for this failure are complex, but it seems that the reluctance among even some of the more pragmatic party members to break all historical and ideological links with the Soviet Union blocked moderation. Only when dependence on the Soviet Union ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall did the party evolve towards the model of a classical social democratic party.⁷

The leader of the Spanish PSOE, Felipe González, clearly understood that the cause of the party's stagnation in the 1979 elections was in its ideological radicalism (Share, 1999). Actually, the issue of PSOE's radicalism played a crucial role in that year's electoral campaign. Two days before the polls, the conservative Prime Minister made a speech on television in which he highlighted the risk of choosing a party that defended ideas incompatible with the Western lifestyle (Juliá, 1997: 526). Moderate voters did not trust enough in a party that 'could resort to radical measures which were still considered valid in its ideological discourse' (Juliá, 1997: 518).

The history of these parties shows that it was their ideological rigidity which was responsible for their long periods in opposition. In all three cases party leaders were aware that their parties were losing elections because they were too far from the median position. Yet, they did not moderate for a long time. To a large extent, this is consistent with the logic sketched above. Given the degree of ideological rigidity of the parties and the location of the median and the rival party, moderation was not the best response. After a certain time in opposition, however, all these parties finally decided to moderate. Moderation became feasible not necessarily because the ideological locations of the median voter and the incumbent had changed, but rather because there was a change in the ideological rigidity of the opposition party. As moderation was not a best response, moderation only became possible due to a modification in the value of one of the parameters.

What empirical cases reveal is that moderation tends to occur after some change in the parameter w of ideological rigidity. The causes of these variations involve factors that are not contemplated in the model, such as organizational changes or generational renewal. Once the opposition's value of w is reduced, the party moderates and wins elections.

Organizational changes were particularly visible in the Spanish case. As I said before, González's attempt to get rid of Marxism in the PSOE's XXVIII Congress in 1979 was rejected by 61 percent of the delegates. Facing this internal resistance, González resigned. To overcome the crisis, an Extraordinary Congress was convened for after the summer. On this second occasion, the motion to abandon Marxism was approved without problem and González returned to lead the party. This was possible because the XXVIII Congress had approved some organizational reforms designed to centralize decision-making procedures (see Maravall, 1991: 14–15). Dogmatic figures, who represented around 40 percent of the total party membership, accounted for just 10 percent of the delegates to the Extraordinary Congress (Gillespie, 1988: 354). Moderation was only possible

thanks to some internal reform of party decision-making rules that allowed the more pragmatic politicians to curb the power of the party's more dogmatic members, thereby reducing the value of PSOE's ideological rigidity.

In the case of the German SPD, moderation only took place when a new generation of politicians replaced the old dogmatic party rulers. The young socialists first became local leaders in the *Länder* or in large cities (as exemplified by Willy Brandt, who rose to prominence as mayor of Berlin). In 1958, an important meeting of the party in Stuttgart resulted in the largest renovation of party officers since the end of the war. This renovation was crucial for the success of the proposal to reject Marxism in the 1959 Bad Godesberg Congress (Miller and Pothoff, 1983: 172–5; Parness, 1991: 64). Thanks to this process of generational change, the SPD transformed itself from a 'workers' party' to a 'people's party'.

In the Labour Party it is possible to find both organizational reforms and leadership change. After the 1983 failure, several internal reforms were introduced in order to neutralize the influence of the more dogmatic party members. The MPs were too tightly controlled by activists, the latter being more radical than the former (see Tsebelis, 1990: Ch. 5). Moreover, these activists acted in their collective capacity (as delegates from the unions, for example) and did not faithfully represent the views of individual party members. In order to moderate the party, it was necessary to introduce measures to reduce the power of those activists, as well as to reinforce the centralized power both of the leader and of the parliamentary group. Neil Kinnock tried to approve the principle of 'one member, one vote', in virtue of which the choice of representatives would be made by individual members and not by delegates, but the party rejected it (Shaw, 1994: Ch. 2). These reforms did not culminate until 1993, when John Smith won the vote for the 'one member, one vote' proposal (Anderson and Mann, 1997: 319–23). These organizational reforms were accompanied by changes in the leadership (first Neil Kinnock, elected in 1983, then John Smith in 1992, and, after his sudden death, Tony Blair in 1994) and ideological changes, from the time of the 1987 Policy Review to the removal of Clause Four in 1995.⁸

All these examples share a number of common features. For years, the party remained in opposition because of its incapacity to moderate. This incapacity was due to its ideological rigidity given the positions of the median and the incumbent. The period of stability ended when the party's degree of ideological rigidity was substantially reduced, through organizational reforms, leadership changes, or both. The party then moved to a position closer to the median than that of the incumbent, and won the elections. What we find, therefore, is a succession of periods of stability and periods of punctual ideological change in which parties modify their degree of dogmatism. Rather than gradual evolution, the story of moderation that emerges corresponds to punctuated episodes of ideological change amid periods of stability in which parties move little in ideological terms.

Conclusions

Proposals to moderate usually trigger internal conflict and, occasionally, splits. Some parties resist moderation as much as they can, condemning themselves to long periods out of government. I have argued that it is necessary to introduce ideological rigidity in the utility functions of parties if we want to understand their behaviour. Parties care about policy, but also about their ideological principles.

The willingness of a party to remain in opposition to avoid the loss of ideological purity makes sense even in such a restrictive setting formed by two parties competing in a single dimension with complete information and a fixed incumbent. Even with complete information, convergence is not an equilibrium. Resistance to moderation tends to increase the greater the party's degree of ideological rigidity, the greater the distance between the party and the median position, and the smaller the distance between the opposition party and the incumbent.

Empirical cases of moderation show that moderation often takes place in the wake of a reduction in a party's ideological rigidity as a consequence of some organizational reform or of leadership renovation. When moderation is not the best response to the positions occupied by the median voter and the incumbent, a party will moderate only if it softens its dogmatism.

When parties are ideologically rigid, party competition follows an interesting pattern: long periods of stability in which a rigid party stays in opposition, punctuated by periods of change in which the opposition party reduces its rigidity, moderates and eventually wins elections.

Notes

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- 1 On the complexities that arise in the analysis of collective actors, see Tsebelis (2002: Ch. 2).
- 2 Ideological rigidity, like any other aspect related to preferences, is not directly observable. It is nonetheless revealed by parties' actions. If two parties, keeping everything else constant, make different decisions regarding moderation, this difference can be reasonably imputed to varying degrees of ideological rigidity. As can be inferred from the internal discussions on moderation, ideological rigidity is an important, though elusive, determinant of the decision to moderate.
- 3 Note that this is based on the assumption that moderation is always credible in the sense that the median voter always votes for the moderating party if it is the closer party. Yet, there could be doubts about the sincerity of moderation, the party reverting to its previous radical stance. I follow here Alesina and Rosenthal (1995): the repeated nature of elections disciplines parties and makes them stick to their announced platforms.

- 4 It is assumed that if the median voter is indifferent with respect to the two parties, she votes for L .
- 5 This can be shown more formally. Suppose that $x_R^* = x_M^*$. For L , the expected utility of moving to the median is:

$$\frac{1}{2} U_L(x_M^*, x_M^*) + \frac{1}{2} U_L(x_M^*, x_M^*) = -(x_M^*, x_L^*)^2$$

The utility of any other platform x_L such that $x_L^* < x_L < x_M^*$ is:

$$U_L(x_L, x_M^*) = -(w_L(x_L - x_L^*)^2 + (1 - w_L)(x_M^* - x_L^*)^2)$$

It is easy to show that the second quantity has to be greater than the first one. Suppose the contrary, that the first is greater than the second. Then:

$$-(x_M^* - x_L^*)^2 > -(w_L(x_L - x_L^*)^2 + (1 - w_L)(x_M^* - x_L^*)^2)$$

But this inequality implies that:

$$(x_M^* - x_L^*)^2 < (x_L - x_L^*)^2.$$

This contradicts the initial assumption that $x_L < x_M^*$. Therefore, L has an incentive to move away from the median position when the incumbent is at the median position. Convergence is not an equilibrium.

- 6 The Grand Coalition broke down in 1969. A new coalition between the SPD and the FDP was formed allowing Willy Brandt to become Western Germany's first Socialist Chancellor since the end of World War II. Yet the SPD was not the largest party in terms of votes until 1972.
- 7 In his speech in Rome on 20 November 1989, Achille Occhetto, the General Secretary, openly confessed that the party had been dependent in one way or another on the existence of the Soviet Union (the speech is reproduced in *L'Unità*, 1990).
- 8 Clause Four, introduced in 1918, said this: 'To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange and the best possible obtainable system of administration of each industry or service'. An earlier attempt to delete this clause had failed in 1959.

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