

only means that voters can assign blame but also requires that voters be able to choose among real policy alternatives — a point largely ignored by previous work.

Building from this second component of accountability, José María Maravall, sociologist and Minister of Education in Felipe González's government, offers a panoramā of the strategies used by governing parties to conserve power and opposition parties to gain power in Western democracies since World War II in his recently published book *Political Confrontation*.

Supported by the electoral conception of democracy first suggested by Schumpeter (1942) and linked to Friedrich's theory of representative government (1963), the author has unveiled a comprehensive study based on a database of 1109 observations of countries/years in 23 parliamentary democracies of the OECD, with 123 prime ministers forced out by elections and 189 by political party manoeuvrings. The author also closely analyzes the governments of González and Aznar, campaigns such as those of Thatcher and Eisenhower, all without neglecting periods such as those of Suárez and Willy Brandt.

The book follows in the tradition of empirical democratic theory and responds to deep concerns for how citizens can keep governments accountable and the very foundations of representative government. This book unravels the paths travelled by political winners and losers in order to study the strategies by which politicians attempt to hold onto power and act autonomously with regard to citizens.

José María Maravall
Political Confrontation
 (La confrontación política)

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Do party strategies matter for electoral accountability? Despite a well-developed understanding of how policy outcomes affect election results, we know very little about whether parties engage in position-taking to shape accountability ties. Democratic accountability not

The first issue analyzed is the control and use of acrimony (*crispación*) in the political arena. Why do politicians reject strategies of accord and moderation as they seek the majority vote, and opt instead for a radical polarization of the electoral competition? The author explains this decision — the surrender of left and right parties to extreme factions within their own parties in order to win elections — as result of rational calculations which paradoxically appease moderate voters, and studies its consequences on democratic politics. To do so, he utilizes a comprehensive source of information about United States politics in the Clinton and Bush administrations and Spanish politics under Aznar, González and Zapatero.

An in-depth analysis of the Spanish case, where we find dramatic variation in ideological voting as compared to other countries, contributes to the testing of Maravall's hypothesis. He shows how ideological voting for the Socialist party, PSOE, the incumbent from 1982 to 1996 was progressively eroded first by charges of ideological discrepancy and later by accusations of corrupt practices within the party. From 1993 to 1996, the single-party minority government of the PSOE negotiated parliamentary pacts with the Catalan *Convergència i Unió* to support the government and enact its legislation. Curiously, ideological voting for the right wing party, the Popular Party (PP), was strong and stable during the whole period. In 1996 the conservative party, PP, won elections and governed with the support of nationalist parties. In 2000 the PP obtained a majority in Parliament.

An important group of voters who perceived the loss of competence and who were closer to the PSOE than to any other party did not vote in ac-

cordance with their ideological preferences. One of the more obvious lessons for that, according to the author, is that not everyone who is closer to a party votes for that party. According to Maravall, the probability of voting for a party is a function both of the ideological distances between the voter and the parties and some other variables related to consistency and competence.

Unlike the consensus strategy where parties define their policies according to the interests of the median voter and therefore the majority of citizens, the strategy of acrimony is tailored only to the interests of those politicians who aspire to rise to power by any means possible. Such strategies do not attempt to respond to voter preferences or interests and, in fact, work to demobilize voters. According to Maravall, the strategy of acrimony depends on three aspects: (1) the appraisal of the status quo and the level of political impatience; (2) the likelihood that exogenous events may alter the current situation and conditions; and (3) the electorate's uncertain reactions. According to Maravall, the variables that explain the intention to vote lose meaning when explaining voter indecision. Nevertheless, the evidence does demonstrate that the undecided voter is usually quite vulnerable to strategies of acrimony. The great accomplishment of these politicians then is their ability to lure the undecided voter into voting for a party from which they may be ideologically distant.

The second issue analyzed by Maravall is the reasons for which early elections happen. In the great majority of parliamentary democracies, only the prime minister has discretionary power to call an early election. Since 1945, half of the elections held in the 23 parliamentary democra-

cies of the OECD have been called early. How can this be explained? In what way are election results affected by the fact that prime ministers decide when they will be judged by the citizens? Indeed, Maravall argues that the attempts of ruling party politicians to hold early elections when making certain policy decisions are rooted in their desire to be re-elected. Whether they stay in power depends on the timing of the election, involving factors which determine a longer or shorter term for the current head of Government. Party politicians anticipate the judgement of voters when they replace their leader or decide to leave the ruling coalition. Nevertheless, ruling party politicians are not always successful. The analysis demonstrates that success is not always certain, since it is not possible to forecast exactly the date of the elections. The author argues that while prime ministers «of minority governments, whether single party or coalition, are more likely to hold early elections... they also opt for this strategy when they lead single party majority governments». The author concludes that, after prosperous economic times, it is advantageous to hold early elections rather than complete the full term of office. With data for Great Britain, the United States, and specially Spain, Maravall shows that the capacity of a party to preserve its supporters over time is sensitive to these retrospective assessments of ideological consistency.

Are political conspiracies the way to gain power? The author affirms this. Political conspiracies often replace elections, and the criteria of politicians supplant those of voters with results which are unfavourable for the sitting prime minister and the citizens who elected him, but often favourable for other politicians. In parliamentary

democracies, the prime minister is forced out of office owing to political conspiracies and not due to a popular vote, 48 percent of the time. The author shows that the empirical democratic theory only explains the anticipation of reactions from politicians when voters and politicians share the same criteria to punish the prime minister but Maravall argues that it is not always the case. Unfavorable economic conditions increase the risk of electoral defeat. In favorable economic conditions, the risk of political conspiracies increases. In the case of Spain under Adolfo Suárez, splits from the party and a «critical manifesto of the 200», signed in December 1980 by important members of the party, indicated Suárez's inability to keep UCD together. But rather than impopularity breeding internal dissent, it was the internal conspiracies that eroded Suárez's popularity in his final months in office.

Three important conclusions can be drawn from the book: (1) citizens ignore the future in retrospective voting: their decision is not about who is to govern them; (2) voters need considerable information in order to be able to attribute responsibility for past outcomes; (3) much of the punishment is not done by voters, but by politicians. Politicians may dismiss prime ministers because they basically anticipate the future verdict of voters. If this were the case, they would only act as an additional instrument to reinforce accountability. But because the criteria of politicians and voters do not coincide, political survival will not only depend on the will of the people, and the incentives for an incumbent to be representative will disappear.

María ASENSIO