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A COMPARISON BETWEEN UNITED STATES AND 
WESTERN EUROPE IN THE EIGHTIES

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ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES OF GOVERNMENTAL ACTION: 
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EUROPE IN THE EIGHTIES

By Sergio Fabbrini

Sergio Fabbrini teaches Politics of Social Policy at the University of Trento (Italy). He is the promoter of the ECPR Standing Group on American Politics and Society, and the author of two books and several articles on American and comparative politics, on welfare comparative policies, and on political theory.

Summary

I suggest a framework for the interpretation of governmental action, in four democratic countries in the 1980s, based upon the dichotomy leader-dominated vs. party-dominated governmental strategies. Rather than a movement from 'party government' to 'non-party government', we witnessed a transformation, in that decade of political change, within the former one, due to the central role acquired by the individual political leaders of the governments considered. I suggest to interpret that role as a result of a political and electoral context which made rewarding the pursuit of individual strategies of action (here the importance of the American experience). The different success met by the leader-dominated strategy in the second half of the decade showed the relevance that the institutional features of the governmental systems have for the understanding of political behaviour.
Parties, leaders and governmental strategies

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the changes that have taken place in the governmental strategies of Great Britain, France, Italy and the United States during the 1980s. A governmental strategy consists in the choice adopted by the main governmental actors in order to organize the action of the government. In this sense, post-second war party governments in Western democracies has been a choice: the main political actors found rewarding to promote their political view and their political ambitions through a party, and then, once acquired the control of the government, to implement them through the support of a party. Now, it is a commonly-held opinion among observers, backed of course by ample empirical evidence, that the last decade represented a particularly critical period in the organizational and political history of the parties in western political systems. One can therefore justifiably enquire as to the consequences on governmental action of the difficulties experienced by political parties.

The four national cases examined here are chosen deliberately: during the 1980s the governmental processes of all four countries were characterized by strong personal leaderships which restored dynamism to apparently paralysed political systems. Despite their obvious (and here inessential) political and ideological differences, Thatcher (in the period 1979-1990), Mitterrand (in the period 1981-1988), Craxi (in the period 1983-1987) and Reagan (in the period 1981-1988) seemed to share a number of features in common, and two in particular: first, they assumed-political leadership in situations where their parties and their governments were stalemated and, second, they seemed to profit from a more general process of political dealignment affecting their countries, which led to a disorientation of the electorate and to a weakening of its traditional emotional and rational ties with the political system and the partisan cleavages within it.

Of course, the increasing cognitive mobilization of citizens makes it difficult, for political strategies centered exclusively on the charisma of a political leader, to be successful. And in fact, these leaders followed a different pattern: they tried to identify their images with specific issues and with remedies for them. Consequently, rather than a "charismatic"
government (in the Weberian sense), one witnessed the emergence of a leader-dominated government - that is, highly personalized governmental action associated with specific policy objectives. Seen in this light, those leaders belong to the category of political innovators⁹ - i.e. leaders who have to act independently of definite social and programmatic premises and who have to single out (of course on the basis of their political philosophy) the ensuing political choices through which to build a new consensus for their personal and policy positions.

The point to make is the following one: in all four cases the parties did not disappear as such, but a clear internal (to the executive) change took place in the relationship between leader and ministers (team). In sum, especially in the Western European cases, there was a sort of supersession of party government, as if it represented a kind of 'dignified part' of those systems. Of course, it was not like that, as the difficulties met by the new governmental strategy at the end of that decade showed clearly. But we have not theoretical tools in order to detect that internal change: the literature has been concerned with 'party government' and 'not-party government' as such, giving very little attention to the role of the leaders within party government itself. Consequently, the experience of the 198Os represents a formidable occasion in order: (i) to argument in favor of a new framework of analysis (based upon the dichotomy leader-dominated/party-dominated governmental strategies), especially in relation to a context of political change; (ii) to make clear that the movement of the pendulum, between the two governmental strategies, is affected by the changes of the environment and by the institutional features of the governmental system.

**Strategies of governmental action: party government**

Let us consider, now, the literature on party government. If one assumes it as a strategy⁴, and if one uses the three standard criteria for analysis of the features of executives adopted by King⁵, party government is identifiable as such only if the parties have exclusive
control: (i) over the selection of government's personnel - in particular over appointments with greater political responsibility; (ii) over decision-making processes within the government, in the sense that the government's policy objectives reflect decisions collectively taken within the government party or the parties of a coalition government. Of course, this control over governmental action must have been legitimated by the electorate, i.e. it must be the outcome of an open election conducted along party lines; (iii) over the parliamentary majority in order to guarantee the support for the government; support which takes the form of disciplined observance by the parliamentary members of the party (or of the coalition of parties) of the government's decisions and directives (i.e. of the government members of the party or coalition of parties).

We know⁶ that it is possible to identify on empirical grounds three general types of party government, according to the range of choices available to the electorate in its determination of the party make-up and leadership of the government. In the first type the election has resembled a referendum on the government, in the sense that it has served to give a majority to one party or another and therefore to establish the government's composition by party, its programme and its leadership. Great Britain, West Germany, Sweden (and, much less, France of the Fifth Republic as we will see) belong, in different ways, to this category, since their party systems have come to be structured by a bi-polar dynamic.

In the second type of party government, elections have not generally led to the majority of one particular party or coalition, in the sense that no one party has managed to win a dominant position in the political system. This has led to a sort of alternation in the party composition of the government and its leadership, even if both of these (and especially the programme that they must implement) are the outcomes of inter-party bargaining after the election (with the possible albeit paradoxical result that the party receiving the most votes may be excluded from the governmental coalition). This type of governmental organization, of which the most significant Western European example is probably Denmark, has been called "coalitional party government". This definition enables us to distinguish between this second type of
government and a third one, usually labelled "dominant party government".

This latter definition applies to cases such as Italy where the conditions have not been created for a genuine alternation among parties or party coalitions in the government, insofar as one party (in the Italian case the Christian Democrats) "must be the senior party in every conceivable coalition". Electoral changes may lead to marginal changes in the party composition of the Cabinet and also, if the leadership of the dominant party is divided and weakened by internal conflicts, to a situation where the parties in the coalition take turns to lead the government. However, this is only possible through intra- and inter-party bargaining and after the results of the election have been announced.

Moreover, the various kinds of party government that existed in Western Europe were the result of different historical routes to political development and of different administrative and institutional arrangements. Thus, notwithstanding the variety of forms that party government has taken, one may argue, with Wildenmann that it represented post-war Western Europe's answer to the problems raised by the full development of mass politics, or better to the problems faced by democratic government in societies strongly structured along lines of class, religion or language. This strategy has therefore led to forms of governmental action which varied according to specific national political settings but which were all based on the central role of the parties as collective entities. The parties were seen as the indispensable instruments to promote interests and ambitions, programmes and careers.

Now, in this context, the party leadership was generally the expression of the party internal structure or of the party electoral interests. The leaders of the major parties were preferably insiders, who purposefully based their authority upon a respect for the party ideology and leadership group, and for the interests of the traditional party constituency. Of course, in crucial periods of post-war political development, some of them showed to be able to innovate, but generally within the tradition of their parties. As a normal course of action, party and government leaders were regime managers, engaged both to
consolidate already established political and electoral alignments and to gradually update the programmatic profile of their parties. And, in fact, this literature does not distinguish between leaders and parties.

The processes of change of the last two decades have exactly undermined the socio-cultural and political foundation of these various forms of party government, breaking down the cohesion of the social groups and class communities, for which the political parties provided political and ideological representation and in the context of which they managed their reciprocal competition.

Strategies of governmental action: alternatives to party government

As Smith suggested, it is important to bear in mind the structural conditions that have sustained the various Western European experiences of party government in this long post-war period. In fact, only by reference to this overall framework is it possible to identify alternative strategies of governmental action; strategies, that is, that respond more closely to the changes that have taken place within it.

Yet debate over alternatives to party government has been conducted almost entirely in terms of the social and political framework that gave rise to the strategy discussed above, and with no reference to the relations between parties and leaders within the executive. The three alternatives usually considered (neo-corporatist, pluralist and referendary) are national variants - determined by specific politico-institutional arrangements - of forms of governmental action reflecting the interests and values of societies still structured along class and religious lines. Thus neo-corporatist strategies related to social settings where social structuring had achieved high levels of formalization and organizational centralization, to the extent that a few major interest groups were able to aspire - because of the resources they possessed or at any rate controlled - to the role of real and proper private governments.

It should be pointed out, however, that in the concrete reality of political systems (like those of Scandinavia or of the small democracies
of continental Western Europe) more oriented towards neo-corporatism, the political parties (government parties, in particular) continued to occupy important positions in policy-making and performed the strategic function of coordinating the actions of the organized interest groups, mediating their conflicts and - most of all - rendering their policy objectives compatible with the programme decided upon by the government and legitimated by the parliament. These systems therefore comprised twin circuits of representation, the possible clashes between which were kept under control by the government party (or coalition).

Thus in national contexts of so-called referendum government, constant recourse (or the threat of it) to the electorate in order to settle the most controversial aspects of government policy (as in the case of Switzerland) does not appear to explain the role (more limited but certainly not insignificant) played by the parties in the promotion and coordination of the governmental programme. It is probably the case that the relative lack of cohesion of the Swiss parties and the fragmented nature of the country's party system are more the effect of a federal-type institutional structure and of a structure of political divisions (cleavages structure) strongly marked by regional and linguistic rivalries than they are the outcome of government decision-making characterised by direct participation by the citizenry in certain (important) public choices in the form of referenda.

Of course, if we move to the third strategy considered, there is some plausibility in an interpretation of pluralist systems, and of the American case as their archetypal form, which treats such systems as the reflection of an alternative strategy to that which led to (Western European) party government. Certainly, in these cases "there are no parties in the sense of the party government model," that is cohesive and centralized parties, vehicles for general government programmes and acting as the expression of broad class interests or deep religious identities. However, historically speaking, although the American institutional system has been "designed to maximize the number of points at which a policy proposal can be defeated," the United States too have experienced some form government by party: as has been pointed out by Sundquist, between 1832 and 1956, by forming
alternating governments the two main political parties demonstrated their ability to give unity and coherence (albeit relative) to that system of "separated institutions sharing power" that the Founding Fathers had created with the specific intention of impeding the growth of the majority power dynamic in governmental action.

In other words, although the two main American political parties have historically been the semi-organized expression of a coalition of well organized state parties and of sectoral interests, they have managed to express the political and electoral competition of two great programme options; a competition which has led to the formation of cyclical periods of aggregation (de-alignment/realignment) of interests and of groups around the programme and the personnel of one of the two parties in government. Thus the certain pluralist nature of American politics and the relative cross-cutting constituency of the various groups participating in policy-making has not prevented the establishment of a party system capable, in crucial contingencies, of producing programmatically responsible governments (how else can we define F.D. Roosevelt's and L.B. Johnson's Administrations, for example?).

From this point of view, although the American experience over this long period (and especially from the 1930s to the 1960s) certainly cannot be related to any of the three types of party government discussed above, it has not prevented certain interests (e.g. labour and business) from emerging as more influential than others, so influential in fact that the opposing political support of each has characterised the competition between the two major parties. Therefore, while it is true that in the American system of today "the problem of politics is to orchestrate the cacophany of overlapping electorates in a federal system" where "(m)ajorities are formed on an ad hoc basis, one decision at a time," it is equally true that this is the case especially since the 1970s, for it is due to significant changes that have taken place in American politics, and especially in the presidential candidate selection process, changes triggered by more general trends of transformation of American society.

If these considerations are well-founded, then one may plausibly argue that those strategies that have been described as being alternatives to party government in terms of the organization of
governmental action are, instead, strategies that emphasise the existence of factors that constrain (but do not neutralize) the full operation of party government. Moreover, given the social and political setting within which they developed, it is also plausible to say that the same processes of change which undermined the stability of the various forms of party government ended to affect negatively these so-called alternative strategies as well.

The proving ground of leader-dominated government: United States in the 1970s

The difficulties encountered by party government in Western Europe since the second half of the 1970s, and then exploded in the 1980s, have introduced scenarios that are difficult to relate to any of the strategies and cases that have been identified as alternatives to party government. We therefore have to look for another interpretation, starting with an examination of the country (the United States) which first experienced the political change that then fully invested the Western European democracies.

For our present purposes that political change has been characterized by three interwoven and fundamental processes: i) a de-alignment of established party coalitions, because of the balkanization of the social structure and the parties' reduced ability to aggregate old and new interests; ii) a change in the composition and behaviour of the electorate, with an increase in the numbers of electors who judge parties and leaders on the basis of their particular policy opinions; ii) an evolution of the politico-electoral process towards issue politics - with the creation of changing issue (and policy) publics - constituted by overlapping constituencies aggregated around particular issue beliefs.

Seen against this background, the strategy of leader-dominated government has been the result of the conscious attempt to reform both the internal presidential candidate selection process (with the central role acquired by the primaries) and the external financial context of the competition for the Presidency (favouring the candidates and not the
parties), implemented in several steps during the 1970s. Those reforms created a political and institutional setting quite different, from that which had existed before, in terms of the relationship between party and candidate and party and its leaders and elected officials. For sure, they did not produce any irreversible decline in the political parties. But, with an electorate that identifies less and less with parties and more and more with individual issue positions and their spokesmen, these reforms (or, better, these processes of reform) has had in any case the singular outcome of encouraging the relationship between party and candidate (and thus between party, leader and elected officials) toward a competition which had the double strengthening effect of developing the (more important) strategic capacities of the latter and the organizational supportive capacities of the former. In short, they created a context rewarding the pursuit of individual (not collective) strategies of action. The individual candidates and political leaders have thus moved, since the first 1970s, to the centre of the political process, with the parties (and especially the Republican one) acting as "superb services' organizations" of the candidates. And this has favoured the establishment of distinctly personalized electoral links between them (and the policy positions for which they act as spokesmen) and their reference groups.

In the case of presidential candidates (and therefore of the President) these links have not infrequently acquired highly symbolic features, while in the case of candidates for Congress (and therefore of Congressmen and, in particular, of House members) these links have found a solid basis of support in a non-partisan activity of constituency service. However, in both cases, this electoral relationship has taken concrete form in the 'personal vote'; i.e. in electoral support favouring individual candidates and political leaders and the specific (symbolic or concrete) objectives that they either promise to achieve or have already done so. The increased importance acquired by the primaries in the selection of the candidates incentivized this evolution, with their effect of both "narrowing down" candidates' positions (in order to distinguish between them) and promoting their personal organizations. The primaries gradually transformed the parties in "neutral open forum" for the competition of individual candidates.
Thus, this transformation of the selection process has led to a situation where a political leader (and the presidential candidate in particular) submit his/her political candidature to an elective office on the basis of a personal organization and of certain and specific policy positions, which generally concern those limited issues that matter in a particular historical and electoral period. The policy positions taken up, and therefore adopted if the candidate wins the election, are circumscribed, not necessarily coherent with each other, and above all may change in order of priority according to the contexts in which they are raised: but, they are, in any case, in correspondence with specific issue and policy publics, whose support is considered necessary for the contingent electoral success of the candidate. This became quite clear with the two Reagan Presidencies: the two Administrations showed to be characterised by a number of clear policy positions on certain issues of importance in a given period for public opinion, although Reagan started his incumbency with a more general governmental programme. Moreover, as it happened with the Carter experience, Reagan has been supported by a personal organization which eventually took over the Republican national party, but still maintaining its own tight political identity.

In this context, the parties (that is the more permanent structure of political professionals) have managed to find an important role for themselves. On the electoral side, since the late 1970s, they (and in particular the Republican party, as we have said) have set in motion an unprecedented process of organizational renewal, transforming themselves into a support structure for candidates. On the governmental side, by deploying their organizational and institutional resources, they have marked out a special role as the guarantors to the President and to his organization of that network of political links and administrative support without which it would be impossible to deal with the myriad governmental problems that lie outside the direct policy preoccupations of the President (and of the same leaders of Congress). Carter's experience is emblematic: his personal inability (and that's of his group of Georgians) to use this network of links and support soon revealed the fragility and ineffectiveness of his government's leadership.
The strategy of leader-dominated government: the party side

The American presidential system has represented (at least in the current century) an hostile environment for party government, encouraging (since the "rethorical Presidency" of Woodrow Wilson) personalized political leadership at the top of the government, and discouraging (also because of the country's federal structure) the development of cohesive national party organizations. In this sense, the 1970s reform of the presidential candidate's selection system has constituted both a strengthening of an institutional tendency (favourable to the "personal president") and a formidable incentive for a deep political change (in the presidential behaviour). By contrast, the English and Italian parliamentary systems, and the semi-presidential French system, have favoured the growth of more cohesive and relatively homogeneous party organizations which - if one applies King's criteria for analysis of executives - have played an unequivocally leading role in the process of government.

The processes of political and electoral dealignment, at work in the United States since the 1960s, became evident in Western Europe ten years later. Hence in the 1970s, despite the different institutional contexts involved, Western European politics came to assume characteristics very akin to those in the United States: the main political parties were internally divided, uncertain over policies, unable to specify their reference social coalitions. In short, the parties were forced to regard themselves as no longer representing already constituted interests and values and were engaged in a search for new interests and values to promote and therefore represent.

This, then, was the context that favoured the rise within the political parties of strong personal leaderships intent to release them from their political and organizational paralysis and to activate new resources of identification both for their members and for their (traditional and potential) electorate. The personal histories of the leaders discussed here are exemplary in this regard. Mitterrand has
been the undisputed protagonist, at least since the Epinay Congress of 1971, of the transformation of the French Socialists from a minority and quarrelsome force (the SFIO during the 1960s) into an organization (PS) with enough cohesion to take on the role of the country's leading political party (after the 1981 election). In 1975 Thatcher became leader of the British Conservative party after a vicious campaign against her rivals (first Heath, and then Whitelaw, Prior and Howe) and with the specific intent of releasing her party from the paralysis created by what she regarded as the excessively compromising and indecisive Heath and, more generally, old Conservative guard leadership. Craxi, with his unexpected election as Secretary of the Italian Socialist party (PSI) during the central committee meeting in the summer of 1976, made an immediate impact with his assault on the party's old leaders and policies, responsible for its dramatic electoral decline and its equally dramatic loss of political identity. The cases of Mitterrand, Thatcher and Craxi therefore closely resemble that of Reagan, who won the Republican nomination in 1980 after a successful campaign against the old Republican establishment and their moderate post-Watergate policies symbolized by such figures as Ford, Rockefeller and Bush (who was, not coincidentally, Reagan's main rival in the primaries for that nomination).

On gaining power they brought internal changes to their parties - in terms of a renewal (sometimes generational, sometimes ideological) of their ruling groups and of their organizational structure and/or practices. Of course, this process was successful to varying degrees, but it nevertheless took place. Craxi was accompanied not only by an extremely young group of leaders, but also by a neo-charismatic party model that ran directly counter to the old-style correnti (factions within the party) that had always typified the long history of Italian Socialism. Although Mitterrand was unable to deal definitively with the traditional structure of notables of French Socialism, he nevertheless imposed greater cohesion on the new Socialist party, along with the strongly presidential features that the party came to acquire within the institutional context of the Fifth Republic. Thatcher - who unlike the other two European leaders had taken over a traditionally organized party with a cohesive parliamentary group - still managed to change its
political identity and further accentuate the role of centralized decision-making: experiences that were not unlike that of Reagan, who gave the Republican party a fresh right-wing identity sustained by an organizational revival of the party, though closely controlled by a new political personnel (the Reaganauts), constrained by exclusive bonds of loyalty with the President.

However, unlike the American case, such innovative leaders did not take over because of any substantial change in the recruitment procedures adopted within the individual parties. In countries like Great Britain, France and Italy, selection of the party leader was still a wholly internal affair, and was therefore inevitably conditioned by the set of interests and values that had consolidated themselves in the course of the party's history. Hence Thatcher, Mitterrand and Craxi (but not Reagan who, as an outsider, was helped by the primaries system) were very far from being outsiders with respect to their own parties.

Yet, despite these differences between the United States and Western Europe in recruitment procedures, these four leaders all placed themselves firmly outside the mainstream histories of their parties by assuming behavioural strategies surprisingly similar to those of an outsider. While this may not be surprising in Reagan's case (who in any case subsequently exploited his outsiderism to build up the internal strength of his party), it may well be so in the case of the other three. However, and this is an important point, outsiderism is a precondition for the affirmation of a personal leadership in divided or weak parties. Under these conditions, any appeal to the internal tradition of the party can only have adverse effects, because it refers back to the roots of the paralysis or weakness. Thus, in different ways, Thatcher, Craxi and Mitterrand achieved control over their parties by pursuing an outsider strategy and by behaving as if they were true outsiders.

Now, the rise to power of these four leaders brought a change in the organizational identity of their parties: all four parties evolved both towards more centralizitation and towards greater personal control over the party by the leader and his/her followers. Of course the different organizational contexts of the parties and the different institutional structures of the party systems favoured different outcomes of a common trend. Therefore, once these leaders had achieved a
government position, this latter one was exploited as a formidable resource to further their control of the party and thus transform it into a support structure for the leader now become Prime Minister or President. In this case, too, although the process took place at various times and in different ways, according to specific political contingencies, it seemed to move in one particular direction: personally centralized decision-making.

The strategy of leader-dominated government: the executive side

Of course, leaders who have risen through their party ranks by means of an outsider's behavioural strategy try to shape, once in government, the peculiar organizational mechanism of the executive along with their aspiration to the domination of governmental action. But, here, one can detect very important differences. In a consensus-parliamentary system like Italy's, where the government is necessarily a coalition with one dominant party (the Christian Democrats), it is very difficult (especially for a Prime Minister from a non-dominant party) to neutralize the constraints of collegialism within the executive. On the contrary, in a majority-presidential system like that of the United States, however, where the executive is founded on a personal popular investiture, it is much easier to slacken the constraints of collegialism - i.e. constraints deriving from other components in the President's party or from the organizational interests of the Administration's agencies. Moreover, in a parliamentary-majority system like the British one, where the executive is the expression of a single majority party and where the Prime Minister can concentrate a good part of executive power in his/her hands, s/he is still forced to seek constant support from the party that guarantees his/her authority. By contrast, and finally, in a semi-presidential system like France's, especially if the President and the Prime Minister belong to the same party, this concentration of executive power into the hands of the President is much less problematic, precisely because of the popular nature of his investiture.
Thus, despite that the different systems of government all imply some form of collegial constraints, the different "institutional quality" of these constraints generate a different mix of incentives/disincentives for the personal action of the executive’s leader. For example, in Western Europe, that mix derives from the parties in the coalition (the Italian case), or from the various components of the majority party in control of the Cabinet (the British case), or from the various components of the majority coalition (the French case in periods of "political consonance"), or from a parliamentary majority other than the presidential majority (the French case in the period of "political dissonance", or cohabitation). But, quite different is the situation in the United States, where the main disincentives are located in the legislature, given that the President has very few obstacles, within the Administration, to his personal leadership.

The governmental strategy adopted by the four leaders considered here (once conditions were favourable) was to relax these constraints in order to maximize the decision-making autonomy and personal visibility of the head of the government. This strategy was pursued in two different ways. First, by emphasising the public image of the leader through the use of the mass media in order to promote direct, personalizing executive decisions and dramatizing specific events in which intervention by the head of government was seen to be decisive. Second, the strategy was sustained (of course: especially in the parliamentary democracies) by a constant effort to give formal and informal reorganization to the government, the purpose being to place the leader of the executive at the centre of the crucial process of political decision-making. In the Italian case, precisely because of the low level of institutionalization of both the executive and the position of its leader, such reorganization has inevitably had to be formal as well. Thus, with Craxi as the head of government, in 1983 the Council of Ministers decided to set up, within itself, a Cabinet Council comprising the most important (but very few) ministers nominated directly by the Prime Minister. This Council soon became the real centre of governmental decision-making.

Of course, in the other parliamentary majority democracy (like Great Britain), generally with single-party government, this formal
reorganization was less necessary: this country already possessed an institutional framework which encourages the concentration of executive power. The most marked feature here, therefore, was the informal character of the process whereby executive power was concentrated into the hands of the government's leader. This informal reorganization was naturally helped by political contingencies. Thus, taking advantage of her post-Falklands popularity, Thatcher was able to reduce the influence of the 'wets' and 'damps' in her Cabinet and replace some of them with other ministers more loyal to her, although even before 1982 she was busy establishing small decision-making groups (which also included non-Cabinet members) directly dependent on her (like the so called Policy Unit). In France, in the 1981-86 period, there was an unquestionable tendency (as a result of the failures of the two Mauroy governments and the birth in 1984 of the more pragmatic Fabius Government) to install the executive power in the Elysées Palace, or better in the persons of the President of the Republic and his hand-picked collaborators, even concerning areas of domestic politics which are constitutionally the province of the Prime Minister and his/her parliamentary majority. In the other side of the Atlantic, Reagan, in coeherence with a trend set up by Nixon, further strengthened the organisms of the Executive Office of the President (in particular the White House Office and the National Security Council) comprising by his cronies and loyal followers, to the detriment of the more institutionalized structure of the Administration and its various Departments. This process of politicization and centralization of the presidencial branch provoked a series of conflicts within the Administration between official ministers and "shadow ministers": a conflict which can contribute to explain the Iranagate debacle of 1987.

In all four of the cases examined here, therefore, there was a sharp increase in the degree of personalization of the executive. With the partial exception of Italy, there was no substantial change in the organizational model of the executives and in the institutional model of their relations with the legislature. However, as we have seen in the American case, although the parties preserved a certain amount of leverage within the governmental system (more in Western Europe, of course, than in the United States), in the time period considered they
partially adapted themselves to the role of a support structure for the government's leader.

To sum up: The personalization of executives registered a change in the power relationship between the leader and the team (the ministers), implementing new power hierarchies within the governments. The point is that this personalization reflected, extraordinarily closely, ongoing processes of political dealignment, also because it was associated with specific policy objectives favouring the formation of "transverse" consensuses centering on the leader and his or her personal convictions. Certainly, the four leaders sought, in the beginning, to build their images on the basis of broadly-focused views presented to the electorate as the government's horizon of action: the freeing of market forces from state control in Thatcher's and Reagan's case; the governability of the country in Craxi's case; social justice and national identity in Mitterrand's case. Yet these general views were not translated in coherent governmental programmes, because of the opposition they met within the leader's party (Great Britain), or within the coalition government (in Italy), or from the new governmental majority (in France, during the cohabitation), or from the Democrats-dominated legislature (in the United States, since 1982). 

Ex-post, it is possible to say that the governmental performance of those countries in the 1980s resembles more a potluck government than a programmatic government.

For this reason, a coherent relationship did not always formed between the broad vision with which the leaders sought to associate themselves and the specific policy objectives they variously pursued. But this fact did not prevent these leader to "reinvent" their political placement (and, so, the political identity of their parties) by orchestrating their convictions according to the historical circumstances in which they had to operate. Thatcher and Reagan therefore tried to build a populist base for what had became a highly elitist conservatism. Mitterrand worked energetically, especially after 1984, to channel French Socialism into the river-bed of the country's nationalist tradition, to the point that he presented himself, in the presidential race of 1988, as the President des tous les Français (and not only du peuple de la Gauche, as in 1981). Craxi exploited every
opportunity (and especially his hard-won victory in the 1984 referendum on the 'index-linked wage' against the Communist-influenced union CGIL) to stress the moderate, autonomistico and governmental character of his party, in polemic with its previous maximalist traditions (more in word than in deed).^44^44

In sum, an environment of political and electoral dealignment made rewarding the pursuit of individual strategies by single political entrepreneurs: that is, by political leaders who found more electorally congenial to use an organizational strategy of action based upon their personal appeal (and followers) than upon the appeal of their party (and their collegial decision-making body). Consequently Western European and American governmental action in the 1980s has been dominated by the leader and by his/her convictions rather than by the parties and their programmes.

**Leaders between change and institutions**

If we apply the three standard criteria for analysis of executives, we may argue that the distinctive feature of leader-dominated government is a different hierarchy (compared with that of a government dominated by the party/ies) in the relationship between party and leader - a hierarchy decidedly in favour of the latter. In brief, leader-dominated government can be considered as a type of governmental action which appeared to be in tune with a period where both politics was dealigned and the candidate's politics predominated over the party's; even if the latter still had a role to play, as we have seen. A governmental action in which is the the government's leader the strategic actor who defines the fundamental policy issues that characterizes the executive.

Of course, recognizing the development of a new governmental strategy in the 1980s is not to make any judgement as to its capacity to replace the other strategy in which is the party (the team of ministers) who plays that role. And, in fact, at the end of that decade, the new strategy has been severely questioned, in particular in the two parliamentary democracies. In Italy, in 1987, the Socialist premier
Bettino Craxi was displaced from the leadership position by the Christian Democrats, who, after the short parenthesis (1988-89) of the similar (leader-dominated) Prime Ministership of De Mita (a Christian Democrat he himself), finally installed at the head of the government a traditional insider leader of their party, as Giulio Andreotti. In Great Britain, in 1990, the Conservative party laid off its three-times electorally successful leader, replacing her with another more traditional insider politician, as John Major. In France, with the success of a conservative governmental coalition in the parliamentary elections of 1986, the Socialist President of the Republic has seen strongly curtailed his governmental powers. And, in a sense, also in the United States, with the election to the Presidency of George Bush, in 1988, a more traditional insider leader took over the Administration, with the solemn promise to work in a spirit of "cooperation" with the other branch of the government. In other words, the emergence of the new strategy of action cannot be equated with its success: this latter one depends upon precise institutional features of the governmental systems involved. And especially by the nature of the constitutional role of the head of the executive.

It is not surprising, therefore, that, while in Italy, with the ousting of Craxi from the office of Prime Minister, the country returned to the model of "dominant party government" and, in Great Britain, with the ousting of Thatcher, the country returned to that of "majority party government" (that is to the traditional party-dominated strategies), in the other two countries the dismissal of the leader-dominated strategy has been far to be realized. In France, although the cohabitation of 1986-88 and subsequent clashes and rivalries between the two wings of the 'double-executive' helped to strengthen the parties, their reinforcement (the case of the Socialist party is emblematic) resisted translation in organizational terms precisely because of the control exercised over them by a governmental system ("semi-presidentialism") which encourages their evolution into the "presidential party". And, in the United States, although Iran gate led, in 1988, to a Bush Administration staffed by party professionals and traditionalist conservatives, the personal character of the government continued to be its most salient feature.
In this sense, the direct, and separated from the government, election of the head of the executive represents the most favourable condition for the emergence and for the success of leader-dominated governmental strategy. This condition is further strengthened in those presidential systems (like the United States) in which, not only the legislature is elected by a first-past-the-post electoral formula, but the presidential candidates (and congressional candidates) are selected through an open system. That very same condition appears to be more mitigated in those semi-presidential systems (as Fifth Republic France) in which, for the "double-executive" nature of the government, the premier and his/her cabinet, although nominated by the popularly elected President of the Republic, need to receive the confidence (also "passive") of the Parliament. Here, there is at work a significant constrain to the full success of the leader-dominated strategy. The parliamentary input to the government obliges the parties to a sort of "schizophrenia": to maintain a sense of collective and programmatic identity, while, to the other side, strong is the institutional pressure towards their "presidenzialition" (that is, towards their transformation in the support structure of the individual presidential candidates). This institutional ambiguity makes implausible the equivalence, as Katz has suggested, of the French case with that of the other parliamentary majoritarian cases (and with Great Britain as the archetypal one).

In conclusion, politics in the Western democracies considered here over that decade - with the decline but not the disappearance of political parties and with the environmental pressure towards the emergence of strong leaders willing to take over some of the parties' systemic functions - seemed to oscillate between the two strategies of leader-dominated government and party-dominated government. What emerges from our analysis is that the relationship between leader and party moves or may move in different directions according to the different institutional features of the governmental system. Moreover, the conflictual relationship between leader and team (party) within the executive constitutes the expression of a conflictual relationship between two criteria of political responsibility. In the leader-dominated executive, it is the individual accountability of the leader which democratically characterizes the governmental action. In the
party-dominated executive, it is the collective responsibility of the Cabinet which does so. The point is that democratic governments need to be characterized by both of them: but they did not find yet an institutional system able to incentive their reciprocal maximization. In the waiting of this new institutional solution, it is probable that we are going to witness in the future a cyclical alternation of party-dominated government and leader-dominated government strategies, along the pressure of the environment and the influence (opportunities and constrains) of the governmental institutions.

NOTES
1. Critical period which has not entailed an irreversible decline of both party organizations and party system. See, Peter Maier, "The Problem of Party System Change" (pp.251-276) and Gordon Smith, "A System Perspective on Party System Change" (pp.349-363), both in *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, Vol.1, No.3 (July 1989).
7. Giorgio Freddi, 'Bureaucratic Rationalities and the Prospect for Party Government', in Francis G. Castles and Rudolf Wildenmann (eds), *The Future of
Party Government, Visions and Realities etc.


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34. Anthony King, 'Margaret Thatcher: The Outsider as a Political Leader', paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the APSA, Atlanta, August 31-September 3, 1989.


37. Extremely useful is 'the Special Issues on Western European Prime Ministers', West European Politics, Vol.14, No.2 (April 1991). On the organizational aspects of the executives (in Western Europe), see Jean Blondel and Ferdinand Muller-Rommel (eds), Cabinets in Western Europe (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), and Yves Meny, Politics in Western Europe. Britain, France, Italy and West Germany (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), Ch.6.


40. Olivier Duhamel, The Fifth Republic under Francois Mitterand', in George Ross, Stanley Hoffmann and Sylvia Malzacher, The Mitterand Experiment.


43. Francois Furet, 'La France Unie'.

44. Paolo Ciofi and Franco Ottaviano, Un partito per il leader. Il nuovo corso del PSI dal Mijas agli anni Novanta (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino Editore, 1990).