

## Abstract

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## Abstract

For a fleeting moment in 2007 it seemed as if the French party system was in for a massive change. The foundation of the Mouvement Démocrate (MoDem) as an independent center party without attachment to any political camp, put apparent basic rules of political life in France in question. After all, the centrists surrounding party chief François Bayrou did not want to subject themselves to bipolarization any longer.

This dissertation analyzes, which developments lead to this strategic decision, how this change within the party happened and which consequences they had for the party itself and the French party landscape as a whole. The focus of the analysis is on the Christian democratic, the liberal and the radical party families. With tools derived from organizational sociology and focusing on the election year of 2007, the change is looked at in more and more detail.

The question of crucial actors, internal and external framework conditions is taking up center stage.

With the help of participatory observations and qualitative interviews, the process of change and its implications is traced. Key actors of the party leadership, as well as rank and file members are consulted.

This way, insights into the inner workings, communication and inner party democracy can be gained. Here, the Internet, i.e. digital communication paths are especially significant. It also becomes clear, which difficulties change poses to sluggish organizations such as parties and which particularities derive from this in the French system. Especially the clash of representatives of party tradition and innovation, who each pursued different interests, led to significant difficulties in the case of MoDem.

Using more or less successful election campaigns as examples, the *performance* of the newly founded party is portrayed from different angles and the negative impact of conflicts of objectives and interests, but also practical organizational weaknesses are shown.

Of particular importance is the party's leader, François Bayrou, whose biography is presented and whose influence on the change within the party is shown in detail. His role as an *agent of change*, almost successful presidential candidate and relatively independent party leader have had a massive influence on the center party since the beginning of the Millennium.

All in all, the analysis is making a contribution to the understanding of parties and their change in France and, at the same time, helps with the classification of change within the French party system in the years 2000 to 2012.