

## A Missed Chance –

### Why Christian Democracy failed in France and why this matters

*Matthias Dilling (Nuffield College, University of Oxford)*

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**Abstract.** While the end of European Communism and secularization have been widely perceived as the most crucial threats to Christian Democratic parties, the French *Mouvement Républicain Populaire* (MRP) already collapsed in 1967 – years before these two factors kicked in. I argue that party elites’ organizational decisions in 1944 account for the MRP’s disintegration in 1967 because they initiated two path-dependent processes within the same party. My research finds that the MRP was vulnerable to exogenous shocks because its organization closed off competition for leadership positions. This frustrated second-rank party elites who therefore left the MRP when exogenous changes opened up new options. Studying the dynamics initiated by organizational decisions may thus be a promising approach to better understand the survivability of political parties.

#### France and Christian Democracy

After World War II, Christian Democratic parties managed to establish themselves as one of the cornerstones of Western European politics. They have been part of most government coalitions in continental Western Europe since 1944.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Scandinavian countries as well as Spain and Portugal are not included in this Table. Christian Democratic parties in these countries emerged later and under quite different preconditions than their sister parties in central Western Europe which may partially explain their lower level of governmental relevance.

Table 1: Central-Western European Christian Democratic parties in government, 1944 – 2015<sup>2</sup>

Country	Parties	In government	Years in government
Austria	Austrian People's Party (ÖVP)	1945 – 1970, since 1987	53
Belgium	Christian Social Party (PSC – CVP), Social Christian Party (PSC)/Humanist Democratic Centre (CDH), Christian People's Party (CVP)/Christian Democratic and Flemish (CD&V)	1944 – 1945, 1947 – 1952, 1954 – 1999, since 2007	59
France	Popular Republican Movement (MRP) <sup>3</sup>	1944 – 1954, 1955, 1957 – 1962	16
Germany	Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU)	1949 – 1969, 1982 – 1998, since 2005	46
Italy	Christian Democracy (DC), Popular Italian Party (PPI), Christian Democratic Center (CCD), Democratic Union for the Republic (UDR), Union of Democrats for Europe (UDEUR), Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Union of Christian and Centre Democrats (UDC),	1946 – 1995, 1996 – 2001, 2006 – 2011, since 2013	61
Lichtenstein	Patriotic Union (VU)	1944 – 2001, since 2005	67
Luxembourg	Christian Social People's Party (CSV)	1944 – 1974, 1979 – 2013	64
Netherlands	Catholic People's Party (KVP), Christian-Historical Union (CHU), Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP), Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), Christian Union (CU),	1946 – 1994, 2002 – 2012	58
Switzerland	Christian Democratic People's Party of Switzerland (CVP)	1944 – 2015	71 <sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Data from <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/countries.html> [14.05.2015].

<sup>3</sup> I do not consider the Democratic Center (CD) as the MRP's successor party. By forming the CD, former MRP-leader Jean Lecanuet wanted to form a broad centrist party which could also appeal to secular voters. The formation of the CD can thus be understood as the choice against Christian Democracy. Yet, the CD and its successor parties only played a marginal role in French politics and only participated in government for a total of seven years.

<sup>4</sup> The continuity of the Swiss Christian Democrats in government is mainly due to the Swiss concordance system which was adopted in 1959.

Looking at Table 1, France seems to be the black sheep of Christian Democracy. The *Mouvement Républicain Populaire* (MRP) only existed for 23 years and disintegrated in 1967 – years before secularization and the collapse of European Communism threatened the survival of Christian Democratic parties in other countries. This makes the MRP an interesting case to better understand the puzzling development of Western European Christian Democracy. While the MRP was quite short-lived, the Italian DC only disintegrated once anti-Communism could no longer serve as unifying and mobilizing issue. In turn, the Dutch KVP, ARP and CHU survived by merging into a single platform, whereas the Christian Democratic parties of Austria and Germany have shown an impressive organizational and electoral persistence.

Previous research has been of limited help to solve this puzzle. While academic interest has increased since the mid-1990 (e.g. Kalyvas, 1996; 2003; Gehler and Kaiser, 2004; Van Kersbergen, 2008), Christian Democratic parties' development has remained heavily under-theorized (Kalyvas and Van Kersbergen, 2010: 184 – 185). On the one hand, most comparative work on Christian Democratic survival has mainly focused on exogenous shocks, such as the end of the Cold War in 1990, or slow-moving social changes, like secularization (Bruce, 2002; Conway, 2003; Frey, 2009; Ignazi and Welhofer, 2012). Yet, these shocks have challenged Christian Democratic parties in nearly all Western European countries, while they have shown quite different levels of resilience. On the other hand, alternative approaches have been limited to case-specific, retrospective explanations (e.g. Hanley, 1994; Van Hecke and Gerard, 2004; Duncan, 2006; 2007). The question why the MRP failed may thus offer insights going beyond the context of French politics by allowing us to generate systematic hypothesis regarding the effect of exogenous shocks on party survival.

I argue that the MRP was vulnerable to exogenous shocks because party elites had chosen a decentralized party organization which closed off competition for leadership positions. This

frustrated second-rank elites who therefore left the party when exogenous changes opened up new options. Drawing on the literature on critical junctures and path dependence, I make two theoretical points: Firstly, the initial organizational choices were not preordained by structural antecedents (Capoccia, 2015). Secondly, these initial decisions initiated two interrelated path dependent processes within the same party: They shaped patterns of intra-party competition by incentivizing party elites to rely on ties within rather than across party branches. Once established, these patterns of intra-party bargaining reinforced themselves and influenced the likelihood of party breakdown by driving party elites' behavior in moments of crisis. In short, party elites had missed the chance to make the MRP more robust against exogenous shocks by making the wrong organizational choices in 1944.

This paper begins by suggesting a historical turn in the analysis of Christian Democracy in France to reveal the inaccuracies of previous explanations. I, then, suggest an alternative theoretical framework before testing it through a case study of the MRP. My conclusion summarizes my results.

### **About time - the puzzling fate of the MRP**

As case studies might be criticized for lacking generalizability given the complexity and details which are often entailed by explaining the development of a single case in depth, an empirical strategy is needed which offers a systematic way of coping with these issues while providing the building blocks of an accurate, yet still parsimonious theoretical account (Capoccia and Ziblatt, 2010: 939). I thus follow Capoccia and Ziblatt's (2010) historical approach to causality. They do not seek to replace political scientific research by historiography. Instead, they use 'contemporary social science techniques to test theories rigorously but with an eye to the knotty set of factors associated with the creation of institutions and their successive endurance' (Capoccia and Ziblatt, 2010: 939). Rather than reasoning backwards from the survival or failure of a political party by making the flawed

assumption that the functions of particular factors can always explain actors' decisions regardless of the moment in time of their occurrence, I seek to read history 'forward' (Pierson, 2004; Capoccia and Ziblatt, 2010). In other words, we have to put ourselves in the shoes of actors at the time by reconstructing their institutional constraints, information, incentives and resources to fully understand their choices. This approach allows me to show why we would expect the MRP to break down much earlier if previous research was right.

### *The polarized party system*

If Sartori (1976) was right that the polarization of a party system would weaken the political center, we would expect party breakdown to occur at some point between 1947 and 1958. The polarization of the French party system started in 1947 with the establishment of the parliamentary group of de Gaulle's *Rassemblement pour le Peuple Francais* (RPF) and the PCF's transformation into an anti-system party (Rioux, 1987: 127 – 128). The MRP, however, only dissolved in 1967 when the level of polarization had already been substantially lower for nine years, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Seat share anti-system parties in the *Assemblée Nationale*, 1947 – 1967<sup>5</sup>

Year	Seat share in percent	Anti-system parties (Seat share in percent)
1947	33.9	PCF (27.3), RPF (6.6)
1951	35.7	PCF (15.8), RPF (19.3)
1956	31.3	PCF (23.0), UDCA <sup>6</sup> (8.3)
Mid-1957	40.3	PCF (23.0), UDCA (8.3), Mendésistes (ca. 9.0) <sup>7</sup>
1958	1.7	PCF (1.7)
1962	8.5	PCF (8.5)

Rather than causing party collapse, the polarized party system prolonged the MRP's existence by keeping it in government as it was crucial to form a minimum winning coalition against the anti-system parties (Table 3).

<sup>5</sup> Data available at <http://www.france-politique.fr/> [accessed on 14 March 2015] and in Rioux (1987: 127 – 128).

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Pujade's right-wing populist movement (*Union de defense des commercants et artisans*).

<sup>7</sup> A split of the Radical party (Rioux, 1987: 289 – 298).

Table 3: MRP in government<sup>8</sup>

<b>Coalition</b>	<b>Start</b>	<b>End</b>
Provisory government	September 1944	January 1946
Provisory government/Tripartism	January 1946	June 1946
Provisory government/Tripartism*	June 1946	October 1946
Tripartism	January 1947	May 1947
Third Force	May 1947	November 1947
Third Force*	November 1947	July 1948
Third Force	July 1948	August 1948
Third Force*	August 1948	September 1948
Third Force	September 1948	October 1949
Third Force	October 1949	February 1950
Center-right	February 1950	June 1950
Center-right	June 1950	July 1950
Center-right	July 1950	February 1951
Center-right	March 1951	July 1951
Center-right	August 1951	January 1952
Center-right	January 1952	February 1952
Center-right	March 1952	December 1952
Center-right	January 1953	May 1953
Center-right	June 1953	June 1954
Center-right	February 1955	November 1955
Third Force	November 1957	April 1958
Third Force*	May 1958	May 1958
Gaullisme	May 1958	September 1958
Gaullisme	October 1959	January 1959
Gaullisme	January 1959	April 1962
Gaullisme	April 1962	October 1962

### *The rise of Gaullism*

If the MRP had only performed well in 1945 and 1946 (Table 4) due to the absence of a party led by Charles de Gaulles – the hero of French Liberation (Irving, 1973; Letamendia, 1995; Massart, 2004), we would expect to see the party breaking down in 1946, 1947 or 1951.

<sup>8</sup> Data from Rioux (1987) and Callot (1978). Coalitions led by the MRP are marked with an asterisk.

Table 4: MRP at the first postwar elections

Election	MRP result in percent <sup>9</sup>	Position in the party system (margin in percent)
Constituent Assembly; October 1945	24.9	2 <sup>nd</sup> (- 1.2)
Constituent Assembly; June 1946	28.2	1 <sup>st</sup> (+ 2.2)
Parliament; November 1946	26.0	2 <sup>nd</sup> (- 2.3)

If the MRP had only been an initial placeholder for a Gaullist party (Vaussard, 1956: 109; Vinen, 1995: 153), we would expect the MRP's vote share to decline already in the November elections in 1946 due to its public conflict with de Gaulle over the second draft of a French constitution (Bidault, 1967: 116 – 118, 121 – 122; Bazin, 1981: 534 – 535). Electoral alternatives were available for voters who wanted to support de Gaulle. They could have voted for the Radicals, the conservative *Parti Républicain de la Liberté* or René Capitant's *Union Gaullists* (Bazin, 1981: 532 – 533; Rioux, 1987: 106 – 110). It could be argued that Gaullist voters supported the MRP because they wanted a political stronghold against Communism (Bazin, 1981: 534 – 538). Yet, the MRP had entered a tripartite coalition with the Socialists (SFIO) and Communists (PCF) in January 1946. Anti-Communism was thus much more credibly promoted by the conservatives or the center-right Radicals which had reached 12.8 respectively 11.6 percent in June 1946 (Vinen, 1995: 139, 150, 155 – 157). Political observers thus expected a net decrease for the MRP in June 1946.<sup>10</sup> However, the MRP only lost 1.9 percent compared to the election in June 1946.

Furthermore, while the Christian Democratic vote share declined substantially when de Gaulle challenged the MRP with his own party in the 1947 local, the 1948 Senate and the 1951 general elections, the MRP managed to survive for another 16 years.

<sup>9</sup> Data available at <http://www.france-politique.fr/> [16.05.2015]

<sup>10</sup> Report, *Année Politique*. 1946, p. 144, in Bazin (1981: 512).

### *Algeria and the electoral system*

Finally, if the Algerian decolonization crisis or the replacement of proportional representation by a two-round majority system in 1958 explained the end of the MRP, it should have disappeared years before 1967. Yet, the MRP did not only survive the Algerian War from 1954 to 1962, but also the change in the electoral system. While losing 26 seats in 1958, it was still larger than the Radicals or Socialists and part of the new government (Letamendia, 1995: 131).

By reconstructing the political and structural context and the sequence of events, we can thus see the inaccuracies of previous explanations. Instead, I suggest turning to intra-party factors to better understand the timing and the causal process leading to the MRP's disintegration.

### **Party organization and party breakdown**

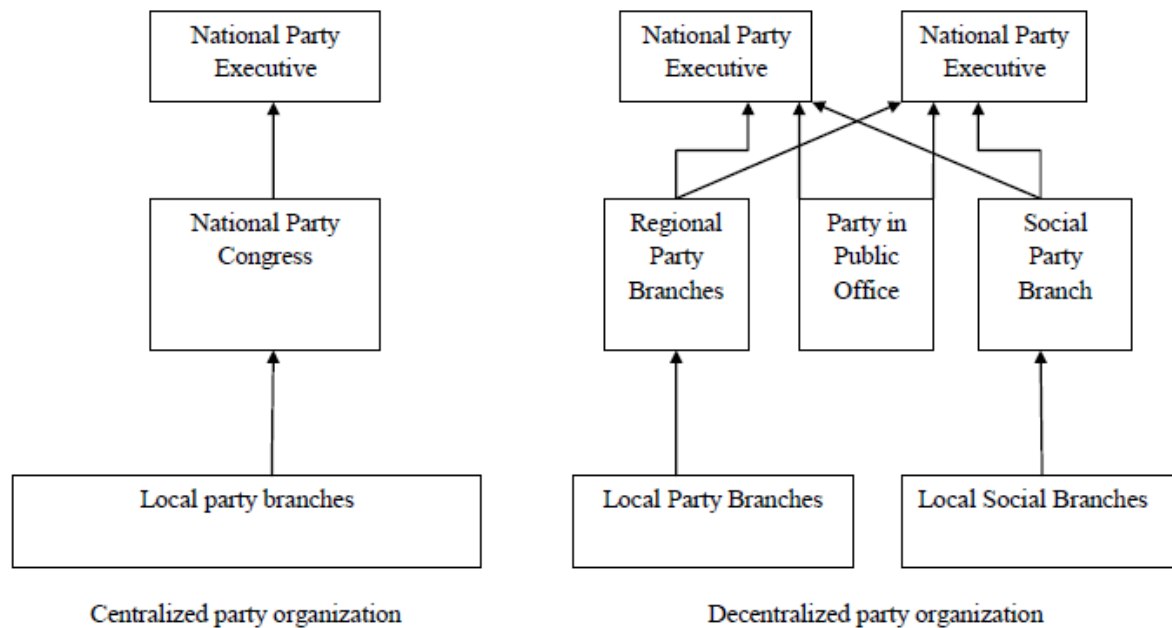
I argue that the initial selection of a decentralized party organization makes party breakdown more likely in the mid-long run by affecting patterns of intra-party bargaining.

### *Critical Juncture*

The selection process of the first party statute can thus be considered as a critical juncture. Critical junctures are “moments in which uncertainty as to the future of an institutional arrangement allows for political agency and choice to play a decisive causal role in setting an institution on a certain path of development, a path which then persists over a long period of time” (Capoccia, 2015: 195). At the moment of party formation, party elites can choose how centralized the party organization will be. *Party centralization* characterizes how access to the party executive is organized. The party executive is the supreme governing body holding the effective decision-making authority within the party (Poguntke, 2000: 105-110, 126). The level of centralization ranges from a centralized (i.e. vertical) to a decentralized (i.e. horizontal) selection procedure (Figure 1).



Figure 1: A centralized and a decentralized party organization



The number of party executive bodies, the number of party bodies involved in the selection of the party executive and the share of executive seats each party body can fill, as outlined in the party statute, serve as indicator for party centralization.

Party elites' preferences regarding the level of party centralization are shaped by their expected intra-party influence. While macro-structural antecedents, such as the structure of predecessor organizations or the political system, may make some party organizations more likely than others (Duverger, 1951; Panebianco, 1988), they do not preordain party centralization. Centralized parties, for instance, have emerged in federal systems (e.g. the German Social Democratic Party), whereas decentralized parties have competed elections in unitary systems (e.g. the MRP). I thus focus on agency and their organizational choices (Capoccia, 2015: 212). They initiate two path-dependent processes within the party which affect patterns of intra-party competition and the likelihood of party breakdown.

### *Self-reinforcement of patterns of intra-party competition*

A decentralized organization leads to patterns of intra-party competition where party elites are not incentivized to bargain across intra-party boundaries. In more detail, party elites seek intra-party power because it is a value-free good which is beneficial for both office- and policy-seeking actors in order to realize policy goals, influence the distribution of cabinet portfolios, and gain public attention (Schlesinger, 1984: 381 – 384, 388 – 389). They will thus choose the behavior that they expect to be the most promising in order to gain influence within the party. The latter is a complex system which comprises a set of organizational branches, such as party branches in the French *Départements* or the party's parliamentary branch (Katz and Mair, 1992: 4 – 6).<sup>11</sup> The level of party centralization determines whether party elites will find it promising to build their support within or across these branches because it regulates how party elites can access party leadership positions (Katz and Mair, 1992: 8). The more decentralized, or horizontal, the selection procedure, the more party executive positions are selected within rather than across the different branches of the party and the less beneficial and the more costly party elites will find it to build networks across party branches (Katz and Mair, 1992: 6).

Intra-party groups, such as factions or tendencies, are thus unlikely in decentralized parties because they are costly and not beneficial. In a decentralized party, the selection process of the party executive mainly takes place within the different party branches which elect their representatives for the executive body independently from one another. If party elites are supported by a majority of their respective branch, their access to the party executive is guaranteed. They therefore have few incentives to form intra-party groups to campaign for further support. In turn, second-rank party elites who are not supported by the majority of their respective branch or whose party branch is individually too small to influence intra-party

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<sup>11</sup> Parliamentary candidates are selected once per legislative period whereas the party executive is usually elected annually. Given this different time horizon, I treat both branches as relatively separate entities.

politics would hardly benefit from seeking support from actors in other branches. Only few executive positions, if any, are elected across party branches. In addition, coordination, communication, and the enforcement of group agreements across several party bodies are costly. In short, party elites have few incentives to form networks across party branches. As a result, ties within a party branch are more valuable than ties across party branches. Competition thus mainly takes place within party branches and between the branches themselves

Once in place, patterns of intra-party competition reinforce themselves. Statutory modifications confirm the behavior of party elites associated with the initial party organization in an increasing set of situations and actors which makes the behavior increasingly resistant to exogenous shocks (Greif, 2006: 17, 168). In detail, patterns of intra-party competition have provided actors with a degree of certainty regarding behavioral expectations, thereby reducing interaction costs (Capoccia and Ziblatt, 2010: 936). Actors' incentives to act according to the existing institutions are thus high (Pierson, 1993: 603, 607). The latter are therefore reproduced as actors' observed behavior confirms behavioral expectations. This determines which resources are valuable. Over time, actors who have benefited from the system in place and are able to initiate change modify existing institutions if they thereby expect to increase the value of their resources. As actors are not always well- and fully informed, the creation of completely new institutions risks implying unintended costs (Capoccia and Ziblatt, 2010: 937-938). They therefore base their evaluation of institutional options on preexisting institutions which makes institutional change likely to complement rather than replace existing institutions (Greif, 2006: 197-199, 204-205, 211). As ties within party branches are more valuable in decentralized parties than ties across branches, party elites adopt institutional modifications which reinforce the decentralized party organization and the value of intra-branch ties. Bargaining and the cooperation of party elites

across party branches thus become increasingly unlikely. This frustrates second-rank party elites as they are disadvantaged by the institutions in place.

*Self-undermining and increasing vulnerability toward exogenous shocks*

Organizational choices trigger multiple path-dependent processes within the same organization. Besides a process of self-reinforcement at one institutional level, an organization can comprise a process of self-undermining at another institutional level. A process of self-undermining starts when the institutions in place disadvantage actors compared to their rivals which reduces their incentives to keep following the institutionalized behavior (Greif, 2006: 17). This occurs when actors' resources prove not to be valuable or when actors do not have a sufficient amount of valuable resources to benefit under the existing institutions. If these institutions are, in addition, reinforced through decisions at another institutional level, discontent actors' expectations to benefit in the future decrease further. As actors' experiences with the negative effects entailed by the preexisting institutions increase over time, their dissatisfaction increases. Yet, this does not immediately lead to discontent actors dropping out because institutionalizing a new behavior implies uncertainty and potentially high start-up costs (Greif, 2006: 180). Exogenous changes, referring to events whose occurrence is beyond actors' sphere of influence, can reduce uncertainty and start-up costs by opening up new options. In such a situation, discontent actors are likely to opt out and endorse a new behavior (Greif, 2006: 168). This weakens the existing institutions and reduces the magnitude of future exogenous changes necessary for other actors to change their behavior as well. Already small exogenous changes, that otherwise would have failed to have this effect, can then already cause institutional collapse (Greif, 2006: 208).

Decentralized parties are vulnerable to exogenous shocks because their organization puts second-rank party elites who are only supported by a minority of their respective party branch

or whose party branch is too small to influence intra-party politics in a competitive disadvantage. As networks with actors in other party branches is unbeneficial and costly, second-rank party elites are excluded from the competition for leadership positions and thus from intra-party decision making. When this situation is reinforced by statutory modifications confirming the decentralized party organization and thus the patterns of intra-party competition, second-rank elites' incentives to stay in the party are undermined. Closing off competition for leadership positions may thus sap the ambitions of minority party elites and drive them out of the party (Kitschelt and Kselman, 2010: 12). Organizational decentralization thus leads to a centralization of power which frustrates those excluded from intra-party decision-making authority.

Yet, in the short-run, second-rank party elites are unlikely to defect from the party because party exit implies potentially high costs. Founding a new party requires start-up costs and implies a high level of uncertainty regarding the future political impact of a new formation. While joining an already existing party might reduce start-up costs, it also entails the risk of being even worse off in the new party. Party elites may, for instance, risk losing their parliamentary mandate after the next election. Moreover, as long as their own party performs well electorally, it may have access to funds to which other parties do not have access. Thus, second-rank party elites are not likely to translate their dissatisfaction into immediate defection. However, this situation changes when exogenous shocks make leaving the party more appealing than staying. They may include, for instance, the emergence of a new party, positions offered by other parties to change sides or a change in the electoral system which makes minority party elites' re-election in their party less likely. While these transformations may not be entirely exogenous to the party leadership, they are likely to be exogenous to second-rank party elites' immediate scope of action. Their party exit and the exit of their supporters as well as the dealignment of their loyal voters increase the electoral pressure on

the party. This reduces the benefits which the party can provide to other party elites (e.g. portfolios, parliamentary seats, staff positions). It is thus increasingly difficult to buy off the loyalty of discontent second-rank elites which makes further defections more likely. It requires thus smaller exogenous shocks to trigger the next party exit. The result is a vicious circle of discontent minority elites, exogenous shocks and party exit which ultimately makes party breakdown more likely.

I will assess the explanatory power of this theoretical framework in the remainder of this paper by tracing the causal process leading from party elites' initial organizational choices to the MRP's disintegration. To do so, my analysis builds on primary sources which were collected during field work at the *Archives Nationales* (AN) in Paris-Pierrefitte-sur-Seine.

### **The MRP – an oligarchic party**

#### *The choice of decentralization*

In 1944, the MRP party congress delegates adopted a decentralized organization which was the result of political interaction rather than structural antecedents. If the structure of the political system (Duverger, 1951) or the sequence of party formation (Panebianco, 1988) had affected the level of party centralization, we would expect the MRP to adopt a centralized organization following a process of territorial penetration in unitary France. We would also expect a centralized organization if the organization of the Socialist party (SFIO) had been the major source of inspiration as Robert Bichet and Francois de Menthon, both members of the MRP's founding coalition, had claimed (Bichet, 1980: 47). Yet, a closer look at the SFIO party statutes shows that the MRP and the centralized SFIO had hardly anything in common.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Delbreil (1990) and Letamendia (1995) have considered the MRP's organization as

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<sup>12</sup> See Statute, *Parti Socialiste/SFIO, Règlement du Parti*. 1905, Art. 30, 32, 33 – 35, 39 – 42. Available at [http://sebastien-chochois.over-blog.com/pages/Les\\_statuts\\_du\\_Parti\\_socialiste\\_SFIO\\_en\\_1905-809394.html](http://sebastien-chochois.over-blog.com/pages/Les_statuts_du_Parti_socialiste_SFIO_en_1905-809394.html) [accessed on 11.03.2015].

an institutional legacy of the prewar *Parti Démocrate Populaire* (PDP). However, the MRP adopted a more decentralized organization than the PDP and even more decentralized options were put forward.<sup>13</sup> They established the party in government as the third pillar of intra-party power (in addition to the *Départements* branches and the party in parliament). The MRP ministers would become ex-officio members of all important party bodies.<sup>14</sup> This was important for the MRP's founding elites because three of them (Bidault, Teitgen, Menthon) were already members of de Gaulle's provisory government. Furthermore, they increased the number of social branches which increased the number of groups involved in the selection of the party executive (Bichet, 1980: 55; Bazin, 1981: 215; Delbreil, 1990: 49 – 60). While the institutional divergence from predecessor organizations is the outcome rather than a defining characteristic of a critical juncture (Capoccia, 2015: 208), it shows that the MRP's founding elites were free to diverge from the PDP.

Yet, this choice was the outcome of intense bargaining. Three sets of actors started negotiating the future of Christian Democracy in early 1943: Auguste Champetier de Ribes and other prewar leaders of the PDP, a group of the *Action Catholique de la Jeunesse Francaise* (ACJF) behind André Colin, and the network of Georges Bidault, one of the figure heads of the Catholic Resistance (Callot, 1978: 95; Letamendia, 1995: 63). In turn, the French tradition of laicism and the support of many bishops and priests for the Fascist Vichy regime incentivized actors not to include the Catholic Church in the negotiations (Warner, 2000: 179 – 183). On the one hand, the group of prewar PDP elites promoted a loose cartel or federation of prewar and postwar Catholic organizations which should remain identifiable entities within the new cartel (Delbreil, 1990: 428 – 429). This would not only have allowed Champetier de Ribes and his PDP followers to maintain a leading position in the new formation as large parts of their network and organization had survived the War. It would have also led to a more

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<sup>13</sup> Note, *Albert Gortais, Note sur les objectes prochains de notre travail sur le plan national*. 23.09.1946, 350 AP 6.

<sup>14</sup> Statute, *Status du Mouvement Républicain Populaire*. 1944. 350 AP 5, Art. 40, 46.

decentralized party organization where the party executive seats would have been distributed among the member organizations. On the other hand, Bidault, supported by his network of young Resistance partisans, sought the formation of an entirely new party which implied a more centralized organization (Bazin, 1981: 158 – 170). When he was elected, thanks to his merits in the Resistance, as president of the provisory government in September 1943, the ACJF group behind André Colin and Albert Gortais started supporting Bidault (Calot, 1978: 97; Sa'adah, 1987: 46 – 47).

The alliance between Colin and Bidault was important to outweigh the organizational advantage of the PDP (Bazin, 1981: 169; 174; 181, 200 – 203; Delbreil, 1990: 428). This encouraged many leading members of the Catholic Resistance, such as Maurice Schumann (the voice of Free France on BBC), Francois de Menthon (second-level PDP-elites) as well as Paul Bacon and Fernand Bouxom (Catholic trade unionists), to support Colin and Bidault (Callot, 1978: 95-96; Letamendia, 1995: 63; Plaza, 2008: 65). Yet, this cooperation was very fragile as they disagreed on the brand of the new party. While Bidault promoted the creation of an explicitly confessional party, de Menthon advocated for a Labour Party (Bazin, 1981: 161; Delbreil, 1990: 431 – 432; Plaza, 2008: 64). This disagreement could have led to the end of the alliance at a meeting in September 1944 and thus substantially weakened Bidault and Colin in their bargaining with Champetier de Ribes and his group. Yet, Bidault and de Menthon ultimately compromised on a Christian Democratic party with a secular name: *Mouvement Républicain Populaire* (MRP) (Sa'adah, 1987: 46 – 47; Letamendia, 1995: 58; Plaza, 2008: 64 – 65).

The choice between the formation of a loose cartel of Catholic organizations or a new party was the main line of conflict at several meetings during the fall of 1944 (Bazin, 1981: 225; Delbreil, 1990: 432). On 08 November 1944, they vaguely agreed 'to form a new and



enlarged political formation' on 25 and 26 November.<sup>15</sup> The MRP group was satisfied with this outcome as they expected the PDP to dissolve and to join the MRP (Bazin, 1981: 228). However, when the MRP delegates came together for its constitutive party congress on 25 November 1944, they were taken by surprise: Earlier that very day, the PDP had unexpectedly decided not to dissolve and to join the new party (Bazin, 1981: 228 – 232; Delbreil, 1990: 435). The MRP delegates had now to decide whether to pursue or postpone party formation. The latter option would have been likely to put an end to the MRP before it was even constituted. After tedious discussions, Bidault and the MRP's founding elites managed to convince the delegates to go ahead with party formation (Bazin, 1981: 234, 256). The option to create a loose federation was finally off the table.

Finally, the delegates at the MRP's constitutive congress had to decide on a level of organizational centralization. On the one hand, the coalition around Bidault and Colin preferred a decentralized organization which guaranteed the representation of the party members in government in all national party bodies. On the other hand, the partisans representing the MRP in the different subnational *Départements* rejected the ex-officio membership of the party members in government in the party executive.<sup>16</sup> They tried instead to increase the representation of the subnational branches at the national party level.<sup>17</sup> However, due to a lack of coordination and agreement among the subnational delegates and thanks to the national party elites' popularity as heroes of the Resistance,<sup>18</sup> the latter could enforce their preferred party organization. The political interaction between prewar and postwar political elites and actors at the national and subnational level thus led to the choice of a decentralized party organization.

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<sup>15</sup> Minutes, *Commissions P.D.P. et M.R.P.* 08.11.1944, 350 AP 1, 1/1 Dossier 1, AN, own translation.

<sup>16</sup> Minutes, *Assemblée constitutive du Mouvement Républicain Populaire*. 25 November 1944, 350 AP 12, AN, pp. 31-35.

<sup>17</sup> Minutes, *Assemblée constitutive du Mouvement Républicain Populaire*. 25.11.1944, 350 AP 12, AN, pp. 27-28.

<sup>18</sup> Note, *Participation à l'Assemblée Constitutive des 25 et 26 Novembre*. 1944, 350 AP 12, AN.

### *A decentralized party organization*

In 1944, the party congress delegates adopted a decentralized organization for the MRP. The different party branches sent delegates directly to a subordinate executive body – the *Comité Directeur*. Two-thirds of the seats in the *Comité Directeur* were allocated proportionally to the 87 subnational party associations (*Fédérations départementales*) which selected their representatives at 23 *Conseil Régionaux* during the three months before the national party congress (Bichet, 1980: 48). The remaining seats were reserved for the party in parliament, choosing their delegates one month before the national party congress. The party members in government were ex-officio members. Furthermore, the small party congress (*Conseil National*) elected twelve members. Finally, up to two delegates per social branch completed the composition of the *Comité Directeur*. Yet, the latter set up the social branches in the first place and the *Conseil National* decided annually how many of them were entitled to seats in the *Comité Directeur*.<sup>19</sup> The list of *Comité Directeur* members had to be approved by the national party congress which, in turn, did not directly elect any party position.<sup>20</sup>

The *Comité Directeur* elected annually the two executive bodies.<sup>21</sup> The *Bureau Directeur* included the party leader, the secretary general and up to 11 other members (Bichet, 1980: 47 – 54). The party leader and his vice chairmen could only be re-elected three times consecutively. At every election of the *Bureau Directeur*, one vice chairman, chosen randomly, was eligible for office only for the upcoming year. Furthermore, the *Comité Directeur* elected the *Commission exécutive permanente* included ex-officio the *Bureau Directeur*, the PPG-leaders and the party members in government.<sup>22</sup> In 1944/1945, the *Commission exécutive permanente* included 13 ex-officio and 17 elected members (Bichet,

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<sup>19</sup> Statute, *Status du Mouvement Républicain Populaire*. 1944. 350 AP 5, Art. 39, 40.

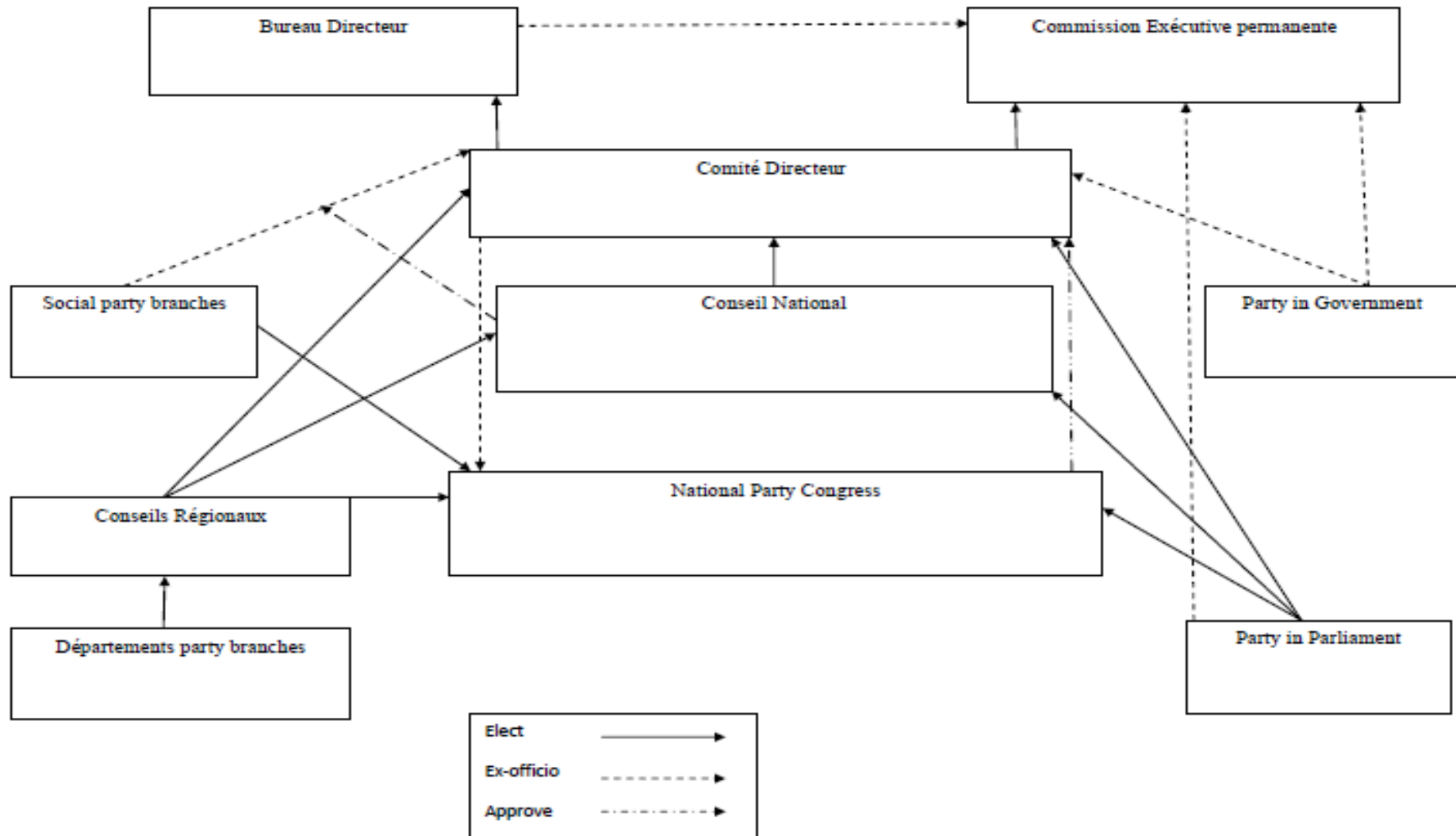
<sup>20</sup> Statute, *Status du Mouvement Républicain Populaire*. 1944. 350 AP 5, Art. 20 – 29, 40.

<sup>21</sup> Statute, *Status du Mouvement Républicain Populaire*. 1944. 350 AP 5, Art. 40.

<sup>22</sup> Statute, *Status du Mouvement Républicain Populaire*. 1944. 350 AP 5, Art. 46.

1980: 53 – 54). All intra-party elections were based on a two-round majority system (Letamendia, 1995: 236). Figure 2 illustrates the MRP's party organization.

Figure 2: MRP party organization in 1944



### *Patterns of intra-party competition*

Bypassing the national party congress and the *Conseil National*, the different party branches sent their delegates directly to the much smaller *Comité Directeur*.<sup>23</sup> Party elites thus needed the support of their respective party branch to be selected for this important party body which incentivized party elites to build ties with the members of their own rather than with actors from other party branches.

#### The party in public office

The party in public office was not incentivized to form networks across intra-party boundaries because a strong representation in the *Comité Directeur* ensured their access to the party executive. When the MRP won 151 seats in the first postwar election in 1945, 10 MPs and the three MRP members in the provisory government (Bidault, Teitgen, Menthon) were members of the *Comité Directeur*. With 13 members, the party in public office was the largest group in this important party body. In addition, the parliamentary system of the Fourth Republic guaranteed communication and coordination within the party in public office (Callot, 1978: 182, 238). Further intra-party groups were thus not needed.

#### The subnational party branches

By contrast, intra-party groups would have been beneficial for the subnational party branches in the *Départements*. While they were strongly represented in the *Comité Directeur*,<sup>24</sup> they were highly fragmented. From the 19 *Départements* in the 1944 *Comité Directeur*, only the subnational branches of Paris, Lyon and Nord had each four delegates.<sup>25</sup> It would thus have been beneficial for subnational party elites to coordinate their activities in order to

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<sup>23</sup> The first *Comité Directeur* had 65 members. In turn, over 1000 delegates usually participated at the party congress and the *Conseil National* had over 150 members.

<sup>24</sup> In January 1947, 22 representatives of the party in public office faced 69 delegates of the subnational branches in the *Comité Directeur*. See Note, *Liste des Membres du Comité Directeur*. 24.01.1947, 350 AP 46, AN.

<sup>25</sup> Newspaper article, *Comité Directeur du MRP*. L'Aube, 28.11.1944, 457 AP 166, AN.

counterbalance the influence of the party in public office. Yet, there were no formal points of contact between them outside of the party executive meetings. Their large number and the geographical distance between them made informal meetings costly (Letamendia, 1995: 235). Hence, the decentralized party structure incentivized leaders of the MRP in the subnational *Départements* not to invest in ties between party branches.

### The social branches

The social branches were not useful for subnational elites to increase their bargaining power as they had been established by the party leadership in order to promote their positions among party members in the different social milieus and to reach out to civil society organizations (Callot, 1978: 114; Plaza, 2008: 76, 87).<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the party leadership had usually a tight control over these groups (Bazin, 1981: 215; Plaza, 2008: 88).<sup>27</sup> The social branches thus mainly served propaganda and outreach rather than aggregation purposes.

### A top-heavy party structure

Organizational decentralization led to a concentration rather than devolution of power in favor of the party elites in public office. This favored the coalition of national party elites that had dominated the process of party formation as most of them were elected to parliament (e.g. Bidault, Menthon, Colin, Bacon, Schumann) (Letamendia, 1995: 233; Bazin, 1981).<sup>28</sup> The dominance of the party in public office was further backed by small, weakly organized, less active and rural subnational branches which usually followed the suggestions of the national party elites in public office (Callot, 1978: 116).

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<sup>26</sup> Minutes, *Commission de Coordination au 2<sup>ème</sup> Congrès National du 13 au 16 Décembre 1945*. 1945, 350 AP 13, AN.

<sup>27</sup> Note, *L'organisation du M.R.P.* no date, 350 AP 6, AN.

<sup>28</sup> Note, *L'Équipe d'Action dans l'organisation du secrétariat général*. No date. 350 AP 7, AN. And the collection of guidelines and directives in 350 AP 9, AN.

Strong ties within the party in public office were thus a promising investment in order to gain intra-party power. After Maurice Schuman, all party leaders were or had previously been ministers and apart from Paul Bacon, all of the later ministers had previously been MPs (Callot, 1978: 238; Letamendia, 1995: 238, 241, 247-250). The risk of conflict among them was relatively low since the term-limits of the party leader and vice chairmen ensured a constant renewal of the party leadership. The MRP depended thus less on a single leader rather than on a small group of party elites in public office. Once the incumbent party leader had served for four years, they decided informally who would succeed as party leader.<sup>29</sup> Table 5 illustrates the resulting continuity in the MRP's leadership structure and the quasi unanimity of leadership elections (Plaza, 2008: 85).

Table 5: MRP Party Leadership Elections

<b>Name</b>	<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Result in percent<sup>30</sup></b>
Maurice Schuman	1944 <sup>31</sup> – 1949	1947	90.2
		1948	97.3
Georges Bidault	1949 – 1952	1949	96.0
		1950	87.4
		1951	missing
Pierre-Henri Teitgen	1952 – 1956	1952	98.2 <sup>32</sup>
		1953	100
		1954	99.2
		1955	92.6
Pierre Pflimlin	1956 – 1959	1956	71.9
		1957	99.3
		1958	92.2
		01/1959	89.7
André Colin	1959 – 1963	05/1959	79.0
		1960	99.1
		1961	99.1
		1962	72.3
Jean Lecanuet	1963 – 1965	1963	97.1
		1964	98.8

<sup>29</sup> Newspaper article, *Le MRP pose trois conditions à son maintien au gouvernement*. Combat, 24.05.1952, 350 AP 22, AN.

<sup>30</sup> Data in Minutes, *Congrès National du MRP*. 1947 until 1965. See 350 AP, 15, 17, 18, 21, 22, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32, 34, 35, 37, 39, 41, 42, 90, all in AN.

<sup>31</sup> Only election results from 1947 are reported when the party leader started being elected by the party congress.

<sup>32</sup> Bidault asked the party congress delegates to elect Teitgen as his successor. See Minutes, *Congrès National du MRP*. 24.05.1952, 350 AP 22, AN.

Moreover, the party leadership was institutionally well protected against statutory modifications which risked jeopardizing their dominance. A majority of the *Comité Directeur* or *Conseil National*, where the party in public office enjoyed strong influence, or one quarter of all subnational branches was necessary for statutory changes which needed a two thirds majority at the national party congress.<sup>33</sup> The quorum led, for instance, to the failure of a statutory project initiated by the *Fédération de la Seine* in 1952, which proposed to make the position of the secretary general incompatible with a governmental position.<sup>34</sup>

In turn, the party in public office used its dominant position to impose institutional change which reinforced their dominance. Table 6 summarizes all four statutory reforms.

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<sup>33</sup> Statute, *Status du Mouvement Républicain Populaire*. 1944. 350 AP 5, AN, Art. 55.

<sup>34</sup> Letter, *Lettre du Secrétaire général André Colin aux Fédérations*. 04.03.1952, 350 AP 5, AN.



Table 6: Statutory reforms within the MRP

Year	Trigger for reform	Statutory modification <sup>35</sup>	Effect
1947	The party leadership sought to gain legitimacy against a Gaullist minority who opposed the leadership's decision to continue the coalition with the PCF.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Party leader and secretary general directly elected by the party congress</li> <li>- Abolishment of the <i>Conseils Régionaux</i></li> <li>- Merging of the <i>Comité Directeur</i> and the <i>Conseil National</i> to the <i>Comité National</i></li> <li>- Quotas guaranteed the representation of the different party branches in the <i>Comité National</i></li> <li>- Subnational delegates to the <i>Comité National</i> only replaceable by members from their own subnational branch</li> <li>- Quotas guaranteed the representation of the different party branches in the <i>Commission exécutive</i></li> <li>- <i>Bureau</i> elected by the <i>Commission exécutive</i></li> <li>- More than half of the members of the <i>Bureau</i> gained their membership ex-officio</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increasingly difficult communication and coordination across subnational branches</li> <li>- Party in public office with de facto majority in all leading party bodies</li> </ul>
1950	The party leadership tried to appease discontent second-rank elites after some of them had exited the party.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reducing the quota for additional seat for subnational branches in the <i>Comité National</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More proportional representation of subnational branches and an overall increase of the <i>Comité National</i></li> </ul>
1959	Party exits provoked discussions about organizational reforms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Further specification of the quotas guaranteeing the representation of the different party branches in the <i>Comité National</i>, <i>Commission exécutive</i> and the <i>Bureau</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Confirmation of the party in public office and the subnational branches as the main organizational units of intra-party competition</li> </ul>
1962	The party leadership wanted to improve the MRP's linkages to civil society organizations due to its declining vote share.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Including a fixed number of party members who were also members of civil society organizations and supported by the MRP's social branches in the <i>Comité National</i> and <i>Commission exécutive</i>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- None (After the electoral losses in 1962, the party focused on its institutional survival rather than the implementation of statutory reforms.)</li> </ul>

<sup>35</sup> Statute, *Status du Mouvement Républicain Populaire*. 1947, Art. 27 – 37, 43 – 46; 1950, Art. 32; 1959, Art. 44; 1962, Art. 32, 42.

As these statutory reforms confirmed the different party branches as main organizational units of intra-party politics, two attempts to establish networks across party branches as a reaction to the escalating decolonization crisis failed in the 1950s. Neither the *Équipe d'Études et d'Action pour un plus grand MRP* nor *Rénovation Démocratique* managed to win substantial support beyond the *Fédération de la Seine*.<sup>36</sup> The party's MPs could be misunderstood as agents of their respective subnational party branches which would have made the MRP's parliamentary group a promising arena to coordinate inter-branch activities. However, MRP members in parliament had only weak ties with their subnational branches. While the latter chose their candidates for national parliamentary elections, the slates had to be approved by the party executive where the party in public office enjoyed a majority (Callot, 1978: 119).<sup>37</sup> It is thus not surprising that not even one MP was among the leaders of the two unsuccessful attempts to establish factions or tendencies.

The intra-party bargaining system persisted even against the backdrop of massive changes in the political system. The establishment of the Fifth Republic and the replacement by PR through a majoritarian electoral system did not alter the patterns of intra-party competition.

#### *Driving second-rank elites out of the party*

A low level of factionalism should not be misinterpreted as a high level of party unity. Tensions between an intra-party right, left and center characterized intra-party politics from the MRP's very early days. Since bargaining mainly took place within and between the party branches, second-rank elites who were only supported by a small party branch or by a minority of their respective party branch were de facto excluded from intra-party decision-making. Their incentives to remain members of the MRP were thus undermined and they

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<sup>36</sup> A diversity of documents illustrating their activities and development can be found in the *Archives Nationales* in the boxes 350 AP 10, 457 AP 167 and 458 AP 168.

<sup>37</sup> Statute, *Status du Mouvement Républicain Populaire*. 1944. 350 AP 5, Art. 13; Statute, *Status du Mouvement Républicain Populaire*. 1949. 350 AP 5, Art. 19; Statute, *Status du Mouvement Républicain Populaire*. 1959. 350 AP 5, Art. 19.

ultimately left the party when exogenous shocks opened up new options. Table 7 shows the major exogenous shocks challenging the MRP and their effects on the party.

Table 7: Exogenous shocks and their effects on the MRP

Date	Exogenous shock	Effect
30.03.1947	De Gaulle announced the formation of his party <i>Rassemblement pour le Peuple Francais</i> (RPF).	Discontent conservative MRP elites defected to the RPF.
17.04.1950	The trade unionist Édouard Mazé was shot by a policeman during a demonstration at Brest.	Abbé Pierre Groués, who had been an influential figure among the MRP's left wing, blamed the MRP leadership's stance on workers' rights for the tragedy at Brest and left the party.
25.06.1950	The Korean War broke out.	This set the issue of France's membership in NATO on the legislative agenda which ultimately led to the exit of Paul Boulet and Charles d'Aragnon, two main representatives of the MRP's left.
08.05.1954	The French forces lost the battle of Dien Bien Puh.	Pierre Mendès France replaced Joseph Laniel as prime minister and offered ministerial portfolios to the MRP. Three of its MPs accepted the offer, thereby defecting from the party.
01.11.1954	The Algerian War of Independence broke out.	Frictions erupted within the party's parliamentary group and among the previously united party leadership.
13.05.1958	Pro-colonial forces staged a coup in Algiers against the Pflimlin government in Paris.	With a MRP government under attack, Georges Bidault saw a chance to win back his leading position in French Christian Democracy. He defected from the MRP and founded his own party.
13.10.1958	The two-round majority system was passed as a piece of emergency legislation by de Gaulle.	Bidault's party only won two seats. Bidault thus started seeking to win dissidents from other parliamentary groups to set up an inter-group. 16 MRP parliamentarians defected to Bidault's group.
05.12.1965	The first round of the French presidential elections took place.	Jean Lecanuet, running as a joint candidate of Christian Democrats and other centrist parties, won 15 percent of the votes in the first round of the presidential election which encouraged him to leave the MRP and to form a new party.

### The Formation of the RPF: Exit of conservative party elites

In January 1947, a conflict erupted in the MRP whether to continue the coalition with the PCF or not. The intra-party left narrowly won the respective votes at the *Bureau Directeur* and the party congress. The MRP thus joined a new tripartite cabinet (Woloch, 2007: 101 – 102). This frustrated right-wing party elites (Vinen, 1995: 143). Even though Edmond Michelet, Louis Terrenoire, and their supporters had only lost narrowly, they could not expect to turn the situation around in the near future as they only represented a minority within the MRP's parliamentary group which mostly backed the party leadership's coalition strategy. Since the PPG played an important role in the selection of the party executive and the party executive members representing the MRP branches in the *Départements* were also rather left-leaning, Michelet had little chance to overcome their minority position in the party executive. Moreover, the decentralized organization of the MRP made it complicated to organize their supporters across the 87 *Départements* branches to increase their bargaining power at the party congress.

They left the MRP when a development exogenous to the MRP's intra-party politics opened up alternative options. Against the backdrop of the beginning of the Cold War, an alarming economic situation and massive strikes, de Gaulle announced the formation of the *Rassemblement du Peuple Français* (Rally of the French People, RPF) in spring 1947 (Callot, 1978: 263; Rioux, 1987: 112 – 124). This provided discontent conservatives in the MRP with an appealing exit option. It may have been possible to convince them to stay when the coalition with the Communists ended on 05 May 1947 due to disagreement over the appropriate approach to cope with the strike wave and the PCF's increasing orientation toward Moscow. Yet, the MRP leadership's decision to join the new *troisième force* government under the Socialist Paul Ramadier seemed to underline the party's position on the center-left. Moreover, none of the ministerial portfolios previously held by the Communists

was given to Michelet, Terrenoire or one of their supporters. When de Gaulle managed to win sufficient support of MPs defecting from other parties to form a parliamentary group, Michelet, Terrenoire and other conservatives could leave the MRP, while keeping the privileges associated with group membership in parliament (e.g. plenary speaking time). They thus defected to de Gaulle's group (Letamendia, 1995: 99). It is noteworthy that the MRP lost large parts of its intra-party right before the local elections in October 1947.<sup>38</sup> I do not argue that the defection of the MRP's right wing was the only reason why the RPF could win 38 percent of the votes, while the MRP performed quite poorly with only 10 percent. Yet, the RPF only managed to celebrate this electoral success after the exit of Michelet and other right-wing party elites had discredited the MRP in the eyes of conservative voters. The rise of parties on the political right of the MRP was thus at least partially endogenous to organizational factors in the MRP which prevented a better integration of its right wing.

#### The shooting of Brest and the outbreak of the Korean War: Exit of left-wing party elites

When the MRP leadership decided to form a coalition with parties right of the center on 04 February 1950, the leaders of the left-leaning subnational branches and the left minority within the party's parliamentary group fiercely criticized the party leadership. Yet, individual subnational branches, such as the *Fédération de la Seine* or *Nord*, were not powerful enough to influence intra-party decision-making and coalitions between *Départements* branches were costly given their large number. In turn, parliamentarians representing the intra-party left were in a minority position. The majority of MPs supported the party leadership's coalition strategy as it provided them with a number of cabinet portfolios, undersecretary positions and other posts in ministerial departments. While some left-leaning MPs thus resigned,<sup>39</sup> others, especially from the *Fédération de la Seine* (i.e. Joseph Dumas and André Denis), *du Tarn* (François Reile-Soult) and *du Nord* (Léon Robichez) tried to organize a left-wing group

<sup>38</sup> See <http://mrp.creapag.com/html/mouvement/chronologie.php> [05.05.2015].

<sup>39</sup> Letter from Eugène Rigal (MP Seine) to Bidault and Menthon, 15.02.1950, 457 AP 166, AN.

within the party (Sa'adah, 1987: 54; Letamendia, 1995: 222, 242). Such networks were, however, difficult to form given that 87 *Départements* sent their delegates to the party congress. With no formal points of contact between them, it was difficult to agree on joint candidates for these two positions. It is thus not surprising that Joseph Dumas failed to get elected when he was running for secretary general against André Colin at the 1950 party congress, although his result of 42.8 percent of the votes showed the potential for a left-wing faction.<sup>40</sup> In turn, Dumas and his followers had no chance in the *Comité National* which elected the majority of the non-ex-officio members of the party executive as it was controlled by the party in public office where the left-wing group was in a minority position.<sup>41</sup> Disillusioned by their failed attempts to win more intra-party support for their social policies, their incentives to remain within the MRP were undermined.<sup>42</sup> Two events finally incentivized some prominent representatives of the MRP's left wing to leave the party.

When the trade-unionist Édouard Mazé was shot by a policeman during a demonstration at Brest on 17 April 1950,<sup>43</sup> Pierre Groués, who was one of the figureheads of the MRP's left wing, exited the party. He criticized the MRP leadership's firm anti-strikes policies for being partially responsible for the tragedy at Brest.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the outbreak of the Korean War brought the question of France's entry into NATO on the political agenda. This led to intra-party tension. Paul Boulet refused to support the MRP's vote in favor of NATO membership which led to his expulsion from the MRP.<sup>45</sup> Charles d'Aragon saw thus no future place for pacifists like Boulet and himself within the MRP and also decided to leave the party

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<sup>40</sup> Minutes, *Congrès National du MRP*. 20.05.1950, 350 AP 21, AN, p. A2.

<sup>41</sup> In June 1950, the PPG was represented by 56 delegates in the *Comité National*. See Letter from the Secretary General to the PPG, 07 June 1950, 457 AP 166, AN.

<sup>42</sup> Letter, *Lettre par André Denis à Bidault*. 11.07.1950, 457 AP 166, AN.

<sup>43</sup> See newspaper article, Mort d'Édouard Mazé. Les archives vont parler. Ouest-France, 16.04.2010, available at : <http://www.ouest-france.fr/mort-d-edouard-maze-les-archives-vont-parler-576817> [14.03.2015].

<sup>44</sup> Open letter by abbé Pierre Groués, *Pour qu'une Aube Nouvelle*. 14.05.1950, 457 AP 166, AN.

<sup>45</sup> Letter from Colin to Boulet, 24.04.1950, 457 AP 166, AN.

(Vaussard, 1956: 126).<sup>46</sup> The MRP had thus lost major identification figures of both its intra-party right and left within the first six years of its existence. Its organization seemed to hinder the aggregation of different interests within the party. Thereby undermining its catch-all party brand, the 1951 general elections were ill-omened.

### The importance of staying in power

Despite a change in the electoral system which should favor the incumbent coalition,<sup>47</sup> the MRP's vote share drastically declined from 26 to 12.5 percent in 1951 (Woloch, 2007: 93). Yet, the MRP still won 12.5 percent of the votes and remained in government. Governmental participation was important to compensate for the de facto exclusion of the subnational party level and minority groups from intra-party decision-making.<sup>48</sup> The *Départements* branches were allowed to keep 50 to 75 percent of the membership fees which provided large subnational branches, such as the *Fédération du Nord* and the *Fédération de la Seine*, with some financial autonomy. Moreover, as one of the major governmental parties, the MRP had access to the funds of their respective ministries which were used, like by all governmental parties, to finance the party or to pay party officials. This was especially important as there was no public funding for political parties. The MRP, further, benefited in its function as part of the governing coalition from private donations from firms and enterprises (Letamendia, 1995: 220 – 222). The MRP thus had better financial resources than the opposition parties. Governmental participation thus increased party exit costs which helps to understand why the MRP had so far not experienced a mass exit (Sa'adah, 1987: 44).

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<sup>46</sup> Letter from d'Aragon to Menthon, 01.05.1950 shown in Newspaper article, *Grace malaise au M.R.P.* Libération. 05.05.1950, 457 AP 166, AN.

<sup>47</sup> Note, *Il y a deux facon de faire élire un communiste : Voter communiste ou... voter R .P.F.* Annexe au Bulletin d'information, 06.06.1951, 457 AP 166, AN.

<sup>48</sup> Minutes, *Congrès National du M.R.P.* 04.05.1951, AP 21 7, pp. A/5 – A/7, AN. Newspaper article, *Au Congrès de Lyon. De nombreux militants M.R.P. se font l'écho de l'indication de la classe ouvrière.* Humanité, 05.05.1951, 350 AP 21, AN.



As the government depended on the confidence of the legislature in the parliamentary system of the Fourth Republic, governmental participation was also an efficient way of uniting the PPG behind the party members' in government. Given the decentralized party organization and the low level of factionalism, a united party in public office, in turn, protected the party leadership from intra-party competition. Governmental participation was thus the uniting link. It tied the PPG to the party leadership and the discontent party elites to the party.

#### Military defeat in Indochina and Pierre Mendès France

The exogenous shock of military defeat in Indochina in June 1954 triggered the overthrow of the Laniel government. The MRP leadership decided not to join the new government under Pierre Mendès France as they feared that participating in a left-wing government might ultimately put an end to the hope to recover at least parts of the conservative electorate which the MRP had lost in 1947 (Callot, 1978: 272 – 274, 287 – 289, 292; Letamendia, 1995: 103).

However, some left-leaning party elites refused to follow the party leadership. They had been frustrated by the MRP's center-right strategy since 1950 (Vaussard, 1956: 127 – 130; Callot, 1978: 286 – 287, 292). When Mendès France offered the Christian Democrats to join his cabinet, three of them accepted: Robert Buron, André Monteil and Jean-Jacques Juglas (Callot, 1978: 293; Letamendia, 1995: 104). Regarding his motivation, Buron had noted in his diary: 'It appears to me that my working-class hopes that had emerged even before the formation of the MRP have little chance of ever being achieved [within the MRP]' (Buron in Sa'adah, 1987: 56, own translation). While the MRP's disciplinary commission decided to exclude the three dissidents as well as other rebellious MPs from its parliamentary group (Sa'adah, 1987: 54 – 56; Plaza, 2008: 99), this incidence underlines that the MRP's organization did not seem to allow second-rank elites to compete for their positions which made the party vulnerable to exogenous shocks. This was especially problematic when

governmental participation was not available to appease intra-party discontent which resulted in an increase in parliamentary divisions (Macrae, 1963: 203).

Yet, unlike in the Radical and Moderate party, the high organizational costs to set up factions or tendencies kept dissent in the party relatively individual rather than group-oriented (Macrae, 1963: 209 – 210). While the low level of factionalism may have reduced the intensity of intra-party bargaining in the short-run, it also meant the absence of more systematic aggregation procedures across intra-party boundaries. This was even more problematic as it also increased the electoral pressure on the MRP: Whereas the loss of its conservative wing in 1947 had alienated the MRP from center-right voters, its decision not to support Mendès France had a similar effect on center-left voters (Callot, 1978: 287, 293; Letamendia, 1995: 106). The MRP had thus been substantially weakened when it had to face the escalation of the Algerian Crisis.

#### The double shock of Algeria

The outbreak of the Algerian War of Independence in November 1954 led to divisions within the coalition of national party elites who had been dominating the MRP since 1944. Previously, the national leadership group had always informally agreed who would succeed as party leader once the incumbent had served for four terms. Yet in 1955, Robert Schuman, Francois de Menthon and Pierre Pflimlin aimed for the leadership at the 1955 party congress. None of them was willing to cause a contested election illustrating the lack of unity among the party leadership. Menthon and Pflimlin thus met between the party congress sessions and agreed that Pierre-Henri Teitgen should run again.<sup>49</sup> This compromise, however, only lasted for a year. In 1956, the MRP experienced its first and only seriously contested party leader

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<sup>49</sup> Minutes, *Congrès National du MRP*. 21.05.1955, 350 AP 29, AN, p. F/2.

election which Pflimlin won with 71.9 percent against Menthon.<sup>50</sup> Pflimlin decided to join the Socialist government in 1956, promoting a reconciling stance on colonial policies (Callot, 1986: 286, 304 – 305; Letamendia, 1995: 91). While this was supported by many subnational party branches and his former rival Menthon, a conservative minority within the PPG, headed by Bidault, firmly rejected Pflimlin's liberal attitude toward the Algerian independence movement.<sup>51</sup>

Yet, while Bidault still enjoyed the support of a respectable number of MPs and was popular among some party members,<sup>52</sup> his increasingly nationalist positions had alienated many MRP elites. As the leaders of the different party branches, however, played an important role in selecting the delegates for the higher party bodies, Bidault was de facto excluded from intra-party influence. In March and April 1958, he thus failed, though narrowly, to win the approval of the *Comité National* and the executive commission for his proposition to create an anti-independence government (Callot, 1978: 307 – 308; 1986: 287, 289; Letamendia, 1995: 122). As the low level of factionalism did not allow him to mobilize his supporters across party branches to make a stronger appearance at the party congress in 1958,<sup>53</sup> Bidault realized that he was fighting a lost battle within the MRP. Instead of him, Pflimlin became prime minister of the new government (Callot, 1986: 289).

Pflimlin's investiture, however, triggered an exogenous shock which encouraged Bidault to leave the party. When the Assembly in Paris was about to vote Pflimlin's investiture on 13 May 1958, French officers in Algiers staged a coup against the new government and its liberal stance on colonial issues in order to enforce a government of *Algérie française* (Rioux, 1987: 301 – 302). As it seemed that the MRP had brought France on the verge of civil war, Bidault

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<sup>50</sup> Minutes, *Congrès National du MRP*. 12.05.1956, 350 AP 30, AN, p. G/6 ; Newspaper article, *Conclusion du Congrès M.R.P.* Le Figaro, 14.05.1956, 350 AP 30, AN.

<sup>51</sup> Minutes, *Congrès National de la Démocratie Chrétienne*. 1958. 457 AP 168, AN, pp. 53 – 54.

<sup>52</sup> Letter, unknown origin. 1958. 457 AP 168, AN.

<sup>53</sup> Minutes, *Congrès National du M.R.P.* 17.05.1958, 350 AP 34, AN.

saw his chance to renew his leading position in French Christian Democracy. He proclaimed the formation of his own party *Démocratie Chrétienne en France* (Christian Democracy in France) on 13 June 1958.<sup>54</sup> A series of MRP elites and members chose this newly available option and followed Bidault.<sup>55</sup> The coup against the Pflimlin government also led to de Gaulle's political comeback.

### The new electoral system

De Gaulle demanded fundamental constitutional reforms which the political parties had no choice than to accept if they wanted to avoid a civil war (Callot, 1978: 310; Rioux, 1987: 302 – 312; Letamendia, 1995: 117, 122 – 124, 131). Besides the transformation of France into a semi-presidential system, de Gaulle also wanted to change the electoral system. On 13 October 1958, he introduced a two-round majority system by decree as a piece of emergency legislation, replacing the PR system of the Fourth Republic. The new system disadvantaged new or small parties without a regional stronghold (Elgie, 2005: 120, 126). It contributed to Bidault's *Démocratie Chrétienne* only managing to win two seats which incentivized Bidault to reach out to discontent parliamentarians of other parties in order to form a parliamentary intergroup.

This opened up a new option for MRP MPs who were dissatisfied with their party leadership's decision to accept the likely loss of Algeria and to form a coalition with de Gaulle who had been a *persona non grata* for many people in the MRP since 1946. As the 1958 elections were also quite disappointing,<sup>56</sup> 16 of the 56 MRP parliamentarians defected to Bidault's intergroup. Managing to attract 96 members, his group became even larger than the MRP's (Letamendia, 1995: 128). Other dissident members of the MRP even tried to change

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<sup>54</sup> Minutes, *Conférence de presse de la Démocratie Chrétienne de France*. 08.07.1958, 350 AP 168, AN; Minutes, *Congrès national de la Démocratie Chrétienne*. 1958, 457 AP 168, pp. 54 – 60.

<sup>55</sup> 11 of the 19 members of the first party executive of Bidault's *Démocratie Chrétienne* had come with him from the MRP (Letamendia, 1995: 126).

<sup>56</sup> While the MRP had confirmed with 11.1 percent its result from 1956 in the first round, the party only reached 7.5 percent in the second round which translated into a loss of 26 seats (Höhne, 2006: 185).

the MRP's strategy by leaving the party, joining a new one and then seeking to merge with the MRP. This attempt to change the MRP from the outside is illustrated by the activities of the *Rassemblement des Forces Démocratiques* (Rally of Democratic Forces).<sup>57</sup> Weakened by these defections and the expectation that the MRP would not do much better in the 1962 elections than in 1958, parliamentary unity decreased (Callot, 1978: 406; Letamendia, 1995: 131 – 133). Given these intra-party divisions, the MRP leadership ultimately decided to leave the coalition on 04 October 1962 after de Gaulle had emphasized his Eurosceptic positions during a press conference.

While party elites often only differed in the degree to which they would have been willing to cooperate with De Gaulle (Letamendia, 1995: 136),<sup>58</sup> the different positions divided the MRP's party branches. As the party structure blocked aggregation procedures which took place across party branches, it was not possible to mediate between the competing positions. Intra-party competition thus resembled a cacophony rather than systematic bargaining. Unable to provide a clear party brand, the MRP only reached 5.3 percent of the votes in the second round of the 1962 elections which meant a loss of 21 seats (Callot, 1978: 407).

#### The presidential election in 1965 and the end of the MRP

After the 1962 elections, the party leadership lost faith in the MRP's continued longevity. To maintain its status as parliamentary group, the MRP even needed to form an intergroup with parts of the Independents and Social-liberals (Callot, 1978: 407 – 408; Letamendia, 1995: 120, 146). At the 1963 party congress, the delegates thus approved the creation of the *Centre Démocratique* (Democratic Center, CD). The MRP should merge with other center and

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<sup>57</sup> Letter from MRP Party Leadership to the Comité National provisoire du Rassemblement des Forces Démocratiques, 20.01.1959, 350 AP 11, AN ; Note by Assemblée Nationale, Groupe des Républicains Populaires et du Centre Démocratique. 21.01.1959, 350 AP 11, AN ; Newspaper article, *Ne Recommencez pas le M.R.P.* France Observateur, 05.02.1959, 350 AP 11, AN.

<sup>58</sup> Minutes, *Congrès National du MRP*. 02.06.1963. 350 AP 41, AN.

center-left parties (Callot, 1978: 408).<sup>59</sup> Yet, Gaston Defferre's (SFIO) surprising initiative to form a socialist-democratic party, excluding both the PCF and the Gaullists, showed that quite divergent preferences existed within the MRP regarding the respective partners for the new party. Many MRP leaders in the *Départements* and some party members in public office sought a fusion with the Socialists (SFIO).<sup>60</sup> Maurice Schumann, in turn, thought it would still be possible to win back parts of its Gaullist electorate, while Pflimlin and party leader Jean Lecanuet promoted the formation of a centrist party, excluding both the SFIO and the Gaullists (Letamendia, 1995: 143 – 144).<sup>61</sup>

Undermined by more than 20 years of a party structure which complicated the aggregation and mediation between competing preferences, the timing of the electoral calendar was enough to sound the death knell for the MRP. As it seemed that no compromise could be reached between the MRP's left, centrist and Gaullist wing, Jean Lecanuet resigned as party leader on 19 October 1965 in order to run as the presidential candidate for all center-democrats. Finishing third with 15.6 percent of the votes, he unexpectedly forced de Gaulle in a second round (Callot, 1978: 409; Letamendia, 1995: 146). Lecanuet's strong performance encouraged him to believe that there was an electoral potential for a new centrist party. He thus left the MRP and formed the Democratic Center on 02 January 1966 (Letamendia, 1995: 146). With its party leader leaving the sinking ship, other party elites left the MRP as well. The majority of MRP members followed Lecanuet in the Democratic Center where former MRP members represented 44 percent of the overall party membership. In turn, the Gaullists around Schumann joined the De Gaulle's *Union pour la Nouvelle République* (Union for the

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<sup>59</sup> Resolution, *Résolution du Congrès National du MRP*. 1963. 350 AP 41, AN; Declaration, *Notion de politique générale. XXIIème Congrès National M.R.P.* 27. – 29.05.1965. 350 AP 43, AN; Minutes, *Congrès National du MRP*. 28.05.1965, 350 AP 44, AN, pp. B-2 – C4 ; Newspaper article, *Abbelin, Pierre : Pour une force politique neuve. Forces Nouvelles*, 03.06.1965, 350 AP 44, AN, p. 7.

<sup>60</sup> Newspaper article, *Teitgen, Pierre-Henri : Sur le plan des principes, comme sur celui des réalités, nous devons dire 'oui' à la Fédération*. *Forces Nouvelles*, 03.05.1965, 350 AP 44, AN.

<sup>61</sup> Minutes, *Congrès National du MRP*. 28.05.1965, 350 AP 43, AN, pp. E-1 – J – 7. Newspaper article, *Pflimlin, Pierre : La Fédération n'est pas la bonne solution pour renforcer la Démocratie*. *Forces Nouvelles*, 03.06.1965, 350 AP 44, AN ; Newspaper article, *Lecanuet, Jean: Comment pourrions-nous dire 'non' à nous-mêmes ?* *Forces Nouvelles*, 03.06.1950, 350 AP 44, AN, p. 10.

New Republic, UNR). Finally, Paul Bacon and others joined left-wing parties (Mayen, 1980: 172). The MRP itself ceased existing in 1967 (Callot, 1986: 368; Letamendia, 1995: 146).

## **Conclusion**

Early organizational choices initiated two path-dependent processes within the MRP which ultimately account for its vulnerability toward exogenous shocks. Christian Democracy was likely to fail in postwar France because party elites made the wrong organizational choices in 1944. The selection of a decentralized party organization closed off competition across intra-party boundaries which frustrated second-level party elites because it excluded them from intra-party decision-making. Organizational decentralization thus led to a top-heavy party structure. This intra-party oligarchy was reinforced by statutory reforms which made the intra-party bargaining system persist against major political and social changes. It undermined discontent party elites' incentives to remain within the party as they could not expect to increase their influence in the future. When exogenous shocks opened up new options, they were likely to choose party exit. The exit of some second-rank elites and their followers alienated parts of the electorate which increased the electoral pressure on the MRP. Smaller exogenous shocks were thus sufficient to incentivize other discontent actors to leave. Party breakdown ultimately occurred due to the electoral calendar. As party elites were unable to decide on a strategy for the 1965 presidential elections, party leader Jean Lecanuet run as an independent, cross-party candidate of the political center. His strong performance resulted in him leaving the MRP. This also encouraged other party elites to exit the MRP which disintegrated into a left, Gaullist and centrist group.

In sum, early organizational decisions have long-lasting and sometimes devastating consequences that were neither expected nor desired by the actors involved in these early choices. They trigger different path dependent processes within the same political party which influence its resilience toward exogenous shocks. Focusing on the consequences of

organizational choices for party elites' incentives and behavior may thus allow us to better understand both the likelihood and the timing of party breakdown.

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