

The Quebec provincial election of 2007 was unusual in several respects. The Liberal Party won with only 33 percent of the votes and 48 seats, closely followed by Action démocratique du Québec (ADQ), with 31 percent of the vote and 41 seats, and the Parti québécois (PQ), which had 28 percent of the vote and 36 seats. For the first time since 1878 Quebecers elected a minority government, and Mario Dumont's ADQ became the official opposition in the National Assembly, relegating the PQ to third place.

These results raise new questions about the evolution of party preferences in Quebec. To more clearly grasp the implications of the 2007 election, our information about Quebecers' electoral behaviour needs to be updated. Éric Bélanger and Richard Nadeau's study is based on a survey of over 2,000 citizens immediately after the election. The authors present an exhaustive portrait of the profile and motivation of the supporters of Quebec's five main political parties. The study helps answer an important question about the results of the 2007 election, namely: Are voters for third parties (the ADQ, Québec solidaire and the Green Party of Quebec) different from those who voted for the two major parties (the Liberals and the PQ), and if so, how are they different?

The study reveals that three new party constituencies have emerged among the Quebec electorate, in addition to those of the two main parties. The largest, which overwhelmingly supported the ADQ, is conservative in orientation and nationalist in leaning. Two other smaller groups have also emerged: a green electorate – which may be growing – supported the Green Party, and a leftist, sovereignist constituency supported Québec solidaire.

Why did these groups break off from the traditional parties during the 2007 election? The authors suggest that a combination of short- and long-term factors appears to have played a part. The Liberal government's mixed track record was a key element, as was the PQ's inability to provide an alternative for all the malcontents, largely due to the unpopularity of its leader. These factors bred disaffection with the two major parties and fostered a desire for change that the new parties were able to exploit. While the ADQ reaped more benefit from this than Québec solidaire and the Green Party, political disaffection is a common thread explaining the rise of third parties in Quebec in 2007.

The authors find that the issues under debate during the 2007 election also pushed the voters toward emerging parties, but this factor played out differently for each of the third parties. Quebec greens, disappointed with traditional parties, chose to vote for the Green Party rather than support the traditional party that was most open to the environment. The Green electorate tends to be English-speaking, more federalist and a little more conservative than those who voted for Québec solidaire. In addition, the ADQ did not demonstrate much environmental fervour during the election. Support for Québec solidaire was based on other factors. This party found favour with the left wing of the PQ and is made up of voters who are a little less sovereignist and a little more progressive than the average *péquist*.

According to Éric Bélanger and Richard Nadeau, many factors explain the growth of the ADQ. While most of its gains since 1994 were largely made to the detriment of the PQ, the ADQ's rise in 2007 was the result of numerous defections from the Liberals. This is primarily due to the similarity of the two electorates on economic and social issues. But, at the time, the unpopularity of Jean Charest and his government, the popularity of Mario Dumont, and the ADQ's position on reasonable accommodation provided other bridges that facilitated the movement of a conservative nationalist electorate from the Liberal Party to the ADQ. Although defections from the PQ to the ADQ were fewer in 2007, they were still apparent. The PQ's promise to hold a quick referendum, combined with the ADQ's position on reasonable accommodation and its "autonomist" stand also contributed to the increased support for Mario Dumont's party.

Having drawn a portrait of the voters and analyzed the factors favouring vote shifts from traditional parties to third parties in the 2007 election, the authors conclude by examining the sustainability of third-party success in Quebec.