

**Proportional Representation on Trial:
Elite vs. Mass Opinion on Electoral System Change in New Zealand***

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Abstract: This paper compares support for New Zealand's new electoral system among party candidates and their voters. We examine the extent to which partisan self-interest, preference for coalition government, and support for proportionality influences attitudes about fairness and support for the new electoral system. Our results indicate that elites express much stronger support for MMP than voters. Nevertheless, partisan self interest continues to structure support. Consequently, while elites remain more supportive, they are fairly close to their voters. There is one factor that appears to be responsible for the gap between elite and voter opinion - whether voters or parties should decide the order of election from the list. A majority of voters believe they should decide, and those who do are more likely to be dissatisfied with MMP. In contrast, nearly all the candidates favour closed lists. Therefore, one method for increasing support for MMP and narrowing the gap between elites and voters would be to allow voters some discretion over the order of election from the list.

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Changes to electoral systems are rare. Recently, electoral reforms have been seriously considered in stable democracies such as Britain, and implemented in others, such as in Italy, Japan, and New Zealand. Theory and experience indicate that electoral system transitions are rarely non-problematic, and a certain amount of disappointment and instability can be expected, particularly when such changes bring electoral rules under greater scrutiny. Worse, unintended consequences may produce even more problems than those encountered under the old system. On the other hand, it is possible that change can be successful in attaining its objectives in certain cases, once difficulties and disappointments encountered in the short- to medium-term transitional period are overcome.

Reforming the electoral system creates an environment where parties and voters must learn new rules. For electoral outcomes to have legitimacy there must be a certain degree of support for the new electoral system. In cases where political elites are responsible for change and voters have had little say, lack of popular support might create problems. Where changes are mandated by popular referendum, voter support is more likely, but cannot be guaranteed if the new system proves a disappointment in its early consequences. Since electoral system changes are rare, little is known about how voters and parties may respond in such circumstances. Does confusion arise when voters are confronted with a new system with new rules? To what extent do expectations about winning and losing shape attitudes? How do changes in institutions weaken or strengthen legitimacy? We examine these questions in New Zealand, where voters have now experienced two elections under a new electoral system (in 1996 and 1999) that guarantees more proportional outcomes and a wider degree of representation.

Background and Expectations

In 1993, voters in New Zealand approved a referendum changing its electoral system from first past the post (FPP) to a mixed member proportional (MMP). Once described by Lijphart (1984, 16) as a “virtually perfect example of the Westminster model,” New Zealand’s switch to proportional representation (PR) represents a radical change toward a more a system somewhat closer to Lijphart’s “consensus” model (see Vowles et al 1995). Modelled after the German system, MMP combines single member districts with PR. Electors cast two votes, one for a party, and one for a candidate in a constituency (electorate, in New Zealand discourse, of which there were 67 in 1999). Under New Zealand’s version of MMP, parties secure representation by crossing a threshold of 5 per cent of the party vote, or by winning an electorate seat. The party vote is normally the only basis for calculation of seat entitlements

for parties that cross the threshold. In 1999 the process allocated 53 seats from party lists to top up the seats won in electorates to the number for each party determined by the Sainte Lague formula. This combination makes the New Zealand mixed system ‘compensatory’, as compared to the new Japanese non-compensatory system which does not use the party vote to correct for disproportional outcomes that may occur in the single member districts.

The story of the events leading to electoral system change in New Zealand has been told in numerous places (Jackson and McRobie 1998 is the most comprehensive source, but see also Vowles, 1995; Boston, Levine, McLeay and Roberts 1996). Among the accounts, partisan self-interest was considered to be one of the main factors responsible for putting electoral reform on the agenda. Although both of the major parties were successful in gaining representation under FPP, the National party appeared to benefit more than the Labour party. In 1978 and again in 1981 the National party succeeded in winning a majority of the seats even though Labour had received more votes. By 1993, Labour had held office for only 12 of the previous 44 years (Lamare and Vowles 1996). These results underscore the success that National had in retaining government and explain why there was little support for electoral reform within the National party. In contrast, some members of the Labour elite, notably former Prime Minister Geoffrey Palmer, were instrumental in setting the agenda for electoral reform (Jackson and McRobie 1998). Empirical studies of the 1993 binding referendum confirm that partisan rational self interest was a motivating factor that shaped voter’s and parties’ willingness to change the rules of the game (Lamare and Vowles 1996; Levine and Roberts 1993). MMP did not pay off for Labour in 1996. Labour won 31 seats on 28.2 percent of the vote to National’s 33.8 percent. But in 1999 Labour received 38.7 per cent of the vote to National’s 30.5 per cent, and was able to form a coalition government with a smaller party to its left, the Alliance.

Given this history, on assumptions of partisan strategic rationality it seems reasonable to expect Labour supporters to be more likely to embrace the new electoral system than their National counterparts. We might also expect supporters of small parties who, would otherwise have difficulty gaining representation, to be even more enthusiastic about MMP. In 1990, small parties such as NewLabour, Greens, and Christian Heritage received 17.7 percent of the vote, but garnered only 1 percent of the seats in Parliament. In 1993, small parties received just over 30 percent while gaining only 4 percent of the seats. Despite declining vote shares the country's two major parties governed with respective parliamentary majorities until 1993, with Labour forming the Government through much of the decade of the 1980s and National through much of the 1990s. However, in the first two elections under proportional

representation, these smaller parties fared much better, in a 120-seat Parliament gaining 33 seats in 1996 and 32 seats in 1999.

Also consistent with a rational self-interest explanation, underrepresented groups such as Maori and women might also be more supportive of the new proportional electoral system given its potential to increase their representation. Under FPP, Maori representation was primarily confined to the four Maori electorates which operated from 1867 until 1967, when National altered the electoral law to allow Maori to stand for European seats (Royal Commission on the Electoral System 1986). Under MMP, the number of Maori electorates are allowed to vary on the basis of their enrolment rather than remaining fixed at four. Not only does MMP guarantee that Maori representation is proportionate to those wishing to register on the Maori roll, it provides an opportunity for Maori to increase their representation beyond proportionality through additional party list seats (Nagel 1994, 528). Women also stood to increase their representation as PR systems produce, on average, twice as many elected women as FPP systems (Darcy, Welch and Clark 1994, 141). In 1996 and 1999 women's representation increased significantly while Maori representation doubled.

In addition to electoral outcomes, more abstract value concerns about democratic accountability are likely to influence attitudes toward a new electoral system, independent of partisanship. Evaluations of system fairness have been found to have had a strong impact on support for electoral system change in the 1993 referendum that gave it a mandate (Banducci and Karp 1999). Therefore we are interested not just in support for a specific electoral system and how it has been implemented in one case. We are also interested in support for the concepts of proportionality and majority rule and how support for these abstract concepts influences evaluations of the current electoral system. Supporting a specific electoral system may be quite different from support for abstract concepts that are linked to an electoral system. No previous studies have attempted to measure support for the concepts of proportionality, plurality, coalition government and single party government.

We might also expect political knowledge of the system to further one's perception of self-interest and the effect of support for abstract principles. For instance, party elites are likely to evaluate the system in terms of winning and losing. Elites from small parties should be the most enthusiastic supporters of a system that guarantees proportional results, as opposed to those from large parties who would otherwise benefit under a system that offered no guarantees for small party representation. Similarly we might expect these expectations to filter down to a party's supporters, to the extent that they are politically aware. For instance, small party supporters who know that MMP is a proportional system should be more likely to support it. In contrast large party supporters who are knowledgeable should be less likely to

favour the new system. We would expect some increase in understanding over time as voters gain greater experience under the new electoral system. Campaign strategies will reflect the new voting system and place emphasis on the party and this should be reflected in increased understanding. Consequently, as political knowledge of the system increases over time, we might expect greater partisan divisions to develop. This of course depends on whether there are clear winners and losers. Under a proportional system, where more parties are likely to gain representation and power is more likely to be shared, the distinction between winners and losers becomes more blurred (see Lijphart 1999). Therefore in the context of a transition from a plurality to a PR system, we should expect greater support overall to develop, even if such attitudes are shaped by partisan self-interest.

In terms of support for proportional outcomes or coalition governments, the link between these abstract concepts and MMP may be difficult for some voters to make, particularly those least informed about MMP. Indeed, much of the critical rhetoric surrounding MMP has not focused on proportionality but on failed coalition talks, defecting MPs and scandal (Hunt 1998). In other words, if electors are paying scant attention, they may fail to understand that MMP assures proportional outcomes which increases the likelihood of coalition governments. We hypothesize that more knowledgeable citizens will rely more on support for proportional evaluation and coalition governments in their evaluations of MMP than less knowledgeable citizens.

However, two factors may depress the level of understanding about the new electoral system. First, due to a lower allocation of funds, the New Zealand Electoral Commission's effort to increase voter understanding of the two votes were not as great in 1999 as it was in 1996. Additionally, new voters who had no prior experience of MMP (or FPP) entered the electorate. Yet we still expect those who are knowledgeable about the electoral system to be more likely to evaluate MMP by partisan benefits.

The mixed system adopted by New Zealand allows MPs to enter Parliament by either winning an electorate seat or via the party list. On rational assumptions, we might expect candidates, regardless of party, to be more supportive of a system that allows them two chances at winning a seat in parliament. List MPs are able to enter parliament without being directly elected by the voters. Moreover, electorate MPs who are defeated can nevertheless retain their positions in Parliament if they are placed high enough on the list. List MPs rapidly became the focus of public concern after the first MMP election, particularly with the departure of Alamein Kopu from the Alliance to become a government-aligned Independent, and the experience of other 'party hoppers' who defected from their party to support another. While party-hoppers included electorate as well as list MPs, the reputation of list MPs

suffered most from that process. Therefore, we might expect voters to be less supportive of the system than candidates because they cannot directly elect or remove them.

Aside from accountability, concerns over government performance will also influence attitudes toward the electoral system. Dissatisfaction over the 1996 coalition talks (Miller 1998; Boston and McLeay 1997) and dissatisfaction with its performance contributed to a decline in support for MMP following the 1996 election (Karp and Bowler 1999). Therefore, when there is a smooth transition to a new government, as occurred following the second election under MMP, we might expect support for the new system to strengthen.

Public Support for and Opposition to MMP

To test these hypotheses we rely on data from the New Zealand Election Study (NZES). The NZES has been conducting election surveys since 1990, and appears to have generated perhaps the most comprehensive data so far collected over the period of change in an electoral system. The NZES has also surveyed candidates standing from each of the major parties since 1993 when voters approved the referendum replacing FPP with MMP. Therefore we are able to track opinion toward MMP and FPP among candidates and their voters across three elections. Of the election surveys, the 1999 study provides the most extensive measures of knowledge about MMP, support for the electoral system and support for the concept of proportionality and coalition governments. After two elections under the new system, we are now in a better position to evaluate the reactions of both elites and voters to electoral system change. We therefore rely on the 1999 data for most of our analysis.

Questions were designed to measure perceptions of various aspects of the system, such as preferences for single party or coalition government, proportionality, and fairness of the system. We rely on data from the post election surveys, which were conducted by mail with a telephone supplement. On issues that are complex such as evaluating an electoral system, we might expect some degree of opinion leadership from the political elite. Elite opinion in New Zealand on electoral reform was characterized by conflict during the referendum period and this was reflected in a partisan division in support for MMP (Lamare and Vowles 1996).

Table 1 shows changes in support for MMP among candidates and voters by party choice since 1993. In 1993, respondents were asked whether they voted on the referendum replacing FPP with MMP whereas later respondents were asked how they would vote on a hypothetical referendum. In 1999, the form of the question changed somewhat to include alternatives other than just FPP. In 1993, in the actual tally of votes 54 per cent who voted on

the electoral reform referendum chose MMP. The margin for change had been significantly higher only a few weeks earlier, but a well-funded campaign to discredit MMP had significant effects. Optimism about the possibility of MMP returning Labour to government after being denied a majority of seats even with a plurality of votes in 1978 and 1981 is reflected in high support among Labour candidates in 1993. Almost three-quarters of the sample said they had voted for MMP. However, after Labour was unable to form a government support among Labour candidates dropped to 57 per cent. Even after the installation of the Labour-Alliance coalition government after the 1999 election, support among Labour elite did not increase. Among the larger parties, the National party is least likely to favour MMP. Their voters also have the lowest level of support of any partisan group.

Until just after the 1996 election, popular support for MMP remained in the majority. Not long after the 1996 election, polling which put a binary choice between MMP and FPP showed that support for MMP had fallen well behind that for FPP. Behind the drop in support was the formation of a coalition between the National and New Zealand First parties that many voters had not anticipated, and of which many did not approve (Miller 1998; Boston and McLeay 1997).

Between 1996 and 1999, support for MMP among Labour voters continued to drop to below a majority, while there was little change among Labour's candidates. A similar decline is evident among Alliance and Act voters while support among National voters remained relatively stable. Among the Act candidates, support increases from a slight majority to nearly two thirds while support among National candidates also increases somewhat over time, although they remain the least favourable. One might have expected a sharper increase among National candidates following the 1999 election, given that their representation in the new parliament would have been severely curtailed under FPP. National lost most of its electorate seats and only because of the compensatory party list managed to gain significant representation. Nevertheless, support within National almost exactly matches that of their voters. Act voters are also closest to National, suggesting that many of those who voted for Act might, nevertheless, be National sympathisers.

Consistent with partisan rational self-interest, the smaller parties exhibit the highest degree of support for MMP though their levels of support have declined over time. In 1993, all of the Alliance candidates supported MMP in the referendum and their voters were more likely to support change than any other partisan group. New Zealand First candidates were also overwhelmingly in favour of MMP in 1993 while their voters were somewhat less likely than Alliance voters to have supported MMP in the referendum. Despite their party hanging

onto five seats on only 4.2 per cent of the vote due to winning a single electorate seat thus meeting the threshold criteria of MMP, support for MMP among New Zealand First candidates has declined. In addition, even though they formed part of the new coalition, support among Alliance candidates also declined. The Alliance party lost seats between 1996 and 1999 and their share of the vote declined from 10.1 to 7.7 per cent.

In sum, support for retaining MMP is a reflection of perceived partisan advantage for both electors and candidates. Yet with the exception of National candidates remain far more enthusiastic about MMP than their voters. Dissatisfaction with coalition performance undoubtedly dampened voter enthusiasm for the new system. At its lowest ebb, MMP had become a label for a variety of ills associated with the government, including the “party-hopping” of a number of MPs, the increasing appearance of disunity with the National-NZ First coalition, and of course its final collapse. For candidates, the opportunities presented by MMP appear to outweigh these concerns.

(Table 1 here)

A large part of support for retaining MMP appears to be based on partisan self-interest. We move on to examine alternative measures of perceptions of MMP and more general attitudes about proportional representation. Table 2 reports the results from a question that directly put to respondents one of the key rhetorical claims of those opposed to MMP – “MMP must go” (Hunt 1998) – against two alternatives. If responses to survey questions are affected by the most recently acquired and most easily recalled bits of information (Zaller 1992), we would expect that citizens would be more likely to say MMP should not be retained given the preponderance of negative claims about MMP. People were far less likely to hear a message that MMP was a success and should be retained unaltered. However, citizens might feel on the basis of their own perceptions or otherwise have heard from some sources that it was “too soon to tell” and that definitive judgement about MMP was premature. An alternative question was posed to electors in July 1998 and during and after the 1999 election that sought to estimate the extent of agreement or disagreement with these different messages and perceptions. The question was also asked of candidates after the 1999 election. Respondents were given the option of saying that MMP had been a disaster, MMP had been a success or that it was “too soon to tell”.

The data presented in Table 2 indicate that hard-line opposition to MMP is greatest among National and Act voters. In contrast among all of the small party voters with the exception of Act, close to one fifth believe that MMP is a success. The greatest support for

MMP is among the smaller parties. A clear majority of Alliance and Green candidates think MMP is a success. Smaller numbers of Act and New Zealand candidates think it is a success, but these numbers are still larger than hard-line support among Labour candidates. Even though Labour was a major supporter of MMP, its status as a larger party that could have perhaps governed on its own after the 1999 election if it were held under FPP could influence its candidates' support for MMP. Overall, we see that support among the political elite is far greater than it is among the electorate. Only 11 per cent of the candidate sample expressed hard-line opposition to MMP, while around a third of the electorate sample think MMP should be abolished. Both Labour and National candidates are twice as likely as their voters to believe MMP is a success, while Alliance and Greens are three times as likely. The gap is widest between Act candidates and their voters; they are almost four times as likely to believe it is a success.

(Tables 2 and 3 here)

The third indicator of MMP evaluation that we use is whether respondents agree or disagree that MMP is fairer than FPP. As with the other evaluations of MMP, candidates are much more likely than their supporters to agree that MMP is fairer than FPP. Table 3 shows that Labour, NZ First and Act candidates agree in roughly equal numbers that MMP is fairer, while all Alliance and Green candidates agree that it is fairer. National candidates, however, are much closer to their supporters in terms of assessments of the fairness of MMP. Only a third of National candidates agree MMP is fairer and around one fourth of voters also agree. This final question on evaluations of MMP reflects the partisan patterns evident for the other questions.

Support for Proportionality and Coalition Governments

Support for Coalition Governments

One aspect of MMP that might affecting evaluations is a liking or disliking of coalition governments. Given a long history of plurality elections and one party rule, voters were not fully prepared for the process of coalition formation. In 1996 they were particularly not prepared for a process in which New Zealand First, a small pivotal party, took control of the process in a way unlikely in most other jurisdictions (Boston 1998). Table 4 compares support among voters and candidates for coalition governments. The question asks respondents directly whether they prefer single party or coalition governments and whether an election

should ensure one-party government. Opinion appears to be fairly divided on whether respondents agree if only one party is needed to form a government. Among the candidates, partisan interests are clear. Overall, candidates from all parties, except National, are more supportive of coalition governments than the electorate. Clearly support is greatest among the smaller parties, those most likely to benefit from coalition governments.

(Table 4 about here)

The coalition formation process after the 1999 election went much more smoothly and predictably than the first MMP coalition talks in 1996. Coalition formation had taken two months after the 1996 election. In the immediate aftermath of the 1999 election, a new government had been quickly formed. Both of its component parties, Labour and the Alliance, had set out clear sets of policy commitments prior to the election, most of which appeared to be consistent with majority public opinion. While these differed in outline and detail between the two parties, there were significant overlaps. The two parties made it apparent that they intended to work together constructively. The more positive coalition experience after the 1999 election appears to have restored some confidence in coalition governments, particularly in their ability to deliver democratic accountability (Vowles 2000).

Support for Proportionality

As with support for coalition governments, we use several questions to measure support for proportionality. The questions were designed to measure abstract principles and their various implications. In particular, questions were designed to establish the extent to which people supported the ideal and practice of the 'manufactured majority' aspect of first past the post and related systems. Table 5 reports the distribution by party for candidates and electors. As the data in the table show, substantial majorities agree with the principle of proportionality and with the ideal that governments should have a majority not just a plurality of voting support. While just over a third support the principle of a manufactured majority, slightly more oppose it. MMP also still seems to have the edge in terms of a 'fairness' argument, although the undecided camp is very large. While more agree that MMP gives too much power to small parties than disagree, there is a much bigger margin of support behind the claim that first past the post gives too much power to large parties. Finally, a less abstract application of the principle of proportionality still retains strong plurality support, with a

significant number indicating support for a modification of proportionality so as to give a somewhat larger share of seats to the largest party, but without guaranteeing it a majority.

(Tables 5 and 6 about here)

Table 6 displays the results of a question designed to force respondents to trade off their preferences for proportionality, if they have them, against those they might have for single-party government. It is significant that post trade-off support for proportionality remains quite consistently around the 50 per cent mark, even in July 1998 when MMP was most unpopular (Vowles 2000). As can be seen in Table 6, residual support for the principle and practice of proportional representation remains relatively strong in New Zealand even when controlling for partisan support. Overall, support is highest among those who voted for smaller parties and among all candidates except those from National. When compared to support for retaining MMP (see Table 1), support for proportionality is higher. Support for MMP is more problematic, as that label may be associated with lengthy coalition talks, failed coalitions, political scandal and party hopping MPs. Because we hypothesise that the effect of these abstract principles and self-interest on support for a specific electoral system will be conditioned by understanding of that electoral system, we next examine understanding of MMP in the context of learning about a new electoral system.

Understanding MMP

Those who claim that MMP is a complex system and too difficult for the average voter to understand find support in research into the German electoral system which indicates that significant numbers of German voters do not understand the purposes of their two votes (Jesse 1988, Roberts 1988, Schoen 1999; for an opposing view see Bawn 1999). The New Zealand Election Study (NZES) has measured understanding of the two votes in two different ways.

Table 7 shows changes over time in understanding using a question asking respondents to identify which vote is most important in determining which party gets the largest share of seats. Understanding of the primacy of the party vote in 1999 was almost exactly the same as in 1996, despite a much lower budget allocated by the government for electoral education. This level of understanding is at least comparable to that in Germany, and may be slightly better (Banducci, Karp and Vowles 1998, 105). The 1996 pre-election question varies significantly from the other questions measuring the importance of the party vote in that the categories were not presented to survey respondents. Therefore, “both equally

important” was not offered as an alternative. When not offered this alternative, more respondents were likely to correctly identify the party vote as the most important. However, if one just compares the proportion giving the most incorrect answer, the electorate vote, the percentage of misunderstanding has declined slightly from 13 to 10 percent.

A second indicator of understanding of the two votes was asked in the 1999 survey in the form of a true/false question. Respondents to the pre-election survey were asked whether it was true or false that the party vote usually determines the number of seats that a party wins. Of those asked, 69 percent answered “true” which is the most correct answer. Taking both questions together, we can be confident in concluding that well over the half of the electorate understands the meaning of the two votes. A similar question, phrased so that a “false” answer was correct, was asked in Scotland and Wales, which held their first MMP elections in 1999. Of Scottish respondents to an election survey 30 percent gave the correct answer while 21 percent gave the correct answer in Wales (Curtice, et al., 2000). While the questions we use do not directly measure whether citizens know that the system is proportional, we can assume that voters who know that the party vote is most important in determining the allocation of seats are more likely to know that the system is proportional.

(Table 7 about here)

Explaining Support for MMP: Multivariate Models

We next turn to a multivariate model to examine the relationship between support for a specific electoral system and support for abstract concepts associated with electoral systems and how knowledge conditions this relationship. We hypothesise that support for MMP is related to support for proportionality and coalition government. We also hypothesise that knowledge about MMP may condition the relationship between these abstract concepts and support for a specific electoral system. Those who know more about the electoral system are also more likely to know that the particular system they are being asked to evaluate either promotes or does not promote proportionality or coalition governments.

We construct three scales that measure support for proportionality, coalition government and strategic voting (see appendix). We also include a scale measuring specific knowledge of MMP and general knowledge of New Zealand politics. Because partisan self-interest is a strong influence on support for MMP, we also control for party support. To examine whether issues of accountability influence support for MMP, we include a variable indicating whether a respondent believes that voters should decide the order of election of candidates who appear on the party list. This power is not currently available to voters, as

party lists are closed. Overall, 57 percent favour open lists, indicating a substantial amount of support for reforming the system. If accountability is a concern, those who believe that voters should decide the order of those who appear on the list should be less supportive of MMP. A series of social and demographic measures have also been included as controls.

We use three different dependent variables to measure support for MMP. We first use an evaluation of the fairness of MMP compared to FPP. In turn, these evaluations of fairness are expected to influence whether a respondent thinks MMP has been a disaster or a success. Finally, to examine the indirect and direct effects of support for proportionality and our other scales, we estimate a model predicting whether respondents would vote to retain MMP. Attitudes toward a particular electoral system should be antecedent to whether or not an individual would behave in a way that reflects these attitudes.

The results in Table 8 show that support for the concept of proportionality and coalition governments do influence support for MMP. Those who prefer proportional electoral results are more likely to think MMP is fairer and MMP has been a success. However, support for coalition governments has a stronger effect on support for MMP. In the second model, even after controlling for evaluations of the fairness of MMP, support for proportionality and coalitions still affect whether or not a respondent believes MMP has been a success, although the effects are almost half when controlling for fairness. However, the direct effects of proportionality on retaining MMP (the third model) disappear when controlling for both fairness and whether a respondent thinks MMP has been a disaster or success.

As expected, the effect of support for proportionality, coalition governments and strategic voting are conditioned by knowledge.¹ These interaction effects between support for abstract concepts and support for a specific electoral system are significant in only the first model. However, they show that the effect of preferring proportional outcomes on thinking MMP is fairer is greatest for the most knowledgeable. One might conclude then that if more citizens knew that MMP fostered proportionality support would be greater. The same conditioned relationship exists for coalition support and preference for strategic voting.

Partisan effects are still evident when controlling for proportionality and coalition governments. National is the reference category. Therefore, those voting for any party other than National is more likely to think that MMP is fairer than someone voting for National. The largest partisan effect is for Green voters. A Green voter is nine times as likely than a National voter to agree rather than not agree that MMP is fairer than FPP. Even Act voters are significantly more likely to think MMP is fairer. These partisan effects are altered when looking at the second model predicting whether MMP has been a success and largely

disappear in the third model. We cannot dismiss partisan effects entirely as some are conditioned by MMP knowledge. Knowledgeable supporters of smaller parties on the left, the Alliance and the Green Party are more likely to say that MMP has been a success.

Finally we see that those who would prefer that voters have a direct influence on the ordering of the party list have a lower probability of supporting MMP. This would suggest that voter assessments of the system are based not just on partisan advantage and electoral outcomes but also on process. Dissatisfaction with the selection and performance of list MPs is likely to have had some influence on shaping attitudes toward the new system. Given that a sizeable majority favours open lists, this finding might suggest one way of reforming the electoral system to achieve greater support.

(Table 8 here)

We have run similar models using the candidate survey. The knowledge scales could not be replicated as the questions were not included in the candidate survey. The strategic voting scale was not replicated either. However, we might assume that candidates are as knowledgeable about MMP and New Zealand politics as the most knowledgeable electors. In addition to the variables hypothesised to influence support for MMP, we include other measures specific to candidates. We might expect those candidates standing as list MPs to be more likely than those standing in electorates to support MMP. Similarly we might expect those standing as both electorate and list MPs to be more favourable. Given that MMP offers candidates two chances of winning a seat in parliament, we might also expect candidates to be more supportive than incumbents. We also include a measure similar to that used in the previous model to measure support for open lists. Unlike the results for the voter survey, this measure is highly skewed; just nine candidates support the idea of having voters choose who appears on the list. The results in Table 9 indicate that evaluations of the fairness of MMP over FPP and candidate's overall assessment of MMP are largely motivated by different factors. Evaluations of fairness are largely based largely on support for proportionality and coalition government. With the exception of Labour, there are no significant differences between National's candidates and candidates from other parties. In contrast, candidates' assessment of MMP appears to be largely driven by partisan self-interest. Compared to National candidates, all other party candidates are more likely to believe MMP is a success. Unlike fairness, support for proportionality has no significant influence on success though preference for coalition government is still significant. When it comes to whether a candidate would vote to retain MMP, evaluations of fairness and assessment of MMP are the strongest predictors. Indeed, none of the other variables are significant, indicating that the effects of partisanship and proportionality are mediated by these other two variables.

While we anticipated that list MPs would be supportive of MMP we find no support for this hypothesis. In addition, incumbents are no less likely to favour MMP than candidates. Unlike the mass opinion data, Maori candidates are no more likely to see MMP as more fair than non-Maori candidates. While women's representation has increased under MMP, we do not find that female candidates are more supportive than their male counterparts. These findings suggest that group based representation is not a factor influencing support for MMP. Finally, we see that those who would prefer that voters choose who appears on the party list are no less supportive.

(Table 9 here)

Conclusion

Our results indicate that elites express much stronger support for MMP than voters. Nevertheless, partisan self interest continues to structure support. Consequently, while elites remain more supportive, they are fairly close to their voters. ACT voters are an exception. They exhibit lower levels of support for MMP than ACT candidates and have a stronger preference for single party government. As a result, their attitudes more closely resemble those held by National voters and candidates. There is some evidence that a large number of ACT voters are strategic rather than sincere voters (Johnston and Vowles 1997). This might help to explain the discrepancy. In addition, the multivariate models show that preference for coalition governments and proportionality strongly condition responses to MMP. For voters, these effects are stronger for those more knowledgeable about MMP. Knowledge also works to enhance the effects of partisan interests on support for MMP. For elites, preference for coalition government and proportional outcomes indirectly influences support for retaining MMP. There is one factor that appears to be responsible for the gap between elite and voter opinion - whether voters or parties should decide the order of election from the list. A majority of voters believe they should decide, and those who do are more likely to be dissatisfied with MMP. In contrast, nearly all the candidates favour closed lists. Therefore, one method for increasing support for MMP and narrowing the gap between elites and voters would be to allow voters some discretion over the order of election from the list.

A committee of New Zealand's Parliament has begun reviewing MMP. Public opinion remains divided, and further change in the system remains an option. An active lobby is likely to continue to promote a return to FPP or similar system, but the most part of submissions favour retaining MMP. The evidence presented here indicates that party elites might be reluctant to embrace any major changes, and, most particularly, those elites in the currently

governing parties which are more disposed to support the new system. To the extent that most parties feel that MMP serves their interest, any change in the system is likely to be minor.

APPENDIX

Variables used in multivariate model (ordered multinomial logit, and binomial logit (keep MMP))

Keep MMP: “ If there had been a referendum held on the electoral system at the same time as the election, how would you have voted?” 1= To Keep MMP; 0 = FPP, an alternative system or DK.

MMP is a disaster/success: Which of the following statements come closest to your view? 1= MMP has been a success and we should keep it; .5 = It is too soon to tell about MMP; 0 = MMP has been a disaster and we should get rid of it as soon as possible.

MMP Fairer: Do you agree or disagree with these statements. MMP is much fairer than the old First Past the Post system. 1 = Agree; .5=Neutral; 0=Disagree.

Proportionality scale: (3 items)

- (1) Imagine that a party wins the most votes in an election with about 40 per cent of the vote. Regardless of whether you liked that party or not, do you think that party should get: 1 = About 40 per cent of the seat; .5 = somewhere between 40 per cent and half; 0 = More than half, so it can easily govern on its own.
- (2) Which of the following is more important to you? 1 = Parties have about the same percentage of seats as their per cent of the party vote; 0 = One party has more than half the seats in parliament, so it can easily govern on its own.
- (3) How much do you disagree or agree with these opinions about what election should do? An election should give each party a percentage of the seats in parliament equal to its per cent of the party vote. 1= Strongly agree, .75 = Agree, .5=Neutral, .25 = Disagree, 0 = Strongly disagree.

Coalition government scale: (2 items)

- (1) Generally speaking, do you prefer: 1 = A coalition government made up of more than one party, 0 = A government made up of a single party.
- (2) How much do you disagree or agree with these opinions about what election should do? An election should ensure that only one party is needed to form a government. 1= Strongly disagree, .75 = Disagree, .5=Neutral, .25 = Agree, 0 = Strongly agree.

Strategic voting scale: (2 items) Do you agree or disagree with these statements?

- (1) Splitting your votes is always more effective than casting them both for the same party. 1 = Agree; .5=Neutral; 0=Disagree.
- (2) I do not see the point of having two votes under MMP. 1 = Disagree; .5=Neutral; 0=Agree.

MMP knowledge scale: (3 items)

- (1) The party votes usually decide the total number of seats each party gets in Parliament. 1=Correct; 0 = Incorrect.
- (2) A party that wins less than 5% of the party vote and wins no electorates at all cannot win any seats. 1=Correct; 0 = Incorrect.
- (3) With MMP New Zealanders now have two votes, one for a party, and one for a candidate in their electorate. Which do you think is the most important in deciding which party will get the largest number of seats in Parliament? 1=Party vote; 0 = Otherwise.

General political knowledge: (3 items)

- (1) The term of Parliament is four years. 1=Correct; 0 = Incorrect.
- (2) Cabinet Ministers must be MPs. 1=Correct; 0 = Incorrect.
- (3) The New Zealand Parliament once had an Upper House. 1=Correct; 0 = Incorrect.

Open lists

Voters, not parties, should decide which of the candidates on the party list get the seats the party has won. 1=voters should decide .5=Neutral 0=voters should not decide.

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¹ To avoid problems of multicollinearity, each of the interaction effects have been entered separately. The other estimates are not changed.

Table 1. Vote to Retain MMP (1993-1999)

	Labour		National		Alliance		NZ First		Act		Green	
	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C
1993*	67.8	72.2	23.9	15.4	82.0	100.0	69.0	95.3				
(n)	(656)	(54)	(742)	(39)	(400)	(79)	(168)	(43)				
1996	59.1	56.7	24.5	18.2	75.0	95.8	68.3	88.2	46.7	53.7		
(n)	(1301)	(60)	(1427)	(44)	(416)	(48)	(669)	(34)	(379)	(54)		
1999	43.9	55.8	22.8	22.0	55.5	81.5	58.3	69.2	26.9	63.8	62.2	90.2
(n)	(1822)	(52)	(1438)	(41)	(366)	(54)	(199)	(26)	(335)	(47)	(241)	(51)

Q: Percent who say they would vote to keep MMP if an election were being held today.

*Reported vote on referendum to replace FPP with MMP

Table 2: Assessment of MMP

	Labour		National		Alliance		NZ First		Act		Green	
	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C
MMP has been a disaster and we should get rid of it	22.4	3.6	45.5	54.5	14.3		21.0	7.7	42.8	6.3	7.6	
MMP has been a success and we should keep it	12.8	21.8	5.2	11.4	21.5	60.0	19.5	46.2	9.6	37.5	23.9	76.0
It is too soon to tell about MMP	55.7	72.7	42.1	34.1	55.9	38.2	50.5	46.2	44.6	56.3	58.8	24.0
Don't know	9.1	1.8	7.2		8.3	1.8	9.0		3.0		9.7	
n	55		44		55		26		48		50	

Q: Percent who say they would vote to keep MMP if an election were being held today.

Table 3: MMP Is Fairer than FPP

	Labour		National		Alliance		NZ First		Act		Green	
	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C
Agree	47.3	79.6	26.6	34.9	63.6	100.0	60.6	80.0	43.8	79.2	77.0	100.0
Neutral	20.0	11.1	22.7	34.9	15.0		14.3	4.0	21.2	14.6	8.0	
Disagree	21.9	5.6	42.8	30.2	13.2		16.0	16.0	30.8	6.3	7.0	
Don't know	10.8	3.7	7.9		8.2		9.1		4.1		8.0	
n	1592	54	1255	43	319	55	175	25	292	48	213	52

Q: Percent who say they would vote to keep MMP if an election were being held today.

Table 4: Preference for Coalition or Single Party Government

	Labour		National		Alliance		NZ First		Act		Green	
	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C
A government made up of a single party	40.0	41.5	64.3	69.8	20.1	5.5	25.3	26.9	47.6	14.6	15.5	2.0
A coalition government made up of more than one party	50.3	54.7	27.6	23.3	72.3	90.9	64.1	73.1	40.1	75.0	73.2	94.1
Don't know	8.5	3.8	6.9	7.0	6.3	3.6	7.1		9.0	10.4	10.5	3.9
n	1816	53	1430	43	364	55	198	26	334	48	239	51

Q: Percent who say they would vote to keep MMP if an election were being held today.

Table 5: Attitudes Toward Proportionality: Manufactured Majority

	Labour		National		Alliance		NZ First		Act		Green	
	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C
About 40 percent of the seats in Parliament	42.0	70.4	39.4	43.9	56.8	89.1	44.7	80.0	54.4	83.3	67.4	94.2
More than half of the seats, so it can govern on its own	18.4	1.9	25.3	29.3	11.1		16.6	12.0	19.0	6.3	4.2	
Somewhere between 40 percent and half the seats	22.2	22.2	19.0	19.5	17.5	7.3	16.6	8.0	15.1	8.3	21.6	5.8
Don't know	16.9	5.6	15.3	7.3	13.0	3.6	18.1		10.3	2.1	6.4	
n	1814	54	1429	41	361	55	199	25	331	48	236	52

Q: Imagine that a party wins the most votes with 40 percent of the votes....do you think that the party should get...

Table 6: Proportionality Vs. Single Party Government:

	Labour		National		Alliance		NZ First		Act		Green	
	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C	V	C
Which is more important: One party has more than half the seats in Parliament, so it can govern alone	38.6	9.4	53.4	54.8	21.2	1.8	30.8	19.2	39.9	10.4	9.6	
Parties have about the same percentage of seats as their percent of the vote	48.9	88.7	35.5	38.1	67.9	98.2	57.9	76.9	51.7	87.5	83.3	100.0
Don't know	12.6	1.9	11.1	7.1	11.0		11.3	3.8	8.4	2.1	7.1	
n	1813	53	1431	43	364	55	195	25	333	48	240	52

Q: Percent who say they would vote to keep MMP if an election were being held today.

Table 7: Changes in Understanding of Two Votes: Which Vote is Most Important?

	Party Vote	Both Equally	Electorate Vote	Don 't Know	n
1996 Pre-election ^a	71%	8.1	13	7.9	4376
1996 Post-election ^b	56.6	25.9	9.5	8.1	4951
1999 Pre-election ^c	49.7	35.1	10.2	5	3405
1999 Post-election ^d	57	27.2	9.4	6.4	5596

^aWhich vote do you think will be most important in deciding which party will get the largest number of seats in Parliament? (Phone survey. Response categories not read out loud.)

^bQuestion wording: (Same intro as pre-election) Which vote do you think will be most important in deciding which party will get the largest number of seats in Parliament?

(Postal questionnaire. Answer categories: Party vote, Both equally, Electorate vote or Don't know.)

^cWhich vote do you think will be most important in deciding which party will get the largest number of seats in Parliament?

the party vote, the electorate vote, or would you say they are equally important? (Phone survey.)

^dQuestion wording: With MMP New Zealanders now have two votes, one for a party, and one for a candidate in their electorate.

Which do you think is the most important in deciding which party will get the largest number of seats in Parliament?

(Postal questionnaire. Answer categories: Party vote, Both equally, Electorate vote or Don't know.)

Table 8: Knowledge, Attitudes toward Proportionality and Support for MMP

	MMP Fairer than FPP		MMP Has Been a Success		Would Vote to Keep MMP	
	estimate	s.e.	estimate	s.e.	estimate	s.e.
Threshold (Dep. Var. =0)	3.04 **	(0.26)	2.42 **	(0.28)	-3.88 **	(0.37)
Threshold (Dep. Var. =.5)	4.68 **	(0.27)	7.04 **	(0.31)		
MMP Fairer			3.40 **	(0.14)	2.55 **	(0.18)
Too Soon					-0.04	(0.11)
Disaster					-6.46 **	(1.40)
Support for Proportionality	1.58 **	(0.16)	0.71 **	(0.17)	0.38	(0.21)
Support for Coalitions	2.48 **	(0.12)	1.50 **	(0.15)	1.81 **	(0.16)
Support for Strategic Voting	1.98 **	(0.13)	1.09 **	(0.16)	0.72 **	(0.20)
MMP Knowledge	-0.03	(0.17)	-0.23	(0.14)	0.10	(0.20)
General Political Knowledge	0.27 *	(0.14)	-0.21	(0.15)	0.01	(0.18)
Open list preference	-0.41 **	(0.07)	-0.32 **	(0.08)	-0.20 *	(0.09)
Labour	0.65 **	(0.09)	0.47 **	(0.10)	0.33	(0.28)
Alliance	0.91 **	(0.17)	-0.27	(0.45)	0.20	(0.19)
NZ First	0.98 **	(0.21)	0.21	(0.21)	0.80 **	(0.27)
Act	0.30 *	(0.15)	-0.50 **	(0.17)	-0.36	(0.22)
Green	1.53 **	(0.25)	-0.71	(0.57)	-0.06	(0.21)
Other	0.61 **	(0.16)	0.11	(0.17)	0.32	(0.21)
Did not vote	0.39 **	(0.12)	0.29 *	(0.14)	-0.12	(0.17)
Female	-0.05	(0.07)	-0.09	(0.08)	-0.52 **	(0.10)
Age (/10 years)	-0.02	(0.03)	-0.01	(0.03)	0.03	(0.03)
Education	0.08 *	(0.03)	0.01	(0.04)	0.06	(0.04)
Public Employee	0.09	(0.09)	0.17	(0.09)	-0.17	(0.11)
Union Member	-0.07	(0.08)	0.13	(0.08)	-0.12	(0.11)
Maori	0.53 **	(0.13)	0.52 **	(0.13)	0.21	(0.15)
Proportionality*Knowledge	0.41 **	(0.16)				
Coalitions*Knowledge	0.39 **					
Strategic*Knowledge	0.36 **					
Alliance * Knowledge			1.00 ^a	(0.53)		
Green * Knowledge			1.63 *	(0.66)		
Pseudo R2 (Cox & Snell)						
*p < .05; **p < .01; n=4140						
^a p = .058	0.44		0.51		0.47	

Source: NZES Elector Survey, 1999

Table 9: Attitudes toward Proportionality and Support for MMP (Candidates)

	MMP Fairer than FPP		MMP Has Been a Success		Would Vote to Keep MMP	
	estimate	s.e.	estimate	s.e.	estimate	s.e.
Threshold (Dep. Var. =0)	1.37	(1.96)	4.92	** (1.50)	-1.09	(2.03)
Threshold (Dep. Var. =.5)	2.79	(1.98)	9.32	** (1.67)		
MMP Fairer Too Soon			2.68	** (0.67)	1.71	* (0.78)
Disaster					-0.90	* (0.40)
Support for Proportionality	2.79	** (0.97)	1.81	(1.05)	-9.45	(17.50)
Support for Coalitions	2.45	** (0.56)	1.88	** (0.54)	1.21	(1.28)
Open list preference	0.52	(0.88)	1.10	(0.64)	1.10	(0.64)
Labour	1.40	* (0.56)	-0.49	(0.72)	0.08	(0.99)
Alliance	21.72	(0.00)	1.56	** (0.57)	0.09	(0.66)
NZ First	1.03	(0.74)	2.55	** (0.61)	0.90	(0.69)
Act	0.84	(0.56)	2.73	** (0.70)	1.32	(0.87)
Green	21.72	(0.00)	2.01	** (0.59)	0.61	(0.67)
Female	0.30	(0.47)	3.19	** (0.64)	1.11	(0.76)
Age (/10 years)	-0.02	(0.03)	-0.20	(0.30)	-0.05	(0.38)
Education	0.17	(0.21)	0.00	(0.02)	0.00	(0.02)
Public Employee	0.46	(0.49)	0.31	* (0.14)	-0.05	(0.18)
Maori	-0.34	(1.26)	0.26	(0.32)	-0.42	(0.40)
List Candidate	-0.23	(0.64)	-0.69	(0.97)	-0.46	(1.07)
Both List and Electorate Candidate	0.26	(0.47)	0.24	(0.48)	0.48	(0.70)
Incumbent	-0.46	(0.57)	0.04	(0.35)	-0.82	(0.48)
			0.16	(0.46)	0.22	(0.62)
Pseudo r ² (Cox and Snell)	0.35		0.46		0.35	

p < .05; p < .01; n=282

Source: NZES Candidate Survey 1999