CHAPTER 9

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND REPRESENTATION

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> . . . social representation . . . refers to whether the composition of legislatures reflects the society from which they are drawn, in terms of politically salient cleavages like gender, class, language, and ethnicity.
> — Norris 1996

Democratic politics everywhere, regardless of the role of referendums (see Chapter 10), are founded on representation. MPs elected to Parliament may bring their personal attributes with them, but they are there to speak not for themselves but as the representatives of various wider interests, some clear-cut, others shifting or informal. Most obviously, they represent their respective parties. The equally long tradition of geographical representation is present in the country's 61 General electorates, while six separate Maori electorates in 1999 ensured the representation of New Zealand's indigenous population. The process of group-interest representation is generally thought to be strengthened when in the hands of an MP who is visibly of that group.

The Royal Commission which recommended MMP believed that the introduction of proportional representation (PR) would improve the quality of political representation in various ways (RCES 1986, 50–1, 63) Those campaigning for MMP in the lead-up to the 1993 referendum also made much of this section of the commission's report. They maintained that among the advantages of the new voting system was the expectation that there would be a more diverse representation of interests in Parliament, which would then better reflect New Zealand society. Aside from the enhanced representation of small parties, groups such as Maori and women were likely to improve their representation under MMP by means of the party lists. While improving descriptive representation in this way and providing for proportional outcomes, MMP would also retain some of the advantages of first past the post. Through the preservation of single member districts, citizens would continue to choose their individual representatives, and those MPs continue to have an incentive to serve as local advocates. By diversifying representation, MMP was also expected to promote greater policy responsiveness among politicians and parties. Under FPP, parties had a strong incentive to appeal to the broadest

possible audience to win the most votes. The result was a system often characterised by two large parties sharing often very similar platforms. In a PR system, parties can maintain greater ideological purity and cater more specifically to their core supporters. This increases the number of parties competing for votes and offers clearer choices to voters. Such improvements in representation and policy articulation were in turn expected to strengthen satisfaction with the democratic process. Advocates of the new system argued further that PR would not only be fairer than FPP in the proportional allocation of parliamentary seats, but would also encourage a politics of consensus, requiring cooperation between several parties to achieve effective government, in contrast to the dominance in government of one party, and the resulting adversarial nature of politics under FPP. In this chapter we examine the extent to which MMP has met these expectations.

Attitudes toward Descriptive Representation

There is a growing expectation that Parliament and governments will mirror the diversity of society, that MPs collectively will not only represent this diversity in what they do, but in what they are. Peter Fraser's cabinet (1943–46) of fifteen men, with an average age of 58, the youngest being 43, would now evoke derision (Bassett and King 200, 259–60). After an election the proportions of women and Maori are promptly tallied, and notable newcomers identified in the media — an MP of Chinese descent (Pansy Wong, National, 1996), a Samoan (Taito Phillip Field, Labour, 1996), the first Rastafarian (Nandor Tanczos, Green party, 1999), and the first transsexual (Georgina Beyer, Labour, 1999). Heterogeneity has become, if not an end in itself, then at least a accepted attribute of the House of Representatives.

MMP delivered a more representative and a slightly more diverse Parliament. Following the first MMP election in 1996 the proportion of Maori in Parliament doubled from 6 to 13 per cent and the proportion of women increased from 21 to 29 per cent. In the second MMP election in 1999, women and Maori were able to maintain but not improve on their representation in Parliament. As comparative research has demonstrated, party lists enhance the representation of women (see e.g. Darcy, Welch and Clark 1994; Rule 1994). Whereas only 16 per cent of women entered Parliament by winning an electorate seat in 1996, 46 per cent entered via the party list. In 1999, a slightly lower percentage of women entered through the party list but 24 per cent won electorate contests. As for Maori MPs, similar proportions were elected in party list and electorate seats.

Improved representation for women and Maori is reflected in the electorate's changing attitude toward descriptive representation. In 1993 the unrepresentative nature of Parliament had been highlighted in the campaign for MMP, whereas it was a much less prominent issue in 1996 and 1999. In 1993, 60 per cent of the electorate believed that there should be more women MPs. Immediately following the 1996 election, the proportion holding this view was reduced by half. Similarly, the proportion believing that Maori representation should increase was reduced from 44 per cent in 1993 to just 17 per cent in

1996. This proportion was almost unchanged in 1998, while opposition to an increase doubled, possibly reflecting the fact that Maori were now represented in Parliament in almost exact proportion to their numbers in the 1991 census, and expressing also respondents' judgement of the erratic performance of some Maori MPs since the election. Yet when respondents were reminded in 1998 that women comprised about 30 per cent of the MPs in Parliament, more thought the number should be increased.[1] By the 1999 election, however, concern for the composition of Parliament appears to have fallen away again, especially among non-Maori respondents, a trend evident since 1993 (Table 9.1).

Greater representation of minorities has been shown in the United States to lead to greater trust in government and to higher levels of political interest and rates of participation in elections on the part of minority citizens (Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Vanderleeuw and Utter 1993; Lublin and Tate 1995). We do not know, however, how far these generalisations might apply to New Zealand, given that Maori have been guaranteed at least limited representation since 1867. As Tate (1991) suggests, once minority representation is achieved, interest and thus turnout decline, negating some of the gains expected from representation.

Maori have long been assured representation through the creation of separate Maori electorates that are defined territorially but overlap with the General electorates. While guaranteeing a Maori presence in Parliament, the creation of four separate Maori electorates also helped to preserve their under-representation. At the time the seats were created, the Maori population was around 50,000, compared to a European population of 250,000, represented by 72 MPs (Sorrenson 1986, B–21). The number of Maori electorates, and correspondingly of Maori Members of Parliament, remained unchanged from 1867 until the passage of the Electoral Act of 1993.

According to some scholars, descriptive representation has not resulted in substantive policy responsiveness to minority interests. Wide gaps remain between Maori and New Zealand Europeans in educational attainment, income, health and prison rates (Sullivan 1997). Disillusionment with Labour's perceived ineffectiveness in promoting Maori issues together with its monopoly over the Maori electorates until the 1993 election may have contributed to growing alienation among Maori in the early 1990s (Sullivan and Vowles 1998). If we are to assume that the roots of Maori discontent lie in part in under-representation, then we may expect to see the recent gains in Maori representation leading to improvements in political support among Maori. The effects of under-representation on political cynicism may also be strong for Maori since they appear to place a greater emphasis on descriptive representation than other under-represented groups, such as women (see Banducci and Karp 1998).

As the data in Table 9.1 show, although fewer Maori than previously believe that their representation should be increased, a substantial proportion (44 per cent in 1999) continue to desire further representation. A majority of Maori also favour an increase in the proportion of women represented in Parliament, and the difference between Maori and non-Maori is greater on female representation than on Maori representation. These opinions have some

influence on attitudes toward governmental responsiveness or external efficacy. Those who believe that Maori should be better represented are also more likely (77 per cent) than those who do not (67 per cent), to believe that MPs are out of touch. This suggests that attitudes toward responsiveness can be partly explained by the degree to which minorities feel properly represented.

As is evident from Table 9.1, Maori place a greater emphasis on descriptive representation than non-Maori. Not only are Maori consistently more likely to believe in furthering their own representation, they are also more likely to favour increased representation for women. Whereas the proportion of non-Maori who believed that there should be more women representatives in Parliament had declined to 20 per cent in 1999, a majority of Maori continued to believe that there should be more.

Table 9.1 Attitudes toward Descriptive Representation (1993–99)

	1993		1996		1998		1999	
Non-Maori	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
More Women MPs	59	19	23	13	41	35	20	15
More Maori MPs	41	31	11	30	16	57	6	32
Maori only								
More Women MPs	75	10	40	4	55	28	52	8
More Maori MPs	83	7	57	3	43	32	44	13
Total								
More Women MPs	60	18	30	15	42	32	22	14
More Maori MPs	44	29	14	28	18	55	10	29

NOTE: Row percentages do not add up to 100 because those who responded 'depends on candidate' or 'don't know' are not reported. The sample size in 1993 for Maori is 139, and for non-Maori is 2106; in 1996, Maori 390, non-Maori 3591; in 1999, Maori 1000, non-Maori 4461.

Attitudes toward descriptive representation are also manifested in support for the separate Maori electorates and appear to influence the decision on which roll to register — the Maori roll or the General roll. Despite its long history, separate Maori representation remains a controversial issue in New Zealand. As the data in Table 9.2 reveal, in 1993, 43 per cent of non-Maori wanted the seats abolished and just 11 per cent thought the number should be increased. Although this indicates strong resentment against the seats, many non-Maori also believed at the time that there should be more Maori MPs (see Table 9.1). This suggests that non-Maori respondents were often drawing a distinction between the means and the ends, the presence of separate and guaranteed representation being more contentious than the number of Maori MPs.

Consistent with this view, the Royal Commission had proposed that if MMP were adopted the separate Maori seats should be abolished, contending that they were no longer necessary to guarantee representation. Maori,

however, expressed strong support for the preservation of the seats. As a compromise, the Electoral Act of 1993 allows the seats to be retained but their numbers may rise or fall depending on how many Maori choose to register on the Maori roll. After each five-year census, the drawing of the new electoral boundaries begins with a four-month Maori Electoral Option, during which time those who indicate on their enrolment forms that they are of Maori descent are sent letters asking them to choose between registering on the Maori or the General roll. Because the number of Maori seats is determined by enrolment, taking the Maori option is more important, at least in terms of descriptive representation, than voting. As Table 9.2 reveals, a majority of Maori who have opted to be on the Maori rolls desire further representation. In contrast, while Maori on the General rolls are more supportive of the seats than non-Maori they are about half as likely to want further representation than those taking the Maori option.

As of 1999, the electorate remained divided over the question of the Maori seats. Nevertheless there appears to be a consensus among Maori and non-Maori alike that whether or not the Maori seats are retained is a matter for all New Zealanders. While in 1999 a similar proportion of non-Maori as in 1993 believed they should be abolished, slightly more believe they should be retained. Among Maori, particularly those on the Maori rolls, the separate seats were still highly valued. Thus, at least for the foreseeable future, they will likely remain one of the unique features of the New Zealand electoral system.

Table 9.2: Opinions about Maori Seats over Time and by Enrolment Status

	Maori				Non-Maori	
	Roll Status					
	1993	1999			1993	1999
Future of Seats	All	Maori	General	All		
Have more Maori seats	74	51	25	38	11	4
Keep the six we have now	15	39	52	46	27	41
Get rid of Maori seats	6	5	15	10	43	43
Who Decides?						
Maori	54	34	18	27	26	20
All New Zealanders	38	63	79	70	62	75
N	123	514	405	1000	1885	4505

SOURCE: 1993, 1999 NZES; 1999 NZES Maori survey

Attitudes toward the Political Process

Recently, research has emphasised the importance that institutions have on influencing levels of popular support for the political system (see Lijphart 1999; Anderson and Guillory 1997). Specifically, in consensual systems based

on proportional representation, winners and losers alike exhibit generally higher levels of satisfaction with democracy than under majoritarian systems. New Zealand's change from majoritarian FPP to consensus MMP thus forms an interesting test case of the hypothesis over time (almost all empirical studies being based on cross-national analysis).

The evidence in the NZES surveys appears to confirm these findings. Overall, the New Zealand electorate has become somewhat more satisfied with the political process after the introduction of MMP, indicating that the change of electoral system may have succeeded in generating more positive views toward the political process. As Table 9.3 shows, on most indicators the most substantial changes occurred between the last election held under FPP in 1993 and the first election held under MMP in 1996. In particular, more voters came to see that their votes really mattered, fewer thought that their MPs did not care or were out of touch, and fewer thought that government was run by a few big interests (see also Banducci, Donovan, and Karp 1999). Nearly three-quarters of the electorate expressed satisfaction with the democratic process. Although we have no similar measure of satisfaction prior to MMP, this level of support is high compared to many other advanced democracies (Karp and Bowler 2001).

These positive trends during the transition to proportional representation can be seen in part as a reflection of growing optimism about the new system. Yet such optimism appeared to be short-lived. Lengthy coalition talks followed by New Zealand First's decision to enter into a coalition with National were heavily criticised and surveys suggested a loss in confidence in both the government and the political process itself. When opinions were sampled in July 1998, dissatisfaction with the coalition government was high; half the electorate strongly disapproved of the way the coalition government was handling its job whereas just 15 per cent approved. When asked whether government could be trusted to do what is right, just 26 per cent agreed while two-thirds believed the government could not be trusted. Previously in 1996, New Zealanders were more reluctant to distrust government. While 30 per cent had said they could trust government, 44 per cent disagreed and 26 per cent were unsure. But the levels of discontent were not confined to the government. Satisfaction with democracy dropped from 73 per cent to 45 per cent. Close to a majority (42 per cent) agreed that MMP was a disaster and that the country should be rid of it as soon as possible. Three-quarters of the electorate believed that MPs were out of touch, an increase of 20 per cent. Such a substantive decline in support for the democratic system would pose a challenge, or even a crisis of democracy (see Fuchs and Klingemann 1995, 22).

The lack of experience with coalition politics together with the formation of a coalition that was neither expected nor desired may explain New Zealanders' reaction to MMP (see Chapter 11). As the experience of the National–New Zealand First coalition suggests, disillusionment with political processes in general may occur when a government is formed that is contrary to the expectations created by the election campaign. Such perceptions seem to have furthered the belief that politicians were out of touch and diminished the system's legitimacy. If such attitudes reflect dissatisfaction with the National–New Zealand First coalition, we might find greater levels of support

for democratic processes over time as citizens in New Zealand experience elections that produce a more consensual (and expected) outcome. Unlike the previous election, in 1999 both Labour and the Alliance made their coalition intentions clear and pre-election surveys suggested (and later confirmed) that the centre-left would have enough support to govern.

During the 1999 campaign, pre-election surveys suggested that attitudes about the political process had recovered to levels comparable to 1996. At the beginning of the campaign, eight out of ten voters believed that their vote really counts in elections. With a number of parties and candidates courting their votes over the campaign, the percentage agreeing that their vote counts increased slightly to 85 per cent. We expect that this same courting would make MPs appear more responsive to voters. At the start of the 1999 campaign, about 75 per cent believed that MPs are out touch, almost the same proportion as measured in July 1998. But over the first five weeks of the campaign, the proportion of those believing that MPs are out of touch declined to a low of 57 per cent. Toward the latter part of the campaign, however, the trend reversed and reached 67 per cent in the last day of polling before the election. While there is some variation in satisfaction with democracy, the percentage satisfied at the beginning of the campaign is very similar to that at the end of the campaign just prior to the election.

After the election, there was a further increase in positive attitudes toward the process, indicating that election outcomes can make a difference. After increasing prior to the election, the evaluation of the responsiveness of MPs improved; the number agreeing that MPs are out of touch decreased to 52 per cent.[2] In particular, supporters of the new government experienced a greater change than those who supported parties that were defeated. Consistent with an increase in responsiveness, the percentage of people who are satisfied with democracy increased after the election to 57 per cent.[3] Nevertheless, compared to 1996, when MMP was first introduced, fewer were satisfied with the way democracy works in 1999. As for efficacy, between pre- and post-election surveys the proportion of those saying their vote counts dropped, indicating lower efficacy. This decline could be explained by a loss of efficacy among supporters of the parties that did not form part of the new government. Among those who did form the government, Labour voters experienced the greatest change, becoming significantly more satisfied with democracy than those who voted for other parties. It is clear that electoral outcomes continue to shape voter attitudes toward the political system, probably much as they always have done.

Opinions about Representatives

The belief that politicians are out of touch or do not care expresses diffuse attitudes toward politicians in general rather than toward specific individuals. As Table 9.4 shows, just half the electorate correctly recalled the name of their electorate MP, while list MPs have an even lower profile.[4] Just 19 per cent of respondents could give the name of any person when asked if they knew anything about a list MP. Within this group, 15 per cent named an existing list

Table 9.3: Changes in Political Attitudes over Time (% in agreement)

	1993	1996	1998	1999
MPs out of touch	61	53	76	52
People like me have no say	63	57	—	55
Politicians don't care what people think	66	57	—	55
Government is run by a few big interests	60	54	—	50
Satisfaction with democracy	—	73	45	57
Trust Government to do what is right	31	30	26	36
My vote really counts in elections*	75	85	66	77
N	2205	4086	535	5601

NOTE: All data are based on post-election surveys except for the survey conducted in July 1998.
* In 1996, the question was asked slightly differently: 'My party vote really counts in elections'.

MP and the other 4 per cent an electorate MP, usually in their area. Not surprisingly the list MPs that received a great deal of media scrutiny were those that New Zealanders remembered most. 'Party hoppers' had a higher profile among list MPs than their numbers deserved: they made up 25 per cent of those mentioned, and nearly four out of five of these respondents named one party hopper, Alamein Kopu (see Chapter 1). Knowledge of electorate MPs is considerably higher. About half of the respondents correctly recalled the name of their electorate MP, indicating that electorate MPs do indeed have a higher profile.

When our respondents were asked about the way in which the local electorate MP handled his or her job, about one-third approved, compared to only 18 per cent who approved of the way MPs in general handled their job. Even more significant is the difference between local electorate MPs and list MPs, with only 7 per cent approving of the latter group's performance. Yet, approval of both list and General electorate MPs is higher among those who correctly recalled the name of their electorate MP or any list MP. Among Maori, just 11 per cent approved of either Maori list MPs or Maori electorate MPs in general. About one in every four Maori could recall the name of a Maori list MP while a similar proportion of those on the Maori rolls recalled the name of their electorate MP. Whereas Maori were less likely to recall the name of their Maori electorate MP than non-Maori, they were more likely than non-Maori to recall the name of a Maori list MP.[5] The higher name recognition of Maori list MPs reflects the visibility of Alamein Kopu, whose name was recalled by 20 per cent of Maori. Approval among those who correctly recalled the name of a Maori list MP is about the same as those in the general election survey. There is evidence of greater dissatisfaction with the Maori electorate MPs, which helps to explain their resounding defeat in 1999 (see Chapter 5).

When the NZES questions moved from ascertaining people's superficial knowledge and evaluation of representatives to measuring the more demanding linkages that depend on the political involvement of respondents, rather than the behaviour of an MP, far fewer reported having any contact with either an

electorate or list MP. Whereas almost half the electorate could recall the name of their electorate MP in 1999, only about a fifth reported having had some contact with an electorate MP over the previous twelve months (a similar proportion to that having reported contact in the past two elections). The proportion reporting contact with a list MP is about 3 per cent lower still. Contact is lower for both Maori electorate and list MPs. One in ten Maori reported having any contact with their Maori electorate MP, while just 6 per cent reported having contact with a Maori list MP. As Table 9.4 shows, approval of both electorate and list MPs is much higher among those who reported having contact with either representative.

Table 9.4 Opinions about Electorate and List MPs, 1999

	Percent who recall name correctly	Percent who approve regardless of name recall	Percent approval of those who recall name	Percent having contact	Percent approval of those having contact
General electorate MP	50	34	45	19	64
Specific list MP	16	—	43	16	72
List MPs in general	—	7	—	—	—
MPs in general	—	18	—	—	—
Maori electorate MP	27	19	34	11	36
Specific Maori list MP	28	—	42	6	76
Maori list MPs in general	—	11	—	—	—
Maori MPs in general	—	11	—	—	—

NOTE: Data on opinions about General electorate MPs, specific list MPs, list MPs in general and MPs in general are from the post-election survey (N=4816). The data on opinions about Maori MPs are from the Maori survey that includes only those who identify as Maori (N=1000). Evaluations of Maori electorate MPs are for those on the Maori rolls.

Evidence from Germany has long indicated that many people there find it difficult to distinguish between electorate and list MPs (Bawn 1999). In New Zealand, by contrast, the distinction is clear. In part this may be related to the introduction of MMP. New Zealanders had no experience with party lists to elect their representatives, and consequently their use raised questions of legitimacy and accountability. In the debates before the 1993 referendum which authorised the change to MMP, opponents of the new system attempted to discredit it by focusing on the use of closed lists, raising the spectre of MPs defeated in their electorates being returned to the House as list MPs, having secured a favourable place on their party's list by deferring to party 'bosses'. To whom were such representatives accountable? Such a question played on the long tradition of FPP elections in which MPs, no matter how small the plurality which had elected them, claimed a direct mandate from their constituents. Following the first MMP election, cartoons, TV political satire, and the print media contributed to a growing perception that there were two types

of MPs and that list MPs were 'second-class' (see Ward 1998). In part, these perceptions may have been shaped by their perceived lack of legitimacy. But the behaviour of certain list MPs also helped to stimulate the criticism. List MPs rapidly became the focus of public concern, particularly with the departure of Alamein Kopu from the Alliance to become a government-aligned Independent, and the experience of other 'party hoppers'. While party hoppers included electorate as well as list MPs, the reputation of list MPs suffered most from that process. Post-election data in 1999 show that just over 80 per cent of respondents would approve of legislation to discourage party hopping. And those who support such legislation are more likely to disapprove of list MPs than those who do not.

While New Zealanders express fairly strong support for the principle of proportionality (see Chapter 11), there is far less support for the use of closed party lists to achieve that outcome, and a clear preference instead for open lists enabling voters to directly influence which candidates might be elected. When asked whether voters and not parties should decide which of the candidates on the party list should get seats in Parliament, 57 per cent agreed, compared to just 16 per cent who disagreed. Table 9.5 shows that opinions about the method for deciding the party list is influenced by approval of list MPs. Those who approve of the performance of list MPs are divided about whether voters or parties should decide the party list while two-thirds of those who disapprove believe that voters should decide the list. Opinions about the method for deciding the party lists also structure opinions toward MMP, suggesting that concerns about accountability are linked to opinions about the electoral system (see Chapter 11).

Table 9.5: Opinions about Open Lists and Approval of List MPs, 1999

	Approval of List MPs		
Voters Should Decide the Party List	Disapprove	Neutral	Approve
Agree	67	54	49
Neutral	15	19	18
Disagree	13	15	28

NOTE: Column percentages do not add up to a hundred because those who responded 'don't know' are not reported. The sample size is 4816.

Priorities of Electorate and List MPs

We have seen that a substantial gap exists in people's knowledge of list and electorate MPs. These differences can be attributed to the fact that electorate MPs have a strong incentive to respond to local interests, and are more generously funded for this purpose than their list colleagues, whereas list MPs have a stronger incentive to respond to party leaders, and develop expertise in issues that transcend local electorates. Indeed, one of the advantages of a mixed system like MMP is that it offers such countervailing electoral incentives (see also Bawn 1999). But differences in priorities between list and electorate MPs

could also account for the lower visibility of list MPs. Data from the candidate survey confirms this.

Table 9.6 reveals substantial differences between list and electorate MPs in the importance they give to representative activities. While both electorate and list candidates attach great importance to committee work, they diverge when it comes to activities representing a specific constituency. Electorate candidates considered representing an electorate as the most important activity for an MP, whereas its importance for list MPs was ranked near the median. Electorate candidates are far more likely to attach importance to casework than list candidates; 52 per cent of electorate candidates believed helping with individual problems was a very important part of an MP's job, compared to just 21 per cent of list candidates. Similarly, nearly half the electorate candidates believed that attending local community functions was very important, compared to 14 per cent of list candidates. For list candidates, dealing with individual problems and attending community functions were the lowest among their priorities. Regional interests were also likely to be given much greater importance by electorate candidates than list candidates. In contrast, a somewhat larger proportion of list candidates believed that developing party policy was very important. Comparing the results from an identical survey conducted of candidates in the 1993 general election reveals that the priorities of electorate MPs have not changed dramatically with the advent of MMP with the exception that party voting is given more importance under MMP than under FPP.

Table 9.6: Importance of Representative Activities by Candidate Type

	1999						1993	
Type of Candidate	Electorate		List		Both		Electorate	
	% very imp.	Order	% very imp.	Order	% very imp.	Order	% very imp.	Order
Representing electorate	79	1	49	5	64	3	82	1
Select committee work	72	2	71	1	71	1	57	4
Holding regular electorate clinics	70	3	57	2	69	2	81	2
Representing regional interests	63	4	36	6	45	6	55	5
Voting with party	56	5	56	3	52	4	17	13
Helping with individual problems	52	6	21	12	43	8	62	3
Developing party policy	49	7	51	4	43	9	43	7
Attending local community functions	49	8	14	13	44	7	36	8
Supporting party leaders	44	9	34	7	31	11	20	12
Working with interest groups	44	10	29	10	41	10	32	9
Attend local party meetings	37	11	29	9	45	5	43	6
Speaking in Parliament	37	12	26	11	30	13	29	10
Being interviewed by media	30	13	32	8	31	12	21	11

SOURCE: NZ Candidate Study, 1999, 1993

Data from the candidate survey presented in Table 9.7 indicate that casework, as well as being given high priority by electorate representatives, is consuming an increasing amount of an MP's time. In 1993, 11 per cent of

incumbents reported spending over 20 hours a week attending local functions. In 1999, the proportion has doubled. In 1993, 55 per cent of incumbents reported spending over 20 hours a week 'dealing with people's problems' and 28 per cent spent over 20 hours a week travelling. In 1999, 65 per cent reported spending over 20 hours a week on casework while 31 per cent reported spending as much time travelling. Aside from casework, more MPs are devoting time to party fund-raising. In 1993, just 6 per cent reported spending over ten hours a week on the activity. In 1999, three-quarters reported spending between 10 and 20 hours on raising funds for the party, while 15 per cent reported spending over 20 hours a week.

Table 9.7: Time Spent by Incumbent MPs

	1999 Hours Per Month			1993 Hours Per Month		
	<10	10 to 20	20+	<10	10 to 20	20+
Speaking at public meetings	54	41	5	87	11	2
Attending local functions	31	49	21	51	38	11
Party fundraising	8	77	15	94	4	2
Dealing with people's problems	8	28	64	15	30	55
Attending party meetings	49	41	10	83	13	4
Traveling	15	54	31	34	38	28
Attending national (non-party) meetings	69	23	7	—	—	—

NOTE: Number of MPs 1999=32; Number of MPs 1993=53
SOURCE: NZ Candidate Study, 1999, 1993

Constituents also appear to be demanding more of their electorate MPs. As Table 9.8 reveals, in an average week in 1993, 11 per cent of the MPs reported receiving at least 50 requests for help with constituents' problems compared to 54 per cent who received less than 25 requests. By 1999, almost half of the electorate MPs reported receiving at least 50 requests for help. The bulk of the increase appears to be handled by the electorate MPs; just one out of the thirteen list MPs in our sample reported receiving as many requests as half of the electorate MPs. These findings contrast with research in Germany which suggest that list MPs receive as much mail from constituents as constituency MPs (Burkett 1985). Our survey suggests that the list MPs are likely not to confine their casework to a single electorate. Of the former list MPs, just 17 per cent report having the most contact with the people they represent in a single electorate; almost half (47 per cent) reported representing people across a wider region including several electorates, and a third (37 per cent) across the whole of New Zealand.

To the extent that the processes of representation include assisting individual constituents, our evidence suggests that the introduction of MMP has had two effects. On the one hand the larger size of the single-member electorates under MMP has raised the case load of many MPs; on the other, however, list members are assuming a complementary service role extending

beyond the boundaries of single electorates, a development of the process that may yet be incomplete.

Table 9.8: Number of Constituents' Problems per Week

	1999		1993
Type of MP	List	Electorate	Electorate
Less than 25	7	16	54
	(8)	(3)	(29)
Between 25–50	31	37	35
	(4)	(7)	(19)
More than 50	8	47	11
	(1)	(9)	(6)

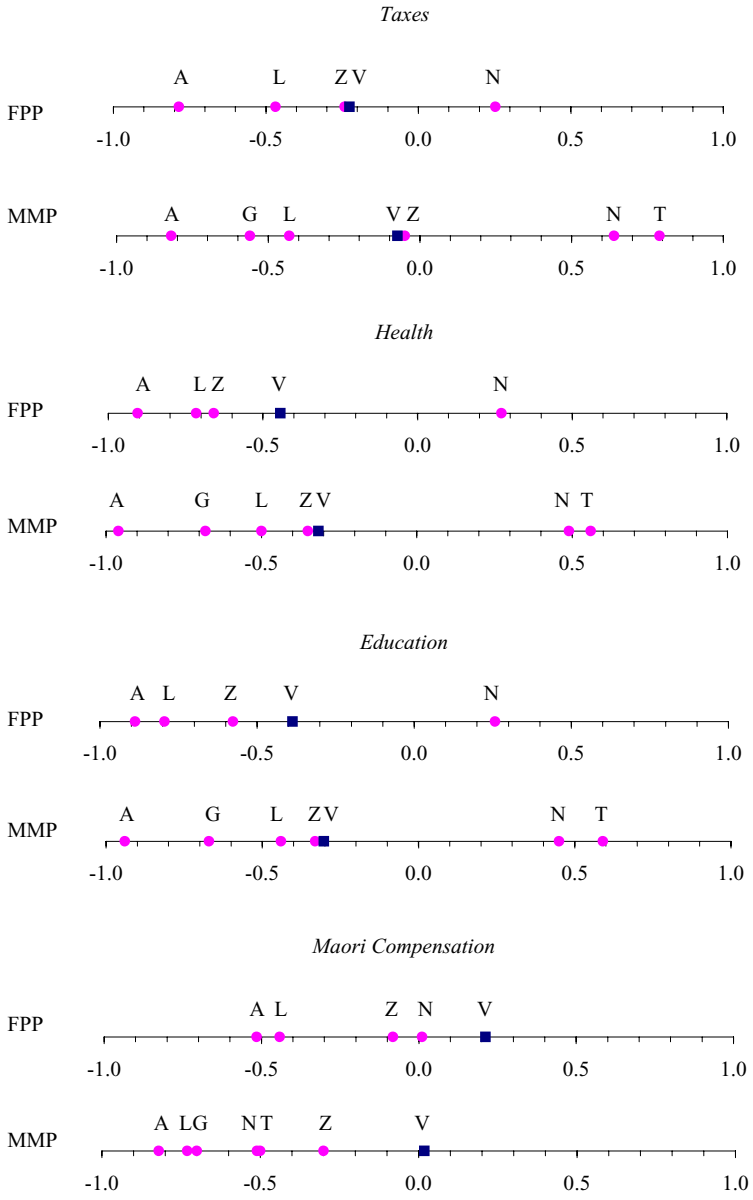
NOTE: Sample size in parentheses
SOURCE: NZ Candidate Study, 1999, 1993

Policy Representation and Electoral System Change

Aside from improving the process of representation, the change in the electoral system was also intended to improve policy representation. In a plurality or FPP system, voters typically have an effective choice of only two political parties that often take similar positions on a range of issues. According to the proximity model of elections, which has been a predominant paradigm in election studies, parties are likely to adopt positions that are closest to their voters. When policy preferences are normally distributed, parties will thus converge to the median or 'average' voter, located in the crowded centre of the political population. Under PR, however, parties can gain representation without winning a plurality of the votes. Parties, therefore, have less of an incentive to widen their appeal to the largest group of voters, allowing them instead to maintain ideological purity. Thus, in a multi-party system, rather than converging toward the median voter, parties will strive to distinguish themselves on ideological and policy matters (Downs 1957, 126–7).[6] In multi-party systems, according to Downs (138), parties tend to 'narrow the spread of their policies, differentiate their platforms more sharply, and reduce ambiguity'. This strategy will have the effect of appealing to the full spectrum of interests in the electorate rather than simply the median voter. Proximity theory thus leads us to anticipate that a transition to PR will result in a more diverse offering of parties competing for representation. Under MMP we therefore expect to find parties distancing themselves more from each other on major issues, rather than converging toward the centre. To explore this tendency we have analysed party positions on seven major issues during the transition to MMP, comparing survey data from the last election under plurality rules in 1993 with the second MMP election in 1999.[7]

Figure 9.1 shows the parties' positions on each issue, derived from the responses in our candidate surveys, while the placement of the mean voter on each, calculated from the mass surveys, is also given. As anticipated, the party

Figure 9.1: Party Positions under FPP and MMP



NOTE: A=Alliance, G=Green, L=Labour, N=National, T=ACT, Z=New Zealand First, V=Mean voter. Note that ACT and the Greens do not appear under FPP rules because they did not exist then.

SOURCE: NZES Candidate and Elector Surveys 1993, 1999.

positions have diverged under MMP, compared to their positions in 1993. The movement has not been great, however, largely because the parties had not

clustered around the mean voter under FPP as much as theory might have led us to expect, except on the issues of superannuation and environment. Nevertheless, compared to 1993, the placement of parties on the issues, as perceived by their candidates in 1999, is more dispersed, partly owing to the emergence of the Greens and ACT as separate players, consistent with the advent of PR, and partly owing to the shifting positions of the parties.

For example, under MMP the distance has increased between the two largest parties, National and Labour, on taxes, National having moved more than twice as far from the centre, perhaps influenced by the appearance of ACT, which occupies a more extreme position. A similar pattern is evident on health and education, two of the most salient issues in both elections. There has been least divergence among the parties on the issue of superannuation, while on environment the Greens especially and less so ACT account for the greater spread of policy positions since 1993. The issue of compensation for Maori is unique, however, in that both before and since PR not only has the spread of party positions been relatively small, compared to other issues, but all parties have clustered on the side of compensation, and to one side of the mean voter. Although in 1999 the mean voter moved closer to a neutral position, the gap to the parties remains as they also have all become more committed to compensation. On overall ideology, the tendency toward a greater party spread under PR is confirmed, as, however, is the weakness of that tendency. As expected, the ACT party emerges under MMP as consistently least committed to government intervention, while with the exception of one issue — environment — the Alliance occupies the opposite pole of the new multi-party continuum.

Conclusion

After two elections under MMP, we are now in a better position to evaluate the impact of electoral system change. One of the most obvious changes has to do with the composition of Parliament. Under MMP, the New Zealand Parliament is more diverse than before, with a larger proportion of women and Maori MPs, along with more parties representing views across the ideological spectrum. These changes in descriptive representation have satisfied many New Zealanders. There is also some evidence that improved representation for Maori has helped increase the perception that government is responsive to their concerns. As a whole, the electorate has become somewhat more content with policy responsiveness and somewhat less cynical. However, the experience of the National–New Zealand First coalition showed that support for democratic processes can be rather fragile. While there have been some improvements over the longer term, most people in New Zealand continue to feel that politicians are unresponsive and unconcerned about the people they represent. In particular, most citizens strongly disapprove of the list MPs and prefer that they be held directly accountable through open lists. While MMP creates some incentives to enhance the responsiveness of MPs, the closed party list system would appear to create the opposite impression. It may also be difficult for list MPs to overcome these stereotypes. They are less well funded to carry out

constituency service and they place a lower priority on such activities than electorate MPs. In addition, few list MPs place much importance on helping individuals with their problems. This may explain why they are less likely to have contact with constituents.

As for policy representation, the change to a PR system may have succeeded in promoting a more diverse representation of interests. Under the FPP system, parties in New Zealand appear to have taken more divergent positions than the proximity model would predict on a range of issues. But on average, parties operating under MMP took even more divergent positions than they had in the past. On such issues as taxes, health, and education, National and Labour have moved farther to the right along with the average voter. Yet other parties, such as the Alliance, have either remained where they were or moved slightly to the left. As a result, voters have greater representation and more choice than in the past. As Barker and McLeay (2000) observe, the larger number of parties under PR means that more voters' preferences are reflected in the policy process than under FPP, when one party was the sole significant source of policy.

In sum, MMP has delivered on its promise to provide greater diversity in Parliament and a greater choice. It is less clear how the change to PR has contributed to greater satisfaction with the democratic process. Most of the positive changes that we have observed in voter attitudes are rather subtle. In some cases, MMP appears to have contributed to voter cynicism by creating two types of MPs that may be held accountable in different ways. If, over the long term, voters develop different expectations for list and electorate MPs, the link between the representative and the represented may be strengthened and New Zealand may well be on its way toward a 'better democracy' — as the Royal Commission intended.