



MMP, Minority Governments and Parliamentary Opposition

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Two questions:

- (1) Why minority governments in recent years?
- (2) What are the implications for parliamentary opposition?

Outline of paper:

- (1) Is there a systematic relationship between electoral systems and government status? No!
- (2) So why minority governments in New Zealand? And why are they so special in a comparative perspective?
Structure of policy competition in the party system. Spatial analysis of party system.
- (3) Implications for parliamentary opposition: from Westminster-type to Scandinavian-type issue-by-issue opposition.
- (4) Will these patterns endure? Probably!

(1) Is there a systematic relationship between electoral systems and government status?

Descriptive statistics for 35 OECD/EU countries, 1990 – 2004, country-years as units of observation (N), in per cent:

	Majoritarian/pluralitarian	List PR	MMP	STV
Single party majority	61.3	12.6	-	-
Coalition majority	34.4	57.7	76.6	46.7
Single party minority	4.3	17.4	2.1	-
Coalition minority	-	12.1	21.3	53.3
N	93	298	47	15

Source: Comparative Political Data Set III (Klaus Armingeon, University of Berne). Own calculations.

- list PR by far the most often used type of electoral system
- in contrast to what many coalition theories assume, minority governments occur relatively often, < 30 per cent
- interestingly, and again against the expectations of coalition theories, we find a large number of coalition minority governments
- minority governments go with all types of electoral system (Canada has, unusually, seen few minority governments in the 1990s), especially in systems with a PR formula. Minority governments occur less often in MMP systems than in other PR systems
- New Zealand is responsible for about half the minority government country years in the MMP category.
- interesting because generally the two-vote element of MMP leads to incentives for ticket-splitting on the side of

voters and, in return, to pre-electoral coalitions on the side of parties.

No systematic relationship between type of electoral system and government status. In the MMP category, New Zealand is a special case.

(2) So why minority governments in New Zealand?

	Election Year					
	1990	1993	1996	1999	2002	2005
National Party	<u>68</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>44</u>	39	27	48
Labour Party	28	45	37	<u>49</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>50</u>
New Labour Party	1	-	-	-	-	-
Alliance	-	2	13	<u>10</u>	-	-
New Zealand First Party	-	2	<u>17</u>	5	13	<u>7</u>
ACT New Zealand	-	-	8	9	9	2
United New Zealand	-	-	1	1	-	-
Green Party of Aotearoa	-	-	-	<u>7</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>6</u>
United Future New Zealand	-	-	-	-	<u>8</u>	<u>3</u>
Progressive Coalition Party	-	-	-	-	<u>2</u>	-
Maori Party	-	-	-	-	-	4
Jim Anderton's Progressive Party	-	-	-	-	-	<u>1</u>
Sum	97	99	120	120	120	121

Note: Parties which form a government after general election are underlined. Parties that support the government without joining it are shaded.

- from 1999 coalition minority governments
- formal agreements with legislative support parties on confidence and supply votes. These were allowed and did vote against the government on non-essential policy issues
- 2005 a very special case with two innovations: (a) Greens formally no longer a legislative support party but still agreed to not vote against the government on supply and

confidence. (b) NZF and United Future do not formally belong to the government but each with a minister outside cabinet.

Why these peculiar arrangements?

Patterns of policy competition in the party system.

Spatial analysis based on CMP data set with Franzmann-Kaiser transformation [Franzmann, Simon/ Kaiser, André (2006): Locating Political Parties in Policy Space. A Reanalysis of Party Manifesto Data, *Party Politics*, 12:2, 163-188]. Data set at <http://www.politik.uni-koeln.de/kaiser/>.

Note: Not all parties included. For the sake of data analysis we need at least three election manifestos of a party to calculate its position on an issue dimension.

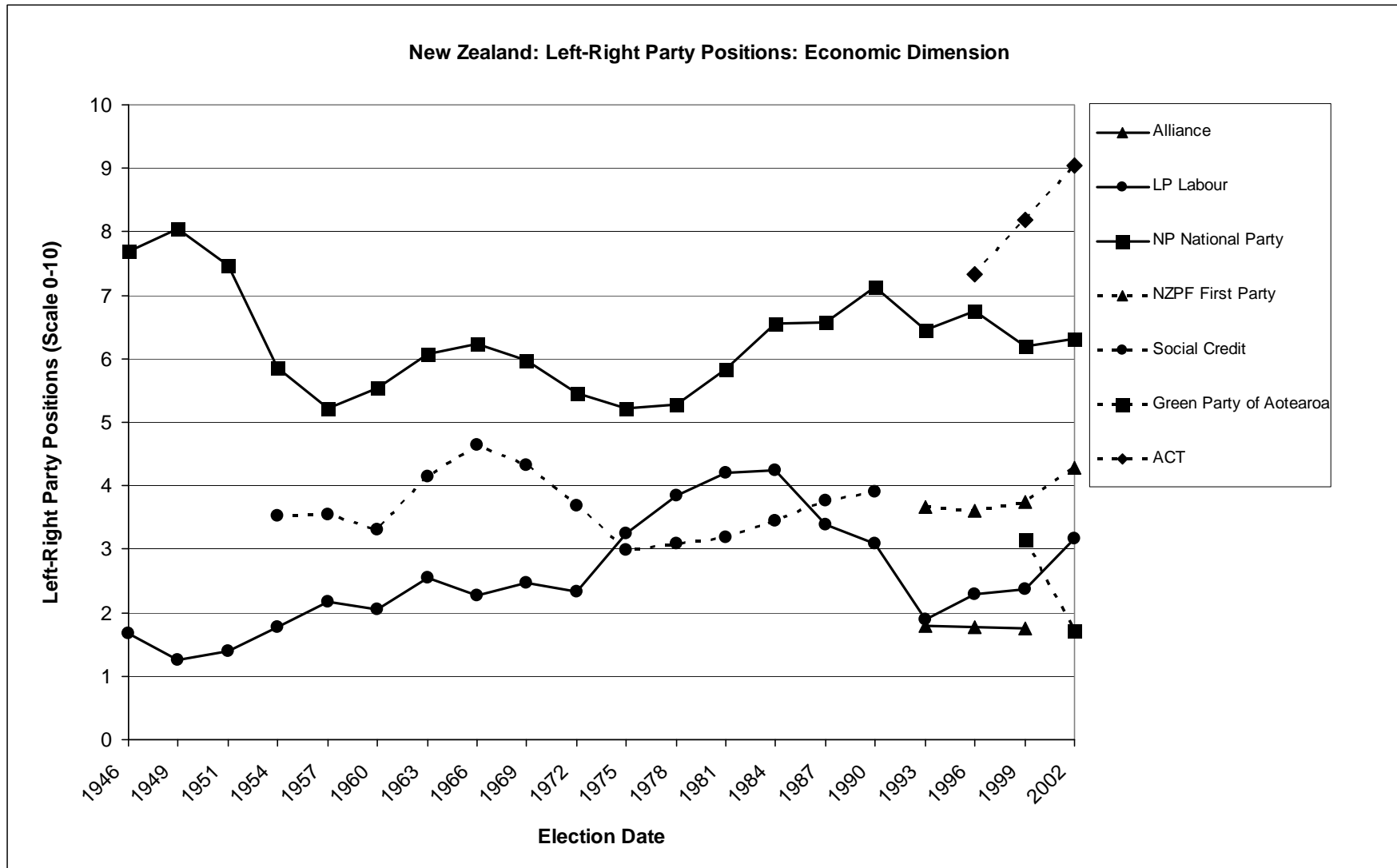
Here:

Economic dimension:

All categories of the CMP-domain 4 (economics) PLUS per303 (administrative efficiency), per503 (social justice), per504 (welfare state expansion), per505 (welfare state limitation), per701, per702, per703, per704 (positive or negative mentions of special professional groups).

Non-economic dimension:

All categories of the CMP-domains 1 (external relations), 2 (freedom and democracy) and 6 (fabric of society) PLUS all categories of the CMP-domain 3 (political system) except per303 (administrative efficiency), all categories of the CMP-domain 5 (welfare and quality of life) except per503 (social justice), per504 (welfare state expansion), and per505 (welfare state limitation) PLUS * per705 (underprivileged minority groups) and per706 (non-economic demographic groups).



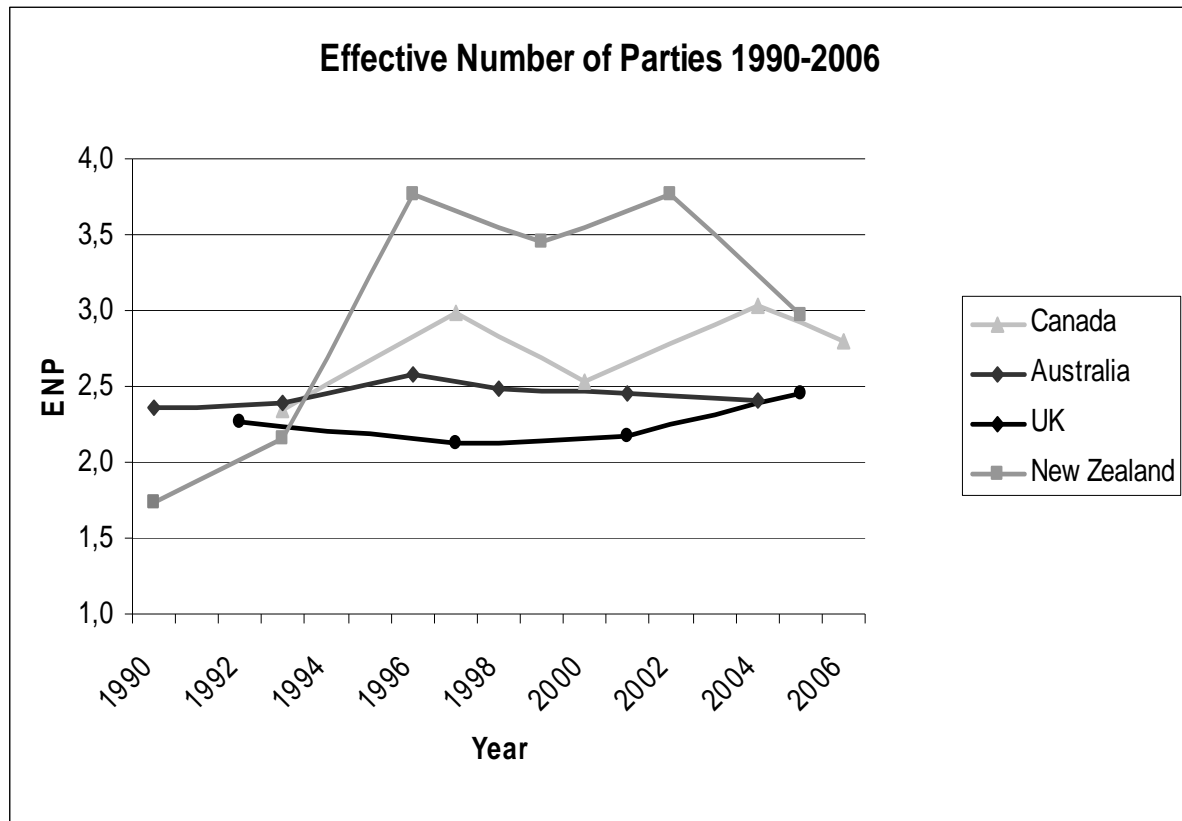


Findings:

- patterns of spatial competition differ in one respect – the position of Labour.
- economic dimension: polarization between Labour, Greens, socialists, and NZF on one hand and National and ACT on the other with regard to socio-economic issues.
- non-economic dimension: much smaller gap; Labour is central player.
- all in all, this puts Labour in a privileged position. So far, National is constrained in its coalition options (ACT) whereas the parties left to the Labour Party can only choose between formally entering the government or serving as legislative support parties. Given this choice, it is rational for the smaller parties – which are in competition with each other – to stay formally out of government, because this gives them a better chance to portray themselves as fully independent whilst achieving important policy concessions. Example: the postmaterialist agenda of the Greens.
- no data for United Future, but probably a center party on the economic dimension and a bit to the right on the non-economic dimension.

(3) Implications for parliamentary opposition: From Westminster-type to Scandinavian-type opposition.

- concept of parliamentary opposition is heavily influenced by **Westminster model of democracy**: only two parties are represented in parliament, one which commands a majority of seats and therefore can govern with no institutional restrictions, and the other which is in a minority and functions as 'Her Majesty's Opposition'. The only task of the latter is to publicly criticise the government in order to give voters on election day the possibility of making informed decisions between the two different political teams and policy packages. Role of opposition is then analyzed on the basis of its institutional opportunity structure.
- no longer relevant, for two reasons:
 - (a) party system fragmentation, ENP has increased to 3.0 – 3.8.
 - (b) minority governments.



Source: Computations by author.

- **alternative approach:** an actor-centred institutionalist understanding of parliamentary opposition with three dimensions:
 - (a) institutional opportunity structure in executive-legislative relations
 - (b) parties' policy positions and potential for cohesive behaviour by non-governmental parties
 - (c) external veto points that may be used by opposition parties

(a) institutional opportunity structure:

- very few comparative investigations
- in parliamentary democracies only indirect influence on legislation through parliamentary committees, public agenda, time constraints for the government, except for legislative support parties.

(1) Kaiser (2002) on four Westminster democracies:

- based on data by the Inter-Parliamentary Union PLUS a written survey of the clerks of the NZ House of Representatives and the first chambers of Australia, Britain, and Canada.
- indicators: whether committee chairs are distributed on a proportional basis; whether there is a business committee that seeks to make decisions upon the parliamentary agenda by consensus; whether a committee minority has the right to publish a minority report; whether the opposition parties have the right to control the parliamentary agenda (the so-called 'Opposition days') on at least ten days per session; and, finally, whether the committee stage takes place before the major principles of a bill are decided upon in the plenary.
- increased indirect opportunities since the 1980s (reforms in 1985 and 1995), leading the table compared to other Westminster systems. However, still relatively few opportunities when compared to a number of European parliamentary democracies.

(2) Schnapp and Harfst (2005) on parliamentary information and control resources in 22 established democracies:

- indicators: control structures (the number of committees; the average number of committee membership; mirroring of portfolios), control resources (the number of staff per MP and committee; the number of research staff in the parliament and in its library; the number of volumes in the library), control rights (the summoning and information rights of committees; the timetable for budget laws; support by audit offices and ombudsmen).
- control structures: Britain, Australia, and Canada rank very low, whereas New Zealand is not far from middle-ranked countries such as Norway and the Netherlands.
- control resources: Canada fits well at the top-end of the countries, Australia and Britain rank in the middle, whereas New Zealand is at the lower end.
- control rights: Britain achieves a rank near the top, whereas the other three countries belong to the middle-ranked group of countries.

(3) expert survey by Laver and Hunt (1992):

- Britain at the bottom end, New Zealand ranks 14th, Canada 11th, and Australia 7th in a sample of 19 countries. The astonishingly high ranking of Australia has mainly to do with the fact that experts did not distinguish between the influence of the opposition in the House of Representatives and the Senate.
- in addition: Rob Salmond's study of question time and its effects on the opposition parties' performance in the polls. Commonly believed to be mere window dressing. In contrast, Salmond finds that a Westminster-type question period is not only associated with higher levels of political engagement of the citizens (knowledge, partisanship, and turnout) but it can also help the opposition to improve its

stance in opinion polls. His case study of New Zealand demonstrates that a well-performing opposition leader during question time can have a notable effect on voting intentions.

- all in all, these are only indirect instruments. As long as the government commands a majority in parliament and its MPs follow party lines, it has a firm hand on legislative output in Westminster democracies. This is underlined by the immense time pressure under which bills have to be dealt with.

(b) parties' policy positions and potential for cohesive behaviour by the opposition as a collective actor:

- assumption: the opposition quality as a collective actor rests on its closeness in policy terms
- closeness of the parties not in government – National and ACT on one hand, the small parties to the left of Labour and United Future as a centre party on the other – is absent. Coordination of behaviour when facing a coalition minority government is next to impossible.
- understanding 'the opposition' only through its institutional opportunities does not make much sense. Without coordinating behaviour 'the opposition' as a collective actor simply cannot exist. Under minority governments, the different non-governmental parties experience extremely divergent possibilities to affect legislative decision-making. Legislative support parties become highly influential; the 'official opposition' has to accept a status of powerlessness.

(c) institutional veto points external to executive-legislative relations in the first chamber

- no veto points such as second chamber, federal arrangements for intergovernmental negotiations or constitutional courts which may rule law unconstitutional available. Therefore: electorate the only veto point; what about CIR?

(4) Will these patterns endure?

- on one hand: MMP implies a multi-party system with incentives for coalition majority government
- on the other hand: spatial party competition gives a large centre party the chance to form a minority government, facing a bilateral opposition that has tremendous difficulty to coordinate behaviour
- consequence: minority governments supported by small parties on an issue-by-issue basis might endure.