In May 1999, Scotland will hold its first election and convene its first parliament in almost three hundred years. To this end, the British parliament and government, together with the Scottish Office (the government’s administrative arm in Scotland) and the political parties, have undertaken a rigorous review of Scotland’s political structures and processes. One of the earliest decisions, announced even before the vote for a devolved parliament, was the adoption of proportional representation in preference to the plurality system still used for election to the House of Commons. Coincidentally, Scotland’s transition to PR bears a striking resemblance to that already undertaken by New Zealand - in 1993, New Zealand voters endorsed the same German two-tier system of PR subsequently chosen for Scotland. This paper will examine the consequences of candidate selection resulting from this shift from plurality voting to PR. While some consequences admittedly reflect the historical and institutional features of each particular country, others invite cross-national comparison. Given that New Zealand embraced electoral reform earlier, the outcomes of its decision offer useful insights into possible future developments in Scotland.

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**Introduction**

Of the numerous outcomes of electoral reform, changes to candidate selection are among the most important. Whereas the personal qualities expected of candidates tend to reflect the changing needs and conditions of the time, the methods by which candidates are selected have been relatively unresponsive to change. In adopting the German model of proportional representation, New Zealand and Scotland retained an important feature of the old system, namely plurality voting in single-member constituencies. However, with the introduction of party lists it became necessary to overhaul some selection priorities and processes. As well as providing each party with its proportional entitlement, party lists challenged long-established assumptions about democratic accountability and the nature of constituency-based representation.

More generally, the PR decision raised the expectation of a fundamental change from an adversarial style of politics to one based on consultation, co-operation and consensus (Lijphart 1984; Vowles et al 1995; Brown et al 1998). It was variously predicted that PR would ‘revitalise’ parliament (Palmer and Palmer 1997: 11), cause greater inter-party negotiation and compromise (Mulgan 1997: 326), restore the public’s esteem for political parties and politicians, and produce a fairer and more effective system of representation (Wallace 1986: 50; Jenkins 1998; 2). Conversely, the critics of PR dwelt on a number of unfamiliar and, in their view, unwelcome prospects, notably hung parliaments, prolonged coalition negotiations, and unstable government (Hunt 1998).

While the parties of both countries have begun to adapt to the vote-seeking demands of PR, in New Zealand the office-seeking and policy-making processes have been more resistant to change. Electoral reform was expected to have a generally positive effect on the selection of women and ethnic minorities, as well as on a wider cross-section of localities and ages (Wallace 1986: 11; Brown 1998a: 116). On the other hand, inter-party and executive-legislative relations, together with the policy-making process, promise to remain rooted in the adversarial culture of the former plurality system. We will explore the extent to which the consequences of candidate selection are responsible for the persistence of factionalism and conflict including, in the case of New Zealand, continuing resistance to PR among some senior politicians, political inexperience on the part of several small parties and first-term MPs, and the residual effects of incumbency.

This paper will be structured around the vote-seeking, office-seeking and policy-making functions of political parties. Strom (1990: 572) has argued that there is potential for incompatibility both within and between these three objectives, resulting in conflict and the need for compromise. Conflict has been said to exist between the demand for democratic involvement in the selection process and the goal of equal representation (Plant 1992: 85).
Other sources of friction, requiring trade-offs, may occur between a party’s office-seeking and policy-making goals. As the case of the populist New Zealand First party illustrates, the desire to hold office may have implications for a party’s ability to maintain internal discipline and electoral support. The paper will explore candidate selection in relation to the manifestation and possible resolution of conflict, together with an assessment of any resulting trade-offs.

Since the New Zealand experiment with PR is more advanced, the first election under the new system having been held in 1996, that country’s experience provides a starting point from which to speculate about the parties’ office-seeking and policy-making goals in the new Scottish parliament.

**Party Context**

It has been said that ‘crises not only provide the context in which political parties first emerge but also tend to be a critical factor in determining what pattern of evolution parties later take’ (LaPalombara and Weiner 1966: 14). Economic crisis and the unravelling of the postwar KWS consensus provided a justification for major ideological shifts by the governing parties in the period of the 1980s and 1990s. An unintended outcome of this process was the gradual reconfiguration of the party systems of the two countries.

In New Zealand, the radical economic and social policy agendas of the Labour (1984-90) and National (1990-) governments provoked deep divisions within party ranks, brought about the formation of splinter parties, and contributed to the decline of two-party voting (from an average of 95 percent throughout much of the postwar period to 70 per cent in 1993). (Aimer 1997: 190). By 1992 a five-party Alliance had emerged from the left flank of Labour, and in 1993 the NZ First party was formed from the left of National. The latter was the brain-child of Winston Peters, a former National cabinet minister and prominent Maori politician. In 1996, when its popularity was at its height, NZ First was the preferred choice of almost 30 per cent of all voters (Miller 1997: 171).

Although electoral reform had been the subject of elite discussion since the mid-1980s, it failed to arouse public interest until presented as a solution to the perceived excesses of the two-party system, notably its unresponsiveness to public opinion and abuse of executive power (Mulgan 1997: 325). In a referendum held in 1992, some 85 per cent of New Zealand voters opted for a change in the voting system. Of the four reform options presented, the German Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) system enjoyed the most support (71 per cent), followed by the Single Transferable Vote (17 per cent). In a subsequent referendum run-off between plurality voting and MMP, held at the time of the 1993 election, MMP was the preferred choice of some 54 per cent of voters.
National retained power in 1993, but with only 35 per cent of the vote. In contrast, the combined third party vote was 30 per cent. During the period of electoral transition the fragmentation of the party system accelerated. A number of MPs whose chances of re-selection appeared slim began to change parties or create new ones of their own. By 1996 some 21 parties were formally registered with the Electoral Commission, including three green parties, two Christian parties, and three parties representing indigenous Maori. At the 1996 election the combined two-party vote declined to a record low of 62 per cent (see Table 1). A total of ten parties took their place in the first PR parliament.

It was devolution rather than electoral reform which proved to be the lightning-rod for political change in Scotland. In supporting limited home rule, Scottish voters were calling into question unitary government, as well as established patterns of party and electoral support. The Westminster government’s decision to trial the discredited poll tax in Scotland had been widely interpreted as merely confirming the relative powerlessness of the Scottish electorate. It also strengthened a perception among many Scots that the London-based government was not only ‘foreign’, but excessively adversarial, and undemocratic (Brown 1998a: 103). A slowly evolving electoral transfer had been taking place between the Scottish Unionist and Conservative party and Scotland’s other parties, especially Labour. In contrast to its performance in other parts of Britain, notably the South East, the Conservative party’s share of the Scottish vote and seats declined dramatically during the 1980s and 1990s. Following the 1997 election the Conservatives held none of Scotland’s 72 seats.

Significantly, neither the Conservatives’ losses nor the introduction of electoral reform later the same year served as a catalyst for the emergence of new breakaway parties. Ideological division, a significant cause of party fragmentation, has been much better contained in Scotland than in New Zealand. In the case of Scottish Labour, the size of its 1997 victory, together with its ability to deflect the blame for unpopular decisions towards London, has so far prevented the spawning of a serious rival on its vulnerable left flank. Besides, the Scottish National party (SNP) has become an effective and potentially powerful repository for both anti-Labour and pro-independence sentiment. Yet another brake on party fragmentation in Scotland in the lead-up to the first election has been the relative absence of opportunistic incumbent MPs. As a result, only four parties are in serious contention for seats in the new Scottish parliament: the two major parties, Labour and the SNP, together with the centrist Liberal Democrats and right-wing Scottish Unionist and Conservative party.

In making its case for PR, the New Zealand electoral commission called for effective participation, fair representation, and stable and responsible government (Wallace 1986). Its preference for MMP over other proportional systems was based on the perceived need for a system which offered proportionality whilst preserving key features of the old system, notably
the centrality of political parties, electoral continuity through the preservation of single-
member constituencies, and stable government (Boston et al 1996: 19). To achieve
proportionality and retain relatively small single-member constituencies, the number of
parliamentary seats was increased from 99 to 120.² A total of 66 are constituency seats (60
general and 6 Maori), leaving 54 list seats. List members are elected from closed and ordered
party lists, with one national list for each party. In the interests of political stability and the
retention of a two-party-dominant system, a 5 per cent threshold was applied, although this is
waived for any party which, like the United party in 1996 (see Table 1), wins a constituency
seat. On the death or resignation of a constituency MP a by-election may be held. List MPs are
replaced by the next person on the list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>% Party votes</th>
<th>Electorate seats won</th>
<th>List seats allocated</th>
<th>Total seats allocated</th>
<th>% Seats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>30.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>NZ First</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.8</td>
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<td>ACT</td>
<td>6.1</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>United</td>
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<td>0.8</td>
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The Scottish Additional Member System (AMS) bears a number of similarities to that
chosen for New Zealand, with 73 constituency MPs (MSPs) to be elected by the plurality
method and 56 list members drawn from eight regional lists representing the current European
parliamentary constituencies. All but two of the constituency seats cover the same
geographical areas as those for Westminster (under the new system, the Orkney and Shetland
Islands have each gained their own seat). Constituency MSPs are to be elected by the simple
plurality method. As in New Zealand, the lists are closed and ordered. Where the Scottish
system differs, however, is in the lack of a formal threshold, although the preference for
regional lists guarantees an effective threshold of approximately 6 per cent.

Vote-seeking Function
An essential feature of the vote-seeking function is the assumption that parties will seek to
maximise their support (Downs 1957: 117). To this end, the parties of Scotland and New
Zealand have been under pressure to adopt three related strategies: a repositioning of their
movements towards the electoral mainstream; opening up the selection process to greater
grassroots participation; and broadening the candidate base by selecting from hitherto neglected sections of the community, especially women and ethnic minorities. Given the centrifugal distribution of voters in New Zealand and Scotland, rekindling a party’s moderate tendencies makes sense electorally (Downs 1957: 122). By taking the two additional steps of encouraging greater participation in the selection process and providing a more representative mix of candidates, parties can reasonably expect enhanced public approval, if not electoral support.

Yet all three strategies hold hidden dangers for the parties involved. In appealing to the moderate centre, parties are under pressure to purge extremist candidates, a move which can have a destabilising effect on internal relations and morale. Dangers also lurk behind the claim of a causal link between PR and fairer representation. While the PR list system creates pressure on selectors to come up with a balanced ticket, responsibility for under-representation lies as much with the attitudes and selection practices of the parties as with the failures of plurality voting (Norris 1997). Nor is there any guarantee that, by encouraging grassroots involvement, a more representative parliament will result. At least one study has found, for example, that ‘a national selectorate may be more inclined to select women than local selectors’ (Gallagher and Marsh 1988: 14). Given these potential pitfalls, it is useful to explore the implications of each strategy for the parties concerned.

1. Effective voter mobilisation

By adopting extreme policy positions the major parties of the two countries had, for many years, effectively abandoned the median voter. The electoral consequences were dramatic - as we have seen, the British Conservative party lost all its seats north of the border, and by 1993 the combined two-party vote in New Zealand had slipped to a mere 70 per cent, the lowest on record. With the prospect of increased competition under PR, the major parties took immediate steps to adopt catch-all strategies with a view to broadening their electoral appeal. We will look at the manifestation of this strategy in the form of party policy moderation and the avoidance of pre-election coalition agreements.

a) Policy moderation. The flight from neoliberal orthodoxy to pragmatic centralism has had uneven results. In the run-up to the first PR election in New Zealand, the governing National party focused on the public’s anxiety over the consequences of reform in health, education and welfare. Its more moderate policies included relaxing the surtax on pensioners, boosting spending on health, and increasing aid to the poor (Miller 1997: 41). Labour’s task, on the other hand, was more complicated, being based on the contradictory strategy of undercutting electoral support for the left-wing Alliance whilst simultaneously defending aspects of its record in government. This dual approach largely failed to convince, let alone
satisfy, either extreme of the party; at the 1996 election it gained only 28 per cent of the vote, its smallest share of the vote since 1929. Several prominent former ministers, including the finance minister, Roger Douglas, had earlier resigned their party membership. Together with members of the Backbone Club, a free market ginger group within Labour, they formed the Association of Consumers and Taxpayers, which later became a fully-fledged political party.

Paradoxically, at the same time as the New Zealand Labour party was attempting to rekindle its reputation as a centre to centre-left party, its Scottish counterpart was moving in the opposite direction. Under the leadership of Blair and Donald Dewar, the Scottish Secretary, the cornerstones of left-wing dogma have been significantly weakened, if not abandoned. They include the party’s well-known commitment to public ownership, progressive taxation and universal welfare provision. In their place are priorities their critics would associate with ‘Thatcherism’, including an aversion to borrowing and a commitment to a welfare system based on tight fiscal restraint. ‘New’ Labour’s values are tellingly illustrated with reference to its ‘welfare to work’ scheme for the unemployed. In as much as Clinton looks to ‘middle America’ and Blair to ‘middle England’ (Giddens 1998, viii), Scottish Labour is appealing to an amorphous grouping known as ‘middle Scotland’. Its task has been complicated by the fact that Labour is a party ‘deeply imbued with working-class culture’ (Bennie et al 1997: 46). It must also contend with public opinion, which has a more left-wing bias than in England (Brown et al 1998: 153). In particular, the two voting publics are said to have divergent views on economic and social policy, with one study finding that Scots are more strongly opposed to the free market and in favour of state spending on the unemployed (Curtice 1996: 9).

To what extent has policy moderation had an impact on the choice of parliamentary candidates? Despite attempts to re-brand the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party as a truly Scottish party, with ‘Made in Scotland’ is its 1999 theme, and one of the pragmatic centre, its regional lists are dominated by senior party members, many of whom served under Thatcher and John Major. However, of all the selection outcomes, that of Scottish Labour is the most controversial and interesting. As a result of a number of prominent left-wing and nationalist candidates stumbling on the first, preselection hurdle, the party’s selectors have been accused of conducting an ‘ideological cull’. The most damaging case involves Dennis Canavan, a veteran left-winger and nationalist Westminster MP for Falkirk West. Following his failure to get on the approved list, Canavan initiated legal proceedings against the party as well as announcing his intention to stand as an independent. His supporters claimed that ‘we, as socialists, no longer feel that we can support a party which is, effectively, a more publicly-acceptable face [sic] of Toryism.’.
A similar ‘ideological cull’ was mooted within the New Zealand Labour party in the run-up to the first PR election. Based on the assumption that the party leader, Helen Clark, the president and many activists were intent upon either deselecting or placing low on the list some right-wing members, a number of prominent MPs defected from the party. In 1995, two former Labour ministers helped form United, a new centre party, and the following year a senior Labour MP left to join NZ First.

b. Pre-election coalition agreements. Under the former plurality system, vote-maximisation was carried out in an atmosphere of intense inter-party competition. Electoral accommodation was rare, and the fiercest rivalry tended to occur between the parties in close proximity ideologically. By retaining plurality voting in constituency seats, the perpetuation of this electoral competition under the new electoral system was assured.

Prior to the 1996 election, most New Zealand voters expected Labour to be the senior partner in the first coalition government (Miller 1998: 129). However, its most obvious partner, the Alliance, laid down a non-negotiable twelve-point policy statement and the further condition that, unless Labour signed a coalition agreement before the election, the Alliance would refuse to negotiate after it. Labour declined, partly on the grounds that it stood to suffer electorally from any such arrangement with its erstwhile enemy. The other parties also refused to discuss their coalition prospects prior to the election, with NZ First coming closest to a declaration with the pledge of its deputy leader that he would not serve in any government which was led by the National Prime Minister, Jim Bolger (Miller 1997: 174). Since National’s voters had a preference for single-party minority government, it made little sense for the party to publicly woo potential partners in advance.

Fear of a voter and party activist backlash also kept the parties from standing down candidates in particular seats. Labour and the Alliance candidates went head-to-head in all electorates, and National generally refused to make concessions to potential allies, with the exception of the small United party. Because United was performing poorly in the polls, with every indication that it was unlikely to break the 5 per cent threshold, National decided not to contest the Wellington seat of Ohariu-Belmont, thereby allowing United to gain a parliamentary presence with less than 1 per cent of the nationwide vote. Indications are that National will agree to the same arrangement in 1999, as well as giving the leader of the struggling Act party a free run in the neighbouring seat of Wellington Central.

As well as avoiding any form of electoral accommodation with potential partners, the Scottish parties have also refused to enter into any pre-election coalition agreements. While Labour favours a coalition with the Liberal Democrats, the latter is coy about being perceived by voters as close to the government, particularly given the controversy surrounding Paddy Ashdown’s amicable working relationship with the Prime Minister. Furthermore, some
Liberal Democrats still feel aggrieved over the condescending treatment they allege to have received at the hands of Blair over the devolution referendum and subsequent PR decision. For these and other reasons, the Scottish Liberal Democrat leadership is doing nothing to dampen speculation that it could coalesce with the SNP. There has been the further suggestion that Labour might consider a partnership with the Conservatives, although the practicalities of such a partnership are daunting, particularly given the long-standing hostility between the two sets of voters.\(^7\)

### 2. Effective participation

A number of independent commissions on voting systems have made the link between the move to PR and increased levels of participation. In the view of one such commission, for instance, public disapproval can be expected of any voting system which presupposes the power of party machines (Jenkins 1998: 2). Whereas constituency selection methods have remained largely unaffected by the move to PR, the introduction of lists has caused several parties to address the need for increased levels of public involvement and influence.

Writing in the late 1980s, David Denver described candidate selection in Britain as centrally determined yet decentralised (1988: 48). While most Scottish parties have adopted a bottom-up approach to the final constituency and list selections, with either delegates (SNP) or members (Liberal Democrats) making the choice from a pre-determined approved list, responsibility for deciding who goes on that list rests squarely with the central party organisation. In the case of Labour, an electoral college is given the power to accept or reject the pre-ranked regional lists, but not to alter them in any way.\(^8\)

Each of the four main parties requires potential candidates to undergo a pre-selection process which includes formal application, an extended interview and, in the case of the SNP and Conservatives, successful involvement in a series of role playing exercises, such as a mock debate and drawing up a national budget.\(^9\) Among the qualities listed by all four parties are education, previous employment, and work in the community. Whereas the emphasis of the SNP and Conservative party applications is on biographical data, much as in an application for a private or public sector job, Labour requires its applicants to comment on a number of personal abilities, including evidence of creativity, advocacy skills, strategic thinking, leadership and teamwork, interpersonal skills, and the ability to mount an effective election campaign. It also asks potential candidates to provide a 500-word statement on reasons for wanting to be a candidate.\(^10\)

More than any other party, Scottish Labour has been criticised for paying excessive attention to the backgrounds and abilities of its candidates, although the party’s general secretary maintains that the vetting process is a product of pressure from party activists.\(^11\) As
early as 1996 the Shadow Secretary for Scotland, George Robertson, warned that ‘time
servers’ and ‘self-seekers’ would not be selected as candidates for the new parliament. As
part of its campaign to modernise the party and remove left-wing and nationalist influences,
the leadership advised Westminster MPs against making application for selection. However,
it was not simply the meritocratic selection criteria, but Labour’s methods, which attracted
wide public attention. Controversially, the pre-selection panel of some twenty ‘eminent
persons’ included parliamentary colleagues of several applicants. It received independent
advice from professional consultants, including a personnel director. The panel rejected some
208 applicants prior to the interview stage. The remaining 326 candidates each received a
40-minute interview. One rejected Westminster MP was allegedly criticised for not wearing a
suit to the interview. According to another source, those being interviewed ‘were asked
what contribution they had made to New Labour’s “modernisation” drive; whether they
would abide by the Blair government’s spending limits; and whether they would have
voted against the government on the one-parent benefits issue. The more persuasive the
answer, the higher the score.’

In the interests of gender parity, Scottish Labour adopted a formula whereby female
and male candidates were twinned in adjacent constituencies. In contrast, the Conservatives
condemned what they regarded as contrived and undemocratic attempts to create gender
balance. As one party spokesperson said: ‘This is a principled stand and we are not afraid to
be alone on this. We believe gender balance has no significant support unless it just happens -
but it should not be enforced’. He proved to be wrong on both counts - as we will see, gender
balance did not ‘just happen’, certainly not in 1999, nor did the Conservatives end up being
alone on the issue. Despite making a commitment to gender parity, both the Liberal
Democrat and SNP leaderships yielded to pressure from grassroots activists opposed to any
form of affirmative action. Opposition within the SNP was led by young student delegates,
who argued that affirmative action patronised women and other favoured groups. Liberal
Democrat activists who favoured purely meritocratic selection criteria were said to be
‘vitriolic in their opposition’ to special mechanisms for achieving gender parity, preferring
what they described as ‘an organic, gradual approach to improving the position of women’. In
response, supporters of affirmative action pointed out that the gradualist approach had not
worked, with only three of the 46 Liberal Democrat MPs in Westminster being women.

Somewhat ironically, given the historically low level of participation in candidate
selection in New Zealand (Catt 1997: 141), public criticism of PR has focused on the potential
for head office abuse of the party lists. New Zealand’s electoral commission had stated that
‘there should be ample opportunity for ordinary party members to participate effectively in the
selection of candidates’ (Wallace 1986: 62). The new Electoral Act (1993: 71) even stipulated that registered parties must follow ‘democratic procedures in candidate selection’, although no mechanisms were put in place to monitor or enforce such a requirement (Electoral Act 1993: 71). These assurances notwithstanding, it was widely suspected that the lists would be compiled by and in the interests of party officials and activists, with little or no involvement by ordinary party members.

While the parties of New Zealand have few preselection requirements, no candidates approved list, and have opted for a delegate-based selection for the lists in preference to one-member-one-vote, in all cases the ranking process has been placed firmly in the hands of national moderating committees. This allows the parties to determine the selection outcome in a number of important ways. For the Alliance, for instance, a centralised ranking system has enabled it to both address its equity obligations and ensure that each of its five constituent parties will have a reasonable chance of being represented in parliament. In the case of Labour, centralised ranking has facilitated the use of affirmative action principles in preference to the less palatable fixed quotas (Street 1997: 151). Use of a moderating committee also allows the party hierarchy to make high list positions available to the occasional glamour candidate. The ‘Mary Doll Syndrome’, as it is referred to in Scotland, was used by the Alliance in the case of a prominent media personality, Pam Corkery. Thus, whereas the Scottish selection process moves from the highly centralised pre-selection stage to the de-centralised, in New Zealand it moves in the opposite direction.

3. Effective representation

a) Gender and ethnicity: The increase in the incidence of women and ethnic minority candidates represents the most important development since the introduction of PR. Following the 1996 election the New Zealand parliament was more diverse than at any time in its history. As well as becoming a genuinely multiparty institution, with six parties represented (or ten if the Alliance parties are counted separately), there was a marked rise in the numbers of women and ethnic minority MPs. The proportion of women members went from 21 to 29 per cent, with women in every party caucus. Labour had the highest proportion (37 per cent), followed by National (23 per cent) and the Alliance (11 per cent) (Catt 1997: 203).

The rise in the proportion of Maori MPs was even more dramatic, from 6 per cent before the election to 12.5 per cent (Maori comprise approximately 13 per cent of the country’s total population). In another important development, after more than six decades the link between Maori voting and representation and support for Labour was finally broken - of the 15 Maori MPs, seven represented NZ First, four Labour, two the Alliance, and one each
National and Act. Other ethnic groups represented in the new parliament were Pacific Islanders (3) and the first Chinese MP (1).

A comparison between the list and constituency categories of MP reveals that most New Zealand parties used the list rather than the constituency seats to meet their gender and equity targets. Whereas women took 45 per cent of the list seats, they won only 15 per cent of the electorates (Banducci and Karp 1998: 141). The Alliance, a list party, did best in this regard by having women candidates in 58 per cent of its successful list seats. Although Labour was the only party to experience a slight fall in the proportion of women members, it still had the largest number (13 out of 37 MPs). Labour decided to protect a number of incumbent women MPs in highly marginal constituency seats by giving them high places on its list (Street 1997: 152). Five of the top ten and twelve of the top twenty positions on the Labour list were occupied by women (Ibid). In contrast, National, which decided against using gender as a criterion for selection, had only three women in its top ten list seats and five in its top twenty. Doubtless the proportion of women elected from the two main parties would have been greater were it not for the decision to offer some protection for incumbent MPs, most of whom were male. Of the 33 sitting MPs who occupied the top 49 positions on the National list, 29 were males and only four were females (Gustafson 1997: 144). A slight majority of Maori MPs, as well as two of the three Pacific Islanders and the ethnic Chinese MP, were chosen from the list.

Although, at the time of writing, Scottish Labour’s lists had not been released, the selection process for the other parties was virtually complete. Based on the results of the most recent public opinion poll, Scotland on Sunday has estimated that there could be around 49 women in the new 129-seat parliament (38 per cent).23 This is a slightly higher figure than the 33 per cent predicted by the independent adviser on candidate selection to the Scottish Labour party, Professor Alice Brown.24 According to Scotland on Sunday’s calculations, the party with the highest proportion of women would be the SNP (43 per cent), followed by Labour (41 per cent), the Conservatives (25 per cent) and Liberal Democrats (14 per cent). Given that all but one of Labour’s 24 women MSPs would be constituency members, they could be regarded as being direct beneficiaries of the party’s twinning mechanism. On the other hand, because Labour is expected to gain few list seats, its women are unlikely to benefit from what is, in most other parties, the more common source of gender parity. Despite its rejection of formal affirmative action measures, the SNP has an estimated 15 women out of 31 seats coming off the list. The Conservative party, which is unlikely to gain any constituency seats, could have four women among its estimated 16 list MSPs. Whereas prospects for gender parity appear reasonably bright, the same cannot be said for ethnic representation; indeed, perhaps the only realistic prospect for ethnic minorities is Tasmina Ahmed Sheikh, a Glasgow
lawyer of Pakistani background, who is ranked second on the Conservatives’ Glasgow regional list.

Based on the experiences of the two countries, it is possible to reach a number of tentative conclusions. First, although there appears to be a fairly strong correlation between PR and increased levels of gender and ethnic representation, it should not be over-stated. Although there was virtually no progress towards improved representation for New Zealand women during most of the postwar period, by the late 1980s New Zealand had a higher proportion of women MPs than any other English-speaking democracy (Vowles and Aimer 1993: 176). The country’s eleventh ranking among national legislatures in the early 1990s placed it significantly behind Scandinavia, but ahead of Australia (20th), the United States (47th) and the United Kingdom (51st). (Julian 1992: 401). Following the 1993 election, the last under the plurality system, the proportion of women in the New Zealand parliament had risen to an all-time high of 21 per cent (Wilson 1997: 424). Scotland also experienced an increase in the proportion of women MPs, although the rise occurred somewhat later and was more modest. Following the 1992 election there were only five women MPs from Scottish constituencies in the House of Commons, a representation rate of less than 7 per cent. Remarkably, the proportion of women MPs from Scotland was even lower in 1992 than after the elections of 1959 and 1964 (Brown et al 1998: 173). Following the 1997 the number of women representing Scottish seats stood at 10 (14 per cent).

Second, while there is evidence of a link between improved gender and ethnic representation and centralised selection, one does not necessarily follow the other. The Scottish Conservatives and New Zealand Act party have very centralised selection processes yet relatively few women candidates and activists. The SNP, on the other hand, although deciding against affirmative action on democratic grounds, may end up being the party with the highest proportion of women MSPs. The reasons for gender imbalance are the same as those elsewhere, in particular, the absence of a political agenda reflecting the interests and life-experiences of women (Wilson 1997: 422), and the domination of the candidate selection system by male party activists and officials (Julian 1992: 404).

However, the move to PR provided an impetus for change through the mobilisation of mainly women’s groups and organisations (Brown 1998a; Brown 1998b). Largely due to their initiative, parties were prepared to employ mechanisms favourable to women and ethnic minorities, such as party lists, affirmative action programmes, and quotas (especially twinning). There is little room for complacency, however, as the 1996 New Zealand Election Study (NZES) candidate survey findings reveal. After the gender and ethnic breakdowns for the first PR parliament were known, candidates were asked if they thought there should be more women and Maori MPs. Only 36 per cent of candidates wanted more women MPs and
26 per cent more Maori MPs. Support for increases in the numbers of women and Maori was lowest among the right-of-centre National (26 and 19 per cent respectively) and Act (15 and 4) candidates and highest among those representing Labour (64 and 46) and the Alliance (65 and 51). Male candidates were significantly less sympathetic to more women (30 per cent) and Maori (21 per cent) MPs than were women candidates (53 per cent and 38 per cent respectively).

Third, as the Scots may discover shortly, improved parliamentary representation does not necessarily translate into legislative action and increased executive power. Although there is evidence of some cross-party cooperation between women members, on legislation which is seen as being of vital importance to women, party allegiance is a stronger influence than gender. On the issue of paid parental leave, for example, a private member’s bill introduced by an Alliance MP, Laila Harre, received some support from Labour women members, but those in the various centre and right-of-centre parties proved to be less than cooperative. One Act woman MP who was implacably opposed to the bill described its introduction as the low point of her time in parliament. In 1990, women held only 16 per cent of the parliamentary seats yet occupied five positions in cabinet. Following the first PR election they had 29 per cent of the parliamentary seats, but only one seat in the twenty-member coalition cabinet.

b. List/constituency roles: In addition to the aforementioned concern that list selection would be carried out by and in the interests of the party hierarchy, it was feared that list MPs would have no constituency function, with the result that they would remain largely unaccountable to the wider community. As the 1996 NZES candidate survey shows, a significant proportion of party candidates complained about the inefficiency and unfairness of their party’s list selection process. In fact, some 41 per cent of all candidates regarded the selection method adopted by their party to be inefficient, with strongest disapproval coming from candidates selected by the Alliance (74 per cent) and NZ First (66 per cent), followed by National (43 per cent) and Labour (39 per cent). Given the Alliance’s problems in both meeting the demands for representation from each of its five parties and ensuring that equity targets were met, it is hardly surprising that some 48 per cent of Alliance candidates regarded the process to be too complicated. Similarly strong views were expressed on the question of fairness, with some 76 per cent of Alliance candidates and 56 per cent of NZ First candidates viewing the list selection process adopted by their party as unfair.

Voters expressed their own views on the list process although, as the 1996 NZES survey of voters reveals, their response was less one of dissatisfaction than indifference. Approximately four out of every ten voters did not see any of the party lists, including that of their preferred party, prior to voting. Of those who did, most found the personal qualities of
the people chosen to be acceptable, although where a strong opinion was expressed it was almost as likely to be negative as positive.

Candidates were asked to comment on their expected roles as list and constituency MPs. Under plurality voting, parliamentarians were widely regarded as being both uncaring and out of touch (Miller and Catt 1993: 11). Although levels of public confidence improved after the introduction of PR, the 1996 NZES panel data reveals that some 56 per cent of voters continued to be of the view that MPs were inattentive to their needs (64 per cent in 1993), and 60 per cent thought that public officials did not care what people thought (down from 68 per cent). (Banducci and Karp 1998: 157).

When list and constituency candidates were asked to assess the importance of a number of characteristics in choosing a candidate, clear differences of perspective and role emerged. Whereas list candidates placed greater importance on performance-based skills, such as detailed knowledge of issues, superior education, and public speaking ability, constituency candidates stressed a range of inter-personal qualities, including personal appearance, commitment to constituents, and empathy. The two sets of candidates also placed varying levels of importance on the functions of an MP, with list candidates stressing parliamentary debating and select committee work, and constituency candidates focusing on the importance of electorate duties, such as conducting clinics. Given their stress on parliamentary work, one might expect that list MPs have a better attendance record than their constituency-based counterparts. In fact, of the 92 sitting days in 1998, list MPs were absent from parliament slightly more often (average 15 days) than were constituency members (average 14.5 days). This is not to suggest that list MPs do not have a commitment to constituency work. Most maintain constituency offices and, in one extreme case, a Pacific Island list MP, Mark Gosche, maintains constituency offices in three different electorates.

Office-seeking
A smooth transition between electoral systems is largely dependent upon the ability of the parties and politicians to respond to the consequential, as well as the procedural, implications of change (Plant 1992: 23). New Zealand’s unfamiliarity with coalition government and long tradition of adversarial politics may have inclined the parties towards more procedural matters, such as constitutional amendment, party positioning and selection processes, at the expense of a number of consequential factors, notably coalition formation and cohesion, party unity and accountability, and the importance of sound executive-legislative relations. As a result, neither the voting public nor the parties were prepared for what amounted to a hijacking of the entire coalition process by Winston Peters and his small populist party, NZ First. While Scotland’s experience of coalition government is even more tenuous, being
limited to the Labour-Liberal pact of 1977 to 1978, there are indications that its transition to PR will be smoother than New Zealand’s has been. It remains to be seen, however, whether the promise of a more cooperative and consensual style of politics is as elusive as that experienced by New Zealand. The current ferment of pre-election inter-party rancour would tend to suggest that it is.

1. Coalition government

New Zealand’s brief experiment with coalition government raises a number of issues, not least the matter of what concessions a minor party can reasonably extract in exercising the balance of power. The particular case of NZ First raises the further question of the influence of candidate selection on personality-based parties, especially with respect to their role in ensuring the stability and effectiveness of government.

At the 1996 election National won 44 seats, well short of the 60-plus seats required for a single-party majority government. With Labour having already rejected the Prime Minister’s suggestion of a grand coalition, the only hope of a National-led majority government rested with the unlikely support of NZ First (see Table 2). A more probable and popular scenario, however, was a centre-left coalition between Labour and NZ First, with the coalition-averse Alliance providing constructive opposition from parliament’s back-benches.

Although Peters refused to declare his intentions prior to the election, there were strong grounds for the view that he would reject any coalition agreement with National. Personal animosity between Peters and senior members of the National party ran deep - in 1991 he had been summarily dismissed from the cabinet, and he later became the first MP in the party’s 56-year history to be expelled from the parliamentary caucus (Miller and Catt 1993: 40-41). In opposing National’s New Right agenda, he adopted an ideological position in close proximity to that of Labour and the Alliance, particularly on welfare restructuring and fiscal spending. In fact, so generous were Peters’ spending proposals that a number of National MPs reportedly warned their negotiators that the cost of going into power with NZ First was likely to be too high (Miller 1998: 125).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coalition 1996-8</th>
<th>Minority Govt 1998-9</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seats</td>
<td>Seats</td>
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<tr>
<td>Govt</td>
<td>Govt and Allies</td>
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Why did Peters seemingly defy logic by joining forces with his old nemesis, National?

One set of explanations is based on the assumption that the decision was never in doubt. According to this view, Peters’ tribal instincts precluded a working relationship with Labour, his unhappy association with National over several years notwithstanding. But what of Peters’ decision to enter into simultaneous negotiations with both major parties and his claim that Labour had a 50.50 chance of being in government? Supporters of this argument respond that he intended to create the illusion of a ‘bidding war’ with a view to extracting the maximum in programmatic and portfolio concessions from his chosen, but as yet unannounced, National partner.

A second, opposing argument posits that Peters entered into negotiations with an open mind, but that National, having been in government for two successive terms and for 35 of the previous 50 years, proved to be a more persuasive and persistent suitor. The Prime Minister, although a vocal critic of electoral reform, repeatedly expressed his willingness to be constructive and cooperative in his dealings with other parties (Vowles et al 1995: 2). According to this view, Peters’s decision ultimately boiled down to a question of which party was prepared to concede the most. Labour’s refusal to give Peters the economic super-ministry appears to have tilted the balance in National’s direction, a decision which was finally announced by the NZ First leader some eight weeks after negotiations began.

So far we have only considered the part played by Peters in the negotiating process. What was the role of the 16 NZ First MPs who accompanied Peters into the new parliament? As we will see, a combination of inexperience, deference and ideological incompatibility largely precluded the NZ First caucus from playing any significant part in the coalition formation process. Apart from Peters and his deputy, Tau Henare, only two MPs had prior parliamentary or other significant political experience. Having arrived in Wellington only a matter of days before negotiations commenced, and having not even met previously as a...
group, they were particularly susceptible to direction from Peters and his paid political adviser, his brother Wayne. Alan Ware has observed that ‘charismatic leaders tend to resist institutionalism in their party as a threat to their own power’ (1996: 100). The opinions of individual MPs notwithstanding, the party lacked an effective organisational source from which Peters could receive competing advice.

A further reason for the lack of independent influence on the part of NZ First MPs stemmed from their attitude towards the leader. Populist parties tend to be built around the personality of the leader, and Peters’ reputation as a ‘warrior’ politician gave him a special status among his seven Maori parliamentary colleagues (Miller 1997: 173). More than this, however, it was reasonably well known within the party that Peters and an adviser, Michael Laws, had personally ranked the NZ First list (Laws 1998: 342). Their intervention produced a number of surprises, including the demotion of prominent candidates who dared to disagree with Peters and the dramatic promotion of several relatively unknown loyalists. One of the most notable winners from this process was Deborah Morris, a 26 year old researcher to Winston Peters and relatively new party member. Her high ranking not only propelled her into parliament, but also into the ministry. Hers was a telling testimony to what loyalty and gratitude to the leader could achieve.

Thirdly, ideological incompatibility among NZ First MPs would have made it difficult for any consensus of opinion on coalition partners to have emerged without direction from the leader. The members were united in their support for Peters and in their antipathy towards the two major parties but, as we will see shortly, there was little evidence of a shared doctrine. Moreover, whereas several came from a National background, others were former Labour candidates and activists. The Maori MPs reportedly favoured a coalition with Labour, and were lobbied to that effect by Maori voters. Yet they were quick to endorse Peters’ decision to form an accommodation with National.

Does New Zealand’s first experience of coalition formation under PR offer any pointers to what might occur in Scotland? Clearly the Liberal Democrats are more cohesive and politically experienced than NZ First. Their policy programme has been developed over many years and enjoys the broad support of parliamentary candidates. Furthermore, with plans already in place for any post-election discussions, there is little likelihood that the leader or any other group will subvert or otherwise try to manipulate the negotiations process. Although refusing to indicate which party is their preferred partner in government, this is not because of a desire to enter into a ‘bidding war’ with Scottish Labour and the SNP, as their decision not to enter into parallel negotiations serve to confirm.

Where the New Zealand experience is instructive, however, is with respect to the concessions a third party can realistically expect from its coalition partners. Despite the
National’s parliamentary strength and NZ First’s lack of executive experience (Peters was the only MP with previous ministerial experience, and that was limited a minor portfolio, held over a ten month period in 1990-91), the party immediately gained five cabinet seats and a total of eight ministerial appointments. It also received the promise of three further cabinet positions within two years, giving it 40 per cent of all cabinet seats. Furthermore, despite his lack of economic experience, Peters was given the most powerful finance portfolio, as well as being made Deputy Prime Minister. Four of NZ First’s ministers had no previous parliamentary experience, an unprecedented occurrence in New Zealand, where three years parliamentary experience is considered a minimum requirement for appointment to the executive.

This disproportionate allocation of executive positions began to have a corrosive effect on relations between the two coalition partners. Underlying the National MPs’ resentment towards NZ First was a profound distaste for coalition government. According to the 1996 NZES candidate survey, on the important criteria of stable government and ability to make tough decisions, National candidates preferred single party government by margins of 80 and 93 per cent respectively. Consistent with their strong preference for single party government was a long-held opposition to PR - only 16 per cent of National candidates had voted for PR in the 1993 referendum, making them by far the most anti-PR group of candidates. Virtually from the time the coalition was announced, National back-bench MPs and activists resented the concessions made to NZ First and began questioning the legitimacy of the agreement. The Prime Minister, Jim Bolger, who was primarily responsible for the success of the negotiations, was accused of being too close to the NZ First leader. In November 1997 he was replaced as Prime Minister by Jenny Shipley, whose strengths were said to include an ability to ‘deal to’ Winston Peters.

The coalition had been the product of a series of trade-offs, all of which became increasingly untenable as relations between the parties soured. NZ First had gained office, but at great cost to its internal cohesion and electoral support. While many of its problems stemmed from the unrealistic expectations of its leader, who exposed the party to executive office before its parliamentarians had developed the necessary experience and range of skills, an even more fundamental weakness concerned the volatile nature of the third party’s electoral support. Simply being in government not only irrevocably compromised the party’s populist principles, but also caused a haemorrhaging of its largely protest, anti-government constituency. Within two months of the election, at which NZ First had received 13 per cent of the vote, the party’s popularity had declined to 3 per cent. It remained stubbornly within the 2 to 3 per cent margin for most of the following eighteen months.
A second coalition trade-off involved National. As the country’s best performing party at the 1996 election, National had to weigh up the risk to its vote-seeking appeal of a coalition arrangement with NZ First. As the 1996 NZES survey of voters shows, only 13 per cent of National voters favoured a coalition with NZ First (Miller 1998: 129). Few considered NZ First to be trustworthy, and almost half deemed it to be untrustworthy. During the life of the coalition, public disapproval of its performance remained high, averaging approximately 75 per cent in its final months. When Peters and three colleagues took the unusual step of walking out of cabinet in protest at National’s decision to sell the public shares in Wellington Airport, the Prime Minister promptly dismissed Peters and announced the formation of a minority government on 14 August 1998.


Minority government was made possible by the presence of a new category of MP, namely the party-defecting independent (the last time an independent was elected to the New Zealand parliament was in 1943). Moreover, for the first time in over six decades, New Zealand had independent cabinet ministers. As well as having a corrosive effect on party loyalty and discipline, the rise in the number of independents has resulted in calls for tighter selection criteria and the introduction of legislation requiring defectors to resign their seats.

The new minority government’s legislative majority was built on the uncertain support of nine independent MPs (see Table 2), all but one of whom defected from their party within the first twenty-months of being elected. Most were list members, only three had previous parliamentary experience, and all had entered parliament through one or other of the third parties. As well as distorting the proportionality of parliament, their defections resurrected criticisms which had once been directed towards representation under plurality voting, specifically its lack of fairness, responsiveness and accountability. Having left their party, who did list MPs represent and who were they answerable to?

But the spate of defections also had an adverse effect on internal party discipline and morale. In this respect, no parliamentary grouping was more badly hit than NZ First. Following Peters’ dismissal from cabinet, the Prime Minister requested the continuing support of each of NZ First’s remaining ministers. Four of the six chose to retain their ministerial warrants as independent MPs. In resigning from both the executive and the party, a fifth NZ First minister commented that the party’s ‘lack of discipline, cohesion and strategy has caused me constant frustration’. Peters was left with a caucus of only eight MPs. Later, when one of the newly independent list members decided to resign her parliamentary seat, NZ First was given the chance to increase its representation by appointing the next person on its list. By this time party discipline and loyalty had completely broken down. The candidate in question was
tape-recorded boasting that, on being appointed, he would immediately defect to National.  

Faced with the threat of legal action, including further revelations about the way the list had been constructed, the party decided to confirm his appointment. As well as expunging any remaining confidence in NZ First, these defections simply reinforced public scepticism as to the credibility and efficacy of MMP.

The Alliance’s defections were less severe, although in losing first the Greens, then the Liberals, it went from an association of five parties to one of just three. During the selection process, the Alliance had been the only party to require its candidates to sign a pledge stipulating that MPs who left the party must resign their seats. The issue reached parliament’s Privileges Committee following the 1997 decision of an Alliance list MP, Alamein Kopu, to leave the party but remain in parliament. Its decision that the Alliance’s pledge was unenforceable resulted in the introduction by Labour of the Electoral (Party Registration) Bill, which required that party defectors resign their seats. To prevent the possibility of parties using the measure to simply expel dissident members from their caucus, thereby forcing them to resign their seats, the bill excluded party expulsion from its provisions. Issues raised in the debate included those of representation, proportionality and mandate. National opposed the bill on the grounds that ‘it is difficult to impose restrictions in law on the democratic freedom of MPs’. Although the bill was defeated, Labour and the Alliance have promised to re-introduce it on becoming the government.

Policy-seeking process

One of the most serious shortcomings of Strom’s analytical framework is its tendency to obscure the issue of interdependency, especially in relation to the importance that should be attached to each model. Nowhere is this more obvious than with respect to the relative importance of policy-seeking on coalition formation. While some scholars argue that policy-seeking is of primary concern, with parties coalescing around common priorities and objectives, others deem it to be less important than the pursuit of power (Lijphart 1984).

Clearly there is a fundamental link between the two objectives, a point captured by De Swaan (1973: 88) in his description of an actor striving for ‘a winning coalition in which [sic] he is included and which he expects to adopt a policy that is as close as possible, on a scale of policies, to his own most preferred policy’. In acknowledging the deficiencies inherent in the policy-seeking model, Strom establishes as a minimum standard the requirement that ‘no party should join a government without effecting policy change in its favour’ (1990: 568). This part of the paper will discuss the relative importance of policy-seeking for New Zealand’s coalition partners. It will focus on the dynamic interplay between policy and the pursuit of offices and votes, relationships which Strom’s static model largely fails to capture.
Despite the prolonged nature of the coalition bargaining process, there was much in the behaviour of both partners to suggest that policy was of secondary importance to the pursuit of office. As we have seen, National’s reputation for ideological purity, established during its six years in office, was seriously compromised in the run-up to the first PR election when, in an effort to maximise its vote, it became ever more moderate and pragmatic. NZ First also engaged in overtly opportunistic, patronage-based policy adjustments, making some significant policy u-turns right into the final few weeks of the campaign. An example of Peters’ use of patronage politics was his willingness to make policy commitments to prospective candidates in exchange for their support. One such deal involved a National MP, Peter McCardle, who switched to NZ First before the election on the understanding that his ‘work for the dole’ scheme, which had been rejected by National, would be adopted by NZ First. As a measure of good faith, following the coalition negotiations McCardle was appointed to cabinet as Minister of Employment. Within months the ‘work for the dole’ scheme began to be implemented. Peters also attracted the services of Neil Kirton, a senior health sector executive, who was a strong advocate of a publicly funded health system. Kirton was placed high on the party list and subsequently became the Associate Minister of Health.

Given the highly fluid and opportunistic nature of party policy, a trade-off might have seemed reasonable between NZ First’s office-seeking and policy-making aspirations, with National gaining ground on the policy agenda to compensate for its losses in the allocation of ministries. However, when the terms of the Coalition Agreement were announced, it became clear that NZ First had achieved both goals in almost equal measure. In searching for possible explanations beyond National’s sheer determination to stay in power, one is struck by the extent to which NZ First’s pragmatic, highly personal and somewhat indifferent approach to policy worked to its advantage. NZ First, unlike junior coalition partners in many other countries, was not an ideologically-driven party. In fact, much of its appeal to National lay in its lack of either a competing dogma or a coherent set of principled arguments. While concessions were required on a range of idiosyncratic proposals representing the pet projects of some key politicians, the total programme amounted to a fairly short and modest set of demands. Thus the bargaining process was considerably less fraught than it would have been with a more ideologically-motivated party, such as Act.

### TABLE 3: ATTITUDES TO TAX RATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reduce</th>
<th>Maintain</th>
<th>Increase*</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>100</td>
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</table>
NZ First’s pragmatic centrism is reflected in the findings of Table 3. As might be expected, National and Act candidates overwhelmingly endorsed further tax reductions (tax rates had been reduced a few months earlier). The strong preference of centre-left candidates for tax increases is equally understandable, especially given the way the question was framed, with tax hikes being linked to improvements in the health and education systems. NZ First candidates, on the other hand, chose to maintain tax rates at current levels, a position which seemed odd in light of their criticism of welfare retrenchment and demand for greater social spending - in response to a separate question, 84 per cent of NZ First candidates demanded a universally free health system, and 70 per cent wanted free education up to and including university.

This ambivalent stance can be explained not only by the disparate party backgrounds of its candidate base, with former Labour and National activists being represented in almost equal numbers, but also by the diverse nature of its electoral support. As a genuine protest party (only a quarter of its voters actually identified with the party), NZ First appealed to the elderly, many of whom were attracted by Peters’ social conservatism on immigration, law and order and race relations. At the same time it appealed to indigenous Maori and those on low (45 per cent earned less than $15,000 per annum) and middle incomes.

Given National’s vast parliamentary experience, its leaders may have had reason to believe that their magnanimity towards NZ First was not as misplaced as its partisan supporters alleged. Whereas NZ First had a raw and inexperienced team, National’s MPs had been in parliament for an average of ten years. In addition, some two-thirds of its MPs had served in the executive, with a number having been in cabinet continuously over the previous six years. National MPs also held 15 of the 17 committee chairmanships in the new government. Their ability to use their experience to advantage was manifested in a variety of ways, not least in taking credit for popular policies (such as free health care for young children, a NZ First initiative) whilst distancing themselves from unpopular ones (such as Peters’ 1997 referendum on compulsory retirement savings, which was rejected by over 90 per cent of voters). National was also able to force through ‘after minimal discussion a highly controversial budget and finance bill as well as other far from consensual legislation’ (Jenkins 1998: 21).
The complex interplay between the vote-seeking, office-seeking and policy-making models can be summarised thus. Having ambiguously pursued a mixture of populist and protectionist themes with a view to maximising its vote, NZ First proceeded to exercise the balance of power by forging a coalition with its old nemesis, National. By so doing, it attracted criticism for breaking pre-election promises and disregarding the express wishes of its own voters. At that point, office-seeking was the primary motivation, although NZ First was able to exploit National’s weak bargaining position by extracting a generous array of policy concessions. However, when neither ministerial positions nor policy initiatives proved helpful in wooing back its lost electoral support, the party proceeded to break ranks with National and return to the populist imagery on which its earlier appeal had been based.

Conclusion
Early evidence suggests that the consequences of candidate selection in New Zealand and Scotland are likely to have a number of similarities, as well as important differences. Already it is clear to many New Zealanders that PR’s effects are falling short of what its advocates had predicted. Several changes to the new system have been proposed in advance of the scheduled review in the year 2,000. These include a reduction in the number of MPs (from 120 to 99) and measures designed to provide more stable legislative-executive relations, such as the introduction of a fixed parliamentary term and the use of a constructive vote of no confidence. Polls on voting intentions point to the likelihood of a significant swing back to two-party voting at the 1999 election. In Scotland, where PR has been linked with limited home rule and a growing sense of national identity, initial attitudes among politicians and the public are altogether more positive.

In general, candidate selection methods represent an attempt to both increase central control and encourage the participation of grassroots party members. This seemingly contradictory goal of ‘centralising in order to decentralise’ is best exemplified by Scottish Labour’s tight control over candidate pre-selection and the ranking of lists, while using the one-member-one-vote method in hustings meetings to select constituency candidates from the approved list. Controlling both ends of the selection process has been defended on meritocratic and equity grounds, with selectors having been instructed to focus on the quality of the candidate, not what that person has done for the party. In New Zealand the difference is more of degree than of substance. On a superficial level the general trend has been towards more open selection, especially with respect to party activists or delegates nominating candidates for the party lists. The all-important ranking process, however, is firmly in the hands of carefully selected central committees. The high incidence of defections by third party MPs might reasonably have resulted in a review of selection procedures. However, the NZ
First president blamed ‘trying to be democratic’ for his party’s problems and promised to impose greater centralised control. In a similar vein, the Alliance began its 1999 selections with a commitment to greater control over preselection criteria.

While affirmative action measures are having an immediate and significant effect on the gender and ethnic balance of parliament, especially among parties of the centre-left, other selection changes promise to have largely detrimental outcomes. In particular, efforts to modernise and, arguably, sanitise the party’s image threaten the ideological diversity and breadth of representation of parliament. If the experience of New Zealand is any guide, such reforms also provide openings for new, more ideologically committed third parties. By effectively reducing political representation to the status of any other job, party selectors are in danger of discounting the importance of party loyalty and public service, two key features of the Westminster system of democracy. There is mounting evidence from the spate of party defections and parliamentary resignations in New Zealand, for example, that changes in selection criteria are having a detrimental effect on party discipline and morale, as well as posing an ongoing threat to the stability and durability of government. Finally, as some critics have observed, employing rigorous meritocratic criteria may also discriminate against particular social and employment categories, such as ethnic minorities, blue collar workers and the unemployed.

A number of first-term MPs, as well as members of the New Zealand public, have criticised MMP for failing to deliver any marked improvement in standards of co-operation and compromise, features of the consensus model they had come to regard as a by-product of PR. Two women MPs who chose to resign before completing their first three-year term have admitted to being worn down by ‘the brutalising nature of the business of politics’. However, given the lack of checks and balances in the New Zealand unicameral parliament, and with 74 of its 120 members having had previous parliamentary experience, it was perhaps unrealistic to expect an immediate cessation to the factionalism and ill-will. Inter-party relations in the new Scottish parliament will be similarly robust, especially since MSPs will have to work alongside the British government, as well as being constrained by established inter-party relations in the parent Westminster parliament. Given its recent experience of single-party government, Scottish Labour can expect to have the greatest difficulty in negotiating with and giving ground to the other parties. It is also suffers from the effects of being pulled in opposing directions; by the popular movement for greater Scottish self-determination and, on the other hand, by an instinctive desire to enforce centralised London-based control. This tension was evident during candidate selection and will be repeated if and when Scottish Labour draws up a policy agenda as the senior partner in government. These expected difficulties notwithstanding, the Scottish party system is less fractured and largely
devoid of the residual hostilities endemic to New Zealand’s splinter parties. Other indications of a more stable transitional phase include a strong, bipartisan commitment to make the new parliament work, as well as something which is unique to new parliaments, namely the absence of incumbent MSPs.

While the high proportion of first-term members (several Westminster MPs will be elected) has obvious advantages, not least a greater openness to new parliamentary principles and procedures, it also poses a number of potential risks. As New Zealand’s experience of coalition formation illustrates, lack of negotiating experience was evident in several different ways: the willingness of the two major parties to participate in an eight-week process of parallel negotiations; NZ First’s seemingly instinctive preference to be part of the government, when the role of constructive opposition might have been a preferable role for the party both tactically and electorally; and the political cost of NZ First’s office-maximising strategy for the stability of government, especially given the lack of parliamentary and executive experience of NZ First’s ministers.

The only viable permutations for coalition government appear to be pacts between the Liberal Democrats and either Labour or the SNP.40 A recent poll found that more voters favoured a Labour/Liberal Democrat pact than an SNP/Liberal Democrat one.41 However, both options present dangers for the partners involved. The Liberal Democrats, who are expected to hold the balance of power, have decided against parallel negotiations, preferring to negotiate first with the party winning the most seats. While the SNP’s refusal to compromise on its raison d’etre, a referendum on independence, appears to be an insurmountable barrier to its coalition prospects, the New Zealand experience bears witness to the eagerness with which parties negotiate the terms of a coalition agreement. In the case of the SNP, there may be room for an accommodation based on the strategy employed by the Parti Quebecois, namely postponement for an indeterminate period.42 While such a compromise risks polarising the party along the purist/pragmatist divide, a compensating feature is the chance to prepare the country for eventual independence. As we have seen, the chances of a coalition with Labour must be weighed against the Liberal Democrats’ instinctive distrust of Blair and his Westminster government. Thus the negotiations will be a test of the Liberal Democrats’ maturity, fortitude and negotiating skill.

Given Scotland’s unfamiliarity with coalitions, minority single-party government could well provide the smoothest transition to self-rule. Scottish Labour’s superior legislative and executive experience, together with its intimate relations with the British government, pose a formidable threat to the Liberal Democrats’ ability to impose a distinct character and style. As New Zealand’s third party ministers quickly discovered, there is no substitute for governmental experience, especially in dealing with opposition parties, the civil service, the
media, and the numerous interest groups which cross a minister’s path. Conversely, the SNP’s lack of legislative and executive experience may well hold as many dangers as any partnership with Labour, particularly as relations between Holyrood and Westminster deteriorate over the question of Scottish independence.

References


Endnotes

1 The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of the following people: Jenny Chapman and Phil Jerrat of the Department of Political Studies, University of Auckland; Peter Lynch and Stephen Ingle of the Politics Department, University of Stirling; and Alice Brown, Politics Department, University of Edinburgh. Alex Rowley and Derek Munn (Scottish Labour), Derek Barrie (Liberal Democrats), Alex Bell and Fiona Hyslop (SNP) and Iain Stewart (Scottish Conservative and Unionist party) agreed to be interviewed. Finally, the author acknowledges the encouragement and assistance of Jack Vowles (University of Waikato) and Peter Aimer (University of Auckland). Funding for the 1996 New Zealand Election Study was provided for by the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology.

2 The size of the New Zealand parliament has been the subject of a Citizens’ Initiated Referendum. In the wake of growing public disapproval with the new MMP parliament, a petition calling for the number of MPs to be reduced from 120 to 99 gathered the required number of signatures. The referendum will be held at the time of the 1999 election.


4 The (Glasgow) Herald, 9 February 1999.


6 The (Glasgow) Herald, 7 August 1998.

7 The (Glasgow) Herald, 6 April 1998.


11 A. Rowley, General Secretary, Scottish Labour party, personal interview, The Scotsman, 22 October 1996.

12 The (Glasgow) Herald, 6 January 1998.

13 The(Glasgow) Herald, 26 March 1998

14 The (Glasgow) Herald, 14 May 1998.


16 The (Glasgow) Herald, 4 March 1998.


18 A. Bell, research director, SNP. Personal interview, 25 August 1998, Edinburgh.


21 The relative absence of a preselection process has had some potentially serious repercussions. For example, in 1999 the Labour leader and senior party officials supported John Tamihere for the Maori seat of Hauraki in preference to a trade unionist and party stalwart. Tamihere announced that if he did not win the nomination he would consider running against the chosen Labour candidate. It was also revealed that he had been accused of rape, although a formal complaint had never been laid.

22 Scotland on Sunday, 20 February 1999.


24 The NZES candidate survey was conducted immediately following the 1996 election. A 24-page questionnaire was sent out to some 487 candidates. The response rate was 65 per cent or 316 returned questionnaires.

25 L. Harre MP, personal correspondence, 16 February 1999.

26 The NZES voter post-election survey involved a random sample of 1,650. The response rate was 63 per cent, or 1,043 completed questionnaires.

27 The NZES panel study included respondents who participated in the earlier studies of 1990 and 1993. Some 1,306 respondents participated in both the 1993 and 1996 surveys.

28 New Zealand Herald, 21 October 1996.
33 The Green party decided to contest the 1999 election on its own. Although its two MPs continued to vote with the Alliance, they had, to all intents and purposes, left the Alliance by 1997. The Liberal party went out of existence in 1998. Its sole MP will contest the 1999 election as an independent.
34 Waikato Times, 15 October 1997.
35 According to the latest public opinion poll, combined support for National and Labour stands at 82 per cent (1996 election 63 per cent). One Network News Colmar Brunton Poll, 12 February 1999.
37 D. Munn, research officer, Scottish Labour party, personal interview, 8 September 1998, Glasgow.
38 New Zealand Herald, 2 February 1998.
40 The Scottish Conservatives have said that they will not form a coalition with any other party after the May 1999 election. The Scotsman 29 January 1999.
41 The Scotsman, 6 February 1999.
42 While the SNP remains committed to a referendum within its first term, it is expected to be held at the end rather than the beginning of the four years. A Bell, research director, SNP. Personal interview, 25 August 1998, Edinburgh.