MPS’ REPRESENTATIONAL ROLES IN MMP SYSTEMS. A COMPARISON BETWEEN GERMANY AND NEW ZEALAND

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how Members of Parliament (MPs) in Germany and New Zealand (NZ), two countries with a similar MMP (Mixed Member Proportional) electoral system, define their representational role and how they perceive the roles of list and electorate MPs. Relying on interviews with 25 German and 27 NZ MPs, it shows that, while personal experiences and background also play a role, electoral incentives matter. Electorate MPs, who are elected directly in an electorate and thus dependent on votes within their electorate, are more likely to assert that they represent their electorate than list MPs who win a seat via the party list. Yet, list MPs who also campaigned actively in an electorate tend to argue that they primarily represent this electorate. This pattern holds in Germany, but is particularly strong in NZ. When asking MPs about their perceptions of the roles of list and electorate MPs, electorate MPs are more likely than list MPs to think that there is a difference, in particular in prestige. Compared with German electorate MPs, however, NZ electorate MPs more often explicitly say that they would not want to be a list MP and tend to more openly wonder about the role of list MPs, except of list MPs with an ethnic minority background. In sum then, it appears as if NZ MPs are still “grappling” with the concept of list MPs.

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INTRODUCTION

Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) electoral systems, such as those used in New Zealand and Germany, are characterized by Members of Parliament (MPs) elected by two different methods: electorate MPs who are elected directly from their electorate with the relative majority of the vote, and list MPs who win a seat in Parliament via the party list. There is an ongoing debate in the literature over whether these two types of Members of Parliament (MPs) behave differently. Some research (e.g. Klingemann and Wessels 2000; Lundberg 2006; McLeay and Vowles 2007; Patzelt 1997; Stratmann and Bauer 2002) has found a link between the way MPs are elected and their representational role, with electorate MPs spending more time on electorate-related activities than list MPs. Patzelt (2007), however, finds no significant difference between the number of hours that German list and electorate MPs invest in work for their electorates. Looking at both the way MPs have campaigned and the way they have been elected, Manow (2013) finds no evidence of a difference in committee membership (that is, in the likelihood of being a member of an electorate-oriented committee) between MPs elected in an electorate and MPs entering parliament via the party list having also contested an electorate. Similarly, investigating the number of locally relevant written questions in Hungarian parliament, Papp (2016) finds that electorate MPs submit a larger number of such questions than list MPs who did not campaign as an electorate MP, but less than list MPs who also campaigned as an electorate MP. This suggests that one has to look at more than the just MPs’ mandate, and also include the way they campaigned in order to understand their behaviour (see also e.g. Stoffel 2014).

Few studies have, however, asked list and electorate MPs themselves how they see their representational role and who they primarily represent. Yet, understanding how MPs themselves perceive their representational role, and in particular, whether they view themselves as a direct representative of an electorate or of a party or interest group will help us to better understand how representational democracy functions. Therefore, the current study investigates the extent to which MPs’ electoral pathways influence how MPs define who they represent. By examining MPs’ views on who they represent in general, the study is also broader than many previous studies (e.g. Manow 2013; Stoffel 2014) which mainly focus on the extent to which MPs represent their electorate.

In addition, the current paper examines the extent to which MPs themselves see differences in the representational roles and prestige of list and electorate MPs. By investigating these questions, I aim to add to our understanding of the extent to which MPs represent their constituencies. Additionally, knowing what MPs themselves think of the
differences in roles of list and electorate MPs can give us a clearer understanding of how parliament works under MMP. Are there two classes of MPs, with list MPs considered “inferior” to electorate MPs, or is parliament relatively homogenous, with both types of MPs considered legitimate representatives? This is important, as these perceptions may inform behaviours and affect the perceived legitimacy of list MPs and the MMP system as a whole.

In contrast to most previous work on the differences between list and electorate MPs under MMP which focusses on a single country, I use a two case comparison of Germany and New Zealand in the current study. Both countries use MMP electoral systems, but have different lengths of experience with the system. It was introduced in Germany in 1949, whereas New Zealand only introduced it after a referendum held in 1993, having previously used First-Past-The-Post (FPTP), with the first elections taking place under MMP in 1996. To answer my research questions, I rely on interviews conducted in 2016 with 25 German federal MPs and 27 New Zealand MPs. In both countries, I interviewed MPs from the two main parties, SPD and CDU/CSU in Germany and Labour and National in New Zealand, since these parties have a meaningful number of both list and electorate MPs, allowing for a direct comparison between the two types of MPs.

THEORISING (PERCEPTIONS OF) THE REPRESENTATIONAL ROLE OF MPs IN MMP SYSTEMS

The Representational Roles of List and Electorate MPs

A consequence of the design of MMP systems is that there are two types of MPs: electorate MPs who are elected directly in an electorate and therefore rely on support from their electorate to win an election, and list MPs who win a seat via the party list and therefore rely on receiving a high position on the list to win an election. It is often suggested that the two types of MPs behave differently: those elected via party lists are more likely to be oriented towards their parties than towards constituents, and thus primarily represent their party and interest groups, while those elected directly in an electorate will primarily focus on their constituents, and represent their electorate in parliament (e.g. Klingemann and Wessels 2000; Lancaster and Patterson 1990; Lundberg 2006; McLeay and Vowles 2007; Patzelt 1997; Stratmann and Bauer 2002).

The suggested difference in representational roles between electorate and list MPs has been attributed to the differences in electoral incentives between both types of MPs, with electorate MPs directly dependent on support from their electorate and list MPs being dependent on their position on the party list. Lundberg (2006), for example, posits that the differences in behaviour between list and electorate MPs in the Scottish Parliament and
Welsh National Assembly – where electorate MPs spend more time with constituents and seek more funding for their electorate than list MPs – are driven by a “rudimentary” rational choice calculus and MPs’ ambitions for re-election. Similar evidence has been shown for Germany, with those elected from single-member constituencies having a greater interest in pork barrel projects for their electorate than those elected from party lists (Lancaster and Patterson 1990). Furthermore, German research has found that list MPs are less likely than electorate MPs to consider it important to represent all members of their local electorate (Klingemann and Wessels 2000) and to be less likely to produce party-independent campaign material and run a party-independent campaign (Zittel and Gschwend 2008). This indicates that party allegiance is more important for list MPs. Similarly, studying the voting behaviour of German MPs in the 16th legislature (from 2005 to 2009), Sieberer (2010) reveals that the likelihood of deviating from the party line is significantly higher among electorate MPs compared with list MPs.

Overall, these findings thus suggest that MPs’ behaviour is driven by electoral incentives. The electoral incentives for candidates under MMP are, however, rarely straightforward. The vast majority of candidates in the German and New Zealand MMP system are so-called ‘dual candidates’, standing both in an electorate and on the party list. This dual candidacy raises effects in behaviour that do not correspond to the basic mandate divide and has been shown to result in a more nuanced effect of mandate on MPs’ behaviour. For example, Manow (2013; 2015) showed that German list MPs who also contested an electorate are as likely as electorate MPs to be a member of an electorate-oriented committee. Investigating locally relevant written questions in the Hungarian parliament, Papp (2016) revealed that candidates who lost in their electorate but entered parliament via the list were more likely to submit locally relevant written questions than list MPs who did not contest an electorate and more likely to do so than even electorate MPs. This behaviour makes sense from an electoral incentive point of view as, by focusing on their electorate, these MPs hope to win their electorate next time. Similarly and investigating allocation of federal road construction projects in Germany, Stoffel (2014) shows that in particular MPs with a weak position on the party list and who face a competitive district race focus on district service. Carman and Shephard (2007) show that list MPs of the Scottish parliament are significantly more likely to have an electorate office in more marginal constituencies. These findings thus indicate that electoral prospects matter but interact with the safety of one’s electorate seat. Primarily representing an electorate is thus particularly likely to occur among MPs who ran a very close race in their electorate. In comparison,
electorate MPs who feel confident that they will win their electorate may be less likely to focus on their electorate. The degree of safety of a seat, however, seems to lead to complex consequences for electoral incentives. Herron (2002), for example, finds that having a safe seat allows MPs to deviate from party policy more easily and focus on their electorate (Zittel 2012). By contrast, Becher and Sieberer (2008) show that MPs from safe electorates are more likely to toe the party line (see also Soffel 2014). This difference in behaviour may hinge on whether MPs feel their success in the electorate is self-made, or the result of their party’s endorsement (Batto 2012).

Finally, electoral incentives may interact with the stage of an MPs’ career. Senior MPs tend to play a more important role within their party, and are also more likely to be better known by voters compared with less experienced MPs who still need to build a strong link with their electorate to increase their profile and help to ensure their immediate electoral survival. Consequently, junior MPs may be more likely to primarily represent their electorate than more senior MPs who will, in their turn, be more likely to represent their party. Fenno (1978) indeed found that first term members go home more frequently and place a larger proportion of their staff in the district than do more senior members.

Similarly, Russell and Bradbury (2007) find evidence that new members engage in greater levels of electorate casework in order to build up a local profile.

In addition to the question of whether or not a basic mandate divide between list and electorate MPs exists, the rational choice approach, which suggests that electoral incentives will guide MPs’ behaviour, has been challenged, as factors other than rational thinking may influence MPs’ representational role. For instance, parties typically have an expectation about the extent to which an MP should focus on electoral work, with MPs from larger and left-wing parties generally taking on more of an electoral orientation (André et al. 2014; Patzelt 2007). Furthermore, MPs’ personal background and interests may also influence their behaviour. MPs can focus on a wide variety of tasks and take various roles, including party delegate or voters’ delegate (Dudzińska et al. 2014). The choice of these roles may be based on the MPs’ preferences and the extent different tasks give them satisfaction (Andeweg 1997; Searing 1994), rather than on whatever is most likely to get them re-elected. It is also not uncommon for MPs to move between list and electorate status throughout the course of their career, and the established connection with the electorate and habits of representing an electorate may persist when former electorate MPs become list MPs (Manow 2013; Olivella & Tavits, 2014). Indeed, if representational roles are
learned roles rather than based on rational choice (Zittel 2012), election history may impact who MPs feel that they represent.

Finally, institutional arrangements besides the electoral system may also have an effect on who MPs represent. For example, countries with multiple levels of government can mean that national-level MPs are not expected to spend as much time with members of the public, as those duties are delegated to the regional level (André et al. 2014; Patzelt 2007). District size may also play a role, with smaller districts (in terms of population) likely to lead to a stronger orientation toward electoral work (Anagnoson 1983).

Perceptions About List and Electorate MPs
To date, there has been limited systematic research on differences in perceptions among MPs themselves of the roles and prestige of list and electorate MPs in MMP systems. Shortly after New Zealand adopted MMP, Ward (1998) noted that list MPs were considered “second class” MPs by the media, and that some list MPs felt that electorate MPs saw themselves as ‘better’ than list MPs. This stemmed from the view that list MPs lack a mandate because they are indirectly elected, in contrast to electorate MPs who are elected directly by the voters. Moreover, there was the perception among colleagues, the media and the public that – because they were not elected directly – list MPs did not have a legitimate role in terms of electorate work, meaning their role is unclear. While this view has, perhaps, eased over time, a number of public submissions to the 2012 MMP review indicated that list MPs are viewed as “unelected”, and are only accountable to the party that had “appointed” them (Electoral Commission, 2012).

Some of New Zealand politicians also continue to see a clear distinction between list and electorate MPs. For example, electorate MP Peter Dunne (United Future), proposed in a 2016 interview that list MPs should be prohibited from being allowed to “pretend” to be from a particular electorate (The Spinoff 2016). Former electorate MP David Cunliffe (Labour) said in a radio interview in March 2017 (Radio New Zealand 2017): "Parliament is a very special place - people call it the gilded cage, because when you're in it's hard to look out, and that's why I guess I've enjoyed being an electorate MP." This suggests that he sees electorate MPs as being more in touch with the citizens than list MPs. Similarly, and looking at Germany, Patzelt (1997) concludes that Electorate MPs in the Bundestag regard themselves as more successful representatives of the citizens. Scholars investigating Scotland have also contended that electorate MPs often suggest that list MPs have more
‘free time’ and list MPs have also been referred to as second-class MPs (Carman and Shephard 2007).

**MIXED MEMBER PROPORTIONAL ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN NEW ZEALAND AND GERMANY**

The versions of MMP employed in New Zealand and Germany bear many similarities, which is not surprising, given that the German system was the example on which the New Zealand Royal Commission based its recommendations (Royal Commission on the Electoral System 1986). The first elections under MMP in New Zealand took place in 1996, after a referendum in 1993 selected MMP over FPTP as the country’s voting system for national elections. In Germany, MMP was introduced in 1949, making Germany the country with one of the longest existing mixed member systems.

In both systems, each voter casts two votes, one for a party and one for a candidate to represent their electorate. A party’s share of the seats in parliament is based primarily on their percentage of party votes, although electorate seats can cause deviation from a strictly proportional allocation (for example, if a party wins more electorate seats than they would otherwise be entitled to, based on their party vote, a so called “overhang”). A key difference between the two counties’ systems is that the party list in New Zealand is national, whereas each German state has a separate party list.

Both New Zealand and German MPs tend to have strong ties to their parties, as reflected in MPs’ tendency to vote along party lines. With regards to the status of MPs, there is no constitutional difference between list and electorate MPs in either country. Both share the same basic roles and responsibilities in parliament, and are eligible for the same positions, including committee membership and executive positions. Differences, however, exist in the funding of MPs in New Zealand, with electorate MPs (whose funding also differs depending on the size of their electorate) receiving a higher expense allocation than list MPs (Directions of the Speaker of the House of Representatives 2014). This difference does not exist in Germany.

There are other descriptive differences between the countries which may also influence behaviours and perceptions of representational roles. While numbers differ slightly per legislative period as a result of overhang seats, New Zealand’s 51st parliament (2014-2017) has 121 MPs, with 64 general electorate seats, seven Māori electorate seats and 50 list seats.1 Germany’s 18th Bundestag (2013-2017) comprises 630 MPs, including 298

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1 It is interesting to note that the Royal Commission on the Electoral System in New Zealand suggested an equal split between electorate seats and list seats. One of the arguments was that “if
electorate seats and 332 list seats. The proportion of list MPs is thus larger in the Bundestag compared with the New Zealand Parliament. In both countries, the major parties tend to dominate the electorate seats. There is also a large difference in the average size of electorates (in terms of population) between the two countries, with Germany having electorates approximately 3.5 times larger on average than New Zealand. Whereas the average population per electorate is 252,072 people in Germany, it is only 73,950 in New Zealand.²

Dual candidacies, where a candidate stands in an electorate and has a position on the party list, are allowed in both Germany and New Zealand and are very common in both countries (Electoral Commission 2012; Manow 2015). Parties generally expect electorate candidates to campaign both to win the electorate seat and to increase their share of the party vote in the electorate.³ In both countries, the two main parties have few candidates who run on the list only. Yet, while there seems little controversy over the practice of dual candidacy in Germany (Shugart and Tan 2016), it has increasingly come under scrutiny and criticism in New Zealand, and it was one of the provisions subject to the review of MMP in 2011 (Electoral Commission 2012). The biggest controversy over dual candidacy stems from incumbents losing their electorate race yet remaining in parliament via the party list. These legislators are sometimes referred to by names like ‘zombies’ or ‘back-door MPs (Shugart and Tan 2016).

Finally, in New Zealand, parties typically assign “duty electorates” to members elected from the party list to serve as the party’s designated representative in that electorate to deal with casework and other electorate concerns (Heitshusen, Young and Wood 2005). This practice is also followed in Germany.

EXPECTATIONS

Before turning to a description of the interview data and findings based on the interviews, I first summarize my main expectations.

² This is the result of simply dividing the total population of each country by the number of electorate seats.
³ In New Zealand, however, the Labour Party has chosen to have all its candidates for the Māori seats run as electorate only in the 2017 election (Davidson 2017).
Differences in Representational Roles

I expect differences to exist between list and electorate MPs in the representational roles they believe they have, with electorate MPs, in general, believing they represent their electorate, and list MPs mainly believing they represent their party or a particular social group to which they belong. For example, list MPs who belong to an ethnic minority may feel they represent their ethnic group. However, list MPs who also campaigned in an electorate may also feel they primarily represent that electorate, especially if it was a close race and list MPs hope to win the electorate at the next election. List MPs who have previously been electorate MP will also be more likely to primarily represent their electorate than list MPs without such an experience.

Besides whether an MP holds a list or electorate seat, other characteristics that may play a role include MPs’ seniority (with senior MPs more likely to focus on their party, and junior MPs more likely to focus on their electorate), MPs’ role within the party (if they hold a major role within party they may be more likely to represent the party), the MP’s ideology (with left-wing MPs more likely to represent the electorate) and personal experiences and preferences of MPs.

Differences in Perceptions

I expect electorate MPs to see themselves as having a more prestigious role, having been elected by “the voters.” List MPs will not perceive such a difference, but may be aware that electorate MPs believe they hold a more prominent role.

Cross-National Differences

While scholars have argued that electorate work is a critical part of holding office for German MPs (Patzelt 1997), having previously used a First-Past-the-Post electoral system, New Zealand has a very strong tradition of electorate work (Ward 1998), and it has constituencies encompassing fewer voters compared with Germany. These characteristics may mean that New Zealand MPs (both list and electorate) will be more likely to primarily represent their electorate compared with German MPs. Debates around the introduction of MMP in New Zealand in 1996 and the subsequent referendum in 2011, highlighted the difference between list and electorate MPs, which may result in a greater difference in the representational role of list and electorate MPs in New Zealand compared with Germany.

Related, differences in perceptions between the role of list and electorate MPs may also be larger in New Zealand compared with Germany. The German system has state party lists and, as a consequence, German list MPs may feel they represent their region/state.
DATA
To examine the representational role of MPs and MPs’ perceptions of the role of list and electorate MPs, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 25 German MPs and 27 New Zealand MPs in 2016. The sample of interviewees has been restricted to MPs affiliated with one of the two main parties (Labour or National in New Zealand, and SPD or CDU/CSU in Germany) since they are the only ones that have a meaningful number of both list and electorate MPs. The selection of my sample of MPs in each country was basically random, but I aimed at interviewing MPs that are diverse in the way they have campaigned and been elected, their seniority, and gender. Table A in the Appendix provides an overview of the interviewed MPs.

Interviewees were asked who they feel they primarily represent, what they consider as their main task, whether they see differences between list and electorate MPs, and if so, what those differences are. Emphasis is thus given to MP’s own orientations and perceptions. Consequently, I rely on subjective information, rather than objective data. In the following section, I indicate the MP’s party and gender when providing a quote or referring to a statement by a specific MP, except in cases where it might compromise confidentiality.

ANALYSIS OF THE REPRESENTATIONAL ROLES OF MPs
The Representational Roles of List and Electorate MPs
When asking MPs who they believe they primarily represent a pattern confirming a mandate divide of electorate MPs being more likely to say that they primarily represent their electorate than list MPs emerged. Yet, list MPs who also campaigned actively in an electorate also had a tendency to argue that they primarily represent the electorate in which they campaigned and in which most list MPs also hold an office. As one New Zealand list MP (Female-Labour) who narrowly lost an electorate contest on multiple occasions said:

“I am not allowed to say that I represent my constituency, but I do feel that it is my home base. And I do feel a duty to speak on behalf of this constituency.”

It is, however, not only list MPs who ran a close race for an electorate seat who argue that they represent the electorate in which they campaigned. Indeed, a handful of list MPs, who campaigned in an electorate where they were very unlikely to win the electorate, believed that they primarily represent their electorate. In these cases, the MP (supported by their party) felt it is important to have a presence in the electorate, despite being unlikely to win
the electorate. As one list MP (Female-Labour) who said she primarily represented her electorate put it:

“While I am not an electorate MP, I am the only Labour voice in the constituency.”

While the overall majority of MPs did suggest that they primarily represent their electorate, most MPs did say that in cases of conflict between the opinion of their electorate (while realizing that various opinions often exist within the electorate) and their own opinion, they would follow their own opinion. MPs thus seem to take up the role as a trustee rather than a delegate. Patzelt (1997: 67-68) also argued that “MPs view themselves as ‘trustees’ holding a free mandate, and they would not like to be constrained in their discretion, that is, to act as ‘delegates’ with a ‘binding’ or ‘imperative’ mandate.”

The pattern of electorate MPs being more likely to argue that they represent their electorate does appear in both Germany and New Zealand, but is more pronounced in the latter. Indeed, in New Zealand, many list MPs stated that they represent a particular social group rather than their electorate. More striking, however, was the cross-national difference in the satisfaction that electorate-related work gave. Indeed, when asked which part of the job as MP they found most satisfying only four German MPs (three electorate and one list MP) mentioned electorate-related work. By contrast, the vast majority of the New Zealand MPs interviewed mentioned electorate-related work, and in particular the satisfaction that individual case work gave. This seems to suggest that, with its long history of FPTP, electorate work is (still) considered as a more important and satisfying job in the New Zealand parliament than it is in Germany. As one would expect, electorate MPs were more likely to say that they find electorate-related work the most satisfying part of their job as MP than list MPs in New Zealand. Hence, there does seem to be a link between the way MPs are elected, the group they feel they primarily represent, and the work that gives them most satisfaction.

There were few obvious differences between the parties of both countries in MPs’ views on whether they primarily represent their electorate, though a pattern was noticeable in Germany, with MPs of the left-wing SPD being more likely to believe they represented their electorate compared with CDU/CSU MPs. In addition, there did not appear to be a pattern indicating that seniority decreased MPs likelihood of saying that they represent an electorate.

MPs also named other social groups that they felt they represented, often related to their policy focus and committee membership, such as working families, young people, the
self-employed and craftsmen. While list MPs were appreciably more likely to believe that they represent a specific social group, several electorate MPs also thought that they represented a specific social group. For example, one electorate SPD MP and had a background in education as a teacher argued that he primarily represented young people. Another SPD electorate MP said he primarily represented workers, relating this back to his background as a unionist. This indicates that MPs’ views about their representational role is not only influenced by electoral incentives but also by personal preferences, background and previous occupational experience.

Surprisingly few MPs claimed to primarily represent their party and – in contrast to what one may expect – it was more common among electorate than list MPs. Representing the party was often mentioned in combination with representing the electorate. For example, as one electorate New Zealand Labour MP (Male) said:

“I primarily represent my whole constituency, but I am a Labour MP with particular values.”

However, while MPs do not tend to say that they primarily represent their party, most did say that in cases of conflict between the group that they primarily represent (whether it is their electorate or a particular social group) and their party, they would follow the party line once the caucus (where they would present their position) has taken a stance. This confirms the importance of party politics. Both list and electorate MPs are highly partisan, and both list and electorate MPs realize that they are selected by their parties, and in parliament thanks to their party, although this relationship was stressed more often by list MPs.

Leaving aside conscience issues on which MPs vote individually, preference voting is limited in both New Zealand and Germany and most MPs follow the party line, even when it goes against the interests and opinions of their electorate or the interest group they represent. Some do, however, refer to possible electoral risks when following the party line. Related to the policy of fracking, one Electorate MP (CDU/CSU – female) explicitly said:

“If I followed the party-line, I would not get re-elected.”

A small minority of electorate MPs also claimed to follow their electorate in cases where their own and their electorate’s interests and opinions differs significantly from their party’s policy line. One long-term New Zealand MP of a rural electorate, for example, highlighted that he has to pay attention to the issues and the positions in his rural electorate which does not have the facilities and support of a large city. The needs of his electorate differ from those of urban electorates, and need to be heard in parliament. He has a strong
belief in geographical representation, and has in the past not followed the party line and not used the party branded hoardings, running his own campaign.

Among those who have been both list and electorate MP, the vast majority argued that they define their representative role as MP in a similar way regardless of the type of seat they held. Yet, a few did note that the group that they represented differed. One Labour MP (Male) argued that as a list MP he brought business experience and expertise within the party’s caucus and thus also represented the group of business people. As electorate MP, he focused more on his electorate. A similar shift in focus happened to a Pasifika MP (Male–Labour) who specifically represented the Pasifika community as list MP, whereas he primarily represents his electorate (which has a large Pasifika community) as electorate MP. Finally, a female electorate Labour MP who was (briefly) a list MP in the past did recognize that as a list MP she was less self-directed and had to do what the party and leader asked her to do.

Overall, ethnic minority MPs in New Zealand often highlighted representing their ethnic group. This held for both electorate and list MP, though ethnic minority MPs are significantly more likely to be a list MP and are often presented by the party as the MP representing a particular minority group (Barker and Coffé 2016). Some ethnic minority MPs also prefer to be a list MP and only campaign as list candidate allowing them to focus on the representation of their ethnic group. For example, one MP from an ethnic minority stated that he and his party considered standing him in an electorate, but eventually decided against it, as he would then also have to focus on an electorate whereas only standing as a list MP allowed him to focus exclusively on his ethnic community. In addition, he argued that while there are many other (non-ethnic minority) MPs who could replace him in an electorate, none could replace him as the MP for his ethnic community.

A few MPs also ‘outed’ themselves as gay during the interview and said they believed they represent the gay community. Women, both in New Zealand and Germany, rarely suggested that they primarily represent women. MPs, including MPs in Germany elected on a state-level list, also never mentioned a region broader than their electorate or state as primary focus of their role as representative.

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4 I was unfortunately only able to interview one ethnic minority MP in Germany. This list MP argued that he does not represent ethnic minorities but did recognize that he could act as a link between his continent of origin and Germany.
Perceptions About List and Electorate MPs

Turning to the question about MPs’ perceptions of the difference between list and electorate MPs, only a small minority of both list and electorate MPs believe that there is a difference in the likelihood that list and electorate MPs will be successful in receiving funding for electorate-related projects. This success is said to mainly depend on whether or not one’s own party is in government.

Electorate MPs do, however, believe that there are differences in other respects between list and electorate MPs. In particular, they see themselves as being more free and independent and being able to be more critical compared with list MPs who are said to be more likely to follow the party. For example, one electorate MP (Male-CDU/CSU) stated:

“As an electorate MP, I am more independent. I do not depend on party leadership.”

Or as a Labour electorate MP (Male) put it:

“List MPs generally have to be more mindful as their position depends on their position on the party list.”

Many electorate MPs also highlighted the experience and feeling of having been elected directly by the voters, compared with list MPs who are directly elected via the party list. As one male electorate CDU/CSU MP stated:

“As an electorate MP, you win a lot of trust from the voters.”

Some electorate MP also see being elected directly by the voters as a personal validation and confirmation. As one female electorate Labour MP put it:

“I think I’d rather put my hands in the people, if the people want me to be their representative, then I’m happy to serve them.”

Furthermore, various electorate MPs believe that they have more (informal) influence within the party and some even argue that they have more (informal) influence. Finally, some electorate MPs do believe that they are busier and have more obligations because of their work in their electorate compared with list MPs.

List MPs, in their turn, do not see a difference between the two types of MPs and tend to highlight that list and electorate MPs have the same rights and responsibilities. Some do mention that some electorate MPs may believe that they are more important or prestigious than list MPs. In New Zealand, some list MPs also mentioned the difference in resources. One List MP (Female–Labour) was particularly critical about this:

“There is a difference in terms of resources. That is fundamentally wrong since I do the same as electorate MPs. But I am seen as a secondary citizen.”
While the majority of MPs who have been both list and electorate MP argued that there were no major differences in their jobs as list or electorate MP, some did see a difference between electorate and list MPs in prestige and in the dependency towards the party. One electorate MP (Male-Labour) who had been list MP in the past stated:

“There is a difference. List MPs will say that there are no differences, and MPs may say in public that there are no differences, but there are. There is an hierarchy. As a list MP, you know [as a list MP] that [electorate MPs] have an electorate and have been directly elected by the voters.”

Some MPs with experience as both list and electorate MP, particularly in New Zealand, also explicitly said that they prefer to be electorate MP. This was often related to the experience having received a direct mandate from the voters, and a feeling of being more free and less dependent on the party (and the list formation). One female electorate Labour MP who had been a list MP in the past phrased it as follows:

“There is a huge difference between list and electorate MPs: it is a different mandate with different responsibilities and a different link with party and caucus. As a list MP, you have strong party obligations. I had to do various things for the party. The office of Helen Clark was very directive and told me what I had to do.”

Overall, New Zealand electorate MPs perceive more difference between list and electorate MPs compared with German electorate MPs. New Zealand electorate MPs also tend to more openly wonder about the role of list MPs, particularly so for list MPs who do not campaign in an electorate (excepting list MPs with an ethnic background.) Many NZ Electorate MPs also explicitly stated that they would not want to be a list MP, something few German MPs expressed. Those who made that argument commonly highlighted that as an electorate MP, they are elected directly by and received a mandate from “their” electorate and the voters. By contrast, list MPs have no direct mandate from the people. Both within Labour and National, list MPs were mainly seen as a role for ethnic minorities, to increase ethnic diversity in the New Zealand Parliament. As one male electorate Labour MP (who also only campaigned as an electorate MP) put it:

“A white, middle-aged, heterosexual man should not be a list MP”, thereby arguing that the main aim of the list process should be to allow parliament to look more diverse.
CONCLUSION

The main aim of the current paper was to examine how the electoral pathways of MPs within MMP systems define their representational role and how these pathways influence the way in which list and electorate MPs are perceived. Overall, the interviews conducted for this research show evidence supporting the assumption that electoral incentives shape MPs’ definition of their representational role, as suggested by the rational choice approach. There is a trend, in Germany and particularly in New Zealand, of electorate MPs being more likely than list MPs to assert that they primarily represent their electorate. However, list MPs who also campaigned actively in an electorate tend to argue that they primarily represent this electorate. Yet, factors other than electoral incentives – such as MPs personal background, previous occupation, and interests – also play a role in the way that MPs define their representational role and the primary group that they represent. These groups, which are more commonly mentioned among list than electorate MPs, vary widely and include groups such as young people, self-employed people, working class people, and ethnic minority groups.

Few MPs argued that they primarily represent their party, but when conflict on policies occurs between the group they represent, their own opinion and the party’s line, most MPs eventually follow the party line. While this does not indicate that parties restrict the arena for debate over policy proposals, it does show that parliamentary parties are tightly disciplined when voting on policy matters. When MPs’ ideas and positions differ from those of the group they represent, most MPs will follow their own position and thus take up the role as a trustee rather than a delegate.

In both countries, when asking MPs about their perceptions of the roles of list and electorate MPs, electorate MPs are more likely than list MPs to think that there is a difference, and particularly so in prestige. This pattern is particularly strong in New Zealand. Compared with German electorate MPs, New Zealand electorate MPs also more often explicitly say that they would not want to be a list MP. They also tend to more openly wonder about the role of list MPs, except of list MPs with an ethnic minority background. It thus seems difficult for a new political system and culture to evolve and to be supported by MPs, as it appears as if New Zealand MPs are still “grappling” with the concept of list MPs. In New Zealand, the role of list MPs is seen as one primarily for ethnic minority groups, and thus is used to bring more diversity to parliament. For other non-territorial interests (e.g. women’s interests), the link with list MPs was rarely made. More generally, the
representation of the interests of women was rarely spontaneously mentioned during the interviews.

In sum then, this study confirms that it is important to look beyond a basic mandate divide when trying to understand MPs’ attitudes and behaviour, and to include other explanations than those based on electoral incentives. In addition, the cross-national approach, which has been rarely used in the existing literature on MMP and MPs’ attitudes and behaviour, suggests that factors other than the electoral system influence MPs’ attitudes and behaviour. While Germany and New Zealand have the same electoral system, significant differences do occur, and MPs themselves perceive the roles and prestige of list and electorate MPs differently. The latter has – to the best of my knowledge – not been studied systematically before, but does indicate that perceptions about the role and prestige of list and electorate MPs do differ between list and electorate MPs, particularly in New Zealand. This is important as it indicates that – among MPs themselves – list MPs who do not belong to an ethnic minority group and who do not have a meaningful role in an electorate are seen as inferior to electorate MPs, and particularly so among those who have been elected as an electorate MP themselves. This suggests that the Parliaments, and in particular the New Zealand parliament where MMP was introduced more recently than in Germany, has two types of MPs with one being seen as more prestigious and even superior. This may affect the perceived legitimacy of list MPs and the MMP system as a whole. It will be interesting to see how these perceptions about list MPs may change over time as New Zealand becomes more familiarized with MMP. Future research could also extend the current study by including MPs from smaller parties (some of which have only list MPs) and explore how these MPs perceive the difference between list and electorate MPs.

Finally, it would be interesting to compare politicians’ and citizens’ perceptions of the role and prestige of list and electorate MPs in both Germany and New Zealand, and also investigate how the interact with the media’s portrayal of those roles. Previous work has illustrated the close connections between the views of politicians, the public and the media on particular issues (Herbst, 1998), so the perceptions of these actors about the roles of list and electorate MPs – and, particularly, how those perceptions interact – would help to shed light on how the perceptions of the roles of list and electorate MPs described in this study originate.
REFERENCES


Patzelt, Werner J. 1997. German MPs and Their Roles. In Wolfgang C. Müller and Thomas


**APPENDIX**

Table A: Overview Interviewed MPs

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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Party</th>
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Notes: a DE: Germany; NZ: New Zealand