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Formation, Durability and Susceptibility

Coalition Traits that Affected New Zealand's MMP Governments of 1996-2002

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relevant impact of three influences - policy, personality and opportunity - on New Zealand governments since 1996. The Mixed Member Proportional electoral system (MMP) was adopted by New Zealand for the 1996 general election. The various coalition government arrangements since then have been analysed using a series of case studies of identified events during coalitions' crucial pre-election, formation, duration and termination stages. The roles assumed by, or perceived of, small parties have been important as have the actions of the pivotal party in each government.

My interest in this topic springs from my service as an Alliance MP. I was an Alliance party list Member of Parliament during the 45th and 46th Parliaments (1996-2002). Systems theory was relied upon as the methodology with which to study relevant political processes. Key informant interviews and participant observation were the main research methods.

This research investigates the traits, apparent in the coalitions formed from 1996 until 2002, which contributed to each government's continuation or termination. Each stage reflected the parties' competing interests as argued by theorists such as Muller and Strøm. Wolfgang Muller and Kaare Strøm knitted together theoretical approaches and concluded that politicians are motivated by competing goals. This seminal work provides the theoretical guideline for explaining events in New Zealand and was adopted as a framework to develop this research.

Coalitions faced policy shocks, adverse polls and other critical events during the three coalition governments included in this study. Politicians adapted the formal and informal constraints. In this way, they attempted to strengthen the attributes of both the Parliaments and Cabinet to ensure that they were robust enough to withstand adverse incidents. Politicians' ambitions fluctuated between seeking office, policy objectives or electoral support depending upon the circumstances of the time. Stable and durable coalitions, as desired by the 1986 Royal Commission on the Electoral System, were those where the relevant parties' leadership enjoyed positive relationships with each other.

However, parties could not be considered to be unitary actors. Intra-party relationships were important factors. Intra-party dissension contributed to inter-party conflict and vice versa. Governments that were terminated earlier than constitutionally required suffered from deteriorating intra-party and/or inter-party relationships. The crucial component identified as an important consideration for the success or otherwise of any coalition government can be summed up as that pertaining to ‘relationship issues’ as affected by policy, personality and opportunity.

Acknowledgments

This is a key informant, interview based thesis and I would have been unable to conduct the research without the willingness and openness of my former parliamentary colleagues. Serving and former MPs from all parties as well as officials gave time to answer questions during reasonably lengthy interviews in a forthright and informative manner. I want to take this opportunity to convey my thanks to them as well as to the MPs and academics from Eire, England and Scotland who arranged and rearranged their crammed schedules so as to be able to contribute to my research. The efficient assistance of staff in New Zealand House, London and the Office of the Clerk Houses of the Oireachtas in suggesting and arranging interviews is much appreciated. Many thanks.

These interviews, conducted in Eire and Britain, were carried out during an event packed tour with my mother, Joan, in 2004. Mum and I raced around England and Scotland cramming tourist sights in with interview appointments. Stress levels rose on several occasions as late or rescheduled interviews required speedy dashes to the airport to meet flights or roundabouts appeared that did not feature on our out-dated touring map. However, I am grateful to Mum for her company, understanding and forbearance during this time of haste, malfunctioning tape recorders and chaotic airport hassles. As a treasured bonus, this study provided me with the opportunity to spend additional time with Dad during the last weeks of his illness as I sorted interview scripts on the table as my bemused father looked on. I suspect that Mum and my late Dad, Paul, were never quite sure what I was up to taking time out to study however they were always supportive and understanding of the often rushed cups of coffee as I dashed from one deadline to another.

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I have already mentioned two members of my family but I want to introduce you to some more. This thesis is dedicated to my children, John, Paula and Conrad, and particularly to my wife and partner, Kirsty. My family gave up a lot when I served in Parliament and continued to sacrifice family time when I began my university studies. My family's support allowed me to study full-time instead of dragging the work out over many years. This was a major factor in my completion. Not only did Kirsty have to work harder and longer to pay the bills, she spent many hours alone as I shut myself away typing on the computer. Many a meal time was missed or hurried and leisure time forgone as thesis time encroached. These stolen hours can never be replaced. Not only was there never a complaint but Kirsty read, proofed and corrected this thesis several times. Kirsty also noted relevant articles in the newspapers, magazines and on television that contributed to my gaining a greater understanding of the topic. John, Paula and Conrad all have an insightful and deep understanding of politics and often contributed, probably unknowingly, to my studies with their discussions and comments. They also expertly steered me through the complications of Microsoft Word which was an appreciated bonus. With all the help that I received from outside the home I would never have been able to start, let alone complete this study without the continuous and proactive support of Kirsty and my family.

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Glossary

Advocacy Coalitions

Wallis and Dollery (1997) discussed a concept of "advocacy coalitions" where networks of individuals or groups "engaged on a particular policy quest". They argued that the members of an advocacy coalition network were bound together by shared policy ambitions.

Act

Act New Zealand Party. More information on Act can be found on their website <http://www.act.org.nz>

Alliance

The Alliance Party. More information on the Alliance can be found on the party's website <http://www.alliance.org.nz>

APL

Autonomous policy leaders have a passionate commitment to using a particular policy to make a difference rather than vote or office seeking (Wallis & Dollery, 1997).

CD

The Christian Democrat Party.

Connected (coalitions)

A coalition is connected if its members are ideologically adjacent in a one-dimensional policy space (Axelrod, 1970; Crombez, 1996).

Consociational (societies)

These are pluralist societies such as Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands. They are pluralist societies, divided by cleavages but exhibit co-operation among the elites (Crombez, 1996).

Democratic Party

The NZ Democratic Party. The NZ Democratic Party joined the Alliance and remained with Jim Anderton's Progressive Party for the 2002 election. Following that election the party decided to become a separate party again. More information on the NZ Democratic Party can be found at <http://www.democrats.org.nz>. See also Social Credit.

Deterministic

The philosophy that all events, including human actions are fully determined by preceding events and so freedom of choice is illusory (*Collins concise dictionary*, 1995).

Electoral Coalition

An electoral coalition is a formal pre-election arrangement between parties. Sona Golder (2005) devised a definition of electoral coalitions as “a collection of parties that do not compete independently in an election either because they publicly agree to coordinate their campaigns, run joint candidates or joint lists, or govern together following the election” (p. 652).

Equilibrium

A coalition is in equilibrium if there is no other alternative that can govern and guarantee its members no less than the current situation. This means that the parties in equilibrium cannot find a more satisfactory alternative arrangement (M. Taylor & Herman, 1971).

FPP

First Past the Post. The non-proportional system of electoral voting that preceded the adoption of MMP in New Zealand.

Formateur Party

The formateur party is the largest party in the governing coalition (Volden & Carrubba, 2004). A formateur is an individual who is empowered or central to forming a coalition.

Fractionalisation

Fractionalisation is an index that characterises the size and numbers of parliamentary parties. The more parties in a legislature inevitably means there are many small parties, which increases the fractionalisation of the legislature. The more fractionalised the more potential coalition partners and the greater the number of potential viable cabinets (Boston, Church, & Pearse, 2004; Grofman & van Roozendaal, 1997).

Government

Different scholars use different definitions of government. Most refer to a change in government as a change in cabinet and use the terms interchangeably. Lijphart (1984) and Dodd (1976) use the idea of a change in party composition as depicting a change in cabinet. Grofman and van Roozendaal (1997) defined a cabinet as being terminated (and hence a new cabinet or government formed) if new elections were required or if a new cabinet formation was necessary, whether or not the previous cabinet was reinstated. Browne, Gleiber, and Mashoba (1984), King, Alt, Burns and Laver (1990) and Warwick (1992b) used a similar but more detailed definition of government termination if 1) it is removed from power by its parliament; 2) it resigns; 3) its party composition or prime minister changes; or 4) an election takes place. In effect 1, 2 and 4 have similar consequences of either an election or new negotiations. Item 3 also means a reconstructed cabinet. Taylor and Herman (1971) used the definition of a government being headed by the same prime minister and relied on the support of the same party or parties in the chamber.

GE

GE is an acronym for genetic engineering (genetic modification) or a genetically engineered organism.

GM

GM (genetic modification) is an acronym for genetic engineering or a genetically engineered organism.

GMO or GMOs

GMOs is an acronym for a genetically modified organism or organisms.

Greens or Green Party

The Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand. More information on the Greens can be found on their website <http://www.greens.org.nz>

House

The New Zealand House of Representatives, ie the Legislature.

HSNO

The *Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Bill*.

Labour

The New Zealand Labour Party. More information on the Labour Party can be found on their website <http://www.labour.org.nz>

Majority Government

A majority government occurs when a party or group of representatives controls at least half of the legislature. For example the New Zealand convention requires a vote that is greater than fifty per cent in the legislature to pass legislation. Therefore, the majority would have to comprise no less than fifty per cent plus one.

Mana Motuhake

A Māori based party formed by former Labour minister Hon. Matiu Rata. The party was a founding member of the Alliance.

Māori Party

More information on the Māori Party can be found on their website <http://www.maoriparty.com>

Minimum Winning Coalition

The withdrawal of any one party from a minimum winning coalition would bring down the government. This is a coalition that is rendered a blocking coalition or a losing coalition by the removal of any member. There is no party that is not necessary to

maintain the coalition's winning status (Crombez, 1996; Dodd, 1976; Riker, 1975, p. 40).

Minority Government

The parties that comprise the cabinet do not control a majority of seats in the legislature and so the government has to seek the support of other non-executive parties (Crombez, 1996). Laver and Shepsle (1990) used a simpler definition of, "governments whose participants do not constitute a legislative majority" (p. 885).

MMP

Mixed Member Proportional is the electoral system adopted by New Zealand in 1996. Electors cast two votes: one for a candidate and one for a party. The parliamentary make-up is composed through proportional means.

Monotonicity

An increase in the number of votes for a candidate or issue will provide an increase (but certainly not a decrease) in support for a candidate or issue. In this way there is an amalgamation of individual tastes (or values) into a social outcome (Riker, 1982).

National

The New Zealand National Party. More information on the National Party can be found on their website <http://www.national.org.nz>

NBR

The National Business Review is a weekly newspaper with content oriented towards business news.

Neutrality

Neutrality is a condition of simple majority decision-making and is also known as duality. This means that the process is neutral and does not favour, or advantage, any alternative (such as a candidate or the status quo) over another (Riker, 1982, p. 56).

NLP

NewLabour Party. Initially formed from former mainly Labour Party members and became a constituent party of the Alliance. The NLP disbanded in July 2001 and the party's website is no longer active.

NOOM

The *New Organisms and Other Matters Bill*.

NZF or NZ First

New Zealand First Party. More information on the NZ First Party can be found on their website <http://www.nzfirst.org.nz>

Oversized or Surplus Majority Government

An oversized government is defined as any coalition in which a party may leave and the remainder still comprises a majority (Crombez, 1996; Volden & Carrubba, 2004).

Payoffs

Refer to 'Side payments'.

Pivotal Systems

Pivotal systems occur when parties fight elections individually rather than in alliances with other parties (Bergman, 2003).

Pivotal Position

A pivotal position is the position that is occupied by the last member of the minimal winning coalition. This is the point where if one member is subtracted then the coalition is no longer a winning one (Riker, 1975, p. 125)

Poisson Process

The Poisson process is a statistical process. A Poisson distribution models the number of events occurring randomly in a fixed time at an average rate (NIST/Sematech, 2006).

Polarisation

Polarisation is the degree of ideological distance between parties. Generally, polarisation is the spread of parties along the ideological continuum but may also be measured by society's support for extreme or anti-system parties (Boston et al., 2004; Grofman & van Roozendaal, 1997; King et al., 1990).

Policy Horizon

This term refers to the maximum extent of policy compromise that a party is willing to accept in order to join a government and beyond those limits a party would prefer to stay in opposition (Warwick, 2000, p. 38).

Policy Viability

"The incumbent government is policy viable if its policy position is such that there is no alternative executive coalition that can put forward a credible policy position that is preferable to the incumbent government by a majority of legislators" (Laver & Budge, 1992, p. 6).

Probabilistic

A measure of a degree of confidence in the occurrence of an event measured on a scale of 0-1 where zero is impossible and 1 is certain.

Progressive

Jim Anderton's Progressive Party also called the Progressive Party for election and parliamentary purposes. The Progressives were formerly the Progressive Coalition, and Jim Anderton's Progressive Coalition. More information on the Progressive Party can be found on their website <http://www.progressive.org.nz>

RCES

The Royal Commission on the Electoral System (RCES) tabled their Report of the Royal Commission on the Electoral system in 1986. Among other things it recommended MMP as the preferred electoral system.

Registered Party

These are New Zealand's political parties that are formally registered with the Electoral Commission. The Electoral Commission is required to maintain and make available for public inspection the Register of Political Parties. The register shows for each party its name, any abbreviated name, any component parties, dates of registration of the party and any logo, details of its secretary and contact information, along with dates of amendments. The parties might or might not be represented in Parliament. For more information, see http://www.elections.org.nz/parties/registered_political_parties.html

RoC

A political party called the Right of Centre Party. It had a brief parliamentary existence just prior to the 1996 election.

Rationality Condition.

Where participants in an activity, faced with choices, choose the course of action that is deemed to provide the greatest reward (Riker, 1975, p. 15).

Side-payments

Side-payments of coalitions are payoffs and include valuable items such as money and position. Browne and Franklin (1973, p. 453) defined payoffs as resources that are distributed among coalition partners and used by them to advance their individual goals. Side payments include policy promises and flattery, affection and offers of loyalty. Side payments might also be negative and include a promise to not carry out threatening action such as expulsion from the party or loss of office.

Social Credit

Social Credit or the NZ Social Credit League was the main third party in New Zealand between 1954 and 1990. Social Credit changed its name to the NZ Democratic Party which joined with the Alliance to contest the 1993 general election. Refer the NZ Democratic Party.

Stochastic

This is a statistical approach a) (of a random variable) having a probability distribution usually with a finite variance. b) (of a process) involving a random variable the successive values of which are not interdependent (*Collins concise dictionary*, 1995).

Undifferentiatedness

This property of an electoral system is voter anonymity and equality. Undifferentiatedness is the technical condition underlying the principle of 'one person one vote'. One particular vote cannot be differentiated from another and allows for anonymity which in turn leads to equality (Riker, 1982, p. 51).

United

United refers to the party, inclusive of the various name changes, led by the Hon. Peter Dunne. More information on United can be found on their website <http://www.unitedfuture.org.nz>

Whip

The whips (the term is derived from the hunting field) are parliamentary party office-holders who ensure that the member's party's supporters are present in parliament to support or oppose a vote. Government whips are essential to ensure that the government maintains its voting majority. Whips often manage the party's parliamentary budgets and keep track of members' movements. They are also the principal communicators between parties in the House (McGee, 2005).

Zero-sum condition

The interests of the participants must be in direct conflict. This is when the sum of what the winners gain is equal to the total of what the losers lose. This assumes that the wins and losses can be quantified. In some circumstances such as total civil war and revolution, lives are forfeit. In politics the losers in the zero-sum condition apparently continue in the hope of winning in the future (Riker, 1975, pp. 15, 39 & 103).

