

The Impact of Electoral System Reform

The New Zealand
example

The present cabinet

- <http://www.dpmc.govt.nz/cabinet/cabinet/index.html>

Reasons for change:

- View that minor parties were unfairly treated
- 1978 and 1981 elections: National won the most seats while Labour won the most votes
- Voters felt that governments were unaccountable to them

Brief timeline

- 1986: Royal Commission on the Electoral System recommended MMP
- 1992 and 1993: referendums on the electoral system
- 1993-1996: last FPP-elected Parliament prepared for MMP
- 1996: first MMP election
- Two MMP elections since: 1999 & 2002

New Zealand's MMP electoral system

- Parliament comprises (2002 election)
 - 69 constituency MPs (single member, simple plurality), including 7 Maori seats;
 - and 51 List MPs (nationwide, closed party lists).
- Electors have two votes: for the preferred party list; and for the choice of constituency MP.
- http://www.elections.org.nz/elections/esy/st/govt_elect.html
- Total of 120 (usually) parliamentary seats

New Zealand's MMP system cont.

- In order to be awarded parliamentary seats
 - *Either* parties must gain 5% of the nationwide, party list vote
 - *or* they must win one constituency seat (and then they are awarded seats in proportion to their shares of the party vote).
- A candidate may stand for both a constituency and a party list.

New Zealand's MMP system cont.

- Maori seats (4 in number between 1867 and 1996) continue to exist, with their number under MMP linked to the numbers of Maori who choose to register on the Maori (rather than General) electoral roll. Approx. 55% of Maori are registered on the Maori roll.

New Zealand's MMP system cont.

- The Sainte-Laguë formula is used to allocate seats to parties that cross the 5% threshold (to add to any electorate seats they may have won to bring their shares of seats close to the proportions of nationwide party votes they have gained).
- Constituency seat vacancies are filled by by-election; list seat vacancies are filled from the relevant party list from the previous election.

The impact of MMP?

□ on the *political institutions*

□ on the *citizens*

Parliament: composition

- Change from a dominantly two-party Parliament to a multi-party Parliament.
- Five percent threshold excluded Christian Coalition in 1996 (4.3% party vote), and many other parties that fell far short of attaining the threshold.
- One-seat threshold brought in NZ First (1999); and Progressive Coalition (2002).

2002 election: the parties that crossed the threshold

	% votes	no. of seats		%seats
		C	L	
ACT	7.1	0	9	7.5
Green	7.0	0	9	7.5
Prog.C	1.7	1	1	1.7
Labour	41.3	45	7	43.3
National	20.9	21	6	22.5
NZF	10.4	1	12	10.8
UF	6.7	1	7	6.7

The 2002 election: the parties under the threshold

	<i>% nationwide votes</i>
Alliance	1.27
ALCP	0.64
Christian Heritage	1.35
Mana Maori Movt.	0.25
NMP	0.01
One NZ	0.09
Outdoor Recreation	1.28

As can be seen from the above:

- MMP has delivered a much more party-proportionate Parliament than under FPP
- The thresholds have affected parliamentary composition
- The traditional parties – Labour and National – are predominantly constituency parties while the newer parties are predominantly list parties. This affects both election campaigning *and* MP/constituent relationships

Parliament and the parties cont.

Party fragmentation, defections and discipline

- Three Parliaments (1993-6, 1996-9, 1999-2002) experienced 'party-hopping';
- Minor parties, esp. those aligned with governments, have fragmented (NZ First, 1998); (Alliance, 2001-2);
- The question is whether these were simply the 'teething problems' of an unfamiliar electoral system.
- In general, the parliamentary parties remain disciplined.

Parliamentary social composition

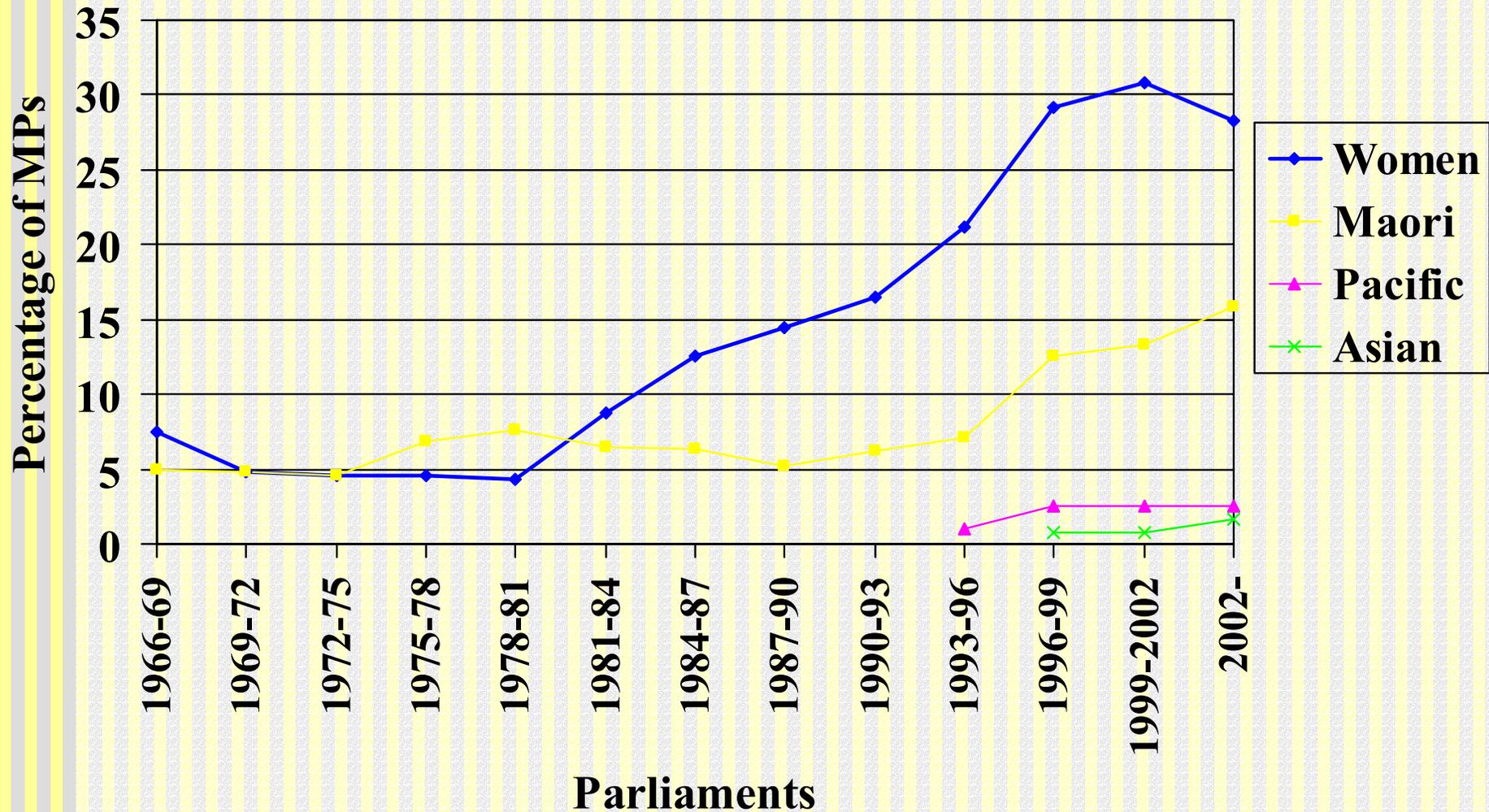
- MMP Parliaments are more representative of groups and opinions than under FPP;
- Increased social representativeness is the consequence (mainly) of parties creating 'balanced' party lists.

Parliamentary social composition cont.

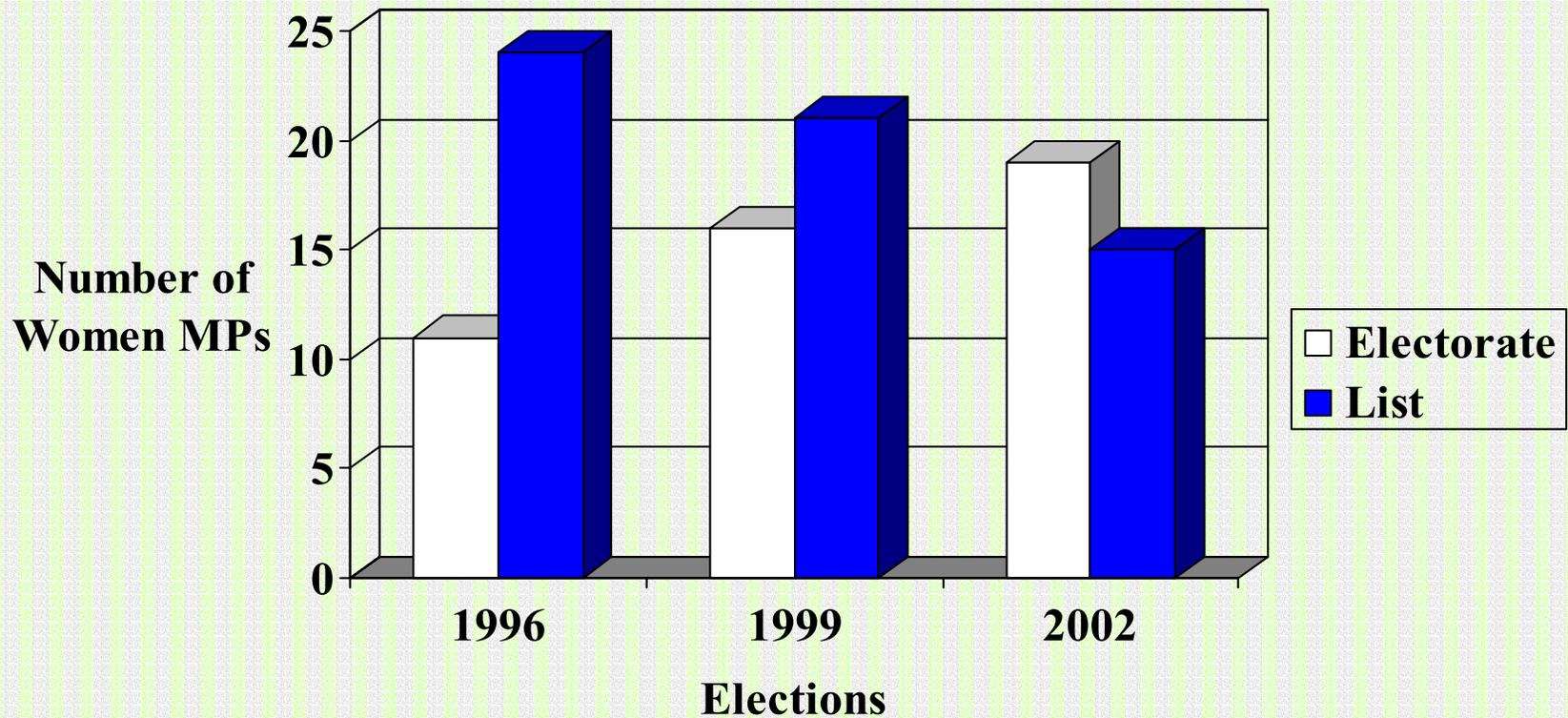
After selected general elections

	<i>MPs 1945</i>	<i>MPs 1993</i>	<i>MPs 1996</i>	<i>MPs 1999</i>
Women	2.5	21.2	29.1	30.8
Maori	5.0	6.0	13.3	13.3
Pacific Island	0.0	1.0	2.5	2.5

Microcosmic representation 1966-2002

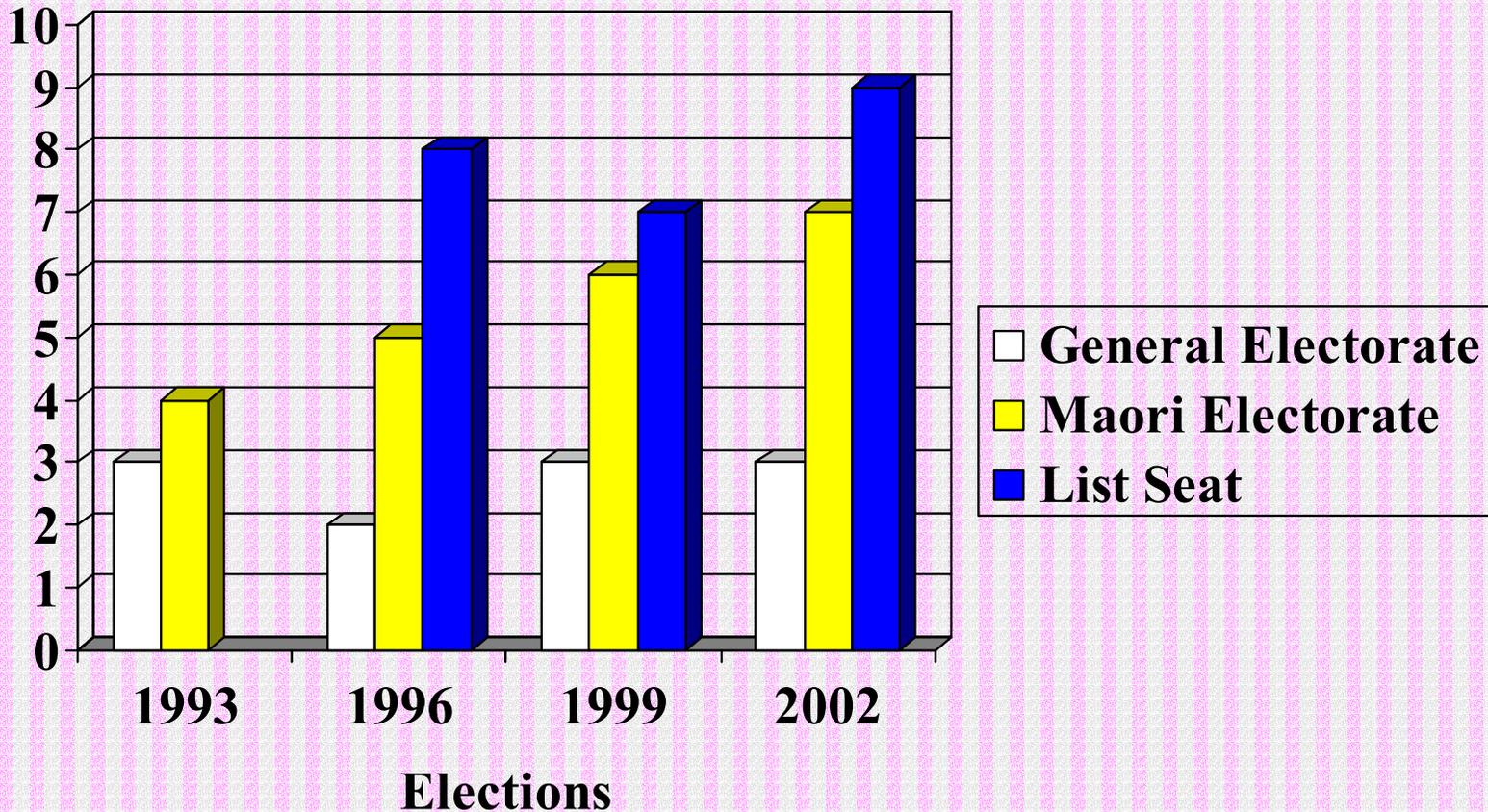


Pathways to representation: women



Pathways to representation: Maori

Number of
Maori MPs



MPs and the people

- MPs, voters and the media have taken a while to adjust to having two types of MPs.
- List MPs widely regarded as less-hardworking and less accountable than constituency MPs.
- Because there are fewer electorates than there used to be, they are larger, affecting rural areas – and their MPs – most markedly.

MPs and the people cont.

- Many list MPs have taken up area or regional responsibilities; and many have built relationships with particular groups across New Zealand.
- List and constituency MPs have the same responsibilities in Parliament.
- Constituency seats have become safer under MMP, with the marginal list seats the most precarious.

Parliament and the executive

- Parliament has become more important, partly because governments under MMP have usually lacked a majority of seats and governments have had to consult other parties to pass legislation;
- Parliament has become more assertive as a consequence of having more parties and, also, a strong committee system.
- Parliament illustrates wider policy views than under FPP, and these have to be considered by governments.

And the style of politics and policy-making under MMP?

- No less aggressive in elections and parliamentary debates.
- Negotiation has become usual within the parliamentary committees.
- Consultation necessary between ministers of the coalition parties, ministers and the caucuses of their support parties, and ministers and their own backbenchers.
- Radical policymaking constrained, although governments have implemented distinctively different policy programmes.

Making and breaking governments under MMP

- Only one majority (coalition) government so far. Governments have had to learn to find support parties and create legislative coalitions to pass laws.
- NZ has had both centre right and centre left governments.
- Junior coalition parties have had problems (two split while in government).
- The parties have learned to form governments and create coalition agreements (after a rocky start).

Negotiations and payoffs

- Negotiations are usually secret.
- Party negotiations determine:
 - government policies, perhaps a formal coalition agreement
 - working rules of the coalition
 - allocation of cabinet posts (according to relative party strengths)
 - selection of ministers.

The unanticipated consequences of MMP?

- Post-election party fragmentation (93-99)
- Parties (but not all) continue to occupy uni-dimensional policy space (socio-economic). List MPs' legitimacy questioned
- Some hostility to perceived Maori power
- Some parties slow to learn the new campaigning
- Continuing decline in party membership
- Continued adversarialism
- Minor party exercised disproportionate power in post-1996 coalition negotiations; and its choice of coalition partner did not coincide with pre-election statements
- Less impact on the public sector than expected

The unanticipated consequences: the voters

- Voters employed new rules strategically; and about one-third split their votes.
- Voters dislike dual candidature.
- Voters distrust the party list MPs, regarding them as unaccountable to electors.
- Significant role played by one-seat alternative threshold—voting weight and party campaign distortions
- Public dislike increased size of House (and note destabilizing effects of referendum on the number of MPs under the Citizens Initiated Referendum Act 1993)

Explanations for the unintended consequences?

- Underestimation of the strength of the old political traditions
- Significance of time dimension not allowed for (both in terms of the learning by political actors, including parties, and the opportunities for rule manipulation).

Lessons to be learned?

1. Don't expect electoral system reform to cure all (or even most) of a political system's problems: make sure expectations are realistic.
2. Give the new rules time to settle down and become established after electoral system change.
3. The early years are important when establishing the legitimacy of a new electoral system—politicians' behaviour is particularly influential at this time.
4. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to predict all the effects of electoral system change.