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Proportional representation and attitudes about politics: results from New Zealand[1]

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Abstract

PR systems often are credited with producing more equitable outcomes between political parties and encouraging wider social group representation than majoritarian systems. Theory suggests that this should instill greater trust, efficacy, and faith in the political system. We assume that citizens disadvantaged by majoritarian rules (political minorities) will have a relatively greater shift toward positive attitudes about democracy following a transition from a majoritarian system to proportional representation. We employ panel data from the 1993–1996 New Zealand Election Study (NZES) to test hypotheses about the effects of electoral system change on attitudes about governmental responsiveness, trust in government, and political efficacy. We find that there is a general shift in mass opinion toward more positive attitudes on some measures of efficacy and responsiveness. Political minorities display a greater shift toward feelings of efficacy than other voters.

Keywords: Proportional representation; Electoral systems; New Zealand politics

1. Introduction

Studies of voting typically have ignored the effect of institutional design on behaviour and attitudes. Institutions are treated as constants, while variations in prior socia-

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lization (Campbell et al., 1960) and short-term forces such as economic conditions (Fiorina, 1981) are seen as the major influences on behaviour and attitudes. Although a large literature documents the effects of electoral laws on party systems (e.g. Duverger, 1954; Rae, 1971), fairly little is known about the individual-level relationships between electoral institutions and attitudes.

Some, however, have noted that institutional rules affect attitudes and behaviour (Powell, 1989). Participation in elections, political trust, and efficacy (Amy, 1993; Guinier, 1991, 1994), the propensity to cast tactical votes (Cox, 1997; Neimi et al., 1992; Riker, 1982), and attachments to parties (Bowler et al., 1994) are affected by electoral rules. In this paper, we examine the possible links between electoral systems and individual-level attitudes and behaviour by studying attitude change after a major electoral system reform was adopted. We test how a recent switch from a majoritarian (or plurality), 'first-past-the-post' (FPP) system to proportional representation (PR) affected mass attitudes and behaviour in New Zealand soon after the first PR election there.

Faith in the assumption that institutional reforms can affect mass attitudes about democratic practices often motivates advocates of political reforms. Indeed, this assumption causes many to expect that changes in political processes should facilitate improvements in civic life. Advocates of greater direct citizen involvement in politics (Barber, 1984; Held, 1987; Dolbare and Hubbell, 1996) suggest that participation can lead to a more interested, engaged, and informed citizenry (see also Pateman, 1970). In a similar vein, proponents of legislative term limits in the US contend that a return to short-term 'citizen legislators' could purge the electorate of cynicism and renew public trust in government (Will, 1992, p. 183).

Much of the discourse surrounding proposals to switch from majoritarian FPP to PR rules echoes these themes. Advocates of electoral reforms are not simply concerned with establishing more proportionate (or 'fair') outcomes, but also with improving public confidence about democratic processes (see, for example, Guinier, 1994). PR rules also can be seen as more 'fair' since—compared to majoritarian FPP systems—they reduce the proportion of voters who cast 'wasted' votes. Therefore, by increasing the effective impact of individual votes, PR rules might be expected to increase attachment to and trust in a political system (Amy, 1993). According to PR proponents, majoritarian electoral rules also fail by reducing voter choices to parties that converge at the political centre which marginalizes citizens who have preferences outside the centre (Lijphart, 1984, pp. 20–23; Amy, 1993; Guinier, 1994; Ritchie and Hill, 1996). Others note that the flexibility of proportional systems not only allows for the possibility for political integration of minority groups but aids in the formation of protest parties that enhance mass perceptions of system legitimacy by channelling discontent into the political arena (see Miller and Listhaug, 1990, pp. 364–366). PR systems also tend to encourage multipartyism which better protects minority rights (Lawson, 1997). Greater representation of minorities, furthermore, has been shown to lead to greater trust in government on the part of minority citizens (Bobo and Gilliam, 1990).

2. Election systems, attitudes and behaviour

Variation in national electoral rules has been associated with many contemporary political ills. Lijphart argues that "majority rule spells majority dictatorship and civil strife rather than democracy" in heterogeneous societies (Lijphart, 1984, p. 23). He argues further (Lijphart, 1995) that politicians enjoy greater respect in PR nations than in majoritarian nations due to differences in electoral rules. Winner-take-all rules have been said to accelerate decaying civic involvement, citizen apathy and political ignorance in the US (Ritchie and Hill, 1996), to be at the root of low public evaluations of political institutions in the UK (Electoral Reform Society, 1998), to be a source of public discontent with government and politicians in Canada (Loenen, 1997), and to be a cause of low voter turnout in a number of nations (Amy, 1993). Advocates suggest that by presenting voters with more effective (or 'real') choices, PR rules could mitigate these forces and produce a renewed civic spirit—particularly by incorporating marginalized minorities into the political system.

However, the extant evidence of electoral system effects on attitudes and behaviour is limited and consists exclusively of cross-sectional, cross-national studies. For example, Blais and Carty's study (Blais and Carty, 1990) of over 500 elections pooled across 20 nations identified greater voter participation in PR than majoritarian nations. Anderson and Guillory's study of 11 European democracies (Anderson and Guillory, 1997) using Lijphart's (Lijphart, 1984) distinction between consensus vs majoritarian systems found that political institutions mediated the relationship between a person's status as a political minority and their satisfaction with democracy. Although highly valuable, studies such as these can be ill-suited for controlling for some of the national-level effects that might covary with election systems in these nations (i.e., political history, aggregate levels of national wealth, public policies, left vs right control of government, levels of repression of minorities, etc.). This lack of control makes it difficult to isolate institutional factors from other forces that might also affect attitudes and behaviour.

One alternative approach is to use a longitudinal panel design to examine the attitudes and behaviour of a set citizens before and after a major electoral system change in a single nation. Although this might limit our ability to generalize beyond the findings, it reduces the uncertainty associated with cross-national studies that cannot control for variation in national political context. Major changes in established democratic institutions, however, are rare events, and it is even more rare for an established democracy to change from majoritarian FPP to PR. Scholars seldom have the opportunity to study the effects of such institutional changes over time, yet these are precisely the situations where we would be confident that observed differences in behaviour were caused by the temporal intervention of institutional change.

3. Electoral system change in New Zealand

New Zealand is an established democracy that reformed its election system in the era of survey research and, thus, presents a unique opportunity for examining how

a change from majoritarian to PR rules might affect mass attitudes and behaviour. Anderson and Guillory concluded their study of the relationship between institutions and attitudes in Europe by noting that "the recent change in electoral system in New Zealand may provide a quasi-experimental setting that could produce important insights into how changes in democratic institutions affect citizen attitudes about democracy" (Anderson and Guillory, 1997, p. 79).

We take advantage of this quasi-experimental setting by using post-election panel data from the 1993 and 1996 New Zealand Election Studies to test several hypotheses about how changes in attitudes about responsiveness of government, trust in government, and political efficacy might be associated with electoral system change.[2] Panel data allow us to test if citizens who were disadvantaged or marginalized by previous majoritarian electoral rules (specifically, winner-take-all, single member districts) might perceive government as more responsive, or have higher levels of trust and efficacy, after electoral reform. We are particularly interested in attitude change among political minorities, such as voters who prefer previously under-represented smaller parties, for these are the citizens who are expected to be marginalized or alienated by majoritarian rules. Evidence of increases in positive attitudes among political minorities would bolster the case of PR advocates who claim that electoral system change will engage people in democracy and renew the civic spirit of people who might otherwise remain on the periphery of politics.

New Zealand's electoral change, furthermore, can be seen as a prime example of a shift from a majoritarian system toward the more consensual form of democracy thought to foster greater appreciation of democratic institutions. Prior to the shift to a mixed member proportional (MMP) system,[3] New Zealand's system of governance was described as a "virtually perfect example" of the Westminster model of majoritarian democracy characterized by its centralized system and the concentration of power in the hands of one of two major parties (Lijphart, 1984, p. 16). In contrast, consensual democracies incorporate a plural distribution of power via PR elections and aim at restraining majority rule by encouraging the sharing of power between the majority and the minority (Lijphart, 1984). The transition to MMP in New Zealand thus leads to a major shift from the majoritarian end of Lijphart's spectrum toward the consensus end (Anderson and Guillory, 1997, p. 79; Vowles et al., 1995). Lijphart's theory suggests that this shift should foster greater consensus between majority and minority groups and lead to increased citizen satisfaction with democracy.

Like many Western democracies, disenchantment with political institutions and growing cynicism about political processes became some of the defining character-

[2] Other established democracies including Japan and Italy have also implemented major electoral system reforms recently. New Zealand is the only case we are aware of where panel data designed to measure political attitudes are available.

[3] The new MMP system in New Zealand, adopted in 1993 and implemented in 1996, is similar to Germany's electoral system. Voters cast one vote for their local MP and another for a party. Parties receiving more than 5% of the vote are represented in parliament in proportion to their vote. Of the 120 MPs in parliament, 65 seats are held by MPs elected in single-member constituencies by first-past-the-post. The remaining 55 seats are held by MPs on party lists.

istics of the New Zealand electorate in the 1990s (Vowles, 1995). In 1993, only one-third of the NZ electorate agreed they could trust government to do what is right most of the time (Vowles et al., 1995). Following the 1993 NZ election, 60% of NZ voters believed that "politicians don't care much about what people like me think," while 68% thought that the New Zealand government was largely run by a few big interests. Confidence in parliament declined from 33% in 1975 (McRobie, 1994, p. 103) to single figures by 1988 (Miller and Catt, 1993, p. 31).

Implicit in the PR advocates' arguments is the idea that this general mass dissatisfaction with politics has roots in electoral systems that produce disproportionate translations of votes into seats. Although New Zealand historically has had a two-party system, minor parties have been successful in attracting support in an era of dealignment (Vowles, 1995). Notably, Social Credit, a monetary reform party whose support came primarily from disaffected National voters received over 10% of the vote in 1954, 1966, 1978, and as much as 20% in 1981. Other minor parties emerged over specific issues. A debate over non-economic issues and increasingly polarized public opinion in the 1970s contributed to the formation of minor parties such as the Values party in 1970, the first environmental party, and Mana Motuhake, a party founded in 1980 to address Maori rights (Aimer, 1997). The formation of these parties was aided by the small scale of New Zealand society which makes the task of organizing national campaigns less problematic than in other industrialized democracies (Vowles, 1995).

As a consequence, the plurality system produced increasingly disproportionate results as small parties captured a growing share of the vote (Vowles et al., 1998). In particular, the fairness of New Zealand's electoral system was challenged when majority governments were formed in 1978 and 1981 by parties that finished second in the vote. In 1990, small parties such as the New Labour, Greens, and Christian Heritage received 17.7% of the vote, but garnered only 1% of seats in parliament. In 1993, small parties received just over 30% of the vote while gaining only 4% of seats. Despite declining vote shares the country's two major parties governed with respective parliamentary majorities until 1993, with Labour forming the Government through much of the decade of the 1980s and National through much of the 1990s.

During much of this period, pressure had been mounting for reform. Labour had made a commitment prior to the 1984 election to establish a commission to review the electoral system but had failed to act on its recommendations. National, in turn, promised a referendum during the 1990 campaign and delivered on its promise in September of 1992, when it put electoral reform before the voters in a two-part referendum that gave voters several options, including retaining the existing FPP system. Voters approved MMP from several options on the 1992 referenda and this system was eventually adopted by way of a separate binding referenda held during the 1993 general election.

Dissatisfaction with politics in New Zealand also stems from the concentration of power in the hands of a majority that made it possible to implement a series of unpopular reforms in the space of just a few years, which took New Zealand from one of the most regulated to one of the most deregulated economies in the world. Implemented by a Labour government, these policies were seen as incompatible with

the traditional beliefs and policies of the party. By 1990, support for Labour collapsed, contributing to a National victory. National's own policies furthered privatization, including the sale of New Zealand Rail, but National disappointed its own supporters as it continued to pursue unpopular social policy reforms in health care and retirement income (Vowles et al., 1995, p. 7). Two of the strongest small parties contesting the 1993 election made direct appeals to voters over these issues—winning many votes but few seats. New Zealand First positioned itself as a centre/right party that attacked National on the social insurance issue, while Alliance appealed to left-of-centre voters disenchanted by Labour's move toward market-oriented policies. National still managed to win the 1993 election by leading all parties with 35% of the vote, and formed a government with a one seat majority. But anticipation of MMP led some government MPs to defect and form their own parties, forcing National to govern in coalition by May of 1995 (Vowles et al., 1998, p. 20).

Although National won the first MMP election in 1996 (with 34% of the party vote) and again formed a coalition government, the allocation of seats was much more proportionate to vote. Small parties that had been successful in winning votes but not seats in 1993 (primarily NZ First and Alliance) received 38% of the party vote and earned 32% of seats in 1996. The first MMP election was also associated with the election of a record number of women and an increase in the proportion of Maori and Pacific Islander MPs to levels mirroring their proportion in the general population. Maori representation increased from 6.5% of seats in 1993 to 12.5% in 1996, while women MPs increased from 21.2% to 29.2% in 1996 (Vowles et al., 1998, pp. 139–141). MMP thus gave New Zealand's citizens the result that many PR advocates suggest should renew public faith in democratic practices: a more equitable allocation of votes into seats and proportionate representation of major ethnic minorities.

4. Expectations about electoral reforms

Can this type of electoral system change mitigate the political cynicism evident in New Zealand and other democracies? New Zealand's electoral reformers were clearly concerned with enhancing fairness in the transfer of votes to seats. But they were also keenly aware that electoral system change could promote other qualitative improvements in democratic practices. In their report recommending a change to MMP, the New Zealand Royal Commission on the Electoral System (1986, p. 52) argued that MMP would enhance democracy by leading to greater political integration, more effective parties, and increased voter satisfaction. It was expected that voting under MMP would also be more satisfying, and democratic practice more legitimate, because each citizen's vote would be more equal than under a majoritarian system and voters would have more flexibility in making choices (New Zealand Royal Commission on the Electoral System, 1986, p. 56).

As noted above, among the principle arguments made about proportional representation systems are those that concern trust and faith in the political system. Proponents argue that, under FPP, minority parties might gain a sizeable amount of

support but nevertheless be denied representation. This was the case in New Zealand in 1990 and 1993 and may have had the effect of alienating citizens from the political system. These marginalized citizens could include people who prefer small parties and people who have no affiliation with established parties. Under the old system, these people might be unable to elect their preferred representatives, and thus may have had less faith in government and democracy. Under MMP, however, small parties stand a more credible chance of winning seats. Indeed, the number of parties seated in parliament increased to six after the 1996 election.[4] We might expect that voters who preferred smaller parties came to be more efficacious and more trusting in 1996 as their parties were able to secure more seats. Likewise, in 1996, these voters could come to see government as more responsive and see their votes as more meaningful since their preferred parties would now be more likely to be participating in parliament or even participating as a coalition partner in Government.

The above discussion of PR also suggests that political minorities outside the centre are disadvantaged by majoritarian rules. Under FPP, credible electoral choices available to voters positioned at the extreme ends of the left–right ideological continuum are possibly limited to centrist parties which may cause dissatisfaction among ideologically extreme voters.[5] In order not to waste a vote, those on the extreme ends of the ideological spectrum are forced to vote for major parties that tend to converge toward the centre. Therefore, extreme voters have difficulty not only in gaining representation but also in finding alternative parties with ideologically proximate positions. However, in New Zealand in 1996 under PR, the smaller parties positioned outside of the centre were now in a position to win seats. As a consequence, we expect New Zealanders who identify themselves as far left or far right to develop more positive attitudes about democracy. We also expect those forced to vote for an alternative party capable of winning seats in 1993 to be more satisfied in 1996.

Using the same logic, we might also expect women and Maori to view the political system more favourably after 1996. Women have been systematically under represented relative to their share of the population, and the Maori have had a long history of grievances against the government that include breached treaty agreements (Walker, 1997). The increased presence of these groups in parliament following the first MMP election is expected to enhance the group member's attachment to political processes.

5. Voting before and after electoral reforms

Before testing hypotheses about the effects of reforms on attitudes about political institutions, we briefly examine how the switch from majoritarian FPP to MMP affec-

[4] One of the parties, United, gained its 1996 seat through the constituency vote.

[5] Evidence from European political systems suggests that the Downsian convergence thesis is not supported as most parties adopt positions which are more extreme than the positions of voters (Rabinowitz et al., 1991; Dalton, 1985). However, these conclusions apply largely to multiparty systems (Iverson, 1994). In New Zealand under the old FPP system, both the Labour and National parties tend toward the centre of the ideological spectrum (Banducci and Karp, 1998).

ted voter behaviour. Theory suggests that proportional election rules should affect behaviour as well as attitudes (Sartori, 1968; Duverger, 1954). Voters and elites can quickly recognize and avoid parties/candidates that have poor electoral chances under FPP (Cox, 1997; Bowler and Lanoue, 1992). Typically, majoritarian systems are in an equilibrium where there are only two 'serious' options for voters to consider (Cox, 1997; Riker, 1982; Rae, 1971). Potential supporters of small parties having little chance of being 'first past the post' have a strong incentive to 'defect' and vote for a less preferred major party that can possibly win (or prevent a least preferred major party from winning) in order to maximize their vote. PR systems discourage this type of strategic behaviour since fewer votes are needed to win seats. Thus, if a political system changes from FPP to PR, smaller parties should gain votes from former major party voters—voters who preferred small parties but were forced into strategic defection under FPP. After the switch to PR, we should expect more voters to select smaller parties, or consider selecting these parties during the campaign. Given the discussion above we might also anticipate that majoritarian systems discourage some voters from participating by presenting only two credible choices. After a switch to PR, we also might expect fewer non-voters if former non-participants are mobilized by new election rules that make small parties appear as more credible choices.

We rely on post-election panel data from the 1993–1996 New Zealand National Election Study to examine how mass behaviour changed after the adoption of electoral reforms. The panel consists of 1278 respondents surveyed after the 1993 and 1996 elections. Table 1 provides evidence illustrating that the switch to MMP might

Table 1
Change in vote intentions and voting, 1993–1996[a]

	1993	1996	Change %	*Z*-value
Seriously considered another vote during the campaign?				
Did not consider another party	52.2	47.9	− 4.3	1.45
Considered National or Labour	13.0	13.2	+ 0.2	0.05
Considered a smaller party[b]	22.9	31.4	+ 8.5	2.46[d]
Considered not voting	11.9	7.6	− 4.3	1.07
Reported vote				
Did not vote	6.3	3.9	− 2.4	0.62
Voted Labour or National	65.4	60.0	− 5.4	2.16[d]
Voted a smaller party[c]	28.4	36.1	+ 7.7	2.36[d]

[a]Source: New Zealand Election Study (1993–96 Panel Study), 1278 respondents.
[b]In 1996, these included Alliance (7.3%), NZ First (9.6%), ACT (4.5%), Christian Coalition (2.3%), United (0.6%) and others (7.1%). In 1993, these included Alliance (13.3%), NZ First (6.2%), and others (3.7%).
[c]In 1996, these included NZ First (12.7%), Alliance (10.1%), ACT (6.8%), Christian Coalition (4.5%), Aotearoa Legalise Cannabis (2.0%), United (0.5%) and others. In 1993, Alliance (19.1%), NZ First (6.8%) and others.
[d]Difference between 1993 and 1996 significant at $P < 0.01$.

have mitigated incentives for strategic voting associated with majoritarian rules. More voters supported small parties in 1996, and more considered voting for small parties. We see an 8.5% increase in voters considering small parties, and a 7.7% increase in voters actually selecting these parties. Since there were significantly fewer panel respondents (5.4% less) who claimed to have supported one of the two major parties in 1996, some of these voters were former major party voters. A test of the difference between proportions (*Z*-test) indicates that change on these items was statistically significant. There was also a 2.4% decline in non-voting from 1993 to 1996. This represents a substantial decline in the proportion of respondents reporting non-voting (from 6.3% to 3.9%). Although not statistically significant, these data closely match official figures that show an increase of 3% in overall turnout. Although small, this increase is substantively significant given that almost all of the other OECD countries experienced a decline in turnout in the 1990s (Wattenberg, 1998). Thus, when panel respondents are considered in aggregate, the switch from a majoritarian to PR system is associated with more support for small parties and a small but significant increase in overall turnout.[6]

6. Attitudes about political processes before and after reforms

The literature presented above proposes that a more equitable apportionment of votes to seats should enhance popular attachments to government and political institutions. New Zealand's first election under PR succeeded in a more equitable apportionment than previous elections. This begs the question, however, about whether voters who came to enjoy the opportunity to vote for and be represented by parties that were previously denied access to parliament did, in fact, experience changes in their attitudes about government and representation.

One edge of the PR advocates' sword cuts at the matter of fairness in outcomes, while the other cuts at mass attitudes about politics and system legitimacy. By enjoying more credible, effective electoral choices, voters are expected to come to see the political system in a better light. We now examine how mass attitudes about political processes changed after New Zealand's first PR election and the subsequent inclusion of more parties and minorities in parliament.

Below, we utilize several survey measures to tap three key dimensions of attitudes about political processes: (1) trust in government, (2) perceptions of responsiveness

[6] We must stress that although some of these results are consistent with the expectations of PR advocates, it is difficult to credit these behavioural changes directly to voter response to incentives created by the new electoral rules. Smaller parties might have become more in-tune to popular preferences in 1996 than 1993. Elites also responded to the adoption of new election rules in 1996 by mobilizing more small parties, so voters were given more small party options in 1996 than 1993.

or attentiveness of government, and (3) political efficacy (see Table 2 for question wording). All of these might be seen as sub-components of views about general political legitimacy (see Weatherford, 1992; Miller, 1974). The NZES 1993–1996 panel survey included several questions about trust, responsiveness, and efficacy that were identical to those used in American National Election Study surveys. Although there is disagreement over what the trust, responsiveness and efficacy items are measuring, our choices reflect past research (see Craig, 1993; Weatherford, 1992) and available data.

We assume that the questions we examine reflect citizens evaluations of political *processes* rather than evaluations of public policy *outcomes*, and thus should be particularly sensitive to opinion shifts associated with alterations in electoral rules and representation. If new voting procedures or increased representation of previously excluded groups causes people to have more favourable evaluations of political processes, we expect to see a shift in voter attitudes from 1993 to 1996 that reflects greater faith in democratic practices. While all questions are assumed to be evaluations of the political process, some questions we examine relate more specifically to electoral arrangements. For example, 'my vote counts' and 'people like me don't have a say' tap assessments of parties and elections which are the mechanism by which governments are held accountable (Weatherford, 1992). On the other hand, we include the question of 'voting is important' as a measure of efficacy. Clearly this question could be measuring an underlying dimension of attitudes that includes evaluations of civic duty. Indeed, attitudes about political efficacy and civic duty are likely to be related at some level. However, civic duty is typically cast as the product of long term forces (socialization) and the individual's attributes (education). This

Table 2
Change in attitudes about political processes, 1993–1996 (Percent who agree or strongly agree with the statement)[a]

	1993	1996	Change	*Z*-value
Trust in Government				
You can trust the government to do what is right most of the time	32	32	00	0.00
The New Zealand government is run by a few big interests	68	58	− 10	4.82*
Responsiveness of Government				
Most MPs are out of touch with the rest of the country	64	56	− 08	3.04*
I don't think politicians and public servants care much about what people like me think	68	60	− 08	3.20**
Political efficacy				
My vote really counts in elections[b]	80	92	+ 12	6.94*
Voting is important even if it makes no difference to who wins	87	89	+ 02	1.53
People like me don't have any say about what government does	64	61	− 03	1.21

[a]Source: New Zealand Election Study (1993–96 Panel Study), 1278 respondents.
[b]The 1996 version of this question asked about the party vote.
*Difference between 1993 and 1996 significant at $P < 0.01$.

being the case, it is not expected to be something that would shift as the result of a short-term change in the electoral process. Conversely, attitudes about the importance of the vote that are more directly affected by short-term forces should, given our theory, be sensitive to changes in electoral rules.

Data presented in Table 2 illustrate change in the three categories of attitudes about democracy and political processes. With several of these measures we see some significant changes in the panellists' attitudes, and the change is in the direction that PR advocates would predict. Among the trust in government questions, we find a significant 10% drop in the proportion of respondents holding the opinion that government is run by big interests. Attitudes measured by the more direct question about trust in government remained stable over time, however. As for responsiveness of government, significantly fewer people agreed that their MPs were out of touch after the 1996 election, and significantly fewer claimed that politicians don't care what they think.

There also was some movement in the direction PR advocates would predict on each of the political efficacy measures, but with two questions (voting is important and people have no say), the changes were slight and insignificant. The largest substantive change for all these questions is evident in the percentage of respondents who believe that their vote counts in elections. Following the first election held under MMP, 12% more voters agreed that their vote 'really counts' in elections.

We must acknowledge that the 1996 post election survey might be better suited at detecting changes in some attitudes than others. Some effects of the switch to PR might be more immediate (i.e. evaluations of voting) than others (i.e. evaluations about governmental responsiveness). It may simply be too soon to judge the full impact of MMP on some attitudes about representation and democracy with a 1996 post-election survey. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to expect that parties were responding to the electoral system incentives created by MMP prior to the 1996 election. MPs were forming new parties in parliament as early as 1994 (Vowles et al., 1998, p. 20), presenting voters with an increased range of policy debate.

When the panel respondents are considered in sum, we do see evidence suggesting that some New Zealand voters did have more positive attitudes about government and political processes after the first election held under MMP. The discussion of election systems above, however, strongly suggests that the adoption of PR should not simply produce a generalized, uniform shift in attitudes, but that renewed civic spirit should be particularly pronounced among political minorities who might have been disadvantaged under majoritarian rules. We examine this issue next.

7. Evaluating opinion change: which voters are less cynical or more efficacious?

If opinion change is related to electoral reform in the manner that PR advocates would have us expect, we might see that those voters most disadvantaged by the previous majoritarian FPP system would be more likely to have a better view of government and democracy after the MMP election in 1996. This expectation flows

from the assumption that these voters could have felt disadvantaged or marginalized by the old election system that failed to offer them credible options for representing their preferences.

As an initial test of this hypothesis, we examine changes in trust and efficacy among previous non voters and those preferring minor and major parties between 1993 and 1996. We anticipate that the gap in cynicism and efficacy between minor party and major party supporters will be reduced following the adoption of MMP. Non-voters may be similarly affected by the representation of new parties and increased effectiveness (or fairness) of voting. To the extent that non-voting is the result of ineffective participation and lack of viable alternatives, we might expect people who did not vote in 1993 to view democracy more favourably after the 1996 election.

To measure party preference, we use a ten point scale ranging from strongly like to strongly dislike. Respondents' highest ranked party is coded as the respondent's preference.[7] If the preference is for either National or Labour, the respondent is identified as having a preference for a major party. Respondents who gave any of the five smaller parties the highest rating are classified as having a preference for a minor party.

As the results in Table 3 reveal, persons favouring minor parties in 1996 became less cynical and more efficacious. The most significant change appears to be for those who think their vote 'really counts'. In fact, on this measure and the other measures of efficacy, minor party supporters are more likely to change than major party supporters. As a consequence, there is virtually no difference between the groups in their levels of efficacy on two of three items. In contrast, major party supporters were more likely to change their assessment on the items measuring responsiveness so that a gap remains. Given their comparatively high levels of disenchantment and their identification with parties that had previously operated on the periphery of the political arena, the positive changes evident among minor party supporters on all of the items are notable. The change in electoral systems also appears to have been successful in leading to greater efficacy among previous non voters. In 1993, less than half of the non-voters believed that their vote 'really counts'. In 1996, more than 75% of the same individuals believed their vote makes a difference. There was a similar increase in the proportion of non-voters who considered voting important between 1993 and 1996. On all of the efficacy measures, non voters were more likely to change their assessment than voters. The proportion of non-voters, for example, who changed their opinion that 'people have no say', is five times larger than for voters.

We now turn to a more systematic comparison of changes in attitudes about responsiveness, efficacy and trust using a method that allows us to take into account additional factors. Since the change in election system affected all respondents as a constant, we cannot include a variable that directly isolates the effect of exposure

[7] The NZES asked respondents to rank seven parties on a scale from 0 to 10. These parties are National, Labour, New Zealand First, Alliance, ACT, United, and the Christian Coalition.

Table 3
Changes in attitudes about trust, responsiveness and efficacy by party preference and voter participation (% in agreement)[a]

	1993	1996	Change	1993	1996	Change	1993	1996	Change	1993	1996	Change	*n*
Trust and responsiveness	You can trust the government			Government run by big interests			MPs are out of touch			Politicians do not care			
Party Preferences (in 1996)													
Major party	41.0	40.4	−0.6	59.3	46.4	−12.9	58.1	49.0	−9.1	62.7	53.3	−9.4	715
Minor party	21.3	21.9	0.6	78.6	72.1	−6.5	72.2	65.0	−7.2	76.8	70.4	−6.4	351
Voter Participation (in 1993)													
Voter	19.3	24.6	5.3	67.8	57.8	−10.0	63.6	55.9	−7.7	68.0	60.2	−7.8	1198
Non voter	19.1	19.4	0.3	69.1	66.2	−2.9	68.1	60.6	−7.5	72.6	59.7	−12.9	107
Efficacy	My vote really counts			Voting is important			People have no say						
Party Preferences (in 1996)													
Major party	81.8	93.0	11.2	86.9	89.3	2.4	57.8	55.5	−2.3				715
Minor party	77.0	91.6	14.6	88.0	90.9	2.9	69.8	66.6	−3.2				351
Voter Participation (in 1993)													
Voter	82.3	92.7	10.4	75	89.4	14.4	62.5	60.4	−2.1				1198
Non voter	48.4	77.3	28.9	64.7	89.2	24.5	76.2	65.3	−10.9				107

[a]Source: New Zealand Election Study (1993–96 Panel Study).

to electoral change. Rather, we estimate post-reform (1996) attitudes as a function of earlier (1993) opinions, and include separate terms that identify the individuals who, given the discussion above, we expect to view democracy more favourably after the first MMP election. By estimating 1996 opinions while controlling for the respondent's 1993 opinion, we can evaluate how some group's opinions shifted over time relative to other reference groups. These lagged endogenous variable specifications are well-suited for examining change in panel data (see Markus, 1979), and are a conservative test for opinion change since they can be biased against rejecting the null hypotheses.[8] Our models are estimated as:

$$Y_{i96} = a + \beta^* Y_{i93} + \beta^* X1_{it} \ldots\ldots + \beta^* Xn_{it}$$

Y_{i96} and Y_{i93} are the relevant attitudinal measure for each individual, before and after reforms were adopted. $X_{1it} \ldots X_{nit}$ are independent variables from the relevant cross-sections that identify categories of citizens who are expected to have developed more favourable attitudes about politics as a result of the change to MMP.

Citizens who expressed a clear preference for small parties in 1996, as discussed earlier, are represented by a dummy variable. The effective reference (excluded) category for comparing the intercept shifts associated with this variable are those who either expressed a single preference with either of the major parties (National and Labour) or did not express a clear preference for any single party. Citizens who have withdrawn from the political system are classified as those who do not identify with any party and those who did not vote in 1993, and are represented by dummy variables, respectively.[9] Separate dummy variables also represent voters who placed themselves at the extreme ends of a 10 point left–right ideological scale.[10]

We assume that citizens who preferred small parties but voted for a less preferred major party in 1993 represent those forced to strategically defect from their party due to FPP election rules. We expect that, after experiencing the opportunity to cast a more effective vote under MMP, these voters would develop more positive attitudes about democratic politics. These voters are represented by a dummy variable.

Separate dummy variables also represent women and people who identify as Maori, the primary ethnic minority in New Zealand. Previous research has also demonstrated that one of the main policy areas where parties and government are held accountable is their handling of the economy (Fiorina, 1981; Weatherford, 1984). It is reasonable to expect that perceptions of national economic affairs should affect

[8] Another method of measuring change would be to use the change in attitudes between 1993 and 1996 (Y_{1993}–Y_{1996}) as the dependent variable. While this solution appears to be uncomplicated, using change as the dependent variable is undesirable because observed changes between 1993 and 1996 may be due to regression toward the mean and, therefore, cannot be distinguished from true change (Thorndike, 1924; Campbell and Stanley, 1963; Markus, 1979, p. 47). Such a modelling strategy would result in too many Type 1 statistical errors (rejecting the null when it is true).

[9] No Party ID = 1 if respondent claimed no identification with parties, 0 if otherwise. For Did Not Vote, 1 = did not vote in 1993, 0 = voted.

[10] For Left, respondents who placed themselves at 1 or 2 on the scale (far left) were coded 1, with 0 = others. For Right, those responding 9 or 10 (far right) were coded 1, others = 0.

attitudes about government, particularly in evaluations of responsiveness. The models include a term that represents the respondent's evaluation of 'the state of the economy these days in New Zealand.' Higher scores on this variable reflect positive evaluations of the economy.

Since the new PR election system might be more complex than the old single-vote FPP system, we anticipate that highly-educated voters might be more likely to be sensitive to changes in efficacy produced by MMP. Highly educated voters also might be more likely to be sensitive to changes in government and the composition of parliament after the MMP election, and thus might be more likely to have an increased sense of trust and responsiveness of government. We employ an ordinal measure of education ranging from one to seven. Finally, a measure of age (in years) is included as a control variable.[11]

8. Results

Table 4 reports models of change in attitudes about the responsiveness and trust in government questions, and Table 5 reports change in the efficacy questions. The dependent variables used in Tables 4 and 5 are coded such that higher scores on each item are associated with positive attitudes about political processes and government. A positive coefficient for a relevant independent variable illustrates that a category of voters is more likely to see government as responsive, trustworthy, or more likely to feel efficacious in 1996 than 1993 (relative to the reference category for dummy variables). Negative signs indicate the variable is associated with more cynicism or distrust by 1996.

While there was an overall shift in mass opinion toward seeing government as more responsive (see Table 2), citizens with preferences for small parties experienced less of a shift than others. This is also the case with those who lack party attachments, though most of the differences are not significant. In contrast, non-voters did not become more cynical or see government as less responsive than voters. We must emphasize that these results do not suggest that the change in electoral systems did not have any effect on political minorities. As we saw in the previous analysis, small party supporters did experience a positive increase. Rather these findings suggest that compared to everyone else, electoral system change either had the same effect or less of an effect. Similarly, non-voters and non-partisans did not come to see politics any more favourably than participants and partisans.

The most pronounced shifts occur on all of the indictors of trust and responsiveness among those who felt the economy improved. Similarly, those with higher education levels, who are likely to be more politically aware, and thus more sensitive to the changes resulting from MMP, are more likely to see MPs as being in touch,

[11] Income was also included in these models as a control, with no substantive or significant changes in the estimates. Since a number of respondents did not answer the income question, we report models that omit this variable.

Table 4
Lagged endogenous estimates of 1996 attitudes about trust and responsiveness[ab]

	You can trust government	Government run by big interests	MPs are out of touch	Politicians do not care
Constant	− 1.52*	1.60*	2.00*	1.72*
	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.18)
1993 response	0.33*	0.56*	0.40*	0.43*
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Did not vote in 1993	0.03	− 0.11	− 0.04	0.05
	(0.13)	(0.15)	(0.13)	(0.12)
No party identification	− 0.02	− 0.08	− 0.10	0.02
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Minor party preference in 1996	− 0.28*	− 0.16**	− 0.02	− 0.13**
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Minor party preference in 1993	0.07	0.09	− 0.06	0.16
but voted major party under FPP	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Left	− 0.46*	− 0.19	− 0.16	− 0.12
	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.14)
Right	0.28*	0.27*	− 0.01	0.16
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)
Positive economic evaluation	0.22*	0.21*	0.16*	0.20*
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Female	− 0.18*	− 0.05	− 0.10	0.01
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.05)
Age	0.00	0.00	0.00**	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Maori	0.19	− 0.21	− 0.03	− 0.29
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.16)
Education	0.00	0.06*	0.08*	0.10*
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Number of cases	1023	905	1021	1050
Adj. R^2	0.26	0.44	0.29	0.32

[a]Note: OLS estimates. Standard errors are in parentheses.
[b]Source: New Zealand Election Study (1993–96 Panel Study).
*Significant at $P < 0.05$ (two-tail).
**Significant at $P < 0.01$ (two-tail).

to see politicians as caring, and to think that government was not run for big interests only.

Although fewer women claimed MPs were out of touch in 1996 than 1993, women were still significantly more likely than men to think that MPs were out of touch in 1996—even after the first MMP election increased the number of women in parliament. Women were also less trusting of government compared to men in 1996. In contrast, older voters also came to see MPs as more responsive by 1996.

Table 4 demonstrates that voters who position themselves on the extreme left of the ideological continuum were significantly less likely to shift their trust of government than others. We find the opposite effect with attitude changes among self-placed ideological rightists. These voters became significantly more trusting and sig-

Table 5
Lagged endogenous estimates of 1996 attitudes about efficacy[ab]

	My vote really counts	Voting is important	People have no say
Constant	− 1.91*	− 1.62*	1.87*
	(0.14)	(0.17)	(0.19)
1993 response	0.13*	0.34*	0.41*
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Did not vote in 1993	− 0.14	− 0.14	0.10
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.13)
No party identification	− 0.12*	− 0.13**	0.04
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)
Minor party preference in 1996	0.09	0.09	− 0.04
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.07)
Minor party preference in 1993 but	0.19**	0.20**	− 0.13
voted major party under FPP	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.11)
Left	0.21	0.16	− 0.16
	(0.11)	(0.13)	(0.16)
Right	0.24*	0.10	0.05
	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.10)
Positive economic evaluation	− 0.03	− 0.01	0.17*
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Female	− 0.01	0.03	0.01
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.06)
Age	0.01**	0.01*	0.01**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Maori	0.08	0.08	− 0.01
	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.17)
Education	0.03**	0.01	0.07*
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Number of cases	1014	1037	1019
Adj. R^2	0.07	0.16	0.28

[a]Note: OLS estimates. Standard errors are in parentheses.
[b]Source: New Zealand Election Study (1993–96 Panel Study).
*Significant at $P < 0.05$ (two-tail).
**Significant at $P < 0.01$ (two-tail).

nificantly less likely to see government as run by big interests. It is important to note, however, that a right of centre government was returned after the 1996 election. Voters who may have been forced into strategic defection from their preferred small party in 1993, furthermore, show no greater change in attitudes about responsiveness and trust after being able to cast more effective votes under MMP than other voters. Maori citizens' attitudes about government did not improve or decline relative to other voters.

When we examine changes in attitudes about the efficacy of participating in elections, we see results that are more consistent with expectations raised by PR advocates. Table 5 displays the estimations of change in attitudes about efficacy. Voters who preferred small parties were significantly more likely than major party voters to think that their vote 'really counts' after the 1996 election. Similarly, Maori citi-

zens were more likely than non-Maori to think their vote 'really counts' and to think that voting is important, but the effects are not significant when we use the conservative measure of Maori identity.[12] Although there was a general shift in attitudes between 1993 and 1996 toward greater feelings of efficacy on these statements (see Table 2), the change was significantly more pronounced among voters who preferred small parties, and possibly among Maori. There was no greater change in attitudes about political efficacy among women as compared to men, however.

As expected, citizens who preferred small parties but voted for major parties in 1993 under FPP (the strategic defectors) experienced greater political efficacy than other voters after the change to MMP. These voters were significantly more likely to think their vote 'really counts', and significantly more likely to think that voting was important after the 1996 election. We also find that citizens who placed themselves at the left and right extremes of the ideological spectrum were more likely than other voters to feel their vote 'really counts' after the switch to PR. Unlike the results in Table 4 that produced coefficients for these ideology variables having opposite signs (possibly reflecting left-wing dissatisfaction and right-wing satisfaction with election results) the effects here are in the same direction. This result suggests that, although voters at opposite ends of the spectrum might have different evaluations about the government, they shared a gain in efficacy after the change to PR. As expected, educated voters were also significantly more efficacious after the introduction of PR in New Zealand. The highly educated were more likely to respond that their vote really counted in 1996, and more likely to feel that people have a say in politics.

While the earlier bivariate analysis in Table 3 suggested that non-voters were more likely to experience an increase in efficacy than voters, the results in Table 5 indicate no significant difference. Furthermore, when non-partisans are compared to others, by 1996, they are less likely to think that voting is important and that their votes counted after the switch to MMP.

If electoral system change is driving attitude change across time and causing many to feel more efficacious, the effect was least pronounced among non-partisans. This suggests that while electoral system changes might increase efficacy for many voters, the effect may be most pronounced among those who have developed an identification with (or loyalty to) a party.

9. Discussion and conclusion

Regardless of the relative shifts in attitudes between political majorities and minorities, there were significant aggregate shifts toward more positive attitudes about politics in New Zealand after the 1996 PR election. Between 1993, when New Zea-

[12] There are two ways of measuring Maori identity in the NZES data: self-professed ethnicity (which is used in these estimations) and claiming to have Maori ancestry. There are more respondents claiming ancestry than ethnicity. When we employ the latter indicator, the coefficients remain the same, but the standard errors shrink such that the effects are significant.

land held its last election under first past the post, and 1996, when its first election under PR was held, there was a shift in mass attitudes on some key measures of political efficacy and perceptions of government responsiveness. In particular, more voters came to see that their votes really mattered, fewer thought that their MPs did not care or were out of touch, and fewer thought that government was run by a few big interests. These changes are consistent with the idea that electoral reforms increase political efficacy and system trust.

Whether such changes can be attributed to the novelty of the reform (a 'Hawthorne effect') rather than to the reform itself may be subject to debate.[13] We have reason to believe that these changes can be attributed to PR because the observed increases in efficacy are not uniform as the Hawthorne effect would predict. Although everyone experienced the transition to proportional representation, shifts in attitudes across time are most pronounced among certain sub-groups of citizens—those political minorities who we assume are marginalized or disadvantaged by the old first past the post system. Some political minorities were more likely than political majorities to come to see their votes as 'really counting' or see voting as important after participating in the first MMP election.[14] We find weaker evidence supporting expectations that PR would energize these political minorities with a renewed sense of civicness or political trust. Small party supporters for example, came to see government as more responsive (Table 3), but they continued to view government far less positively than people in political majorities (Table 4).

There is one important factor that complicates our ability to measure change in attitudes of these citizens. Some of the small parties are organized around the theme of distrusting the government and status quo politics. To this extent they are vehicles for mobilizing anti-government sentiments, and their loyal identifiers might be self-selected to see government as less responsive and less worthy of trust over time. Furthermore, if their attitudes are shaped by their party's campaigns, their opinions about government could become more hostile over time regardless of electoral system change. We suspect that this effect is evident in results presented in Table 4.

Nevertheless, some of our other results, albeit preliminary, suggests that there might be some merit to claims that PR will make citizens feel better about politics. We might exercise caution, however, when advancing expectations about these political reforms. First, because we only have two observations—one prior to reform and one after, it may be too soon to tell if changes that occurred between 1993 and 1996 will hold up over time. Second, a switch from majoritarian elections to proportional representation might have clear short-term effects on the voter's willingness to consider small parties and on the number of parties in a legislature. It might also make

[13] The Hawthorne effect refers to a change in behaviour following the onset of a novel treatment such as special attention. See Hoover and Donovan (1995, p. 83).

[14] One might also suggest that those who experienced an increase in efficacy between 1993 and 1996 were simply echoing the rhetoric of elite advocates who claim that proportional representation should make people feel better about politics because it is a fairer system than first past the post. However, if this were the case it is likely that this would apply in 1993 during the referendum campaign on MMP rather than in 1996 when no such campaign took place.

citizens who prefer small parties and those on the extreme ends of the ideological continuum more efficacious. But even with these results, it does not appear that this sort of electoral reform can serve as an immediate 'magic bullet' cure for the political cynicism and distrust that is becoming endemic in many democratic nations. Most people in New Zealand continued to think that politicians were not responsive, and most continued to distrust government after the switch to PR. The lack of change on the main measure of trust in government is particularly striking, suggesting that the roots of distrust of government lie in something other than the rules used to translate votes into seats.

Some further qualifications are required at this point. It is quite possible that, although we find that voters quickly realize the effect that new electoral rules have on the utility of voting, it is simply too soon for them to identify any change in what government does or how parliament functions. It is impossible to know a priori the time lag that would be needed to detect changes in attitudes about trust in government produced by PR elections. We have worked from the assumptions of PR advocates, expecting that many voters surveyed after the 1996 election would respond favourably to the more plural distribution of power in parliament. Trust in government may be a function of the longer-term performance of the new parliament, and thus not affected in the time frame examined here. It is also plausible that PR can produce outcomes that, in the long run, may cause citizens once accustomed to majoritarianism to react unfavourably (e.g. more frequent coalition governments, minority governments, or a lack of alteration in parties in government).

As a final conclusion, we suggest that although a reform such as switching from majoritarian-FPP to MMP might change how citizens think about the utility of their vote, slowing the growing tide of anti-government cynicism and distrust is a much bigger task—one that even large-scale electoral system change might not be able to affect. Furthermore, if we can generalize from our findings in Tables 3 and 5, changes in political efficacy produced by such a reform might be most pronounced among citizens having a party attachment. This means that the effect of increased efficacy could elude a sizable (and, in many nations, increasing) proportion of the electorate: non-partisans and independents. Unfortunately, these are precisely the voters with whom many writers are concerned.

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Appendix

Dependent variables are questions from Table 2 with the response categories: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) disagree, (5) strongly disagree.

The direction of coding is reversed on the Trust, Vote Counts, and Voting is Important questions in order to produce a consistent response directions across questions.

Maori: Coded 0 = non-Maori and 1 = Maori.

Economy: Response to the question: 'what do you think of the state of the economy…' (1) very bad, (2) bad, (3) neither good nor bad, (4) good, (5) very good.

Age: Age in years, in 1996.

Female: Coded 0 = male, 1 = female.

Education: (1) Incomplete primary education/no formal education, (2) Primary school completed, (3) Secondary education without university entrance qualification, (4) Complete secondary Education (university entrance qualification), (5) Nondegree professional, trade or technical tertiary qualification, (6) Incomplete university education, (7) University degree.

All other variables described in text.

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