THE ROLE OF POLITICAL POSITIONING IN PARTY PERFORMANCE IN THE 2008 NEW ZEALAND GENERAL ELECTION

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What accounts for variation in electoral success for minor parties in New Zealand? Although there have been many attempts to analyse minor party emergence and success, including institutional and sociological approaches, they have tended to exclude the role of political positioning. With this in mind, this thesis uses the work of Meguid and Green to explain minor party performance at the 2008 New Zealand general election. It is argued that the tactics of political parties, both major and minor, will considerably influence the electoral fortunes of one another, recognising that party tactics work by altering the salience and ownership of issues for political competition.

Minor party performance was analysed for the New Zealand 2008 general election campaign. The thesis found that political positioning by both major and minor parties can influence the electoral performance of minor parties. Furthermore, positioning was not limited to just policy but also to non-policy events, such as potential coalition make-ups.
To what extent can the tactics of a political party affect other parties’ electoral fortunes as well as their own? Are minor parties, in particular, vulnerable to the effects of major party positioning? It is these and related questions that this dissertation seeks to answer.

The introduction of the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) electoral system saw the political landscape of New Zealand undergo something of a revolution. New political parties, or indeed parties once ignored by voters, emerged on the basis of previously overlooked policy platforms such as the environment or immigration; or ideological stances since abandoned by mainstream parties such as neo-liberal economic reform. Since its inception, MMP has proved pivotal in the rise of the relevance and subsequent influence of minor parties, with no major party securing enough votes to govern alone. The prospect of participation in coalition governance influences minor party strategy, with a number of minor parties stating their preferred coalition partner when campaigning for the party vote.

Support for minor parties remains volatile, however, with the majority of minor parties receiving significantly different levels of support at each election. The performance of minor parties remains relevant to the understanding of MMP politics in New Zealand, with the specific make-up of any future government determined by the overall performance of minor parties. An attempted explanation of this variation in performance will be the focus of this dissertation.

How one party performs on election day depends on a number of factors, some of which are within its control, such as the calibre of its leaders or the appropriateness of policy, but often those that are not within its control play a significant role in its electoral success. An example of this would be the state of the world economy and how this may impact on voting behaviour despite the incumbent government exercising little influence over this variable. Another ‘uncontrollable’ variable is how other parties’ behaviour can influence the success of this party. This second example shall be the primary focus in attempting to answer the question, ‘What accounts for variation in the electoral performance of New Zealand minor parties under MMP?’ While much research is devoted to the role of party leaders, policies and campaign strategy in attempting to explain a party’s fortunes at the polling booth, there is less focus on how the strategy and positioning of other parties affects a particular party’s fortunes. Smith notes that
political positioning is a “central plank of marketing thinking”, and cites Ries and Trout, who defined it as “what you do to the mind of a prospect. That is, you position the product in the mind of the prospect.”

Aaker and Shansby expand on this by stating,

*a product or organisation has many associations which combine to form a total impression. The positioning decision often means selecting those associations to be built upon and emphasised and those associations to be removed or de-emphasised.*

*The term “position” differs from the older term “image” in that it implies a frame of reference, the reference point being the competition.*

With Trout stating “all politics is perception, posturing and positioning” and Mauser observing that positioning has long been recognised as playing a significant role in politics, it is important not to overlook the role of positioning under MMP. Do major parties ignore parties that are ideologically distant from them on the grounds they pose no electoral threat? Or do they attack them because they promote policies that are anathema to their own? Do major parties attack minor parties that are close to them because they pose an electoral threat, or do they act friendly towards them because they may be useful coalition partners? And what are the electoral consequences of these differing party strategies? These are significant questions to address as minor parties have, since the introduction of MMP, played a crucial role in New Zealand governance. Explaining their fluctuating electoral fortunes is important. Under first-past-the-post, minor party support fluctuated considerably but this did not affect government formation. Under MMP it does.

In addition to understanding how the positioning of the Labour and National parties influences the success of minor parties in New Zealand, it is also important to see how the positioning of Labour and National influences each other’s performance. As many voters in New Zealand vote strategically, often splitting their votes between parties, it can be assumed that this is the result of their preference for

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potential minor party coalition partners for their chosen party. Therefore, it is important to understand how major party positioning can affect other major parties in order to grasp how this may influence the performance of minor parties. For instance, do major parties attack minor parties that are ideologically linked to the opposing major parties, in an attempt to limit the coalition options available, or is the focus of major parties primarily on each other?

Although the question of what affects minor party performance is not new, significant consideration of the role political party positioning plays in minor party performance appears to be lacking, particularly under MMP. For example, in 1996 it can be said that New Zealand First’s profile rose out of public discontent with National and a reluctance to vote Labour after its deeply unpopular reign from 1984-1990. From this, New Zealand First was able to promote policy in areas such as immigration and the Treaty of Waitangi, topics that Labour and National previously appeared reluctant to discuss. There is a clear differentiation between support for New Zealand First resulting from a protest against National or Labour, and support as a result of New Zealand First’s own positioning. However, the party appeared to benefit from both. Similarly, in 1999, the major rise in support for Labour, Alliance and the Greens signalled a significant ‘swing to the left’ as a result of the failed National-New Zealand First coalition. The 2002 election could therefore be explained as a continuance of this trend, with a convergence of support for Labour as a result of the implosion of the Alliance. Likewise, National’s significant rise in support in 2005 may be linked to rising voter discontent with the Labour Party, whose defeat in 2008 is largely attributed to links to New Zealand First, dogged by funding allegations throughout the election. With New Zealand First unable to attract enough votes in 2008, Labour was left isolated, without a credible coalition option.

Concentrating on the effect campaign events played on minor party performance overlooks the role party positioning plays. A political party positions itself to create a perception, through the use of the media and the adoption of policy, of where it stands on certain issues, either explicitly or implicitly, in relation to other political actors. An example from the 2008 New Zealand general election is the National Party making it clear, through statements from the party leader and press releases, that National would not consider any post-election relationship with New Zealand First. This positioning of National in relation to New Zealand First not only had electoral consequences for New Zealand First, but also restricted the permutations of potential coalitions that could be formed after the election. Understanding the dynamics
of party positioning, therefore, may bring fresh insights into the electoral performance of parties under MMP. This dissertation will attempt to provide such insights by testing a framework that helps account for the electoral performance of New Zealand political parties, major and minor, using the 2008 New Zealand general election as a case study. This will encompass all parties who contested the 2008 election and who were represented in the New Zealand Parliament at the time.

Chapter 1 will cover the relevant theory on positioning strategy used in this study, where Meguid's modified spatial theory, which forms the basis of the framework, will be outlined and explained, supplemented primarily by the work of Green. Chapter 2 sets out the methodology used to establish party positioning, before Chapter 3 focuses on the role minor parties have played within the New Zealand political system. This chapter aims to provide an understanding of minor parties' crucial role in deciding New Zealand governments, while describing each party's specific policy platforms and place within the political spectrum so that any discussion of major party strategy can be better understood. Chapter 4 will provide the findings of this study concerning the major parties' strategy. This chapter will be organised into sections on Labour and National, and the specific positioning each party adopted toward the particular minor parties. In order to provide further understanding of the role of positioning under MMP, Chapter 5 provides discussion of the positioning and strategy adopted by each major party toward each other. Chapter 6 then focuses on the positioning and strategy adopted by specific minor parties toward other minor parties.

One advantage of comparing party positioning during the 2005 and 2008 New Zealand general election campaigns, in an attempt to understand the role of this within MMP, is gaining insight into the role and influence of the Maori Party within New Zealand politics. A focus primarily on the 2005 election would fail to adequately see changes in party positioning around this party. As a new party contesting this election there was no previous evidence from which other parties could move their position. By taking the 2008 election into consideration we are able to see how each party adapted their position toward the Maori Party as it established itself as a potential influential player in the political landscape. Moreover, with the 2008 election delivering significantly different results than 2005 (leading to a change in government), we are provided with an opportunity to gain insight into major party political strategy under MMP. By contributing to the discussion of the work by Meguid and Green we will also be able to understand the changing role of minor party position within this political system.
Obviously, party positioning is not the sole explanation for minor parties’ fluctuating fortunes. Institutional and sociological approaches do offer some understanding of minor party performance. However these approaches neglect the role of minor and major party strategy and positioning. An example is evident in the 2008 election where polls showed that environmental issues were of high concern for New Zealand voters, yet support for the Green Party did not seem to confirm this sociological explanation. Similarly, while the switch to MMP helps to explain the establishment of minor parties, an institutional explanation fails to account for the subsequent successes and failures of these parties. As Meguid noted: “In moving from a definition of strategies as purely programmatic tools to one with salience, ownership, and programmatic dimensions, our understanding of the range and effectiveness of party tactics increases”,⁶ so such understanding of party positioning under MMP in New Zealand may therefore shed some light on why some minor parties have thrived and some have struggled.

Bonnie Meguid attempts to understand the variation in minor party performance by classifying major party positioning ‘strategy’ as *accommodative, adversarial or dismissive* toward minor parties. An *accommodative* strategy is adopted when a major party attempts to recognise an issue, policy or event, held by a minor party up to that point. As a result, the legitimacy of the issue, policy or event increases and the major party “signals its prioritisation of that policy dimension for electoral purposes.” The distinctiveness of the minor party’s ownership of the particular issue is therefore undermined, “providing like-minded voters with a choice” between the minor party and the major party, the latter being more likely to be in a position to implement the policy, or influence the issue or event. With the issue now highlighted, it is argued it would now be emphasised as a ‘vote-swinging issue’ providing major parties an opportunity to absorb all of the minor parties’ potential supporters, thus undermining minor party performance.

Alternatively, a major party may adopt an *adversarial approach*, effectively opposing a minor party, its policy/issue or an event that party has contributed to. By adopting this position the major party has called attention to itself, placing emphasis on the issue and providing voters with a clear choice: to oppose or support the minor party’s stance. This approach may reinforce the minor parties’ ownership of the issue, strengthening the symbolic link between that particular party and that particular issue, effectively justifying that party’s existence and raising its credibility.

A *dismissive approach* would come as a result of a major party classing a political party, issue, policy, or event as insignificant, and therefore effectively ignoring it as a result. “By not taking a position on the niche party’s issue, the mainstream party signals to voters that the issue lacks merit.” Political positioning is something parties actively do, even if dismissing another party. Meguid suggests the decision to ignore another party would be made in an attempt to undermine the legitimacy of that other

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7 Meguid, (2005), 349.
8 Meguid, (2005), 349.
9 Meguid, (2005), 349.
party’s policies, therefore being a more potentially effective strategy than it would appear. In order to be more relevant under MMP we intend to extend the use of a dismissive approach to include not only policy, but non-policy events, more specifically potential coalition make-ups. For example, a party that may not feel its voter base at all threatened by another party’s policies might still feel threatened by another party’s ability to join a coalition. ACT might attack the Green Party or New Zealand First, not because they are competing for the same voters, but because if the Green Party or New Zealand First do badly it would then be more likely that National would look to ACT for a coalition partner. It cannot always be certain that the consequences of a party’s positioning will be what is desired. For example, National leader John Key adopted an adversarial position towards New Zealand First in 2008, stating he would not work with the party after the election. This is heralded as a successful strategy because New Zealand First did not gain enough votes to remain in parliament. However, if it had gained just 0.3% more of the party vote, New Zealand First would have received enough votes to remain in parliament and Key’s positioning would then have appeared a failure. So, positioning is also risk taking – will the strategy backfire?

Meguid found that across Western Europe between 1978 and 1996, the strategies of the major parties were successful in influencing the electoral fortunes of minor parties, predominantly because of their ability to manipulate the salience and ownership of the minor parties’ policy platform. Meguid noted that “competition is not restricted to interaction between ideological neighbours, as the standard spatial theory claims; non-proximal parties play a critical role in the success and failure of Western Europe’s niche parties.” 10 This is relevant within a New Zealand context as the parties represented in the New Zealand Parliament differ significantly in ideology. This study will consider the political positioning between all New Zealand political parties represented in parliament, not just those of similar ideological positions.

Unlike Meguid we will also consider the positions of minor parties against each other and major parties against each other. Such positioning may affect a party’s electoral fortunes and there seems no reason to exclude such minor-minor or major-major relationships from our study.

Meguid’s theory will be also be extended to consider party positioning on non-policy related events, something she neglects to consider. A relevant example of this was the ‘funding’ issue surrounding New

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10 Meguid, (2005), 349.
Zealand First’s leader Winston Peters in 2008. Each party adopted a position toward New Zealand First as a response to this issue, which appeared to play a significant role in the outcome of the election. This may be considered a non-policy issue as it focused on the activities of the party leader prior to the election and was unrelated to the party’s policy. In order to take account of non-policy issues, the term *accommodative* will be extended to mean any supportive positioning adopted by one party toward another; an *adversarial* position will mean any critical or opposing positions adopted by one party toward another; and a *dismissive* position ignores both policy and non-policy stances of other parties. One final point regarding the adaptation of Meguid’s work to this study is her use of the term “niche” in reference to minor parties. Within a New Zealand context, we would not consider all minor parties as niche parties and so we will just use the generic term “minor” to describe a party that does not have any realistic expectation of being the largest party in parliament. Thus in our analysis there are two major parties: Labour and National, and six minor parties: New Zealand First, Green Party, United Future, Progressive Coalition, ACT and the Maori Party.

In addition to Meguid, the work of Green (2007) considers the role of valence issues in political campaigning. This approach outlines the positioning of the two major parties in the UK: Labour and the Conservatives. She argues that they have converged toward the centre, now competing over valence issues, such as law and order, the environment, health or education, where the goals (for centrist parties) are the same. As no party is in favour of crime, pollution, or a sick and/or uneducated society, the focus then turns to competency issues, with the parties judged according to which is most capable of implementing/administering commonly agreed policies. This is in contrast to traditional political positioning where conflict was focused on contrasting or alternative positions on issues such as state ownership of industries or the control of inflation rather than reactions to rising unemployment. This was evident in New Zealand in 2008, with the National Party positioning themselves closer to the centre, competing with voters traditionally aligned with the Labour Party. Valence issues can be non-policy, with a focus on competence by National and trust by Labour overshadowing a traditional policy debate over the desirability of tax cuts in the 2008 election.

Green identified three trends in her observation of UK politics, which may be applicable to the New Zealand political system in 2008. First, Green states that one can expect to see lower ideological polarisation as an outcome of voter de-alignment and a weakening of class associations. A de-aligned
electorate is linked to melting social divisions, the decline of the working class and subsequently an increase in voter moderation. As a result of Green’s focus on the Labour government in the UK (1997-2010) she noted that Labour were effectively “working themselves out of a job” as voters’ priorities changed after they became more affluent under the Labour government. With a Labour government in power leading to the 2008 New Zealand general election, some parallel developments in the two countries may be seen.

Her second trend links from the first as she states that, in order to be successful, party organisations are subsequently expected to become “catch all” parties, which would require each major party to conduct a process of de-idealisation, rather concentrating on “valence issues”. In the New Zealand context an example could be Labour accepting the role of the market in 1999, conducting a “third-way” approach to economic development - effectively a compromise between the ideals previously held by each major party. Another example may be National jettisoning their “Thatcherism” or “Rogernomics” reputation of the 1990s and “Brashisms” of the 2005 campaign in order to gain more mainstream appeal in 2008. This trend appears consistent with Meguid’s accommodative theory.

Finally, Green notes that some issues have therefore failed to capture modern political disagreement given the “exogenous economical and political environment” and both parties now agree in principle to either the maintenance or the introduction of similar policies. A New Zealand example may be each party’s approach toward the environment with both major parties (and all minor parties with the exception of ACT) accepting the idea of global warming – the competition is now over as to which party can come up with the most cost-effective policy to deal with this.

Green’s approach links with that of Meguid and becomes relevant to New Zealand as the rise in valence issues may be consistent with accommodative approaches by National and Labour toward each other, on both policy and non-policy issues. Green noted that this may be directly linked in the UK to the blurred social divisions resulting from policies introduced by Labour. However in the New Zealand context this may also be linked to the rise in influence of minor parties. As major parties converge in the centre, minor

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12 Green, J. (2007), 632.
parties were able to capture some lost ground on the fringes of the political spectrum. An acknowledgement of the presence of valence issues in the 2008 election may therefore provide further insight into the complexities of electoral performance of both minor and major parties under MMP.

HYPOTHESES

The positioning theories outlined in the previous section display the potential relationships between major and minor parties and how they may affect the electoral fortunes of each other. But how is this relevant to the New Zealand context under MMP?

The hypotheses listed below have considered the logic behind the work of Meguid and Green and extended it to be more relevant for the New Zealand context. For example, if Meguid states that an accommodative position adopted by a major party toward a minor party should adversely affect that minor party’s electoral performance, it is argued that that same could be said for an accommodative position adopted by a minor party toward another minor party, or indeed a major party toward another. It is important to note that these hypotheses are tentative and it is acknowledged that other factors may contribute to a party’s electoral performance.

Hypotheses regarding major v minor positioning

1) Where a major party adopts an accommodative strategy toward a minor party, we expect the minor party’s electoral performance will be adversely affected. It is acknowledged that not all policy positions are a deliberate attempt to affect one particular minor party’s performance. Therefore, in this study, an indirect accommodative position is to be considered on a par with direct accommodative positioning (that which is considered in the work of Meguid). It is also expected that an indirect accommodative position (a position adopted by one party with the intent to affect the electoral fortunes of another, but which indirectly affects a third party) will contribute as much toward the negative electoral performance of a minor party as a direct position. In terms of threatening “issue ownership” of a party, this will occur regardless of whether the positioning party intended it to. In the eyes of a voter the comparison between the two remains the same and, therefore, it is expected that the effect of any form of accommodative positioning will be consistent with Meguid’s findings on major party strategy.
2) Where a major party adopts an adversarial position, either directly or indirectly, toward a minor party, the minor party's electoral fortunes will be unaffected or even improved. In adopting an adversarial position the major party effectively acknowledges the minor party, gifting it attention and profile it may not have otherwise received. The minor party is subsequently in a better position to campaign on its policies than it would have been otherwise. Where a major party adopts a dismissive strategy toward a minor party the minor party's electoral fortunes will be adversely affected.

3) The major parties, Labour and National, will adopt a dismissive position against any party which is ideologically distant from them. For example, using the traditionally accepted left – right positioning of New Zealand politics, those of the left will dismiss those of the right.

Hypotheses regarding major vs. major positioning

4) Because the National Party needs to win extra votes in order to form a government it will adopt an accommodative strategy toward the Labour Party. In order to capture enough votes to form a coalition National is required to attract Labour voters, which in turn may require accommodative positioning.

5) Similarly, the Labour Party will adopt an adversarial position toward the National Party.

6) Where a major party adopts an accommodative strategy toward the other major party the targeted major party's electoral performance will be adversely affected.

7) Where a major party adopts an adversarial position, either directly or indirectly, toward another major party, the targeted major party's electoral fortunes will improve.

8) A major party will not adopt a dismissive position toward another major party. Unlike the relationship between a major party and a minor party, where the minor party poses a relatively small threat to the major party's electoral support, there is a realistic possibility that the opposing major party may attract electoral support from the major party. Adopting a dismissive position would only assist the opposing major party's efforts to attract that party's electoral
support. The probability of a dismissive position being adopted therefore is linked to the risk posed by the targeted party.

**Hypothesis regarding minor v minor positioning**

9) Where a minor party adopts an accommodative strategy toward another minor party the targeted minor party's electoral performance will be adversely affected.

10) Where a minor party adopts an adversarial position, either directly or indirectly, toward another minor party, the targeted minor party's electoral fortunes will either be unaffected or improved.

11) Due to the threat each minor party poses to another in terms of potential coalition make-ups, a minor party will not adopt a dismissive position towards another minor party.

**Hypotheses regarding coalition preferences and positioning**

12) Where a minor party does not declare a major party as its preferred coalition partner before the election that party will adopt an adversarial position toward the major party.

13) Where a minor party declares a major party as its preferred coalition partner before the election, the opposing major party will adopt an adversarial position toward that minor party.

14) Where a major party declares a minor party as its preferred coalition partner before the election it will adopt a dismissive position toward that minor party.

15) Where a major party does not declare a minor party as its preferred coalition partner before the election an adversarial position will be adopted toward that minor party.

These hypotheses are attempting to test two separate theories within this thesis. Firstly, one that refers to the effects of party positioning on electoral outcomes and secondly, one that refers to an expectation that parties themselves will make decisions about their own party positioning based on an assumption that such positioning will have the kinds of effects hypothesised by the work of Meguid.
METHODOLOGY

Definitions

**Minor and Major Parties in New Zealand.** As stated previously, for the purposes of this study the generic term ‘minor’ will be used to describe those parties contesting the 2008 New Zealand general election that did not have any realistic expectation to be the largest party in parliament, namely New Zealand First, ACT, Greens, Progressive Coalition, Maori Party and United Future. The New Zealand Labour and National parties comprise the two major parties contesting the 2008 general election and thus shall be referred to as such within this study.\(^{13}\)

**Accommodative Positioning.** Meguid describes an *accommodative* strategy as an attempt by one party to adopt a position previously held by a competing party in an attempt to attract support from that party. “The salience of that issue increases as the (competing) party acknowledges the legitimacy of the issue and signals its prioritisation of that policy dimension for electoral competition\(^{14}\).” Meguid continues by stating “An *accommodative* tactic undermines the distinctiveness of the new party’s issue position, providing like-minded voters with a choice between parties.”\(^{15}\) Meguid’s description shall be used to form the basis of how an *accommodative* position will be perceived within this study. If one party, either major or minor, can be reasonably deemed, as it may have been by New Zealand voters, to have adopted a policy comparable to another party, then that shall be considered accommodative positioning.

**Adversarial Positioning.** Meguid states, "When a party adopts an *adversarial* strategy, it declares its opposition to the niche party's policy stance."\(^{16}\) The possible reasons for a party adopting an *adversarial* position are various, however the effect would be to enable the targeted party to re-establish its position on the issue and, if that position was deemed attractive by voters, to potentially benefit from this. Likewise, if this party’s position is not considered attractive then the party may lose support. For the

\(^{13}\) A description of minor parties can be found in Edwards, B. “Minor Parties” in Miller, R (ed.) *New Zealand Government and Politics (Fifth Edition)* Oxford University Press. Melbourne, 522-536.

\(^{14}\) Meguid, (2005), 349.

\(^{15}\) Meguid, (2005), 349.

\(^{16}\) Meguid, (2005), 350.
purposes of this study therefore if one party, either major or minor, adopts a position in opposition to another party’s policy or activity then that shall be considered *accommodative* positioning.

**Dismissive Positioning.** When one political party effectively ignores another, neglecting to adopt a position toward that party, this is described by Meguid as a *dismissive* strategy. “By not taking a position on the niche (minor) party’s issue, the mainstream (major) party signals to voters that the issue (or party) lacks merit.” “If voters are subsequently persuaded that the targeted party’s issue dimension is insignificant, they will not vote for that party.”17 Although such a position is difficult to measure, primarily because of the lack of tangible data, for this study when one party does not issue a press release or publicly state a support or opposition toward another party’s policy or stance then that shall be considered *dismissive* positioning.

**Valence Issues.** A valence issue will be determined where it is clear that a convergence of the centre occurred and both Labour and National concurred on a particular issue on which they did not concur in previous elections. As Labour is traditionally of the Left/Centre-Left and National of the Right/Centre-Right, any policy area in which they both agreed in principle will be considered a valence issue, such as the area of welfare, where both parties agreed on its preservation, but not its delivery. An example of this may be National declaring between 2005-2008 a willingness to maintain a number of Labour Party initiatives if elected. This conflicted with previous opposition to such initiatives and was commonly referred to as ‘flip-flops’ throughout the 2008 campaign. The positioning around this issue would be considered *accommodative*, and as both major parties agreed upon the position, this will be referred to as a valence issue.

**Non-Policy Issues.** It is argued within this study that in order to fully understand party positioning under MMP it is important not only to focus on each party’s policy movement but also to consider positioning on issues that do not revolve around policy. The most relevant of these at the 2008 election was the New Zealand First funding issue, toward which all parties included in this dissertation adopted a position. This was not a policy-related event and would not have been considered by Meguid’s framework. But it was a significant aspect of party positioning at the 2008 election. For the purposes of this study, any position, whether directly or indirectly adopted toward one party, will be considered. This includes any

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17 Meguid, (2005), 349.
circumstance where one party did not deliberately adopt a position with another party specifically in mind. Furthermore, it is important not to overlook any circumstance where a party may take a position towards another party, not on policy or voter support, but on the perception that that party was a potential coalition partner to a major party and therefore a threat.

Data Sources

Press Releases

The primary source for policy statements were the press releases of each party. Press releases provided unedited information from each political party and when one party directly mentioned, praised or criticised another, this was an indication of where that party stood in relation to the other party. Each press release from every political party represented in parliament for the 12 months leading up to the 2008 election were collected. Any press release by one party that contained a reference to another party and/or their policy was deemed relevant. The press releases were accessed from www.scoop.co.nz, a New Zealand-based news media website which stockpiles all press releases issued by New Zealand political parties. Each relevant press release was catalogued into various categories revolving around a relevant issue and the movement each party may have made as a result. For example, if the National Party made a policy announcement concerning welfare that was similar to that previously made by Labour, yet this was inconsistent with previous National statements, this would be considered a positional movement by National toward Labour under the category of welfare. Such categorisation provides a clear understanding of the positioning of each party. As the information within press releases is directly from each party, they provided further insight into what was said regarding policy and what was said about other political parties from which an understanding of party positioning was developed.

Newspaper Articles

In order to determine the position a party has adopted toward another party, newspaper articles from the period 9 November 2007 to 8 November 2008 (12 months leading in to the 2008 election) were analysed. All articles in which some reference to one or more of the major or minor parties listed above were
collected. Also analysed were any party advertisements that appeared in the newspapers during this period. These were selected from the following newspapers: *Dominion Post, New Zealand Herald, Sunday Star Times, Sunday News and Wairarapa Times-Age.*

Each article was searched for quotes or analyses by political commentators, which could provide some indication of each party’s policy developments leading up to the 2008 election. To determine if a party was consciously adopting a position in an attempt to directly affect the electoral fortunes of another, quotes from MPs, candidates and party leaders about other party policies were a useful source. Policy announcements leading into the 2008 election also provided such an indication, as any change in a party’s policy in 2008 from previous elections was widely publicised by major newspapers, which could then be investigated further. Any movement in a party’s policy positions can provide a further indication of that party’s policy trajectory. A combination of these quotes and policy statements provided indications of where each party stood in relation to each other on a number of relevant issues in 2008.

*Television*

The printed material was supplemented with information from television advertising and leaders’ debates. From these it was assessed where each party stood on certain issues, as well as with whom they intended to place their support after the election. As television material may be the primary influence on New Zealand voting behaviour, it is important to acknowledge and use the information provided by this source.

*Content Analysis*

Babak Bahador states that “content analysis offers a systematic and relatively objective way to quantify and categorise media messages for the purpose of subsequent assessment.” It is recognised that this research is not quantitative and as such is not completely objective, as the researcher’s assumptions and

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choices in research design and operationalisation will almost always introduce some subjectivity.\textsuperscript{19} Yet, Holsti states that the purpose of content analysis is to create understanding by ordering information "into some meaningful pattern. Gathering of facts or description of events creates understanding of those facts and events, but otherwise has little broader application. Only when these facts and events are fitted against some framework of concepts can they be seen essentially as illustrations of general and recurring processes"\textsuperscript{20} in politics.

Content analysis is widely used in political science, so is an appropriate approach to conducting the qualitative research for this study. Press releases, newspaper articles, media commentary and academic research was collected to identify three core themes; \textit{adversarial, accommodative} and \textit{dismissive}, the definitions of which were listed above. All this material was read and analysed by the author, in an attempt to identify the themes accordingly. It is recognised this is not a quantitative analysis and there was no attempt made to quantify the number of press releases or newspaper articles analysed. It is important to acknowledge that a number of other factors will explain party electoral performance in the 2008 New Zealand general election. It is also important to note that a party's policies do not automatically determine its positioning towards another party. For example, simply having opposing policies is not the same as adopting an adversarial position towards that party. Therefore it was necessary to clearly determine a party was actively adopting a position toward another. In order to do this the print and televised material was evaluated using qualitative content analysis conducted by the author. Each printed or recorded document was analysed to determine:

- Source party: the party adopting a policy or non-policy position.
- Target party: the party toward which the source party directed its policy or non-policy position.
- Whether the position of the source party was: \textit{dismissive, adversarial} or \textit{accommodative}.
- Whether the effect on the electoral fortunes of the target party were as a result of direct or indirect positioning from the source party.

\textit{Adverse Electoral Performance.} There is no single measure of this. However, for the purposes of this study, the electoral performance of each party in the 2008 election will be measured by considering

\textsuperscript{19} Levine and Roberts (2010), 299.

opinion polls, media commentary, both printed and televised, and the 2005 election results to gauge the relative performance of each party in 2008.
CHAPTER 2

MINOR PARTIES IN NEW ZEALAND

Why are minor parties important in the New Zealand political system and why it is important to study their relationship with major parties? In a referendum in 1993, New Zealand decided to adopt a new electoral system, mixed member proportional (MMP), where the share of seats a party receives is approximate to its share of the nationwide vote. Until 1996, elections in New Zealand were conducted under the First-Past-the-Post (FPP) electoral system. FPP is a single-vote system, based on the Westminster system of Britain, where only the option to vote for an electorate MP is offered, and the proportion of votes received by a political party does not automatically guarantee a corresponding share of seats. For example, in 1978 the Labour Party secured 4039 more votes than National in the electorate of Mangere, with National securing the electorate of Nelson with a majority of 635. Although the Labour Party gained 3404 more votes than National in this instance, both secured the same number of seats. The same can be seen in the 1990 election, where the National Party won a majority of 7569 votes in the Pahiatua electorate and Labour gaining a majority of only 495 votes in Kapiti, both securing one seat each.

Although it can be argued that this is the same for each electorate and therefore disadvantages both Labour and National equally, New Zealand continually saw governments formed by a party allocated a greater share of seats than its share of the vote. In 1978 Labour (40.4%) received more votes than National (39.8%) but 11 fewer seats. In the same election the Social Credit Party won 16% of votes but only 1 seat. Moreover, in 1981 Labour received 0.2% more votes than National, yet 4 fewer seats and Social Credit increased its vote to 20.7%, but won only 2 seats. In the 1984 election the New Zealand Party won 12% of the vote but no seats. Under MMP, in a 120-seat parliament, the New Zealand Party would have received their proportional allocation of 14 seats. In these scenarios neither Labour nor National would have held a majority, requiring a coalition arrangement or support agreement with Social Credit or the New Zealand Party. Jack Vowles notes that "under FPP de-alignment among voters was not


23 These and all other election statistics cited in this chapter are taken from www.electionresults.govt.nz
reflected in the election of MPs. In terms of seats held in parliament, there was little or no evidence that voters were moving away from the two main parties.”

The origins of the rise of minor party influence lay in this de-alignment, which rose from the gradual breakdown of public trust and confidence in politicians, parliament, and the simple certainties of the old two-party system. Disillusioned with both National and Labour, more voters began to look to alternative parties, such as Social Credit or The New Zealand Party. The 1993 election, probably in expectation of the introduction of MMP, saw minor parties receive 30.3% of the vote, with Alliance (two seats with 18.2% of the vote) and New Zealand First (two seats with 8.4% of the vote) represented in parliament. Both of these parties benefited from each respective leader breaking away from their original parties and gaining the seat under the banner of each new party.

**ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE OF MINOR PARTIES UNDER MMP**

Vowles observes that “under MMP the votes, as expected were distributed more widely across the political spectrum than they would have been under FPP.” This is clearly seen in the 1996 election results where minor parties continued to flourish, receiving 40.1% of the total party vote. Both New Zealand First and the Alliance parties benefited substantially from the introduction of a proportional electoral system, gaining 13.4% (17 seats) and 10.1% (13 seats) respectively. ACT gained eight seats from its 8.1% share with United managing only 0.9%, but holding one seat – Peter Dunne’s Ohariu electorate. If this election had been held under FPP “the small parties would have had little or no chance of winning seats … and as a consequence their combined vote would have been almost halved as electors avoided wasting their votes on small-party candidates who had no chance of winning – a comparable finding to that of 1999.”

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The 1999 election results saw minor party support dropping to 30.7% of total party vote. Voter dissatisfaction with the coalition break-up of National and New Zealand First can explain the rise in support for Labour and therefore the subsequent drop in minor party support, yet it remains significant that the Alliance and breakaway Greens collected 10 seats (7.7%) and seven seats (5.25%) respectively; a substantial rise from three years earlier if both parties’ votes were to be considered as one. ACT increased its seats in parliament to nine, however its support dropped by 1.1% to 7.0% - a peculiarity of the MMP system. Once again, Peter Dunne holding his electorate seat kept United in parliament. New Zealand First survived the backlash from the drawn-out 1996 coalition talks and the aforementioned coalition break-up only as a result of Winston Peters holding Tauranga, which gave his party five seats despite falling below the required 5% threshold with just 4.3% of the vote.

Minor party support rose again in 2002 to 37.9% with New Zealand First the largest benefactor, rising again to 13 seats with 10.4% of the party vote. Winston Peters’ ability to distance himself from his party’s previous relationship with the largely unpopular National Party contributed to this return of support, yet ACT failed to benefit significantly, maintaining nine seats but gaining only 0.1% of the party vote. With Jim Anderton breaking away from the Alliance (leading to its demise), the Greens benefited with a rise in support to 7.0%, managing nine seats. By holding the seat of Wigram, Jim Anderton’s new party, the Progressive Coalition, received two seats with 1.7% of the vote, and Peter Dunne’s United Future gained eight seats with 6.7% of the vote.

In 2005, with MMP and minor parties well established in the political framework of New Zealand, minor party votes fell to 19.9%. New Zealand First held seven seats with 5.7%; Greens six seats (5.3%) and United Future three seats (2.7%). By holding Wigram Jim Anderton maintained his Progressive Party’s representation in parliament (1.2%), and with ACT’s Rodney Hide winning Epsom, the party was able to maintain its presence with two seats (1.5%). The Maori Party, in its first election, won four Maori electorate seats, overshadowing its party vote of 2.1%. As the Maori Party won more seats than its party vote entitled it to, this increased the number of seats in parliament to 122, known as an ‘overhang’; another peculiarity of the MMP system.

Once again, in 2008, minor party support differed with a slight rise to 21% of the party vote, with only the Greens managing the 5% minimum, gaining nine seats with 6.7%. ACT, with Rodney Hide maintaining
Epsom, rose to 3.7% bringing them to five seats. United Future and Jim Anderton’s Progressives maintained their electorate seat representation with only 0.87% and 0.9% respectively. The Maori Party rose to five seats but only managed 2.4% of the vote, creating a further ‘overhang’ status. Of most significance was New Zealand First’s fall to 4%. Despite gaining the fourth largest percentage of the party vote, with Winston Peters unable to regain Tauranga, New Zealand First failed to maintain their presence in parliament.

Theoretically, MMP offers more scope for voters to select a party which best represents their views, which, in turn, provides lower average rates of electoral volatility than that seen under FPP. Yet, the results above show that electoral volatility has remained a consistent theme throughout every MMP election in New Zealand so far. Vowles notes that “some of this may be attributed to the appearance of new parties in response to MMP, but much is of political origin, the results of people’s reactions to the cut and thrust of party politics and their judgements of the performance of government, the opposition parties, and their leaders.” 29 Such an observation adequately outlines the traditional approach used to understanding volatility in electoral results. This study hopes to provide an understanding of the role political positioning plays in this so that, although unable to answer all the questions alone, when applied in conjunction with these traditional approaches we can better understand such variance in the electoral success of New Zealand political parties.

MINOR PARTY INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNMENT UNDER MMP
Former Prime Minister Helen Clark stated during the 2008 election that “under MMP, it’s all about who has the friends in parliament to form a government,” 30 summarising the influence minor parties now hold. With every election winner since 1996 being determined by minor party support, Labour and National appear increasingly aware of the role minor parties play in determining the fate of elections in New Zealand, often declaring their preferential coalition partners during campaigns. Although minor parties are placed along the political spectrum, previous post-election deals have shown that major parties are willing to work with most minor parties in order to maintain or gain power. From 1999-2008

30 “Minor parties may decide fate of New Zealand election”, Nov. 3 2008, AFP
Labour has held coalition or support agreements with the Green Party, the Alliance, the Progressive Coalition, New Zealand First and United Future, leaving only the Maori Party and ACT not formally involved. Likewise, from 1996-1999 and after the 2008 election, National has been in coalition or support agreements with New Zealand First, ACT, United Future and the Maori Party, highlighting that at some point since the inception of MMP all minor parties have held an arrangement with the governing party.

Previous elections have been followed by days or even weeks of protracted negotiations between major and minor parties before a government has been formed, with both major parties attempting to woo each potential coalition partner. This has led to minor parties gaining various influential positions in the newly-formed government in return, most notably New Zealand First leader Winston Peters being appointed Deputy Prime Minister in the National-led government of 1996-1999 and Foreign Affairs Minister in the Labour-led government of 2005-2008.

Under FPP, minor parties were restricted in their ability to influence any government, often unable to gain representation in parliament, despite receiving more than 5% of the vote. If able to enter parliament their influence was limited, rarely sought for support or contribution in any government activity. Conversely, under MMP these parties have flourished, fulfilling a crucial role in determining government coalitions either formally or informally. From this increased influence minor parties enjoyed further recognition from voters which, in turn, led to further potential increases in influence after the next election.
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Table 1

Source: www.electionresults.govt.nz

It can be seen from Table 1 that after the implementation of MMP minor parties have received considerably more support than under FPP. Moreover, the combined percentage of support of the minor parties which were not represented in parliament, compiled in the “others” group was relatively high, suggesting a larger number of registered minor parties with higher recognition given to these parties.

Many of these parties have established a strong, consistent support base, partly due to their specific policy platforms, which Meguid referred to as their “niche”. Each minor party is able to establish “ownership” of certain policy areas, forming themselves a unique place on the political spectrum, which then appeals to specific voting groups. Figure 1 shows how, although the electoral performance of minor parties remains volatile, the vast majority of the support received by New Zealand First and the Green Party (the only two minor parties to receive more than 4% of the party vote in 2008), was from voters who had supported that party at the 2005 election.

31 Meguid, (2005), 348.
32 Meguid, (2005), 349.
CORE POLICY PLATFORMS OF MINOR PARTIES

On their parliamentary website, the Greens describe themselves as the “only party that has a clear vision of how we can live a better life while protecting our beautiful planet.”\(^\text{33}\) The key policy platforms promoted by the Green Party during the 2008 election appeared to be primarily moulded around their environmental policies, unsurprisingly perhaps for a “green” party. The Greens identified a number of policy areas in 2008, which included climate change, food, water and transport. They identified three key areas of concern: “The economic crisis, the environmental crisis and the climate crisis.”\(^\text{34}\)

\(^{33}\) [www.greens.org.nz](http://www.greens.org.nz)

\(^{34}\) [www.greens.org.nz](http://www.greens.org.nz)
The Greens’ clear focus on environmental issues is therefore visible. As they are the only party within the New Zealand Parliament with a consistent environmental focus and, perhaps more importantly, which maintains a consistent level of support, primarily among voters who determine their vote on environmental policy, the Greens have created a niche, holding their ground as a minor party. As noted previously the Greens have consistently reached the minimum 5% threshold since 1999 and although they won an electorate seat at this election, the Greens have never relied on an electorate seat to hold a presence in parliament.

Vowles, in an overview of the 2008 election, identified the Green Party as “undoubtedly the most left-leaning party across all dimensions, and the furthest from the average voter”. This is a view shared by Wood and Rudd who categorise the Green Party as part of a “broadly left/centre-left” group which also includes the Alliance, Progressive and Labour parties.

The Maori Party was formed as result of its co-leader, Tariana Turia, leaving the Labour Party in protest of legislation preventing Maori from claiming customary rights to the New Zealand seabed and foreshore. Their name alone suggests their focus on indigenous issues and on providing a Maori perspective in New Zealand politics, which is supported by their claim that they are “the only political party where the Treaty (of Waitangi) underpins its actions.” The policy areas highlighted by the Maori Party in 2008 were constitutional review, immigration, local government, Maori health, diversity and representation and the ‘Ratou’ Policy, which would see the introduction of heritage and Maori studies into New Zealand’s primary and secondary education facilities. Vowles classifies the Maori Party as one of “the two pivotal parties” along with United Future, which are essentially centrist but “were leaning towards National in their strategic thinking.”

After the election the Maori Party won 5 of the 7 Maori electoral seats, all of which were previously held by the Labour Party. The Maori Party, therefore, are clearly appealing to a particular voting group (as

36 Wood and Rudd (2004), 181.
37 www.maoriparty.org
38 Vowels (2010), 368.
required by Meguid’s theory);\(^{39}\) in this instance New Zealand voters identifying themselves as Maori. Moreover, as they were formed on the basis of their opposition to the Seabed and Foreshore Act, they would qualify as a minor party under this definition.

Vowles stated “there was much less doubt about the ideological consistencies between National and ACT”\(^ {40}\) with both parties being on the right of centre “but not necessarily in close proximity there. National was determined to appear close to the centre (in 2008), while ACT was comfortable with a much more defined policy position on the right.”\(^ {41}\) During the 2008 election, ACT produced a 20-point plan “to turn New Zealand around and help us catch up to Australia over the coming years.”\(^ {42}\) The plan covered a wide range of issues based around the principle of economic growth, highlighting policies such as tax and de-regulation, privatisation and opposition to New Zealand’s approach to climate change. ACT has previously received strong support from New Zealand’s business community as similar policies were abandoned by both major parties from 1990 onwards, creating a niche position along New Zealand’s political spectrum where only ACT were campaigning for neo-liberal economic reform. Not since 2002 has ACT received the minimum 5% but its leader Rodney Hide has held the electorate seat of Epsom since 2005, keeping them in parliament.

New Zealand First was established as a result of its leader, Winston Peters, being expelled from the National Party in 1993, becoming an outspoken critic of New Zealand immigration policy. As in other elections, New Zealand First’s criticism of New Zealand’s immigration policies was coupled with a clear focus on elderly issues, which formed the foundation of their policy platform for 2008. Although New Zealand First appeared to receive support from various voter groups, being a strong advocate for increases in superannuation and other benefits to the elderly saw the party receive notable support from elderly voters throughout this time. A populist centrist party which belongs, “despite some of its ideological positioning, somewhat to the right,”\(^ {43}\) New Zealand First proved it was willing to work with both Labour and National, supporting both at various times from 1996-2008. Although popular, its

\(^{39}\) Meguid, (2005), 349.

\(^{40}\) Vowles (2010), 368.

\(^{41}\) Vowles (2010), 368.

\(^{42}\) www.act.org.nz/policies

\(^{43}\) Vowles (2010), 368.
support has often been based on the popularity of its leader, relying on his electorate seat to maintain a place in parliament in 1999 and failing to return to parliament when he was unable to re-take his seat in 2008.

Similarly, United Future, characterised as a centrist party by Wood and Rudd,\(^4^4\) has consistently relied on the popularity of its leader to remain in parliament. Apart from 2002 and 2005, United Future (formerly United) has received less than 1% of the party vote, holding only 1 seat in every other election contested by the party. The party describes itself as “a modern centre party, focused on New Zealand’s best interests” promoting “strong families and vibrant communities”.\(^4^5\) It was United Future’s focus on New Zealand families that appeared popular in 2002, however it has since been unable to gain any traction among voters. Peter Dunne has been a minister in both Labour-led and National-led governments, reinforcing Vowles’ claim that “United Future has clear policy preferences more consistent with National’s, but, had the (2008) result been different, could have taken a different position.”\(^4^6\)

The fact that Jim Anderton’s Progressive (formerly Jim Anderton’s Progressive Coalition) continues to use its leader’s name in the name of the party highlights its reliance on his electorate seat for its presence in parliament. Apart from 2002, Jim Anderton’s Progressive has only managed to receive less than 1.2% of the party vote. Describing his party as “logical, practical and having the inner strength to care for people,”\(^4^7\) Jim Anderton’s Progressive promotes policy similar to that of the Labour Party, possibly explaining its lack of success in attracting significant numbers of votes. Nevertheless, Jim Anderton has held strong links to the Labour Party, being a Minister in a Labour-led government from 1999-2008. This link continued after the 2008 election defeat, with Anderton maintaining the spokesmanship for the Agriculture portfolio of the Labour Party, despite not being a member of that party.

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\(^4^4\) Wood and Rudd (2004), 181.
\(^4^5\) www.unitedfuture.org.nz
\(^4^6\) Vowles (2010), 368.
\(^4^7\) www.progressive.org.nz
This chapter follows the approach taken by Meguid where policy movements, statements and strategies adopted or applied by major parties are considered in terms of how they potentially affected the electoral performance of minor parties.

LABOUR
As a major party within the New Zealand political system the Labour Party has played a significant role in MMP politics, forming a government in all but one MMP election prior to the 2008 election. Part of Labour’s success was its ability to form coalition governments with parties from both the left and the right, most evident in its relationship with New Zealand First and United after the 2002 and 2005 elections. Due to the nature of MMP politics both these parties, among others, declared their willingness to work with Labour after these elections, which was bound to have influenced Labour Party positioning during the campaign. Confident of its ability to form a coalition, Labour could afford to seek to capture minor party support so that it was in a better position after the election.

The 2008 general election was different in the respect that Labour was not guaranteed to be in a strong position after the election. With a resurgent National Party encroaching on previous Labour support and a former coalition partner declaring its unwillingness to work with it, Labour found itself in a position where it needed as much support from minor parties as possible in order to form a coalition government after the election. All opinion polls in the run-up to election day were predicting a convincing National Party victory and this was certain to have influenced Labour’s positioning during this time. Under MMP, it was possible for Labour to potentially form a government after the election as it had previously shown an ability to form minority governments. Having had working relationships with many parties previously, a Labour “victory” was a possibility, despite its poor showing in the polls. In order to achieve this it required strongly positioned coalition partners, a reality which influenced its positioning during the pre-election period. If Labour was to adopt positions that attracted support from its guaranteed minor support partners, and in doing so preventing their re-entry into parliament, Labour would have been in a disadvantaged position after the election. Labour adopted positions that would try to attract support
from National, ACT or United, where any support won from these parties would mean a consolidated left and a weaker right.

Following Meguid’s positioning theory, Labour would need to adopt either an *accommodative* or *dismissive* position toward the right depending on the issue. Theoretically, if Labour adopted an *accommodative* position toward National then it would benefit by attracting sympathetic voters away from National toward Labour. As the 2008 election saw a considerable shift of support toward National it is difficult to see why Labour would attempt to reduce points of difference between themselves and National; a party that adopted an *accommodative* position toward Labour. Labour’s strategy would be to adopt an *adversarial* position toward National, create sufficient points of difference between the two parties and in doing so combat the potential threat National posed to Labour.

Labour required the success of specific potential coalition partners and adopted either a *dismissive* or *adversarial* position toward these parties, strategies that Meguid would argue benefited these minor parties. Labour’s intent was to maintain the support of these parties, without losing its own support to them. Labour had a vested interest in New Zealand First and Jim Anderton’s Progressive parties remaining in parliament. Similarly, despite not having formal coalition agreements with the Maori Party and the Greens, Labour was confident in its ability to work with these parties. This was enhanced by the Greens declaring they would not work with National, and with the other parties declaring their willingness to work with both sides, which potentially worked in Labour’s favour. Moreover, the Green Party had constantly fared well under MMP, and were polling positively, promising their re-entry, which left New Zealand First as Labour’s sole concern. Potentially, if New Zealand First could re-enter parliament, Labour may have had a chance of forming another coalition government.

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48 Meguid (2005), 348.
49 Meguid (2005), 348.
50 Meguid (2005), 348.
51 Meguid (2005), 354.
ACCOMMODATIVE POSITIONING BY THE LABOUR PARTY TOWARDS MINOR PARTIES

LABOUR AND NEW ZEALAND FIRST

New Zealand First has played a significant role in MMP politics in New Zealand, holding support or coalition agreements with both Labour and National parties at various points since 1996. As part of these arrangements its leader, Winston Peters, held senior ministerial positions including Treasurer, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister, a reflection of the influential positions New Zealand First held after the 1996 and 2005 elections. It is reasonable to assume therefore, that New Zealand First's influence in government leading up to the 2008 election, and indeed the potential influence as a result of the election, would itself shape the political strategy and positioning of both the minor and major parties.

Meguid argues that if one political party considers another party a genuine contender in an election, and therefore a threat, it may adopt either an adversarial or an accommodative position against that potential threat in order to alter the effectiveness of that party in the election.\(^{52}\) This may lead rival parties to position themselves either in favour or in opposition to that party in the hope of influencing the success of that party and indeed the success of themselves. As a party of much influence; one which had previously decided the make-up of a New Zealand government and might possibly do so again after the 2008 election, New Zealand First would therefore naturally attract the attention of other parties. As will become evident in this discussion, the nature of that attention - the strategy and positioning adopted by each party toward New Zealand First - differed considerably.

By declaring his willingness to work with either major party after the election, intending to speak first to the party which won the most party votes, Winston Peters outlined the potential threat his party posed to each major party.\(^{53}\) Despite having displayed a strong working relationship with the Labour Party over the previous nine years, New Zealand First was declaring it was also willing to work with Labour's opposition, sending a clear message to Labour that it could no longer depend unconditionally on New Zealand First's support.\(^{54}\) This had the potential to work in New Zealand First's favour in two ways. First, Labour, desperate to maintain a support agreement with New Zealand First, may have offered more

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\(^{52}\) Meguid (2005), 348.


\(^{54}\) “Peter’s ‘could work’ with National”, *Wairarapa Times-Age*, 16 June 2008.
generous policy concessions in any future support arrangements, leading to further increase New Zealand First's influence in government. Second, National, whose standing in the pre-election polls suggested it would gain more party votes than Labour,\(^{55}\) may have considered New Zealand First a viable coalition partner, attempting to “out-bid” Labour with more desirable policy concessions in order to gain its support (with parallels to 1996 when New Zealand First formed a coalition government with National, despite campaigning to the contrary leading up to the election). Either way, by not excluding any major party as a potential coalition partner, New Zealand First left itself open to further opportunities to impose its influence on government, whatever its make-up.

This strategy also created a potential threat to the minor parties, as any agreement entered into by New Zealand First decreased the need for support from any alternative political party. For example, in 2005 New Zealand First entered into a support agreement with Labour on the basis that Labour did not enter into any formal agreements with the Green Party. As New Zealand First was able to provide more parliamentary seats than the Greens, New Zealand First was able to prevent Green Party involvement in government. As this could also occur after the 2008 election, it influenced the strategy and position of minor parties toward New Zealand First.

Following the reasoning of Meguid, the attention given to New Zealand First by the other parties increased the legitimacy of New Zealand First in the eyes of New Zealand voters, inadvertently signalling to them that New Zealand First is a viable “third party” option.\(^{56}\) A voter who felt disenchanted with one of the major parties would seek an alternative party to give their party vote. But while they may not necessarily want to vote for their previously preferred party, they may wish to vote for one that can work with that party. By signalling their intention to work with both Labour and National, New Zealand First was portraying an image that it might work with either party after the election, thus appearing attractive to disenchanted voters from both parties.

This may be a desirable situation for a minor party during an MMP election: considered a threat to other minor parties while being desired by both major parties. As a result, however, New Zealand First found itself the target of various strategies and positioning from both major and minor parties in 2008. As

\(^{55}\) “Government takes double hit in polls”, *Wairarapa Times-Age*, 4 March 2008, sec. A.

\(^{56}\) Meguid (2005), 348.
previously mentioned, New Zealand First failed to gain enough support in 2008 to re-enter parliament; the first time this had occurred since the creation of the party - a significant event in the history of MMP politics in New Zealand. What caused this to occur? New Zealand First had failed to reach the minimum 5% threshold previously in the 1999 election but maintained its presence in parliament as a result of holding an electorate seat. Its failure to reach the minimum threshold in 1999 is widely considered a result of voter backlash to New Zealand First's failed coalition with National. As New Zealand First had completed a successful relationship with Labour between 2005 and 2008, it is difficult to apply the same logic in order to understand its 2008 result. New Zealand First had expressed a willingness to work with National after the 2008 election, so it is not tenable to assume voters moved away as a result of its relationship with Labour, despite a nation-wide swing from Labour to National.57

Possibly the most significant event that influenced the positioning of minor and major parties toward New Zealand First in 2008 was the issue of New Zealand First funding. The coverage this issue received from the media and other political parties saw the credibility of New Zealand First, and in particular its leader, questioned. This was to define New Zealand First’s 2008 campaign, as a considerable portion of its opening political statement was dedicated to addressing this issue.58

In the weeks prior to the 2008 election, New Zealand First was accused of incorrectly declaring donations made to the party during the previous term. It was alleged that Sir Robert Jones, Owen Glenn and the Vela family donated amounts of $25,000, $100,000 and $150,000 respectively.59 As these accusations were made public, further information that appeared to incriminate Mr Peters arose, leading to further speculation from both the media and rival political parties over the nature of these donations, and raising questions of New Zealand First’s and Winston Peters’ credibility and integrity.60

When questioned by the media, Winston Peters initially categorically denied receiving a donation from Owen Glenn, to the point of demanding that journalists resign for their involvement in “innuendo and
character assassinations”.\(^{61}\) Winston Peters eventually admitted his party received the donation from Mr Glenn, claiming that he had no knowledge of the donation as it was donated to the Spencer Trust, a trust account held in connection with his party, and that as his lawyer controlled all activity concerning the trust he was not in a position to know.\(^{62}\) Despite admitting to the donation, further speculation arose concerning the donation, as papers were released showing that Mr Glenn sought an honorary consulate position in Monaco.\(^{63}\) As Winston Peters was Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, this was seen to have been an inappropriate donation, thought to have been a potential conflict of interest as it could be interpreted as Mr Glenn’s donating the money to New Zealand First so that Peters would grant him the position he sought. Peters denied any involvement in the solicitation of the donation, reiterating his lawyer’s involvement and his lack of knowledge concerning the event.

ACT leader Rodney Hide made a complaint to the New Zealand Police and the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) in light of these accusations\(^{64}\) and Peters was brought before the Privileges Committee of the New Zealand Parliament to defend himself. During this process, Peters was accused of fraudulently depositing the $25,000 donation from Sir Robert Jones into the Spencer Trust as well as moulding New Zealand First policy around the interests of the Vela family, resulting in a $150,000 donation from them\(^{65}\). Moreover, it was accused that public money was used to fund the work of Brian Henry, the lawyer Peters claimed solicited the Owen Glenn donation on behalf of New Zealand First. These allegations would clearly call New Zealand First’s integrity into question. However the Owen Glenn donation remained the most significant as it was claimed that, in denying it, Peters deliberately misled parliament, a serious offence.

Owen Glenn also testified to the Privileges Committee claiming that it was Peters who solicited the donation, providing evidence to refute Peters’ claim to the contrary.\(^{66}\) Members of the committee


\(^{62}\) “Peters admits Glenn donation”, Dominion Post, 19 July 2008, sec. A.


\(^{64}\) Martin Kay, “Hide urges MPs to look into NZ First funding”, Dominion Post, 7 August 2008, sec. A.

\(^{65}\) Martin Kay, “Hide wants Glenn to attend inquiry”, Dominion Post, 8 August 2008, sec. A.

\(^{66}\) Martin Kay, “PM told me let it slide, Says Glenn”, Dominion Post, 30 October 2008, sec. A.
recommended, by an 8-5 majority, that parliament censure Peters. It was this that set the platform from which rival parties would base their positioning toward New Zealand First. Each political party in parliament was represented on the committee, all of whom were privy to information that led them to determine whether or not Peters had deliberately misled parliament over the $100,000 donation. Once a party had determined their view on this issue, the trajectory of their strategy and positioning appeared to be set.

The nature of MMP may have influenced this, as other parties are almost forced to consider potential coalition partners leading up to the election. As there has not been one party that has received enough votes to govern alone since the inception of MMP, there is an expectation that each party should declare their preferred coalition partner before the election, allowing the voter to use this information to determine their vote. For example, in 2005 the Green Party declared that they were not willing to work with the National Party as a result of its policy platforms. As a result voters were able to place their vote with the Greens knowing that vote would be supportive of a Labour-led government. Although Meguid never considered this, such a move could be considered an accommodative strategy as such voters are moving toward Labour, not so much in a policy sense, but are being accommodative in terms of a potential coalition. This may influence voters to vote Green rather than Labour, as a vote for the Greens could realistically be seen as a vote for Labour, or at least for a coalition of parties of the left of the political spectrum. Minor parties could be seen campaigning on this assertion, with the most notable being the ACT Party which campaigned as a party that would “keep National in check”. ACT attempted to discourage voters from voting for New Zealand First, as this was “essentially a vote for Labour”, drawing on New Zealand First’s close links with that party.

Such an approach was adversarial toward New Zealand First, as ACT was distancing itself from New Zealand First in terms of potential future coalitions, which could have resulted in National-friendly
supporters of New Zealand First moving to ACT. Such a strategy was also *accommodative* toward National,\(^{72}\) as it attempted to draw National voters away. A vote for ACT could be considered a vote for National – a campaign strategy unique to MMP and one that could easily be considered a form of political party positioning.

Nevertheless, it remains clear that the issue of political funding for New Zealand First was a significant one leading into the 2008 election - one that influenced the strategy and positioning of other political parties. Although differences in policy between New Zealand First and other parties remained as relevant as in previous elections, the issue of funding evolved to become central to party positioning concerning New Zealand First’s viability as a future coalition partner, and therefore potentially influencing how New Zealand First was viewed by voters. This shall be considered alongside differences in New Zealand First’s policy and that of both major and minor parties, as well as the positioning and strategy connected to this in determining the role these parties played in New Zealand First’s performance in the 2008 election.

As it was in Labour’s interest that New Zealand First remain in parliament, Labour would not pursue positioning that threatened the support of New Zealand First.

In order to prevent absorption of New Zealand First’s support, Labour would have to avoid *accommodative*, and to a lesser extent, *adversarial* positioning, as although this could potentially assist New Zealand First by way of increasing its profile, in a case where its profile is already established this may actually harm that party.\(^{73}\) Under this model Labour had only one choice, adopting a *dismissive* position toward New Zealand First. As Meguid focussed only on policy positioning, this model needs to be extended so that Labour’s positioning toward New Zealand First on the non-policy matters is considered. Here, in Labour’s specific position, they had no alternative but to adopt an *accommodative* position toward New Zealand First. If they positioned themselves *adversarially* they risked losing a potential coalition partner, as New Zealand First would certainly be left isolated with no supportive parties in parliament. Alternatively, Labour may have adopted a *dismissive* position, simply ignoring the issue, leaving New Zealand First to approach it alone. If this was any other party under any other circumstance, this may have indeed been the position adopted. However Labour needed one of two things to have a

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\(^{72}\) Meguid (2005), 348.

\(^{73}\) Meguid (2005), 348-353.
serious chance of re-election - New Zealand First being re-elected, or Labour absorbing its entire support base. As the latter was highly problematic, Labour was forced to position itself so that New Zealand First had the highest possibility of re-election, giving itself in turn the highest possibility of re-forming a coalition government. It appears unlikely therefore that Labour would ignore such a significant issue, when they themselves had a vested interest in the outcome.

With New Zealand First considered to be of the centre-right,\textsuperscript{74} and Labour of the centre-left,\textsuperscript{75} there were many policy areas in which both parties agreed, and many in which they did not. From this it can be assumed that Labour adopted a combination of both adversarial and accommodative positions toward New Zealand First.\textsuperscript{76} Under MMP, the issue of policy achievements can arise as a contentious area, with both the major and minor coalition partners potentially claiming credit for the implementation of popular policy. The relationship between Labour and New Zealand First is perhaps an appropriate example of this, with New Zealand First claiming that Labour regularly “stole” their policy ideas,\textsuperscript{77} and both heralding the same policy initiatives during the 2008 campaign as their own initiatives.\textsuperscript{78} In terms of charting policy movements, and therefore what positioning had been adopted, such a situation makes comparisons less clear. Nevertheless, with both parties claiming the same policy achievements, this suggests accommodative positioning, which therefore points to fewer areas of difference.

Under a banner titled “our achievements”, the New Zealand First website homepage lists the following policy areas as achievements initiated by New Zealand First between 2005 and 2008: \textsuperscript{79}

- SuperGold Card
- 1000 more police
- Free doctor visits for under 6


\textsuperscript{75} Vowles (2004), 19.

\textsuperscript{76} Meguid (2005), 349.


\textsuperscript{78} New Zealand First. Peters: Our Promises to You-We Deliver. Scoop Media, 11 August 2008.

\textsuperscript{79} www.nzfirst.org.nz
• It “saved the racing industry”
• It “secured funding for the elderly”
• Lower business tax
• $17.3m for Maori Wardens”
• Minimum wage raised

Indeed most of these were initially New Zealand First initiatives, which were then passed into law with support from the Labour-led government, primarily as part of New Zealand First’s confidence and supply agreement. It may be argued that free doctor visits under age six and raising the minimum wage were essentially Labour Party policy also, and therefore may have been initiated without New Zealand First.\textsuperscript{80} Nevertheless, this further signals \textit{accommodative} policies between New Zealand First and Labour within these two areas.

Labour did proclaim a number of the above achievements as its own in its opening election address.\textsuperscript{81} As it provided most of the support for these policies, and so helped them to be passed by parliament, it could be argued it enabled the policies to become law and therefore was justified to claim them as its own. Nevertheless, these were not Labour Party policies until New Zealand First initiated them, so in terms of positioning movement, a clear \textit{accommodative} stance from Labour toward New Zealand First is evident in these areas. According to Meguid’s modified spatial theory, by adopting an \textit{accommodative} position, Labour threatened New Zealand First’s ownership of these policies and as such “undermined the distinctiveness of (New Zealand First’s) issue position, providing like-minded voters with a choice between parties.”\textsuperscript{82} This is significant, as positioning theory predicts that in this instance voters will tend to drift from the minor party (New Zealand First) toward the major party (Labour) as a result. It may thus have come down to a question of what party was more likely to further implement similar policies after the 2008 election.\textsuperscript{83} Despite New Zealand First legitimately claiming ownership of these policies, by also claiming credit Labour diluted New Zealand First’s message and therefore threatened to attract some voters from New Zealand First.

\textsuperscript{80} www.labour.org.nz/policies

\textsuperscript{81} Television New Zealand. ‘New Zealand Political Parties, 2008 election opening addresses.’ 10 October 2008.

\textsuperscript{82} Meguid (2005), 349.

\textsuperscript{83} Meguid (2005), 359.
New Zealand First maintained staunchly loyal support from various voting groups throughout its time in parliament,\textsuperscript{84} most of whom would have been well aware of New Zealand First’s role in the implementation of these policies.\textsuperscript{85} Nevertheless, there remains a considerable proportion of voters who determine their vote from information they receive during the election campaign, many of whom may have been convinced to vote Labour as a result. Despite having a vested interest in New Zealand First’s ability to re-enter parliament, Labour could not afford to dismiss its role in the implementation of these policies. To do so would have neglected a large number of popular achievements made under the Labour-led government and risked losing support to other parties, potentially New Zealand First, as a result. This is perhaps the paradox of MMP, as major parties must pursue any avenue that would potentially gain them support. In doing so, however, they may reduce voter support of those minor parties supportive of them, potentially reducing their chance of forming a coalition government. For example, a major party, as a result of its positioning on various issues, may benefit by attracting 2\% of voter support from a minor party. However that fall in support for the minor party may push it below the 5\% threshold, leaving it ineligible to re-enter parliament (assuming it does not win an electorate seat). As a result, the major party may potentially find itself in a less advantageous position, as although it has benefited from an extra 2\% support, its power in parliament has diminished because its support partner is no longer represented. In the example of Labour and New Zealand First in the 2008 election, the major party received a net loss of 3\% support in parliament - enough to potentially prevent it forming a coalition government. With New Zealand First unable to re-enter parliament after 2008 - a scenario which hindered Labour remarkably - Meguid’s theory suggests that in adopting \textit{accommodative} positioning toward New Zealand First, Labour may have contributed to its own demise.\textsuperscript{86}

The 2008 election result was widely considered a “swing to the right”,\textsuperscript{87} so in that context it is difficult to see that Labour did attract New Zealand First support, particularly when the tide of votes appeared to be


\textsuperscript{85} www.electionresults.govt.nz

\textsuperscript{86} Meguid (2005), 347-353.

\textsuperscript{87} Paula Oliver, “Labour changes tack on campaign trail”, \textit{Wairarapa Times-Age}, 27 October 2008, sec. B.; Peter Wilson, “Captain Key will run a tight ship”, \textit{Wairarapa Times-Age}, 11 November 2008, sec. B.
turning toward the National Party. Moreover, with the Labour Party actually losing support in 2008, it is also difficult to see votes leaving New Zealand First in favour of Labour over National, with Labour support heading toward National at the same time.

It is unlikely that Labour’s positioning toward New Zealand First on the funding issue would have led to support leaving New Zealand First in favour of Labour. In supporting New Zealand First throughout the funding debate, Labour became isolated on this issue as the only parliamentary party to do so. However this was a position Labour was forced to adopt, as once again it could not afford to see New Zealand First fail in re-entering parliament after 2008. If New Zealand First was left to contest the allegations alone, it was conceivable that its integrity would be questioned to the point where it lost support. This influenced Labour Party positioning around this issue - if New Zealand First was not a realistic coalition option for Labour, why would Labour have supported the party to the extent it did? To adopt such positioning was risky, as being linked to New Zealand First potentially placed Labour in a situation where it would also lose support. The justification appears to be one of defence for Labour, as it could not have conceivably gained support with such positioning. If indeed New Zealand First was to be proved innocent of the allegations (which it was), it is highly unlikely that New Zealand First voters would switch to Labour in recognition of their support. It is more likely that the best-case scenario for both New Zealand First and Labour was that they managed only to maintain their respective levels of support.

The converse however, could be that New Zealand First’s integrity would be damaged as a result of the allegations to the point where they subsequently lost support. When considering the 2008 results, this did happen, despite New Zealand First being cleared by the SFO and Police. Labour’s accommodative positioning toward New Zealand First on this issue may have also contributed to Labour’s drop in support. As the only party to have supported New Zealand First, voters may have seen that Labour was choosing politics over principles, and voted accordingly. Neither the result nor the scenario are considered within Meguid’s work, and the study of such may provide further understanding of party positioning in this area.

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Levine and Roberts show that the "New Zealand First vote in 2008 consisted overwhelmingly of former New Zealand First voters (who accounted for 17.4 per cent of the support given to Peters’ party).” More importantly the same data shows that “85 per cent of Labour’s 2008 vote came from electors who had voted for Labour three years previously. The next largest bloc of support for the Labour Party came from people who had not voted in 2005.” This bloc constituted 8.6 per cent of Labour Party support which was “larger than the support Labour received from former supporters of all other parties combined (which together accounted for a mere 7.8 per cent of Labour’s 2008 voting base).” Surprisingly, New Zealand First attracted more votes from Labour than it lost to it, the opposite from what could be expected from an accommodative strategy, according to Meguid. Yet, it still failed to remain in parliament, an outcome that has been labelled as the “most significant” of any MMP election in New Zealand, as had New Zealand First returned it “would have probably supported a Labour-led government.” It would have therefore been in Labour’s interest for New Zealand First to remain in parliament so one possible explanation for a move in support from Labour to New Zealand First is that some Labour supporters gave their party vote to an ailing New Zealand First in attempt to keep the party above the 5% threshold. As suggested by some media commentators, however, no evidence was found to reinforce such a theory. The figures remain relevant for the purposes of this study however as they show that, despite Labour adopting an accommodative strategy towards New Zealand First, it failed to attract New Zealand First support which is inconsistent with the results of Meguid’s work.

LABOUR AND THE GREEN PARTY
Since separating from the Alliance before gaining entry into parliament in 1999, the Green Party of Aotearoa/New Zealand has enjoyed a prolonged period of influence upon government. A remarkable feat, particularly considering the Greens have never held formal coalition agreements with either major party, typically a pre-requisite for any minor party seeking to achieve policy concessions from government. However, as a minority government, Labour often relied on other parties in order to pass certain

88 Levine, S and Roberts (2010), 289
89 Levine, S and Roberts (2010), 36.
90 Levine, S and Roberts (2010), 36.
91 Vowles (2010), 368.
legislation and with the Greens' policy platform more conducive than others toward that of Labour, the Greens were able to negotiate concessions in return for their support.93

Throughout this period, environmental concerns evolved from a niche issue to a more mainstream concern, with many political parties, most notably Labour and National, developing policy accommodate to that of the Greens.94 Moreover, it can be seen, from the fact that both Labour and National highlighted their environmental and conservation credentials in 2008, that this had become a fundamental election issue.95 Smith sees this as an example of voting trends determining policy within parties.96 As the Greens increased their profile, their policy platforms appeared to gain credibility among voters. With this occurring, both National and Labour recognised the development of environmental concerns into a vote-determining issue, and in fear of losing support to the Greens, hoped to address the issue with the promotion of their own approach to the environment. If Meguid's theory were applied to this scenario, both major parties were adopting accommodate policies, not only in the hope of preventing voter support to the Greens, but preferably attracting Green Party support also.

Such an assessment assumes that Green Party support is determined by their environmental platform. When considering their approach to the 2008 election this is a reasonable assumption. During their opening election address the Greens presented polices on the basis of how they would impact on the environment and "provide for a future generation".97 Although the Greens are not a one-policy party, they do place significant emphasis on environmental policy, an approach that is consistent with other Green parties worldwide.98 Although the Green Party promotes policy areas other than the environment, it is clear that these are shaped and influenced by their environmental policy. A clear point of difference between the Greens and their primary threat, the Labour Party, is their environmental policy, which Meguid would label their “niche”.


97 www.greens.org.nz

The 2008 election was the second most successful election for the Greens, when they won 6.7% of the party vote, 0.28% less than their party vote at the 2002 election, when the Greens benefited from the breakdown of the Alliance a year earlier. A possible factor in the rise in Green Party support between 2005 and 2008 is that the Greens may have won votes from disenchanted Labour Party voters. If that is the case, a greater understanding of the role party positioning played in the rise in Green Party support will provide some insight into why Labour simultaneously lost support.

The phrase “A vote for Green is a vote for Labour” was used often by opposition parties during the 2008 election, in reference to the compatibility of many policies of both parties and also the previously strong working relationship between the two parties. It was often assumed that the Green Party was the “natural” coalition partner of Labour. However, paradoxically, Labour never formalised any agreements with the Green Party. The relationship was evidently there, however, with Prime Minister, Helen Clark, once referring to the Greens as a “real option” for coalition during the 2005 campaign, openly campaigning alongside its co-leader Jeanette Fitzsimons. Nevertheless due to the nature of MMP coalition negotiations, Labour was often forced to neglect the Green Party because coalition partners United Future and New Zealand First declined to work with the Green Party. This example of adversarial party positioning, from United Future and New Zealand First, was an attempt to discourage voters from considering the Greens as a viable coalition partner with Labour in 2005. By this strategy, these parties were in effect saying, ‘there is no point voting for the Greens because we won’t work with them and Labour will need to work with us, so you may as well vote for us.” This type of positioning was not so evident in 2008; perhaps as it did not look like a Labour victory, so these parties may not have felt the need to take such an open adversarial stance toward the Greens.

By making the statement, “a vote for the Green Party is a vote for the Green Party”, Jeanette Fitzsimons affirmed that the Greens were an independent party and were not aligned to Labour, despite stating they were not willing to work with National after the election. This portrays the message that the Greens were content to remain in opposition as they had done for the previous three years, perhaps in

101 Levine and Roberts (2010), 30.
recognition of an impending National victory. It is a noteworthy contrast to the positioning of other minor parties which attempted to portray their potential coalition credentials. It also signalled that the Greens were attempting to adopt an alternative position in terms of campaigning, preferring to campaign as an independent party. As they received the third highest party vote in 2008 it appears this tactic was successful. This was not a new approach however, as it appears similar to the positioning adopted in 2005 by New Zealand First, which campaigned that it would not seek a coalition agreement with either Labour or National, though it formed an agreement with Labour soon after the election. Regardless, New Zealand First support fell dramatically, from 10.4% in 2002 to 5.7% in 2005. This suggests that an independent approach did not work for New Zealand First. On the other hand, New Zealand First had to cope with a resurgent National Party in 2005 as well as a highly publicised, controversial campaign battle in the seat of Tauranga between Winston Peters and National Party candidate Bob Clarkson. These factors undoubtedly impacted on support for New Zealand First. Possibly New Zealand First’s campaign position of not seeking a coalition in 2005 proved popular enough to allow New Zealand First to reach the 5% threshold. Whether or not this was the case, it does appear that the Greens’ attempt to distance themselves from the Labour Party did contribute to their solid electoral performance in 2008.

As previously mentioned in this chapter, although much emphasis is placed on environmental issues, the Green Party is not a one-policy party, promoting policy in many other areas. Despite their ownership of environmental concerns, they also contribute toward debates on economic and social issues. Of all the minor parties, Green Party positioning is most likely to attract voters from either party, so it is appropriate that relevant components of the Greens’ economic and social policies are compared to those of Labour.

Politically, one of the most significant achievements of Labour’s third term was the signing of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with China in 2008. This attracted widespread support across the political spectrum, including both National and ACT, traditional foes of Labour. As concluding an FTA with China was considered economically beneficial to New Zealand, it was considered somewhat of a coup for Labour, a party previously attacked by National and ACT as lacking in economic credentials. The Green Party adopted an adversarial position toward the FTA, however, citing China’s human rights record while

102 “Free trade deal arrives”, Wairarapa Times-Age, 7 April 2008, sec. A.
promoting the benefits of a “fair trade” alternative. The Greens had consistently highlighted China’s human rights record during their time in parliament, with Green MPs often holding the Tibetan flag aloft during official Chinese government visits to New Zealand’s parliament, in protest against China’s handling of Tibetan affairs. By extending their position toward China to incorporate New Zealand’s economic policy toward that country, the Greens created a clear differentiation between themselves and many other parties represented in parliament.

What could the Greens conceivably gain from this positioning? The Greens stood to attract support from voters who also opposed the signing of the FTA. If voters identified the FTA as a vote-determining issue, and therefore felt compelled to vote for a party that opposed it, the Greens would have benefited. They were not the only party who opposed it, however, as New Zealand First adopted a similar position, despite Winston Peters being Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time. New Zealand First stated that its reason for opposition was not China’s human rights record, but rather its economic policies. This opposition to the FTA may have diluted the benefits to the Greens as they no longer held ownership of an adversarial positioning on this issue. If Greens were the only party to oppose the FTA, they may have attracted support from like-minded voters, regardless of the reasons those voters had for opposing the FTA. With New Zealand First stating that it opposed the FTA on economic grounds, the chance of any voters who also opposed the FTA on economic grounds being persuaded to vote for the Greens was lessened. Moreover, any voter who held views sympathetic toward centre-right or right wing parties, had a choice between New Zealand First, a party identified as centre-right, or the Greens, a party identified as left-wing. It is unlikely the Greens would attract support from centre-right voters over the FTA.

From this it seems that the Greens may have benefited only by attracting voters from other parties who opposed the FTA on similar grounds to the Greens. This is reiterated by Vowles, who observed that “those switching their votes away from their previous choices went in all directions, though the largest clusters usually favoured parties ideologically closest to their former choice.” The chances of this occurring


104 Peter Wilson, “Party politics and the FTA”, Wairarapa Times-Age, 8 April 2008, sec. B.


appear limited however, as Labour had actively sought FTA agreements with China, the United States and other nations throughout its time in government. If voters determined their votes on the grounds of human rights-based opposition to the FTA, it appears unlikely that the Greens would have attracted votes from Labour on this issue prior to the signing of the FTA with China. Considering the similarity of the two parties, it is over issues like this that the Greens were able to establish differences in brand and identity between themselves and Labour. As these differences were well established during the previous three elections, however, it is unlikely that the Greens attracted significant levels of Labour support in 2008 on this particular issue. Although a likely scenario for individual voters, it appears the number of voters attracted to the Greens as a direct result of their adversarial positioning over human rights would not fully explain the rise in support for the Greens and subsequent loss of support for Labour in 2008.

The intensity of welfare provision also arose as a contentious issue between the two parties leading toward 2008. Both parties adhere to traditional socialist or left-wing positions on the welfare state, and the importance of its preservation and place in New Zealand society. Nevertheless, the level of welfare provision provided by government may have created further differentiation between the two parties. This is apparent when considering the Working For Families (WFF) tax relief package and the introduction of a Universal Student Allowance (USA). WFF was introduced by Labour in 2004, and provided New Zealand families who were in employment, with financial assistance from the government; the level of which was determined by the number and age of children. The Greens initially supported the introduction of the Taxation (Working for Families) Act 2004, but with the reservation that the package did not cater adequately for unemployed families. The Green Party maintained this position after the implementation of the Act, describing the “In Work Tax Credit” component of WFF as “discrimination” toward the unemployed as it only provides relief to families where at least one parent is employed. Labour stated in its 2008 election manifesto that such a provision creates an “incentive” to seek

employment as a clear difference of income is created between benefit payments and the minimum wage.\textsuperscript{110}

Labour introduced this bill during a period of increasing support for the National Party, which could be linked to the provisions focusing on “incentives”. With the rise in popularity of National leader Don Brash came a rise in anti-welfare sentiment from New Zealand voters. By providing the “In Work Tax Credit” to working families only, Labour could claim it was not providing for families that did not work. Whether Labour Party positioning on this matter was influenced by National is a matter of debate. However, it was the case that Labour’s new provisions were not as broadly applicable as previous Labour Party social development policies,\textsuperscript{111} suggesting \textit{accommodative} positioning toward National, as observed by Vowles.\textsuperscript{112} With Labour moving toward the centre, the Greens were able to establish a niche, promoting policies that catered more favourably to the unemployed and thus attracting potential centre-left Labour voters. This approach continued at the 2008 election as the implications of the global recession began to emerge. Despite both major parties promoting relatively liberal income support packages to those who lost their job during this period, this extra financial assistance was limited to those who were made redundant. Such an approach remains consistent with the sentiment of the previous election, as this assistance only supported those who were once working and through no fault of their own lost their job. Wanting to avoid the label of welfare “handouts”, effectively buying votes, Labour formed a policy that would appeal to the conservative working voter, sympathetic to those made redundant.

The Greens did not promote a specific welfare policy as a result of the recession; their traditional left-wing approach to this issue, which placed “greater emphasis on sufficiency, simplicity, universality”\textsuperscript{113} would have generously covered all unemployed equally. We can see from this that the Greens could have attracted some of the unemployed vote or the vote of those who were sympathetic toward the plight of such people. Nevertheless, as the Greens did not make salient their welfare policy \textit{and} the Greens were even more unlikely than Labour to be in government after 2008, there would be little incentive for a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{110} www.labour.org.nz
\item \textsuperscript{111} Labour Party Manifesto, 1999.
\item \textsuperscript{112} Vowles (2010), 378.
\item \textsuperscript{113} www.greens.org.nz
\end{itemize}
potential Labour Party voter to shift to the Greens over this particular issue – if anything, abstention would be more likely.

Although not specifically considered welfare, Labour’s promotion of the introduction of a Universal Student Allowance (USA) in 2008 was an accommodative positioning toward the Greens. Labour had refrained from supporting such a policy up until October 2008, a month before election day, preferring to promote an interest-free student loan scheme during the previous election. As the Greens had consistently promoted both policies at every election it had contested, by adopting a USA policy remarkably similar to that of the Greens, Labour was attempting to prevent losing support to the Greens, or to adopt a position that would attract Green Party support. However, given that the Green Party was not the main threat to Labour during the 2008 campaign, motivation for Labour’s change in position was more the creation of a point of difference between Labour and National; effectively a strategy to win the student vote (as in 2005 when Labour adopted the interest-free student loan policy) rather than to deliberately undermine the Greens. Grant Robertson, elected as a Labour MP in 2008, identified the interest-free student loan policy in 2005 as critical to Labour’s success, suggesting Labour’s USA policy in 2008 was an attempt to maintain the support received in 2005. This is further emphasised by the Greens’ lack of focus on their tertiary education policy during their campaign. Nevertheless, the Greens’ ownership of tertiary education policy was indirectly undermined by Labour’s positioning and the consequence of an accommodative strategy.

Environmental policy, an area on which the Greens built their political fortunes, also arose as an area of contention between the two parties in 2008. While Labour addressed environmental concerns in its opening address, portraying climate change as “one of the greatest issues facing the planet” (and allocating an entire policy within its 2008 manifesto on climate change), their attempt to remain a centrist party restricted the extent to which Labour could offer solutions to this issue. The Greens were less constrained and could promote more radical policies in this area, enabling them to maintain their niche as an “environmental party”. The presence of the Green Party in New Zealand has contributed to the


recognition of environmental issues by both Labour and National at the 2008 campaign. The emergence of the issue of global warming “forced” Labour and National to respond. In some ways the Green Party did not have an opportunity to fully benefit from the issue before Labour and National had “green washed” the issue. For Labour to declare “we don’t want to leave a world to our children where the glaciers are all gone”\textsuperscript{117} is significant, as it outlines a clear positional shift from its approach in earlier elections, particularly 1996, 1999 and 2002 where no such focus was displayed. In 2005 Labour promoted policies that acknowledged the key Green issues (such as global warming), but not to the point where it declared its environmental concerns in its opening address. That Labour did this in 2008 may be the result of a number of factors, one of which was the Greens.

It remains possible that Labour adopted its position solely because of the potential threat of the Green Party. However, as in the case of the USA, Labour’s focus was primarily on the National Party. Labour’s positioning on this issue was influenced by the threat posed by National. National adopted an \textit{accommodative} position toward Labour on many policy areas in 2008,\textsuperscript{118} which in turn led to reduced points of difference between the two parties. Although, in effect, Labour adopted an indirect \textit{accommodative} strategy toward the Greens on environmental issues, this was a result of Labour’s strategy toward National.

Labour signalled a clear change in positioning on environmental issues when it introduced the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS). The ETS was one specific environmental policy where Labour and the Greens disagreed and \textit{adversarial} positions were evident. The basis of Green Party positioning on the issue was that the ETS did not go far enough to address climate change issues, whereas Labour sought parliamentary consensus, signalling its desire to remain centrist on this issue, which was particularly important in the lead-up to an election. To implement a system more compatible with that of the Greens would have been portrayed by National as a move to the left, confirming in the eyes of the voters the “nanny state” image of Labour that the opposition attempted to paint during the 2008 campaign.


\textsuperscript{118} Vowles (2010), 366.
By supporting a watered down ETS scheme, Labour risked allowing the Green Party to re-establish their ownership of the issue and therefore potentially lose support.\textsuperscript{119} Although the Greens supported the legislation in parliament, this was only on the basis of policy concessions from Labour.\textsuperscript{120} They remained clear in their opposition to it, highlighting a position that Labour’s ETS was better than no ETS, but not what they would implement if given the opportunity. By taking this position the Greens were able to maintain their credibility as the “environmental party”, as they clearly showed their reluctance, but their stance also gave them an opportunity to present their alternative, a “shadow ETS” in effect. This enabled the Greens to maintain their ownership of the climate change issue by highlighting how Labour’s ETS failed to adequately address (in their view) agricultural emissions.\textsuperscript{121} By allowing the agriculture industry a longer period before it would come under the scheme, Labour was catering to the rural sector in order to secure votes, which may have led to Labour supporters who disapproved of such a concession switching their votes to the Greens. This would require these voters to hold an ETS that was inclusive of agriculture as a high priority, so the damage to Labour may have been limited. However as Labour was caught between the Green Party and National, it seems there was no alternative in terms of how to approach this issue.

If Labour were to include agriculture in the ETS they risked losing to National the little rural/provincial sympathetic vote they still held. This loss could be considered “sunk” support, as there would be no possibility that Labour would benefit from it in any potential coalition. If Labour were to lose support to the Greens however, that support could still be used in a post-election coalition and therefore would not harm Labour’s “net” result. It was unlikely that Labour would attract any National Party support as a result of this accommodative strategy, but by adopting it, Labour sought to prevent a loss of support to the right, and to consolidate the support of the centre-left/left.

Labour’s support dropped from 41.1% in 2005 to 34% in 2008 while the Greens increased their support from 5.3% in 2005 to 6.7% in 2008. Levine and Roberts observed “disgruntled former Labour voters

\textsuperscript{119} Meguid (2005), 349.


\textsuperscript{121} NZ Green Party. ETS crumbles as ‘grand coalition’ forms. Scoop Media, 9 May 2008; NZ Green Party. Green will not support a gutless ETS. Scoop Media. 6 May 2008
constituted a larger share of the Green Party’s 2008 vote base than did 2005 Green voters.” 122 Meguid suggests that sufficient similarities between the two parties would be required in order to allow for a logical switch for voters.123 As both parties are of the left, on ideological grounds at least, vote switching between them is facilitated.124 But there would need to be adequate difference between the two parties within the area of environmental policy in order to provide voters with a reason to switch parties. As voters may perceive Labour’s ETS as catering to the centre-right/right (therefore providing the Greens with an opportunity to promote an alternative, regaining “ownership” of the issue) this scenario was made possible by Labour’s positioning.

In such a specific area as environmental policy it would be impossible for Labour to appease both those voters tempted to move to National and those tempted to vote for the Greens. As a result similarities between the two parties would dictate that Labour favoured losing support to the Greens over losing support to National. Voters may have felt disillusioned with Labour, adhering to the call for “change” but may not have been prepared to vote for National, so the Greens were a logical choice. Applying Meguid’s theory it seems that, although Labour’s move was not adversarial toward the Greens, rather accommodative toward National, it had the same effect.125 The Greens were able to re-establish their niche and benefited accordingly. Although not all of the Green’s rise in support in 2008 can be linked to Labour’s positioning on the ETS, considering the emphasis placed on this by all parties both left and right during the campaign, Levine and Roberts findings suggest that Labour’s accommodative positioning toward National on this issue contributed toward the rise in Green party support in 2008.

**ADVERSARIAL POSITIONING TOWARDS THE MINOR PARTIES**

**LABOUR AND NEW ZEALAND FIRST**

Following Meguid’s theory it can be argued that if Labour adopted adversarial positioning toward New Zealand First this would have prevented support drifting from New Zealand First toward Labour, and

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122 Levine and Roberts (2010), 37.
123 Meguid (2005), 349.
125 Meguid (2005), 349.
New Zealand First's ownership of these disputed policies would have been maintained.126 This may explain why support did not drift from New Zealand First toward Labour despite their *accommodative* positioning toward New Zealand First on the funding issue. Vowles attributes this *accommodative* positioning from Labour as a key reason why it lost support in 2008.127 Two policy areas where Labour held *adversarial* policies when compared to New Zealand First were immigration and the "smacking debate".128 New Zealand First consistently maintained its conservative positioning on immigration throughout its confidence and supply agreement with Labour, displaying clear positioning differences on this matter.129 As Labour held government for the nine years leading to the 2008 election, it was its policies that were often attacked by New Zealand First.130 Similarly, Labour was clear in its opposition to New Zealand First's immigration policies, labelling them an "embarrassment" in 2002.131 This was reiterated in 2008 while New Zealand First and Labour were coalition partners, when Ethnic Affairs Minister Chris Carter stated that "cultural diversity [was] a strength for New Zealand", and that New Zealand First's immigration policies in turn were "nonsensel.132 By maintaining this positioning on immigration, New Zealand First was able create a clear point of difference between the two parties, something that was essential if New Zealand First were to maintain its support levels. In contrast, Jim Anderton's Progressive, as part of the Labour-led government throughout this time, held similar policies to that of Labour and thus did not create such points of difference.

The other area of difference was the smacking debate, which was focused on Labour's positioning around the Green Party initiative of repealing s59 of the Crimes Act 1961, enabling the use of "reasonable force" against children. This was dubbed the "anti-smacking bill", and divided parliament on the issue of

126 Meguid (2005), 350.
127 Vowles (2010), 367.
smacking, as opposed to its original intent of addressing child abuse.\(^{133}\) Nevertheless, Labour instructed its members to vote according to party lines, despite this not previously being party policy. In doing so, Labour was heavily criticised by opposition parties, leading to the “anti-smacking bill” becoming an election issue.\(^{134}\) New Zealand First voted against the bill, labelling it “fundamentally flawed”,\(^{135}\) possibly in an attempt not to upset its traditionally conservative elderly support base. As Labour did not benefit from New Zealand First’s decline, it could be stated that the adversarial positioning from Labour on immigration and from New Zealand First toward Labour on the smacking debate provided New Zealand First with enough points of difference in terms of policy to prevent leaking support to Labour. Such an assessment helps explain why New Zealand First maintained the majority of their 2005 support and actually attracted some votes from Labour.\(^{136}\) In order to determine where and how New Zealand First lost support, the positioning of other parties will need to be considered.

**LABOUR AND THE MAORI PARTY**

The Maori Party may be classified as the only other niche party represented in the New Zealand Parliament (the other being the Green Party), as it promotes highly concentrated policy toward a small proportion of New Zealand voters. New Zealand has two types of electorates, general and Maori. The Maori electorates cover the same areas as general electorates but have differing boundaries determined by the populations of enrolled Maori voters within them. If a voter is of Maori decent they may be eligible to enrol in either the Maori or the general roll, they then vote in the electorate for whichever roll they have chosen. The number of voters who choose to vote via the Maori roll determines the number of Maori seats available. This is a unique system designed to provide guaranteed representation to the indigenous population of New Zealand and is what provided the Maori Party with a platform to establish its place in New Zealand’s political landscape.


\(^{134}\) ACT Party. People should have a say on anti-smacking law. Scoop Media, 24 June 2008; ACT Party. ACT pushes anti-smacking referendum. Scoop Media, 4 February 2008.


\(^{136}\) Levine and Roberts (2010), 37.
As its name would suggest, the Maori Party promotes policy that “upholds indigenous values”, underpinned by Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Maori text of the Treaty of Waitangi). The Maori Party provides the only truly indigenous representation in New Zealand’s Parliament, but that is not to suggest that they are the only political party promoting such policies. Although the Maori Party won five of the seven Maori seats available, Labour won the remaining two, and had held all the Maori seats prior to the formation of the Maori Party, suggesting that although the Maori Party is “niche” in its approach, it has yet to convince the entire Maori voting population of its ability. This is further evident when considering that Labour received considerably more party votes from the Maori seats than the Maori Party. Nevertheless, despite the fact that this is a contested voter group, it is the focus of the Maori Party, which did not contest any general electorate seat.

The National Party adopted the position of abolishing the Maori seats leading into the 2005 election, and did not stand any candidates within these electorates in 2008. As a result the whole dynamics of major and minor parties within these electorates differs slightly as, although Maori electorate voters can place their party vote with any party that contests the election, the two main parties contesting the Maori electorates were Labour and the Maori Party. Considering that Labour had such a stronghold on these seats previously and that they were able to retain two seats after 2008 despite strong Maori Party support within these electorates, it might be assumed that both parties adopted similar positions when targeting these voters. However, this did not appear to be so, which may come down to the differences in the make-up of each party.

Despite Labour’s continued support as a party within the Maori electorates it remained a major, mainstream party reaching across various socio-economic boundaries in terms of its support base. As a party that seeks such support, unlike the Maori Party, it is unable to focus solely, in terms of both policy and potential support base, on the Maori electorates. This enabled the Maori Party to adopt more radical policies and positions that proved more popular in terms of the electorate vote than Labour’s relatively pragmatic approach to Maori issues. Labour’s dilemma was that it could not afford to become too accommodative toward the Maori Party for fear of a backlash from its non-Maori supporters. With the

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137 www.maoriparty.org
National Party proving more popular in the polls leading toward 2008 Labour could not afford to gift National any points of difference on this issue.

The fact that Labour was restricted in how far it was able to accommodate the Maori Party’s positions helps to explain why Labour lost the Te Tai Tonga electorate seat to the Maori Party. Labour had held that seat continuously since 1999, and although New Zealand First took the seat in 1996, Labour had held it for many years before. Despite maintaining strong support in terms of the party vote within the Maori electorates, Labour’s candidates appeared to be losing appeal within these electorates with the two elected Labour MPs having reduced majorities from the 2005 election. The MMP system allows New Zealand voters to split their vote between a party and an electorate candidate, with the result in this instance suggesting these voters preferred the Maori Party candidates and Labour Party policy. This may indeed have been the case, given that the Labour Party was in a more likely position from which to implement their policy (although, as the election results turned out, the opposite was the case). This would have gone against previous discussion where it was stated that Labour’s likelihood of policy implementation was declining in conjunction with their declining election outlook. Maori electorate voters maintaining their support for Labour despite its poor prospects may have been more of a vote of no confidence in the Maori Party than a vote of confidence in the Labour Party, or it may simply have been a case of voters seeking to gain as much representation within parliament as possible. As the Maori Party gained five MPs, well above the proportion of the party vote they received, the number of seats in the New Zealand Parliament was set at 122, two seats above the intended 120. Known as an “overhang”, this saw Maori voters receive two extra representatives than they would have been entitled to if this “overhang” had not been created. It is impossible to determine if this was the motivation behind Maori electorate voting patterns. However as these electorates are “over-represented” in parliament these regions have clearly benefited as a result of such voting strategies.

In displaying a preference toward Labour, Maori electorate voters went against the evident trend within the general electorates toward the centre-right, particularly National. This is not to say voters moved toward Labour, rather they maintained their support for this party despite National’s growing popularity.

138 [www.electionresults.org.nz](http://www.electionresults.org.nz)
That some Maori voters did not shift their support to National should not come as a surprise, particularly considering National’s policy to remove the Maori electorates from New Zealand’s electoral system. Interestingly, the Maori Party did not eliminate National as a potential coalition partner, as other minor parties had. By not giving the Maori Party their party vote in 2005, and subsequently 2008, it may be perceived that those voters were displaying a preference for Labour as a potential coalition partner after the election, a preference which may have arisen from the Maori Party’s positioning toward National.\textsuperscript{139}

In 2005, Prime Minister Helen Clark stated that she did not intend to work with the Maori Party, describing it as the “last cab off the rank”.\textsuperscript{140} This sent a clear message to the Maori electorates that any party vote for the Maori Party would not result in representatives who would be part of government. If Clark had stated she was willing to work with the Maori Party, the Maori Party may have received more party vote support as it would have been seen as a viable coalition partner and therefore worthy of the Maori electorate party vote. In 2008, however, Labour expressed a willingness to work with the Maori Party, indicating to the Maori electorates the potential for the Maori Party to enter government after the election. This change from a\textit{ dismissive} position in 2005 to an\textit{ accommodative} position in 2008 provided a rationale for Maori voters to switch their electorate vote to the Maori Party, and potentially have a stronger voice in government as a result. Stating they were willing to enter a coalition with National after the election may have confused this message, however, as Maori voters were then in a position where they had to choose between Labour, which had represented them in the government previously, or the Maori Party which had an opportunity to work with Labour after the election, yet might also work with National, a party that did not even bother to stand candidates in these electorates. The Maori Party did enter into an agreement with National after the election, enabling them to form a majority in parliament. The fact that the vast majority of Maori electorate voters gave their party vote to Labour despite their indications of a preference for the Maori Party suggests their disapproval of any potential deal with National after the election. Maori Party voters’ preferences were highlighted in the New Zealand Election Survey (NZES) conducted after the 2008 election, which asked voters “...between National and Labour,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{140} Television New Zealand. ‘Leaders’ debate’ 22 August 2005.
\end{itemize}
which party did you most want to be part of the government?” 67.3% of Maori Party supporters answered Labour, 17.3% National.  

As suggested within Meguid’s study, in any instance where a dismissive position is adopted by a major party, the minor party will fail to gain traction with voters. Although Meguid’s focus was on policy, it appears that this can be extended to include potential coalition arrangements, an important consideration under MMP politics in New Zealand. It can be seen in 2005 that Labour’s dismissive position toward the Maori Party may have decreased Maori Party appeal to Maori voters because it decreased Maori Party chances of being involved in government. Then Labour’s accommodative position toward the Maori Party in 2008 appears to have been muffled by the Maori Party declaring its willingness to be part of a National-led coalition after the 2008 election. In positioning themselves closer to the centre-right the Maori Party alienated a core section of its potential vote, maintaining Labour’s popularity among this group.

In terms of policy, central to the Maori Party 2008 campaign was the call for entrenchment of the Maori seats, as well as a constitutional review to include the Treaty of Waitangi in a written constitution for New Zealand. This was in direct contrast to any policy offered by Labour prior to 2008. Yet, as the election date drew closer, Prime Minister Helen Clark stated that it was always Labour Party policy that these seats should be entrenched, and that would remain Labour Party policy during the 2008 campaign. Despite Labour’s claims that this was always its policy, it had not been actively promoted during previous elections, and so may have appeared as a deliberate change in policy as a result of the Maori Party’s threat toward Labour. Regardless of whether it had always been Labour policy, the fact they chose to promote the entrenchment of Maori seats during the 2008 campaign showed a clear accommodative position toward the Maori Party, threatening their “ownership” of the issue and potentially reducing their chances of attracting “party vote” support from Labour.

141 Vowles (2010), 371.
142 Meguid, B. (2005), 350.
143 “Clark courts Maori with seats offer”, 29 October 2008, sec. A.
LABOUR AND ACT

The ACT Party (Association of Consumers and Taxpayers) is widely considered to be a party with policies firmly anchored in the right.¹⁴⁴ This is most evident when considering particular policies promoted in ACT's 2008 election “20-point plan,”¹⁴⁵ which include reducing government spending, cutting and flattening tax rates, promotion of the private sector in education, health and welfare, privatisation, and the introduction of relatively tough law and order policies. ACT has previously attempted to distance itself from the negative perception toward such policies (for example by campaigning as “ACT: The liberal party”¹⁴⁶, and promoting liberal recreational drug and alcohol policies similar to that of the Green Party - a party of the left).¹⁴⁷ However, when comparing its policies to that of other parties of the centre-right, such as National and New Zealand First, ACT promoted policies in 2008 which placed it at the furthermost right position on the New Zealand political spectrum (out of those represented in Parliament).¹⁴⁸

It can be expected that, as the centre-left Labour Party targeted different voting groups from ACT during the 2008 election campaign, a largely dismissive position would have been adopted by Labour. Labour would ignore ACT as it posed minimal threat to Labour’s traditional support base, while Labour stood a limited chance of attracting ACT’s business and economic vote. During the 2005 election, when ACT’s chances of re-entering parliament appeared slim, Labour could afford to ignore ACT. In 2008 the situation was different and Labour adopted an adversarial position toward ACT. With Rodney Hide, the ACT leader, relatively secure in the Epsom seat, there was a realistic possibility ACT could help form a National-led government.

ACT conducted its campaign by targeting those aspects of Labour’s previous term in government which it felt were universally unpopular, such as certain legislation labelled “Nanny State”.¹⁴⁹ This was a

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¹⁴⁴ Vowles (2010), 368; Wood and Rudd (2004), 181.
¹⁴⁵ www.act.org.nz/plan
¹⁴⁶ www.act.org.nz
¹⁴⁸ Vowles (2010), 368.
consistent theme from parties of the right, an apparent attempt to appeal to voters who disapproved of what they saw as restrictive legislation brought in by Labour, such as its involvement in repealing s59 of the Crimes Act, and electricity regulations. ACT targeted policies where it felt it could gain traction, such as tax reform, as it was perceived that many voters were frustrated at the lack of tax cuts during Labour’s previous term. ACT leader, Rodney Hide, stated, “the political response from Michael Cullen has been both woeful and irresponsible. Their policy promises will make tough times worse”. Within its “20-point plan” ACT claimed that its policies would directly benefit each New Zealander’s income by $500 per week, a claim that appeared popular to those voters who were struggling as global economic conditions worsened leading into 2008.

Yet, although the ACT Party seemed to be gaining traction from its positioning in this campaign, it remained unlikely that it would directly benefit by attracting Labour voters. This was primarily due to the vast differences in policy between the two parties and counter-adversarial positioning against ACT by Labour. More likely is that National benefited from ACT’s anti-Labour campaigning as the issues being promoted by ACT were similar to those promoted by National. As ACT campaigned for less government regulation and lower taxes, National’s policy platform gained recognition and because it appeared less radical than that of ACT, it made it easier for Labour voters to switch to National. For Labour voters to switch to ACT would have been an ideological “step too far”. ACT, in turn, then benefited from a shift in allegiance by some National supporters in what was effectively a net shift to the right.

Due to the nature of MMP politics Labour was forced to grant attention to ACT in order to stave off any potential momentum for a National–ACT coalition. As ACT openly campaigned as the “natural coalition partner for National,” Labour tried to discredit this potential partnership in order to prevent losing support. Labour warned that ACT would be “king makers” and a "A vote for ACT is a vote for Roger

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150 ACT Party. People should have a say on anti-smacking law. Scoop Media, 24 June 2008.


152 www.act.org.nz/plan

153 Levine and Roberts (2010), 36.


Douglas at the Cabinet table in any John Key National government.”  

Prime Minister Helen Clark stated that “any arrangement from National that brings Roger Douglas anywhere near government is something that people do not want at all, so he’s trying to cover that very unpopular fact.” It seemed Labour believed the majority of voters would be concerned at the prospect of a National-led government implementing ACT Party policy, so commenced a campaign focusing on “trust”, asserting that National could not be trusted to resist or prevent such an implementation.

Such positioning may have actually influenced National’s positioning toward ACT, as National leader John Key announced that ACT was considered a potential coalition partner by his party. However he assured that ACT’s finance spokesman, former Finance Minister Sir Roger Douglas, would be denied a cabinet position. Douglas remained a staunch advocate for neo-liberal economic reform and appeared to personify the image of ACT that Labour warned voters about. National appears to have attempted to settle any concerns about its return to right-wing financial policies, a move that may not have occurred if it was not for Labour’s positioning on this issue.

Labour’s adversarial positioning toward ACT was not an attempt to attract votes from that party or an attempt to prevent losing support to that party. Rather it seems a strategy to prevent losing support to National. Positioning theory would argue that Labour potentially gave ACT more attention by adopting its adversarial position toward them; yet Labour had little choice. ACT appeared to have been contributing considerably to the right’s positioning against National, and as such threatened Labour’s support. If Labour had adopted a dismissive position, something that would usually be expected in a comparison of centre-left and right wing parties, then Labour would have risked losing more support to National in 2008 than actually occurred. This highlights the point that positioning theory should not only be concerned with how parties position themselves vis-à-vis other parties, over policy, parties also

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position themselves vis-à-vis other parties, over coalition potential (this is an important point and one which will be revisiting in the discussion chapter).

DISMISSIVE POSITIONING TOWARDS THE MINOR PARTIES

LABOUR AND JIM ANDERTON’S PROGRESSIVE

As the policy platforms between these two parties were so similar, positioning theory would explain that Labour attracted Progressive Party support between 2005 and 2008 as a result of accommodative positioning toward the Progressives. It has been previously suggested by the author that it would have disadvantaged Labour to attract support away from its potential coalition partners to the point where they were unable to re-enter parliament, so it may initially appear that Labour would attempt to attract support away from the Progressives. This is a slightly different scenario, however, as providing the Progressives had an elected member representing them in parliament, they would receive the proportion of seats in parliament depending on the party vote they received, regardless of whether this was below the 5% threshold. As a result Labour had guaranteed support from Jim Anderton regardless of how much support his party received, which enabled Labour to attract Progressive Party support without threatening the coalition support from that party. Such a scenario would require an active accommodative strategy from Labour however, which is unlikely when the major threat to Labour was from National, not the Progressives.

It may be suggested that Labour’s announcement of a USA policy, a policy previously promoted by the Progressives, could be an accommodative position from Labour toward the Progressives, yet once again this is unlikely. The Progressives only managed to secure 1.2% of the party vote in the 2005 election, so it is hard to see Labour using campaign resources to target this support in 2008 when the National Party, among others, posed a threat that could have potentially removed more support from Labour than they ever could have gained from the Progressives. Labour’s accommodative positioning toward the Progressives was not deliberate, rather appearing as an attempt to create points of difference between it and the National Party. Labour’s adversarial positioning toward National on the issue of a USA had an adverse effect on the Greens, potentially posing the same threat as an accommodative position would
have. This may explain the loss of support in 2008 as the Progressives’ policy on USA was now threatened not only by the Greens but by Labour, which, coupled with the Progressives’ minimal profile (and the close links with the Labour Party),\footnote{Vowles (2004), 23.} would make the prospect of a voter maintaining support for, or switching support to the Progressives unlikely.\footnote{Meguid (2005), 349.}

Considering the Progressives minimal threat toward Labour’s support and their previously staunch support of the Labour Party it is difficult to see Labour adopting any deliberate positioning toward this party; by default a \textit{dismissive} approach. Positioning theory argues this would restrict the Progressives’ ability to create a profile, as other parties were paying no attention to it. Indeed, the common use of the “Labour-led coalition” appears to reinforce this, as the term “Labour-Progressive Coalition” was not commonly used, if at all, by political parties or media throughout the Progressives’ coalition agreement with Labour. According to positioning theory, a deliberate \textit{dismissive} approach from Labour combined with an inadvertent \textit{accommodative} position would lead to a decrease in support for Progressives, with Labour benefiting from this,\footnote{Meguid (2005), 349.} which is indeed what occurred.\footnote{Levine and Roberts (2010), 36.} As Labour and the Progressives proved to be compatible it is logical that voters would switch from the Progressive Party to Labour. Naturally, after 2005, with these voters being represented by only one MP, the chances of the Progressive Party increasing its vote within the context of the 2008 election was highly unlikely. The incentive for voters to remain with the Progressives decreased accordingly, benefiting Labour, despite the number of voters who fled Labour in 2008, primarily to the Green and National parties.\footnote{Levine and Roberts (2010), 35-36.}

\textbf{LABOUR AND UNITED FUTURE}

United Future also lost support between the 2005 and 2008 elections. United Future could pose a threat toward Labour, as both parties are considered parties of the centre,\footnote{Wood and Rudd (2004), 181; Edwards, B. “Minor Parties” in Miller, R (ed.) \textit{New Zealand Government and Politics (Fifth Edition)} Oxford University Press. Melbourne, 528.} and with Peter Dunne once being a
Labour MP there may be a perceived link between the two parties. Both parties were involved in a government relationship during the previous election and Labour had helped turn into legislation a number of United Future policies, including the establishment of the Families Commission. However, United Future would be considered of the centre-right due to their conservative positioning on many of Labour’s progressive legislative “achievements” since 1999, including the decriminalisation of prostitution and civil union legislation, to which United Future was opposed - claiming the bills had hidden agendas. Moreover, United Future’s continual push for tax reform and dismissal of the Green Party’s environmental police as “ideological solutions” indicated United Future was a potential coalition partner for the National Party.

As has been seen in the study of Labour’s positioning toward Jim Anderton’s Progressives, the potential threat of United Future toward Labour appears to have influenced Labour’s positioning toward it. Politically, there was little gain for Labour in concentrating time and resources to adopt significant positions toward a party that either posed no threat to it, or where there were few votes to be gained. For United Future to realistically gain in the polls would have required a higher profile among the electorate, allowing its leader Peter Dunne an opportunity to show himself as a viable coalition partner for either Labour or National. This was achieved in 2002 when United Future attracted support from an unpopular National Party. However it has steadily declined in popularity since 2002. As Peter Dunne has had a strong working relationship with Labour since this time, he had the opportunity to build the profile of his party, particularly around policy concessions he achieved. Yet despite this, United Future only managed to gain re-entry into parliament due to Peter Dunne regaining his electorate seat. United Future appeared not to gain votes for its participation in government or the policy concessions it won.

Although United Future previously attempted to create a profile by criticising Labour policy while issuing warnings of any potential coalition agreements with the Green Party, there was no evidence from the press releases and newspaper articles collected for this study of any positioning from Labour


toward United Future; Labour adopted a *dismissive* position. This may explain United Future’s steady decline since 2002, as according to the positioning theory, with decreased attention from the major parties comes decreased recognition from voters.\(^{171}\) Moreover, Labour would not realistically gain United Future support even if it sought it, as United Future focuses attention toward the socially conservative, religious sectors of the spectrum, not traditional supporters for a Labour Party, which promoted socially liberal policies such as the decriminalisation of prostitution, the amendment of s59 of the Crimes Act\(^ {172}\) and the Civil Union Bill. United Future was more of a natural coalition partner for National as its conservative policies were more compatible with the centre-right National.\(^ {173}\) Peter Dunne seemingly recognised this when he announced his party’s determination to work only with National after 2008, despite remaining part of the Labour-led government at the time.\(^ {174}\)

Dunne received widespread ridicule for this announcement, which appeared to call his credibility into question.\(^ {175}\) Such a situation was not ideal for any party leader heading into an election, and the United Future party showed no sign of gaining any support. This suggests Dunne’s strategy was designed to benefit him personally rather than serve his party as a whole – a possibility suggested by the Progressive leader Jim Anderton.\(^ {176}\) Rob Eaddy, chief of staff in the office of Peter Dunne at the time, holds a differing view, stating:

> “we asked our pollster to ask a specific question of those respondents who had voted for Dunne in 2005 (in his Ohariu seat) but who would not do so again (or were considering not doing so) this election: what did he need to do to win back their

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\(^{171}\) Meguid (2005), 349.

\(^{172}\) Edwards (2010), 531.


support? The overwhelming response from these voters (and they numbered about 15 per cent of the polling sample) was a simple one—‘align with National.’”

Labour maintained that it would be willing to continue its relationship with United Future after the election despite Dunne’s preference for National. This was obviously a non-policy accommodative position toward the party, the only attention Labour appeared to grant the party up to this point. As with previous examples, Labour’s willingness to still consider United Future as a coalition partner, as well as National welcoming Dunne’s intentions to switch coalition partners, in theory should have increased United Future’s vote in 2008, but this did not occur. There are two possible reasons. First, Dunne’s announcement was made late in the campaign, so any potential recognition would have been diluted by the limited time voters had to consider this new positioning. In that sense other parties, such as ACT, had already established themselves as viable coalition partners for National, and United Future would have needed to position itself against these parties in order to compete for this vote, something that did not occur. Second, despite the recognition now given to United Future by both major parties, United Future remained an insignificant player, often not rating a mention in opinion polls leading toward the 2008 election. This low profile would not have assisted United Future, as it is unlikely that a voter not previously aligned to this party would feel compelled to switch their support from a major party to United Future when it had no realistic potential to gain more than its leader’s electorate seat. It appears appropriate to state that any accommodative positioning toward United Future from Labour in terms of potential coalition relationships would have been muffled by the low profile and perceived lack of relevance of United Future.

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CHAPTER 4

MAJOR PARTY POSITIONING: NATIONAL AND THE MINOR PARTIES

After winning the first MMP election in 1996, the centre-right National Party has not fared well under the new political system, unable to form a coalition government since 1999. National appeared initially to struggle to distance itself from its neo-liberal policies of the early-mid 1990s, and did not receive enough support in 1999 and 2002 to be in a position to form any coalition agreements. Moreover, National was not as successful as Labour in forming relationships with other parties, in particular those from outside National’s “natural” coalition partners. Labour succeeded in forming relationships with the centre-right New Zealand First and United Futures parties, but conversely National failed to appeal to parties of the left, namely the Greens and Jim Anderton’s Progressive coalition, which both refused to consider the party as a potential ally. Although National could have formed a relationship with New Zealand First and United, it was unable to do so, effectively leaving the ACT Party as its only supporter in Parliament. This in itself may have contributed to National’s inability to remove itself from its past as the ACT Party continued to promote policies from which National appeared to be distancing itself.

Nevertheless, in 2005 National enjoyed a resurgence of support, which placed it in serious contention for forming a government. This further exemplified National’s predicament with both New Zealand First and United preferring to enter a coalition government with Labour rather than National, despite the potential grouping of New Zealand First, United, National and ACT having enough seats to govern. Moreover, Labour may have been able to rely on the Greens if needed and to a lesser extent the newly formed Maori Party, a party which had not declared any intention to enter an agreement with National.

With the prospects for the 2008 election appearing more positive for the National Party, their isolation as a major party appeared to be lessening. Apart from the Greens and the Progressive Party, which refused to consider working with National, all other minor parties, including the Maori Party, stated they would consider a potential relationship with National after the 2008 election. The potential support National could have received after 2008 was limited when its leader John Key declared his unwillingness to enter into a deal with New Zealand First after the election. Although this could have potentially harmed National’s chances of forming a coalition government, as the results showed, National was able to gain more support than it received in 2005, to the detriment of the Labour Party, and form a coalition
agreement with ACT, United Future and the Maori Party. Moreover, with New Zealand First failing to gain enough support to secure its re-entry into parliament National’s positioning on this issue appears to have proven effective as it attracted a “not insignificant number of people who had voted for New Zealand First three years earlier,”\textsuperscript{179} while discouraging potential New Zealand First support.

Although National’s 2008 election outlook looked promising, the possibility of a Labour victory could not be dismissed, which was sure to have influenced National’s positioning toward minor parties leading to the election, including that toward New Zealand First. In order to succeed, National needed to gain enough support to either govern alone or as part of a coalition with those minor parties willing to assist. In order to achieve this National needed to adopt positioning toward not only Labour, its obvious threat, but also toward those minor parties that could threaten National’s fortunes or those of its coalition prospects. Learning from previous elections, National realised that it needed as much support from minor parties as possible in order to gain office so it may have proven counter-productive to adopt adversarial positions toward these potential partners. Positioning theory would predict that National adopt a dismissive position toward ACT and United Future so that National would not draw support away from these parties, to the detriment of their potential future coalition support. New Zealand First would have previously come into this category, which highlights the significance of John Key’s positioning toward this party.\textsuperscript{180}

Conversely, positioning theory would predict an accommodative or adversarial position adopted by National toward parties of the centre-left, so as to attract support from these parties. With the Labour Party occupying the centre-left on the New Zealand spectrum this would account for major v major party positioning, something Meguid’s study does not focus on. As National did not expect to gain much support from the parties of the left (the Greens, the Progressive Party) as well as the Maori Party; a dismissive position towards these parties was also an option for National.

\textsuperscript{179} Levine and Roberts (2010), 36.

\textsuperscript{180} Levine and Roberts (2010), 29.
ADVERSARIAL POSITIONING BY NATIONAL TOWARDS MINOR PARTIES

NATIONAL AND NEW ZEALAND FIRST

In announcing its unwillingness to work with New Zealand First after the 2008 election as a result of the funding controversy surrounding the party, National reduced its number of potential coalition partners, a result that could have had drastic repercussions on the party. This adversarial positioning signalled John Key’s “determination to marginalise” New Zealand First, while creating a clear point of difference between National and Labour, Labour having stood by New Zealand First throughout the funding allegations. This positioning defined the relationship between National and New Zealand First during the 2008 election, as the debate and dialogue between the two parties turned from policy to the non-policy issue of New Zealand First funding.

In terms of policy there are many similarities between National and New Zealand First, as would be expected with two parties considered to occupy a similar position on the political spectrum. When considering each party’s policies on welfare, conservation, law and order, defence and Maori affairs, there are clear similarities between the two parties. In terms of immigration National is closer to New Zealand First than other parties, but fails to hold as strong a position, allowing New Zealand First to maintain “ownership” of the issue. It is clear from a National Party press release titled “National Values Immigration”, that National made a deliberate attempt to distance itself from any perception that it was accommodative of New Zealand First on this issue. The party stated “National has a different view to New Zealand First on the value of Asian immigration” and New Zealand First’s immigration policies “were not perspectives held by National”. The fact that immigration was not a high priority salience of the 2008 election goes some way to explain why National was willing to allow New Zealand First to regain “ownership” of this issue. Winston Peters seems to have intended to cement this ownership by expressing

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181 Levine and Roberts (2010), 30.
182 Edwards (2010), 528.
an adversarial position toward National and Labour by suggesting both parties promoted “open door immigration” policies.\textsuperscript{185}

Nevertheless, positioning theory suggests that even though National did not adopt as strong a stance on immigration as many New Zealand First voters would have preferred, National did benefit by being in a position where it was potentially able to implement its policy, whereas New Zealand First was not. In the mind of the voter, implementation of a diluted version of their preferred policy is better than no implementation at all, so National was an attractive option for New Zealand First voters. Given that New Zealand First was losing support to National, this is a realistic scenario. In moving toward the centre, there would be no point for National to highlight a position on immigration that might alienate potential centre-left voters. Thus, if a New Zealand First voter moved to National on the grounds of immigration policy, the basis may have been perceptual, rather than realistic. So, National posed a limited threat toward New Zealand First on immigration, which although potentially threatened by National, maintained ownership of this issue.

New Zealand First maintained an adversarial position toward National on the grounds of privatisation, suggesting that National intended to “hijack” the ACC.\textsuperscript{186} National appeared to have pre-empted any attack on its previous right-wing privatisation policies (when last in government) by promising not to seek privatisation in its first term.\textsuperscript{187} National ignored New Zealand First’s positioning, enabling it to focus on areas where it could attract votes from Labour. This essentially disabled the effectiveness of New Zealand First’s positioning on privatisation.

National’s positioning toward the funding issue was initially accommodative,\textsuperscript{188} which left New Zealand First in a relatively strong position despite the allegations surrounding the party. By signalling its support for New Zealand First, both National and Labour sent a clear message to voters that they believed Winston Peters’ version of events. In effect this maintained New Zealand First’s credibility and integrity in the eyes of the voters. By adopting accommodative positions toward New Zealand First, the major parties

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\textsuperscript{185} Dominion Post, 17 October 2008.


\textsuperscript{187} “Election fever hots up in Parliament” Wairarapa Times Age, 4 July 2008, Sec A; Television New Zealand. ‘Leaders; debate; The decider’ 5 November 2008.

\textsuperscript{188} Levine and Roberts (2010), 29.
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legitimised New Zealand First as a potential coalition partner, and so maintained their chances of re-election. The reasons behind such positioning are obviously complex. However it is unlikely that the main factor influencing the positioning of both Labour and National was the potential support for New Zealand First, which could assist either major party to form a coalition after the election. Before the allegations broke, only the Greens and New Zealand First stood a realistic chance of receiving 5% of the party vote. As the Greens were considered natural coalition partners of Labour, and New Zealand First had displayed a strong working relationship with them also, such a result on election night would have prevented National gaining office despite a clear difference in the party vote between National and Labour. Nevertheless, New Zealand First had worked with National before and, as he did in 2005, Winston Peters declared he would be willing to work with both Labour and National after the election.

This was sure to influence National’s positioning toward New Zealand First on the funding issue because if National stood any realistic chance of forming a coalition government after 2008, the support of New Zealand First could be crucial. Nevertheless, as the allegations unfolded, the ACT and Green parties rose in the polls, as they expressed their criticism of Winston Peters. Further to this, after Owen Glenn provided evidence contrary to that provided by Winston Peters, the pressure on New Zealand First appeared to increase from both the media and subsequently the voting public. With New Zealand First slipping in the polls (both nationally for the party and in the Tauranga electorate for Winston Peters) it was evident that New Zealand First would struggle to gain re-election. At this time National adopted an adversarial position toward New Zealand First in terms of the funding issue, with John Key stating he could not trust Peters as his actions had led to Key (among others) to question his integrity. This was significant as it sent a clear signal to New Zealand First voters that there was no chance of New Zealand First forming part of a government unless there was a Labour victory. Immediately, any New Zealand First supporters who were not supporters of Labour would have been isolated, with a strong chance they would then shift to National in order to have their vote “count”. Furthermore, any voters who determined

their vote on the chances of their preferred party forming a government may have decided to not vote New Zealand First. Damian Edwards, chief of staff to Winston Peters during the 2008 election, describes John Key’s ruling as the “killer blow” for New Zealand First, stating “this saw those among the party’s potential supporters who were National-leaning – or, more importantly, who wanted to see Labour out – shift from New Zealand First.”

The timing of National’s change in positioning was also significant as it placed emphasis on trustworthiness, a campaign theme being used by Labour. By stating that he no longer trusted Winston Peters, John Key was not only able to raise questions over Winston Peters’ integrity but he also diverted attention away from Labour’s efforts to brand him as untrustworthy – can a Labour Party that gives unconditional support to someone whose trustworthiness is being questioned be trusted itself? Moreover, if National had adopted their adversarial position toward New Zealand First at the start of the allegations, this position may have been dismissed by voters as National simply playing politics. But, in changing National’s position when he did, John Key was placing an emphasis upon it, appearing as if it was a carefully considered, rational outcome. From this, it appears that National was more effective in creating a cloud of doubt over New Zealand First than the other parties involved.

At first sight the funding scandal did not seem to affect New Zealand First remarkably, as it only dropped 1.7% percentage points from 2005. Such an analysis would be overlooking the fact that it was that drop in support which prevented New Zealand First from re-entering Parliament for the first time since the party’s inception. In terms of voters, the numbers would not have benefited National dramatically. However the loss of seven seats drastically reduced the possibility of Labour forming a minority coalition government. In that sense New Zealand First’s result remains incredibly significant to the result of the 2008 election, and relevant in understanding the role party positioning played in that result.

All parliamentary parties, both major and minor, adopted a position toward New Zealand First on policy, and all also adopted a position on the funding issue, a non-policy issue. Although Meguid’s theory does

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not consider party positioning around such issues, it can be seen from the emphasis placed upon this issue by these parties that it was not only a significant election issue, but also one that appeared to have influenced the outcome of the 2008 General Election.

NATIONAL AND THE MAORI PARTY
As National did not stand any candidates in the Maori electorates, it can be expected that National would adopt a dismissive position toward the Maori Party, in recognition of the fact that National expected to win few party votes in these electorates. As the Maori Party received 27.7% of the party vote from the Maori electorates and only 0.5% of the party vote in the general electorates in 2005 (where National received its support), both parties were essentially competing in different elections. Contrary to the situation of Labour in relation to the Maori Party, where Labour would be disadvantaged considerably if the Maori Party received significant support from the Maori electorates, National would not be affected by a strong Maori Party performance (apart from the possibility that the Maori Party might enter into a coalition with Labour). This is primarily due to the low possibility that any support the Maori Party attracted would come from National, rather than Labour. For the Maori Party to take votes from Labour benefited National, not just by reducing the support Labour received, but also by providing National with a stronger potential coalition partner.

Having said that, policy promoted by National during the 2008 election was not compatible with that of the Maori Party, calling for the abolition of the Maori electorates and placing a time limit on the lodgement of historical Treaty claims. Although such policies were adversarial toward the Maori Party, which advocated for entrenchment of the seats, National’s policy was not directed against the Maori Party as much as it was intended to reassure its Pakeha voters. Nevertheless, the effect remains the same, with both parties campaigning for directly oppositional policies while not discarding the other as a potential coalition partner. The National Party position on the Maori electorates was carried over from the 2005 election when it was introduced by then leader, Dr Don Brash, and proved popular among “mainstream New Zealanders.” Such a policy deliberately created a point of difference between National and the

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Labour Party, in an attempt by National to maintain the ground gained from Labour in 2005. To maintain the policy in 2008 suggests that National wanted to continue the momentum they gathered in 2005 on this issue, a direct adversarial position toward Labour.

Nevertheless, if both parties were hoping to form a coalition agreement after the election this required a compromise on their respective positions over the Maori electorates, as it would be difficult to see the Maori Party entering into an agreement to remove the seats on which they are dependent for representation in parliament. Furthermore, it is unlikely the Maori Party would enter into any agreement with National where the retention of the Maori electorates was not categorically assured, as to do otherwise may be seen as catering to National’s demands in return for a coalition agreement, potentially reducing their “mana” within these electorates. Moreover, any sign that the Maori Party supported a party that maintained a desire to remove the seats could result in a shift of votes back to Labour within these electorates, something the Maori Party would want to avoid.

This scenario did not appear lost on National leader John Key, who, after initially denying talking to the Maori Party, stated that he “indicated” to Maori Party co-leader Dr Pita Sharples that National’s policy on the Maori seats “were not a bottom line” for any potential post-election talks with the Maori Party. When details of this were released mid-campaign, National came under scrutiny for apparent “back room” deals with the Maori Party, going against policy for which it sought support publicly. John Key initially denied these claims, which suggests National was willing to accommodate the Maori Party on this policy in order to secure its support in any potential coalition agreement, but did not wish to publicly announce this as it might cause disaffection amongst some National voters. Prior to John Key’s “indication” to the Maori Party, Pita Sharples declared a pre-election preference for the Labour Party, stating that “we would prefer that Labour got the higher share of the vote.” That the Maori Party entered into an agreement with National after the election, on the premise that National would no longer pursue its seats policy, reaffirms that National adjusted its positioning in order to appease a Maori Party bottom line.

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Nevertheless, apart from National’s Maori seats policy being *adversarial* to that of the Maori Party, their positions toward the Maori Party in other respects remained primarily *dismissive*. Indeed, National’s Maori seats policy appeared to be the only policy area where National gave attention to the Maori Party, perhaps as this was the only area that may have prevented any coalition agreements. No other evidence was found in press releases from the respective parties to show any other positioning by National toward the Maori Party. As the Maori Party was no threat to National in terms of electorate or party vote, the Maori Party was given little attention by National.

**DISMISSIVE POSITIONING BY NATIONAL TOWARDS MINOR PARTIES**

**NATIONAL AND THE GREEN PARTY**

When comparing the policy platforms of both National and the Greens it is clear that the parties are poles apart ideologically. This is most evident when considering statements made by the respective leaders during the opening election addresses and televised leaders’ debates, where both were given the opportunity to explain their party’s vision for New Zealand. Greens co-leader Jeanette Fitzsimons stated that the Green Party was committed to “clean energy, sustainable business, healthy food, treasured environments, free education, public transport and investment in health,” declaring her party’s desire to provide a “healthy environmental legacy to the next generation”.\(^202\) Conversely, National’s opening address declared a focus on economic concerns, promising “prosperity, security, opportunity and ambition - better wages and lower taxes.”\(^203\) with no reference to the environment.

Although an opening address or vision statement lacks policy detail it does provide a clear indication to the voting public of each party’s central focus in terms of its policy platform and direction. Indeed this appears to be the purpose of these opening addresses, as each statement is pre-rehearsed and is uninterrupted, or rebutted by other parties participating in the debate. Such an opportunity is a rarity during an election, with obvious benefits to each party, as it outlines the policy platform upon which it places the most emphasis. From this we can see that both National and the Greens approached the 2008 election from differing positions, attempting to appeal to separate voting groups. National adopted a


dismissive position toward the Greens. As both parties are ideologically far apart, the chances of National directly benefiting from Green Party support were slim. As the Green Party appears to be targeting left-leaning and environmentally sympathetic (their “niche”) voters they posed no realistic threat to National Party support.

The Green Party was “linked in their voters’ eyes inextricably with Labour,” so it was clear there was no benefit to National from focusing any attention on the Green Party, as doing so would only increase the Green Party profile and attention from the media. As the polls showed Green Party support increasing after declaring their refusal to work with the National Party, there was little point in National adopting a position toward the Greens that would further increase this support. The National Party did not respond to the Green Party’s announcement: a dismissive position from National (focusing rather toward potential coalition partners such as United Future and ACT). The Greens would benefit from this positioning, as being dismissed by National may have attracted disenchanted Labour Party supporters who did not want to vote Labour in 2008, nor support a minor party that might potentially support National post-election, as occurred with New Zealand First in 1996. The Greens were the only minor party, apart from Jim Anderton’s Progressive, to rule out a deal with National. The Greens were more likely to attract Labour supporters, as the Greens would contribute more seats toward a potential Labour-led government than the Progressives.

Environmentally sympathetic voters were provided with a choice as a result of the adversarial positioning (in terms of coalition partners) toward National by the Greens. If they held environmental concerns to be a vote-determining issue and approved of Green Party policy in this area, they may have placed their support with this party. However if these voters hoped to see the Greens work with National after the election (as opposed to Labour) the Greens’ positioning may have discouraged them, resulting in their vote going to an alternative party, presumably National. Although under Meguid’s framework this is entirely plausible, it appears unrealistic considering the nature of MMP and previous voting patterns under this system. The Green Party had received consistent support every MMP election since 1999, yet

204 Meguid (2005), 349.
205 Meguid (2005), 349.
206 Levine and Roberts (2010), 30.
207 “Poll has Green vote climbing” Dominion Post, 23 October 2008.
never entered into a formal coalition agreement with Labour. This suggests that Green party supporters were not concerned with the Greens being outside government, a scenario encouraged by the Greens’ policy achievements despite their parliamentary status. Furthermore, if a voter under MMP considered environmental concerns a vote-determining issue, it seems unlikely they would vote for National as an alternative to the Greens, because of the parties’ ideological differences on this issue. Although National recognised the need for policy relating to climate change in 2008, they disagreed with the Green and Labour Parties’ ambition to be a world leader on climate change policy, preferring to be a “fast follower.”\(^{208}\) John Key stated “Why should we put these policies in place when countries like China continue to emit carbon emissions?”\(^{209}\) an approach that directly contrasts with that of the Greens.

Recognising the presence of climate change and that “New Zealand needs to play its part,”\(^ {210}\) the National Party could be seen as accommodative toward the Greens as this is a direct reversal of previous policy. Nevertheless, this position appears unlikely considering the minimal threat the Greens posed toward National. National’s position was more a response to Labour Party policy on this issue, making climate change an area of convergence between the two parties. Regardless, the effect remained the same – National Party policy had moved accommodatively toward that of the Greens. Yet in order for this to be so, National’s policy needed to threaten the Greens’ “ownership” of environmental policy, which is also unlikely considering National’s previous rhetoric on this issue. So, although National acknowledged climate change during the 2008 campaign, simply doing so would not be enough to attract Green Party support.

During the televised leaders’ debate, National leader John Key was adversarial toward the Greens in terms of the potential make-up of a Labour government post-2008. He consistently referred to any potential Labour-led government as a “Labour-Greens government”, while referring to any potential National-led government as a “National-led government”.\(^{211}\) This was an effort by Key to discredit Labour by highlighting a potential relationship with the Green Party, despite the Greens not partaking in a prior


\(^{209}\) Television New Zealand. ‘Leaders; debate; The decider’ 5 November 2008.

\(^{210}\) Television New Zealand. ‘New Zealand Political Parties, 2008 election opening addresses.’ 10 October 2008

\(^{211}\) Television New Zealand. ‘Leaders; debate; The decider’ 5 November 2008.
coalition agreement with Labour. Key was attempting to discredit Labour by associating Labour with the Greens. National was competing for the same voters as Labour, some of whom may have been apprehensive about a potential relationship with the Green Party. Associating Labour with the Greens may have been enough to discredit Labour in the eyes of some voters. With New Zealand First and United Future previously refusing to work with the Green Party, such sentiment appears to be evident. However there was no evidence found to show this was the case among Labour support.

As Labour is of the centre-left it is unlikely that many of its supporters would be against a proposed Labour–Greens partnership. Nevertheless, the chance of a minority, however small, being against such a deal cannot be ruled out. This appears to have been a deliberate attempt by National to discredit Labour by association with the Greens, in effect an adversarial position toward the Greens. Whether this significantly adversely affected support for the Greens is questionable.

Nonetheless, despite such indirect positioning there remained a lack of significant deliberate positioning toward the Green Party by National throughout the 2008 campaign – more suggestive of a dismissive than an adversarial approach. National would benefit from the demise of the Green Party as that would further reduce the potential coalition partners of Labour: a situation which further increases the plausibility of National’s adopting dismissive positions against the Greens. Considering the vast differences in policy between the two parties it appears unlikely such positioning caused much harm to the Green Party performance in 2008.

NATIONAL AND JIM ANDERTON’S PROGRESSIVE COALITION

There was a gulf between policy advocated by Jim Anderton’s Progressive Coalition and that of National. As with the Greens, the Progressives, considered also to be of the left, posed minimal threat to the support base of National. Where the Progressives appeared to differ from the Greens was their lack of profile and unique policy platform (ownership on an issue). Although the Green Party differed ideologically to National, their considerable profile and “ownership” of environmental policy ensured that they were influential within New Zealand’s political landscape, and as such a potential threat to National’s support.

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212 Meguid (2005), 349.
base. The Progressives advocated policy that could be considered more socialist than that of the Greens or Labour, yet were unable to delineate between these parties, subsequently failing to build an adequate profile.

As the Progressives received only 1.2% of the party vote in 2005, returning a sole MP, leader Jim Anderton, to parliament, National could confidently see them as largely irrelevant, and adopted positioning that reflected this. Their dismissive positioning toward the Progressives is evident in National’s continual references to the Labour government, where they neglected to acknowledge the Progressives. In all of the press releases and newspaper articles analysed for this dissertation, not once did the National Party refer to the “Labour-Progressive government”, despite the Progressives being the only party in a formal coalition with Labour and despite the National Party referring to New Zealand First and United Future on a number of occasions. Moreover, no press releases were issued by National (or any other party) that made direct reference to the Progressives or their policy during the period of study.

Jim Anderton, however, did pursue adversarial positioning toward the National Party, consistently criticising their policy platform, and stating he “would never work with National”.213 During the televised leaders’ debates, Anderton highlighted many of National’s failings during its previous term, in an attempt to discredit the party and discourage voters from adhering to the “call for change”, moving from the Labour-Progressive government to National.214 He stated that “National cut benefits, reduced government expenditure and froze the minimum wage for two years”, before explaining the achievements of his party during its previous term.215 Although such rhetoric is potentially detrimental to National’s campaign, it is unlikely this had much impact on National support because of the Progressives’ low profile and subsequent irrelevance as shown by 2008 election results. Anderton’s positioning may have resonated with sympathetic voters, perhaps from the Greens or Labour, but not with National’s supporters or even those considering voting National. If this messaging did not resonate with these voters when presented by Labour it is unlikely to have done so when presented by Anderton.

National did not actually pursue a strategic *dismissive* positioning of the Progressives, as such an act would suggest an attempt to limit losing support to that party or preventing a rise in profile or public attention. As Jim Anderton’s party had steadily declined in support since 2002 and posed no genuine threat to National, it appears unlikely National would be concerned enough to deliberately devise such positioning. Rather, National viewed the Progressives as largely irrelevant and essentially ignored them, preferring to focus attention on those minor parties which might support National, or potentially threaten National’s support base.

**NATIONAL AND UNITED FUTURE**

Like Jim Anderton’s Progressive Coalition the United Future party has consistently lost support since the 2002 election, and as a result its influence upon government has declined. Receiving 2.3% in 2005 and failing to register significantly in the polls leading to the 2008 election, United Future looked likely to retain only one MP, leader Peter Dunne. How did National regard United Future in this respect?

Theoretically, United Future could pose a threat toward National as both parties attempt to hold the centre-right – and campaign from similar policy platforms. Indeed, in 2002 when National slumped to only 21%, United Future benefited considerably, receiving 6.7%.²¹⁶

Key United Future policies during the 2008 campaign included lowering taxes, particularly the top tax rate to 30c above $38,000, promoting the use of the private health sector and the promotion of a referendum on MMP. These policies were remarkably similar to National’s policy platform. Dunne declared during the televised leaders’ debate that his party called for income splitting for tax purposes, an increase of the minimum wage to $15 per hour, the retention of the Families Commission and a referendum on New Zealand becoming a republic. Although these were not National Party policy in 2008, many of these were compatible with National’s general stance on these issues. The exception was Dunne’s call for a referendum on becoming a republic, which Key declared would not be endorsed by his party.²¹⁷

Although this policy provided United Future with a point of difference with National, it was not an issue


²¹⁷ Television New Zealand. ‘Leaders; debate; The decider’ 5 November 2008.
to hinder any potential coalition between the two parties, nor would it be likely to threaten National’s support base.

We can use the work of Meguid to see that even if a National voter placed the issue of New Zealand becoming a republic as a vote-determining one, it was unlikely United Future would attract their vote. As Dunne had already accepted the offer of a ministerial position under any potential National government, his bargaining power had reduced significantly and there was little chance of National adopting his party’s policy on the republic issue. Any shift of votes from National to United Future would have had to be considerable to have given United Future more than one MP. As such, any vote switching to United Future would be a “wasted vote”. The fact that Dunne was sure to enter into a coalition agreement with National, declaring he would not work with Labour, influenced National Party positioning toward United Future. As United Future posed a minimal threat to National, and was guaranteed to support it after the election, it would be counter-productive for National to position itself toward United Future in any other way but **dismissive**. Other than welcoming Dunne’s offer to support a National-led government, there was no point wasting resources on a party which would support National anyway and due to United Future’s minuscule support base National would not realistically gain anything if it was to position itself **adversarially or accommodatively** toward them.
NATIONAL AND ACT

In terms of policy, both National and ACT traditionally “sang from the same song sheet”; both claiming to adhere to the right-wing principles of individual responsibility, less government and free-market economic ideology. Like the relationship between Labour and the Green Party, National and ACT agreed upon the fundamental ideology from which their policies were influenced, yet disagreed about the level of intensity they wished to employ to pursue that ideology. As most votes are located at the centre of New Zealand’s political spectrum, National recognised that in a multi-party environment, appealing too far to the right, too far toward ACT, risked losing support to Labour or other parties of the centre (United Future or New Zealand First). National’s shift to the right in 2005 saw it regain many voters lost in 2002. But in order to regain the position of New Zealand’s largest party, it needed to straddle the central ground, picking up more votes from the centrist parties but also disaffected Labour voters.

Under John Key, National was coming to terms with MMP and the need to be not just the largest party but a party with coalition options. By shifting to the centre, it enabled ACT to re-establish points of difference with National it had lost in 2005 when National was recapturing its core vote. National welcomed a strong ACT party as this guaranteed a strong coalition support partner. With United Future’s electoral fortunes not looking good and New Zealand First ruled out by John Key, ACT was a key coalition partner for National. ACT was widely considered the “natural” coalition choice for National during the 2008 election, with compatible policy platforms. ACT certainly conducted its campaign as if it was the logical choice for National’s coalition partner after the 2008 election. Yet as National moved closer to the centre, and away from ACT, National did not downplay the distance between it and ACT, despite clear intentions to enter a coalition with the party. National was aware that centre-left supporters of Labour (the votes National wanted to target) would be reluctant to support National if that might result in a return to the

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219 ACT Party, campaign ad, Dominion Post, 7 November 2008, sec. A.

220 ACT Party, campaign ad, Dominion Post, 7 November 2008, sec. A.


Rogernomic-type policies espoused by ACT. This required National to be *accommodative* toward Labour, enough to reassure Labour-leaning voters that National had no intention of implementing the radical aspects of ACT Party policy.\(^{223}\)

One policy area where National was particularly apprehensive was that of privatisation, a fundamental policy for ACT which formed the basis of its 20-point election policy plan.\(^{224}\) ACT promoted the privatisation of all state-owned business "where private firms can serve customers better".\(^{225}\) Moreover, ACT promoted the privatisation of state services where there had previously been a consensus for retention between Labour and National, such as welfare and superannuation. This policy also extended to include the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC), which had previously been privatised by National and then re-nationalised by Labour. National adopted an *adversarial* position toward privatisation policy, in an effort to neutralise the issue.\(^{226}\) National declared that it would not pursue any privatisation in its first term, which can be interpreted as either *accommodative* toward Labour or *adversarial* to ACT.\(^{227}\) Labour attacks on National Party policy on privatisation,\(^{228}\) pushed National to confirm that privatisation was not on the policy agenda for 2008–2011 (a similar development occurred at the 2007 UK election).\(^{229}\) So as not to appear linked to privatisation, National was behaving *adversarially* toward ACT. Yet, if National had truly intended to be *accommodative* to Labour it would have declared no intention to privatise state-owned businesses, regardless of what term it was in. By leaving the option of privatisation open from the second term onward, National still received some criticism from the left while appeasing immediate voter concerns. Further, this signalled to ACT that its policies could appear on a long-term agenda.

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\(^{224}\) [www.act.org.nz/plan](http://www.act.org.nz/plan)

\(^{225}\) [www.act.org.nz/plan](http://www.act.org.nz/plan)

\(^{226}\) Martin Kay, “National to allow competition on ACC”, *Dominion Post*, 17 July 2008, sec. A.


\(^{229}\) Green (2007), 631.
The extent to which National adhered to neo-liberal economic reform also appeared to be an area of contention between the two parties. Although National promoted free-market policies, these were not as radical as those of ACT’s, where the abolishment of the minimum wage and flat tax rates were openly promoted. The adoption of such policies by National would threaten efforts to attract centre-left support, as these policies appeared to be associated with Labour and National party policy of the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, where high unemployment and low economic growth significantly affected many New Zealand families. Such an assessment appears justified when considering National’s refusal to consider Sir Roger Douglas, ACT Party economic spokesman, for a ministerial portfolio. Douglas was considered too “extreme” for National, which appeared conscious of the damage a perceived link with his policies may have done to their election chances. It is an unusual situation for a major party to position themselves *accommodatively* toward a minor party, declaring their intention to work with that party after the election, yet then adopt an *adversarial* position toward one specific member of that party. This *adversarial* positioning toward ACT was an *accommodative* move toward Labour. National had to muffle concerns over its link to these policies and it appears that eliminating the prospect of Douglas’ return was essential in doing this.

Furthermore, in positioning itself *accommodatively* toward Labour on the issue of climate change, National indirectly adopted an *adversarial* position toward ACT. After initially questioning the issue of climate change, National adopted a position in 2008 where it intended to simply amend Labour’s Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), as opposed to ACT’s calls to scrap it. Although the rhetoric of being a “fast follower” was similar in both National and ACT, that National declared an intention to maintain an ETS showed clear recognition of the emphasis placed on environmental concerns among the left; acknowledging it would not attract centre-left support without adopting an *accommodative* position on this issue. In doing so, National moved away from ACT, enabling ACT to create a point of difference between itself and National, claiming “ownership” of the policy to scrap the ETS altogether, not

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232 Hansard, 10 May 2005.

recognising climate change to the extent of other parties. This was a key policy for the ACT Party in 2008, targeting the agricultural sector,\textsuperscript{234} National's traditional support base.

Other policy areas, such as law and order and the reduction of “red tape” saw National position \textit{adversarially} toward Labour, indirectly taking an \textit{accommodative} positioning toward ACT.\textsuperscript{235} National adopted \textit{accommodative} positions toward Labour on areas such as climate change, interest free student loans, Working for Families, 20-hours free early childhood education, Iraq and according to Dr Pita Sharples, the Maori electorates.\textsuperscript{236} It was therefore essential that National maintain some points of difference between the two major parties, so that the “call for change” would maintain some credibility. The areas of law and order and reduction of bureaucracy were ideal for this differentiation as they enabled National to maintain its centre-right credentials while providing policies that appealed to socially conservative Labour voters. National’s rhetoric for “tougher sentences for the worst offenders,”\textsuperscript{237} was popular and was not as potentially divisive as ACT’s “3 strikes and you are in (jail)” policy.\textsuperscript{238} Moreover, National’s position on reducing bureaucracy sought to “redirect to the frontline”,\textsuperscript{239} as opposed to ACT's approach which appeared to focus more on saving money, which invited accusations from the left of job-cutting.\textsuperscript{240}

So, in order to capture the support required to form a government National had to focus primarily on Labour which then allowed ACT to promote its policies without hindrance from National. Despite John Key deliberately distancing National from ACT, National’s strategy toward ACT was largely \textit{dismissive}. The positive electoral fortunes enjoyed by ACT in 2008 seemed similar to what may be expected if National had adopted a direct \textit{adversarial} position toward ACT, as ACT was able to re-establish “ownership” of

\textsuperscript{234} ACT. Rodney Hide Speech: Dump the ETS. Scoop Media, 7 September 2008.

\textsuperscript{235} National Party. Labour fails on law and order promises. Scoop Media, 24 September 2008.


\textsuperscript{237} Television New Zealand. ‘Leaders; debate; The decider’ 5 November 2008.

\textsuperscript{238} \texttt{www.act.org.nz/plan}

\textsuperscript{239} Television New Zealand. ‘Leaders; debate; The decider’ 5 November 2008.

\textsuperscript{240} Labour Party. \textit{Public should be wary of “Razor Gang”}. Scoop Media, 16 October 2008.
various policy areas National claimed in 2005. Positioning theory suggests that National’s dismissive positioning toward ACT should not have positively affected ACT’s electoral performance; however owing to ACT’s already prominent political profile the party was able to re-establish this ownership without the attention that may have been granted had National adopted an adversarial position. National’s strategy toward ACT was dismissive in practice, yet adversarial in effect, notwithstanding apparent accommodative positioning from National toward ACT in terms of post-election coalition possibilities.

National would benefit from a strengthened ACT to guarantee a coalition partner of the right, a reality that may have formed the basis of National’s apparent willingness to focus on Labour while ignoring ACT. National needed a partner in order to form a coalition after the election, so it benefited from a resurgent ACT. National’s accommodative strategy toward Labour (which was then subsequently indirectly adversarial toward ACT) enabled National to attract support from Labour while inadvertently ensuring strengthened coalition prospects.
To focus solely on the positioning of major parties toward minor parties in an attempt to understand political positioning under MMP in 2008 would ignore the importance of the positioning of major parties towards each other. As Meguid’s theory does not consider major v major positioning, this study should provide relevant information to complement the findings within Meguid’s work and other approaches.

Much has been made of the “mood for change” among the New Zealand voting public during the 2008 campaign, a key factor in National’s ability to attract Labour support.241 Vowles would describe this as “the electoral life cycle and the degenerative effect on a government’s support of an extended period in office”.242 Levine and Roberts highlighted the “extraordinary amount of publicity” highlighting the US Presidential election which culminated only three days before the 2008 New Zealand General Election, and which led to the New Zealand voters’ “sentiment for change being even stronger”.243

Therese Arseneau also observed this “call for change” during the 2005 election campaign and uses this election as an example to show that “a mood for change does not necessarily result in a change of government”.244 She states that in order for a change in government to occur, “first, the opposition must offer voters policy change in crucial areas but without straying too far from the median voter at the centre of the policy spectrum – fresh solutions to old problems without a radical change of direction”.245


NATIONAL’S POSITIONING TOWARDS LABOUR

Considering the ideological differences between the two parties in 2005, where National’s positioning was “centred on clearly differentiating the party from Labour by moving further to the right” Meguid’s positioning theory would dictate that in order to achieve this result it would be necessary for National to adopt accommodative positioning toward Labour. It may require only a small positional change by a major party to affect the electoral performance of a minor party. However, as both Labour and National are major parties it appears this would require a more significant positional move by National to influence any switch in support from Labour. National would therefore be required to either promise to maintain popular Labour Party initiatives or adopt policy that was similar enough to that of Labour, so that the new policy reduced the points of difference between the two parties and threatened Labour’s “ownership” of these policies. This was National’s strategy, as observed by Arseneau who stated that, “In 2008 National was often called ‘Labour-light’ for promising to continue many of Labour’s programmes but with an assurance of a fresh approach in, most significantly, the economy, taxation, and law and order.” In 2008, she states, “National finally adopted an election strategy suited to winning an MMP election. Under John Key the party softened its rhetoric, moved toward the centre on several key policy issues and challenged Labour for the crucial centrist swing vote. This strategy was intended to grow National’s vote primarily at Labour’s rather than at its allies’ expense as had happened in 2005.”

One area where National softened its rhetoric and moved toward the centre was that of climate change. In 2005, when Labour warned of the potential impact of climate change by promoting the Kyoto Protocol, the National Party was reluctant to accept its existence. In reference to climate change in a debate on New Zealand’s position on the Protocol John Key stated “This is a complete and utter hoax, if I may say so. The impact of the Kyoto Protocol, even if one believes in global warming - and I am somewhat suspicious of it - is that we will see billions and billions of dollars poured into fixing something that we are not even sure

is a problem.” When compared to John Key’s statement during the televised leaders’ debate in 2008 that “Man-made climate change is happening ... New Zealand must play its part to combat this,” and his statement during an interview on Radio New Zealand where Key said “I firmly believe in climate change; I always have,” the positional change on this issue is clearly evident. Although National maintained conservative rhetoric calling for an approach that “balances environmental responsibilities with economic opportunities,” the recognition of climate change remains, which shows the adoption of an accommodative position by National. As National was initially reluctant to accept the existence of climate change, this initial policy appears to have influenced their adversarial position toward Labour’s ETS. Nevertheless, during the 2008 campaign National declared that it would maintain the ETS, only calling to amend certain aspects, such as Labour’s proposed introduction of the agricultural sector into the scheme. Consistent with Meguid’s theory, National recognised that it had to acknowledge climate change if it was going to be successful in targeting new voter groups – and so adjusted its policy position accordingly.

When comparing National’s adversarial positioning toward Labour’s Interest Free Student Loan (IFSL) policy in 2005 to their accommodative stance in 2008, another significant positional change becomes evident. During the 2005 campaign, when Labour introduced this policy, John Key described it as one “that tells young New Zealanders to go and borrow to the hilt. What an unaffordable and irresponsible cost to the country! It is a sad day ... National members will be opposing this legislation with every bone in our bodies.” National failed to attract Labour Party support as a result of this positioning, rather attracting support “primarily at the expense of its potential coalition or confirmed allies - ACT, United Future and New Zealand First”. This is evident when considering that National gained 21 seats in 2005, but ACT, New Zealand First and United Future together lost 18. This adversarial positioning from National toward Labour effectively resulted in indirect accommodative positioning toward these minor parties –

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251 Television New Zealand. ‘Leaders; debate; The decider’ 5 November 2008.


253 Television New Zealand. ‘Leaders; debate; The decider’ 5 November 2008.


“leading mainly to a reconfiguration of existing seats within the opposition”.256 During a three-day caucus retreat in Rotorua in January 2008 John Key announced the National Party’s election policy on the IFSL issue, pledging to keep Labour’s policy in its entirety.257 John Key stated on TV 3’s Campbell Live show that “there are half a million New Zealanders who have got used to not paying interest and we have to listen to that pretty carefully”.258

Labour MP Grant Robertson, first elected in 2008, identified Labour’s interest free student loan policy as a primary reason for Labour’s re-election in 2005,259 a view shared by various political commentators and academics.260 So, by National adopting an accommodative position toward Labour on this issue, Labour no longer owned it, and thus their support was threatened. While Labour benefited considerably from this policy difference in 2005, in 2008 National had successfully neutralised (or “inoculated”) this issue.

Although the issue of the Iraq war did not appear as relevant during the campaign of 2008 as it did during 2005, National’s apparent change in position on this issue remained significant in the context of the 2008 election. In 2003 John Key reflected the sentiment of many National Party MPs that New Zealand should enter the Iraq War by stating that:

“Blood is thicker than water and we should stick with the family which has supported us in the past and will support us in the future ... I know it may not be a popular decision, but at the end of the day we have to look to the future, and that isn’t with some Franco-German coalition. Instead we should stick with the family we would rely on if we are ever called on to defend ourselves.”261

261 “NZ should be in the war, Rodney National MPs say” Rodney Times, 25 March 2003.
This position was in direct contrast to Labour’s policy opposing New Zealand intervention. As Labour attempted to re-ignite the issue in 2007, John Key emphatically answered “No” when asked in a *Campbell Live* interview: “And it wasn’t your personal view that they should have gone?” (In reference to New Zealand troops entering the Iraq conflict\(^{262}\)). The reason National’s position shift on this issue remained relevant in 2008 was Labour’s campaign positioning toward National, stating that the election was about “trust”, calling into question the trustworthiness of the National Party. As part of this strategy Labour used National’s initial policy on the Iraq war as justification for its “untrustworthiness”, which in turn required National to reiterate its new position on this issue. This enabled National to re-demonstrate the similarity of its position to that of Labour, effectively granting National an opportunity to further decrease Labour’s “ownership” of the issue.

Another *accommodative* positioning, during the 2008 election campaign was John Key’s announcement of National’s intention to maintain Labour’s Working for Families social welfare package in its entirety,\(^{263}\) despite once labelling it “Communism by stealth.”\(^{264}\) This positional shift may have been an attempt to counter the criticism from Labour regarding National’s potential post-election relationship with the ACT Party. With ACT advocating the privatisation of welfare services, National seemed reluctant to be associated with such positioning (evident by John Key ruling Roger Douglas out of any potential National-led cabinet). With a large proportion of New Zealand families reliant on the WFF package in 2008 it was essential that National adopted an *accommodative* position on this issue. The WFF package was enjoyed by both low and middle income families, so to maintain an *adversarial* position would risk alienating such votes. Indeed, the WFF package was popular among many National-sympathetic Labour voters.\(^{265}\)

Moreover, as the global economic crisis emerged during the election, both Labour and National announced welfare packages aimed at assisting those who had become redundant as a result of the crisis. Although such policy would be expected from the centre-left Labour Party, the fact that National

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proposed a package that was essentially “more generous” than that proposed by Labour was further evidence of a vigorous *accommodative* strategy toward Labour in 2008.\textsuperscript{266}

Labour recognised the momentum National was gathering as a result of its *accommodative* positioning, attempting to restrict this by offering tax cuts in October 2008, one month prior to election day. Considering Labour did not actively pursue a policy of tax reduction for most of the previous nine years, such a move was an *accommodative* position toward National on this issue. As National was attempting to attract Labour voters by moving toward Labour in key policy areas, so Labour was attempting to prevent the loss of support to National by appeasing National’s call for tax cuts.\textsuperscript{267} Yet as election day approached this policy by Labour appeared too little, too late. The cuts offered by Labour were still less than those proposed by National, further fuelling the right-wing rhetoric surrounding the issue – “It took Labour 25 days to raise taxes and 9 years to cut them” - John Key.\textsuperscript{268}

These considerable positional changes by National were a result of a deliberate and calculated strategy that placed emphasis on capturing Labour voters. The *accommodative* positions adopted by National toward Labour reduced certain points of difference between the two parties, threatening Labour’s “ownership” of various policy areas. Nevertheless, National was constrained in adopting too much of an *accommodative* strategy toward Labour for two reasons. First, if National moved too far toward Labour it risked losing significant amounts of support to ACT and other centre-right parties such as United Future and New Zealand First, as had happened in 2002. Second, if National failed to maintain some points of difference between itself and Labour, it may have restricted the effectiveness of its strategy - if it became too similar to Labour the incentive for voters to switch support, or the “call for change”, would be ineffective.

Consistent with Meguid’s positioning theory,Labour voters were now provided with a choice as a result of National’s considerable *accommodative* strategy toward Labour, between the party they had previously supported – Labour – or a party that was now similar yet maintained clear points of difference – National.

\textsuperscript{266} Tracy Watkins, “Tussle over security blankets for workers”, *Dominion Post*, 1 November 2008, sec. A.


As the polls leading to election day all predicted a National Party victory, National now appeared to voters as a party that was likely to be in a position to deliver on policy promises. Those voters considering switching from Labour to National now had an extra incentive to do so. Moreover, even though National maintained centre-right policies such as targeting bureaucracy, cutting taxes, reducing KiwiSaver payments and proposing the removal of the Maori electorates, that they had made a significant move toward Labour on many other policies would have made the possibility of switching parties easier for these voters to consider. National’s *accommodative* positioning toward Labour was a major factor in Labour’s loss of support in 2008. Furthermore, such an assessment remains relevant in terms of understanding minor party performance in 2008.\(^{269}\) By contributing to Labour’s loss of support, National significantly altered the environment within which the campaign was fought. As Labour looked less likely to remain in power, this was sure to have influenced the way significant numbers of left-leaning minor party supporters cast their vote. Likewise, as National’s electoral fortunes rose leading to election day, this may have significantly altered the way some right-leaning minor party supporters decided to place their votes, giving further emphasis to the importance of considering the role of major vs. major party positioning under MMP.

**LABOUR’S POSITIONING TOWARDS NATIONAL**
Labour attempted to counter the “mood for change” in 2008 by adopting an *adversarial* position, most evident in campaign advertising which was labelled “negative” by National’s 2005 and 2008 campaign director, Steven Joyce.\(^{270}\) Joyce stated that Labour adopted a strategy that was “far more negative” than National had anticipated, but a strategy that evidently helped the electoral fortunes of the National Party in 2008.\(^{271}\) The most famous of these were the “Two Johns” television advertisements, which attempted to highlight various conflicting statements made by John Key, portraying him as a man who could not be

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269 Levine and Roberts (2010), 36.


271 Joyce (2010), 68.
trusted and nicknaming him “slippery John”. Salmond states this negativity was met with surprise as “much of the government’s message over the 2005–2008 period had been about how well New Zealand was doing under Labour’s leadership.” This initial focus on policy, which emphasised popular initiatives such as WFF and KiwiSaver, changed to an adversarial focus on “trust” a month before the election.

In this instance positioning theory would expect Labour’s attacks to highlight National as untrustworthy and John Key lacking in leadership credentials. However, unfortunately for Labour, this strategy was ineffective. Robertson stated that Labour’s theme of trust was an “important part” of Labour’s 2008 election strategy, yet by establishing the theme of trust, Labour effectively provided National with a platform from which to portray John Key as more trustworthy than Helen Clark. This proved beneficial to National, as the longitudinal TV3 poll questions about leadership characteristics showed that since May 2007 greater numbers of voters considered Key more trustworthy with the economy and “better able to understand the economic problems facing New Zealanders” than Clark.

Negative adversarial campaigning does not appear to be effective in New Zealand. National’s negative campaign against Labour in the 1999 election campaign was “at best, ineffective and, at worst, counterproductive. Similarly, in 2002 the Greens’ attack on Labour over the ‘corngate’ affair backfired and hurt the Greens.” Arseneau states that “all too often Labour’s modus operandi was overly personal and petty” which appears to be the aspect of Labour’s adversarial strategy that failed to resonate with the voting public. It therefore appears that Joyce was correct in stating that Labour’s adversarial strategy assisted National during the 2008 campaign.

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272 Robinson (2010), 148-149.
273 Salmond (2010), 214.
274 Salmond (2010), 214
275 Robinson (2010), 149
276 Robertson (21), 78.
277 Robinson (2010), 149.
278 Arseneau (2010), 286.
279 Arseneau (2010), 286.
SUMMARY OF LABOUR AND NATIONAL POSITIONING TOWARDS EACH OTHER

Table 2 summarises the party positioning adopted by Labour and National towards each other in the 2008 election compared to that adopted in the 2005 election.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Position adopted by...</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2008</th>
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<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>Adversarial</td>
<td>Adversarial</td>
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<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>Adversarial</td>
<td>Accommodative</td>
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The table shows that Labour and National adjusted their positioning between 2005 and 2008. Arseneau observes that National’s “Labour-lite” approach of promising to continue a number of Labour’s initiatives in 2008 “was in sharp contrast to National’s approach in the 2005 election, when strategy centred on clearly differentiating the party from Labour by moving further to the right. As a consequence, while National’s share of the vote grew in 2005, it did so primarily at the expense of its potential or confirmed allies – ACT, United Future and New Zealand First.”

Levine and Roberts stated “the main issues of the 2005 campaign (tax policy; policies towards Maori; police emergency services; education; health) – were ones emphasised by National.” The 2005 campaign ended with more voters identifying tax as their number one issue of personal concern, an issue that had only rated fifth and eighth in similar surveys during the 1999 and 2002 elections, so it was evident that National was significant in determining the path of the 2005 campaign. Although Labour adopted adversarial positioning towards National’s leader, Don Brash, Labour’s accommodative shift in positioning on the issues of tax and Maori policy is more significant in the context of this study. Because National was reclaiming ground to the right, and gaining significant support as a result, Labour was forced to follow suit on tax and Maori policy. For the first time since its election in 1999, Labour promised tax cuts as part of its 2005 campaign and included a final settlement date to Treaty of Waitangi claims as part of its election pledge card, a significant shift in

281 Arseneau (2010), 285.
283 Levine and Roberts (2007), 373; Arseneau (2010), 280.
284 Arseneau (2010), 285.
policy. Even so, Labour was still required to differentiate itself from National on a positive front, and in terms of policy this came in form of Labour’s interest free student loan policy, which Levine and Roberts describe as Labour’s single most important campaign stratagem.”

Although Labour appeared hypocritical, as Finance Minister, “Dr. Cullen’s strictures about the unavailability of surplus funds were being tossed aside in a desperate bid to retain office,” its adversarial positioning towards National on the student loan policy has been credited with Labour’s 2005 victory and therefore defines Labour’s 2005 strategy.

285 Levine and Roberts (2007), 371-373
286 Levine and Roberts (2007), 375.
CHAPTER 6

MINOR PARTY POSITIONING TOWARDS EACH OTHER

ADVERSARIAL

NEW ZEALAND FIRST AND ACT
In terms of policy New Zealand First and ACT occupy distant spaces on the political spectrum, neither in direct competition with each other’s target support base. New Zealand First promotes policies that are similar in nature to those held by both Labour and National. This can be seen when comparing three of New Zealand First’s key policies with those of National in the areas of immigration, tax reform, and law and order. By promoting policies which called for the strengthening of New Zealand’s immigration rules, the first $100 earned per week to be tax-free, and being “tough on gangs”, New Zealand First threatened National’s “issue ownership” of these areas. Through these particular policies, both National and New Zealand First were targeting the same voters and therefore held the same ground in the political spectrum. The same can be seen when considering New Zealand First’s policies on elderly issues, student allowances and minimum wage increases with those of Labour. During New Zealand First’s opening election address, several policy achievements from the previous term were highlighted, a considerable proportion of which could be considered to be similar to policies traditionally held by parties of the left. By highlighting achievements in increases to National Superannuation, the introduction of the SuperGold Card, $530m extra funding for the eldercare sector, and increases to the minimum wage, while reiterating its long-held policy on a universal student allowance, clear similarities to Labour policy can be identified. Moreover, as these policies were introduced with the support of the Labour government during the previous term, the similarities in policy between New Zealand First and Labour were further emphasised.


But while New Zealand First’s combination of centre-right and centre-left leaning policies place it somewhere in the middle of the political spectrum, ACT is much more clearly located on the right. The economic policies of both New Zealand First and ACT are centred on two fundamentally different approaches to taxation. ACT has long promoted lower taxation, calling for the eventual introduction of a flat tax rate for all New Zealand workers. This would see all New Zealand income earners paying the same percentage of tax regardless of their income. During the 2008 campaign, ACT validated this stance by claiming that the “marginal tax rates were too high, particularly for families”\textsuperscript{290} and were the result of personal tax brackets changing to reflect inflation over “10 years”.\textsuperscript{291} Moreover, with the tax system as it stood “increasingly seen as unfair,” ACT claimed that “too much wasteful private sector effort is being devoted to devising ways around New Zealand tax laws”.\textsuperscript{292}

Therefore, in an attempt to ease an apparent tax burden on New Zealand families and prevent private sector tax evasion in New Zealand, the ACT party outlined the following tax policy detail:

- Personal taxes to be reduced to 12.5% on up to $20,000 income by 2018/19
- Personal taxes to be reduced to 15% on income over $20,000 by 2018/19
- Company taxes to be reduced to 15%, "the same as the top personal tax rate" by 2018/19
- GST rates to be reduced to 10% by 2018/19
- Petrol tax cuts of “around $500 million.”\textsuperscript{293}

Often, when tax cuts are promoted by a party of the right, these policies are criticised as a precursor to cuts in government spending or surpluses, and so the political party promoting the tax cuts is at pains to argue how their policies would not affect the services provided to voters.\textsuperscript{294} This was most evident with the tax policy promoted by the National Party. Nevertheless, the ACT party is a long-standing advocate of reduction in government spending, so did not attempt to justify its proposed changes to taxation by maintaining current levels of government spending. ACT claimed its taxation policy would be achieved by

\textsuperscript{290} www.act.org.nz/plan
\textsuperscript{291} www.act.org.nz/plan
\textsuperscript{292} www.act.org.nz/plan
\textsuperscript{293} www.act.org.nz/plan
\textsuperscript{294} Levine and Roberts (2006), 339.
“using expenditure savings that flow from holding government expenditure increases to 3.6% to finance tax reductions.” In its taxation policy listed on its website, ACT claimed that up to 88.8% of government spending was wasteful, and so could be reduced in order to fund the proposed tax reductions.

Moreover, ACT advocated an eventual tax-free threshold of $25,000, allowing for New Zealand workers to earn up to this amount without yielding taxation to the government. In exchange for this, however, those who chose to partake in this scheme would opt out of any government provision of accident, sickness and healthcare cover.

At first sight, New Zealand First’s taxation policy may appear similar in nature to that of ACT’s, stating that New Zealand First, “actively oppose any increase in general taxation,” continuing that it is committed to “reducing the personal tax burden on New Zealanders by raising tax thresholds and, over time, by adjusting tax rates to achieve greater equity”. With that in mind, however, it is important to note that at no point in this policy did New Zealand First advocate a lowering of taxes, which created a fundamental difference between New Zealand First’s approach and that of ACT (although, raising the tax thresholds would cause those voters to pay less tax).

New Zealand First aimed to “maintain a progressive tax system”, which differed considerably from the flat tax rate proposed by ACT. Furthermore, New Zealand First stated it “will achieve this by applying budget surpluses and not by reducing social services.” As with ACT, New Zealand First was justifying its tax policy by outlining the consequences such changes may have for the current system. In the case of ACT, the consequences were a reduction in government spending, whereas New Zealand First intended to maintain current spending levels. Like ACT, New Zealand First advocated a tax-free threshold. However New Zealand First’s proposal of $5,200 was much smaller than ACT’s $25,000. New Zealand First would have maintained current government provisions of accident, sickness and healthcare cover.

295 www.act.org.nz/plan
296 www.nzfirst.org.nz
297 www.nzfirst.org.nz
298 www.nzfirst.org.nz
299 www.nzfirst.org.nz
ACT maintained its “ownership” on the issue of privatisation, which was another point of difference between ACT and New Zealand First. With National pledging not to sell state assets in its first term in government, ACT became the sole promoter of privatisation. As National nullified the privatisation debate, at least in the short term, ACT maintained its position. This is most evident when considering the privatisation components of ACT’s 20-point plan for the 2008 election. Within this, ACT promoted selling all government-owned businesses where “private firms can serve customers better”, which would lead to “happier customers, more variety and choice, and lower prices.” ACT positioning on this issue was ideologically influenced, which contributes to ACT being viewed as a party of the right, an observation which is further enhanced by ACT aligning Labour’s stance on privatisation with that of Cuba, Myanmar and North Korea, all militant communist states. Such an attempt to discredit Labour’s pro-public ownership position by aligning it with these nations was also adversarial in effect toward other pro-public ownership parties, such as the Progressives, Greens and New Zealand First. With New Zealand First positioning itself in favour of government ownership, consistent with previous elections, this was an obvious point of difference between the two parties. New Zealand First campaigned during the 2008 election under the premise of “Protect and Save Your New Zealand”, which was a theme that outlined New Zealand First’s vision for New Zealand after 2008. One of the areas in which New Zealand First highlighted “protection and maintenance” was government-owned assets. The use of the words “protect” and “save” created a clear image to voters of what New Zealand First’s intentions were, but also reinforced the point of difference between New Zealand First and ACT.

These significant differences in policy reflect that New Zealand First and ACT targeted different voter groups in their 2008 campaigns. This may be interpreted as adversarial positioning on policy, but these differences are long-standing and there was no evidence in press releases, newspaper articles or commentary that suggested either party was attempted to use these differences for strategic gain. But, when considering the New Zealand First funding scandal, a non-policy issue, ACT’s positioning was very different, targeting New Zealand First with an adversarial strategy.

300 [www.act.org.nz](http://www.act.org.nz)
This adversarial positioning was evident when ACT issued a complaint about New Zealand First to the Serious Fraud Office. This undoubtedly contributed to New Zealand First’s poor electoral performance at the 2008 election. While policy differences were long standing, ACT’s adversarial position toward New Zealand First on the issue of party funding was specific to the 2008 election and was a position actively initiated and pursued by the ACT leader, Rodney Hide.

What were Hide’s motives? Despite competing for different voter groups, if New Zealand First was removed as a potential coalition partner for National, ACT would benefit as this would make National more dependent on ACT as a coalition partner. There is no doubt that the New Zealand First funding issue played a significant role in the 2008 election, accounting for up to 42% of all non-policy related media references during the last eight weeks of the campaign.303

There was no evidence found to show that ACT benefited directly from New Zealand First’s loss of support. However it is evident that the National Party directly benefited, attracting a considerable amount of support away from New Zealand First, as shown in Figure 1. This is significant. The funding scandal was highlighted by The Economist magazine as the single issue which brought about the end of the Labour-led government,304 but it also dropped New Zealand First’s support to below 5%. This left ACT as the only centre-right/right coalition partner for National, apart from the solitary United Future MP, Peter Dunne.

NEW ZEALAND FIRST AND THE GREEN PARTY
As was shown in the previously cited works of Vowels, Edwards, Wood and Rudd, New Zealand First and the Greens are located at the centre-right and left of the political spectrum respectively. Neither party hold similar policy positions and they target different voter groups. In such a scenario Meguid states that both parties generally adopt a dismissive approach toward each other. With neither posing a real threat to each other, both parties would choose to direct their attention toward a party that does threaten them.

303 Bahador (2010), 166.
There would be no reason for the Greens to concentrate on New Zealand First if there is little chance of them attracting any voters.

Like New Zealand First’s relationship with ACT, New Zealand First and the Green Party differ significantly in many areas of policy, notably climate change/environmental issues and immigration. Although New Zealand First acknowledges and supports New Zealand’s commitment to the Kyoto Protocol and anti-whaling policy, this is where the similarities in environmental policies between New Zealand First and the Green Party end.

Immigration is one of New Zealand First’s core policy platforms, a position which the Green Party has always opposed, as shown in the following contrasting quotes:

"We must never return to open-door immigration undermining the efforts of New Zealanders trying to find a job in tough times. When times are tough internationally immigrants are attracted to New Zealand like moths to a flame" (Winston Peters MP, New Zealand First leader).

"It’s silly to talk about cutting immigration when net immigration is at a very low level … immigration is only just replacing the outflow of kiwis overseas. A recession is not likely to change this much. Australian pay rates are still going to be attractive to skilled New Zealanders" (Keith Locke MP, Green Party Immigration Spokesman).

These policy positions have been long-standing within both New Zealand First and the Green Party, as has each party’s accommodative policies on the introduction of a USA, but there is no evidence to suggest that either New Zealand First, nor the Green Party were trying to use their policy positions for strategic gain.

Again, similar to the discussion on New Zealand First and ACT, one example where Green Party positioning may have threatened New Zealand First support concerned the contentious New Zealand First funding scandal, where the Greens adopted an adversarial position throughout the progress of the


307 www.greens.org.nz/policy
allegations. The Green Party positioning on this issue became evident early when the party leadership called for an enquiry into the allegations soon after they broke into the mainstream media. This is in direct contrast to the positioning of both the Labour and National parties, who at that stage appeared to favour a position of “wait and see”. In calling for an enquiry, the Green Party signalled their dissatisfaction with what had been alleged, and hoped the results would enable them to make an assessment on New Zealand First as a potential coalition partner. In other political systems, essentially those highlighted by Meguid and Green, a minor party’s positioning toward another may be ineffective in influencing voting patterns, as the likelihood of those parties gaining representation in parliament or playing a role in government remains slim. This is primarily because a major party can realistically expect to govern alone, reducing the need for voters to consider a minor party. Under MMP, however, the likelihood of a minor party gaining representation is increased, enhancing its legitimacy among voters. Because of this, coupled with the fact that a major party realistically requires the support of a minor party, its influence in parliament is considerably enhanced. The effect of Green Party positioning on New Zealand First’s success is relevant here, with voters needing to consider potential coalition parties when voting. A Green Party refusal to work with New Zealand First might influence voters to vote for an alternative minor party.

During the televised minor party leaders’ debate on TV1, Green Party co-leader Jeanette Fitzsimons stated that although her party would be unwilling to work in a formal coalition with New Zealand First, it might consider a confidence and supply agreement.\textsuperscript{308} All parties were asked specifically, as a result of the allegations facing New Zealand First, whether they were willing to work with New Zealand First. No parties were asked about their position regarding other parties, which gave a clear signal to voters that this was a very significant issue during the 2008 election campaign. Although the Green Party did not specifically rule out working with New Zealand First, it outlined clear restrictions to any relationship it may have after the election. It was clear from this that the allegations faced by New Zealand First had affected its positioning on this issue, as in previous elections the Green Party had been willing to work with New Zealand First. The positioning adopted by the Greens resulted in two possible scenarios. First,

the Greens may have discouraged potential voters who felt sympathetic toward New Zealand First and who were hoping to see a coalition agreement between the two along with a major party. For this to be a realistic scenario those voters would also need to be sympathetic toward Labour, as the Green Party has previously stated its unwillingness to work with National. This being the case, the Green Party’s adoption of an adversarial position toward New Zealand First, appears likely to have disadvantaged only itself, as supporters may have been encouraged to vote for Labour as a result.

The second and potentially more likely scenario is that by adopting this position the Green Party played a role in undermining support for New Zealand First. For this to have occurred voters needed to have either come to the conclusion that they believed New Zealand First committed an offence, regardless of New Zealand First’s assurance otherwise; or that they believed New Zealand First no longer existed as a genuine coalition option for their other preferred parties. This assumes that voters would determine their vote by either of these two options, where obviously there are a number of factors a voter may consider in order to determine where to place their support. Nevertheless, if a minor party’s positioning on this issue did influence a voter’s decision, subsequently affecting the support of New Zealand First, it appears that it was one of these two scenarios which influenced that decision. If a voter resolved that they were convinced of New Zealand First’s wrongdoing, the role party positioning played is difficult to gauge, particularly the specific role the Green Party may have played. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Green Party voted to censure Winston Peters after his hearing with the Parliamentary Privileges Committee, which is of significance considering the Greens were the only party of the left to do so. Although it is clear that committee members voted according to party lines, the fact that the Greens were unwilling to vote along with Labour and New Zealand First opposing the ban, sent a very clear message regarding their potential coalition ambitions after 2008. If the Green Party had opposed the censure they would have made the numbers to oppose the motion and substantially alter the potency of the case against Winston Peters. Moreover, it can be stated that if the censure motion had been voted down, the level of support for New Zealand First in the 2008 election could have been considerably more than that actually received. Obviously, other parties may have voted against the censure motion also, potentially creating the same result. However this move was unlikely as the support for National, ACT and, to a lesser extent, United Future and the Maori Party may have reduced had they voted against the motion. Although New Zealand First was eventually cleared of all wrongdoing before election day, the fact remained that
Winston Peters was one of only a small number of New Zealand MPs to be censured by his parliamentary colleagues, which clearly played a role in New Zealand First’s inability to re-enter Parliament. It could be argued that apart from the Green Party, all those who voted for the censure had a vested interest in the failure of New Zealand First, which would have taken a potential coalition partner from Labour and thus reduced its chances to form a government after 2008. Apart from United Future, none of these parties had previously been involved in any coalition or confidence and supply agreement with Labour, suggesting they could benefit from Labour's downfall. Moreover, Peter Dunne had previously stated his intention to enter into a coalition agreement with National after the election, suggesting that he could also benefit from any circumstances that contributed to a National-led government after 2008.

This was not the case, however, with the Green Party which had exhibited a strong working relationship with Labour and which had also previously refused to work with National; positioning that was continued during the 2008 election campaign. In terms of a potential entry into government, the Greens would have clearly benefited from Winston Peters re-entering parliament and possibly propping up a Labour-led government. It is this point that highlights the significance of voting to censure Winston Peters, as the disapproval of New Zealand First then extended across the political spectrum, sending a clear signal to voters.

It is clear from New Zealand First's polling results in 2008 that the funding issue played a significant part in its failure. But it was the positioning of other parties that placed emphasis on the issue, first making it a relevant issue, then an election issue and finally a vote-determining issue. Despite targeting different voter groups the Green’s adversarial positioning on this issue clearly contributed to New Zealand First's 2008 result. Obviously it was not solely Green Party positioning that led to that result. However it cannot be ruled out that this positioning contributed to New Zealand First's failure. This analysis of the consequences of the New Zealand First controversy for the 2008 election result illustrates the importance of widening Meguid’s theory to include non-policy issues and the role of minor vs. minor positioning.

It proved difficult to find press releases, newspaper articles or commentary that showed positioning between New Zealand First and the remaining minor parties. Although all minor parties were represented on the select committee which voted to censor Winston Peters, there is no evidence to allow us to determine whether these other minor parties actively adopted a position towards New Zealand First on this issue.

Likewise, there was no evidence found that showed positioning from minor parties towards any other minor party, except the adoption of an adversarial position by ACT and the Green Party towards New Zealand First, which shows a tendency for minor parties to ignore each other, equating to a dismissive position. Logically, it is difficult to see how the Maori Party would benefit by targeting the United Future and Progressive parties, for example, as neither compete within the Maori electorates and therefore pose no realistic threat. Likewise, it would be illogical for the Progressive Party to target United Future as there is little benefit to doing so and, as each party obtains their own 'niche' and place on the political spectrum, it is unlikely these parties would be successful in attracting this support.
The primary question of this thesis is ‘What accounts for variation in the electoral performance of New Zealand’s political parties under MMP?’ From this, various sub-questions arise:

1. Do major parties ignore parties that are ideologically distant from them on the grounds that they pose no electoral threat? Or do they attack them because they promote policies that are anathema to their own?

2. Do major parties attack minor parties that are close to them because they pose an electoral threat, or do they act friendly towards them because they may be useful coalition partners?

3. What are the electoral consequences of these differing party strategies?

4. How does the positioning of Labour and National influence the success of minor parties in New Zealand?

5. How does Labour and National’s positioning influence each other’s performance?

These questions relate back to the two theories being tested by the hypotheses, with the primary question, and sub-questions 3, 4 and 5 concerned with the effects of party positioning on electoral outcomes. Sub-questions 1 and 2 are concerned with explaining the issue and coalition positions taken by parties. The dependent variable in the effect hypotheses is electoral success. The dependent variable in the explaining hypotheses is the political positioning adopted by each party.

In order to these the hypotheses this study aimed to apply Meguid’s positioning theory to a case study, the New Zealand general election of 2008. Furthermore, although Meguid did not consider major v major or minor v minor party positioning, these were included as a focus of this study to see if the explanations provided by Meguid could be complemented, providing for further insight into MMP politics in New Zealand. It was found that major v major positioning played a significant role in the 2008 election, which, among other factors, resulted in a National-led government. Less clear was the role played by minor v minor party positioning. Some significant positioning was evident, particularly concerning potential coalition formation, and to a lesser extent the New Zealand First funding scandal. But overall, there was
little to suggest that minor v minor party positioning significantly affected the outcome of the 2008 election.

**Major v minor positioning**

When comparing the positioning adopted by Labour and National toward the minor parties it is clear there is little similarity between the strategies adopted by the two parties. Table 3 summarises the analysis of chapters 3 and 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position adopted by</th>
<th>Progressives</th>
<th>Greens</th>
<th>Maori Party</th>
<th>New Zealand First</th>
<th>United Future</th>
<th>ACT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Accommodative</td>
<td>Adversarial</td>
<td>Accommodative</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Adversarial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Adversarial</td>
<td>Adversarial</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

We can see that National adopted a *dismissive* position towards four parties. Two of these, the Progressive and Green parties, offered no realistic chance of attracting support, so there was no benefit to National in allocating resources towards them. Towards the remaining two, United Future and ACT, National adopted a *dismissive* position in order to give them room to run their campaign, consequently providing the two minor parties, which had already declared post-election support to National, the opportunity to gain support.

The National Party adopted *adversarial* positioning towards both the remaining minor parties, New Zealand First and the Maori Party. As regards to New Zealand First, it was in National’s interest to prevent New Zealand First remaining in Parliament. As regards to the MP, however, motivation was very different. National’s position towards the Maori Party was not adopted in an attempt to attract Maori Party supporters, but rather as a consequence of core National Party policy (Maori seats) and the prospect of a Labour–Maori coalition government.

The Labour Party adopted a more varied approach, positioning itself as *dismissive, adversarial* and *accommodative*: each approach applying to two parties. First, Labour adopted *dismissive* positioning towards the Progressive Party because it was in Labour’s interest to have a strong coalition partner.
Conversely, Labour adopted a *dismissive* position towards United Future because there was no point wasting resources on a party that had previously declared its allegiance to National and posed minimal, if any, threat to Labour Party support.

Labour adopted an *adversarial* position towards ACT and the Maori Party because it was in its interest to prevent these parties attracting support. Both parties were in direct competition with Labour. ACT did not compete with Labour on policy grounds, but was considered the “natural coalition partner” for National, so limiting ACT’s electoral performance would subsequently limit National’s potential to form a government. Similarly, the Maori Party posed a genuine threat to Labour within the Maori electorates, of which Labour held three. Labour’s *adversarial* positioning towards the Maori Party was in attempt to limit this threat.

Labour’s *accommodative* positioning towards the Green and New Zealand First parties was again for different reasons. First, the strategy towards the Greens was not a deliberate attempt to attract Green Party support but rather an attempt from Labour to prevent losing support to National. Once again, it is important to acknowledge this distinction. Labour adopted an *accommodative* strategy towards New Zealand First not on ground of policy, as an attempt to attract New Zealand First voters, but in an effort to show solidarity to its partner in government, one which would be required after the 2008 election if Labour were to have any chance of leading another coalition.

These observations raise a significant finding, that a major party can adopt the *same* strategy towards different parties but with *different intentions*.

Hypothesis 1 states that as the Greens increased their support in 2008 they should have been subject to *adversarial* positioning from either the major or minor parties. In fact, the Greens were subject to a mix of strategies, dominated by *dismissive* approaches from the minor parties and National, with Labour adopting an *accommodative* position. Obviously Labour posed the greatest threat because of its ideological similarities, However, Labour’s *accommodative* positioning toward the Greens was an attempt to maintain points of difference between Labour and National. This brings the factor of indirect positioning into play. Did Labour adopt its policy with the Green Party in mind? No, it did not, and this needs to be taken into consideration in any analysis.
The Maori Party gained support between 2005 and 2008 and was subject to adversarial positioning from both Labour and National, with the other minor parties opting to ignore the party. Hypotheses 2 and 11 have thus been met as this example is purely on policy grounds. The adversarial positions adopted by these parties enabled the Maori Party to maintain ownership of its niche and promote its policies, which in this instance benefited the Maori Party. Similarly, by adopting an adversarial position towards ACT, Labour assisted ACT to gain support in 2008.

Hypothesis 4 expected Labour and National to adopt a dismissive position against any party where ideological distance precluded any competition for votes. Within the context of the 2008 election, for Labour this would primarily mean ACT as Labour had previously worked with all but ACT and the Maori Party, (and the latter promoted policies which may be considered somewhat similar in ideology to those of Labour). Labour did not adopt a dismissive position toward ACT. As ACT was seen as a potential coalition partner for National, Labour could not afford to dismiss ACT.

For National, a dismissive position towards ideologically dissimilar parties would mean the Greens, Progressive Coalition and the Maori Party. ACT, New Zealand First and United Future had all previously worked with National or had pledged their pre-election support to the party. National adopted a dismissive approach toward both the Green and Progressive parties, which meets the criteria of the hypothesis. National however, adopted an adversarial position toward the Maori Party. Two factors are important here. First, the National Party did not directly target the Maori Party in its positioning; rather it was National’s policies that qualified its approach as adversarial. As has been seen in discussion above, the indirect nature of this positioning appears to have swayed the results. Second, National formed a confidence and supply agreement with the Maori Party after 2008, so although their ideological (and electoral) differences would normally qualify the Maori Party’s inclusion under this hypothesis, the post-election agreement questions the relevance of doing so.

**Major v major positioning**

Consistent with the work of Green, both Labour and National converged in the centre in attempt to win the most votes. The expectations of hypotheses 5 and 6, that National would adopt an accommodative strategy toward Labour, were met. As anticipated, Labour, in an attempt to maintain some points of
difference with National, adopted an *adversarial* strategy, as summarised in Table 2. Also, as expected in hypothesis 8, no major party adopted a *dismissive* position toward the other.

**Minor v minor positioning**

Table 4 summarises the positioning strategy of each minor party. Any instance in which a minor party *ignored* another was deemed as *dismissive*. This reveals whether a minor party was largely ignored, contributing to an understanding of how that party was targeted throughout the election.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Greens</th>
<th>Progressives</th>
<th>Maori Party</th>
<th>New Zealand First</th>
<th>United Future</th>
<th>ACT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Adversarial</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressives</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Accommodative</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maori Party</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Adversarial</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand First</td>
<td>Adversarial</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Adversarial</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Adversarial</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Future</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Adversarial</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Adversarial</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Dismissive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

It can be seen that by and large minor parties ignored each other, with the few exceptions all involving New Zealand First. It is evident ACT and the Green Party felt compelled to adopt a position toward New Zealand First on the funding issue, as a deliberate effort to jeopardise New Zealand First’s re-election chances. It can also be seen that a minor party is only likely to adopt a position towards another minor party on non-policy grounds, specifically if it is advantageous, in terms of potential coalition make-ups, for the targeted minor party’s support to be reduced.

It was anticipated in hypothesis 9 that where a minor party adopts an *accommodative* strategy toward another minor party the targeted minor party’s electoral performance will be adversely affected. This was proven to be false, as no minor party was found to adopt an *accommodative* position towards another. Indeed, as a result of the findings in this study it is no longer anticipated that a minor party will adopt an *accommodative* position towards another, unless that minor party’s coalition prospects are threatened.
Hypothesis 10 was also shown to be incorrect because in both instances of a minor party adopting an adversarial position towards another minor party, that party’s electoral fortunes were adversely affected. It was found that ACT only adopted an adversarial position in an attempt to remove New Zealand First as a coalition option for National. This is an important factor in any future hypotheses in this area. The importance of potential coalition make-ups was acknowledged in hypothesis 13, but was applied incorrectly. It was expected that no minor party would dismiss another, because of the threat they posed in any future coalition agreements. Yet, it was found that, apart from the non-policy issue of the New Zealand First finding scandal, every other minor party pairing ignored each other, equating to a dismissive position.

**Coalition preferences positioning**

The potential make up of post-election coalitions was a significant influencing factor for party positioning in the 2008 election. In a circumstance where a minor party declared no preference for a major party, preferring to wait until after the election, it was expected that it would adopt an adversarial position toward the major parties (hypothesis 13). In the 2008 election this applied to New Zealand First and the Maori Party who indeed adopted adversarial positions to both Labour and National.

United Future and ACT pledged their pre-election support for National, which was in turn reciprocated. The Greens and Progressives however, pledged their support for Labour, which was also reciprocated. It was expected in hypothesis 15 that when this occurs the minor party will adopt an accommodative position toward that major party. Although the minor party intends to work with the major party, it must maintain some points of difference between itself and the major party in order to secure a strong, or relevant, position. As expected, the dismissive positioning was mutually beneficial for the minor and major party.

Hypothesis 13 expected the opposing major parties to adopt an adversarial position toward the minor parties which declared allegiance to the opposing major party. Labour adopted an adversarial position toward ACT, warning voters of a potential National-ACT coalition, but effectively ignored United Future. National also ignored the Green and Progressive parties.
Where a major party had not declared a preference for a minor party the positions adopted were mixed, and not solely adversarial as expected. The only two parties in question are New Zealand First and the Maori Party. As expected in hypothesis 15, the Maori Party received an adversarial response from both Labour and National. New Zealand First received largely accommodative positioning from Labour and adversarial positioning from National. However, considering the significance of the funding issue in the 2008 election campaign, this example has exceeded the bounds of the hypothesis and, as in previous examples, must be considered further.

So, what does this mean? These findings show that political parties, both major and minor, will adopt a position towards another party only if that party threatens its support base. This explains why (apart from the non-policy positioning around New Zealand First’s funding scandal and coalition make-ups) minor parties predominantly ignored each other.

The findings did not adhere to Meguid’s original hypothesis that an accommodative strategy from a major party would decrease the electoral fortunes of the minor party. In the example of Labour and Greens this obviously did not occur, which leads to the conclusion that either this hypothesis is not applicable under MMP or the analysis of Labour’s strategy toward the Green Party was incorrect.

From these findings, the original hypotheses can be amended to be more relevant and applicable under MMP in New Zealand:

i. Where a major Party adopts an adversarial position, either directly or indirectly in terms of policy, toward a minor party, the minor party’s electoral performance will be positively affected. If this positioning was adopted as a result of non-policy issues however this will have the opposite effect.

ii. The major parties, Labour and National, will adopt a dismissive position against any party in which ideological distance precludes any competition for votes.

iii. Where a major party adopts a dismissive strategy toward a minor party, the minor party’s electoral performance will be adversely affected.
iv. Where a major party adopts an *accommodative* strategy toward another major party, the targeted major party's electoral performance will be adversely affected.

v. Where a major party adopts an *adversarial* position, either directly or indirectly, toward another major party, the targeted major party's electoral fortunes will be positively affected.

vi. *In terms of policy,* a minor party will adopt a *dismissive* position toward another minor party. *If this is in terms of non-policy issues however, a minor party will not adopt a dismissive position toward that party.*

vii. A minor party will not adopt an *accommodative* strategy toward another minor party.

viii. Where a minor party adopts an *adversarial* position, either directly or indirectly, toward another minor party, the targeted minor party's electoral performance will be positively affected. *If this positioning is adopted as a result of non-policy issues however, this will have the opposite effect.*

ix. A major party will not adopt a *dismissive* position toward another major party.

x. Where a minor party declares a major party as its preferred coalition partner before the election, it will adopt an *accommodative* approach toward that preferred partner.

xi. Where a minor party does not declare a major party as its preferred coalition partner before the election, that party will adopt an *adversarial* position toward the major parties.

xii. Where a minor party declares a major party as its preferred coalition partner before the election, the opposing major party will adopt an *adversarial* position toward that minor party.

xiii. Where a minor party declares a minor party as its preferred coalition partner before the election, it will adopt a *dismissive* position toward that minor party.

xiv. Where a minor party does not declare a minor party as its preferred coalition partner before the election, an *adversarial* position will be adopted toward that minor party.

Yet to be adequately confirmed:

xv. Where a major party adopts an *accommodative* strategy toward a minor party, the minor party's electoral performance will be adversely affected.
The findings justify the extension of Meguid’s work to include major v major and minor v minor positioning, particularly the consideration of non-policy issues. By excluding these, the role they played in the electoral success of political parties in the 2008 election may have been overlooked. The emphasis placed on non-policy issues (the New Zealand First funding scandal and potential coalition make-ups) by both major and minor parties was significant, altering the hypotheses as a result. Although the findings in this thesis do not provide all the answers to understanding party positioning under MMP in New Zealand, they should prove complementary to already published work in this area.
ACADEMIC


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