

**Third-Party Strategy under Plurality Rule: The British Liberal Democrats and  
the New Zealand Social Credit Party**

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## **Third-Party Strategy under Plurality Rule:**

### **The British Liberal Democrats and the New Zealand Social Credit Party**

#### **Abstract**

This paper examines the strategic options facing small centrist third parties in two-party parliamentary systems operating under the single-member district plurality (SMDP) electoral system. It uses a spatial model to show that centrist third parties are better off targeting the 'safe' districts of a major party rather than marginal districts. Furthermore, it is optimal to target one party's districts, not both, to benefit from tactical and protest voting. The paper also questions the implicit conclusion of the median-legislator theorem that pivotality-seeking is the best strategy for a third party, at least under SMDP, because that would usurp voters' ability to select the executive directly, a key feature of two-partism. Finally, the paper shows that third parties can damage themselves if they 'flip' from opposition to one major party to support for it. Evidence is provided for the British Liberal Democrats and New Zealand's historic Social Credit Party.

## Introduction

Centrist third parties have long been a feature of two-party systems based on the single-member-district plurality (SMDP) electoral system, particularly in parliamentary democracies (Gerring, 2005). They have been described as ‘safety-valves’ for two-partism (McCraw, 1979, p.54), offering dissatisfied voters an alternative to the major parties (Kang, 1997). Some have secured significant proportions of the vote: the Liberal Democrats won 17-25% of the vote in UK general elections between 1983 and 2010, while Social Credit achieved 20% in New Zealand in 1981 (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005; Miller, 1989). However, unless third parties have geographically-concentrated support, SMDP usually prevents them converting votes proportionately into seats because of the ‘wasted-vote’ problem (Duverger, 1964; Cox, 1997).

Much of the literature on third parties is country-specific, including the UK (Russell et al., 2007; Cutts, 2012; MacIver, 1996), the USA (Rosenstone et al., 1984), New Zealand (McCraw, 1979) and Canada (Pinard, 1971). However, third-party strategy is under-developed theoretically. Recent research has yielded important insights, particularly on how third parties motivate major-party divergence (Adams and Merrill, 2006; Nagel and Wlezien, 2010). Although some of this literature discusses district-level competition, much of it focuses on the national level. Yet votes in SMDP elections are cast in districts (Cox, 1997). There are variations across districts, with some ‘safe’ for one party while others are ‘marginal’ (Johnston and Pattie, 2006). The intensity of competition differs between districts, and so might the identity of the main competitors (Johnston et al., 2012; Johnston and Pattie, 2011; Johnston et al., 2016).

Building on the work of Pinard (1971) and Kang (1997) on third parties, and Cox (1997) on SMDP, this paper examines centrist third-party strategy. It sketches a spatial model of how third parties can become the recognised challenger to the incumbent in some districts, benefiting from tactical and

protest voting. That is most likely to happen in districts of one-party dominance, where one major party is already weak. Here, the 'wasted vote' logic can work *in favour* of a third party and against the weak major party.

The paper challenges the view that the optimal strategy for a centrist third party is pivotality-seeking in a hung parliament, striking deals with whichever party offers it the best terms (Keman, 1994). It may be better off primarily opposing one major party. That enables it to attract tactical votes from the supporters of one major party in districts where the latter is weak, to deprive the other major party of a seat and reduce its chances of controlling the executive. This strategy preserves voters' exclusive power to select the executive. If a third party is willing to deal with either major party, voters are uncertain what executive they are voting for when they support it, weakening their incentives to do so. Moreover, third parties can damage themselves by 'flipping' from opposition to support for a major party.

After developing the theory of third-party strategy, the paper applies it to the British Liberal Democrats and New Zealand's historic Social Credit Party. The parties were chosen because of their relative centrism, positioned between the two major parties in each country. The analysis is not applicable without modification to non-centrist third parties.

### **Third Parties and Plurality Rule**

The relationship between SMDP and two-party politics was established in 'Duverger's law', which states that '[a]n almost complete correlation is observable between the simple-majority single-ballot system and the two-party system' (Duverger, 1964, p.217; Cox, 1997; Ware, 2009). Two-partism is reinforced by two effects under SMDP. A 'psychological effect' deters voters from 'wasting' their votes on candidates with no realistic chance of winning. A 'mechanical effect' of plurality rule is that

the need to win in districts leaves smaller parties under-represented in parliament (Duverger, 1964, pp.224-6).

SMDP tends to reduce electoral competition to two viable candidates. If the incumbent leads an electoral race, voters who oppose her will seek to coordinate their opposition behind the best-placed rival candidate, turning the contest into a two-horse race. In this 'Duvergerian equilibrium', there are only two candidates at the district level, with all others abandoned by voters fearful of 'wasting' their votes (Cox, 1997, p.72). Sometimes, it might not be clear which of two rivals is best-placed to defeat the incumbent because the challengers are evenly matched in support. That may produce what Cox (1997, p.72) calls a 'non-Duvergerian equilibrium', with two challengers splitting the anti-incumbent vote.

The logic of Duverger's law is clear at the district level, where voters cast their votes. It implies that competition reduces to two viable candidates or parties in each district. However, that does not explain how the same two parties dominate every district in a *national* two-party system. Further assumptions are required to derive national two-partism. According to Cox (1997, pp.181-202), these concern the competition for executive power. If executive power is strong, it is highly valued by politicians. If the executive is selected by a process akin to a plurality election, e.g. when the leader of the largest legislative group gets the first chance to form a government, legislators have incentives to organise into parties to control the executive. If voters select legislators at the same time as executive selection occurs, they effectively elect the government directly. These factors produce national two-partism (Cox, 1997, pp.190-2).

This paper takes national two-partism under SMDP as its starting point and considers how third parties arise. The focus is on centrist third parties establishing themselves within the primary

cleavage alignment, rather than nationalist parties with geographically-concentrated support benefiting from a secondary cleavage, though the latter can help third parties.

#### *District-Level One-Party Dominance*

The theoretical literature on third parties under SMDP is not extensive but some important ideas have emerged. Pinard (1971) provided a sociological account of the success of the Social Credit Party in Quebec in the Canadian federal election of 1962. He argued that third parties required a 'grievance', often economic, to spur their growth on the back of protest votes. However, they performed better in areas of 'one-party dominance' because the weaker major party would be unlikely to win these districts, which were safe for the other major party (1971, pp.63-71; see also Johnston and Pattie, 2011; Johnston et al., 2016).

Building on Pinard, Kang (1997) outlined a public-choice model of third parties under SMDP. He reformulated district-level one-party dominance in spatial terms, with the distribution of voters' preferences skewed to one end of the ideological spectrum (pp.40-3). Such districts offer more opportunities for third parties than those in which both major parties are strong. Kang used an exit-voice-loyalty framework, but while that is not the present approach, the spatial model is useful and can be supplemented with Cox's (1997) interpretation of Duverger.

Assume there are two major parties, L (Left) and R (Right), competing in a large number of districts under SMDP. The districts can be categorised as strongly-L (L's 'safe' districts), strongly-R or marginal L-R, where the two-party race is close. Each has a different distribution of voters, perhaps reflecting an existing cleavage, e.g. social-class differences, and thus the position of the district-level median voter differs in each. A myriad of safe and marginal districts is a feature of SMDP because of regional variations in cleavage divisions (Johnston, 1992; Johnston and Pattie, 2006). Here it is assumed that L

and R have similar numbers of safe districts.<sup>1</sup> Party policy is determined nationally, with L and R each adopting the same respective position in all districts, with no local variation. Policy is fixed for the next electoral cycle. Figure 1 depicts the three types of district in spatial terms (Downs, 1957). Under pure two-partism, L and R would win their safe districts, with the election hinging on the marginals.

[FIGURE 1]

Now suppose that L and R are joined by a small centrist party, C, which positions itself ideologically between them. Again, it adopts the same position in every district. 'Duvergerian logic' (Cox, 1997) imposes pressures for two-partism at the district level because voters do not want to waste their votes. C would need to establish itself as a 'focal point' (Schelling, 1980) for local opposition to the incumbent. Such a 'Duvergerian challenger' would be a candidate with the greatest local prominence and therefore most likely to attract the support of voters opposing the incumbent. By establishing itself in second place, C acquires a base from which to challenge for first place.

An advance for C in L-R marginal districts appears unlikely because it would be fighting on two fronts. C would struggle to break through because the second major party already offers a focal point for opposition to the incumbent. Voters that supported C would be wasting their votes. This scenario is depicted in the upper panel of Figure 1, where C would appeal to all voters up to halfway between itself and each rival (between the dashed lines). However, most may plump for a major party that had a better chance of winning and C would be squeezed. A partial exception might be if the major parties were ideologically polarised, although C would still face powerful Duvergerian forces as it confronted two established contenders.

Districts that are strongly-L or strongly-R offer C more opportunities (Kang, 1997, pp. 40-3). These districts are 'safe' for one major party in relation to the other because policies cannot be adjusted locally. That creates a chance for C to become the principal challenger. L's weakness in strongly-R districts undermines the 'wasted vote' logic for opponents of R considering voting for C, since a vote for L is 'wasted' regardless. C could appeal to more voters given that preferences are skewed to the right.

This situation is depicted in the middle panel in Figure 1 (the lower panel shows strongly-L districts). Under pure two-partism, R would easily win the district, capturing all votes to the right of the halfway point between itself and L (indicated for simplicity at point C). But if C fields a candidate, all voters between the dashed and solid vertical lines are closer to C than to either major party. Given the distribution of voters, C's potential voter-appeal is greater than L's and it could eventually become the focal point of opposition, attracting the anti-R vote (Cox, 1997).

The local weakness of one major party appears a necessary condition for district-level third-party success. It is not, however, sufficient. For C to become a Duvergerian challenger, it must convince voters of its electoral *credibility* (Russell and Fieldhouse 2005, p.150). In some districts, it may succeed, but in others it will not. The local and historical context could be crucial. First, secondary cleavages may exert influence, e.g. a still-active centre-periphery cleavage offering regionalised support (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005, pp.147-8; Pinard, 1971). Second, local-government elections provide stepping-stones to parliamentary representation by boosting local credibility (MacIver, 1996; Cutts, 2014). Third, resource-poor third parties can target specific districts (Johnston and Pattie, 2006, pp.204-12). Fourth, success in one district can have a 'contagion effect', boosting the third party's credibility in neighbouring districts (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005, pp.152-5; Dorling et al., 1998). Finally, by-elections offer third parties a chance to exploit incumbent unpopularity by

appealing to protest voters and boosting their long-term credibility if they win (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005, pp.151-2). By-elections also attract vital media attention for third parties. Each of these tactics can help C to convert potential support into actual support.

### **Third Parties and Executive Preferences**

The preceding analysis concurred with Pinard (1971) and Kang (1997) that a centrist third party is better off targeting one-party-dominant districts. However, that leaves open its national strategy in relation to the major parties. At this point, it is necessary to incorporate executive competition into the model (Cox, 1997). Under SMDP-based two-partism, voters' preferences over individual legislators and executive composition are fused into a single choice. In a two-party system where the executive is drawn from the legislature, voters effectively elect the executive directly and so executive preferences dominate voting choice (Cox, 1997; Ware, 2009).

In pure two-partism, there is no ambiguity between voters' legislative and executive preferences (except for the relatively small proportion of personal votes cast for candidates: see Carey and Shugart, 1995). However, there is more ambiguity when there is a third party, particularly if it has no chance of winning the election. It is necessary to understand the motivations of third parties and of the voters that support them in a context where executive preferences dominate.

In line with two-party theory, L and R are vote-seeking parties trying to win parliamentary majorities (Downs, 1957). The motivations of C are less straightforward. Some third parties, such as the British Liberals in the 1960s and Social Credit in New Zealand had long-term goals of replacing their respective centre-left parties as the main opponents of their respective major centre-right parties (Bogdanor, 2007; McCraw, 1979, p.54). Perhaps more realistically, the Liberals (later the Liberal Democrats) sought the adoption of proportional representation (PR) to ensure better representation

and regular leverage. That first required a hung parliament under SMDP, with PR following as the price for joining a coalition (McIver, 1996, pp.180-1). Possessing coalition potential would facilitate that and enable a third party to pursue policy and office payoffs in the meantime, as would extracting concessions from a minority government (Laver and Schofield, 1990). Overall, *legislative seat-maximisation* would likely promote all of these goals under SMDP.

Voters also face a dilemma. In marginal districts, they have an executive choice between two strong major parties and their incentive to vote for a third party is weak. In safe districts, there is no such choice. Supporters of L in strongly-R districts cannot influence the composition of the executive under pure two-partism because L has no chance of winning such districts. But the presence of the third party, C, may give them the opportunity to vote *against* an executive of R. If C won the district, it would deprive R of a legislative seat, decreasing its chances of a legislative majority. It would not increase L's chances of winning a majority but could increase its chances of forming a minority or coalition executive.

Figure 2 depicts a strongly-R district in which C is seeking Duvergerian-challenger status. The mid-way point between  $c$  (C's position) and  $l$  (L's position) is  $y$ , while  $z$  is the mid-way point between  $c$  and  $r$  (R's position). The district-level median voter is also at  $z$ . C's immediate task is to replace L as the focal point of opposition to R. If it did, it could potentially win votes within the range  $x-z$ , enabling it to contest the district with R (L could win only  $x-c$  under two-partism). C could appeal to *tactical voters* (Johnston and Pattie, 2006, pp.23-5), who feel negatively towards R and are positioned on the left of the ideological spectrum. It could also appeal to *protest voters*, who are ideologically closer to R than to L but are dissatisfied with R's performance (Kang, 1997, pp.79-83, 89-95). Their 'protest' against an R executive is facilitated by the availability of the ideologically proximate C.

Voters can be disaggregated into three blocs. Bloc 1 (x-y) contains voters who prefer L both ideologically and in executive formation. They might vote tactically for C, their second-preference party, to defeat R. Bloc 2 (y-c) consists of voters ideologically closest to C, but who prefer L to R in executive formation. They could vote for C sincerely in terms of legislative representation but also tactically to decrease R's executive chances. In bloc 3 (c-z), voters ideologically prefer C to R, but normally prefer R to L in executive formation. If R were nationally unpopular, e.g. because of its governmental performance, bloc 3 voters could cast protest votes for C to register their disapproval rather than for the ideologically-distant L. To win the district, C must secure all three blocs of voters.

[FIGURE 2]

### **Third Party Strategy**

The linkage of voters' legislative and executive preferences has consequences for the optimal national-level strategy for C. The latter's goal is seat-maximisation but it requires a strategy towards the major parties that enables it.

#### *Pivotality*

At first glance, it seems the best way for C to maximise seats is to target the safe districts of both major parties. It would require non-alignment, neither permanently supporting nor opposing either major party. By maximising its seats, C would increase the likelihood of a hung parliament, in which it would possess *pivotality*, that is, being the king-maker and able to seek a coalition with or support a minority administration of whichever party offered the best deal.

This strategy reflects the median-legislator theorem (Laver and Schofield, 1990). Under multi-partism, the party controlling the median legislator is in a strong bargaining position, able to play left and right off against each other (Keman, 1994). Centrist parties are more likely to control the median legislator (Laver and Schofield, 1990). From this perspective, a third party should keep its options open to maximise its leverage.

Although superficially appealing, pivotality-seeking has serious drawbacks. Voters are uncertain over C's executive preferences in a hung parliament. In supporting C, they would not know what executive they were voting for or against, depriving them of the greatest power they possess under SMDP. C might join a coalition government led by their least-preferred party, e.g. L supporters voting tactically for C, which formed a coalition with R. That weakens the incentive for tactical voting by voters in bloc 1 (Figure 2). Without bloc 1 it is doubtful whether C could establish itself as a Duvergerian challenger in the first place.

There may be different considerations for some voters in blocs 2 and 3. Assume the likely coalition policies in a hung parliament are  $y$  (L-C coalition) or  $z$  (R-C coalition). Bloc 2 voters from  $y'-c$  prefer  $y$  and  $z$  to each single-party point,  $l$  and  $r$  (voters at  $y'$  are indifferent between  $l$  and  $z$ ). However, that is not true of voters from  $y-y'$ . Only if C could exploit its bargaining power to situate policy at  $c$  would it capture the whole of bloc 2. Similarly, bloc 3 voters from  $c-z'$  would prefer both coalition points to  $l$  and  $r$  (voters at  $z'$  are indifferent between  $r$  and  $y$ ). Those from  $z'-z$  would not, although they would prefer  $c$  to both  $l$  and  $r$ . However, if C were much smaller than L and R, voters might doubt whether coalition policy would end up close to  $c$ , hindering C's ability to secure blocs 2 and 3.

C's problems would be deepened by hostility from the major parties. While each would happily see its rivals' safe districts targeted by C, if both were targeted, they would have incentives to collude in

destroying C. That would preserve the two-party system and their alternating monopolisation of executive power, rather than being at the mercy of a small king-maker. Such major-party cooperation – which would resemble an iterated prisoner's dilemma (Axelrod, 1984) – could see them competing hard in unwinnable districts, running strong campaigns and cautioning against tactical voting. Thus, although pivotality-seeking appears to offer the prospect of holding the balance of power, C could be left fighting on two fronts.

### *Alliance and Opposition*

A second option for C would be to ally with one major party (in this case, L) and oppose the other (R). It could campaign weakly in L's safe districts, while seeking to win in strongly-R districts. In a hung parliament, C would support an L-led executive.

Securing the tactical votes of L's supporters in blocs 1 and 2 should be straightforward. L would have incentives to allow C to inflict damage on R, knowing that C is allied to L. These are unwinnable districts for L. L could withdraw local candidates or run weak local campaigns, and might signal its approval of tactical voting. C would have a good chance of becoming a Duvergerian challenger.

The problem could be in convincing protest voters in bloc 3 to defect from R. Given C's alignment with L, these voters would know that a vote for C would be a vote for an L-C alliance in a hung parliament. If an L-C coalition positioned policy at  $y$ , bloc 3 voters from  $c$ - $z'$  might vote for C. However, voters from  $z'$ - $z$  would still prefer  $r$  to  $y$ . Given C's strategic proximity to L, voters might suspect that policy would end up closer to  $l$  than  $c$ . The danger for C would be that voters would see it as an extension of L, with the latter's policy dominating any coalition. C could struggle to win strongly-R districts because of its weak appeal to bloc 3 voters.

### *Non-alignment and Opposition*

A variation of the previous strategy is for C to oppose R while not aligning with or against L. An anti-R stance would help C secure tactical votes from L supporters in strongly-R districts (blocs 1 and 2). Such voters would have incentives to vote for C in L's unwinnable seats because they could be sure they were voting against an R-led executive and would reduce its likelihood if they deprived R of a seat. In a hung parliament, there might be an L-C coalition, although it would not be guaranteed.

'Soft' R supporters in bloc 3 may consider voting for C, a party to which they are ideologically closer. The circumstances would likely be that R was nationally unpopular and these voters wanted to cast protest votes. Given C's anti-R stance, they could be sure that it *would* be a protest vote and not a prelude to C joining R in coalition. It would not necessarily be a vote for an L-C coalition, although such a possibility would exist. However, C might remain out of government in a hung parliament, voting on the minority administration's policies on a case-by-case basis. That could be acceptable to bloc-3 voters if they were temporarily disinclined to support R. If L looked certain to win the election outright, protest voting might be more attractive for bloc 3 voters, as they could be choosing which party to *oppose* L in the legislature.

Theoretically, C could also target L's safe districts. However, that would move it into an antagonistic relationship with L, increasing the likelihood of collusion between L and R to destroy C. Moreover, C's anti-R stance – necessary for securing tactical votes from L's supporters in strongly-R districts – would hinder its chances of mobilising tactical voting by R's supporters in strongly-L districts. R's supporters would observe the hostility between C and R and likely view C as another opponent of R.

### *'Flipping'*

One further option is available to C. Assume that C adopted a clear anti-R stance and established itself as a Duvergerian challenger in strongly-R districts. Further suppose that, in a hung parliament, C unexpectedly allied with R after all, because it had been offered better terms in a post-election negotiation. I describe this strategic choice as 'flipping'.

There is a huge risk in flipping. In establishing an anti-R reputation, C would have won the tactical support of voters who believed there was no chance of it facilitating an R-led executive (blocs 1 and 2). If it reversed strategy, it would risk a major breach of trust with these voters. A clear strategic orientation for C is important because it leaves the ultimate decision of executive formation to the electorate. In flipping, C assumes that role for itself. It would appear opportunistic and could suffer in future elections as voters in blocs 1 and 2 felt weaker incentives to vote tactically causing it to lose seats to R. C could also lose its status as a Duvergerian challenger in strongly-R districts. Meanwhile, R would still have an incentive to win back districts it had lost to C as that would increase its chances of winning a legislative majority. 'Flipping' could pay off if it resulted in the concession of a change in the voting system, for example. However, there is no guarantee it would be delivered and C might still pay an electoral price for its 'flip'.

### **Two Third Parties: The British Liberal Democrats and the New Zealand Social Credit Party**

The remainder of this paper applies the theoretical framework to the UK and New Zealand. Both countries had classical two-party systems based on SMDP for much of the post-war era. In Britain, Labour and the Conservatives won a combined 86-99% of legislative seats after 1945, while in New Zealand, Labour and National won 95-100 percent of seats until the adoption of PR in 1996. In both countries, the main parties' combined vote share was lower but the legislative effects were cushioned by SMDP (Quinn, 2013; Miller, 2005). A class cleavage structured competition in both countries but weakened with the onset of dealignment (Denver et al., 2012; Vowles et al., 1995).

Each country had a third party that generally positioned itself as a centrist force. In Britain, the Liberals were a major party before being supplanted by Labour in the 1920s (Dutton, 2004, pp.78-136). They almost disappeared in the 1950s, before growing significantly from the 1970s onwards, as voters became disillusioned with the governing performance of the two main parties. An electoral pact with the small Social Democratic Party (SDP) from 1983-87 (the Alliance) was followed by a merger in 1988 to create the Liberal Democrats (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005). On an anti-Conservative surge from 1997-2010, the Liberal Democrats won 17-23% of the vote and 7-10% of legislative seats (from 1964-92, the Liberals won an average 16.0% of votes and 1.9% of seats: Quinn, 2013, p.383). In New Zealand, the Social Credit Political League (Social Credit Party in 1982, the Democrats in 1985) contested its first election in 1954, though the movement had its origins in the 1930s (James, 1980, p.148). It established itself as an agrarian competitor with National in dairy-farming districts in the North Island (Miller, 1989, p.247). From 1954-84, Social Credit won 7-21% of the vote (average 10.0%), although it was a weaker parliamentary force than the Liberal Democrats, failing to acquire more than 2% of parliamentary seats (Miller, 1989, p.246).

### *Target Districts*

The major opponent for the Liberal Democrats and Social Credit was their respective countries' centre-right party. That can be seen from the districts in which each enjoyed electoral success. The Liberal Democrats appealed largely to middle-class voters in affluent districts where Labour was weak, competing primarily with the Conservatives (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005). In every election bar one from 1964-2010, the Conservatives finished second in at least two-thirds of Liberal-held districts (Figure 3).<sup>2</sup> The major gains the Liberal Democrats made in 1997 were all from the Conservatives. In 2005 and 2010, the party increased its gains from Labour, as left-wing protest votes migrated to it over two contentious decisions of the Labour government, the Iraq War and

university tuition fees (Russell et al., 2007). However, these districts tended to be more middle-class than most Labour districts, often in university towns and recently Conservative-held (Russell et al., 2007, pp.203-4). As the Conservatives declined as a regional force, the Liberal Democrats became the principal challenger to Labour in many Northern English urban constituencies, albeit only occasionally to the point of threatening to win seats (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005).

[FIGURE 3]

It was a similar story with Social Credit, although its dearth of victories (just six over 13 elections covering 36 years) requires a wider focus on those districts where it finished first or second. These ‘challenger’ districts are shown in Figure 4. Of the 57 times Social Credit finished first or second during 1954-90, National was its main rival on 51 occasions (including the six times it won) and Labour on six. Of the six victories, two were in Rangitikei in 1978 and 1981, and two others in East Coast Bays in 1981 and 1984. Both districts were first won in by-elections in 1978 and 1980 respectively but these are not included in this table, which considers only general elections.

[FIGURE 4]

Duvergerian logic would lead to a third party displacing a major party at district-level, with the latter’s vote share shrinking. It is difficult to test directly whether voters support a third party for protest or tactical reasons as understood in Figure 2 above. Definitions of tactical voting in the academic literature – voting for a party other than one’s first preference in order to prevent the victory of one’s lowest preference – are typically narrower than the conception deployed here, where it refers to voters in blocs 1 and 2. These could include people who initially vote tactically for a third party but later identify with it after it becomes a Duvergerian challenger. However, in districts

where a third party is such a challenger, it and the remaining major party would be expected to secure a large majority of votes, and that can be measured.

Table 1 shows the combined vote share of the Liberals/Alliance/Liberal Democrats and their nearest challenger in districts won by the third party from 1964-92 (the data include multiple entries for those districts won multiple times over different elections). Table 2 shows the corresponding data for 1997-2010, when the Liberal Democrats surged. A majority of the latter contests were Liberal Democrat-Conservative battles in England, where the two parties' average combined vote share was 82.9%, indicating Duvergerian forces at work. (Of the 13 districts the Liberal Democrats lost in 2010, 11 were to the Conservatives in England, with an average combined vote share of 85.6%.) The average two-party vote share in Liberal Democrat-Labour contests was slightly lower, reflecting less tactical voting by Conservative supporters (Russell and Fieldhouse 2005, p.202). The figures were lower in Scotland and Wales, where nationalist parties also competed. Table 1 shows a higher proportion of Liberal-Conservative districts in Scotland from 1964-92, where the Tories were much stronger than they were post-1997. Otherwise, the two periods are broadly comparable. The third party won on average about 45% of the vote in districts it held.

[TABLES 1 AND 2]

A similar pattern prevailed in New Zealand. In Social Credit's six victories from 1954-90, its average district vote share was 46.1% and the average combined Social Credit-National vote share was 85.3%. In Social Credit's 57 'challenger' districts (first-/second-placed finishes) in this period, the average two-party vote share was 79% and similar during its 1978-81 peak (Table 3). Social Credit's average vote share was 32.7% in the 51 Social Credit-National contests and 27.8% in the six Social Credit-Labour contests. In the Social Credit-National districts, Labour's average vote share was just

17.5%. In the Social Credit-Labour contests, National's average vote share was 22.7%, just 5.1pp (percentage points) behind Social Credit. These latter contests approximated 'non-Duvergerian equilibria', with less tactical voting (Cox, 1997).

[TABLE 3]

### *Historical Profile of Districts*

Given that the Liberal Democrats and Social Credit primarily competed with their respective centre-right parties, the expectation would be that each achieved its success mainly in districts that were once safe for the Conservatives/National, with Labour far behind. To determine whether that was so, we must examine the intensity of major-party electoral competition in Liberal Democrat-held and Social Credit 'challenger' districts in earlier periods of strong two-partism. The aim is to remove the third party from strategic consideration as much as possible to identify which districts embodied one-party dominance under pure two-partism. The most recent periods of electoral two-partism were the early-1950s in the UK and the late-1940s/early-1950s in New Zealand. The UK elections of 1951-1955 and the New Zealand ones of 1946-1949 are selected for the analysis, with two elections chosen to reduce any effects from one misleading result.

In the UK, the Conservatives won the elections of 1951 and 1955, although in 1951, they secured fewer votes than Labour, while they finished 3.4pp ahead in 1955. The major-party combined vote- and seat shares were 96.8% and 98.6% respectively in 1951, and 96.1% and 98.7% in 1955. The Liberals fell below 3% in 1951 and 1955, winning 1% of legislative seats (Quinn, 2013, p.383). The Liberals were not a newly-formed party, although the points about third-party growth still hold because the latter is still more likely where one major party is weak. In New Zealand, Social Credit first competed in 1954, and of the previous post-war elections, those of 1946 and 1949 saw Labour

and National most evenly matched, Labour winning narrowly in 1946 and National by 4.8pp in 1949. The major-party combined vote- and seat shares were 99.7% and 100% respectively in 1946, and 99.2% and 100% in 1949 (Miller, 2005, pp.252-4).

The focus is on UK districts that would later be won by the Liberal Democrats during the period 1997-2010 and those in New Zealand that would later become Social Credit 'challenger' districts. In each country, district boundaries and sometimes names changed between the earlier and later periods. The nearest equivalent districts by geographical similarity have been selected. The appendices contain full lists of the modern and historical districts used for comparison. District-level demographic and social changes are ignored, as the aim is to provide a rough, but insightful, exposition of how third parties slotted into district-level party systems over time.

Figure 5 contains data from 1951-1955 for 66 and 65 UK districts respectively that the Liberal Democrats would win at least once between 1997 and 2010. Districts where the Liberals finished first or second in 1951-1955 (six and nine respectively) are excluded because they were already established as Duvergerian challengers (see Appendix 1. Districts where the Liberals came first/second in 1951-1955 but did not win in 1997-2010 are also excluded.) Figure 6 provides data on 16 New Zealand districts for 1946-1949 that would later become Social Credit 'challenger' districts.

[FIGURES 5 AND 6]

As expected, districts that would later become areas of third-party strength were, on average, previously safe districts for the respective centre-right party in both the UK and New Zealand. In Britain, only 12 of the 66 districts were won by Labour in 1951 and 10 of 65 in 1955, with the rest won by the Conservatives. The distribution is skewed to the right. The median districts in the British

distributions give Conservative majorities of 21.0pp in 1951 and 23.0pp in 1955. A 'safe' district is conservatively defined as one where the winning party's majority is 20pp. In New Zealand, four of the 16 districts were Labour-held in 1946 and three in 1949, with the rest won by National. Again, the results are skewed to the right, with the median districts in the two elections having National majorities of 21.7pp in 1946 and 31.8pp in 1949.

Third parties do not develop into major challengers in every previously one-party-dominant district. To become local Duvergerian challengers, they must establish their electoral credibility. There is little available evidence on credibility indicators for Social Credit, but more on the Liberal Democrats. Russell and Fieldhouse (2005) found that strong prior performance in local elections was vitally important for the Liberal Democrats in winning parliamentary districts. Of the 30 districts the party won from the Conservatives in 1997, 24 were in areas where it enjoyed a majority on the local council (2005, p.151). By-elections also enabled the Liberal Democrats to attract protest votes and having won once, go on to retain some of those seats, such as Rochdale for 25 years and Bermondsey for 32 years, the latter not being 'natural' Liberal territory (pp.151-2). Similarly, Social Credit first won Rangitikei and East Coast Bays in by-elections and retained them in two general elections. A historic religious cleavage was also important in the UK, with Liberal Democrat support higher in areas of nonconformist Christianity in the 'Celtic fringe', just as Liberal support had been in the nineteenth century (pp.163-5; see also Cox, 1970).

### **Third-Party Strategy in the UK and New Zealand**

The parties' strategic choices reflected their district-level focus, albeit more clearly for the Liberal Democrats. However, both 'flipped' their strategies and paid the price.

#### *The Liberal Democrats*

Until 1918, the Liberals were one of Britain's two largest parties, competing for government with the Conservatives. However, after a split during the First World War and following the rise of Labour, the Liberals went into decline in the 1920s. The party pursued electoral reform, but to no avail (Searle, 2001, pp.159-60). In the 1930s, the Liberals split again with one segment joining the Conservative-led National government (Cook, 2010, pp.117-28).

After 1945, a Conservative-Labour two-party system took shape, with the Liberals facing extinction. Just six Liberal candidates were elected in 1951, five of them unopposed by the Conservatives (Dutton, 2004, pp.175-6). The party risked becoming an adjunct of the Tories. But under the leadership of Jo Grimond (1956-67), the Liberals took an anti-Conservative turn, adopting a new strategy of 'realignment on the left'. With Labour divided, the Liberals' aim was to become the principal opposition to the Conservatives by adopting moderately left-of-centre positions (Bogdanor, 2007). This strategy fitted the profile of Liberal strength at district-level, where the party was strongest in Conservative-leaning districts (see above).

Future leaders continued the strategy of opposing the Conservatives, although accommodations were sought with Labour. The party signed up to the 'Lib-Lab pact' that sustained a minority Labour government during 1977-78 (Quinn and Clements, 2011, p.64). An electoral pact with the ex-Labourites of the SDP cemented its centre-left identity (Cook, 2010, pp.163-74). After the Liberal-SDP merger in 1988, the new Liberal Democrats initially pursued an 'equidistant' strategy of non-alignment amid Labour-Conservative ideological polarisation. However, it was abandoned in 1995 in favour of 'realignment on the left' (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005, p.40).

Under Paddy Ashdown's leadership, the party not only opposed the Conservatives but cooperated with the modernised Labour Party of Tony Blair, echoing the strategy of 'alliance and opposition'

examined earlier. The Liberal Democrats hoped that Labour would deliver on a promise to hold a referendum on electoral reform (Cook, 2010, p.243). Anti-Conservative tactical voting between Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters surged in 1997 when the Tories lost by a landslide (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005, pp.39-43; 106-8). The Liberal Democrats' legislative seats increased from 20 to 46, entirely at the expense of the Conservatives.

Relations with Labour cooled after Blair failed to hold a referendum on electoral reform (Dutton, 2004, p.289). Under a new leader, Charles Kennedy, the anti-Conservative focus remained, but it was combined with an appeal to left-leaning voters disaffected by Labour's centrism (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005, pp.178-98; Cook, 2010, pp.260-78). This strategy delivered a post-war high of 62 seats in 2005, although the party suffered losses to the Conservatives. Kennedy had switched to a strategy of 'non-alignment and opposition', although a slightly less centrist variation. Indeed, the Liberal Democrats were sometimes to the left of Labour during this period (Lehmann et al., 2016).

Despite the reorientation towards Labour, the most successful period in the Liberal Democrats' post-war history was built on opposition to the Conservatives, with an electoral focus on Tory-leaning districts. Their voters' profile reflected that. A major study of the Liberal Democrats from 1997-2001 found that Liberal Democrat voters were socially similar to middle-class Conservative voters but attitudinally similar to left-leaning Labour ones (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005, p.99). It also found that the party's core vote was small (pp.99-100). The proportion of voters very strongly identifying with the Liberals/Liberal Democrats fell from 14% in 1979 to 7% in 2001 (p.100).

SMDP provided the major obstacle to the Liberal Democrats, as the fear of 'wasted votes' led potential supporters to vote for other parties (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005, p.141). However, the party also benefited from tactical voting. In 1997, Labour's vote share increased on average by

12.8pp in Conservative-Labour districts but by 6.1pp in Conservative-Liberal Democrat marginals, the latter being the only type of district where the Liberal Democrats' average vote share increased (pp.106-8). The Liberal Democrats combined tactical votes from Labour supporters and protest votes from former Conservatives.

The anti-Conservative stance would be reassessed after the election of Nick Clegg as leader in 2007 (Cook, 2010, pp.279-308). Faced with a modernising Conservative Party, the Liberal Democrats feared the loss of protest votes back to the Tories. Clegg abandoned 'realignment on the left' in favour of a pivotality-seeking 'equidistance', as he sought to protect the Liberal Democrats from the resurgent Conservatives (Quinn and Clements, 2011). Labour's unpopularity and the greater competitiveness of the Conservatives boosted the short-term rationality of this approach. Despite the new strategy being signalled, it was still a major surprise when, after the hung parliament of 2010, Clegg joined a coalition with the Conservatives – even if the electoral arithmetic pointed towards it (Cutts and Russell, 2015). Among a range of concessions secured, his most significant was a referendum on electoral reform (Quinn et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the Liberal Democrats had 'flipped' their strategic orientation from anti-Conservatism to an alliance with the Tories. The party suffered an instantaneous decline in popularity, falling from 23% in the May general election to 9% in December 2010 (Figure 7). It may also have played a role in the defeat of the electoral-reform referendum in 2011 (Cutts and Russell, 2015, p.72). The party would not recover before the 2015 election, when it slumped to 7.9% of the vote, losing 49 of its 57 seats. That included 27 losses to the Conservatives, 12 to Labour and ten to the Scottish Nationalists (most of these Scottish districts having once been Conservative strong-holds: see Appendix 1).

The cause of the Liberal Democrats' collapse was the decision to govern with the Conservatives, which repelled centre-left supporters (Cutts and Russell, 2015, p.80). The party's slump followed the

abandonment of its anti-Conservative strategy and the installation of a Conservative-led government by legislators elected partly by anti-Tory votes.

[FIGURE 7]

### *Social Credit*

Social Credit's unorthodox ideology, based around monetary reform, ensured that it resisted being pigeon-holed in left-right terms. It initially mixed a doctrinal demand for cheap credit with social conservatism, sometimes spilling over into anti-Semitism (Miller, 1989). Social Credit's electoral strength in dairy-farming communities and nearby towns in the North Island gave it an agrarian feel (Miller, 1989, pp.246-7), but it sought a more catch-all appeal in the 1970s. Under the leadership of Bruce Beetham, it presented itself as 'a mildly reformist centre party' (Miller, 1989, p.254), mingling social democracy with liberal conservatism (James, 1980, pp.153-4).

Only sketchy information is available on Social Credit's supporters and so caution is needed when drawing conclusions (Miller, 1989, pp.246-9). Its core vote was 7-9%, mainly in rural areas and nearby towns, although many supporters showed intense loyalty to the party. Meanwhile, Beetham enjoyed substantial popularity within and beyond Social Credit's ranks (James, 1980, p.157). Given the lack of public interest in the party's monetary theories, it could serve as a repository for ex-National protest voters (James, 1980, pp.153-4; Miller, 1989, p.248; McCraw, 1979, p.56). To win seats, it also required tactical voting from Labour supporters, which it sometimes managed, as in the Rangitikei by-election of 1978 (James, 1980, pp.162-3).

Social Credit's early years were characterised by doctrinal purity and an ambition to replace Labour as the reformist alternative to National (McCraw, 1979, p.54). It devoted little time to developing a

strategy for a hung parliament, although its minimal parliamentary representation rendered that otiose (Miller, 1989, pp.254-5). However, Social Credit's support increased in the 1970s as the major parties lost popularity amid New Zealand's economic problems (McCraw, 1979). Boosted by the East Coast Bays by-election, it touched 30% in the polls in 1980. Beetham considered the party's relation to government, expounding the notion of a 'balance of responsibility' in a hung parliament, whereby Social Credit would not vote down a government in a confidence motion. He sought to reassure voters that the party would not exert undue influence over governments, although he did not rule out a deal with either major party (Miller, 1989, p.255; James, 1980, pp.158-9). At one point, Beetham floated an 'accommodation' with Labour, allowing it to govern in return for an electoral pact, although nothing happened.

Social Credit's principal district-level competitor, however, was National. From the arguments developed above, an 'accommodation' between Social Credit and National ought to have caused problems because of Social Credit's reliance on left-leaning voters in National's districts. Following its best-ever election result in 1981, Social Credit secured two legislative seats (out of 92). National won a wafer-thin majority of two seats but in 1982, a government MP supported Labour in opposing a controversial dam-construction project. Robbed of its majority, National sought Social Credit's support to introduce legislation to overturn any successful judicial review of the government's proposal. Social Credit's MPs acquiesced in return for guarantees (Miller, 1989, p.255).

Social Credit's decision attracted widespread condemnation. Left-leaning tactical supporters who regarded the party as an anti-National force interpreted the move as a strategic 'flip' and deserted it after its 'act of betrayal' (Miller, 1989, p.256). A later pledge to vote with Labour in a confidence motion merely alienated ex-National protest voters attracted to the 'balance of responsibility' concept (Miller, 1989, p.256). Social Credit's support fell 10% over the next few months (Figure 8). In

1983, it was further undermined by the emergence of the free-market New Zealand Party (NZP), which appealed to disaffected National voters. NZP surged to third place in 1984, winning 12.2% of the vote, overwhelmingly at the expense of National and Social Credit (Aimer, 1985, pp.197-8). Social Credit slumped to 7.6%, although it won in two districts where NZP damaged National. It lost both seats in 1987. The party later joined the Alliance, a multi-party pact, but never regained its previous heights.

Social Credit was smaller than the Liberal Democrats. It was somewhat constrained by its agrarian roots, although in winning East Coast Bays (and nearby Pakuranga in 1984), it managed briefly to create an opening in suburban Auckland (Miller, 1989, 248). Overall, its appeal was narrower, its parliamentary representation weaker and its strategic choices less decisive. Social Credit normally did well when National was struggling (McCraw, 1979, p.55), reflecting its identity as an alternative to National. Its strategic 'flip' in 1982 had predictably disastrous consequences.

[FIGURE 8]

### **Conclusion**

Centrist third parties can 'succeed' under SMDP if they find a place within the logic of two-party competition. That normally entails targeting districts of one-party dominance and becoming Duvergerian challengers, benefiting from tactical and protest votes. It is facilitated by primarily opposing one major party while taking a less oppositional but still arms-length approach towards the other. That lets voters choose the government directly while offering a way of voting *against* an executive of one major party if they cannot or will not choose the other.

This conclusion accords with Gerring's observation that 'minor party performance [under SMDP] is endogenous to major party performance' (2005, p.99). Third parties' choices are limited by the strategies of the major parties, from district targeting to choice of national opponent. Even as 'centrist' parties, they must win tactical and protest votes within a very broad ideological range (from x-z in Figure 2), ensuring that they tend to lean more in one ideological direction. The dynamics of two-partism continue to shape competition (Ware, 2009). Third parties are better off eschewing a strategy of pivotality, which would usurp voters' right to choose the government and decrease their incentives to support third parties.

The two parties examined in this paper nevertheless succumbed to the temptation to play the king-maker, as short-term benefits outweighed considerations of longer-term reputational damage. The theory does not predict that centrist third parties will eschew pivotality-seeking, merely that they will suffer damage if they do not. Third parties' own strategic insights are often consistent with the theory, albeit generated by years of experience (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005; James, 1980). The Liberal Democrats were thus aware of the historical dangers of a coalition with the Conservatives (Quinn and Clements, 2011). Despite that, the prospect of power proved irresistible.

A broader question concerns whether these lessons for centrist parties apply under PR. While district targeting is less relevant, pivotality-seeking and flipping are strategic options. Some liberal parties have held the balance of power, such as the German Free Democrats, which famously flipped in 1982. The populist New Zealand First Party also flipped, after New Zealand's first PR election in 1996, when it was expected to support Labour but joined National in coalition. Subsequently, it suffered a major loss of support (Vowles, 2002). Small parties' strategic flexibility under PR may be less than assumed. With a trend towards bipolar systems, where rival multi-party coalitions of right

and left compete for government (Mair, 2006), executive selection is handed to voters, and king-making parties may find themselves punished. Flipping may be as risky under PR as under SMDP.

On the other hand, centrist parties under PR typically appeal to a narrower ideological range of voters than under SMDP – genuine centrists rather than half of the ideological spectrum (Figure 2). That leaves fewer worries about lost tactical votes. In general, minor-party performance is not as endogenous to major-party performance under PR. If C lost votes to R, it could appeal to L voters and convert votes into seats under PR. Under SMDP, losing votes in strongly-R districts would deprive C of seats that could not be easily replaced in strongly-L districts. Further comparative research could usefully explore these differences.

### **Acknowledgements**

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### **Notes**

1. If the two main parties had substantially different numbers of safe seats, one would likely be electorally more successful over the longer term, as it would need to win fewer marginals to be victorious. The less successful party would have incentives to reposition itself (Downs, 1957), leading ultimately to more safe seats.
2. Figure 3 presents only seats won by the Liberal Democrats, rather than first- and second-place finishes, which Figure 4 does for Social Credit. The latter approach was necessary because Social Credit won so few seats. The analysis of the Liberal Democrats is not substantially affected, however. Their second-place finishes were as follows: 73 to the Conservatives and

32 to Labour in 1997; 57 to the Conservatives, 53 to Labour and one to Plaid Cymru in 2001; 83 to the Conservatives and 106 to Labour in 2005; 166 to the Conservatives and 76 to Labour in 2010; and 46 to the Conservatives, nine to Labour and eight to the SNP in 2015. Despite the growing number of second-place finishes to Labour – a consequence of the Liberal Democrats' more leftist positioning – the raw figures are deceptive. Many were on low vote shares in very safe Northern Labour seats amid a collapsing Conservative vote. In 2005, when the Liberal Democrats had more second-place finishes behind Labour, the average Labour vote share in those seats was 52.3% compared to the Liberal Democrats' 23.7%, a difference of 28.6%. In contrast, where the Liberal Democrats were runners-up to the Conservatives, the latter's average vote share was 48.3% to the Liberal Democrats' 29.6%, a difference of 18.7%.

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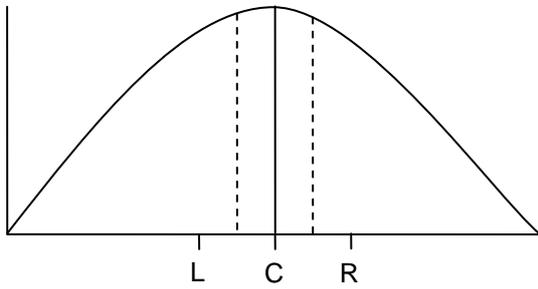
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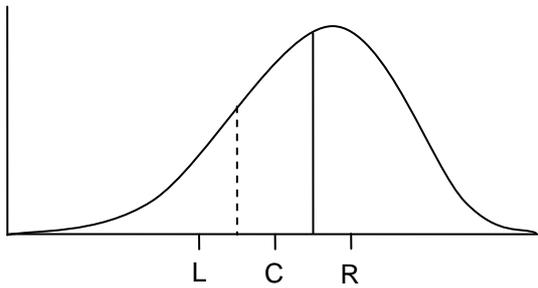
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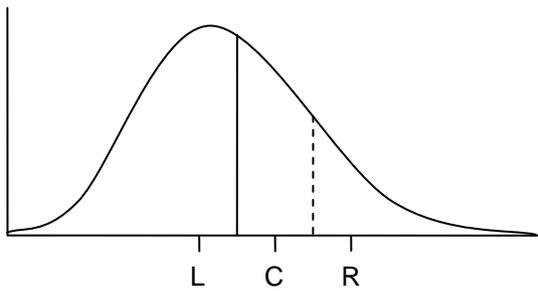
Figure 1: Three Types of Electoral District under SMDP



(a) L-R marginal districts



(b) Strongly-R districts



(c) Strongly-L districts

Figure 2: District-level Voting and Executive Preferences

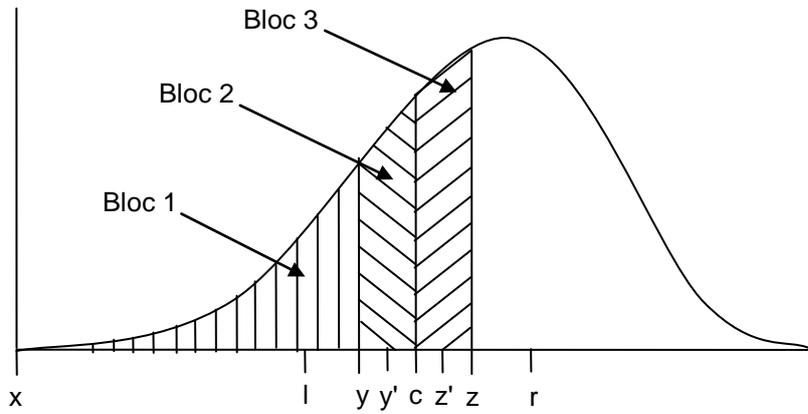
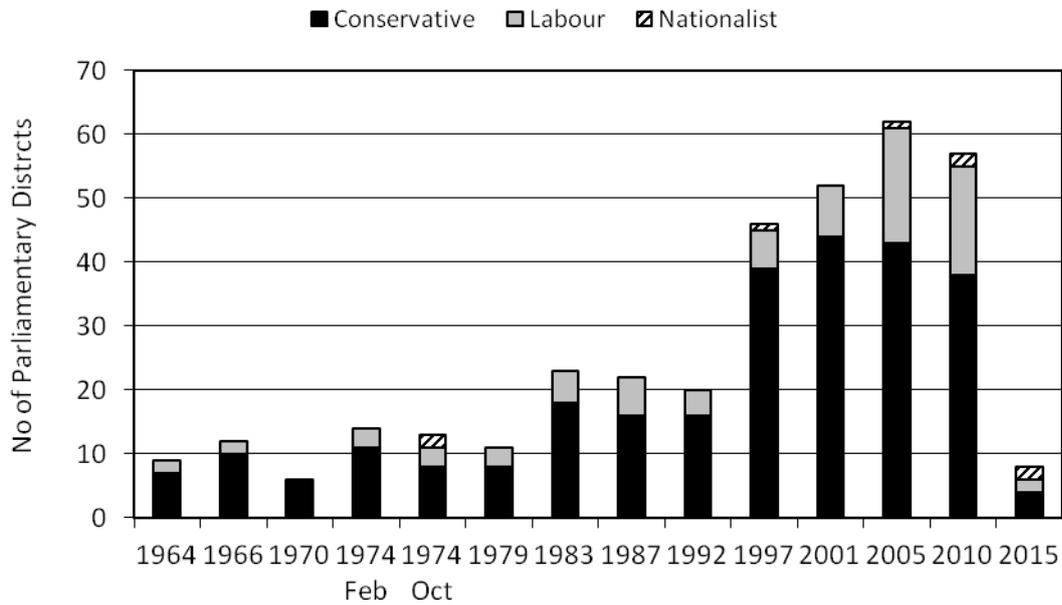


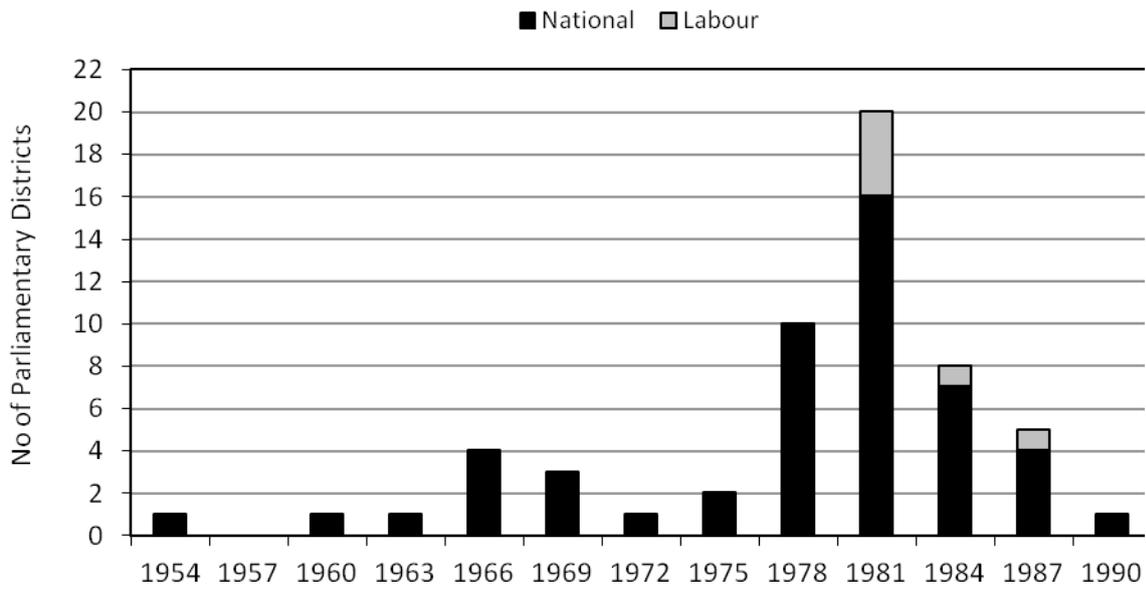
Figure 3: Second-Placed Party in British Liberal Democrat-Held Districts



Source: 'United Kingdom general election results since 1832', available at [www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/edates.htm](http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/edates.htm).

Notes: Liberal 1964-1979; SDP-Liberal Alliance 1983-1987; Liberal Democrat 1992-2015. In the five elections from 1945-1959, the Liberals enjoyed a total of 39 victories. Of these, 25 were in districts uncontested by a major party: 19 by the Conservatives, five by Labour and one by the Conservatives and Labour (a university seat). Of the remaining 14, the Conservatives finished second in 10 and Labour in four.

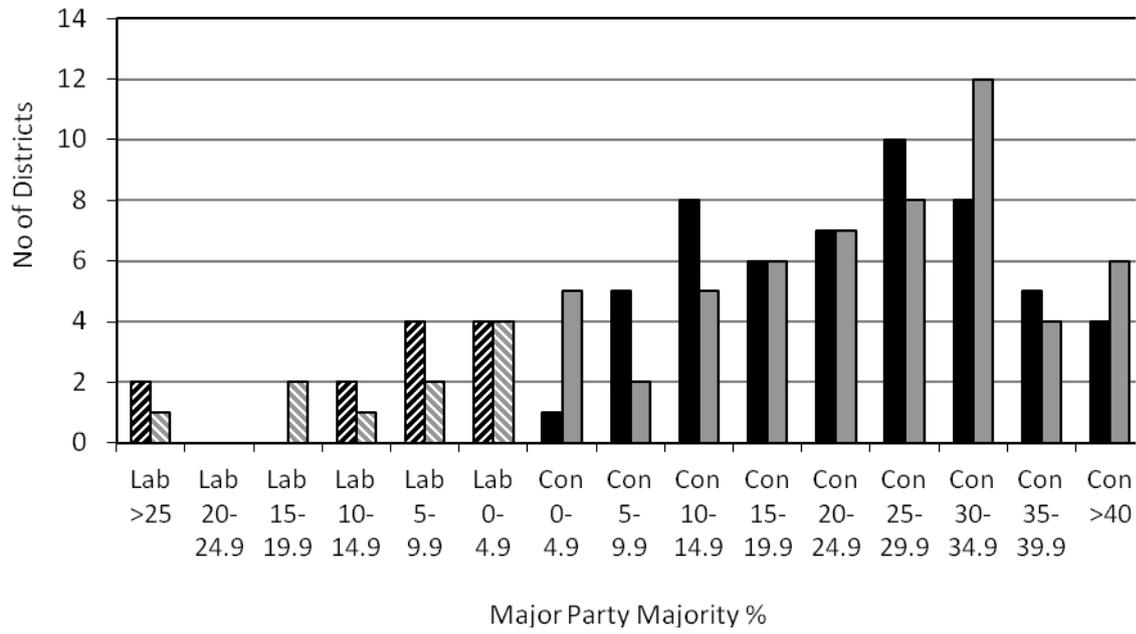
Figure 4: New Zealand Social Credit 'Challenger' Districts by Main Opponent



Source: New Zealand Election Study, available at [www.nzes.org/exec/getdata/NZ\\_elections\\_1946-69.xls](http://www.nzes.org/exec/getdata/NZ_elections_1946-69.xls) and [www.nzes.org/exec/getdata/NZ\\_elections\\_1972-93.xls](http://www.nzes.org/exec/getdata/NZ_elections_1972-93.xls).

Notes: 'Challenger' district defined as one where Social Credit finished in first or second place. Social Credit 1954-1984; Democrats 1987-1990. Excludes Maori districts.

Figure 5: Post-1997 Liberal Democrat-Held Parliamentary Districts: Conservative/Labour Majorities in the 1950s

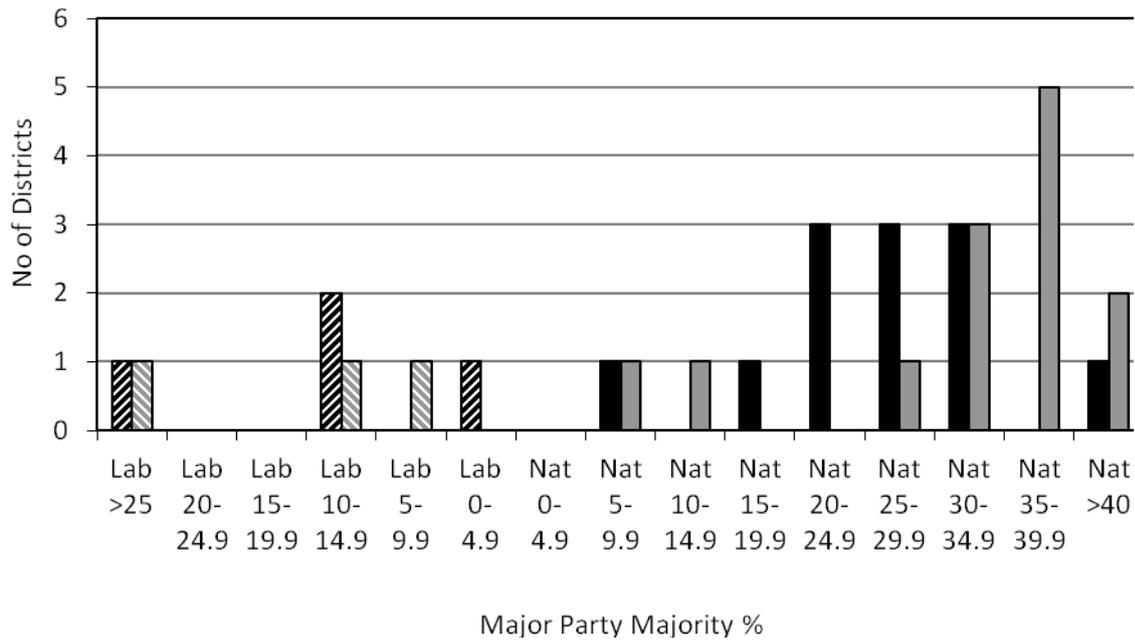


Source: 'United Kingdom general election results since 1832', available at [www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/edates.htm](http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/edates.htm).

Notes: black/black stripes = 1951; grey/grey stripes = 1955. Stripes = Lab, solid = Con. Comparison with closest equivalent districts in 1950s.

Median: 1951 = Con 21.0%; 1955 = Con 23.0%. N = 66 districts (1951) and 65 districts (1955).

Figure 6: Social Credit 'Challenger' Districts 1954-1990: National/Labour Majorities in the 1940s



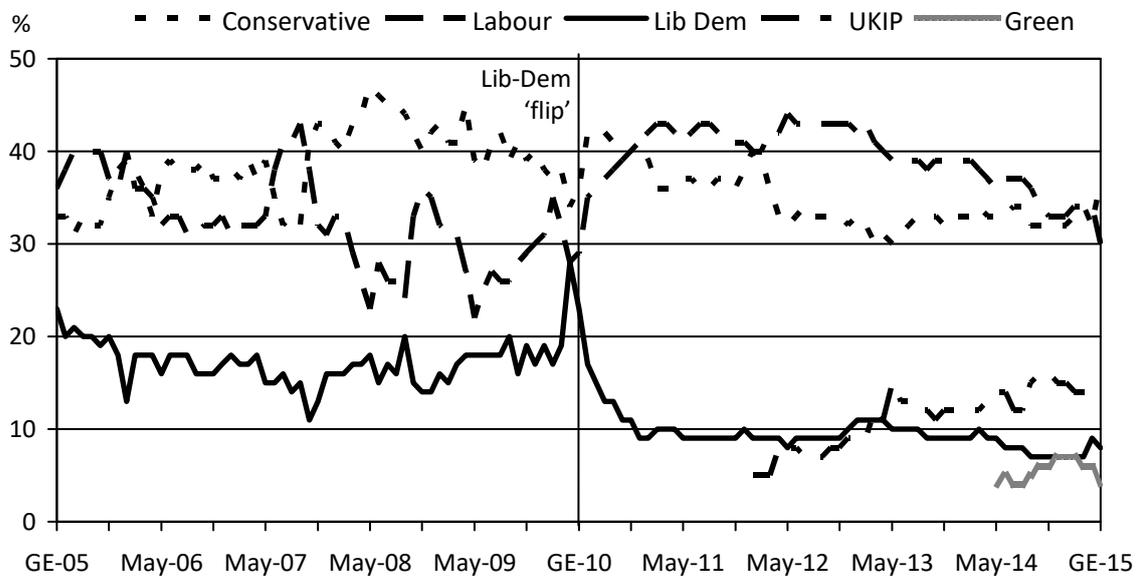
Sources: McRobie (1990: 94-129); New Zealand Election Study, available at [www.nzes.org/exec/getdata/NZ\\_elections\\_1946-69.xls](http://www.nzes.org/exec/getdata/NZ_elections_1946-69.xls) and [www.nzes.org/exec/getdata/NZ\\_elections\\_1972-93.xls](http://www.nzes.org/exec/getdata/NZ_elections_1972-93.xls).

Notes: black/black stripes = 1946; grey/grey stripes = 1949. Stripes = Lab, solid = Nat. Comparison with closest equivalent districts in 1940s.

Median: 1946 = Nat 21.7%; 1949 = Nat 31.8%. N = 16 districts (1946 and 1949).

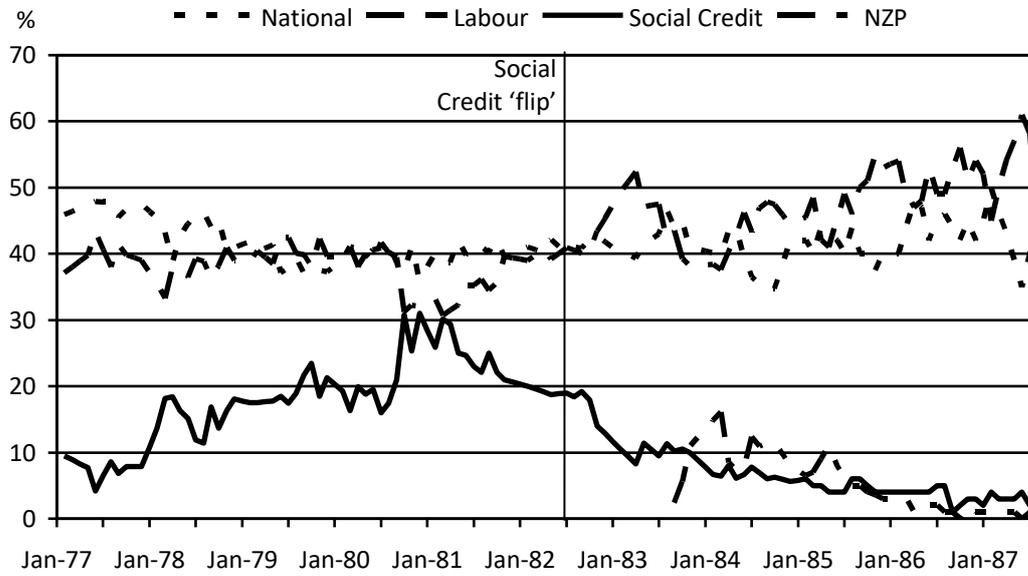
Excludes Maori districts.

Figure 7: UK Parties' Poll Ratings, 2005-2015



Source: YouGov, 'Political trackers 2005 2007', 'Political trackers 2008 2010', and 'Voting intention 2010 to 2015', all available at <https://yougov.co.uk/publicopinion/archive/?year=&month=&category=political-trackers>.

Figure 8: New Zealand Parties' Poll Ratings, 1977-1987



Source: Heylen Research Centre (provided by David Farrar of Curia Market Research Ltd).

Note: Social Credit 1977-1985; Democrats 1985-1987.

*Table 1: Average Combined Vote Share of British Liberals and Nearest Challengers in Liberal-Held Parliamentary Districts 1964-92*

	Ave. Combined 2-Party Vote Share				Ave. Liberal Vote Share			
	ENG	WAL	SCO	All	ENG	WAL	SCO	All
Liberal-Conservative districts	87.5% (48)	72.7% (12)	76.3% (40)	81.2% (100)	47.7%	41.5%	46.2%	46.3%
Liberal-Labour districts	81.3% (20)	73.4% (3)	64.4% (5)	77.4% (28)	45.0%	40.2%	35.5%	42.8%
Liberal-Nationalist districts	-	-	67.7% (2)	67.7% (2)	-	-	44.3%	44.3%
Total	85.7% (68)	72.8% (15)	74.6% (47)	80.2% (130)	46.9%	41.2%	44.9%	45.5%

*Notes:* Each victory counted separately in districts won multiple times. Number of districts in parentheses. Figures include SDP (11 districts).

*Table 2: Average Combined Vote Share of British Liberal Democrats and Nearest Challengers in Liberal Democrat-Held Parliamentary Districts 1997-2010*

	Ave. Combined 2-Party Vote Share				Ave. Lib-Dem Vote Share			
	ENG	WAL	SCO	All	ENG	WAL	SCO	All
Liberal Democrat-Conservative districts	82.9% (139)	75.9% (7)	70.6% (18)	81.3% (164)	46.9%	45.0%	44.6%	46.6%
Liberal Democrat-Labour districts	77.9% (25)	77.2% (2)	66.9% (22)	72.9% (49)	43.4%	45.6%	43.8%	43.6%
Liberal Democrat-Nationalist districts	-	75.4% (2)	60.8% (2)	68.1% (4)	-	43.3%	38.1%	40.7%
Total	82.2% (164)	76.0% (11)	68.2% (42)	79.1% (217)	46.4%	44.8%	43.9%	45.8%

*Source (for Tables 1 and 2):* 'United Kingdom general election results since 1832', available at [www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/edates.htm](http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/edates.htm).

*Notes:* Each victory counted separately in districts won multiple times over different elections. Number of districts in parentheses.

*Table 3: Average Combined Vote Share of New Zealand Social Credit and Largest Major Party in Social Credit 'Challenger' Districts 1954-90*

	1954-90		1978-81	
	N	%	N	%
Social Credit-National districts	51	79.2	26	80.4
Social Credit-Labour districts	6	75.3	4	76.3
Total	57	78.8	30	79.9
Social Credit Average % (National)	51	32.6	26	33.5
Social Credit Average % (Labour)	6	27.8	4	25.7
Social Credit Average % (All)	57	32.1	30	32.5

Source: New Zealand Election Study, available at [www.nzes.org/exec/getdata/NZ\\_elections\\_1946-69.xls](http://www.nzes.org/exec/getdata/NZ_elections_1946-69.xls) and [www.nzes.org/exec/getdata/NZ\\_elections\\_1972-93.xls](http://www.nzes.org/exec/getdata/NZ_elections_1972-93.xls).

Notes: Each first-/second-placed finish counted separately in districts where that was achieved multiple times over different elections. Excludes Maori districts.