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Competition Between Constituency and List Representatives

The elections to the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales were conducted using the mixed-member proportional (MMP) electoral system new to Britain, and some members of these bodies, elected in the two different ways, came into conflict almost right away. Problems arose as list-elected representatives began to ‘shadow’ their constituency-elected counterparts by performing constituency service functions. In Scotland, a panel study of 13 members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) noted the presence of friction between constituency and list members early on, often over who was entitled to casework (McCabe and McCormick 2000). Initially there was less of a problem in Wales, but after the second Welsh Assembly election in 2003, more attention was paid to the practice of shadowing performed by list Assembly Members (AMs). In 2005 the British government began the process of introducing a ban on dual candidacy, where candidates are allowed to stand in both constituency and regional list contests at the same time, for Welsh Assembly elections.

While competition between constituency and list members of German assemblies, most of which are elected by MMP systems, has led to shadowing as well, the practice is considered normal and does not result in the kind of problems seen in Britain. Survey data in Chapters 4 and 5 indicate that differences between Landtag members do exist, however – between how constituency and party list representatives perceive each other, as well as how they carry out their constituency roles. Tensions between German constituency and list representatives are less severe than those between their British counterparts, however, and dual candidacy is the established German practice, and is allowed almost everywhere else where mixed-member electoral systems are used.

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This chapter analyses the comments of MSPs and AMs in an attempt to learn more about the shadowing phenomenon and the competition between constituency and party list representatives more generally. The activities of Scottish and Welsh list representatives are investigated to discover how they come into conflict with their constituency counterparts. MSP and AM comments, as well as some survey data, will assess the attitudes held by British politicians towards the new competition facilitated by the MMP electoral system. The dual candidacy debate over Welsh Assembly elections will show how the Labour Party, creator of the increased pluralism in Welsh politics, tried to constrain this pluralism by pursuing an electoral system change that would harm the party’s opponents. How shadowing operates in Germany and why the practice appears not to elicit the negative reaction seen in Britain is then explored, along with a more general examination of the activities of party list representatives there. Comments and survey data are used to assess how German legislators view their electoral system and each other, and comparisons to another international experience, that of New Zealand, are also made. Finally, the German experience will be compared to what is happening in Scotland and Wales.

Shadowing and constituency service in Scotland and Wales

Taking Scotland and Wales together, 48.5 per cent of constituency representatives responding to the survey in 2000 claimed they were being shadowed, while 33.3 per cent of list representatives admitted to the practice that year. List representatives often target constituency representatives they plan to stand against in the constituency part of the next election by establishing a local presence – acting like a shadow constituency representative. Christine Chapman, Welsh Assembly constituency AM, notes that a regional list AM who planned to stand against her at the next election from the nationalist party Plaid Cymru had a rival ‘constituency office’ in her constituency (Chapman 2001). Chapman’s reaction was not to take anything for granted; the competition makes politicians less complacent, which she believes could be good for voters, although perhaps a bit confusing. ‘If I were a list member, I would work across the region’, and not just concentrate on one constituency, Chapman says (2001).

Relations between other constituency representatives and their list counterparts could be more cordial, however. For Margaret Smith MSP, a degree of shadowing (if it can even be called that) came from Lord James Douglas Hamilton, who was the Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) for her constituency at Westminster before a fellow