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**UNBRIDLED OPTIMISM:  
PUBLIC CHOICE, THE PUBLIC SERVICE AND  
ELECTORAL LAW REFORM**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Arts in Social Policy

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses issues that are likely to be confronted by the public service in New Zealand as a result of the advent of electoral law reform.

During the decade since 1984 the institutional arrangements that circumscribe the activities of the core public sector have undergone a process of considerable change. The proposition extended in this research is that the structural configuration that has emerged out of the process of public sector reform will face a number of significant challenges in the emerging political environment.

In the context of a milieu shaped by the imperatives of proportional representation, two particular characteristics of the contemporary public service may prove problematic. Specifically, the nature of the statutory interface between responsible ministers and the chief executives of government organisations may, in conjunction with an 'atomised' core public sector, function so as to compromise both the impartiality of public servants and the ability of an administration to develop and implement policy in a strategically consistent fashion.

The extent to which such difficulties are likely to occur will be the result of the convergence of a series of variables, including the calibre of political leadership provided by future Prime Ministers, and the nature of the advice and guidance provided to public servants in the new climate. Perhaps most significant of all, however, will be the precise configuration of future parliaments returned under the new electoral system. The fusion of the legislative and executive arms of government under New Zealand's constitutional arrangements means that patterns of legislative representation influence the formation of governments; in the future, those patterns may exercise a more direct influence upon the environment within which the public service operates than has historically been the case in New Zealand.

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