

# HOW TO VOTE IN A GENERAL ELECTION IN NEW ZEALAND

Under MMP, every New Zealand citizen or permanent resident over the age of 18 has two votes.

## Party vote

Total **party votes (list votes)** decide how many list seats each party gets in parliament. Every voter has the same selection of parties to choose from, regardless of which electorate the voter is in. Party votes are counted nationally. In 2015 there were 50 list seats that could be allocated. To qualify for a list seat, a party must win 5% of the total number of party votes cast, or win an electorate seat.

Party seats are allocated on a proportional system, so the seats match the party's popularity.

## Electorate vote

Otherwise known as the **candidate vote**, these votes decide the MP who will represent you and your area (electorate) in Parliament. Each electorate has a different selection of candidates to choose from. Some parties do not contest some electorates, although the bigger a party is, the more likely it is to contest more seats. You do not have to belong to a political party to become an MP; you can be independent and run alone, without the support of a party. However, no Independent has ever won an electorate under MMP.

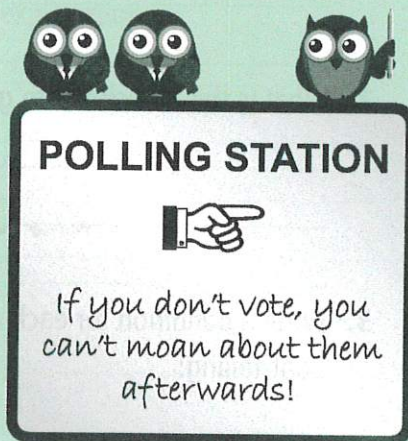
Electorate seats are run on a first-past-the-post or plurality system – the person who receives more votes than anyone else wins, even if they get less than 50% of the vote. In most electorates, the winning MP receives much less than half the total electorate vote.

## How do party votes turn into seats?

Each party's share of seats is filled first by any electorate seats it has won, and then by taking candidates from the party list, which must be published and made available to the voting public well before the election.

**YOU HAVE 2 VOTES**

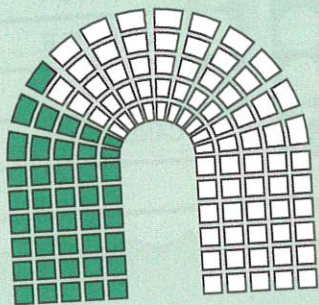
Vote for only one party	Vote for only one candidate
<input type="checkbox"/> PARTY SQUARE	<input type="checkbox"/> CANDIDATE A
<input type="checkbox"/> PARTY DIAMOND	<input type="checkbox"/> CANDIDATE B
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CANDIDATE C
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARTY HEART	<input type="checkbox"/> CANDIDATE D
<input type="checkbox"/> PARTY TRIANGLE	<input type="checkbox"/>







This proportion of party votes



The same proportion of seats in parliament

A party receives a share of seats that closely resembles its share of party votes if it 'crosses the threshold' by winning:

- 5% or more of all the party votes; or
- one or more electorate seats.

If a party gets less than 5% of the nationwide vote, *but* wins an electorate seat, its party vote counts. This is sometimes called **coat-tailing**. A party that does not have a high profile nationally, but has one or two popular candidates, might win more parliamentary seats than its share from the party vote. For example, between 2005 and 2014 the Māori Party had more MPs in Parliament than its share of the vote. While the Māori Party won many Māori electorate seats, it received comparatively little support in the general electorates. As a result, Parliament occasionally ends up with more than 120 seats because a political party is over-represented. This is called an **overhang**. Many people would like to see coat-tailing abolished.

If a party wins less than 5% of the nationwide vote, and does not win an electorate seat, it does not get into Parliament. A party which has some support across the whole country but no candidates popular enough to win an electorate seat will not get any seats in Parliament. Two examples are New Zealand First in 2008 and the Conservative Party in 2014. Both parties won over 4% of the party vote but did not win any electorates, so they did not get into Parliament. Many people would like to see the threshold reduced to 4%, as long as coat-tailing is abolished.

Answers – see **RESOURCES**

### Activity: Seats in parliament

1. How many votes do you get in a New Zealand election? How do the votes differ?

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2. What is the 'threshold' to get into Parliament? Why do you think there is a threshold?

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3. Write a definition for each of the following words.

Coat-tailing:

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Overhang:

4. In the 2008 election, New Zealand First won 4.07% of the party vote but did not win an electorate seat; it received no seats at all in Parliament. In contrast, ACT won 3.65% of the party vote – almost 10 000 fewer votes than New Zealand First – but received five seats in Parliament; it had won the electorate seat of Epsom, so *all* its votes counted.

- a. Why did New Zealand First not receive any seats in Parliament?
- b. Find out why ACT received seats in Parliament, even though it had fewer votes than New Zealand First.
- c. Do you think this result was fair or unfair? Give a reason for your opinion.

5. The 2014 Parliament had 71 electorate seats (7 Māori), and 50 list seats. How many seats would a party have had in Parliament from 2014 if:

- a. it won 30% of the nationwide vote but no electorate seats
- b. it won 10 electorate seats and 10% of the vote
- c. it won 15 electorate seats and 10% of the vote
- d. it won 1 electorate seat and 4.5% of the vote
- e. it won no electorate seats and 4.5% of the vote

6. Explain how a candidate can win an electorate seat without getting 50% of the vote. Create an example with at least four imaginary candidates to support your explanation.



## A New Zealand voting form

Where the official writes down the page and line numbers that relate to where your name is on the electoral roll. They then cover it up with a black sticker to protect your anonymity – the sticker is removed only if people are believed to have voted more than once.

The official who gives you your voting paper must stamp the form to make it legal.

OFFICIAL MARK

[Consecutive Number]

### YOU HAVE 2 VOTES

#### PARTY VOTE

**Explanation**  
This vote decides the share of seats which each of the parties listed below will have in Parliament. Vote by putting a tick in the circle immediately after the party you choose.

Vote for only one party

- LABOUR
- NEW ZEALAND
- NATIONAL
- ALLIANCE
- THE GREENS, THE GREEN PARTY OF AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND
- NZ FIRST
- ROC
- CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS
- UNITED NZ
- CHRISTIAN HERITAGE PARTY OF NEW ZEALAND
- MCGILLICUDDY SERIOUS
- TE TAWHARAU
- REPUBLICAN PARTY
- DEMOCRATS
- ADVANCE NZ
- CONSERVATIVE
- SOCIAL DEMOCRATS
- SUPERANNUITANTS PARTY

#### ELECTORATE VOTE

**Explanation**  
This vote decides the candidate to be elected Member of Parliament for the electorate you live in before the candidate you choose.

Vote for only one candidate

- ALLEN, Fred  
LABOUR
- BAKER, Mary  
NEW ZEALAND
- BURNS, Alistair  
NATIONAL
- ELLIS, John  
ALLIANCE
- GREIG, Tony  
THE GREENS, THE GREEN PARTY OF AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND
- ILLOTT, Anne  
NZ FIRST
- MARTIN, Hamish  
ROC
- NEMETH, Elzabeth  
CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS
- OSBERT, Sebastian  
UNITED NZ
- PEOPLES, Wendy  
CHRISTIAN HERITAGE PARTY OF NEW ZEALAND
- QUENTIN, Oliver  
MCGILLICUDDY SERIOUS
- RAWIRI, Whare  
TE TAWHARAU
- ROSS, Arthur  
REPUBLICAN PARTY
- RUSCOE, Noel  
DEMOCRATS
- SMITH, Eugene  
INDEPENDENT
- TULIP, Belinda  
ADVANCE NZ

The form is alphabetised by the surname of each candidate; their party appears directly opposite their name.

If you have two ticks in a single column (you vote for two candidates, or two parties), the paper is 'spoilt'. You do not have to use both votes; some people vote only for a person or a party.

Some parties do not stand candidates in every electorate – they are listed alphabetically at the bottom of the form.

Once you have voted, fold the form and put it into the specified ballot box. This will have been pointed out to you when you collect your form.

- Final Directions**
1. If you spoil this ballot paper, return it to the officer who issued it and apply for a new one.
  2. After voting, fold this ballot paper so that its contents cannot be seen and place it in the ballot box.
  3. You must not take this ballot paper out of the polling booth.

If you are unsure about how to vote, you can ask for help, *but* electoral officials are not allowed to tell you who to vote for.

Don't write anything on the form – it may be considered 'spoilt' and not counted.

**Activity: Voting form**

1. Why must the official stamp the voting form?  
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2. a. In what order are candidates' names printed on the voting paper?  
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b. Why are the names printed in this order?  
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3. Why are the political parties not printed alphabetically on the form?  
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4. Is a person allowed to ask for help from the electoral officials when voting?  
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5. How is the voter's anonymity protected?  
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6. How could a voting form be spoiled (two ideas)?  
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7. Describe what the voter does with the form after voting.  
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8. In what year will you become eligible to vote?  
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