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# IT'S YOUR VOTE



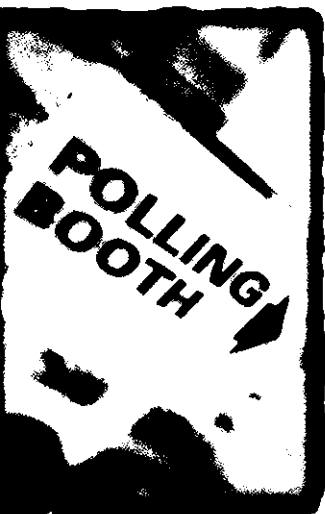
Electoral Commission  
*Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri*

## New Zealand is a parliamentary democracy

- Our Parliament is chosen by all adult New Zealanders.
- A new Parliament is elected at least every three years.
- The Government has to have the support of a majority of MPs.

See pages 3 - 4

# KEY POINTS



## Almost everyone aged 18 and over can vote

- Voting is your chance to have your say in New Zealand's Parliament.
- You are eligible to enrol to vote if you are aged 18 or over and a New Zealand citizen or permanent resident.

See pages 5 - 6

## You MUST be enrolled to vote

- Your name and current residential address must be on the electoral roll.
- If you are a Maori enrolling for the first time you can choose either the General or the Maori electoral roll.
- If you have not enrolled before or you've changed address, you must either enrol or update your details.

See pages 5 - 6



## MMP is a proportional system

- Our voting system is called MMP.
- After the 1999 election Parliament will have 61 General Electorate MPs, 6 Maori Electorate MPs and is likely to have 53 List MPs.
- In general, the more Party Votes a political party gets, the more MPs it is likely to have.

See pages 7 - 10

## You need to know which electorate you are enrolled for

- As well as your Party Vote you can vote for an electorate candidate standing for your electorate.

See pages 11 -12

## You have two votes at a general election

- Your Party Vote is for the political party you most want represented in Parliament.
- Your Electorate Vote is for the person you most want as your local MP.
- Election day is always a Saturday - if you are working the law says you must be given time off to vote.
- There will be special ways for you to vote if you can't get to a polling place in your electorate on election day.

See pages 13 - 15

## Parties need to register too

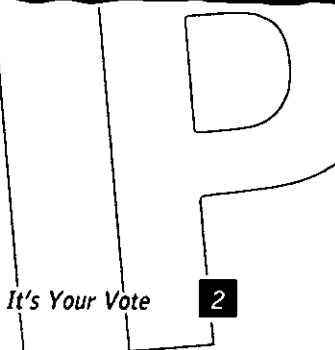
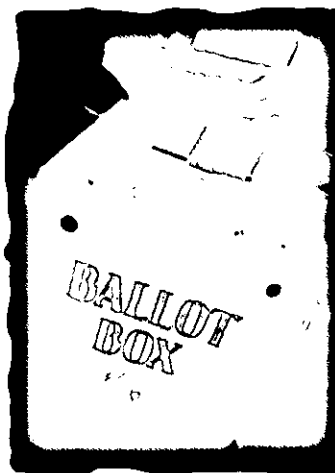
- If they want to contest the Party Vote at an election, political parties have to be registered by the Electoral Commission.

See page 16.

## You can easily find out more

- You can be sent information in another language.
- More detailed information on MMP is available.
- You can ask about anything you're unsure of.

See page 17.



# NEW ZEALAND IS A PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

The MPs and the political parties in New Zealand's House of Representatives (Parliament) are elected by the people.

As such, the parliamentarians represent us.

Elections are held at least every three years. Election day is your chance to *have your say*. It is important that you vote, because the laws passed by Parliament and the decisions made by the Government affect you, your country and the area in which you live.

Parliament's main tasks are to provide government and hold it accountable, to pass laws, vote supply, and to act on grievances

On election day the people of New Zealand vote for the candidates and the political parties they want to represent them.



**New Zealand's democratic system**

Any New Zealand citizen who is enrolled to vote can stand for election to Parliament

A government that has the support of a majority of MPs is formed

The winning candidates enter Parliament and become MPs

## How the Government is formed

The Government is formed from the party or parties in Parliament that have the support of a majority of MPs. All parties not in Government are said to be *in the Opposition*.

A party that gains more than half the seats can form a *majority government* by itself.

If no one party has an outright majority of MPs, two or more parties with a combined majority of seats can form a *majority coalition government*. The parties agree to work together in developing and passing laws and making policy decisions. This is what happened after the 1996 election.

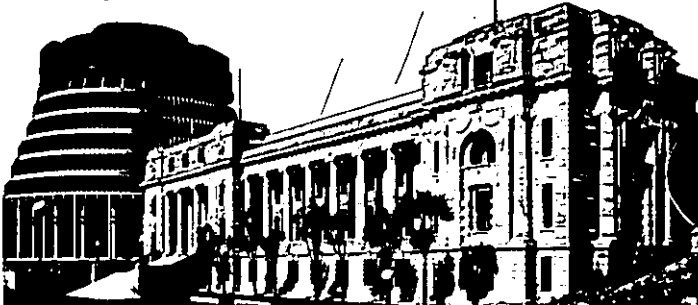
If no one party has an outright majority and no majority coalition can be agreed upon, one or more parties can form a *minority government*, with the support of other parties outside the Government.

The Government cannot act effectively without involving Parliament because it needs parliamentary approval to spend money.

New Zealand is a constitutional monarchy. Our sovereign, the Queen of New Zealand, is the Head of State. The Queen's representative, the Governor-General, has the formal power to appoint the Prime Minister, but that power must always be exercised in a way that is politically neutral and in accordance with democratic principles.

Ultimately, MPs voting in Parliament will have the final say because the Government has to have the support of a majority of MPs who vote on a vote of confidence.

Although an integral part of the process of government, the Queen and Governor-General remain neutral and do not get involved in the political contest.



## Q&A

**Q. What is a Caretaker Government?**

**A.** After the elections, there is a period before a new Government can take office.

*This is especially true if a coalition agreement has to be negotiated after the election, as in 1996. The old government stays in power as a Caretaker Government, but does not make major policy decisions without consulting the new government.*

**Q. What is Cabinet?**

**A.** The main decision making body in Government. Cabinet meets regularly and in secret.

**Q. Can Parliament change or repeal laws introduced by previous Parliaments?**

**A.** Yes. However, for some changes, a larger majority is needed.

In 1893  
New Zealand became the  
first country in the world  
to give women  
the vote.

# Making sure of your vote

Before you can vote, your name **MUST** be on the electoral roll. The electoral roll is a record of all enrolled New Zealand voters, which is kept up to date between elections. You can check the electoral roll at any time at your local Post Shop.

*You will need to enrol* if you have not been enrolled for a New Zealand election before.

*You will need to update your details* if you have enrolled before, but since changed address and have lived at your new location for at least a month.

# YOU MUST BE ENROLLED TO VOTE

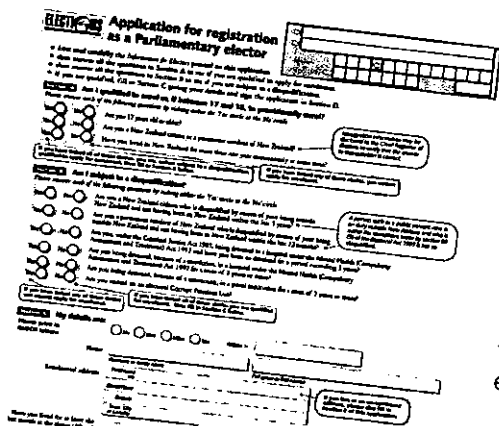
You are eligible to vote if you are aged 18 or over and a New Zealand citizen or permanent resident (unless you are disqualified).

## How to enrol or update your details:

1. Visit your nearest Post Shop or postal agency and ask for an enrolment application form. Or call the Electoral Enrolment Centre's freephone on **0800 Enrol Now (0800 367 656)** between 9am and 5pm weekdays, and ask for an application form to be sent to you.
2. Complete and return your form.
3. You'll be sent confirmation that you are enrolled.

If you are aged 17 now, it's a good idea to fill out an enrolment application form. That way, you'll be automatically enrolled when you turn 18.

To be sure your details are still up to date during election year, you'll be sent a re-enrolment form through the post to check your details. You **MUST** sign, date, and return this in the freepost envelope provided to ensure your name stays on the roll.



## You are disqualified from enrolling if:

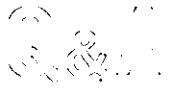
- You are a New Zealand citizen but haven't been here in the last three years (unless you're a public servant or in the defence forces on overseas duties)
- You are a permanent resident of New Zealand, but haven't been here in the last year
- You are in a penal institution serving a sentence of three years or more because of a criminal conviction
- You have been detained in a psychiatric hospital for three years or more following criminal proceedings
- You have been convicted of a corrupt practice (a serious offence against the Electoral Act)

## Enrolling on the Maori Electoral Roll:

If you are of Maori descent and enrolling for the first time, you can choose to go on either the General or the Maori electoral roll. Once enrolled, you cannot change the type of roll you are on until the next Maori Electoral Option which is held every five years, generally after a census.

During the Maori Electoral Option, a card is sent to all Maori electors giving them the option to choose which roll they want to be on for the next five years.

By going on the Maori roll you'll be voting for a Maori electorate MP instead of a General electorate MP. But everyone chooses between the same parties with their Party Vote.



**Q. What if my address details have not changed since the last elections but I haven't received a re-enrolment form?**

**A. Visit the nearest Post Shop or call 0800 Enrol Now (0800 367 656) and ask for a re-enrolment form to be sent to you.**

**Q. What information is recorded on the electoral roll?**

**A. Your name, residential address and occupation all appear on the printed roll for your electorate. This is available to any member of the public at each Registrar of Electors' office and at Post Shops.**

**Q. Is enrolment information used for anything else?**

**A. Information from the electoral roll is used to compile the rolls for local body elections, and to form jury lists. It is also available to scientific or health researchers, candidates and political parties.**

**Q. What if, for safety reasons, I do not wish some people to know where I live?**

**A. If having your name and address on the printed roll could endanger your personal safety, ask for your name to go on the unpublished roll. An individual or organisation will not then be able to use the electoral roll to find your address.**

*If your name is on the unpublished roll, you will need to cast a Special Vote at an election.*

**Q. What should I do if I move to a new permanent address?**

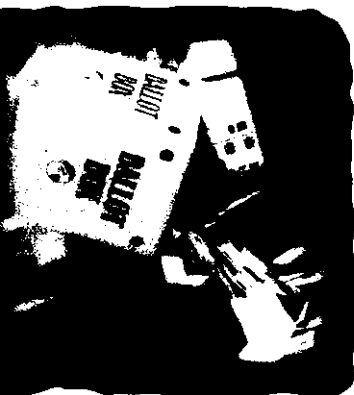
**A. After you've been at your new address for a month, you need to fill in a 'Change of Address Request' form or a new application form. Both are available from any Post Shop.**



## USING MMP

Our voting system is called MMP (Mixed Member Proportional). Under MMP, Parliament's 120 MPs are elected as electorate MPs or as list MPs.

# HOW THE VOTING SYSTEM WORKS



## Party Vote

This vote is for the registered political party you most want to be represented in Parliament. All voters choose between the same parties, whether they are enrolled for a General Electorate or for a Maori Electorate.

## Electorate Vote

This vote is for the individual you most want as your electorate MP. The candidate who gets the most votes becomes the MP for that electorate.

### To qualify:

A registered political party needs to 'cross the threshold' by winning at least 5% of all the Party Votes OR by winning at least one General or Maori Electorate seat.

In general, each qualifying party's share of seats in Parliament is decided by its share of all the Party Votes.

So the more Party Votes a party gets, the more MPs it is likely to have.

### Deciding the number of list seats:

If a party's share of the Party Votes entitles it to more seats than the number of electorate seats it has won, the party gets whatever number of list seats will bring it up to the right total.

But if a party's share entitles it to fewer seats than the number of electorate seats it has won, it still keeps its electorate seats. These are known as *overhang seats* and the total number of seats in Parliament increases by that number until the next election.

### Filling the list seats:

A party's list seats are filled by its list candidates in the order they appeared on the party's list, after deleting any candidates who won electorate seats.



Here's a fictitious election result showing how MMP works.

	PARTY							TOTAL
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	
% of all Party Votes	41	25	17	6	4	4	3	100
Number of seats entitled to	53	32	22	8	5	0	0	120
Number of electorate MPs	34	22	10	0	1	0	0	67
Therefore number of list MPs	19	10	12	8	4	0	0	53

So the first 19 candidates on Party A's list who hadn't won an electorate seat would become list MPs for Party A.

In this example, Party E, Party F, and Party G won fewer than 5% of all Party Votes. But because Party E won an electorate seat, it crossed the threshold and so it was entitled to a share of all 120 seats based on its share of all the Party Votes. Party F and Party G did not cross the threshold, so they won't have any seats in Parliament.

## Q&A

*Q. How do I know who is on a party's list?*

*A. Each household will receive an information pack from the Chief Electoral Office about a week before election day including all the party lists. You can also see the lists at the polling booth when you go to vote. Parties are also likely to advertise their lists.*

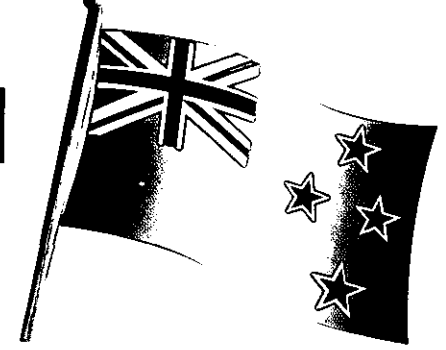
*Q. Under MMP, will there still be by-elections?*

*A. Yes - for electorate seats but not for list seats. If an electorate MP dies or resigns from Parliament there's a by-election for the seat. But a list MP is replaced by the next candidate from the party's list, so long as they are still a party member and are willing to take the seat.*

*Q. When will MMP be reviewed?*

*A. The Electoral Act 1993 requires a parliamentary select committee to begin reviewing New Zealand's current electoral system in the year 2000. It must report to Parliament by mid-2002.*

# THE VOTING SYSTEM



You have 2 Votes

The **Party List** shows candidates in the order the party wants them elected.

## Party Vote



In general, decides the total number of seats for each party.

## Electorate Vote

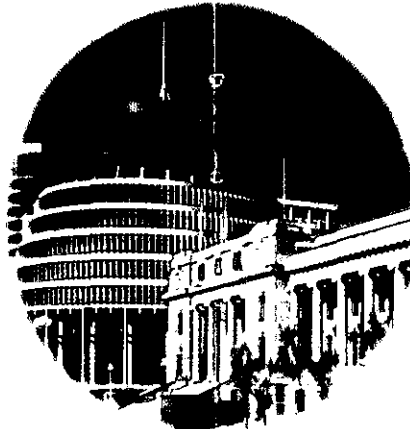


Decides who will be your electorate MP.

## To Qualify

A party qualifies for parliamentary seats by winning **either** at least 5% of Party Votes **or** a General or Maori electorate seat.

## Parliament



### List Seats

These are added to a party's electorate seats so it has the correct number of seats it is entitled to based on its Party Votes.

### Electorate Seats

Filled by candidates who win the most votes in each of the 67 electorates.

**You need to know which electorate you are enrolled for ... so you can cast a valid vote.**

# KNOW YOUR ELECTORATE

Wherever you live in New Zealand, and whether you are on the General roll or the Maori roll, you are enrolled for a particular electorate.

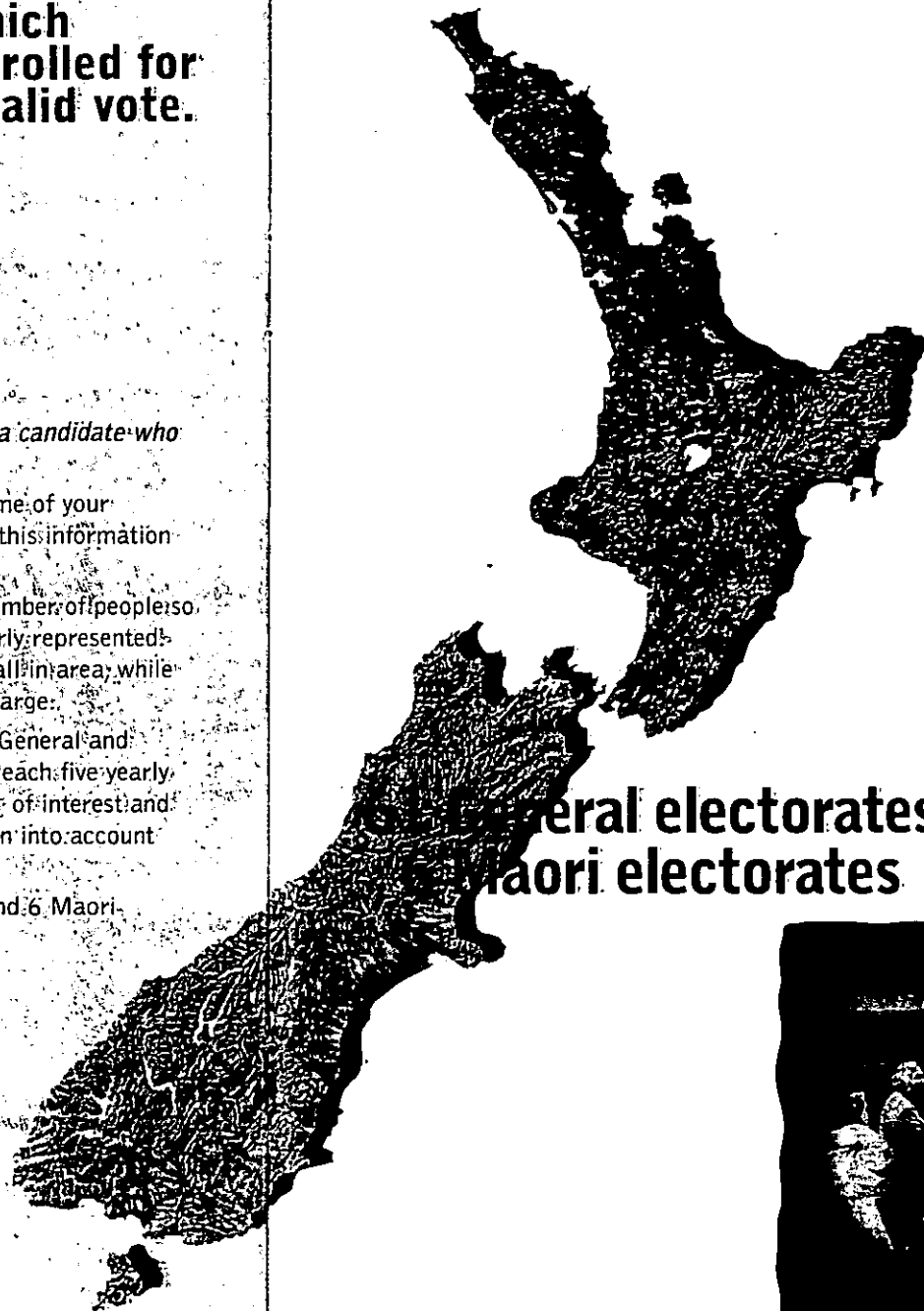
*Your Electorate Vote can only be for a candidate who is standing for your electorate.*

This means you'll need to know the name of your electorate. If you're on the electoral roll, this information will be posted to you.

Each electorate has about the same number of people, so that everyone around New Zealand is fairly represented. This is why some city electorates are small in area, while rural and Maori electorates can be very large.

It's also why the boundaries of all the General and Maori electorates must be checked after each five-yearly census. Other factors such as community of interest and topographical features must also be taken into account when electorate boundaries are decided.

There will be 61 General electorates and 6 Maori electorates at the 1999 election.



**General electorates**  
**Maori electorates**

## Q&A

*Q. What if I own homes in different electorates?*

*A. You must enrol for the one address you consider to be your home.*

*Q. Why will there be more electorates at the 1999 election?*

*A. New Zealand's population has increased, and more people have registered on the Maori roll. To keep about the same number of people in each electorate, one Maori electorate and one General electorate have been added. The overall number of MPs (120) is likely to be the same so there will be two fewer list MPs.*



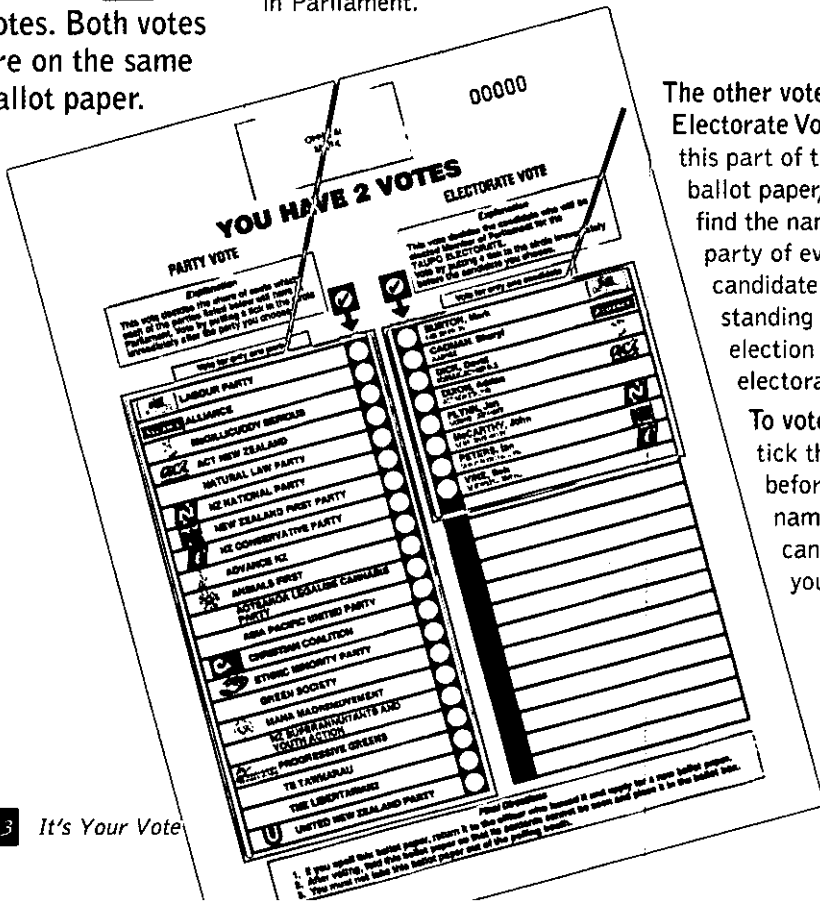


# WHAT TO DO ON ELECTION DAY

Remember, when you go to a polling booth on election day - you have two votes. Both votes are on the same ballot paper.

One vote is your Party Vote. On this part of the ballot paper, you'll find the name of every registered political party that has nominated a party list.

To vote - simply tick the circle after the name of the party you most want to be represented in Parliament.



The other vote is your Electorate Vote. On this part of the ballot paper, you'll find the name and party of every candidate standing for election as your electorate MP.

To vote - just tick the circle before the name of the candidate you prefer.



# Q&A

## Where to vote

You can vote at any polling booth in your electorate. These are in public places such as school and church halls. Before election day, the Chief Electoral Office will send a *Voter's Guide* to each household which has the locations of all the polling booths in that electorate. You will also be able to call the electoral freephone number, **0800 800 610**.

Voting only takes a few minutes. If you are working your employer must give you time off to vote.

An official will check your name against the electoral roll and give you a voting paper. Take this into a private booth to make your vote, then put your voting paper into the ballot box. No-one knows how you have voted except you.

You can cast an early vote if you are going to be away from your electorate on election day or you can go to any polling place on the day and ask for a Special Vote. If you are overseas contact the electorate's returning officer or the Chief Electoral Office (see page 17) or the nearest New Zealand embassy.

If you know before election day that you will be unable to reach a polling booth (for example if you will be at sea) contact the returning officer or call **0800 800 610** and arrange to vote before election day.

If you're in a hospital, maternity or rest home, you'll be given the opportunity to vote there.

*Q. Which of my two votes is more important?*

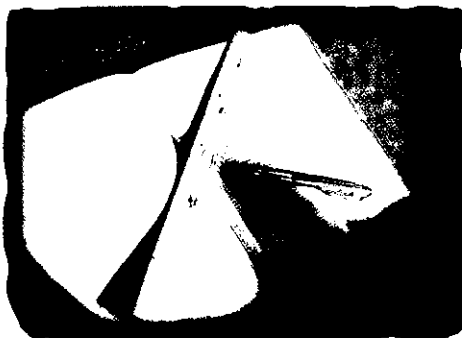
*A. Your Party Vote and your Electorate Vote are both important ... for different reasons. The Party Vote is important because it decides each registered political party's share of Parliament's 120 seats. Of course, the more seats a party has, the more influence that party is likely to have in deciding how New Zealand is run and what laws will be passed. The Electorate Vote is also important because it lets you say who you want to represent your electorate in Parliament.*

*Q. Do I have to cast both votes?*

*A. No. You can cast both votes, or just one. It's your choice.*

*Q. Can my Electorate Vote candidate be for a different party from my Party Vote?*

*A. Absolutely. You could give your Electorate Vote to a candidate from the same party as your Party Vote ... by ticking circles on the same line of the ballot paper. On the other hand, you could vote for a candidate from a different party, or for an independent candidate if one is standing in your electorate ... by ticking circles on different lines. It's up to you.*



**Q. Who can cast a Special Vote?**

*A. Anyone who is unable to get to a polling place in their electorate on election day, including those people who may be ill or infirm. It can also be used by anyone whose name is not on the printed roll but believes it should be.*

**Q. What is a Tangata Whenua vote?**

*A. It's similar to a Special Vote. It is used by voters on the Maori roll to enable them to vote at polling places in their electorate that don't have ordinary Maori voting facilities available.*

**Q. When are votes counted?**

*A. After polling closes, all the votes in each electorate are added up, and preliminary results are announced on election night. Final results are declared about two weeks later. This allows time for receiving Special Votes cast in New Zealand and overseas.*

**Q. How can I contact an MP?**

*A. Their offices are listed under Members of Parliament in the Blue Pages of the telephone book. You can also write to an MP by sending a letter c/o Parliament Buildings, Wellington, and you don't need a stamp.*

# Parties need to register too

If they want to be able to contest the Party Vote in an election, political parties have to be registered with the Electoral Commission before they can nominate a party list.

Independent candidates and members of an unregistered party are able to contest electorate seats using their party name, but they can't contest the Party Vote.

By law, all registered parties have to give an audited return of their election expenses to the Electoral Commission after the election. The returns and the auditors' reports are available for public inspection.

Registered parties have to provide an annual return of the donations they receive at both the national and the electorate levels no later than 30 April each year. These returns are also available for public inspection.

Information about registered parties, including their addresses and other details, is available from the Electoral Commission.



## Q&A

*Q. How do registered parties put their party lists together?*

*A. By law, the parties must use democratic procedures to select their parliamentary candidates.*

*Q. Can a candidate standing for an electorate seat be included in a party list as well?*

*A. Yes. Such dual candidates are allowed, but if they win an electorate seat their name comes off the party list when the list seats are allocated and the next person below them takes their place on the list.*

*Q. How many members are needed before a party is eligible for registration?*

*A. 500 who are eligible to enrol as electors and have paid a membership fee.*



# Like to know more?

If you have any questions or would like more information, here are the names and addresses of the electoral agencies.

For more information on the electoral system:



**Electoral Commission**  
*Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri*

View the electoral website at  
[www.govt.nz/elections](http://www.govt.nz/elections)

or contact

**Electoral Commission**

Box 3050, Wellington

Phone (4) 474 0670, Fax (4) 474 0674

E-mail: [elect@netlink.co.nz](mailto:elect@netlink.co.nz)

To enrol or check whether you're on the electoral roll:

Visit your local Post Shop or postal agency or call the Registrar of Electors in your electorate (listed under New Zealand Post in the white pages of the phone book).

To have an enrolment form sent to you, call  
Freephone 0800 Enrol Now (0800 367 656)

or contact

**Electoral Enrolment Centre**

Box 190, Wellington

Phone (4) 801 0700, Fax (4) 801 0709

E-mail: [enrol@netlink.co.nz](mailto:enrol@netlink.co.nz)



To find out about arrangements for Special Votes or polling places:



Call Freephone 0800 800 610

or contact

**Chief Electoral Office**

Box 3220, Wellington

Phone (4) 495 0030, Fax (4) 495 0031

E-mail: [chief.electoral.office.nz@justice.govt.nz](mailto:chief.electoral.office.nz@justice.govt.nz)

**Electoral Commission**

Level 6, Greenock House

39 The Terrace

PO Box 3050

Wellington, New Zealand

Tel (4) 474 0670 Fax (4) 474 0674

email: [elect@netlink.co.nz](mailto:elect@netlink.co.nz)

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