

March 2, 2020

Briefing: Election 2020

New Zealand will hold a General Election on September 19, 2020, for all 120 seats in the House of Representatives. A binding referendum on voluntary euthanasia legislation and a non-binding referendum on cannabis legislation will be held at the same time.

Timetable

Friday 19 June

Regulated period for election advertising expenses begins.

Around this time the public service will start to wind down work on any new initiatives.

Wednesday 12 August

Dissolution of Parliament. Legislation must pass before the House rises on 6 August 2020.

During the final lead up to the election date, campaigning will start to take up much of Ministers' time. After this date, Ministers and officials will generally only focus on policy work that is likely to be completed before the election, and any urgent business.

Sunday 16 August

Writ Day: The Governor General issues formal direction to the Electoral Commission to hold the election. It is issued within seven days of the dissolution of the previous Parliament.

Writ Day is also the first official day of the 'election period' that allows party-political election advertising to be broadcast. The Electoral Commission allocates a set amount of broadcasting time to parties, which they must adhere to, and public money to pay for it — based predominantly on the results of the previous election.

Wednesday 2 September

Overseas voting starts

Monday 7 September

Advance voting starts

Friday 18 September

Advance voting ends

Friday 18 September midnight

Regulated period ends. All election and referendum advertising must end. Signs must be taken down by midnight.

Saturday 19 September

- Election day. Voting places open from 9.00am to 7.00pm
- Election night. Preliminary election results released progressively from 7.00pm.
(*Referendum votes will not be counted on election night*)
- Caretaker Period begins and applies until a new government is formed.
- Under New Zealand's MMP system, it is almost certain parties will need to conduct negotiations in order to form a government. This process can take a number of weeks.

Friday 2 October

Preliminary referendum results will be released.

Friday 9 October

Official results for the 2020 General Election and referendums declared.

Thursday 15 October

Last day for the return of the writ. The successful candidates are considered to be members of Parliament from the day after the return of the writ.

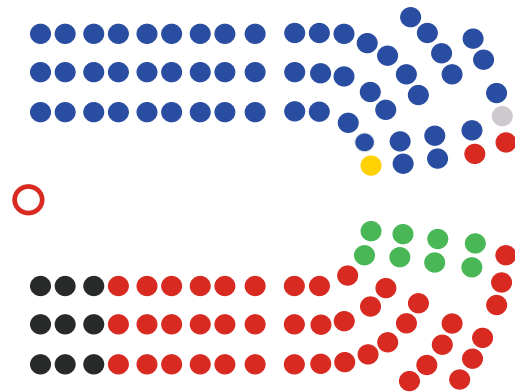
Current make up of NZ Parliament

GOVERNMENT

- Labour 46
- NZ First 9
- Green 8

OPPOSITION

- National 55
- Act 1
- Independent 1



Current polling

Recent public polls show a tight race between a Labour and Greens Government or National and ACT Government. On current public polling, New Zealand First is out of Parliament. We understand recent polling conducted for Labour by UMR has the race much more in favour of a Labour-led Government. In all polling, Jacinda Ardern is heavily favoured over Simon Bridges as preferred Prime Minister.

	TVNZ / COLMAR BRUNTON		NEWSHUB / REID RESEARCH	
	Party vote	Seats	Party vote	Seats
National Party	46%	59	43.3%	56
Labour Party	41%	52	42.5%	55
Green Party	5%	7	5.6%	7
New Zealand First	3%	0	3.6%	0
Māori Party	1%	0	0.9%	0
ACT	2%	2	1.8%	2
Result:	<i>National/ Act Government</i>		<i>Labour/ Green Government</i>	

Preferred PM	TVNZ / Colmar Brunton	Newshub / Reid Research
Jacinda Ardern (Labour)	42%	38.7%
Simon Bridges (National)	11%	10.6%
Judith Collins (National)	3%	N/A
Winston Peters (NZ First)	3%	N/A

Referenda (TVNZ/ Colmar Brunton)	Support	Oppose
Cannabis legislation	39%	51%
Voluntary euthanasia	65%	25%

Key Election Themes

- The central question of the election is shaping up to be — has Labour delivered enough?
- Labour will argue they are making good progress fixing problems they inherited and still have more work to do.
- National will argue that Labour has failed and it's time to restore National to power.
- Whether or not the smaller parties, particularly New Zealand First, make it back into Parliament will be a major determinant of which bloc can form a majority.



Labour Party

Positioning: Centre-left

Leader: Jacinda Ardern

Key message: Jacinda Ardern and Labour inherited major social and infrastructure deficits. Labour is making progress tackling the big issues but there's more to do.

Priority areas:

- Housing
- Health (including mental health)
- Education
- Infrastructure
- Poverty and child wellbeing
- Climate change

Commentary:

Labour intends to fight the election on what it has delivered so far, and the promise of more to come. Labour will point to results, and unfinished business, across a swathe of policy areas including health, education, housing, poverty, climate change, and infrastructure. At the same time, it will fight criticism it has not delivered as much as promised or fast enough.

Jacinda Ardern's popularity and proven abilities as a leader in tough times will also be a major theme for Labour, in contrast to the unpopular and unproven Bridges. Ardern has called for a positive, fact-based campaign, which reflects her genuinely held views and also sets her in contrast to Bridges more negative approach.

Labour also needs to pay attention to its governing partners. On current polling, New Zealand First would be out of Parliament after the election and the Greens are also perilously close to the 5% party vote threshold it needs. Labour will want to show it has a stable government and give its allies room to win votes by offering distinct policies while not coming into conflict. Labour may also consider whether to try to help New Zealand First to win an electorate seat to ensure their return to Parliament if their party vote is below 5%. However, if New Zealand First continues to be dogged by electoral funding scandals this may cause Ardern to want to keep distance between Labour and its coalition partner.



National Party

Positioning: Centre-right

Leader: Simon Bridges

Key message: Labour has failed to deliver on its promises. National can get the job done.

Priority areas:

- Cost of living (tax cuts)
- Crime
- Infrastructure (mostly roads)

Commentary:

Simon Bridges has said that National will campaign on law and order, the cost of living, and infrastructure (mostly roads), with a heavy emphasis on arguing the Government has failed to deliver on its promises. Tax cuts pitched politically at middle-income earners will be a central policy plank for National. Bridges has also signalled the party would roll back a number of the current Government's policies including fees-free tertiary education, increased protection for tenants, the ban on foreign buyers investing in housing, KiwiBuild, and the Provincial Growth Fund.

National is currently running an aggressively negative campaign focusing on perceived Government failures, with a major focus on social media. This is inspired by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison's recent election victory.

For National, the lack of potential governing partners apart from the one-seat ACT Party means it needs to secure a large portion of the party vote itself, likely above 45%. This is especially the case given Bridges has ruled out working with New Zealand First. National now requires New Zealand First to be unable to win any seats in Parliament (by polling under 5% of the party vote and not winning any electorates). This would knock out one of Labour's allies and allow National and ACT to win a Parliamentary majority with less than 50% of the vote. National faces a disadvantage given the historic unpopularity of its leader, however, this has not yet dented the party's vote according to public polls.

Green

Green Party

Positioning: Environmental left

Co-Leaders: James Shaw & Marama Davidson

Key message: A stronger Green Party will mean a more progressive Ardern-led Government

Priority areas:

- Climate change
- Environment
- Poverty
- Transport

Commentary:

The Greens are campaigning on the basis that a stronger Green Party can deliver a more progressive and a more environmentally focused Ardern-led Government. They are looking to demonstrate wins, while also appealing to left-leaning voters who believe the Government has not gone far enough or fast enough on key issues such as climate change, housing, and poverty.

The Greens have the challenge of showing they offer something more radical than Labour without being cast as extremists and still looking like a stable governing partner. They also need to be wary of being overshadowed by Ardern's popular appeal.

**New Zealand First****Positioning:** Populist**Leader:** Winston Peters**Key message:** Only NZ First can deliver for the regions and keep Labour and the Greens in check.**Priority areas:**

- Regional development
- Transport
- Support for older New Zealanders

Commentary:

New Zealand First will want to demonstrate success in delivering for the regions through the Provincial Growth Fund, transport investment, and being a stable part of the Coalition Government that has anchored it in the political centre. They will be campaigning on their ability to keep Labour and the Greens in check in order to lure National voters (however, this strategy relies on those voters believing National cannot win). To this end, New Zealand First is already becoming more oppositional towards progressive policies, for example blocking the Greens' feebate policy to increase the uptake of electric vehicles.

There is a particularly bitter conflict emerging between New Zealand First and the National Party since Bridges ruled out working with them. National is attempting to drive New Zealand First's vote below 5% by denying it the role of kingmaker and miring it in scandal (both parties are currently facing serious donations scandals). New Zealand First will focus heavily on the seat of Northland, which it hopes to win back from National. Winning this seat would mean the party no longer needs to reach the 5% threshold to be eligible to win seats in Parliament.

**ACT Party****Positioning:** Libertarian right**Leader:** David Seymour**Key message:** A stronger ACT will get Labour out of power**Priority areas:**

- Opposition to proposed hate speech laws
- Opposition to gun control
- Crime
- Tax

Commentary:

ACT is looking to grow its party vote, after three successive elections winning only the electorate of Epsom and failing to bring in any additional list MPs. A key election theme for ACT is opposing the new hate speech and gun control laws, that are being developed in the wake of the March 15 massacre. ACT hopes to win conservative and libertarian voters reacting against these changes.

**Māori Party**

Positioning: Indigenous rights

Leader: Che Wilson (President)

Key message: Only the Māori Party can give Māori a genuine voice in government.

Priority areas:

- Whānau Ora funding
- Reform of Oranga Tamariki
- Ihumātao

Commentary:

The Māori Party is seeking to return to Parliament in 2020, after being knocked out at the 2017 election. The party has recognised that its nine years supporting National in Government, from 2008-2017, was deeply unpopular with Māori voters (who lean strongly to the left) and has indicated it would likely support Labour next time if given the opportunity.

They will likely argue that Labour is not properly representing Māori interests and only the Māori Party can be trusted to do so. Whether this message will gain traction among Māori voters so early in Labour's term is uncertain.

The Māori Party is currently the only party outside of Parliament that stands a credible chance of winning seats in 2020.

Electoral system

To form a Government, a party or group of parties must command the support of a majority of Members in the House of Representatives. Currently, the House of Representatives has 120 seats, of which the Labour-led Government holds a majority with 63 seats. The governing parties are Labour, New Zealand First (in coalition with Labour), and the Green Party (in a confidence and supply agreement with Labour).

Under the Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP) electoral system, voters have two votes: one for a party and one for an electorate candidate. Parties must win at least 5% of the party vote or an electorate to win seats. The number of seats that a party receives is generally proportional to its share of the party vote. The most popular candidate in each electorate wins that seat. Each party that wins either an electorate or more than 5% of the party vote is entitled to additional members elected from party 'lists' when needed to make up its total number of seats proportional to its share of the party vote. Electorate and List MPs have equal voting power and rights in the House.

The system has a number of quirks that affect parties' strategies:

- If a party wins more electorate seats than its proportion of party votes, an 'overhang' is created and more seats are added to Parliament for those supra-proportional seats.
- If a party wins less than 5% of the party vote but wins an electorate seat, it also gets any additional list seats proportional to its share of the party vote. This allows list MPs to win

- seats on the 'coattails' of an electorate MP despite the party polling under 5%.
- There are two layers of electorates: General seats and Māori seats. Voters of Māori descent have the option to register on either the Māori roll or general roll.

Parties can exploit these features in several ways. For example, the National Party does not seriously contest the heavily conservative electorate of Epsom and encourages its supporters to give their candidate vote to the ACT Party candidate. ACT polls well below 5%, however, Epsom gives it a lifeline and if its party vote is sufficient, it can bring in additional list MPs on the Epsom MPs' coattails. Labour has the option of making similar deals to try to gift seats to its support parties if they are polling below 5% but does not tend to do this on any formal basis.

Major parties can also attempt to 'knock out' their opponent's support parties. National, for example, is aiming to ensure New Zealand First gets less than 5% of the party vote and won't be able to win an electorate, thereby depriving Labour of an ally. Last election, Labour successfully knocked the Māori Party and United Future out of Parliament, leaving National with only one ally— ACT.

In the Māori seats, the vote traditionally leans heavily towards Labour, so the Māori Party encourages voters to give their party vote to Labour and vote for the Māori Party candidate as a 'two for one' deal that creates an overhang and increases the total number of Māori MPs.

Further information

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