

NEW ZEALAND

Date of Elections: 28 November 1981

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the seats in Parliament on the normal expiry of its term. Previous elections took place on 25 November 1978.

Characteristics of Parliament

The unicameral Parliament of New Zealand, the House of Representatives, comprises 92 members elected for 3 years. Of these, 88 are members for "general" electoral districts, while 4 are members for electoral districts set aside for representatives of the aboriginal *Maoris*, who account for one-tenth of the population.

Electoral System

Every person 18 years of age or over who is ordinarily resident in New Zealand and who has resided continuously in the country for at least one year may register as an elector. Such a person may vote in that electoral district in which he has resided continuously for three months immediately preceding the date of his application for registration. Persons of the Maori race, and anyone who is a descendent of a person of the Maori race and who wishes to be considered as a Maori, may register and vote either in the general electoral district in which they reside or in one of the four Maori electoral districts.

Persons suffering from various forms of insanity or mental disorder, those who have been convicted of corrupt electoral practices within the preceding three years, and persons incarcerated in any penal institution are disqualified from registering as electors.

Electoral rolls are drawn up for each electoral district by Registrars of Electors. They are kept up to date by means of a system of continuous registration of voters, reprinted annually, and are completely revised every three years. While it is compulsory to register as an elector, there is no legal obligation to vote.

All registered electors who are citizens of New Zealand are qualified to be members of Parliament. In addition, persons who were registered as electors on 22 August 1975 are qualified to be parliamentarians regardless of their nationality.

If a public servant is nominated as candidate, he must be placed on leave of absence until after the election and, if elected, vacates office as a public servant.

Candidates need not be members of a political party. Each must be nominated by at least two electors of the district for which he seeks election, by a day which must not be less than 20 nor more than 27 days prior to polling day. A deposit of NZ\$ 100 is compulsory and is forfeited by the candidate if he receives less than one-fourth of the total number of votes obtained by the victor. Individual election expenses must not exceed NZ\$ 4,000.

New Zealand is divided into 92 electoral districts. Each district returns one member to Parliament on a simple majority system.

By-elections are held to fill any parliamentary seat falling vacant between general elections.

General Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

The 1981 election date was set two months earlier, on 28 September.

For the third consecutive election, the three parties represented in Parliament were led by the same leaders - Mr. Robert Muldoon (Prime Minister - National Party), Mr. Wallace Rowling (Leader of the Opposition - Labour Party) and Mr. Bruce Beetham (Leader of the Social Credit League).

The major issues in the campaign involved the Government's emphasis on its "Think Big" strategy of capital-intensive development projects in contrast with the Opposition's wish to stimulate the growth of small-scale local industries, and the legacy of bitterness left over from a rugby tour by a team from South Africa earlier in the year. On the latter issue the Government, while disapproving of the tour, decided that it could not interfere with the decision of the independent sporting body responsible for rugby in New Zealand to invite the South Africans, while the Opposition maintained that the Government should step in and itself call off the tour if, as proved to be the case, the sporting body failed to do so.

In opinion polls during 1978-1981, the third party, the Social Credit League, had consistently enjoyed a degree of support and had even captured a seat from the Government at a by-election in September 1980. There was considerable speculation that it might well hold the balance of power following what was seen as a very close-fought election. The Party fielded its candidates in all the constituencies. The new *Maori* party - *Manu Motuhake* ("self-government") - also put up candidates in the four *Maori* constituencies.

The National Party was returned to power with a narrow overall majority. The vote was very close in several constituencies, necessitating a count of absentee and overseas ballots to determine the winner. Once again the Labour Party obtained slightly more votes in total than the National Party. But this represented a very small percentage of the total votes cast in the election. The Social Credit League gained a considerably increased percentage of the total votes cast but this was not concentrated enough in particular areas to enable it to do more than retain the seats it held at dissolution. In the result, very few seats changed hands - only five in all, with a net gain of three to the Labour Party, one fewer than it needed to deny the National Party an overall parliamentary majority. Final results gave the NP 47 seats to Labour's 43, Social Credit League holding on to its two seats. In this context, Mr. Muldoon named a new 19-man Cabinet on 11 December.

Statistics

1. *Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats
in the House of Representatives*

Number of registered electors.	2,034,747	
Voters.	1,860,564	(91.44%)
Blank or void ballot papers.	59,261	
Valid votes.	1,801,303	

Political Group	Number of Candidates	Votes obtained		Number of Seats	Number of Seats held at Dissolution	Number of Seats won at Previous Election
National Party	92	698,508	38.78	47	50	51
Labour Party.	92	702,630	39.01	43	40	40
Social Credit League.	92	372,056	20.65	2	2	1
Values Party.	15	3,460	0.19	—	—	—
Others.	46	24,649	1.37	—	—	—
				92	92	92

2. *Distribution of Representatives according to Professional Category*

Lawyers.	16
Farmers.	14
Trade and commerce.	10
Teachers (primary and secondary school)	1
Public service.	x
Trade unionists.	8
Lecturers (university).	6
Accountants.	5
Doctors.	3
Farm-related.	3
Real estate.	2
Social work.	2
Others.	6
	92

3. *Distribution of Representatives according to Sex*

Men	84
Women	8
	~92~

4. *Distribution of Representatives according to Age Group*

Under 30 years	4
30-34	10
35-39	16
40-44	14
45-49	17
50-54	13
55-59	9
60 and over	9
	92

Average Age of Representatives: 45.8 years