



Post-election round-up: New Zealand voters' attitudes to the current voting system

The topic:

Following on from the recent general election, there has been much discussion in the media about how events unfolded and the role the current voting system played in the outcome of the election.

For example, the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) electoral system, that replaced the First Past the Post (FPP) system by referendum in 1993, has come under scrutiny in terms of how it impacted this year's result.

While the new government has stated they will retain the Māori seats, there has also been much debate recently about their future.

The idea of compulsory voting being introduced, similar to our Australian counterparts, has also been discussed, as has whether all voters should be required to show an appropriate form of identification at the polling station.

The policy areas outlined by the newly elected Labour-led government have also been widely reported in the media, with speculation existing on how the coalition government will fare in their initial months in office.

This month, Research New Zealand's social poll aimed to gauge the opinions of voters on these topics. Conducted online between 25 October and 6 November 2017, this poll was completed with a nationally representative sample of adult New Zealanders who had voted in the general election.

Much like the outcome of this year's general election, opinion was often divided on many aspects of New Zealand's current voting system. But there was a clear message in terms of where voters expected the new government to focus in terms of policy.



Key results

The key results are as follows:

- ◆ More than one-half of respondents (56 percent) believed voters should be required to provide appropriate ID at the polling booth, and one-third (34 percent) stated they would like to see compulsory voting introduced.
- ◆ Views on the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) voting system were relatively polarised. Almost a half of respondents (47 percent) reported that they were satisfied with the current system; however, more than one-third (37 percent) claimed they were not.
 - ◆ When asked to agree or disagree with a number of statements about MMP, almost one-half of respondents (47 percent) agreed that the 'MMP voting system results in a government that better represents all New Zealanders'. Thirty-two percent disagreed.
 - ◆ Twenty-eight percent believed that 'coalition governments that result under the MMP system are less effective at running the country than the previous First-Past-the-Post system'. Significantly more people (52 percent) do not agree with this.
 - ◆ The fact that Labour formed the new government, despite National winning the most votes was a worry for some (42 percent). For slightly more respondents (47 percent) this was not an issue.
- ◆ Opinion was also divided when it came to the future of the Māori seats. Forty-one percent of respondents were in favour of them staying, while 44 percent stated they preferred to see them abolished.



Detailed results:

Do changes need to be made at the polling booth?

Respondents were asked two questions which would potentially impact what happens at the polling booth. The first of these questions asked whether a person intending to vote needed to show a form of identification at the polling booth, to prove they were the person that they said they were. Under the current system, this is not required.

As shown in Table 1, 40 percent of respondents believed the system should stay as it is and that no ID should be required when voting. However, significantly more people (56 percent) were in favour of the system changing so that when a person goes to vote, they must provide an appropriate form of identification. Females (61 percent) were significantly more likely to think this when compared with males (50 percent).

Table 1: Support for the provision of Identification (ID) when voting

Q. Under the current system, when a person goes to vote, they do not need to show any form of identification (ID) to prove that they are the person they say they are. Do you believe that the system needs to change so that a person has to show an appropriate form of ID (e.g. a driver's licence or passport), or should the system stay as is?

	Base =	Total 1137 %
I believe a person should be required to provide appropriate ID		56
I believe the system should stay as is (no ID required)		40
Don't know		4
Would prefer not to say		0
Total		100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Respondents were also asked whether they would like compulsory voting to be introduced. A third of respondents (34 percent) believed it should be introduced. However, the majority (59 percent) did not. Those aged 65 years and over (45 percent) were more likely to want to see compulsory voting introduced compared with younger respondents (30 percent of 18-44 year olds and 31 percent of 44-64 year olds).

The verbatim below add context to the results shown in Table 2 overleaf.

Compulsory voting does not give the individual the opportunity to abstain, this is also a democratic right.

Voting can only be compulsory if the final option is 'none of the above'.

If you don't vote you should lose the right, people died for the privilege.



Table 2: Support for the introduction of compulsory voting

Q. Do you think New Zealand should introduce compulsory voting? Compulsory voting means that all eligible citizens would be required by law, to register for and participate in all official elections.

	Base =	Total 1137 %
Yes		34
No		59
Don't know		7
Would prefer not to say		0
Total		100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

How satisfied are New Zealand voters with the current Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) system?

In relation to the MMP system, respondents were first asked to rate themselves in terms of how familiar they were with this voting system. Most respondents considered themselves at least somewhat familiar with it (Table 3). Over three-quarters (79 percent) reported that they were very familiar with the MMP voting system, 16 percent believed they were somewhat familiar and the remaining five percent stated they were not familiar.

Table 3: Level of familiarity with the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) system

Q. In New Zealand we vote using the MMP (Mixed Member Proportional) voting system. How would you rate yourself in terms of how familiar you are with this voting system?

	Base =	Total 1137 %
1 Not at all familiar		2
2		3
3 Somewhat familiar		16
4		29
5 Very familiar		50
Don't know		0
Would prefer not to say		0
Total		100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Respondents were then asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the MMP system. Overall, opinion was mixed, with almost one half (47 percent) of respondents reporting they were satisfied with the current system, another 37 percent were dissatisfied and 16 percent were neutral (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied) (Table 4).

There are significant differences in satisfaction levels across key demographics. For example, males were significantly more likely than females to be satisfied with the MMP system (51 percent and 42 percent respectively). Those in urban areas (49 percent) tended to be more satisfied than those in rural areas (49 percent and 35 percent).

Those aged 65 and over (44 percent) were more likely to be dissatisfied than those aged 18-44 (30 percent).



We also found that the more familiar respondents were with the MMP system, the more satisfied they tended to be with it as New Zealand's current voting system.

The following verbatim provides additional insight.

Since the first MMP election, for me, MMP as a system has delivered exactly what I wanted and expected of it, irrespective of which party gets to form the government. FPP, along with the short 3-year electoral term, encouraged governments in bulldozer behaviour. FPP was all accelerator, very little steering and no brakes. My vote for MMP was a vote for steering and brakes, and it has delivered what I wanted.

I prefer the German MMP system where the highest polling party has the opportunity first of forming government and if unable to, the second highest polling party is given the opportunity. The current situation was ludicrous with NZ First holding both major parties to ransom yet only had a very small percentage of the votes themselves. I would like a system where, before the election, what party the minor parties would support in coalition [is made public]. I could have voted accordingly. I did not feel confident in voting for a minor party as I did not know this.

I think it is terrible that a party that got so few votes controls the establishment of a new government. The tail wagging the dog, not the dog wagging the tail.

I believe MMP is a good voting system as all factions have the possibility of being able to be part of governing the country. However, the 5% threshold eliminates many smaller factions and the setup of formal coalitions creates the same effect as a first-past-the-post government.

Table 4: Level of satisfaction with the MMP system

Q. How satisfied are you with the MMP (Mixed Member Proportional) voting system as New Zealand's current voting system?

	Base =	Total 1134* %
1 Very dissatisfied		22
2		15
3 Neutral		16
4		23
5 Very satisfied		24
Don't know		0
Would prefer not to say		0
Total		100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

*Sub-sample based on those respondents who gave a rating of 1-5 in terms of familiarity of the MMP system.



Respondents were then given a list of three statements about the MMP system and asked to state their level of agreement with each statement. Reflecting the overall satisfaction results (see above), agreement-disagreement is polarised.

For example, almost one half of respondents (47 percent) agreed that the ‘MMP voting system results in a government that better represents all New Zealanders’. This is based on those giving a rating of 7-10. Thirty-two percent disagreed that MMP achieves this (0-3 rating) and 19 percent neither agreed nor disagreed (4-6 rating).

Twenty-eight percent of respondents agreed that ‘coalition governments that result under the MMP system are less effective at running the country than the previous First Past the Post system’. In comparison, significantly more respondents (52 percent) did not agree that coalition governments under MMP are less effective. Sixteen percent were unsure.

The fact that Labour formed the new government despite National winning the most votes was a worry for some (42 percent). However, for slightly more respondents, this was not an issue (47 percent).

Table 5: Level of agreement with the MMP system

Q. Please rate your level of agreement with each of the following:

	Total %
The MMP voting system results in a government that better represents all New Zealanders	
Base =	1134*
Strongly disagree 0	15
1	4
2	7
3	6
4	4
5	9
6	6
7	7
8	10
9	7
Strongly agree 10	23
Don't know	2
Total	100



	Total %
Coalition governments that result under the MMP voting system are less effective at running the country than governments under the previous First Past the Post (FPP) system	
	Base = 1134*
Strongly disagree 0	26
1	8
2	9
3	9
4	4
5	8
6	4
7	5
8	5
9	4
Strongly agree 10	14
Don't know	5
Total	100

	Total %
The fact that the party that got the most votes in the recent election didn't form the new government doesn't worry me	
	Base = 1134*
Strongly disagree 0	26
1	5
2	6
3	5
4	4
5	4
6	3
7	5
8	7
9	4
Strongly agree 10	31
Don't know	1
Total	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

*Sub-sample based on those respondents who gave a rating of 1-5 in terms of familiarity of the MMP system.

What are New Zealand voters' views on the future of the Māori seats?

In terms of the Māori seats, respondents were first asked whether they were aware of these seats. The majority (96 percent) reported that they were aware that under the current electoral system, New Zealand has both general and Māori electorates.

Respondents were then asked, hypothetically-speaking, if a referendum was held today about the future of the Māori seats, which way they would be likely to vote. As shown in Table 6, practically equal numbers of respondents stated they would vote in favour of the Māori seats being retained as would vote for them to be abolished (41 percent and 44 percent respectively). The difference between these results is not significantly different.

However, there are significant differences in the opinions of key demographic groups. For example, males (49 percent) were more likely than females (39 percent) to want to see the Māori seats abolished. Fifty-eight percent of those aged 65 years and over reported that



they believed the Māori seats should be abolished. This result is significantly higher when compared to those aged 18-44 (38 percent) and 44-64 (42 percent).

Similarly, those in rural areas (58 percent) were also more in favour of the seats being abolished compared with their urban counterparts (42 percent). Those who were dissatisfied with the current MMP system (72 percent) were also more likely to believe the seats should be abolished compared with those who were satisfied with MMP (23 percent).

I believe in this day and age that the Māori seats are no longer relevant.

Governance in NZ should reflect 'Te Tiriti o Waitangi' and the partnership between 'The Crown' and 'Māori'.

Enough time has passed where ALL New Zealanders should be considered as one race. We don't provide any special consideration for our Islander or Asian peoples.

In regard to Māori Electorates - I would like them to stay until Māori decide they no longer need them.

I'm happy with the Māori seats at present but long term, as we become a diverse but multicultural society, these should be assimilated.

Finally, of the small but representative number of Māori respondents included in the sample (n=56), more Māori were in favour of the seats staying (57 percent) than being abolished (33 percent).

Table 6: Opinion on the future of the Maori seats

Q. The Māori electorates (or Māori seats) provide for Māori representation in Parliament and the number of Māori who are enrolled on the Māori Roll (as opposed to the General Roll) determines how many Māori electorates there are. Currently, there are seven Māori electorates.

There has been some discussion recently about the future of the Māori electorates, although the new government has stated that it will retain them. However, if a referendum was held today about the future of the Māori electorates, which way would you be likely to vote?

	Base =	Total 1137 %
I would like the Māori electorates/seats to stay		41
I would like the Māori electorates/seats to be abolished		44
Don't know		13
Would prefer not to say		1
Total		100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



What are the most important areas of focus for the new government?

Respondents were provided with a list of policy areas and asked to rate their level of importance as areas of focus for the new government. According to respondents, their order of importance is as follows. Note that with the exception of only one, all were rated important by 50 percent or more of respondents:

- ◆ Public health funding (83 percent).
- ◆ Mental health (78 percent).
- ◆ Crime (75 percent).
- ◆ Child poverty (73 percent).
- ◆ Cleaning New Zealand's waterways (73 percent).
- ◆ Affordable housing (69 percent).
- ◆ Regional development (67 percent).
- ◆ Investment in New Zealand's superannuation fund (65 percent).
- ◆ Overseas housing speculators (64 percent).
- ◆ Income inequality (59 percent).
- ◆ Rental housing (58 percent).
- ◆ The minimum wage (56 percent).
- ◆ Immigration (53 percent).
- ◆ Zero carbon emissions (50 percent).
- ◆ Tertiary education fees (39 percent).



Table 7: Level of importance of key policy areas

Q. How important should each of the following be as areas of focus?

	Total %
Affordable housing	
	Base = 1137
Unimportant (0-3)	9
Neutral (4-6)	21
Important (7-10)	69
Don't know	0
Total	100
Mental health	
	Base = 1137
Unimportant (0-3)	6
Neutral (4-6)	16
Important (7-10)	78
Don't know	0
Total	100
Tertiary education fees	
	Base = 1137
Unimportant (0-3)	29
Neutral (4-6)	33
Important (7-10)	39
Don't know	0
Total	100
Income inequality	
	Base = 1137
Unimportant (0-3)	17
Neutral (4-6)	22
Important (7-10)	59
Don't know	0
Total	100
The minimum wage	
	Base = 1137
Unimportant (0-3)	17
Neutral (4-6)	27
Important (7-10)	56
Don't know	0
Total	100
Child poverty	
	Base = 1137
Unimportant (0-3)	9
Neutral (4-6)	18
Important (7-10)	73
Don't know	0
Total	100



	Total %
Rental housing	
	Base = 1137
Unimportant (0-3)	14
Neutral (4-6)	28
Important (7-10)	58
Don't know	0
Total	100
Public health funding	
	Base = 1137
Unimportant (0-3)	4
Neutral (4-6)	12
Important (7-10)	83
Don't know	0
Total	100
Cleaning New Zealand's waterways	
	Base = 1137
Unimportant (0-3)	6
Neutral (4-6)	21
Important (7-10)	73
Don't know	0
Total	100
Zero carbon emissions	
	Base = 1137
Unimportant (0-3)	21
Neutral (4-6)	27
Important (7-10)	50
Don't know	1
Total	100
Immigration	
	Base = 1137
Unimportant (0-3)	14
Neutral (4-6)	32
Important (7-10)	53
Don't know	1
Total	100
Investment in New Zealand's superannuation fund	
	Base = 1137
Unimportant (0-3)	7
Neutral (4-6)	27
Important (7-10)	65
Don't know	1
Total	100
Crime	
	Base = 1137
Unimportant (0-3)	6
Neutral (4-6)	18
Important (7-10)	75
Don't know	1
Total	100



	Total %
Regional development	
Base =	1137
Unimportant (0-3)	6
Neutral (4-6)	26
Important (7-10)	67
Don't know	1
Total	100
Overseas housing speculators	
Base =	1137
Unimportant (0-3)	13
Neutral (4-6)	21
Important (7-10)	64
Don't know	2
Total	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Comment:

“This is a very interesting set of poll results which reflects, in particular, that New Zealanders have not completely embraced the Mixed Member Proportional system and still have a First Past the Post mentality”, said Research New Zealand Director, Emanuel Kalafatelis.

The Research New Zealand poll of 1,137 people aged 18 years and over was conducted online using the Research New Zealand recruitment panel between 25 October and 6 November 2017. The maximum margin of error is +/- 3.8 percent (at the 95 percent confidence level). The data has been weighted on age to match voter turnout at the most recent general election to ensure it is an accurate representation of the voting population of New Zealand. It was also weighted on gender to match the Census 2013 population data. The poll was not taken on behalf of any organization, but as part of Research New Zealand’s social poll of New Zealanders’ opinions about topical issues.

Contact: Emanuel Kalafatelis
Director
Research New Zealand Limited
P O Box 10-617
Wellington 6143
Ph. 04-462-6401 (DDI); 027-500-4401 (M)

Research New Zealand is an independent, New Zealand-owned research organisation undertaking social and business research.

www.researchnz.com