



## Influence of Party Policies on Voting Intentions

The General Election 2011 is less than a week away, and the parties have now published their election policies and explained them to the public. In a recent article in the New Zealand Herald, Mai Chen quoted Drew Weston, author of *The Political Brain*, to the effect that “voters are influenced by their emotions and feelings, and policies come a distant third”.

At Research New Zealand we have also been interested in discovering to what extent voters are influenced by the policies of the political parties, so we conducted a survey of 500 people 18 years and over to find out.

We read a number of policy statements to the respondents, and asked to what extent they would be more or less likely to vote for a party promoting the policies concerned. The respondents were **not** informed which party promoted each policy. We then asked them which political party they would vote for in the coming General Election.

We expected that it would be possible to classify the respondents into two groups, based on the pattern of responses to the 12 policy statements we asked them about, and that the groups would reflect *Left of Centre* and *Right of Centre* attitudes to the policies concerned.

The analysis created two groups in such a way that the members of each group had more in common with each other than they had with the members of the other group, in terms of their likelihood to vote for a party promoting the policies concerned.

The findings can be summarised as follows:

- ◆ There is a substantial difference between the two groups and they do, in fact, correlate with the party the respondent intends to vote for, as shown in the table on page three. Of those in the *Right of Centre* Group 71 percent would vote for National, and in the *Left of Centre* Group, 52 percent would vote for Labour or the Green Party.
- ◆ Also, of those with *Left of Centre* views, some 31 percent would vote for the National Party. Of those with *Right of Centre* views, some 24 percent would vote for Labour or the Greens.

This is obviously evidence for the fact that while there is more to winning an election than the policies promoted, policies do matter, and are probably not a “distant third” as claimed by Drew Weston.



We also examined whether the groups differed in composition by demographic factors, but found only minor differences.

One can, of course, also determine party support from the table, i.e. National leads with 51 percent, followed by Labour at 30 percent and the Greens at 12 percent. None of the minor parties received more than 2 percent support. The maximum sampling error for this part of the sample, n=344, is  $\pm 5.6$  percent. The table excludes those who did not state a party preference, or were not qualified to vote, or did not intend to vote, which together came to 31 percent.

So, which policies divide the two groups, and which are they more or less agreed on?

- ◆ Working for Families extended to beneficiaries with children (*Left of Centre* 66% support, *Right of Centre* 26 percent support).
- ◆ Making KiwiSaver compulsory (*Left of Centre* 70 percent support, *Right of Centre* 33 percent support).
- ◆ Raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour (*Left of Centre* 80 percent support, *Right of Centre* 46 percent support).
- ◆ Introducing a capital gains tax (*Left of Centre* 53 percent support, *Right of Centre* 19 percent support).
- ◆ Remove GST on fresh fruit and vegetables (*Left of Centre* 83 percent support, *Right of Centre* 56 percent support).
- ◆ Make it more difficult for people and businesses based overseas to buy New Zealand farms (*Left of Centre* 71 percent, *Right of Centre* 47 percent).
- ◆ Remove income tax on the first \$5,000 of income (*Left of Centre* 76 percent support, *Right of Centre* 58 percent).
- ◆ Sell up to 49 percent of shares in selected government owned assets to fund other areas (*Left of Centre* 68 percent do **not** support, *Right of Centre* 47 percent do **not** support).

The issues the two groups agree on, broadly speaking, are:

- ◆ Introduce a starting wage for those 16–19 years at 80 percent of the minimum wage (*Left of Centre* 64 percent support, *Right of Centre* 65 percent support).
- ◆ Reform the social welfare system (*Right of Centre* 72 percent support, *Left of Centre* 61 percent support).



It is noteworthy that, in the case of selling down assets, not only are respondents pretty much agreed that they don't support it, but they also come down clearly on one side or the other; only 3 percent felt it would not influence their vote one way or the other.

"It seems clear that there is sufficient correlation between voting intentions and policies put forward by the parties to conclude that policies do in fact matter", said Research New Zealand Director, Emanuel Kalafatelis.

The table below and the graph overleaf provide the detailed information:

**Table 1:**

*Q6a. And in the election on November 26, which political party will you support with your party vote?*

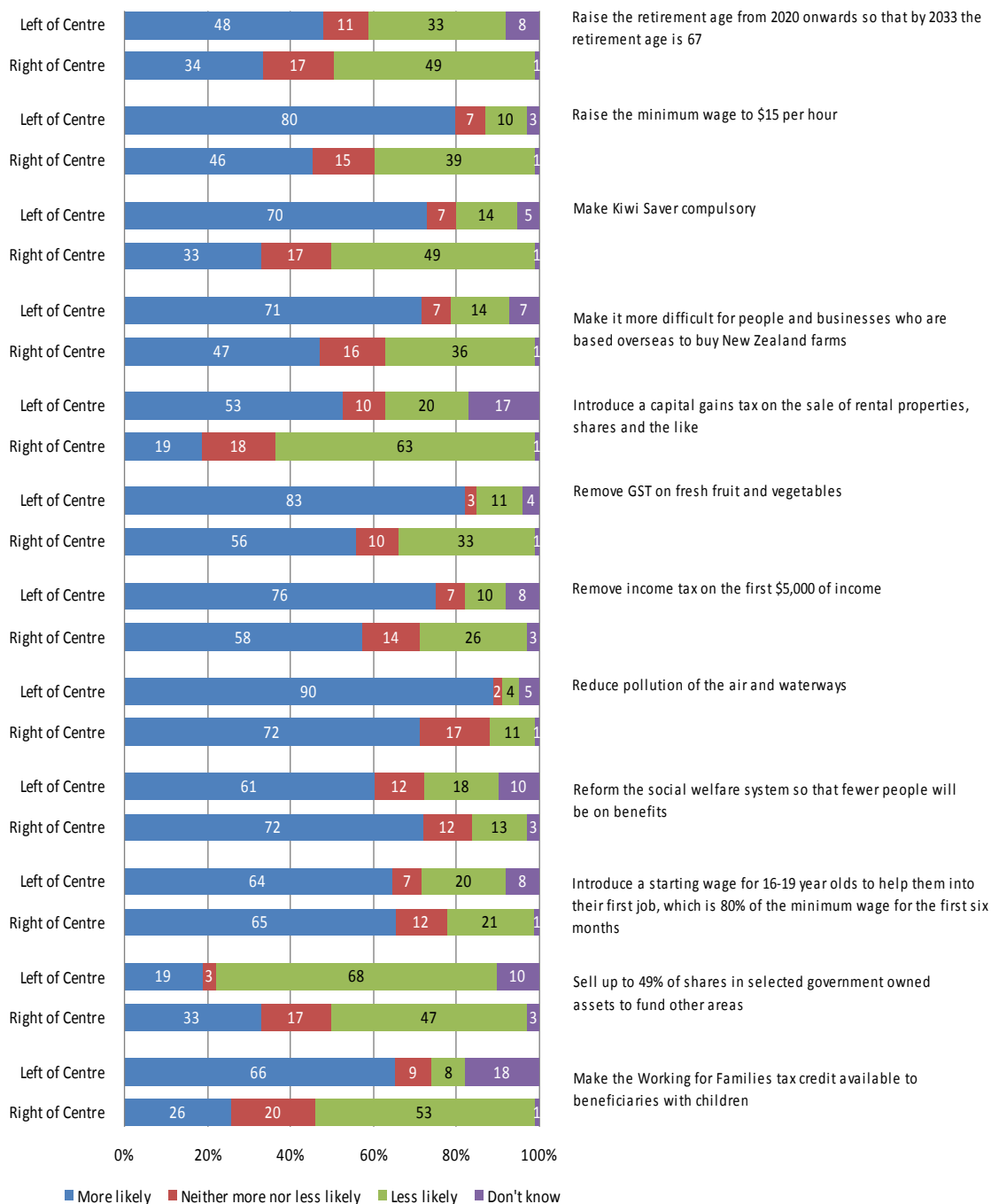
Base =	Total 344* %	Right of Centre 173 %	Left of Centre 171 %
Act	1	2	0
Greens	12	8	17
Labour	30	16	45
Maori Party	2	1	2
Mana Party	1	1	1
National	51	71	31
New Zealand First	2	1	4
United Future	0	1	0
Total	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

\*Sub-sample based on those respondents who indicated a party choice.



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*The Research New Zealand poll of 500 people aged 18 and over was conducted by telephone on 8–17 October 2011. The maximum margin of error for the sample as a whole is +/- 4.7 % (at the 95% confidence level). The data has been weighted to ensure it is an accurate representation of New Zealand's general population. The poll was not taken on behalf of any organisation, but as part of Research New Zealand's monthly survey of attitudes and opinions.*

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