Date Printed: 04/22/2009

JTS Box Number: IFES_67

Tab Number: 120

Document Title: The Referendum. The Guide.

Document Date: 1993

Document Country: New Zealand

Document Language: English

IFES ID: CE01218






The Referendum.

The Guide.






Referendum'93

WHAT'S IT GOING TO BE?

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A MESSAGE FROM THE ELECTORAL REFERENDUM PANEL

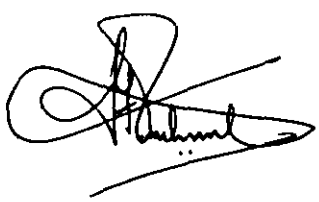
Last September, in the 1992 Electoral Referendum, New Zealand voters had their first say about the type of voting system they wanted. This was an indicative referendum. A second and binding referendum is being held this year, on the same day as the general election. This referendum offers voters a final choice between the First-Past-The-Post system (FPP) and the Mixed Member Proportional system (MMP), the preferred option in last year's indicative referendum. The option preferred in this referendum will be the way Parliament is elected at the next general election which will normally be in 1996.

The Electoral Referendum Panel is an independent body established by the government to oversee a public information programme funded by taxpayers. The panel is headed by the Chief Ombudsman, John Robertson, and its other members are Sir Hugh Kawharu, from Auckland University; Professor Margaret Clark, from Victoria University; and the Clerk of the House of Representatives, David McGee.

The panel's task is to make sure that voters are factually and impartially informed about the two options put forward in the referendum. Its terms of reference expressly prohibit the panel from putting forward arguments for or against the two electoral systems. It was considered that these will emerge from the public debate and the campaigns of those supporting particular options.

The panel has already issued a pamphlet comparing the facts of both options and this was recently delivered to homes throughout New Zealand inside community newspapers. As well as this Guide, the panel is also posting a further brochure to every voter on the electoral roll. There will be a variety of briefings and community based activities using all this information, a specially prepared video, and a wide range of advertising in all types of media.

On behalf of the Electoral Referendum Panel, I ask you to consider this information carefully, to participate in the public debate, and to take the time to vote in the coming 1993 Electoral Referendum.



John Robertson *CBE*
Chairperson, Electoral Referendum Panel

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WHAT THE REFERENDUM IS ABOUT

The electoral referendum is about how New Zealand voters elect their Members of Parliament.

It is not about how governments operate, or how Parliament conducts its business. It is about how New Zealanders choose other New Zealanders to represent them in the place where laws are made.

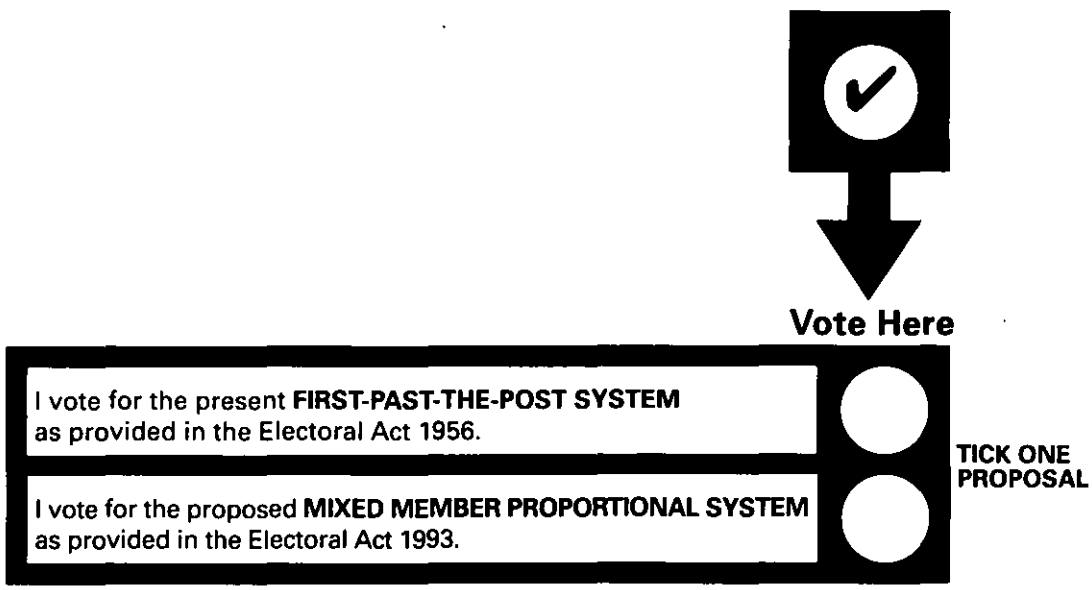
The referendum offers a choice between two different ways of electing our Members of Parliament:

- The First-Past-The-Post system (FPP) is the system we have now. Its details are set out in the Electoral Act 1956.
- The Mixed Member Proportional system (MMP) is the alternative system being proposed. It was the preferred option in last year's indicative electoral referendum. Its details are set out in the Electoral Act 1993.

HOW THE 1993 ELECTORAL REFERENDUM WILL WORK

This year's electoral referendum is being held on the same day as the general election. As well as voting for their Member of Parliament, voters will be asked to make a final decision on what voting system they want for New Zealand in the future - either the First-Past-The-Post system (FPP) or the Mixed Member Proportional system (MMP). The option selected in this referendum will fix the way that Members of Parliament are elected from the next general election which, based on a normal three-year parliamentary term, should be held in 1996.

When electors go to vote they will be given two ballot papers. One will be the paper they will use to vote for the MP for the electoral district where they live. The other ballot paper will be used to vote on the electoral referendum. It looks like this:



Electors vote by putting a tick (✓) next to the electoral system they prefer.

HOW VOTERS VOTE UNDER FPP

FPP

Each elector has one vote. They vote by putting a tick (✓) next to the name of the candidate they want to see elected.

The ballot paper looks like this:

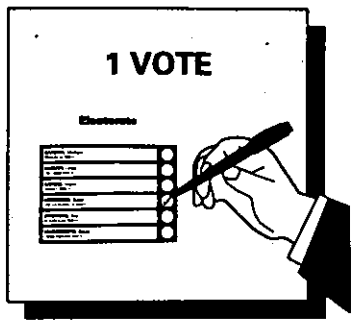
FPP Ballot Paper

Vote for only one candidate

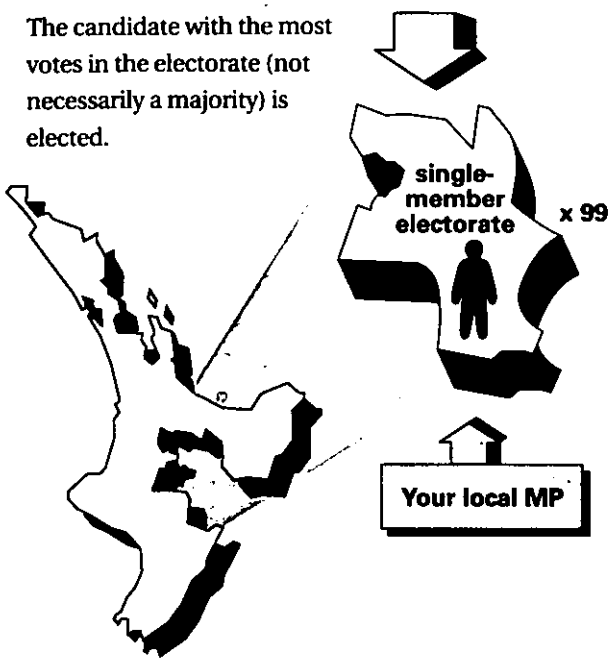
CARSON, Michael PROGRESS PARTY	○
HARVEY, Linda FREEDOM PARTY	○
KATENE, Hemi JUSTICE PARTY	○
MORRISON, Susan UNITED PEOPLE'S PARTY	○
STAFFORD, Zoe REPUBLICAN PARTY	○
WADSWORTH, David CONSERVATION PARTY	○

The candidate who gets the most votes becomes the Member of Parliament (MP) for that electorate. To be successful, candidates do not have to win more than half the votes cast. A candidate can be elected with fewer than half the votes so long as no other candidate contesting the election receives more votes. (For example, in 1990 the winning candidate in one electorate received only 33.1 per cent of the votes cast but this was enough to win the seat.)

The Present First-Past-The-Post System (FPP)



The candidate with the most votes in the electorate (not necessarily a majority) is elected.



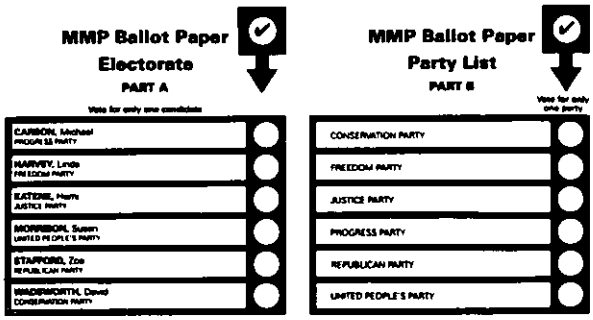
Total MPs for each party = The number of electorate MPs elected for each party in single-member electorates.

FPP usually produces a clear winner because one party tends to win more than half the seats in Parliament. This means coalition governments are less likely. Minor parties find it harder to get seats in Parliament, and a party's share of MPs in Parliament does not necessarily reflect its share of the votes cast.

HOW VOTERS VOTE UNDER MMP

MMP

Each elector has two votes. The ballot paper, which will be divided into two parts before it is handed to voters, looks like this:



One vote (the Part A vote) is for an electorate MP. Electors vote by putting a tick (✓) next to the name of the candidate they want to see elected.

The candidate who gets the most votes becomes the Member of Parliament for that electorate.

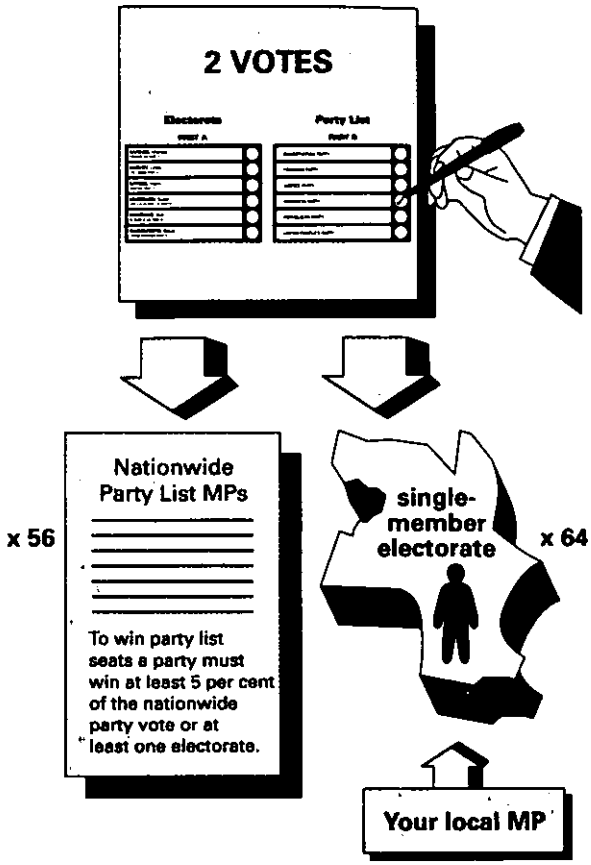
Voting on this part of the ballot paper is no different to voting for an electorate MP under the First-Past-The-Post electoral system.

The other vote (the Part B vote) is a nationwide vote, for the party the elector would most like to see represented in Parliament. Electors vote for that party by putting a tick (✓) next to its name. This vote decides the total number of seats that each party gets in Parliament.

This part of the ballot paper is the same for every electorate: all electors choose between the same parties, regardless of the electorate they live in.

Voters don't have to use both votes. They can choose to vote just for the person they want as their electorate MP, or they can choose to vote just for a party they would like to see represented in Parliament. They can also vote for a candidate from one party to be their electorate MP, and for a different party in their party vote.

The Mixed Member Proportional System (MMP)



The number of nationwide MPs a party receives is decided in two steps. First, its percentage of the total nationwide party list vote is worked out. Then, the number of nationwide MPs it may receive is adjusted according to the number of electorate MPs it already has. This is so that its total number of MPs matches its share of the nationwide party list vote.

Total MPs for each party = *The number of electorate MPs elected for each party in single-member electorates*
plus
the number of nationwide party list MPs elected (adjusted so that a party's total MPs are in proportion to its share of the total nationwide party list voting).

MMP is less likely to produce a clear winner, and coalition governments or agreements between parties are more likely. Each party's share of MPs in Parliament reflects its share of the votes, and minor parties find it easier to get seats in Parliament.

THE NUMBER OF MPs

FPP

After the 1993 General Election there will be 99 Members of Parliament. Ninety-five of these 99 MPs will represent General electorates and the other four will represent Maori electorates. Each electorate will be represented in Parliament by one MP.

The total number of MPs has risen gradually over the years. For example, 15 years ago there were 92 MPs and 30 years ago there were 80.

Under FPP the number of MPs grows if the population of the North Island increases at a faster rate than the population of the South Island.

The starting point for determining the number of North Island General electorates is the number of South Island General electorates which, since 1969, has been fixed by law at 25. The average population (or quota) of each South Island electorate is divided into the General electoral population of the North Island. This calculation establishes the number of North Island General electorates, so if the South Island's electoral population does not grow as fast as the North Island's electoral population, the number of electorates (and so the number of MPs) in the North Island increases. If the electoral population in both islands increases at the same rate, the number of electorates and MPs will remain the same - although each electorate would contain more people.

On the basis of the 1991 census, each of the 95 General electorates to be contested in 1993 will have a population of approximately 33,500 people.

The number of Maori electorates is fixed by law at four and this number can only be changed by an Act of Parliament. On the basis of the 1992 Maori electoral option the average size of the four Maori electorates is approximately 45,000 people.

The number of General electorates in the South Island is fixed at 25 and the number of Maori electorates is fixed at four but the number of North Island General electorates varies according to population. The number of MPs is likely to continue to increase gradually.

MMP

Under MMP there will be 120 MPs in Parliament. This number is set by the 1993 Electoral Act and just over half of these MPs will represent electoral districts.

The number of General electorates is based on the number of South Island General electorates, which is fixed at 16 by the 1993 Electoral Act. The average size of South Island electorates is used to determine the number of North Island and Maori electorates.

Based on the 1991 census there would be 64 electorate MPs (16 South Island General electorates, 45 North Island General electorates and 3 Maori electorates) if MMP was used in this election. However, if MMP is used in future elections new electoral boundaries would be needed. Before these are set, Maori will be given a chance to say if they wish to be on a General or Maori electoral roll.This could change the electorate balance.

The remaining 56 MPs will be chosen from party lists which parties will publish before the election. A party is allocated party list seats so its total seats in Parliament - electorate plus party list seats - will reflect its share of the nationwide party vote.

Candidates may stand both in an electorate and on the party's list. However, candidates winning an electorate seat will be removed from their party list before the party is allocated its list seats. So, if a party is entitled to 15 party list seats these will be allocated to the first 15 names remaining on that party's list. (The allocation method is known as the St Laguë formula, and a working example can be found in Appendix A.)

Because the total number of MPs is 120, the number of party list MPs drops as the number of General electorate MPs rises. This will happen if the North Island's population grows faster than the South Island's. If population trends continue, in time, the number of party list seats would eventually be insufficient to ensure that each party's total number of MPs is close to its share of the party vote and the Electoral Act would have to be changed.

A temporary increase in the number of MPs is also possible if a party is highly popular in a few electorates but wins only a small share of the nationwide party vote.

The number of General electorates in the South Island is fixed at 16, but the number of General electorates in the North Island and the number of Maori electorates varies according to population. The number of MPs remains at 120 unless a party wins more electorate seats than it is entitled to by the overall share of the party vote.

MAORI REPRESENTATION

FPP

The number of Maori electorates is set at four by the 1956 Electoral Act. The number can be changed only by an amendment to the 1956 Electoral Act.

Maori can choose to be registered on the Maori electoral roll and vote in one of the four Maori electorates, or they can register on the General electoral roll and vote in one of the 95 General electorates.

Whether Maori register on the Maori roll or the General roll is a matter of personal choice. Apart from the choice Maori voters make when they first register on the electoral roll, there is a Maori electoral option every five years. This gives Maori an opportunity to state whether they wish to change from one roll to the other.

If FPP is retained as the voting system in New Zealand, the next Maori electoral option will follow the census in 1996 (the last Maori option was held in 1991).

Under FPP Maori may stand as candidates in General electorates. Non-Maori may stand as candidates in Maori electorates.

MMP

The number of Maori electorates may vary because the number will be determined by dividing the Maori electoral population by the average size (or quota) of the South Island's General electorates. Current population figures (based on the 1991 Maori electoral option) mean that there would be three Maori seats.

Maori can choose to be registered on the Maori electoral roll and vote in a Maori electorate, or to be registered on the General electoral roll and vote in one of the General electorates.

Voters in Maori electorates (as is the case in General electorates) will have one vote for an electorate MP and one vote for the party the voter would most like to see represented in Parliament.

The number of Maori electorates will go up or down, depending on how many people choose to be on the Maori electoral roll.

If the Maori electoral population increases in relation to the South Island's electoral population, the number of Maori seats will also increase.

The existing Maori electoral population numbers mean that there would be three Maori electorates at present. These figures may be different if MMP is adopted, because Maori will be given a chance to choose which roll they wish to be on before the MMP electorates are drawn up. Thereafter the option will be offered every five years, shortly after the census, as is available currently under FPP.

Whether Maori register on the Maori roll or the General roll is a matter of personal choice.

Under FPP Maori may stand as candidates in General electorates. Non-Maori may stand as candidates in Maori electorates. Political parties may also include Maori candidates in their party list.

HOW MINOR PARTIES ARE AFFECTED

FPP

It's more difficult for minor parties to get into Parliament. In practice, minor parties tend to be excluded from Parliament or to be restricted in the number of seats they can win.

This is because the only way parties can win seats in Parliament is for their candidates to win electorate seats. But only one candidate can win in each electorate. Since support for minor parties is usually spread thinly across electorates rather than being concentrated in only one or a small number of electorates it is difficult for minor parties to win sufficient votes in any electorate to beat all the other candidates.

For example, in 1981 Social Credit had more than 20 per cent of the overall vote but it won only two seats (2.2 per cent of the seats then in Parliament).

MMP

It's easier for minor parties to get into Parliament because seats in Parliament are won by parties in proportion to their share of the nationwide party vote.

Even if a party doesn't win any electorate seats, it will be able to get some seats in Parliament as long as it wins at least 5 per cent of the nationwide party vote. If this happens, all its MPs will come from the party list. (Winning 5 per cent of the party vote would give a party a total of about six seats in a 120-member Parliament.)

This 5 per cent 'threshold' means that only the larger minor parties are likely to have seats in Parliament. Very small minor parties are not likely to clear this hurdle - they will not usually win any electorate seats and their share of the nationwide party vote will not be sufficient for them to obtain any party list seats.

However, a minor party which wins less than 5 per cent of the party vote will still be eligible for its share of the party list seats in Parliament if it wins at least one electorate seat.

HOW PROPORTIONAL ARE THE TWO SYSTEMS?

Proportional representation means that a party's share of parliamentary seats reflects its share of the nationwide party vote.

FPP

FPP is not a form of proportional representation. A party's share of the seats in Parliament depends on how many electorates it wins, not on its share of the overall vote.

In 1972, for example, the Labour Party won only 48.4 per cent of the overall vote. It won 63.2 per cent of electorates, which meant it got 63.2 per cent of the seats in Parliament.

The results that a First-Past-The-Post electoral system can produce are also shown in the 1990 General Election:

1990 New Zealand Election Results

Party	*Votes*	*Votes (%)*	*Seats (No.)*	*Seats (%)*
National	872,358	47.8	67	69.1
Labour	640,915	35.1	29	29.9
Green	124,915	6.8	—	—
New Labour	94,171	5.2	1	1.0
Democrat	30,455	1.7	—	—
Mana Motuhake	10,869	0.6	—	—
Others	30,409	2.8	—	—
			97	

In some circumstances FPP can produce results which are roughly proportional. This happened in New Zealand in 1928 when there were three largish parties with somewhat similar shares of the overall vote, and in 1946 when the election was a straight fight between Labour and National.

MMP

MMP is a form of proportional representation. Each party represented in Parliament wins seats that reflect its share of the nationwide party vote. (Added together, each party's total number of electorate MPs and party list MPs is close to its share of the overall party vote.)

The following table is a hypothetical election result which has been designed to illustrate how MMP could work:

The Election Result

	Electorate Votes (Total)	*(%)*	*Electorate Seats Won*	*(%)*	*Party List Votes (Total)*	*(%)*	*Party List Seats*	*Total Seats*	*(%)*
Conservation	63,843	3.1	0	—	46,654	2.6	0	0	
Freedom	56,547	3.1	1	1.6	71,140	3.9	4	5	4.2
Justice	696,803	38.2	23	35.9	736,933	40.4	27	50	41.6
Progress	93,029	5.1	0	—	155,820	8.5	11	11	9.2
Republican	870,092	47.7	40	62.5	808,073	44.3	14	54	45.0
Others	43,778	2.4	0	—	5,472	0.3	0	0	—
			64				56	120	

Sometimes MMP is not fully proportional. This happens where minor parties fail to win an electorate seat and win less than 5 per cent of the party vote. Because these parties do not qualify for list seats in Parliament, parties which do qualify normally end up with a share of seats slightly bigger than their share of the votes.

HOW A GOVERNMENT IS FORMED

FPP

The party that wins a majority of the seats in Parliament becomes the government. This officially happens when the Governor-General formally asks the leader of that party to form a government.

If no single party has a majority of the seats in Parliament, then the Governor-General may ask the leader of one of the parties to try to form a government. This happened in New Zealand in 1928, when a three-way split of parliamentary seats (between United, Reform and Labour) meant that the United party had to govern as a minority government. To pass legislation, the United party government had to obtain the support of other MPs - in this case, Labour party MPs.

Sometimes two or more parties will join together in a formal coalition government. New Zealand has had a coalition government once under FPP, between 1931 and 1935. (The coalition government of the United and Reform parties was formed shortly before the 1931 election.)

Coalitions are less likely under FPP. This is because the FPP system usually produces a clear winner - that is, where one party wins more than half the seats in Parliament. This, in turn, is because a party's share of parliamentary seats does not necessarily reflect its share of the overall vote.

MMP

If one political party wins a majority of the seats in Parliament it becomes the government. This officially happens when the Governor-General asks the leader of that party to form a government.

If no single party has a majority of the seats in Parliament, then the Governor-General may ask the leader of one of the parties to try to form a government. This may mean that one party will govern as a minority government, relying on the support of one or more other parties to pass legislation; or that two or more parties will join together in a formal coalition.

The party that is invited to form a government would be the one most likely to achieve enough support in Parliament to be able to pass legislation.

Coalition governments are more likely under MMP. This is because the MMP system results in a Parliament that reflects each party's share of the nationwide party vote. Having several parties in Parliament makes it more likely that there will be no one party with a majority of seats in Parliament.

THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

From 1 July 1994 an Electoral Commission will be set up regardless of whether FPP or MMP is endorsed by voters in this year's referendum.

The Electoral Commission will be responsible for registering political parties, sponsoring and carrying out research into aspects of the electoral system, and publicising its work.

It will be presided over by a Judge and have three other members.

It will be independent of the government in carrying out its functions and activities.

HOW CANDIDATES ARE SELECTED

From 1 July 1994, political parties will be able to register with the Electoral Commission.

Parties that do register will be required to use democratic methods which allow all their current financial members to participate directly, or indirectly (through delegates), in selecting candidates. Under MMP this requirement will apply equally to candidates selected to contest electorate seats and to candidates who are included on a party list.

Under MMP, parties must be registered with the Electoral Commission if they wish to compete for party list seats.

REDRAWING ELECTORATE BOUNDARIES

This task will continue to be carried out by the Representation Commission under both FPP and MMP.

The boundaries of electorates are revised after each census (which is held every five years). If MMP is adopted as the voting system for New Zealand, new electorates will have to be drawn before the first election is held under MMP. Before this can happen, the numbers of Maori who wish to be on the Maori roll under MMP will have to be established.

FILLING VACANT SEATS

This will be the same for electorate seats under both FPP and MMP. It will be different, however, for the party list seats under MMP.

A seat becomes vacant when an MP resigns or dies before the end of a parliamentary term.

When a vacancy occurs in an electorate there will usually be a by-election to elect a new MP within 2-3 months. (When a vacancy in an electorate occurs within six months of the end of a parliamentary term, a by-election can be avoided if 75 per cent of all MPs agree.)

When a vacancy occurs in one of the party list seats under MMP, the first available person on that party's list who is not currently an MP will be invited by the Chief Electoral Officer to fill the vacancy. If there is no person from that party's list available, the seat remains unfilled until the next general election. (It can also remain unfilled if the vacancy occurs in the six months before the end of a parliamentary term and if 75 per cent of all MPs agree that it stay unfilled.)

APPENDIX A: ST LAGUË FORMULA

The following Table shows how seats are allocated under MMP.

Because parties which get, say, 12.3 per cent of the party votes obviously cannot be allocated 12.3 per cent of the seats (that is, 14.76 seats in a 120-seat Parliament) and because it is also necessary to determine the precise order in which all the seats in Parliament are allocated to the various political parties, proportional representation electoral systems use a variety of formulae to allocate seats in Parliament. The 1993 Electoral Act has decided that a formula called the St Laguë formula will be used for this purpose. This formula takes the nationwide party vote of each of the parties which qualify for representation in Parliament and divides them by successive odd numbers starting with 1 (i.e. divides the party votes by 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, etc., etc.). The 120 highest numbers (which are called quotients) determine both the number of seats for each party and the order in which they are allocated.

Because the Freedom Party won one electoral district seat, it is eligible for party list seats (even though it won less than five per cent of party votes). In this example, the St Laguë formula (dividing by 1, 3, 5, 7 and so on) has determined that the Freedom Party is entitled to five seats in Parliament. As a result it is allocated four list seats in addition to the electoral district seat won.

Electorate Seats

Party Lists Seats

		Conservation	Freedom		Justice		Progress		Republican		
Total Party Vote		46654	71140		736933		155820		808073		
Party Vote %		*2.6%*	*3.9%*		*40.4%*		*8.5%*		*44.3%*		
			Quotient	*R.*	*Quotient*	*R.*	*Quotient*	*R.*	*Quotient*	*R.*	
Party Vote	1		71140	13	736933	2	155820	6	808073	1	*First party list seat to be allocated.*
Divided by	3		23713	38	245644	4	51940	18	269357	3	
	5		14228	62	147386	7	31164	29	161614	5	
	7		10162	88	105276	9	22260	41	115439	8	
	9		7904	113	81881	11	17313	51	89785	10	*Largest quotient - first seat to be allocated.*
	11		6467		66993	14	14165	64	73461	12	
	13				56687	16	11986	75	62159	15	
	15				49128	19	10388	85	53871	17	
	17				43349	21	9165	97	47533	20	
	19	With less than			38785	23	8201	108	42530	22	*120th largest quotient - last seat to be allocated.*
	21	5% of the party			35092	26	7420	120	38479	24	
	23	vote and no			32040	28	6774		35133	25	
	25	electoral district			29477	31			32322	27	
	27	seats, the			27293	33			29928	30	
	29	Conservation			25411	35			27864	32	
	31	party does not			23772	37			26066	34	
	33	qualify for a			22331	40			24487	36	
	35	share of the			21055	43			23087	39	
	37	party list seats.			19917	45			21839	42	
	39				18895	47			20719	44	
	41				17973	49			19709	46	
	43				17137	53			18792	48	*55th largest quotient.*
	45				16376	55			17957	50	
	47				15679	57			17193	52	
	49				15039	59			16491	54	
	51				14449	61			15844	56	
	53				13904	65			15246	58	
	55				13398	67			14692	60	
	57				12928	69			14176	63	
	59				12490	71			13696	66	
	61				12080	73			13247	68	
	63				11697	77			12826	70	
	65				11337	79			12431	72	
	67				10999	81			12060	74	
	69				10680	83			11711	76	
	71				10379	86			11381	78	
	73				10094	89			11069	80	
	75				9825	91			10774	82	
	77				9570	93			10494	84	*87th largest quotient - all electorate seats allocated at this point.*
	79				9328	95			10228	87	
	81				9097	98			9976	90	
	83				8878	101			9735	92	
	85				8669	103			9506	94	
	87				8470	105			9288	96	
	89				8280	107			9079	99	
	91				8098	110			8879	100	
	93				7924	112			8688	102	
	95				7757	115			8506	104	
	97				7597	117			8330	106	
	99				7443	119			8162	109	
	101				7296				8000	111	
	103								7845	114	
	105								7695	116	
	107								7552	118	
	109								7413	121	*121st largest quotient. Had Parliament been one seat bigger - with 121 instead of 120 seats - the Republican Party would have won this seat. (The Republican Party narrowly missed winning the last seat to be allocated, which went instead to the Progress Party.)*
Electoral Seats		0	1		23		0		40		
Party List Seats		0	4		27		11		14		
Total Seats		0	5		50		11		54		
% of Seats			4.2%		41.6%		9.2%		45.0%		

Party share of votes.

(Compare % votes and % seats to ascertain proportionately)

Party share of seats.

APPENDIX B: CRITERIA FOR JUDGING VOTING SYSTEMS

All voting systems have advantages and disadvantages. And what one person sees as an advantage, another person will see as a disadvantage. As a result, there's no such thing as a perfect voting system.

There are some generally accepted criteria for judging voting systems - and people may want to ask questions along these lines.

LEGITIMACY

Do people on the losing side accept the results? Does the community as a whole accept the voting system as the best possible basis for running the country?

POLITICAL INTEGRATION

Does a voting system unite a country or divide it? Does it promote respect for different points of view?

EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT

Can a government elected under a particular voting system achieve what it sets out to do? Will the government last, or will it fall because it does not have a majority in Parliament?

EFFECTIVENESS OF PARLIAMENT

Will Cabinet dominate Parliament under a particular voting system? Does the voting system mean that Parliament can challenge and debate government policies in the way it is meant to?

FAIRNESS

Do political parties win a share of the seats that is similar to their share of the votes? Is there a marked difference between the number of seats some parties get and the votes they win?

REPRESENTATION OF MINORITIES AND SPECIAL GROUPS

How well are the interests of ethnic minorities and other groups such as business people, workers and women represented in Parliament under various voting systems? How well are such groups themselves represented?

MAORI REPRESENTATION

Will a particular voting system help or hinder representation of Maori people? Are Maori people fairly represented in Parliament? How will different voting systems affect this? How will different systems affect the existing separate representation of Maori people?

REPRESENTATION OF CONSTITUENTS

Does a voting system encourage close links between people and their Members of Parliament? How easy will it be for constituents to get their ideas across to their Members of Parliament under a particular voting system?

VOTER PARTICIPATION

Do voters understand how the system works? Is the method of electing Members of Parliament straightforward or is it difficult to follow?

EFFECTIVE POLITICAL PARTIES

Will a voting system give us political parties that are too strong or too weak? Will a particular voting system help parties listen to and act on voters' views and concerns?

Voters will have to make up their own minds on which criteria are important to them. Different points will be important to different people.

APPENDIX C: A BRIEF HISTORY OF NEW ZEALAND'S ELECTORAL SYSTEM

1852 The New Zealand Constitution Act established a system of representative government for New Zealand. Parliament consisted of a Legislative Council (appointed by the Crown) and a House of Representatives (to be elected by male property owners with individual freehold or leasehold title). Although some Maori (almost invariably tribal leaders) were registered on the electoral roll, the Constitution Act effectively denied Maori the vote because they owned their lands under communal title.

1853 The first five-yearly election was held for the House of Representatives, using the First-Past-The-Post electoral system in a mix of single and multi-member electorates, to elect 37 MPs.

1860 Gold miners who held a Miners' Right continuously for at least three months were able to vote without having to own or lease property.

1867 Four Maori seats were created as a temporary measure (they were to disappear after five years). This meant that Maori males received universal suffrage 12 years before European males in New Zealand.

1871 First elections held using secret ballot (this law had been passed by Parliament in 1869). By this election nearly all electorates were represented by only one MP.

1876 The four Maori seats became a permanent part of New Zealand's electoral system.

1878 Frederick Whitaker introduced a Bill to change New Zealand's electoral system to a form of the single transferable vote. (At the time Whitaker was a member of the Opposition.) This marked the beginning of a period of considerable interest by various MPs in proportional representation voting systems, which lasted until the emergence of the modern two-party system in the 1930s.

1879 Universal suffrage for non-Maori males introduced. The parliamentary term was reduced from five to a maximum of three years.

1881 All electorates were single-member electorates. A formal country quota was introduced in which rural electorates had 25 per cent fewer people in them than town electorates.

1887 An independent Representation Commission was established to determine electoral boundaries after each census. This commission continues to carry out this task today.

1889 The number of MPs was reduced from 91 to 70, multi-member electorates were reintroduced for the four main centres (Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin) and the electoral law was amended to make residence the only criterion for registering as an elector. (From the 1890 election, no elector was permitted to cast more than one vote.)

1890 The secret ballot became compulsory for all elections except in the four Maori seats.

1893 Universal suffrage was granted to women although they were not permitted to stand for Parliament until 1919. (The first woman MP, Elizabeth McCombs, was elected to represent the electorate of Lyttelton in 1933.) Also in the same year Maori who were of more than half Maori descent were required to register on the Maori roll and those who were of less than half Maori descent were required to register on the European roll. Only Maori whose descent was exactly half Maori were given the choice of which roll they wished to be included on.

1900 The number of MPs was increased to 80 (76 representing European [now General] electorates and four representing Maori electorates). The size of Parliament remained fixed at 80 until the 1969 election.

1903 The law requiring Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin to be multi-member electorates was repealed. (Single-member electorates came into effect at the 1905 General Election.)

1908 A second ballot voting system was introduced for the general election that year. This was, effectively, a form of preference voting and was interpreted as a move to keep third parties - particularly the rapidly rising Labour Party - out of Parliament.

1913 The second ballot electoral system was abolished in favour of First-Past-The-Post. The First-Past-The-Post electoral system has been used in every general election since 1914.

1914 A form of single transferable voting was introduced as an option for local body elections. It was used in some Christchurch local body elections until 1933 and it remained available as an option until the 1960s.

1923 The United Party government drafted a Bill which proposed a mixture of the single transferable vote and mixed member proportional electoral systems. Its defeat marked the last serious attempt to introduce proportional representation for New Zealand's parliamentary elections until the 1980s.

1924 Registration as an elector was made compulsory for all eligible voters except Maori.

1928 The United Party formed a minority government after reaching an agreement with the Labour Party.

1931 A coalition government was formed between the United and Reform parties. This coalition won the 1931 General Election and governed until 1935.

1937 Secret ballot was made compulsory for elections held for the four Maori seats. (It was first used in the 1938 General Election.)

1945 The Representation Commission (which had been divided into two bodies, one for the North Island and the other for the South Island) was converted into a single body. The country quota was abolished.

1950 The Legislative Council was abolished. From the beginning of 1951 the House of Representatives became New Zealand's only legislative chamber.

1956 The present Electoral Act was passed by Parliament. This Act made a number of important changes to New Zealand's electoral law which are still in force today. (For example, the registration of all electors was made compulsory; electorates could not vary in population numbers by more than ±5 per cent.) An important aspect of this law is that certain parts of it cannot be amended unless the proposed changes are agreed to by either 75 per cent of all MPs or by a majority of electors voting in a referendum.

1965 The number of General electorates in the South Island was fixed at 25 and provision was made for the number of North Island General electorates to increase whenever the North Island's population increased at a faster rate than the South Island's population between censuses. (This provision came into effect with the 1969 election.)

1967 New Zealand voters rejected a proposal to increase the term of Parliament from three to four years in a referendum.

1969 The voting age was reduced to 20.

1974 The voting age was reduced to 18.

1975 Maori were permitted to stand for election in either a Maori or a General electorate. Maori were permitted to choose which electoral roll - Maori or General - they wished to be included on, regardless of their degree of Maori descent.

1985 The Royal Commission on the Electoral System was appointed. It reported in December 1986 and recommended the adoption of a form of Mixed Member Proportional representation.

1990 New Zealand voters rejected a proposal to increase the term of Parliament from three to four years in a referendum.

1991 The Electoral Referendum Act 1991 was passed to authorise the 1992 indicative referendum on New Zealand's electoral system.

1992 The September referendum. Most electors who voted supported change and a majority of them supported the Mixed Member Proportional electoral system (MMP) as the preferred option.

1993 The Electoral Referendum Act 1993 and the Electoral Act 1993 were passed by Parliament to enable a final and binding referendum on New Zealand's electoral system to be held on the same day as the 1993 General Election.