Key dates in New Zealand electoral reform

1852 - 1895

1852 The New Zealand Constitution Act (UK) established a system of representative government for New Zealand. Parliament consisted of a Legislative Council appointed by the Crown, and a House of Representatives elected every five years by males over the age of 21 who owned, leased or rented property of a certain value.

1853 First election for the House of Representatives held; 37 MPs elected using First-Past-the-Post in a mix of single-member and multi-member electorates; although some Māori (almost invariably tribal leaders) voted, Māori were effectively excluded because they owned their lands under communal title.

1858 Act passed to prohibit treating, bribery, undue influence and the use of licensed premises for electoral purposes or as polling booths.

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

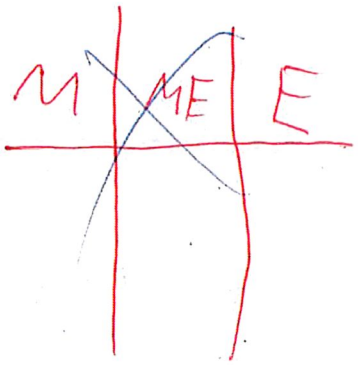
1867 Four Māori seats were created as a temporary measure for five years, with universal suffrage for Māori males aged over 21.

1871 First elections held using secret ballot for European seats (called 'General' seats from 1975); nearly all electorates represented by one MP.

1876 Four Māori seats made permanent.

1878 Unsuccessful attempt to change New Zealand's parliamentary voting system to a form of the single transferable vote. This marked the beginning of a period of considerable interest by various MPs in proportional representation voting systems lasting until the emergence of a two-party

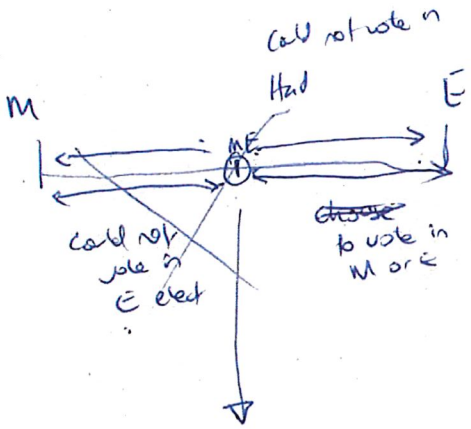
political system in the 1930s.



1879 Universal suffrage for non-Māori adult males; parliamentary term reduced to three years.

1880 Responsibility for determining election petitions transferred from Parliament to the courts.

1881 First general election with universal male suffrage; all MPs elected in single-member electorates; introduction of 'country quota' allowing rural electorates to have 25 percent fewer people than town electorates; European and Māori elections held on single (but different) days; rules defining legal campaign spending introduced.



1887 Independent Representation Commission established to draw electorate boundaries after each population census; country quota reduced to 18%; £10 candidate's deposit introduced.

1889 Number of European seats reduced from 91 to 70, taking total seats from 95 to 74; multi-member electorates reintroduced in four main centres; plural voting abolished - one man, one vote introduced; country quota increased to 28 percent.

1890 Secret ballot compulsory for all elections except those in the four Māori electorates; absentee voting rights granted to seafarers.

1893 Universal suffrage granted to women (including Māori) aged over 21; plural registration abolished; plural voting for Māori property owners abolished; only those whose descent was exactly half Māori or less allowed to choose whether to vote in European or Māori seats.

1895 - 1951

1895 Limit of £200 placed on each candidate's campaign spending.

1900 Total number of MPs increased to 80.

1903 All multi-member electorates changed to single-member electorates.

1905 Absentee voting introduced for all electors

unable to be in their own electorate on election day.

1908 Second ballot voting system introduced.

1911 First triennial national referendum on prohibition of alcohol; further referendums held with each general election (except 1931 and 1951) until abolished in 1989.

1913 Second ballot voting system repealed, and First-Past-the-Post reinstated.

1914 Act passed for Legislative Council to be elected by single transferable vote but never implemented.

1919 Women given the right to stand as candidates for Parliament.

1922 Chatham Islanders enfranchised for the first time (included in Lyttelton and Western Māori electorates).

1924 Registration as an elector made compulsory for all eligible electors except Māori; withdrawal of Reform Government's bill to introduce proportional representation for parliamentary elections.

1927 Postal voting introduced for certain specified groups (e.g. invalids) who could not get to a polling booth on election day.

1928 United Party formed a minority government following an agreement with the Labour Party.

1931 Coalition government formed between United and Reform parties.

1933 First woman MP (Elizabeth McCombs) elected (Lyttelton by-election).

1934 Parliamentary term increased to four years.

1937 Secret ballot required for elections in four Māori seats (first used 1938); parliamentary term reduced to three years.

1945 Abolition of country quota.

1948 Legislation passed for registration of Māori electors (roll completed 1949).

1950 Act passed to abolish Legislative Council from 1 January 1951; legislative requirement for election day to be a Saturday.

1951 First election at which voting in Māori and European electorates conducted on the same day.

1956 - 1975

1956 Parliament passed new Electoral Act, including entrenched provisions which could not be amended unless the proposed changes were agreed to by either 75 percent of all MPs or a majority of those who voted in a referendum; eligible Māori required to register as electors.

1965 Number of European electorates in the South Island fixed at 25, and provision for the number of European electorates in the North Island to increase according to population changes.

1967 Defeat in a referendum of a proposal to increase the term of Parliament from three years to four years; Māori permitted to be a candidates in European electorates, and vice versa.

1969 Parliament reduced the voting age to 20.

1974 Parliament reduced the voting age to 18.

1975 Term for non-Māori electorates changed from 'European' to 'General'; introduction of 'Māori electoral option' held after each five-yearly population census to permit Māori to choose which type of roll (General or Māori) they wish to be on until the next option; right to vote extended to permanent residents of any nationality.

1985 -

1985 Appointment of Royal Commission on the Electoral System to inquire into a wide range of matters concerning the electoral system.

1986 Report of the Royal Commission on the Electoral System, recommending (among other

things) that a referendum be held on changing the voting system from First-Past-the-Post to Mixed Member Proportional representation.

1990 Defeat in a referendum of a proposal to increase the term of Parliament from three years to four years.

1992 Indicative referendum supports changing the voting system; MMP preferred over single transferable vote, preferential vote and supplementary member systems.

1993 Final and binding referendum changes New Zealand's voting system from First-Past-the-Post to Mixed Member Proportional; number of Māori electorate seats permitted to vary according to results of Māori electoral option.

1995 Declaration of final boundaries for 60 General electorates and five Māori electorates for MMP; first referendum held following a petition presented under the Citizens Initiated Referenda Act 1993.

1996 First general election held using MMP; National/NZ First majority coalition government formed.

1997 First nation-wide postal referendum held (on proposed compulsory superannuation scheme).

1999 Second MMP election, held with second and third referendums under the Citizens Initiated Referenda Act 1993; Labour/Alliance minority coalition government formed; the second (indicative) referendum proposed a reduction in the number of MPs from 120 to 99 which received a 81.5% "yes" vote with 18.5% voting "no".

2001 Parliamentary MMP Review Committee recommends no changes to voting system.

2002 Third MMP election; Labour/Progressive Coalition minority coalition government formed.

2005 Fourth MMP election; Labour/Jim Anderton's Progressive minority coalition government formed.

2007 Electoral Finance Act 2007 increased

transparency of donations to, and campaign spending by, parties, candidates and third parties; provides for listing and expense limits for third parties; lengthened regulated period, and introduced media-neutral definition of election advertising.