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Political parties

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New Zealand National Party

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New Zealand National Party, political party founded in 1936 in the merger of non-Labour groups, most notably the United Party and the Reform Party, two parties that had been in coalition since 1931. It supports free-market economic policies and draws votes heavily from suburban and rural districts.

The Reform Party, the full name of which was the New Zealand Political Reform League, was a conservative organization that held control of the national government from 1912 to 1928. The United Party, formed in 1927, was the successor to the Liberal Party, dating to the 1890s and formally established in 1905. The new United Party was surprisingly successful in the elections of 1929 and formed a government, under Joseph Ward. A United-Reform coalition government was established in 1931 only to lose disastrously to the New Zealand Labour Party in the 1935 elections. Leaders of the right-wing parties deemed that the only way to revive conservative hopes was to unite their various groups, which separately had been dissipating their strength. The New Zealand National Party was thus born in 1936. The road back was slow, and not until 1949 did it win back the government. For the next 35 years, however, it was New Zealand's dominant party, holding office for the periods 1949–57, 1960–72, and 1975–84.

In the mid-1980s the party suffered from internal divisions, which kept it out of office until 1990, when it returned to power under James Bolger. Though the party remained in power until 1999, it split in 1993, when a former National Party minister formed the New Zealand First Party. In 1994 Bolger formed a coalition after the defection of one of his party's members of Parliament. In 1997 Bolger was replaced as prime minister and party leader by Jennifer Shipley, the country's first female prime minister. In 1999 the party was ousted from government by a Labour-led coalition. After the subsequent National leaders—Bill English (2001–03) and Don Brash (2003–06)—failed to return the party to power, John Key became head of the party in 2006. Two years later he led the National Party to victory over the Labour Party.

LINKS Year in Review

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