

New Zealand

Country:

New Zealand

Year:

2016

Freedom Status:

Free

Political Rights:

1

Civil Liberties:

1

Aggregate Score:

98

Freedom Rating:

1.0

Overview:

The ruling coalition led by Prime Minister John Key, leader of the center-right National Party, governed with relative stability during the year. Concerns remained about de facto discrimination against New Zealand's Maori people, although the government has made significant efforts in recent years to enhance representation of their interests.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 40 / 40 (+1) [Key]

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

New Zealand's political system is patterned largely on the British Westminster model. Queen Elizabeth II is the head of state, represented by Governor General Jerry Mateparae, a former military and intelligence chief. The prime minister is the head of government and leader of the popularly elected majority party or coalition, and is officially appointed by the governor general.

The unicameral House of Representatives has 121 members serving three-year terms. A mixed-member electoral system combines voting in geographic districts with proportional representation balloting. Key led the National Party to a third term in general elections held in 2014, forming a coalition government with the Maori Party, United Future, and ACT New Zealand. The National Party won 60 parliamentary seats, while its coalition partners provided an additional four. The Labor Party won 32 seats, the Green Party took 14, and New Zealand First captured 11.

The law stipulates universal suffrage for men and women of at least 18 years of age who are New Zealand citizens or permanent residents, though only citizens may serve in parliamentary positions.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16 (+1)

The law protects people's rights to form and join political parties and to freely express, promote, pursue, and defend common interests. The two main political parties are the center-left Labor Party and the center-right National Party. Other key groups include the ACT, which focuses on free markets; the environmentalist Green Party; the nationalist New Zealand First Party; United Future, which maintains a platform devoted to family values; the Maori Party, which focuses on representation of indigenous interests; and the Mana Movement, which is dedicated particularly to socio-economic indigenous rights.

Seven of the parliament's constituency seats are reserved for representatives of the Maori population, though Maori can also vote or run in general electoral districts. Mateparae is the second individual of Maori descent to hold the position of governor general.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

New Zealand is one of the least corrupt countries in the world. It was ranked 4 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. In recent years, the government has initiated several policies to strengthen anticorruption measures to bring New Zealand into line with international best practices. The country participates in the Open Government Partnership international initiative, and authorities have implemented mechanisms to prevent overseas entities from using New Zealand's commercial registration systems to create fraudulent shell companies. Cases of corruption and misuse of office are routinely investigated in New Zealand, and several convictions were made in 2015.

The law guarantees public access to information, and government agencies are responsive to requests. The government upholds transparency in budgetary procedures, and the law requires members of the House of Representatives to submit annual financial disclosure statements.

Civil Liberties: 58 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

Media in New Zealand are free and competitive. Newspapers are published nationally and locally in English, and several foreign-language publications serve the growing immigrant population. Television outlets include the state-run Television New Zealand, three private channels, and a Maori-language public network. There is also a Maori-language radio station. The government does not control or restrict internet access, and competitive pricing promotes large-scale diffusion.

Freedom of religion is protected by law and respected in practice. Only religious organizations that collect donations need to register with the government. Academic freedom prevails at all levels of instruction.

Two laws passed in 2013 granted the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB)—New Zealand's main intelligence agency—increased surveillance authority over phone and electronic communications, drawing criticism from civil rights and legal scholars. GCSB previously could conduct only foreign surveillance, but the new legislation empowered the body to collect data on residents and citizens in New Zealand. During the 2014 election campaign, GCSB came under close scrutiny, especially after investigative journalists claimed the agency had illegally monitored

the communications of up to 80 residents and citizens. In March 2015, the *New Zealand Herald* published leaked documents, provided by whistleblower Edward Snowden, showing that the GCSB was engaged in indiscriminately collecting telecommunications data from neighboring island nations. The documents also suggested that authorities shared the information with Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, which together with New Zealand form the Five Eyes intelligence alliance.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

The government respects freedoms of assembly and association. A number of demonstrations, including some focused on political and economic issues, took place in 2015 without undue interference from state actors. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are active throughout the country, and many receive considerable financial support from the government.

The 2000 Employment Relations Act allows workers to organize, strike, and bargain collectively, with the exception of uniformed personnel, who are not allowed to strike but can bargain collectively. There are numerous trade unions, and many are affiliated with the Council of Trade Unions. As of 2015, approximately 18 percent of the workforce was unionized.

F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16

New Zealand's social, political, and economic policies are based on well-established rule of law. The judiciary is independent, and the criminal justice system generally meets or surpasses international standards. Maori, who make up roughly 15 percent of the national population, are disproportionately represented in the penal system—they account for half of the male prison population and two-thirds of the female prison population.

In 2015, the national police continued an open campaign to recruit more officers of Maori, Pacific Islander, and Asian descent, aimed at enhancing cultural and racial sensitivity within the force and combating profiling and discrimination.

Discrimination on the basis of race, color, gender, origin, sexual orientation, and a number of other factors is illegal. However, most Maori and other Pacific Islanders continue to lag behind the European-descended majority in social and economic status. The Maori population has become more assertive in its claims for land, resources, and compensation from the government, including rights to fisheries, water, and minerals.

A more open immigration policy and an end to preferential treatment for migrants from Europe in the past two decades have fundamentally changed the demographics of the country. In the 2013 national census, one in four New Zealand residents were identified as foreign born.

In September 2015, officials announced that in an emergency step, they would resettle 600 additional refugees from Syria over the next two and a half years. This plan will supplement New Zealand's annual acceptance of 750 refugees, of which 150 are to be Syrian. Separately, in July, New Zealand's highest court denied asylum to Ioane Teitiota, an applicant from Kiribati who had lodged a claim based on environmental threats to his island home. The court determined that the applicant and his family would not face serious harm in Kiribati, and that climate change did not qualify as a basis for refugee status in the case. Authorities deported Teitiota and his family in September.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

The government respects freedom of movement, and neither state nor nonstate actors interfere with the rights of individuals to choose their residence, employment, or institutions of higher education. The country's legal and regulatory frameworks provide strong protections and mechanisms for the establishment and operation of private businesses, which are widely free from government interference. New Zealand maintains a free market economy, and ranked third in the 2015 Index of Economic Freedom, which noted improvements in the management of government spending, monetary freedom, and labor freedom over the past year.

According to a December 2015 government report, close to 29 percent of children in New Zealand lived below the poverty line in 2014, with children of Maori and Pacific Islander descent being particularly vulnerable. Moreover, violence against women and children remains a critical problem in these communities; Maori and Pacific Islanders are disproportionately represented as both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.

Same-sex marriage was legalized in 2013, and same-sex couples can jointly adopt children. The government enforces strong legislation protecting the rights of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals.

Migrants in New Zealand are particularly vulnerable to being trafficked for forced labor or sexual exploitation. In November, legislators approved an omnibus bill that, among other things, aims to strengthen existing antitrafficking provisions. The draft redefines trafficking to base the crime on exploitation, rather than on cross-border movement.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

Full Methodology

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