



The Governor-General and her part in the election process

The Governor-General has an important part to play in the stages of the election process. Remember that these are not political actions - she is not a politician. The things the Governor-General needs to do are constitutional and ceremonial actions. They help make sure all the correct steps are followed, so that we have a proper process and formation of a new Government after the general election.

Step one:

The Governor-General signs the Proclamation dissolving Parliament. This is an official document signed by the Governor-General stating that Parliament will finish until after the election. She also states a date, set by law, that the new Parliament must convene (meet) by. The Governor-General giving this date is a symbol of the Crown's commitment to preserve the continuity of Parliament in New Zealand. This date can be changed later with a new Proclamation, if the incoming Government wants to bring it forward.

Step two:

The Proclamation is read publicly and is published in the New Zealand Gazette. On the date set Parliament stops sitting and the MPs focus on the election. The current government will keep governing the country until a new government is appointed.

Step three:

The Governor-General then issues a writ (signs a formal instruction) telling the Electoral Commission to hold the General Election on the day that the Prime Minister has chosen. From 'Writ Day' political ads can be shown on TV and played on the radio. The Writ puts the Electoral Commission in charge of the election process. In the event of an emergency, the Electoral Commission may delay voting.

General election

Step four:

After the election the Governor-General does not get involved in the party discussions and negotiations about who will be the new government. Her job is to appoint the Prime Minister and government once negotiations have finished. The Governor-General relies on public statements by political parties, including from the ones that can't form a government. She must be certain the party or group claiming to be able to form the new government have the support of enough members of Parliament to be able to pass legislation through Parliament and govern the country.

Step five:

The incoming Prime Minister and Ministers are invited to Government House, where they are appointed by the Governor-General. This is a formal ceremony where the Prime Minister and Ministers make promises in front of the Governor-General of loyalty to the King and on the good management of New Zealand. This must happen, even if there is not a change in the Prime Minister after the election. If there is a change, then the old Prime Minister comes to Government House to hand in their resignation before the new Prime Minister is appointed.

Step six:

The new Parliament now needs to be opened. This takes three ceremonies. First is the Commission Opening where the Royal Commissioners (senior judges) are sent by the Governor-General to open Parliament. The Chief Commissioner also tells the House that the Governor-General will attend in person to deliver the Speech from the Throne. They also say it is the Governor-General's wish that a Speaker is elected by the House, and that the House's choice of Speaker should be presented to the Governor-General for confirmation. Once the Commissioners leave, Parliament can swear in the Members of Parliament and elect the Speaker, so that they are all set for the State Opening. Next the new Speaker of the House is confirmed by the Governor-General at Government House.

Finally comes the ceremony for the State Opening of Parliament. The Governor-General travels to Parliament and enters the Legislative Council Chamber. The members of Parliament are summoned to hear the Speech from the Throne which is read by the Governor-General. The speech is written by the Government and sets out the things that they aim to do in their three-year term.

Odd fact –The Governor-General does not enter the debating chamber (as traditionally the King also does not enter the debating chamber). When the Governor-General performs the State opening and Speech from the Throne, the ceremony takes place in the former Legislative Council Chamber rather than the current debating chamber.

After this, all the ceremonial bits are over, and Parliament can settle into its business.

Important dates in 2026.

Wednesday 21 January – Prime Minister announces the date of General Election

Thursday 1 October – Dissolution of Parliament following the Proclamation signed by the Governor-General

Sunday 4 October – Writ day – the Governor-General issues a formal direction to the Electoral Commission to hold an election

Thursday 8 October (noon) – Nominations close for candidates

Wednesday 21 October – Overseas voting starts

Sunday 25 October – Last day to enrol to vote in the 2026 election

Monday 26 October – Advance voting starts in New Zealand.

Saturday 7 November – Polling (election) day

Monday 9 November – The Clerk of the Executive Council sends a letter to all party leaders represented in the new Parliament, setting out the Governor-General's expectations of the government formation process.

Friday 27 November – Declaration of official results.

Thursday 3 December – An Electoral Commissioner on behalf of the Electoral Commission must return the writ to the Clerk of the House on, or before, this date. The writ lists the name of every successful electorate candidate, as determined by the Electoral Commission based on the election results. The successful candidates are considered to be Members of Parliament from the day after the return of the writ. A separate declaration is forwarded to the Clerk showing the names of the candidates elected from party lists. The returned writ and declaration together show that the elected representatives have the right to be members of Parliament. The writ can't be returned until any electorate vote recounts have been finished. Parliament must meet within 6 weeks of the return of the Writ.

14 January 2027 – Parliament must meet by this date, although it usually meets earlier. There is a Commission Opening and a State Opening by the Governor-General, including the Speech from the Throne.

Dissolution of Parliament Proclamation signed by Governor-General.

The Proclamation is read out in public and officially published. Parliament is now dissolved (finished until after the election)

Governor-General issues a writ giving the date of the election.

The date has been chosen by the Prime Minister. The writ hands management of the election over to the Electoral Commission.

The General Election takes place and NZ votes to choose a government.

People can vote from 21 October (overseas)/26 October in NZ. Election day is 7 November.

Discussions take place between political leaders to see who will form the next government.

The party/parties who can form a government contact the Governor-General. The new Prime Minister is invited with the Ministers to Government House to be appointed by the Governor-General. Before the New PM can be appointed the old PM (if there is one) visits the Governor-General and gives their resignation.

Parliament is opened in a ceremony called the Commission Opening in the debating chamber, so that MPs can be sworn-in and a Speaker of the House elected.

The Speaker visits the Governor-General to be 'confirmed'.

The State Opening is held.

The Governor-General reads the Speech from the throne in the Legislative Council Chamber. The speech lays out the new government's plans.

THE NEW SESSION OF PARLIAMENT IS
NOW GOOD TO GO!