

Foreign interference and elections

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This resource focuses on **foreign interference and elections**; highlighting activities and behaviours foreign states and their proxies may undertake to leverage election periods to achieve outcomes aligned with their strategic goals.

Foreign interference refers to an act by a foreign state, often acting through a proxy, which is intended to influence, disrupt, or subvert New Zealand's national interests by deceptive, corruptive, or coercive means. Normal diplomatic activity, lobbying and other genuine, overt efforts to gain influence are not considered interference.

Foreign states may try to take advantage of elections by exploiting the increased engagement between political parties, candidates, and communities during the election period. Foreign states, or people acting on their behalf, may misrepresent the views or concerns of communities to politicians and other decision-makers in an attempt to influence political outcomes.

Foreign interference can happen at any stage of the electoral process, including outside of the formal campaign period. It can involve things like covertly trying to influence political parties' selection of their candidates. It can also involve hidden political donations that come with expectations, which can happen months or years before an election. This can impact public confidence in New Zealand's democratic institutions and processes, and the ability of individuals to exercise their rights and freedoms.

How foreign interference in elections can impact communities

In the lead-up to an election, communities may see or experience foreign interference activities in a range of ways. Some examples of the type of activities that might be initiated by foreign states are listed below, some of which are also illegal under the Electoral Act 1993.

- **Threats or pressure to vote** for certain candidates or political parties.
- **Threats or pressure aimed at candidates or political parties** to make them change their positions or views in a way that benefits a foreign state.
- **Attempting to influence people's views or voting choices**, creating division, or undermining trust in the election process and the results.

- **Deliberately spreading** false or misleading information.
- **Misrepresenting community views** to create the false impression that a community broadly supports a foreign state's objectives.
- **Monitoring people directly or through others**, including encouraging people to report on, observe, or put pressure on people because of their political views or involvement in elections.
- **Carrying out or encouraging harassment** of candidates, journalists, community leaders, or others to discourage them from speaking out against a foreign state.

How to report foreign interference in elections

If something doesn't feel right, you should report it. You will not get in trouble for raising your concerns. If someone tries to pressure, change or control your vote, please report it.

Learn more about reporting foreign interference [here](#)

Voting and elections in New Zealand

Elections in New Zealand are free, fair and independent.

New Zealand is home to many diverse communities, each with their own experiences, perspectives, and views.

Every eligible voter has the right to participate in elections in New Zealand and to decide freely who they will vote for.

Where to get official information

General elections

General elections are run by the Electoral Commission, who is an independent organisation that works separately from the government.

Their role is to make sure general elections are fair, independent, and can be trusted by voters.

If you're eligible to vote in New Zealand's elections, you must enrol, but voting is not compulsory. Enrolling and voting means you can have a say on the issues that affect you and your community. Your vote is private. The Electoral Commission does not tell anyone, including the government, how you voted.

Learn more about enrolling and voting in elections here: www.vote.nz

The Electoral Commission's website has trusted information about the general election process and your voting rights with information on the following topics:

- [Quick facts](#)
- [Eligibility to enrol](#)
- [How to enrol or update your details](#)
- [Your vote is your choice](#)
- [Your vote is private](#)
- [Help to vote](#)
- [What to expect at the voting place](#)
- [How to vote](#)
- [You have two votes](#)
- [Scrutineers](#)

This information is also available [here](#). You can download this information and other related resources on the Electoral Commission's [website](#).

Local government elections

Local elections in New Zealand are run by local councils. In local elections, voters choose their mayor, councillors, and other local representatives. Learn more about local elections here: <https://elections.nz/democracy-in-nz/about-elections/what-are-local-elections>

If you are enrolled to vote in the general election, you can also vote in local elections.