

# I want Two-choice party voting

I want to:

- support a small party AND
- have a say in the overall MMP election result

I should be able to do BOTH

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Kia Ora He Arotake Pōtitanga Motuhake

Ed Hitchcock, New Zealander at present in France.

I submitted to the 2012 review . I have no political party affiliations.

I want MMP to be inclusive of more voters.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to the review.

# Hasn't New Zealand done well?

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New Zealand has achieved much with its change to MMP:

- ❑ We've actually completed the change from FPTP, ahead of the pack.
- ❑ The change was well conceived, implemented, and accepted.
- ❑ The country has adapted well to the change.
- ❑ We have closed lists – and they seem to work well for us.
- ❑ We have one national zone for list seats – simple.
- ❑ We have few overhangs, and they are simply handled
- ❑ Fast results – NZ election nights are great
- ❑ And we're not complacent, still looking for improvements.

# This presentation addresses

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The threshold mechanism.

# The impossible choice

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Under the present system, I have ONE party vote.

So I have to choose either:

To support a small party

OR

To vote in the general election proper

I want to do both. I should be allowed to do both.

I may be one of the 5-8% of all voters who are denied a say in the election proper because I show support for a small party that does not pass a threshold.

This is unfair.

I want to be able to support a small party AND have a vote in the election proper.

# I have to choose one of these messages:

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1. I want to support a small party which has little chance of passing the threshold AND I have NO interest in the overall result of the election.
2. My sole interest is in the overall result of the election AND I have NO interest in expressing support for any small party.
3. I don't really understand how this works, so I'll tick any two boxes and see what happens.
4. I don't like any of the above, so perhaps it's easier not to vote at all.

But I like none of the above options.

I want to express support for a small party. But if it does not pass the threshold, I want my vote to go to one of the parties that I think will pass the threshold.

Because I want a say in the main event.

**I want MMP to change to allow me to express this.** I think there are many people like me.

# I want to participate, but I am frustrated

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‘I want to support a small party. But if I do so my vote will probably be wasted. But the overall result of the election is very important to me. I am stuck.’

‘My group would like to start a new party. But people in existing allied parties are likely to say: *Don’t, you will just take votes from us and probably waste them. And so reduce the chances of getting our bloc over 50%. Getting past 50% is everything, so we hate wasted votes.*’

‘The new party will never know how many supporters it had. Many potential supporters will vote strategically, choosing not to risk wasting their vote.’

‘It seems the big party bloc which I support is frightened of potential support parties – because of the risk of having votes ‘stolen’ and wasted.’

The atmosphere around small parties is poisonous. I do not like it.

# I want to give new parties a chance

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Since MMP there have been no new parties start and grow support until they eventually passed the 5% threshold. As far I can find out, all small parties have made their first entry into parliament with the help of an electorate seat.

We have had parties led by rebel MPs from the old system.

We have had parties get a few percent one election, then fade from view.

We have had parties with support from wealthy individuals

The Greens were lucky. They jumped straight to 5% (only just) in 1999, with one electorate and were lucky to stay just above 5% for a few elections before eventually becoming well-established. They could have been just below instead of just above.....and really struggled.

I'd like to see an environment where a party can safely grow amongst ordinary people with ordinary resources, without these unfair obstacles.

# If my party is close to the arbitrary 5%?

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I'm worried that just a few votes one way or the other could change the overall result.

6 seats in parliament depend on that last vote of about 100 000 for a party to get to 5%. It'd feel so unjust to miss out by just a few votes.

But worse, allied parties would probably be furious at my party. We probably ruined their chances of forming a government

But if my party just passed the threshold, there might be a huge legal dispute over the validity of just a few votes, because annulling a few votes could change the overall result of the election.

This sort of thing does sometimes happen. Donald Trump in the 2020 US presidential election was 'looking for' just 12780 votes in the hope of swinging the whole state of Georgia in his favour.

Just the kind of thing I do not want to see in New Zealand.

In any system, for elections or otherwise, arbitrary thresholds are to be avoided!



# Would a lower threshold help me?

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I have heard people advocate for lowering the 5% threshold to say 4%. Could this help?

- I would still have to make that unwanted choice.
- I would still be frightened of wasting my vote, so will still be put off supporting a small party.
- And small parties will still have that problem of being at odds with their friends.
- A result within a few votes either side of passing the threshold is still possible, just a little less of a problem.

So reducing the threshold percentage does not do much for me at all.

What can be done to give a choice when we cannot be sure that all options will be available?

Such situations arise all the time in our daily lives.

Let's try going to the beach for inspiration.....

# Time for an ice cream (a pistachio one)

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When someone offers me an icecream, I like pistachio flavour, but I also do not want to miss out altogether. So I might say:

*At the dairy, please get me a pistachio ice cream.  
If they have no pistachio, get me a vanilla one – they are sure to have that.*

Yes, a second choice means I can ask for my preferred flavour, but if that is not available, I am pretty certain to get the more popular flavour that I like nearly as much.

I think that every New Zealander has encountered this method of offering choices in an inclusive way.

I'd like to see this simple, intuitive idea applied to party voting in New Zealand MMP elections.



# How can I have that second choice?

*If my first choice party does not pass the threshold,  
give my party vote to my second choice party.*

A second choice of party vote is simple to implement.

1. Add another column to the party voting paper, with instructions.
2. Counting involves just a little more than before.
3. Seat allocation proceeds from here exactly as before.

It is easy to understand,  
robust against voter error,  
and fast and easy to count.

And that *excluded* 5-8% of voters  
are now *included*.

This method needs a name. Perhaps  Two-choice party voting



# Recap: Benefits of Two-choice party voting

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Every voter can have a vote that counts.

- ✓ No need for strategic voting.
- ✓ It's inclusive.
- ✓ Higher proportionality.

Obstacles to entry for new parties are lower because

- ✓ Allied parties no longer at odds – so they can work together.
- ✓ Small parties can see their support directly in the results.

Works with any threshold

- ✓ Lower the percentage or not
- ✓ One-seat-rule or not.

Eliminates the present threshold problems

- ✓ While retaining the threshold for its useful effect.

Vote counts just under the 5% threshold become a minor issue.

- ✓ Because second choice votes should lead to a similar overall result.
- ✓ It is disappointing for the party that falls short, But they haven't taken their friends down with them.

It's an idea with roots in the 2012 MMP review

- ✓ Many submitters mentioned a second choice.
- ✓ Several submissions went into detail.

# Why might I like Two-choice party voting? :

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- I can both support a small party AND have a say in the main election.
- And so can every New Zealand voter.
- I understand how the second choice works, no more complicated than choosing an ice cream.
- I can stop worrying about wasting my vote.
- No need for strategic voting.
- No worries about results close to that 5% threshold.
- If they decide to keep the threshold at 5%, I'm OK with that.
- I can help start (or work for) a new party without harming its allied parties.
- The country can have the benefits of a threshold without the present downsides.
- And I can still have easy voting, with fast paced results on election night.
- Oh, and there is New Zealand leading the way again.....

# More information

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More details will follow in my written submission to this review.

More information on MMP thresholds and the inclusive Two-choice party voting proposal can be found on my website at:

[www.onTheThreshold.nz](http://www.onTheThreshold.nz) or [www.ott.nz](http://www.ott.nz)

# Brief comments on other review issues

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Abolishing the one electorate seat threshold as proposed is I think dangerous. It makes one person parties into independents. Abolishing overhangs means taking from list seats (minority interests) to give to independents (usually connected to major parties). That is very likely to distort proportionality. (as seen in Scotland).

NZ's fast election results make proportionality or the lack of it very obvious.

False independents can be used to game MMP. They can be 'friends' of major parties and get seats beyond those justified by party votes via vote splitting.

One way of protecting against gaming is to deem a candidate vote also a party vote for that candidate's party. (Under inclusive party voting they would still have a second choice of party vote)

I would retain the one-electorate-seat rule, because it helps keep MMP proportional, and one-electorate situations are largely a hangover from FPTP and so ever fewer. I would introduce the second choice of party vote soon. And consider overhang changes later, taking an incremental approach.