



Session Three

TAKE YOUR SEAT

Take Your Seat. How your vote shapes representation in Parliament

The fundamental choice we all face on election day is between competing visions of Aotearoa.

From sessions 1 and 2, we now know each political party represents a vision of how Aotearoa should be. Each voter chooses the party whose vision they share. And through this process, 4 million voices get reflected in a 120-seat Parliament.

This session explores the mechanics of the electoral system – focussing on how the party vote translates values into political power on election day

Your vote helps decide who takes the seats in Parliament and how strongly those ideologies are represented to achieve the world you want.

Overview

This session explores the mechanics of the electoral process and government formation.

- Students start by learning some of the key concepts or features associated with our democracy, including parliament, decision making, and government.
- Students then run a mock election process – voting for parties, counting party votes, and apportioning seats.
- Students then explore how governments are formed through coalition.

Using a hands-on simulation, students explore how New Zealand's **Mixed Member Proportional (MMP)** voting system translates votes into seats in Parliament. Rather than focusing on real political parties, students will use fictional teams so they can





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concentrate on understanding the democratic process rather than political opinions.

Working together, students build a model Parliament, allocate seats **proportionally**, and discover why the magic number of **61 seats** matters. They see that the party with the most votes does not always have enough seats to govern alone, and that cooperation is often needed to form a government.

Equipment

- Voting ballot papers (x1 per student)
- Calculator (or phones if appropriate)
- Printable outline of parliament displaying 120 seats
- 6 different coloured pens to allocate seats.

Step One The Election (10 minutes)

Gathering the data

In the last lesson we learnt that participation gives your values power. Today we'll discover what happens after everyone has voted.

Have students cast one anonymous vote for one of the fictional parties (e.g. favourite pies; beef, lamb, chicken, fish, vege, fruit). Tally up the votes together on the board.

Example Tally (30 students):

- Lamb: 7 votes
- Beef: 9 votes
- Chicken: 5 votes
- Fish: 2 votes
- Vege: 4 votes
- Fruit: 3 votes

Ask: "Does the party with the most votes automatically get to make all the rules?" (Most will say yes. Use this to introduce that under MMP, power is shared proportionally).



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Step Two Build Parliament (15 minutes)

Translating votes into parliamentary power

Place **120 blocks** in the centre of the room. *Each block represents one seat in New Zealand's Parliament.*

Students work in groups to calculate each party's share of the 120 seats.

Split the class into as many groups as there are parties with votes. Assign each group one of the above party names. Each group counts out and builds its own pile of seats. Have groups arrange their seat piles together in a semi-circle to create the classroom Parliament.

For example:

Party	Votes	% of votes	Seats in 'parliament'
Lamb	7	23%	28 seats
Beef	9	30%	36 seats
Chicken	5	17%	20 seats
Fish	2	7%	8 seats
Vege	4	13%	16 seats
Fruit	3	10%	12 seats

- **61 seats = a majority.**

Step Three Build a Government (15 minutes)

The magic number: 61

Explain the core rule of Parliament: to pass a law or form a government, you must have a majority. Out of 120 seats, the magic number is **61**.

Challenge the parties: "Can anyone reach 61 seats on their own?"



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If the answer in your class is “NO – every party has less than 61 seats”:

- a) Invite the parties to negotiate
- b) When enough parties agree to work together, they can fill in the government and opposition benches of the final Parliament.

If the answer in your class is “YES – one party has 61 seat or more”:

- a) Explain a party who passes the 50% threshold can form a government on its own, appoint the Prime Minister, and start making laws.
- b) Explain special votes – which are not counted on Election Day – have now been counted, and the largest party falls below the 50% threshold.
- c) Invite the parties to negotiate.
- d) When enough parties agree to work together, they can fill in the government and opposition benches of the final Parliament.

As coalitions form, ask:

- Have you reached 61?
- Do your values/ideologies match enough to work together?
- What policies will you have to compromise on?

Keep this discussion light – the focus is understanding why cooperation is often necessary under MMP.

Step Four The One Vote Challenge (10 minutes)

The ripple effect of participation

Reveal the power of a single ticket from Session Two.

Change just **one** or **two** classroom vote from the winning party to the smallest party (e.g. Beef loses one, Fish gains one). Recalculate the percentages on the board and have the students adjust their Parliaments.

The Insight: Often, shifting just one or two votes changes the seat math enough to completely break a coalition's majority, forcing a new government to form.



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- "How many votes changed?" -> *Just one.*
- "How much changed in Parliament?" -> *Everything.*

Recalculate the seat totals (you can prepare this example beforehand to save time). Students rebuild Parliament. Do this with a different number of votes to change to different parties. Experiment with what that/those votes do to the percentages and seats.

Often, one vote will shift enough seats to:

- create a majority,
- remove a majority, or
- change which coalition can govern.

This creates a connection back to Session Two. **Every vote carries equal weight, and every vote contributes to the shape of Parliament.**

Digital Extension: Visualising the Shift

The Parliamentary Service has an online tool which students can use to rapidly test "What if?" scenarios without having to constantly recalculate the maths by hand.

<https://www.parliament.nz/learn/create-your-own-parliament?lang=en>

Reflection

Unscrambling the journey

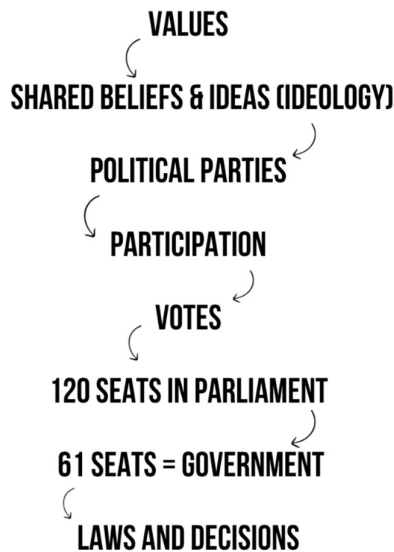
To tie all three sessions together, give the students these seven scrambled concepts on cut-out cards (or write them scrambled on the whiteboard).

Challenge them to put the steps in the exact chronological order of how a democracy works.



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The Correct Order:

Values: (What matters to you)

Ideology: (How you think society should work)

Party: (Finding people who share your lens)

Policies: (The practical rules you want to make)

Vote: (Using your ticket to participate)

Seats: (Translating votes into proportional representation)

Government: (Combining seats to reach 61 and gain the power to make laws)

1. What surprised you most about how votes became seats?
2. Why doesn't the largest party always form the government?
3. How did today's activity connect with what you learnt about participation in the previous lesson?

Summary Explanation

Democracy begins with your values. It grows through participation. It is measured in votes, represented by seats, and ultimately shapes the decisions that affect all of us.

Students finish with a concrete understanding of how **MMP turns votes into representation**, completing the journey from **values to participation to Parliament**.

By the end of the lesson, students will understand that elections are not simply about choosing a winner – they are about ensuring the values/ideologies of voters are represented in Parliament in proportion to the votes they receive.

Extension Activity Campaign for the classroom

Students apply their understanding of political parties, campaigning and voting by running a mock election and seeing how the results translate into representation.

Extension Activity: Campaign for the Classroom



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This is a practical application where students use their knowledge from the three sessions to try and win representation on a fictional Student Council.

Scenario: The class has been given funding to improve school life. Four groups will campaign to lead the project. They aren't competing to "win" outright; they are competing to earn *representation* based on proportional voting.

1. Form Your Party (5 mins): Use the groups from Session One. Decide on a party name, a logo, and three clear policies to improve school life (e.g. better study spaces, more sports gear).
2. Campaign (10 mins): Each party has two minutes to pitch the room. They must explain their underlying *ideology* (why it matters) and their *policies* (what they will do).
3. Secret Vote (5 mins): Every student gets one vote. Voting is secret. The teacher also gets a vote to simulate outside participation.
4. Take Your Seat (10 mins): Use the 30 classroom chairs (or 60 LEGO blocks). Convert the secret vote into seats.

Final Debrief:

- Did the loudest campaign get the most seats, or did the best values win?
- If this were our real school, what is one issue you would most like a genuine say on?