

20 October 2021

██████████
By email to: ██████████

Dear ██████████

OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT REQUEST 2021/36

On 22 September 2021 you made a request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) for the following information:

I'm writing to request under the OIA data you have about overseas participation in the previous three general elections.

In particular, I would appreciate data divided by the country of domicile of the voter, especially the total number of votes cast by country and the number of votes cast for each party by country.

I would also appreciate data on the method of voting used by overseas voters, including voting in person at NZ diplomatic missions and voting via mail. If that data is also available on a by-country basis, that would be much appreciated.

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At New Zealand parliamentary elections, overseas voters are made up of registered electors who reside overseas (who remain eligible to enrol and vote because they have been in New Zealand within the last 3 years for citizens, and 12 months for permanent residents) and registered electors who reside in New Zealand who are temporarily overseas at the time of the election.

Electors who reside overseas can provide an overseas postal address for electoral purposes, or may choose to provide a postal address in New Zealand for receipt of their electoral correspondence. Overseas electors are registered to vote at the address in New Zealand where they have last lived for at least a month.

All overseas voters are asked to confirm their current location overseas and their New Zealand address where they are enrolled to vote on the special vote declaration completed with their voting papers. This information is used to check their eligibility to vote and is sent to the Clerk of the House with all voting papers after an election and securely destroyed six months after the election.

We are not able to provide data by country of domicile of voter for overseas votes. However, for planning and reporting purposes we do collect data by country of overseas votes received, see the attached spreadsheet and the second part of your request.

Data on the number of votes cast for each party by country is not held by the Commission. However, we do publish information on the number of overseas votes cast by electorate. This information is available online for the last three elections by party and candidate vote here:

https://electionresults.govt.nz/electionresults_2020/statistics/party-sdv-by-electorate.html

https://electionresults.govt.nz/electionresults_2020/statistics/candidate-sdv-by-electorate.html

https://electionresults.govt.nz/electionresults_2017/statistics/party-sdv-by-electorate.html

https://electionresults.govt.nz/electionresults_2017/statistics/candidate-sdv-by-electorate.html

https://electionresults.govt.nz/electionresults_2014/e9/html/e9_part10_1.html

https://electionresults.govt.nz/electionresults_2014/e9/html/e9_part10_2.html

I would also appreciate data on the method of voting used by overseas voters, including voting in person at NZ diplomatic missions and voting via mail if that data is also available on a by-country basis, that would be much appreciated.

Data for the 2014, 2017 and 2020 General Elections in the attached spreadsheet provides an indicative breakdown by country and method of return of voting papers.

The Electoral Regulations 1996 (the Regulations) prescribe the methods available to overseas voters to return their voting papers. These methods allow overseas voters to return their voting papers:

- by upload
- at an overseas voting place
- by fax
- by post to the Commission in Wellington or an overseas voting place

There are special rules around defence force votes in Part 3 of the Regulations. Defence force votes are reported as a single line for the 2014 General Election.

Votes can be received from vessels under Part 3 or Part 4 of the Regulations. These are reported as a single line in the spreadsheet for 2014, 2017 and 2020.

Part 4 of the Regulations allow voters in remote locations to complete their voting papers electronically, by post, by fax or by dictation. Remote overseas voters who return their votes electronically are included in the upload column. Since the 2017 General Election we have also been able to offer remote voting services to electors on off-shore installations. These are reported in the spreadsheet as a separate line for 2017 and 2020. Votes can also be received from special voters on remote islands administered by the Department of Conservation. These are listed on a separate line for 2020.

Overseas voting places are NZ diplomatic missions and in Australia there are additional locations provided by the Australian Federal Electoral Commission and individual Australian State Electoral Commissions. The number of overseas voting places was reduced from 81 at the 2017 General

Election to 22 overseas voting places doing in-person voting and 26 offering postal voting at the 2020 General Election because of COVID-19.

Please note the number of overseas votes returned is different to the number of overseas votes in the statistical information provided in the links above. The information provided by country includes the total number of votes returned, whereas the results report the total number of valid and informal overseas votes. Votes that are disallowed because the voter is not qualified to vote, or because the declaration is not in order, are not included in the results.

In the interests of transparency, we release responses to Official Information Act requests every three months. We will publish this response with your personal details redacted on www.elections.nz.

You have the right under section 28(3) of the Act to make a complaint to the Ombudsman if you are not satisfied with the response to your request. Information about how to do this is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or by phoning 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Astle', written in a cursive style.

Graeme Astle
Manager Voting Services