



NEW ZEALAND CITIZENSHIP TEST

STUDY GUIDE

Everything you need to know to pass the

New Zealand Citizenship Test

nztestcitizen.com

2026 Edition
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KEY POINT: This guide is designed to be read alongside the practice tests at nztestcitizen.com. Take a test first to identify your weak areas, then study the relevant chapters.

Introduction

About the New Zealand Citizenship Test

From late 2027, most people applying for New Zealand citizenship by grant will need to pass a citizenship test. The test was announced by the Minister of Internal Affairs in May 2026 as part of reforms to ensure that new citizens understand their rights, responsibilities, and the democratic values of New Zealand.

What to expect:

The test consists of 20 multiple-choice questions selected randomly from a larger pool. You need to get at least 15 correct (75%) to pass. The test is taken in person, in English, and is administered by the Department of Internal Affairs.

KEY POINT: Each test attempt costs \$24 NZD. You get 3 attempts, then must wait at least 30 working days before 3 more attempts. After 6 failures, you may need to withdraw your citizenship application.

Who is exempt?

- Applicants under 16 years of age
- Applicants aged 65 and over
- Those granted a waiver for the English language requirement
- Those with certain medical conditions affecting their ability to sit the test
- People applying by birth, descent, or Western Samoa pathways

Chapter 1

The New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990

The New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 (commonly called BORA) is one of the most important laws in New Zealand. It protects and promotes civil and political rights and fundamental freedoms for everyone subject to New Zealand law — not just citizens, but all people in New Zealand.

KEY POINT: BORA applies to EVERYONE in New Zealand, regardless of citizenship or immigration status.

Key Rights Protected by BORA

Life and Security of the Person

- The right not to be deprived of life
- The right not to be subjected to torture or cruel treatment
- The right to refuse to undergo any medical treatment

Democratic and Civil Rights

- The right to vote (for citizens aged 18+)
- Freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief
- Freedom of expression (including freedom of the press)
- Freedom of peaceful assembly
- Freedom of association
- Freedom of movement (including the right to leave NZ)

Non-Discrimination and Minority Rights

- Freedom from discrimination on any grounds in the Human Rights Act
- Rights of ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities

Search, Arrest, and Detention

- Protection from unreasonable search or seizure
- The right to be informed of the reason for arrest
- The right to consult a lawyer

Fair Trial Rights

- The right to a fair and public hearing
- The right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty
- Protection from double jeopardy (being tried twice for the same offence)

Limits on Rights

Rights under BORA are not absolute. Section 5 states that rights may be subject to "such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society." For example, freedom of expression does not protect threats of violence or incitement to hatred.

The Role of the Attorney-General

Under Section 7 of BORA, the Attorney-General must report to Parliament if any proposed law (Bill) appears to be inconsistent with the Bill of Rights. This ensures Parliament is aware of any rights issues before passing a law.

KEY POINT: Courts cannot strike down laws passed by Parliament, but since 2022 they can issue formal 'declarations of inconsistency' to highlight when a law breaches BORA.

Chapter 2

Human Rights in New Zealand

New Zealand is committed to protecting human rights through domestic law and international treaties. The key legislation is the Human Rights Act 1993, which prohibits discrimination and promotes equality.

Prohibited Grounds of Discrimination

The Human Rights Act 1993 makes it unlawful to discriminate against anyone based on:

- Sex (including pregnancy and childbirth)
- Marital status
- Religious belief
- Ethical belief
- Colour
- Race
- Ethnic or national origin
- Disability (physical, psychiatric, intellectual)
- Age
- Political opinion
- Employment status
- Family status
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity

The Human Rights Commission

The Human Rights Commission is an independent body that promotes and protects human rights in New Zealand. It investigates complaints about unlawful discrimination, provides education, and advocates for policy changes.

KEY POINT: Everyone in NZ has equal legal rights regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. Same-sex marriage has been legal since 2013.

International Obligations

New Zealand is a party to seven of the nine core UN human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Chapter 3

Criminal Offences You Should Know

New Zealand has clear laws about what is and isn't acceptable behaviour. As a citizen, you are expected to know and obey these laws. Here are the key areas likely to be tested.

Family Violence

Family violence (domestic violence) is a serious criminal offence in New Zealand. The Family Violence Act 2018 strengthened protections for victims. It is never considered a 'private family matter' — it is a crime, and police will investigate and prosecute offenders.

Physical Discipline of Children

Since the 2007 amendment to Section 59 of the Crimes Act, using physical force for the purpose of correcting a child is NOT legally justified. This means smacking or hitting a child as punishment is against the law.

KEY POINT: Hitting a child as punishment is illegal in New Zealand since 2007.

Firearms

A firearms licence is required to possess firearms in New Zealand. After the 2019 Christchurch mosque attacks, most semi-automatic weapons and assault rifles were banned. The law is strictly enforced.

Drink Driving and Drug Driving

Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs is a criminal offence with serious penalties including fines, disqualification from driving, and imprisonment. The legal blood alcohol limit is 50mg per 100ml of blood for adults aged 20 and over (zero for under 20s).

Other Important Offences

- **Bribery and corruption** — criminal for everyone, not just officials
- **Forced marriage** — a criminal offence
- **Inciting racial disharmony** — an offence under the Human Rights Act
- **Threats to kill** — criminal, punishable by up to 7 years imprisonment
- **Elder abuse** — a criminal offence in all its forms
- **Recreational cannabis** — remains illegal (the 2020 referendum did not pass)

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- **Minimum alcohol purchase age** — 18 years old

Chapter 4

Voting Rights in New Zealand

Who Can Vote?

New Zealand citizens and permanent residents aged 18 and over who are enrolled can vote in general elections. New Zealand is unusual internationally in allowing permanent residents (not just citizens) to vote.

KEY POINT: Enrolling to vote is **COMPULSORY**. Actually voting is **NOT** compulsory.

The MMP Electoral System

New Zealand uses Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) representation, adopted in 1996. Under MMP, every voter gets two votes:

- **Electorate vote** — for the candidate you want to represent your local area
- **Party vote** — for the political party you want to see in Parliament. This determines the overall proportion of seats each party gets.

A party must win at least 5% of the party vote OR win one electorate seat to enter Parliament.

The Maori Electoral Option

People of Maori descent can choose to enrol on either the general electoral roll or the Maori electoral roll. This choice is made during the Maori Electoral Option period, which occurs after each census.

Referendums

A referendum is a public vote on a specific issue. Recent examples include the 2020 referendums on cannabis legalisation (which did not pass) and the End of Life Choice Act (which did pass).

Democratic Principles

Constitutional Monarchy

New Zealand is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy. The King (or Queen) is the head of state, represented in New Zealand by the Governor-General. The Prime Minister is the head of government.

The Rule of Law

The rule of law means that no one is above the law — including the government and its officials. Everyone is subject to and accountable under the law. This is a fundamental principle of New Zealand's democracy.

KEY POINT: No one is above the law in New Zealand — not the Prime Minister, not the government, not anyone.

The Treaty of Waitangi

The Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1840 between the British Crown and Maori chiefs, is considered a founding document of New Zealand. It established the relationship between Maori and the Crown and is a key part of New Zealand's uncodified constitution.

No Single Written Constitution

Unlike countries such as the United States, New Zealand does not have a single written constitution. Instead, its constitution is made up of key statutes (like BORA), the Treaty of Waitangi, constitutional conventions, and common law. This is called an 'uncodified' constitution.

Parliamentary Sovereignty

Parliament is the supreme law-making body. No court can override its legislation. This principle means that the elected representatives of the people have the final say on what becomes law.

Separation of Powers

New Zealand's government has three separate branches that provide checks and balances:

- **Legislature (Parliament)** — makes the laws
- **Executive (Government)** — implements the laws, led by the Prime Minister and Cabinet
- **Judiciary (Courts)** — interprets and applies the laws independently

Freedom of Expression

Everyone has the right to hold and express opinions. However, this right is subject to reasonable limits — for example, you cannot make threats of violence or incite hatred against groups.

Cabinet and Collective Responsibility

Cabinet is the most senior decision-making body of government, made up of Ministers and chaired by the Prime Minister. Under collective responsibility, all Ministers must publicly support Cabinet decisions, even if they personally disagreed during the discussion.

The Opposition and Select Committees

The Opposition plays a vital democratic role: holding the government accountable and presenting alternative policies. Select committees are small groups of MPs that examine Bills in detail, hear public submissions, and scrutinise government spending. Any member of the public can submit their views on proposed laws.

Chapter 6

Structure of Government

Parliament

New Zealand's Parliament is located in Wellington. The executive wing is known as 'the Beehive' due to its distinctive shape. Parliament has a unicameral (single chamber) system — the House of Representatives. The upper house (Legislative Council) was abolished in 1950. There are usually 120 Members of Parliament (MPs).

Head of State

The head of state is the King of New Zealand (the British monarch), represented by the Governor-General. The Governor-General's duties include giving Royal Assent to Bills, opening Parliament, and formally appointing the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister

The Prime Minister is the leader of the party (or coalition) that can command a majority in Parliament. After an election, the Governor-General invites this person to form a government. General elections are held every 3 years.

KEY POINT: General elections are held every 3 years. There are 120 MPs. NZ has a unicameral Parliament (no upper house/Senate).

The Courts

The Supreme Court of New Zealand is the highest court, replacing the Privy Council in London as the final court of appeal in 2004. The judiciary interprets and applies the law independently from the government.

The Waitangi Tribunal

The Waitangi Tribunal is a permanent commission of inquiry that hears claims by Maori about breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi by the Crown. It makes recommendations but cannot enforce its decisions.

Local Government

New Zealand has two levels of government: central government (Parliament) and local government (regional, district, and city councils). Local councils provide community services like water, roads, and libraries, and can make bylaws for their area.

Other Important Roles

- **The Speaker** — chairs debates in the House and ensures rules are followed
- **The Ombudsman** — investigates complaints about government agencies
- **Hansard** — the official written record of everything said in Parliament

Travel, Passports & Citizenship

Pathways to Citizenship

There are three ways to become a New Zealand citizen:

- **By birth** — born in New Zealand (with at least one parent who is a citizen or permanent resident)
- **By descent** — born outside NZ to a parent who is a NZ citizen
- **By grant** — meeting residency requirements (generally 5 years with a resident visa)

KEY POINT: Marriage to a NZ citizen does NOT automatically give you citizenship. Dual citizenship IS allowed.

Passports and Travel

New Zealand citizens need a valid NZ passport to travel internationally, including to Australia. If your passport expires overseas, you can apply for a new one at a NZ embassy, high commission, or consulate. Your citizenship is not affected by an expired passport.

Right to Enter and Remain

NZ citizens have the fundamental right to enter and remain in New Zealand. They cannot be deported. The Bill of Rights Act also affirms the right of everyone to leave New Zealand.

Privileges & Responsibilities of Citizens

Privileges of NZ Citizenship

- The right to live in New Zealand indefinitely
- Hold a New Zealand passport
- Vote in elections and referendums
- Stand for Parliament or local government
- Represent New Zealand in international sports
- Full access to education
- Full access to economic and social rights
- Cannot be deported from New Zealand

Responsibilities of NZ Citizens

- Obey and promote the laws of New Zealand
- Enrol on the electoral roll (compulsory)
- Pay taxes
- Not act in a way that is against the interests of New Zealand
- Behave as a responsible New Zealander

KEY POINT: Enrolling to vote is compulsory. Paying tax is a responsibility. You must not act against NZ's interests — but this does NOT mean you cannot criticise the government.

Chapter 9

Quick Reference Summary

Key Facts to Remember

Topic	Key Fact
Bill of Rights Act	1990
Human Rights Act	1993
Treaty of Waitangi signed	1840
Voting age	18
MPs in Parliament	120 (usually)
Electoral system	MMP (since 1996)
General elections	Every 3 years
Parliament type	Unicameral (single chamber)
Upper house abolished	1950
Head of state	The King, represented by Governor-General
Head of government	Prime Minister
Highest court	Supreme Court (since 2004)
Capital city	Wellington
Parliament building	The Beehive (Wellington)
Party vote threshold	5% to enter Parliament
Citizenship test	20 questions, 75% to pass
Test cost	\$24 per attempt
Maximum attempts	6 total (3 + wait + 3)
Residency for citizenship	5 years with resident visa
Same-sex marriage legal	Since 2013
Physical discipline of children	Illegal since 2007
Minimum alcohol purchase age	18
Recreational cannabis	Illegal
Dual citizenship	Allowed

Good Luck!

You now have a solid understanding of the key topics covered in the New Zealand Citizenship Test. The best way to prepare is to combine reading this guide with taking practice tests.

Take unlimited practice tests at:

nztestcitizen.com

This study guide is an unofficial resource based on New Zealand legislation and government publications. It is not affiliated with the NZ Government or the Department of Internal Affairs.

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