

New Zealand or Aotearoa is a small island country located in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. Despite only making up 0.06% of the world's total population (Statistics New Zealand, 2018), its political system is just as complex and multifaceted as those of other countries like Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, etc. This essay aims to explain the various sources of power and influence in Aotearoa, including what it means to be a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy, the role of the monarch and the Governor-General, the role of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, the role of the Government and its three branches as well as the democratic process and individual citizens. In addition to these traditional sources of power, Aotearoa's political system also includes various interest groups, media outlets, wealthy individuals, and businesses that can exert influence on the government's decisions and policies. This essay will delve into these different sources of power and their roles in shaping its political landscape.

As previously mentioned, New Zealand is a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy, which means that the current monarch, King Charles III, is the head of state. However, the King does not directly play a role in the day-to-day governance of the country. Instead, the King is represented by the Governor-General, Dame Cindy Kiro, who was appointed by the late Queen Elizabeth II at the advice of the current Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, and sworn in on 21 September 2021 (New Zealand Government, 2021). The Governor-General serves as a ceremonial figurehead and performs a range of duties on behalf of the King, including signing bills into law, appointing judges, and representing Aotearoa at international events. Despite not having any political power or influence, the Governor-General possesses important constitutional duties, including the power to dissolve parliament and call a general election, as well as the authority to appoint and dismiss on the advice of the Prime Minister and the responsibility for appointing the Prime Minister on the advice of the House of Representatives (Mulgan, 2004).

The Prime Minister (PM) is the leader of the government and the head of the Executive branch of the government. They are chosen from the political party that holds the most seats in the House of Representatives. The Prime Minister is responsible for setting the direction and priorities of the government and representing the country on the international stage, particularly in matters of foreign policy. As the leader of the government, the Prime Minister also plays a key role in shaping the country's domestic policies. In addition to these responsibilities, the Prime Minister is also a member of the Cabinet, a group of Ministers that is responsible for the overall direction and control of the government (McGee, 2017; Mulgan, 2004). The Cabinet is composed of the Prime Minister and other Ministers appointed by the Prime Minister to be responsible for specific areas of government policy. These Ministers are typically drawn from the ruling political party and are responsible for implementing and enforcing the policies of the government. The Cabinet meets regularly to discuss and make decisions on government policy, and the Prime Minister is responsible for chairing these meetings and leading the Cabinet. The Cabinet plays a crucial role in the decision-making process of the government, as it is responsible for the overall direction and control of the government (McGee, 2017; Mulgan, 2004).

The government is made up of three branches: the Executive, the Legislative, and the Judicial. The Executive branch, led by the Prime Minister and Cabinet, is responsible for implementing and enforcing government policies. They are responsible for the administration of the country and have a wide range of powers and responsibilities, including the power to make appointments to important government positions, negotiate and enter into treaties with other countries, and declare war or peace. It is also responsible for the management of public service, the defence of the country and the administration of justice (Mulgan, 2004). The Legislative branch is responsible for creating laws that reflect the will of the majority of the population. It consists of the Parliament, the highest law-making body, which is made up of the House of Representatives, the lower house of Parliament, and the Senate, the upper house of Parliament. The House is composed of 120 Members of Parliament (MPs) elected by the people in the general election. The party that wins the most seats forms the Cabinet. The Senate is made up of 51 members, including 6 Maori members who are elected through a separate process known as the Maori Roll (McGee, 2017; Mulgan, 2004). The Senate has the power to review and scrutinise legislation passed by the House but can't initiate or amend legislation. The Judicial branch is responsible for interpreting and applying laws made by Parliament. It consists of the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal, the High Court, and the District Court, as well as specialised courts and tribunals that deal with specific areas of law. The Judiciary plays a vital role in upholding and ensuring that laws are applied fairly and consistently (McGee, 2017). This separation of power is in place to ensure that no one part of the government has too much power.

The democratic process in Aotearoa allows the people to play a crucial role in choosing their representatives and influencing the direction and policies of the government (Palmer, 2022). Through the Mixed Member Proportional representation (MMP) voting system, the number of seats a political party holds in Parliament reflects the number of votes it receives from citizens, resulting in a more proportional representation of the population (Boston, et al., 1996; Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2021; Palmer, 1997). As a result, it is unlikely that any one political party will hold a majority of seats in the House of Representatives. The party with the most votes will typically form a coalition with another party on the same side of the political spectrum, allowing the public to vote for minor parties that more closely align with their personal beliefs. In addition to voting, the public can also participate in the democratic process through mechanisms such as referendums and the petition process. These mechanisms provide the public with the opportunity to express their opinions and concerns and have them taken into consideration by the government. Referendums allow the public to vote on specific issues, while the petition process allows individuals or groups to bring specific issues to the government's attention (New Zealand Parliament, 2020). Overall, the democratic process in Aotearoa is a crucial aspect of the country's political system and empowers the people to shape the direction and policies of the government through their participation in elections and other forms of political engagement (Palmer, 2022).

In addition to the traditional sources of power we have discussed, there are several outside sources of power that can play a role in the political system. The media, including newspapers, television, and radio, can have a significant influence on public opinion and shape the public's

understanding of political issues. They can report on political events and policies, provide analysis and commentary, and facilitate public debate. However, the media can also be biased or subject to pressure from political actors, which can impact the objectivity of their coverage (Entman, 1989). Interest groups, such as trade unions, environmental organisations, and advocacy groups, can also play a role in the political system by representing the interests of their members and seeking to influence government policy. They may engage in activities such as lobbying, campaigning, and public advocacy to promote their views and goals (Pi, 2010). Wealthy individuals and businesses may also seek to influence the political system through their financial resources. They may donate money to political parties or candidates, engage in lobbying, or use their media platforms to advocate for certain policies. However, there are laws and regulations in place to ensure that such influence is transparent and accountable (Pi, 2010). Overall, these different players can all contribute to the political discourse and decision-making process in Aotearoa. It is essential that all sources of power are held accountable for their action and that the political system remains transparent and fair for all participants.

In conclusion, the political system of New Zealand is a complex and multifaceted system that involves a range of traditional and outside sources of power shaping its political landscape. As a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy, the country's political system is characterised by the separation of powers between the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches of government, with the monarch serving as a ceremonial figurehead and the Governor-General carrying out important constitutional duties. The Prime Minister and Cabinet play a key role in setting the direction and priorities of the government and shaping domestic policies. In addition, media outlets, interest groups, wealthy individuals and businesses also play a role in the political system by seeking to influence government policy and decision-making. The political system of New Zealand ensures that the country is governed democratically and transparently, with the participation and engagement of its citizens being crucial to its functioning.

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