THE BUZZ

ISSUE 4 | 2025

Prepared by the Public Policy Club
University of Auckland

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

We are thrilled to present the 2025 instalment of *The Buzz* (Issue 4), and to have served as Content Co-Directors for the year. As the annual publication of the PPC's content team, *The Buzz* compiles articles produced by our fantastic team of writers.

Guided by 2025 Co-Presidents Stephanie Austin and Evangelos Siatiras, the Club placed a deliberate emphasis on international issues, encouraging writers to look beyond domestic policy debates. The result is a body of work that is broader in scope and more ambitious in outlook. The articles that follow span foreign policy and defence, economic policy, health and education, regulation, constitutional arrangements, and a range of pressing social issues affecting Aotearoa and the wider world.

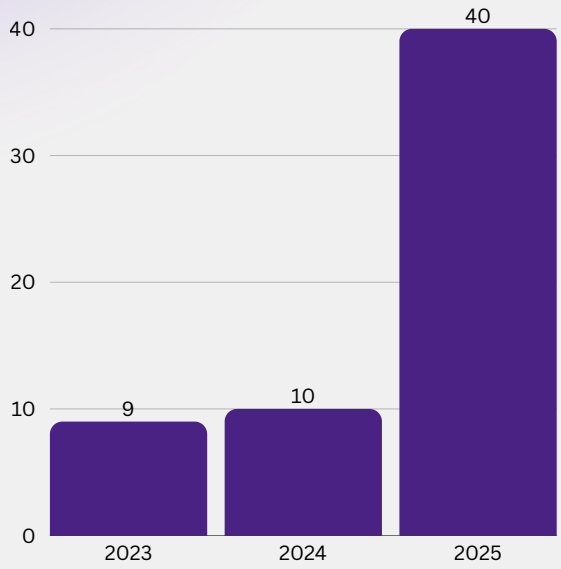
The Club experienced significant growth this year, and the content team reflected it. Our writing team expanded from eight writers in 2024 to twenty-two in 2025, producing a total of 40 articles across the year. We are immensely grateful to all of our writers for the time, effort, and care you have volunteered. It has been a privilege to work closely with such a thoughtful and committed group, and to review so many high-quality pieces. While there is not enough space in this issue for every article, we have included our favourite piece from each writer who submitted at least two articles this year.

This issue of *The Buzz* includes two new initiatives: the Debate Series and the Interview Series. We have included selected highlights of each. Full versions of these pieces, alongside other work by our writers, can be found on the Articles page of our newly refreshed website. Click here to read further.

Please note that all views expressed are those of their author(s). They do not necessarily reflect of the opinion of the Public Policy Club. Rather, as with all of the Club's work, *The Buzz* seeks to increase student civic engagement and deconstruct issues of policy and politics. It does so by providing a space where readers can engage with our writers' analysis of, and reflections on, the year that has been.

Ngā mihi,
Riley Parnwell and Gabriella Beecroft
2025 Content Co-Directors

YEAR IN REVIEW



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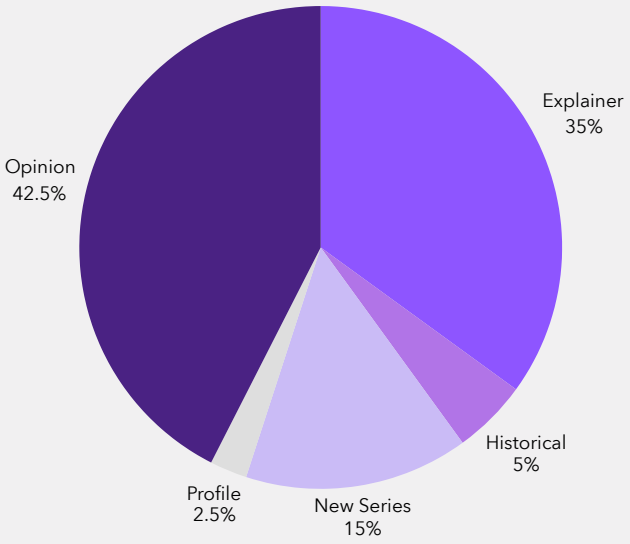

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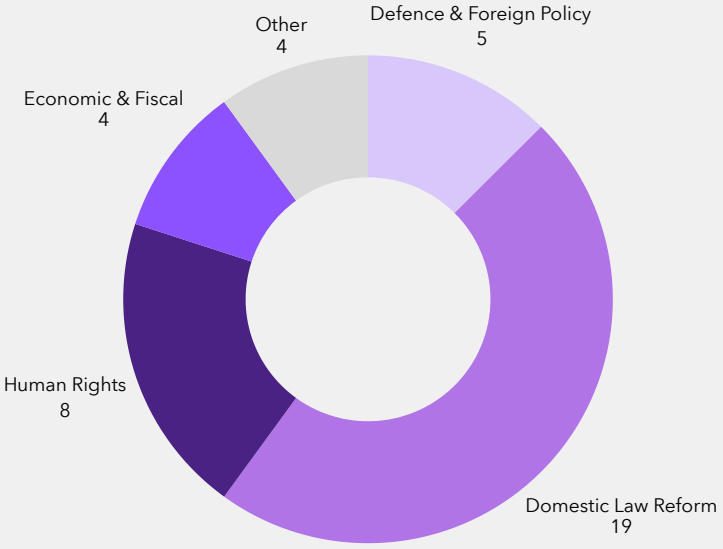

Article Theme Composition

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EDITOR'S PICK

OPINION | CODIFYING FEMICIDE: LATIN AMERICA'S EMERGENCY AND THE LIMITS OF INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL LAW

BY TILOURSHITA THIAGU

Marisela Escobedo Ortiz boarded a bus on December 16, 2010, heading to the Government Palace in Chihuahua to demand justice for her 16-year-old daughter, Rubí. Rubí's body had been found in 2008, burned, dismembered, and abandoned for months. Her killer, Rubí's former boyfriend Sergio Barraza, confessed. And yet, three state judges released him, citing "lack of evidence" (Foreign Policy in Focus, 2011). Marisela, undeterred, carried her grief through courtrooms, protests, and petitions until a masked gunman shot her dead in broad daylight, outside the very building where she had placed her last hope for justice. Two crimes. One unanswered demand: dignity for her daughter. And she paid for it with her own life (Foreign Policy in Focus, 2011).

Women protest gender-based violence in Puebla, Mexico (Source: Reuters, Imelda Medina)

Marisela and Rubí's story is not an anomaly; it is one among thousands. Across the region, women are killed not because of what they have done, but because they are women. Shot by husbands. Beaten by ex-partners. Strangled by strangers. Their deaths are brutal, intimate, and predictable. This is not domestic violence. It is femicide: the gender-motivated killing of women. And it has become a regional emergency.

The statistics are staggering. In 2022 alone, over 4,000 women were murdered in Latin America simply for being female (ECLAC, 2023). Every six hours, a woman is killed by someone who once claimed to love her. In many cases, the bodies are never recovered. The perpetrators are never caught. And the state never speaks their names. These deaths are not isolated incidents. They form a pattern that is systemic, relentless, and largely ignored.

To its credit, some Latin American countries have attempted to legislate against this crisis. Mexico defined feminicidio in its penal code in 2012, with Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia following with their own legislative reforms (Oxford Research Encyclopedia, 2020). These laws often acknowledge gender-based motives and impose harsher penalties when factors like domestic abuse or sexual violence are involved. However, despite this, conviction rates remain abysmally low. Investigations are routinely mishandled. Police often dismiss killings as crimes of passion or suicide. In some cases, judges do not apply femicide laws at all, reverting instead to lesser charges like murder or manslaughter.

This failure is not only cultural but structural. Many of these countries lack the institutional training, forensic capacity, or political will to implement these laws effectively. There is no single protocol for identifying femicide. Families often conduct their own investigations. In El Salvador, nearly 98% of femicide cases end without conviction. In Mexico, the impunity rate hovers at around 95% (Amnesty International, 2023). In Honduras, femicide is the leading cause of violent death for women. These numbers reveal a harsh truth: codification alone is insufficient without enforcement, oversight, and accountability.

Regionally, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, known as the Belém do Pará Convention, was adopted in 1994 (Organisation of American States, 1994). It was groundbreaking, defining violence against women as a human rights violation and obligating states to act. However, it lacks strong enforcement mechanisms, leaving a significant margin of discretion for states to implement its provisions. This lack of enforceability limits the impact of these conventions, as their recommendations are often ignored.

Rather than drafting an entirely new convention, what is needed now is a dedicated regional protocol or legal instrument under the framework of Belém do Pará, one that directly confronts femicide. This protocol must mandate standardised legal definitions, outline evidence-based investigative procedures, and enable cross-border cooperation on data collection and forensics. Importantly, it should empower the Inter-American Commission of Women to oversee implementation and hear complaints when domestic systems fail.

Such a mechanism would help bridge the gap between political will and legal accountability. It would strongarm states to go beyond symbolic reforms, aligning their national laws with a shared regional standard. Like the Istanbul Convention in Europe, this would transform a rights-based aspiration into legally enforceable obligations, finally treating femicide as the regional emergency it is (Council of Europe, 2011).

Gender-based violence protest outside Mexico City's National Palace (Source: Reuters, Edgard Garrido)

At the UN level, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is the only legally binding instrument addressing discrimination against women, but it too lacks teeth as it sadly fails to expressly address violence against women, let alone femicide (Khadija Saad, 2021). While the CEDAW Committee, which monitors the treaty's implementation, has provided evolutive interpretations of the Convention through its thirty-nine general recommendations, these are not legally enforceable and do not bridge the treaty's gap regarding explicit protection against femicide.

Codifying femicide in international law is not symbolic but necessary. Naming it as a standalone international crime would do three things: create pressure, establish legal precedent, and open pathways to justice. The Rome Statute should be amended to explicitly include femicide as a crime against humanity.

Alternatively, the UN General Assembly could adopt a resolution urging member states to criminalise, track and report femicide just as they do with torture, trafficking, and enforced disappearance.

Legal codification also shifts culture. When rape was defined as a war crime in the 1990s, it reshaped military conduct, prosecution standards, and survivor support (Britannica, 2025).

When apartheid was named, it legitimised global intervention and accountability. Naming femicide would do the same. Until then, the world will continue to treat it as tragic, but tolerable.

It would also create practical tools. Governments would be required to fund forensic training, establish femicide units within law enforcement, and provide support services for victims' families. Courts would be compelled to consider gender motive. Prosecutors would be trained in trauma-informed practice. Families could access international legal forums when their domestic systems fail to provide them with adequate protection.

Each time a woman is killed and the law looks away, the message becomes louder: your life is not worth the paperwork. Your death does not count. Your absence does not require justice.

Marisela Escobedo Ortiz carried her daughter's name on placards, in interviews and on courtroom steps. She died because the state refused to protect her, and then failed again to investigate her murder adequately. Her case represents not just a failure of law, but a failure of will. That will can be reshaped by naming the crime, defining it and demanding action beyond borders.

There is no justice without naming. And there is no excuse left for delay.

SEE ORIGINAL ARTICLE FOR THE FULL REFERENCES

Activist Khumo Maake pictured in protest against femicide and gender-based violence in Pretoria, South Africa (Source: Agence France-Presse)

ARTICLES

OPINION | WHEN POLITICS IS PERFORMANCE: THE BURDEN ON ETHNIC WOMEN MPS

BY SHREYA BAKHSHI

From Hana Rawhiti Maipi-Clarke to Priyanca Radhakrishnan and Rebekah Jaung, ethnic women in Aotearoa face the double bind of being both too ethnic and not ethnic enough.

This article draws on discussions from Session 1 - Representation and Ethnic Women in Politics, of the Ethnic Women in Politics Summit (EWP), September 2025. Ethnic Women in Politics is a 3-year research project led by Dr Rachel Simon-Kumar, Dr Priya Kurian, and their team. The research examines the lived realities of women in New Zealand politics, focusing on those who are non-Pākehā, non-Māori and non-Pasifika, addressing the complex intersections between gender, ethnicity, culture and politics in Aotearoa's bicultural and multi-ethnic democracy (EWP, n.d).

Rebekah Jaung, Green Party candidate in the 2018 Northcote by-election (Source: New Zealand Herald)

Politics is inherently performative, defined by factors like party ideologies and electoral systems. After all, membership itself signals alignment between personal values and collective party ideology. Aotearoa is no different when it comes to 'performing' politics. When Hana Rawhiti Maipi-Clarke, a Māori woman MP, tore up the Treaty Principles Bill in Parliament, it was more an act of justified rebellion than anything else the Privileges Committee deemed it to be (Dunlop, 2025; Farrier, 2024). But how would the outcomes have looked if Maipi-Clarke were not a woman of colour? Deeper questions like this, and more, were raised at the Ethnic Women in Politics Summit, jointly hosted by the University of Auckland and the University of Waikato, which asked, "Where do women stand when politics intersects with ethnicity?" and "What happens when the actions of women politicians are judged against the norms of the majority population we live in?"

The first session, on Representation and Ethnic Women in Politics in Aotearoa, was chaired by Rachel Simon-Kumar and had Labour MP Priyanca Radhakrishnan and former Green Party MP Rebekah Jaung as the panellists. They spoke to the research through their own experiences, emphasising how systemic gender disparities are exacerbated by ethnicity. Reports like Te Iwitanga i roto i te Ratonga Tūmatanui – Ethnicity and the Ethnic Evidence (Ministry of Ethnic Communities, 2024; Public Service Commission, 2024) suggest a growing presence of ethnic women in public roles. But numbers only tell part of the story; retention, especially in politics, adds essential context.

Speaking about political representation, Radhakrishnan, a long-term Labour list MP, spoke about the difficulties of being recognised within a party. According to her, ethnic women lack role models, which creates an initial limitation to their joining the party. Even though ethnic women join political parties on an ideological basis, soon after, they are left scrambling for support. This lack of support often channels them into roles where the performance of their politics is scripted for them to perform their diversity, reducing them to mere symbols. Jaung and Radhakrishnan both agreed, citing their own experiences (EWP Research Findings, 2025).

Priyanca Radhakrishnan on Commonwealth Day, 2022 (Source: GG-Govt)

"There was a huge amount of expectation that you would be an 'ethnic candidate', and that you would bring in the ethnic vote," said Radhakrishnan (EWP Research Findings, 2025). There is an expectation for ethnic women politicians to attend their community events and be the spokesperson for their entire community, which, according to both Radhakrishnan and Jaung, is unrealistic. This expectation was something both women grappled with. Jaung tried to bridge the gap between the Korean-NZ community and politics, but she was more than a 'Korean-Kiwi woman' and often had to suppress other parts of herself. Likewise, Radhakrishnan could not speak for every Indian or every Malayali (EWP Research Findings, 2025). Expecting one politician to represent an entire community is not only unrealistic but also impractical.

Performing one's ethnicity in politics comes with the added burden of being tokenised for characteristics that define your belonging in the space. The Summit made clear that this tokenisation is not abstract; it plays out daily in politics, highlighting the reality on the ground where gendered systemic differences further play into the intersectionality of ethnicity and politics. Ethnic women politicians are then torn between performing ethnic politics for their respective parties and performing politics that they truly believe in. In Jaung's words, "I was seen as a Korean-Kiwi woman, but there were other aspects to my personality I couldn't express while performing my ethnicity" (EWP Research Findings, 2025).

Radhakrishnan spoke about how she did not want to be recognised only for her ethnicity, but for her skills and merit as a politician; she soon realised it was a lot more difficult than it seemed. And in Maipi-Clarke's case, performing her politics came with some serious consequences. There are numerous other examples of ethnic women exiting political spaces for this very reason. It is a battle between joining a party, being tokenised, and being unable to succeed because you were not resilient enough for the real world of politics (Chapman, 2024). This tug of war reflects institutions that pigeonhole ethnic women into their identities rather than positioning them as leaders. They are too ethnic for the mainstream and not ethnic enough for their own communities.

Hana-Rāwhiti Maipi-Clarke during a hīkoi to Parliament, 2024 (Source: 1News)

The mixed-member proportional system (MMP) provides a level of respite with its list function; however, being on the list doesn't guarantee reelection, let alone representation. This leads to candidates questioning their agency since they are already part of a system that has reduced them to symbols. Furthermore, MMP does not provide any safeguards beyond elections, and instead becomes more of a revolving door for ethnic women. The three-year term cycle is not enough time for ethnic women candidates to prove themselves or build a governance track record. Ethnic women may get through the door; however, the political machinery rarely allows them to stay long enough, leading to higher attrition and lower retention rates. Thus, representation without retention becomes tokenism dressed as progress (EWP Research Findings, 2025).

For things to change, the political system needs to change. Unless the system carves out a space for ethnic women politicians, they will continue to remain stuck in the revolving door of the three-year cycle. One way to achieve this, as Radhakrishnan said, is by creating support systems for oneself within the system. Creating representation that uplifts ethnic women and allows them to perform politics beyond the narrow confines of their ethnicity. The need for this change is pertinent, as Aotearoa is a diverse land home to an increasingly diverse population. One that requires leaders who represent them regardless of where they come from.

True representation will only be achieved when the performance of politics moves beyond tokenising ethnicity to embracing it. Maipi-Clarke's bill tearing was more than just a rebellion; it was proof that when ethnic women stop performing, the system starts punishing.

Note: Malyali is the term used to refer to people from the southern Indian state of Kerala.

SEE ORIGINAL ARTICLE FOR THE FULL REFERENCES

EXPLAINER | THE 2025 BUDGET IN A NUTSHELL

BY DANIEL BLUNDELL

The Government recently released their 2025 Budget, outlining where it will be spending New Zealanders' money for the next fiscal year. For 2025/26, key aspects of the Budget include an 'Investment Boost', KiwiSaver changes, additional investment in health, education, law and order, and social services, as well as increased defence spending. This article will detail the larger allocations that have been made in the 2025 Budget and explore its reception by industry professionals, including their critiques and praises for what the Budget falls short on, and what it achieves.

BUDGET OVERVIEW

Investment Boost

The Investment Boost is described by the Government as their 'centrepiece of Budget 2025', and is essentially a form of tax relief for business owners who are looking to further invest in productive assets such as machinery, vehicles, tools, and equipment. With this boost, businesses can deduct 20% of a new asset's value from that year's taxable income. The Government's goal is for this to ultimately drive economic growth, increase the productivity of workers and lift incomes. The Investment Boost is predicted to lift GDP (Gross Domestic Product) by 1% and wages by 1.5% over the next twenty years, with half of that increase predicted to occur within the next five years.

KiwiSaver Changes

The default rate of employee and employer contributions is rising from the minimum 3% to 3.5% from 1 April 2026, and then finally to 4% from 1 April 2028. Furthermore, the Government contribution is being extended to apply to 16 and 17-year-olds. To account for this increased cost, however, the Government has decided to reduce its annual contribution from 50 cents per dollar contributed (with a maximum of $521.43) to 25 cents per dollar contributed, with a maximum of $260.72.

Those who earn more than $180,000 per year will not receive the annual government contributions from 1 July 2025. The Government says that with these changes, the KiwiSaver balances of employees contributing at the new default rate will grow faster than they do at the current default rate of 3% (The Treasury New Zealand, 2025b).

The 2025 Budget (Source: RNZ / Samuel Rillstone)

Health and Education investment

Overall, the Government has committed to a funding increase of $5.5 billion for hospital and specialist services, primary care, and public health, with $1 billion being allocated to redeveloping Nelson Hospital, the Wellington Emergency Department, and upgrading Auckland hospitals. A further $447 million is being used to expand access to urgent care and after-hours services, and $1 billion is being allocated to providing new, additional treatments and medicines that Pharmac have announced over the last 12 months.

In the education sector, the Government is aiming to lift school achievement by investing $646 million to support children with additional learning needs, and $100 million to support kids who need extra maths help. A further $140 million is being used to lift falling school attendance.

Law and order and social services

Larger investments in the law-and-order sector include $480 million of additional funding to frontline policing, $472 million to manage prison growth, and $246 million to reduce court delays and improve access to justice for victims. Additionally, $774 million has been allocated to respond to the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care, and $760 million is being provided to support the provision of Disability Support Services.

Increased Defence Spending

The Government says it has increased defence and foreign affairs spending to enhance security in the Pacific region and to promote New Zealand's interests internationally. Overall, $2.7 billion is being used to boost capability in the New Zealand Defence Force. Included in this is $660 million being funded to improve Defence Force capabilities across air, sea, land and cyberspace sectors, and $368 million is being used to deliver overseas development assistance focused on the Pacific. Additionally, funding is being provided to support troop deployment and training in countries such as Ukraine, and to fund new aircraft and replace older ones. The Government is also spending $84 million to improve New Zealand's relations in Asia to support its goal of doubling exports in that region.

RECEPTION OF THE 2025 BUDGET

Law and order and social services

Responses to the Government's budget have been mixed, with some viewing it as positive and others believing that it is lacking in some areas or has neglected pressing issues. Phil O'Reilly, former Business NZ boss, in correspondence with the NZ Herald, said that the budget did a reasonable job of balancing fiscal consolidation and staying true to the goal of growth (NZ Herald, 2025). He supports the investment boost, saying that a 100% reduction like is offered in other countries may not incentivise growth, and instead prompt unnecessary spending for tax breaks.

Craig Renney, economist and director of policy at the Council of Trade Unions, said he was disappointed that the $12 billion saved from the recent changes to pay equity claims (Satherley, 2025) wouldn't be going towards things that would benefit those affected. He also explained that the KiwiSaver contribution changes would affect low-income workers the most, though he supported the extension of KiwiSaver to 16 and 17-year-olds. Overall, he had a largely negative view of this year's Budget, saying that "this is a Budget with all its priorities wrong – and working people will be paying the price" (NZ Herald, 2025). Economist Shamubeel Eaqub seems to agree, saying that middle-income earners will be hit by the KiwiSaver changes, as once they are fully implemented, an average worker earning $75,000 would end up paying more employer superannuation contribution tax (ESCT), and combining this with the reduced Government annual contribution, "the Government will claw back about $500 from you per year" (Ricketts, 2025).

The Policy and Public Affairs Manager for the NZ Taxpayers' Union, James Ross, described the Budget as being bad for everyone and a lot worse for young people, and agreed with Renney that middle-income workers would feel the pain of stagnant wages, which is outlined in the Government's Economic and Fiscal Update (Ricketts, 2025). However, Ross, as well as former Conservative Party CEO Christine Rankin, thought the decision to rescind the benefit for 18 and 19-year-olds who have just left school was a good idea, with Ross saying that if parents can support their school leavers, they should.

In Parliament, the opposition has condemned the budget, with Leader of the Opposition Chris Hipkins saying "this budget is nothing but bad news" and that it would be remembered as "the budget that left women out" (Lardies, 2025). Green Party Co-leader Chlöe Swarbrick called it the "trickle-down budget, the no ambition budget, the child poverty budget"(Lardies, 2025). Whereas David Seymour, leader of the ACT Party, claimed on Facebook that it was a budget that "represents another year of stable government" (Lardies, 2025).

OPINION | A LOSING BET: ARE WE DOING ENOUGH TO PREVENT GAMBLING HARM IN YOUNG NEW ZEALANDERS?

BY YEONSOO SON

The 2023/24 New Zealand Gambling Survey paints a stark picture of escalating youth vulnerability: approximately 26,000 individuals aged 15 to 24 now fall within the moderate-to-high-risk categories for gambling-related harm (Health New Zealand, 2025). One in three secondary school students have gambled before (Rossen et al., 2013), and disturbing reports have surfaced of children as young as 11 racking up thousands in gambling debt (Craig, 2024). These are not isolated incidents but a systemic failure to protect rangatahi in a rapidly evolving risk environment.

What emerges is not only a public health concern, but a regulatory and social blind spot. Policy frameworks remain tethered to a pre-digital era, fragmented in delivery, and largely unresponsive to the technological environment shaping youth behaviour. This article examines the drivers and impacts of gambling harm among young New Zealanders, critiques the adequacy of current protections, and explores what meaningful reform could look like.

WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE GAMBLE?

A confluence of social, technological, and psychological forces is fuelling a surge in youth gambling across Aotearoa. One of the most insidious contributors is the erosion of boundaries between gaming and gambling. Digital gaming environments now routinely feature chance-based mechanics – loot boxes, prize wheels, and microtransactions – that mimic the psychological dynamics of gambling: randomised rewards, variable pay-out schedules, and emotional investment in "wins" (Craig, 2024). Normalising these experiences from an early age increases the likelihood of progressing into more traditional forms of gambling (Boyd et al., 2024).

Casino tables in full swing in Skycity, Auckland (Source: Jan Greune)

Compounding this trend is the growing commercialisation of gambling through social media. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have become powerful marketing vehicles for gambling operators, allowing direct engagement with young audiences through influencer partnerships and viral content. In Aotearoa, the New Zealand TAB and its youth-focused offshoot, Betcha, have embraced these tactics - leveraging meme culture, gamified content, and lifestyle branding to build appeal to the youth demographic (Mathias, 2024). This form of marketing often bypasses conventional age-gating mechanisms and embeds gambling within the everyday digital landscape under the guise of entertainment or community.

Social and family environments reinforce these risks. Adolescents who witness gambling within their homes are more likely to view the practice as routine and acceptable. Peer influence intensifies this vulnerability. For many, gambling becomes a social activity, a form of bonding or bravado among friends, especially in online spaces where financial consequences feel abstract (Rossen, Butler, & Denny, 2011). These quiet yet powerful forces mask the gambling risks, allowing harmful behaviours to take root.

BEYOND THE DOLLARS – THE IMPACT OF YOUTH GAMBLING

The growing accessibility of gambling and its increasing presence in young people's digital and social worlds are especially alarming, given that the consequences stretch far beyond financial loss. Gambling during adolescence can inflict deep and lasting harm on mental, emotional, and social well-being. Young people who engage in problematic gambling are significantly more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and distress, with mounting evidence linking gambling harm to increased rates of suicidal ideation (Moreira, Azeredo & Dias, 2023).

Furthermore, gambling initiated during adolescence is a strong predictor of chronic gambling problems in adulthood (Moreira et al., 2023). What may begin as impulsive or socially driven risk-taking can solidify into entrenched patterns of harm with lifelong consequences. Over time, these behaviours risk being passed down and perpetuated across generations. This cycle elevates youth gambling from a personal issue to a serious, intergenerational public health concern. Policy responses, therefore, must move beyond narrow regulatory fixes and confront the deeper conditions that make gambling appealing and accessible to vulnerable rangatahi.

A REGULATORY REGIME STUCK IN THE PAST

Yet Aotearoa's regulatory framework remains outdated in rapidly evolving digital gambling landscapes. The Problem Gambling Foundation said that despite its original intent, the Gambling Act 2003 no longer offers adequate protection in an era shaped by digital convergence and algorithmic targeting (Craig, 2024). Conceived before the rise of smartphones and social media, the Act focuses narrowly on physical venues and legacy gambling formats.

While it sets age limts – 18 for Instant Kiwi, TAB betting, and pokie machines, 20 for casinos, and none for Lotto games (beyond parental consent for prizes over $1,000) – these thresholds are increasingly disconnected from contemporary youth gambling behaviour. Rangatahi are not walking into casinos; they are gambling on their phones.

The Cabinet has acknowledged this policy lag by moving to regulate online casino gambling (Velden, 2024). However, critical protections, such as robust age verification systems and built-in harm minimisation tools, remain under development. Until these mechanisms are operational and enforced, young people will continue to navigate a borderless gambling ecosystem.

WIthout any online gambling laws, New Zealand has become a highly targeted grey market. Source: Newsroom

Equally concerning is the lack of structured, nationwide gambling education in schools. Although programmes like Tūturu – a collaboration between the NZ Drug Foundation and the Problem Gambling Foundation – are beginning to offer evidence-based resources to improve student awareness and resilience, most schools still operate without formal curriculum content on gambling harm (New Zealand Drug Foundation, 2024). This leaves rangatahi poorly equipped to recognise the risks of gambling or navigate the increasingly blurred lines between gaming, betting, and entertainment. Without national guidance or curriculum mandates, the responsibility for addressing these issues falls to individual schools, many of which lack the resources to respond effectively.

POLICY SOLUTIONS: WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Reducing gambling harm among rangatahi requires more than piecemeal regulation. It calls for a comprehensive public health approach that acknowledges the structural, cultural, and digital contexts shaping youth behaviour.

A critical starting point could be reforming digital regulation. Despite the challenges posed by rapid and complex technological change, policy responses should address known risk factors with evidence-based interventions. For example, policymakers may wish to consider expanding advertising standards to restrict gambling promotion on platforms heavily used by under-25s. In parallel, establishing a dedicated regulatory agency with an explicit mandate to oversee digital gambling, particularly across social media, could help fill significant gaps in current oversight.

However, regulation alone is unlikely to be sufficient. Complementary efforts within the education system can help build long-term prevention capacity. Rather than focusing narrowly on financial risks or individual choices, school-based programmes will be more effective if they address the broader psychological and social drivers of youth gambling. Research shows that interventions are most effective when participatory, holistic, and culturally grounded, emphasising digital literacy in ways that resonate with rangatahi.

HONOURING TE TIRITI O WAITANGI: INDIGENOUS-LED SOLUTIONS

Culturally responsive approaches must also include a genuine commitment to te Tiriti o Waitangi. This is not a supplementary concern – it is essential for a just and effective public health response. Māori continue to experience disproportionate harm from gambling, a reality rooted in colonisation, which has undermined the self-determining rights of hapū and imposed Western health models that often fail to serve Māori communities (Palmer du Preez, Lowe, Mauchline, Janicot, Henry, Garrett, & Landon, 2020).

A Tiriti-consistent response necessitates structural change. The Health and Disability System Review (2020) recommended resourcing the Māori Health Authority (Te Aka Whai Ora) to commission, design, and deliver gambling harm reduction services based on kaupapa Māori frameworks. However, the recent legislation (Pae Ora Disestablishment of Māori Health Authority Amendment Act 2024) disestablishing Te Aka Whai Ora highlights the fragility of Maori-led health institutions within existing political structures. Rather than diminishing the case for reform, this reinforces the urgent need for developing enduring structures that supports a whānau-centred model of care grounded in whanaungatanga (relational connection), wairua (spiritual well-being), and manawhakahaere (self-stewardship). This approach is vital given the evidence that Māori-led addiction and harm reduction approaches are significantly more effective when they honour collective, intergenerational wellbeing and centre Māori worldviews (Graham & Masters-Awatere, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The rise in youth gambling harm reflects more than a gap in individual responsibility – it reveals a collective failure of systems designed to protect. While no single intervention will eliminate risk, this article identifies that meaningful change begins by recognising that behind every statistic is a story, a whānau, a community. As digital environments continue to evolve, so too must our policies. Crucially, the response to youth gambling harm is not just a matter of regulation, but a matter of heart – and of our willingness to meet the urgency of this issue with the compassion it demands.

SEE ORIGINAL ARTICLE FOR THE FULL REFERENCES

OPINION | WHY NEW ZEALAND'S ABORTION LAWS ARE NOT GUARANTEED

BY TIA DEB

The US Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v Wade in 2022 made headlines worldwide. In Aotearoa, this emboldened anti-abortion activists to protest the then-new Abortion Legislation Act 2020 (1News, 2022). While unsuccessful in their endeavour to repeal the act, the legislation is still not as protected as many might assume. This article analyses concerns around the current Health Minister, Simeon Brown, and how his stance on abortion may undermine access.

BACKGROUND ON HEALTH MINISTER SIMEON BROWN

The Abortion Legislation Act removed abortion from the Crimes Act and allowed for termination before 20 weeks, without a doctor's referral (Ministry of Health, 2023). Current Health Minister, Simeon Brown, voted against the Act in all three readings (Witton, 2025), proposed controversial amendments to track women's fertility and abortions (De Anda, 2025), and voted to dismantle safe areas around abortion clinics in the name of what David Seymour labelled "free speech" (Witton, 2025; Coughlan, 2020). He also led protests with the group 'Stop Family Planning' with the hopes of dismantling abortion access, and, as a university student, established and became President of the ProLife Auckland group on campus (Emily Writes, 2025). Clearly, his views are deeply enmeshed in his political action, policy, and voting decisions.

Roe v. Wade demonstrations, 2022 (Source: Organization for World Peace)

TIA'S ARTICLE EXPANDS ON A COURSE ASSIGNMENT WHICH CAN BE FOUND HERE.

Even Dame Margaret Sparrow, prolific pro-choice activist and former Abortion Law Reform (ALRANZ) president commented that "he was very arrogant" and was "quoting unscientific statistics about medical abortion" when she met him during his advocacy at university (Emily Writes, 2025). Now, as Health Minister, he has promised that no changes to abortion law will be made (Smith, 2025). Even so, many have noted that there are other ways to undermine the Abortion Legislation Act and make it more difficult for people to access abortion without outright repealing the law (Beddoe, 2025; Beddoe & Joy, 2022).

WHAT THE GOVERNMENT CAN DO TO UNDERMINE ABORTION

Firstly, Simeon Brown and the National-led coalition government have the power to cut funds or limit resources to support abortion services (Beddoe, 2025; Beddoe & Joy, 2022; Emily Writes, 2025). This applies especially to Sexual Wellbeing Aotearoa (formerly Family Planning), as they rely heavily on government funding (Te Whatu Ora, n.d.). Brown has also already advocated against the group in his youth.

Aotearoa's major pro-choice organisation – ALRANZ – has commented on how they do not believe Brown will be able to put his personal views aside in his role as Health Minister (Witton, 2025). While it is not likely he or the government would get away with banning abortion outright, they could certainly "chip away" at access discreetly while never having to touch the law (De Anda, 2025). This makes it especially difficult to hold them to account as it provides a space for plausible deniability, all while people in NZ suffer from lack of access.

In January, the Government considered shifting abortion care to Health NZ's child and youth team, despite most people accessing abortion being adults (Thomas, 2025). In April, Simeon Brown dodged questions posed by Labour's Dr Ayesha Verrall at a parliamentary debate. She also commented on abortion care at Whakatāne Hospital being "shelved" due to staff shortages (Labour, 2025). This left those seeking abortions with little choice but to travel long distances without support and, in many cases, without financial assistance, which is typically provided for pregnancy care. Brown claimed he was "not aware" of this issue, which raises concerns about the Health Minister's scrutiny and due diligence regarding upholding abortion access (Brown, 2025).

Clearly, a quiet dismantling of abortion services in New Zealand is not implausible. In fact, despite standing laws, a New South Wales hospital ceased providing surgical abortions due to conscientious objection, leading to patients not being able to access the care they needed (Barbour, 2024a).

This is a pattern across New South Wales and Australia broadly, with many reporting on an "unspoken ban" creating barriers, especially for those living in rural areas (Barbour, 2024b). A similar pattern of practice seems to be emerging in New Zealand (Steele, 2025; Labour, 2025), and it is unclear whether Health Minister Simeon Brown will stand to prevent it.

CONCLUSION

Despite Brown and Luxon repeatedly stating that abortion laws will not change under their government, it is difficult to believe that their personal views would not interfere. As mentioned, abortion access can be discreetly undermined in many ways, and Simeon Brown has the means and the motive to do so. New Zealand's abortion law may have changed in 2020, but we are not out of the woods yet.

SEE ORIGINAL ARTICLE FOR THE FULL REFERENCES

EXPLAINER | UNDERSTANDING PROTECTIONISM: GLOBAL POLICY, VOLATILE EFFECT

BY PAIGE STEPHENS

The volatile global economy has seen a re-emergence of complex and unpredictable trade policies. As impulsive and powerful governments such as the Trump administration attempt to strengthen domestic industries, the media frequently discusses protectionism. Despite its relevance in the global economy, many are not fully aware of the issue. So, what is protectionism? How does it affect the world? How can New Zealand be affected by its unpredictable nature? This article explains how protectionist policies affect global trade, diplomacy and living standards and discusses direct effects on New Zealand.

WHAT IS PROTECTIONISM?

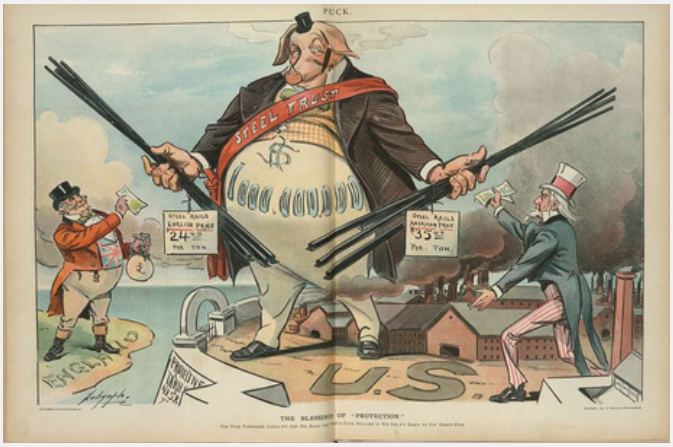
Recently, protectionism has been a frequent strategy in global economic policy, most commonly in the form of tariffs. Protectionism, as defined by Thies & Nieman (2011), is the use of trade policies that restrict the importation of foreign goods into a domestic market through financial or inconvenience-based incentives. Sumner, Smith, and Rosson (2001) define the two main protectionist measures. Firstly, tariff barriers: taxes on imports with the underlying purpose of protecting domestic industries and generating government revenue. The second form of protectionism is non-tariff barriers, including quotas, technical standards, and licensing requirements, which restrict trade by increasing the difficulty of importing. Despite the appearance of strictly negative media attention, protectionism can benefit domestic industries if used in moderation and with respect for other nations and markets. For example, the 2002 U.S. steel tariffs temporarily protected domestic U.S. steel producers by reducing foreign competition, boosting production and jobs (McGee & Yoon, 2017). But it is essential to recognise that although protectionism may sound favourable in theory and sometimes has positive implications, global disruptions and tensions are common (Peres, 2025).

Global Trade Ministers adopting an anti-protectionism pledge at a World Trade Organization meeting, 2011 (Source: Eric Bridiers)

NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS OF PROTECTIONISM

Ironically, protectionism has been commonly found to undermine economic efficiency rather than promoting it. A frequent misconception by consumers, or perhaps a manipulation by governments, suggests that tariffs will always reduce domestic market prices (Ikenson, 2018). Many consumers instead attribute price increases to inflation, instead of the direct impacts of tariffs as a result of misguided expectations or understanding (Simon-Kucher & Partners, 2025). Despite government efforts, such as the White House claiming the Trump administration's tariffs will provide long-term relief for American consumers on essential goods, recent studies suggest the opposite. A survey by Feigenbaum & Romalis (2025) estimates that a 25% tariff on goods from Canada and Mexico and a 10% tariff on goods from China could add as much as 0.8 percentage points to core inflation, ultimately making goods more expensive for the consumer.

Further support from Rozen Bakher (2021) suggests that tariffs reduce market competition, straining international trade relationships, and fostering economic nationalism by prioritising domestic industries over global integration. For consumers, this results in higher prices driven by limited competition, restricted supply, and increased demand. In contrast are liberal trade policies: the removal of trade barriers which enables highly competitive markets and keeps prices low for consumers, promoting global economic growth and stability (International Monetary Fund, 2001). By fostering open markets, these policies create a more competitive environment for businesses, which in turn drives innovation, efficiency, and broader economic development.



Over a century ago, critics mocked tariffs as protection for producers paid for by consumers. This 1901 cartoon shows Uncle Sam paying more for steel than foreigners under a "protective" tariff (Source: Keppler & Schwarzmann)

So how bad are the repercussions of protectionism? Ultimately, protectionism worsens living costs for citizens in all nations involved. Furceri et al. (2019) claim that protectionist nations suffer from limited market competition and inflated prices due to constrained supply; meanwhile, targeted countries experience less export demand, harming national GDP. Furthermore, protectionism brings harmful deglobalisation effects, defined as the weakening of interdependence between nations which discourages foreign trade (Witt, 2019).

To make matters worse, protectionism will not allow for economic growth, as supported by the International Monetary Fund (2001), stating that it has not been plausible for any country in recent decades to experience economic growth without globalisation. Further global impacts of protectionism, as supported by the International Monetary Fund (2025), include how erratic trade policy erodes investor confidence and destabilises markets. Ironically, fear of financial crisis, justified or not, sets in motion a self-fulfilling prophecy—the occurrence of economic instability through expectations and predictions of said instability (Minneapolis Federal Reserve, 2016).

PROTECTIONIST ESCALATION – HOW CAN NEW ZEALAND BE AFFECTED?

Constrained by geographic location and a scarce domestic market, New Zealand is a prime example of a trade-dependent economy (McCann, 2003). The U.S. government holds 10% tariffs on New Zealand, which is expected to decrease export earnings by $900 million for the New Zealand economy (Beckford, 2025). Not only is this devastating for the New Zealand working class, but it is also shocking, as interdependence between NZ and the U.S. has been previously supported and underpinned by the 1992 Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (United States Trade Representative, 2023).

Furthermore, New Zealand's exposure to geopolitics, particularly between China and the U.S., poses a complex dilemma amid the China-U.S. trade war. Hurst & Ni (2021) suggest that while New Zealand has long committed to independent foreign policy and neutrality, global pressures constantly challenge this sovereignty. Involvement in the Five Eyes intelligence alliance with the U.S., the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia suggests an alignment with Western agendas, a flaw in this diplomatic juggling.

In recent years, pressure has increased from the Five Eyes, including coercion to publish joint public statements regarding human rights concerns in China (Zheng, 2021). This highlights the ongoing challenge for the New Zealand Government: balancing domestic policy and alliances with vital international economic ties.

A Western bias from New Zealand risks jeopardising a critical relationship with China, the nation's largest trading partner. China has demonstrated a willingness to retaliate against diplomatic disagreements, evidenced by the 2020-2021 import bans on Australian goods in response to a call for an independent COVID-19 inquiry (Walsh, 2021).

For New Zealand, the pressure is high: in 2020, 30% of New Zealand's exports were sold to China (World Bank 2020). Losing Chinese consumers would devastate the New Zealand economy, a considerable threat developing from the geopolitical tensions of protectionism.

SUMMARY

Protectionism: a trade policy that restricts imports through tariffs or non-tariff barriers to protect domestic industries can provide short-term benefits such as job preservation and industry support; however, it often leads to higher consumer prices, reduced market competition, and strained international relations. Over time, protectionism will contribute to deglobalisation, harming economic growth and increasing living costs for all involved nations. New Zealand, heavily reliant on international trade, is especially vulnerable, facing risks from U.S. tariffs and pressure to align with Western allies, which could jeopardise vital economic ties with China. Protectionism, though appealing for national industry development, generally destabilises global markets and damages long-term economic prospects.

SEE ORIGINAL ARTICLE FOR THE FULL REFERENCES

OPINION | READING BETWEEN THE LINES OF THE TREATY PRINCIPLES BILL

BY ROCHELLE O'CONNOR

After seeing the outpour of disgust against the Treaty Principles Bill and feeling Aotearoa's unity and aroha around supporting te Tiriti o Waitangi, the final result of the Justice Committee and the rejection of the bill in its second reading should be the final nail in its coffin. Approximately 270,000 written submissions and 38,088 hours of oral submissions overwhelmingly rejected this bill (RNZ, 2025), and the overwhelming majority of the House, 112 MPs, voted against it. Aotearoa's message is clear: we will not support division, and we will not support setting back decades of progress towards greater Māori rights.

The Justice Committee's 45-page report highlighted the fundamental flaws of David Seymour and ACT's bill drawing on insights from relevant experts, as well as the concerns of the general public (Maxwell, 2025). The bill's problems can be boiled down to its major inconsistencies with the meaning of te Tiriti, uncertainty of legal and constitutional implications, deterioration of Crown-Māori partnership, Aotearoa's support for the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the devastating effect on the status of Māori in Aotearoa (Dexter, 2025).

As someone closely following the bill's introduction and development since late September, I found myself caught by the extreme but shallow rhetoric from both sides of the House. The political parties' narratives around the bill, with attention-grabbing claims that the bill was starting a 'divisive culture war' (Miller, 2025) or being 'racist toward Māori' (Ward, 2024), while true, are dangerously oversimplified and allowed the bill's deeper implications to fly under the radar. The major problems with the bill were not clearly outlined in mainstream media, nor thoroughly discussed for the average Kiwi to understand, despite its constitutional implications.

This allowed many to be caught in the black and white and discouraged a proper nationwide conversation, contrary to Seymour's objective. At the heart of the debate are several key misconceptions that have shaped the discourse around the bill. These misunderstandings have fueled political rhetoric and shaped public perception, particularly around equality, Māori rights, and te Tiriti o Waitangi's role in governance.

THE PROMOTION OF 'EQUALITY' OVER EQUITY

The premise of the Treaty Principles Bill is "equal rights for all", found in the bill's 'Principle 3: Right to Equality.' (The ACT Party, 2024). Seymour poses the question on te Tiriti o Waitangi, "is it a contract between two collectives defined by ancestry, or something that gives equal rights for all to flourish?" (Walters, 2024). His framing suggests that recognising Māori rights under the Treaty is incompatible with equal prosperity for all New Zealanders. This perpetuates the zero-sum mentality that positions Māori co-governance as a threat, rather than a path to justice and equity for all. Removing 'race' from the question does not address the systemic oppression, discrimination and racism that exists in state institutions which perpetuate the cycle of worse outcomes for Māori. This is why we need 'by Māori for Māori' solutions - one size does not fit all.

Painting by Marcus King depicting the signing of te Tiriti o Waitangi (Source: Government Archives)

Further, te Tiriti o Waitangi's contractual obligations are not defined by ancestry or whether one is Māori or Pākeha. Māori rights under te Tiriti are not solely "ancestral" but are grounded in their status as Crown and tangata whenua, sovereign partners in the agreement. te Tiriti recognises the governance and authority of hapū and iwi, not just individuals. It guarantees the protection of Māori tino rangatiratanga and equitable access to resources and opportunities. Centuries of oppression have weakened Māori hapū and te ao Māori as collective political entities, reinforcing this misconception. Thus, the idea that anyone can be anything in an 'equal' society, despite their ancestry, is like saying every individual should conform to a 'work hard to get ahead' mentality to thrive in this civilised capitalist society, which blissfully ignores systemic injustice.

THE SYSTEM OF RECOGNISING MĀORI RIGHTS NEEDS REFORM

Principle 2 of the bill, concerning the Rights of Hapū and Iwi Māori, asserts that "any specific customary Māori rights that differ from those of others should only be recognised through agreement in Waitangi Tribunal settlements" (The ACT Party, 2024). ACT claims this principle will uphold recognition of Māori rights, as well as redress for generational harm. The fundamental issue is that the Waitangi Tribunal, as a Crown entity, decides and dedicates the outcome of its own government-related grievances. Oftentimes it does not adequately provide redress at all. It is known that it is a tedious, decades long process that many iwi go through to no avail (Mutu, 2019, 4-18). This principle could therefore continue to erode Māori rights. Tina Ngata argues that "when the Crown acts as the self-appointed ultimate authority over a process meant to address its own misconduct, significant issues arise" (Ngata, 2024). She critiques the Crown's decision to bypass negotiations at the hapū level - where te Tiriti was originally signed - due to perceived inconvenience, time constraints, and costs. Instead, the Crown chose to negotiate only with those who fit its criteria for a "large natural grouping," thereby sidelining its true Treaty partner in favour of a more convenient construct.

TINO RANGATIRATANGA, THE LITERALIST INTERPRETATION

Within Principle 2, ACT interprets Article 2 of te Tiriti o Waitangi as granting all New Zealanders tino rangatiratanga over their as assets and property. However, this literalist interpretation is flawed—historical context reveals the correct understanding. To put it simply, the original Māori text of Article 2 guarantees tino rangatiratanga to "nga Rangatira ki nga hapu-ki nga tangata katoa o Nu Tirani," meaning "the chiefs, the subtribes, and all the people of New Zealand.". Early English drafts preceding the signing of te Tiriti further clarify British intentions, specifying that property rights outlined in Article 2 were meant to benefit "the Chiefs and Tribes of New Zealand and the respective families and individuals thereof," referring specifically to Māori.

ACT's argument, which extends this to all New Zealanders, relies on a literal interpretation of 1840 language that does not align with historical context. At that time, 'New Zealander' referred exclusively to Māori. The Oxford Dictionary of New Zealand English notes that 'New Zealander' originally applied only to Māori and was only later extended to include non-Māori after European settlement grew post-1840. British settlers were considered 'British subjects' both before and after te Tiriti was signed, and it wasn't until 1948 that people born in New Zealand were granted citizenship (Heard, 2024). Therefore, the promises made in Article 2 were directed solely at Māori, and ACT's literalist interpretation clearly overlooks the original intent to protect Māori rights.

THE ACT PRIVATISATION AGENDA

The ACT Party's framing of the existing Treaty principles as anti-democratic and a power grab by elites masks their true aim of clearing the way for their privatisation and deregulation agenda. The Treaty principles have historically acted as a significant barrier to corporatisation and privatisation, blocking attempts to privatise public assets. Writer Rupert O'Brien believes this effect is likely "one of the key, although unstated, reasons for the push to return Te Tiriti to its erstwhile status as a simple nullity." (Ward, 2024). Historically, Treaty principles have prevented the sale of Crown land and assets to private interests, as seen in the 1987 Lands case, where the Māori Council challenged the government's move to corporatise public assets. The Court ruled in favor of upholding Māori rights, forcing a delay and consultation (Whare, 2024). ACT's agenda seeks to dismantle these protections, removing Crown obligations and making it easier to sell off public assets without considering Māori interests. This is part of a broader effort to weaken the Treaty's role in safeguarding Māori land and resources, ultimately prioritising corporate profit over Māori sovereignty.

DANGERS OF A REFERENDUM

In theory, a referendum is supposed to facilitate a national conversation around te Tiriti. However, similarities can be drawn with the 2024 Indigenous Voice referendum in Australia despite the different colonial histories and varying levels of recognition for Māori and Aboriginal peoples. Each oversimplifies complex Indigenous issues and ignores the deep historical injustices faced by both groups. It assumes voters fully understand Aotearoa's colonial history and the Treaty's significance, when over half of the population lacks confidence in understanding the Treaty's principles (Desmarais, 2024). Furthermore, similar political rhetoric used by anti-The Voice groups, such as the "if you don't know, vote no" message, could easily be replicated in a referendum here (E-Tangata, 2024). Supporters of the bill could manipulate such messaging to sway uncertain voters toward a 'yes' vote for the bill, potentially leading to decisions made based on misinformation or prejudice, not informed consensus. The idea of majority rule undermines Māori rights, turning them into a popularity contest rather than upholding the inherent Treaty partnership. A referendum would only weaken protections and set us back in the fight for justice.

FUTURE OF TREATY RIGHTS

With the Select Committee's feedback from the people of Aotearoa, and no majority support in the House, this bill has been successfully buried. Yet Seymour envisions a longer term path, and contends that uncomfortable conversations sparked by the bill are the opening to normalising a free conversation around the place of te Tiriti (Meyer, 2024). Seymour says "Watch this space" (Palmer & Moir, 2025), but Aotearoa needs to remain vigilant in safeguarding it. We reject the rewriting of history to suit political agendas. The Treaty Principles bill belongs in the past, not our future.

GLOSSARY OF TE REO MĀORI WORDS

Aroha – to love, feel pity, feel concern for, feel compassion, empathise.

Tangata Whenua – local people, hosts, indigenous people – people born of the whenua, i.e. of the placenta and of the land where the people's ancestors have lived and where their placenta are buried.

Tino Rangatiratanga – self-determination, sovereignty, autonomy, self-government, domination, rule, control, power.

Hapū – kinship group, clan, tribe, subtribe - section of a large kinship group and the primary political unit in traditional Māori society. It consisted of a number of whānau sharing descent from a common ancestor, usually being named after the ancestor, but sometimes from an important event in the group's history. A number of related hapū usually shared adjacent territories forming a looser tribal federation (iwi).

Iwi – extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people, nationality, race - often refers to a large group of people descended from a common ancestor and associated with a distinct territory.

SEE ORIGINAL ARTICLE FOR THE FULL REFERENCES

PEOPLE PROFILE | SIR GEOFFREY PALMER KCMG AC KC PC

BY NICK HOLDEN

Prime Minister, King's Counsel, Professor. These are all titles that Sir Geoffrey Palmer has held over his career. Yet, even these titles do not fully capture the enormity of his impact, achievement and influence over his public life. Born on the 21st of April 1942, Geoffrey Palmer attended Nelson College before graduating with a BA/LLB from Victoria University of Wellington in 1964 and 1965, respectively. He then went on to gain a Juris Doctor from the University of Chicago Law School in 1967. To date, Geoffrey's diverse career has traversed legal academia, politics and legal advocacy. Throughout this time, he has spearheaded some of New Zealand's (NZ) most major legal, constitutional and policy developments. Despite his legacy, his contributions remain under-recognised by the general public. In turn, I will examine some of Geoffrey's major contributions to the legal, policy and constitutional canon of NZ.

NEW ZEALAND BILL OF RIGHTS ACT 1990

Arguably, Geoffrey's most well known and most significant contribution is the instrumental role he played in the enactment of the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 (NZBORA). The enactment of the NZBORA was, and remains, a cornerstone in New Zealand's legal framework as it gave statutory recognition to fundamental rights, and provided a means of holding the government to account for breaches of these rights. The NZBORA is no doubt one of the most important and consequential developments in NZ's legal and constitutional history (Manatū Taonga – Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2024).

Geoffrey played a vital role in the entire legislative process (Rishworth, 2012). It was Geoffrey who, in 1985, introduced the proposal for a Bill of Rights in White Paper form (Rishworth, 2012).

Sir Geoffrey Palmer in his office at Victoria University of Wellington's Law School (Source: Radio New Zealand).

For context, 'white papers' are documents that contain policy proposals formulated by Ministers (McGee, 2017). Geoffrey's personal views regarding human rights and NZ's constitutional arrangements were certainly made clear by his proposals in the White Paper. The White Paper was met with much criticism as it contained a number of controversial features, including (Rishworth, 2012):

- The NZBORA being supreme law, meaning that Courts would be able to invalidate legislation that was inconsistent with it. Effectively, this would have been a total upheaval of the traditional relationship between Parliament and the Judiciary.
- The NZBORA being entrenched. This would have meant that the approval of 75% of the House would have been needed to amend or repeal the NZBORA.
- The incorporation of the Treaty of Waitangi, thereby making the Treaty supreme law.

ENVIRONMENTALISM

A lesser known passion of Geoffrey's is the environment and environmental protection. From 1987 to 1990, Geoffrey served as the Minister for the Environment, but his legacy and interest in environmental protection has transcended his time in politics. He has taught courses on climate change law and published research recommending large changes to international environmental law, aiming to improve the speed at which the law develops to better reflect the environmental realities of the day (Victoria University of Wellington, 2022). The quality and strength of his environmental advocacy was acknowledged through his induction as a member of the coveted Global 500 Roll of Honour by the United Nations Environment Programme (Victoria University of Wellington, 2022).

ADVOCACY FOR A WRITTEN CONSTITUTION

In his life after politics, Geoffrey has become a vocal proponent of New Zealand adopting a written constitution and doing away with the incumbent unwritten constitution. Written constitutions are single unified documents that guide and regulate the relationship between the government and society. Generally, written constitutions are supreme in nature, as in the United States (US). This is unlike unwritten constitutions, characterised not by one single unified document, but instead a range of laws and rules from a vast array of sources which govern interactions between the general public and government.

It is clear that during Geoffrey's tenure in the US working as a legal academic, the American constitutional arrangements made an impression. Throughout his vast and detailed writings on this topic, there is one constant concern – it being too easy for the government to abuse power under the current unwritten system, to the detriment of society. This concern about government overreach has been at the heart of much of his work, most clearly in relation to the enactment of the NZBORA. Whilst some of the recommendations Geoffrey has made in his proposed constitutions are purportedly 'radical' (Wilkinson, 2016), his desire to improve the state of New Zealand's constitutional arrangements must be commended, regardless of what you think of his proposals.

LEGACY

Sir Geoffrey Palmer's legacy is one of immense legal and constitutional innovation. He was and still is driven by a desire to help everyday New Zealanders navigate their plights and lead better lives without unlawful government overreach. At the age of 83, Geoffrey is not done yet. He is an Honorary Fellow at the Victoria University of Wellington Law School, where he regularly publishes and teaches. Additionally, he has recently published a new book titled The Futures of Democracy, Law and Government. With fuel still left in the tank, it will be interesting to see what wisdom Geoffrey has yet to impart, particularly in the context of legal academia.

SEE ORIGINAL ARTICLE FOR THE FULL REFERENCES

EXPLAINER | EXPLORING THE REGULATORY STANDARDS BILL

BY BINOLI GOONATILLAKE

Over its term so far, the coalition government has introduced a number of controversial bills, some of which have passed into legislation and some of which have not. The Regulatory Standards Bill, spearheaded by the leader of the ACT Party, David Seymour, was introduced to Parliament on 19 May 2025 and is proving to be a worthy successor of the aforementioned bills (New Zealand Parliament, 2025). What exactly does this bill entail?

WHAT IS REGULATION?

Simply put, regulation is the practice of creating, implementing, and monitoring rules to govern individuals and groups in a given state. The New Zealand regulatory system is made up of such rules, including primary and secondary legislation, policies, and the common law. A regulator is a parliamentary member or any other individual authorised by the parliament to carry out regulatory work. Regulatory practice is the manner in which regulators carry out their work, and there are different mechanisms that promote good regulatory practice. This is essential as poor regulatory practices can create negative social, environmental and economic outcomes through regulation that either does not address essential issues, or regulation that further exacerbates them (Ministry for Regulation, n.d.).

David Seymour, 2024 (Source: Getty Images / Hagen Hopkins)

WHAT MECHANISMS ARE ALREADY IN PLACE?

There are already several mechanisms in place that promote good regulatory practice. These include constitutional documents, legislation, and judge-made common law. The usual checks performed on parliament by the Ombudsman and the Regulations Review Committee also serve to promote good regulatory practice. There are also advisory committees like the Legislation Design and Advisory Committee (LDAC) and the Parliamentary Counsel Office (Ministry for Regulation, 2025).

In March 2024, Mr Seymour established the Ministry for Regulation and was appointed as the Minister for Regulation in charge of overseeing it (New Zealand Government, 2024). This was part of the coalition government's 100-day plan to increase productivity and economic growth through improved quality of regulation (Seymour, 2024). The creation of the Regulatory Standards Bill, also headed by Mr Seymour, is another step taken to achieve this goal.

WHAT ARE THE PROVISIONS OF THE BILL?

Mr Seymour states that, "The Bill will codify principles of good regulatory practice for existing and future regulations" (Seymour, 2025, para. 5). This statement perfectly encapsulates what the Bill intends to achieve.

The bill establishes six principles of what it considers to be responsible regulation. Namely, the rule of law, liberties, taking of property, taxes, fees and levies, the role of courts, and good law-making.

The bill will also provide for the establishment of a Regulatory Standards Board (RBS) that will consist of members appointed by the Minister for Regulation.

The RBS will have the power to review both new and existing legislation against the principles and make recommendations at its own discretion or prompted by public complaints. It is, however, very important to note that the principles and reports outlined above are not legally binding.

The bill will further cement the role and powers of the Ministry for Regulation as an overseer of regulatory practice (Ministry for Regulation, n.d.).

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE BILL, AND WHO SUPPORTS IT?

The purpose of the bill is to improve wages and productivity by creating a regulatory system that is less expansive, higher quality, and focuses more on the impacts that it will have on the public. Mr Seymour states that this will save both time and money needlessly spent on compliance and regulatory activities, allowing for more productive activities that will result in boosted economic outcomes (Seymour, 2025).

Mr Seymour claims that regulating is currently "politically rewarding" for regulators (Seymour, 2025, para. 4). Supporters of the bill agree. They believe that regulators avoid risks and choose to overregulate (Ministry for Regulation, 2025). The provisions increasing transparency and allowing the public to appeal to the RBS are intended to hold regulators accountable, making regulating less rewarding, which will result in lower quantity, higher quality regulation (Seymour, 2025).

National Party MP Ryan Hamilton states that National also "believes in less government" (New Zealand Parliament, 2025). The bill was part of the coalition agreement between National and ACT, although Dan Bidois, another National MP, claims that "it is with scepticism that we support this bill in the House" (New Zealand Parliament, 2025).

As set out in a discussion document, supporters of the bill predict that it will increase the consistency of regulation (Ministry for Regulation, 2025). Regulations will all be held to the same principles, ideally creating bipartisan regulation that will benefit everyone. Tailoring regulations to the same set of principles will also result in regulations that should work better together, saving money on litigation and the interpretation of legislation.

They also pointed out that overregulation affects small businesses disproportionately and reducing this factor will help them thrive, increasing competition for larger businesses, which will result in lower costs for consumers (Ministry for Regulation, 2025).

CRITIQUES AND OPPOSITION

The Regulatory Standards bill faced sizable opposition. During the it's first reading on 22 May 2025, a line was drawn between the coalition parties and the opposition parties; Labour, Green, and Te Pāti Māori, who all voted against the bill. The bill passed its first reading owing to the coalition's majority in the House (New Zealand Parliament, 2025).

In a discussion document released by David Seymour titled, "Have your say on the proposed Regulatory Standards Bill", the public made over 23,000 submissions over the span of three months from November 2024 to January 2025. Approximately 88% of these submissions were found to oppose the bill and 12% were found to not have a clear position. Only 0.33% of submissions were found to support or partially support the bill (Ministry for Regulation, 2025).

Submitters believe that the bill is unnecessary and that it would result in duplication of already existing regulatory mechanisms, which will overcomplicate law-making (Ministry for Regulation, 2025).

Submitters were concerned about the Bill's complete lack of recognition of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and The Treaty of Waitangi as constitutional documents.

This concern is echoed by Tania Waikato, a Māori lawyer representing Māori rights group Toitū te Tiriti in its urgent Waitangi Tribunal hearing on the bill. Waikato states that the bill "will alter the constitutional arrangements between the Crown and Māori under te Tiriti by stealth, and without the consent by Māori as Treaty partner" (Waikato, 2025, para. 5).

Labour MP Duncan Webb stated that "This Bill favours corporate interests ahead of our communities, environmental protections" (Webb, 2025, para. 2).

The taking of property principle states that regulation should not allow for the taking or impairment of private property, and doing so must result in fair compensation to the impacted parties (Ministry for Regulation, n.d.). Submitters have raised concerns that this principle will significantly impact environmental and public health regulations among many other regulations, especially given its vague terms. It will provide an extra avenue for corporations to contest regulations requiring the government to spend money on compensation in addition to potentially high litigation costs. It will also deter the government from applying regulations in the future, demonstrating the potential negative social, economic, and environmental outcomes of the bill that will drive further inequality and poverty (Ministry for Regulation, 2025).

Another factor is that the rule of law principle focuses on equality over equity, failing to take into account systematic inequalities and how seemingly equal regulations impact different groups unequally. This principle may also prevent legislative changes that can account for these inequalities. These outcomes would affect Māori communities disproportionately and further exacerbate already existing issues (Ministry for Regulation, 2025).

Key takeaways

- The Regulatory Standards Bill recently passed its first reading in Parliament and is now in the Select Committee stage.
- The purpose of the bill is to increase productivity and wages/economic outcomes by creating a regulatory system that is low in quantity and high in quality.
- Opposition parties criticize the bill for failing to acknowledge Te Tiriti and The Treaty as well as for prioritizing corporate interests over social, economic, and environmental interests.
- Submissions for the Regulatory Standards Bill close on 23 June 2025 (New Zealand Parliament, 2025).

EXPLAINER | FROM SHADOWS TO SENTENCES: KEY CHANGES IN NEW ZEALAND'S PROPOSED ANTI-STALKING LAW

BY AMELIE LIM

In an age where the boundary between attention and intrusion is increasingly blurred, stalking has become an elusive yet insidious epidemic in New Zealand (Williams, 2024). The constantly evolving nature of stalking has made it difficult to define and, subsequently, even more challenging to prosecute. In response to these concerns, the government is set to formally criminalise stalking. On 10 June, 2025, a set of legislative reforms was introduced. But what exactly do these changes entail, and why are they urgently needed?

WHY IS THE GOVERNMENT DOING THIS?

The Ministry of Justice defines stalking as repeated unwanted attention, contact, or surveillance that makes a person feel harassed or intruded upon (NZ Ministry of Justice, 2020). Unlike single isolated incidents, stalking is characterised by a persistent pattern of behaviour.

Stalking can take various forms. This often includes appearing uninvited, visiting a person's home without permission, confrontation, repeated calls or text messages, delivering gifts, threats, and sabotaging freedom. These actions accumulate to become deeply distressing.The impacts are profound, reaching far beyond mental health to damage the victim's employment, relational, familial, and social domains (Thorburn & Jury, 2019). As safety becomes elusive, the victim's increased fear, hypervigilance, and hopelessness plague their freedom.

In New Zealand, stalking is an issue of grave concern. The 2021 New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey found that harassment and threats, behaviours consistent with stalking, are among the five most common crime experiences (NZ Ministry of Justice, 2022). Victims are disproportionately from vulnerable groups. This includes young people, disabled individuals, rainbow communities, and wāhine Māori, as highlighted by Leoni Morris, the project lead at Aotearoa Free from Stalking (Auckland Women's Centre, 2023).

THE INITIAL PROPOSAL FOR AN ANTI-STALKING LAW

In June 2024, the New Zealand government responded to growing public pressure and advocacy by proposing an anti-stalking law. Justice Minister Paul Goldsmith introduced the Crimes Legislation Stalking and Harassment Amendment Bill. This bill aimed to fill critical gaps in current legislation that covered stalking crimes. The Harassment Act 1997 has been long criticised as being outdated and ineffective in addressing contemporary stalking behaviours such as digital harassment.

The bill was formally introduced and passed its first reading in December 2024. During the policy development process, it was ruled that this legislation would require a threshold of three separate instances of stalking before any prosecution could occur. Once enacted, this law would make stalking a criminal offence punishable by up to five years in prison.

CRITICISMS AND CONCERNS FOR THE INITIAL PROPOSAL

The initial version of the stalking bill was met with intense criticism, particularly from victims and advocacy groups. In early 2025, many argued that the proposal was a missed opportunity, as the initial threshold risked protecting stalkers rather than victims (Ternouth, 2025).

Associate Professor of Law at the University of Auckland, Carrie Leonettie, voiced concern about the bill's repeal of the existing criminal harassment offence. She argued that the new legislation would offer weaker protections than the current law (Leonettie, 2025). Under the proposed framework, a person would only be convicted of stalking if they knew their behaviour was likely to cause fear. This threshold could exclude entitled, oblivious, or delusional offenders, especially in cases involving former partners. What some perpetrators might view as romantic persistence is, in reality, deeply traumatic for victims.

Additionally, the bill raised the requirement for criminal charges from two acts of harassment to three. This change was described as perplexing as it appeared to raise the threshold for victims to receive justice (Palmer, 2025).

Furthermore, critics highlighted the bill's failure to address the digital dimension of modern stalking. Typical tactics of online stalking include monitoring electronic communications, publishing harmful content online, and targeting a victim's friends and family online.

WHAT ARE THE NEW CHANGES TO THE ANTI-STALKING PROPOSAL?

The proposed legislative changes aim to protect victims by imposing a more robust legal definition of stalking. Central to the reform is focusing on victim-centred justice (Nealon, 2025). Stalking is now proposed to be recognised as a criminal offence after two specified acts within a 24-month period. This change acknowledges that stalking is often premeditated, with offenders planning their offences to avoid detection. Incidents often cluster around emotionally significant dates such as anniversaries, which these new changes seek to prevent (Goldsmith, 2025).

Other key changes include:

- Addressing the publishing of statements or other material relating to the survivor or purporting to originate from that person (colloquially known as doxing)
- Adding new sections to enable the disposal of any intimate visual recordings possessed by a person convicted of the new stalking and harassment offence;
- Adding the new offence to the Firearms Prohibition Orders regime, allowing those orders to be made when a person is convicted of the new offence;
- Clarifying the new aggravating factor relating to stalking by more clearly linking the associated stalking and harassment-type behaviours to the offence the person is charged with; and

- Making it clear that restraining orders under the Harassment Act 1997 and orders under the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015 can be made when a person is discharged without conviction about a new offence.

PUBLIC FEEDBACK AND REACTIONS TO THE NEW PROPOSAL

The government's chief victims advisor, Ruth Money, described these changes as proving the select committee has listened to lived experiences and is a positive step in the right direction (Edward, 2025).

Conversely, the advocacy group Aotearoa Free From Stalking argued that these changes still fall short. Awatea Mita criticised how police are encouraged to warn potential offenders but are not required to notify victims. This could endanger those experiencing intimate partner violence, where a police visit could risk retaliation (Edward, 2025). Proper resources and training would ensure the approach of police is victim-centred.

Some critics argue underlying causes, including pervasive sexism in tech culture, need to be addressed in order to truly prevent cyberstalking (Mudgway, 2024). Further suggestions to improve these changes include police focus on holding stalkers accountable, addressing issues of blame and attribution and adherence to stalking myths, and a focus on intimate partner stalking (Thorburn & Jury, 2019).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The new changes to New Zealand's proposed anti-stalking bill now define stalking as a pattern of behaviour involving two specified acts over 24 months, among other criteria.

- This change has been met with positive reactions for listening and responding to the public's concerns, but also with negative reactions connected to the potential dangers of intimate partner violence, emphasising the need to address deeper causes and issues within New Zealand’s society.

EXPLAINER | LESS PAPERWORK, MORE PROTECTION? A BREAKDOWN OF THE NEW HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK ACT REFORMS

BY ASIL KUTTY

The New Zealand Government is making significant changes to its workplace health and safety laws, focusing on benefiting smaller businesses. These reforms are expected to reduce 'excessive' regulations, shift the focus to preventing significant workplace risks, and ease administrative burdens for small businesses. This shift aims to create a more optimistic and manageable environment for small business owners and managers (van Velden, 2025).

But what exactly is changing? Who qualifies as a low-risk and small business? What risks will the government and businesses continue to manage? Moreover, what are the concerns about this approach?

BACKGROUND: WHAT IS THE ACT, AND WHY IS IT BEING REFORMED?

The Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 is New Zealand's primary work health and safety legislation, largely modeled on Australia's work health and safety framework. Its primary purpose is to ensure that everyone in the workplace is safe and protected from harm. The law was initially designed to cater to any business size and minimize compliance costs. It also places responsibilities on businesses to manage any potential risks and hazards while also protecting employees. The new reforms aim to simplify these responsibilities, providing reassurance for small business owners and managers (Worksafe, 2019).

According to data collected by the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment in 2022, small businesses are defined as having less than 20 employees. 97% of businesses in New Zealand have fewer than 20 employees (575,703 businesses), employing 693,100 people (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2022).

A low-risk business is one where the danger or exposure to hazards is minimal and experiencing accidents, harm, or illness is unlikely.

However, small businesses have stated that they struggle with compliance costs and determining which risks to mitigate. The new reform, announced by Minister of Workplace Relations and Safety, Brooke van Velden, is part of the ACT-National agreement. This reform aims explicitly to cut unnecessary obligations for small businesses (van Velden, 2025).

WorkSafe assures staff it will be able to do core job, despite cutbacks (Source: Radio New Zealand)

WHAT WILL ACTUALLY CHANGE UNDER THE REFORM?

Under the proposed changes, small and low-risk businesses will only manage critical risks, which can cause death, serious injury, or serious illness. These businesses will only be required to offer basic facilities such as drinking water, lighting, ventilation and first aid. For instance, 'basic facilities' could mean drinking water provisions, adequate lighting in work areas, proper ventilation systems, and a first aid kit. They will also no longer have to notify regulators of any minor incidents (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2025).

A hotline will also be available to the public to report unnecessary road cone use. This is part of a broader effort to reduce over-regulation and reclaim public spaces unnecessarily cordoned off due to excessive risk aversion. This reduction in over-regulation hopes to bring a sense of relief to small businesses and the public.

The changes will also aim to narrow the main objectives of the Health and Safety at Work Act to prioritize handling serious workplace risks and reduce unnecessary compliance. The reforms bring a clear definition of the responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act and how they differ from those under other regulations that address the same risks. This clarity aims to reduce confusion and prevent directors from feeling pressures to overdo compliance (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2025).

All businesses are still required to report serious harm incidents and manage any significant risks that can cause significant harm (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2025).

WHY IS THE GOVERNMENT DOING THIS?

Proponents argue that these reforms will reduce unnecessary compliance costs and administrative burdens for small businesses, allow businesses to focus on managing significant risks and clarify responsibilities, primarily distinguishing between government regulations and operational management (van Velden, 2025). All of these aim to alleviate the current stress that small businesses face. The CEO of Retail NZ, Carolyn Young, agreed that the reforms would remove burdens for small businesses and allow them to focus more on selling their products (Radio New Zealand, 2025). The reforms were announced on March 31, 2025, and legislation is expected to be introduced in late 2025. If passed, it will be implemented in 2026 (MinterEllisonRuddWatts, 2025).

CONCERNS AND CRITICISM

The reforms also have their fair share of critics. Mike Cosman (chair of the Institute of Safety Management) stated that the reforms would not do much to address the 50-70 deaths that occur due to workplace accidents every year in New Zealand. The reforms focus more on cutting costs but neglect the potential cost of harm (Radio New Zealand, 2025). Furthermore, the president of the Council of Trade Unions stated that the minister had ignored key problems expressed in letters to the government from academics, professionals and business owners and that she is reducing the government's position in enforcing people are safe at work. The letters advocated for a stronger system and more investment in the workforce along with better regulations (Radio New Zealand, 2025). Something else to consider is how repetitive injuries will be managed, especially those that can affect the long-term health of employees. How will mental health be addressed under the new reforms? It remains unclear whether conditions such as workplace stress, burnout, or gradual-onset injuries will continue to receive adequate attention under the reforms.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYERS

- If an employee works in a small shop, their employer still needs to provide first aid and manage significant risks.
- The law will clarify what managers and directors are legally obligated to do to ensure workplace safety for their employees.
- Minor accidents like slips or cuts are not obligated to be reported unless they cause serious harm.

SEE ORIGINAL ARTICLE FOR THE FULL REFERENCES

OPINION | DOES BANNING DISPOSABLE VAPES REALLY MAKE US SMOKEFREE?

BY ENJIE SHEN

Smoking is the leading risk factor for non-communicable diseases in New Zealand, causing approximately 3,580 deaths each year (Drope & Hamill, 2025). Associate Health Minister Ayesha Verrall has observed that smoking is "the leading cause of preventable death in New Zealand and is responsible for a quarter of all cancers" (New Zealand Government, 2021).

Beyond its health toll, smoking imposes significant social, environmental, and economic burdens, including an estimated annual cost of NZD $3.6 billion and 270 tonnes of cigarette litter (Vital Strategies & Tobacconomics, 2024).

These factors demonstrate that from both economic and social perspectives, it is essential for the government to implement effective tobacco control policies.

NEW ZEALAND'S SMOKEFREE GENERATIONAL LAW – FROM AMBITION TO REPEAL

In December 2022, New Zealand passed one of the world's most ambitious tobacco control laws under the Smokefree Aotearoa 2025 Action Plan. It banned cigarette sales to anyone born after 1 January 2009, reduced nicotine content by 95 per cent, and cut tobacco retailers from 6000 to 600 (Radio New Zealand, 2024). The law was globally praised as bold and comprehensive.

However, just over a year later, the new coalition government led by Prime Minister Christopher Luxon repealed the law under urgency, bypassing public consultation (Sharma, 2024). Critics argued the repeal prioritised political and economic interests over public health (Corlett, 2024). Due to income and crime concerns, convenience store owners opposed the Smokefree law. Meanwhile, an investigation by Radio New Zealand revealed that British American Tobacco New Zealand and Imperial Brands covertly supported the "Save Our Stores" campaign (Corlett, 2024).

The repeal dismantled a globally recognised health policy. University of Otago researchers warned that it would cause thousands of preventable deaths, particularly among Māori (University of Otago, 2024). Health Coalition Aotearoa estimated the policy would have saved NZ$1.3 billion in health costs over two decades (Radio New Zealand, 2023).

FROM SMOKEFREE GENERATION TO DISPOSABLE VAPE BAN

So has the Labour Party's once-ambitious smokefree vision for New Zealand been abandoned halfway? That conclusion may be premature. Associate Health Minister Casey Costello has affirmed that the government's reform efforts are still working toward the same goal (Radio New Zealand, 2025). On 17 June 2025, Costello stated the current coalition government is committed to addressing youth vaping by targeting retailers who sell disposable vapes to young people (New Zealand Government, 2025).

While the Smokefree Generation law sought structural change through long-term reform, the disposable vape ban is a move toward narrower, more reactive policymaking. By targeting a single product category,

the government invites questions about whether a disposable vape ban can truly replace comprehensive tobacco control (Radio New Zealand, 2025).

THE RATIONALE AND STRENGTHS OF THE DISPOSABLE VAPE BAN

The disposable vape ban is not without rationale; it directly addresses critical issues in vape control. According to the Ministry of Education, 1,945 students were temporarily suspended for vaping in 2023 (Borissenko, 2024). Additionally, 10.5 per cent of those aged 15 to 17 vape daily (Dirga, 2025).To address this, the ban introduces significant penalties, including fines of up to $400,000 for major retailers, and limits how vape products are presented in stores (New Zealand Government, 2025). These visibility restrictions reduce the appeal of vapes to younger audiences. Vape Free Kids NZ spokesperson Tammy Downer noted that manufacturers frequently use bright packaging and subtle marketing tactics to attract children (Borissenko, 2024).

Environmental risks provide another strong justification. Evidence shows that vaping products have worsened New Zealand's waste stream. In Auckland alone, 132 vapes were found in just 575 roadside bins (Bhetuwal & Bullen, 2025). These devices' plastic casings, e-liquid residue, and lithium batteries pose long-term environmental hazards. Banning disposable vapes addresses these key issues, helping to protect ecosystems and long-term public well-being (Bhetuwal & Bullen, 2025).

Overall, the disposable vape ban represents a targeted and justified measure to reduce youth vaping through enforceable controls and protect the environment from vape-related waste.

GAPS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE DISPOSABLE VAPE BAN

Despite its strengths, the ban is not without limitations, There are some significant gaps and limitations in policy coverage and it lacks sufficient strength to fully meet New Zealand's smokefree goals. The ban applies only to disposable vapes and excludes rechargeable and replaceable-pod devices. This means the restriction addresses just the tip of the iceberg. While the low cost of disposable vapes is a major factor attracting young users, manufacturers can easily respond by releasing cheaper reusable alternatives. Additionally, removing one of the most accessible cigarette alternatives may increase the risk of consumers returning to traditional smoking (Dirga, 2025).

The gap between the policy's goals and its practical implementation reveals the enforcement challenges. Manufacturers may look for ways to circumvent the disposable vape ban. The Vaping Industry Association of New Zealand (VIANZ) has warned that without stronger enforcement and regulation, some vape sales may shift to underground illegal trading (Ministry of Health, 2024).

RESTORING THE STRATEGIC VISION BEHIND SMOKEFREE AOTEAROA

While the disposable vape ban addresses urgent concerns, it falls short of the long-term, systemic change once promised by the Smokefree Generation law. One offered structural reform; the other delivered targeted regulation. New Zealand's challenge is balancing immediate action with a broader vision.

To realign with the Smokefree Aotearoa vision, tobacco control must build on the disposable vape ban while addressing its limitations. Regulation should cover all vaping devices and close loopholes that enable "store-within-a-store" models and other practices to escape oversight (VIANZ, 2023). Weak enforcement and low penalties have weakened the system. VIANZ urges the government to use the $3 million collected annually in licensing fees to improve compliance checks and to raise fines to $10,000 for violations (VIANZ, 2023). Addressing black market risks and oversight failures requires stronger regulations and incentives for legitimate retailers to transition to smoke-free alternatives.

Ultimately, future policies must combine a long-term vision with stricter and more comprehensive regulatory measures to restore the momentum lost after repealing the Smokefree Generation law.

EXPLAINER | NEW ZEALAND'S PROPOSED OVERHAUL OF THE SECONDARY QUALIFICATION SYSTEM

BY SETH QUINLIVAN-POTTS

Since the turn of the century, New Zealand's secondary qualification system has been in a state of continuous evolution. Debate over the balance between academic rigour and equity has been persistent (Gerritsen, 2025; Amos, 2025). The current proposal to replace the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) with the New Zealand Certificate of Education (NZCE) and the New Zealand Advanced Certificate of Education (NZACE) marks the latest swing of New Zealand's educational pendulum.

Prior to 2002, the qualification system was dominated by the School Certificate and Bursary, which were largely norms-referenced and relied heavily on high-stakes, end-of-year examinations (NZQA, 2024; Trenwith 2025). This model was criticised for effectively rationing success and failing to recognise vocational or non-traditional academic excellence (Alison, 2008; PPTA, 2025). The introduction of NCEA in 2002 sought to address these flaws by shifting to a standards-based system, where any student demonstrating the requisite knowledge attained the qualification. The proportion of students leaving school with a qualification subsequently increased and a broader range of subjects and assessment methods were integrated, making education more inclusive and flexible (NZQA, 2024).

However, NCEA eventually became a target for criticism. The system was reviewed in 2018 and 2022, culminating in the current proposed overhaul. Critics argued that the qualification's excessive flexibility and fragmented credit system fostered a culture of credit counting, whereby students strategically chose the easiest path rather than engaging deeply with a subject's curriculum (Universities NZ, 2025). Furthermore, data revealing that barely half of teenagers could pass the core NCEA literacy and numeracy tests highlighted a widespread deficiency in foundational skills (Gerritsen, 2024), compounded by a loss of employer and parental trust in the qualification (Deerness, 2025; Ensor, 2025). The government concluded that NCEA was not consistent and can be hard to navigate, ultimately failing to deliver the essential skills needed for post-school pathways (Luxon and Stanford, 2025).

Unsatisfied with NCEA, Auckland Grammar was the first state school to introduce Cambridge Exams in 2011 (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

The proposed replacement seeks to impose a framework that can deliver such skills. However, the reforms have sparked considerable concern. Some educators fear the proposed system is an over-correction that risks sacrificing the inclusivity and flexibility NCEA was designed to enhance (Trenwith, 2025). The NZCE for Year 12 and NZACE for Year 13 will require students to enrol in five full subjects and pass at least four to gain the qualification. This requirement may deter students from attempting new or difficult subjects for fear of jeopardising their certificate. A Cabinet paper highlighted that these changes would likely disproportionately affect attainment rates in Māori, Pacific, and neurodivergent students (Stanford, 2025).

Finally, while the Government's proposal is now available for public review, the six-week consultation window is viewed by many in the education sector, particularly the PPTA (New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association / Te Wehengarua), as insufficient for a thorough evaluation (PPTA, 2025). The profession's exclusion from the proposal's initial drafting has also eroded confidence that their concerns and requirements for successful implementation will be given adequate weight during the process (PPTA, 2025). The PPTA's overarching position is clear; NCEA is not perfect but evolution will produce the most settled environment and the best outcomes for New Zealand's learners, not a rushed overhaul devoid of real consultation (PPTA, 2025). While the rigour and achievement in New Zealand's secondary education system should be increased, we must first have a strong foundation. Swinging the education pendulum again risks disrupting our already shaky foundation.

In conclusion, the proposed shift from NCEA to the NZCE/NZACE model reflects a desire to reinforce academic rigour and clarity. Yet, the challenge for policymakers and educators is substantial, tasked with successfully implementing a qualification that restores confidence without reintroducing the barriers and pressure that NCEA was created to dismantle. The outcome of this transition will determine whether New Zealand can truly balance high standards with equitable access to success for all students.

SEE ORIGINAL ARTICLE FOR THE FULL REFERENCES

OPINION | THE NZLAV UPGRADE: A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

BY DAVID NEAL

Editorial note: this is the second of two defence policy articles in a series produced by David. The first article can be found on our website.

As part of our ongoing series on the 2025 Defence Capability Plan, this article examines the proposed upgrades to the New Zealand Light Armoured Vehicle (NZLAV) fleet. According to the plan, these upgrades are necessary in order to "ensure NZDF personnel can continue to safely and effectively manoeuvre and fight on the modern battlefield." (New Zealand Ministry of Defence, 2025, p. 29). While these upgrades appear to achieve part of that aim, the NZLAV is not sufficient for a modern fighting force.

First, what is an NZLAV? The New Zealand Light Armoured Vehicle, is the version of the Canadian Light Armoured Vehicle III, LAV III, operated by the New Zealand Army. NZLAV mounts a 25mm autocannon, sufficient armour for protection from small arms and shrapnel, and carrying 3 crew, plus 7 infantry (New Zealand Defence Force, 2003).

It is intended as a light, mobile vehicle capable of also providing supporting fire for the infantry it carries. Initially ordered in the early 2000's, the NZLAV was expected to remain in service for 25 years (Burton, 2000). We are fast reaching the end of that 25 year period. So, does the upgrade program achieve its set aims, or is the NZLAV in dire need of total replacement?

While recent months have seen other LAV III variants, such as the American Stryker IFV, perform reasonably well in combat in Ukraine (Mukhina, 2025), it is important to note that the NZLAV and the Stryker are designed for distinct roles. The Stryker is a vehicle designed to get in fast, deploy infantry, and then get out even faster. As stated by Vladyslav, a battalion representative for the Ukrainian 81st Separate Airmobile Brigade, "fight should last 5, maybe 10 minutes."

LAV III variants, including both NZLAV and Stryker, share a level of armour called Standardisation Agreement III, STANAG III, and can be fitted with appliqué armour to the next level, STANAG IV.

Stryker is explicitly not suitable for combat against mechanised infantry or tanks, per US Army Maj. Walter Gray II, due to its inadequate armour and weaponry (Axe, 2024). This may be less of a problem for NZLAV, due to the 25mm autocannon, which has been able, in ideal circumstances, to defeat the armour of a T-90 main battle tank (Tuzov, 2024). Despite this, it remains the case that the NZLAV does not carry dedicated anti-tank weapons, such as the TOW missile mounted on M2 Bradley IFVs, or the Malyutka missile mounted to Soviet or Chinese designed IFVs. This difficulty in dealing with armoured vehicles puts NZLAV at a disadvantage if it is intended to be used as the sole fire support vehicle for the New Zealand Army.

Thus, the NZLAV may be adequate for certain aspects of its intended role within the New Zealand Defence Force, but it may be insufficient for the challenges of modern warfare. A revolution is unfolding in military affairs, driven by the large-scale use of drone systems on the modern battlefield. Military analysts have likened this with the introduction of gunpowder weapons (Nielsen, 2025). In terms of its speed and immediate effect on the battlefield, it can be compared to the development of tanks in the First World War.

An NZ army soldier and an NZLAV in Afghanistan, 2011 (Source: New Zealand Defence Force)

The Lancet 3 drone, with a range of approximately 40 km, a 3kg payload designed to destroy a tank, and a top speed of 110km/h, poses a significant threat to armored vehicles such as the NZLAV (Borsari, 2025). FPV drones can carry RPG warheads and similar anti-armour weapons, and can be made immune to jamming, one of the traditional defences against drones (Kirichenko, 2025). Both kinds of systems are capable of destroying an NZLAV, regardless of appliqué armour.

A lancet drone on display, 2025 (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

These emerging threats are outside the scope of what the NZLAV was designed to defeat. If we intend to maintain NZLAV in service, a method of defeating drones must be implemented.

A variety of anti-drone weapons are currently in use, and it remains unclear which will be the most effective solution. Some of these methods are extremely high tech, such as vehicle mounted anti-air lasers, which were demonstrated last month and are currently in operation with the Armed Forces of Ukraine (Litnarovych, 2025; Reporting from Ukraine, 2025). Others are unconventional in their simplicity, such as trucks mounting the nearly century-old M2 Browning heavy machine gun (Epstein, 2025). More common than the former, and more effective than the latter, are systems such as the German Flakpanzer Gepard, capable of locking onto targets as small as birds at distances of up to 14 km, and engaging them with twin 35mm autocannon.

While lasers hold significant promise as close-in weapon systems - particularly for warships and land-based applications - they are likely well beyond the New Zealand Defence Force's budgetary constraints. On the other hand, trucks mounting heavy machine guns are an extremely affordable option, although they come with substantial limitations. These systems lack protection, and without their own radar, are not going to be engaging anything much at the scale of an FPV drone at any distance.

Ultimately, we are left with a problem. Self-propelled air defence systems (SPADs), such as Gepard, are usually built onto tank hulls and are a costly investment. While experiments with air defence variants of LAV II were undertaken (LAV-AD, 2001), there was no similar program for LAV III. This makes it impossible to buy off-the-rack air defence systems to fit on current NZDF combat vehicles.

Canada appears to have been experimenting with LAV VI based short range air-defence, which may prove a useful answer, as LAV VI shares the same hull as NZLAV (LAV 6.0, 2024). This would not be a short term solution, however, as the product does not currently exist to purchase. Available now is the Australian designed Slinger air defence system, a radar guided autocannon designed to be fitted to light vehicles (Defense Express, 2023). As Slinger is an Australian design, with American parts, the system would also improve interoperability with our Five Eyes allies (United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand).

In short, the NZLAV is still an effective vehicle for its intended role, but is inadequate on its own to deal with new threats it was never designed for. There are, however, readily available solutions for the most pressing concerns which, if accepted, would allow the NZLAV to continue in service for years to come.

SEE ORIGINAL ARTICLE FOR THE FULL REFERENCES

OPINION | A CRADLE OF BONES: STARVATION AS A WEAPON OF WAR AGAINST GAZA'S CHILDREN

BY TILOURSHITA THIAGU

SENIOR WRITER

She was five months old and she died weighing less than she did when she was born.

Her name was Zainab Abu Halib. She died in Khan Younis, wrapped in a thin blanket, held in her mother's arms as her body slowly shut down. Doctors at Nasser Hospital reported that she weighed under two kilograms when she died, more than a kilogram less than her birth weight. Her ribs pressed through fragile skin. Her ankle was thinner than her mother's thumb. She did not cry. She did not move. Zainab did not die from shrapnel or burns. She died from hunger (Los Angeles Times, 2025).

And she is not the only one.

In Gaza, children are not dying because of a lack of global resources. They are dying because food is being kept out. Because trucks carrying aid are turned away. Because fuel is blocked. Because the entry of flour, formula, and medicine is being tightly controlled, delayed, or bombed. They are dying because starvation is being used as a weapon of war (BBC, 2025).

More than 100 people, most of them children, have already died from starvation-related causes in Gaza in 2025 alone (Time, 2025). Aid workers believe this number is an underestimate. Access to northern Gaza is so restricted that deaths are likely going unrecorded. Médecins Sans Frontières reports that cases of severe acute malnutrition among children under five have tripled in just two weeks (The Guardian, 2025). The World Health Organisation has warned that famine is imminent (WHO, 2025). The World Food Programme describes the humanitarian situation as catastrophic (WFP, n.d). There is no excuse left to give. Everyone knows what is happening. The difference is that most have chosen to look the other way.

Children in Gaza are eating birdseed, animal feed, and grass. Families drink contaminated water because bottled water is unaffordable or unavailable. Babies die not from trauma, but from emptiness. Mothers no longer produce breast milk because they themselves are starving (Reuters, 2024). Feeding tubes are in short supply. Fuel for incubators and medical devices has run out in many hospitals. Some infants die before they are even named (RNZ, 2025).

This is not an unfortunate consequence of war. This is a tactic.

The use of starvation as a weapon is explicitly prohibited under international law. Article 54 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions outlaws the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare (ICRC, 1977). Article 8(2)(b)(xxv) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines it as a war crime (ICC, 1998). The law is clear. And yet it is being broken, every hour, every day. What is happening in Gaza is not just a humanitarian crisis. It is a legal, moral, and political crisis. One that implicates those ordering the siege, and those who remain silent as it continues.

In March, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, citing reasonable grounds to believe they bear responsibility for the war crime of starvation (ICC, 2024). The decision was historic. It was also overdue. Gaza has been under a form of blockade for nearly two decades, but the situation since October 2023 has escalated into something far more horrific. Gaza has become a controlled starvation zone, where children's survival depends not on nature, but on politics. And the international community, for all its declarations, has failed to stop it.

This is not about numbers. This is about lives. Zainab Abu Halib should have lived. She should have grown teeth, taken her first steps, and said her first words. Instead, she died in silence. Her death is not an isolated failure; it is the consequence of repeated choices to withhold food, fuel, and medical care from an entire population.

Diplomatic language has done nothing to stop it. Governments continue to speak in vague terms about "humanitarian corridors" and "tactical pauses," as if starvation can be scheduled (CNN, 2025).

Meanwhile, aid trucks sit at border crossings. Flour expires in warehouses. Convoys are bombed (Al Jazeera, 2024). And children die with nothing in their stomachs.

The world is not witnessing a tragedy. It is enabling a crime.

New Zealand, like many nations, has called for humanitarian access and condemned violence (New Zealand Government, 2025). But words are not enough. As a country that claims to stand for human rights, international law, and peace, we must do more than issue statements; we must take concrete action. We must call for unrestricted humanitarian access, without exception or negotiation. We must support international investigations and prosecutions of those responsible for the starvation of civilians. We must increase funding for frontline organisations delivering aid. We must act.

To do nothing is to accept this. To do nothing is to make starvation normal.

Zainab is gone. Hundreds more will follow if nothing changes. These children are not collateral damage. They are not statistics. They are the proof that the world has mechanisms to prevent genocide and famine, but no political will to enforce them.

Starvation is not a natural disaster. It is not an accident. It is the result of conscious decisions to cut off food, delay convoys, bomb infrastructure, and deny access to the most basic necessities of life. It is a weapon. And it is being used right now, in front of all of us.

We will be asked, someday, what we did when Gaza's children starved. Let us not say we watched.

SEE ORIGINAL ARTICLE FOR THE FULL REFERENCES

DEBATE SERIES EXCERPTS

WILL PRIVATE SECTOR INNOVATION OR GOVERNMENT REGULATION BE MORE EFFECTIVE IN SOLVING CLIMATE CHANGE?

"COP28 commitments have no legal standing and will ultimately rely on political climates [...] While we agree that governments play a significant role, we disagree on how much we can feasibly depend on them. Instead of wasting precious time hoping for political stability, we should support the private sector innovation which is currently involved in solving the problem of our time."

VS

"Carbon Majors (2025) found that 53% of global fossil fuel and cement CO_2 emissions came from state-owned entities in 2023, compared to 24% from investor-owned companies [...] I am highlighting the fact that because so much of our global CO_2 emissions come from state-owned enterprises, it is the governments that have to bring forth effective solutions themselves."

SHOULD THE VOTING AGE BE LOWERED TO 16 IN NEW ZEALAND?

"16 and 17-year-olds are deemed competent enough to drive, drop out of school, start university, work a job, and have medical autonomy (Watters, 2020). When our ultimate goal is increasing the quality of voting and engagement, our best solution is lowering the voting age. Young people will inherit our world, and there is no better time to get them involved in the politics that will shape their futures."

VS

"New Zealand once sat with a selection of states who restricted voting to the age of 21, which included nations like Singapore. Singapore's lowest voter turnout this year, at 92.47% (Strait Times, 2025) is dramatically higher than New Zealand's 77.51% (Electoral Commission, 2023)[...] We should not let the excitement of short-term measures distract us from the necessary, substantial improvements required by our democracy. "

SHOULD PRISONERS BE SUBJECT TO A VOTING BAN?

"Although prisoners are removed from society, they are held within executive institutions where their sentences and everyday lives are ultimately determined by ministers who generally follow the agendas of their parties. I.e., Justice Minister Goldsmith applying the National Party's tough-on-crime approach with this voting ban. Is it democratic to have people who are impacted by our political representatives not be represented by them?"

VS

"While our justice system has significant flaws and need for reform, the purpose of incarceration is, in large part, to protect communities from those who have seriously harmed them. That harm is the breach of the social contract. Those who commit that harm, those who refuse to be bound by our society's laws, mark themselves out as not part of society, and hence not party to social decision making. In this situation, it is entirely acceptable to curtail their voting rights."

INTERVIEW SERIES EXCERPTS

What do you hope students take away from your course(s)?

"Right now, I'm teaching in our short course programmes, and our participants are professionals, mostly in the public sector. If they will only remember one thing from my courses, I hope it is that everyone has a voice and should take part in conversations on governance and public policy, particularly in emerging technologies like AI, which will immensely affect the lives of everyone. We should also help the marginalised get a seat at the table if we have the ability or influence to do it."

Are there any policy issues you're especially interested in right now? Why?

"I've done a lot of work as a Research Assistant for Senior Lecturer Jayden Houghton during my studies. One project that was particularly cool to be involved in was his book 'Tikanga Māori and State Law'. The interaction of state law and tikanga is, I would argue, the most cutting edge policy issue for the law and the courts. There's a lot of thinking to be done on how we move forward as a country – especially considering the current Government's regressive and harmful policies."

What makes for a strong student writer or thinker in public policy?

"I think it's important to follow the recent news and policy debates, including commentaries in outlets such as Foreign Affairs and the actual policy documents from organizations such as the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development or the World Bank. The language used by various policy bodies differs depending on the audience. It's like learning different languages – you need to communicate differently to New Zealand local councils and differently to a general audience of foreign affairs columns. Be empathetic – know your audience, and be able to craft your message in different styles."

IRON DUKE POLICY BRIEF COMPETITION WINNER

Leo Taylor - "Securing Tomorrow: Reforming Superannuation for Fiscal and Social Sustainability"

INTRODUCTION

Aotearoa is ageing rapidly. As of 2025, 16% of the population is over 65, a figure projected to climb to nearly 25% by 2050.[1] But while NZ Super's cost grows, its adequacy for retirees diminishes. Mounting living costs mean many are not enjoying retirement, they are surviving it. Reform is essential to provide for those in later life and secure long-term sustainability for future generations.

THE KEY ISSUES

Fiscal Sustainability

NZ Super is the fastest-growing area of government spending, projected to rise by $1.4 billion annually and consume over 21% of tax revenue by 2036/37.[2] By 2028/29 NZ Super will cost $29 billion, up from $24.7 billion in 2025/26, and is forecast to reach 7.7% of GDP by 2061.[3] This trajectory is fiscally unsustainable and risks crowding out spending in critical areas of investment, contributing to a forecast where core Crown debt could reach 111% of GDP, a level not seen since World War II.[4] The NZ Super Fund will not meaningfully change this fiscal outlook and is only projected to cover a small percentage of the *increase* in annual NZ Super expenditure.[5]

Evolving Societal Realities

NZ Super is increasingly inadequate for supporting retirees in today's economic climate. The system was built on the assumption that most retirees would be mortgage-free homeowners, yet by 2048, 40% of over-65s are projected to be renters, a 100% increase from 2018.[6] NZ Super is the sole income for 40% of retirees, and another 20% rely on only slightly more, and weekly housing costs can exceed 40% of their NZ Super payments.[7] As living costs rise, retirees are forced to make extreme cutbacks and remain in the workforce, 36% of working over-65s cite financial necessity, up from 29% in 2022.[8]

1. Katie Wesney, Fixing New Zealand's Retirement Math Problem, May 21 2025, https://www.stuff.co.nz/politics/360695490/beyond-budgetfixing-nzs-retirement-math-problem
2. Katie Wesney, Fixing New Zealand's Retirement Math Problem, May 21 2025, https://www.stuff.co.nz/politics/360695490/beyondbudget-fixing-nzs-retirement-math-problem
3. The Treasury New Zealand, Budget Economic and Fiscal Update 2025, p. 44.
4. Te Ara Ahunga Ora Retirement Commission, Aotearoa New Zealand in 2050, 2024, p. 36.
5. St John, Susan. "Opinion: A Tax-Free Super Fund Sounds Appealing, but Retirees Won't Magically Benefit without Budget Trade-Offs." University of Auckland, 2024. https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/news/2024/11/22/tax-free-nz-super-fund--smoke-and-mirrors-or-smart-policy- .html
6. Te Ara Ahunga Ora Retirement Commission, Pension Tension: Summing up the Super Summit, 2024, p. 9.
7. Te Ara Ahunga Ora Retirement Commission, Pension Tension: Summing up the Super Summit, 2024. p. 9.
8. Quill, Annemarie. Retirees Work into 80s, 90s with 'Insufficient' Super and Rising Costs, Stuff, 2024. https://www.stuff.co.nz/nznews/350218070/retirees-work-80s-90s-insufficient-super-and-snowballing-living-costs

Intergenerational and Social Equity

The growing retiree population is supported by a shrinking workforce. By 2050, the number of working-age people per older person will fall from 3.6 to 2.6.[9] This could result in taxes potentially needing to rise by around 5-10% per worker to cover costs.[10] Furthermore, Māori, carers, and manual workers face shorter life expectancy and lower ability to work past 65, making retirement age increases potentially inequitable. KiwiSaver can[11]also lead to inequity in retirement because its work-based, contributory nature often results in lower balances for women, Māori, Pacific peoples due to varying earning and employment patterns. Falling homeownership[12]will only worsen equity concerns, and challenges the assumption that NZ Super, even if supplemented with KiwiSaver, is sufficient.

PROPOSED POLICIES

A Cross-Party Political Accord

Superannuation reform is politically toxic with past attempts have proven electorally costly, leading to inaction despite growing pressures.[13] A formal cross-party accord, as modelled off Sweden's pension reform, would depoliticise reform and provide the durability needed for meaningful change.[14]

Parliamentary Accord Working Group

Establish a working group based on proportional representation and cap membership at 12 to remain effective. Supermajority voting rules encourage genuine collaboration, and parties should appoint members with relevant policy expertise to maintain credibility. To foster trust, hold confidential, timelimited discussions and create a Memorandum of Understanding committing to shared retirement reform goals.

A 'Retirement Accord' Act

The Retirement Accord Act would codify a cross-party governance framework for superannuation, requiring five-yearly statutory reviews informed by independent analysis. An automatic balancing mechanism as seen in Sweden's pension reform will adjust benefits based on life expectancy and economic conditions, to keep costs stable, and provide for both predictable and flexible change. Substantive amendments would require supermajority approval within the Accord Working Group. An intergenerational equity clause would guide deliberations, ensuring policy settings remain fiscally sustainable and socially balanced. Legislative entrenchment of this process preserves flexibility while ensuring ease of reform for the future.

9. Te Ara Ahunga Ora Retirement Commission, Aotearoa New Zealand in 2050, 2024, p. 9.
10. Te Ara Ahunga Ora Retirement Commission, Aotearoa New Zealand in 2050, 2024, p. 5.
11. Te Ara Ahunga Ora Retirement Commission, NZ Super: Issues and Options, 2024. p, 24.
12. Te Ara Ahunga Ora Retirement Commission, NZ Super: Issues and Options, 2024. p, 24.
13. Donovan, Emile. "The Detail: Why Superannuation Is Political Kryptonite." RNZ/Stuff, 2020. https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/thedetail/300028774/the-detail-why-superannuation-is-political-kryptonite.
14. Nilsson, Björn. 2000. "The Swedish Pension Reform." In Pensions for the Future: Developing Individually Funded Programs, edited by Olivia S. Mitchell, Robert J. Myers, and Howard Young, 35–52. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Raising the NZ Super Age to 67

The age for eligibility for the pension has been 65 since 1898, times have changed.[15] In 1898 the average life expectancy was approximately 60, now it's 82.[16] Raising the eligibility age from 65 to 67, phased gradually from 2029 to 2041, would generate long-term savings while allowing adequate time for adjustment.

Phased Timeline

Beginning in July 2029, the retirement age will gradually increase by two months each year, reaching age 67 by July 2039. This phased approach provides a 10-year lead time, allowing individuals ample opportunity to adjust their retirement planning and ensuring greater fairness and predictability in the transition.

Addressing Equity Concerns

To mitigate inequities arising from an increase in the superannuation age to 67, a limited early access provision is proposed. Eligibility at age 65 would be retained long-term manual workers and full-time carers. Despite lower life expectancy for Māori and Pacific peoples, race-based eligibility adjustments lack policy nuance and public legitimacy; instead, eligibility is tied to demonstrable labour market disadvantage and ability. Based on current data, the total fiscal impact of this provision is projected at $681 million.[17] This approach preserves fairness while maintaining the overall integrity, and savings trajectory of the reform.

Introducing a Smart Clawback System

Financial insecurity in old age is growing, yet wealthy retirees continue to receive full payments. The current universal model is increasingly inequitable.

NZ Super Grant (NZSG)

A universal, non-taxable weekly grant for all New Zealanders aged 67 and over would replace NZ Super, with a progressive clawback applying to those above an income threshold of $70,000 through integration into the existing PAYE system to minimise administrative complexity. Wealthy retirees can opt out of the NZSG to avoid this increased taxation. This preserves the dignity of universality, and maintains the praised simplicity of NZ Super.[18] The system avoids complex means testing by building on the existing tax structure and preserves incentives to work and save in retirement. This reform is estimated to save approximately $3 billion per year.[19]

Strengthening KiwiSaver

Increased Forecasted Contributions

The government is currently phasing in higher default KiwiSaver contribution rates, from 3% to 4% by 2028.

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15. Ministry for Culture and Heritage. 2023. "Old-age Pensions Act Passes into Law." NZHistory, October 26. Accessed August 7, 2025. https://nzhistory.govt.nz/old-age-pensions-act-passes-into-law.
16. Pool, Ian. 2025. "Death Rates and Life Expectancy." Te Ara – The Encyclopedia of New Zealand. Accessed August 7, 2025. https://teara.govt.nz/mi/death-rates-and-life-expectancy/print.
17. Te Ara Ahunga Ora Retirement Commission, NZ Super: Issues and Options, 2024. p, 28.
18. Te Ara Ahunga Ora Retirement Commission, NZ Super: Issues and Options, 2024. p, 4.
19. Susan St John, "Economist Offers Fresh Take on Pension Reform.", University of Auckland, 2025. https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/news/2025/03/05/economist-offers-fresh-take-on-pension-reform.html

This combined KiwiSaver contribution of 8% is significantly lower than Australia (12%), and Canada (11.9%). To adapt to changing economic and social conditions, contribution rates should gradually rise to 6% for employees and 6% for employers by 2034, aligning with international benchmarks, allowing wage growth to absorb the impact, and boosting future outcomes. Employees will be able to temporarily opt down to the 3% rate for up to 12 months in case of financial hardship. An autoescalation mechanism would increase employee contributions by 0.3% annually, unless members actively opt out, up to a cap of 6%. KiwiSaver access should also be decoupled from the NZ Super age to prevent hardship.

Targeted Government Contributions

Budget 2025 has halved the GVC to 25c per dollar and restricted it to earners under $180,000. To strengthen equity, the government should restore higher GVC rates for low-income earners (e.g. under $40,000). The reforms are expected to save the Crown nearly $2.8 billion, following Budget 2025, with the increases to GVC for low-income earners costed at 200 million given population and income statistics.[20]

Financial Illiteracy and Policy Implementation

Financial Education Package

The Retirement Commission finds many New Zealanders lack basic financial knowledge, leading to under-saving, and overreliance on NZ Super.[21, 22] To address this, a $250 million Financial Education Package is proposed over 10 years. This package will be delivered through the secondary school curriculum (integrated with current education reform), free seminars through workplaces, marae, and community centres, and a national awareness campaign on savings, tax, and retirement. Without education, even the best retirement reforms cannot deliver effective outcomes. This package supports long-term financial resilience for retirees and recognises the strong link between financial education and a dignified, stable retirement.

CONCLUSION

New Zealand's superannuation system faces mounting fiscal and social pressures that demand action. Future focused reform that covers political consensus, targeted equity measures, gradual structural changes, and strengthened private savings will secure both sustainability and dignity in retirement. By learning from global best practice and acting decisively, Aotearoa can ensure that tomorrow's retirees inherit a system worthy of their contribution.

20. Te Ara Ahunga Ora Retirement Commission.. Analysis of KiwiSaver Changes: Budget 2025. 2025, p. 18.
21. Wesney, Katie. Beyond the Budget: Fixing NZ's Retirement Math Problem. Stuff, 2025. Accessed August 7, 2025. https://www.stuff.co.nz/politics/360695490/beyond-budget-fixing-nzs-retirement-math-problem
22. Te Ara Ahunga Ora Retirement Commission, Aotearoa New Zealand in 2050, 2024, p. 47.

HARVARD X PPC INDO-PACIFIC SECURITY TREATY COMPETITION WINNERS

William Hays, Mitchell Faint and Vincent Walker

AOTEAROA-UNITED STATES TREATY OF PACIFIC MARITIME SECURITY AND RESILIENCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

New Zealand's welfare is inseparable from the health and stability of *Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa*, the Blue Pacific Continent.

The AUSPMSR crystallizes existing bilateral initiatives—such as the 2024 Strategic Dialogue, the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), and recurrent multilateral drills—into a coherent framework that is simultaneously ambitious and feasible.

NATURE AND TIMING OF THE PROPOSED TREATY ACTION:

Form

A bilateral treaty, open for accession by Pacific Island states after entry into force.

Signing

1st of July 2025 in Wellington.

Timeframe

60 days after both parties deposit instruments of ratification, expected no later than the 30th of June 2026.

Review Cycle

Comprehensive performance reviews every five years; simple amendment by mutual 2 consent; withdrawal with a twelve-month notice; obligations on marine-environment clauses survive for two years.

KEY PROVISIONS:

Article I - Principles and Objectives

1. Affirm UNCLOS, the 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security, and the 2024 Wellington Statement on a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.
2. Embed Māori concepts of kaitiakitanga (guardianship) and whanaungatanga (relational stewardship) alongside U.S. commitments to freedom of navigation.
3. Define maritime security holistically: defense cooperation, law enforcement, environmental protection, and resilience to climate-related shocks.

Article II - Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)

1. Establish the Te Moana Fusion Centre - Auckland (TMFC-A) as the Pacific node of IMPDA.; This will integrate satellite feeds, AIS data, and classified imagery under a common operating picture.
2. Mandate near-real-time information sharing on IUU incidents, grey-zone coercion, and marine hazards.
3. Create a classified digital corridor secured through post-quantum encryption co-designed by the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) and U.S. Cyber Command.

Article III - Combined Operations and Capacity Building

1. Form a Combined Pacific Patrol Wing (CPPW): rotational USCG detachments embark on RNZN offshore patrol vessels; reciprocal ship-rider provisions extended to Pacific Island constabularies.
2. Schedule two annual bilateral exercises—Exercise KUAKA (search-and-rescue) and Exercise TANIWHA (law-enforcement & HADR)—with invitations to Pacific partners.
3. Launch a Maritime Scholarship Fund (NZD$ 25 m over five years) for Pacific Island cadets at the New Zealand Maritime School and the U.S. Naval War College.

Article IV - Environmental Security and Climate Resilience

1. Coordinate blue-carbon accounting, maritime-plastic interception, and coral-reef monitoring throughout the EEZ.
2. Commit to a Green Fleet Pathway: hybrid-propulsion retrofits for three RNZN patrol craft and two USCG cutters by 2030, jointly financed and using New Zealand-developed green hydrogen.
3. Establish rapid-response environment task forces deployed within 72 hours of maritime disasters.

Article V - Governance and Indigenous Partnership

1. Constitute a Bilateral Maritime Council (BMC), co-chaired by MFAT and the U.S. State 4 Department, with permanent seats for Te Puni Kokiri and federally recognized U.S. tribal representatives.
2. Require the BMC to conduct a hui-a-tau (annual meeting) rotating between Aotearoa and Hawaii, publishing public communiques of the invited Pacific Island state in English and Māori.
3. Embed a gender-responsive budgeting framework consistent with UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

Article VI - Compliance, Dispute Resolution, and Amendments

1. Establish a three-tier compliance mechanism—self-reporting, independent auditing by the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, and consultative remediation.
2. Provide for ad-hoc arbitration under the Permanent Court of Arbitration of unresolved disputes.
3. Permit amendment by written consent; silent acceptance after two review cycles triggers automatic sunset of the contested clause.

NATURE AND TIMING OF THE PROPOSED TREATY ACTION:

(1) Reasons for Becoming a Party

The drivers for New Zealand to become a party to the treaty are myriad. A pertinent central driver is, first and foremost, to safeguard the blue economy. IUU fishing in the wider Western-Central Pacific still strips an estimated USD $ 616 m worth of tuna from regional economies each year (Tauafiafi, 2017). Persistent losses erode New Zealand seafood exports, 5 compromise food security and undercut the Quota Management System. This rationale aligns with existing policy based on the Fisheries NZ 2023 Briefing to Incoming Ministers, identifying "strengthening regional surveillance partnerships" as the most cost-effective lever for IUU deterrence.

The force-to-need gap in sovereign presence is undeniable; RNZN maintains only two offshore patrol vessels. Despite the 2025 Defense Capability Plan's intent to recapitalize the patrol fleet, gaps in persistent surveillance will persist until at least 2030 (NZ Ministry of Defense, 2025). Embedding USCG cutters fulfils the immediate coverage deficit without prejudging future platform choices.

Climate-linked maritime hazards are another cause for concern—Pacific states rank among the world's most climate-exposed (Lowy Institute, 2024); Major threats to Pacific Regional Stability through environmental drivers are now recognized by MFAT as a "national risk" (NZ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, n.d.) A legally binding mechanism for joint HADR and green-fleet innovation operationalizes New Zealand's climate-first foreign policy narrative.

Strategic balancing without militarization is one of New Zealand's forefront priorities. China's coastguard and maritime militia activity is expanding south of the Equator, raising concerns among Pacific partners (Reuters, 2024). The ability to leverage US presence through a constabulary (rather than warfighting) lens reinforces rules-based order while honoring New 6 Zealand's tradition of being nuclear-free and non-aligned.

(2) Material Background

The South-West Pacific has re-emerged as a strategic imperative. While piracy is negligible, grey-zone competition manifests through subsidized distant-water fleets, dual-use port investments, and cyber intrusions against maritime infrastructure.

Restraining threats to New Zealand in the Blue Pacific Continent remain elusive. The threat of IUU Fishing remains a priority. In the wider Pacific region, IUU fishing costs an estimated NZD$ 440 m each year. (NZ Defense Force, 2024). Transnational crime is a cause for concern; during the first five months of 2024 (1 January to 31 May), more than 1.6 tons of drugs were confiscated through our overseas border and enforcement partners (NZ Customs Service, 2024). Furthermore, warming currents are shifting hoki stocks southward, challenging quota allocations and putting pressure on marine protected areas. (NIWA, 2024). Additionally, there is an increased demand for HADR as cyclones Harold (2020) and Kevin/Judy (2023) exposed capability shortfalls in rapid debris clearance and offshore desalination that a combined NZ-US task group could remedy (LEDI, 2025).

(3) Advantages and Disadvantages

Political & Strategic:

There are unequivocal political and strategic benefits for New Zealand; it amplifies New Zealand's voice in shaping Indo-Pacific rules and demonstrates tangible commitment to Pacific partners' security requisitions. However, there are risks of perception of alignment with the Western bloc which may complicate relations with China—New Zealand's largest trading partner (StatsNZ, 2024). This can be mitigated through limiting scope to non-lethal maritime security and Article I.4 explicitly reaffirms New Zealand's non-aligned foreign policy and nuclear-free status.

Defense & Security:

The advantages to New Zealand in terms of defense and security are eminent. The patrolcoverage gap is closed through the Combined Pacific Patrol Wing and New Zealand can access U.S. satellite and MQ-9B data, leading to improved response times. A notable flaw is that the greater exposure of New Zealand platforms to contested environments could raise operational risk profiles. This can be mitigated through shared rules of engagement (ROE) aligned to constabulary law; insurance fund for hull repair included in Article VI.3.

Economic:

Economically, this treaty is advantageous as it protects New Zealand's NZD $1.8 b annual seafood exports and encourages tech-sector growth in uncrewed systems. As with any implementation of resources there are costs. Most notably, there is an implementation cost of est. NZD $ 110 m over five years (capital and OPEX). This can be mitigated through a 60:40 costshare with the U.S with eligibility for FMF and Green Climate Fund to be leveraged.

Social/Cultural:

Māori and Pacific partnerships are highly desirable as part of New Zealand's commitment to honoring Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations and uplifting the indigenous people of Aotearoa. Embedding kaitiakitanga in Article I institutionalizes Māori guardianship concepts. At the same time, scholarship and ship-rider provisions build Pacific capacity and answer the repeated calls for "Pacific-led" security solutions under the Boe Declaration in 2018. A potential disadvantage, however, could be that there is a brain-drain from Pacific agencies. This can be helped overcome through bonded scholarships and through rotating training detachments stationed in-country.

Legal:

Conforming to legality is pertinent; this treaty allows us to codify transparent compliance and arbitration mechanisms, which strengthens the rule-of-law narrative. An aspect to consider though is the complex classification issues around shared ISR data. This can be mitigated through the data-governance annex which invokes Five-Eyes standards overseen by NZ Privacy Commissioner.

(4) Key Obligations on New Zealand:

Operational:

- Host Te Moana Fusion Centre - Auckland (capex NZD $38 m)
- Provide two OPVs for CPPW rotations (minimum 180 sea-days / year)

Responsible Entity: NZDF (RNZN)

Financial:

- Contribution to Pacific Maritime Scholarship Fund (NZD $25 m)
- Co-finance Green Fleet retrofits (NZD $30 m)

Responsible Entity: Treasury / MoT

Legislative:

- Amend Maritime Crimes Act 1999 to extend hot-pursuit provisions to USCG personnel embarked on NZ vessels

Responsible Entity: Ministry of Justice

Reporting:

- Annual public report to parliament on treaty performance; classified annex to Cabinet National Security Committee

Responsible Entity: MFAT (lead)

Māori Partnership:

- Establish Te Rōpū Kaitiaki o Te Moana advisory group with representation from iwi hoki quota holders and Pacific community leaders

Responsible Entity: Te Puni Kōkiri / MFAT

CONCLUSION:

The AUSPMSR offers a calibrated yet visionary blueprint for safeguarding the Pacific's maritime commons. It welds New Zealand's legitimacy as ina kaitiaka—the guardian of a rules-based ocean order—to the United States' unparalleled surveillance and logistics might. This is legally sound, fiscally prudent, and diplomatically attuned to the hopes and anxieties of 10 Pacific Island neighbors, allowing strategic alignment to be converted into tangible and measurable public goods. Most importantly, it future-proofs Aotearoa's maritime sovereignty against a horizon of accelerating ecological and geopolitical change.

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PUBLIC POLICY CLUB

Thank you for reading.