Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

By: TA | AP Insight

New Zealand's conservatives may stay in power but face tough negotiations



The final vote count in New Zealand's election published Friday showed neither the right-wing incumbents nor the left-wing opposition bloc won enough seats to form a majority, giving a centrist party new to Parliament the balance of power in deciding the shape of the next government.

It left conservative Prime Minister Christopher Luxon the only leader with a viable path to victory, but he faces the prospect of fraught negotiations with three divergent minor parties who will seek deep policy concessions to secure their support.

Endorsement from all three would be necessary to break the election deadlock and return Luxon's center-right National party for a second term in office.

The election on Nov. 7 was the tightest vote in years, and the conservative bloc finished the night with a wafer-thin majority.

But after counting 400,000 so-called special votes, including those cast by New Zealanders living abroad, the Electoral Commission said Friday that National had lost two seats, finishing with 40.

The right-wing parties now have a collective 65 seats in a 130-seat parliament, one short of the 66 needed for a majority government.

The left-wing opposition, led by the Labour party's Chris Hipkins, won 58 seats, up by one from election night. Labour itself won 36 of those seats.

The figures leave a new entrant to Parliament, the Opportunity party — an unaligned centrist group that won seven seats — with the ultimate power to propel Luxon to power.

Opportunity's support wouldn't be enough to install a left-wing government, Hipkins admitted on Friday in an apparent concession of defeat.

Luxon says he will form a government, but it won't be easy

Luxon said Friday that he was confident he could form a government with Opportunity and his traditional partners, the libertarian ACT and the populist NZ First.

However, his route to power is not simple because some of Opportunity's socially liberal, technocratic and pro-environment values are at odds with the policies of parties on the right.

Opportunity is led by 38-year-old business consultant and political newcomer Qiulae Wong, who has said she could work with either side to form a government.

Wong's pledges of evidence-based centrism and an end to partisan bickering apparently appealed to voters, who delivered a stinging rebuke to the major parties that have long dominated New Zealand politics.

> The final count showed more support for minor parties on the ideological flanks than before

The final count showed more support for minor parties on the ideological flanks than before. A total of 2.8 million votes were cast.

Among the right-wing parties that have traditionally supported National, ACT won 13 seats and NZ First won 12.

Out of the parties supporting Labour, the left-leaning Greens won 17 seats and Te Pati Māori, an Indigenous rights group, won five.

New Zealanders cast two votes in elections, one for their preferred political party and another for their choice of local representative.

The country has only one house of parliament, and no states, which means that the central government has ultimate sway over the country's direction.

The results punish New Zealand's major political parties

Both Labour and National secured less than 30% of the preferred party vote. Analysts said it reflected voters' malaise about high living costs and a lack of enthusiasm for both Luxon, who survived two confidence votes among his lawmakers this year, and Hipkins, who led Labour to a 2023 election loss.

At the final count, National won 28.35% and Labour 29.88%. National, however, secured more seats in Parliament because more of its candidates won local races.

> If a government can't be formed, New Zealand could face a fresh vote

Luxon vehemently ruled out working with Opportunity before the election, a position he reversed on Friday when Wong's support became the only way to form a government.

If a government can't be formed, New Zealand could face a fresh vote. Elections in New Zealand are typically held every three years.

Newcomer Wong says she won't budge on bottom lines when making a deal

Making a deal will be a grueling task. Opportunity's five so-called "bottom line" policies include stronger measures on climate change and an end to bottom-trawling fisheries, which are in direct opposition to the stances of NZ First and ACT.



Opportunity's kingmaker role was a staggering ascension for a party that made three failed attempts at Parliament before Qiulae Wong became leader less than a year ago

Wong also repeated Friday a position that she would not enter a government where NZ First leader Winston Peters served as Foreign Minister, a role he held until the election.

Peters has been lambasted by his detractors for remarks he has made in Parliament about Asian people, which Wong said made him unsuitable to represent New Zealand abroad.

On Friday, Luxon didn't divulge how he might solve those conflicts. But he warned that the country could face a long wait for a government.

"These negotiations may be challenging and they could take some time," he said. "But getting it right matters far more than getting it done quickly."

Wong told reporters that her party would consider a formal coalition deal or a so-called "confidence and supply" agreement, in which Opportunity's lawmakers would agree to back key government legislation and support other bills on a case by case basis.

Opportunity's kingmaker role was a staggering ascension for a party that made three failed attempts at Parliament before Wong became leader less than a year ago. None of its incoming members have been lawmakers before.