

# New Zealand government ramps up anti-immigrant measures

Tom Peters  
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As New Zealand approaches an election in November, the right-wing coalition government is pursuing a raft of policies to restrict the rights of immigrants, while whipping up nationalism and scapegoating migrants for the country's worsening economic and social crisis.

Last week the government announced that from the second half of 2027, most adults applying for New Zealand citizenship will be required to pass a new test with 20 questions on the “responsibilities and privileges” of citizenship. The far-right ACT Party, which pushed for the test, said it would contain questions about “values” that are “fundamental to the New Zealand way of life” including “equal rights regardless of sex or race, free speech, religious freedom, and democratic principles.”

For the government to pose as the defender of freedom and equality, while insinuating that foreigners are subverting these “values,” is outrageous. The same government has passed laws making it harder for people to vote, further restricted the right to strike, and responded to increased homelessness by giving police draconian powers to “move on” people from public spaces. New “foreign interference” laws will enable the state to criminalise actions, such as opposition to war, deemed contrary to the “national interest.”

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon told Radio NZ on May 7 that the citizenship test will be “very, very similar to what the UK and Australia have been doing for years.” Australia introduced its test in 2007 under then Prime Minister John Howard, amid an avalanche of Islamophobic demagoguery, with government ministers portraying Muslims as potential terrorists and stating that anyone who didn't accept “Australian values” should leave.

The chauvinist frenzy was bound up with justifying

Australia's participation in the criminal US-led wars against Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, New Zealand and Australia are both building up their militaries in preparation to join even more devastating wars in the Middle East and against China.

The NZ test, like the Australian one, will be administered only in English, discriminating against migrant workers from non-English speaking backgrounds who are often unable to afford language lessons. Both tests define citizenship not as a right but a “privilege,” contingent on pledging loyalty to the hypocritical patriotic “values” defined by the state.

The test is part of a broader crackdown. The Immigration (Enhanced Risk Management) Amendment Bill, which passed its first reading in parliament in March, will make it far easier for the state to deport people.

It extends the period of time during which someone on a residence visa can be deported for criminal offending from 10 to 20 years. This means people can be deported even if they have spent most of their lives in New Zealand and have no links to their country of birth.

Additionally, the Minister of Immigration will get sweeping powers to deport someone on a residence visa who has not been found guilty of any crime, if the Minister determines that they “provided fraudulent, forged, false, or misleading information” or “concealed relevant information.” These criteria are so broad that it could be applied to virtually anyone and could easily be used to deport political opponents of the government.

Immigration enforcement officers will get new powers to harass migrants by demanding information if they “suspect that someone may be liable for deportation or may be in breach of their visa conditions.”

Another draconian clause removes the right of someone on a temporary visa to appeal against deportation on humanitarian grounds. This would make it easier to deport someone with a severe medical condition, to separate families, and to deport children.

Immigration lawyer Soane Foliaki told *Tagata Pasifika* on May 9 that about 25 percent of appeals against deportation to the Immigration Protection Tribunal are successful. If this judicial oversight is removed, migrants “will be left with just the immigration officers [and the Minister] making decisions, their powers increased... like ICE in the United States.”

Trump’s Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Gestapo is terrorising entire towns and cities. It has imprisoned and deported thousands, including children and families. ICE agents have carried out brutal acts of violence with impunity, including the murders of Renée Nicole Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis.

The New Zealand government, a close ally of Washington, has not opposed these flagrant attacks on democratic rights. In response to ICE’s arrest of NZ citizen Everlee Wihongi, a 36-year-old woman who has lived in the US since age six, Foreign Minister Winston Peters, from the right-wing NZ First Party, told reporters on April 29: “It is not our responsibility to comment on other countries’ immigration policy.” Wihongi has been imprisoned since April 10 for the “crime” of failing to declare a decade-old conviction for possession of cannabis.

The conservative National Party, the biggest party in the coalition, is largely adopting the anti-immigrant agendas of ACT and NZ First—far-right parties that received just 8.6 and 6 percent of the votes in the 2023 election.

Last year NZ First leader Peters ranted that too many immigrants “don’t salute our flag, don’t honour the values of our country, don’t respect the people living here.” He demanded that new arrivals be forced to sign a “Kiwi values” pledge. The party has recently stoked racism against Indian migrants, blaming them for low wages and overstretched public hospitals.

ACT is campaigning for a “dedicated enforcement unit,” clearly modeled on ICE, to deal with 20,000 people who have “overstayed” their visas. ACT also wants stronger English language requirements, a \$6 a

day tax for people on temporary work visas, and a ban on new residents receiving social welfare for five years.

The Labour Party and the Greens have criticised the latest anti-immigrant measures. Labour MP Phil Twyford told the Pacific Media Network on May 6 that the government’s policies were “election-year politicking.”

This is pure hypocrisy. Labour formed a coalition government with the Greens and NZ First in 2017 under prime minister Jacinda Ardern, which adopted many of NZ First’s policies. It implemented class-based restrictions on immigration, and during the first years of the COVID pandemic it prevented visa-holders outside the country from returning to their homes in New Zealand.

Under Labour in 2023, police carried out brutal “dawn raids” against visa “overstayers”—a measure first used in the 1970s as part of a campaign to scapegoat Pacific Islanders for rising unemployment.

As in the US, the attacks on foreign-born workers—who make up 28 percent of New Zealand’s population—are aimed at weakening the collective power of the working class to fight back against austerity and militarism. Anti-immigrant measures also serve to strengthen the repressive apparatus of the state, which will be used against all working people.

Workers can oppose this reactionary offensive only by uniting across all national, ethnic, and immigration-status divisions on the basis of a socialist program, against the entire capitalist political establishment. Such a movement must take as its starting point the unconditional defence of all migrants and refugees and the fight to reorganise society to meet social needs, not private profit. The working class must defend the right of all to live and work in any country of their choosing with full citizenship rights.



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