KEEPING COMMUNITIES SAFER

When National came into Government in 2008, Labour had left the Justice system in a mess, and law and order in disarray.

Violent crime was rising, the criminal justice system lacked accountability and a focus on victims, and the legal aid budget was blowing out. Police were struggling to get on top of crime because they didn’t have enough officers.

National has regained control over law and order by focusing on crime prevention, backing the Police, improving the responsiveness of the Justice system and putting victims first.

We have increased the penalty for breaching protection orders, improved non-violence programmes for offenders, established Children’s Teams to reduce abuse and neglect, and are training Probation Officers to work with family violence offenders.

National is focusing on the tough areas to assist the country’s most vulnerable.

That hard work is paying off.

Over the past three years violent and youth crime levels have fallen dramatically, the crime rate is at a 35-year low, and public confidence in Police is at a record level.

National is committed to putting victims at the heart of our criminal justice system. That’s why we will increase support for victims to reduce re-victimisation by expanding the services of the Victims Centre, and appointing a Chief Victims Advisor to the Justice Minister.

New Zealand’s courts have a proud reputation for fairness and impartiality, but courts also need to run on time. While the quality of our justice system is well regarded, there is an urgent need to improve the transparency, speed and efficiency with which courts operate. National is making major changes to court processes, to remove unnecessary delays and to ensure the way courts work reflects the 21st Century.

Over the past three years violent and youth crime levels have fallen dramatically, the crime rate is at a 35-year low, and public confidence in Police is at a record level.

POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

→ Achieved the lowest crime rate in 35 years.
→ Since the Criminal Proceeds (Recovery) Act came into force in December 2009, the Police have obtained forfeiture orders for assets worth around $49 million, over 60 per cent of which are related to methamphetamine offences.
→ More parents are resolving their disputes outside of court only months after the Government’s family justice reforms came into effect.
→ Reformed alcohol law to give communities a say on alcohol in their neighbourhoods.
→ Tightened laws around supplying alcohol to minors.
→ Tougher sentences for crimes against children, and for involvement in gangs.
→ Maximum jail sentences with no parole for the worst serious violent offenders under the Three Strikes Law.
NATIONAL IS...

GETTING AGENCIES WORKING EFFECTIVELY TOGETHER TO FIGHT CRIME

- Brought together Justice sector agencies (Justice, Courts, Police, Corrections, Crown Law and Serious Fraud Office) to work together collaboratively with cross-sector Better Public Services targets, to reduce crime and re-offending.

SUPPORTING VICTIMS

- Introduced a comprehensive set of initiatives to protect survivors of family violence.
- Introduced the $50 Victims’ Offender Levy, which has collected $17 million from offenders since the levy began in July 2010, creating 13 new grants and services for victims of crime.
- Increased funding and support to victims of crime through the expanded safe@home programme for women and families at high risk of serious injury or death from family violence; grants to assist families of homicide victims; and additional support for victims of sexual violence.
- Increased funding for restorative justice programmes.
-Reviewed and upgraded domestic violence programmes to make them more effective.
- Increased the penalty for breaching Protection Orders from two to three years’ imprisonment.
- Passed the Victims of Crime Reform Bill to improve the rights and services for all victims, and provided for the introduction of a Victims Code to ensure victims are given information about their rights and the duties and responsibilities of government agencies.

- Passed the Victims’ Orders Against Violent Offenders Bill to create a new restraining order to protect victims of serious violent or sexual crimes from unwanted contact from their attackers.
- Introduced the Harmful Digital Communications Bill to protect victims of cyber-bullying by providing a mechanism for removal of harmful content from websites, making it an offence to send messages and post material online with intent to cause harm, and creating a new offence of incitement to commit suicide even when a person does not attempt to take their own life – punishable by up to three years imprisonment.

CLAMPING DOWN ON CRIME

- Passed the Bail Amendment Bill to tighten up on bail and introduced electronically monitored bail.
- Increased penalties for child abuse and neglect from five to 10 years.
- Made it an offence for an adult not to take reasonable steps to protect a child or vulnerable adult knowing they are at risk.
- Strengthened the Crimes Act to make it an offence to stay silent when it is known that a child or adult is at risk of death.
- Introduced the Public Safety (Public Protection Orders) Bill to better protect New Zealanders from the worst serious and violent offenders.
- Introduced the Objectionable Publications and Indecency Legislation Bill to create tougher penalties for sexual abuse of children online, and creating a new offence of indecent communication with a child by texting, online and verbal communication.
- Increased the maximum penalty for breaching a protection order from two to three years’ imprisonment.
REFORMING ALCOHOL LAW; CONTINUING TO BE TOUGH ON P & OTHER DRUGS

✔ Passed and implemented the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012, which introduced restrictions on the sale and supply of alcohol to curb alcohol harm. Police report a drop in alcohol-related offences since the new laws took effect.

✔ Confiscating criminal proceeds and using these through the Methamphetamine Action Plan to hit the drug trade and reduce harm from drugs. Over $10 million has been used so far to fund initiatives to break the methamphetamine supply chain, and expand alcohol and drug treatment programmes.

✔ Piloting Alcohol and other Drug Courts in Auckland, offering defendants with severe substance abuse issues an opportunity for treatment before they are sentenced.

✔ Brought in tougher penalties for serious and repeat drink drivers, and the ability for courts to order offenders to use alcohol interlocks.

BRINGING IN STRONGER BAIL LAWS

✔ Extended the reverse burden of proof to more crimes through the Bail Amendment Bill.

✔ Extended adult tests for bail to 17- to 19-year-olds if they have previously served prison time.

✔ Introduced a power for judges to impose electronic monitoring when granting bail.

REFORMING THE PRIVACY ACT

✔ Passed the Privacy (Information Sharing) Bill to facilitate improved information sharing between, and within, agencies delivering public services.

✔ Amended the Privacy Act to allow the use and disclosure of personal information when there is a serious threat to health or safety.

IMPROVING OUR COURTS

✔ Implemented Family Court reforms to encourage parties to family disputes involving children to reach agreement without resorting to formal court processes.

✔ Brought increasing legal aid costs under control.

✔ Implemented the Criminal Procedure Act changes to speed up and simplify criminal cases to deliver more timely justice to victims, defendants and the community.

✔ Introduced the Judicature Modernisation Bill to streamline our Courts, allow for more electronic court processes, require written court judgments to be published online, extend the District Court’s jurisdiction to $350,000, establish a commercial list in the High Court and require the Judiciary to publish information on outstanding judgments.

✔ Improved security by expanding the use of video links between courts and prisons, allowing prisoners to attend their hearing from prison.
OUR RESULTS SO FAR

WE HAVE THE LOWEST CRIME RATE IN 35 YEARS

From June 2011 to March 2014:

- Total crime fell by 16 per cent, surpassing a 2017 target of 15 per cent.
- Youth crime is down by 30 per cent, surpassing a 2017 target of 25 per cent.
- Reoffending is down by 12 per cent against a 2017 target of 25 per cent.
- Violent crime is down by 11 per cent against a 2017 target of 20 per cent.
- The number of children and young people being charged in court is the lowest in 20 years – down 45 per cent since the peak in 2007/08.

SPED UP THE COURTS PROCESS AND IMPROVED FINES COLLECTION

- The number of criminal cases is down by 38 per cent since 2009, with 86,000 fewer new criminal cases each year.
- Installed video links to prisons in 16 courts, saving time and the costs of transporting prisoners, removing escape risk and speeding up courts hearings.
- In just four months, $4.6 million in unpaid fines were collected thanks to the introduction of Driver Licence Stop Orders.

PUT VICTIMS FIRST

More than 5,000 victims received support from the Victims’ Offender Levy in 2012/13.

BROUGHT THE LEGAL AID BUDGET UNDER CONTROL

From 2006/7 the cost of legal aid leapt by 13 per cent a year to $173 million in 2009/10, and was forecast to grow to over $220 million by 2013/14.

Under National the cost of legal aid has fallen to $144 million in 2013/14 – about $29 million less than in 2009/10.
WHAT WE WILL DO NEXT…

1. BUILD ON OUR SUCCESS IN REDUCING THE CRIME RATE TO A 35-YEAR LOW

➔ Introduce a new Better Public Services target to reduce crime by 20 per cent by 2017.

From June 2011 to March 2014, total crime fell by 16 per cent, surpassing a 2017 target of 15 per cent. We will build on that by introducing an ambitious target of reducing the total crime rate by 20 per cent from June 2011 to June 2017.

- Crime rate: 20% (On track)
- Violent crime: 20% (On track)
- Youth crime: 25% (Surpassed)
- Reoffending: 25% (On track)

This will be challenging, but National has ensured law enforcement and justice agencies have the right capabilities to achieve the new target.

National backs the Police to do their job. We are improving the responsiveness of the Justice system and putting victims first, and we are focusing on crime prevention.

We are making real changes to the Justice system. We have increased the penalty for breaching protection orders, improved non-violence programmes for offenders, established Children’s Teams to reduce abuse and neglect, and are training Probation Officers to work with family violence offenders.

That hard work is paying off for New Zealanders.
2. DEVELOP A STRONGER RESPONSE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

→ Strengthen efforts across Justice, Police, Corrections and Courts.

National will:

→ Establish a Chief Victims Advisor to the Minister of Justice to advise on the needs and views of victims of crime.

→ Test an intensive case management service, which would provide specialist support for family violence victims at high risk of serious harm or death.

→ Establish a nationwide home safety service to help victims who want to leave a violent relationship.

→ Review the Domestic Violence Act 1995 to ensure the system keeps victims safe and holds offenders to account.

→ Explore the possibility of a conviction disclosure scheme which could allow people to ask whether their partner has a history of violence.

→ Introduce legislation to allow courts to stipulate GPS monitoring on high-risk family violence offenders.

→ Trial mobile safety alarms with GPS technology for victims so they can immediately notify Police of an emergency, and their location.

→ Develop a comprehensive, long-term approach to break the cycle of family violence through changing attitudes and behaviours towards family violence, and using early interventions for drug and alcohol addiction.
3. CONTINUE TO BE TOUGH ON CRIME AND PUT VICTIMS FIRST

→ Take further legislative action to protect victims.

National will:

→ Reform the Privacy Act to improve the management of privacy by agencies holding private information and improve processes for the Privacy Commissioner to deal with complaints.

→ Progress the Harmful Digital Communications Bill to address cyber-bullying.

→ Progress the Organised Crime and Anti-Corruption Bill to strengthen New Zealand’s financial system against serious crime.

→ Progress the Parole Amendment Bill to reduce unnecessary parole hearings.

→ Introduce Public Protection Order Bill to protect New Zealanders from a small number of the worst serious violent offenders.

→ Progress the Objectionable Publications and Indecency Legislation Bill to increase penalties for child sexual abuse online.

“WHERE THERE IS A BALANCING OF RIGHTS TO BE DONE BETWEEN CRIMINALS AND VICTIMS, AND WHERE THERE IS A DOUBT ABOUT WHAT ACTION SHOULD BE TAKEN, I WILL TAKE A SIDE. AND THAT SIDE WILL BE THE SIDE OF THE VICTIM.”

- JOHN KEY

4. INCREASE FUNDING FOR THE PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

→ Provide an additional $7 million to the Privacy Commissioner’s funding.

This funding will allow better protection of New Zealanders’ private information especially in the current technology-driven environment.

5. INVESTIGATE THE POTENTIAL FOR BETTER INFORMATION-SHARING BETWEEN AGENCIES

→ Investigate the potential for information sharing between the criminal and family courts and the Parole Board.

We would like to see if it is possible for the Parole Board to have more, relevant information when considering parole applications.
DON’T PUT IT ALL AT RISK

Labour and the Greens would:

✗ Be soft on crime. During Labour’s last term in government, violent crime skyrocketed, growing 47 per cent in the decade to 2008. Under Labour, the criminal justice system lacked accountability and a focus on victims, and the legal aid budget was blowing out. Police were struggling to get on top of crime because they didn’t have enough officers, and there was a critical shortage of prison beds.

✗ Offer no coherent strategy for delivering better support for victims of crime. Under the previous Labour government, there was no improvement in services for victims. National has continually improved victim support services and is committed to further improving the rights of victims.

✗ Seriously damage our criminal justice system by introducing an inquisitorial system for sexual violence offences in our courts.

✗ Offer no commitment to modernising our courts. Under Labour our courts became increasingly sluggish and inefficient. Legal Aid costs were out of control. National has a plan for modernising our justice system to make it accessible for the users, transparent and efficient.