

Ten things to know about Hana's haka

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Source: screenshot

Māori MP Hana-Rāwhiti Maipi-Clarke captured global attention with a powerful haka performed to protest the controversial Treaty Principles Bill

On Nov. 14, 22-year-old [Hana-Rāwhiti Maipi-Clarke](#) made global headlines when she performed a powerful *haka*, a Māori war cry, in New Zealand's Parliament, tearing a copy of a controversial bill as part of her protest. A TikTok video of the moment, posted by Māori Television, has since been viewed over 200 million times and has garnered over 25 million likes in just three days. Online pundits have debated the effectiveness of the theatrical protest, but the bigger questions remain: Who is this young lawmaker? Why did she perform this *haka*? And what impact is her action likely to have on the broader movement for [Māori sovereignty](#)? Here are ten things you should know about Hana's *haka*.

Hana's election victory

Hana-Rāwhiti Maipi-Clarke was elected to Parliament at just 21 years old, making her New Zealand's youngest Member of Parliament in 170 years. Her victory was surprising—not because of her age, but because she unseated one of the country's most seasoned politicians, Nanaia Mahuta, to win the [Hauraki-Waikato](#) Māori electorate seat.

Mahuta, a long-serving Labour MP, was widely considered certain to retain her seat. In 2017, experienced tribal leader [Rāhui Papa](#) had contested the seat against Mahuta with the full backing of the Māori King, only to suffer a crushing defeat in a race that seemed to solidify Mahuta's unshakeable hold on the electorate.

Hana's rise in popularity

So how did Hana-Rāwhiti Maipi-Clarke secure her historic election victory against such a formidable opponent? Part of the shift in voter preference can be attributed

to declining support for the Labour Party, which, despite two terms in power, had delivered little for Māori. In contrast, the Māori Party's popularity had been rising since it secured two seats in the 2020 election with its campaign to be "unapologetically Māori."

A key factor in Hana's rise was the series of threats she faced in the lead-up to the election—including [home invasions](#), vandalism, and a threatening letter. When asked if these attacks had intimidated her, Hana responded with resolve: "Don't be scared, because the [Kohanga Reo](#) generation is here," referring to the generation of Māori educated in Māori language immersion schooling from an early age. Rather than weaken her campaign, Hana's steadfastness in the face of these threats only secured greater support.

Why Hana performed a haka

Hana performed the *haka* Ka Mate during Parliament's first reading of the controversial [Treaty Principles Bill](#)—an attempt by the far-right coalition government to strip Māori of their Treaty rights. The bill is widely regarded as one of the most egregious measures in a series of legislative changes pushed by the government, which Māori view as direct attacks on their health, language, culture, and land rights.

A 9-day nationwide *hīkoi* (protest march), beginning at the northern tip of New Zealand's North Island, was planned to arrive at Parliament on the day of the bill's first reading. However, with just two days' notice, the government moved the first reading forward, scheduling it for a date just four days into the *hīkoi*—when the marchers had only reached the Waikato region. This move was widely perceived as a cynical, anti-democratic attempt to stifle debate and avoid the pressure of Māori exercising their right to protest. By performing the *haka*, Hana disrupted parliamentary proceedings as the votes were being counted.

What Hana said in Parliament

Hana began by calmly stating in her native language, “Six votes opposed.” She then performed a *pao*—an impromptu song—reminding members of Parliament of their place within the country: “Government! You were made a guest by me!” Despite Speaker of the House Gerry Brownlee’s attempt to interrupt, Hana launched into the iconic *haka* Ka Mate. She was joined by members of her own party, Māori MPs from Labour and the Greens, and a packed public gallery.

The *haka* Ka Mate was composed in 1820 by celebrated Māori leader Te Rauparaha of the Ngāti Toa Rangatira tribe. It speaks to moments of “life or death” and celebrates the triumph of surviving seemingly insurmountable odds, making it an apt protest against the controversial bill.



Credit: Huriana Kopeke-Te Aho

Hīkoi as a tactic in Māori activism

Hīkoi is a Māori word meaning “walk,” but as a form of activism, it has taken on a deeper significance and played a central role in the Māori sovereignty movement. The tactic was famously used in the 1975 Land March to oppose the theft of Māori land and again in 2004 to protest the Foreshore and Seabed Act.

The latest *hīkoi* was led by Toitū Te Tiriti, a group with strong ties to Hana’s [political party](#). It began at Te Rerenga Wairua, the northernmost point of New Zealand, and involved relay teams physically traversing the land, accompanied by car convoys traveling between protest action points. In this way, the land was symbolically and physically reclaimed, while momentum built as the *hīkoi* progressed toward Parliament. On Tuesday, November 19, the *hīkoi* reached Wellington, where the march on Parliament was one of the largest in the nation’s history.

Hana’s role in the *hīkoi*

While Hana has received widespread praise for her *haka*, less attention has been given to her earlier work that day in the Waikato region, 550km north of Parliament. Hana met the *hīkoi* in her hometown and completed a 16km relay leg through her electorate. There, she delivered a speech and expressed a mix of weariness and hope, saying, “I’m sick of fighting.” She urged Māori to update the rallying cry, *Ka whawhai tonu mātou! Ake! Ake! Ake!* (We will fight forever and ever and ever), to *Ka ora tonu mātou! Ake! Ake! Ake!* (We will live and be well forever and ever and ever).

Hana’s international recognition

Despite being only one year into her political career, Hana-Rāwhiti Maipi-Clarke has already received international recognition. This year, [Time](#) magazine named her as a ‘next generation leader’, and she was one of four people to be awarded the ‘[One Young World Politician of the Year](#)’.

Hana’s view of the world

Hana is a member of Te Pāti Māori (The Māori Party), which currently holds six seats in Parliament and has been vocal in its criticism of New Zealand's foreign policy. In a statement on [Gaza](#), the party condemned the government for "turning a blind eye to genocide" and urged New Zealand to end its role in "providing political cover for US-funded imperialism" and "acting as a Pacific spy base for the Five Eyes Alliance." The party also demanded "an immediate ceasefire in Gaza" and called for New Zealand to "expel the Israeli and United States ambassadors" until a ceasefire is achieved.

Reactions to Hana's haka

The viral video of Hana's *haka* has sparked online debate about the effectiveness of using *haka* as a protest tactic, particularly when performed by a member of Parliament. Critics who argue that a *haka* alone won't achieve meaningful change often fail to acknowledge the broader context of the concurrent mass mobilization. Meanwhile, those who label Hana's *haka* as "uncivilized" can be dismissed as racist.

Some critiques, however, have raised important points—ones that those within the Māori protest movement are acutely aware of. Protest movements should be led by the people, not politicians. Yet, the group leading the recent *hīkoi* has become closely associated with Hana's Māori Party, creating a contradiction: the type of transformative change needed cannot be achieved through electoral politics alone. A broader political solution, such as constitutional transformation, is essential. Māori must remain vigilant to ensure the movement for constitutional justice is not co-opted for electoral gains within the settler government framework.

Additionally, *hīkoi* as a tactic alone would be insufficient unless it is clear that the mass mobilization is prepared to escalate if their demands are not met. Hana hinted at this potential, stating that if the government continues to push the bill, "honestly, it's going to cause [riots](#)."

Hana's own reaction to her *haka*

After halting proceedings with her *haka*, Hana exited the House, where she was immediately surrounded by reporters asking why she had performed the *haka*. Hana casually responded that she was simply being Māori, as that's all she knows. Her words reflected those of the late Māori King, Tūheitia Pōtatau Te Wherowhero VII, who addressed legislative attacks on Māori at a gathering earlier this year. In August, he [said](#):

"The best protest we can make right now is being Māori. Be who we are. Live our values. Speak our *reo*. Care for our *mokopuna*, our *awa*, our *maunga*. Just be Māori. Be Māori all day, every day. We are here. We are strong."

Upholding Te Tiriti

On Tuesday, November 19, the *hīkoi* arrived at Parliament. While the Treaty Principles Bill is unlikely to pass its second reading, there remains the possibility of a citizen-initiated referendum on the bill. If this occurs, Māori—who make up 17.8% of New Zealand's population—could face the tyranny of the majority, similar to what happened during Australia's Voice to Parliament referendum.

However, the *hīkoi* has always been about more than the Treaty Principles Bill. The Toitū te Tiriti *hīkoi* is a movement to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi—the true Treaty, written in Māori. If fully honored, the Treaty calls for radical constitutional change in Aotearoa. While the current far-right government's attacks on Māori have been distressing, they have also served to unite, galvanize, and radicalize the community. As Hana [herself put it](#):

"Why are they [the Crown] consistently dictating over us when that's not what the Treaty says? That is not what our founding document says. It says, you look after your people, we'll look after our people, and we can get along. It does not say you

govern over us. And that's the bigger question that we're starting to ask ourselves now."

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Source: [Peoples Dispatch](#)

