

# WHAT IS DRIVING PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

July 2023

Discussion levels have flattened out as we approach the general election; central government issues instead are taking up the majority of attention when it comes to politics. A lot of the discussion about local government is through the lens of relationships with central government. For some regions, this has been fraught, while other regions are concerned about what change might mean to seemingly established plans.

Within the local government related arena, the Wellington hostel fire generated the largest spike in discussion. Many suggested that more could have been done to prevent the tragedy, particularly stricter or better enforced regulation from the Wellington City Council. Similarly, the death of a student on a school trip to a cave resulted in questions about local regulations.

Auckland's mayor continues to be able to generate spikes in conversation. The ongoing disputes around finances in Auckland and the future of its airport also featured.

Eliminating the peak in January, July's satisfaction survey results show the overall trend in public perceptions across the country, since October last year, has been on a slow positive incline which is great to see. Auckland's significantly better result around opportunities for residents to have their say looks like a win and hopefully something that comes through in next quarter's results as well.

The information presented here provides a holistic view of public perceptions by combining data from a nationally representative sample of New Zealanders with social media trend analysis.

If you would like to unpack this more, get in touch with Liz Morley [liz@researchfirst.co.nz](mailto:liz@researchfirst.co.nz)



## -53%

Discussion levels relating to local government are down on the previous quarter

**Wellington:** The hostel fire generated discussion on whether local government fire safety regulations were fit for purpose. Also trending in Wellington was chatter around policy from the National Party that appeared to go against "Let's Get Wellington Moving". This was set out by local government and supported at the local body elections.

**Auckland:** Finances and the fate of council ownership of the airport took centre stage. The relationship between the mayor and the media has also been under further scrutiny.

**Canterbury:** Water chlorination is the significant issue in Christchurch, driving strongly negative sentiment toward both local and central government. Also trending was discussion around cycleways, particularly the Park Terrace temporary route

**Otago:** Discussion was dominated by concern about cuts to the new hospital. Commentary also included how neighbours in Gore are handling the division around the Mayor and the Chief Exec.

**Waikato:** Plans to modernise Hamilton's transport network are being met with strong resistance from a growing group nationally who oppose anything other than a car focus.

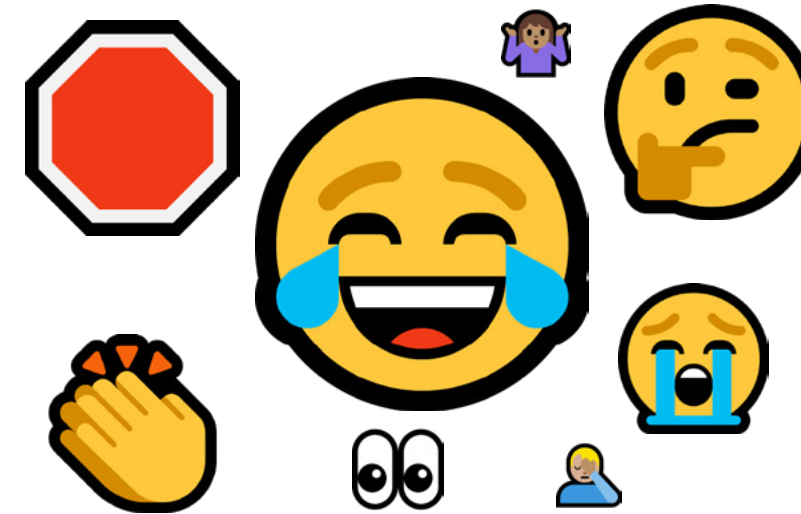
We also asked residents whether they think their councils are getting better or worse in these areas. The results are consistent with the last quarter and perceptions of value for money remain the biggest risk area.

Proportion who think these services have got worse over the last year	Aug-21	Dec-21	Apr-22	Jul-22	Oct-22	Jan-23	Apr-23	Jul-23
Information on decisions that affect your area	20%	23%	21%	27%	30%	13%	20%	20%
Opportunities to have my say	20%	23%	22%	26%	37%	12%	14%	19%
Value for money	35%	41%	37%	46%	46%	34%	38%	41%
Overall satisfaction	27%	29%	29%	38%	35%	19%	27%	28%

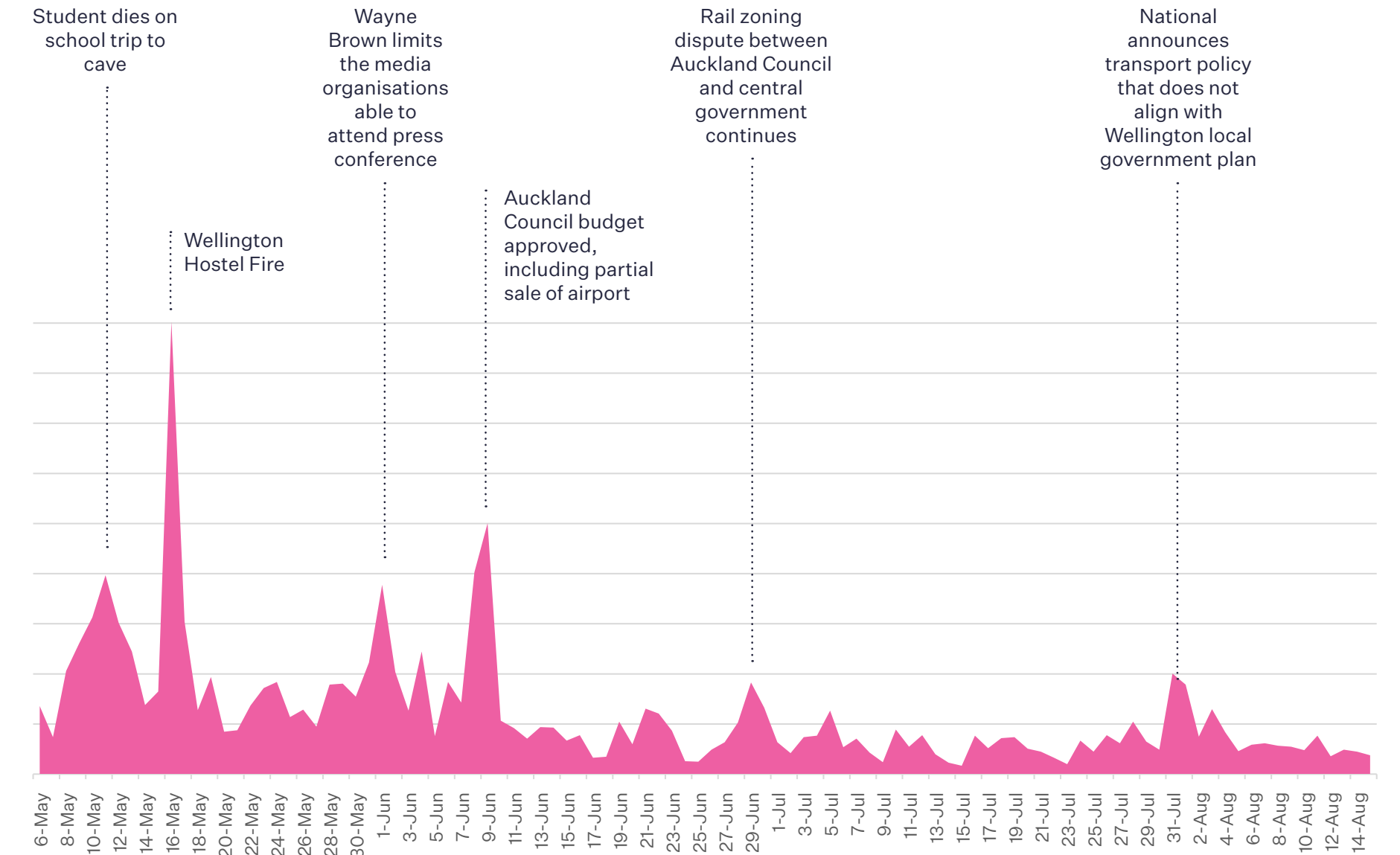
### Top trending emojis and keywords

The top trending emojis this quarter were again distinctly negative. Associated commentary identified the perception that councils were not doing a good job listening, that they had their own plans already and would likely ignore any consultation that went against them.

The top trending keywords over the last quarter were related to the Wellington hostel fire. There was a wide-ranging discussion around fire safety, regulation and how we treat vulnerable people in cities.



### Discussion levels by location: weighted for population



### Improvement areas: Engagement, Comms and VFM

Perceptions of engagement, communication and value for money are the common key drivers of overall negative perceptions resident feedback surveys.

Results for these measures are relatively stable against the last quarter, with a longer term slow upward trend in perceptions starting to become evident from the October 2022 point.

