WHAT IS DRIVING PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

Oct 2023

Discussion over the last quarter has been relatively slow; focus has been on the general election instead.

The most widely discussed story was the vote by Auckland Council not to proceed with establishing Māori seats in the region. Reaction was polarised. However, this is not reflected in our Auckland satisfaction scores for 'information on decisions that affect your area', or in 'opportunities to have your say'.

The results for the key measures of satisfaction point to a slight dip in the general mood of the nation in relation to local government outside of Auckland and consistency within Auckland. Interestingly, value for money scores are indicating an upward trend, despite the first rates bills being due. This is one to watch though, the proportion dissatisfied is on the increase but perceptions that value for money has dropped over the last year are down. It could go either way.

The Chief Ombudsman Peter Boshier's review of eight Councils in relation to concerns on closed door meetings was released at the end of this reporting period and the impact is not yet seen. This is something we will keep an eye on for the January analyses.

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

RESEARCH FIRST

in association with dynata

-20%

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

Discussion relating to local government.

Wellington: City budgets, particularly re. earthquake strengthening. Budget blowout of the Town Hall drew particularly negative comment.

Auckland: The vote on whether to establish Māori wards was particularly divisive, reflecting the national-level conversation around co-governance and similar topics. This brought with it the accusations of racism and of unfair privilege that have come to define the broader debate. Also widely shared and discussed was the felling of a stand of native trees to make way for a housing development in South Auckland, with many upset at the loss.

Canterbury: The announcement that a rates blowout of up to 18% could occur with current budgetary settings caused a significant reaction in Christchurch. To many it appeared surprising. Support for the previously popular stadium appeared to waver as the scale of the problem became apparent. This reaction was intensified by the announcement that the new sports and recreation centre would require substantial additional funding.

Otago: The Otago Regional Council voting to shift to an STV model for the 2025 elections was well received.

Northland: Kaipara District Council mayor Craig Jepson's plan to translate Te Reo using ChatGPT has resulted in continued pushback in the region, particularly from Iwi.

All regions: Rates increases mean cost-cutting has become a priority with the public. However, few realistic suggestions for cuts are provided.

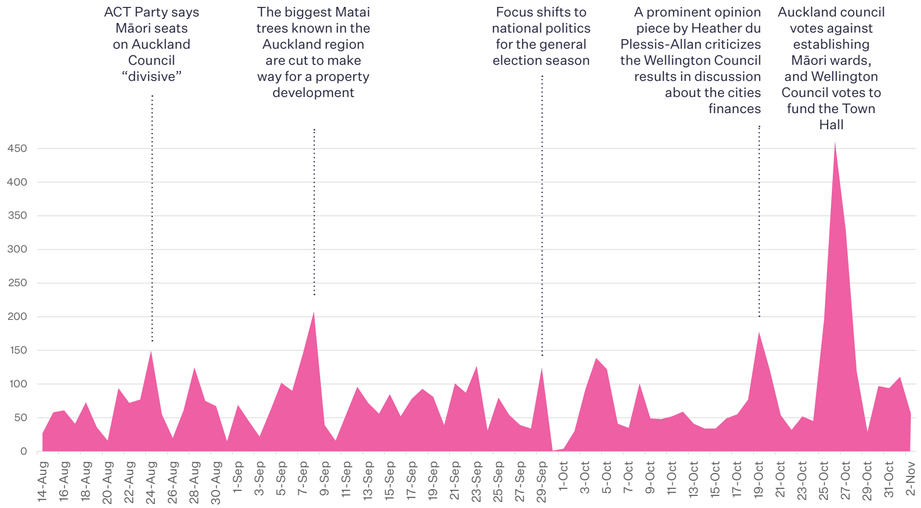
Discussion levels by location: weighted for population

Top trending emojis and keywords

The top trending emojis this quarter were the thread and index pointing down, both imploring the reader to look at contributions and longer-form discussions spanning a number of posts. These posters are creating a conversation rather than simply stating an opinion.

The usual negative emojis are also still there: the stop sign, angry face, crying face and confused face.

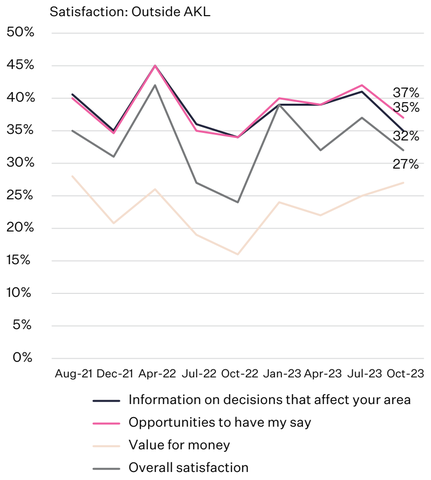
The top trending keywords over the last quarter were related to the Auckland vote not to proceed with establishing Māori seats in the region.

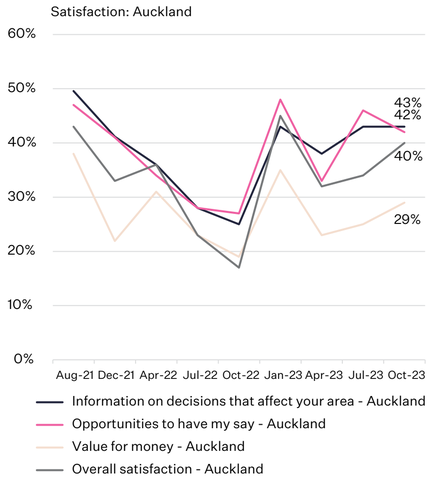
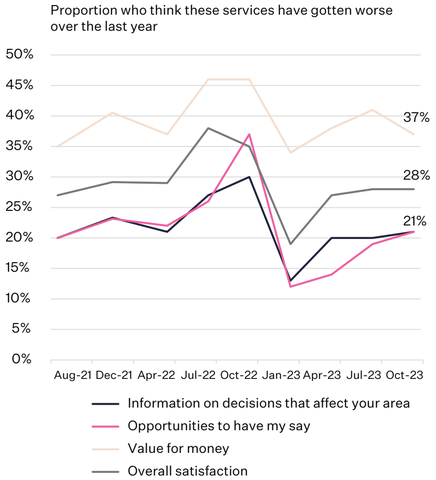


Improvement areas: Engagement, Comms and VFM

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

Outside of AKL results are down slightly on last quarter. Perceptions of value for money shows a slight positive increase. However, the neutrals have dropped and the dissatisfied have increased since the previous wave, coinciding with first rates instalments being due for many. AKL's results show the opposite: less negative perceptions, more neutral and a slight increase to the positive.





We also asked residents whether they think their councils are getting better or worse in these areas. The following chart shows the proportion who think they got worse; therefore we are looking for low results and a downward trend to show improvement in perceptions. Results are consistent with the last few quarters and an improvement on the position this time last year.