

WHAT IS DRIVING PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

November 2022

With local body elections falling in this quarter, discussion levels were up significantly. Candidate links to anti-vaccination groups as well as infrastructure issues created a lot of chatter.

Many regions experienced a polarisation, with two distinct visions of the future pitted against one another. This resulted in a comparatively heated local body campaign, and the social media discussion reflected this. Issues like Three Waters, that stretch right across local and central government, served as a rallying point for those dissatisfied with government more generally.

Alongside the elections, this quarter also sees a significant increase in the proportion that think service levels have dropped in relation to opportunities to have their say. The voting process did not influence this result more positively. Preliminary results from LGNZ put voter turnout at 36%, a drop from 2019.

Last quarter's results were influenced by rates increases being confirmed in annual plans. There was a big increase in proportions believing the value for money they receive from their council has got worse over the last year. This has held through to this quarter too; people remain unimpressed.

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



+26%

Discussion levels relating to local government have risen compared with the previous quarter

Discussion relating to local government.

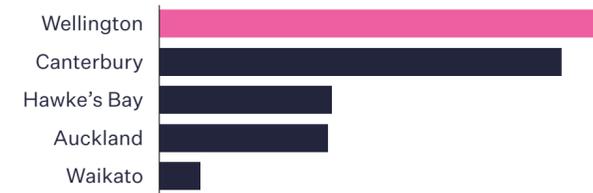
Wellington: Wellington was seen as the outlier in the major cities, with a left-leaning mayor elected. This resulted in significant discussion about what makes the Wellington situation different, and why voters seem more accepting of issues like transport mode shifts.

Auckland: The Auckland mayoral race was highly contentious, with many charged points of view expressed about the future of the city online. Issues such as Three Waters and cycleways will likely continue to drive discussion.

Canterbury: Housing intensification was the prominent issue in Christchurch, with the outgoing council voting to stand against the new regulations from central government.

Hawke's Bay: Much higher discussion levels than usual. There has been heated discussion about a number of environmental issues, such as what will be done about the Dannevirke's dam and how this will impact water in the region.

Discussion levels by location: weighted for population



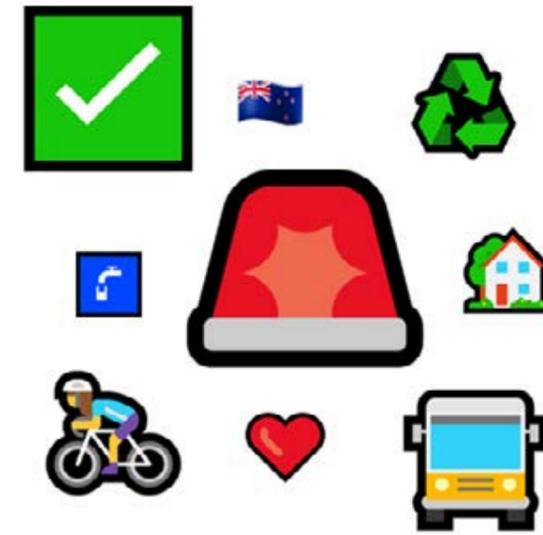
We also asked residents whether they think their councils are **getting better or worse in these areas**. Noting that this quarter was election time, we see higher numbers stating that the information on decisions affecting their area is getting worse and significantly higher numbers stating that opportunities to have their say are getting worse. These numbers do not reflect confidence in the voting process.

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

Top trending emojis

The most popular emojis related to the election with calls to action to get people engaged.

Other high use emojis reflect the dominance of transport, housing intensification, water (Three Waters), cycling/cycleways and waste/recycling in discussion.

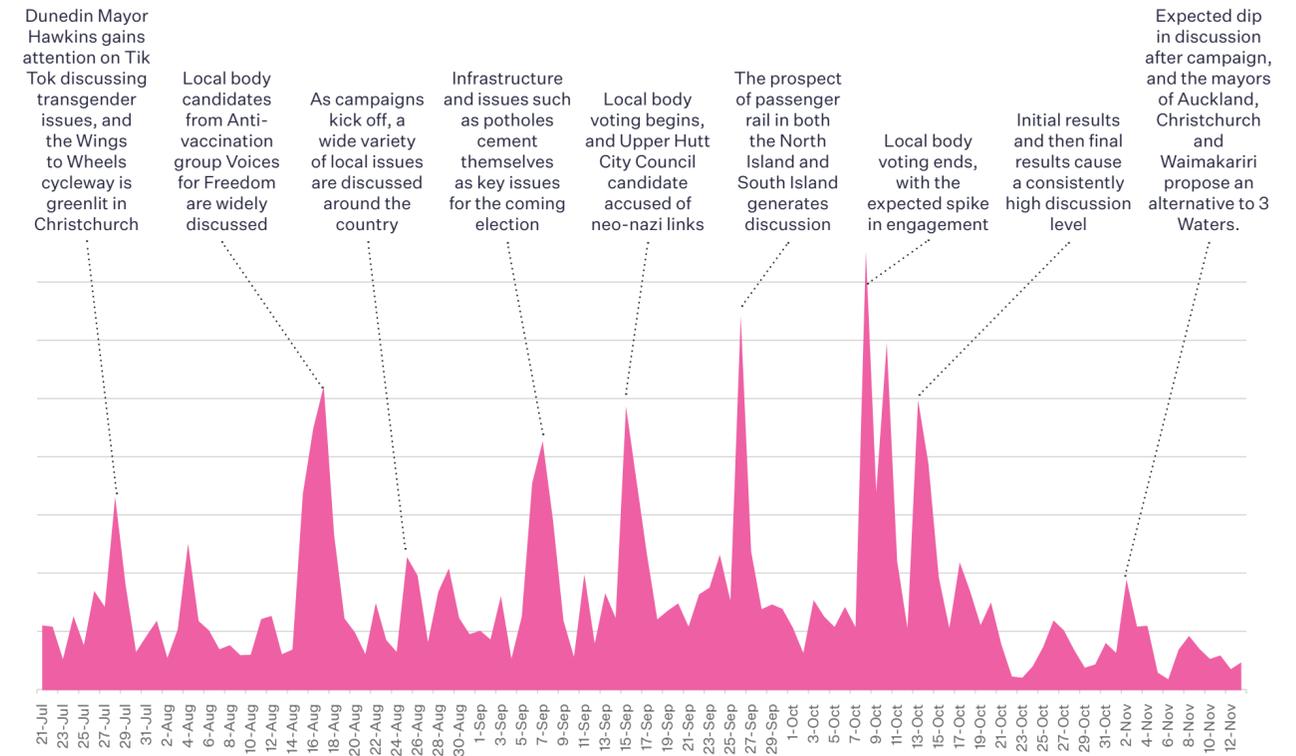


Roads and public transport remain the service areas where people want to see the biggest improvements. This included better communication about plans and changes.

Cutting unnecessary spending, reducing rates and increasing transparency around spending also got a lot of mentions.

“Traffic speed, road repairs, decreases in rate payments... not wasting money on things like beautifying streets.”

“Efficiency - too much money is wasted on unnecessary projects and staffing”



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.

The more positive perceptions recorded outside of AKL in April, have not been replicated. October results remain consistent with July's drop. With Auckland, the downward trend in perceptions continues.

