

WHAT IS DRIVING PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

July 2024

This quarter's big spike in discussion surrounded Hastings District Council and its decision to fluoridate water. More recently the group opposing the fluoridation was ordered to pay 41K in legal costs to the council. The opposing group has, however, seen success on social media with its campaign.

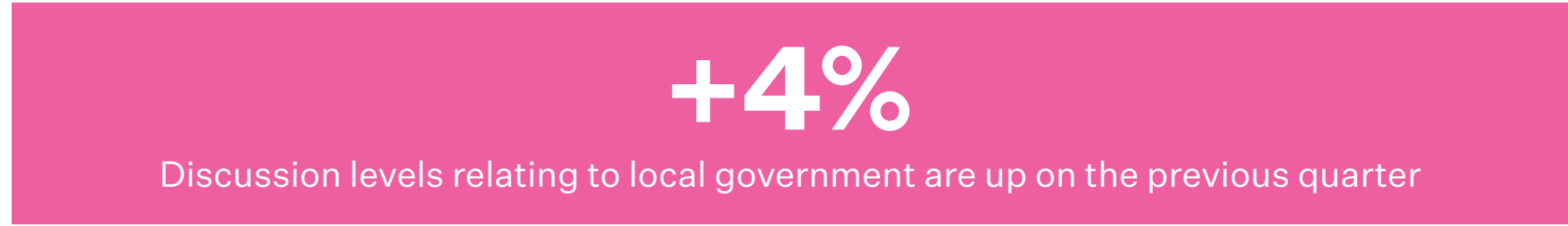
The Interislander ferry running aground caused another spike in discussion, with most suggesting there had been underinvestment in the ferry service. The negative impact on the regions immediately served by the ferry was front of mind.

The top news story was from RNZ: Government to 'flood' cities with more housing by liberalising planning rules. This highlighted controversial reforms that will remove council powers over urban boundaries and development standards.

Tension between central government and local government is evident. The speed limit changes from the government have been a source of conflict for local boards and councils. The new bill requiring a referendum on all Māori wards by 2025 has also caused some concern. Many are surprised the government wants to take such an active role in policy relating to local government, when one of their planks in the election had been returning local control on issues like water.

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



Discussion relating to local government.

Wellington: The proposal to sell the city's stake in Wellington Airport divided the council and voters, debate over density and housing intensification continued.

Auckland: Conflict with central government: Council opposition to the fast-track bill and speed limit changes. "Local water done well" deal seen as a relief to the possible rates hike. n about a new stadium in the city was also popular.

Canterbury: Exit from LGNZ, conflict with central government on speed limit changes, investigations into Orana Wildlife Park sparked questions around Council funding of the attraction.

Hawke's Bay: Regional council under fire, many feel money has been wasted and that cyclone recovery and flood protection haven't moved quickly enough.

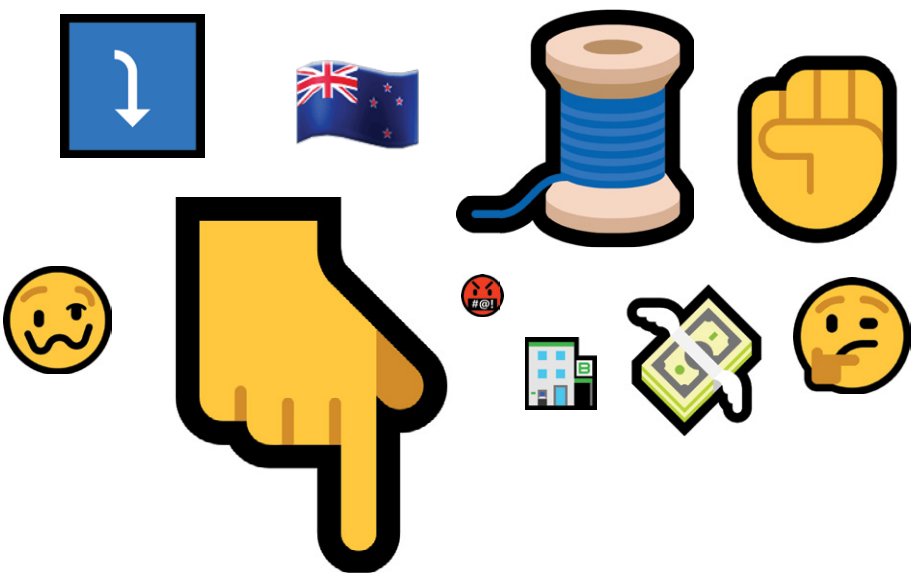
Waikato: The decision by Waikato Regional Council to cover NZTA's funding shortfall on the Te Huia train was met with concern over rates increases. Similarly, a \$70,000 app to help Hamilton City Council staff with te reo had one councillor calling for closer scrutiny of "pet projects" as ratepayers face an unprecedented rates rise.

Top trending emojis and keywords

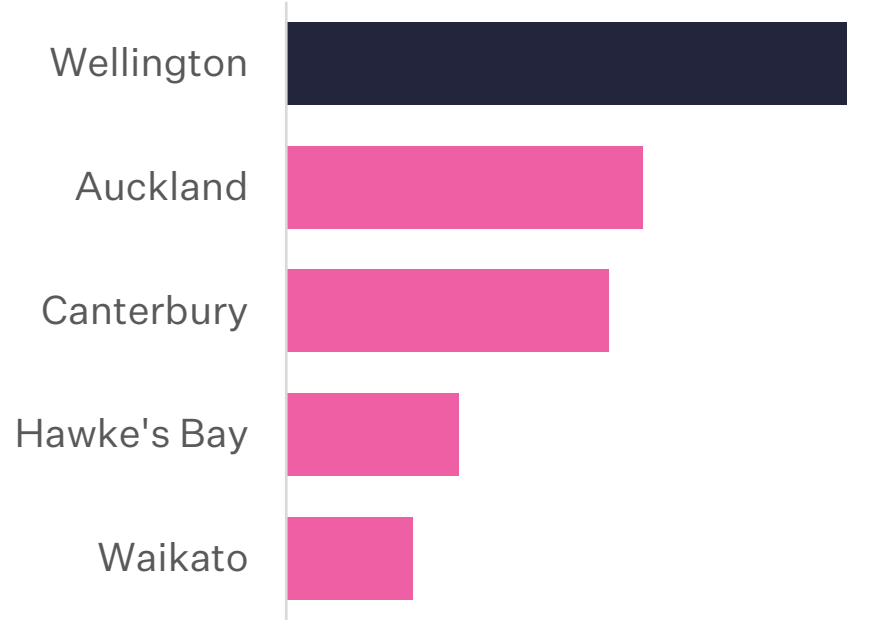
The top trending keywords were related to a series of issues the Free Speech Union has raised about various local body governments around the country, with a focus on expenditure perceived unnecessary spending.

The top trending emojis are attention grabbers for a longer conversation/thread of information. These posts generally related to the top trending issues such as rates increases, fluoridation and some related to the LGBTQ+ issues that were prominent earlier in the year.

Other top emojis indicate opposition to local government actions or concern about them. Money and bank buildings were a reaction to rates increases and the cost-of-living crisis.



Discussion levels by location: weighted for population



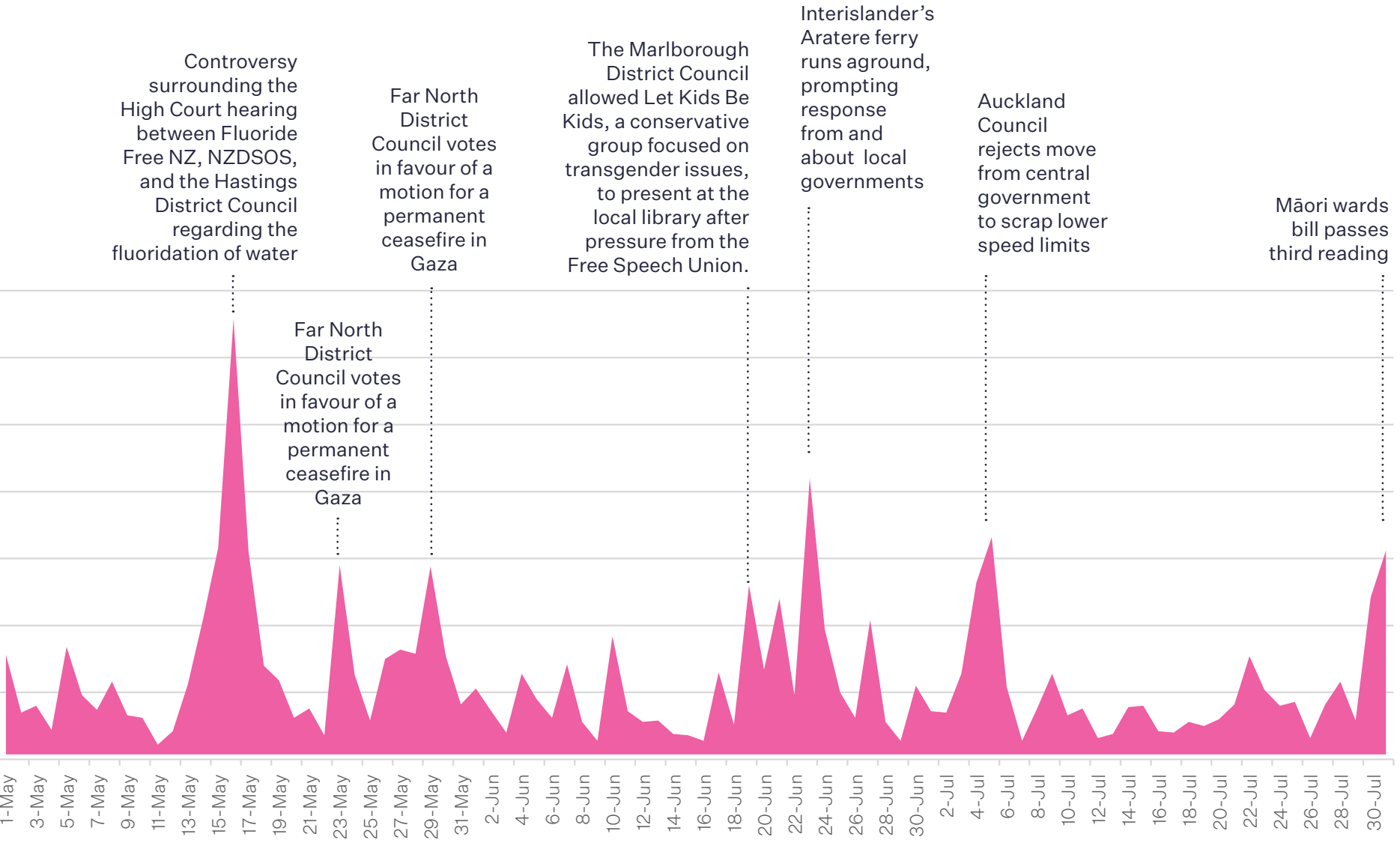
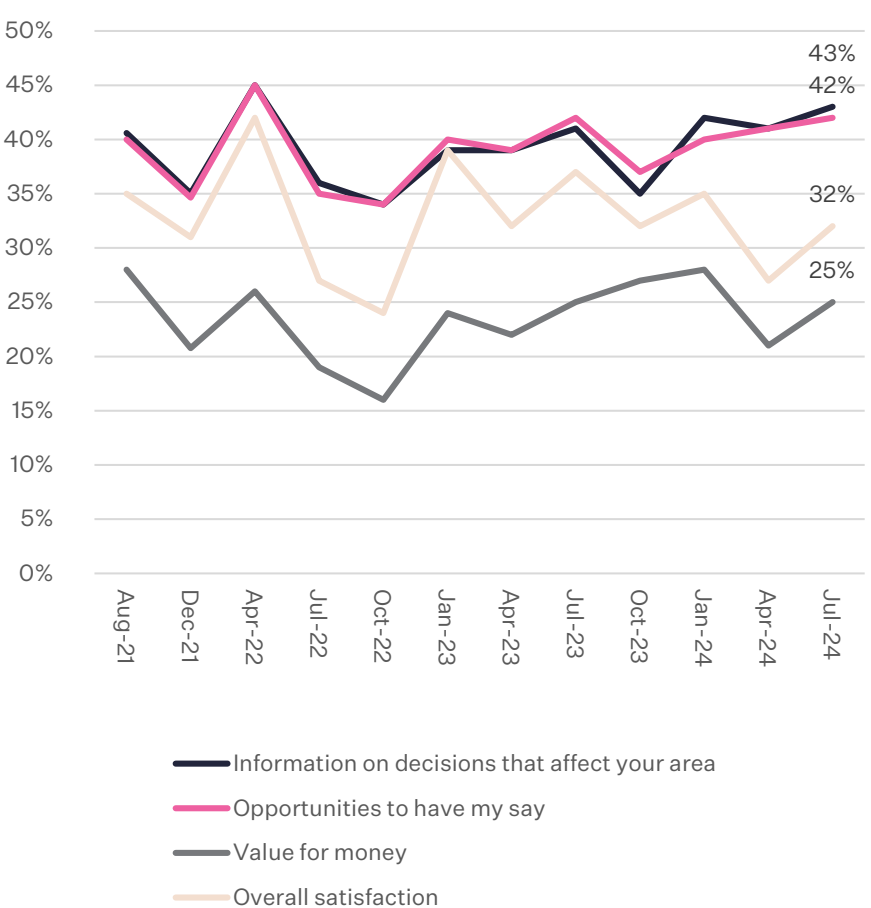
Improvement areas: Engagement, Comms and VFM

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

Perceptions of communication and engagement remain stable outside of the primate city of Auckland. In Auckland these have dropped.

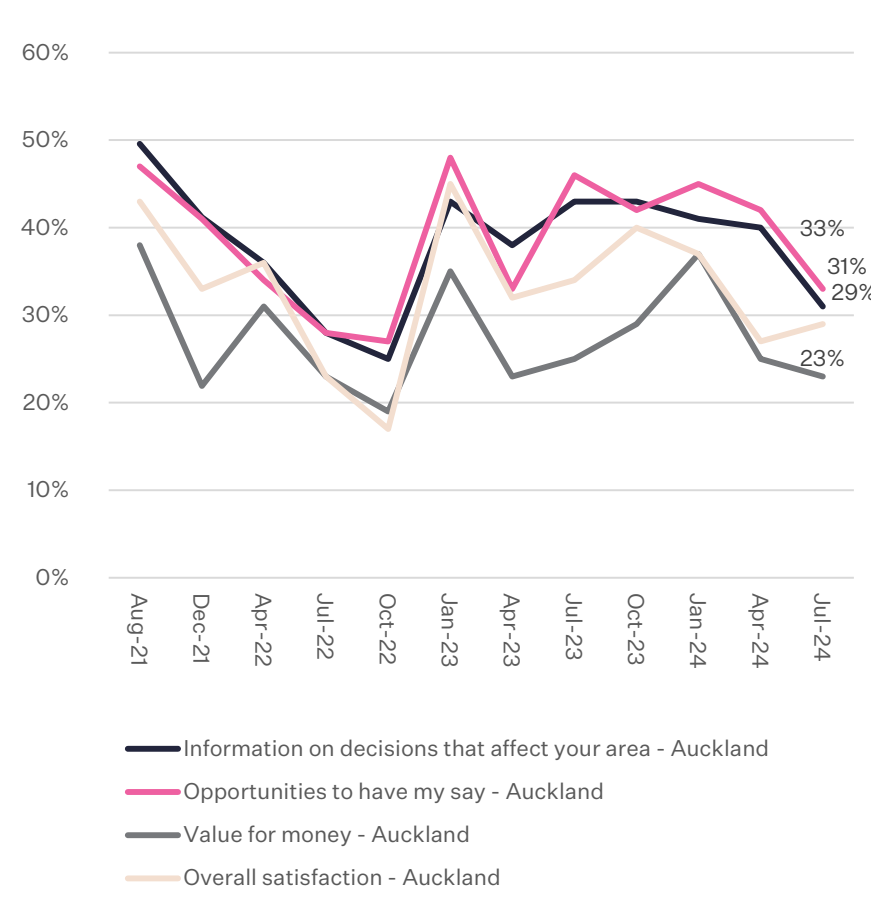
Value for money remains the biggest driver of overall satisfaction. Outside of Auckland we see a rise in perceptions now the shock of rate rise announcements has worn off. This is accompanied by a rise in overall satisfaction. Results in Auckland stay in line with the previous results.

Satisfaction: Outside Auckland



We also ask residents whether they think their councils are getting better or worse in these areas. The 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 have been relatively consistent over the last few quarters, with no significant upward or downward trend.

Satisfaction: Auckland



Proportion who think these services have got worse over the last year

