

# Aotearoa-New Zealand Public Responses to COVID-19



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## Introduction

### **Aotearoa-New Zealand Public Responses to COVID-19**

This report is based on findings from a national survey conducted by the School of Communication, Journalism & Marketing—Te Pou Aro Kōrero, Massey University and fielded by Qualtrics. Interview dates: June 26 to July 13, 2020, after New Zealand moved to **Alert Level 1**. Interviews: 1040 adults (18+). Average margin of error: +/- 3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The research was funded by the Massey University.

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## Executive Summary

Drawing on a national survey ( $N = 1040$ ), this report describes how the New Zealand public has responded to the spread of COVID-19.

### 1. Knowledge: Most, But Not All, New Zealanders Understand Important Facts About the Coronavirus

- A large majority of New Zealanders know important facts about the coronavirus:
  - 97% know frequent handwashing is a way to protect against coronavirus
  - 94% know coronavirus can be spread by people who do not show symptoms
  - 93% know a fever is a symptom of coronavirus
  - 87% know a dry cough is a symptom of coronavirus
- A majority of New Zealanders also know that certain claims are false:
  - 94% know that it is false that only elderly people get infected by the coronavirus
  - 94% know it is false that 5G towers are spreading the coronavirus
  - 91% know it is false that Bill Gates is behind the coronavirus
  - 84% know it is false that hydroxychloroquine can prevent or kill coronavirus
  - 84% know it is false that antibiotics can prevent or kill the coronavirus
  - 76% know it is false that exposure to the sun or extreme heat can prevent or kill coronavirus
  - 66% know it is false that coronavirus was created in a lab

### 2. Many New Zealanders Say the Coronavirus Pandemic Has Disrupted Daily Life

- One in three or more New Zealanders say they or a household member lost income from a job or business (33%), had their work hours reduced (33%), or had lost money in retirement accounts or investments (32%)
- Nearly one in five New Zealanders say they or a family member lost a job (13%), have filed for unemployment benefits (14%), or been unable to pay monthly bills (19%)
- About one in five New Zealanders say they were unable to get prescription medicine on time (16%) or get adequate medical care (17%)
- Four in ten say they or a household member felt depressed (41%) or had trouble sleeping (43%)
- About half of New Zealanders say they were unable to meet family members who are at higher risk of infection (46%)
- About a third or more say they were unable to buy disinfectants products (e.g., disinfecting wipes, hand sanitiser) (38%) or were unable to get groceries on time (30%)
- Māori are twice or more likely to say they or a household member has lost a job (20% vs. 11%), are unable to pay monthly bills (34% vs. 14%), filed for unemployment benefits (27% vs. 10%) compared with New Zealand Europeans. Māori are also more likely to report other economic consequences, distress or lack of access to adequate medical care

### **3. A Large Majority of New Zealanders Adopted Protective Behaviours**

- About eight in ten say they have always (48%) or often (35%) washed their hands with soap for twenty seconds and have always (46%) or often (35%) kept at least two-meters physical distance with strangers
- About seven in ten say they have always (49%) or often (25%) coughed or sneezed into elbow; always (40%) or often (13%) self-isolated at home when not well; always (24%) or often (23%) checked themselves for fever, cough or shortness of breath,
- A majority say they have always (31%) or often (27%) kept track of places they have visited and people they have met
- About seven in ten say that they have always (31%) or often (40%) used hand sanitizer and have always (33%) or often (35%) cleaned and disinfected frequently touched surfaces
- About half say they have always (21%) or often (27%) called or checked in on friends, whānau and neighbours to see how they are and if they need support. A quarter report that they have always (10%) or often (15%) dropped essential supplies like food or medications to those at home during alert level 4
- About half or less say they avoided family or personal events, such as wedding or funeral services (53%), reduced attendance at places of worship (35%), and choose to keep children at home or away from others (36%)
- Only a minority say they have always (15%) or often (14%) wore a mask—not mandatory in New Zealand—in public to protect themselves or others

### **4. New Zealanders Perceive Strong Social Norms to Adopt Protective Behaviours**

- Nearly all New Zealanders (90%) strongly or somewhat agree that their family and friends took action to limit the spread of the coronavirus during lockdown. In addition, they strongly agree (45%) or somewhat agree (36%) that most people in their neighbourhood took action to limit the spread of the coronavirus
- A large majority (86%) agree it was important for their family and friends that they took action to limit the spread of the coronavirus. Similarly, about seven in ten agree people in their neighbourhood expected them to take action to limit the spread
- A majority of New Zealanders strongly agree (49%) or somewhat agree (26%) that their family and friends would disapprove if they did not take action. Similarly, a majority strongly (42%) or somewhat agree (26%) that people in their neighbourhood would disapprove if they did not take action to limit the spread of the coronavirus

### **5. Most New Zealanders are Likely to Change Their Behaviours in the Short Term**

- About half of New Zealanders say they are more likely to regularly exercise to remain healthy (65%), get regular health check-ups (47%), and get regular flu shots (43%) over the next month
- Close to half of New Zealanders say they are likely to reduce shopping for non-essential items (52%). About four in ten say they will shop online instead of visiting groceries or retail stores (37%)
- Six in ten New Zealanders say they will reduce contact with strangers (59%)

- One in four New Zealanders say that it is extremely likely (14%) or somewhat likely (10%) that they will reduce or refrain from eating at Chinese restaurants
- Similarly, almost a quarter say that it is extremely (15%) or somewhat likely (9%) that they will refrain travelling in Uber or cab if they notice a driver with a Chinese sounding name. Individuals with lower education levels and those in the middle-aged group were more likely than others to say they are likely to do the above two behaviours

## **6. A Majority of New Zealanders Say They Will Witness Economic, Social, and Health Impacts in the Next Six Months**

- About 9 in 10 New Zealanders believe that in the next six months, there will be job losses (89%). A majority also think there will be a significant drop in income or closure of local businesses (80%)
- Over half of New Zealanders report that in the next six months, there will be an increase in poverty rates (65%), homelessness (50%), more housing shortages (37%)
- A majority also expect that there will be more cases of depression and mental health issues (74%) and about half say there will be drug related issues (42%) in next six months
- A majority think that fewer people will travel abroad in the next six months (86%), about one in three or more say that most people will continue to work from home (43%) and fewer people will shop for non-essential items such as new clothes (34%)

## **7. A Majority Correctly Identified the Government's Campaign Against COVID-19**

- A majority (74%) correctly identified the government campaign ("Unite against COVID-19"), while others incorrectly identified the government campaign ("Fight against COVID-19", 15%; "Stay alert, control the virus", 10%; "Coronavirus warriors", 1%). "Stay alert, control the virus, save lives", is UK government's campaign.

## **8. A Majority of New Zealanders Express Very High Praise about the Government's Communication about COVID-19**

- Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's communication during the lockdown was rated highest ( $M=8.45$ ), closely followed by Ashely Bloomfield's communication efforts ( $M=8.19$ ), when asked to rate on a scale of 0-10, where 0 refers to poor and 10 to the best performance
- Communication about different alert levels ( $M=8.26$ ), rules about the lockdown ( $M=8.13$ ), availability of essential services ( $M=7.93$ ), government's support for business ( $M=7.71$ ) and individuals, ( $M=7.61$ ), and government's economic stimulus package ( $M=7.20$ ), all received high praise
- New Zealanders were unhappy with the opposition party's response during the lockdown ( $M=4.85$ )

## **9. Most New Zealanders Support Reducing or Stopping Immigration Following the Coronavirus Impact**

- More than 8 in 10 New Zealanders strongly support (63%) or somewhat support (22%) reducing or stopping immigration from countries that have poorly managed their response to the coronavirus such as the United States (US)
- About 7 in 10 New Zealanders strongly (52%) or somewhat support (18%) reducing or stopping immigration from countries like China; strongly (53%) or somewhat support (21%) reducing or stopping tourists from countries like China
- Similarly, 7 in 10 New Zealanders strongly (41%) or somewhat support (28%) reducing or stopping immigration from all countries

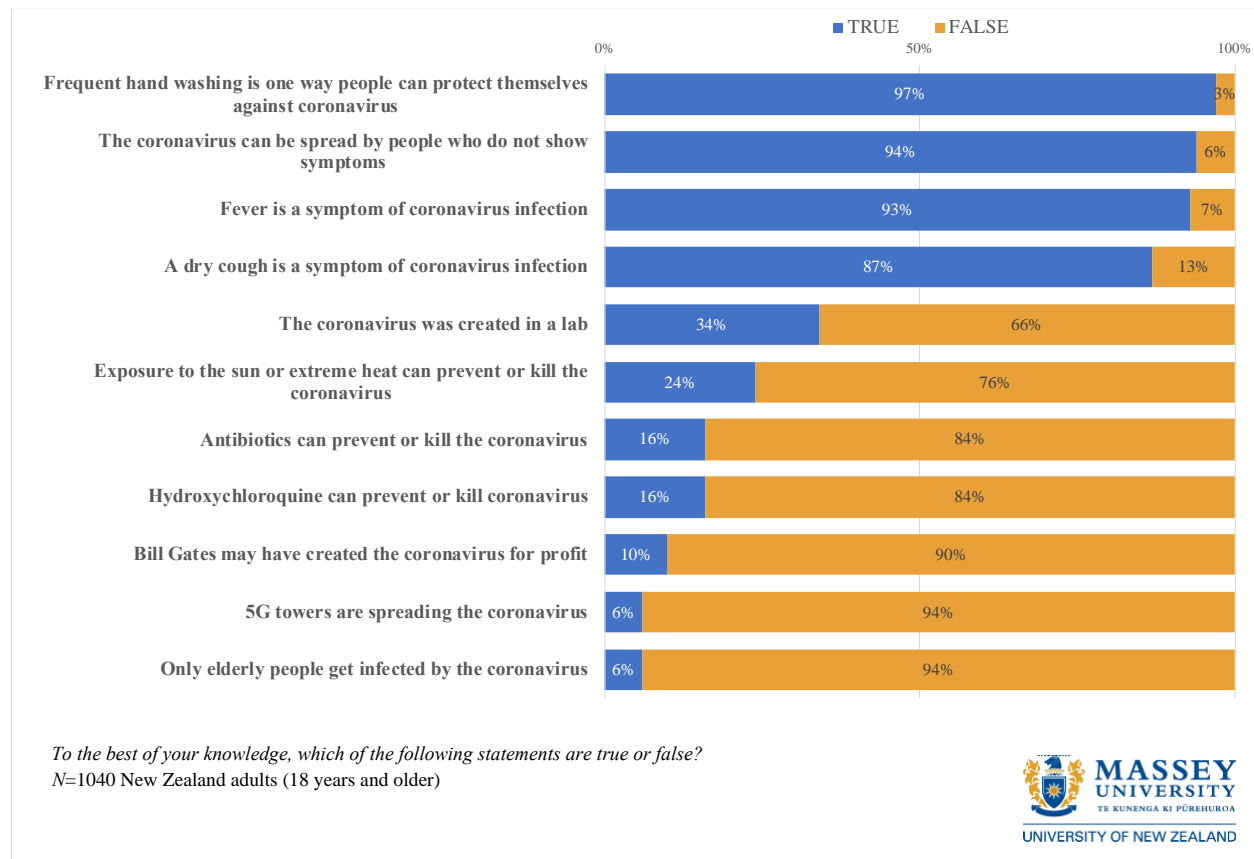
## **10. Health Care, Affordable Housing, Economy, and Coronavirus are Top Elections Issues**

- About nine in ten New Zealanders say health care is extremely important (54%) or very important (33%) issue for their vote in the September 2020 elections
- About eight in ten New Zealanders say affordable housing is extremely (48%) or very important (30%) issue for their vote in the September 2020 elections
- About eight in ten or more New Zealanders say economy is extremely important (49%) or very important (29%) issue for their vote in the September 2020 elections
- Seven in ten New Zealanders say coronavirus is extremely important (46%) or very important (28%) issue for their vote in the September 2020 elections
- About two in three or more New Zealanders say reducing water pollution (70%), protecting the environment (65%) are extremely or very important issues for their vote. About sixty percent New Zealanders say that developing clean energy sources (59%) and climate change (55%) are important issues
- New Zealanders say agriculture support (60%), terrorism (56%), race relations (54%), immigration reform (52%), and legalising marijuana (30%) are other top issues for their vote in the September 2020 elections

## 1. Knowledge

Almost all New Zealanders correctly understand important facts about the coronavirus. About nine in ten New Zealanders know about the symptoms (fever, 93%, dry cough, 87%), protective behaviours (frequent handwashing, 97%), and about the asymptomatic transmission (94%). A large majority of New Zealanders correctly identified false or misleading statements.

However, one in three New Zealanders agree that the coronavirus was created in a lab (34%) and about one in four agree that exposure to sun or extreme heat can prevent or kill the coronavirus (24%). One in six say that hydroxychloroquine can prevent or kill coronavirus (16%) and antibiotics can prevent or kill the coronavirus (16%).

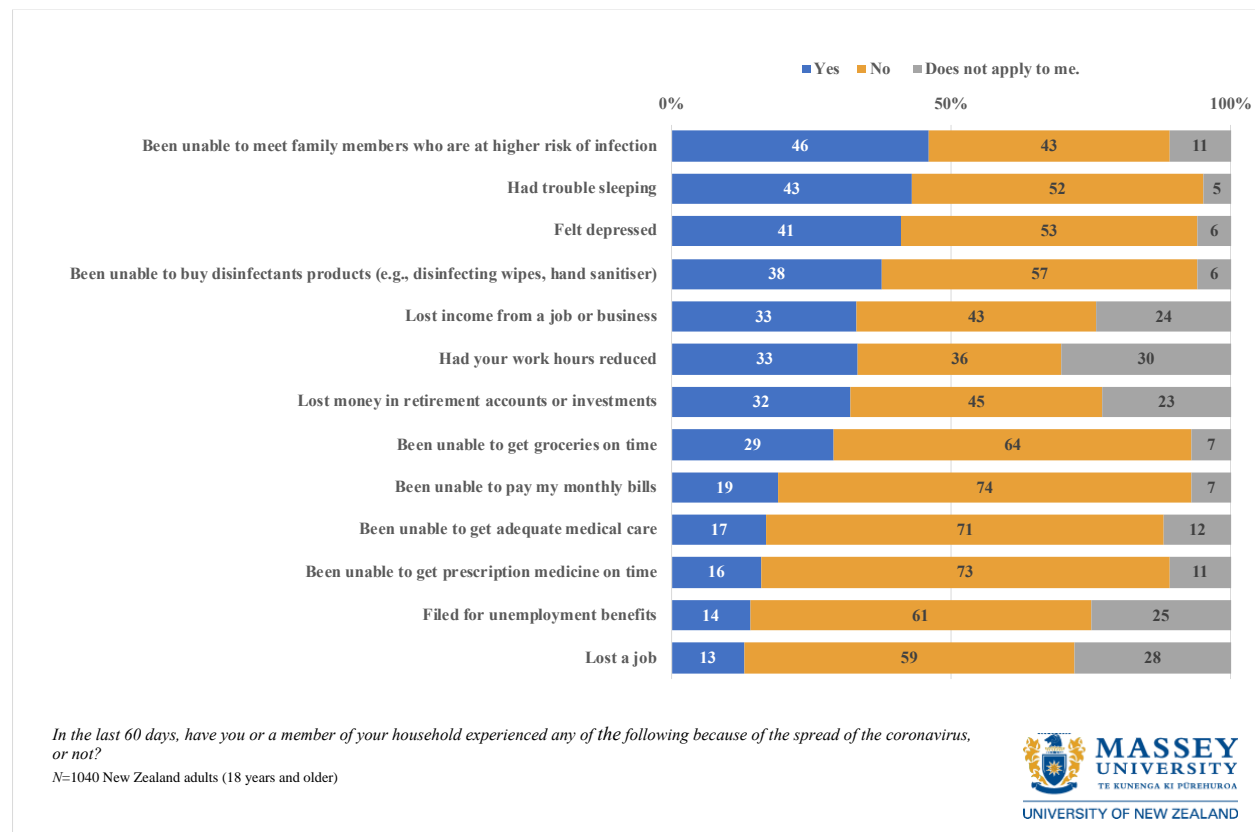




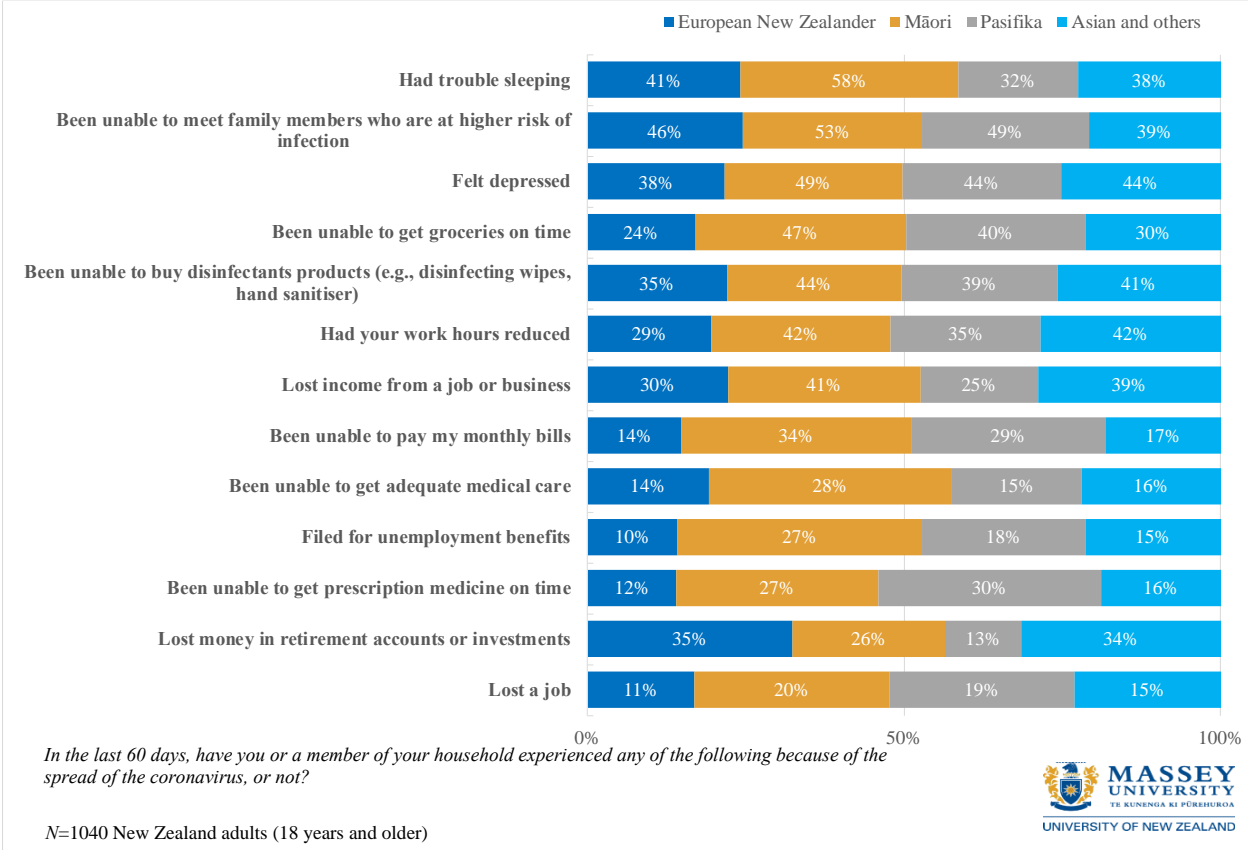
## 2. Behavioural Responses

### Many New Zealanders Say the Coronavirus Pandemic Has Disrupted Daily Life

Nearly one in six New Zealanders say they or a family member lost a job (13%), have filed for unemployment benefits (14%), or been unable to pay monthly bills (19%). One in three or more New Zealanders say they or a household member lost income from a job or business (33%), had their work hours reduced (33%), or had lost money in retirement accounts or investments (32%). Four in ten say they or a household member felt depressed (41%) or had trouble sleeping (43%). About half of New Zealand respondents were unable to meet family members who are at higher risk of infection (46%).



Māori are about twice or more likely to say they or a household member has lost a job (20% vs. 11%), were unable to pay monthly bills (34% vs. 14%), and filed for unemployment benefits (27% vs. 10%) compared to New Zealand Europeans. Māori are also more likely to report inability to get prescription medicine on time (27% vs. 12%) and adequate medical care (28% to 14%). They also report facing more economic, social, and health impacts than others.

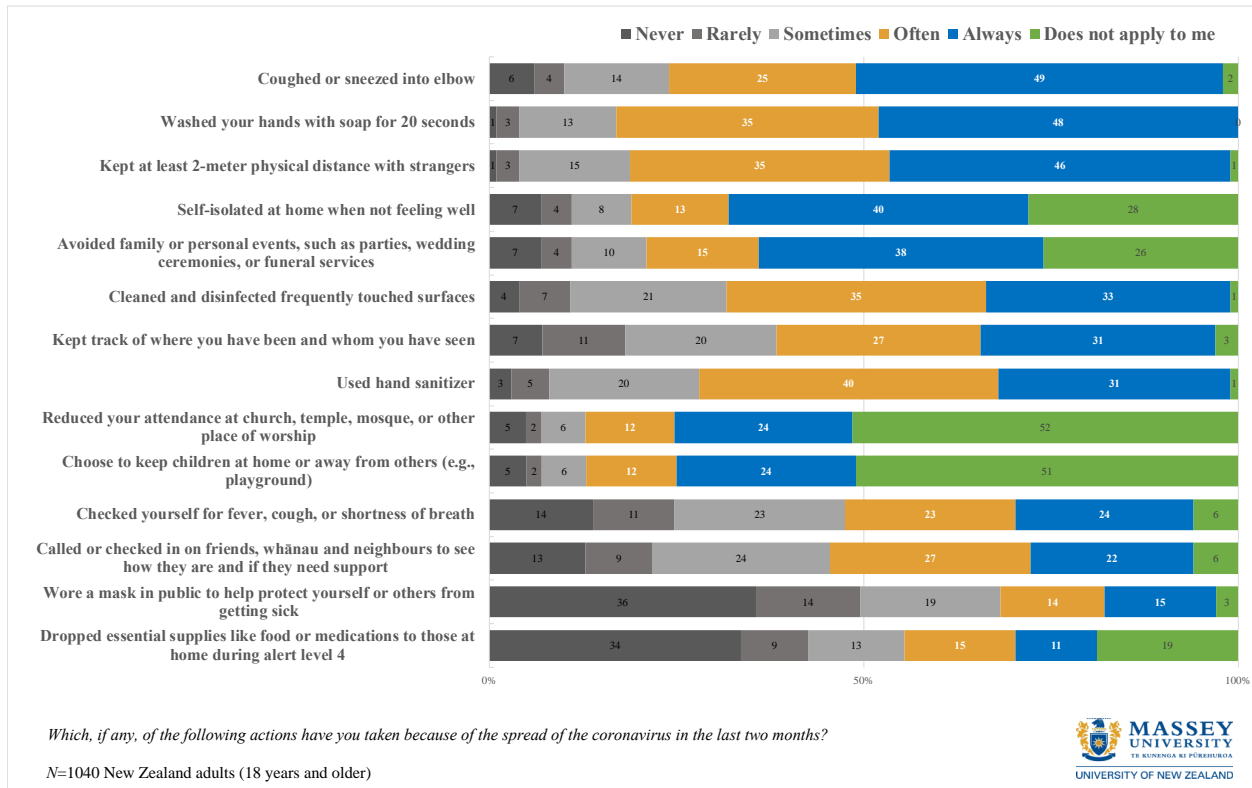


### 3. Protective Behaviours

#### A Majority of New Zealanders Adopted Protective Behaviours

A majority of New Zealanders have followed numerous protective behaviours recommended by the [health agencies](#). Many say they always or often performed these protective behaviours and very few say they have never performed these behaviours, or it does not apply to them. About eight in ten say they washed their hands with soap for twenty seconds and kept at least two-meters of physical distance with strangers. About seven in ten say they coughed or sneezed into elbow, used hand sanitizer, and cleaned and disinfected frequently touched surfaces.

One in two New Zealanders say they have called or checked in on friends, whānau and neighbours to see how they are and if they need support. One in four say they have dropped essential supplies like food or medications to those at home during alert level 4.

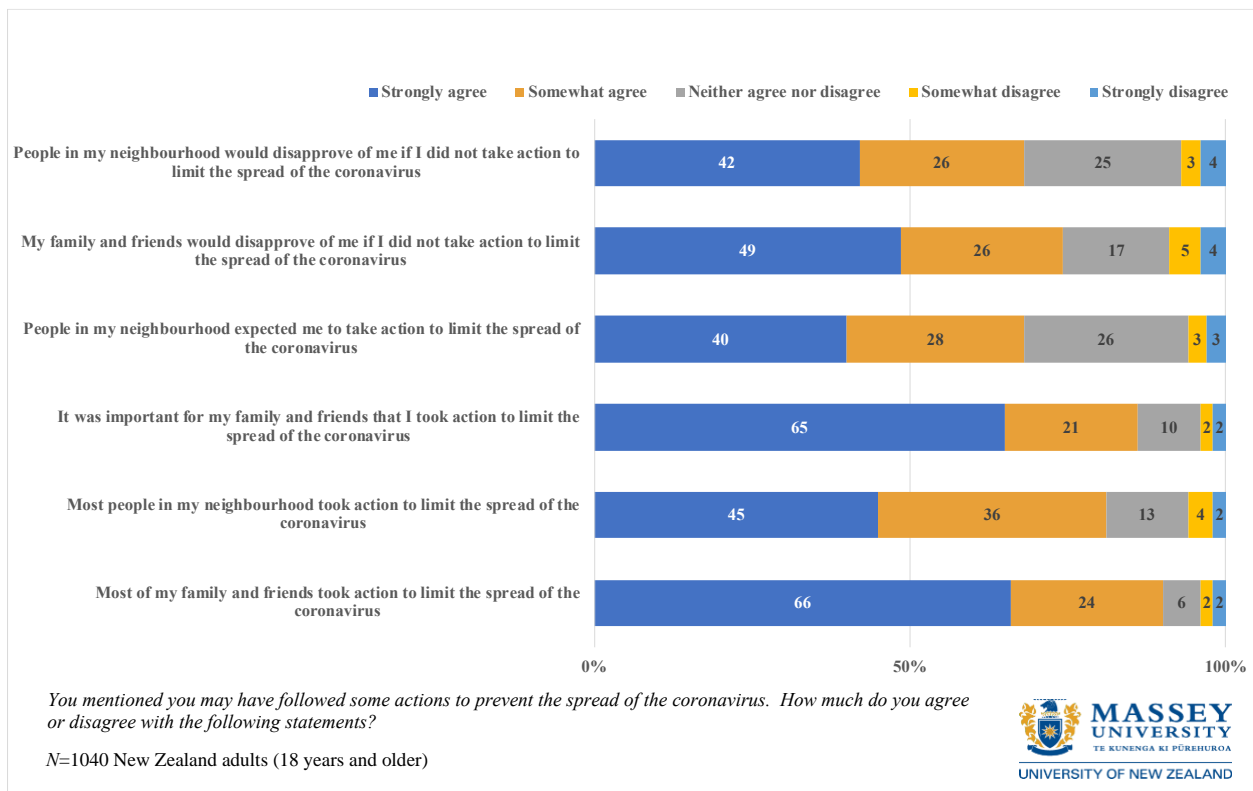


## 4. Social Norms

### New Zealanders Perceive Strong Social Norms to Adopt Protective Behaviours

Our actions, to a large degree, are shaped by our beliefs about the popularity of specific actions among our family and friends or descriptive norms, beliefs about how much our friends and family approve we perform these actions—at the risk of social sanctions—or injunctive norms, and beliefs about important others’ expectations or subjective norms.

Nearly all New Zealanders (90%) agree that their family and friends took action to limit the spread of the coronavirus. They strongly agree (45%) or somewhat agree (36%) that most people in their neighbourhood took action to limit the spread of the coronavirus. A large majority (86%) agree that it was important for their family and friends that they took action to limit the spread of the coronavirus. Similarly, about seven in ten agree that people in their neighbourhood expected them to take action to limit the spread. A majority of New Zealanders (74%) agree that their family and friends would disapprove if they did not take action and that people in their neighbourhood would disapprove if they did not take action to limit the spread of the coronavirus (68%).

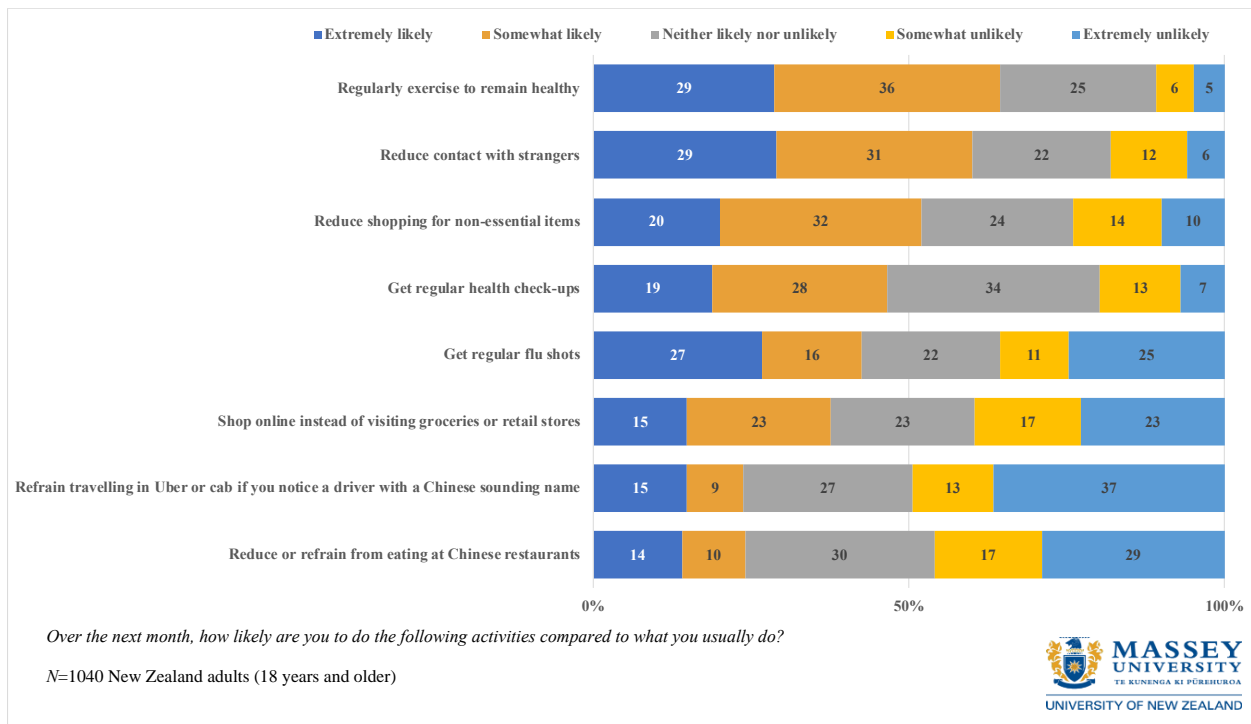


## 5. Behaviour Changes in the Short Term

### Most New Zealanders are Likely to Change Their Behaviours in the Short Term

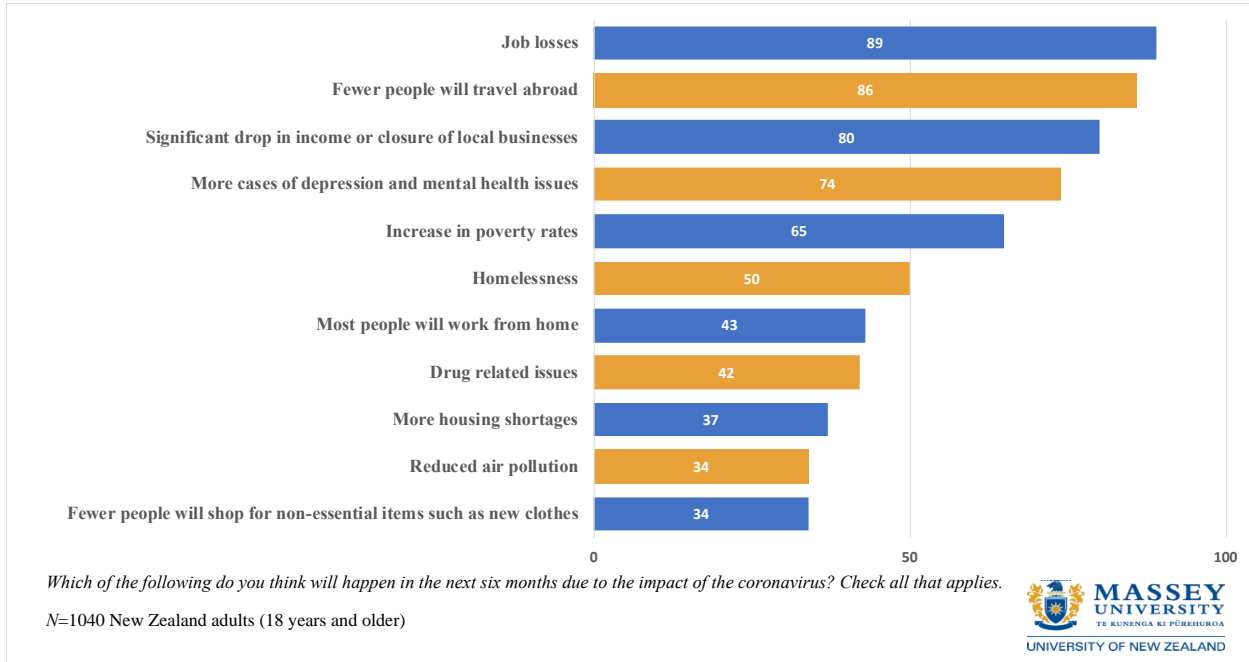
About half of New Zealanders say they are more likely to attend to their health over the next month, including regular exercise (65%), health check-ups (47%), and flu shots (43%). Close to half of New Zealanders say they are likely to change their shopping patterns, including reducing shopping for non-essential items (52%) and shopping online instead of visiting groceries or retail stores (37%). Six in ten New Zealanders say they will reduce contact with strangers (59%).

One in four New Zealanders say that they are likely to reduce or refrain from eating at Chinese restaurants or refrain travelling in Uber or cab if they notice a driver with a Chinese sounding name.



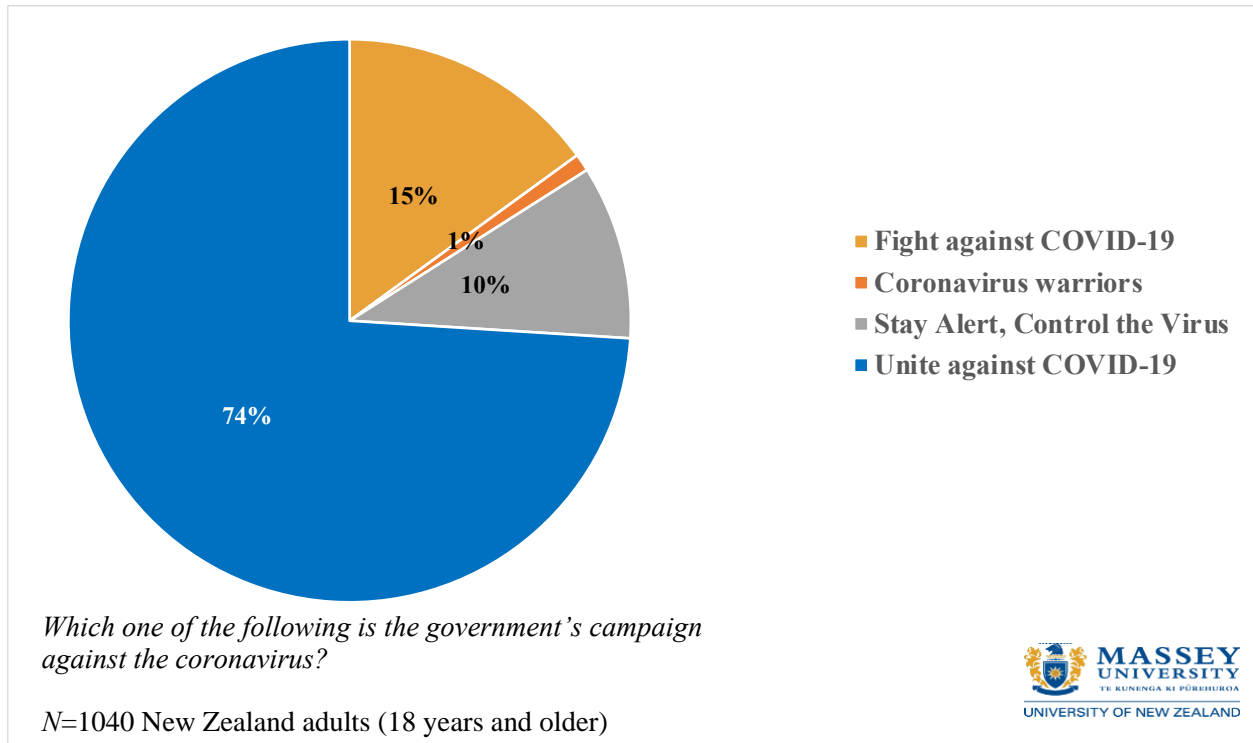
## 6. Impacts in Future

### A Majority of New Zealanders Say They Will Witness Economic, Social, and Health Impacts in the Next Six Months



## 7. Knowledge about Government's Campaign Against COVID-19

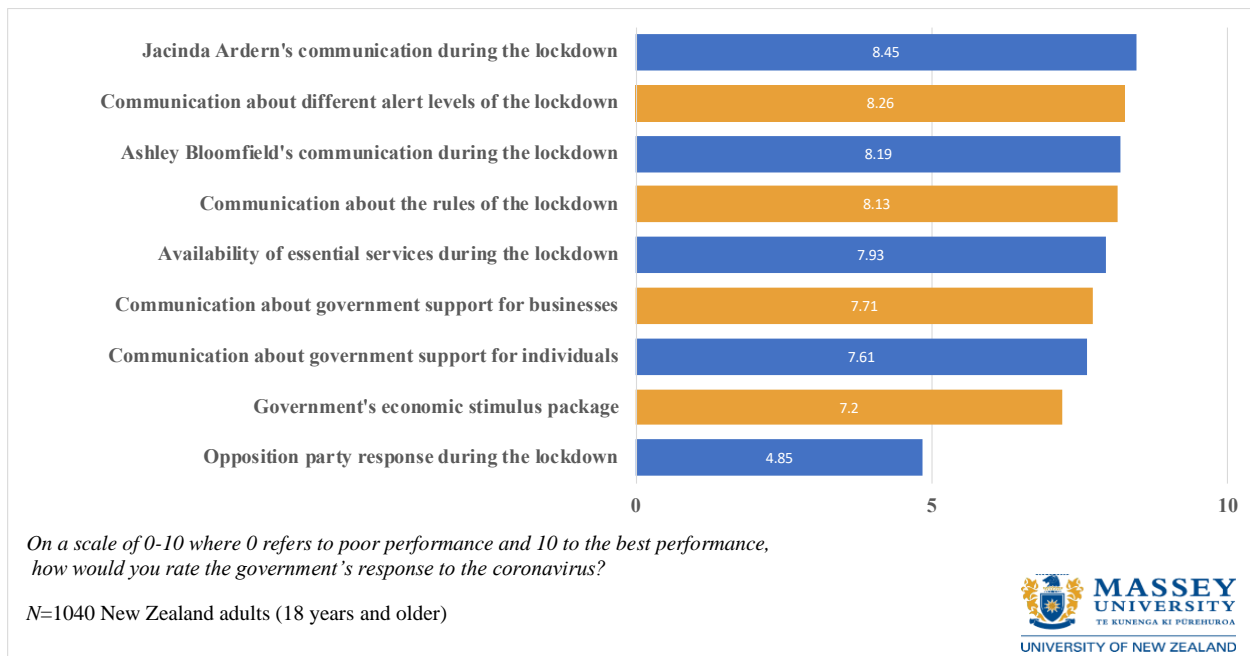
### A Majority Correctly Identified the Government's Campaign Against COVID-19



## 8. Response to Government's Communication about COVID-19

### A Majority of New Zealanders Express Very High Praise for the Government's Communication about COVID-19

When asked to rate communication efforts about the coronavirus on a ten-point scale, with 0 referring to poor performance and 10 to the best performance, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern received the highest score, closely followed by Dr. Ashley Bloomfield, the Director-General of Health and Chief Executive of the Ministry of Health (Manatū Hauora). Communication about the different alert levels, rules of the lockdown, availability of essential services during the lockdown, as well as government support for businesses, individuals, and economic stimulus package, all received high scores. New Zealanders rated the opposition party's response during the lockdown as poor, comparatively.

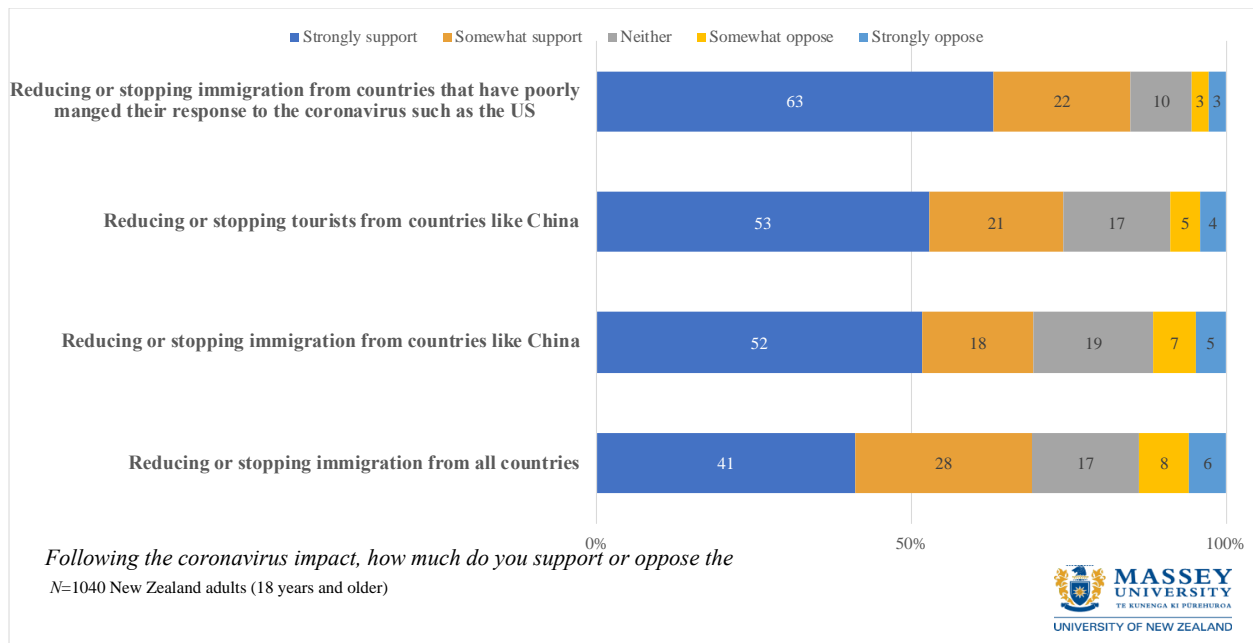




## 9. Attitudes towards Immigration

### Most New Zealanders Support Reducing or Stopping Immigration Following the Coronavirus Impact

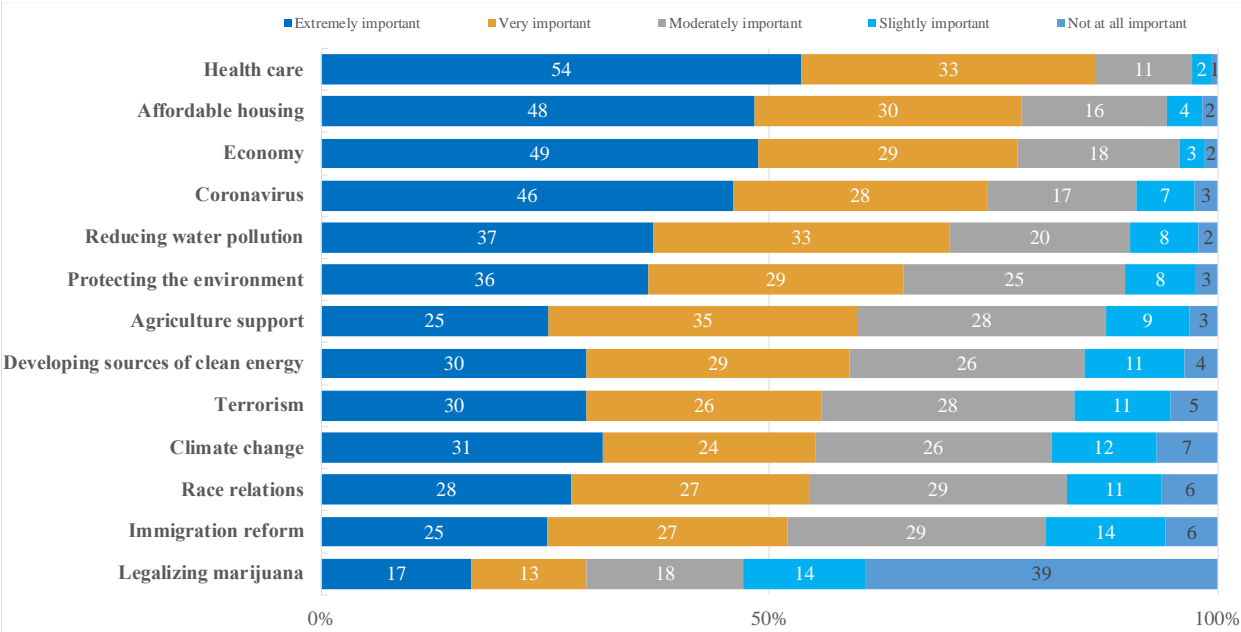
More than 8 in 10 New Zealanders support reducing or stopping immigration from countries that have poorly managed their response to the coronavirus such as the United States (US) following the coronavirus impact. About seventy percent of New Zealanders support reducing or stopping immigration or tourists from countries such as China following the coronavirus impact. About seven in ten support reducing or stopping immigration from all countries following the coronavirus impact.



## 10. Election Issues

### Health Care, Affordable Housing, Economy, and Coronavirus are Top Elections Issues Scheduled in September 2020

The most important issue with regards to September 2020 elections for New Zealanders is health care (86.5%). About eight in ten New Zealanders say affordable housing (78%) and economy (78%) are important election issues. More than seven in ten New Zealanders (74%) say coronavirus is an important election issue for them. Reducing water pollution (70%), protecting the environment (65%), developing clean energy sources (59%), and climate change (55%) also feature as important election issues for the public. New Zealanders say agriculture support (60%), terrorism (56%), race relations (54%), immigration reform (52%), and legalising marijuana (30%) are other top issues for their vote in the September 2020 elections.



*In September 2020, there will be an election to choose the next government. As of today, how important are the following issues for your vote:*

N=1040 New Zealand adults (18 years and older)



## Survey Method

The data in this report are based on a scientific online poll of 1040 New Zealand adults, aged 18 and older, conducted by the School of Communication, Journalism & Marketing—Te Pou Aro Kōrero. Data was collected by Qualtrics using online panels. The survey was conducted between June 26 to July 13, 2020. All questionnaires were self-administered by respondents in a web-based environment. The survey took about 22 minutes on average. The data were weighted, post survey, on gender, age, education, and ethnicity to match the New Zealand census estimates. Weights ranged from .47 to 3.30, with a mean of 1.21, median of .98, and standard deviation of .63. 95% of the weights fall between .58 and 2.15.

The survey instrument was designed by Drs. Jagadish Thaker (JT) and Vishnu Menon. We acknowledge help from Drs. Esther Jaspers and Elena Maydell in preparing the questionnaire and John Hilbert in helping with the design of the cover page and charts.

Average margins of error, at the 95% confidence level, are plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Percentages in a given chart may total slightly higher or lower than 100% due to rounding error.

## Sample Demographics

	<i>N</i> (unweighted)	% (unweighted)	<i>N</i> (weighted)	% (weighted)
Total	1040	100	1040	100
Female	609	58.6	530	51
Male	431	41.4	510	49
<i>Age</i>				
18-25	189	18.2	146	14
26-35	220	21.2	187	18
36-45	175	16.8	166	16
46-55	163	15.7	187	18
56-65	127	12.2	156	15
66 and above	166	16	198	19
<i>Education</i>				
No qualification	96	9.2	199	19
Level 1 to Level 6 diploma	577	55.5	564	54
Bachelor's degree or higher	367	35.3	277	27
<i>Ethnicity</i>				
European New Zealander	648	62.3	640	61.5
Māori	139	13.4	170	16.3
Pasifika	50	4.8	80	7.7
Asian or Another Category	203	19.5	150	14.4
<i>Annual personal income</i>				
Less than \$19,999	280	26.9	286	27.5
\$20,000 to \$39,999	254	24.4	273	26.2
\$40,000 to \$59,999	182	17.5	188	18
\$60,000 to \$79,999	138	13.3	130	12.5
\$80,000 to \$99,999	68	6.5	59	5.6
\$100,000 to \$119,999	64	6.2	55	5.3
\$120,000 or above	50	4.8	46	4.4
<i>If the elections were held today, who would you vote?</i>				
National	223	21.4	212	20.3
Labour	591	56.8	598	57.5
Green	59	5.7	57	5.5
New Zealand First	39	3.8	40	3.8
Māori Party	13	1.3	14	1.3
ACT	23	2.2	25	2.4
Other	88	8.5	91	8.8