

COVID-19 NZ Values Study

Insights summary

Despite recent challenges, New Zealanders are feeling hopeful about the unfolding situation around COVID-19.

Although many New Zealanders are feeling anxious (39%) and frustrated (27%) about the unfolding situation around COVID-19, the country's most common emotional response is hope (45%). Despite the challenges that New Zealand and the world has experienced since COVID-19 was declared a pandemic on the 12th of March, New Zealanders are looking to the future with a sense of optimism. One in four have felt reflective (26%) or even relaxed (25%) during this time, showing that New Zealanders are in a state of acceptance about the situation and are ready to see how the nation is going to take its next steps. Although 91% of New Zealanders feel uncertain about the future to some extent, only 29% say they are extremely or very uncertain. Most New Zealanders are feeling somewhat (38%) or slightly uncertain (24%).

It is largely the older generations that are feeling positive about the unfolding situation around COVID-19. Builders (52%), Baby Boomers (49%), Gen X (45%) and Gen Y (44%) are more likely to feel hopeful than Gen Z (33%). In fact, Gen Z are most likely to be feeling frustrated (42%) or anxious (39%) about the situation unfolding around them.

Although New Zealanders missed going out to shops, restaurants and events during lockdown, this period provided opportunities to spend more time reflecting.

New Zealanders have faced a number of challenges living in lockdown and continue to do so even as restrictions are lifting. The aspects of life that New Zealanders missed most included going out to shops, restaurants and events (76% strongly/somewhat/slightly agree) and spending time outside (67%). Seven in ten New Zealanders felt they were spending too much time on technology (70% strongly/somewhat/ slightly agree). More than half found it hard to have social connection with people (59%) and found it difficult to stay physically healthy (52%). Positively, New Zealanders are less likely to agree they found it difficult to stay mentally healthy (44%) during this time.

The younger generations felt the effects of being in lockdown the most. Gen Z are particularly different to their older counterparts in the proportion who agree they found it difficult to stay mentally healthy (70% Gen Z, 58% Gen Y, 46% Gen X, 24% Baby Boomers, 13% Builders) and missed spending time outside (84% Gen Z, 81% Gen Y, 64% Gen X, 50% Baby Boomers, 57% Builders).

Despite the challenges of living in lockdown, this period also provided several opportunities. More than seven in ten New Zealanders strongly/somewhat/slightly agree they spent more time reflecting (73%) and that they saved money (72%). This period has also given New Zealanders more quality time with family (67%) and more time to do the things they enjoy (67%). More than one in three New Zealanders (34%) spent more time praying.

Since COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, New Zealanders are placing more value on health, kindness and time for reflection.

Prior to COVID-19 being declared as a pandemic, New Zealanders were most likely to value freedom (53%), travel (41%), health (40%), relationships (39%) and choice (30%). New Zealanders are most likely to believe their personal set of values comes from their parents or their family (78%). Almost two in five (37%) believe their values come from their faith and beliefs.

Significant events, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, can often cause people to reflect and even reassess what they value in life. The most common questions that New Zealanders have asked themselves over the past couple of weeks are:

- What does the future look like? (65%)
- Are any of my friends/family going to catch COVID-19? (51%)
- Am I going to catch COVID-19? (43%)
- What is going to get our nation through this pandemic? (41%)
- What is really important to me? (40%)

As many of the things we value have been disrupted in the past month or so, New Zealanders are placing more importance on kindness, health and relationships. Health has increased by 14 percentage points, from 40% to 54% becoming the area New Zealanders now value most. This is followed by relationships (49%), freedom (38%), kindness (35%) and connection (27%). Other values, apart from health, which have increased include kindness (14 percentage points), time for reflection (14 pp.), relationships (10 pp.) and spirituality/faith (5 pp.)

New Zealand's leaders have inspired confidence since the outbreak of COVID-19.

In times of crisis, people look to their leaders to inspire confidence. Almost three quarters of New Zealanders (72%) say the Prime Minister is one of the leaders who has most inspired their confidence since the outbreak of COVID-19. New Zealanders have also been inspired by health experts/officials (53%) and the police (26%).

Older generations are more likely to say the Prime Minister is one of the leaders that has most inspired their confidence since the outbreak (77% Baby Boomers, 75% Gen X, 71% Builders, 69% Gen Y, 66% Gen Z) and are also much more likely to say their confidence has been inspired by health experts and officials (81% Builders, 64% Baby Boomers, 56% Gen X, 41% Gen Y, 32% Gen Z). Younger generations, however, are more likely to have been inspired by celebrities (16% Gen Z, 11% Gen Y, 6% Gen X, 1% Baby Boomers, 1% Builders).

New Zealanders identify the most important values for a leader to demonstrate during times of crisis as empathy (41%), confidence (39%), integrity (38%), commitment (33%) and accountability (30%). Positively, New Zealanders believe many of these values have been demonstrated by the country's leaders during this time including commitment (61%), empathy (59%), confidence (58%) and integrity (43%).

The power of community in times of uncertainty.

Thinking about their current capacity and situation, more than half of New Zealanders (54%) believe they are extremely/very emotionally resilient. More than two in five believe they are spiritually (43%) and physically resilient (43%). New Zealanders are least likely to believe they are extremely/very financially resilient (34%). Similarly, when thinking about their future, New Zealanders are more likely to be worried about their financial wellbeing (74% strongly/somewhat/slightly agree) than their physical (64%) or mental wellbeing (57%).

Resilience differs for each generation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, younger generations believe themselves to be more physically resilient than their older counterparts (51% Gen Z, 51% Gen Y cf. 42% Gen X, 31% Baby Boomers, 37% Builders). When it comes to emotional resilience, however, older generations tend to see themselves as more resilient (69% Builders, 60% Baby Boomers, 49% Gen X, 53% Gen Y, 47% Gen Z). Younger generations are also much more likely than older generations to strongly/somewhat/slightly agree they are worried about their mental wellbeing when thinking about the future (75% Gen Z, 73% Gen Y, 61% Gen X cf. 37% Baby Boomers, 23% Builders).

Positively, in this context of uncertainty, New Zealanders can look to family and friends for comfort and support. Three in five New Zealanders say their sense of security primarily comes from their family and friends (62%) and almost half (49%) believe they are extremely/very relationally resilient. During this period, New Zealanders are seeing the importance of community (78% strongly/somewhat/slightly agree) and believe that recent challenges have actually brought out the best in their local community (77%). New Zealanders have seen many aspects of the Kiwi spirit shining through, despite the challenges of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The most common aspects that New Zealanders have noticed include pulling together for the greater good (66%), kindness and friendship (66%) and a sense of achievement 'we can do this' (61%). New Zealanders have also noticed positivity (57%) and humour (50%) shining through even in the midst of the pandemic.

New Zealanders hope that life will return to normal after the current pandemic with more focus on caring for the vulnerable and the environment.

Thinking about their own lives after the current COVID-19 pandemic, New Zealanders expect they will spend more time with family and friends face-to-face (55%), take better care of their health (47%) and prioritise financial saving (40%). The top three things that New Zealanders hope for their country as they move beyond the pandemic are:

- To return back to normal life (53%)
- To place more priority on the vulnerable in society (53%)
- To place a greater priority on the environment (51%)

When it comes to life after the current pandemic, New Zealanders are most likely to strongly/somewhat/slightly agree the Church has a role to play in supporting the vulnerable in society (78%). Just over seven in ten agree the Church has a role to play in building a sense of local community (72%) and working alongside other faith traditions (72%). New Zealanders are less likely to strongly/somewhat/slightly agree the Church has a role to play in providing religious instruction in state schools (45%) and in discussions about New Zealand's economic future (45%).

One in five New Zealanders (20%) hope there will be an increased place for spirituality in New Zealand when the country moves beyond the pandemic. Although this proportion is relatively small, COVID-19 has caused a shift in values as New Zealanders have spent more time reflecting and asking the deeper questions in life.

Methodology

In April 2020, Wilberforce Foundation engaged McCrindle to conduct research into the impact of COVID-19 on New Zealanders' attitudes, values and beliefs. These insights are based on an online survey of 1,002 New Zealanders, nationally representative by age, gender and region. Māori represented 13% of the survey sample.

The survey was in field from the 22nd to the 28th of April 2020. At the time of the survey launch, New Zealanders were aware they were moving into alert level 3 (announced 20th April) but were still in alert level 4 until the 27th April.

The sample size of this survey (n=1,002) provides a 95% confidence interval and a 4% margin of error on statistics about New Zealand as a whole.

Generational insights are based on the following age brackets:

- Generation Z: aged 18 to 25
- Generation Y: aged 26 to 40
- Generation X: aged 41 to 55
- Baby Boomers: aged 56 to 74
- Builders: aged 75+