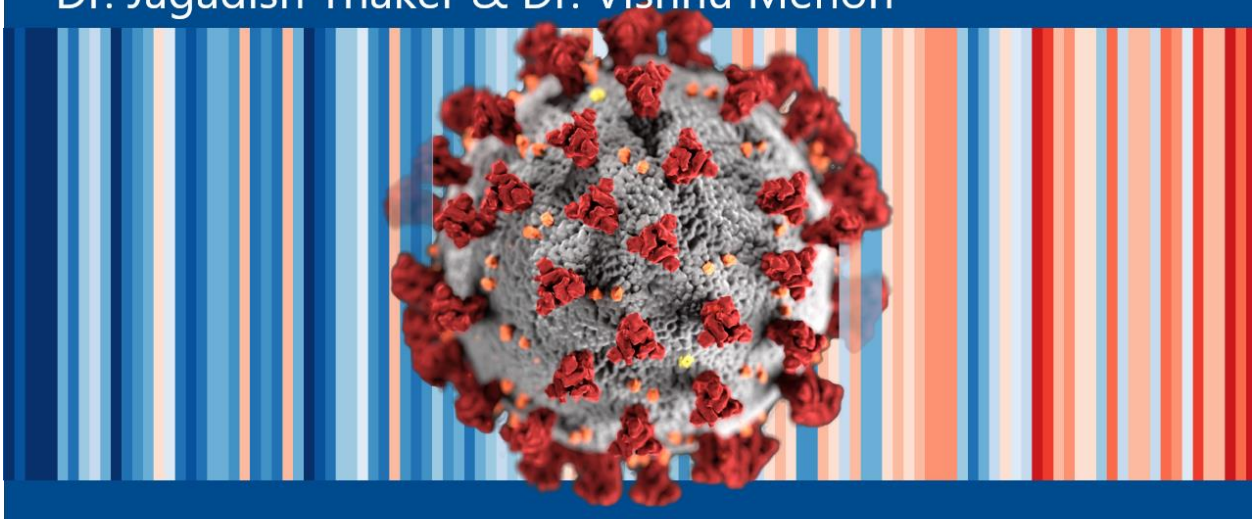
Aotearoa-New Zealand Public Responses to COVID-19 and Climate Change

Dr. Jagadish Thaker & Dr. Vishnu Menon



School of Communication, Journalism & Marketing | Te Pou Aro Kōrero
Massey Business School | Kaupapa Whai Pakihi
Massey University | Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

MASSEY BUSINESS SCHOOL
TE KURA WHAI PAKIHI

Table of Contents

Introduction

Aotearoa-New Zealand Public Responses to COVID-19 and Climate Change

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.

Research Leads:

Jagadish Thaker (JT), PhD
Vishnu Menon, PhD

School of Communication, Journalism & Marketing | Te Pou Aro Kōrero
Massey Business School | Kaupapa Whai Pakihi
Massey University | Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa

Cite as

Thaker, J & Menon, V. (2020). *Aotearoa-New Zealand Public Responses to COVID-19 and Climate Change*. Massey University.

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. The following questions focus on their perceptions, behavioural intensions, and policy support related to climate change.

Context

According to the World Health Organization (WHO)[1], there is no direct link between climate change and the emergence or transmission of the COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus. However, climate change may indirectly affect "the COVID-19 response, as it undermines environmental determinants of health, and places additional stress on health systems" (para 3). Some of the root causes of climate change (e.g., deforestation, land use change) and climate change signals (e.g., temperature rise, extreme weather events) increases the risk of human contact with wild animals and subsequent disease transmission. A majority of emerging infectious diseases, and almost all recent pandemics such as SARS, MERS, West Nile, H1N1, and Ebola, originate in animals ("zoonotic disease" or "zoonosis").

Actions to address climate change—such as reduced impact on natural environment, protection of plants and animals—are similar to those for preventing new infectious disease outbreaks such as the coronavirus.

As countries race to support COVID-19 economic recovery, it is important that these policies also address climate change, or risk further disease outbreaks. The economic costs due to the COVID-19 pandemic is estimated to reach $9 trillion in the next few years. Scholars at the Oxford University[2] have identified five COVID-19 fiscal recovery policies with high potential on both economic multiplier and climate impact metrics: clean physical infrastructure, building efficiency retrofits, investment in education and training, natural capital investment, and clean R&D.

[1] World Health Organization. (2020, April 22). Q&A: Climate change and COVID-19. https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-on-climate-change-and-covid-19

[2] Hepburn, C., O'Callaghan, B., Stern, N., Stiglitz, J., and Zenghelis, D. (2020).*Will COVID-19 fiscal recovery packages accelerate or retard progress on climate change?* Smith School Working Paper 20-02. shorturl.at/mDJK1

1. Most New Zealanders Identify a Link between Human Impact on the Environment and the Risk of Infectious Diseases

- Eight in ten New Zealanders strongly agree (33%) or somewhat agree (47%) that human impact on the environment increases the risk of new infectious diseases
- Seven in ten New Zealanders strongly agree (30%) or somewhat agree (40%) that large-scale animal "factory" farms increase the risks of new disease outbreaks

2. New Zealanders are Divided on the Issue of Deforestation and Rapid Agriculture Expansion as Risk Factors for the Spread of Infectious Diseases from Wildlife to Humans

- About half of New Zealanders strongly agree (16%) or somewhat agree (35%) that cutting forests increases the risk of new infectious diseases jumping from wild life to humans. However, half also strongly disagree (17%) or somewhat disagree (32%) with the statement
- While more than half of half of New Zealanders strongly agree (19%) or somewhat agree (36%) that rapid agricultural expansion in wildlife areas makes it easier for infectious diseases to spread to humans, slightly less than half strongly disagree (14%) or somewhat disagree (31%) with the statement

3. New Zealanders Don't See or are Split on the Role of Climate Change in Infectious Disease Outbreaks and Transmission

- About six in ten New Zealanders strongly disagree (21%) or somewhat disagree (37%) that climate change causes the spread of infectious diseases to new places. However, forty two percent either strongly agree (9%) or agree (32%) with the statement
- About six in ten New Zealanders strongly disagree (21%) or somewhat disagree (36%) that climate change increases the risk of new disease outbreaks such as the coronavirus. However, forty three percent agree with the statement
- New Zealanders are split on the role of climate change and pandemics: More than half of New Zealanders strongly disagree (20%) or somewhat disagree (33%) that climate change will result in more pandemics such as the coronavirus. Forty seven percent, however, agree with the statement
- New Zealanders are split on the role of climate change making conditions more suitable for disease transmission between wild life and humans, with about equal proportions that agree (49%) and disagree (51%) with the statement
- Slightly more number of New Zealanders agree (53%) that increasing temperatures due to climate change make it difficult to practise preventive behaviours against the coronavirus than those who disagree (47%)

4. A Large Majority of New Zealanders Say that Extreme Weather Events Increase Vulnerability to the Coronavirus

- Eight in ten New Zealanders strongly agree (38%) or agree (44%) that extreme weather events increase the spread of diseases such as the coronavirus when people displaced from their homes crowd into shelters

- Eight in ten New Zealanders say extreme weather events such as hurricanes and floods make it harder to treat diseases like the coronavirus because it places more strain on hospitals

5. Most New Zealanders say Environmental Actions also Help Protect Against Coronavirus

- About eight in ten New Zealanders strongly agree (34%) or somewhat agree (42%) that we cannot protect our health without protecting the environment
- Over half of New Zealanders strongly agree (20%) or somewhat agree (38%) that greater protection of plant and animal species reduces the risks of future outbreaks of new diseases such as the coronavirus. However, forty two percent disagree with the statement
- Over half of New Zealanders strongly agree (16%) or somewhat agree (37%) that reducing air pollution caused by burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and natural gas protects us from respiratory infections like the coronavirus. However, forty seven percent strongly disagree (17%) or somewhat disagree (30%) with the statement.

6. A Majority of New Zealanders Support a Clean and Green COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan

- More than seventy percent of New Zealanders strongly (27%) or somewhat (48%) agree that industries that receive substantial emergency financial assistance should be required to lower their carbon emissions
- Seven in ten or more New Zealanders strongly (26%) or somewhat (47%) agree that industries that farmers that receive government funding should reduce carbon and water pollution. Slightly more than a quarter (27%) disagree with such a plan
- Seven in ten or more New Zealanders strongly (28%) or somewhat (42%) agree that government funding should require electric utility companies to generate 100% of their electricity from clean energy sources, like solar and wind
- About seven in ten New Zealanders also agree that funding to airlines should be based on their commitment to reduce their carbon emissions (68%) and support the agriculture sector only if there are concrete plans to reduce environmental problems (67%)

7. There is a Moderate to a Great Deal of Support for the Government's Emergency Funding for Climate-Change Related Policies

- A majority (75%) of New Zealanders support increased government emergency funding in improving public transportation and rail infrastructure, a great deal (17%), a lot (25%) or a moderate amount (34%). About a quarter say not at all (7%) or a little (18%)
- Over seven in ten New Zealanders support government funding to research clean technologies such as solar and wind power (73%), forest restoration (72%), providing tax credits or rebates to individuals to improve energy efficiency of their homes (70%)
- Sixty five percent of New Zealanders say most of government emergency funding in education should go for training for jobs in renewable energy industries

- Six in ten New Zealanders support funding for retail sector only if the sector plans to reduce their pollution and waste, and support more government funding to improve and expand walking paths, cycling lanes (55%)
- Less than half of New Zealanders support government funding to provide tax credits and subsidies to individuals who purchase electric cars or trucks (47%). More than half New Zealanders do not show any support (27%) or express a little support (26%) for such a policy measure on subsidies to promote purchase of electric cars or trucks

8. A Majority of New Zealanders Are Likely to Change to More Environmentally Friendly Behaviours, even if it Costs More or is Inconvenient, in the Next 12 Months

- About nine in ten New Zealanders strongly agree (43%) or somewhat agree (45%) to reduce food wastage in next twelve months
- Over six in ten New Zealanders say they will purchase energy efficient appliances even if they need to pay more initially (64%)
- About or more than half of New Zealanders say they will increase use of public transportation, if available in their area, even if increases their travel time (57%), reduce car use even if it is inconvenient for travel (53%), and buy an energy efficient car even if it costs more initially (43%)
- New Zealanders are divided about reducing consumption of meat even if it is inconvenient; more individuals disagree (56%) than agree (44%)

9. Many New Zealanders Say They Will Engage in Civic and Political Action on Climate Change

- Four in ten New Zealanders either strongly agree (10%) or somewhat agree (32%) that they will donate money to an organisation working on climate change
- Four in ten or less (41%) New Zealanders say they will write letters, email, or phone government officials urging action against climate change
- One in three New Zealanders (35%) say they will personally engage in non-violent civil disobedience (e.g., sit-ins, blockades, or trespassing) against corporate or government activities that make climate change worse
- A quarter of New Zealanders (26%) say they will host a neighbourhood meeting in their home to discuss climate change

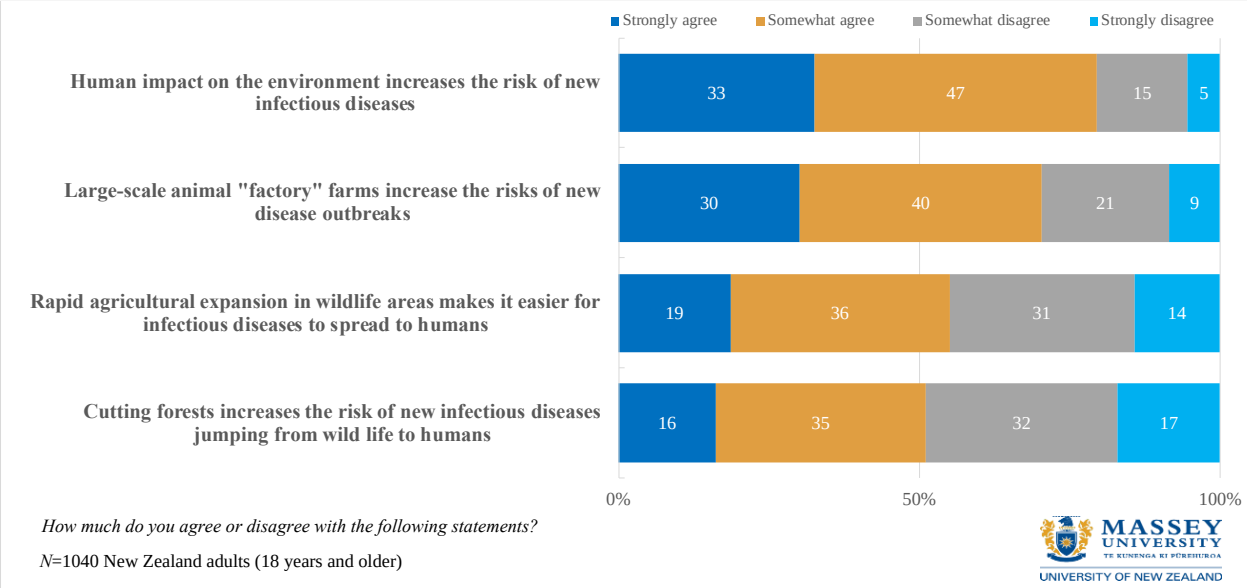
10. New Zealanders are Confident that, Working Together, They Can Affect Business and Government Action on Climate Change

- Six in ten New Zealanders say they are at least "moderately confident" that people like them, working together, can affect what local businesses in their community do about climate change. Half of New Zealanders say that they are at least "moderately confident" that people like them, working together, can affect corporations do about climate change
- More than half of New Zealanders (55%) say they are similarly confident that they can collectively affect what their local council does about global warming. About six in ten New Zealanders (57%) say they are confident that they can collectively affect what the government does about climate change.

1. Environmental Impact and Risk of Infectious Diseases

A majority of New Zealanders see a link between human impact on the environment and the risk of new infectious diseases (80%). A majority also say large-scale animal “factory” farms increases the risk of new disease outbreaks (70%).

However, New Zealanders are split on the issue of deforestation (51%) and rapid agriculture expansion (55%) as risk factors for the spread of infectious diseases from wildlife to humans.

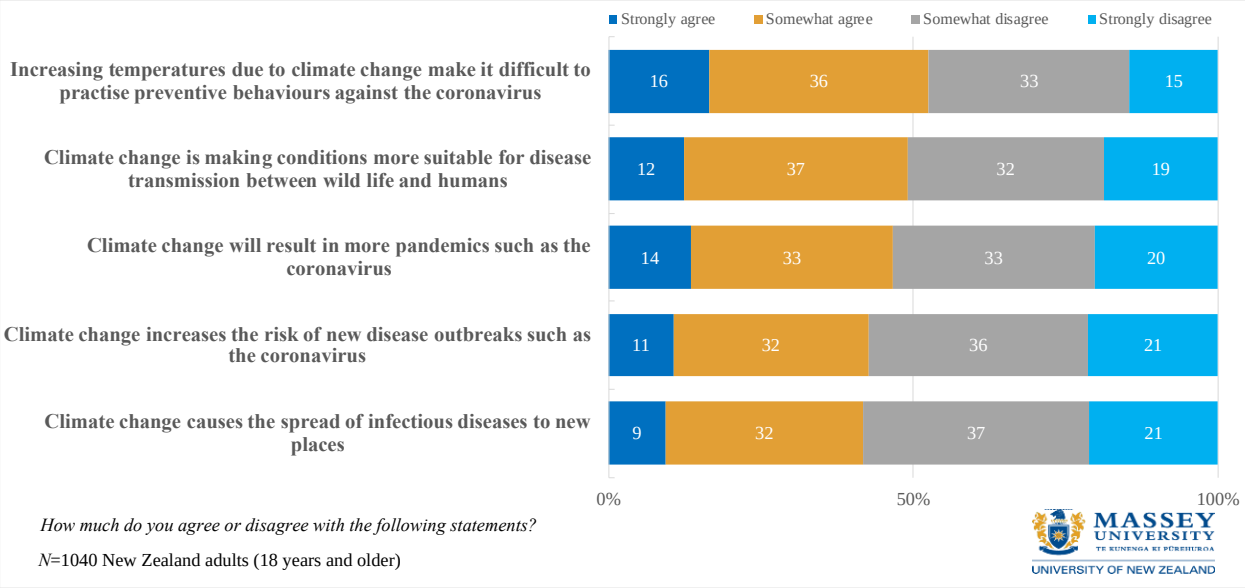


2. Climate Change and Infectious Diseases

New Zealanders Don't See or are Split on the Role of Climate Change in Infectious Disease Outbreaks and Transmission

Over half of New Zealanders think that increasing temperatures due to climate change make it difficult to practise preventive behaviours against the coronavirus (53%). New Zealanders are split about climate change making conditions more suitable for disease transmission between wild life and human (49% agree vs. 51% disagree), and climate change resulting in more pandemics such as the coronavirus (47% agree vs. 53% disagree).

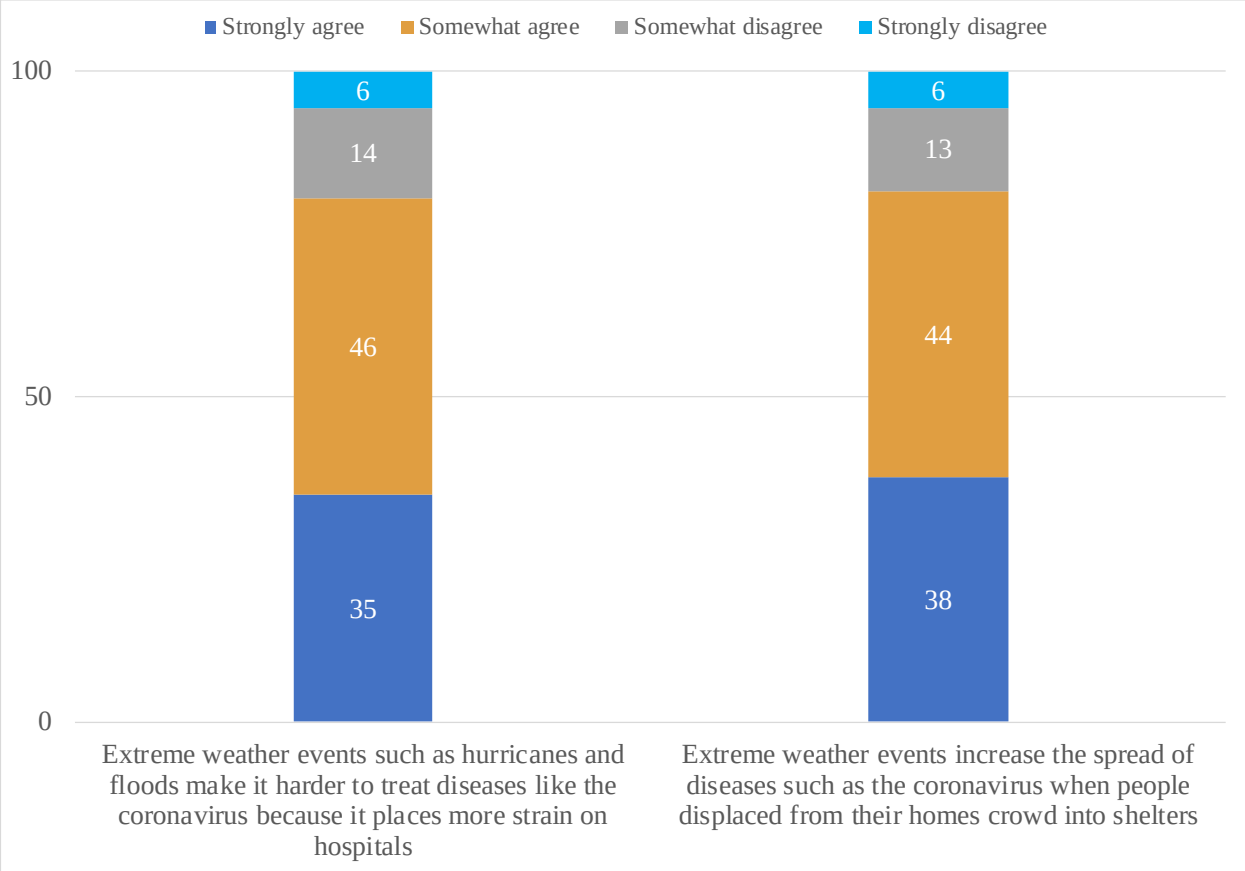
More New Zealanders disagree (57%) than agree (43%) that climate change increases the risk of new disease outbreaks such as the coronavirus. Similarly, more New Zealanders disagree (58%) than agree (42%) that climate change causes the spread of infectious diseases to new places.



3. Extreme Weather Events and Vulnerability to Coronavirus

A Majority of New Zealanders Feel that Extreme Weather Events Increases Vulnerability to the Coronavirus

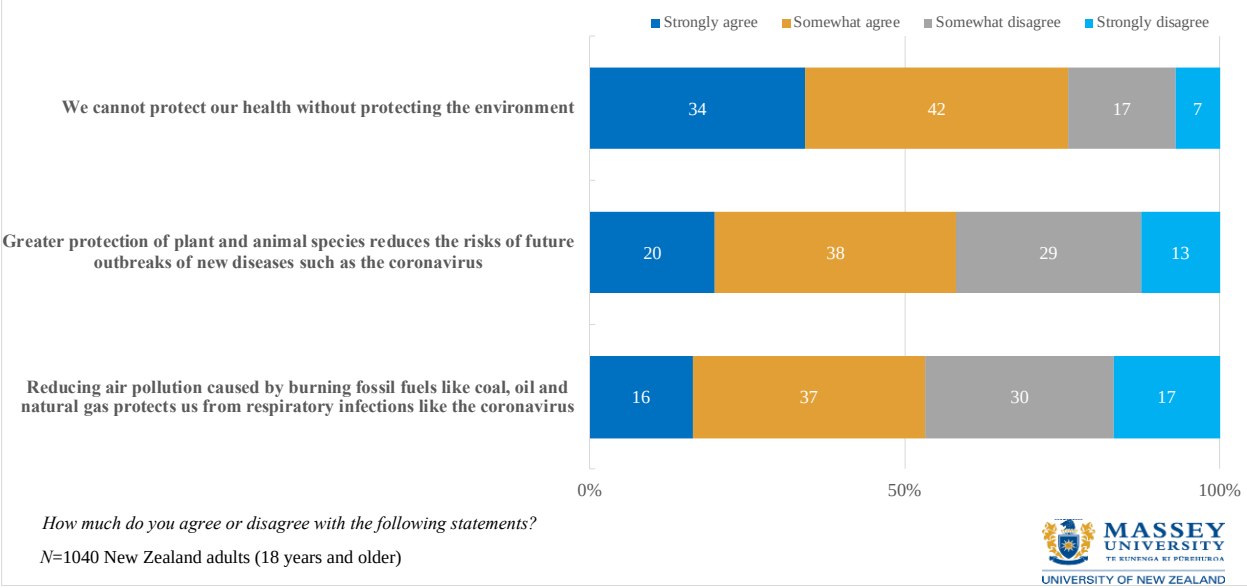
About eight in ten New Zealanders say that extreme weather events increase the spread of diseases such as the coronavirus when people displaced from their homes crowd into shelters and that extreme weather events such as hurricanes and floods make it harder to treat diseases like the coronavirus because it places more strain on hospitals.



4. Co-benefits of Actions to Address Environment and Coronavirus

Most New Zealanders say that Environmental Actions also Help Protect Against Coronavirus

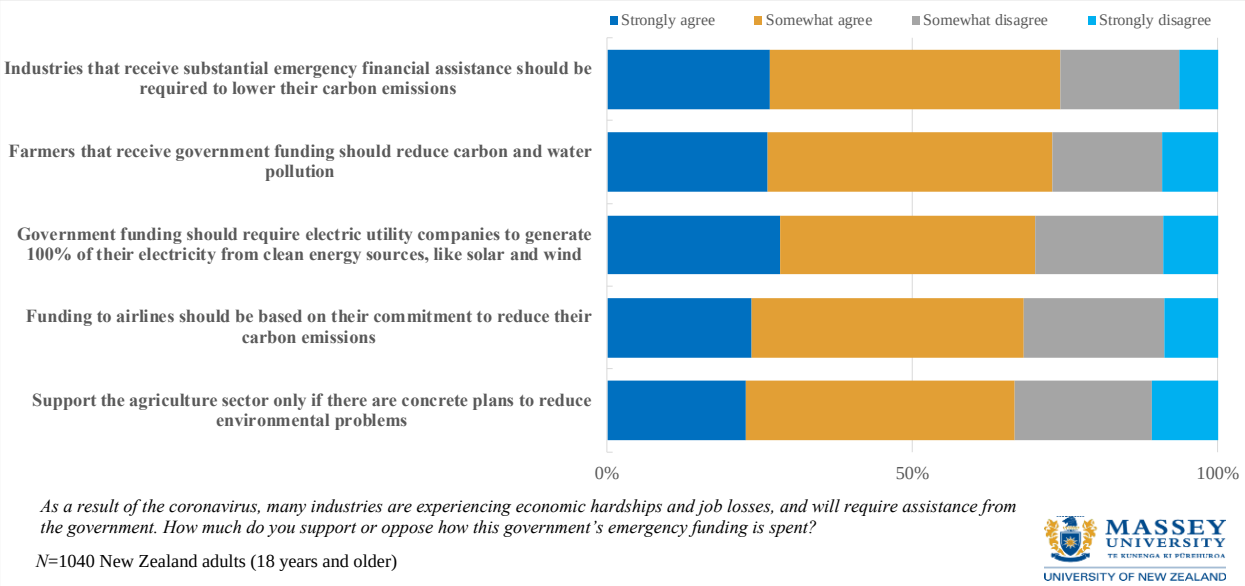
A majority of New Zealanders (76%) say that we cannot protect our health without protecting the environment. Over half of New Zealanders say that greater protection of plant and animal species reduces the risks of future outbreaks of new diseases such as the coronavirus (58%) and reducing air pollution caused by burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and natural gas protects us from respiratory infections like the coronavirus (53%).



5. Support for Clean and Green COVID-19 Economic Recovery Policies

A Majority of New Zealanders Support a COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan that Also Reduces Emissions and Supports Clean Energy

Over seventy percent of New Zealanders say that industries that receive substantial emergency financial assistance should be required to lower their carbon emissions (74%); Farmers that receive government funding should reduce carbon and water pollution (73%); Government funding should require electric utility companies to generate 100% of their electricity from clean energy sources, like solar and wind (70%). About seven in ten New Zealanders say that funding to airlines should be based on their commitment to reduce their carbon emissions (68%) and support the agriculture sector only if there are concrete plans to reduce environmental problems (67%).



As a result of the coronavirus, many industries are experiencing economic hardships and job losses, and will require assistance from the government. How much do you support or oppose how this government's emergency funding is spent?

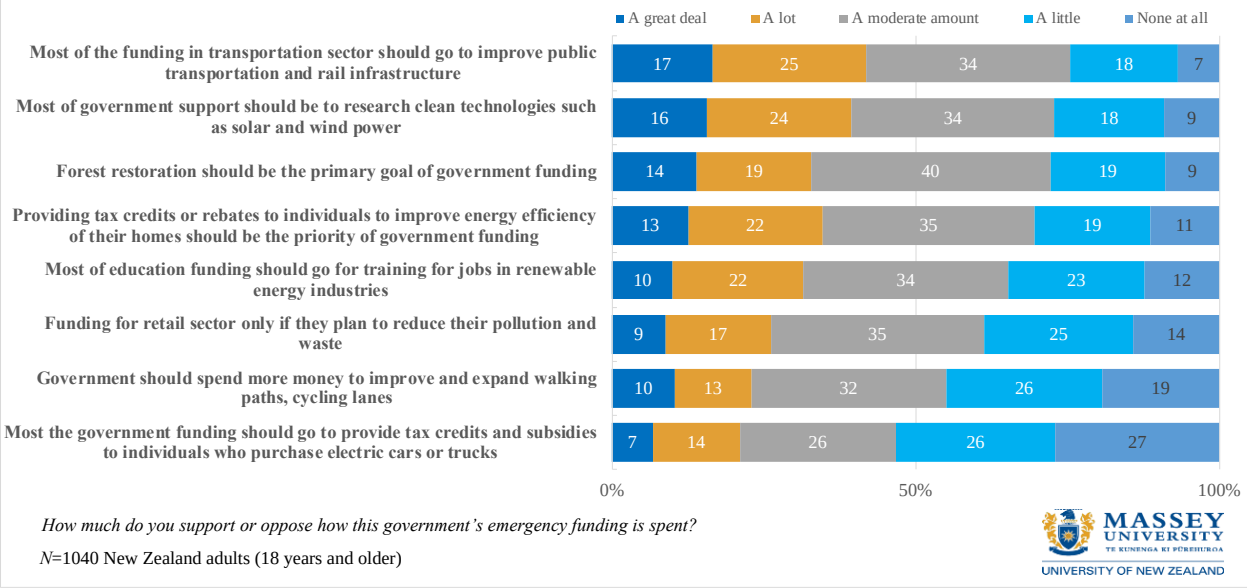
N=1040 New Zealand adults (18 years and older)

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

6. Support for Climate-Change Related COVID-19 Emergency Funding

There is a Moderate to Strong Support for the Government's Emergency Funding for Climate-Change Related Policies

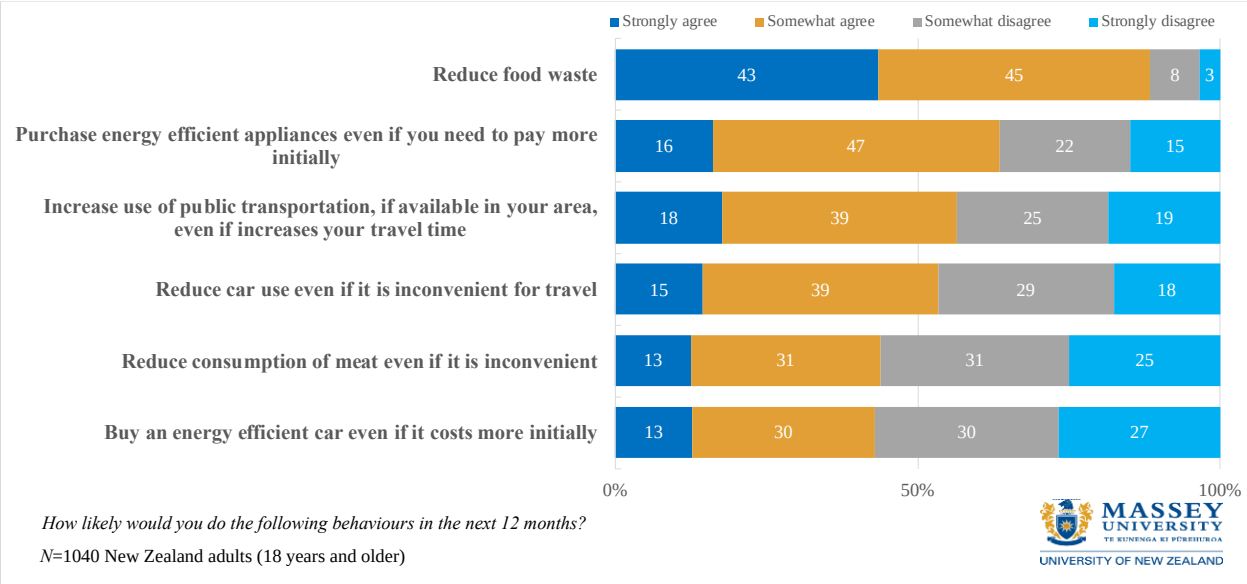
A majority (75%) of New Zealanders support government's emergency funding in improving public transportation and rail infrastructure, research clean technologies such as solar and wind power (73%), forest restoration (72%), providing tax credits or rebates to individuals to improve energy efficiency of their homes (70%). Six in ten New Zealanders say most of emergency education funding should go for training for jobs in renewable energy industries (65%) and support funding for retail sector only if the sector plans to reduce their pollution and waste (61%). About half of New Zealanders support government emergency funding to improve and expand walking paths, cycling lanes (55%), and to provide tax credits and subsidies to individuals who purchase electric cars or trucks (47%).



7. Intensions for Behaviour Change

A Majority of New Zealanders Are Likely to Change to More Environmentally Friendly Behaviours, even if it Costs More or is Inconvenient, in the Next 12 Months

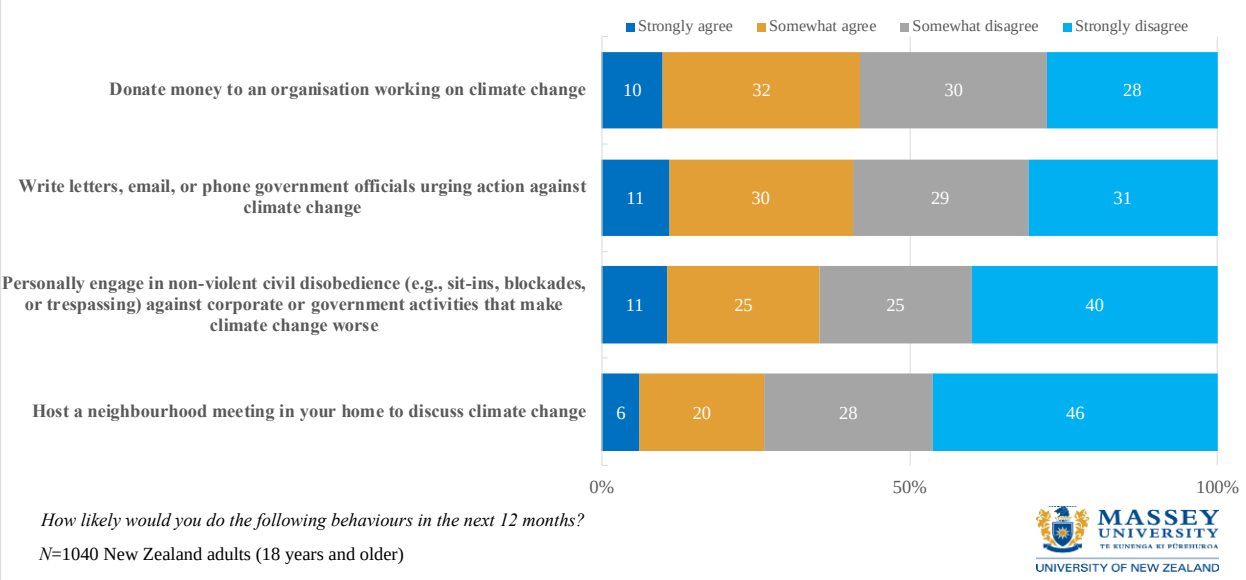
About nine in ten New Zealanders say that they will reduce food wastage in next twelve months (88%). Over six in ten New Zealanders say they will purchase energy efficient appliances even if they need to pay more initially (64%). About half of New Zealanders say they will change a number of their transportation behaviours: increase use of public transportation, if available in their area, even if increases their travel time (57%), reduce car use even if it is inconvenient for travel (53%), and buy an energy efficient car even if it costs more initially (43%). However, New Zealanders are divided about reducing consumption of meat, even if it is inconvenient (44%).



8. Civic and Political Action on Climate Change

Many New Zealanders Say They Will Engage in Civil and Political Action on Climate Change

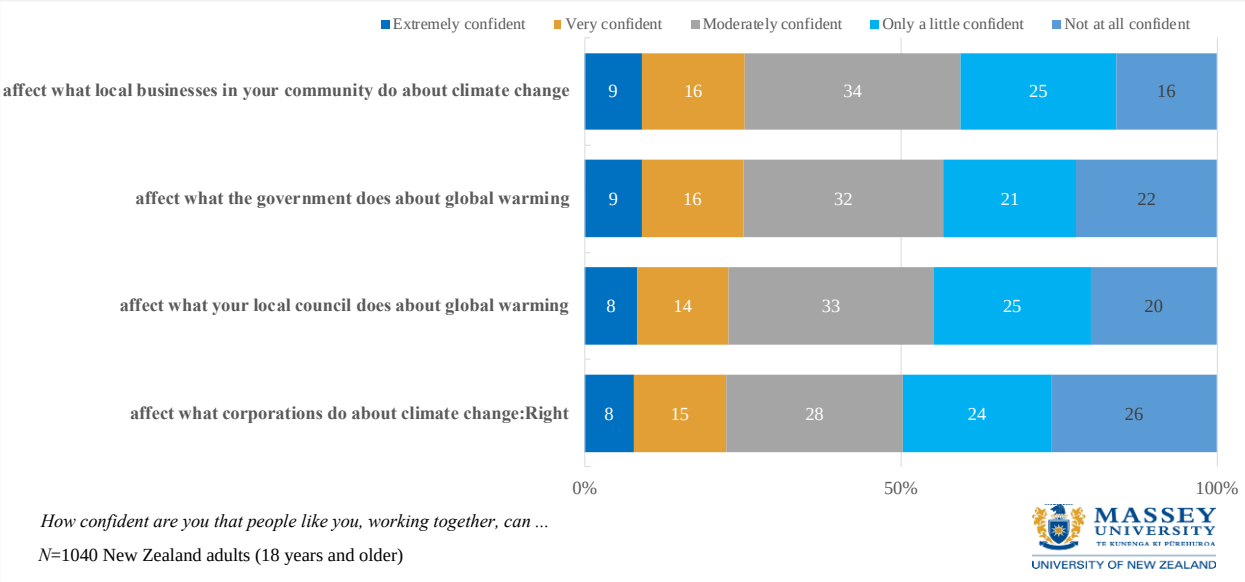
Four in ten New Zealanders say they will donate money to an organisation working on climate change (42%) and will write letters, email, or phone government officials urging action against climate change (41%). More than a third of New Zealanders (35%) say they will personally engage in non-violent civil disobedience (e.g., sit-ins, blockades, or trespassing) against corporate or government activities that make climate change worse. A quarter of New Zealanders (26%) say they will host a neighbourhood meeting in their home to discuss climate change.



9. Collective Efficacy

New Zealanders are Confident that, Working Together, They Can Affect Business and Government Action on Climate Change

Perceived collective efficacy—people's beliefs that they can act together to achieve their group goals—is an important motivator for collective action[3]. Six in ten New Zealanders say they are at least "moderately confident" that people like them, working together, can affect what local businesses in their community do about climate change. Similarly, many New Zealanders say they are confident that they can collectively affect what their local council does about global warming (55%). About six in ten New Zealanders (57%) say they are confident that they can collectively affect what the government does about climate change. Half of New Zealanders say that they are confident that they can affect what corporations do about climate change



[3] Bandura, A. (2000). Exercise of human agency through collective efficacy. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 9*, 75-78. doi:10.1111/1467-8721.00064

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. 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 to complete. 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 Dr. John Kotcher and Dr. Edward Maibach from the Center for Climate Change Communication at the George Mason University, USA, and Dr. Esther Jaspers and Dr. Elena Maydell from Massey University in preparing the questionnaire. John Hilbert helped with the design of the cover page.

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

	N (unweighted)	% (unweighted)	*N* (weighted)	% (weighted)
Total	1040	100	1040	100
Female	609	58.6	530	51
Male	431	41.4	510	49
Age				
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
Education				
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
Ethnicity				
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
Annual personal income				
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

References

Bandura, A. (2000). Exercise of human agency through collective efficacy. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 9,* 75-78. doi:10.1111/1467-8721.00064

Hepburn, C., O'Callaghan, B., Stern, N., Stiglitz, J., and Zenghelis, D. (2020).*Will COVID-19 fiscal recovery packages accelerate or retard progress on climate change?* Smith School Working Paper 20-02. shorturl.at/mDJK1

World Health Organization. (2020, April 22). Q&A: Climate change and COVID-19. https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-on-climate-change-and-covid-19
Science, 9, 75-78. doi:10.1111/1467-8721.00064

Aotearoa New Zealand Public Responses to Covid-19 and Climate Change

Thaker, J

2020-08-06