



Localism

Qualitative and Quantitative Research

February 2019

Topics

- Our approach
- Summary of findings
- Detailed data
 - Levels of support for localism
 - Types of services
- Next steps

Methodology

Qualitative (8 focus groups)

- 1 x general public and 1 x opinion leaders (Auckland, Napier, New Plymouth and Christchurch).
 - Included some rural respondents (Christchurch and New Plymouth).
 - Opinion leaders = tertiary educated, high declared interest in news, current affairs and in local government issues.

Quantitative (online representative survey of n=1,000)

- Module of questions in UMR's online omnibus survey.
- Fieldwork 28th November to 14th December (2018).
 - Judgement needed to balance findings from qualitative and quantitative research where opinions are still developing.


Summary of findings

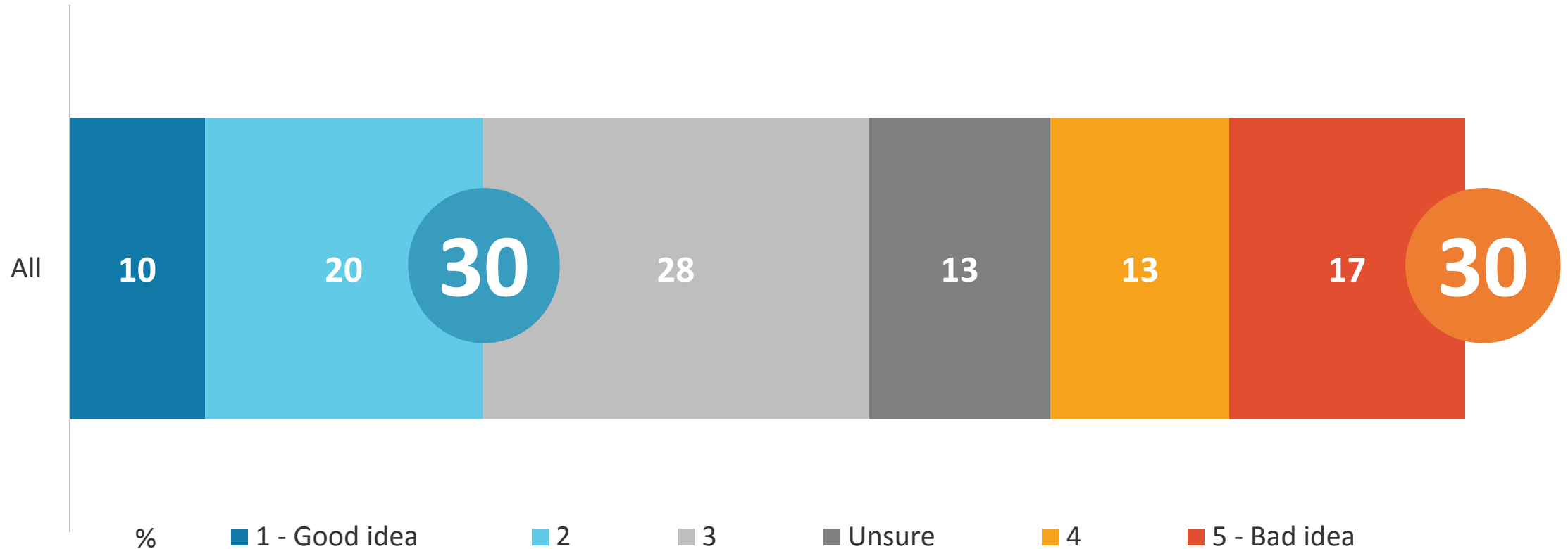
- New Zealanders now evenly divided on localism – 30% for; 30% against; 40% neutral or unsure.
- Arguments against tended to be stronger than those for.
- Considerable engagement in discussion on issue in focus groups (more than expected).
- The 88% of New Zealand central government expenditure compared to the 46% OECD average was effective springboard for discussion.
- Very strong acceptance of basic arguments for localism – **better decisions** from **greater local knowledge**; **faster action**; more **direct accountability**; more **engagement**.
- But opinion is soft and can be easily moved.
- Main concerns were **duplication of services**; **increasing inequality** between the regions; **need for national standards**, greater **risk of corruption and cranks** gaining control.
 - Some question competence of people in local government.

Summary of findings (cont.)

- Very early days on revenue discussion – needed prompting.
- Grasp there are problems with financing all local government expenditure from rates.
- Muted support in principle for local dedicated taxes such as fuel, bed and congestion taxes.
- Possibility of raising local income tax is much harder to comprehend.
- Support for areas under high tourist pressure to keep some of the revenue.
- Discussion on raising or keeping revenue runs into considerable concern that some areas in New Zealand will get richer and some will get poorer.
- Some support for hybrid models with central government providing funding or setting national standards and local government having more scope than currently for action.
- “*Localism*” not a great name – something centred on “*community*” better, but has “do good, woolly” negatives.

Support for localism

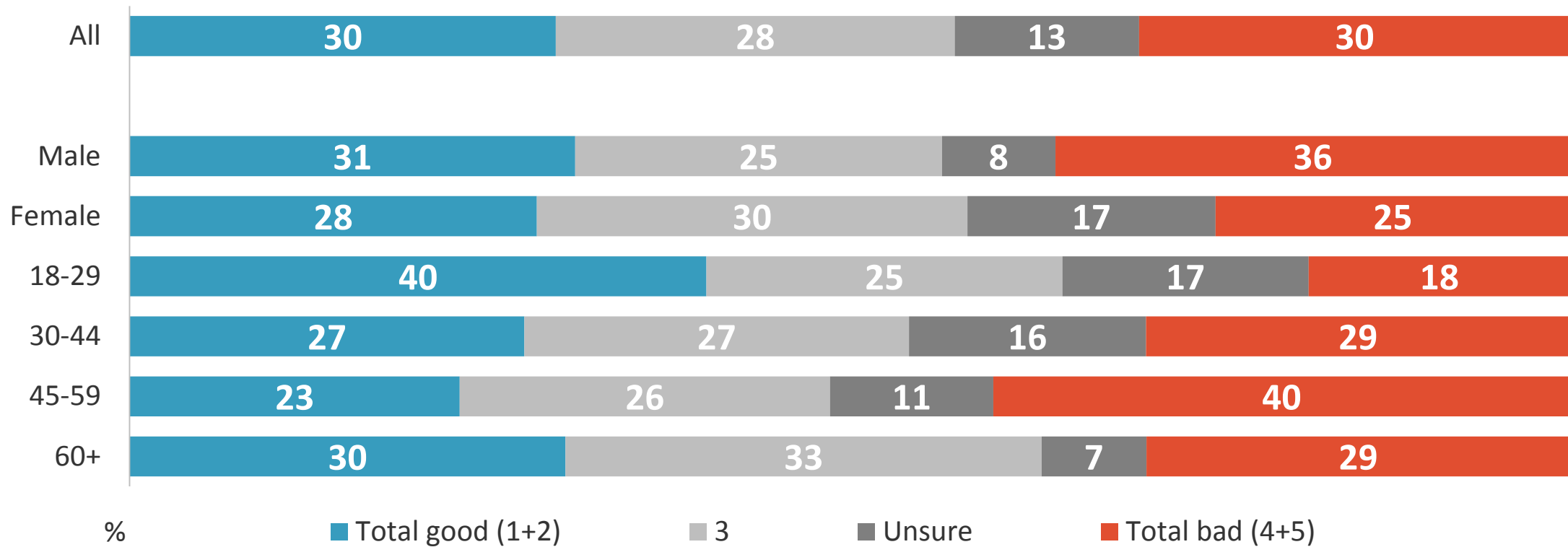
 In principle, do you think a gradual move towards more local services being controlled and provided by local decision-makers is a good idea or a bad idea?



Base: All (n=1,000), online, November 2018


Support for localism

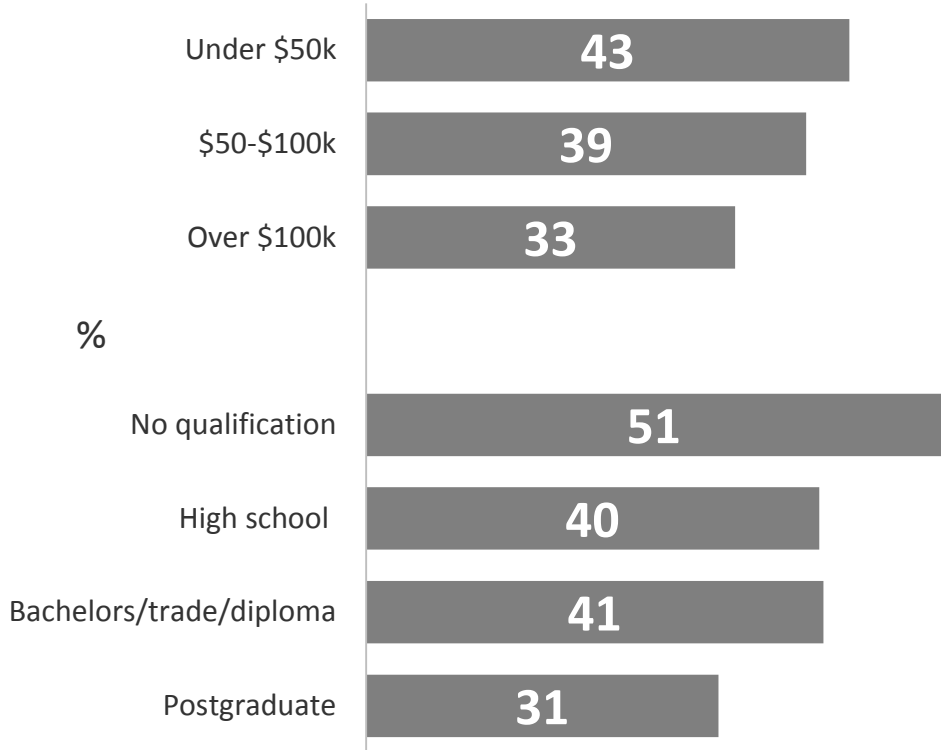
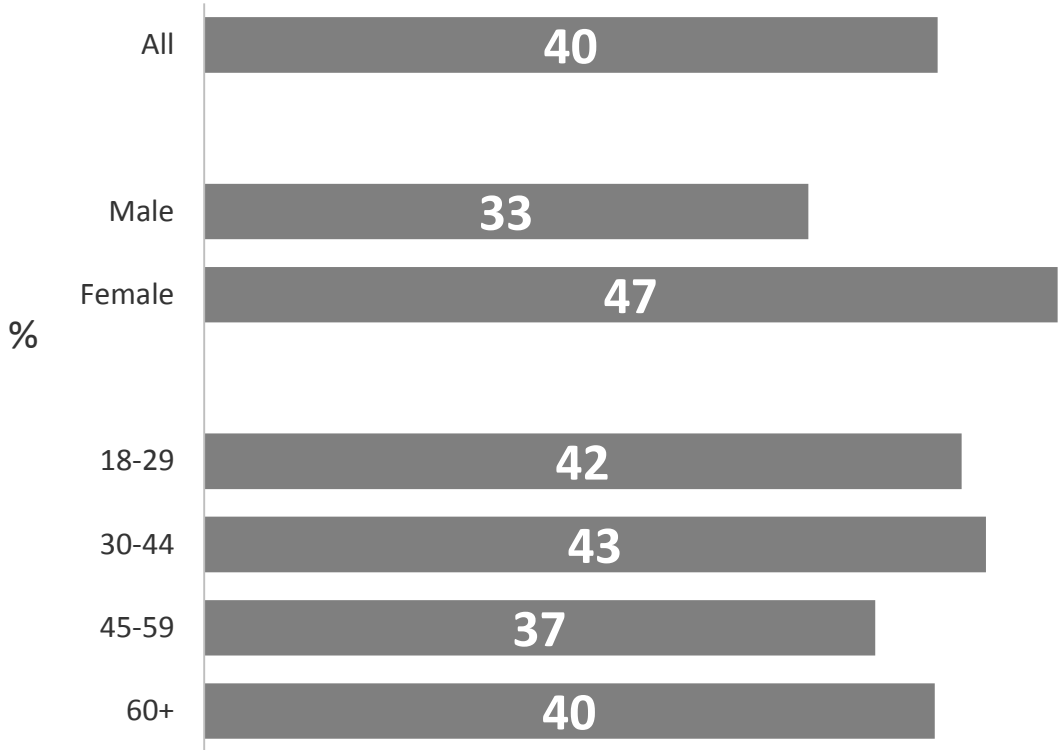
Q In principle, do you think a gradual move towards more local services being controlled and provided by local decision-makers is a good idea or a bad idea?



Base: All (n=1,000), online, November 2018

Support for localism – demographics of the ‘undecided’

 *In principle, do you think a gradual move towards more local services being controlled and provided by local decision-makers is a good idea or a bad idea? 3 or unsure*

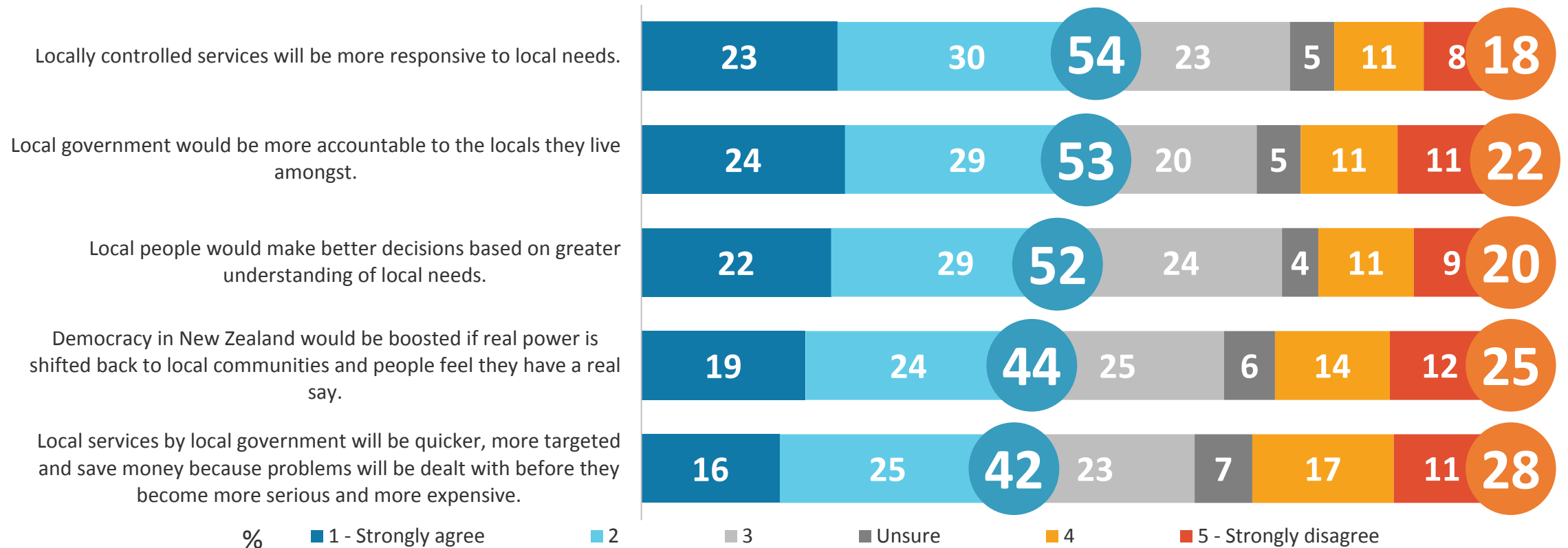


Base: All (n=405), online, November 2018




Arguments for localism

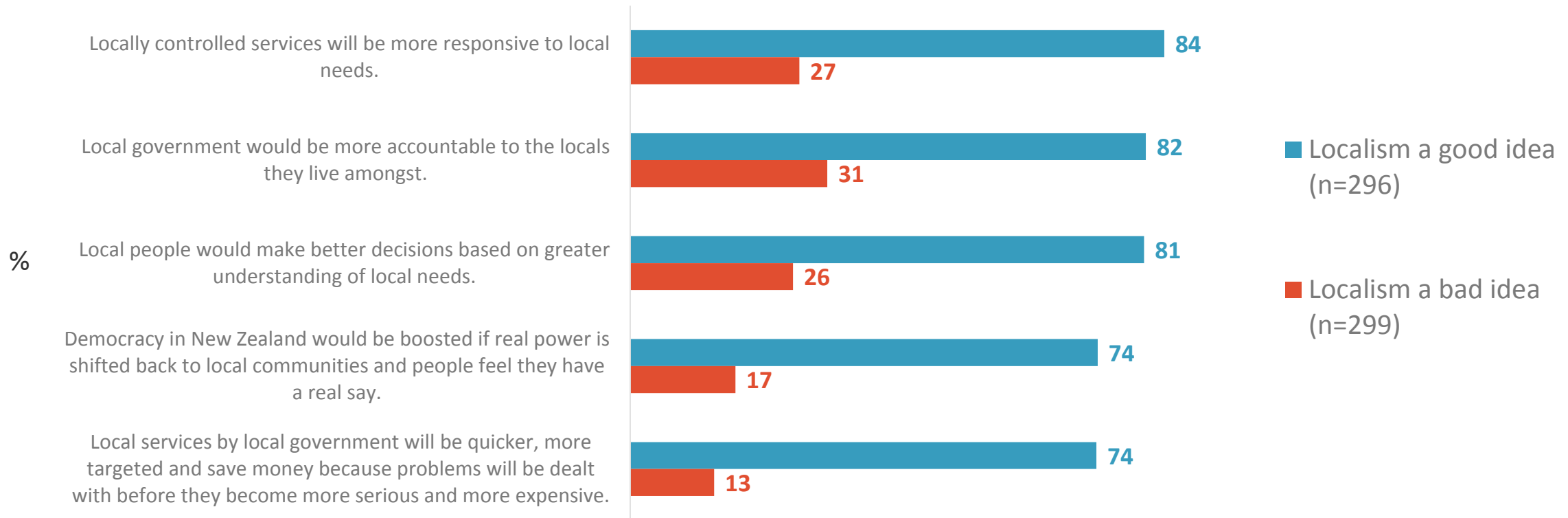
Q How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following arguments **FOR** public services being controlled and provided by local government?



Base: All (n=1,000), online, November 2018

Arguments for by general support or opposition to localism

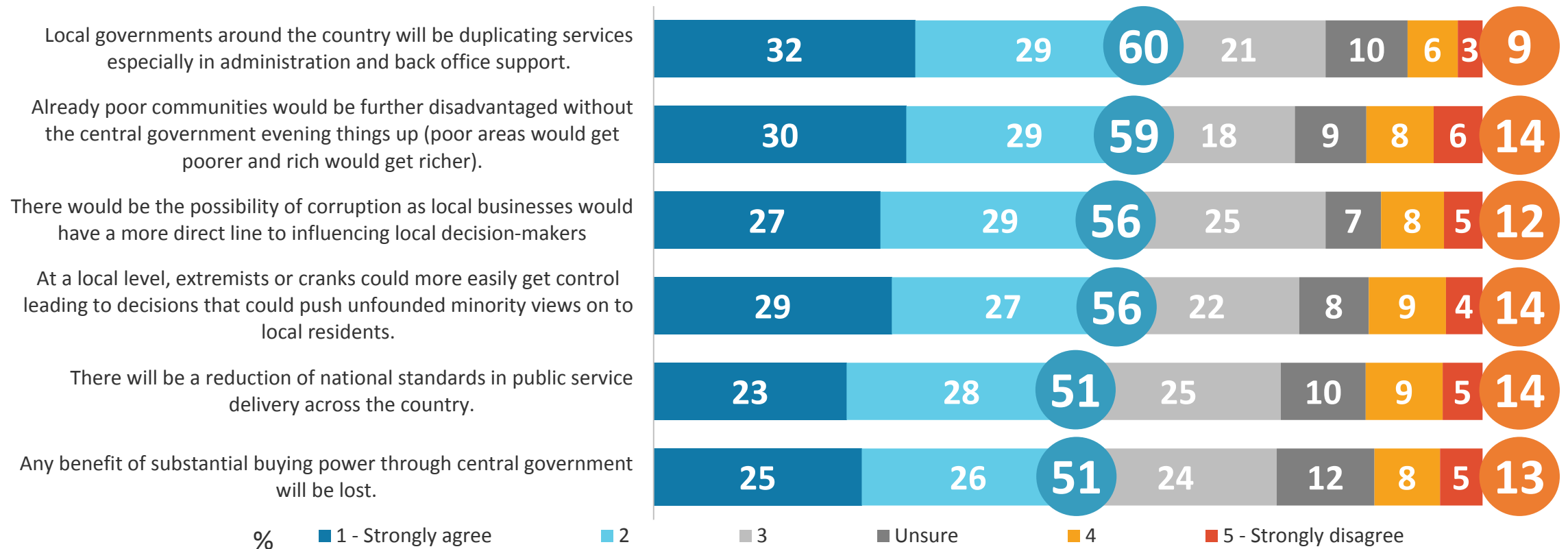
 How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following arguments **FOR** public services being controlled and provided by local government? (Total agree)



Base: Respondents who believe moving local services to local government control is a good (1+2) or bad (4+5) idea, online, November 2018

Arguments against localism

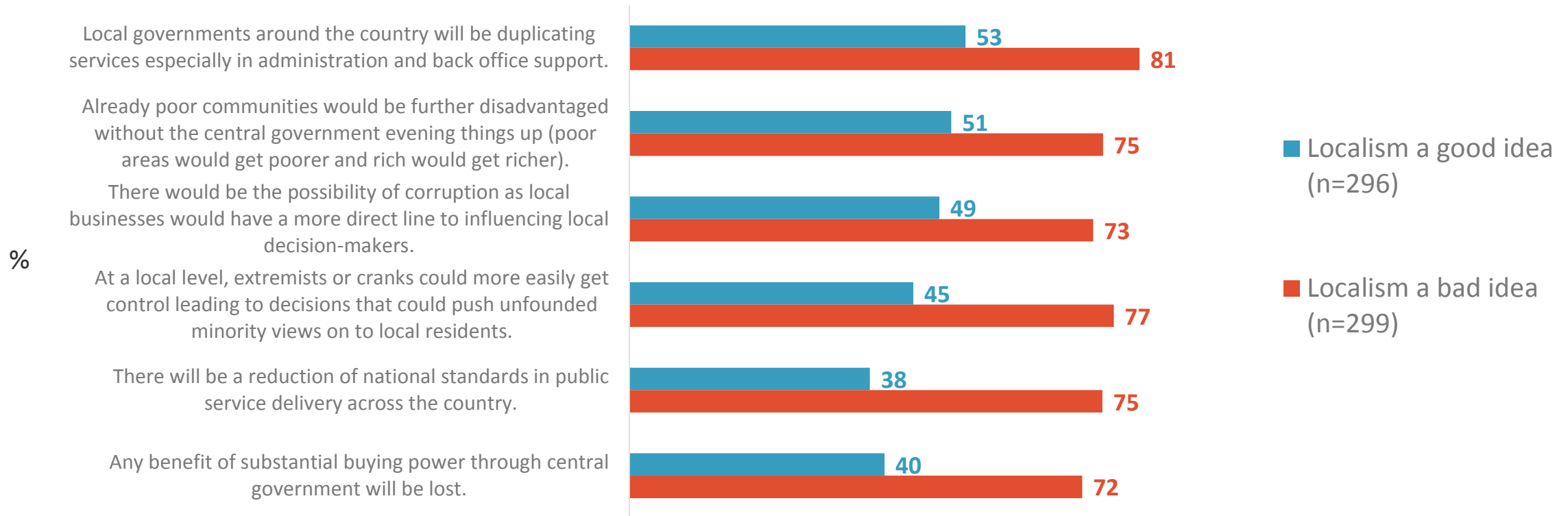
Q How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following arguments **AGAINST** public services being controlled and provided by local government?



Base: All (n=1,000), online, November 2018

Arguments against by general support or opposition to localism

Q How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following arguments **AGAINST** public services being controlled and provided by local government? (Total agree)



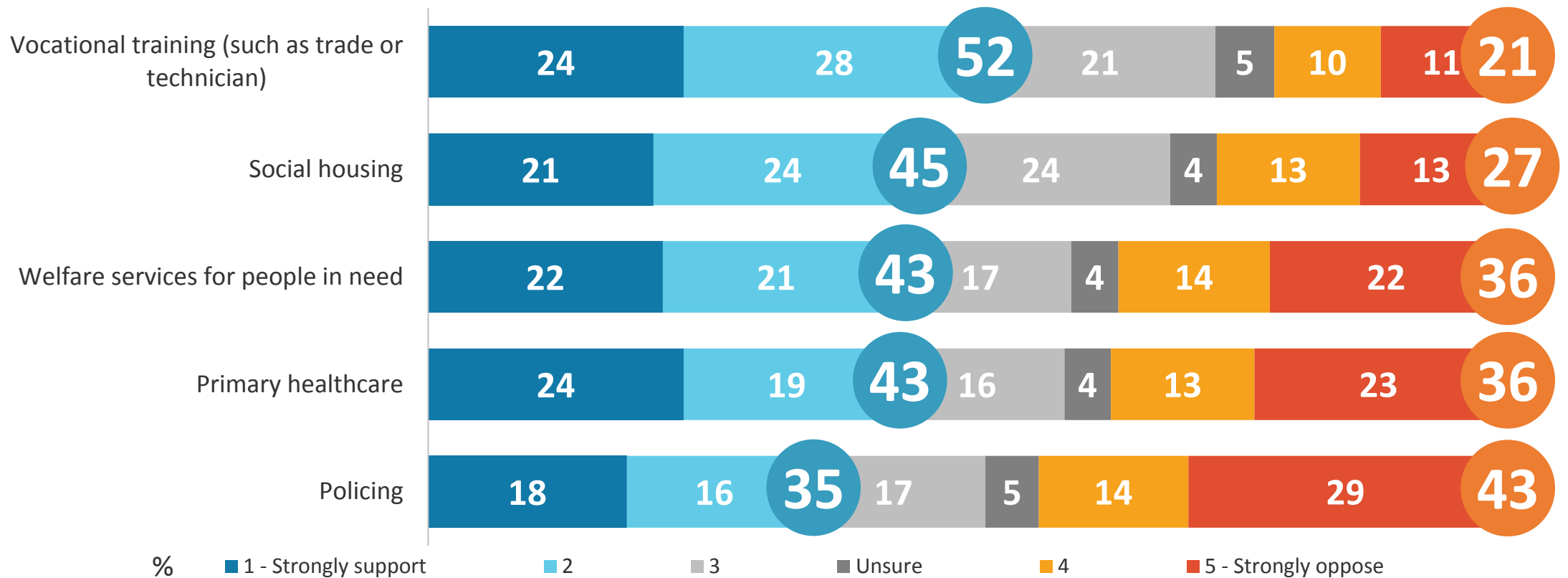
Base: Respondents who believe moving local services to local government control is a good (1+2) or bad (4+5) idea, online, November 2018

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a black and red pencil, poised to write on a white document. The background is blurred, showing another person in a dark red garment. A large, semi-transparent blue geometric shape is overlaid on the left side of the image. The text 'Types of services' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font across the middle of the image, partially overlapping the blue shape and the document.

Types of services

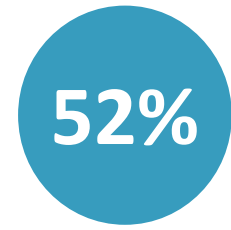
Support for services controlled by local decision-makers

Q How strongly do you support or oppose each of the following types of services being controlled and provided by local decision-makers?



Base: All (n=1,000), online, November 2018

Vocational training



Support



Oppose

- Strong support on basis of knowing employment needs
- Evidence of local labour shortages e.g. horticultural and pastoral farm workers in Hawke's Bay
- Engaging local employers and decision makers may lead to growth

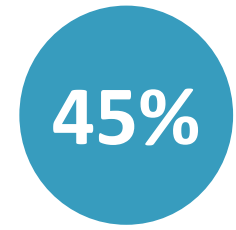
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- Happening already; role of local polytechnics

Vocational training

Vocational education should be local because local can know what services are needed in the region and then can offer that specifically. Out of town you might come up with a whole lot of different segments, but you might not need any of them.

The other thing I think with vocational training you can work in with local businesses and see what needs they have.

Social housing



Support



Oppose

- Local people aware of issues
- National policy dominated by Auckland crisis
- Been done by local government

-
- Need for central funding

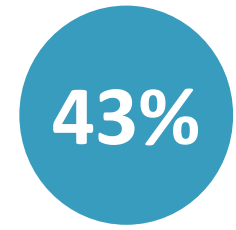
Social housing



Central government don't quite have a grasp on what is needed and where it is needed. In Napier there has been so many state houses pulled down and all you ever hear about from central government is housing in Auckland. Ours is smaller scale but we probably have the same percentages of people living in cars or garages as they do in the major cities.

If social housing was centrally funded but locally organised. I don't think a local area could actually fund it. If the government said here is your lump of money go and socially house the people then probably local areas could do that.

Welfare services



Support



Oppose

- More rapid action; fence at top of cliff
- More efficient co-ordination of wrap around services
- Auckland benefits need to be higher

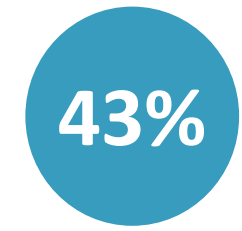
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- Strong preference for central funding
 - People lost if move between regions

Welfare services

[Welfare support?] *I think it could work, the local community knows where the need is.*

You can maybe look at things like welfare for different places because if you are on the benefit in Auckland or on the benefit in Christchurch you probably get around about the same but the cost of living is very different. So that is more of a local issue.

Primary healthcare



Support



Oppose

- Deal with issues unique to regions
- Obvious benefits of faster action

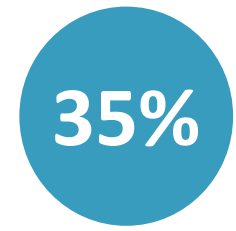
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- Need national standards

Primary healthcare

In terms of health because I work at the hospital so funding for the community. If it is locally you can provide solely for the local community.

[Services provided locally?] Good place. Things like sexual health, a lot of cases of chlamydia you can respond to that quickly.

Policing



Support



Oppose

- Know local problems
 - Better allocation of resources
-
- Need national standards, policies, training
 - Concerns of possible corruption

Policing

I would think things like policing can be dealt with locally through local government they can be in charge of organising what the region needs, what the areas need as opposed to being decided in Wellington. We have problems here with all the police facilities have essentially shifted to Hastings and Napier really is a satellite office.

I think it would be a disaster if policing was run locally, I think it would have to be done centrally because of the technology and the standards involved. I think you would have a system of vigilante law enforcement if you had Ruatoria having their own policing policy or something like that.

Education

- Recognise community character schools
 - Want local zoning decisions
 - Auckland salaries for teachers
-

- Want a national curriculum

Education

[Local education decisions?] *They know the surroundings and they know the schools and they know the socio-economic areas of the cities.*

I think what you are saying about education going local I think it needs to be part and part. You can't say Auckland is going to set their curriculum I think they need to deal with the local issue of what we pay our teachers. So the curriculum has to be national but the local is what they are paid.

Revenue raising

- Some support (in principle) for targeted taxes – bed, congestion, fuel.
- Some support for regions under tourist pressure keeping some revenue for providing infrastructure.
- Prompted agreement: using rates is problematic given increased pressure as house values sky rocket.
- Baulked at local income tax.

Revenue raising

I think you almost have to have rates for your core services but if local government was allowed to diversify and do more things then yes they should be allowed to do things like bed taxes, road taxes. But they have to be able to justify it.

It worries me. With a centralised system the voice of the nation speaks and says we are not happy about it. Whereas if local government starts to impose income taxes what is the opportunity for people to raise their voice.

Name for 'localism'

- The term 'localism' did not test well
- For some the word didn't clearly represent the topic
- Others felt it held negative connotations ('Locals only') nationalism
- Needs to portray the concept of community control without the negatives of being too soft and easily swayed

Locally they might not be able to make those tough decisions that central government can make. They can make the tough calls if they need to be made. We want to be able to give funding to everybody but we can't and we have to focus. Like with Pharmac we would like to be able to give all the drugs to everyone but because of the limited pool we have to make decisions.

Localism

It is a bit like communism, localism. That was my first thought it instantly sounds a bit especially in the current world of Trump with nationalism it does give it quite a negative connotation.

Localism is a nice warm phrase but you have to have two sentences after it to explain what it is.

I think it has bad connotations. It is often seen as a, "You can't come here." The idea that you can't come here. I know that is not what you are getting at.

If you are not local you are not welcome.

It is the 'ism' that is the problem. Hub comes to mind.

Why aren't they using the word decentralisation, that is what is normally used isn't it. It is confusing throwing something else in the mix and having a funky word.

Next steps

- Can get a debate underway beginning with facts on NZ centralised public sector spending (88% compared to 46% OECD average)
 - Avoid specific comparisons
- Build on acceptance that locally based decisions will be:
 - More responsive (fence at the top of the cliff as opposed to the ambulance at the bottom)
 - More accountable (decision makers will live among us)
 - Foster better decisions (locals understand local needs)
- Start by developing and honing arguments for three areas where sound policy and public opinion coincide:
 - Vocational services
 - Welfare services
 - Social housing
 - Primary health care.
- Recognise revenue raising difficult issue – highlight problems with limited revenue bases but establish a foundation on principle localism first.
- Work on a better name.