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chapman tripp

Choices that count

The Deloitte and Chapman Tripp Election Survey, conducted by BusinessNZ

Our perspectives

2026

About this report

This report brings together perspectives from Deloitte and Chapman Tripp experts across the areas that matter to business and is informed by data from BusinessNZ's Election Survey of its members.

The Election Survey, conducted by BusinessNZ, consists of two questionnaires.

The member survey
The first questionnaire surveyed BusinessNZ members across a range of business sizes, regions and industries. While the response was lower than in previous years, at 423 responses of which 279 were fully completed, the breadth and depth of the questions asked means it remains one of the most useful barometers of business sentiment available. We put this year's lower turnout down to ongoing survey fatigue and the absence of some member groups.

Because not every respondent answered every question, the 'valid percent' – the proportion of those who answered each individual question – is the truest reflection of results, and it is the basis reported in almost all instances in the tables that follow.

Members completed a broader survey than the political party questionnaire. A subset of the most comparable responses are matched with the political party responses. To explore results from the full BusinessNZ member data set, contact Max Doyle (mdoyle@businessnz.org.nz) at BusinessNZ.

A note on this year's respondents
The 2026 sample is more heavily weighted towards large businesses than in previous years, with over a quarter of respondents employing 500 or more staff. While we do not consider this has materially changed the overall findings, there are questions where the perspective of a large enterprise may differ from that of a smaller business or a self-employed operator.

Compulsory KiwiSaver is one example: close to nine in ten respondents supported making contributions compulsory, including for the self-employed – a group barely represented in this sample, and one that may well have taken a different view, given many regard their business as their long-term retirement savings. Results throughout should be read with this context in mind.

The political party survey
The second questionnaire invited the main political parties contesting the election to set out their policies across five areas of particular interest to business: the economic environment, sustainable investment, infrastructure, skills and human capital, and the employment environment. For reasons of space, their statements had to be reasonably short, and some responses have been updated to reflect policy announced after we received them.

All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number, and as a result not all totals equal 100%.

Contents

Building the New Zealand of the future

Deloitte

If there's one thing I've observed about New Zealand, it's that we're exceptionally good at identifying risks. Sometimes so good at it that we accidentally talk ourselves out of opportunities.

It isn't necessarily a bad thing. It reflects many of the qualities that have served New Zealand well over time. We tend to be practical, thoughtful and cautious, and we like to understand what could go wrong before we decide what to do next. But if we're going to achieve the ambitions we have for our economy, our businesses and our communities, we'll also need to be bolder about pursuing opportunities when they present themselves.

Of course, that doesn't mean ignoring the realities of the world around us. The world remains a pretty unpredictable place, shaped by geopolitical tensions, rapidly changing technology, and shifting economic conditions. That's not going to change anytime soon. Yet despite this unpredictability, the mood is starting to feel different. When I talk to business leaders, I now hear more conversations about growth than survival. There's more discussion about investment and what comes next. The challenges remain, but there seems to be a greater willingness to look further down the road.

This approach resonates with me, because at Deloitte, we talk about the "Deloitte of the future". We haven't solved every challenge facing us today, but organisations that focus only on the immediate horizon eventually run out of road. At some point, you have to make time to think about where you're going, even while navigating the now.

I think the same applies to New Zealand. There's plenty happening around us that we can't control, but what we can control is how we respond. We can choose to invest and to innovate. We can choose to build capability and think carefully about the kind of country we want to create for future generations.

One conversation that feels increasingly important is the one we're having about infrastructure, particularly energy. For many years, infrastructure conversations in New Zealand have focused heavily on transport, but energy is becoming one of the defining growth conversations of the next decade.

That's partly because demand continues to grow, but also because New Zealand is at an important moment in its development. We have an opportunity to expand renewable energy while continuing to grow our economy. Not many countries can make that claim. But producing more is only part of the equation. Prosperity also depends on staying connected to the world through trade, investment, talent, and ideas. In many ways, the ability to produce, connect, and compete is inseparable from prosperity.

That connection to the rest of the world has always mattered for New Zealand. We're a small country located a long way from many of our major markets, but we compete on the world stage every day. Success has always depended on our willingness to stay connected, remain outward-looking, and engage with ideas, talent and investment from beyond our shores.

Looking ahead, I'd be remiss not to talk about the role technology will play. The pace at which conversations around AI have evolved has been remarkable. What began as curiosity for many organisations has quickly become a practical part of how people work and solve problems.

Like any significant technological shift, AI brings both opportunities and risks, but what interests me most is what it enables people to do. In my experience, technology tends to amplify the strengths that already exist. Used well, AI has the potential to help people make better use of their time, access information more easily, and focus their energy on higher-value work. But technology on its own is rarely the answer. The outcomes still depend on the quality of the decisions people make, the culture of the organisation, and the clarity of the problem being solved.

That's one of the reasons I don't see the future as a choice between technology and people. If anything, I think human capability becomes even more important. Communication, judgement, trust, leadership, and the ability to work well with others remain deeply human qualities. We've spent years describing these as "soft skills", but they may prove to be some of the hardest skills to replace.

Ultimately, I'm optimistic about New Zealand's future. The challenges aren't small, but when I look across the business community, I see people who are still prepared to invest, adapt, and back themselves. I see organisations thinking about what's possible, not just what's difficult.

If we're serious about building the New Zealand of the future, that's a pretty good foundation to build from.

Mike Horne
Chief Executive, Deloitte

A longer term for stronger government

Chapman Tripp

As we head into the clamour of the coming campaign, we know that across the economy investment decisions are being put on hold until the election outcome is known – which will not be on the night but weeks after, when the coalition agreements are signed.

Which is why I used this forum in 2023 to argue the case for a four-year term and why I'm making that argument again this time. Because, although there's been a bit of activity around the idea over the last three years, the wheels have been spinning in the mud and we're still substantially where we were.

A key reason for a longer electoral cycle is that it creates a stronger base for good government because it allows more time for policies to be bedded in, creating a more settled policy environment and enabling the electorate to make a more informed judgement of the quality of governance on offer.

There has been movement in this area. As we say in the infrastructure section of this document, there is encouraging evidence that MPs have got the message about avoiding unnecessary and debilitating policy churn – especially in the infrastructure space where the 30-year National Infrastructure Plan has been signed up to by the Coalition Government, the Labour Party and the Greens.

The Labour Party in particular has committed to project continuity where projects are already underway, albeit subject to certain caveats.

Some of the credit for this must go to BusinessNZ and to the wider infrastructure sector for its strong messaging around the need for investment certainty, and some must go to the New Zealand Infrastructure Commission Te Waihanga for the excellence of its analysis.

I note in passing that the Commission is itself an example of consensus in action – having been created by the 2017 Labour-led Government and continued by the current Government.

Of course, there will always be areas of policy contest. A Labour-led Government will promote some form of union-led, multi-employer collective bargaining and will retreat from some of the recent health and safety changes. And tax policy is shaping up to provide a colosseum-style battleground.

But this is healthy. This is what democracy is about.

So, yes, there's been some progress in terms of political culture without wanting to overstate it. And yes, National has already committed to running a referendum on a four-year term if re-elected.

And yes, ACT, Labour, New Zealand First and the Greens also support a shift to four years – ACT so much so that it committed the Government in its coalition agreement with National to promote a Bill enabling a binding referendum through first reading and to select committee.

So what went wrong?

ACT was concerned that a four-year term would strengthen the significant influence that the executive already wields over the Parliament in the New Zealand political system. To avoid this, its Bill provided that three years remain the default term and that a four-year term be available only if select committee membership was proportionate not to the membership of the whole House but to the party membership of the rank-and-file MPs (excluding Ministers and Parliamentary Under-secretaries).

And that formula had little appeal beyond ACT. Among the concerns raised by submitters was that the variable term approach would mean that voters wouldn't know when casting their vote whether they were making a three or a four-year decision. So, the committee recommended that "the change should be subject to a referendum without the proportionality requirement".

And that's where we stand. I'm confident that a referendum will be held (probably at the 2029 election if not before). Whether it will succeed is another matter entirely.

The New Zealand public likes to keep its politicians on a short leash, having twice voted down an extension of term – by more than two-thirds majorities in 1967 and 1990. And the cost-of-living crisis is creating significant grumpiness in the electorate which could easily reinforce this tendency.

So the supporters of change are going to have to make their case by highlighting the hidden costs of the status quo and the benefits of a longer, four-year horizon to the governance of the country.

Pip England
Chief Executive Partner, Chapman Tripp

Tax

Business backs stability over reform

Robyn Walker
Partner, Deloitte

In a world where "bad news sells", it's easy to get bogged down in the illusion that the tax system isn't fit for purpose, on the basis that Inland Revenue and Treasury have predicted that we won't have enough tax revenue… in 2065. These forecasts are based on predicted demographics and ceteris paribus (an assumption that nothing else will change). Given tax laws are constantly being assessed and tweaked, that assumption is unrealistic, but the dire future predictions are likely influencing the proliferation of new taxes being proposed in Election 2026 and an increasing number of people expressing a view that more tax is necessary, not just in 2065, but now.

How does this compare with business sentiment? Compared with the results of the Election Survey in 2023, most respondents still favour maintaining taxes at current levels, although there is an increasing minority favouring higher personal taxes and GST.

	2023	2026
Personal Taxes		
Up	7.8%	9.1%
Down	40.2%	29.1%
Stay the same	52.0%	61.8%
GST		
Up	8.1%	12.4%
Down	16.9%	7.3%
Stay the same	75.0%	80.4%
Corporate Tax Rate		
Up	17.3%	12.9%
Down	22.9%	29.5%
Stay the same	59.9%	59.6%

Compared with 2023, most respondents still favour maintaining taxes at current levels, although there is an increasing minority favouring higher personal taxes and GST.

The high numbers preferring the status quo on existing taxes flow through to thoughts on new taxes, with the majority opposed to wealth taxes, windfall taxes, and land taxes. The popularity of Capital Gains Tax is on the rise, with marginally more now in favour than against, which is a change from 2023.

	2023	2026
Capital Gains Tax		
Yes	27.5%	46.0%
No	61.1%	45.7%
Unsure	11.4%	8.3%
Wealth Tax		
Yes	18.5%	25.5%
No	66.8%	65.3%
Unsure	14.8%	9.1%
Windfall Taxes		
Yes	12.1%	15.6%
No	69.6%	69.2%
Unsure	18.2%	15.2%
Land Tax		
Yes	[not surveyed]	15.0%
No		68.5%
Unsure		16.5%

Putting aside tax types, a new question asked in this survey was whether it was important to have an internationally competitive tax system. Over 93% of respondents viewed a competitive tax system as being either important (37.7%) or very important (55.8%).

While New Zealand struggles to compete on rates (our corporate tax rate is much higher than the OECD average), our comparatively simple tax system (including lack of a comprehensive capital gains tax) can count in our favour.

The past three years

In the 2023 Election Survey, a staggering 92.7% of respondents felt that the then-Government had increased the cost of doing business. In 2026, things are more positive, with only 47.1% considering that costs have increased and 41.7% indicating that the Government had not contributed to cost increases.

When it comes to taxes, the majority of respondents felt compliance costs had stayed the same, which is a flip of the position in 2023, when over 63% of respondents felt tax compliance costs had increased over the previous three years.

From a tax perspective, the last three years have been focused on incremental improvements, virtually all of which have been taxpayer favourable. This term, the Government has placed a lot of emphasis on trying to simplify the tax system and take out compliance costs. While only a small number (1.8%) thought that compliance costs had decreased, that's likely due to the lead time it takes for a tax change to flow through the legislative process and into filed tax returns.

Many businesses are anticipating a significant reduction in compliance costs once the Fringe Benefit Tax changes to motor vehicles announced in Budget 2026 are put in place. Other notable compliance cost measures which have already taken effect include providing exemptions for residential solar, simplifying GST record-keeping rules, allowing flexibility in how employee benefits are taxed, increasing employee share scheme thresholds, and ensuring donated trading stock is not taxed.

On top of the compliance cost changes, there were a number of initiatives aimed at boosting productivity, including the big-ticket items of personal tax cuts (Budget 2024) and Investment Boost (Budget 2025).

The choice

When it comes to taxes, Election 2026 provides two very stark choices, parties proposing significant tax reforms and parties largely comfortable with the status quo.

Ultimately, this survey suggests that business sentiment is not calling for wholesale tax reform. Respondents see value in stability, simplicity and international competitiveness, even while debate about new taxes is gaining volume.

Investment Boost lacking a bit of lift?

Almost half (45.8%) of 2023 survey respondents thought accelerated depreciation deductions would positively influence decision making around investing in new, productivity-enhancing assets, against only 27.3% who thought there would be no impact.

The Government responded with Investment Boost in 2025. But the take-up of the incentive has been lower than expected with the result that the numbers have flipped. In 2026, only 25.5% were in the positive influence camp, while 47.1% were reporting no effect.

Why? The economy will be a factor, but there are others specific to Investment Boost. A: it is still relatively early days, and amendments were needed earlier this year to ensure the intended application. B: research for Inland Revenue found only 29% of businesses felt they had a good understanding of Investment Boost.

But as we move into the election campaign with Labour proposing to repeal Investment Boost, there is an important point to be made.

Businesses value stability. Doubt over continued availability raises uncertainty and influences decision making. If Investment Boost is to be discontinued, transitional provisions should be put in place to maintain accelerated deductions where investment decisions have already been taken.

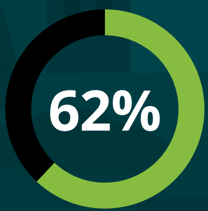
Bevan Miles
Partner, Chapman Tripp

From a tax perspective, the last three years have been focused on incremental improvements, virtually all of which have been taxpayer favourable. This term, the Government has placed a lot of emphasis on trying to simplify the tax system and take out compliance costs.

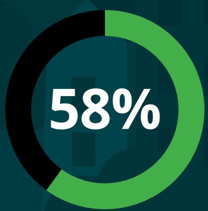
Tax

Businesses desire stability on tax

the majority of respondents want tax rates to **stay the same**:

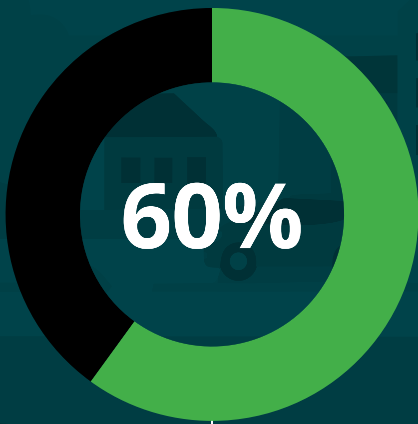


Personal tax rates

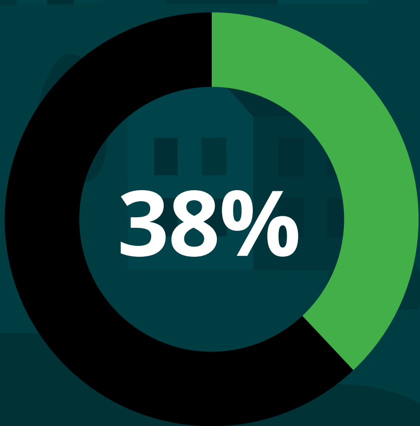


Corporate tax rates

GST



of respondents **don't believe** the tax system should be used to deliver **wider social outcomes**



of businesses experienced an **increase in tax compliance costs** over the last three years

Infrastructure

Some light at the end of the tunnel?

Leigh Kissick
Partner, Chapman Tripp

Among the strongest responses in the 2026 Election Survey is the 94.7% support for a bipartisan, long-term approach to infrastructure planning across housing, tax, welfare, and aging population needs.

It's a big ask especially in a democracy like ours with a strong competitive culture, and especially as under current polling, three-party or even four-party agreement may be required.

But a big step forward was taken this year when Labour and the Greens wrote forewords to broadly endorse the Government's formal response to the 30-year National Infrastructure Plan 2026, published on 16 June.

And we note the various undertakings the Labour Party has given in the policy comparison table prepared for this conference.

In relation to Public Private Partnerships (PPPs), Labour is "committed to honouring what is contracted, underway and already funded" and is prepared to use PPPs itself while maintaining public ownership and operation of hospitals, schools, and prisons; it will also amend rather than repeal and replace the Natural Environment Act and the Planning Act.

We don't want to overstate this.

We expect that some of the amendments to the resource management replacement Acts will be significant – including repealing the regulatory relief provisions (under which local councils have to compensate landowners when specific environmental and heritage protections severely limit the reasonable use of their property), reinstating Whakahono ā Rohe agreements, and winding back some of the Ministerial powers to override environmental limits.

Labour leader Chris Hipkins has also attached some important caveats to the project continuance commitment, such that where there are sharp differences of view, where the business case is contested and where the project is in the early stages – discontinuance still seems the likeliest prospect.

But beneath the project churn and discontinuity that were such a feature of the post-2023 transition, there has been a continuity of direction in terms of the policy framework for infrastructure investment – a key issue for New Zealand.

Examples of policies which have been developed across successive administrations are congestion charging, targeted rates, and fast track consenting (although Labour would allow Ministers less discretion than under the National/New Zealand First model).

Similarly, we would expect that the package of changes now being pursued by the New Zealand Infrastructure Commission and the Treasury to improve the Investment Management System will be continued through the next term, regardless of the election result.

Among the work streams is the Investment Decision Assurance process, announced in April this year in response to recommendations seven to nine in the National Infrastructure Plan and intended to apply from 1 November – six days before polling day.

The Infrastructure Commission is responsible for preparing an Infrastructure Investment Assurance Framework (to replace Gateway and the Infrastructure Priorities Programme) with the objective of optimising "value from new and existing investments and assets for current and future generations of New Zealanders" and providing Ministers and Cabinet with better information on projects in order to make sound infrastructure investment decisions.

In other words, to lift the planning horizon and decision-making well beyond the exigencies of a three-year electoral cycle.

Consensus on need, debate on delivery

Energy has emerged as the infrastructure priority for New Zealand businesses. The 2026 Election Survey ranks it as the sector most critical to future growth, reflecting rising concern about whether New Zealand can provide the affordable, reliable, and secure supply needed to support economic growth, industrial demand and increasing electrification.

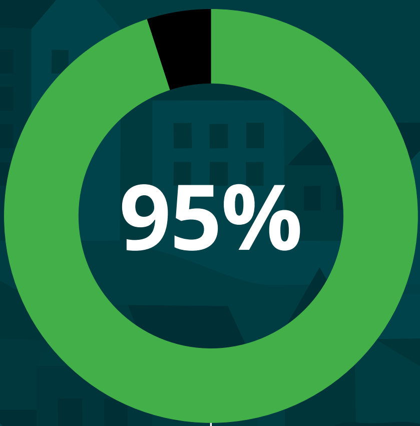
While businesses and political parties appear largely aligned on the need for significantly greater energy capacity, there is far less agreement on the mechanisms required to deliver it. Questions around the future energy mix, funding models, regulatory settings, the role of private capital, and the allocation of risk remain unresolved. These are the issues that ultimately determine whether projects proceed, investment is unlocked and capacity is delivered.

The challenge now is providing the market with sufficient certainty around funding and delivery pathways to support investment decisions. Clarity on how projects will be funded, and how risks and returns will be shared, is essential to developing robust investment cases and turning ambition into investment.

Mary Kilkelly
Partner, Deloitte

Trevor Manners
Partner, Deloitte

Infrastructure



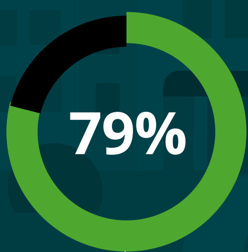
An **overwhelming proportion** of businesses believe New Zealand should adopt **a bipartisan long-term (20-30 year) approach** to infrastructure planning and funding

Businesses agreed that **energy** (electricity and gas) and **transport** (roads, rail and ports) have the most potential to contribute to **New Zealand's business growth**:

Energy	Transport
4.36v/5	4.21/5

Telecoms	Water
3.43/5	3.21/5

of respondents support a greater role for **public-private partnerships (PPPs)** in delivering major infrastructure projects



of respondents believe there should be **increased user pays charges and infrastructure levies** to help fund infrastructure build

Sustainability and climate change

The case for investment-led growth

Louise Aitken
Partner, Deloitte

Rikki Stancich
Partner, Deloitte

The resounding message from this year's Election Survey, is that growth and resilience are no longer viewed by the business community as separate agendas. Businesses are signalling that affordable energy, resilient infrastructure, and climate adaptation are now core economic priorities.

The impacts of climate-related costs are already showing up in balance sheets. More than half of the survey respondents (52%) say climate change is affecting their insurance costs, while 43.7% report impacts on input costs.

This clearly informs the position of 63.3% of respondents who believe that New Zealand needs to increase investment in climate adaptation and natural hazard resilience, with two-thirds (64.5%) of respondents identifying that central government should be the primary funder.

This then begs the question: where does the investment come from?

The survey repeatedly revealed resistance to using the tax system as a policy tool. Only 11.1% support increasing taxation to fund natural disaster investment. Almost six in ten respondents do not think the tax system should be used to deliver wider social outcomes. Wealth taxes, windfall taxes, and land taxes are all opposed by around two-thirds of respondents. Rather than leveraging fiscal policy, 55.9% favour reprioritising existing expenditure.

Energy security and affordability is top of mind for the majority of businesses. For the first time, businesses ranked energy ahead of transport as the infrastructure investment with the greatest potential to contribute to New Zealand's economic growth. Yet 80.4% of businesses are concerned about future energy costs, with electricity emerging as the dominant cost concern, affecting 70.6% of respondents, well ahead of diesel (51.3%) and petrol (39.1%).

There is consensus among businesses that government should play a key role in New Zealand's energy future. More than 61% believe government is not doing enough to remove barriers to electricity supply needed to meet future demand.

However, this should not be interpreted as a call for more regulation. Regulatory compliance costs and regulatory complexity were cited as the two largest regulatory challenges, with 47% saying that regulatory changes in the last three years have increased the cost of doing business.

Instead, businesses are calling for long-term policy certainty. An overwhelming 94.7% of respondents support bipartisan 20 to 30-year approaches to infrastructure planning and funding. Businesses are signalling that critical investments in energy, transport, water, and resilience cannot be planned around three-year electoral cycles. While political parties themselves differ on the role of renewables, gas, storage, and market reform, there is broad political agreement that energy security should be a priority.

Businesses are not opposed to government intervention where markets alone cannot deliver strategic outcomes. Indeed, they are signalling a preference for government to explore novel approaches to financing infrastructure upgrade, with 78.6% calling for broader based mechanisms, such as congestion charging and user-pays models, to help fund infrastructure build.

Whether it is accelerating energy generation, improving resilience, strengthening supply chains, or supporting innovation, businesses appear more receptive to tax relief, co-investment, depreciation incentives, and targeted subsidies that encourage investment than to new taxes or regulatory mandates. The challenge for government is to create the right signals that attract private capital into nationally important outcomes.

Bipartisan policy shifts

Two flagship shows of bipartisanship this term have demonstrated the art of the possible when parties reach across the political divide to address long-standing, systemic challenges.

A Modern Slavery Bill was introduced with co-sponsorship from National and Labour, and the select committee has now recommended the Bill be passed, which would bring New Zealand into alignment with regimes in Australia and the UK.

The National Infrastructure Plan also enjoyed broad support across Parliament. The Plan's 16 recommendations set out a pathway to deliver New Zealand's 30-year infrastructure needs. With nearly two-thirds of survey respondents believing that increased climate adaptation investment is needed, an enduring approach to resilient infrastructure will be a welcome development for many in the business community.

For the nearly half of businesses surveyed who indicated regulatory changes had increased operating costs, such a collaborative approach provides some comfort that policy in these key areas may endure across the election cycle.

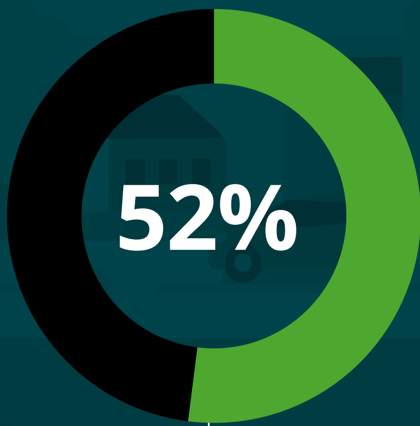
Nicola Swan
Partner, Chapman Tripp

Sustainability and climate change

The **future cost of energy** is a concern for

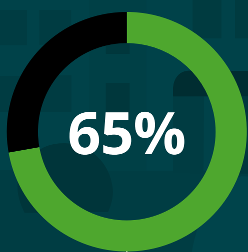
4 in 5

businesses (80%)



More than half of respondents said that **climate change was affecting the cost of their insurance** (52%), followed by cost of inputs at 44%, **down from 59% in 2023**

of respondents believe New Zealand needs to **increase its investment in adaption to climate change** and natural hazards



of these respondents believe **central government should fund this investment** followed by **private property owners** affected by the changes (28%)

Employment, skills and human capital

Another shift in the dial?

Marie Wisker
Partner, Chapman Tripp

Because workplace law is a key source of differentiation between National and Labour, it is also hostage to changes in government.

One of the Coalition Government's first priorities on taking the Treasury benches in 2023 was to repeal the Fair Pay Agreements Act, effective 20 December that year. Should the voters put Labour back in charge this election, expect some form of multi-employer, union-led collective bargaining to be restored and expect this to be fairly high on the new Government's agenda.

But under ACT's Brooke van Velden, the Workplace Relations and Safety portfolio has been a high-activity area over the last three years, the cumulative effect of which has been to move the dial sharply toward deregulation. The three big Acts were the Employment Leave Act 2026, to replace the unlamented Holidays Act 2003, the Health and Safety Amendment Act 2026, and the Employment Relations Amendment Act 2026.

BusinessNZ's survey of its members shows different levels of support. In particular:

- 41.3% of respondents considered the Employment Leave Act would have a net positive or neutral effect on their business, while
- only 25.7% thought the health and safety reforms would be net positive.

We expect that a Labour-led Government would amend, rather than scrap, the Employment Leave Act as the problems with the previous regime were severe and the reform process to arrive at the new Act was tortuous.

Labour's strongest objection to the Bill, according to its minority report, is that it ties annual leave and sick leave to standard hours only, rather than all hours worked with the effect that "workers can do the same job for the same employer and receive different leave outcomes depending on how their hours are classified".

It is possible that the Health and Safety Amendment Act might be wound back even under a National-led Government, depending on how much (or how little) leverage ACT has. The select committee had recommended a commencement date of 1 November but this was deferred to 1 April 2027 through a late amendment under urgency from the floor of the House.

Protecting the apprenticeship of work

AI is changing what work looks like and how it gets done. It's putting entry level roles at risk, where people develop professional habits, judgement, and practical experience. These changes, combined with early career talent heading overseas for opportunities could weaken New Zealand's future leadership pipeline.

BusinessNZ survey respondents continue to rank access to skills and talent as New Zealand's most important employment issue. Technical skills, apprenticeships, literacy and numeracy are leading priorities, alongside support for Apprenticeship Boost. More than a third believe compulsory education is not adequately preparing young people for work.

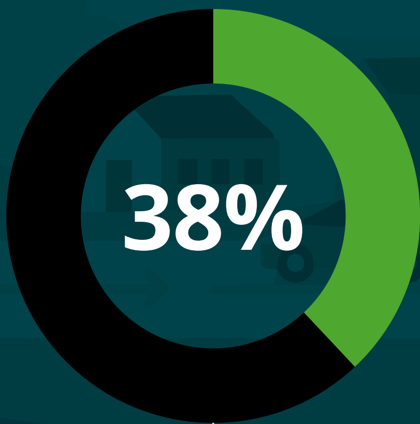
Rather than trying to predict every skill businesses will need, New Zealand must develop a workforce able to learn and adapt continuously. Protecting the apprenticeship of work and creating clear pathways for people to build new capabilities throughout careers will be essential. Entry-level roles give future managers, specialists and leaders the foundation they need to succeed and help secure the talent pipeline New Zealand will depend on ahead.

Lauren Foster
Partner, Deloitte

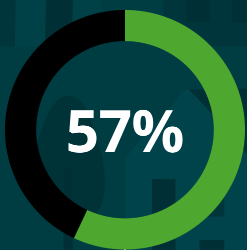
BusinessNZ survey respondents continue to rank access to skills and talent as New Zealand's most important employment issue. Technical skills, apprenticeships, literacy and numeracy are leading priorities, alongside support for Apprenticeship Boost.

Employment, skills and human capital

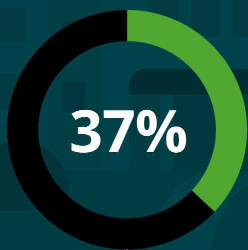
of businesses **support making KiwiSaver contributions compulsory** for employers, employees, and the self employed



of businesses believed compulsory education is **not setting up young people with the skills they need** to succeed in the future



of businesses are **prepared to pay the living wage as a minimum** in their business, **down from 69% in 2023**



The most important employment issue for businesses is **access to skills and talent**: 37%, **down from 52% in 2023**

Economy

Navigating uncertainty: The economic priorities for New Zealand's future

Liza Van Der Merwe
Partner, Deloitte

Election years provide an opportunity to reflect on the previous few years and consider New Zealand's trajectory going forward. For New Zealand businesses, the last several years have been characterised by economic uncertainty, shifting geopolitical dynamics, and rapidly changing market conditions. Faced with this new uncertainty paradigm, businesses will be looking to emerge from this election with a clear direction for the New Zealand economy. In the 2026 Election Survey, businesses overwhelmingly identified the economic environment as the most important factor for achieving sustained economic growth.

Globalisation has fundamentally reshaped New Zealand's economic landscape, connecting the country more closely to global flows of talent, capital, and commerce. New Zealand businesses have benefited significantly from these connections, drawing on international expertise and investment to enhance their competitiveness at home and abroad. In this year's survey, 62.8% of respondents said trade was critical, important, or somewhat important to their business.

While globalisation has created significant opportunities, it has also increased New Zealand businesses' exposure to global economic shocks, geopolitical tensions, and disruptions beyond their control. Respondents also identified freight and logistics costs (50.9%), supply chain disruption (46.6%) and exchange rate volatility (41.6%) as key issues affecting their businesses. Only 14% of respondents said that trade-related issues were not applicable to their business.

Recent events have highlighted just how quickly global shocks can flow through to the New Zealand economy. Earlier this year, Deloitte Access Economics modelled a range of fuel price scenarios, with outcomes spanning from stalled growth and higher unemployment to a more significant economic downturn. At present, inflation sits at 4.1% and unemployment at 5.6%, placing New Zealand broadly in line with the modelled moderate disruption scenario. This serves as a reminder that global uncertainty is not an abstract risk. It has real implications for growth, jobs, and living standards at home.

As the global environment becomes more uncertain, what economic priorities will matter most for sustaining New Zealand's growth and prosperity?

The first is productivity. In the long run, productivity is the engine of economic growth. By producing more value with the resources we already have, New Zealand can lift wages, strengthen competitiveness, and ease fiscal pressures.

The second is investment and infrastructure. Encouraging investment can help create certainty for businesses making long-term capital decisions and support the delivery of the right infrastructure in the right place at the right time. Creating certainty for investors will be critical to expanding the economy's productive capacity.

The third is fiscal sustainability. Last year, Treasury referred to New Zealand's fiscal position as a "structural fiscal deficit" and projects that fiscal pressures will only continue to accelerate.[1] Survey respondents strongly favoured spending reductions as a tool to address fiscal challenges (39.1% preferring spending reductions alone and 54.3% preferring a combination of spending reductions and tax increases). There are no easy choices left to address fiscal sustainability, and whether through increased taxes, reduced public spending, or both, trade-offs will be required.

In a world where geopolitical events can shift overnight and throw vital supply chains into turmoil, New Zealand businesses need to be resilient to forces beyond their control. New Zealand cannot control geopolitical tensions, global supply chains, or the economic shocks that originate beyond our shores. But it can control how prepared it is to respond. That means making the difficult choices today that strengthen productivity, unlock investment, and restore fiscal sustainability.

It's the economy, stupid

In an economic downturn, voters reward parties that promise to improve their personal finances.

That's been the challenge for the current Government and it's likely to continue into, and beyond, this election. Sixty two percent of voters surveyed in the July 2026 Ipsos Issues Monitor ranked inflation and the cost of living as amongst the top three most important issues facing New Zealand today. No other issue comes close.

When this is the public mood, the economic priorities of any Government, whatever its flavour, will be focused on the living room, not the boardroom. And with upward cost pressure across the economy unlikely to abate soon, the potential for conflict – real or perceived – between the interests of consumers and business or investors is significant.

This is just to say: talk of growth, productivity, and investment is all well and good, but what will actually drive policy is consumer prices.

The current Government, nominally a friend to business, has not hesitated to get out the whacking stick when it has suited them politically to do so. And it's unlikely a left-leaning coalition would be more lenient. Those sectors that strongly influence the cost of living – utilities, groceries, housing, personal finance, transport, insurance, merchandise – will continue to face intense scrutiny in the years to come.

Simon Peart
Partner, Chapman Tripp

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1. He Tirohanga Mokopuna - Long-term Fiscal Statement 2025 - September 2025

Economy

Trade issues continue to affect businesses

51% **Freight and logistics costs**

47% **Supply chain disruption**

42% **Exchange rate volatility**

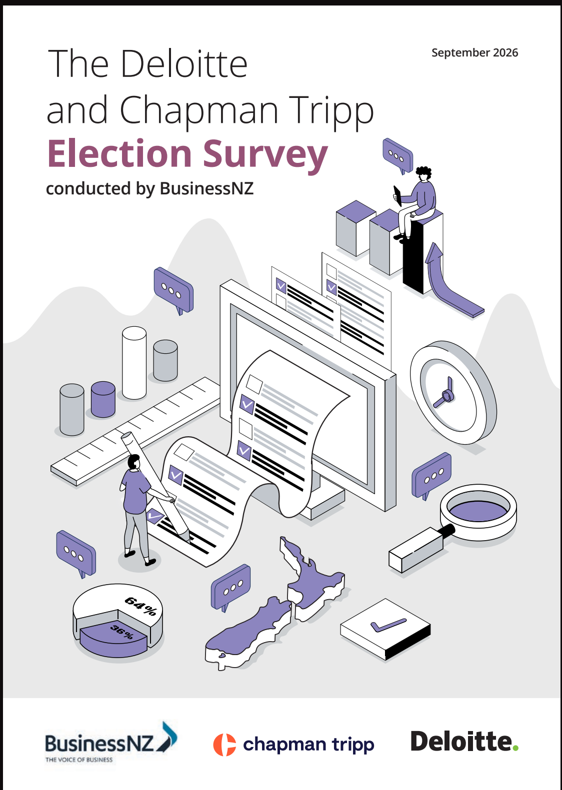
47%

of businesses (nearly half) thought the regulatory changes made by Government **increased the costs of doing business**

58%

of businesses believe the Government's efforts to further **expand New Zealand's free trade agreement network** will have a positive impact

Explore the 2026 Election Survey findings



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