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Report

2023 Look Ahead: 25 Topics to Watch in Local Governments This Year

Mapping Local Government Discussion Trends

Knowing which policy issues are gaining momentum in local governments around the country can help you prioritize your efforts. By paying attention to which topics are showing up more often across the country, you can often predict which issues may show up in your region in the near future.

In this report, we look at how five major policy issues that are often discussed in national politics are playing out in local governments to identify potential topics for government affairs teams to watch. The report data is sourced from the [Curate database](#), which includes weekly meeting minutes and agenda documents from more than 12,000 cities, counties, and districts; more than 4,000 school boards; and more than 200 state boards.

The five policy issues covered in this report are:

1. Carbon Emissions
2. Vehicle Policy
3. Clean Energy
4. Healthcare
5. Labor

Within each policy issue, we've identified five emerging or controversial topics. We examine how frequently each topic appeared in local government discussions in 2022 and note whether they appear to be on the rise or decline, using the new [Trends feature from Curate](#).

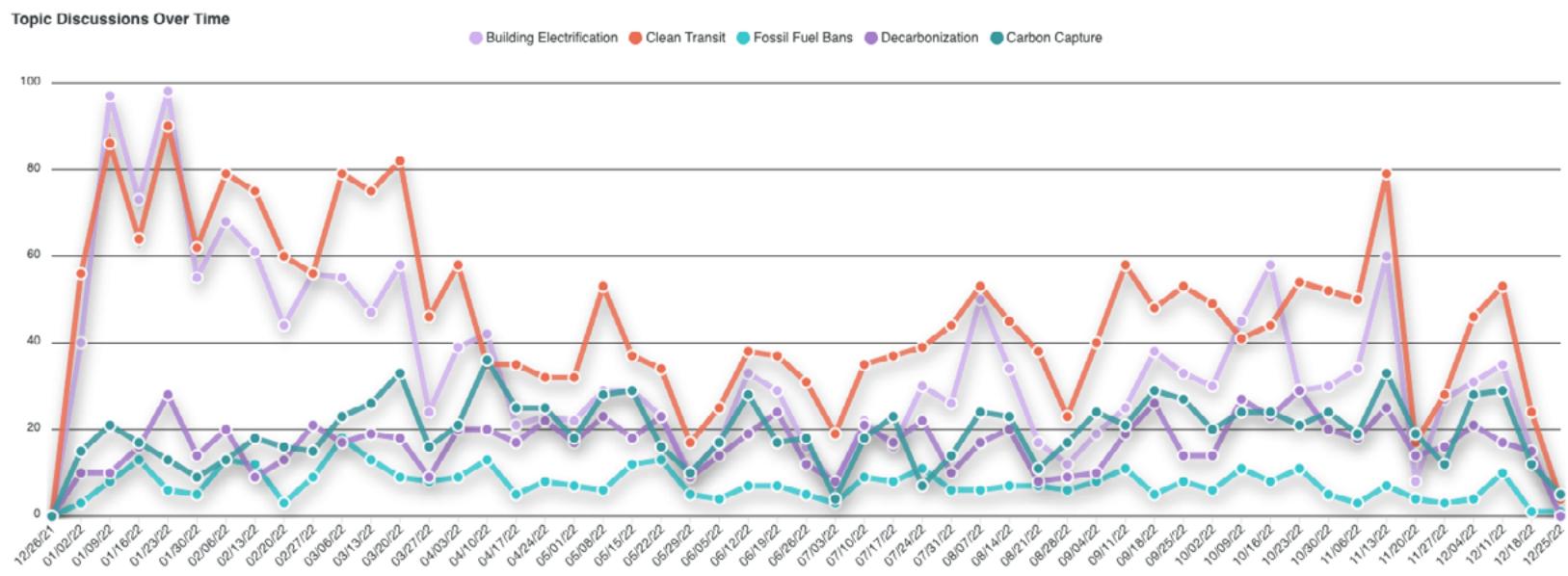


Carbon Emissions

The Biden Administration has established a goal of achieving a 100 percent clean energy economy in order to reach [net-zero emissions by 2050](#). Local governments are taking their own steps to reduce carbon emissions. Here are some of the most popular strategies that were discussed in 2022.

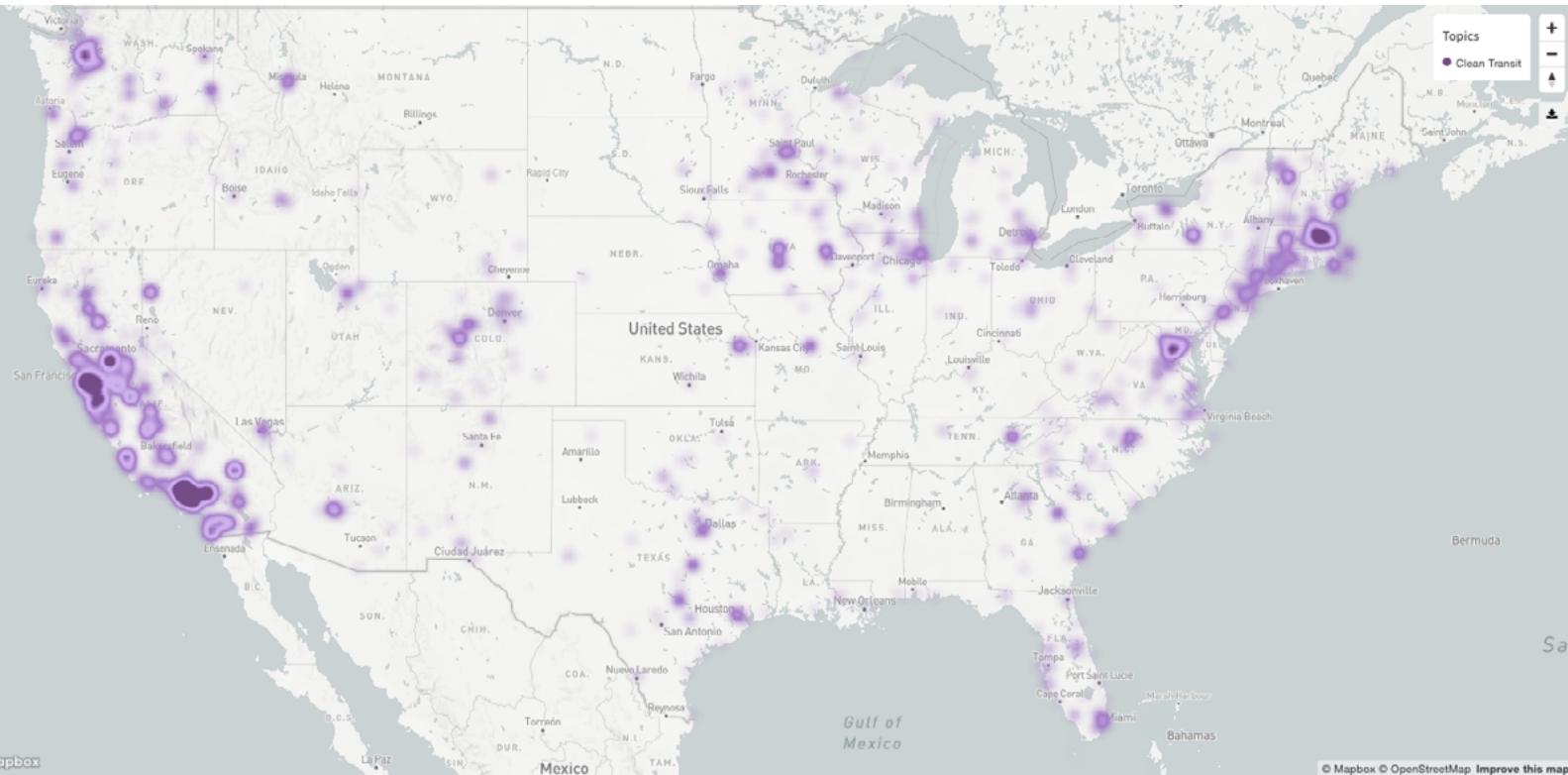
Topic	Discussions
Clean Transit: Transitioning public transportation toward zero- or low-emission vehicles	2,447
Building Electrification: Shifting to the use of electricity rather than fossil fuels for heating and cooking	1,841
Carbon Capture: Capturing and storing carbon dioxide produced by power generation and industry before it enters the atmosphere	1,035
Decarbonization: Reducing carbon dioxide emissions and greenhouse gas output through low-carbon power sources	882
Fossil Fuel Bans: Restricting or banning new fossil fuel infrastructure, fossil fuel production, and natural gas hookups in new construction	390

Discussions of both Building Electrification and Clean Transit were popular in meetings at the beginning of 2022, waned through the summer months, and picked back up again in the late fall. Fossil Fuel Bans trended downward over the course of the year, while Decarbonization and Carbon Capture mostly held steady.



Carbon Emissions

The map below shows where Clean Transit was discussed most in 2022. Unsurprisingly, the biggest hot spots correspond with the nation's largest cities, especially in California and Washington. Some of the more interesting hot spots are smaller communities, like Washoe County, Nev. (home of Reno and a major access point for Lake Tahoe), Aspen, Colo., (home to many popular ski resorts), and Tompkins County, N.Y. (home to Ithaca and Cornell University).



Example Discussion

“The key action items for this goal cycle are to continue supporting fleet electrification at the community level by deploying public charging stations, as prescribed in the Electric Vehicle Readiness Plan (EVRP) and the Electric Vehicle Public Charging Infrastructure Masterplan (EVPCIM) and creating a strategy and process to transition the City of Aspen’s internal fleet to zero emissions by 2050.”

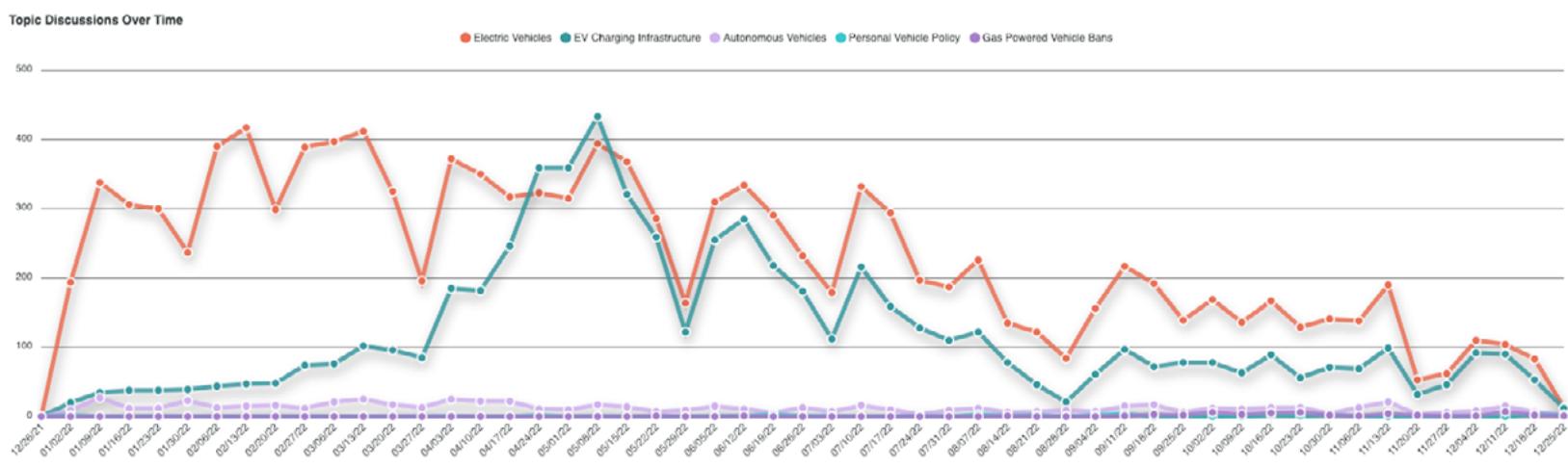
Aspen, Colo. | [Agenda](#) | Aug. 2, 2022

Vehicle Policy

The emergence of autonomous driving technology and electric vehicles has many implications for local driving laws, transportation infrastructure, and more. Communities are responding to these new technologies, as well as concerns about carbon emissions, with a variety of policies related to vehicles.

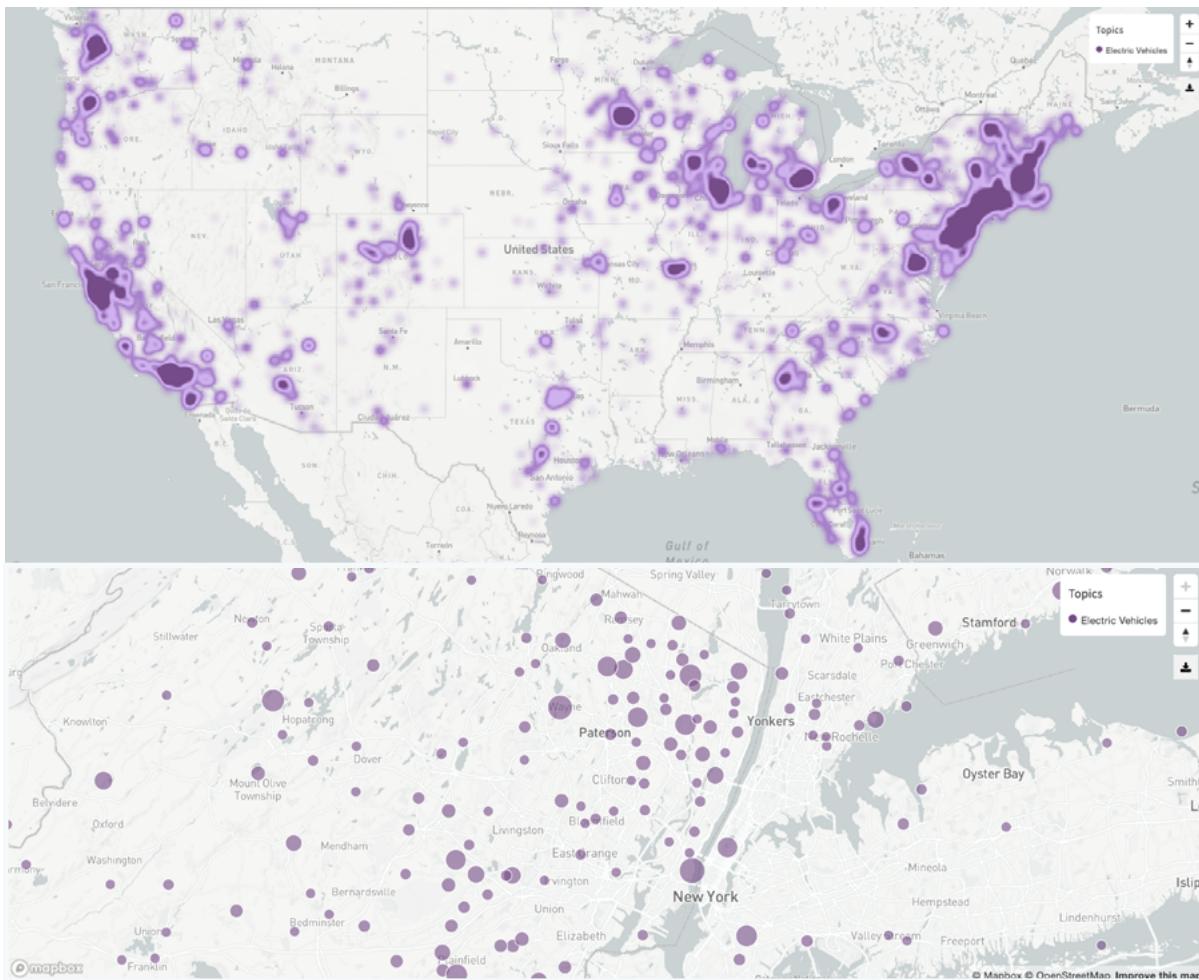
Topic	Discussions
Electric Vehicles: Regulating vehicles that use one or more electric motors for propulsion, including road and rail vehicles, aquatic vessels, and aircraft	12,211
EV Charging Infrastructure: Planning for electric vehicle charging stations and infrastructure	6,297
Autonomous Vehicles: Regulating the use of autonomous vehicles	648
Gas Powered Vehicle Bans: Discussing the possibility of banning gas-powered vehicles	50
Personal Vehicle Policy: Regulating personal vehicles, including insurance info, allowance/restriction in certain areas, discussions relating to ride-sharing/vehicles for hire, etc.	38

Discussions of EV Charging Infrastructure and Electric Vehicles peaked in late spring and then declined throughout the rest of the year. Autonomous Vehicles also saw more activity in the earlier part of the year. Gas Powered Vehicle Bans and Personal Vehicle Policy failed to gain much traction at all in 2022.



Vehicle Policy

The map at the top shows how widespread discussions of Electric Vehicles were in 2022. The map at the bottom shows the volume of discussions around Electric Vehicles in specific localities.



Example Discussion

As part of citywide efforts to begin transitioning the City's fleets to electric vehicle options, a facilities and infrastructure study has also been initiated as part of Phase 1 to determine the needs of current and future transit facilities.

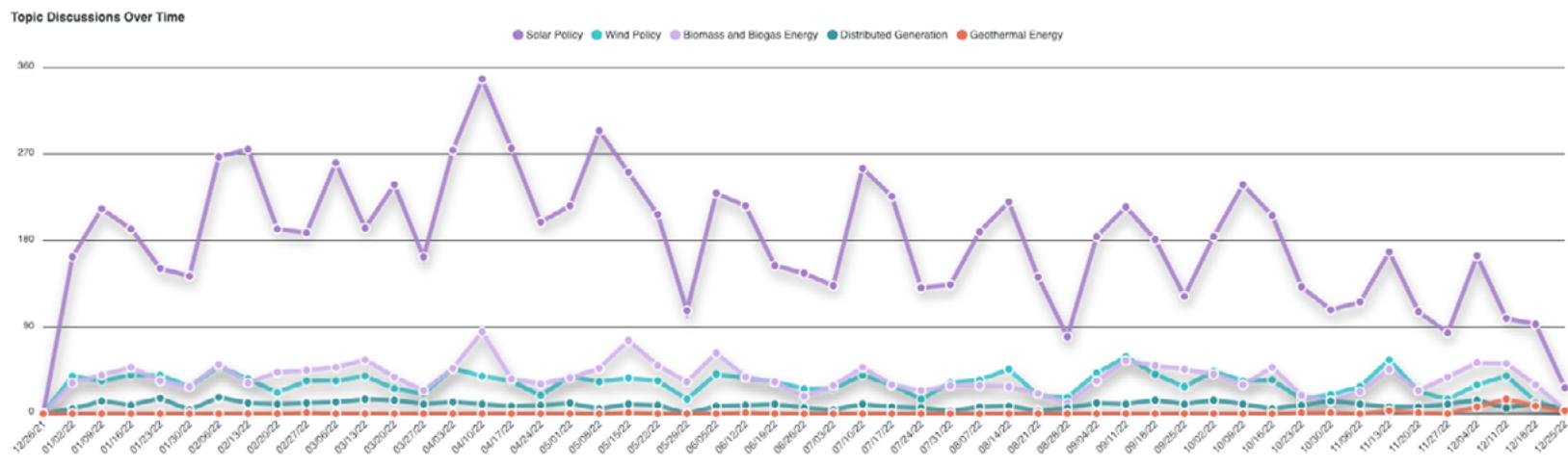
Phoenix, Ariz. | [Agenda](#) | Dec. 14, 2022

Clean Energy

Driven by concerns about climate change and a desire to produce energy locally, communities are exploring a wide variety of options for the generation and distribution of clean energy.

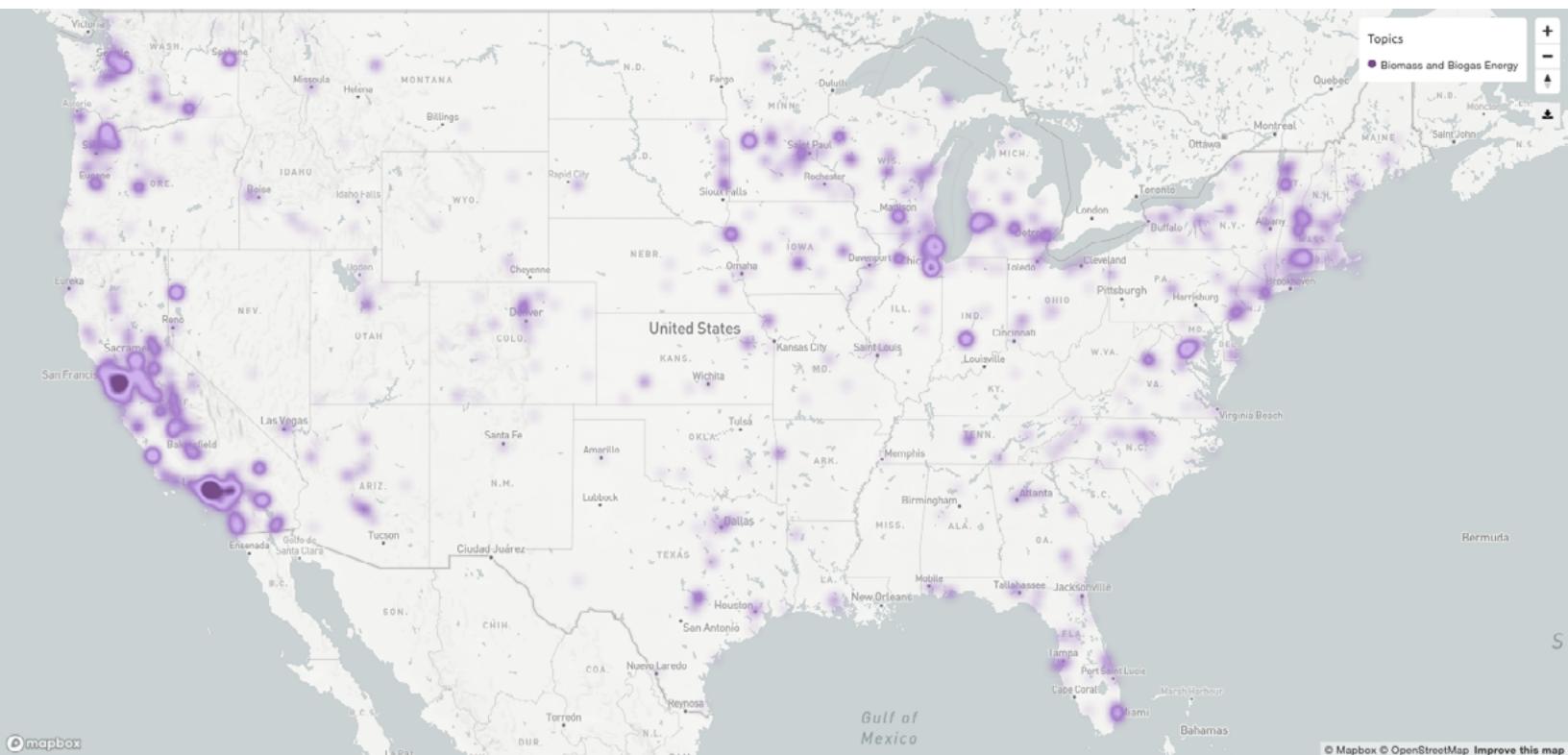
Topic	Discussions
Solar Policy: Discussions related to the development and usage of solar power for the purposes of electricity generation, and updates to solar code and ordinances	9,493
Biomass and Biogas Energy: Discussions related to using plant or animal material as fuel to produce energy	1,968
Wind Policy: Policy, plans, funding, and broad issues surrounding wind energy	1,662
Distributed Generation: Discussions related to technologies that generate electricity at or near where it will be used	472
Geothermal Energy: Discussions related to capturing and using the heat produced by the earth's core for heating structures, or generating steam to produce electricity	42

Discussions related to the development of solar power peaked in the late spring and declined throughout the year, but remained the most popular form of clean energy local governments discussed in 2022. Discussions related to Biomass and Biogas Energy, Wind Policy, and Distributed Generation held steady throughout the year. While Geothermal Energy was the least popular form of clean energy discussed, the topic saw a spike in mentions at the end of the year, indicating it might be a hot topic throughout 2023.



Clean Energy

The map below shows where discussions of Biomass and Biogas Energy were most prevalent in 2022.



Example Discussion

Construction of an anaerobic digester began in fiscal year 2021 and will improve the disposal of biosolids. Progress toward a fiscal year 2024 completion date continued to be made with \$19.9 million spent as of June 30, 2022. The project is expected to be completed at an estimated total cost of \$33.7 million.

Holland, Mich. | [Agenda](#) | Dec. 7, 2022

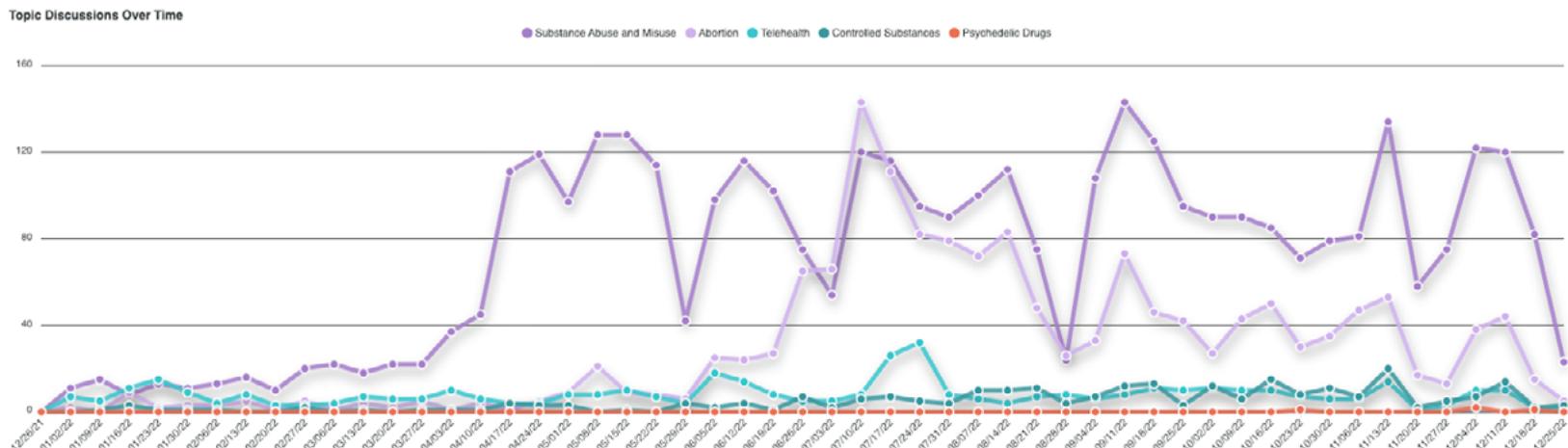
Healthcare

New technological and medical developments in healthcare delivery, the ongoing opioid crisis, and changing cultural attitudes about reproductive health have pushed a variety of healthcare-related issues to the foreground in local government discussions.

Topic	Discussions
Substance Abuse & Misuse: Discussions about substance abuse prevention and assistance; includes initiatives for those currently experiencing substance abuse as well as those in recovery	3,780
Abortion: Policies, discussions, and regulations related to the various methods for terminating a pregnancy	1,568
Telehealth: * Regulating remote health services including virtual health visits, pharmacy services, and remote dentistry	424
Controlled Substances: * Policies and discussions regarding controlled substances	248
Psychedelic Drugs: Discussions, policies, and regulations about psychedelic drugs such as psilocybin mushrooms	4

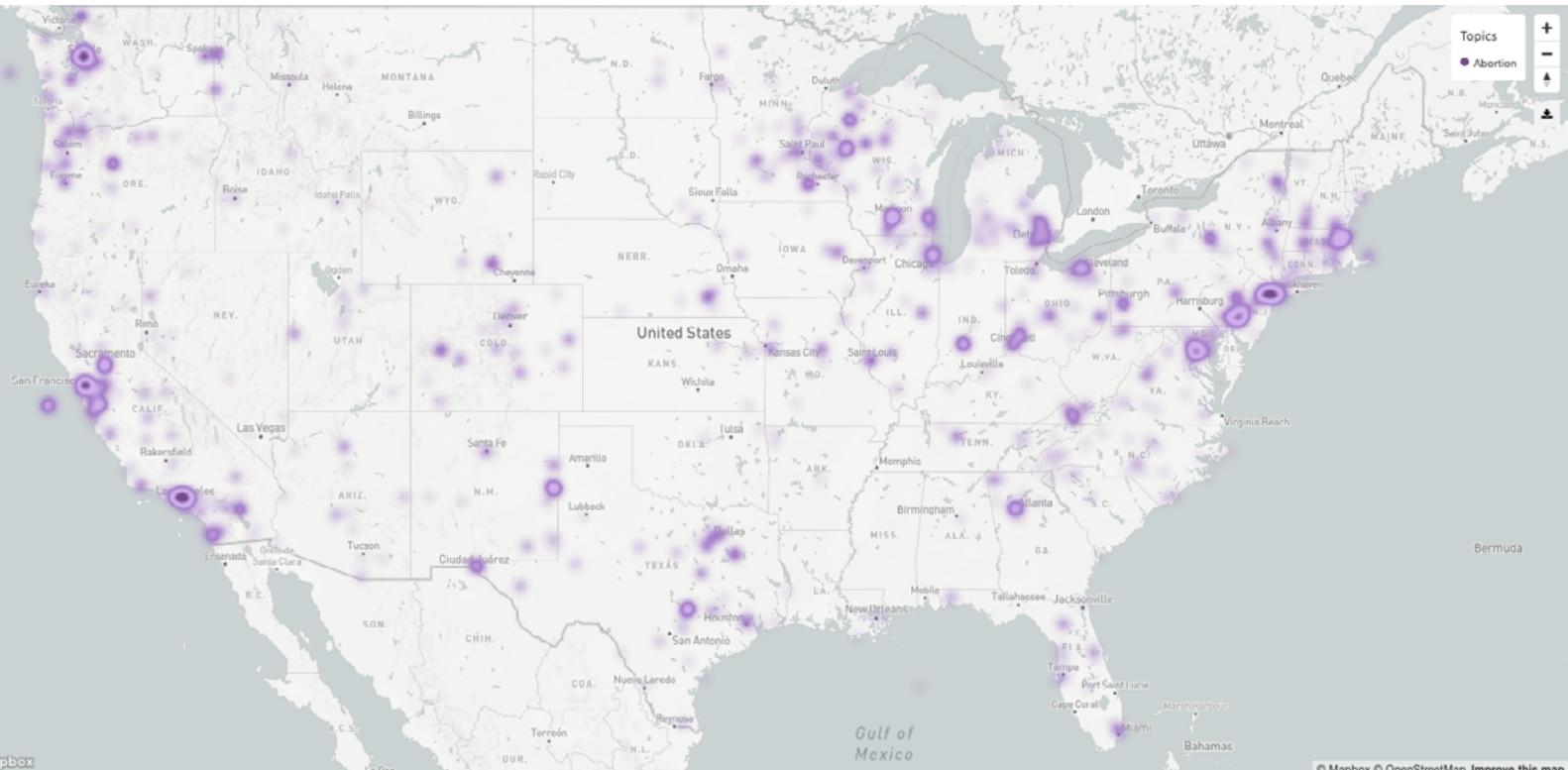
* Topic limited to state boards

Discussions related to Substance Abuse & Misuse trended up throughout the year. Abortion-related discussions spiked immediately following the U.S. Supreme Court's June 24 decision on the Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization case. However, discussions trickled off toward the end of the year, suggesting that most local governments have already done whatever was in their power to address the issue of access to women's reproductive health services. Discussions related to Controlled Substances gained momentum throughout the year. With only four mentions in the entire country in 2022, Psychedelic Drugs have yet to hit the mainstream in local government discussions but could be a trend to watch in coming years.



Healthcare

The map below shows where Abortion was discussed most in local governments in 2022. Most discussions occurred in cities within overwhelmingly blue states, as well as Democrat-led cities within red states, and cities that share borders with states with abortion bans prevalent in 2022.



Example Discussion

Ryan Denton, 5315 69th Street, Lubbock, TX, advised he is the pastor of Grace Covenant Reform Church in Clovis. He is asking the commission to make Clovis a sanctuary city for the unborn.

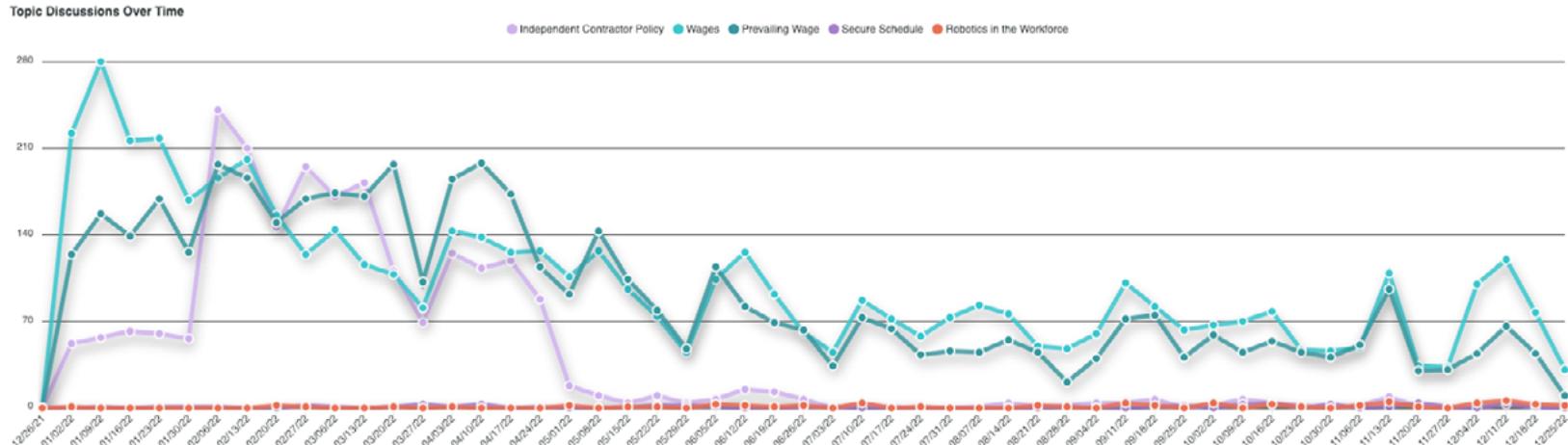
Clovis, N.M. | [Meeting Minutes](#) | Oct. 6, 2022

Labor

As many industries face labor shortages and rising labor costs, organizations are looking into a variety of ways to enhance their productivity and efficiency without adding more full-time staff. Some of those efforts include changing employee scheduling policies, investing in robotics and automation, and relying on independent contractors. In many cases, these strategies have led to backlash from workers and organizations representing workers, prompting local governments to examine the issues.

Topic	Discussions
Wages: Discussions related to minimum wage, living wage laws, hazard/hero pay, and equal compensation	5,344
Prevailing Wage: Discussions related to regulations that require certain companies to pay the average hourly rate of wages and benefits paid to similarly employed workers in a given geography	4,795
Independent Contractor Policy: Discussions regarding independent contractors, gig workers, and app-based workers, including issues such as portable benefits, hourly restrictions, etc.	2,202
Robotics in the Workforce: Discussions surrounding the use of robotics and automation in the workforce, especially to replace human labor	63
Secure Schedule: Discussions on workforce rights for employees to have notice of their schedule in advance	48

Discussions related to Wages, Prevailing Wage, and Independent Contractor Policy were very hot in the first five months of the year, then fell off. Robotics in the Workforce and Secure Schedule both trended slightly up toward the end of the year.



Labor

The map below shows the three areas where secure scheduling was discussed in 2022: Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. While the issue didn't spread beyond these three cities last year, the progressive governments of those three cities are known for being on the leading edge of cultural and political trends. Secure scheduling could become a hot topic in other local governments in 2023.



Example Discussion

We have several policy projects that have remained temporarily on hold, delayed, or slowed due to available capacity and other high-priority, emerging policy work. These projects include, but are not limited to, the development of rules for the Wage Theft Ordinance; development of the Q&A for the Secure Scheduling Ordinance; improved coordination efforts with other City departments and external government agencies; policy efforts to enhance enforcement effectiveness; policy guidance maintenance; and examination of rulemaking needed as a result of the amendments to the Paid Sick and Safe Time Ordinance.

Seattle, Wash. | [Agenda](#) | Oct. 12, 2022

Spot Local Policy Trends & Take Action Faster With Curate

Government affairs leaders and business development strategists, as well as local officials and policy researchers, rely on local monitoring software to be aware of emerging issues like the ones covered in this report. Curate, part of FiscalNote, offers the most comprehensive database of local government documents in the country, and pairs that with many features like the Trends visualizations showcased in this report to help teams be more efficient in managing their organization's most critical issues. Learn more by scheduling a demo of Curate and the Trends feature today.

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