

# SOCIAL COHESION IN NEW ZEALAND

APRIL 2025



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# About Mahi A Rongo The Helen Clark Foundation

Mahi a Rongo | The Helen Clark Foundation is an independent public policy think tank based in Auckland, at the Auckland University of Technology.

It is funded by members and donations. We advocate for ideas and encourage debate; we do not campaign for political parties or candidates. Launched in March 2019, The Foundation produces research and discussion papers on a broad range of economic, social, and environmental issues.

## OUR PHILOSOPHY

New problems confront our society and our environment, both in New Zealand and internationally. Unacceptable levels of inequality persist. Women's interests remain under-represented. Through new technology we are more connected than ever, yet loneliness is increasing, and civic engagement is declining. Environmental neglect continues despite greater awareness. We aim to address these issues in a manner consistent with the values of former New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark ONZ, who serves as our patron.

## OUR PURPOSE

The Foundation publishes research that aims to contribute to a more just, sustainable, and peaceful society. Our goal is to gather, interpret, and communicate evidence in order to both diagnose the problems we face and propose new solutions to tackle them. We welcome your support. Please see our website [www.helenclark.foundation](http://www.helenclark.foundation) for more information about getting involved.

# Acknowledgements

This project was kicked off by Shamubeel Equb after reading the UK's 2024 Khan Review,<sup>1</sup> which highlighted the risks from fraying social cohesion, and the value of the Australian social cohesion measure published by the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute.

Funding for the survey work was provided by J R Mckenzie Trust, The Tindall Foundation, Todd Foundation and Netsafe.

The survey work and descriptive analysis were done by Talbot Mills Research at a discounted rate.

The analysis and commentary were provided pro bono via Equb & Equb Limited (Shamubeel Equb and Rosie Collins).

The report is hosted and supported by the Helen Clark Foundation on a pro bono basis.

1. Khan, S. (2024). *Threats to social cohesion and democratic resilience: A new strategic approach*. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65fdbfd265ca2ffef17da79c/The\\_Khan\\_review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65fdbfd265ca2ffef17da79c/The_Khan_review.pdf)



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This report was written by **Shamubeel Equb** and **Rosie Collins**.

The survey work and descriptive analysis was done by **Talbot Mills Research**.

# Key Points

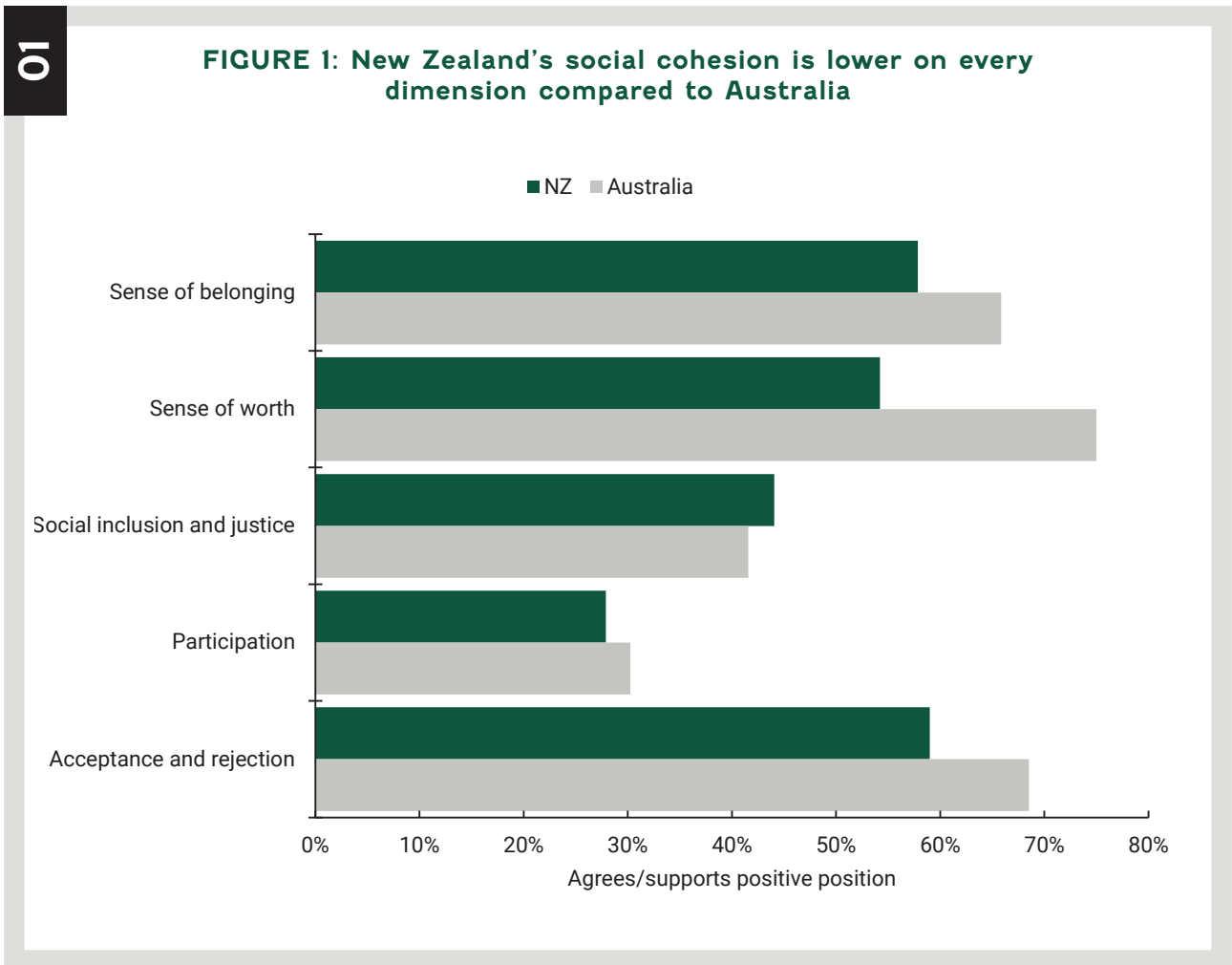
Is New Zealand’s social fabric fraying? While much has been written about social cohesion, there have only been sporadic efforts to measure it. This report provides a broad thematic measure, with Australian comparison.

There is a lot at stake – the opposite of social cohesion is polarisation. Social cohesion can be understood as the glue that holds our communities and society at large together. Without social cohesion, societies become increasingly unstable – from politics to business to civil society to day-to-day life in our communities. This is a pattern increasingly seen around the world, and New Zealand is not immune.

We were inspired by the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute’s long-

running Mapping Social Cohesion Survey.<sup>2</sup> Replicating a subset of the (more comprehensive) survey,<sup>3</sup> we have a broad and consistent measure of social cohesion across five dimensions (sense of belonging, sense of worth, social inclusion and justice, participation, and acceptance and rejection).

This gives us an immediate comparison with Australia – with worrying results. We are lagging in every dimension. Over time, we will also be able to measure changes in social cohesion, in what ways and for which groups. The biggest fracturing in social cohesion is apparent across political preference, work participation, income and ethnicity. There were encouragingly smaller differences across age groups and regions.



2. <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/research/mapping-social-cohesion>

3. Survey conducted by Talbot Mills Research. See Appendix I for methodology. Our survey is a subset as we did not have the budget to replicate the much larger Australian questionnaire.

In 2024, 49% of New Zealanders agreed with positive statements that indicate social cohesion. In Australia, comparable questions gave a higher score at 56%. New Zealand's social cohesion is 8 percentage points lower than in Australia, and New Zealand lags on every dimension. Detailed results are shown in Table 1.

Highlights across the five dimensions:

- **Sense of belonging:** Sense of belonging in the country was high (over 80% felt a national sense of belonging), comparable to Australia, but we lagged at a more local level (less likely to feel connected to and safe in local community). Women felt less safe walking alone at night.
- **Sense of worth:** New Zealanders were much less satisfied than Australians across key measures:
  - 32% were satisfied with their financial situation vs 60% in Australia. This may be related to current economic conditions, which are weaker in New Zealand.
  - New Zealanders were less likely to be happy (55% vs 78% in Australia).
  - 25% of New Zealanders sometimes or often went without meals compared to 13% of Australians. In New Zealand, even people who self-reportedly were comfortably off sometimes went without meals.
  - **Social inclusion and justice:** New Zealanders felt there were fewer economic opportunities than in Australia but were more positive about fairness of our elections. There were similar views about sufficiency of social welfare (well-off people thought welfare was generous enough but poorer people did not).
- **Participation:** Social and political participation was very similar across the two countries, with two exceptions:
  - New Zealanders were more likely to have attended a protest (17% vs 11% in Australia, likely related to significant protests in New Zealand relating to pandemic measures and Treaty of Waitangi issues).
  - New Zealanders reported participating in local government elections more regularly than reality (67% reported voting in local government elections vs actual turnout of around 40%).
  - New Zealanders are less likely to participate in social or religious groups (30% vs 43% in Australia). This was much higher among Māori and Pasifika compared to other ethnicities.
- **Acceptance and rejection:** There are significant divergences with Australia across most aspects:
  - Relationship with Indigenous people and Indigenous culture was rated more important by Australians.
  - Australians have a generally more positive attitude towards migrants, with 82% saying migrants make the country stronger compared to 56% in New Zealand (New Zealanders were less positive across a slew of other immigration-related questions).
  - More New Zealanders believe government can be trusted to do the right thing (42% vs 33% in Australia).
  - 17% of New Zealanders experienced discrimination in the last year, the same as Australia. More Australians believe racism is a problem (63% vs 55% in New Zealand).

There is a diversity of views across groups and domains. Polarisation or fracturing within our society varies depending on which aspect of social cohesion we are looking at.

Within-group difference in perceptions is a broad measure of polarisation or fracturing. Inequality, political ideology, workforce participation, ethnicity and age show the highest polarisation. Those with a diverse friend group tend to be more accepting of others. Those who are religious tend to have more positive cohesion scores. The survey did not show wide variation across family size and composition, geography or country of birth.

**FIGURE 2: Polarisation within cross sections of society varied by domain**

Cross-section	Domain of social cohesion					Total
	Sense of belonging	Sense of worth	Social inclusion & justice	Participation	Acceptance & rejection	
Financial comfort	■	■	■	■	■	■
Political allegiance	■	■	■	■	■	■
Work participation	■	■	■	■	■	■
Ethnicity	■	■	■	■	■	■
Age	■	■	■	■	■	■
Housing tenure	■	■	■	■	■	■
Diversity in close friends	■	■	■	■	■	■
Religiousness	■	■	■	■	■	■
Number of children in family	■	■	■	■	■	■
Gender	■	■	■	■	■	■
Number of adults in family	■	■	■	■	■	■
Region	■	■	■	■	■	■
NZ/foreign born	■	■	■	■	■	■

Polarisation of views:                      Low ■                      Medium ■                      High ■

The widest within-group variations were in the following attributes:

- Inequality (better-off people had more positive perceptions).
- Political preferences (significant divergences across some issues suggesting strong ideological differences, especially among minor parties).
- Work participation (unemployed and students felt most disconnected).
- Ethnicity (significant differences in perceptions across many topics).
- There were some big variations in specific questions (for example, women felt less safe walking alone at night, and men were less likely to provide emotional support to others).

Literature suggests effective leadership and healthy political confrontation processes can (re)define group-based values, norms and behaviours, reshaping culture in a constructive and durable way. In the absence of that, literature suggests the most effective **strategies for improving social cohesion involve:**

- awareness raising (this survey is a contribution to raising awareness)
- countering stereotypes to re-examine our ethics and values (asking if the views we hold are considered)
- offering opportunities for positive contact and a more co-operative assessment of intergroup relations.

But our infrastructure and place making rarely consider ways to encourage positive contact.<sup>4</sup> What could those moments of positive contact and interactions look like? The survey highlights some activities individuals might explore for a starter:

### **POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

- Write or speak to a political representative
- Attend a protest or hīkoi
- Participate in a political or policy discussion/issue
- Vote in a general election
- Vote in a local (council) election

### **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

- Join a community support group
- Join a social or religious group
- Join a civic or political group

### **COMMUNITY ACTIVITY**

- Provide transport or run an errand for someone
- Teach or provide coaching or practical advice
- Provide emotional support to someone

This 2024 social cohesion survey shows that New Zealand is lagging Australia, but our experience is not parallel. There are areas of strength and weakness. Measuring and understanding the level of social cohesion and differences is a helpful step towards greater understanding and, in time, action.

4. Clements, R., Alizadeh, T., Kamruzzaman, L., Searle, G., & Legacy, C. (2023). A systematic literature review of infrastructure governance: Cross-sectoral lessons for transformative governance approaches. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 38(1), 70–87.

TABLE  
01TABLE 1: 2024 social cohesion survey results and comparison to  
Scanlon Foundation Research Institute<sup>5</sup> where available

Domain & question	Statement	NZ	Australia	Difference
<b>Domain 1: Sense of belonging</b>				
Take pride in the New Zealand way of life and culture	Agree	80%	81%	-1%
Have a sense of belonging in New Zealand	Agree	82%	85%	-3%
People in my local area are willing to help their neighbours	Agree	66%	82%	-16%
My local area is a place where people from different national or ethnic backgrounds get on well together	Agree	64%	81%	-17%
I am able to have a real say on issues that are important to me in my local area	Agree	41%	55%	-14%
I feel like I belong in my neighbourhood	Agree	62%	81%	-19%
My neighbourhood has a strong sense of community	Agree	53%	62%	-9%
Would you say that living in your local area is becoming better or worse, or is it unchanged?	Better	22%	18%	4%
How often do you feel isolated from others?	At least sometimes	50%	49%	1%
How safe do you feel at home by yourself during the day?	Safe	90%	0%	0%
How safe do you feel walking alone at night in your local area?	Safe	57%	61%	-4%
Thinking about all types of crime in general, how worried are you about becoming a victim of crime in your local area?	Not worried	60%	70%	-10%
<b>Domain 2: Sense of worth</b>				
How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your present financial situation?	Satisfied	32%	60%	-28%
To what extent do you feel that people treat you with respect?	At least a moderate extent	77%		
Taking ALL things into consideration, would you say that over the last year you have been happy?	Happy	55%	78%	-23%
During the past 30 days, about how often did you feel the things you do in your life were worthwhile?	Most of the time	54%		
Over the last 12 months, "You / your household went without meals because there wasn't enough money for food"	Rarely/never	75%	87%	-12%
<b>Domain 3: Social inclusion &amp; Justice</b>				
New Zealand is a land of economic opportunity where in the long run, hard work brings a better life	Agree	51%	61%	-10%
People living on low incomes in New Zealand receive enough financial support from the government	Agree	40%	38%	2%
Overall, everyone in New Zealand has a fair chance of getting the jobs they seek	Agree	39%	0%	0%
In New Zealand today, the gap between those with high incomes and those with low incomes is too large	Disagree	31%	16%	15%
Elections are fair	Agree	57%	38%	19%
How often do you think government leaders in New Zealand abuse their power?	Rarely/never	31%	50%	-19%
In your opinion, how often do the courts make fair, impartial decisions based on the evidence made available to them?	All+most of the time	57%	55%	2%
<b>Governance</b>				
How often do you think the government in Wellington can be trusted to do the right thing for the New Zealand people?	Most of the time	42%	33%	9%
Would you say the system of government we have in New Zealand works fine as is?	Major change	38%		
<i>Would the following be a good or bad way to govern in New Zealand</i>				
A democracy, in which the members of parliament are chosen in an election	Good	81%		
Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections	Good	32%		
Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country	Good	53%		

5. O'Donnell, J., Guan, Q. & Prentice, T. (2024). *Mapping social cohesion*. Scanlon Foundation Research Institute. <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Mapping-Social-Cohesion-2024-Report.pdf>

Domain & question	Statement	NZ	Australia	Difference	
<b>Domain 4: Participation</b>					
<i>Which of the following have you done over the last three years or so?</i>					
Written or spoken to a Member of Parliament	Yes	19%	20%	-1%	
Joined a boycott of a product or company	Yes	17%	20%	-3%	
Posted or shared anything about politics online	Yes	25%	26%	-1%	
Attended a protest or hikoi	Yes	17%	11%	6%	
Voted in a general election	Yes	81%	82%	-1%	
Voted in a local (council) election	Yes	67%			
<i>In the last 12 months, have you been actively involved in any:</i>					
Community support groups	Yes	25%	23%	2%	
Social or religious groups	Yes	30%	43%	-13%	
Civic or political groups	Yes	10%	17%	-7%	
<i>In the last 4 weeks, did you help anyone (not living with you) with any of the following activities?</i>					
Providing transport or running errands	Yes	45%			
Any teaching, coaching, or practical advice	Yes	38%			
Providing any emotional support	Yes	59%			
<b>Domain 5: Acceptance and rejection</b>					
<i>How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?</i>					
The relationship between Māori and the wider New Zealand community is very important for New Zealand as a nation	Agree	70%	85%	-15%	
It is important for Indigenous histories and cultures to be included in the school curriculum	Agree	62%	83%	-21%	
Accepting immigrants from many different countries makes New Zealand stronger	Agree	56%	82%	-26%	
Ethnic minorities in New Zealand SHOULD be given New Zealand government assistance to maintain their customs and traditions	Agree	37%	35%	2%	
<b>Immigration</b>					
What do you think of the number of immigrants accepted into New Zealand in recent years?	Not too high	65%	51%	14%	
<i>How strongly do you agree or disagree:</i>					
Immigrants make good citizens	Agree	51%	92%	-41%	
Immigrants are good for the economy	Agree	56%	82%	-26%	
Immigrants improve society	Agree	50%	82%	-32%	
New Zealand should reject immigrants on the basis of religion or ethnicity	Do not agree	83%	80%	3%	
Immigrants take away jobs	Do not agree	70%	72%	-2%	
Migrant diversity makes New Zealand stronger	Agree	56%	71%	-15%	
Immigrants are not adopting New Zealand values	Do not agree	63%	41%	22%	
Minorities should be given government assistance	Agree	31%	35%	-4%	
Multiculturalism is good for New Zealand	Agree	68%	85%	-17%	
<b>Discrimination</b>					
Have you experienced discrimination on the basis of skin colour, ethnic origin or religion in the last 12 months?	No	83%	83%	0%	
How big a problem is racism in New Zealand?	Not a problem	45%	37%	8%	

# Outline of paper

This paper summarises the results from the survey, with detail across each question in the following section.

Appendix 1 describes the methodology.

Appendix 2 summarises the current literature on social cohesion in New Zealand. Appendices 3, 4, and 5 summarise social cohesion frameworks from various sources.

# Summary of results

## PROBLEMS FACING NEW ZEALAND

New Zealanders identified cost of living and inflation as the most pressing issues, reflecting widespread economic stress. While these dominate short-term concerns, climate change emerges as the most significant long-term challenge. Housing affordability and unemployment also featured prominently, underscoring the economic pressures many face.

## SENSE OF BELONGING

The survey found that most respondents feel a strong sense of belonging to New Zealand, with 82% stating they feel they belong to the nation to a great or moderate extent. Neighbourhood dynamics reveal mixed experiences of cohesion. While two-thirds of respondents feel neighbours are willing to help, only 53% agree their neighbourhood has a strong sense of community. Those in multicultural areas report higher agreement that people from different ethnic backgrounds get along. Isolation affects half of respondents, and while 90% feel safe at home during the day, only 57% feel safe walking alone at night. Additionally, one in five respondents worry about becoming a victim of crime in their local area, highlighting broader concerns about personal safety.

## SENSE OF WORTH

Economic dissatisfaction remains pervasive, with only 32% expressing satisfaction with their financial situation. Younger respondents and Pasifika communities reported the highest levels of financial dissatisfaction. One in four reported experiencing food insecurity, with much higher levels among Māori, Pasifika and renters. Despite these challenges, over half (55%) reported feeling happy over the past year, with financial wellbeing playing a critical role in determining overall happiness. Most respondents (77%) felt respected to a great or moderate extent, though younger individuals reported lower levels of perceived respect.

## **SOCIAL INCLUSION AND JUSTICE**

Over two-thirds (69%) believe that income inequality in New Zealand is too large, reflecting deep concerns about economic disparity. While just over half (51%) view New Zealand as a land of opportunity, fewer believe that low-income individuals receive adequate government support. Perceptions of fairness in elections remain relatively positive, with 57% expressing confidence in the electoral process. However, trust in institutions appears fragile. Only 43% believe courts make fair decisions most or all of the time, and 32% think government leaders abuse their power at similar levels. These findings highlight widespread dissatisfaction with the equity and integrity of governance structures.

## **PARTICIPATION**

Reported electoral participation is high, with 81% saying they vote in general elections and 67% in local elections. However, engagement in other forms of civic activity such as protests or boycotts is less common. Younger respondents and minority groups, particularly Māori and Pasifika, were more likely to engage in activism and online political discourse but not voting. Community involvement remains limited, with only 30% participating in social or religious groups and even fewer engaging in civic or political organisations.

## **ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION**

A strong majority (70%) of respondents agree that the relationship between Māori and the wider community is vital for the nation's future. Similarly, 62% believe it is important to include Indigenous histories and cultures in the school curriculum, reflecting widespread support for cultural education. Over half (56%) agree that accepting immigrants from diverse countries strengthens New Zealand, though only 37% support government assistance for ethnic minorities to maintain their customs and traditions.

## **GOVERNANCE**

Trust in government is relatively low, with only 42% believing it acts in people's best interests most or all of the time. Views on the fairness of court decisions are

similarly divided. A significant proportion of respondents, especially Māori and Pasifika, expressed a desire for systemic change, with some advocating for a complete overhaul of the government system. Support for democracy remains strong overall, but younger respondents show greater openness to alternative governance models such as leadership by experts or strong leaders without parliamentary oversight.

## **IMMIGRATION**

Public opinion on immigration is mixed. While 44% believe current immigration levels are appropriate, 35% think they are too high. Most respondents view multiculturalism positively, recognising the economic and societal contributions of immigrants. Over half (56%) believe immigrants strengthen New Zealand society, but this view varies by immigrant origin. Australians, British and Japanese immigrants are viewed most favourably, while immigrants from China and the UAE received less positive ratings. Concerns about cultural assimilation and job competition persist, with 30% agreeing that immigrants take away jobs. Personal attitudes towards religious groups also reflect varying levels of acceptance – Christians and Buddhists were viewed most positively, while Muslims and Sikhs received lower ratings. Despite these concerns, only 17% support rejecting immigrants based on religion or ethnicity.

## **DISCRIMINATION**

Discrimination appears to remain a significant issue with 17% of respondents experiencing bias based on ethnicity, skin colour or religion in the past year. Māori, Pasifika and Asian respondents reported disproportionately higher levels of discrimination compared to NZ Europeans. Younger individuals and those experiencing financial hardship were also more likely to face discrimination. When prompted on what kind of discrimination people experienced, the most common theme outlined was discrimination against white or European people (28%). This was followed by racial profiling (23%) and stereotyping (21%). Racism is viewed as a big problem by 55% of respondents.

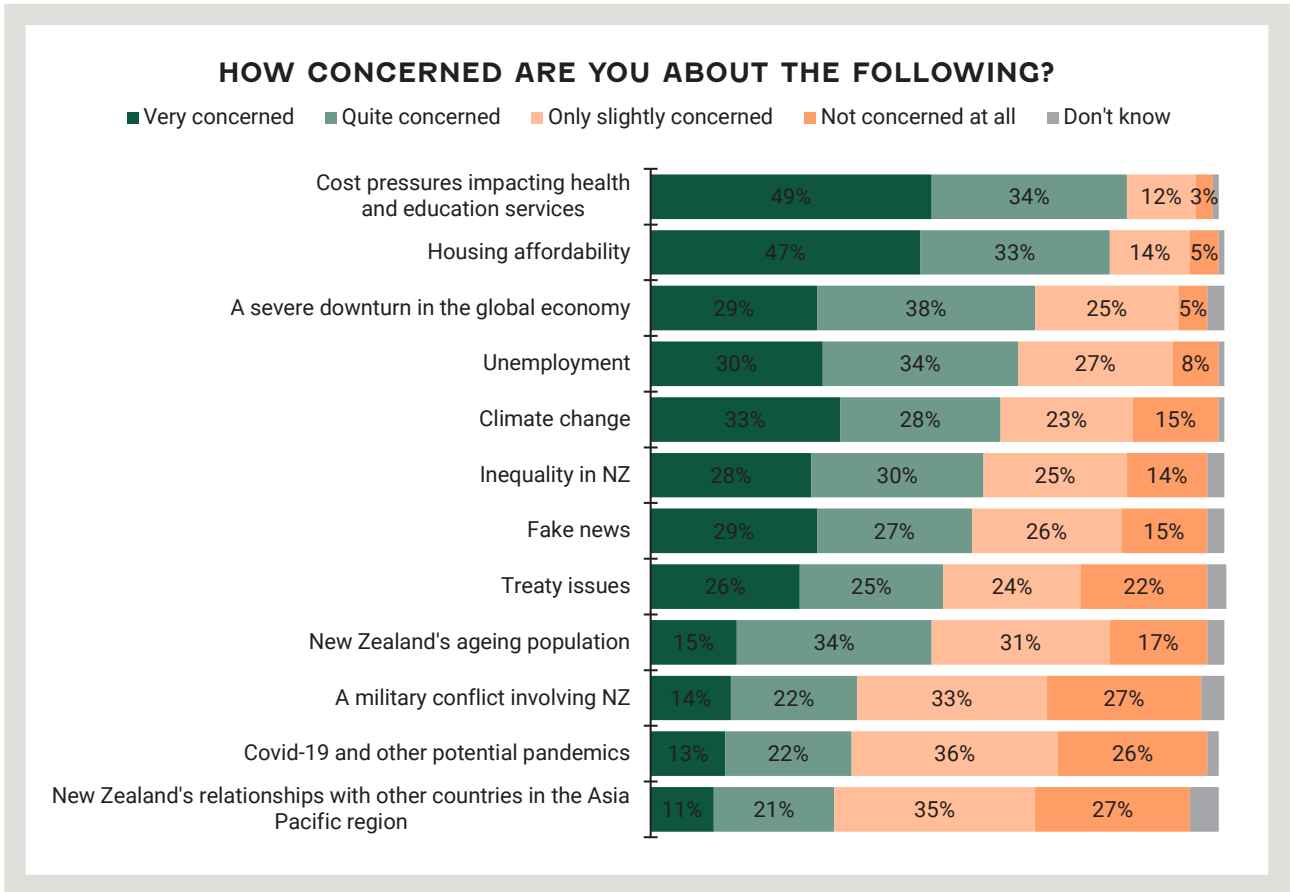
# Detailed Results



# Concern

Cost pressures and housing affordability are the most concerning issues for respondents with 83% and 79% respectively either very or quite concerned.

Māori, Pasifika, Asian, women and younger respondents tended to be more concerned about all the issues tested.

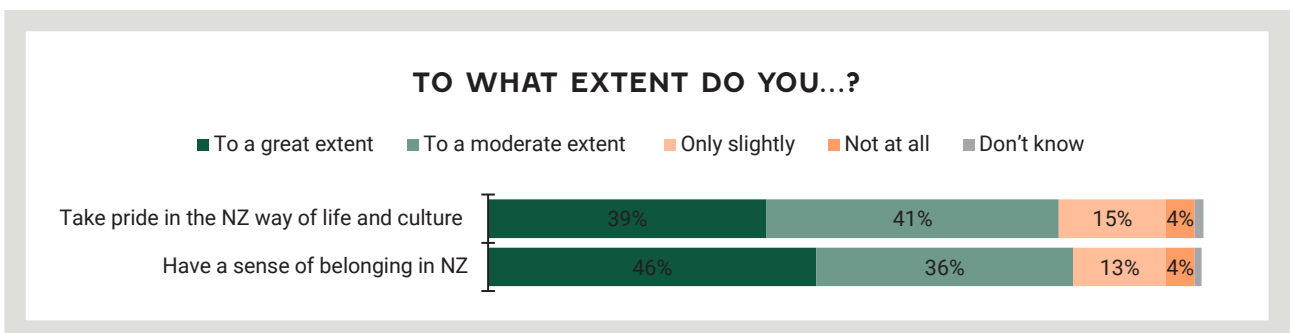


# Sense of belonging

## PRIDE AND BELONGING

The vast majority of respondents said they have a sense of belonging in New Zealand (82% a great or moderate extent) and take pride in New Zealand life and culture (80%).

Non-religious respondents were less likely (79% and 76% respectively) as were respondents aged 60+ (87% and 84%).



## NEIGHBOURHOOD DYNAMICS

Two-thirds agreed that the people in their local area are willing to help neighbours. Respondents who own their own home outright were more likely to agree (73%) compared to those with a mortgage (68%) and those renting (60%).

Nearly two-thirds (64%) agreed their local area is a place where people from different national ethnic backgrounds get on well together. Māori (69%), Pasifika (71%) and Asian (68%) respondents were all more likely to agree.

Nearly two-thirds (62%) agreed they feel like they belong in their neighbourhood. Respondents who own their own home outright were more likely to agree (70%) compared to those with a mortgage (65%) and those renting (57%).

Just over half (53%) agreed their neighbourhood has a strong sense of community. Māori (62%) and Pasifika (59%) respondents were more likely to agree.

Two-fifths (41%) agreed they are able to have a real say on important local issues. Māori (51%), Pasifika (48%) and Asian (47%) respondents were all more likely to agree, as were men (44%) and those in full-time employment (48%).

Those living comfortably, those who have a religion and those who have children under 18 living in their home were more likely to agree with all five statements.

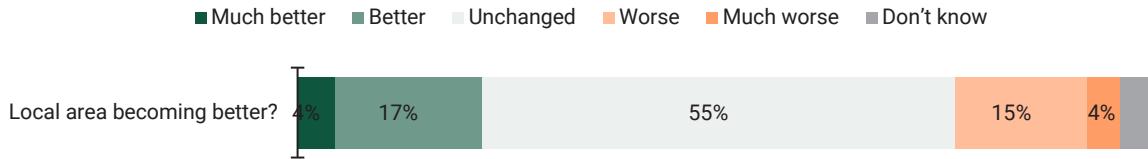


## LOCAL AREA BETTER OR WORSE

About two-fifths each considered their local area is getting better or worse, with over half (55%) saying it is unchanged.

Māori, Pasifika and Asian respondents were the most optimistic and were more likely to say things are becoming better (30–33%) as were younger respondents (30% of those under 30), those employed full-time (28%), those living very comfortably (38%), those with some religion (25%) and those with children in their household (30%).

### WOULD YOU SAY THAT LIVING IN YOUR LOCAL AREA IS BECOMING BETTER OR WORSE, OR IS IT UNCHANGED?

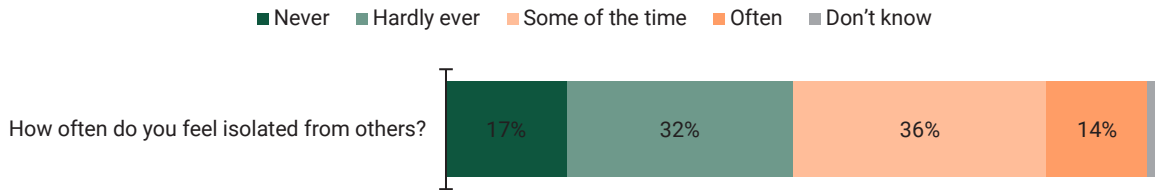


### ISOLATION

Half of the respondents said they feel isolated from others some of the time (36%) or often (14%).

Younger respondents were much more likely to often or sometimes feel isolated (under 30: 65%, 30–44: 62%, 45–59: 46%, 60+: 31%).

### HOW OFTEN DO YOU FEEL ISOLATED FROM OTHERS?



### SAFETY

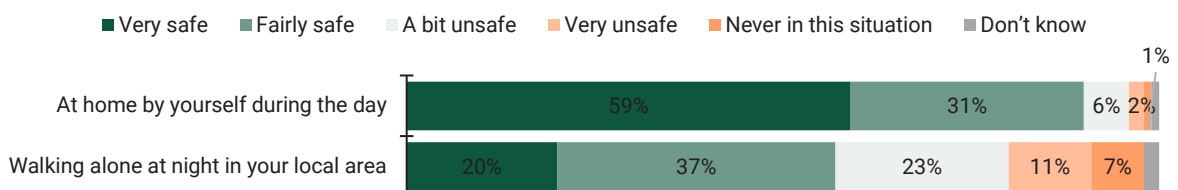
A significant majority (90%) feel safe at home during the day, but this drops to 57% when walking alone at night. About a third (34%) feel unsafe at night.

Women were much less likely to feel safe walking alone at night (45%) compared to men (71%).

Older respondents (60+) reported feeling safer at home during the day (94%) compared to younger respondents (87% for under 30s).

Aucklanders were less likely to say they feel safe at night (51%).

### HOW SAFE DO YOU FEEL?



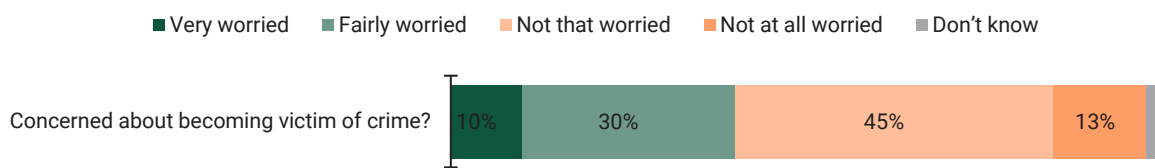
## CRIME CONCERNS

Two in five (40%) respondents worry about being a crime victim in their local area, while most (45%) were not that worried and 13% were not at all worried.

Māori (46%), Pasifika (56%) and Asian (58%) respondents expressed greater concern about crime compared to NZ European respondents (33%).

Respondents aged 60+ were less likely to say they were worried (29%), as were those without children in their households (35%) compared to those with children (47%).

### THINKING ABOUT ALL TYPES OF CRIME IN GENERAL, HOW WORRIED ARE YOU ABOUT BECOMING A VICTIM OF CRIME IN YOUR LOCAL AREA?



## Sense of worth

### FINANCIAL SATISFACTION

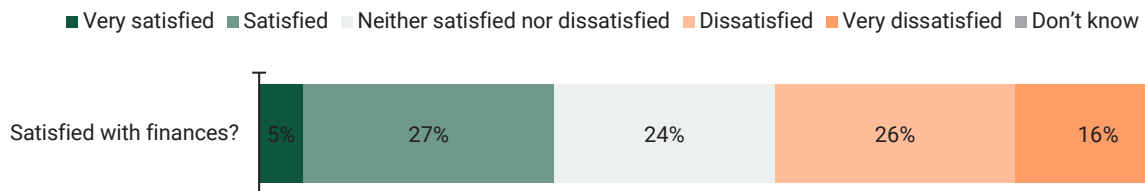
Only one-third (32%) were satisfied with their financial situation, while 43% reported dissatisfaction, including 16% being very dissatisfied.

Younger respondents (under 30) reported lower financial satisfaction, with only 25% satisfied compared to 44% of those aged 60+.

Pasifika (18%) respondents were generally less satisfied and more dissatisfied (55%).

Men (38%) were more likely to be satisfied compared to women (27%).

### HOW SATISFIED OR DISSATISFIED ARE YOU WITH YOUR PRESENT FINANCIAL SITUATION?

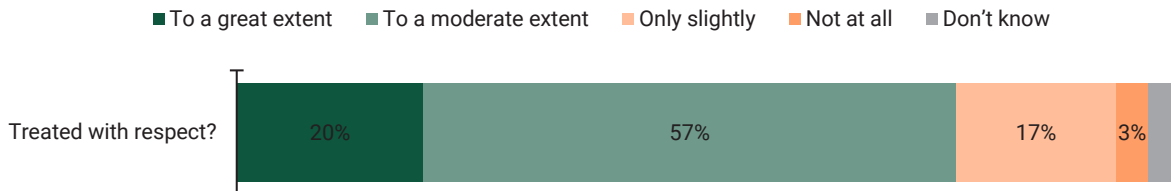


## RESPECT

Most respondents (77%) felt respected to a great or moderate extent, though 17% reported feeling treated with respect only slightly.

Older respondents (60+) were most likely to feel respected to a great or moderate extent (84%) compared to younger respondents (72% among under 30s).

### TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU FEEL THAT PEOPLE TREAT YOU WITH RESPECT?

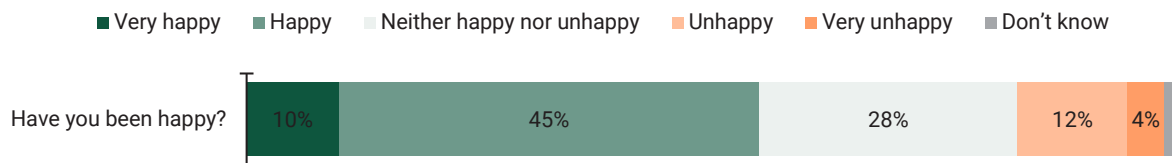


## HAPPINESS

Just over half (55%) felt happy or very happy in the past year, while 16% reported feeling unhappy or very unhappy. Older respondents were more likely to report feeling happy (under 30: 50%, 30–44: 51%, 45–59: 52%, 60+: 67%). Pasifika (61%) and Māori (58%) respondents reported higher levels of happiness compared to Asian respondents (51%).

Financial circumstances impact happiness: those living very comfortably reported happiness levels at 82% compared to only 28% of those struggling.

### TAKING ALL THINGS INTO CONSIDERATION, WOULD YOU SAY THAT OVER THE LAST YEAR YOU HAVE BEEN...?

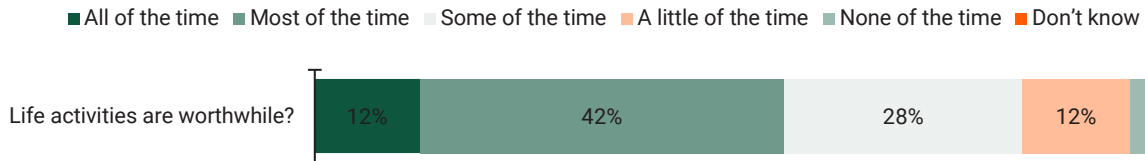


## LIFE FEELING WORTHWHILE

Over half (54%) feel their lives are worthwhile all or most of the time, 28% said they feel this way only some of the time, 12% a little and only 4% said none of the time.

Older respondents (60+) were more likely to feel their life is worthwhile all or most of the time (68%), and Māori (48%) were less likely to feel life is worthwhile.

### DURING THE PAST 30 DAYS, ABOUT HOW OFTEN DID YOU FEEL THE THINGS YOU DO IN YOUR LIFE WERE WORTHWHILE?



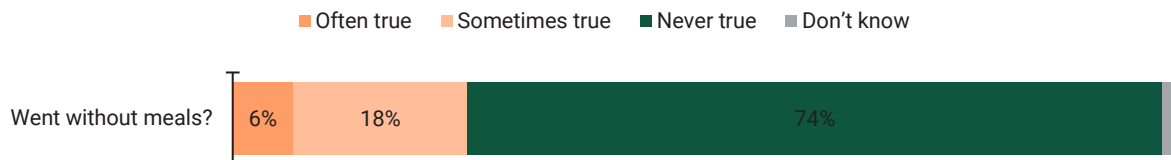
## FOOD INSECURITY

One in four (25%) reported going without meals at least sometimes due to financial struggles, while 74% said this never happened.

Māori (44%) and Pasifika (48%) were far more likely to have gone without meals due to financial constraints compared to Asian respondents (25%) and NZ Europeans (21%). Younger respondents experienced higher food insecurity (under 30: 40%, 30–44: 34%, 45–59: 22%, 60+: 8%).

Respondents renting their home (37%) reported higher food insecurity compared to those with a mortgage (22%) and those who own their home outright (12%).

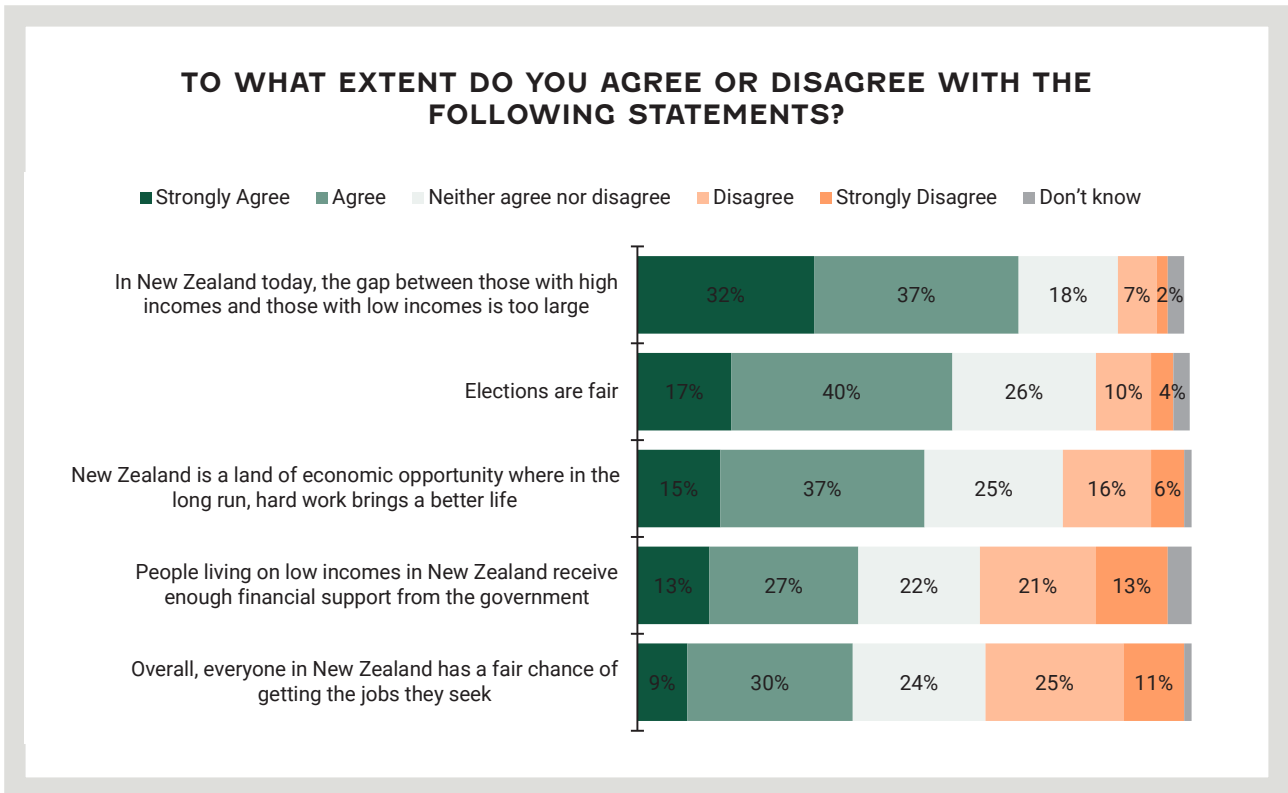
### OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS, HOW OFTEN IS THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT TRUE: "YOU / YOUR HOUSEHOLD WENT WITHOUT MEALS BECAUSE THERE WASN'T ENOUGH MONEY FOR FOOD"?



# Social inclusion and justice

## ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

These results reflect ongoing concerns about economic inequality and fairness, particularly regarding income gaps, government support and job opportunities, while perceptions of electoral fairness remain relatively positive.



A significant majority (69%) agreed that the gap between high and low incomes in New Zealand is too large, indicating strong concerns about economic disparity.

Over half (57%) agreed that elections in New Zealand are fair, although a notable minority remained neutral (26%) or disagreed (16%).

Just over half (51%) believed that New Zealand is a land of economic opportunity where hard work leads to a better life.

Views were split on government support, with 40% agreeing that people on low incomes receive enough financial support from the government, while a significant proportion disagreed (34%).

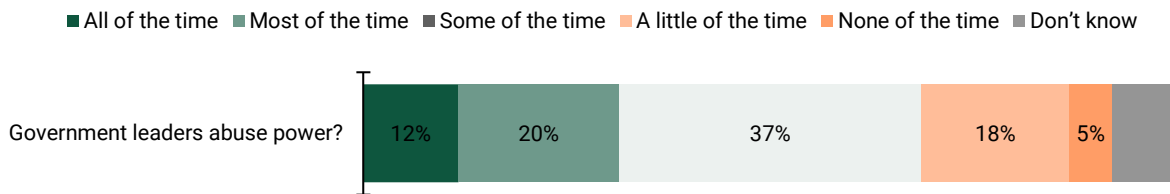
Around two-fifths (39%) believed that everyone has a fair chance of securing jobs in New Zealand and 36% disagreed, highlighting concerns around equal employment opportunities.

## GOVERNMENT POWER

Around a third (32%) think government leaders abuse power most or all of the time, while 37% believe this occurs sometimes. Māori (56%) and Pasifika (60%) were more likely to believe government leaders abuse their power most or all of the time compared to NZ Europeans (28%) and Asians (25%).

Younger respondents were more distrustful (under 30: 41%, 30–44: 36%, 45–59: 30%, 60+: 22%). Those voting Te Pāti Māori (69%), Green (51%), NZ First (41%) or Labour (39%) were more likely to think this occurs all or most of the time compared to those who voted ACT (22%) or National (16%).

### HOW OFTEN DO YOU THINK GOVERNMENT LEADERS IN NEW ZEALAND ABUSE THEIR POWER?



## COURT DECISIONS

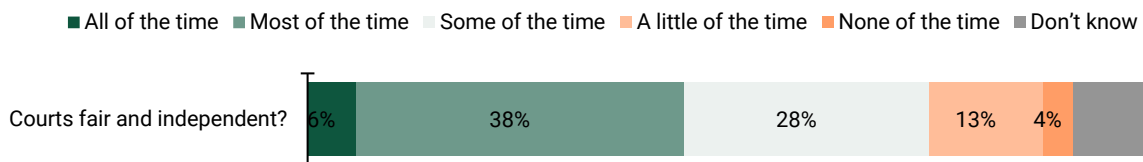
Just over two-fifths (43%) thought courts make fair decisions most or all of the time, with 28% believing fairness happens only occasionally.

Respondents under 30 were more sceptical, with only 35% thinking this occurs all or most of the time compared to 52% of those aged 60+.

Men were more inclined to think this happens all or most of the time (48%) compared to women (39%).

Financial circumstances matter: only 31% of those struggling financially trust court decisions compared to 60% of those living very comfortably.

### HOW OFTEN DO THE COURTS MAKE FAIR, IMPARTIAL DECISIONS BASED ON THE EVIDENCE MADE AVAILABLE TO THEM?



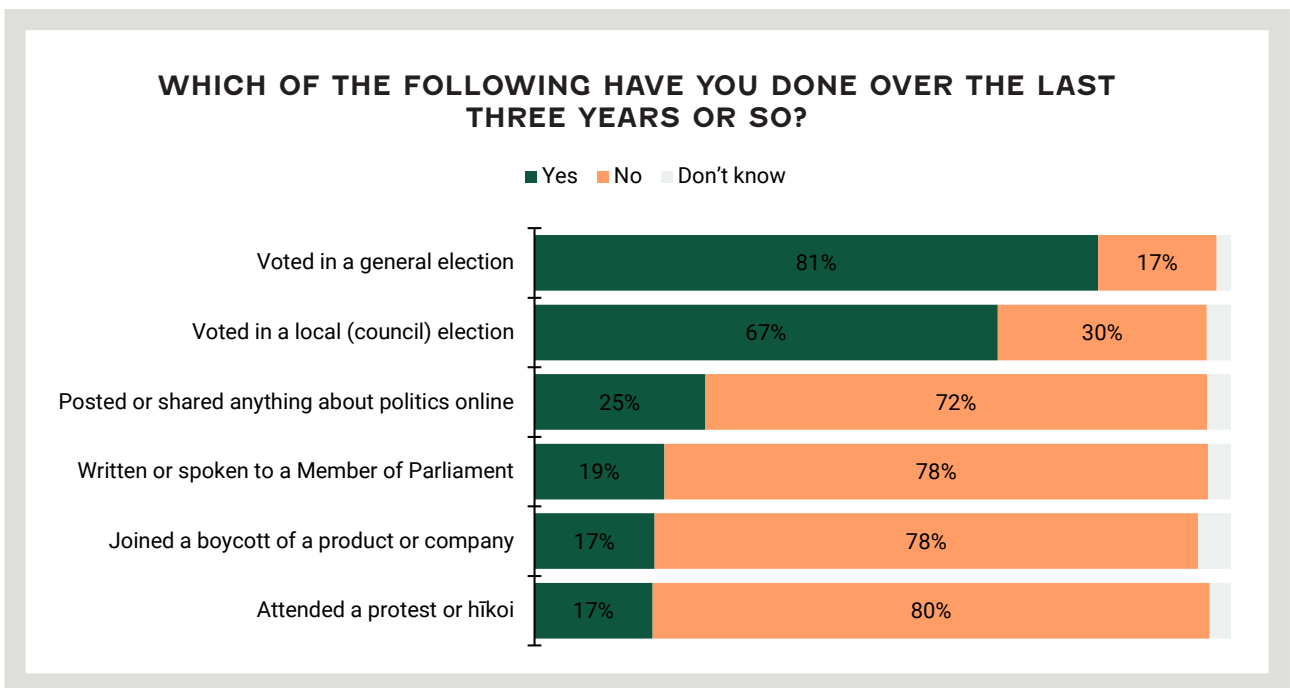
# Participation

## CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Most respondents (81%) claimed to have voted in a general election, but fewer (67%) said they had voted in local elections in the past three years. A quarter said they had shared something political online and 19% said they had communicated with a Member of Parliament. Activities like protests (17%) or boycotts (17%) were less common.

Māori and Pasifika tended to be more likely to have attended a protest (43% and 36%), joined a boycott (26% and 20%), communicated with an MP (24% and 21%) or shared political content (37% and 36%) but they were less likely to have voted locally (58% and 61%) or generally (70% and 74%).

Younger respondents were more likely to protest, boycott and share online but older respondents were more likely to communicate with MPs and vote.



## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Under one-third (30%) were involved in social or religious groups in the past year and 25% in community support groups, while participation in civic or political groups was notably lower (10%).

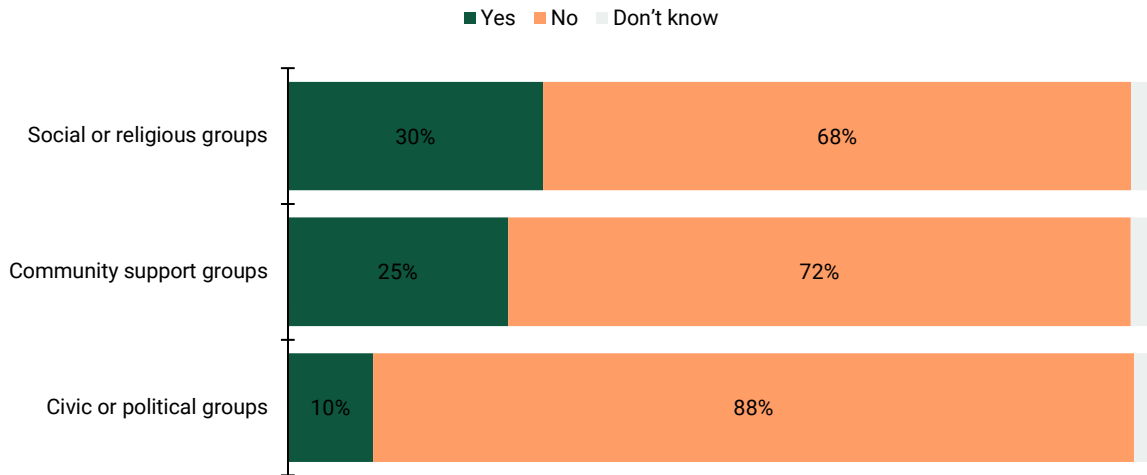
Māori (38%) and Pasifika (42%) had higher involvement in community groups as well as civic/political groups (20% and 17%).

Pasifika (52%) and Asian (38%) respondents were more likely to have been involved in social or religious groups.

Those aged under 30 were more likely to have been involved in a social or religious group (38%) or a civic or political group (14%).

Those with children under 18 report greater involvement in all community activities.

**IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS, HAVE YOU BEEN ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN ANY COMMUNITY GROUPS?**



**HELPING OTHERS**

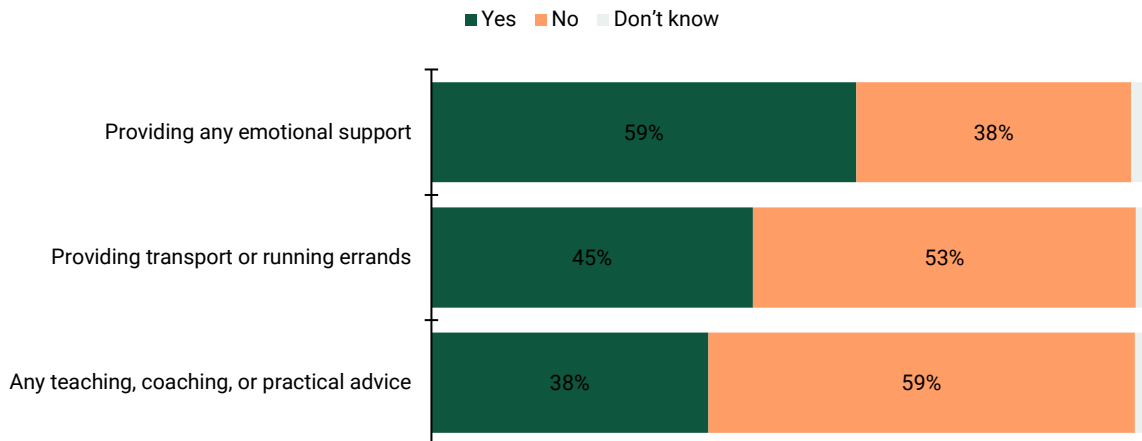
In the past four weeks, 59% provided emotional support, 45% helped with transport or errands and 38% gave teaching or advice to someone not living with them.

Women were more likely to have provided emotional support (66%) and run errands (48%) compared to men (51% and 41% respectively).

Pasifika and Māori respondents were more likely to have done all these activities in the past four weeks (50–73%)

Those who often or sometimes go without meals were more likely to have participated in these activities (47–65%) than those who never do so (36–57%).

**IN THE LAST 4 WEEKS, DID YOU HELP ANYONE (NOT LIVING WITH YOU) WITH ANY OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES?**



# Acceptance and rejection

## ETHNIC INCLUSION

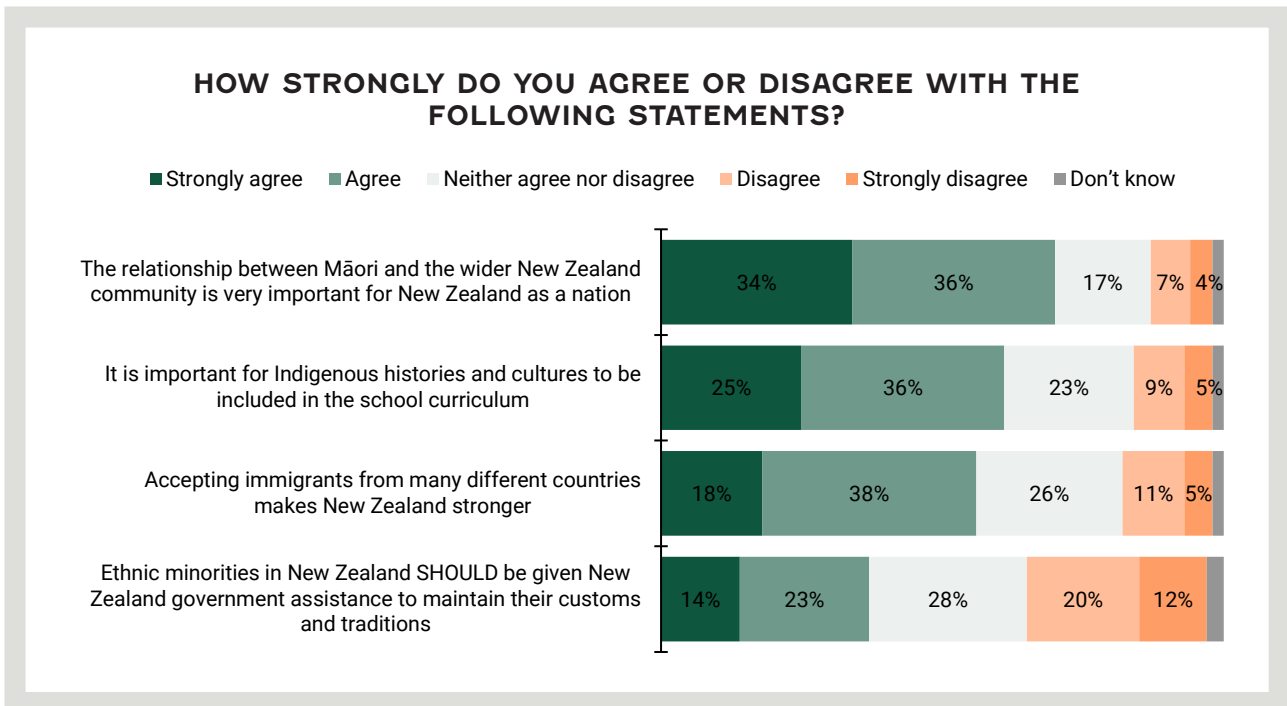
These results highlight widespread support for inclusivity and diversity, particularly regarding Māori relations and multiculturalism, while views on government assistance for minorities to maintain their culture remain more mixed.

A strong majority (70%) agreed that the relationship between Māori and the wider New Zealand community is very important for the nation.

Over three-fifths (62%) believed it is important for Indigenous histories and cultures to be included in the school curriculum, emphasising the value placed on cultural education.

More than half (56%) agreed that accepting immigrants from diverse countries makes New Zealand stronger.

Views were more divided on government assistance to ethnic minorities to maintain their customs and traditions, with 37% agreeing such support should be provided, while opposition remains significant (32% disagreed).



## GOVERNMENT TRUST

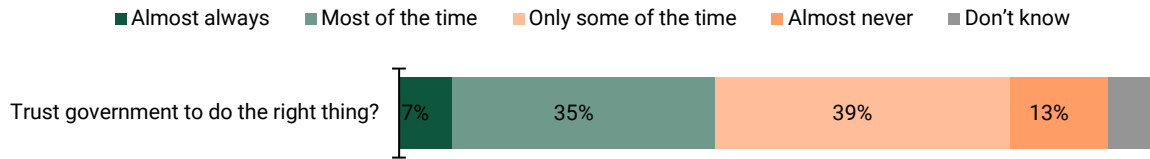
Only 42% trust the government to act in people's best interests most or all of the time, while 39% trust them only occasionally.

Māori (34%) and Pasifika (34%) were less likely to trust the government to do the right thing most or all of the time, while Asian respondents were more likely (53%).

Men were more trusting (48%) than women (37%).

Respondents struggling financially were the least trusting (25%) compared to those living very comfortably (62%).

## HOW OFTEN DO YOU THINK THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IN WELLINGTON CAN BE TRUSTED TO DO THE RIGHT THING FOR THE NEW ZEALAND PEOPLE?



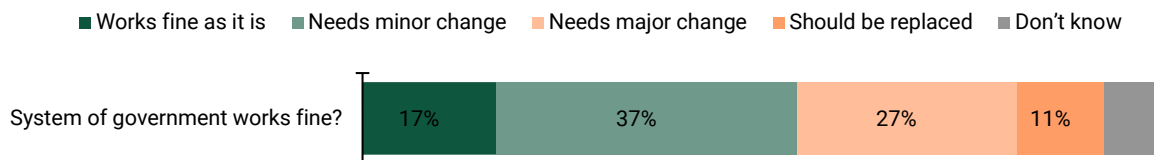
### SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

Over a third (37%) felt minor changes are needed in New Zealand's government system, while 27% believe major changes are necessary and 11% think it should be replaced entirely.

Māori (21%) and Pasifika (21%) were more likely to believe it should be replaced entirely.

Those struggling financially (22%) were more likely to support it being replaced than those living very comfortably (7%).

## WOULD YOU SAY THE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT WE HAVE IN NEW ZEALAND WORKS FINE AS IS?



### GOVERNANCE PREFERENCES

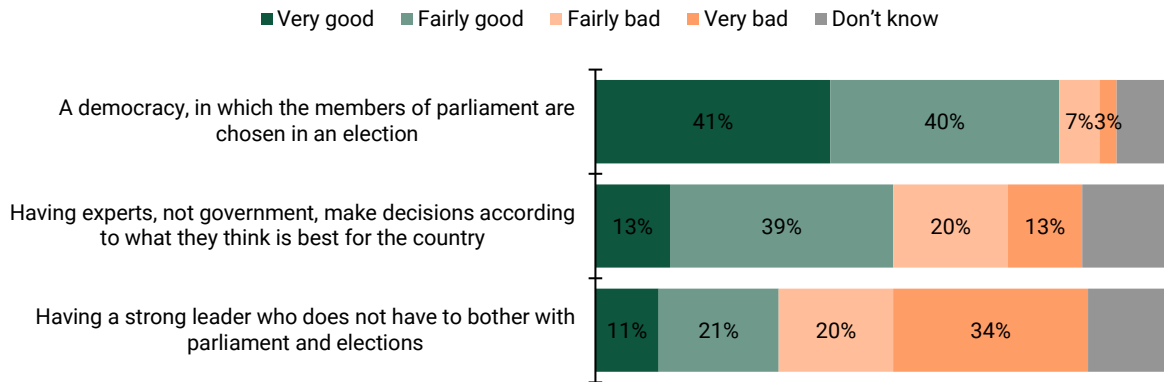
81% rated a democracy as a good way of governing New Zealand and 53% supported having experts make decisions, while a third (32%) supported a strong leader with no parliamentary oversight.

Support for democracy is highest among older respondents (60+: 93%) compared to younger respondents under 30 (68%). Those under 30 were more inclined to rate positively experts (64%) and a strong leader (40%).

Men were more inclined think a strong leader would be good (36%) compared to women (28%). Almost half of younger men rated a strong leader as good (47% of men aged under 30, 49% of men aged 30–44).

Māori (45%), Pasifika (40%) and Asian (51%) respondents showed greater support for a strong leader compared to NZ Europeans (24%).

### WOULD THE FOLLOWING BE A GOOD OR BAD WAY TO GOVERN IN NEW ZEALAND?



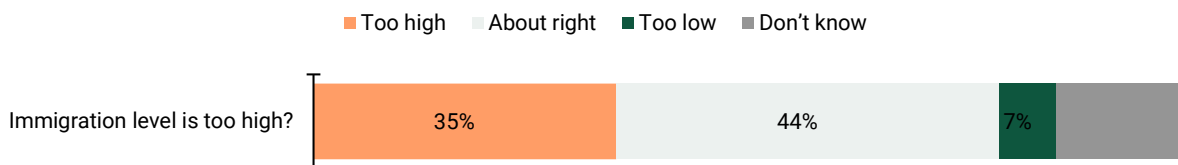
### IMMIGRATION LEVELS

While 44% thought current immigration levels are appropriate, 35% felt they are too high and a minority (7%) thought they are too low.

Older respondents (60+) expressed greater concern about immigration (38% too high) compared to those under 30 (25%).

Those born in New Zealand were more likely to say too high (37%) than those not born here (31%).

### WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE NUMBER OF IMMIGRANTS ACCEPTED INTO NEW ZEALAND IN RECENT YEARS?



### IMMIGRATION PERCEPTIONS

The majority of respondents view multiculturalism and migrant diversity positively, recognising immigrants' contributions to the economy and society, though concerns remain about cultural assimilation, job competition and the need for government assistance to minorities. Only a small minority support rejecting immigrants based on religion or ethnicity.

Over two-thirds (68%) agreed that multiculturalism is good for New Zealand, showing strong overall support for cultural diversity.

Just over half (56%) believed that migrant diversity makes New Zealand stronger, and 56% said immigrants are good for the economy.

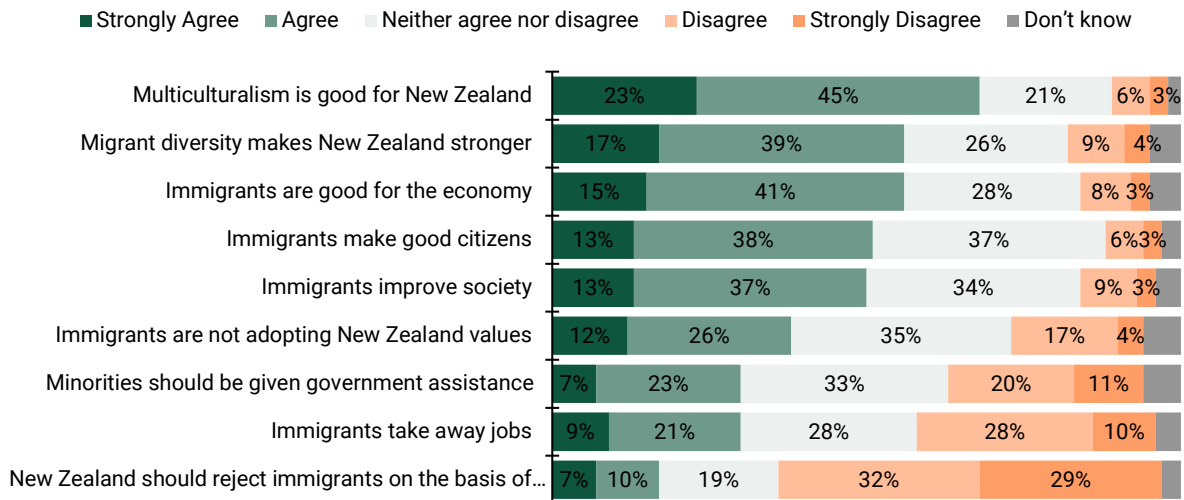
Around half (51%) agreed that immigrants make good citizens, and 50% agreed that they improve New Zealand society overall.

Over a third (37%) agreed that immigrants are not adopting New Zealand's values.

Less than a third (31%) agreed that minorities should receive government assistance, and 30% of respondents agreed immigrants take away jobs, indicating ongoing economic anxieties.

A minority (17%) agreed New Zealand should reject immigrants based on religion or ethnicity, while 61% disagreed.

### HOW STRONGLY DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING?



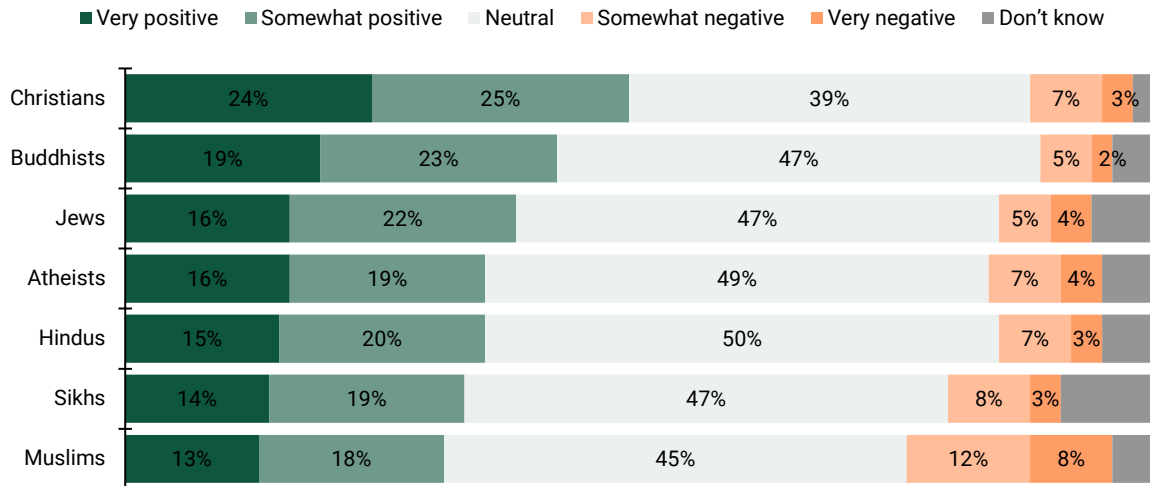
### RELIGIOUS PERCEPTIONS

Respondents expressed the most positive attitudes towards Christians (48%) and Buddhists (42%). Jews (38%), atheists (35%) and Hindus (35%) followed, with slightly lower ratings for Sikhs (33%) and Muslims (31%).

Excluding atheists, respondents with no religion reported lower positive ratings for all groups (25–38%) compared to respondents with a religion (35–64%). Atheists were the opposite, with 39% of respondents with no religion viewing them positively compared to 33% with some religion.

Pasifika (60%) and Asian (55%) respondents were more likely to hold positive views towards Christians.

### IS YOUR PERSONAL ATTITUDE POSITIVE, NEGATIVE OR NEUTRAL TOWARDS...?

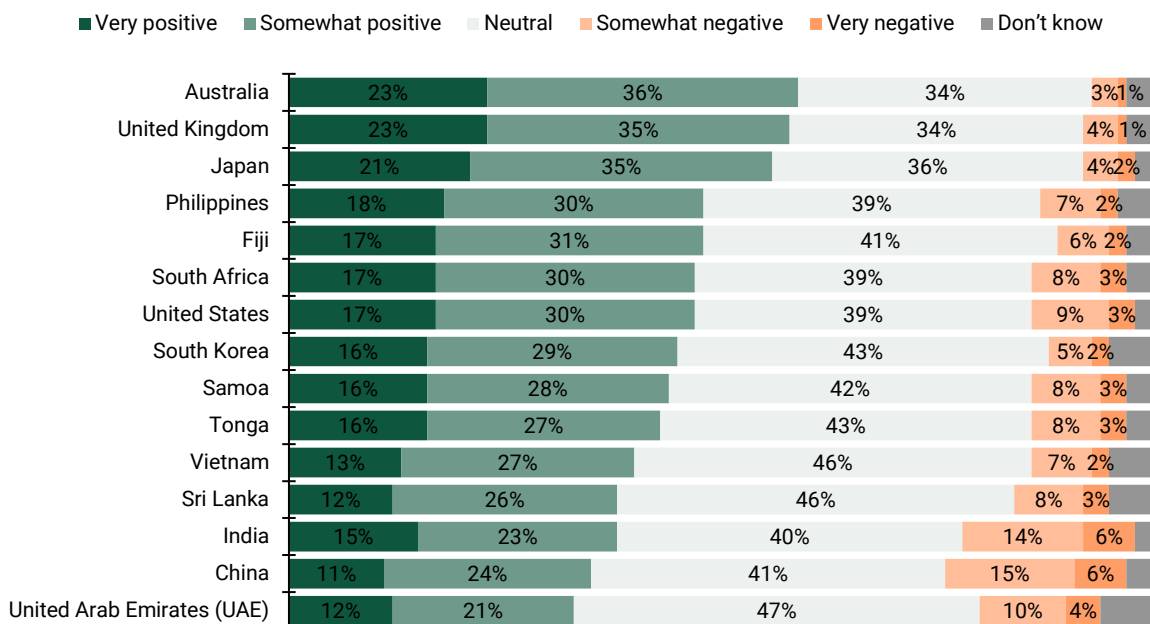


### ATTITUDES TO IMMIGRANTS

Positive views towards immigrants vary, with Australia (59%), the UK (58%) and Japan (56%) receiving most support. Positive perceptions were lowest for China (35%) and the UAE (34%). Outright negative views were low, with the highest total negative ratings scored for China (21%) and India (20%).

Younger respondents (under 30) express more positive views towards immigrants from Fiji (53%), Tonga (51%), China (40%) and the UAE (39%). Older (60+) respondents were more likely to have positive views of Australia (68%), the UK (66%), South Africa (54%), the US (54%), Sri Lanka (43%) and India (42%).

### WOULD YOU SAY YOUR FEELINGS ARE POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS FROM...?



## VIEWS ON IMMIGRATION'S IMPACT

Half (50%) of respondents believe new immigrants enrich New Zealand life, while over a quarter (28%) feel increasing immigration threatens the country's unique identity. A significant portion (22%) remained unsure.

Māori (38%) were less likely to agree that immigration enriches life, while Asian respondents were more likely (62%).

Those living very comfortably financially (58%) were more positive about immigration's impact compared to those struggling (37%).

Respondents with a religion were more likely to agree that immigration enriches life (53%) compared to those with no religion (48%).

### WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS CLOSEST TO YOUR VIEWS?



## Discrimination

Nearly one in five (17%) respondents experienced discrimination based on skin colour, ethnicity or religion in the past 12 months. The majority (76%) reported no such experiences, while 7% preferred not to say.

Māori (27%), Pasifika (27%) and Asian (22%) respondents were significantly more likely to have experienced discrimination in the past 12 months compared to NZ Europeans (13%).

Younger respondents (under 30) reported the highest rates of discrimination (23%), while older respondents (60+) reported the lowest (12%).

Those who sometimes went without meals due to lack of money were more likely to report having experienced discrimination (26%) than those who didn't (15%).

### HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF SKIN COLOUR, ETHNIC ORIGIN OR RELIGION IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS?



## EXPERIENCE OF DISCRIMINATION

Respondents who said they had experienced discrimination were asked to outline their latest experience. Among those willing to share, the most common theme outlined was discrimination against white or European people (28%) followed by racial profiling (23%) and stereotyping (21%).

### BRIEFLY OUTLINE YOUR LATEST EXPERIENCE OF DISCRIMINATION (CODED)

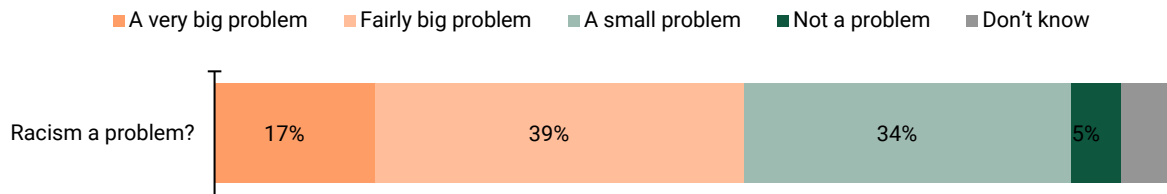
Reverse racism: Particularly white individuals reporting abuse or exclusion from Māori or other minority groups. Includes being called colonisers, being excluded from benefits and facing hostile treatment in healthcare, workplaces and public settings.	28%
Racial profiling and harassment: Followed in stores, accused of theft or treated with suspicion based on their ethnicity or skin colour.	23%
Ethnic and cultural stereotyping: Stereotyping and microaggressions based on their ethnicity, skin colour or perceived cultural background.	21%
General societal racism: Broader societal issues, including systemic racism, unfair government policies and media bias perceived to favour or exclude certain groups.	15%
Workplace discrimination: Bias in hiring, promotions and treatment at work, often favouring certain ethnic groups over others or based on prejudiced assumptions.	12%
Discrimination against migrants: Hostility, stereotyping or barriers faced by migrants, often based on nationality or assumptions about language and culture.	11%
Religious discrimination: Mocked, excluded or treated differently due to their religion or lack of belief.	7%
Intersectionality of discrimination: Layered discrimination due to being mixed race, female or belonging to specific socioeconomic or cultural groups.	5%
Discrimination in healthcare and social services: Access to healthcare or social services was sometimes limited or unequal, often prioritising specific ethnic groups.	5%
Other	6%
Base: n = 339 (those who said they have experienced discrimination and were willing to share their experience)	

## RACISM

Over half (55%) viewed racism as a very or fairly big problem in New Zealand, 34% a small problem and only 5% as not a problem at all.

Around two-thirds of Māori (63%) and Pasifika (67%) viewed racism as a big problem, younger respondents (under 30) were more likely to see racism as a major problem (62%) compared to older respondents (60+: 53%) and those born in New Zealand were more likely to say racism is a big problem (58%) than those born elsewhere (50%).

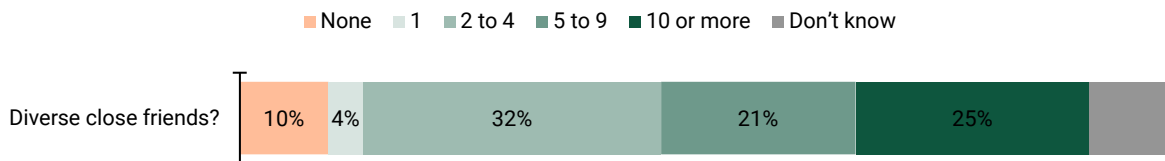
### HOW BIG A PROBLEM IS RACISM IN NEW ZEALAND?



## DIVERSE FRIEND GROUPS

Most respondents (78%) have at least two close friends from different ethnic or religious backgrounds, 10% have none and 46% said they have five or more. Māori (54%), Pasifika (60%) and Asian (57%) respondents were more likely to report having five or more diverse friends as were those aged under 30 (53%).

### HOW MANY CLOSE FRIENDS FROM DIFFERENT NATIONAL, ETHNIC OR RELIGIOUS BACKGROUNDS DO YOU HAVE?



# Appendix 1: Methodology

## NATIONWIDE SURVEY

Results in this report are based upon questions asked in a Talbot Mills Research nationwide online survey. The basis of the sample is  $n = 2000$  nationally representative respondents in New Zealand aged 18 years of age and over and additional booster samples of Māori, Asian and Pasifika respondents. The total sample achieved was  $n = 2631$ , with  $n = 521$  Māori,  $n = 255$  Pasifika and  $n = 509$  Asian respondents. The sample was weighted to account for this oversampling.

## REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE

Interlocked age, gender and regional quotas were used during sampling. Weighting was further used to enhance how closely the results represent the adult population of New Zealand.

The effective maximum sampling error for the total sample at the 95% confidence level is  $\pm 2.0\%$ . Similar margins of error for the boosted subsamples were:

- Māori:  $\pm 4.5\%$
- Asian:  $\pm 4.5\%$
- Pasifika:  $\pm 6.5\%$

## FIELDWORK DATES

Fieldwork for the questions in this report was conducted between 21 November and 9 December 2024.

## REPORTING

All numbers are shown rounded to zero decimal places, hence specified totals are not always exactly equal to the sum of the specified subtotals. The differences are seldom more than 1% (for example,  $2.7 + 3.5 = 6.2$  would appear as  $3 + 4 = 6$ ).

## QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire was based with permission on the 2022 Mapping Social Cohesion Australian study conducted by the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute,<sup>6</sup> with adjustments for a New Zealand audience.

Where results are available and applicable, comparisons have been made to Australia. It should be noted there is methodological difference that could explain some of the differences.

6. O'Donnell, J. (2022). *Mapping social cohesion*. Scanlon Foundation Research Institute. [https://scanloninstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/MSC-2022\\_Report.pdf](https://scanloninstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/MSC-2022_Report.pdf) – for detailed data, see <https://doi.org/10.26193/TZXC2J>.

# Appendix 2: Review of conceptual frameworks

Social cohesion means different things to different people. It generally refers to feelings of social connectedness, solidarity and trust among individuals, both within and across communities and within society at large. It is typically understood to reflect the strength of the social glue and bonds between people in shared places.

Societies with higher levels of social cohesion are typically healthier and more resilient to external shocks and crises and experience higher levels of economic wellbeing.<sup>7</sup> Conversely, the downside risks of social polarisation are salient and broadly felt. It is spilling over into politics and systems of government and governance. This pushback on the current system of governance has been linked to increased feelings of social isolation and growing inequality in many rich, liberal economies. If those forces continue, it could challenge the stability of seemingly consolidated democracies such as our own.<sup>8</sup>

Measuring social cohesion is an inherently subjective but important task as democracies strain. A transparent and repeatable measure will help New Zealand navigate a likely period of significant social change. This section explains the types of approaches we can use to think about and measure social cohesion. There is no perfect measure, but we believe this contribution has the benefit of being comparable, consistent and repeatable.

## WAYS TO LOOK AT – AND DEFINE – SOCIAL COHESION

Measuring social cohesion is an interdisciplinary task requiring overlapping perspectives, methods and conceptual frameworks. As social cohesion refers to a construct rooted in a long history of theoretical debates on what constitutes social order in a society and why it can be maintained even in times of social changes, there are foundational reasons for a lack of consensus regarding its conceptualisation.<sup>9</sup>

Generally, there is agreement among researchers that basic components of focus will include dimensions of social relations, aspects of vertical and horizontal trust, themes of social identity and a willingness to act for the betterment of the group through helping others such as through volunteering and political participation.<sup>10</sup>

Research on social cohesion (such as ours) is often led by those with incentives to focus on a specific lens or narrative within a policy field such as an economic development or poverty reduction. Researchers must be careful to refer to multiple attributes of social cohesion across diverse groups rather than claim a singular lens. A systematic review of literature on social cohesion summarised social cohesion based on three key dimensions – social relations, attachment/belonging and orientation towards the common good (Figure 3).<sup>11</sup>

7. OECD. (2011). *Perspectives on global development 2012: Social cohesion in a shifting world*. [https://doi.org/10.1787/persp\\_glob\\_dev-2012-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/persp_glob_dev-2012-en)

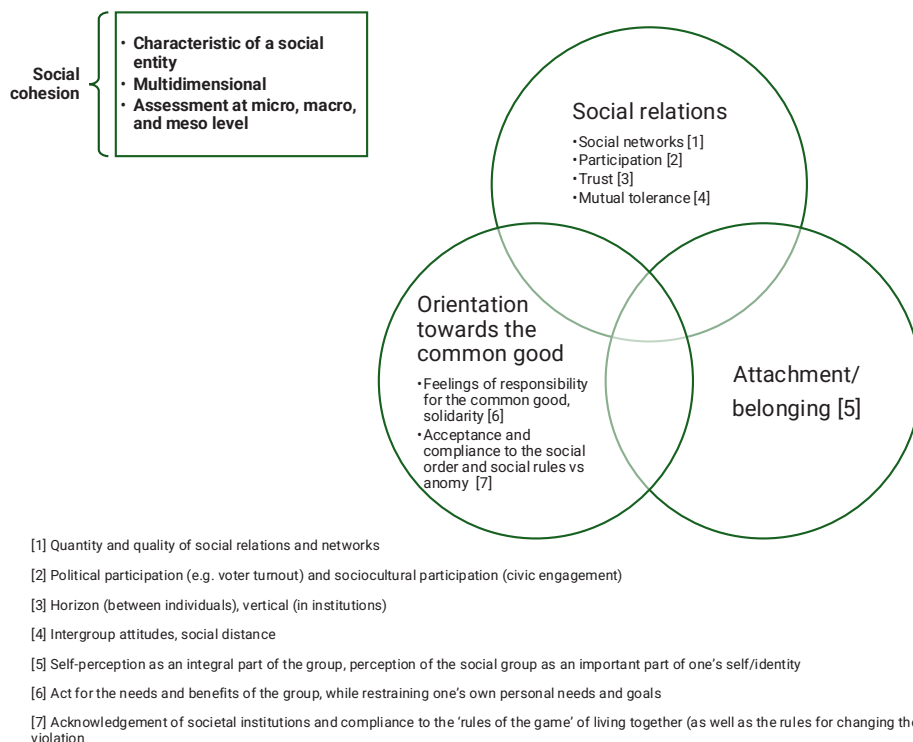
8. Foa, R. & Mounk, Y. (2016). The danger of deconsolidation: The democratic disconnect. *Journal of Democracy*, 27(3), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0049>

9. Green, A. & Janmaat, J. (2011). *Regimes of social cohesion: Societies and the crisis of globalisation*. Springer; Schiefer, D. & van der Noll, J. (2017). The essentials of social cohesion: A literature review. *Social Indicators Research*, 132, 579–603. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-016-1314-5>

10. Orazani, S. N., Reynolds, K. J. & Osborne, H. (2023). What works and why in interventions to strengthen social cohesion: A systematic review. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 53(10), 938–995. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12990>

11. A lack of consensus also reflects what researchers call the paradox of tolerance – in order to maintain a tolerant society, the society must be intolerant of intolerance (Orazani et al, 2023 – see footnote 10).

FIGURE 3: Social cohesion framework



Source: Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017, p. 593 – see footnote 9.

The systematic review found the most effective **strategies for improving social cohesion** involve:

- awareness raising
- countering stereotypes
- offering opportunities for positive contact and a more co-operative assessment of intergroup relations.

**Strategies that are most often missing are leadership processes that can (re)define group-based values, norms and behaviours.**

In 2019, the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attack on Christchurch Masjidain made recommendations to improve focus on social cohesion in Aotearoa New Zealand. Subsequently, Te Korowai Whetū Social Cohesion strategic framework was developed in 2022 through work led by the Ministry of Social Development (see Appendix 3).

This framework defines social cohesion as occurring where all people, whānau and communities connect and feel a sense of belonging, are able to participate, are recognised and respected, are equitably included and have trust in others and in government organisations.<sup>12</sup> Five action areas (predominantly for government agencies) and key outcomes were identified so that, in Aotearoa New Zealand, people, whānau and communities:

- are connected and feel like they belong
- are willing and able to participate
- are included and experience equity
- are recognised for who they are and respect others
- trust each other and public organisations.

12. Ministry of Social Development. (2022). *Te Korowai Whetū Social Cohesion: Strategic framework*. <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/community/social-cohesion/strategicframewrk-formal.pdf>

Notable work led by domestic academics that informed this framework has been led by Spoonley et al. via their indicators framework first developed in 2005. The five dimensions produced in this framework underpin Te Korowai Whetū (see Box 1 for definitions of these dimensions).<sup>13</sup>

Researchers at the Koi Tū Centre for Informed Futures at the University of Auckland have more recently written about the challenges of addressing social cohesion in Aotearoa New Zealand based on this framework.<sup>14</sup> In addition, Koi Tū has consolidated a list of 65 factors that might positively or negatively influence social cohesion and societal resilience, based on a meeting of diverse experts across a range of academic disciplines and geography in London in early 2020. They note that, through “an iterative ranking process, these [factors] were reduced to a priority list and statistical techniques were used to cluster them into the 14 core factors”.<sup>15</sup>

This process reflected perspectives of the global and largely developed world, not local ones. To establish what matters most to groupings within New Zealand, further empirical work is needed.

These are the 14 core factors (see Appendix 5 for the full Koi Tū table of definitions and influences):

1. Environmental change
2. Technological change
3. Inequalities
4. Identity and demography
5. Economic insecurity and instability
6. Economic policies
7. Influence of foreign and non-government institutions
8. Information and public discourse
9. Social boundaries and norms
10. Psychological states and welfare

11. Trust in institutions and government
12. Perceptions of unfairness
13. Inclusion and community
14. Polarisation and extremism

The UK’s Khan Review has pursued similar policy work in recent years. Efforts have been similarly motivated by a rise in violent extremism and an understanding that this phenomenon does not occur in isolation “but appears and takes root in conducive environments and contexts”.<sup>16</sup>

The Khan Review subsequently developed a comprehensive review of social cohesion and resilience dynamics in England in recent years, drawing on a range of perspectives and evidence gathered in conversations with 500 people across 180 meetings and roundtables in 2022–2024.

The Khan Review definition particularly emphasises the macro, meso and micro levels of social cohesion, with social cohesion including:

- a macro level that reflects a sense of membership of broader society and trust and relations with institutions
- a meso level that reflects connections with secondary groups (larger social in – and out – groups that can provide social identities)
- a micro level that reflects interpersonal connections with and trust in close others (mostly within families and between friends).

Social cohesion in the Khan Review is therefore defined as “a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of society as characterised by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioural manifestations”.

13. Spoonley, P., Peace, R., Butcher, A. & O’Neill, D. (2005), Social cohesion: A policy and indicator framework for assessing immigrant and host outcomes. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, 24, 85–106. <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/journals-and-magazines/social-policy-journal/spj24/24-pages85-110.pdf>

14. Gluckman, P., Spoonley, P., Bardsley, A., Poulton, R., Royal, C., Sridhar, H. & Clyne, D. (2023). *Addressing the challenges to social cohesion*. Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures. <https://informedfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Addressing-the-challenges-to-social-cohesion.pdf>

15. Gluckman, P., Bardsley, A., Spoonley, P., Royal, C., Simon-Kumar, N. & Chen, A. (2021). *Sustaining Aotearoa New Zealand as a cohesive society*. Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures. <https://informedfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Sustaining-Aotearoa-New-Zealand-as-a-cohesive-society.pdf>

16. Khan, 2024 – see footnote 1.

### BOX 1: Domestic conceptual explorations of social cohesion

Spoonley and others split social cohesion in terms of two groups of criteria – elements of socially cohesive behaviour and the high-level conditions necessary for a socially cohesive society.

#### ELEMENTS OF SOCIALLY COHESIVE BEHAVIOUR

**Belonging:** Belonging involves a sense of being part of the wider community, trust in other people and common respect for the rule of law and for civil and human rights. New Zealand is home to many peoples and is built on the bicultural foundation of the Treaty of Waitangi. New Zealand's ethnic and cultural diversity should be recognised, celebrated and valued.

**Process/outcome:** Ethnically and culturally diverse communities and individuals experience a sense of belonging and their contribution is recognised, celebrated and valued.

**Participation:** Participation includes involvement in social activities, in community groups and organisations and in political and civic life (e.g. voting or standing for election on a school board).

**Process/outcome:** All people in New Zealand can participate in all aspects of life here.

#### CONDITIONS FOR A SOCIALLY COHESIVE SOCIETY

**Inclusion:** Inclusion involves equity of opportunities and of outcomes with regard to labour market participation, income, education, health and housing. The contribution of good settlement outcomes to social cohesion should be recognised and valued.

**Process/outcome:** All people in New Zealand share access to equitable opportunities and services and contribute to good settlement outcomes in ways that are recognised and valued.

**Recognition:** Recognition involves all groups, including the host country, valuing diversity and respecting differences, protection from discrimination and harassment and a sense of safety.

**Process/outcome:** Diversity of opinions and values among New Zealand's many cultures are accepted and respected, and people are protected from the adverse effects of discrimination.

**Legitimacy:** Legitimacy includes confidence in public institutions that act to protect rights and interests, the mediation of conflicts and institutional responsiveness.

**Process/outcome:** Public institutions foster social cohesion, engender trust and are responsive to the needs of all communities.

## CHALLENGES WITH MEASURING SOCIAL COHESION

There are a range of surveys that measure some aspects of social cohesion:

- **New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (NZAVS):** Initiated in 2009, this 20-year longitudinal study tracks social attitudes, values and personality over time. The NZAVS is curated by Professor Chris Sibley, involves researchers from universities across New Zealand and includes questionnaire responses from more than 70,000 New Zealand residents.
- **Ipsos NZ Issues Monitor:** A monthly survey that tracks the key concerns of New Zealanders and assesses which political parties are perceived as best equipped to address them, based on a small and regular sample of 1001 adult respondents. Ipsos has also run one-off studies such as the Populism Global Advisor Survey 2024: New Zealand Edition, which asked New Zealand adults for their views of Aotearoa New Zealand’s democratic wellbeing and the future of the nation.<sup>18</sup>
- **Living Standards Framework:**<sup>19</sup> The New Zealand Treasury has identified four indicators from the Living Standards Dashboard as useful for understanding social cohesion elements, specifically the ability to express identity, trust held for people of New Zealand, experiences of discrimination and a sense of belonging (see Appendix 4).

The proposed measurement framework for Te Korowai Whetū (while not yet operational) is also planning to use a range of existing domestic data sources to develop key indicators:

- **New Zealand General Social Survey (NZGSS):** Conducted biennially by Stats NZ, the NZGSS collects data on social wellbeing, including aspects related to social cohesion, providing insights into changes over time.

- **Quality of Life Survey:** This survey runs biennially across local government, with data recorded since 2003. It gathers data on residents’ perceptions of their quality of life, including topics such as community wellbeing, housing, safety, transport and local government services. The survey provides cross-sectional views of the current state of quality of life in different regions but does not track changes in public sentiment over time.<sup>20</sup>
- **Kiwis Count:** A biennial survey conducted by Stats NZ to measure the satisfaction of New Zealanders with government services, including health, education and transport.
- **Whataboutme?:** This survey was conducted as a one-off nationwide study exploring the health, wellbeing and experiences of young people in New Zealand in 2021. It surveyed 7700 participants aged 12–18 covering topics such as identity, family, education, community engagement, relationships, mental health and safety.

Other measures also rely on the Household Labour Force Survey, Te Kupenga data on Māori-specific outcomes, Electoral Commission administrative and voter turnout data and the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index.

## LEARNING FROM OVERSEAS: THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPARATIVE MEASURES

The OECD has stressed the importance of alignment with other measures on social cohesion across countries, noting the “selection of high-quality indicators, and consistency in measurement – over time, and across countries – would enable researchers and policy makers alike to better understand the dynamics of social connections over time and identify warning signs early on”.<sup>21</sup>

18. Ipsos. (2024). *Populism – A Global Advisor Survey 2024 (NZ edition)*. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-nz/populism-global-advisor-survey-2024-nz-edition>; Ipsos. (2024). *Ipsos NZ Issues Monitor Oct 2024*. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-nz/ipsos-nz-issues-monitor-oct-2024>

19. Fookes, C. (2022). *Social cohesion in New Zealand: Background paper to Te Tai Waiora: Wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand 2022 (Analytical Paper 22/01)*. The Treasury. <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/ap/ap-22-01>

20. Peace, R. & Spoonley, P. (2007). Social cohesion and indicator frameworks in New Zealand. *Metropolis World Bulletin*, 7, 9–10; Prakash, A. (2023). *Social cohesion in Auckland: Results from the Quality of Life Survey* (Technical Report 2023/17). Auckland Council. <https://www.qualityoflifeproject.govt.nz/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/TR2023-17-Social-cohesion-in-Auckland.pdf>

21. Mahoney, J., Fleischer, L., Bottura, G. & Scrivens, K. (2024). *Measuring social connectedness in OECD countries – A scoping review* (Working Paper 28). OECD. [https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/09/measuring-social-connectedness-in-oecd-countries\\_02a04f4b/f758bd20-en.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/09/measuring-social-connectedness-in-oecd-countries_02a04f4b/f758bd20-en.pdf). Other international policy groups such as the G20, World Social Capital Monitor and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe have also produced dedicated research and indicators on the measurement of social cohesion across geographies.

In Australia, the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute has been mapping social cohesion against consistent criteria since 2007.<sup>22</sup> The 2024 study was the 18th in the series, surveying over 8000 respondents and complementing results with 45 in-depth qualitative interviews. An additional 229 surveys were conducted with people from Indian, Middle Eastern and African backgrounds in one of four different languages (including English) living in Australia.

The domains studied in the Scanlon Index include belonging, political participation, social inclusion and justice, sense of worth, and acceptance and rejection. The Scanlon Index is then built from six indexes constructed for each of the five domains plus one index that measures overall social cohesion relative to a 2007 baseline.

We have chosen to replicate the Scanlon questions in our first survey of social cohesion in Aotearoa New Zealand to support greater comparisons with Australia. The Khan Review's reference to the Scanlon Index as an "effective and practical example" of a national measurement framework for social cohesion also supported our decision to align surveys.

There are some small differences between definitions used by the Scanlon Index and those developed by Spoonley et al. (2005):<sup>23</sup>

- The Scanlon Index definition of political participation is narrower, focusing broadly on involvement in all aspects of political, civic and social life.

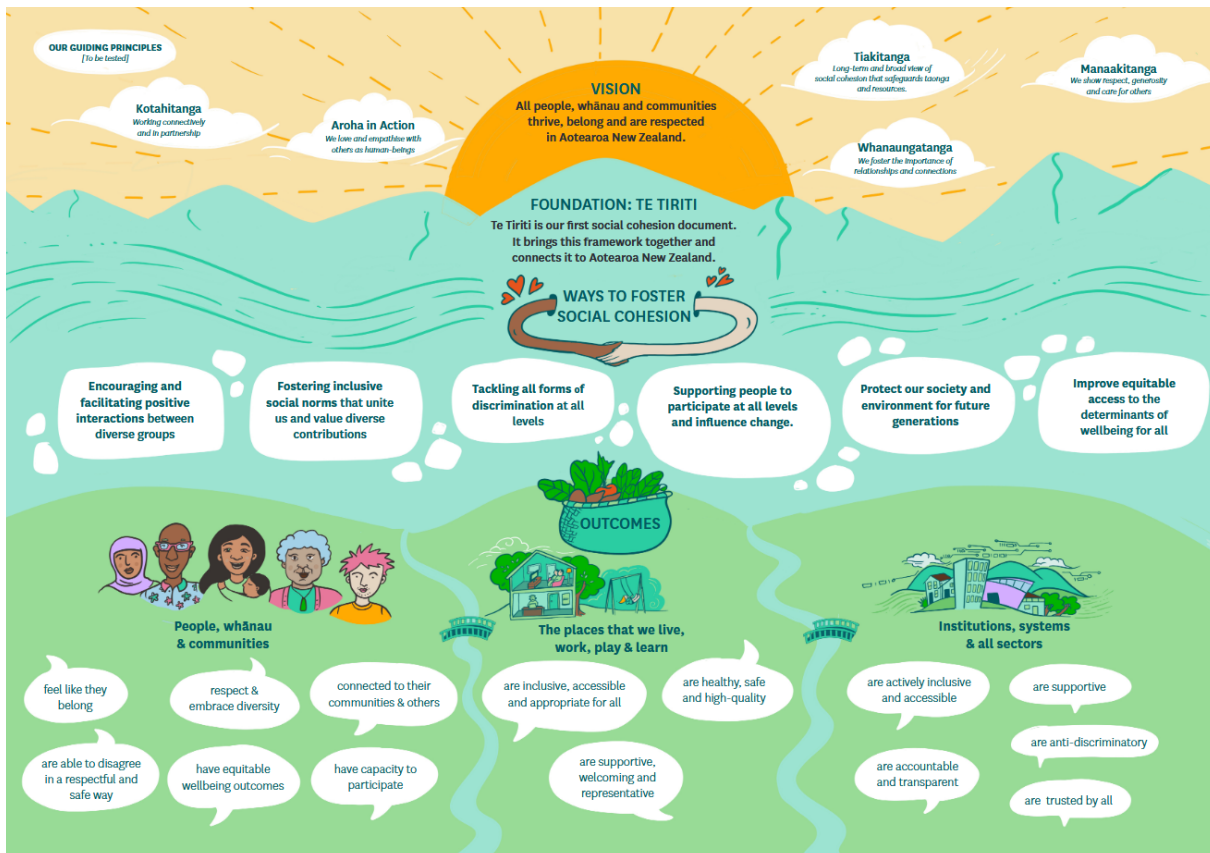
- The Scanlon Index sense of worth dimension is defined as "the degree of emotional and material well-being across society, as measured through levels of happiness and financial satisfaction". While this fits best under the concept of inclusion, it does not map easily into the framework (which does not focus on happiness or financial satisfaction but equity of opportunities and socioeconomic outcomes in definitions of inclusion).
- Legitimacy (defined as "confidence in public institutions that act to protect rights and interests; the mediation of conflicts; and institutional responsiveness") appears in the Scanlon Index under the concept of social inclusion and justice (defined as "perceptions of economic fairness in Australian society and trust in the Federal Government") but is not given its own category of focus.

We have included three additional focus areas of the Scanlon Index for full coverage of the macro, meso and micro dimensions of interest. These include specific questions on governance (views on government trust, systems of government and governance preferences), immigration (immigration levels, religious perceptions, attitudes to immigrants and views on immigrants' impact) and experiences of discrimination (experiences of racism, discrimination and diverse friendship).

22. O'Donnell et al., 2024 – see footnote 5.

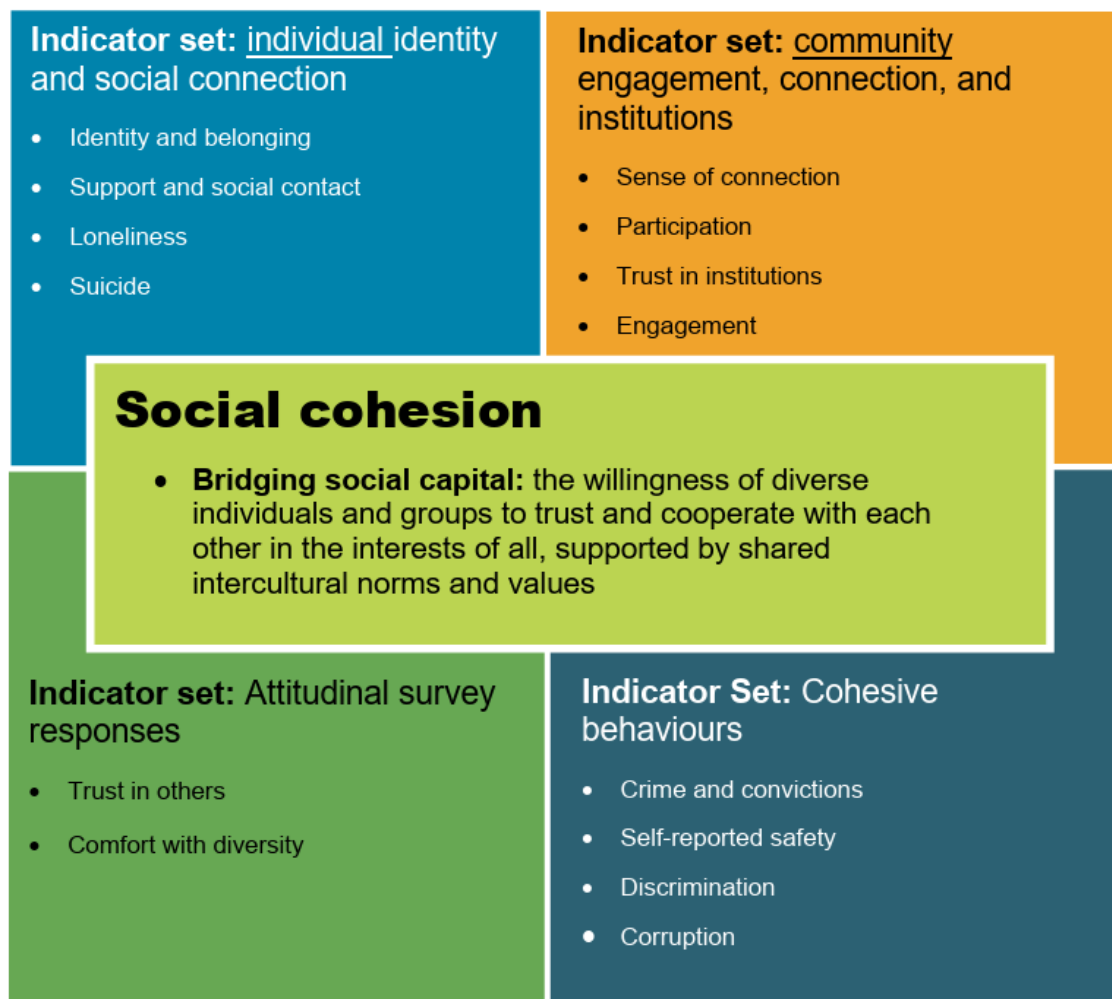
23. See footnote 13.

# Appendix 3: Te Korowai Whetū: Social Cohesion Strategic Framework<sup>24</sup>



24. Ministry of Social Development, 2022 – see footnote 12.

# Appendix 4: New Zealand Treasury's analytical note on measuring social cohesion<sup>25</sup>



25. Fookes, 2022 – see footnote 19.

## Appendix 5: Koi Tū framework – major factor clusters that can affect social cohesion viewed through a global lens<sup>26</sup>

Factor clusters	Component factors
1. Environmental change	<p><b>Future effects of climate change</b> – concern about the real world effects, scale and impacts of climate change, and what needs to be done to moderate its negative impacts.</p> <p><b>Eco-anxiety</b> – growing concerns about the impacts of environmental degradation; feeling powerless to achieve change.</p>
2. Technological change	<p><b>Rapidity of change and technological emergence</b> – ethical, regulatory and social frameworks not keeping up with technological development; emergence in relation to complex systems and synergistic effects of new technologies, leading to significant disruption and wide-ranging impacts.</p>
3. Inequalities	<p><b>Inequality based on wealth</b> – income and wealth inequality resulting in greater socioeconomic divisions and power differentials.</p> <p><b>Inequality of income</b> – unequal flow of money; income earned by the rich has increased compared to most others.</p> <p><b>Inequality of opportunity</b> – based on demographic factors such as family, gender, age, and access to education, health etc.</p>
4. Identity and demography	<p><b>Post-colonial and indigenous issues and grievances</b> (In New Zealand the issues are reflected in the justified and only partially resolved grievances of many Māori, and in the ongoing contention of what Te Tiriti now means in practice and how it is implemented.)</p> <p><b>Impacts of changing demography</b> – ageing population, low fertility, changing ethnic/cultural mix, age-cohort differences, ageism.</p> <p><b>Formal migration</b></p>
5. Economic insecurity and instability	<p><b>Job insecurity</b> – changing labour markets, precariousness of work because of increasing rates of casualisation and automation.</p> <p><b>Housing quality/affordability in cities</b> – jobs centred in cities but cities' liveability declining.</p> <p><b>Forced migration and reactions</b> – international and refugee migration; cross-border movements that result in ethnic and religious co-location, sometimes in ways that escalate anxieties; increased flow of refugees displaced by climate change, war; destabilisation of neighbouring regions.</p>

26. Gluckman et al., 2021, pp. 14–15 – see footnote 15.

Factor clusters	Component factors
6. Economic policies	<p><b>Impacts of government economic policies</b> – taxation, redistribution; macro issues of wealth change within and between generations.</p>
7. Influence of foreign and non-government institutions	<p><b>Power of non-governmental actors</b> – influence of wealthy political donors; influence of tech companies who control data; influence of lobbyists.</p> <p><b>Technocratic plutocracy and the influence of organised disinformation</b></p> <p><b>Decreasing trust in knowledge institutions</b> – suspicion of knowledge elites, scepticism about scientific and other experts.</p> <p><b>Geopolitical stress</b> – rising military tensions, economic and commercial disruptions, changing international relations, intra-state conflict.</p>
8. Information and public discourse	<p><b>Changing role of traditional media</b> – decline in the institutional role of the fourth estate; increasing reliance on gut feelings over facts; preference to act on feelings over reasoning and logic or factual data.</p> <p><b>Social media impacts</b> – impact on personal and group identity, narcissism, sense of opportunity, unrealistic expectations, change in expectations of transparency and accountability.</p> <p><b>Erosion of norms of discourse</b> – the emergence of anonymity online, ad hominem in electronic discourse.</p> <p><b>Declining information reliability</b> – destabilised information environments resulting in difficulty identifying reliable information.</p> <p><b>Information targeting and bias reinforcement</b> – algorithmic identification of personal interests, information targeting, and creation of echo chambers.</p>
9. Social boundaries and norms	<p><b>Compliance with civic values</b> – willingness to acknowledge and action shared values; respect for norms.</p> <p><b>Sense of collective responsibility</b> – efforts to find group or local solutions; not assuming top-down solutions.</p> <p><b>Threats to rule of law</b> – decreasing ability of society to uphold established laws that are deemed to be fair and just.</p> <p><b>New social group structures and group identity</b> – influence of online communities and world views to define individual and group identity, often in problematic ways.</p>
10. Psychological states and stresses	<p><b>Sense of personal security and safety</b> – real or perceived criminality or threats; increased awareness of conflict via media.</p> <p><b>Emotional and psychological stress</b> – societal and personal strains experienced as a result of modern lifestyles and work patterns; mental health status affecting the ability to adapt and recover from adversity.</p>

Factor clusters	Component factors
11. Trust in institutions of government	<p><b>Trust in representative democracy</b> – mistrust that democratic/electoral processes are fair; declining public trust in government accountability and integrity; perceived lack of voice in process.</p> <p><b>Trust in government institutions</b> – public trust in government accountability and integrity; trust in the justice system, in the agencies of central and local government, and that government will meet individual and community needs.</p>
12. Perceptions of unfairness	<p><b>Economic grievances and expectations</b> – growth in anxiety and anger about changes to economies and labour markets; economic expectations not being met.</p> <p><b>Perceived corruption of power elites</b> – decline of trust in elites as a result of perceived corruption and arrogance.</p>
13. Inclusion and community	<p><b>Perceptions of minorities</b> – blame and stereotyping of ‘out-groups’; characterising defined groups in negative terms and problematising them.</p> <p><b>Strength of community groups</b> – strength and availability of (non-state) institutions of communal support such as community social groups, sports clubs, religious groups.</p> <p><b>Sense of nationalism</b> – trend towards populism and exclusion of the ‘other’.</p>
14. Polarisation and extremism	<p><b>Support for authoritarianism</b> – desire for order and hierarchy, desire for strong political leadership, loyalty to strongman leaders who protect from ‘outsiders’.</p> <p><b>Political polarisation</b> – increasingly entrenched divisions between different political world views with little room for compromise.</p> <p><b>Normalisation of extreme views</b> – shift of mainstream views – changes to what is considered ‘normal’; spread of extreme views, radicalisation.</p> <p><b>Perceived threats to group norms/values</b> – sense that long-held societal/group norms and values are under threat from actions for minority rights, gender, etc. (also known as cultural backlash).</p>





