

Perceptions of Parliament

TRA X Parliamentary Service and Office
of the Clerk

TRA



● Objectives

Parliamentary Service and Office of the Clerk commissioned this research with the overall objective of understanding how to empower people to feel that they can engage with Parliament.

To inform and direct future engagement initiatives, we set out to understand:

- What are New Zealanders' perceptions of and attitudes towards Parliament?
- What is New Zealanders' knowledge of Parliament?
- What are New Zealanders' experiences of engaging with Parliament and participating in democratic processes?
- What are the barriers to engaging with Parliament?
- What opportunities are there to increase awareness and participation in democratic processes?
- How does all of the above differ among segments of the population?

The intention is this research can be repeated over time to assess New Zealanders changing perceptions.

The approach

We undertook a two-phase approach.

The objective of the first phase was to inform design, language, and question style of the Phase 2 survey – to ensure that everyone could understand what they were being asked about.

The results in this report speak to the second quantitative stage of this research project and are informed by Phase 1.

Stage 1

**Community-led wānanga
qualitative exploration**

Stage 2

Quantitative research

Stage 1: Community-led Wānanga qualitative exploration

The first phase of our research employed a wānanga-style approach - a structured, yet open discussion format designed to foster deep engagement and collective exploration of the research objectives

This phase ensured that the subsequent quantitative survey is culturally relevant, accessible, and effective for all New Zealanders, while aligning with Parliamentary Services' strategic objectives.

The methodology of the wānanga was as follows

- Format: One six-person 60 minute online wānanga style sessions via Zoom.

Participants:

- Mix of youth, Māori, Pasifika, disabled communities and new migrants.
- A mix of no, low and moderate engagement with Parliament, parliamentary process and the broader democratic process.
- No rejectors of government or parliamentary authority.

Stage 2: Quantitative research

The outputs from the wānanga allowed us to design an effective quantitative survey

This survey was based on the objectives of the project, input from Parliamentary Service, and what we learned from our wānanga participants.

Detailed Method:

An online survey of n= 1033 New Zealanders, nationally representative of the population.

Covering both hard metrics and qualitative insights from open-ended responses. The survey took place from 05/05/2025 – 18/05/2025 and has a margin for error is +/- 3.1 percentage points.

The key topic areas were

- Screeners and demographics
- Participation and awareness of the democratic process
- TRA Trust model – understanding the level and drivers of trust for Parliament compared to other organisations
- TRA Social Norms model – understanding how New Zealanders' social, observed, and individual norms align on the value of participating with Parliament
- Barriers and motivations for participation with Parliament
- Perceptions of Parliament

Stage 2: Quantitative research

The qualitative phase revealed that people could easily be confused about the role of Parliament, so the survey began with an introduction of what Parliament actually does

“This survey is about Parliament and how you interact with it. Before we start here is some information that may help you complete the survey. Please read this information before clicking through to the next screen. Parliament and the Government are different things.”

Parliament:

Parliament makes laws for New Zealand and holds the Government to account for its policies, actions, and spending. Every time there is a general election, we elect people to represent us in Parliament. These people are known as members of Parliament or MPs. Parliament includes the Government and the Opposition.

Parliament's role includes:

- Making new laws and updating old laws
- Representing the people
- Examining and approving Government taxes and spending
- Holding the Government to account for its policies and actions.

Government:

The Government is made up of the political party or group of parties (e.g. coalition) that have over half the people (MPs) elected to Parliament. The Government runs the country and makes day-to-day decisions on how and what NZ should spend its money on. It suggests laws to Parliament, and decides which policies get put into practice. The Government is accountable to Parliament.

Select Committees:

Select committees are groups of MPs from different political parties that focus on a specific subject areas (e.g. environment or health). They consider issues in their area in detail, and report back to the whole Parliament.

Submissions:

Written submissions are a way for you to present your opinions, observations, and recommendations on an issue or proposed law to a select committee. Written submissions are made through the Parliament website or the post. You can also ask to talk to the committee in person.

Petitions:

Parliamentary petitions are petitions that ask Parliament to take a specific action, such as changing a law or policy. People can both start petitions and sign them to show support.

● Agenda

Relationship with Parliament

1

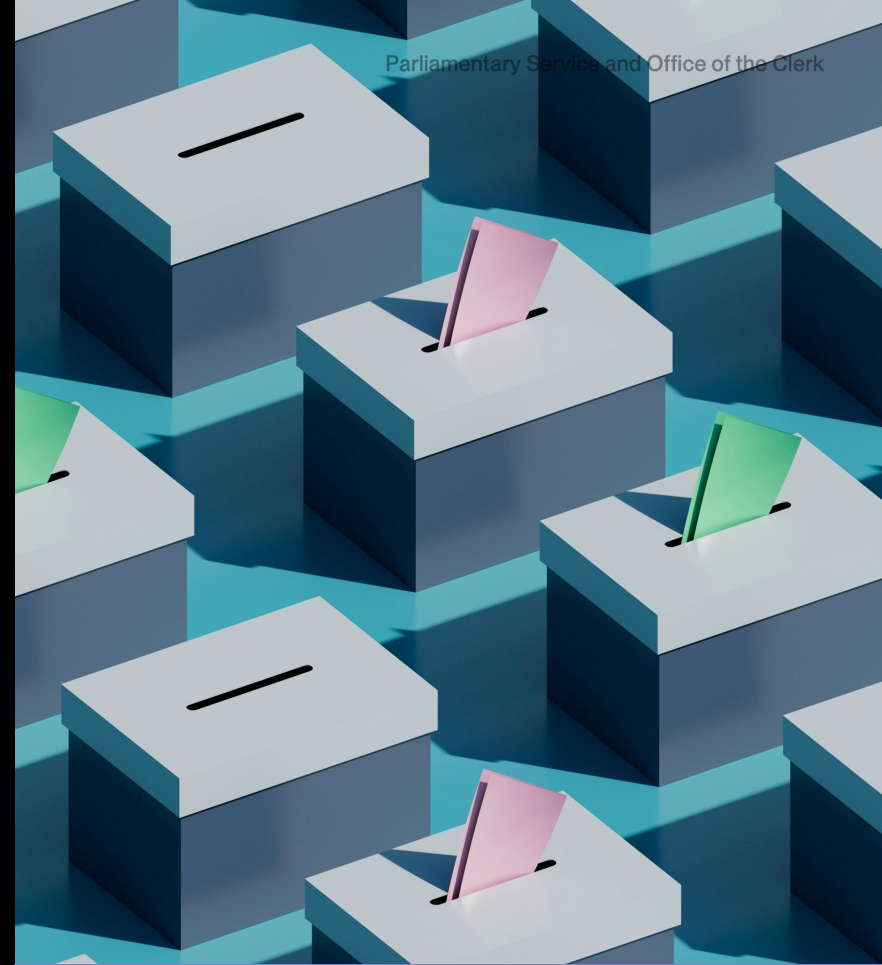
Increasing trust and engagement

2

Bringing it all together

3

Relationship with Parliament



1

We can see that New Zealanders believe our country is one that values the sharing of views as part of the Parliamentary process

Percentage who agree that New Zealanders share their views with Parliament on what is important to them



Percentage of New Zealanders who have voted in a General Election at some point



Q. How strongly do you agree or disagree that New Zealanders share their views on issues or what is important to them with Parliament and MPs? Which of the following have you personally done at some point in the past?
Base: Total sample n=1032)

And on the face of it most New Zealanders are happy with their current level of engagement with Parliament

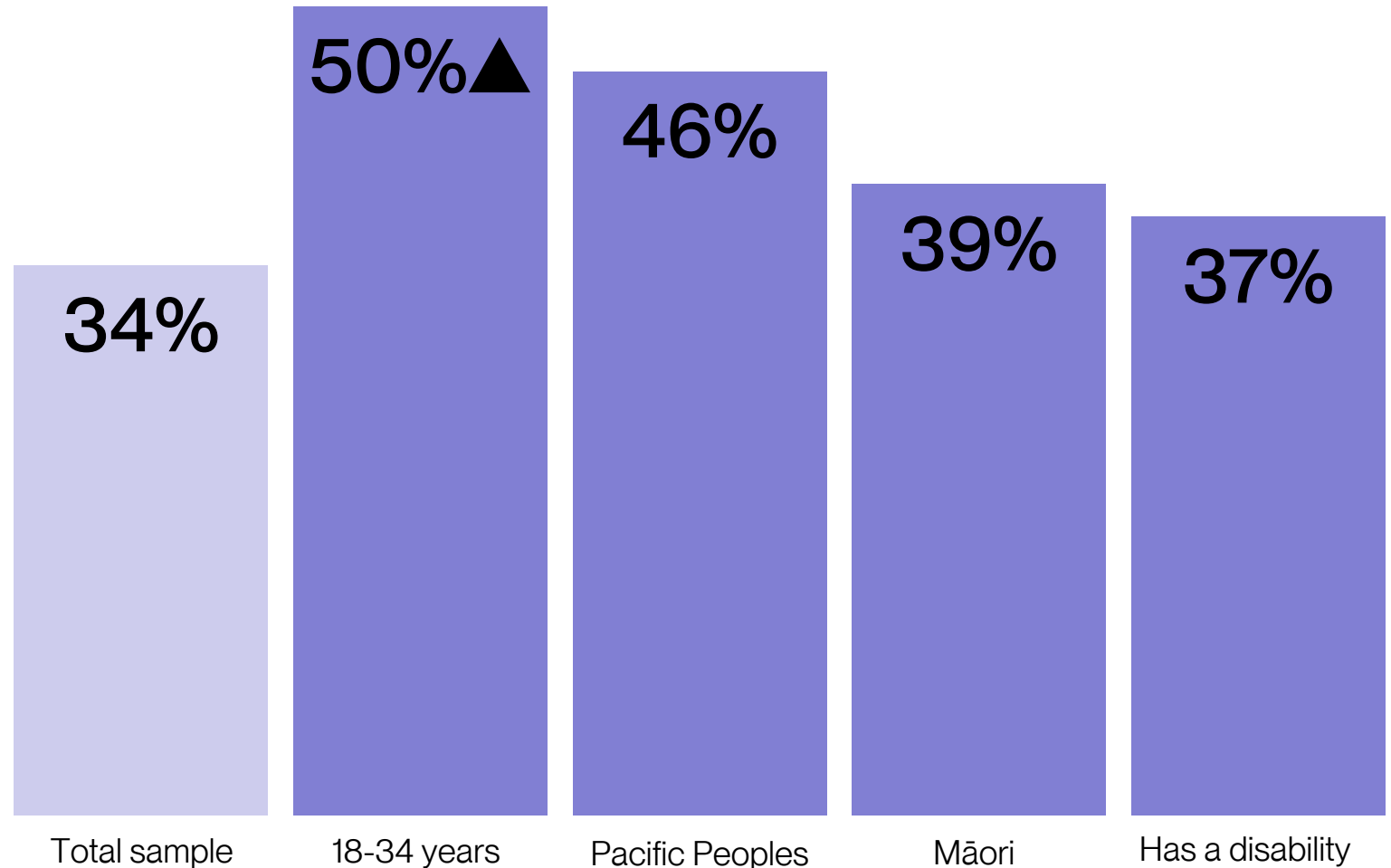
Only 34 percent of New Zealanders would like to have more engagement with Parliament.

Some populations do want to engage more than others – youth, Pacific Peoples and Māori stand out among demographic groups.

(Q. Would you like to be involved with the decisions that are made in Parliament more than you currently are?)

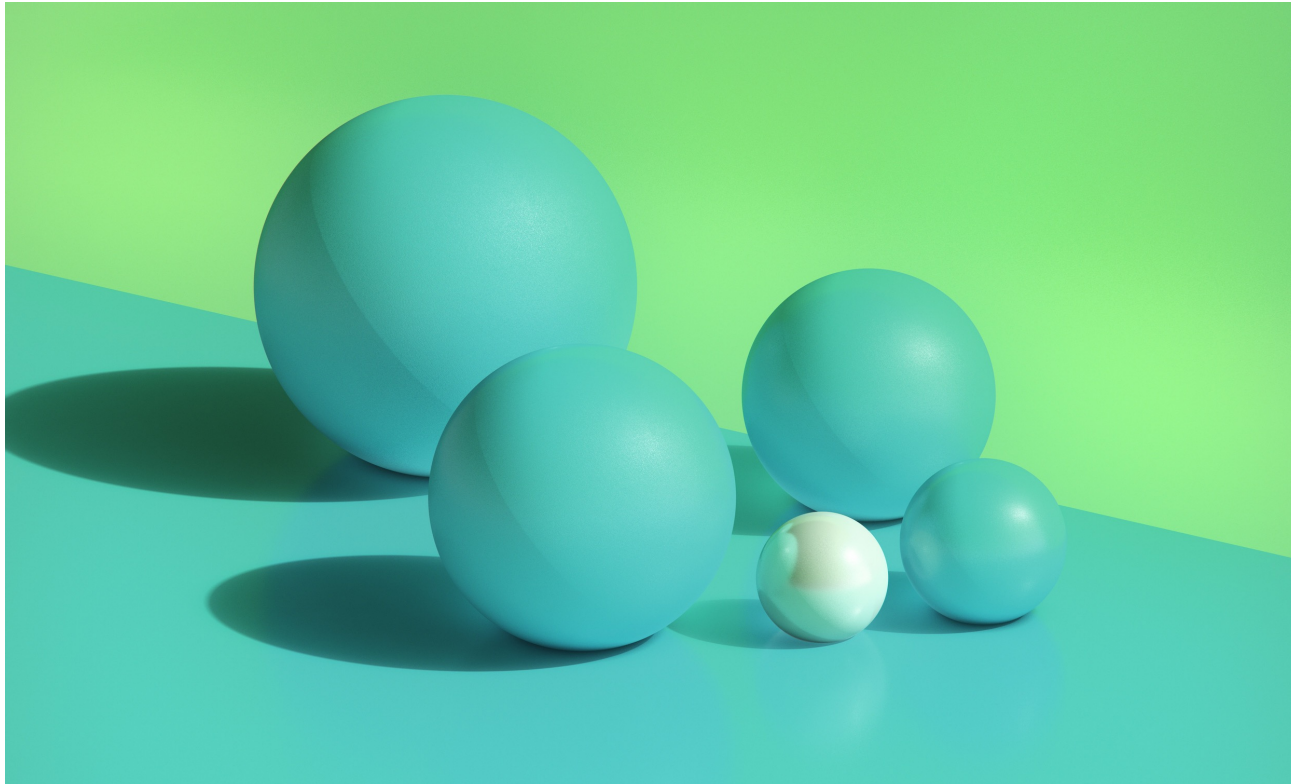
Base: Total sample n=1032, 18-34 years old n=298, Maori n=108, Pacific Peoples n=64, Have a disability n=202)

New Zealanders who would like to have more engagement than they currently have



▲▼ Significantly higher / lower than total

Most people are happy with their current low levels of engagement, but is this enough?

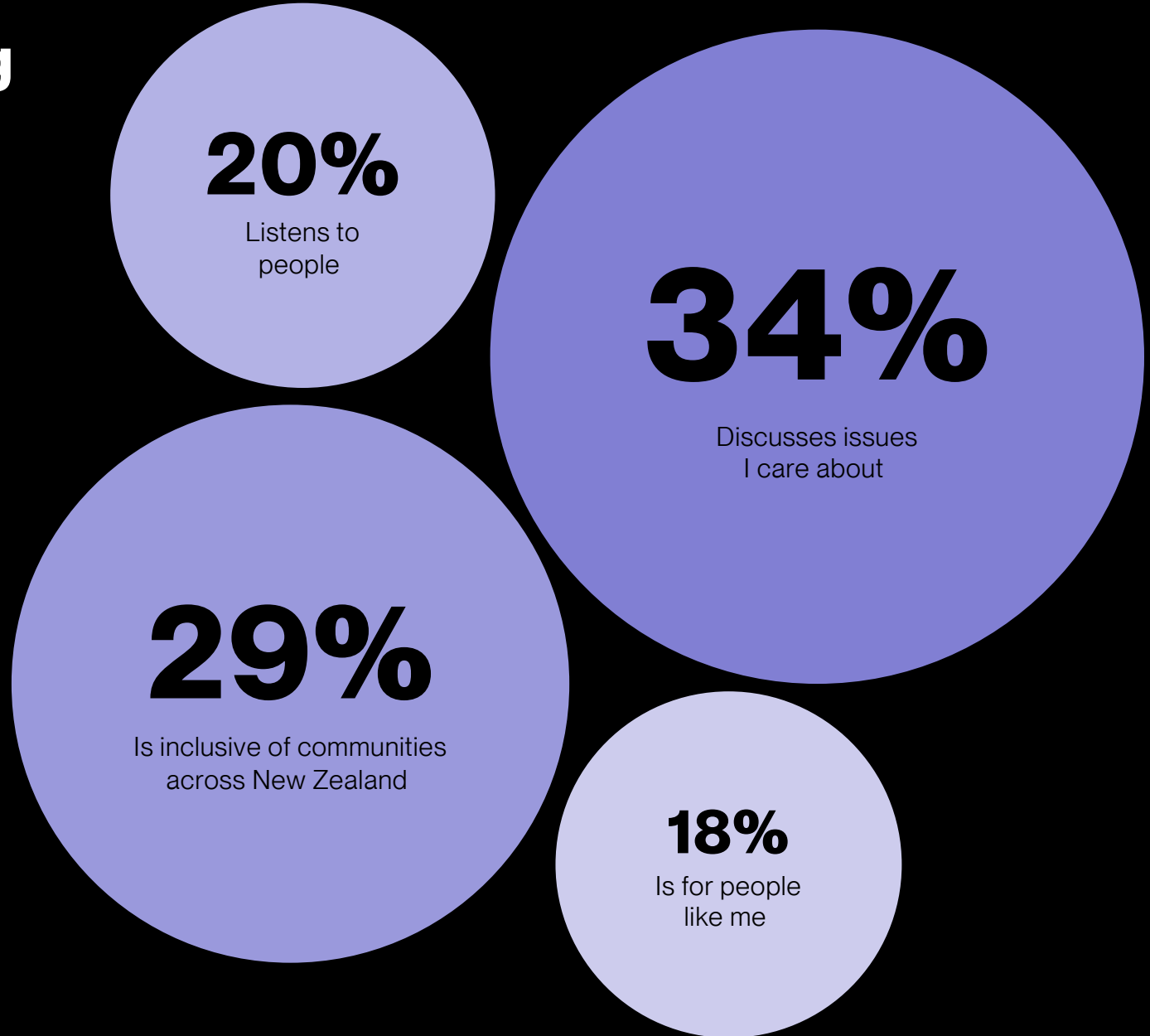


From these scores we might expect that people are generally knowledgeable and trusting of Parliament, and all is well.

But when we look further into the trust and relevance of Parliament, a different story emerges.

Parliament is not seen as being inclusive, listening, or relevant to most New Zealanders

Perceptions of Parliament



(Q. Which of the following do you associate with Parliament?
Base: Total sample n=1032)

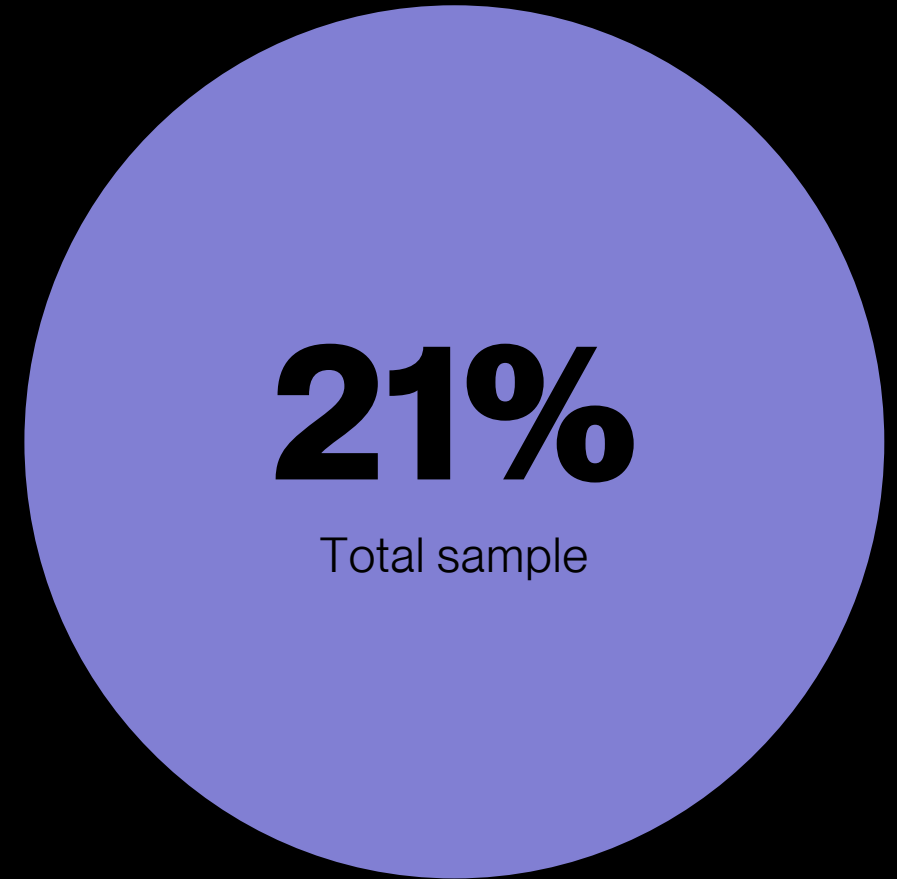
It's also clear there are cultural barriers at play

Māori and Asian people particularly are less likely to feel Parliament is welcoming to other cultures

Parliament does not feel welcoming to people from other cultures

35%▲ Māori

31%▲ Asian



(Q. Which of the following are things that might stop you engaging more with Parliament than you otherwise would?
Base: Total sample n=1032, Māori n=108, Asian n=98

There is also a disconnection in how Parliament communicates

Perceptions of Parliament

21%

Communicates in a way I can relate to

19%

Is easy to understand what they do

19%

Uses simple language

(BASENOTE: Q. Which of the following do you associate with Parliament?
Base: Total sample n=1032)

Further, New Zealanders do not have high levels of trust in Parliament

Parliament has similar levels of trust to local councils and significantly lower levels of trust when compared to the Reserve Bank of New Zealand and ACC

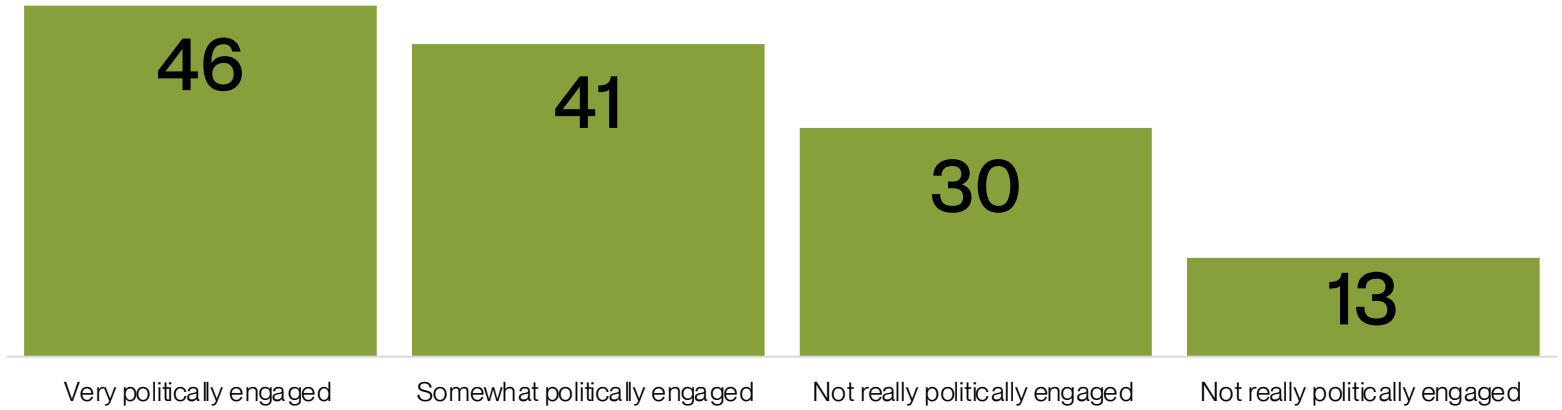
TRA Trust Framework score



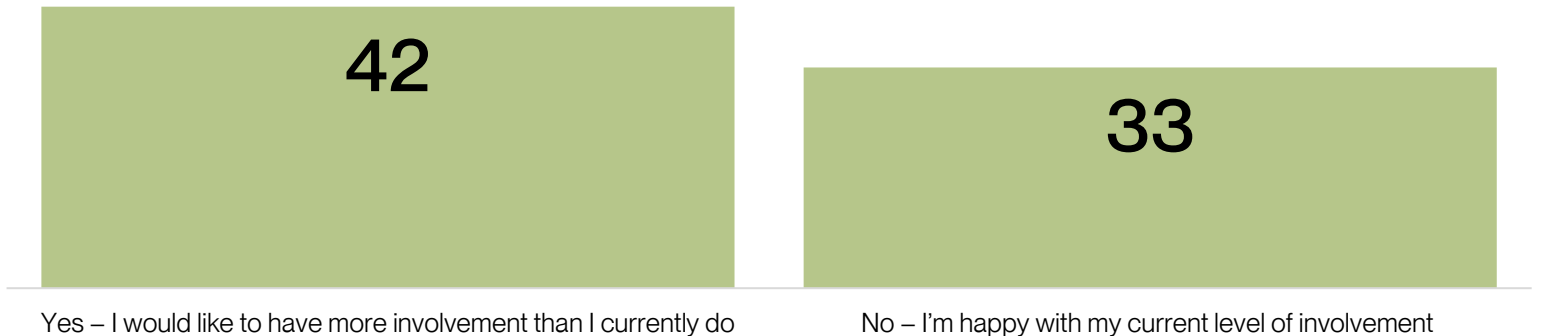
(Q. Trust framework question set
Base: Total sample n=1032)

Trust in Parliament is important – it strongly correlates with how politically engaged New Zealanders feel they are and how engaged they want to be with Parliament

Parliament trust score by how politically engaged New Zealanders feel they are



Parliament trust score by whether New Zealanders would like to have more political engagement than they currently do



(Q. Trust framework question set, How would you see yourself compared to the average New Zealander? Would you like to be involved with the decisions that are made in Parliament more than you currently are? Base: Very politically engaged n=109, Somewhat politically engaged n=476, Not really politically engaged n=374, Not politically engaged at all n=73, Wants more involvement n=350, Happy with current level of involvement n=610)

How Parliament communicates matters – it impacts trust and inclusivity



And these low levels of trust and inclusivity also matter.

They directly impact levels of involvement with Parliament and overall political engagement.

So, while people might be happy with their current levels of engagement, we are putting up barriers that would encourage greater engagement.

There is also confusion about the role of Parliament

More than half of New Zealanders confuse the role of Parliament with that of the Government.

Note: this is despite the introduction that we gave to people at the beginning of the survey. The dual roles are a complex topic that can be difficult to understand.

(Q. What do you think the role of New Zealand's Parliament is? - Coded
Base: Total sample n=1032)

What the role of Parliament is – Open ended responses coded

We analysed all the verbatim comments where people were asked about the role of Parliament. From this we can see substantial confusion.

57%

Confused with Government

25%

Mentions some correct elements of role of Parliament

15%

Other wrong interpretation

3%

Don't know

There is also confusion about the role of Parliament

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57%

Confused with Government

“To direct the affairs of the country in accordance with the will of the people who elected them. To keep it economic and efficient and to relate and trade with other nations.”

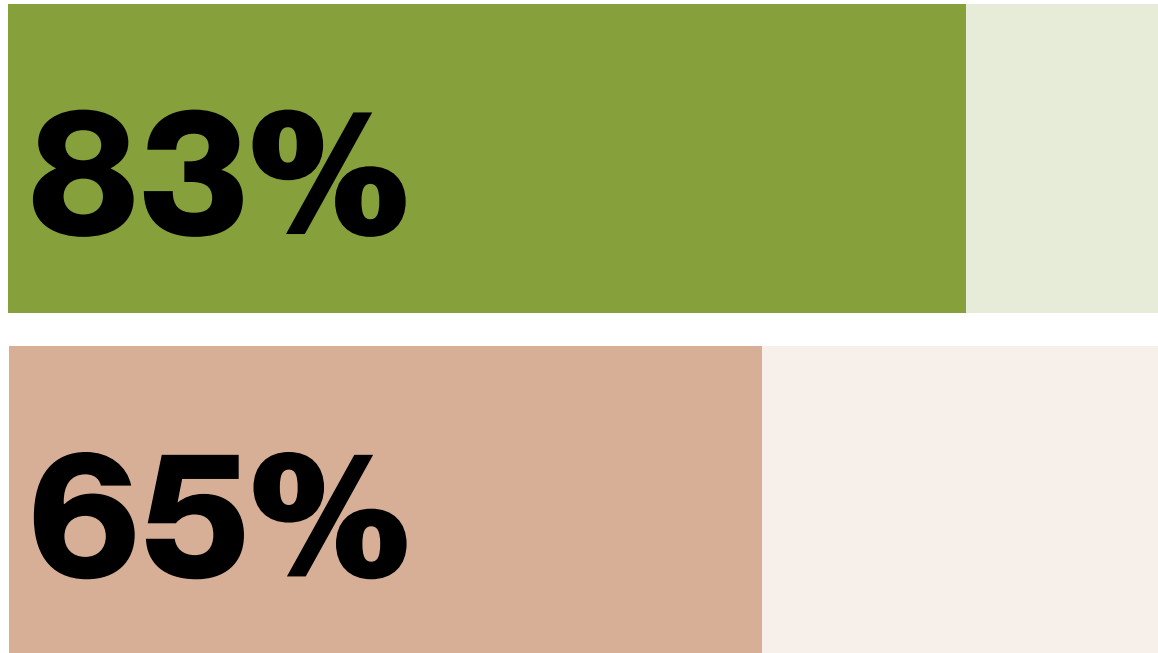
25%

Mentions some correct elements of role of Parliament

“The role of New Zealand’s Parliament is to make laws, represent the people, approve government spending, and hold the government accountable through debate and scrutiny.”

Knowing what Parliament actually does increases positive perceptions and is a prerequisite for higher levels of trust

Has at least one positive perception of Parliament by knowledge of Parliament



Parliament trust score by knowledge of Parliament



■ Mentions some correct elements about the role of Parliament

■ Wrong about what Parliament does

● Implication

There is no one solve for increasing trust – we have to tackle interconnected issues

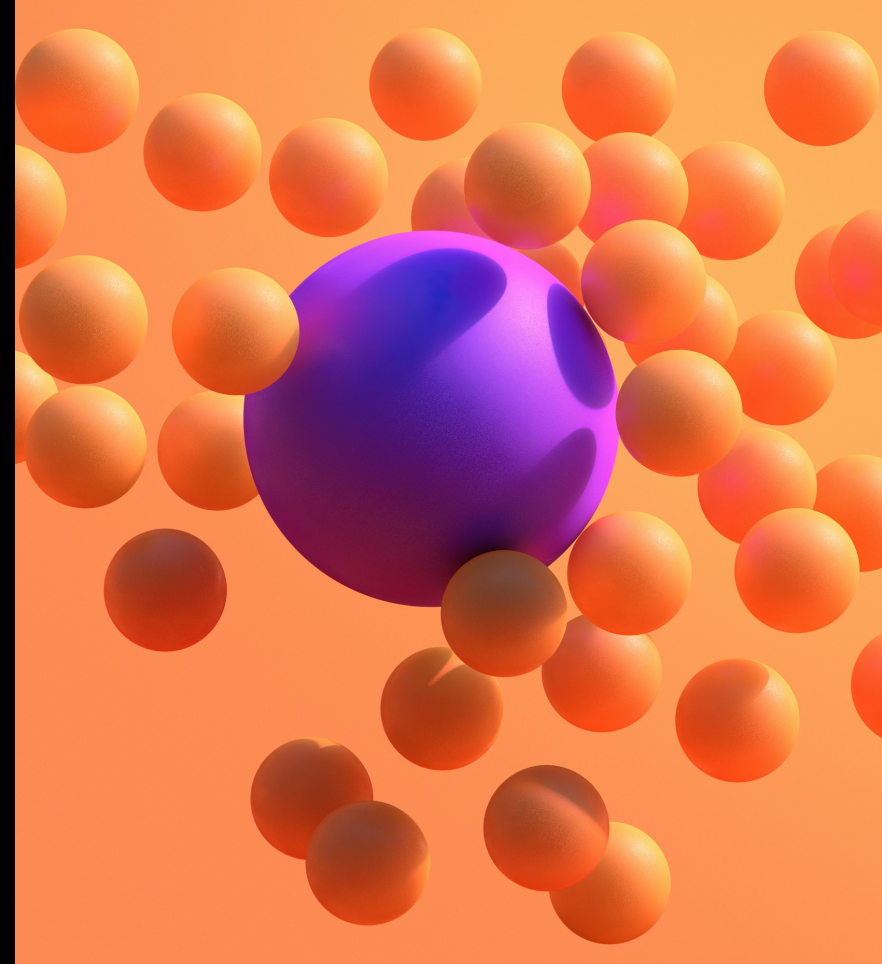
New Zealanders

- Feel that Parliament is not inclusive, connected or relevant
- And can feel confused about how Parliament communicates
- Are confused as to who Parliament is and what they do
- And so lack trust

The issues are interconnected, but we can break them down further to find practical ways of increasing perceptions and engagement. This is where TRA's Trust model, and motivators and barriers to engagement are useful.

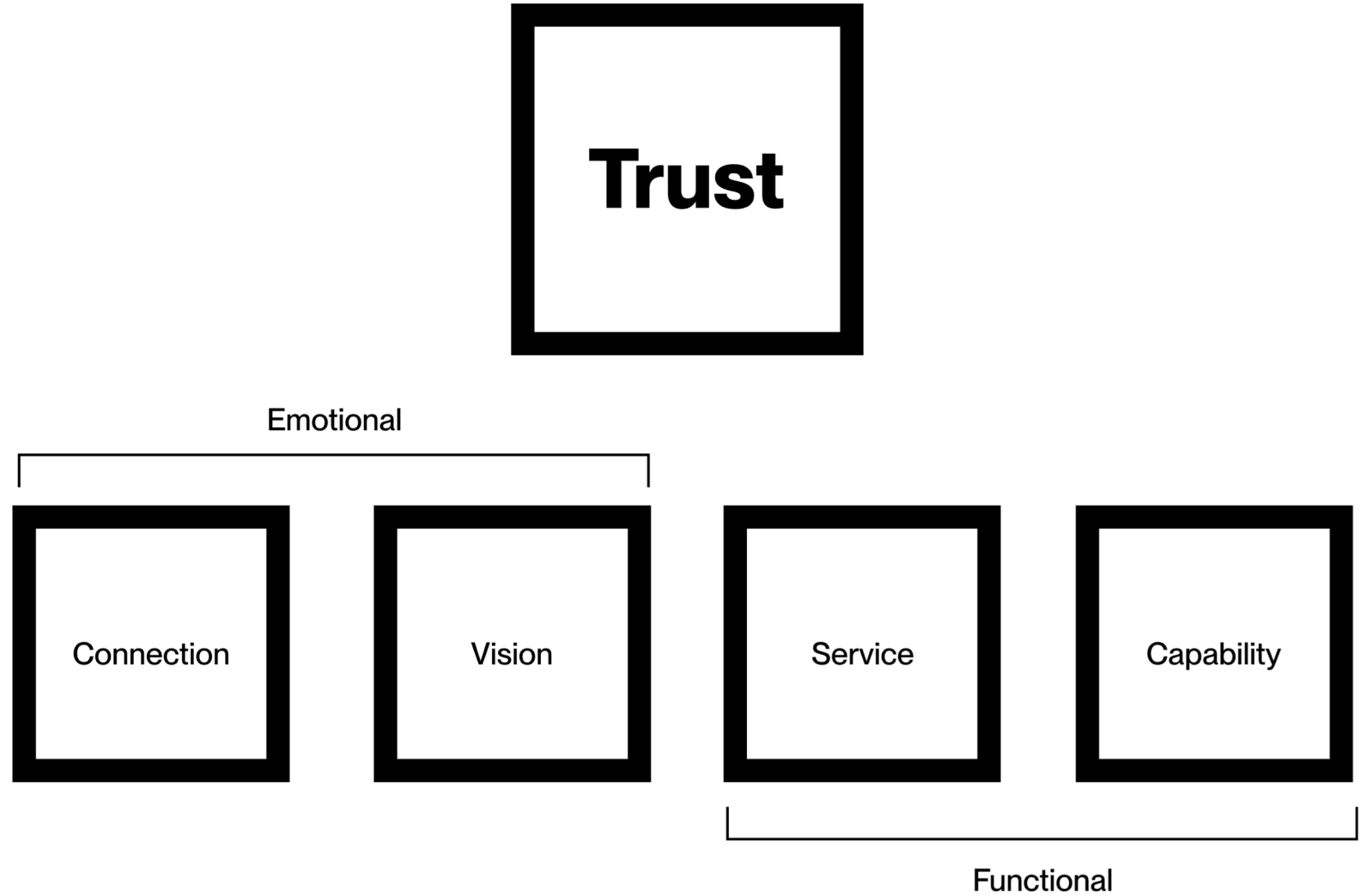


Increasing trust and engagement



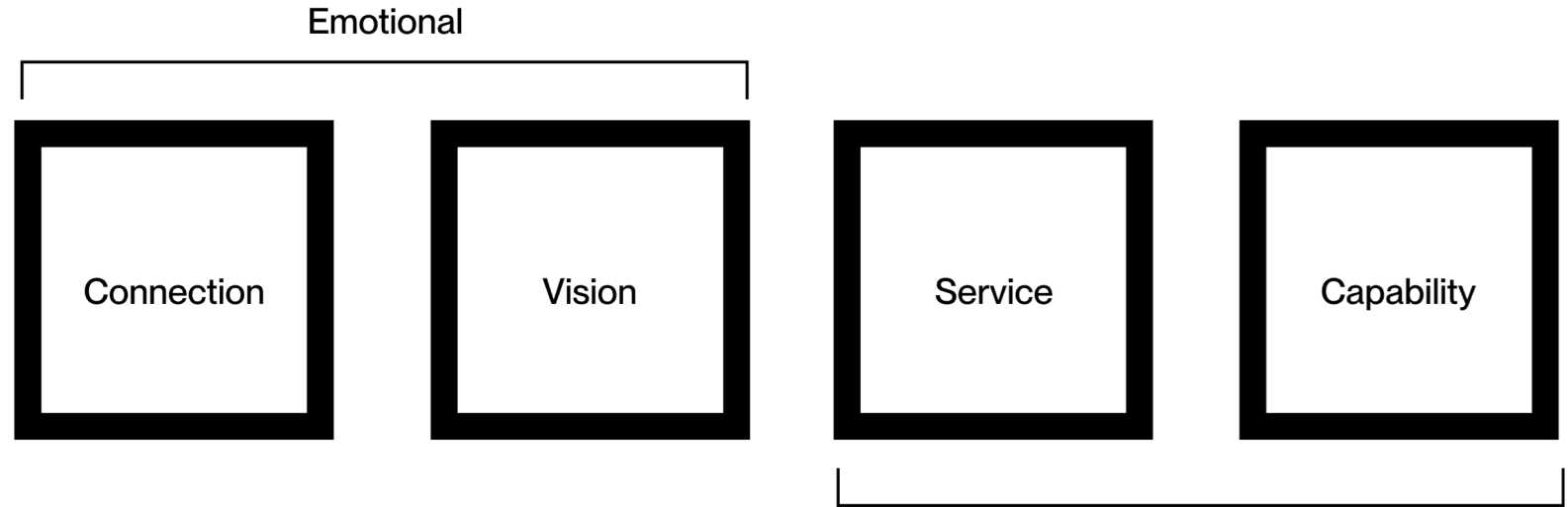
The TRA Trust Framework separates Trust into functional and emotional drivers.

Both are needed for an organisation to be trusted. People value what organisations do, but also need to feel connected to them and to their vision.



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Engages
The opportunity to have some input which is recognised and reflected.

Empowers
Inspires, supports and educations showing how people can be involved.

Transparent
A clear understanding of motivations and values.

Innovative
Promote innovative initiatives and resources.

Visionary
Endorse a relevant vision at all levels through all communications.

Sustainability
Demonstrate care for the environment and future generations.

Experienced
Skilled in their field.

Knowledgeable
Well informed and know their industry.

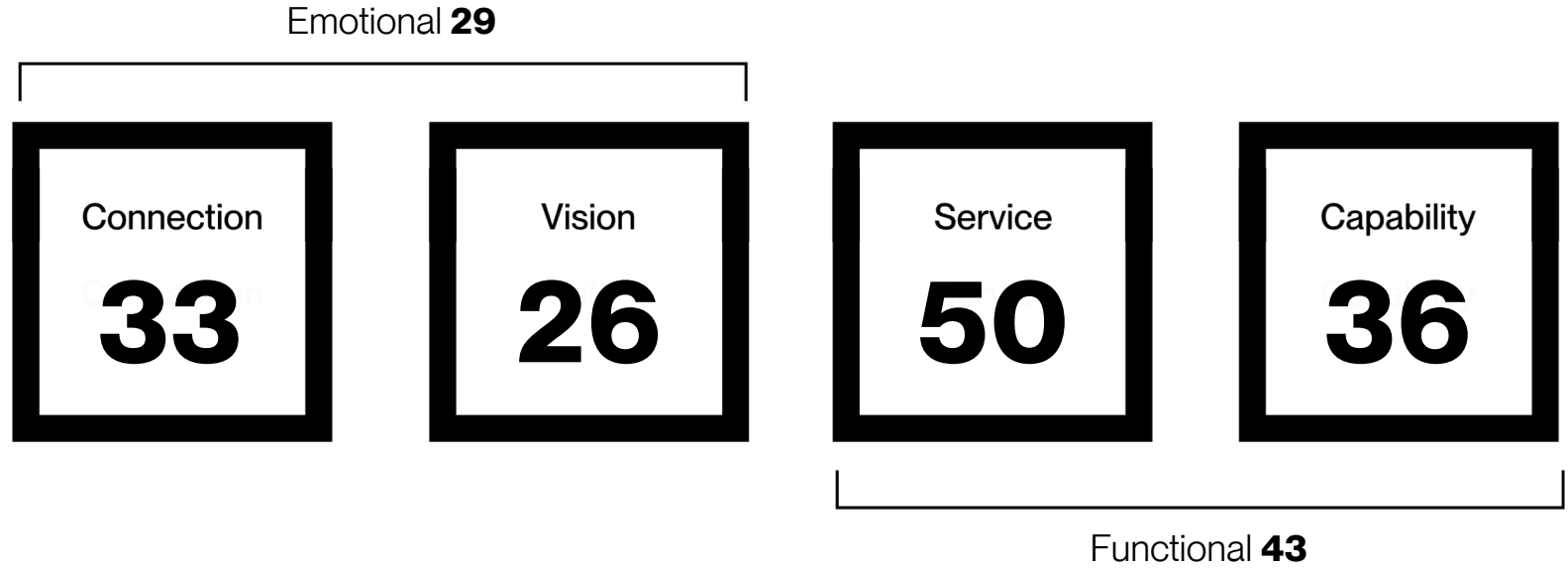
Dependable
Can rely on them to get the job done..

Consistent
Consistently deliver across all touchpoints of the business.

Deliver
Deliver a solution.

Responsive
Timely responses for communications and or manage expectations.

Parliament's overall trust score is being affected by a lower emotional score



Parliament



(Q. Trust frame work question set
Base: Correct about what Parliament does n=263,
Don't know the role of Parliament n=770)

Engages 15%
The opportunity to have some input which is recognised and reflected.

Empowers 15%
Inspires, supports and educations showing how people can be involved.

Transparent 15%
A clear understanding of motivations and values.

Innovative 10%
Promote innovative initiatives and resources.

Visionary 11%
Endorse a relevant vision at all levels through all communications.

Sustainability 14%
Demonstrate care for the environment and future generations.

Experienced 32%
Skilled in their field.

Knowledgeable 32%
Well informed and know their industry.

Dependable 17%
Can rely on them to get the job done..

Consistent 17%
Consistently deliver across all touchpoints of the business.

Deliver 13%
Deliver a solution.

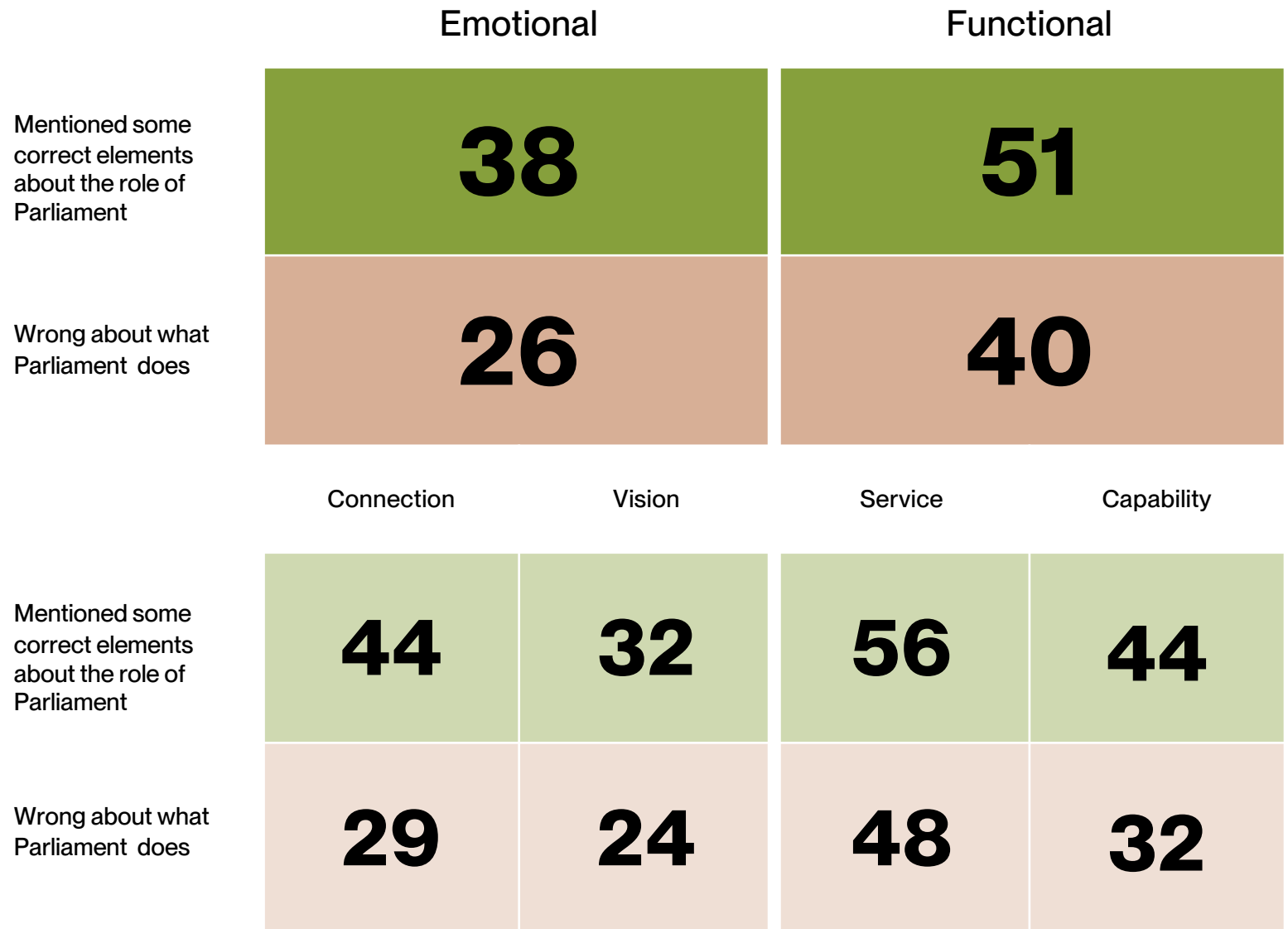
Responsive 21%
Timely responses for communications and or manage expectations.

With confusion about what Parliament does is correlated to lower emotional and functional trust

Key drivers to focus on:

- Emotional connection via a sense of engagement, empowerment, and transparency
- Functional excellence via a sense that Parliament is responsive, delivers solutions, and is consistent across touchpoints.

(Q. Trust frame work question set
Base: Correct about what Parliament does n=263, Don't know the role of Parliament n=770)



- Implication

We've seen that trust in Parliament is connected to knowledge, but also to how Parliament communicates

To drive trust first consider:

- How we foster a sense of transparency and empowerment by use of plain language
- How we use plain language and various touchpoints to be consistent in what we say
- How we foster a sense of responsiveness in how we make it easy and emotionally rewarding to participate in the parliamentary process

How do we do this? By recognising:

- The functional motivations and barriers to participation
- And how we use these to deliver greater ease and emotional reward to New Zealanders when they participate with Parliament.

We need to make it as easy as possible for people to participate and find the information they need

Ease of information access is a motivator for greater participation

(BASENOTE: Q. Which of the following would help you to engage more with parliament?
Base: Total sample n=1032)

Motivations to engage more with Parliament

36%

Easier to understand processes

35%

Better education around how Parliament works including how to participate

33%

More places to find the right information on how to participate

Reciprocity also counts for a lot when fostering engagement

When New Zealanders do participate, people want acknowledgement that their views have been received.

Top motivator to increase engagement with Parliament

41%

Being able to see how my views have been considered

(BASENOTE: Q. Which of the following would help you to engage more with parliament?)

Base: Total sample n=1032)

People also want to know that their participation does make a difference – this is the emotional reward of participation

More than half (55%) of New Zealanders indicated that a barrier to them engaging more with Parliament is the feeling that their engagement won't have any impact.

Barriers to engaging more with Parliament

48%

Even if I do participate, I feel what I say won't make a difference

21%

I want to speak to my local MP, but I don't think they will listen

(BASENOTE: Q. Which of the following are things that might stop you engaging more with Parliament than you otherwise would?

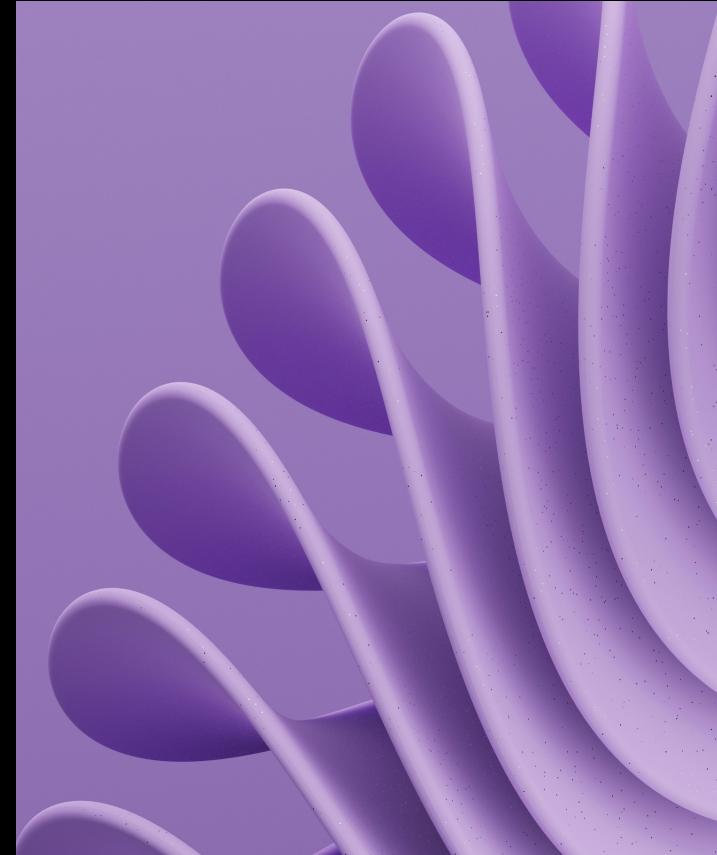
Base: Total sample n=1032)

● Implication

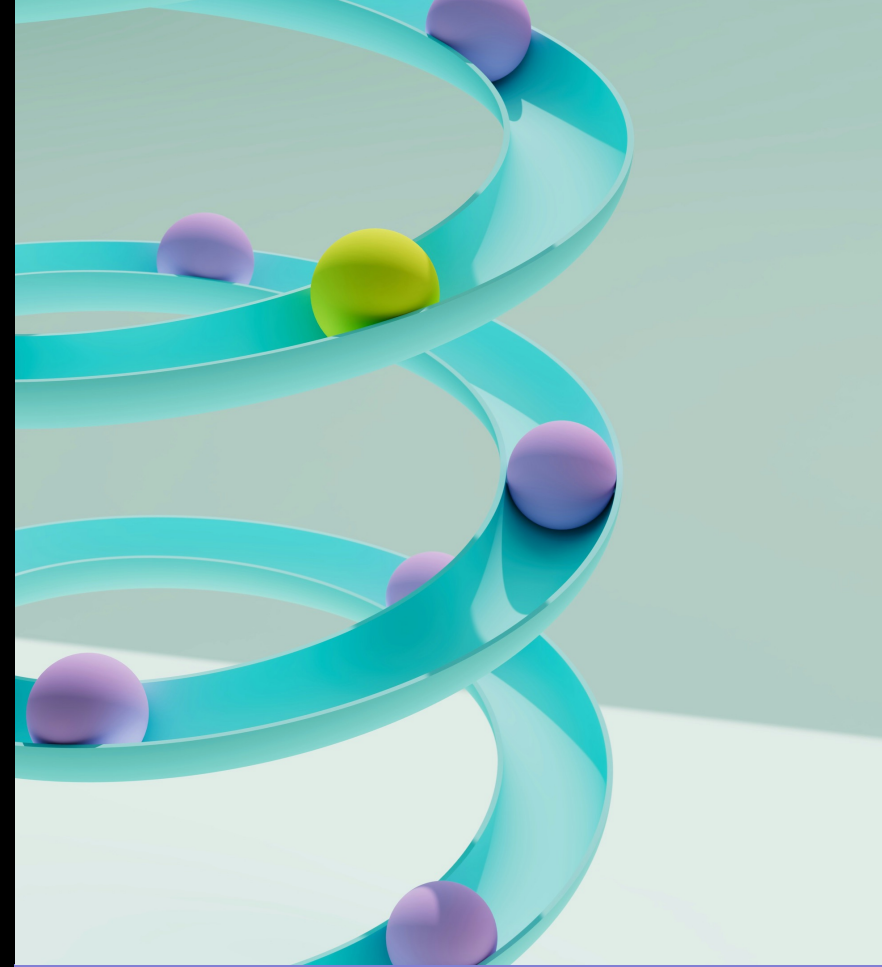
Increasing New Zealanders ability to engage with Parliament will require a multifaceted approach

There are functional measures that are needed to increase literacy of democratic process and how and when individuals fit into this.

There are also emotional gaps in our process. New Zealanders want to know their views have been received and considered.





Bringing it all together





3

We recommend four key areas to improve engagement

-  Communicating simply and clearly

-  Building knowledge

-  Increasing ease of participation

-  Enhancing the sense of emotional reward for participation with Parliament

The job to do

Communicate simply and clearly

How we do it

- Use simple language that is accessible to all New Zealanders. Be overly explicit if necessary.
- Avoid jargon and technical terms
- Consistently reinforce basic democratic concepts

Who do we need to concentrate on

- All demographic groups shared similar levels of confusion, and there is a wide range of political literacy in New Zealand.
- Evaluate communication against a 'lowest common denominator' test.

1

The job to do

Build knowledge and literacy in the democratic process

2

How we do it

- Be specific and don't assume prior knowledge.
- Use basic explainers with simple examples.
- Concentrate on the difference between Parliament and Government.

Repeat the same messages across touchpoints using plain language.

Who do we need to concentrate on

Three quarters of New Zealanders are unable to correctly explain the role of Parliament – again this is a message for everyone.

Examples could be relevant to various demographic groups – youth, those who want a sense of more cultural inclusion.

The job to do

Make it easy for people to participate in the democratic process

3

How we do it

Removing barriers to participation:

- We have come a long way in digitising the democratic process. Remind people how and when they can access these resources.
- Reach people where they are – social media remains an important messaging tool
- Remind people how and when they can participate in different democratic processes.

Who do we need to concentrate on

All New Zealanders are important, but we should focus on those who want to participate more than they currently do. 18-34 year olds and Māori over index on wanting more engagement than they currently have.

The job to do

Provide emotional reward for participation with Parliament

4

How we do it

To encourage participation, New Zealanders need emotional reward for their effort. Acknowledgement that their views have been heard and how their views have made a difference.

- Show examples of how participation made a difference overall.
- Provide individual receipts or communications acknowledging participation, and the next steps

Who do we need to concentrate on

- All New Zealanders participating in the democratic process.
- Māori and New Zealanders aged 55+ have particularly large emotional trust deficits so could be groups to focus on.
- Acknowledgement can also be tailored to individual issues inviting participation.

**“The only way to practice democracy,
is to practice democracy”**

-Hu Shih

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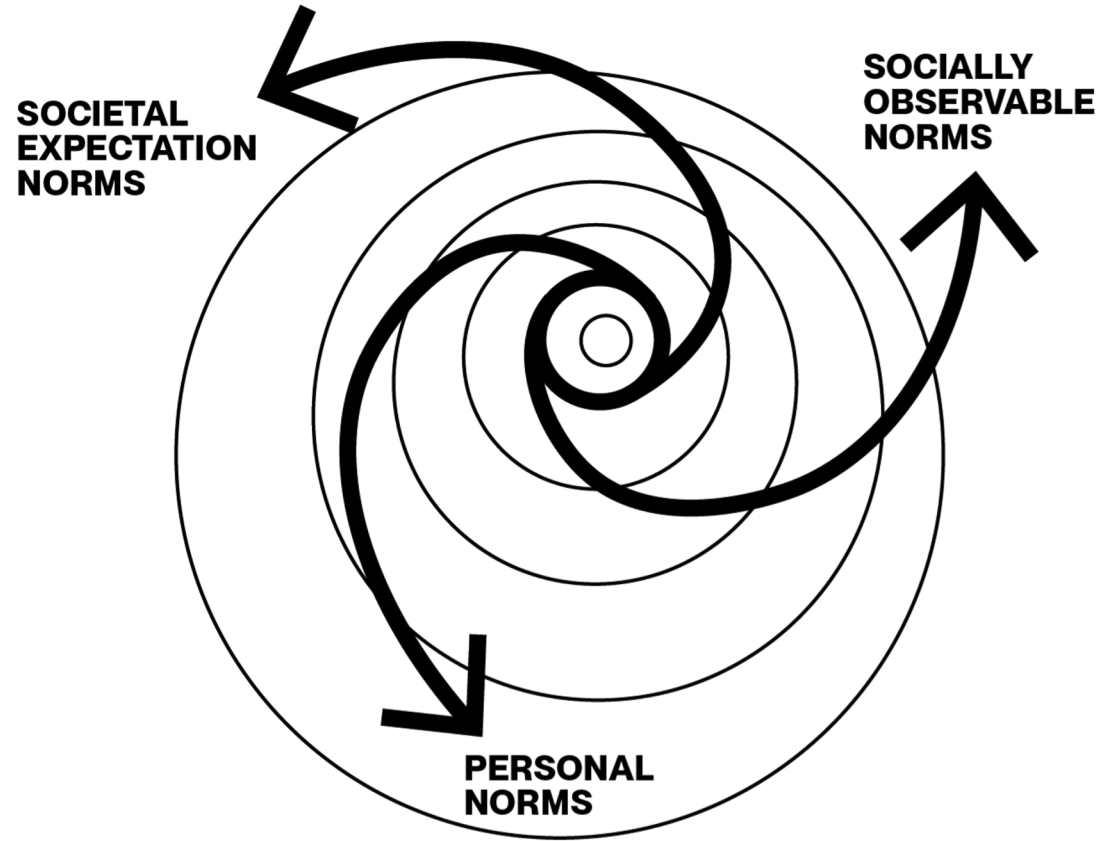
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The way people are expected to behave, following customary etiquette and what society or social groups expect of us (sometimes described as injunctive norms).

The way we do things around here...
The law of the land...



Our herding instinct, coming from unconsciously or consciously observing what others are doing (sometimes described as descriptive norms).

Most people seem to be doing...
I'd feel like the odd one out...

Our moral compass, obeying our personal beliefs and the expectations we hold for ourselves.

I think it's OK to...
I don't like the idea of...