

# Addressing the challenges to social cohesion

Sir Peter Gluckman, Paul Spoonley, Anne Bardsley, Richie Poulton,  
Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, Hema Sridhar and Dawnelle Clyne

June 2023





## KOI TŪ: THE CENTRE FOR INFORMED FUTURES

Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures is a research centre and an independent, non-partisan think tank at Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland with associate members across New Zealand and the world.

We address critical long-term national and global challenges arising from rapid and far-reaching social, economic, technological, and environmental change.

Our name, Koi Tū, was gifted by Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei. It means ‘the sharp end of the spear’. Like our namesake, Koi Tū aims to get to the heart of longterm issues challenging our future.

### Authors



Distinguished professor Sir Peter Gluckman is the director of Koi Tū and the president of the International Science Council.



Distinguished professor emeritus Paul Spoonley is co-director of He Whenua Taurikura (National Centre of Research Excellence for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism). He is an honorary research associate of Massey University’s Collage of Humanities and Social Sciences and an academic associate of Koi Tū.



Dr Anne Bardsley is the deputy director of Koi Tū. She was previously a senior analyst in the Office of the Prime Minister’s Chief Science Advisor. Her current work focuses on approaches to risk and collective decision-making on complex societal issues.



Distinguished professor Richie Poulton is director, Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Research Unit, co-director of the National Centre for Lifecourse Research at the University of Otago, and an academic associate of Koi Tū.

(Photo: Sharron Bennett, NZ Listener)



Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal is a strategic advisor Māori for Koi Tū. He belongs to Marutūahu, Ngāti Raukawa and Ngā Puhi.



Hema Sridhar is the former chief advisor for industry and science at the Ministry of Defence and served as the chief science advisor for Defence. She is a strategic adviser (technological futures) at Koi Tū.



Dr Dawnelle Clyne is a research fellow at Koi Tū with an interest in economic insecurity and inequality. Her work is funded by the Kelliher Charitable Trust.

### Acknowledgements

Dr Andrew Chen – Koi Tū research fellow



# CONTENTS

---

<b>1</b>	<b>Executive summary</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>How societies form – The evolution of cooperation and cohesion</b>
3	Boundaries, rules and norms
<b>3</b>	<b>Governance structures – Autocracy and democracy</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Social and institutional trust in a democracy</b>
5	Institutional trust
5	Social trust
<b>6</b>	<b>Changing times and fuzzy boundaries</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Disinformation, manipulated narratives, and the decline of civil discourse</b>
8	Information technology and the weaponised narrative
<b>9</b>	<b>New Zealand’s shallow democracy</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Social discontent in New Zealand</b>
11	Individual resilience
12	How cohesive are we?
<b>13</b>	<b>Can we find solutions?</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>In conclusion</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>References</b>

---

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Two years ago, Kōi Tū released an analysis of factors that could undermine a society's cohesion (Gluckman et al., 2021).<sup>1</sup> This analysis followed consultation with global experts across a breadth of domains, together with an international workshop which was undertaken just prior to the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. That analysis was generic, and since that time we have experienced the pandemic's worldwide effects. The pandemic and the policy and public responses to it, along with ongoing environmental, technological, economic and geostrategic stresses, have further tested the resilience of liberal democracies, producing growing concern around cohesiveness in many societies.

Aotearoa New Zealand's democracy has been sustained by a relatively high degree of social cohesion. However, as in other liberal democracies, there is increasing concern about the risks from greater polarisation and division, reducing our ability to cooperate and make decisions for the good of society as a whole. The 2022 protests in Parliament's grounds and the way important but sensitive values-laden debates have been reduced to verbal and hostile confrontations illustrate why such concern is rising.

A society's resilience to stresses and rapid changes such as those wrought by the climate crisis, technological developments, natural disasters, and pandemics, is not simply a function of the effectiveness of local and central governance. It is also a matter of the psychological, social, and economic well-being of the community; and individual societal members' sense of agency, their ability to respect and work with each other and the degree of trust they have in institutions – informal, formal and societal – that connect and support citizens. When trust is undermined, individual's anxiety, anger and frustration are elevated, and social cohesion is threatened. The way a government operates and communicates in this context can make the situation better or worse. Similarly, the way individuals and organisations operate and communicate can have adverse or positive effects.

Complex interactions involving many factors underpin or can undermine trust in government, within communities, and between individuals. The changed nature of the information environment creates both opportunities and threats to sustaining social cohesion. For example, social-media platforms have greatly enabled the pervasive distribution of disinformation. Globally, the emergence of advanced information technologies including large-language models (e.g ChatGPT-4) and artificial intelligence (AI), along with the widespread deployment of algorithms, create new opportunities and threats. Concerns are now being raised about the implications of the next stage of the AI revolution on both individuals and society.<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that rapid social, economic, technological and environmental challenges make these testing times. More attention must be paid to enhancing both institutional and social trust and managing the factors that might affect them, as these are the core determinants of social cohesion and societal resilience. There will be limited benefit if the policy focus is confined to boosting trust between identified groups in society and between individuals (social trust). We must also think about sustaining and enhancing the trust of citizens in our institutions, particularly those of governance and control (institutional trust).

---

1 That paper, *Sustaining Aotearoa New Zealand as a cohesive society*, adopted a broad definition of social cohesion, which we also use here. It characterises social cohesion in a democratic society depending on:

- Sufficient levels of trust and respect between those who are governed and the institutions and individuals who they empower to govern them;
- Sufficient trust and respect between all the components of a society (which by inference reflects a diverse set of identities, worldviews, values, beliefs, and interests) to foster cooperation for the good of society as a whole;
- Institutions and structures that promote trust and respect for and between all members of society; and allowing
- Belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition, and legitimacy to be universally possible.

2 There are diverse views on the opportunities and threats created by the rapid emergence of large language models and generative artificial intelligence but there is an increasing recognition that uncontrolled developments could threaten the health of society and individuals. For recent commentaries see: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/24/opinion/yuval-harari-ai-chatgpt.html> & <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/21/opinion/artificial-intelligence-chatgpt.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>

Given the many ways that societies evolve in response to internal and external factors, a healthy democracy needs to continuously reflect on and adapt its institutions and behaviours to sustain the elements that maintain cohesiveness. Lack of clarity and consensus in how New Zealand should evolve as a culturally diverse society with bicultural constitutional underpinnings makes our challenge arguably unique. Among other things, this requires more nuanced and detailed understandings of what various sections of our society see as undermining their sense of cohesiveness. Only then can we make and act on appropriate choices that respect diverse world views and circumstances and sustain our sense as a nation and society in the face of challenges.

In this discussion paper we explore in detail, and with direct reference to New Zealand, those factors that are potentially threatening to our society's resilience. Depending on how we react to a broad range of stresses, this increasingly fragile cohesion could be pushed past a tipping point. The challenges are interacting and complex, and we will need to find solutions that are specific to the cultural, social, and political context of Aotearoa New Zealand. We conclude by suggesting a range of actions by multiple players that focus not only on enhancing social trust but also on protecting institutional trust. The latter raises questions about how our democracy should evolve, and whether new institutions and approaches are needed.

# HOW SOCIETIES FORM – THE EVOLUTION OF COOPERATION AND COHESION

From the earliest emergence of our species, social interactions and a degree of cohesion were critical to humanity's survival and influenced our further evolution.<sup>3</sup> Language, collective memory, tool-making and cumulative learning marked our evolution, shaping how we evolved and in turn determining how we would thrive as a communal species. These attributes persisted because they supported behaviours that ensured the viability of the group and its members. This required the development of group norms and mores that ensured cooperation.

In less than 20,000 years, we have gone from living in small kin groups to very large human aggregations. The growth of complex social groups occurred because of our species' ability to develop technological and cultural innovations that have changed how we live and communicate. The development of agriculture, for example, allowed for settlement formation and increased structures within society. But these innovations and accomplishments can have a cost (Hanson & Gluckman, 2019). For example, climate change is largely the result of technological developments emerging in the 19th century that led to a carbon-based economy; obesity and its complications are related to changes in nutrition resulting from the industrialisation of much of our food supply (particularly after the second world war); and public-health improvements have led to extraordinary growth in the world's population over the past 150 years. And as we will discuss, the latest developments in information technology are creating challenges, both direct and indirect, affecting how we live and socialise.

## Boundaries, rules and norms

In addition to association and identity based on kinship and geography, societies developed by establishing boundaries of behaviour, norms, mores, and laws. These norms and behaviours helped distinguish a society's identity as distinct from other groups and ensured cooperation for the apparent good of that society. Societies thus became very well defined, with identity maintained by affiliation with the "in-group," while being often in conflict with "out-groups."

Common to these rule sets was punishment for those who were seen as contravening society's boundaries such that its cohesion and cooperation suffered (Curry et al., 2019). Historically, rules and norms were imposed by and benefited those at the top of the power hierarchy. In larger-scale societies, inequality of position, status and resources became the inevitable norm. Punishment could take many forms, but generally involved some form of exclusion from society or physical penalty including death. Solitary confinement continues to be seen as a particularly harsh form of punishment.

Modern law-making has largely been about defining the boundaries of what is acceptable in behaviour. Individual rule-breaking can be dealt with by sanctions, generally through the court system or through the court of public opinion. But the rules must not be arbitrary and must be fairly applied.

## GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES – AUTOCRACY AND DEMOCRACY

Large-scale societies have developed two major forms of governance, autocracy and democracy, to maintain societal boundaries and sustain their identity and cohesiveness in order to make collective living possible. However, cohesion is viewed very differently in democracies and autocracies. The former seek to find ways for

---

<sup>3</sup> In the animal kingdom there are species that largely live solitary adult lives and others that must live in groups – these may be herd species or large kin groups as in the case of elephants or gorillas. These species evolved innate ways to survive and thrive in their environmental niches.

society to function while giving agency to individuals and not imposing a singular belief, identity, value set or worldview. Autocracies, on the other hand, can create a form of cohesion independent of requiring trust either between individuals or in institutions by imposing behaviours, beliefs, attitudes and control.

Extreme autocracies rely on top-down management, thus restricting society members' agency to some degree. They protect the power of familial (for example, North Korea), religious (Iran), oligarchic (Russia) or ideological (China) interests. The control over citizens is often generated by fear and strict enforcement of rules. The power elite generally live freer lives than most of the population.

Democracy, at least in its idealised form, takes a different path. Rather than top-down control, democracy's focus is on mechanisms to allow individuals and groups with different interests and world views to reach agreement. The intent is to protect and give rights to citizens, thus upholding their personal agency to a greater extent. Generally, this is done through some form of majority-rule process, but with the caveat that minority interests must be respected, for example by protecting free speech. Increasingly in New Zealand, these protected interests (or characteristics, to use legal terminology) have involved distinctive cultural considerations, specifically those recorded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Unlike autocracies, accountability in democracies is meant to be assured by political systems of representation, notably elections, upheld via scrutiny of those in government by an effective opposition, the encouragement of civil debate over policy, and by a free and independent fourth estate (media). However, democracy and autocracy come in many forms, and the distinction between them is not always absolute. Indeed, there is growing evidence of autocratic tendencies in some democracies. In New Zealand, these perceptions may have been reinforced by the election of the first absolute majority government since the mixed member proportional (MMP) system was introduced.

The emergency powers governments assumed in the pandemic were slow to be removed and, in some cases, went beyond the needs of public safety. Many of the protests seen in democracies against public-health measures reflected individuals' sense of a loss of agency. The unusual circumstances of the pandemic encouraged a degree of public anxiety, and ultimately hostility towards governments internationally. As the Edelman Trust Barometer indicates, this has been associated with a significant decline in trust.<sup>4</sup> Although relative to other countries, we might be viewed as a high-trust society, worryingly low levels of trust are reflected in New Zealand data (OECD, 2023).<sup>5</sup>

The challenge of democracy is how to give all citizens a sense of belonging and agency at a time when there are incentives and technologies favouring autocracy or attempts to deny minority identities and rights.

## SOCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL TRUST IN A DEMOCRACY

The institutions of a healthy democracy aim to ensure both institutional and social trust, the two underpinning elements of a cohesive society (Chan et al., 2006).<sup>6</sup> Institutional and social trust are interdependent – how a government behaves affects social trust, and where social trust breaks down, institutional trust is generally lost. Such an unstable trust environment provides a breeding ground for autocratic and populist leaders.

---

4 See: <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2023/trust-barometer>

5 See: <https://acumennz.com/the-acumen-edelman-trust-barometer/2022/>

6 There are many different definitions of social cohesion. The one we have used, which has particular cogency in policy settings, is derived from Chan et al (2006). We characterise social cohesion in a democratic society as a state depending on:

- Sufficient trust and respect between those who are governed and the institutions and individuals they empower to govern them;
- Sufficient trust and respect between all members of a society (which by inference reflects a diverse set of identities, worldviews, values, beliefs and interests) to foster co-operation for the good of society as a whole;
- Institutions and structures that promote trust and respect between all members of society; and allowing
- Belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition and legitimacy to be universally possible.

Key to both dimensions of trust is the sense of being secure and safe. An individual who does not feel confident or empowered to express their views is likely to feel unsafe. There are many reasons to feel unsafe, including historical disadvantage (for example, colonial effects), economic or social circumstances, or because the future seems threatening because of climate change or rapid technological change, for example. Yet paradoxically, the evidence suggests that when people are anxious and fearful, support for autocratic governments increases (Davies, 2019). We have seen elsewhere populist politicians exploit dystopian fears, often further undermining social trust.

## **Institutional trust**

A cohesive democracy depends on trust in its many institutions (UNDP, 2021). These include the political system (central and local government), and the policy system that advises the political process. Other critical institutions include the justice system, the fourth estate (the media) and many agencies of local and central government at different degrees of remove from the political process. But many other “institutions” play key parts in contributing to a healthy society including universities, religious organisations and components of the commercial sector (banks and insurers, for example). Institutional trust is created and sustained via the performance, integrity and behaviour of these institutions and the actors within them. Trust in these entities spills over, and a loss of faith in one can affect perceptions of the others. Loss of institutional trust also flows across borders, and public attitudes are also likely affected by what they see in other democracies.

People expect governments to be able to solve their problems. Democratic governments must honour the implied contract between citizens and the state over the services to be provided, not act arbitrarily, and be accountable for their decisions and actions. Yet the most recent data show at least half of New Zealanders believe the political system is non-responsive to their situation and input. This is partly a matter of political behaviour and in part systemic (New Zealand Parliament, 2022). It is also influenced by what they see from overseas and the increasingly cynical behaviour of politicians in some of the largest democracies. The complexity of often deeply embedded problems, compounded by the changing sociological context of people’s lives, mean simplistic political messaging neither leads to solutions nor builds trust in the political process. Indeed, it only drives more cynicism, frustration, polarisation and distrust.

## **Social trust**

Social trust relies on people, irrespective of their identity and values, feeling fully part of society. That means their views can be articulated and interests and values will be respected, and that decision-making seems to be ‘fair’ in relation to the diversity of views present. Social trust thus depends on implicit understandings of how such diverse groups interact and how they make collective decisions. Civil discourse and dialogue based on a contest of values and ideas is critical. A conscious effort is needed to incorporate all identities and views, promoting confidence that discourse will not be manipulated, and that no perspectives are discounted or disadvantaged. This can create challenges. There must be a limit to the degree to which majority interests dominate over minority views, but also a balance such that strong or pervasive minority views do not threaten cohesion. Indeed, there is always a risk that highly motivated minorities or elites in a largely apathetic society can dominate the discourse on certain issues.

As the debate over hate speech brought to light, the solutions are not always easy and the balance of what is and is not acceptable behaviour (or in this case, speech) in a society is not always easy to strike. If there is no sense that all voices can be heard, then anger and bitterness emerge. Yet mistaking apathy for acceptance could lead to even greater mistrust.

Many factors can undermine social trust (Gluckman et al. 2021) and not everyone reacts to them in the same way. Rapid change is inevitably destabilising and frightening for some. Technological change,



especially in the digital and post-digital domains, is disruptive to many aspects of our evolved psychology and mode of societal functioning. Wealth and opportunity inequalities appear to be growing and this creates a growing sense that fairness has been lost. There is fear of rising or more-violent crime and a sense that some members of the community are increasingly flouting civic norms. The pandemic increased economic insecurity for many people, compounded by other factors such as inflation.<sup>7</sup>

How Aotearoa New Zealand, as a nation, deals with post-colonial inequalities and grievances while acknowledging and reflecting an increasingly multicultural society is challenging. The complexity of issues such as the effective meaning of articles 2 and 3 of Te Tiriti o Waitangi<sup>8</sup> has been obscured in sometimes shallow debates. Add to this the decline in nuance and inclusivity of social discourse, declining information reliability, geopolitical stress and a climate crisis that both threatens and requires major behavioural and economic change and the challenges multiply. We need to understand what might undermine social trust not only at a population level but also by and at age, ethnic, and socioeconomic cohort.

## CHANGING TIMES AND FUZZY BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are defined not only by law, but also by outside influences and changes in social mores. Boundaries shape our relations with others and encode the norms that allow us to fully function in society. These are not the boundaries of dictatorship or severe constraint. Rather, they are boundaries that matter for psychological development of the next generation. Family, educational institutions and community organisations (sport, faith and cultural groups) all play central roles in imparting acceptable behaviours and mores. They set the scene for behaviour in children that helps learning (in technical terms, executive functions) and foster social engagement, psychological resilience and a sense of belonging (Low et al., 2021; The Education Hub, 2020).

Boundaries should and do change as societies evolve. The human-rights movement is an example of boundaries changing over time and with the backing of a degree of societal consensus. In countries such as New Zealand, there has been immense sociological change since World War II, with far broader rights conferred on members of society, especially women, and minorities including those from the rainbow community. New contraceptive techniques emerging in the 1960s altered social mores. Religion now plays a much lesser role in many people's lives. Educational policies have evolved in accord with this more liberal gestalt, giving young people much more choice.<sup>9</sup> Migration has greatly increased the ethnic diversity of our society. The Vietnam war, nuclear weapons testing, the 1975 hikoī for Māori land rights, 1981 rugby tour, gay rights, and attitudes to euthanasia, show the strength of activist campaigns. In our interpersonal relationships, family structures have changed with mixed consequences, especially for the next generation. In the past, the laws of slander and libel, along with religion ("thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour") and strong social mores put implied and actual boundaries on how social discourse was conducted. These boundaries are being continually eroded by social media and societal trends. In the face of this rapidly changing information environment, every democracy is struggling to find the balance between free expression of views and the damaging consequences of some of what is expressed.<sup>10</sup> A further reflection of these changes and a growing level of intolerance of conflicting views is seen in words like 'cancel culture' and 'woke'.

7 This is not the place to discuss the relative role of various external and internal factors in driving inflation and economic insecurity but some of the internal factors include labour market and immigration policies. Monetary and fiscal policies, etc. There will be inevitable partisan debate over the relative importance of these and external factors – the Ukraine war, supply line issues, etc.

8 This is a contested matter even among acknowledged experts; for example, Dame Anne Salmond (see: <https://ojs.victoria.ac.nz/pq/article/view/8019/7127>).

9 The implications of such changes for mental health is beyond the scope of this paper but has been commented on elsewhere.

10 This is particularly so on social media but extends to university campuses and is reflected in the different views about and difficulties of drafting hate-speech laws.

The arrival of Twitter, Facebook Groups and other platforms allowed anonymity, providing opportunity to mount vindictive or malevolent ad hominem attacks with little personal repercussion. The attention economy that these platforms exploit means extreme material spreads quickly and is not easily refuted. This has fundamentally changed the dynamics as well as the content (and tone) of discussions and debates. Yet social-media companies resist editorial or censorship roles in favour of commercial imperatives, and legislators have been largely passive in response. The Christchurch Call is an initiative that attempts to moderate what content is online.

The boundaries of behaviour in discourse have changed and spilled over from the online world to other means of communication. As lawmakers consider placing limits on hate speech, the challenge of balancing freedom and agency versus the potential to undermine societal cohesion – a core matter to a democratic society – is highlighted. The right to express opinions must be weighed against the responsibilities that are implied in being a member of society.

Technology has also changed ways of engaging in society. Personal networks can be much larger than those we evolved to live within, but much interaction is no longer face-to-face and often shallow rather than deep and enduring (Hanson & Gluckman, 2019). Social media encourage narcissistic behaviours – rewarding us with network friends who “like” us. The algorithms feeding social media herd us into groups of like-minded people – so-called “echo chambers” – such that many people cease to be exposed to pluralistic thought and difficult conversations. In this milieu the fourth estate, the political process and social cohesion all suffer as people are pulled apart through a process of affective polarisation. The appeal for safe places for diverse communities, claims of microaggression and the avoidance of unsafe conversations have been major influences on university campuses, posing risks to the very institutions that should be promoting discourse on complex issues (Ben-Porath, 2017; Haidt & Lukianoff, 2018).

Accepted concepts of privacy that are at the core of how societies operate are also fundamentally changed by social media. People disclose on the internet and in public media prurient and other details that a generation ago would have been a matter of much greater personal discretion. People have, apparently willingly, given up their privacy to digital platform companies when perhaps paradoxically they resist giving the same information to state agencies.<sup>11</sup>

## **DISINFORMATION, MANIPULATED NARRATIVES, AND THE DECLINE OF CIVIL DISCOURSE**

Narratives are core to the human condition. From when language first emerged, stories held us together and created collective memory and a common sense of identity. Humans structure their lives and understandings around stories. Until writing emerged, oral accounts were the only way we could convey intergenerational knowledge and our brains evolved to be responsive to these. Some cultures, such as Māori, see these oral and intergenerational narratives as core to their identity and world view and do much to protect the integrity of their stories (McRae, 2017).

The power of narrative and identity has always been part of the democratic process, but is now ever more central to it. The process of partisan politics has shifted from a contest of ideas to one of personalities and identities, where ‘others’ are defined and maligned through vitriol and suspicion-ridden rhetoric. Those who want to undermine a culture or identity and create political and social divides can use the power of disinformation<sup>12</sup> to manipulate the narrative and attack or dismiss identities or values that have bound us together.

---

11 See: <https://kpmg.com/xx/en/home/insights/2018/06/building-trust-in-governments-use-of-data.html>, <https://www.bis.org/publ/bisbull42.pdf>, & <https://www.lrfoundation.org.uk/en/news/majority-of-world-citizens-do-not-trust-their-governments-with-their-personal-information/>

12 It is important to recognise that there are multiple forms of disinformation. Most effort has focused in the new media on the singular event – a false statement or meme. But it is also possible to combine narrative and elements of misinformation over time to become a strategic weapon to affect beliefs or conduct. Different strategies may be needed to address these situations.

These post-factual, weaponised narratives are propagated through new media and feed into our politics, sowing discord and undermining the very elements that create effective and cohesive democratic societies.<sup>13</sup> This is an insidious process that exploits a desire to believe and satisfy emotions rather than deal with counterarguments and inconvenient facts. Unfortunately, manipulated narratives have become a near-universal feature of the public square, intentionally creating cynicism and undermining trust in core institutions. Political behaviours can feed off and feed into this unstable situation.

While bad actors use disinformation to support their narratives and further their cause, at times even those with the right intentions may also promote false information that furthers their cause (e.g., government or health authorities offering simplified information to promote the public good). It can be difficult to ascertain what people's true intentions are. Even though intentions may be good, there are elements of manipulation and control that can breed distrust and resentment more widely. It is a fine line between the valid articulation of views in a democracy and intentional misuse of information to erode society's norms and cohesion. A variety of internal (e.g. activists, politicians, interest groups, industries) or external actors can interfere with this fuzzy boundary, further weakening social and institutional trust and challenging the essence of a democracy.

Indeed the label 'disinformation' can be problematic. Sometimes information is not objectively disprovable in a straightforward way – it can be more subjective and may fall outside of officially sanctioned or accepted narratives. Labelling something disinformation is a powerful way to dismiss or discredit opinion, narrative or facts that are inconvenient to one's goals. And we have seen occasions when this has been done deliberately.

There is a paradox in this changed information environment. While a liberal democracy was intended to give voice to the diversity of views inherent in society, many sections of the population to various extents have increasingly adopted a coercive and disrespectful style of discourse, exploiting and magnifying personal attacks rather than seeking consensus on key matters. The result is a shutting down of complex but necessary conversations.

## Information technology and the weaponised narrative

Although the internet is an empowering information-sharing and communication tool, it has also contributed to the pervasive distribution of disinformation (Aïmeur et al., 2023). Social media have changed the nature of communication and information sharing, allowing for misinformation and disinformation (both unintended and intended) to spread rapidly. The evidence suggests misleading and negative information spreads much more quickly than accurate information (Vosoughi et al., 2018) and once spread is difficult to rebut (Fay et al., 2021).

The increasing sophistication of digital technologies such as deep fakes and new forms of AI and associated large-language models (ChatGPT, for example) offer further ways to create or manipulate digital content to further disinformation campaigns or support a particular narrative.<sup>14</sup> Machine learning and AI enable pinpoint targeting of audiences, as was demonstrated in 2016 in the Cambridge Analytica involvement in the UK's Brexit and US's presidential votes.<sup>15</sup> We all experience targeting when we are exposed to advertising or recommendations online. Facebook and other social media shifted many people from being exposed to a broad range of viewpoints to only hearing from like-minded people, thereby creating 'echo chambers' that polarise and divide. The accelerated volume and velocity of information we now face has begun to overwhelm (White & Dorman, 2000), causing people to seek simpler and less confronting narratives. Our cognitive biases make us susceptible to hearing what we want to hear rather than facing cognitive dissonance and exploring views other than our own.

---

13 See: [https://www.academia.edu/32669145/Weaponized\\_Narrative\\_The\\_New\\_Battlespace](https://www.academia.edu/32669145/Weaponized_Narrative_The_New_Battlespace)

14 See: <https://weaponizednarrative.asu.edu>

15 See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/04/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-scandal-fallout.html>



As identity politics increasingly takes hold and its leaders become targets of personal attacks through social media and infotainment-driven mainstream media, factionalisation intensifies and leads to affective polarisation – where political identity is not defined by policies but by distrust and a dislike of the other party. This is most obvious in the United States, but recent events suggest a trend towards greater affective polarisation here in New Zealand (Finkel et al., 2020). The explosion of personality targeting was most obvious in relation to attacks on the dark web and in social media against Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, but politicians themselves are not innocent. They have hurled epithets when valid debate is needed.

## NEW ZEALAND'S SHALLOW DEMOCRACY

Diminished bipartisanship in political processes is obvious in many so-called liberal democracies. Coalitions have moved to the edge rather than to centrist groupings. In New Zealand, it could be argued that the shallow nature of our democratic institutions has left us particularly susceptible to short-term and too-often simplistic policymaking at the expense of consultative processes seeking broad consensus on complex issues that crosses partisan divides.

Within our single house of parliament, the executive – the cabinet and ministries – is not strongly held to account. Parliamentary question time has become primarily an entertainment rather than informative: point-scoring rather than policy elucidation seems to be the primary objective. Select committees are weak. The majority (that is, whoever is the government) can effectively block requests by the opposition to interview key players. Parliamentary urgency, which constitutionally was intended to be used in a very limited manner, is misused to rush through laws without any meaningful debate or reflection. Government select-committee members are too-often disinclined to drill down into decisions by the executive for fear of not being seen as team players and ultimately being unworthy of being in cabinet. On the opposition side political objectives can override pragmatic enquiry or broader policy discussions and objectives. Complex matters are dealt with in a hurry, with relatively little time for submissions and people not politically informed or without a direct interest in the issue of the day may be unaware their views are being sought. Further, our parliament operates with very strong party whips, meaning the executive is nearly always in control and dominates decision-making processes. The result is weak accountability of the constitutional separation of executive and legislative roles, and the opposition is largely reduced to seeking soundbites. The absence of an upper or a second house with oversight and powers of review eliminates another check – a mechanism used in many countries. The three-year electoral cycle leads to intense short-termism and almost continuous pre- or post-election behaviour rather than governing for the long term.

The effect of our MMP system of proportional representation is complex. MMP, while importantly allowing minority political opinions to be better represented and increasing political participation, can either achieve consensus politics or alternatively lead to more polarising positions (reinforcing those created by social media) and uncertain outcomes for the electorate. The nature of sometimes opaque post-election negotiations further increases suspicion and cynicism in the institution of democracy.

There are further signs of our democracy's erosion, irrespective of who is in power. There has been an effective depowering the Official Information Act, to the frustration of the Ombudsman and at the cost of growing suspicion of power elites.<sup>16</sup> Critical reports from the Auditor-General have effectively been brushed aside.<sup>17</sup> In past times, resignation after some misstep was seen as honourable and protected the reputation of the government, but the concept of ministerial responsibility has lost some of its bite. Relative to other countries, New Zealand lobbyists are inadequately controlled, adding to the impression that not everyone has an equal voice and that public consultation on policy matters is often window-dressing.<sup>18</sup>

16 See: <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/chief-ombudsmans-oia-inquiry-finds-significant-gaps-and-law-flouted-by-government-spin-doctors/NKZIR4U5NWZYRNA2TPSVVIXM/> & <https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/sites/default/files/2022-09/Ready%20or%20Not%20Thematic%20Report%20of%20the%20Chief%20Ombudsman%20September%202022.pdf>

17 See: <https://oag.parliament.nz/2021/saliva-testing/ministry-of-health>

18 See: <https://lobbyingtransparency.net/lobbyingtransparency.pdf>

But we also must be pragmatic – politicians will always behave as politicians. They seek to be re-elected and to maintain the authority that comes from being in government. Controversy ensues if they misuse their position (for example, via corruption – happily not intrinsic to New Zealand’s political scene),<sup>19</sup> or if they are not truthful or transparent or play identities rather than address policies. Trustworthiness is vital to political legitimacy, and politicians need to reflect on their role in sustaining it.

Local authorities have an even greater credibility problem, with low voting turnouts and identity politics dominating. Yet they exert significant control and influence on individual lives. New Zealand has an extraordinarily large number (67) of local or territorial authorities for a population of a little over 5 million. There is a sense of an undeclared and unresolved tug-of-war between central and local government. But the balance of responsibilities in a layered democracy must be transparent and transparently discussed with citizens who are those most affected.

Underlying the issues of confidence in both central and local government is the rather perfunctory approaches to public consultation. The nuances underlying difficult matters are often over-simplified for political purposes. A democracy depends on politicians meaningfully engaging with the public. Opinion polls are not a sound basis on which to make policy on the many complex matters we face: most polls canvass relatively few people, tend to under-survey important demographic groups and typically ask questions that lack nuance. Most official policy consultation is tokenistic – a rapidly released document for electronic consultation against a small number of predefined questions at short notice and too often over holiday periods. This often results in special interest groups or those on the extremes of debates mostly being heard.

## **SOCIAL DISCONTENT IN NEW ZEALAND**

Few New Zealanders would disagree that our anxieties and concerns have risen in recent times, whether over the state of society, personal safety, the economy or climate change. The protests outside Parliament in early 2022 showed starkly a growing willingness to use aggressive rhetoric – particularly on social media – and one-word epithets in place of dialogue. This is unhelpful when issues, such as how to build Aotearoa-New Zealand as a multicultural society on bicultural foundations while maintaining its democratic nature, need to be constructively and openly discussed. In particular, this creates fuel for destructive or unproductive narratives leading to a loss of trust in institutions and social processes and a growing concern about the cohesiveness of society. This matters immensely because New Zealand has traditionally been perceived as a highly cohesive society with a healthy democracy (Fookes, 2022). We have many challenges ahead where difficult conversations and hard choices are needed.

The drivers of discontent vary, but in part, reflect a sense of frustration at lack of progress on many issues of acute interest to different sectors of society. At the same time, rapid change in some domains is neither well understood nor well accepted, which itself is destabilising (Juma, 2016). The issues encompass growing tensions to do with political economy, inequality and persistent disadvantage, the role of the state, the state of education and other social services, ethnic division, the position of Māori, and environmental matters such as the need to decarbonise our economy. Covid exposed and amplified discontent on many of these matters, all of which are complex and difficult for a society to resolve. Politicians too often propose patently inadequate and simplistic solutions: this is not helped by aspects of the New Zealand political system.<sup>20</sup> Much of this malaise and discontent has its parallels in other liberal democracies.

These observations are supported by a range of opinion polls and surveys. New Zealand’s position in many metrics of well-being (for example, economic or educational performance) has declined compared with other countries over the past two decades. Declining mental wellbeing and life satisfaction and sinking

---

19 See: [https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/CPI2021\\_Report\\_EN-web.pdf](https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/CPI2021_Report_EN-web.pdf)

20 See: <https://informedfutures.org/deepening-our-democracy/>

economic optimism are widely reported.<sup>21</sup> Economic inequalities have clearly grown. As elsewhere, there are growing signs of important age cohort and ethnic effects with the result that some have much less confidence in their futures.

Global studies show about half the population views politics, government and the media as fuelling cycles of division in society. More than half think a point has been reached where people believe their societies are now incapable of having constructive and civil debates about issues on which they disagree (Myllylahti & Treadwell, 2023). In New Zealand, we see people talk past each other on questions relating to the Treaty and co-governance, given the different interpretations of what these concepts mean. Rhetoric, obscurantism, and ad hominem attack rather than constructive (mana-enhancing) discourse is dominating one of the most important and complex issues confronting the country.

Half of New Zealanders report distrust as their default position (Acumen, 2022). This mirrors low levels of trust in our political community: only half the population say they trust government. Other institutions are put at risk when trust in government at any level is compromised. These include faith in the police and the justice system – both often targets in polarised debates – and the media. Surveys suggest trust in the New Zealand media is particularly low compared with many other liberal economies and is continuing to decline (Myllylahti & Treadwell, 2023). Contributing factors include a confused mainstream media in which public-service broadcasting of national issues competes for airtime with “infotainment”, funding for long-form newspaper journalism being sucked up by advertising revenue for online media, and other sources of less-filtered information via social media becoming the dominant news and information channels for many, especially the younger and migrant cohorts. The recent debacle over merging Radio New Zealand and TVNZ reflected – at least in part – confusion over the purpose of public-service broadcasting.<sup>22</sup> While fulfilling an independent public-service broadcasting role, it should also conform to the Reithian principles of “inform, educate and entertain”.<sup>23</sup> These issues have led some people to avoid seeking news altogether (>60% in New Zealand) or to distrust it (>50%). And although many young people only look to social media, this source of information has the lowest trust rating of all news forms (Acumen, 2022; Myllylahti & Treadwell, 2023). Trust is also declining in such institutions as banks and supermarkets: this may be explained by the national mood, the behaviour and economics of the institutions themselves and politically driven blame-shifting. Social media companies have created and empowered much of this new milieu. Basic and shared values of a society can be quickly overridden. The game Pokemon Go provides a less obvious example of the trend. Individuals are led into ignoring values-based respect for sacred spaces, including churches, mausoleums, holocaust memorials and private homes in pursuit of game play. Similarly, many people’s lives have become dominated by activity on Facebook, TikTok, Reddit and more.

## Individual resilience

Societies are made up of individuals who operate with different understandings and capacities to deal with rapid change, stress and shocks. There is growing evidence that events in early life affect how well equipped we are to deal with the unexpected. These executive functions of the brain determine much about how successfully a person will go through life. We now know a lot about the circumstances that impair executive-function development, the importance of the early-life environment and early-childhood education and the need to focus on socio-emotional development (e.g., Low et al., 2021). A critical consequence of the changed environments affecting young people is the increasing loss of subjective well-

21 See: <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/wellbeing-report/te-tai-waiora-2022>, <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/tp/trends-wellbeing-aotearoa-new-zealand-2000-2020> & <https://berl.co.nz/economic-insights/lack-consumer-confidence-signals-tough-times-ahead>

22 See: <https://www.stuff.co.nz/opinion/130690768/the-rush-to-pass-new-laws-is-eroding-the-publics-trust>

23 See the following links for an overview of Reithianism: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100412419> & <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldselect/ldcomuni/96/9606.htm#:~:text=The%20'Reithian%20Principles'%3A%20Inform%2C%20Educate%20and%20Entertain&text=3.3>.



being in young people. Well over 20% of young New Zealanders are at risk at that vulnerable period of their lives when they are forming their identity, developing emotional independence, planning their future and building relationships (Menzies et al., 2020). Youth crime is an associated component of declining states of youth mental health. Likewise, those on the margins of society or the chronically disadvantaged may feel excluded or disaffected. Dealing with these difficulties is crucial, as no society can be cohesive and function well with high levels of individual vulnerability.

Today's young people have grown up as digital natives in a world that is still trying to understand the good and bad of information technology. But the technology is not stable: increasingly powerful hardware combined with AI will emerge at pace. Access to more powerful information systems will be variable and create other inequalities as we see already in health care with respect to the availability of high-technology-based medicines. As crises compound inequalities will grow further affecting individual resilience. Polarisation and exclusion affecting young people are reflected in antisocial behaviour, gang membership<sup>24</sup> and, in some countries, extremist activity. There are strategies to improve the outcome of those born into disadvantage (indeed, New Zealand society has shown greater social mobility than many societies). It will take the combined effort of social-welfare, health, and education authorities to do so, but a truly linked-up system remains an aspiration rather than a reality.<sup>25</sup>

## How cohesive are we?

By global standards, we are still seen as a cohesive society with comparatively high levels of institutional and social trust. But as we have described, the trends seen elsewhere are also reflected in Aotearoa-New Zealand, and are driven by the same factors that have undermined social and institutional trust elsewhere. Parliamentary protests, the rising level of rhetorical attacks in what should be policy debates, confused messaging on such issues as the role of local government, growing evidence of infrastructure failure, concerns about the delivery of education, health and other social services and a comparatively high rate of incarceration all point to questions of trust and cohesion. Politicians fuel cynicism when they focus on the short-term and avoid difficult discussions about the issues underlying this unsatisfactory and potentially destabilising environment. Climate change and our economic future is one issue; our post-colonial quest for a consensual way to marry bicultural underpinnings with a multicultural reality is another. The quality of public services is perceived to be in decline. Other factors such as geostrategic instability in the Pacific cannot be ignored. These issues all merit much more inclusive and substantive conversations.

The climate crisis will – if it is not already doing so – affect every aspect of our economic, social and environmental future. Yet how we make the adjustments needed for a sustained and bipartisan approach to this enormous challenge is not obvious. In turn this drives reflection on matters such as risk management<sup>26</sup>, infrastructure investment and reshaping our economy.

Confronting our society's future and getting into a post-postcolonial mindset requires the resolution of matters, some of which are now 180 years old. We need to separate political opportunism from addressing the real issues, including resolving collectively what Te Tiriti o Waitangi means in a multicultural 21st century society? We need all New Zealanders to agree on the path ahead. Matters are not helped when there is no agreement on the meaning of words being used in political discourse; for example, 'co-governance'.

---

24 Gangs can be envisaged as highly internally cohesive groups that have developed their own strict rules and mores. They provide an identity to those who feel marginalised and build on that by their recruitment and initiation rites. But they also provide strong and brutal incentives to remain within the group. The antisocial behaviour associated with gangs reflects the reality that they see mainstream society largely as an out-group. They thrive as a subculture rejecting the democratic economic model in favour of crime.

25 The failure of successive governments to respond to the 2012 all-party health select committee report on developmental issues (Inquiry into improving child health incomes and preventing child abuse, with a focus from preconception until three years of age – <https://selectcommittees.parliament.nz/v/2/4170a7bc-062d-424b-8ca1-d92e57e411c6>) was a missed opportunity.

26 See: <https://informedfutures.org/risk-listening-rethinking-how-we-understand-and-manage-risk/>

Confusion and uncertainty cause anxiety that undermines trust in policy formation, especially when much of the conversation appears to some to be one-sided and conducted by elites.

## CAN WE FIND SOLUTIONS?

There is no single path ahead. Social cohesion must remain a core consideration, but it is fragile. We must look to better protect what we have and address the emerging risks. The highly connected online world makes finding solutions difficult, but there are strategies that should be within our control. Box 1 lists some of these while acknowledging their aspirational nature.

### **Box 1. Actions that would help sustain New Zealand society's resilience and social cohesion.**

Undertake research to explore factors that matter most to different sectors of society, so that priority is afforded to needed policy actions.

#### **Actions that would focus on institutional trust:**

- Seek a political accord to improve parliamentary processes and political discourse and abolish the use of ad hominem political epithets
- Strengthen compliance with the Official Information Act
- Abolish the cynical release of politically difficult papers at timings designed to bury them
- Resolve the confusion between the roles of central and local government
- Improve public consultation by both central and local government
- Elevate society's expectations that politicians confront complex issues and promote discourse on long-term matters
- Expect greater resolution by consensus of matters that span political cycles
- Seek less-adversarial cross-party approaches to address the many issues relating to economic and social disparities
- Tighten regulation of lobbyists
- Create a safe non-partisan environment to resolve how a multicultural democracy can be built on bicultural underpinnings
- Introduce more systematically innovative democratic techniques for consultation – both digital and participatory
- Improve civics teaching in schools.

#### **Actions that would focus on social trust:**

- Introduce systems-thinking education and raise awareness of disinformation
- Takes steps to optimise young New Zealanders' socio-emotional development, which is critical for executive function formation in infants and children
- Strengthen the use of Reithian principles in public broadcasting irrespective of medium
- Promote a campaign to reduce tolerance of ad hominem attacks while protecting freedom of speech
- Reinforce the information-sharing role of public media
- Promote community activities that impart eusocial activities (sports, social groups, etc.) especially in disadvantaged communities
- Be a leader in the emergent global conversation about how new generations of technology might be managed in a more precautionary manner.

We should not be afraid of complex and difficult conversations. But we need media that support them and advocates and politicians willing to engage constructively in these conversations. Problems get worse if left to fester. Most need bipartisan rather than partisan solutions. And that means a fourth estate more willing and able to look at and dissect complex issues in the local context. Although the future of our public media is a distinct issue that needs resolution, New Zealand editors and publishers could play a critical role in a better future. But we acknowledge the business challenges of competing for the advertising dollar and being reliable information sources.

Institutional trust depends more than anything on the behaviour of politicians and the policy community. Transparency matters. So does a conscious effort by our leaders to debate policy rather than to trivialise arguments, especially through personal attacks. It may be asking a lot of some politicians but as seen elsewhere how they behave has massive flow-on effects on society.

It is worth reflecting on several aspects of our constitutional and governance framework. Can it cope with the complexities and contested realities of the day? Can select committees be strengthened and be less partisan in how they do their work? Can the use of urgency be restricted to its intended purpose? Can the responsibilities of central and local government be clarified? Can the concept of ministerial responsibility be strengthened? Can transparency be increased, especially in the use of the Official Information Act? Do we need a more extensive review of our constitutional arrangements to protect institutional trust?

Should we be making more extensive use of new democratic techniques and participatory democracy? Indeed, these are likely to be particularly effective in empowering people and restoring trust in governing institutions by ensuring effective public consultation and engagement on issues that are complex and long-term.

Taiwan and many European countries use sophisticated and nuanced forms of electronic consultation some of which have been piloted by Kōi Tū.<sup>27</sup> For issues that are particularly values-laden or particularly complex, citizens' juries and other similar processes show promise. Can we devise and employ processes that are Treaty-inspired, reflecting our bicultural foundations and recognising our increasingly culturally diverse society? Open engagement by such means may be the best way to counteract weaponised narratives and disinformation/misinformation. When citizens believe their voices have been heard and they have had a genuine part in the debate irrespective of the outcome they will feel they have been more fairly treated and included. Democratic experimentation is needed. It is illogical to imagine that the system we have now, largely devised before the advent of television, is fit for purpose in a world with a very different information environment.

While it may be a quixotic challenge, democratic societies must look to how they will address misinformation, disinformation and weaponised narratives and promote civil rather than uncivil discourse. Fact-checking and simple rebuttal does not work. Experts must become more skilled at understanding how to interact with a cynical and skeptical public. We need to equip citizens with systems thinking – the ability to take a holistic view of society's challenges – to enable them to engage in critical discourse on complex matters. This requires investment in the education system to promote systems thinking. Civic literacy is also critical. A citizen who does not understand how their society operates cannot be a fully effective member. The evidence in New Zealand suggests a significant deficit.<sup>28</sup> The same strategies are likely to be critical in generating a holistic approach to addressing issues of youth mental health and their subjective well-being. The education system needs a substantive rethink and a reboot to focus on the core issues that will determine who will – and will not – be a successful citizen.

Although some form of regulatory process that limits anonymous ad hominem attacks would be desirable, it is difficult to envisage how that could be established without global agreement that platform companies are indeed publishers, thus giving defamation and libel laws some bite. A better approach would be for society

27 See: <https://informedfutures.org/citizens-assemblies-give-hope-for-reinvigorating-democracy/>

28 See: <https://www.nzinitiative.org.nz/assets/Uploads/Democracy-in-the-Dark-summary.pdf>



to collectively marginalise such attacks and the media to stop amplifying them. Education is almost always preferable to legislation although given the magnitude of the issues both will be needed. There is increasing concern over new developments in digital technologies, especially generative AI, leading to discussion about the need to manage them in a more precautionary way. How that could be achieved is uncertain.<sup>29</sup>

A socially cohesive society should debate different views constructively, recognising the underlying complexity and avoiding animosity. Rights must be accompanied by responsibilities. A guarantee of freedom of speech should be part of an obligation to be a constructive citizen, an understanding of which is core to civics. Regrettably, civics is not a significant part of education.

We must not marginalise people; social inclusiveness and mutual respect are crucial. While we invest heavily in social services, we must look to better integrate those for the most vulnerable, especially the very young.

## IN CONCLUSION

We live in a time of rapid and potentially destabilising change. Although social cohesion is a multidimensional challenge, New Zealand is well placed to protect and enhance it. We not only must explore social cohesion in objective terms but also understand how our citizens perceive it and what may be undermining both it and their perceptions of it. The alternative would be to follow other liberal democracies into a far less happy place – and there are early signs that we are at risk. We should be more active in exploring what will contribute to social cohesiveness in this changed world, understanding that institutional and social trust are intimately linked. And we must endeavour to understand why different elements of society have different concerns – and how can we include and respect these concerns in our political commons. Our previous work (see Gluckman et al., 2021) has highlighted many of the factors that might be in play, but we do not know which are most important to which segments of our society. Whereas some policymakers may be happy discussing some aspects of social trust, and successive governments have made some initiatives in this domain, there appears to be less willingness to confront issues of institutional trust. A commitment to better forms of consultation and to using some of the newer tools of innovative democracy, appropriately separated from the political process, would be a low-cost first step by both local and central government.

Many of those who guide and influence policy and political debates appear unwilling to test and discuss their views in contrary and diverse settings. This breeds cynicism. Policymaking needs to be transparent and less reactionary. Acting on assumptions could be dangerous; we need to understand what matters to whom and why as we make decisions for the future.

Understanding the problem and the challenges is the first step to solving what is a Gordian knot. But there are many small steps possible that combined could allow us to advance while addressing values-laden but critical questions. To passively sit back would risk us being pulled further into a situation where affective polarisation and factionalism characterise public discourse and engagement. Political, policy and community leaders and the institutions of government, academia, education and broader society all have a critical role to play.

---

29 See: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/g20-must-set-up-an-international-panel-on-technological-change-101679237287848.html>

## REFERENCES

- Acumen. (2022). Trust in New Zealand: Acumen Edelman Trust Barometer 2022. <https://acumennz.com/the-acumen-edelman-trust-barometer/2022/>
- Aïmeur, E., Amri, S., & Brassard, G. (2023). Fake news, disinformation and misinformation in social media: a review. *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, 13(1), 30.
- Ben-Porath, S. R. (2017). *Free speech on campus*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Chan, J., To, H.-P., & Chan, E. (2006). Reconsidering social cohesion: Developing a definition and analytical framework for empirical research. *Social indicators research*, 75, 273-302.
- Curry, O. S., Mullins, D. A., & Whitehouse, H. (2019). Is it good to cooperate? Testing the theory of morality-as-cooperation in 60 societies. *Current Anthropology*, 60(1), 47-69.
- Davies, W. (2019). *Nervous states: How feeling took over the world*. Penguin.
- Fay, N., Walker, B., Kashima, Y., & Perfors, A. (2021). Socially situated transmission: The bias to transmit negative information is moderated by the social context. *Cognitive Science*, 45(9), e13033.
- Finkel, E. J., Bail, C. A., Cikara, M., Ditto, P. H., Iyengar, S., Klar, S., Mason, L., McGrath, M. C., Nyhan, B., & Rand, D. G. (2020). Political sectarianism in America. *science*, 370(6516), 533-536.
- Fookes, C. (2022). *Social Cohesion in New Zealand*. New Zealand Treasury. <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/ap/ap-22-01>
- Gluckman, P., Bardsley, A., Spoonley, P., Royal, C., Chen, A., & Simon-Kumar, N. (2021). *Sustaining Aotearoa New Zealand as a cohesive society*. Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures. <https://informedfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/Sustaining-Aotearoa-New-Zealand-as-a-cohesive-society.pdf>
- Haidt, J., & Lukianoff, G. (2018). *The coddling of the American mind: How good intentions and bad ideas are setting up a generation for failure*. Penguin UK.
- Hanson, M., & Gluckman, P. (2019). *Ingenious: the unintended consequences of human innovation*. Harvard University Press.
- Juma, C. (2016). *Innovation and its enemies: Why people resist new technologies*. Oxford University Press.
- Kwan, I., Dickson, K., Richardson, M., MacDowall, W., Burchett, H., Stansfield, C., Brunton, G., Sutcliffe, K., & Thomas, J. (2020). Cyberbullying and children and young people's mental health: a systematic map of systematic reviews. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 23(2), 72-82.
- Low, F., Gluckman, P., & Poulton, R. (2021). *Executive functions: A crucial but overlooked factor for lifelong wellbeing*. Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures. <https://informedfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/Executive-functions-a-crucial-but-overlooked-factor-for-lifelong-wellbeing.pdf>
- McRae, J. (2017). *Māori Oral Tradition: He Kōrero nō te ao Tawhito*. Auckland University Press.
- Menzies, R., Gluckman, P., & Poulton, R. (2020). *Youth mental health in Aotearoa New Zealand: Greater urgency required*. Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures. <https://informedfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/Youth-Mental-Health-in-Aotearoa-NZ.pdf>
- Mylylahti, M., & Treadwel, G. (2023). *Trust in news in Aotearoa New Zealand 2023*. AUT research centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy (JMAD). <https://www.jmadresearch.com/trust-in-news-in-new-zealand>
- New Zealand Parliament. (2022). *Survey of the New Zealand Public*. <https://www.parliament.nz/en/footer/about-us/parliamentary-engagement/engagement-research/survey-of-the-new-zealand-public-february-2022/>
- OECD. (2023). *Building Trust in Public Institutions: Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions in New Zealand*. <https://www.oecd.org/publications/drivers-of-trust-in-public-institutions-in-new-zealand-948accf8-en.htm>
- The Education Hub. (2020). *Executive function in early childhood*. <https://theeducationhub.org.nz/executive-function-in-early-childhood/>
- UNDP. (2021). *Trust in Public Institutions: A conceptual framework and insights for improved governance programming*. UNDP Oslo Governance Centre (OGC). [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/oslo\\_governance\\_centre/Trust-in-Public-Institutions-Policy-Brief\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/oslo_governance_centre/Trust-in-Public-Institutions-Policy-Brief_FINAL.pdf)
- Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *science*, 359(6380), 1146-1151.
- White, M., & Dorman, S. M. (2000). Confronting information overload. *Journal of School Health*, 70(4), 160-160.



**UNIVERSITY OF  
AUCKLAND**  
Waipapa Taumata Rau  
NEW ZEALAND

**KOI TŪ:  
THE CENTRE FOR  
INFORMED FUTURES**

---

## **HELP CREATE AN INFORMED FUTURE**

We engage with people and organisations focused on the long-term development of New Zealand, and on core issues where trustworthy and robust analysis can make a real difference.

### **Professor Sir Peter Gluckman**

Director, Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures

Phone: +64 21 775 568

Email: [pd.gluckman@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:pd.gluckman@auckland.ac.nz)

## **THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS**

Andrew and Elle Grant

Anita Baldauf

Bernard Pesco

Bernard Sabrier

David Levene Foundation

The Gluckman Family

Graeme and Robyn Hart

Gus Fisher Charitable Trust

Kelliher Charitable Trust

The MSA Trust

Norman Barry Foundation

Robert Lerner

The Tindall Foundation

The Wright Family Foundation

[informedfutures.org](http://informedfutures.org)