

Social Cohesion in Aotearoa: Does Housing Policy Matter?

1. What is the complex systems perspective within the literature about policy instruments and social cohesion?
2. How can we measure and compare the alignment between policy instruments and public perceptions of social cohesion?

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Contents

Contents	2
List of Figures	3
List of Tables.....	3
1. Introduction	4
1.1 Background and Context.....	4
1.2 Problem	11
1.3 Research Question and Study Outline	14
2. Methodology.....	15
2.1 Building the Policy Corpus	17
2.2 Text Extraction and Natural Language Processing	17
2.3 Network Construction.....	19
2.4 Network Analysis.....	21
2.5 Measurement Framework	22
2.6 Survey Design and Public Perception Analysis.....	23
2.7 Network Integration of Survey Results	25
3. Literature Review	26
3.1 Systematic Literature Review Approach	26
3.2 Thematic Overview	29
3.2.1 Theoretical Underpinnings of Social Cohesion	29
3.2.2 Defining Social Cohesion: The Case for Chan et al.'s Framework	32
3.2.3 The Function and Evolution of Policy Instruments	34
3.2.4 Implications of Housing Policy on Social and Institutional Trust	37
4. Ethical Considerations and Research Reflexivity.....	40
5. Risks and Limitations.....	41
6. PhD Timeline	42
Appendices.....	43
Appendix 1 – OIA Sent to MHUD and KO.....	43
Appendix 2 – Te Korowai Whetū Social Cohesion Framework	45
References.....	46

List of Figures

Figure 1. Results of a SCOPUS Search on Housing Policy and Social Cohesion in Aotearoa 13

Figure 2. Global Mentions of ‘Social Cohesion’ in Media from January 2015 to October 2024..... 14

Figure 3. N-Partite Graph Representation of Relationships Between Housing Policy Instruments, Institutions, and Social Cohesion Dimensions 20

Figure 4. Literature Review Search Strategy 27

Figure 5. Miro Board for Literature Review..... 29

List of Tables

Table 1. Chan et al.’s (2006) Two-by-Two Framework For Measuring Social Cohesion 10

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

As of 2024, social cohesion faces challenges and emerging opportunities, driven by rising populism, increasing migration, and more frequent natural disasters (Gearhart, 2024; Nadeem et al., 2022; Nawaz & Hussain, 2024; Spoonley, 2023). These issues are compounded by ongoing shifts in the global economic landscape, which heighten barriers to cohesive societies and deepen social inequalities, particularly across regions like Europe, Asia, and South America (Dragolov et al., 2016; Fournier & Garcia, 2013; García Rubio de Ycaza, 2023; Healy, 2016; March Cerdá, 2023; Salazar et al., 2023). The declines in social and political institutional trust further hinder efforts to govern increasingly diverse and ageing populations (Fledderus, 2015; Uslaner & Brown, 2005; Walters, 2024).

Consequently, social cohesion has re-emerged as a theme in policy discourse (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2023, 2024; Ritzen et al., 2000). Yet, defining, measuring, and effectively implementing social cohesion in dynamic contexts remains a significant challenge (Aruqaj, 2023; Berger-Schmitt, 2002; Oberndorfer et al., 2022; Villalobos & Valenzuela, 2012). This stems from the multidimensional nature of social cohesion (Botterman et al., 2012; Braaten, 1991; Vertovec et al., 2024), which encompasses both vertical cohesion—trust in institutions—and horizontal cohesion—cooperation among diverse social groups (Chan et al., 2006; Forrest & Kearns, 2001; Kearns & Forrest, 2000). A range of policy frameworks strive to address these dimensions, particularly in the face of increasing ethnic diversity, economic disparities, and political polarization (Ababsa, 2024; Berger, 1998; Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2024; Norton & de Haan, 2012). Often, social cohesion is integrated into policies aimed at reducing inequalities (Colbert et al., 2024), increasing material wealth dimensions like employment (Scheuring,

2020), income (Cai & Wang, 2012) and home ownership (Grimes et al., 2023; Howden-Chapman et al., 2024), fostering community bonds (Baeker Bispo et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2021), and trust in public institutions (Bradley, 2023; Cleckner & Hallett, 2022; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2023), with housing, education, and labour policies highlighted as key drivers (Green et al., 2011; Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development, 2011). While these challenges paint a picture of social cohesion under strain, their manifestation in Aotearoa presents a unique set of circumstances that demands closer examination.

In 2024, Aotearoa is confronting challenges that impact its social cohesion (Baeker Bispo et al., 2024; Lewis & Morgan, 2021; Morgan et al., 2022), from the 2019 Christchurch Mosque attacks (Battersby & Ball, 2019) to the protests surrounding COVID-19 mandates in 2022, which eroded trust in scientists and researchers (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2022; Razavi et al., 2020; RNZ, 2020). There is a recognition that stability and social cohesion can no longer be taken for granted (Spoonley & Dickie, 2023; Spoonley et al., 2020). Aotearoa has also seen shifts in political power, with a new right-leaning government being elected in 2023 (Paewai, 2023) after a period of left-leaning governance (Lewis & Morgan, 2021; Morgan et al., 2022), sparking debates on justice, welfare, and Te Tiriti o Waitangi issues.

Alongside this, Aotearoa faces rising threats from misinformation and disinformation (Government Communications Security Bureau, 2024; Utrikespolitiska Institutet, 2024), exacerbated by tensions and the increasing polarization of domestic discourse (Linde, 2020). According to the *Threat Environment Report* by New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (2024), foreign interference, espionage, and the threat of violent extremism continue to

pose risks to the country's security, complicating the landscape for maintaining social cohesion.

The demographic landscape of Aotearoa further justifies the need for a more critical conversation on social cohesion. As of 2023, the population reached 5 million people, marking a 6.3% increase since 2018 (StatsNZ, 2024a, 2024d). The nation's 150 languages spoken highlight the need to understand how to govern a hyper-pluralistic population. This multicultural reality reflects demographic growth that contributes to fragmented group identities and tests cohesion. Significant growth in the Māori, Asian, Pacific Peoples, and Middle Eastern/Latin American/African groups further underscores Aotearoa's heterogeneous society (Spoonley, 2023).

Despite most of the population being New Zealand-born, nearly 30% are foreign-born, representing over 200 different birthplaces (StatsNZ, 2024a). These figures highlight Aotearoa's global interconnectedness and the importance of policies that reflect and support its diverse fabric. The presence of one million people identifying as being of Māori descent emphasizes the importance of Indigenous heritage amid shifting demographics. The significance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a foundational political, cultural, and legal touchstone (Penny et al., 2024; Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019, 2020; Smith et al., 2024) also influences the anatomy of social cohesion in this context.

The need for a conversation around a social cohesion framework crystallized after the attack on the 15th of March 2019 in Christchurch, where 51 people lost their lives (Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019, 2020). The Royal Commission of Inquiry (2020) provided 44 recommendations, including the need

for a whole-of-government approach to social cohesion focused on diversity and community engagement. Relevant recommendations included better social cohesion metrics, improved demographic data collection, and enhanced representation in public sector leadership, especially in counterterrorism. These actions brought social cohesion to the forefront of national policy.

In response, the government launched *Te Korowai Whetū Social Cohesion (Ministry of Social Development, 2022)*, featuring policy tools such as a strategic and measurement framework, a policy guide, and a baseline summary report (see Appendix 2 for a sample of the key indicators of the measurement framework). My leadership role in developing this initiative, supported by a Cabinet mandate, provided valuable insights into the practical challenges of not only embedding social cohesion in policy, but defining it, getting different groups to agree on what ideas like shared values where, and the tensions between religion, education, Te Tiriti o Waitangi and immigration became difficult ideas to understand and reconcile within a traditional policy process. This experience shapes my research, which expands on *Te Korowai Whetū* by focusing on housing policies as key influencers of both vertical (institutional trust) and horizontal (interpersonal) cohesion.

Housing was selected as the policy sector under which to explore the research questions, with the aim that the model and insights developed will inform policy analysis across other sectors, such as immigration, infrastructure, and national security. Housing offers a compelling context for this research due to its intersections with social, economic, and cultural dimensions, making it a microcosm for examining patterns of social cohesion.

While the 2023 Census shows a rise in homeownership to 66.0%, up from 64.5% in 2018 (StatsNZ, 2024b), long-term trends reveal a decline since the 1990s. This shift reflects

structural changes, such as an ageing population and growing ethnic diversity (Norris & Nandedkar, 2022; StatsNZ, 2024c). Persistent challenges such as low incomes and overcrowding, particularly for Pacific Peoples and Māori groups, mirror global patterns of systemic inequality in settler-colonial societies (Lewis et al., 2020). These dynamics position housing as a useful sector for examining how policy instruments interact with social cohesion.

To understand the interface between housing on social cohesion, this research will consider how different housing instruments interact or do not interact with social cohesion within housing policy documents. Policy instruments are the tools employed by governments to achieve different objectives, encompassing an array of regulatory, economic, informational, and voluntary measures (Howlett, 2024a; Lascoumes & Le Gales, 2007; Vedung, 1998). Vedung (1998) typology categorizes these instruments into three primary types: regulatory tools (sticks), economic tools (carrots), and informational tools (sermons). Importantly, these instruments are not merely technical or neutral mechanisms—they embody specific governance models, assumptions, values, and power dynamics. As such, their design plays a critical role in shaping political and social outcomes, including their impact on social cohesion.

The selection of policy instruments comprises inherently political and institutional processes. Policy instruments are shaped by the legal, cultural, and social contexts in which they operate, creating structures between policy and political outcomes (Howlett, 2024a). This interplay is relevant to housing, a sector connected to both vertical (trust in institutions) and horizontal (interpersonal trust and cooperation) dimensions of social cohesion (Chan et al., 2006). By researching where policy instruments interact with social cohesion, we can

understand which policy instruments might erode or enhance social cohesion and, therefore, provide a foundation for broader application across other sectors.

Furthermore, policy instruments are not static but evolve in response to shifts in societal values, governance structures, and economic priorities (Lascoumes & Le Gales, 2007). This dynamic underscores the importance of analysing how housing policy instruments adapt to changes in demographics and, therefore, might interface with social cohesion, as seen in the trends of homeownership and ethnic diversity in Aotearoa (Communities & StatsNZ, 2024; StatsNZ, 2024b).

Despite the importance of policy instruments in governance, their analysis in the context of housing policies and social cohesion in Aotearoa remains absent. While housing policy research often focuses on socioeconomic impacts and community well-being (Howden-Chapman et al., 2024; Penny et al., 2024), it rarely examines the mechanisms—such as subsidies, zoning laws, and community programmes—that operationalize these policies and their effects on social cohesion specifically. This research aims to bridge this gap by examining how housing policy instruments interact with social cohesion, shedding light on what policy practitioners and academics can do to ensure that these instruments do not inadvertently erode social cohesion, thereby threatening national security in Aotearoa (Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019, 2020).

To ground this research, the definition of social cohesion used will be proposed by Chan et al. (2006), who describes it as,

a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that includes

trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioural manifestations. (p. 290)

This definition is particularly relevant to the dual focus of this study on institutional trust and inter-group cooperation. While this definition provides a foundational understanding of social cohesion, I expand on its dimensions and justify its selection in the literature review (see Section 3.2.3) to ensure its applicability to the specific context of Aotearoa and housing policy. To illustrate the multidimensional nature of social cohesion as defined by Chan et al. (2006), Table 1 provides a visual representation of their two-by-two framework, which highlights the interplay between subjective and objective dimensions as well as horizontal and vertical interactions.

Table 1. Chan et al.’s (2006) Two-by-Two Framework For Measuring Social Cohesion

	Subjective component (People’s state of mind)	Objective component (Behavioural manifesta- tions)
Horizontal dimension (Cohesion within civil society)	General trust with fellow citizens	Social participation and vibrancy of civil society
	Willingness to cooperate and help fellow citizens, including those from “other” social groups Sense of belonging or identity	Voluntarism and donations Presence or absence of major inter-group alliances or cleavages
Vertical dimension (State-citizen cohesion)	Trust in public figures	Political participation (e.g. voting, political parties etc.)
	Confidence in political and other major social institutions	

Note. Reprinted from “Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical Framework for Empirical Research” by J. Chan et al., 2006, *Social Indicators Research*, 75, 273–302. Copyright 2024 by Springer Nature.

1.2 Problem

The global literature examining the interaction between social cohesion and housing policy remains limited and fragmented, offering little clarity on where the interface of these domains interconnects. The relationships at this interface are rarely identified or understood, leaving important blind spots in both theory and practice. Most studies narrowly address either “housing” or “social cohesion” in isolation, neglecting their interdependencies and the ways they shape one another, or evolve over time. Moreover, the role of policy instruments—the mechanisms through which housing policies are designed and implemented—is overlooked when they relate to social cohesion.

Even when housing policy and social cohesion are considered together, the discourse tends to rely on unexamined assumptions. These include equating housing stability or material wealth with improved social cohesion, despite evidence suggesting that material wealth alone is insufficient to foster a strong sense of social cohesion dimensions like trust, inclusion, and resilience (Berger-Schmitt, 2002; Berger, 1998; Chan et al., 2006). Simplistic and vague definitions of social cohesion further undermine the rigour of existing analyses, failing to capture its multifaceted nature or the complexity of its interaction with policy frameworks (Forrest & Kearns, 2001; Kearns & Forrest, 2000; Pahl, 1991b). As a result, the current literature often makes opaque assumptions about the causal pathways between housing policy instruments and social cohesion, leaving the interface unexplored and poorly understood.

This fragmented and superficial approach has practical implications. Without an understanding of how policy instruments interact with social cohesion, efforts to design policies that address broader social and economic challenges are undermined. Policymakers

may inadvertently reinforce inequality or fail to leverage opportunities to enhance social cohesion. Instead, policy might focus on immediate objectives such as increasing housing supply, with any influence on social cohesion being incidental, secondary or implicit.

For instance, Dai and Sheng (2021) study on US housing markets highlights social cohesion's role in reducing economic uncertainty but does not examine specific housing policy instruments. Likewise, Haigh et al. (2016) research on post-conflict housing reconstruction in Sri Lanka explores community tensions and outcomes without directly linking them to policy frameworks. This disconnect is further underscored by the responses received to Official Information Act requests sent in April 2024 to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MHUD) and Kāinga Ora, as detailed in Appendix 1. These agencies indicated that, while their policies align with overarching goals of well-being, they do not explicitly apply the MSD *Te Korowai Whetū Social Cohesion* framework or the term social cohesion within their housing policy development (Howden-Chapman et al., 2024; Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, 2024a, 2024b). This confirmed the gap between Aotearoa's social cohesion policy and their integration into housing policy—a gap that leaves questions about how housing policy instruments affect different social cohesion dimension such as institutional trust (vertical cohesion) and cooperation between different groups (horizontal cohesion) unanswered.

This gap highlights that while global discussions acknowledge housing's socioeconomic effects and connection to collective stability, they lack targeted analysis of how specific policy instruments directly influence social cohesion. The need for this focus is particularly acute in Aotearoa, where research on the intersection of housing policy and social cohesion is almost non-existent. For example, as illustrated in Figure 1, searching in

Scopus and Index New Zealand, using terms such as “housing policy,” “social cohesion,” and “New Zealand” in titles, abstracts, summaries, and keywords—including advanced NEAR search techniques—yielded zero results. This absence underscores a need for studies that not only address this gap but also respond to the socio-political and cultural context of Aotearoa.

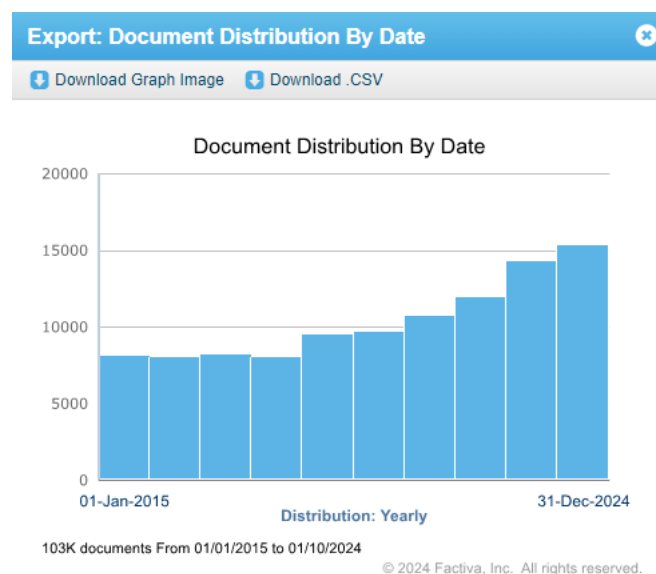
Figure 1. Results of a SCOPUS Search on Housing Policy and Social Cohesion in Aotearoa



This absence of research is concerning given Aotearoa’s intent with its policy on social cohesion, which remains absent within housing policy frameworks. The Ministry of Social Development’s *Te Korowai Whetū Social Cohesion* framework, regardless of its participatory approach, lacks empirical rigour and fails to capture the multi-level interactions essential for thorough analysis. It relies on broad indicators that miss critical individual and group-level dynamics, a gap Aruqaj (2023) notes must be filled for effective measurement.

This research is timely and necessary. Social cohesion is recognised as a linchpin of stable and inclusive societies (Coburn, 2000; Jenson, 1998; Spoonley & Dickie, 2023), yet it is under pressure as the world navigates unprecedented socio-political transformations involving political ideological shifts, migration, digitalisation, and economic disparity (Berger, 1998; Gray, 2023; Kenesov, 2024). As illustrated in Figure 2, between January 2015 and October 2024, the term ‘social cohesion’ appeared in English-language media globally over 103,000 times, with 3,061 mentions in Aotearoa alone, signalling a topic of growing concern and policy interest (Factiva, 2024). The term also featured in the titles of 899 policy documents globally and 10 in Aotearoa during the same period (Policy Commons, 2024), highlighting its limited but increasing role in formal policy discourse. By examining this opaque interface, this research aims to illuminate how housing policy instruments interact with social cohesion.

Figure 2. Global Mentions of ‘Social Cohesion’ in Media from January 2015 to October 2024



1.3 Research Question and Study Outline

Given this context, this research situates itself within the broader fields of political science and institutionalism, engaging with the high-level question: What is the interface

between policy instruments and social cohesion? To contribute to answering this question, the study focuses on the interface between housing policy instruments and social cohesion. The literature review highlighted the importance of examining structures and interdependencies within policy and social networks when researching policy-related issues in social science, suggesting a complex systems view to public policy is sought for. To that end, this PhD research asks the following two specific research questions:

1. *What is the complex systems perspective within the literature about the interface between policy instruments and social cohesion?*
2. *How can we measure and compare the alignment between policy instruments and public perceptions of social cohesion using a complex systems approach?*

2. Methodology

This research is grounded in institutionalism, which is central to political science (Binder et al., 2008) and emphasizes the role of institutional structures in shaping policy outcomes and social dynamics (Hall & Taylor, 1996). The dynamic nature of policy environments underscores the importance of integrating complex systems and mixed methods (Eden et al., 2009; Swanson et al., 2009). These approaches enable an understanding of policy structures, aligning with calls for methodological innovation in policy analysis (Castro, 2022; Mark & Philip, 2019).

Building on this theoretical foundation, the study adopts network institutionalism (Ansell, 2008; Helmke & Levitsky, 2004), which extends the traditional framework by examining the complex interplay of formal and informal actors within governance structures. Specifically, this research will employ network analysis as the main tool within the complex systems method's portfolio. Network analysis will highlight how the policy corpus interacts

with different dimensions of social cohesion, providing an empirical examination of informal and often invisible policy structures, as well as the alignment between policy instruments and a complex construct such as social cohesion (Ansell, 2008; Hidalgo et al., 2007; Rhodes, 2008).

Underpinning the network analysis and allowing for a large-scale approach is natural language processing (NLP), which will be used to examine the policy corpus. NLP allows the extraction of text from a large corpus of documents from which to identify recurring themes and patterns that reveal the interface between different policy instruments and social cohesion dimensions. However, it is important to acknowledge and address challenges associated with NLP, such as ensuring cultural specificity and avoiding misinterpretation of the textual data.

To address the first research question, a systematic literature review will be conducted to analyze the academic landscape of housing policy and social cohesion. This review will identify key search terms to find relevant studies that will be screened, coded and synthesizing through thematic analysis and critical appraisal (Hart, 2018). The output of this process will be a diagram that will provide a conceptual representation of the structure of connections between policy instruments and social cohesion, offering a foundation for deeper and empirical analysis of the policy-social cohesion interface.

Building on this, and to address research question 2, I will develop a measurement framework to quantitatively assess the alignment between policy instruments and social cohesion dimensions. Network analysis will play a central role in this phase, with key phrases extracted from a corpus of approximately 10,000 New Zealand housing policy documents sourced from Policy Commons. This dataset will enable the analysis of both formal and

informal policy structures grounded in institutionalist principles, providing a robust foundation for understanding the intersection of housing policies and social cohesion.

2.1 Building the Policy Corpus

The first step in this methodological framework involves constructing a corpus of housing policies in Aotearoa, sourced from Policy Commons. Policy Commons is a policy database used by Te Herenga Waka Library, containing over 14 million reports from 40,000 think tanks, agencies, governments, and cities. To build a corpus for our research, a series of search queries will be employed. These queries combine key concepts—social cohesion, housing policy, and New Zealand—using advanced search operators, including Boolean logic and proximity searches. Hansard transcripts and parliamentary debates will be excluded at this stage to keep a focus on formal policy instruments. Their inclusion may be revisited in later phases to explore informal governance mechanisms or discursive elements influencing housing policy and social cohesion.

To ensure the robustness of this analysis, comparable policy document corpora for other countries will be created. Comparing Aotearoa to other countries will provide context, helping to assess whether the observed structure of the Aotearoa network is typical, unique, or anomalous. This will be discussed further in Section 2.3.

2.2 Text Extraction and Natural Language Processing

After constructing the policy corpus, the first step will involve ensuring that all documents are machine-readable for analysis. For documents not already in a suitable format (e.g. PDF documents), optical character recognition (OCR) technology will be used to convert them into accessible text. This ensures that every document, regardless of its original format, can be included in the analysis and processed through NLP.

Once full texts are extracted, NLP tools such as KeyBERT will be employed to extract keywords and phrases most relevant to the concept of social cohesion. Due to the rapidly progressing NLP capabilities of large language models (LLMs), we also consider iterative prompting of several contemporary LLMs (e.g. ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini) for this step. Recent research has demonstrated that this performs at adequate quality in a variety of domains (Akpan, 2024; Townsend et al., 2024). The NLP step will surface key concepts like “social cohesion,” “inequality,” “trust,” and “justice,” even when these terms are not explicitly mentioned, helping to uncover latent themes essential for understanding how policies interact with social cohesion.

As a key input into the NLP phase, I will rely on a comprehensive list of social cohesion dimensions and housing policy instruments derived from a systematic literature review (detailed in Section 3.1) using NVivo for a reflexive thematic analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The list of instruments and domains will serve as seeds for the NLP analysis. Combining the structured, qualitative coding of NVivo with the automated pattern recognition of NLP ensures a dual-layered approach. This combination provides both depth and breadth, balancing human-driven thematic insights with the scalability of automated text analysis.

NLP plays a key role in this methodology due to its ability to handle large datasets efficiently. By integrating text extraction, processing, and thematic analysis, this approach provides a systematic exploration of both formal (visible) and informal (hidden) aspects of policy content. The findings will align with institutionalism theoretical frameworks, offering a comprehensive perspective on how housing policies influence social cohesion in both direct

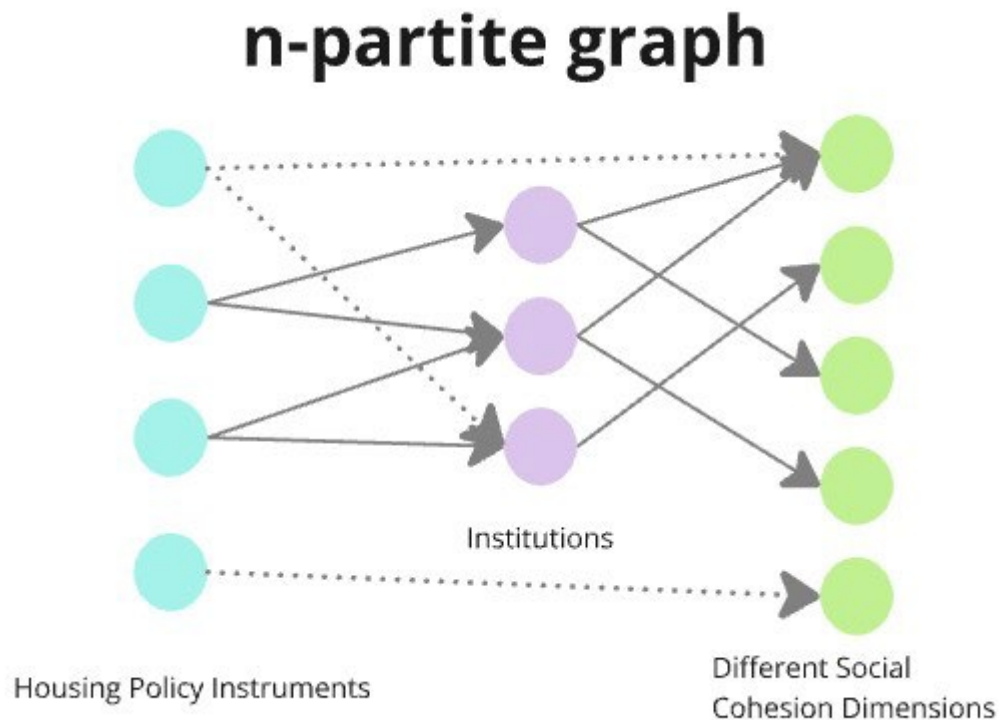
and indirect ways. These insights lay the groundwork for subsequent network analysis by highlighting potential connections that are critical for understanding policy impacts.

2.3 Network Construction

The third phase of this methodology employs network analysis to map and visualize the interface between housing policy instruments and social cohesion dimensions. This approach is designed to address the methodological gaps identified earlier, particularly the fragmented understanding of how policy instruments collide or do not collide with social cohesion dimensions.

This step begins by creating an n-partite graph (see Figure 4) to represent the relationships between housing policy instruments, institutions, and social cohesion dimensions.

Figure 3. N-Partite Graph Representation of Relationships Between Housing Policy Instruments, Institutions, and Social Cohesion Dimensions



The graph will be constructed using information from the policy corpus developed in Section 2.2. It will include nodes representing individual housing policy instruments, such as the First Home Grant Scheme, as well as central government institutions, including HUD, DPMC, and MBIE. Nodes will also represent social cohesion dimensions, such as trust, justice, equity, and inclusion, along with specific groups mentioned in policy documents. Edges between these nodes will be created whenever they are referenced in the same policy document. For instance, if a document produced by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development mentions the First Home Grant Scheme and the social cohesion dimension of trust, edges will be drawn connecting the nodes for HUD, the First Home Grant Scheme, and trust.

To ensure the robustness of the analysis, networks will also be generated from different datasets within Aotearoa. This comparison will help minimize the risk that the

observed network structure is an artefact of the specific dataset used. By applying this method, the analysis strengthens its rigour and provides confidence in the validity of the findings while offering a thorough evaluation of the approach.

2.4 Network Analysis

Network analysis provides a framework for understanding the interactions between housing policy instruments, institutions, and social cohesion dimensions. Unlike linear cause-and-effect models, network analysis accounts for the interconnected nature of real-world systems. These systems often exhibit feedback loops and unintended consequences that emerge from interactions among their components. For instance, a policy designed to affect one aspect of the system may produce ripple effects—both intended and unintended—throughout the network. This complexity underscores the need for robust analytical methods capable of capturing the structures and dynamics of the system as a whole.

In this research, the network will be analyzed to identify patterns and clusters. Specifically, the analysis will focus on clustering and connectivity within the graph, providing insights into how housing policy instruments, institutions, and social cohesion dimensions interrelate. High clustering between nodes representing social cohesion dimensions and institutions, for example, may indicate vertical social cohesion, reflecting trust or cooperation between governing bodies and the public. Conversely, clustering between nodes representing social cohesion dimensions and specific groups could signify horizontal cohesion, reflecting interactions and trust among individuals or communities.

To frame the analysis, social cohesion dimensions will be categorized using the framework developed by (Chan et al., 2006), which distinguishes between vertical and horizontal cohesion as well as subjective (perceptions and feelings of connectedness) and

objective (measurable factors such as participation rates or equity) cohesion. This framework will help evaluate the extent and nature of cohesion across the network.

Housing policy instruments will be analyzed using the typology developed by Helmke and Levitsky (2004), which classifies policies as formal or informal. This approach will allow for an assessment of whether different types of policy instruments are more likely to influence particular social cohesion dimensions or clusters of dimensions. By combining these analytical frameworks, the study will reveal how different housing policy instruments align—or fail to align—with different social cohesion dimensions.

The network analysis will also highlight central nodes, which may represent housing policy instruments, institutions, or social cohesion dimensions with significant influence across the network. Similarly, structural features such as bridges (nodes that connect otherwise separate clusters), holes or isolated nodes will provide insights into potential gaps or opportunities within the system. These findings will offer an understanding of how housing policy instruments interface with social cohesion in practice.

2.5 Measurement Framework

A measurement framework will be designed to evaluate the properties of the network, with a focus on identifying insights into the relationship and alignment between housing policy instruments, institutions, and social cohesion dimensions. Network properties such as clustering, centrality, and connectivity will form the basis of this framework, enabling both quantitative and qualitative assessments of the network structure and its implications.

The framework will begin by identifying key network metrics that capture the structural and functional characteristics of the system. For instance:

- **Clustering coefficient:** This metric will identify connected groups of nodes, which may represent clusters of policy instruments, institutions, and social cohesion dimensions. High clustering could indicate strong interdependencies within certain parts of the network, such as a specific policy instrument alignment with multiple institutions or dimensions of social cohesion.
- **Centrality measures:** Metrics such as degree centrality, betweenness centrality, and eigenvector centrality will be used to identify nodes in the network. For example, a node with high centrality may represent a policy instrument or institution that plays a role in connecting disparate parts of the network.
- **Density and connectivity:** These metrics will evaluate the overall network. A dense network may indicate a high level of interaction between policy instruments and social cohesion dimensions, while disconnected nodes or sub-networks may reveal gaps.

This measurement framework will also allow for the classification of network patterns into broader categories of cohesion, drawing on Chan et al.'s framework of vertical and horizontal cohesion and Helmke and Levitsky's typology of formal and informal policies. These classifications will provide a structured way to interpret how different aspects of the network align with theoretical concepts of social cohesion.

2.6 Survey Design and Public Perception Analysis

The next phase of the study involves a survey to capture public perceptions of how different housing policy instruments influence various dimensions of social cohesion. This step complements the textual network analysis by incorporating data derived from public responses, creating a second network based on survey data. The simplest way to derive a

network from survey responses is a correlation network over items or constructs, but I will also ask open-ended questions that allow a network from word or phrase co-occurrences to be built, like how the network will be derived from policy documents. This enables a direct comparison between the objective connections identified in the policy documents and the subjective associations expressed by the public. Specifically, the survey will explore how people relate specific policy instruments to various domains of social cohesion, such as trust, justice, and inclusion.

The survey design will utilize Chan et al.'s (2006) framework to assess both subjective dimensions of social cohesion (e.g., trust, sense of belonging) and objective dimensions (e.g., inclusion, disparities). This dual approach ensures an understanding of how social cohesion is both experienced and perceived across different population groups. Additionally, drawing on the work of Stone and Hulse (2007), the survey will consider the diverse impacts of housing policy instruments on different population segments, capturing a holistic view of policy outcomes.

A targeted sample of 1,000 to 3,000 respondents (exact number dependant on funding) will be drawn to ensure rigour and demographic representativeness. Key demographic categories such as age, ethnicity, gender, and geographic location will guide the sampling process. The survey will also incorporate material factors—such as housing tenure, affordability, and inequality—identified during the NVivo coding from earlier stages. These factors have consistently emerged in the literature as critical to shaping public perceptions of housing policy and its social impacts.

This survey-based network will mirror the structure of the textual network but will derive its edges from the associations made by respondents. Specifically, survey responses

will be treated similarly to policy corpus documents, where nodes represent housing policy instruments, institutions, social cohesion dimensions, and population groups.

Edges will be drawn between nodes when a respondent explicitly links a housing policy instrument to a social cohesion dimension, such as connecting the First Home Grant Scheme (policy node) to trust (social cohesion dimension node). Additionally, edges will be drawn to reflect respondents' self-identified group affiliations. For instance, if a respondent identifies with a particular demographic group (e.g., Māori, Pacific) and associates that group with a social cohesion dimension like equity, an edge will be created between the group node and the equity node.

2.7 Network Integration of Survey Results

Once the survey network is constructed, it will be integrated with the original text-based network to allow a comparative analysis. This comparison will evaluate the alignment or divergence between the two networks. For instance, the analysis might reveal whether certain policy instruments strongly associated with inclusion in the policy network are perceived by the public as contributing to exclusion instead. Comparisons will also be conducted across different demographic groups to explore how perceptions vary between different groups. This step will help identify patterns of consensus or disagreement between groups, providing deeper insights into how housing policies are experienced by different populations.

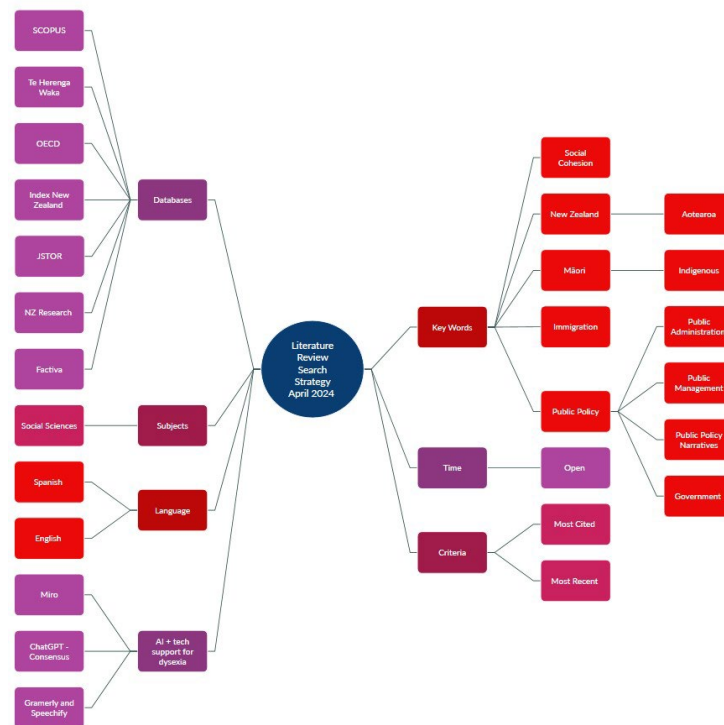
3. Literature Review

Building on the context and rationale established in the introduction, this literature review delves into the theoretical and empirical landscapes that underpin the relationship between housing policy instruments and social cohesion. Employing a systematic literature review approach, this section will synthesize the most relevant, recent, and influential academic work, establishing an overview of key themes and identifying critical research gaps. By analysing the 50 most cited and recent articles this review highlights three primary thematic areas: the theoretical underpinnings of social cohesion, the role of policy instruments in governance, and the intersection of housing policy with social outcomes. Through this synthesis, the literature review provides an initial foundation for the exploration of the interface between housing policy instruments and social cohesion in Aotearoa.

3.1 Systematic Literature Review Approach

Given the vast and interdisciplinary nature of literature surrounding social cohesion and housing policy, a structured Literature Review Search Strategy (LRSS) was imperative for this review to maintain comprehensive coverage and methodological rigour. The LRSS was designed by aligning with established best practices for systematic literature reviews (Harari et al., 2020; Hart, 2001, 2018; Webster & Watson, 2002), such as using the most cited, most recent and most relevant databases, ensuring a framework that balanced thorough exploration with necessary adaptability.

Figure 4. Literature Review Search Strategy



The strategy encompassed search protocols deployed across databases such as Scopus, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, Index New Zealand, and Policy Commons. Each database contributed distinct advantages: Scopus was leveraged for its comprehensive analytics of different searches as well as its breadth of global research, Index New Zealand for localized insights, and Policy Commons for pertinent policy documents. The range of source types captured included peer-reviewed articles, doctoral dissertations, government publications, and media analyses. Additionally, expert consultations with field specialists such as Professor Tracey MacIntosh and Professor Paul Spoonley, senior public servants like Deputy Chiefs Executive of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, Nic Blakeley and Te Herenga Waka librarians enhanced the robustness and rigour of the search as well as helped fine-tune the LRSS for relevance.

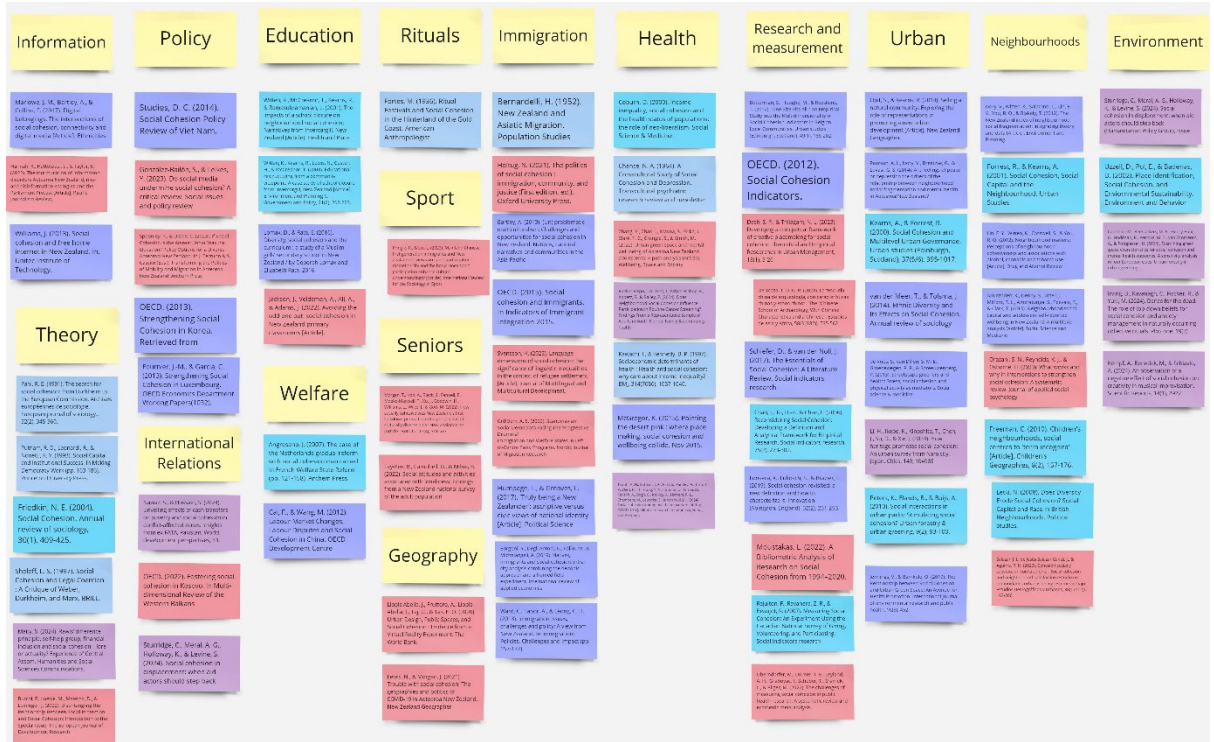
Preliminary searches underscored the strong global attention to social cohesion, with 1,792 results featuring it in titles, expanding to 12,059 when abstracts and keywords were

included. However, the focus sharpened when integrated with ‘policy instruments,’ yielding only 19 relevant studies. The most recent contributions from 2022 touched on related but distinct subjects, such as urban education (Gulosino & Maxwell, 2022), smart city policies (El-Sherif & Khalil, 2022), and identity studies (Chipenda, 2022). This scarcity was pronounced in Aotearoa-specific contexts, where literature directly addressing the intersection of social cohesion and housing policy instruments was absent.

To deepen the analysis of the identified 50 most relevant articles, reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022) was employed. This approach facilitated an iterative process, essential for engaging with qualitative data and identifying nuanced patterns. The RTA followed key stages: familiarization with the data, initial text coding, theme searching, and subsequent review and refinement. NVivo software was used for this process, enabling efficient data organization and systematic text coding such as social cohesion dimensions (equity, inclusion and peace) and housing policy instruments (first home ownership scheme, capital gains tax). After articles were identified, they were imported into NVivo, where coding was conducted, helping identify key concepts and recurring patterns related to social cohesion and housing policy. This combination of RTA with NVivo-supported text coding fostered a structured yet adaptable analysis that informed the development of the themes.

This systematic review unveiled a gap: the interface between social cohesion and policy instruments, especially in the context of housing, has not been sufficiently explored. While the global literature consistently underscores the importance of social cohesion for fostering stable, inclusive societies (Coburn, 2000; Jenson, 1998; Spoonley & Dickie, 2023), its application and interaction with housing policy instruments remain underrepresented. In Aotearoa, this deficiency is even more pronounced.

Figure 5. Miro Board for Literature Review



3.2 Thematic Overview

Following the systematic literature review approach, this section presents an initial thematic analysis based on the most recent and highly cited scholarship. The thematic overview synthesizes findings across three core areas identified through the initial literature review: the theoretical underpinnings of social cohesion, the function and evolution of policy instruments, and the specific implications of housing policy on social and institutional trust. Each theme is explored to illustrate not only the current state of research but also the prevailing gaps and debates that shape academic and policy discourse.

3.2.1 Theoretical Underpinnings of Social Cohesion

The concept of social cohesion has evolved through diverse theoretical interpretations, from Durkheim's early work on the social glue that binds societies (Durkheim, 1964) to contemporary approaches that consider economic, cultural, and political dimensions (Fonseca et al., 2019). More recent theoretical advances have

highlighted how social cohesion interacts with structural and systemic factors, such as policy (Spoonley & Dickie, 2023) and governance (Bennett & Raab, 2020; El-Sherif & Khalil, 2022; Kearns & Forrest, 2000), but with a strong focus on normative ideas such as belonging (Jenson, 1998; Spoonley, 2005) and justice (Spoonley & Dickie, 2023).

The anthropological literature (Holtug, 2010; Shaskolsky Sheleff, 1997) provides valuable insights into the role of shared cultural practices and rituals as drivers of social cohesion. Fortes (1936), who is the first known article mentioning social cohesion in the title, highlighted how rituals in traditional societies serve as powerful mechanisms for reinforcing group identity and fostering trust. This idea has been extended by contemporary studies to modern, multicultural settings (Bartley, 2013; Irving et al., 2024; Johnston et al., 2010; Samarqandi, 2022; Svensson, 2023), where identity and tensions between opposing cultural and political views can enhance or erode resilience and a sense of belonging.

The framework of social cohesion proposed by Chan et al. (2006) offers a more nuanced understanding, distinguishing between horizontal and vertical dimensions, as well as subjective and objective layers. Horizontal cohesion refers to trust and cooperation among community members, while vertical cohesion relates to trust in institutions and the perceived legitimacy of governance structures. This distinction is pivotal for analysing the impacts of policy instruments. The coded literature reinforces this, showing that policy discussions often emphasize vertical cohesion while neglecting the grassroots dynamics integral to horizontal cohesion (Lomax & Rata, 2016; Orazani et al., 2023; Sturridge et al., 2024). This highlights the importance of exploring how both dimensions interact within policy frameworks, particularly in sectors such as housing policy where trust at both levels is material.

The challenge of social fragmentation (Coburn, 2000; Kate et al., 2019; Sitar, 2008) is a key issue revealed through empirical studies and coded literature. Research, such as Ivory et al. (2012), underscores how economic disparities and historical inequalities contribute to social fragmentation, undermining cohesion. This is evident in cases where substandard housing and overcrowding exacerbate social divides (Bernard, 2010; Cheer et al., 2002; Chisholm et al., 2023). The literature review highlights a consistent pattern: decreased trust in both community members and governmental institutions correlates strongly with inadequate housing conditions (Howden-Chapman et al., 2009; StatsNZ, 2021). This indicates that policies addressing housing inequities must consider their broader social impacts to mitigate fragmentation and enhance cohesion.

Policy instruments, as theoretical tools, are shown to influence both vertical and horizontal cohesion (Haigh et al., 2016; Lascoumes & Le Gales, 2007; Ponce, 2004). They are not neutral but reflect underlying governance models and assumptions about social control (Jordan et al., 2005). The coded literature supports this, illustrating how specific interventions like housing subsidies or zoning regulations can have unintended consequences that either support or weaken social cohesion (Fertig & Reingold, 2007; Sitar, 2008). In urban settings marked by diversity, these impacts can be profound (Cardinali et al., 2024; Colbert et al., 2024; Nebbitt et al., 2012; Peters et al., 2010), shaping the ways in which trust and cooperation are fostered or eroded within communities.

Incorporating both macro-level and micro-level data (Baek et al., 2024; Maguire-Jack & Marçal, 2022; Muhuri & Basu, 2018) is essential for an effective analysis of social cohesion. Aruqaj (2023) emphasizes that robust frameworks must go beyond broad indicators to capture individual attitudes and group interactions. This perspective is validated by a notable

gap in the literature: a predominant focus on meso-level data (neighbourhoods, community groups, schools) without sufficient attention to macro-level nuances (central government, iwi level or sector-specific research). The Chan et al. (2006) framework, with its multilayered focus on horizontal, vertical, subjective and objective components, provides a basis for evaluating housing policy's influence on cohesion at multiple levels in Aotearoa.

Overall, the theoretical and empirical landscape of social cohesion underscores its multidimensional nature (Muhuri & Basu, 2021; Norris & Nandedkar, 2022) (Muhuri & Basu, 2021; Norris & Nandedkar, 2022; Penny et al., 2024). Foundational theories set the stage, but it is through empirical research and policy analysis that social cohesion can be better defined, measured, and understood.

3.2.2 Defining Social Cohesion: The Case for Chan et al.'s Framework

Introducing the definition of social cohesion at this stage of the literature review is justified to create a cohesive analytical foundation, made clear following the analysis of the theoretical underpinnings of social cohesion in the preceding section. By presenting the definition here, the discussion bridges theoretical insights with empirical findings, demonstrating why Chan et al.'s (2006) framework is the most suitable for this study. They define social cohesion as:

Social cohesion is a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioural manifestations. (Chan et al., 2006, p. 290)

Against this work, the research critically evaluates past frameworks, especially Jenson (1998), which is the social cohesion framework being used within *Te Korowai Whetū Social*

Cohesion, as the government's official working definition. Therefore, this research seeks to provide a clear, reasoned justification for adopting an updated framework that aligns with the socio-political context in 2024.

Placing the definition at this point also allows for an in-depth exploration of how scholars and policy bodies have conceptualized social cohesion over time, well established by Fonseca et al. (2019) and Schiefer and van der Noll (2017) comprehensive and critical reviews of the conceptualization of social cohesion. This contextual grounding enables the research to position Chan et al.'s (2006) approach as a modern response to these identified shortcomings, creating a logical progression from broad theoretical context to the justification of the selected analytical lens.

Chan et al.'s (2006) framework was chosen after a comprehensive review of social cohesion literature, revealing that existing definitions were often absent (Pahl, 1991a; Wilton, 1998), overly normative (Ababsa, 2024; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017; Spoonley et al., 2020), or rooted in idealized visions of harmonious coexistence (Forrest & Kearns, 2001; Ivory et al., 2012; Kearns & Forrest, 2000; Witten et al., 2016). While aspirational definitions can be inspiring, they often fall short of capturing the pluralistic nature of modern societies and policy environments, especially in the post-COVID era marked by emerging technologies influencing elections and deepening community polarization. This challenge is exemplified by New Zealand's official social cohesion policy, *Te Korowai Whetū Social Cohesion* (2022), which draws on Jane Jenson's 1988 Canadian model, largely focused on the impact of immigration at the peak of neoliberal policies in North America, and at the cusp of the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement, which transform the political and cultural landscape of USA, Canada and Mexico.

What sets Chan et al.'s (2006) framework apart is its analytical precision, distinguishing between horizontal cohesion—referring to trust, cooperation, and reciprocity among individuals—and vertical cohesion, which encompasses trust in governance and the perceived legitimacy of institutions. As well as adding the layers of subjective and objective components, which enable for more robust interpretation of the links between housing policy instruments and social cohesion dimensions. Incorporating this framework ensures that the research acknowledges and adapts to contemporary challenges, aligning with Aotearoa's unique cultural and policy environment. By choosing this definition, the analysis transcends aspirational goals and engages directly with the tangible, multidimensional dynamics of different groups with not only different, but opposing views, that influence social cohesion today.

With a comprehensive definition and analytical framework of social cohesion established through Chan et al.'s (2006) multilayered model, this review can now shift to understanding how policy instruments function and evolve in shaping social cohesion.

3.2.3 The Function and Evolution of Policy Instruments

The study of policy instruments is fundamental for understanding their multifaceted role in shaping societal outcomes and public trust (Howlett, 2024b; Lascoumes & Le Gales, 2007; Vedung, 1998). Far from being neutral or static tools, policy instruments encapsulate underlying theories of governance and social control, inherently influencing the relationship between government, institutions, and citizens (Lascoumes & Le Gales, 2007). These instruments reflect specific governance models, ranging from traditional regulations to innovative, participatory mechanisms that engage non-state actors in policy processes (Jordan et al., 2005). Theoretical advancements have shifted from viewing policy tools as

mere facilitators of administrative action to recognizing them as embedded within social and political assumptions.

Empirical analysis illustrates that policy instruments evolve in response to shifting socio-political contexts (Chang et al., 2024; El-Sherif & Khalil, 2022), adapting to address multifaceted objectives such as the evolution of governance (Bennett & Raab, 2020) and innovation (Borrás & Edquist, 2013). This evolution is evident in initiatives like the Healthy Homes Initiative (HHI) in New Zealand, which was born out of collaboration between local communities, academics, and governmental bodies. The HHI exemplifies a policy pivot towards participatory governance that aligns with WHO guidelines for health-focused housing (Howden-Chapman et al., 2023). Despite these progressive strides, it also reveals inherent challenges, particularly in maintaining equity in housing access and mitigating unintended systemic issues, underscoring Vedung's (2001) assertion that policy instruments may yield outcomes that diverge from their original goals.

The MHUD's strategic initiatives to promote urban density as a sustainable solution reflect this shift, aiming to enhance social connectedness while addressing housing affordability (Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, 2024a). However, as empirical data suggests, such policies must include mechanisms that ensure equitable benefits across diverse communities, particularly Māori, Pacific, and lower-income groups (Adams et al., 2009; Howden-Chapman et al., 2008).

Housing policy instruments like zoning laws, subsidies, and informational programmes embody these theoretical assumptions about governance and societal control (Berenson, 2010; El-Sherif & Khalil, 2022; Jordan et al., 2005). While they are often conceptualized as neutral, these instruments can perpetuate systemic inequities when not

carefully tailored to meet the nuanced needs of various demographic groups (Chen et al., 2021; Ministry of Social Development, 2022). The guide itself prompts policymakers to consider the socio-political implications of their decisions, reinforcing Lascoumes and Le Gales (2007) argument that policy instruments are as much about shaping behaviour as they are about administrative function.

Further curiosity arises from the way these instruments are perceived and implemented across different governance levels. As Klein and Marmor (2009) argue, effective policy requires a grounding in practical realities rather than abstract ideals. The alignment between policy intentions and their on-the-ground impact can vary widely (Gofen et al., 2023), shaped by how these tools are applied within both local and national contexts (Borrás & Edquist, 2013). This reality is exemplified by the challenges outlined in the Te Korowai Whetū framework, which seeks to embed social cohesion into policy development yet often encounters limitations in translating these high-level goals into practical, equitable outcomes (Ministry of Social Development, 2022)

The global and local literature further emphasizes that while housing is recognized for its critical role in social stability (Howden-Chapman et al., 2023), its direct impact as a policy tool for fostering social cohesion remains underexplored. Studies on cooperative housing models (Lang & Novy, 2014) and mixed-income communities (Lukhele, 2014) offer insights but remain inconsistent, highlighting a gap in empirically supported evaluations. This gap is particularly pronounced in Aotearoa, where housing policy has yet to be systematically examined as a driver of both horizontal and vertical social cohesion.

In sum, the evolution of policy instruments reflects a broader trend toward integrating social, economic, and environmental objectives within governance frameworks.

This evolution necessitates that policymakers consider not only the intended benefits of their interventions but also the broader societal implications that may arise.

3.2.4 Implications of Housing Policy on Social and Institutional Trust

The direct exploration of housing policy's implications on social cohesion remains limited in the literature. However, there is ample academic support to assert a strong connection between these elements, with significant repercussions for community well-being and the stability of governance structures (Chisholm et al., 2023; Grimes et al., 2023; Howden-Chapman et al., 2024). For instance, research highlights that inadequate housing conditions can severely impact different social cohesion dimensions such as equity, inclusion, belonging and justice (Lewis et al., 2020; Norris & Nandedkar, 2022), particularly when those conditions disproportionately affect marginalized groups (Lukhele, 2014; Nebbitt et al., 2012; Palacios, 2011). In Aotearoa, the StatsNZ (StatsNZ, 2021, 2024b) report on housing revealed that severe housing deprivation rates are notably higher among young Māori and Pacific communities, showcasing an inequity that risks eroding trust in governmental institutions responsible for equitable policy enforcement.

This connection between housing policy and social trust is further emphasized in studies examining how residential stability and housing quality influence perceptions of governance. For example, Bernard (2010) discusses the necessity of creating intergenerational housing solutions to foster stronger social bonds, a need that remains urgent as housing inadequacies continue to strain social capital and well-being, particularly among the elderly (Baek et al., 2024; Taylor & Buys, 2014; Ternouth, 2024). This aligns with findings by Norris and Nandedkar (2022), who underscore that housing-related structural barriers contribute to systemic inequities and reduced trust, particularly for Indigenous and racially marginalized populations. Such barriers influence not only immediate access to

resources but also broader societal engagement and perceived fairness within institutional structures.

The *Te Korowai Whetū Social Cohesion* initiative underscores Aotearoa's commitment to fostering community integration through policy. However, reliance on outdated models like Jenson's (1998) may limit its effectiveness in fully achieving trust-building outcomes. As Stone and Hulse (2007) note, social cohesion operates on multiple levels, from local communities to broader societal structures. Housing policies that do not adequately address tenure security, affordability, and quality risk deepening divisions and eroding public confidence in government capabilities, challenging the trust necessary for cohesive communities. Which are notably absent from *Te Korowai Whetū Social Cohesion*.

The implications extend beyond local neighbourhoods to national policy debates, as seen in analyses by Dai and Sheng (2021), which show that robust housing policies promoting social cohesion can buffer communities against macroeconomic challenges and uncertainty. Furthermore, "social cohesion, the glue that keeps societies together" (Dai & Sheng, 2021, p. 2) does not significantly alter the nature of uncertainty's impact on real housing returns, states with low social cohesion experience relatively larger negative effects. Similarly, Haigh et al. (2016) demonstrate how post-conflict housing reconstruction efforts can either mend or further destabilize trust within communities, depending on the inclusiveness and participatory nature of the policy approach.

To close this literature review, which has systematically examined key areas relevant to understanding the intersection of housing policy and social cohesion, several crucial insights have emerged. First, the theoretical underpinnings of social cohesion were explored, revealing the interplay between institutional structures, societal norms, and community

well-being. This provided a foundational context for assessing how social cohesion is both conceptualized and operationalized. Next, defining social cohesion through Chan et al.'s (2006) framework was justified as a robust model that distinguishes between horizontal and vertical dimensions, capturing both trust among individuals and trust in governance within subjective and objective components. This framework supports a nuanced analysis that aligns with the research objectives in the unique socio-political landscape of Aotearoa. These themes collectively establish a foundation for the methodology section. The subsequent part of this research will outline the methodological steps that will be taken to investigate the interface between housing policy and social cohesion, drawing from the theoretical frameworks and empirical insights presented in this review.

4. Ethical Considerations and Research Reflexivity

The research process will be guided by the principles of rigour, transparency, inclusion, and accessibility (Donnelly et al., 2018), which are essential for recognizing the unique socio-political and cultural context of Aotearoa. These principles also emphasize the responsibility of this research to uphold ethical standards and produce findings that reflect these core values. By integrating mixed data sources and mixed methods, this study aims to generate actionable insights into whether housing policy instruments are currently designed to support social cohesion and how they can be improved to directly address social cohesion within New Zealand's diverse and growing population.

Reflective Practice: The methodology integrates principles of transparency, cultural competence and reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Popa et al., 2015). Emphasizing radical honesty (Paradise, 2024) in the analysis supports navigating both formal policy structures and informal societal practices, while acknowledging the researcher's positionality as a *Tauwi* of colour, female Mexican migrant. This self-reflective approach aligns with CST's emphasis on responding to emergent findings, allowing for real-time methodological adjustments and ensuring that the research remains both rigorous and culturally competent.

As part of the methodological framework, an anonymous survey will be conducted to address the perception dimension of social cohesion as per Chan et al. (2006) analytical framework. In alignment with Te Herenga Waka's Human Ethics Policy, I will apply for ethics approval within the first six months of 2025, with plans to administer the survey in July–August 2025. This process ensures compliance with institutional ethical standards and fosters trust and confidentiality among participants.

5. Risks and Limitations

The proposed integration of Institutionalism and CST to study housing policy and social cohesion in Aotearoa comes with inherent challenges that must be acknowledged. While synthesising multiple theoretical perspectives offers depth, it risks creating a model that may obscure rather than clarify findings. Data collection presents another challenge; gathering extensive and diverse data to capture institutional networks and system dynamics is resource-intensive and may miss informal or nuanced social interactions.

Operationalizing abstract concepts like institutional embeddedness and system emergence into measurable variables is difficult, potentially affecting validity and reliability. The specific institutional context in Aotearoa may constrain the generalizability of findings to other regions, reducing broader applicability.

Addressing these limitations requires strategies such as clear operational definitions, mixed methods, sensitivity analyses, and transparent communication with stakeholders. Embracing a reflexive stance ensures ongoing methodological refinement and responsiveness to new insights. Despite these challenges, this approach holds potential for meaningful policy analysis and understanding of socio-political systems, provided the limitations are approached with humility and critical awareness. While the survey is an ambitious component of the methodology, it acknowledges the inherent time constraints of the PhD research timeline. Completing this survey in earnest within the next two years may prove challenging. However, its inclusion in the proposal reflects the aspirational scope of the study and provides a clear roadmap should resources and circumstances allow for its implementation. Alternatively, this framework could guide future research extensions of this work.

6. PhD Timeline

Time Period	Activity
January–April 2025	Literature review development; causal loop diagram output while developing the policy corpus
April 2025	3-week break for scheduled jaw surgery
May–September 2025	Developing ethics approval and survey design
October – December 2025	Complete network analysis of policy corpus and survey runs.
December 15, 2025– January 15, 2026	Holiday break.
January 15–March 2026	Develop survey network analysis
April–June 2026	Compare both networks – policy corpus network and survey network
July–December 2026	Write up thesis
January 2027	Submit thesis

Appendices

Appendix 1 – OIA Sent to MHUD and KO

Tēnā koutou [Kāinga Ora] OIA team,

I hope this message finds you well.

I am writing to request information under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) to support my doctoral research at Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington's School of Government.

Context:

- I am currently in the initial stages of my PhD research, which aims to explore and test the relationship between housing policies and social cohesion in New Zealand
- My objective is to understand whether and how government housing policies are linked to this idea of social cohesion
- This inquiry is particularly focused on identifying the government's perspective and strategies regarding the interplay between housing policy and social cohesion
- The information will be instrumental in shaping the direction and scope of my doctoral research and is data that will inform my PhD Research Proposal due January 2025 and design of methodology for full PhD aimed to be completed in 2027
- This similar OIA will also be sent to HUD, MSD and MBIE
- The information I am requesting is from the time period of October 27, 2022, to the present date.

Q1- Policy Documents and Communications: Any policies, cabinet papers, briefs, public consultation documents, and aide-mémoires to Chief Executive, ELT, ministers or other agencies that discuss or reference the connection between housing policies and social cohesion. This might include any mention of concepts related to social cohesion such as belonging, community, and identity.

Q2 - Definition and Frameworks: Explain what definition of social cohesion is used by your agency in the context of housing policy. If Te Korowai Whetū - MSD's strategic framework for social cohesion is used, please confirm. Otherwise, please provide details of the alternative definition or framework employed.

Q3 - Impact Assessments: Any quantitative data, research findings, or analyses conducted by or available to your agency that assess the impact of housing policies on social cohesion within New Zealand. Or any other relevant indicators that might be mentioned in Te Korowai Whetū - MSD's measurement for social cohesion.

Q4 - Stakeholder Engagement: Information on how your agency engaged with any relevant stakeholders including general public, specific communities, experts and interest groups in the development two or three key housing policies that might have an impact on social

cohesion. Keen to know and understand the level of engagement (inform, consult, involve, partner as per the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum), cost of engagement, timeframes, key stakeholder analysis, and any other relevant information re how you usually engage.

Q5 - Monitoring and Evaluation: Information on the mechanisms in place for monitoring and evaluating the impact of housing policies on social cohesion, including the use of any indicators from Te Korowai Whetū or other measurement frameworks.

Q6 - Future Initiatives: Any upcoming initiatives, policy changes, or strategic directions aimed at strengthening the link between housing policy and social cohesion. if any, and if not, why?

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further clarification or details regarding my request. I appreciate the amount of work that goes into these responses, so many thanks to anybody and everybody involved in advance.

Ngā mihi nui,

Nat

Nat Albert

PhD student

Broad topic | testing the relationship between housing policy and social cohesion in New Zealand

Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington | School of Government

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Appendix 2 – Te Korowai Whetū Social Cohesion Framework

Social cohesion dimension	Indicator	What can be measured	Data source
Horizontal Social Cohesion	Trust in Institutions	Mean trust rating in Parliament, for Police, the education system, courts and the health system	General Social Survey
Horizontal Social Cohesion	Trust in Institutions	Average corruption perception index score	Transparency International Corruption Perception Index
Horizontal Social Cohesion	Perception that voice is heard	Proportion of people who feel the public has influence on the decisions their Council makes	Quality of Life Survey
Horizontal Social Cohesion	Perception of fair treatment	Current Gap Identified	Current Gap Identified
Horizontal Social Cohesion	Perception of Representation in Decision-Making	Current Gap Identified	Current Gap Identified
Horizontal Social Cohesion	Civic participation - local	Proportion of Māori who are registered with their iwi in the last three years.	Te Kupenga
Vertical Social Cohesion	Social Contact	Mean rating - connection with people in neighbourhood	General Social Survey (2018 supplement – Due to be updated in 2024)
Vertical Social Cohesion	Solidarity/reciprocity	Participants' feelings of mutual support and reciprocity within their communities	Quality of Life Survey
Vertical Social Cohesion	Cultural participation	Proportion of people who participate in cultural activities	General Social Survey (core content)
Vertical Social Cohesion	Sense of belonging to community	Proportion of people who feel a sense of belonging to their family	General Social Survey (2016 supplement – to be updated in 2021 survey)
Vertical Social Cohesion	Mean Trust Rating of Others	General levels of trust within the community and beyond institutions	Survey responses
Vertical Social Cohesion	Frequency of Face-to-Face Contact with Neighbours	The extent to which participants interact with their neighbours on a regular basis	Survey responses

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