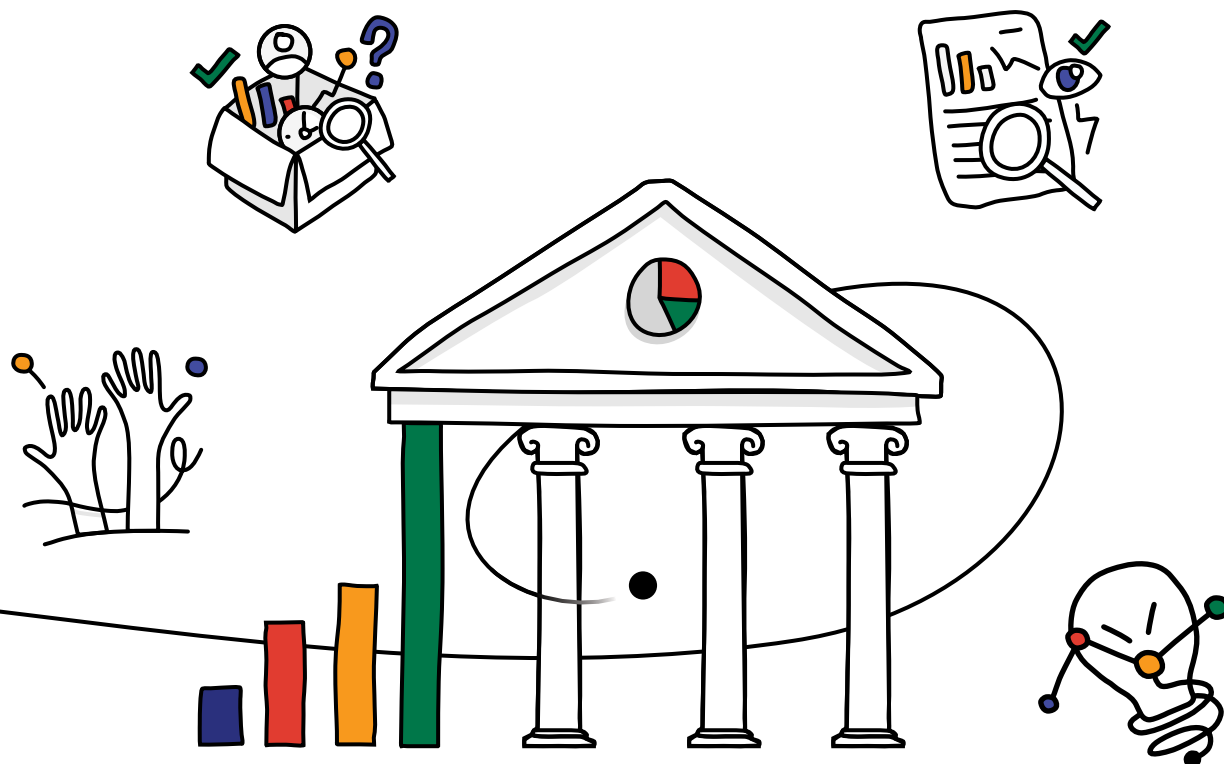




Understanding the public perception of South African Parliament

Survey Report



Co-funded by
the European Union

PMG PARLIAMENTARY
MONITORING GROUP
OUTA openup:
ORGANISATION UNDOING TAX ABUSE

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1. Executive Summary

1.1. *Overview of the Report*

In 2023 Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse (OUTA) partnered with PMG and OpenUp to develop a Parliamentary Oversight Dashboard. This project is co-funded by the European Union under their Enhancing Accountability Programme. The dashboard project aims to create a user-friendly, open-source platform for monitoring and assessing parliamentary performance. The dashboard will offer real-time information on user engagement, data accessibility, and transparency within the parliamentary system. It will facilitate public and stakeholder engagement and will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of parliamentary actions, with a focus on inclusivity for marginalised groups. Towards identifying a baseline from which to commence the development of the dashboard, it was decided to develop and distribute a survey for project-specific purposes.

This report presents findings from a survey conducted as part of the Enhancing Accountability Programme, a collaborative initiative between the (OUTA), Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG), and OpenUp. The baseline survey, engaging a diverse group of 420 South African citizens, was designed to assess the targeted public's understanding, perceptions, and engagement with the national Parliament. This initiative aims to capture a detailed snapshot of public sentiment, focusing on the public's knowledge of parliamentary functions, their levels of engagement with parliamentary processes, and the effectiveness of existing communication channels. These focal points are critical for identifying key areas where parliamentary communications and operations can be improved to foster greater transparency and public participation.

The insights garnered from this baseline survey, which includes both quantitative data and qualitative feedback, are intended to guide policymakers, civil society, and governmental institutions. The findings highlight specific areas where enhancements in parliamentary communications and operations could increase transparency and participation, aligning with the goals of developing a user-friendly, open-source Parliamentary Oversight Dashboard. Additionally, this report provides a demographic analysis, offering detailed insights into how different population segments perceive and interact with parliamentary functions. This



information is vital for tailoring communication and engagement strategies to better meet the diverse needs and expectations of the South African public, thereby supporting the project's objectives to enhance transparency and informed decision-making.

Before delving into the detailed findings, it is important to underscore the inherent limitations of this report. While the survey results provide valuable insights into public perceptions and engagement with Parliament, they represent a snapshot based on the responses of the surveyed individuals and should not be construed as an exhaustive analysis of all demographic segments or viewpoints within South Africa. This preliminary data serves as a foundation for further research and continuous improvement of the Parliamentary Oversight Dashboard, acknowledging that the scope of our inquiry can evolve as new data and user feedback are integrated into our platform.



1.2. Key Findings on Public Perception and Understanding

The survey revealed several critical insights into public perception and understanding of Parliament's roles, responsibilities, and effectiveness:

1.2.1. Familiarity with Parliamentary Functions:

A significant proportion of respondents demonstrated a moderate to high level of familiarity with the functions of Parliament. However, there remains a notable segment of the population with limited understanding, highlighting a gap in public education and outreach efforts.

1.2.2. Engagement with Parliamentary Processes:

Engagement levels varied widely among participants. While a small group reported active participation in parliamentary processes such as public hearings and consultations, the majority indicated minimal to no engagement. Factors influencing engagement include lack of awareness, perceived complexity of participation, and scepticism about the impact of their involvement.

1.2.3. Sources of Information:

Digital media emerged as the primary source of information about Parliament, with social media platforms and official parliamentary websites being the most frequented channels. However, concerns about the reliability and bias of information received via social media were prevalent.

1.2.4. Perceived Transparency and Accountability:

Responses reflected mixed feelings regarding the transparency and accountability of Parliament. While some praised recent initiatives aimed at enhancing openness, others expressed dissatisfaction with the perceived lack of responsiveness and accountability from their representatives.

1.2.5. Suggestions for Improvement:

Many respondents suggested that Parliament could improve its functions by increasing transparency, enhancing direct communication with the public, and simplifying the language used in its communications. Additionally, there was a strong call for more regular updates on parliamentary activities and more accessible platforms for public participation.

1.2.6. Demographic Differences:

Analysis of responses across different demographic groups showed that younger individuals (18 – 40) and those from urban areas are more likely to seek information about Parliament online and participate in discussions via social media. In contrast, older individuals (41 – 65+) preferred traditional media channels and were less likely to participate in online forums.

These findings underscore a need for targeted communication strategies that address the specific needs and preferences of different demographic groups to foster a more informed and engaged public.

1.3. Implications for Parliamentary Communication and Engagement

The survey results offer vital insights into the effectiveness of current parliamentary communication and engagement strategies, pointing to several areas where improvements can be made to better meet the needs of the public. The findings suggest the following implications for enhancing parliamentary communication and engagement:

1.3.1. Enhanced Educational Initiatives:

Given the varying levels of familiarity with Parliament's functions, there is a clear need for comprehensive educational programs that aim to demystify parliamentary processes and roles. These initiatives should be accessible to all citizens and tailored to different learning styles and needs, potentially through interactive webinars, informational videos, and community workshops.



1.3.2. Diversified Communication Channels:

The reliance on digital media for information about Parliament, particularly among younger demographics, underscores the importance of diversifying communication channels. Parliament should maintain a robust online presence while also ensuring that traditional media channels are utilised to reach those less technologically inclined. This dual approach will help bridge the communication gap across different segments of the population.

1.3.3. Feedback Mechanisms and Public Engagement:

There is a significant demand for more interactive and transparent engagement with Parliament. Implementing regular feedback mechanisms, such as surveys and public forums, can help Parliament gauge public sentiment and adjust its policies accordingly. Furthermore, these platforms must be designed to be user-friendly and actively promoted to encourage higher participation rates.

1.3.4. Transparency and Accountability:

Strengthening transparency and accountability remains a pivotal concern. Parliament should focus on making its activities and decision-making processes more visible and understandable to the public. This could involve regular updates on legislative developments, detailed explanations of parliamentary decisions, and open lines of communication for inquiries and feedback.

1.3.5. Language and Communication Style:

The complexity of the language used in parliamentary communications often hinders public understanding. Simplifying the language and adopting a more conversational style can help make parliamentary communications more relatable and easier to understand for the general public.

1.3.6. Strategic Use of social media:

To combat misinformation and ensure the credibility of information, Parliament should adopt a strategic approach to social media use, focusing on regular, accurate updates that

counteract misinformation and provide clear, factual information about parliamentary activities.

By addressing these implications, Parliament can enhance its communication strategies to foster a more informed, engaged, and trusting public, ultimately strengthening the democratic process and public governance.

2. Introduction

2.1. *Background and Context of the Survey*

This survey was launched in the context of significant demands for increased transparency and accountability within the South African government. In recent years, legislative reforms and public debates have spotlighted the critical functions of Parliament and its interaction with the citizenry. These societal and political catalysts emphasise the urgent need to confront corruption and strengthen oversight mechanisms, critical elements in protecting South Africa's democratic gains.

South Africa's journey towards democracy was envisioned to usher in an era of equality, justice, and prosperity. Yet, persistent corruption has jeopardised these ideals, diminishing public trust in government institutions and obstructing socio-economic progress. Amidst this backdrop, there has been a robust call from civil society organisations, the media, and the public at large for enhanced governmental transparency and accountability.

The public discourse on governance, transparency, and accountability has intensified, signifying an increased awareness and commitment to address the systemic hurdles within South Africa's democratic setup. This growing public involvement highlights the necessity of grasping and ameliorating public perceptions and engagements with governmental processes.

In response to these challenges, the Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse (OUTA), in partnership with OpenUp and the Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG), initiated a significant project funded by the European Union as part of their Enhancing Accountability Programme. Commencing in January 2024 and continuing through June 2026, this project aims to develop



the Parliamentary Oversight Dashboard. This user-friendly, open-source platform is designed to offer real-time insights into parliamentary performance, focusing on enhancing transparency, facilitating informed decision-making, strengthening governance, and empowering civil society involvement.

The baseline survey aims to gather data on public attitudes, perceptions, and experiences concerning corruption, parliamentary oversight, and government accountability. These insights are vital for shaping policy discussions, steering legislative changes, and reinforcing efforts to augment transparency and accountability in South Africa's governance frameworks. The findings from this baseline survey are crucial for informing the development of the Parliamentary Oversight Dashboard, ensuring it meets the needs of its users effectively.

By collaboratively promoting integrity, accountability, and exemplary governance, South Africa aspires to eradicate the blight of corruption and achieve its full potential as a thriving democracy.

2.2. Objectives of the Baseline Survey

This report will elaborate on the specific goals of the baseline survey:

- 2.2.1. Assess Public Knowledge: Determine the level of awareness and understanding of Parliament's roles, responsibilities, and processes.
- 2.2.2. Gauge Engagement Levels: Investigate how often and through what means the public interacts with Parliament and participates in its activities.
- 2.2.3 Collect Improvement Suggestions: Solicit public opinion on what changes or improvements are needed for Parliament to function more effectively.
- 2.2.4. Demographic Analysis: Analyse how different demographic segments perceive and interact with Parliament, identifying any trends or significant differences.

2.3. Scope and Methodology of the Survey

The survey was conducted to evaluate South Africans' understanding of and engagement with Parliament. It aimed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data to assess participants' familiarity with parliamentary functions, their personal views on these functions, knowledge about parliamentary operations, their level of engagement, and their suggestions for

improving oversight processes. The survey successfully collected responses from 420 individuals targeted through utilising OUTA, PMG and OpenUp's databases (email lists and social networks).

2.4. Limitations of the Baseline Survey

The baseline survey was designed as a foundational tool to guide the project by establishing a starting point from which development can proceed. It is crucial to note that this survey is not intended as a definitive report; as such, it does not extensively evaluate certain significant elements, including:

- The efforts of Parliament's Public Education Office (PEO), which is focused on harmonising and enhancing its educational programs.
- The activities of the Public Participation Working Group, of which OUTA and PMG are active members.
- The current models and frameworks guiding Parliament's Public Participation efforts.
- Initiatives by other interest groups, such as 'Action on Legislatures', aimed at boosting the awareness and accountability of Parliament.

Nevertheless, the findings from this survey and the subsequent research and actions spurred by it are planned to contribute to and incorporate the efforts of these notable entities. This approach ensures that the ongoing project aligns with broader objectives to enhance transparency, participation, and education concerning parliamentary processes.

2.5. Value of the Baseline Survey

The baseline survey is instrumental in guiding the development of the Parliamentary Oversight Dashboard by fulfilling several key objectives:

- Guiding the Dashboard's Development: The survey helps shape the features and functionalities of the dashboard by providing insights into user needs and preferences.
- Identifying Research and Collaboration Gaps: It pinpoints areas where additional research is needed and where collaboration with other organizations could enhance the dashboard's effectiveness.

- **Addressing Potential Biases:** By identifying potential biases and prejudices within the partner organizations, the survey ensures that the project is conducted with the highest standards of integrity and impartiality.
- **Supporting Existing Entities:** The insights gathered also contribute to the ongoing efforts of existing entities involved in enhancing parliamentary transparency and public engagement.
- **Further Actions:** The survey sets the stage for additional strategic actions that will continuously improve the dashboard's relevance and impact.

3. Overview

3.1. Survey Design

The survey was structured to include multiple-choice questions to quantify public opinions and knowledge levels about Parliament, alongside open-ended questions designed to gather detailed insights into personal experiences and suggestions for improvement. This combination allows for both statistical analysis and thematic exploration of the data.

3.2. Sampling Methodology

Data was collected exclusively online, targeting a wide demographic through various digital platforms to ensure a broad representation. Although this method may not capture segments of the population with limited internet access, it efficiently gathers data from a technologically engaged audience, which is substantial in understanding the views of a digitally active citizenry. As previously noted, the survey was distributed using the email lists and social media networks of the partner organizations, including OUTA, PMG, and OpenUp. Consequently, it is important to acknowledge that the respondents are already proficient users and consumers of digital media.

3.3. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted online through two main channels:

- 3.3.1. **Social Media Platforms:** The survey was distributed across multiple social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These platforms were chosen

for their widespread use and ability to reach diverse demographic groups, from youth to older adults, across various socio-economic backgrounds.

- 3.3.2. Newsletters: The survey was also disseminated through electronic newsletters to subscribers who are typically more engaged with specific community or interest group content. This method likely reached a more informed and possibly more engaged audience segment.

3.4. Analytical Methods

The following analytical methods were utilised:

- 3.4.1. Descriptive Analysis of Demographics: The initial analysis will focus on the diversity of the survey respondents, understanding the distribution of participants across different demographic variables like age, gender, and location, as provided during the survey completion.
- 3.4.2. Detailed Question Analysis:
- Familiarity with Parliament Functions: Responses to questions about familiarity with Parliament's roles and functions will be analysed to assess the general level of public knowledge.
 - Engagement with Parliamentary Activities: Analysis of how respondents engage with parliamentary activities will help identify both the extent and modes of interaction between the public and Parliament.

3.5. Advanced Analytical Techniques:

The following advanced analytical techniques were utilised:

- Text Analysis of Open-ended Questions: This technique will be employed to extract themes, concerns, and suggestions from the responses, providing qualitative insights into public perceptions.
- Cluster Analysis: This statistical method will segment respondents based on their responses, especially concerning their views on Parliament's importance and their engagement levels.



- **Sentiment Analysis:** Performed on the qualitative feedback from open-ended responses, this analysis will determine the overall sentiment towards Parliament's roles and functions, identifying areas of public concern or approval.

3.6. *Data Integrity and Security*

All data collected online was anonymised and securely stored to protect respondent privacy and adhere to data protection regulations. The integrity of the statistical analysis was ensured through rigorous checks and validation processes.

3.7. *Structure of the Report*

This report is structured to provide a thorough analysis of South Africans' understanding of, engagement with, and perceptions of Parliament, as gleaned from our recent survey. Here is how the report is organised:

Section 4: Understanding of the South African Parliament

We begin by examining the public's knowledge and awareness of the parliamentary system. This section is divided into:

- **Knowledge of Parliamentary Structure and Functions:** Analysing how well the public understands the formal makeup and roles of Parliament.
- **Awareness of Parliament's Role in Governance:** Evaluating public awareness of Parliament's overarching role in governance.
- **Perception of Parliamentarians' Duties and Responsibilities:** Assessing how the public perceives the duties and effectiveness of their elected representatives.

Section 5: Sources of Information about Parliament

Next, we explore how information about Parliament reaches the public and how trustworthy it is perceived to be. This section covers:

- **Main Channels of Information Consumption:** Identifying the main sources through which the public learns about parliamentary activities.



- **Trustworthiness and Reliability of Information Sources:** Gauging the credibility of these information sources.
- **Dashboard Desirability and Perceived Usefulness:** Assessing interest in and potential impact of a real-time parliamentary activity dashboard.

Section 6: Public Engagement with Parliament

This section delves into the public's actual engagement with parliamentary processes and their views on the accessibility and transparency of these processes. It includes:

- **Participation in Parliamentary Processes:** Reporting on how the public participates in sessions or contacts representatives.

Section 7: Strengths and Weaknesses in Public Understanding

This critical section identifies what the public perceives as strengths and weaknesses in parliamentary communication and operations. It includes:

- **Perceived Strengths of Parliamentary Communication Efforts:** Highlighting what the public sees as effective in current communications.
- **Identified Gaps and Misconceptions:** Pointing out where misunderstandings or lack of knowledge exist.
- **Opportunities for Improving Public Understanding:** Proposing ways to enhance public knowledge and engagement.

Section 8: Public Sentiment and Cluster Analysis of Parliamentary Perception

This section provides a detailed examination of public sentiments towards Parliament and analyses different clusters.

- **Sentiment Analysis:** Displays a primarily neutral public sentiment, with fewer positive and negative opinions.
- **Cluster Analysis:** Identifies four distinct clusters, each representing different demographic or opinion groups.
- **Thematic Insights:** A word cloud from responses highlights key themes such as transparency, accountability, and performance.



Section 9: Conclusion

The report concludes with:

- **Summary of Key Findings on Public Perception:** Summarising major insights into how the public perceives and interacts with Parliament.
- **Implications for Strengthening Public Understanding of Parliament:** Discussing what these findings mean for future engagement strategies and policy-making.
- **Recommendations for Enhancing Parliamentary Communication Strategies:** Offering specific recommendations to improve communications between Parliament and the public.

Section 10: Appendix

- Survey Questionnaire
- Demographic Breakdown of Survey Respondents



4. Understanding of the South African Parliament

4.1. Knowledge of Parliamentary Structure and Functions

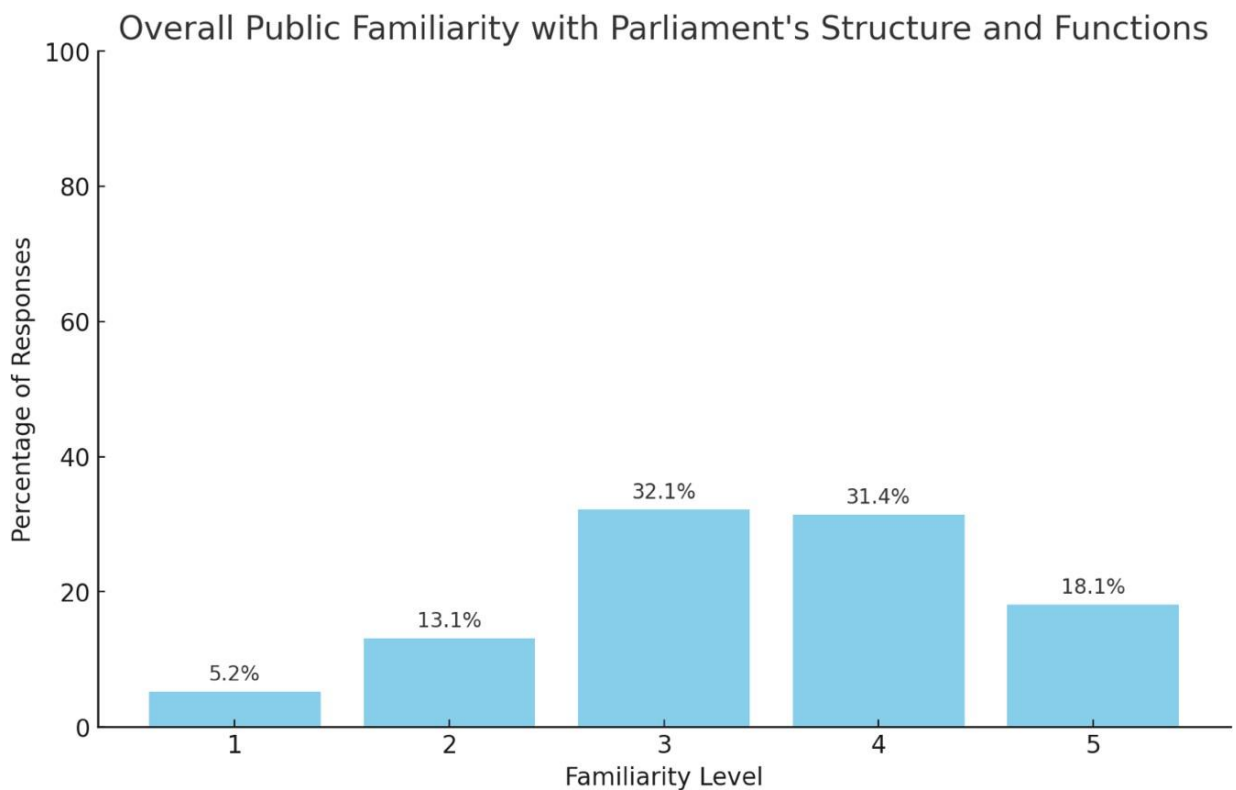


Figure 1: Public familiarity with parliament's structure and functions

The bar chart presents an overview of the public's familiarity with the structure and functions of the South African Parliament based on a survey of 420 respondents. The data illustrates a range of familiarity levels, labelled from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates very low familiarity and 5 indicates very high familiarity.

The results indicate a varied understanding among the surveyed population:

- A substantial portion of respondents exhibit a moderate level of familiarity, with the majority falling into level 3.
- Levels 4 and 5, representing higher familiarity, collectively account for a significant share of the responses, suggesting that a notable segment of the population possesses a strong understanding of Parliament's roles and functions.

- On the other end of the spectrum, levels 1 and 2, which represent lower familiarity, also show notable responses, indicating a segment of the population with limited knowledge of Parliament.

These findings highlight the diverse levels of public knowledge regarding the South African Parliament, underscoring the importance of targeted educational and outreach efforts to enhance understanding of parliamentary operations and responsibilities. The presence of a considerable number of respondents with moderate to high familiarity suggests existing engagement and awareness, which can be built upon to foster deeper public involvement in parliamentary processes.

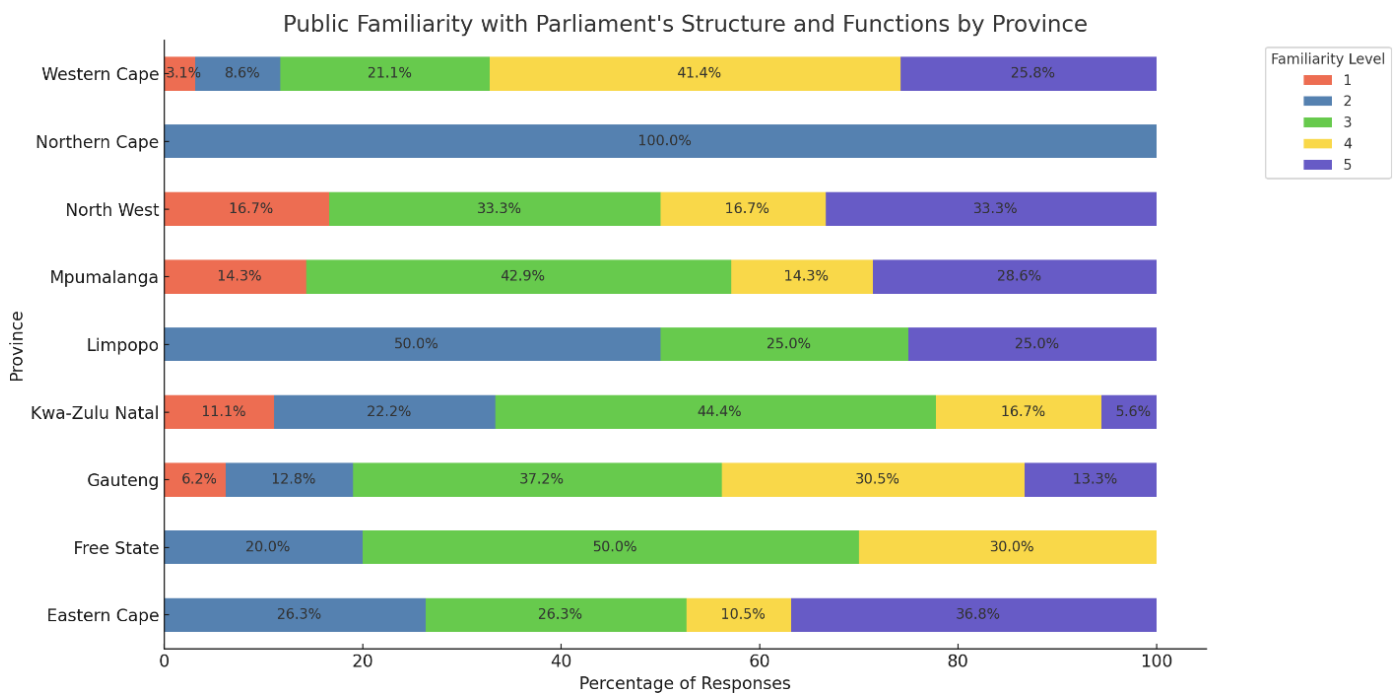


Figure 2: Public familiarity with parliament's structure and functions by Provinces

The stacked horizontal bar chart delineates the familiarity levels with Parliament's structure and functions across various provinces. This visualization allows for a comparative analysis of how well residents in different provinces understand the roles and responsibilities of the South African Parliament.

Key observations from the chart include:

- **Gauteng and Western Cape** show a higher proportion of respondents with familiarity levels of 4 and 5, indicating a relatively better understanding of Parliament's functions within these provinces.
- **Provinces like Limpopo and Eastern Cape** have a noticeable number of responses at lower familiarity levels (1 and 2), suggesting a potential gap in awareness or accessibility to parliamentary education and resources.
- **The distribution in provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal and North West** demonstrates a balanced spread across all familiarity levels, reflecting diverse levels of public engagement and understanding.
- **Northern Cape** stands out with 100% of respondents at the highest familiarity level (5), indicating an exceptionally high level of awareness about Parliament's structure and functions within this province.
- **Mpumalanga and Free State** show significant responses at the lower to moderate familiarity levels (1, 2, and 3), highlighting areas where increased educational efforts might be beneficial.
- **In the North West** there is an equal split between the highest and lowest familiarity levels, suggesting polarized perceptions of parliamentary functions within the province.

These observations suggest varying degrees of understanding and engagement with Parliament across the provinces, pointing to opportunities for targeted educational initiatives to enhance public knowledge and interaction with parliamentary processes.

These regional differences suggest that outreach and educational programs about Parliament might need to be tailored to the specific needs and existing levels of understanding in each province. Enhancing awareness and knowledge about Parliament's functions could foster more active participation and engagement in the democratic process, particularly in regions showing lower levels of familiarity.



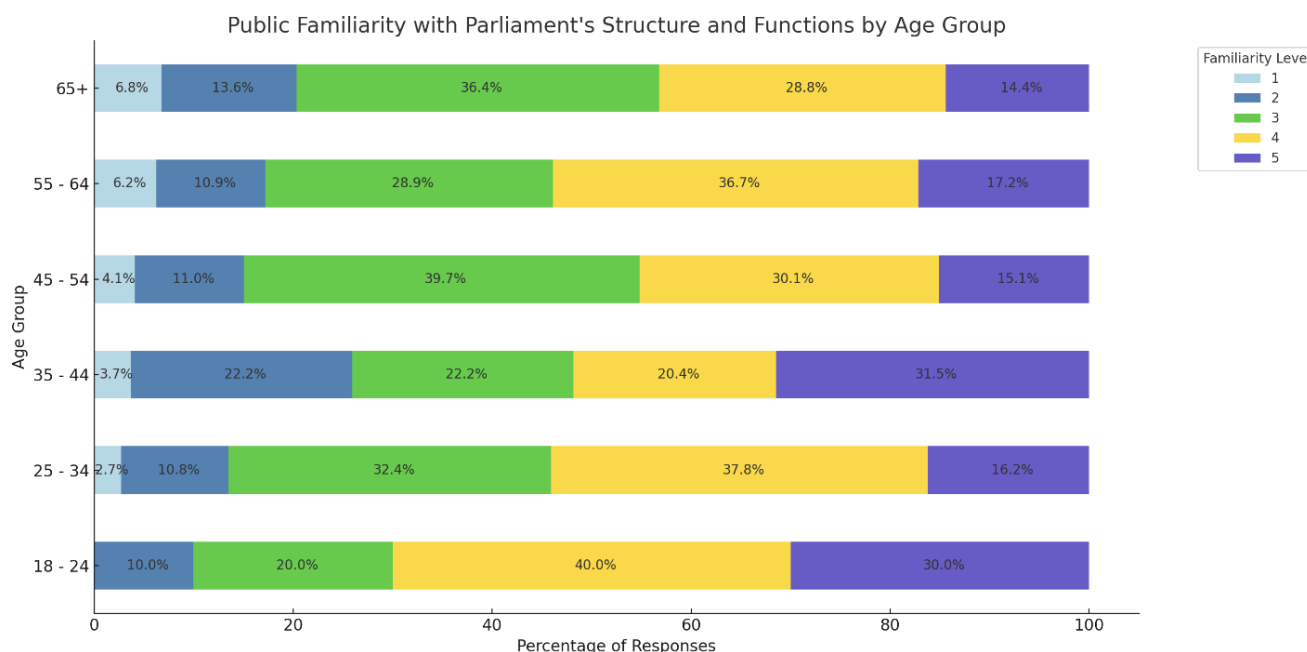


Figure 3: Public familiarity with parliament's structure and functions by age group

The stacked horizontal bar chart illustrates the familiarity levels with Parliament's structure and functions across various age groups. This analysis helps identify age-related trends in the understanding of parliamentary operations.

Key observations from the chart include:

- Younger age groups (18-24 and 25-34) display a significant proportion of respondents with moderate familiarity (level 3), but also a notable presence in the higher familiarity levels (4 and 5). This suggests that younger individuals, potentially through educational institutions or digital media, have a considerable engagement with and understanding of Parliament.
- Middle-aged respondents (35-44 and 45-54) show a balanced distribution across all familiarity levels, indicating varied levels of understanding that could reflect different life experiences and interactions with parliamentary functions.

The oldest age groups (55-64 and 65+) tend to have higher responses in the lower familiarity levels (1 and 2), as well as level 3. This might suggest challenges related to accessibility or the effectiveness of current outreach programs targeting older populations.

The data implies that age is a significant factor in the public's understanding of Parliament,

with younger individuals showing a trend towards higher familiarity. It highlights the need for targeted educational efforts that cater to the specific learning preferences and accessibility requirements of different age groups to enhance their understanding and engagement with Parliament.

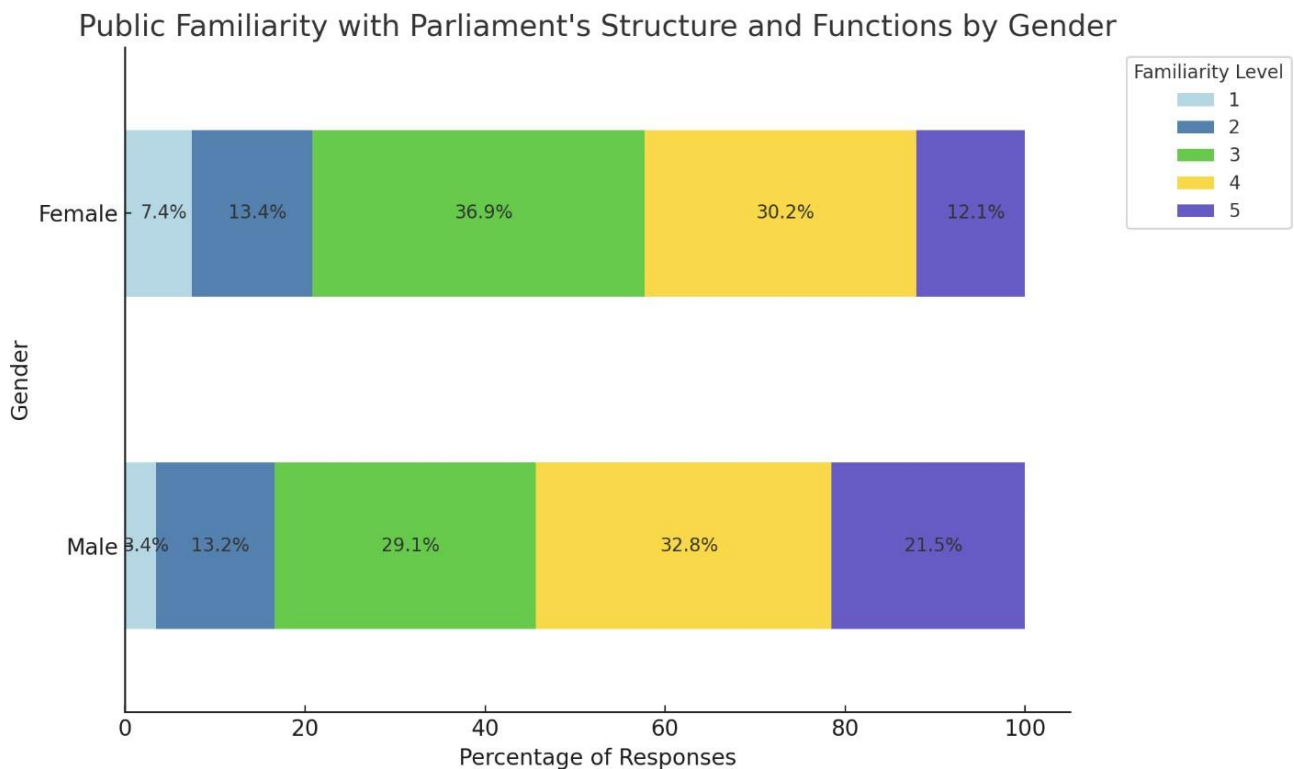


Figure 4: Public familiarity with parliament's structure and functions by gender

The focused analysis on gender reveals differences in the understanding of Parliament's structure and functions between male and female respondents from the survey. This stacked horizontal bar chart displays the distribution of familiarity levels across the two gender groups, providing insights into gender-related disparities in parliamentary knowledge.

Key observations include:

- **Male Respondents:** There is a balanced distribution across the familiarity levels 3 to 5, with a slight emphasis on level 3 (moderate familiarity). Notably, the combined proportion of males in the higher familiarity levels (4 and 5) is substantial, suggesting a significant segment of male respondents possesses a strong understanding of

Parliament's functions.

- Female Respondents: Similar to males, females show a significant presence in the moderate familiarity level (3). However, females show a slight representation in the highest familiarity level (5), indicating some engagement and understanding of Parliament among this group.

The comparison between male and female respondents indicates that both groups have a reasonable level of understanding, with males slightly more represented in the highest familiarity category. This data can be useful for tailoring gender-specific educational initiatives and outreach programs to enhance understanding and engagement with parliamentary processes among both genders.

4.2. Awareness of Parliament's Role in Governance

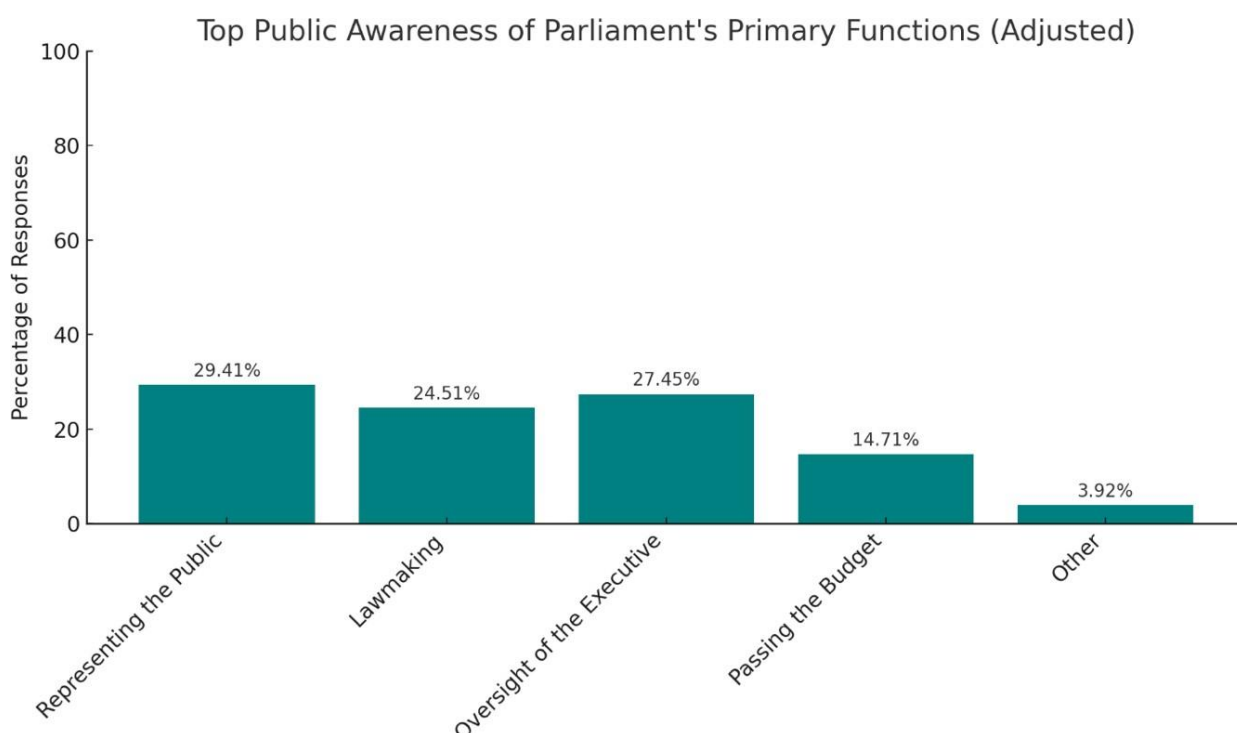


Figure 5: Public awareness of Parliament's primary function

The adjusted visualisation focuses on the primary functions of the South African Parliament as identified by the survey respondents. The analysis prioritises the four most recognised functions, with all other responses aggregated into an "Other" category to maintain clarity.

Key findings from the graph are:

- **Representing the Public:** This function is most frequently recognised, indicating that a large portion of the population views representation as Parliament's primary role.
- **Law-making:** Law-making is acknowledged as a crucial function, reflecting an awareness of Parliament's legislative responsibilities.
- **Oversight of the Executive:** This function, while slightly less recognised than law-making, still stands out significantly, showcasing an understanding of Parliament's role in monitoring and checking the executive branch of government.
- **Passing the Budget:** Also considered a key function, this reflects public recognition of Parliament's role in managing and approving the nation's finances.

The "Other" category encapsulates the remaining functions that were mentioned by respondents but not as frequently as the top ones. This consisted of governance, being the voice of the people and transformation in the form of poverty reduction. This categorisation helps underline the most salient functions as perceived by the public while providing a simplified overview of the broader understanding.

4.3. Perception of Parliamentarians' Duties and Responsibilities

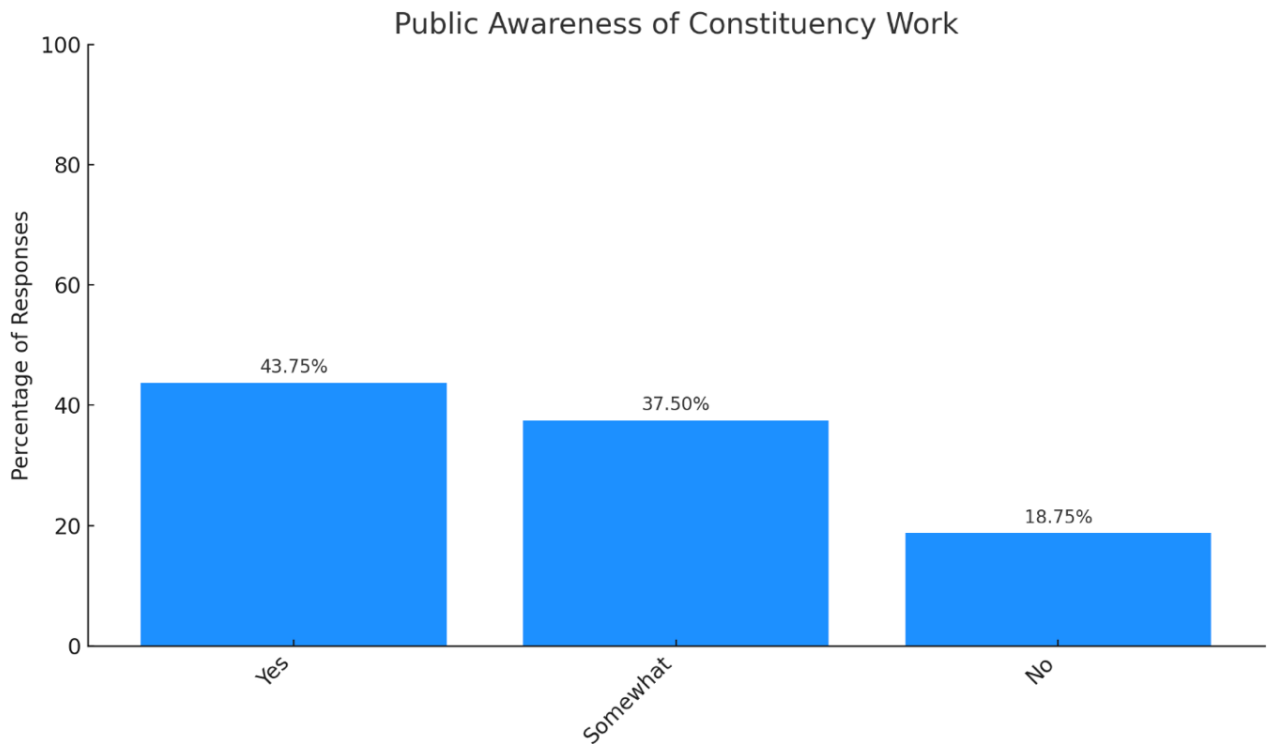


Figure 6: Public awareness of the constituency work

The survey revealed significant insights into the public's awareness of constituency work, a fundamental aspect of a Parliamentarian's duties. The majority of respondents are aware of what constituency work entails, reflecting a basic understanding of their representatives' responsibilities. This awareness is crucial for effective civic engagement and for holding representatives accountable.

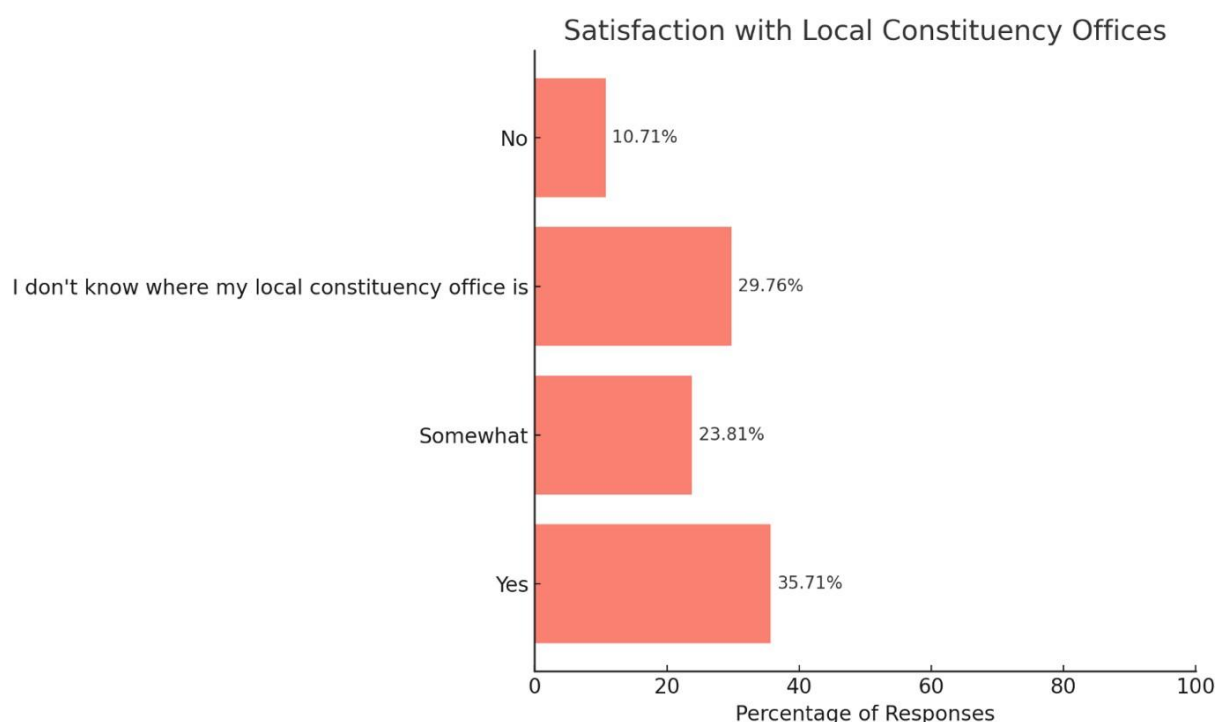


Figure 7: Public's satisfaction with local constituency offices

The horizontal bar chart measuring satisfaction with local constituency offices highlights mixed feelings among the public. While a portion of respondents expressed satisfaction, a considerable number reported only partial satisfaction, and a noteworthy segment indicated dissatisfaction or a lack of knowledge about the location of their local offices. This variance suggests there are gaps in service delivery or communication that need to be addressed to improve public trust and interaction with parliamentary representatives.

These findings underscore the need for Parliamentarians to enhance their visibility and effectiveness in their constituencies. Improving the quality of constituency services and ensuring that offices are accessible and responsive could significantly boost public satisfaction and engagement.

5. Sources of Information about Parliament

5.1. Main Channels of Information Consumption

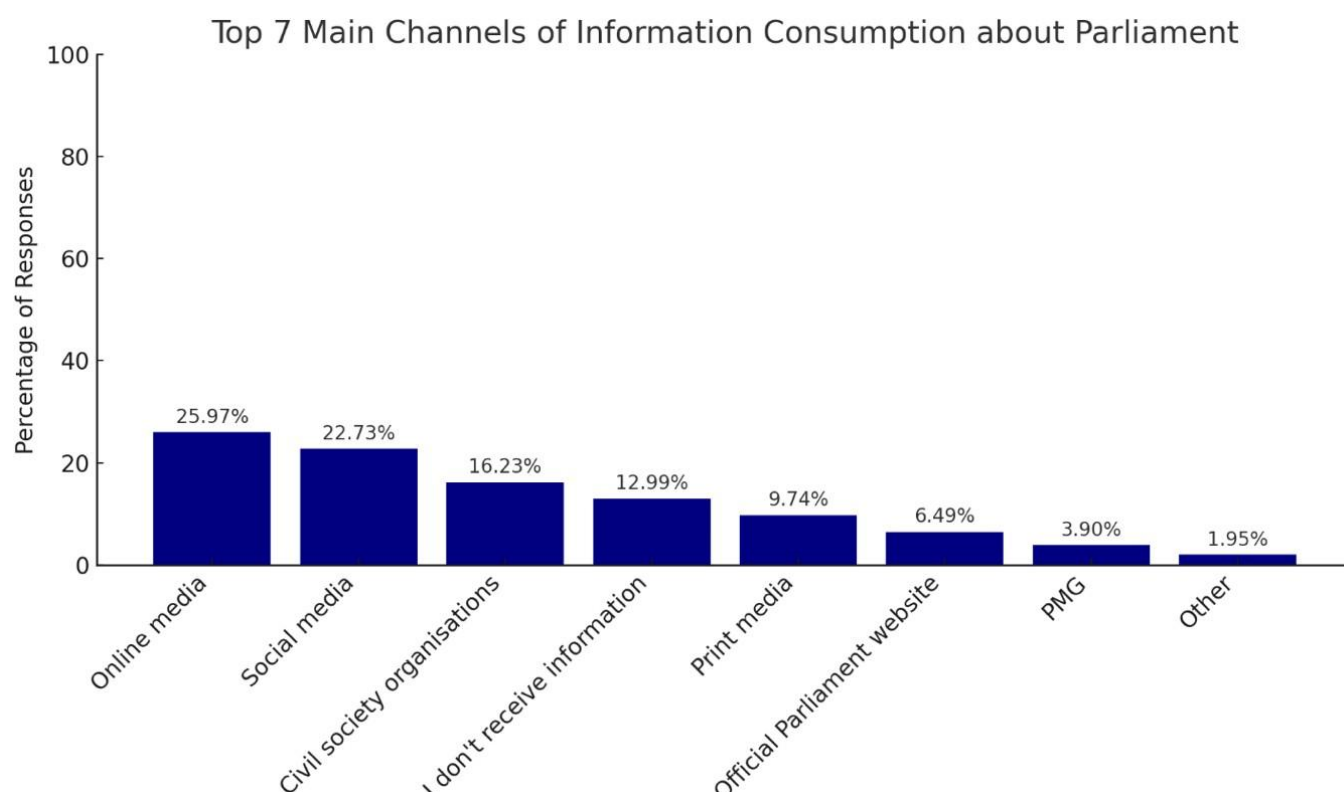


Figure 8: Main channels of information consumption about parliament

The analysis of the main channels through which the public learns about parliamentary activities reveals a clear dominance of digital platforms. The adjusted bar chart underscores the preference for online media as the most utilised source, followed closely by social media. These platforms not only offer real-time updates but also provide a space for interactive engagement, which appears to resonate well with the public.

Key observations from the graph include:

- Online Media (News): The leading channel, highlighting its role as a primary source of news and information for the majority of respondents.
- Social Media: A close second, indicating its importance in the dissemination of parliamentary news, likely due to its accessibility and the rapid spread of information.
- Civil Society Organisations: These play a significant role in informing the public and

suggesting trust in the information provided by non-governmental channels.

- **Print Media and Official Parliament Website:** Although less dominant than digital media, these sources remain crucial for a segment of the population, serving those who prefer traditional forms of news consumption or require official confirmation of parliamentary activities.

The data suggests a shift towards digital consumption of political content, with traditional media still holding substantial importance. Understanding these preferences is crucial for Parliament to effectively communicate and engage with the public, ensuring accessibility and transparency in their outreach efforts.

5.2. Trustworthiness and Reliability of Information Sources

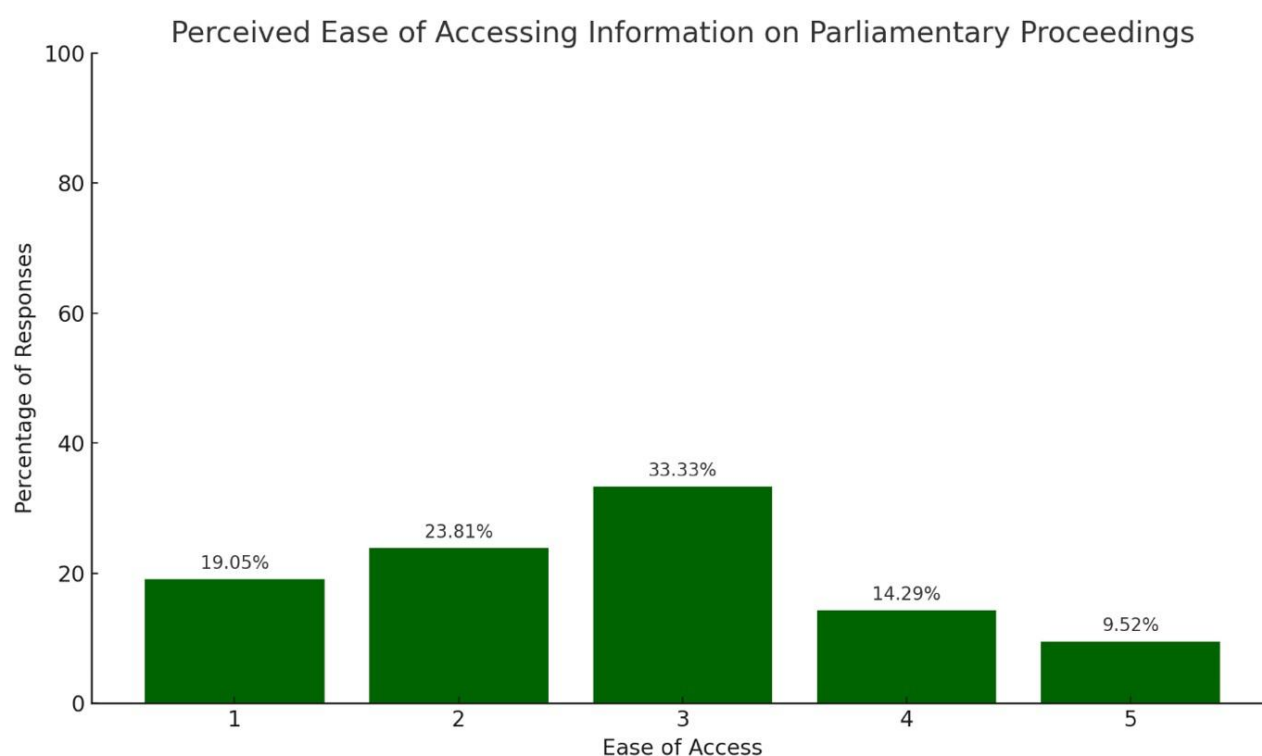


Figure 9: Perceived ease of accessing information on parliamentary proceedings

The bar chart illustrating the public's perceptions of ease of access to information about parliamentary proceedings provides a nuanced view of how citizens interact with information sources regarding their government.

The distribution of responses across the scale – from 'very difficult' to 'very easy' – indicates varied experiences and highlights several key points regarding information accessibility and its perceived reliability:

- **Moderate Ease (3):** This was the most commonly selected option, with a large number of respondents indicating that accessing information on parliamentary activities is neither particularly difficult nor particularly easy. This suggests that while some resources are available, they may not be sufficiently user-friendly or effectively disseminated to ensure broad and effortless public access.
- **Difficult and Very Difficult (1 and 2):** These categories together represent a significant proportion of the responses, pointing to substantial challenges faced by many citizens. Difficulties in accessing information can stem from a variety of issues such as the complexity of the information presented, lack of effective communication channels, or limited digital literacy among certain segments of the population.
- **Easy and Very Easy (4 and 5):** Few respondents found it easy or very easy to access information, which suggests that while there are effective channels in place for some, these are not widespread or well-known enough to benefit the larger population. This reflects a gap in the outreach and engagement strategies of parliamentary communication efforts.

The varying degrees of ease in accessing information have direct implications for public trust and engagement. When citizens find it difficult to access clear and concise information about parliamentary activities, it can lead to a sense of detachment or mistrust towards governmental institutions. Conversely, easy access to transparent information can enhance public engagement and trust, promoting a more informed and active citizenry.

5.3. Dashboard Desirability and Perceived Usefulness

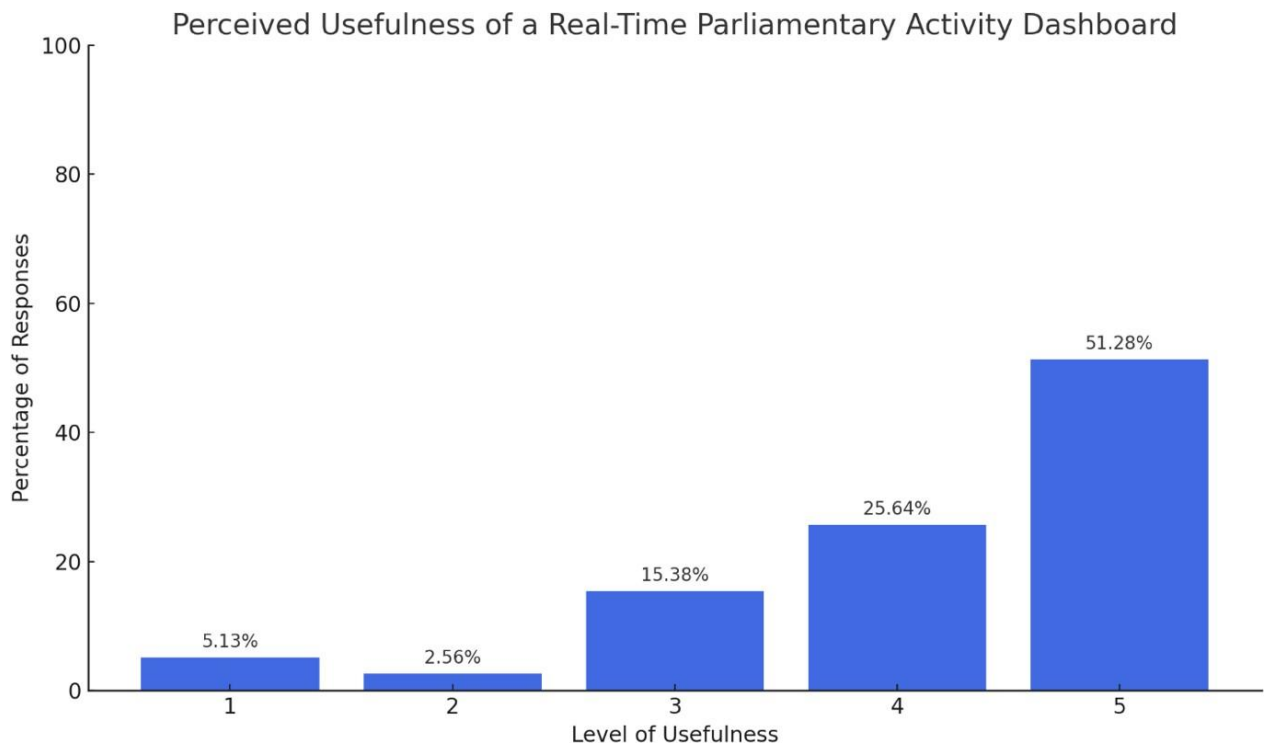


Figure 10: Perceived usefulness of a real-time parliamentary activity dashboard

Here the bar chart is showcasing the perceived usefulness of a real-time parliamentary activity dashboard. The chart indicates a strong positive response from the public, with a significant number of respondents rating its usefulness as very high.

- Very Useful (5): This category received the highest number of responses, indicating that a substantial portion of the survey participants believe a real-time dashboard for monitoring parliamentary activities would be extremely beneficial. This suggests a strong public demand for transparent and accessible parliamentary information.
- Useful (4): The second most common response, further reinforces the perceived value of such a tool in enhancing the public's ability to follow and understand parliamentary proceedings.
- Moderately Useful (3): A smaller group of respondents see the dashboard as moderately useful, possibly reflecting a need for more information on how such a tool would operate and its specific features.

- Little to No Usefulness (1 and 2): Very few respondents feel that the dashboard would not be useful. This minority may already feel satisfied with existing information channels or may not engage regularly with parliamentary content.

The overwhelming interest in a real-time parliamentary activity dashboard highlights a public appetite for tools that enhance transparency and facilitate engagement with political processes. The data suggests that implementing such a platform could significantly improve public understanding of parliamentary activities and potentially increase civic participation.

6. Public Engagement with Parliament

6.1. Participation in Parliamentary Processes

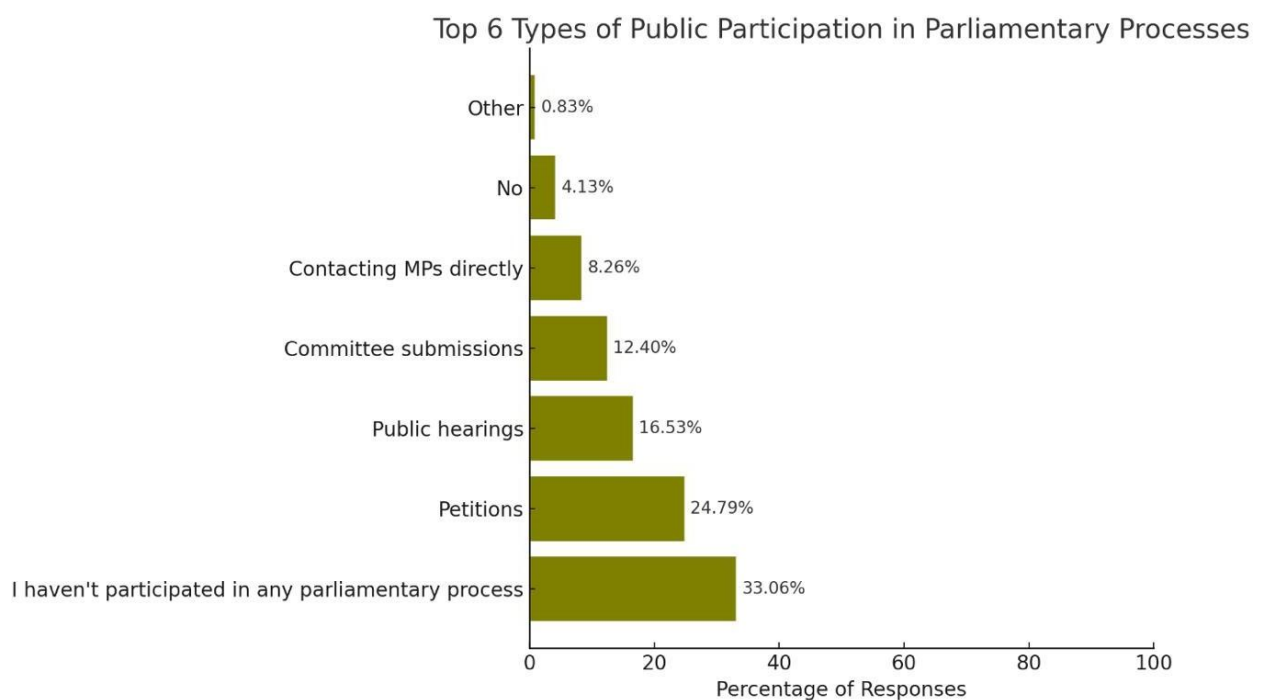


Figure 11: Types of public participation in parliamentary process

The horizontal bar chart provides a clear visual representation of the different ways in which the public engages with parliamentary processes. This overview allows us to understand the prevalence of various forms of participation and offers insights into the public's active involvement with their legislative body.

Herewith a discussion of each category:

- I haven't participated in any parliamentary process: The most common response, indicating a significant portion of the survey participants have not engaged in any form of parliamentary process. This highlights a potential disconnection or lack of awareness about how to participate in such activities, which may be addressed through more robust public education and outreach efforts.
- Petitions: The most popular form of active participation, signing petitions is a relatively accessible way for individuals to express their opinions and concerns. It requires minimal effort and can be facilitated through online platforms, making it an attractive option for many participants.
- Public Hearings: Attendance at public hearings suggests a willingness among respondents to engage more deeply with parliamentary processes. This form of participation allows for direct interaction with legislators and can be a powerful tool for influencing policy.
- Committee Submissions: Making submissions to parliamentary committees is another significant form of engagement, indicating that respondents are taking proactive steps to influence legislation and oversight. This level of participation requires a higher degree of understanding and involvement, which points to a well-informed segment of the population.
- Contacting MPs Directly: Direct communication with Members of Parliament is crucial for personal advocacy and represents a direct channel through which citizens can voice their concerns and suggestions.
- Other: This category includes less common forms of participation, such as attending debates or participating in workshops, which although less frequent, are important for a fully engaged citizenry.

The survey analysis presented here categorises and evaluates the diverse ways South Africans engage with parliamentary processes, revealing key insights into public participation. The findings indicate that the most common response among participants is a lack of



involvement in any parliamentary process. This highlights a significant gap in civic engagement, suggesting a need for more robust public education and outreach to enhance understanding and participation in legislative activities.

Among the active forms of participation, signing petitions emerged as the most popular. This method is accessible and requires minimal effort, often facilitated through online platforms, making it an attractive option for expressing opinions and concerns. Attendance at public hearings represents a more substantial commitment, showing a willingness among respondents to engage more deeply with parliamentary processes. This form of participation enables direct interaction with legislators and can significantly influence policy.

Making submissions to parliamentary committees is noted as another important form of engagement, indicating that a segment of the population takes proactive steps to affect legislation and oversight. Such involvement requires a higher degree of understanding and engagement, pointing to a well-informed subset of respondents.

Direct communication with Members of Parliament is highlighted as a crucial avenue for personal advocacy, allowing citizens to directly voice their concerns and suggestions. Additionally, other forms of participation, such as attending debates or participating in workshops, though less common, play an essential role in fostering a fully engaged citizenry. This analysis underscores the varied levels of public interaction with parliamentary processes and emphasises the importance of implementing strategies to increase and deepen public participation.

7. Strengths and Weaknesses in Public Understanding

7.1. Perceived Strengths of Parliamentary Communication Efforts

The survey reveals that the South African Parliament's communication strategies harness a variety of platforms to reach the public, marking a significant strength. Online and social media stand out as the primary channels through which many respondents receive updates and information. This digital approach caters to a broad audience, facilitating immediate and widespread dissemination of parliamentary news and updates.



Furthermore, civil society organisations play a pivotal role in enhancing parliamentary communication by bridging the gap between the government and less digitally connected communities. These organisations often organise events, distribute newsletters, and conduct workshops, which are crucial for reaching a demographic that might not otherwise engage with digital platforms.

7.2. *Identified Gaps and Misconceptions*

Despite strengths in communication efforts, the survey identifies notable gaps in public understanding and misconceptions about Parliament. A considerable proportion of the population exhibits only a moderate to low level of familiarity with the functions and roles of Parliament. This gap underscores a critical need for Parliament to implement more comprehensive educational and outreach programs aimed at demystifying its operations and roles.

Moreover, while many respondents feel that Parliament represents their interests, about 19% express neutrality or dissatisfaction with how their concerns are addressed. This sentiment points to a perceived gap in effective representation, highlighting the necessity for Parliament to enhance its feedback mechanisms and ensure that all demographic groups feel adequately represented and heard.

7.3. *Opportunities for Improving Public Understanding*

The data presents clear opportunities for Parliament to improve public engagement and understanding. There is a strong public endorsement for the development of an online platform that makes parliamentary oversight more accessible. Such a platform could serve as a centralised resource for learning about parliamentary activities, participating in discussions, and providing feedback, thus increasing transparency and public involvement.

In addition to digital solutions, the survey indicates a desire for more varied and interactive engagement methods, such as public hearings, educational events, and direct communications. Expanding these methods would not only cater to diverse preferences but



also foster a deeper public connection with Parliament, encouraging active participation and a more informed citizenry.

By addressing these gaps and leveraging the identified opportunities, the South African Parliament can significantly enhance its public engagement efforts, ensuring a more informed and involved citizen base. This approach will not only improve public understanding but also strengthen the overall democratic process by making it more inclusive and transparent.

8. Public Sentiment and Cluster Analysis of Parliamentary Perception

8.1. Sentiment Analysis

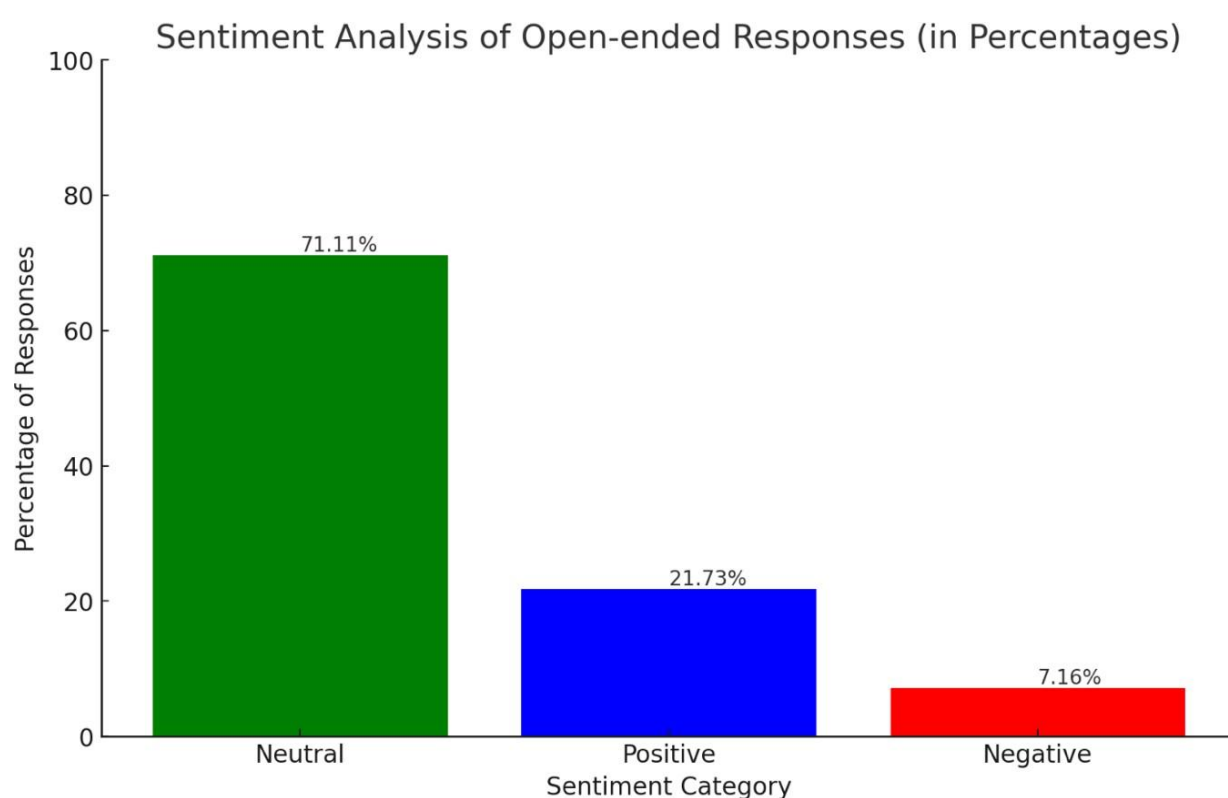


Figure 12: Sentiment analysis of open-ended responses

The sentiment analysis conducted on open-ended responses from the survey provides a nuanced understanding of public sentiment towards the South African Parliament and its operations. This analysis categorises the sentiments expressed by respondents into three groups: Neutral, Positive, and Negative.

The distribution of these sentiments is as follows:

- **Neutral Sentiments (71.11%):** The majority of responses were classified as neutral. These responses typically contained factual statements or general comments that neither expressed specific praise nor criticism of Parliament. This high proportion of neutral sentiments suggests that while many respondents are moderately informed about parliamentary operations, they may lack strong feelings or sufficient information to form more definitive opinions.
- **Positive Sentiments (21.73%):** A significant portion of the responses showed a positive sentiment towards Parliament. These comments often praised specific parliamentary initiatives or expressed approval of recent reforms and efforts to enhance transparency and accountability. Positive sentiments were particularly noted in responses related to parliamentary outreach programs and the perceived efforts of individual Parliamentarians to engage with their constituencies.
- **Negative Sentiments (7.16%):** The negative sentiments expressed by respondents highlighted concerns and dissatisfaction with various aspects of parliamentary performance. Common themes in these responses included perceived inefficiencies, lack of transparency, and dissatisfaction with the level of responsiveness to public needs and concerns. Criticisms were also directed at the perceived disconnect between Parliamentarians and their constituents, and a general scepticism about the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight in curbing corruption.

The sentiment analysis underscores the critical need for Parliament to enhance its communication strategies to address the concerns reflected in the negative sentiments while building on the aspects that have contributed to positive perceptions. The prevalence of neutral sentiments indicates a potential disconnect or a lack of strong engagement with parliamentary processes among the general populace. This calls for more robust educational and outreach efforts to deepen public understanding of Parliament's role and functions.



8.2. Cluster Analysis

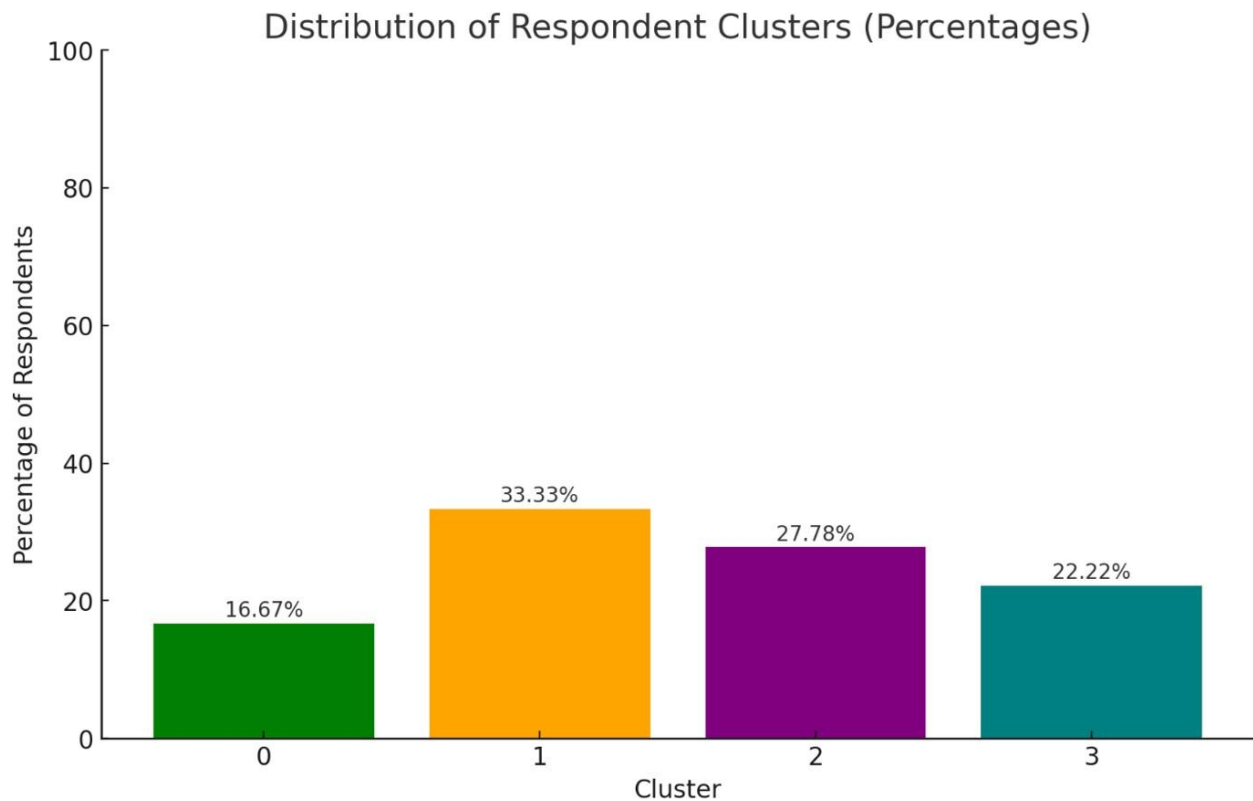


Figure 13: Distribution of respondent clusters

The cluster analysis conducted on the survey data segments the respondents into distinct groups based on their familiarity with Parliament's functions, their perceived primary functions of Parliament, and their engagement levels. This segmentation helps to identify unique groups within the population that share similar attitudes and behaviours towards parliamentary processes, providing valuable insights for targeted communication and engagement strategies.

Here is a breakdown of the identified clusters:

- Cluster 0 (Green – 16.67% of respondents): This group represents respondents with low engagement and familiarity with Parliament's functions. These individuals are less likely to participate in or be aware of parliamentary activities. They might benefit from basic educational programs aimed at increasing awareness of parliamentary roles and the importance of civic engagement.

- Cluster 1 (Orange – 33.33% of respondents): Respondents in this cluster have moderate familiarity and engagement. They occasionally follow parliamentary updates and participate in activities but do not have a deep understanding or consistent interaction. Tailored communication that highlights the impact of parliamentary work on everyday life could increase their engagement.
- Cluster 2 (Purple – 27.78% of respondents): This is the most engaged and knowledgeable group. These individuals are highly familiar with parliamentary functions and regularly engage with its processes. They are likely to be active participants in public consultations and keen followers of legislative developments. This group can be leveraged as a key audience for gathering feedback on parliamentary initiatives.
- Cluster 3 (Teal – 22.22% of respondents): Members of this cluster have a high level of familiarity but lower engagement. They understand parliamentary functions but choose not to participate actively. Understanding the barriers to their engagement could help in designing strategies to facilitate and encourage their participation.

The cluster analysis highlights the diversity in public interactions with and perceptions of Parliament. Each cluster represents a segment of the population with specific informational needs and potential barriers to full engagement. Addressing these needs through differentiated communication and engagement strategies can significantly enhance public involvement and satisfaction with parliamentary processes.

The word cloud created from the open-ended responses in our survey visually encapsulates the key themes and terms frequently mentioned by the participants. This graphical representation highlights the most prominent ideas and concerns, with larger words indicating higher frequency and thus greater emphasis by the respondents.



Here are the prominent themes identified:

- **Transparency and Accountability:** These were the most prominently featured words in the word cloud, underscoring their importance to the respondents. This indicates a strong desire among the public for Parliament to operate in a more transparent manner and for MPs to be held accountable for their actions and decisions.

- **Engagement and Communication:** These terms also featured significantly, pointing to a widespread call for better and more effective communication between Parliament and the public. There is a clear demand for improved engagement practices that facilitate easier and more meaningful participation of citizens in parliamentary processes.
- **Education and Information:** Frequently occurring terms related to 'education' and 'information' suggest that there is a perceived need for better educational resources about Parliament and its functions. Enhancing public understanding through accessible and straightforward informational content could help bridge the knowledge gap.
- **Corruption and Reform:** The prominence of 'corruption' and 'reform' within the responses highlights ongoing concerns about corruption within governmental institutions and a strong desire for comprehensive reforms to address these issues. This reflects a critical view of current governance practices and a demand for systemic change.

The analysis of public responses to the survey about engagement with Parliament reveals several prominent themes that underline the citizens' concerns and expectations. The terms "transparency" and "accountability" were notably prominent in the word cloud, highlighting a significant public desire for greater openness and responsibility from Parliament and its members. This sentiment underscores the importance of trust and integrity in governance.

Additionally, "engagement" and "communication" were frequently mentioned, reflecting a broad demand for improved dialogue between Parliament and the public. Respondents expressed a need for enhanced engagement practices that enable easier and more substantial citizen participation in parliamentary processes.

The themes of "education" and "information" also emerged strongly, indicating a perceived lack of accessible and straightforward educational resources about Parliament's roles and functions. Addressing this gap with clear and informative content could help bridge the knowledge divide, empowering more citizens to participate effectively.



Lastly, the prominence of "corruption" and "reform" within the responses points to ongoing concerns about corruption in government institutions and a robust desire for comprehensive reforms. This reflects a critical stance on current governance practices and highlights a public demand for significant and systemic changes to enhance the integrity and effectiveness of governance.

These themes collectively depict a citizenry that is eager for a more inclusive, transparent, and accountable parliamentary system, emphasising the need for substantial improvements in communication, education, and institutional reform.

9. Next Steps, Future Research, and Recommendation

This section outlines the strategic plan for the continuous development and evaluation of the Parliamentary Oversight Dashboard and provides targeted recommendations for enhancing parliamentary communication and public engagement:

Survey Series for Continuous Feedback

1. **Dashboard User Survey:** Conducted after the initial launch to collect early user feedback and guide immediate enhancements.
2. **Midterm Survey (2025):** Assesses the dashboard's effectiveness halfway through the project timeline, identifying feature updates and improvements.
3. **Endterm Survey (2026):** Evaluates long-term impacts on public perception and engagement, providing feedback for future scalability.

Analytical Focus for Enhanced Engagement

- **Deep Analysis of Baseline Data:** Identifies gaps in public understanding to inform targeted educational and outreach initiatives.
- **Refinement of Public Participation Model:** Utilises insights to enhance inclusivity and effectiveness in engaging the public.



Expert Consultation for External Validation

- **Engagement with Critical Thinkers:** Collaborates with experts like Ms. Jacky Thomas to validate the dashboard's effectiveness and suggest areas for further development.

Recommendations for Enhancing Parliamentary Communication

- **Expand Educational Initiatives:** Develop and disseminate comprehensive, multilingual materials that explain Parliament's roles and functions through digital platforms, community workshops, and school programs.
- **Enhance Digital Engagement:** Use digital tools and social media to create interactive content that fosters public participation in parliamentary discussions.
- **Foster Transparent Communication:** Regularly update the public on parliamentary activities and decisions to build trust and credibility.
- **Facilitate Accessible Engagement:** Make the legislative process more accessible and encourage feedback from underrepresented groups by simplifying language and improving digital interfaces.
- **Monitor and Adapt Communication Strategies:** Continuously evaluate and adapt communication strategies based on public feedback and technological changes.

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

- **Ongoing User Engagement:** Maintains active involvement from users and stakeholders throughout the dashboard's lifecycle to ensure relevance and effectiveness.

By implementing these strategies and adhering to these recommendations, Parliament can significantly enhance its communication and engagement with the public, thereby strengthening governance and the democratic process. This comprehensive approach ensures that the Parliamentary Oversight Dashboard remains a dynamic and effective tool for promoting transparency and accountability in governance.



10. Conclusion

The baseline survey conducted has unearthed significant insights into the public's perception and understanding of the South African Parliament. Key findings indicate that while there is a baseline familiarity with Parliament's functions, substantial gaps in detailed knowledge and engagement exist. Positive sentiments celebrate transparency and proactive communication efforts, whereas negative sentiments focus on perceived inefficiencies and a lack of responsiveness. Engagement levels vary widely, with a significant portion of the populace remaining passive due to barriers such as perceived complexity and scepticism about the impact of their involvement.

It is important to acknowledge that this survey, while informative, has its limitations. The data collected represents a snapshot based on the perspectives of those surveyed and may not encompass the full spectrum of national opinions or demographic representations. Despite these limitations, the findings provide valuable direction for the next steps and further research.

The findings underscore the necessity for Parliament to implement more robust educational and outreach programs that are tailored to meet the diverse needs of the South African populace. An enhanced understanding of parliamentary processes is crucial for fostering civic engagement and ensuring that the public can actively participate in and scrutinize their governance. Moreover, the varied levels of engagement and understanding across different demographics highlight the need for targeted communication strategies that address specific community needs and accessibility.



11. Appendix

11.1. Survey Questionnaire

1. Demographics:
 - Age Group
 - Gender
 - Race
 - Sector
 - Province
2. Are you familiar with Parliament and its functions?
3. What in your personal view, is the primary function of the South African Parliament (select all that apply to you)?
4. Do you know what constituency work is?
5. Do you feel adequately served by your local constituency office?
6. How satisfied are you with the responsiveness, accountability, and effectiveness of the political party you voted for in addressing your concerns and needs?
7. How do you usually receive information about the work of Parliament (select all that apply to you)?
8. How easy do you find it to access information about Parliamentary proceedings and decisions?
9. What barriers, if any, have you encountered in accessing information about Parliament?
10. 9. Do you know how to compliment or complain about Parliamentary processes or behaviour by MPs?
11. Have you ever complained or raised a concern regarding Parliamentary processes? If so, were you satisfied with the response?
12. Have you ever submitted a compliment regarding Parliamentary processes?
13. Have you ever participated in a Parliamentary process, such as public hearings or committee submissions (select all that apply to you)?
14. Do you feel that the South African Parliament effectively represents your interests?



15. How would you want Parliament to effectively engage with you/the public (select all that apply to you)?
16. In your opinion, what role should civil society play in Parliamentary oversight (select all that apply to you)?
17. To what extent would you find an online platform useful, that makes Parliamentary oversight more accessible?
18. What specific metrics do you think should be tracked to measure Parliament's performance? (select all that apply to you)
19. What would you use this online platform for (select all that apply to you)?
20. Do you have anything else to add which can contribute to more effective Parliamentary oversight processes?

11.2. Demographic Breakdown of Survey Respondents

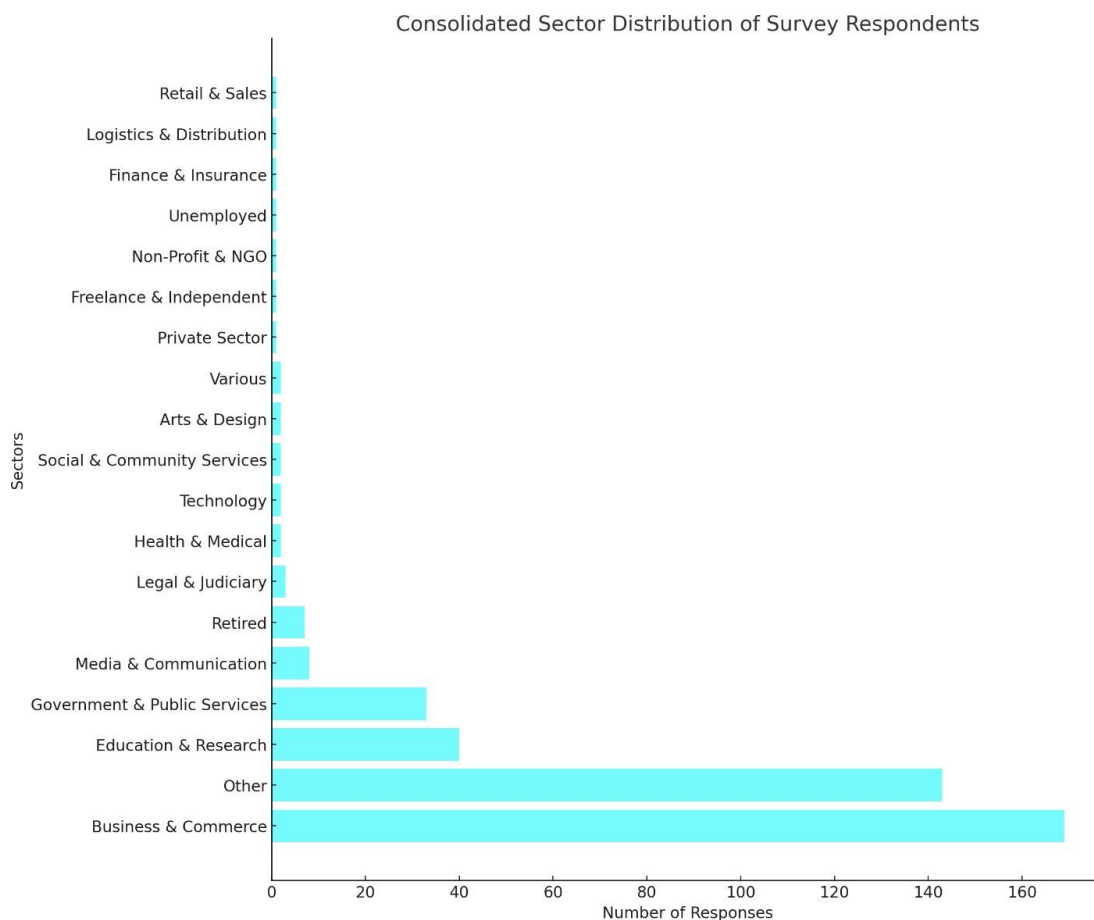


Figure 15: Consolidated Sector Distribution of Survey Respondents

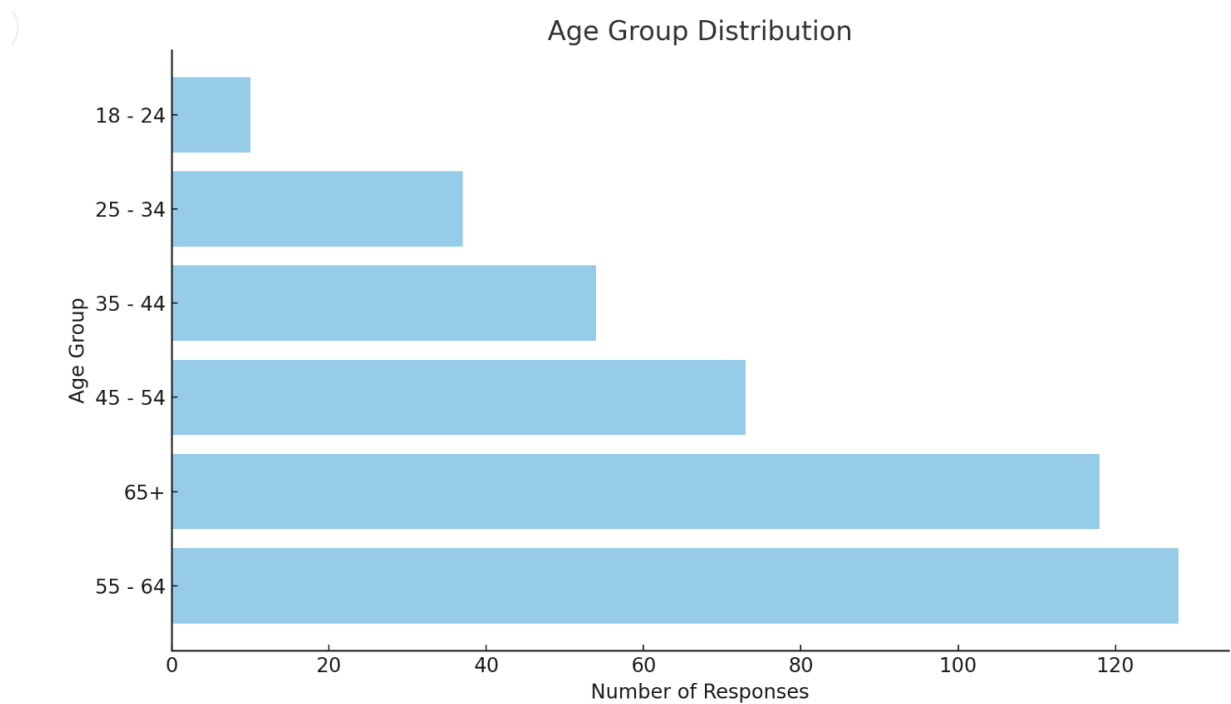


Figure 16: Age Group Distribution of Survey Respondents

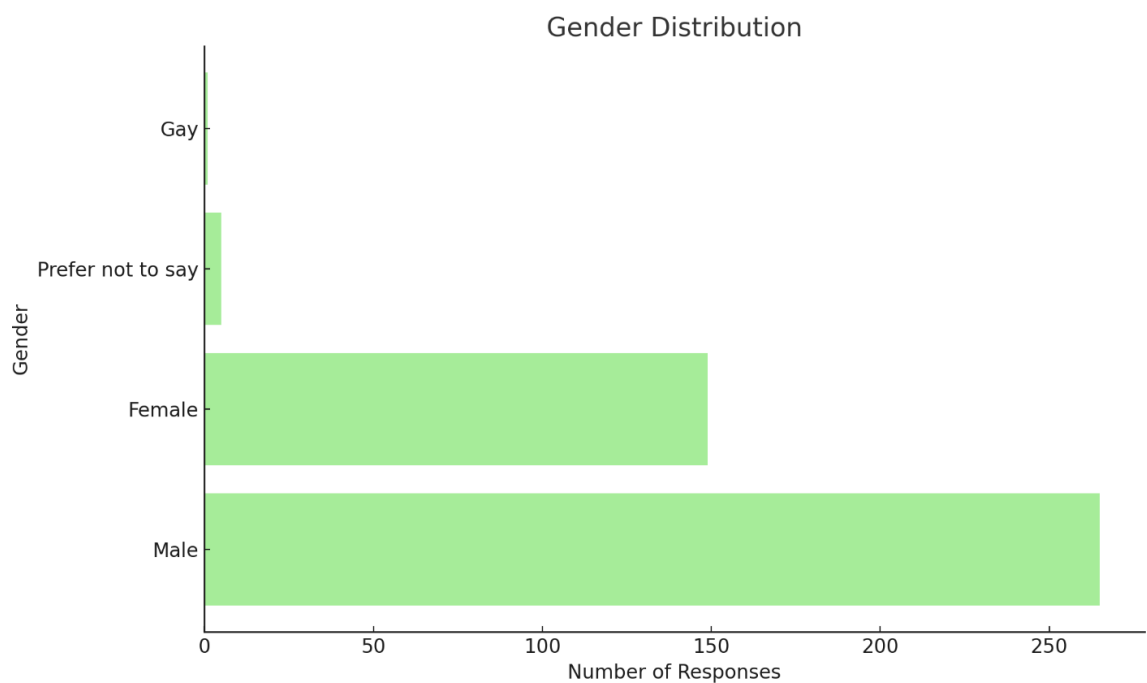


Figure 17: Figure 3: Gender Distribution of Survey Respondents

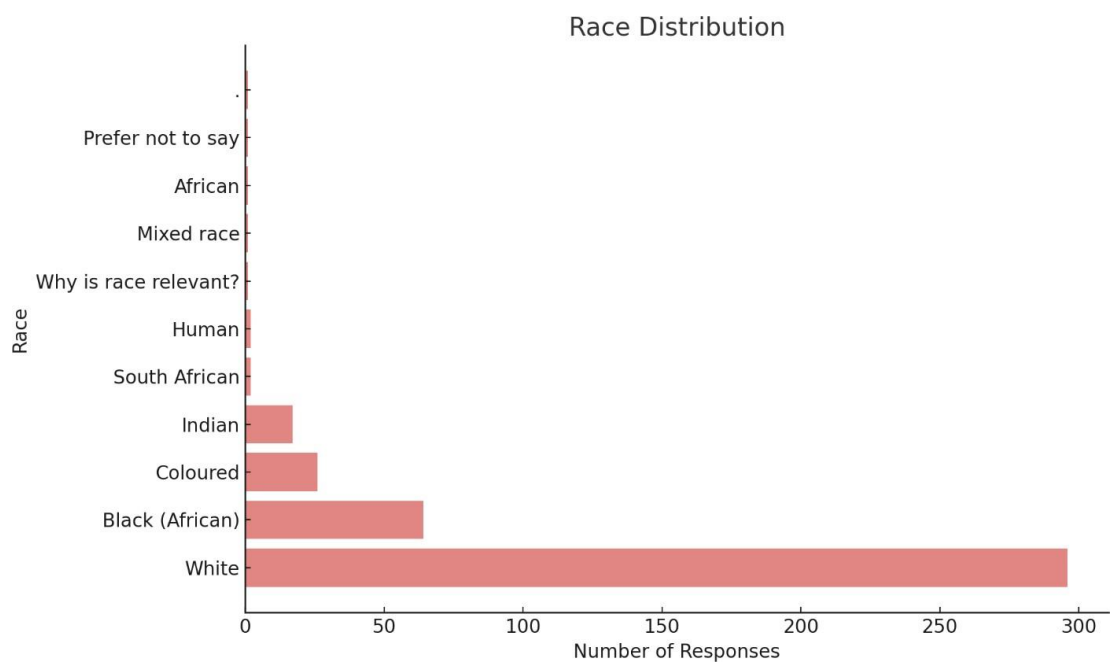


Figure 18: Race Distribution of Survey Respondents

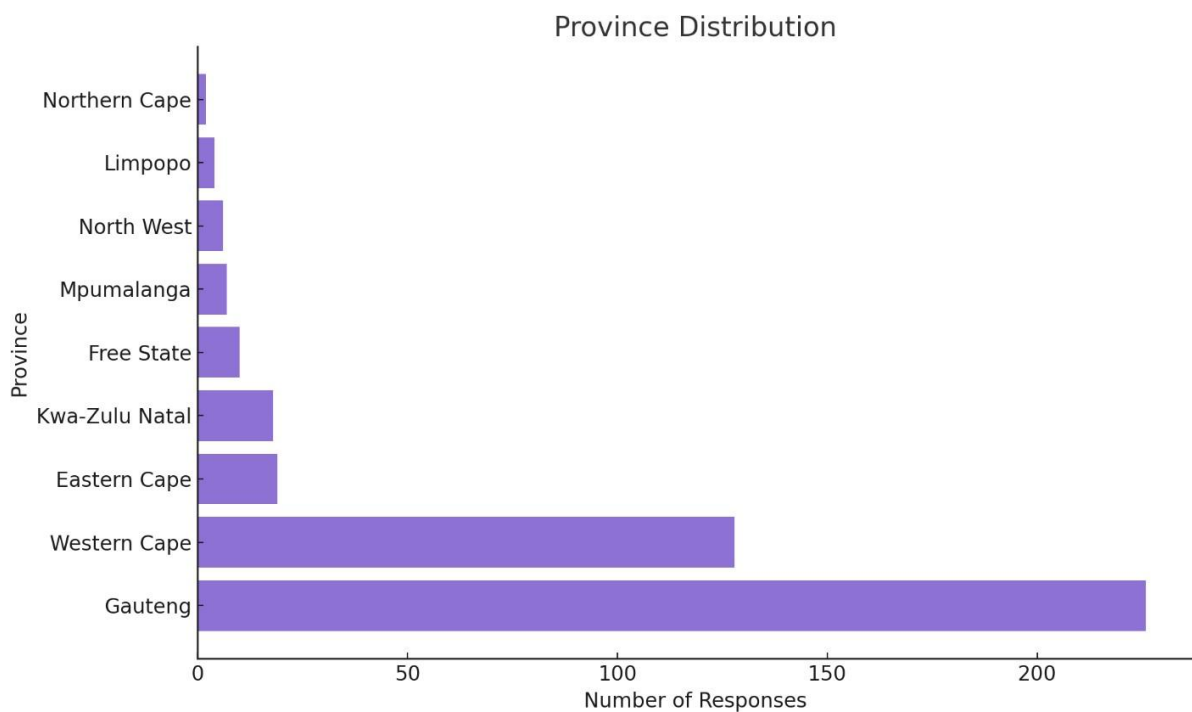


Figure 19: Province Distribution of Survey Respondents