



Detailed analysis of the 2023 Voice to Parliament Referendum and related social and political attitudes

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Extended abstract

On the 14th of October 2023, Australians voted on a proposal ‘To alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.’ Only 39.9 per cent of legal votes were in favour of this change, and there was not a majority or close to a majority in any of the six Australian States (there was a majority, however, in the Australian Capital Territory). In order to support an informed discussion about the referendum and its aftermath, the Australian National University collected a detailed survey immediately following the referendum (the October 2023 Australian Constitutional Referendum Study (ACRS)/ANUpoll) from a broadly representative sample of over 4,000 adult Australians. The survey data is available from the Australian Data Archive (doi:10.26193/13NPGQ).

There is no evidence in the data to suggest that Australians are against the idea of constitutional recognition in general. Of those who were willing to give an opinion as to what their vote would have been if the referendum was just about recognition those who would vote yes outnumber those who would vote no by a margin of almost five-to-one. The vote also did not signal a lack of support for reconciliation, for the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders having a voice/say in matters that affect them, truth-telling processes, or for a lack of pride in First Nations cultures. All of these notions were supported in our survey by around eight-in-ten Australians, or even more. We did find, however, that compared to start of the year, Australians are far less satisfied with democracy, less confident in the government, less satisfied with the direction of the country, and less satisfied with their own life.

Our survey data tells us a few things about who was more or less likely to vote yes. No voters were more likely to be male, older, speaking a language other than English at home, with low levels of education, living outside of capital cities, and living in low-income households. Furthermore, a higher proportion of people who didn’t end up voting said that they would have voted yes when asked in August, implying that low turnout suppressed the yes vote.

There were also a number of attitudinal variables that predicted a no vote. Trust in social media, disliking the Prime Minister, thinking that land rights/native title unfair, and thinking that if Indigenous Australians tried harder they could be just as well off as the non-Indigenous population were all associated with voting no in the referendum. Those Australians who were left-of-centre, those who disliked the Opposition Leader, those who trusted the federal government, those who thought that Indigenous people deserve special cultural protection, those that supported reconciliation, and those that thought that land rights/native title had not gone far enough were all more likely to vote yes.

The data suggests that Australians voted no because they didn’t want division and remain sceptical of rights for some Australians that are not held by others. The data suggests that Australians think that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians continue to suffer levels of disadvantage that is both caused by past government policies and that justified extra government assistance. They did not see the Voice model put to them as the right approach to remedy that disadvantage.

Executive summary

Data and overview

- The October 2023 referendum on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament was the 45th constitutional referendum held since federation in 1901. The referendum proposal failed to meet the dual thresholds of winning a majority of the national vote (39.9 per cent of people voted yes) and a majority of the six states (only the Australian Capital Territory recorded majority support).
- In this paper, we analyse in detail the factors that predict someone's vote in the Voice referendum, as well as people's political and social attitudes immediately following the referendum.
- Analysis in this paper is based on the October 2023 Australian Constitutional Referendum Study (ACRS)/ANUpoll. The main data collection commenced on the 17th of October and was completed by the 29th of October. The final sample size for the survey is 4,219 respondents. The data is available for download from the Australian Data Archive (doi:10.26193/13NPGQ).
- In this paper, we analyse in detail the factors that predict someone's vote in the Voice referendum, as well as people's political and social attitudes immediately following the referendum.

Spatial patterns and the geographic predictors of the vote

- The only jurisdiction with majority support was the Australian Capital Territory with 61.3 per cent of voters voting yes. Of the six states, Victoria came closest to majority support with 45.9 per cent. The jurisdiction with the lowest level of support was Queensland, 31.8 per cent of voters voting yes.
- 29.1 per cent of polling places (out of 8,712) recorded a majority yes-vote amongst those who voted in person.
- Combining in-person and absentee, and pre-polling, 22.5 per cent of Electoral Divisions had a majority of voters voting yes.
- Electoral Divisions with a higher per cent of the (2021 Census) population identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander had a lower per cent of yes votes. This reflects the voting patterns of the non-Indigenous population in those divisions, who make up the vast majority of almost all the divisions in Australia.
- Those divisions that have a higher level of education were more likely to vote yes. A 1 per cent increase in the per cent of the division with a bachelor degree is associated with a 0.9 per cent increase in the yes vote. When education is controlled for, lower income divisions had a higher yes vote.
- Electoral divisions that had a Labor member had a 7.5 percentage point higher yes vote than those with a Coalition member, controlling for other characteristics. Electoral Divisions that had a Greens/Independent member had a 3.1 percentage point lower yes vote than those with a Labor member.

Demographic and socioeconomic predictors of the yes vote

- Amongst the voting population, females were more likely to vote yes than males, with a roughly seven-percentage point difference in the yes vote by sex (43.2 per cent compared to 36.5 per cent respectively). Younger Australians were more likely to vote yes than older Australians, with those aged 18 to 24 years at the time of the

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referendum were more than twice as likely to vote yes as those aged 75 years and over (58.6 per cent compared to 24.2 per cent).

- Education was also strongly associated with voting yes. Those with a degree were more than two-and-a-half times as likely to vote yes as those who had not completed Year 12.
- In order to understand in detail the factors associated with voting yes, we undertook a regression-style analysis. In addition to sex, age, and education, we found that those who were born overseas in an English-speaking country were more likely to vote yes, but there was no difference between those born overseas in a non-English speaking country and those born in Australia. Those who speak a language other than English were less likely to vote yes than those who spoke English only. There were no differences by the socioeconomic characteristics of the area in which a person lived, but those who lived in a capital city were more likely to vote yes than those in a non-capital city. Those in the lowest income households had a lower likelihood of voting yes.
- The survey suggests that there is still widespread support for a broad definition of constitutional recognition. Respondents were asked 'If the Referendum question was not to establish the Voice to Parliament but instead to recognise Indigenous people in the Constitution only, would you have voted YES or NO?' Around three-in-ten Australians who were eligible to vote in the actual referendum (29.3%) responded that they were unsure and would have needed more details. However, of those who felt able to give a yes or no response, about five times as many people who said that they would definitely have voted yes (41.5%) or would probably have voted yes (14.7%) than those who said that they would probably have voted no (5.4%) or would definitely have voted no (9.2%).

Voting dynamics

- Very few people switched from voting no to yes over the campaign. Of those who said that they would have voted no to the voice when asked in January 2023, only 4.8 per cent ended up voting yes. In the opposite direction, 42.0 per cent of those who said that they would have voted yes when asked in January 2023 ended up voting no in October 2023.
- Over the six months between April and October, we estimate that 37.7 per cent of voters voted no, and never intended to vote yes. 36.0 per cent of voters voted yes, and always intended to do so. There were, however, 22.3 per cent of Australians that eventually voted no, but at some stage either in April and/or August had intended to vote yes. This is more than five times the per cent of voters that eventually voted yes, but at some stage had considered voting no (4.0 per cent).
- Between January and October 2023, there was a relative decline in voting yes amongst those aged 35 to 54 years. Those who speak a language other than English at home were less likely to stay as yes voters over the period than those who speak English only. There was also a widening gap in voting intentions by education and income over the period. At the start of the year, those in a low-income household were no more or less likely to say they would vote yes, and if anything, those in the highest income quintile were slightly less likely to. By the time people made their final vote, however, it is those in the lowest income households that are least likely to vote yes.

The informal vote

- Those who voted informally or who did not vote appear to be more likely to be yes voters based on their August 2023 response. Of the respondents who in August 2023 said they intended to vote yes, 12.3 per cent did not vote or voted informally, much higher than the 5.9 per cent of those who intended to vote no (in August) who ended up not voting or voting informally.
- Compared to those aged 18 to 44 years, older voters were less likely to not have submitted a valid vote. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians were more likely to not have submitted a valid vote than non-Indigenous Australians. Those who lived in the two most disadvantaged quintiles of areas were more likely to not submit a valid vote. In addition, those who lived in the two most advantaged household income quintiles were less likely to vote informal/not vote.

Interest and engagement with the referendum

- Only a small minority of respondents (10.3 per cent) said they paid no attention at all to the yes campaign, but a further 23.6 per cent reported paying ‘not much’ attention. The most common response was paying some attention (34.2 per cent), but nearly one-third of Australians (31.9 per cent) reported that they paid ‘a good deal’ of attention.
- Older Australians were more likely to say they paid some or a great deal of attention than younger Australians. Those who speak a language other than English at home were less likely to pay attention to the voice referendum, as were those with lower levels of education. Those in relatively disadvantaged areas paid less attention than those in the middle of the advantage/disadvantage distribution, whereas those in high-income households paid more attention than those in middle-income households.
- The most common source of information about the referendum was online news sites with 22.7 per cent of Australians paying a good deal of attention and 36.1 per cent paying some attention. The least used source of media was newspapers, with 47.2 per cent paying no attention at all, and 21.1 per cent paying not much attention.
- Most Australians (61.5 per cent) said that they cared a good deal about the referendum. There was only a small minority (7.5 per cent) that said that they did not care at all, with a further 30.9 per cent saying they did not care much.
- Respondents were somewhat more likely to say that they knew enough about the issue to vote (60.1 per cent) than that they didn’t, with the remainder of the sample reasonably evenly split between those who said that they would have liked a lot more information (19.4 per cent) or would have liked a little more information (20.5 per cent).
- Most Australians (63.6 per cent) said they definitely would have voted even if it were not compulsory, with a further 15.7 per cent saying they probably would have. There were only a small minority of voters (3.6 per cent) that said that they definitely would not have voted, with an additional 10.1 per cent saying they probably would not have. The remaining 7.0 per cent said they ‘might, might not’ have voted.
- Yes voters were more likely than no voters to say they would have voted if voting was compulsory – 88.4 per cent compared to 73.1 per cent. However, even amongst those that said they definitely or probably would have voted if voting was not compulsory, only 44.9 per cent of voters voted yes.

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Political party, leaders, and political attitudes

- The outcome of the voice referendum appears to have had no impact on the per cent of people who said that they would vote for Labor, which has remained steady between August and October at 39.1 per cent. Between August and October 2023 there was a large increase in the proportion of people who said that they would vote for the Coalition (from 25.9 to 30.1 per cent) and a corresponding large decline in the per cent who said that they would vote for another party or who were undecided (from 35.1 to 30.8 per cent).
- Those that said that they would vote for Labor were the most likely to say that they would vote yes – 61.6 per cent of all those that voted. Minor party/undecided voters were also quite likely to say yes (55.0 per cent), but Coalition voters were very unlikely to vote yes (9.4 per cent).
- The yes vote declined much more for those who would have voted for the Coalition than for the two other party groups. The yes vote amongst Coalition voters in October 2023 was roughly one-quarter of what it was in January 2023.
- Australians were much more likely to rate Prime Minister Albanese favourably than Opposition Leader Dutton (an average of 5.1 compared to 3.4 respectively). Furthermore, much of the difference between Coalition and Labor voters was due to the views of the party leaders.
- There have been declines in confidence in government, satisfaction with direction of the country, and trust in some institutions over 2022/2023.
- From January to October 2023, there was a more than doubling in the per cent of Australians who were not at all satisfied in democracy, a smaller increase in those who were not very satisfied, a small decline in those who were fairly satisfied, and a large decline in those who were very satisfied.
- Trust in the judiciary declined by the most out of six institutions from just after the May 2022 federal election (78.2 per cent) to just after the referendum (70.9 per cent).
- There was one institution that experienced a small increase in trust between May 2022 and October 2023 – social media – with 39.1 per cent of Australians saying that they did not trust social media at all in May 2022, declining to 32.8 per cent in October 2023.
- Australians in October 2023 rated themselves as being more left-wing compared to May 2022, with fewer Australians placing themselves to the right of the political spectrum immediately after the referendum than did so after the May 2022 federal election.

Wellbeing and satisfaction with the direction of the country

- In net terms, there have not been major changes between August and October 2023 in satisfaction with the direction of the country, life satisfaction, or psychological distress.
- Between August and October 2023, there was a large decline in satisfaction with direction of the country for those who voted yes in the referendum (a decline from 69.3 per cent in August 2023 to 61.5 per cent in October 2023). However, for those that voted no, there was a small (but not statistically significant) increase from 57.7 to 60.8 per cent. Voice vote was not associated with changes in life satisfaction or psychological distress.
- There was no increase in the per cent of people who were finding it difficult or very difficult on their current income between August and October 2023. There was an

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increase though from January to April 2023. We do not find a significant difference between those who were experiencing financial stress and those who were not, controlling for other characteristics.

Views on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues

- The vast majority (79.1 per cent) of Australians feel proud of First Nations cultures, more than the 69.0 per cent that feel proud of British/European cultures.
- Most Australians (79.4 per cent) think that the Federal Government should help improve reconciliation, and roughly the same number (80.5 per cent) think that Australia should ‘undertake formal Truth-telling processes to acknowledge the reality of Australia’s shared history.’
- Even after the referendum, 87.0 per cent of Australians think that ‘It is important for First Nations peoples to have a voice/say in matters that affect them.’ Around three-quarters of no voters (76.0 per cent) agree with the statement.
- Compared to 2014, Australians are now more likely to think that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are treated equally to other Australians (34.9 per cent) and that recognising land rights and Native Title of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is unfair to other Australians (45.0 per cent). Australians are more likely to think that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be able to decide for themselves about their way of life (87.2 per cent), but less likely to think that in the long run it would be best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be completely assimilated in Australian society (51.6 per cent).
- The question that is most evenly split across the population is whether or not ‘If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people tried harder, they could be just as well off as non-Indigenous Australians.’ Slightly more than half (51.3 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. This is despite more than two-thirds of Australians (68.0 per cent) agreeing or strongly agreeing that ‘Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are disadvantaged today because of past race-based policies.’
- When given the option of having gone too far, not gone far enough, or about right, the most common response with regards to land rights and Native title, government help, and government intervention was that more should be done. There has been an increase in the per cent of people who think more should be done since 2014.
- Very few Australians (13.1 per cent) think that ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia have largely caused their own problems.’ However, while there are many more Australians that think that the ‘problems have been caused primarily by the attitudes of other Australians and the policies of governments’ (37.4 per cent), the most common response given by 49.6 per cent of respondents is that the problems have been caused by ‘Both equally.’
- We create an index of attitudes towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations and issues. Higher values are related to a greater support for government intervention to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, lower values are related to a belief that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians should be treated equally, and injustices are mostly in the past.
- We estimate a higher index value for females, younger Australians, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. There was no difference between those born in Australia and those born overseas in an English-speaking country, but a lower value for those born overseas in a non-English speaking country and those that speak a language

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other than English at home (compared to those that speak English only). There is a very big difference between those who have not completed Year 12 and those that have a Certificate or Diploma but no degree on the one hand, and those with a postgraduate degree or an undergraduate degree. The latter has much higher index values than the former.

- Respondents were asked which of three possible statements best reflected their situation. The most common response, given by 48.2 per cent of respondents was that 'I know Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but do not regularly mix with them.' The next most common response, given by 34.2 per cent of respondents was that 'I do not know any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people personally,' with the remaining 17.7 per cent of Australians saying that 'I mix regularly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on a day-to-day basis.' There is a slightly lower index value, however, for those that mix regularly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Views and attitudes that explain the voice vote

- Amongst those who voted no, the factor that was most likely to be given as very important in influencing their decision was concern about dividing the country. This was given by 66.1 per cent of no voters. Amongst those that voted yes, the most important reason was that it would deliver better outcome, given by around three-quarters (75.8 per cent) of relevant respondents.
- There are a range of complex factors that predict whether someone voted yes or no in the Voice referendum. We identify twelve variables that have a strong and independent association with someone's vote, in addition to their demographic, socioeconomic, or geographic characteristics.
- Those who identify as being to the left of the standard left/right divide were far more likely to vote yes than those in the centre or to the right. The voice referendum came to be associated with other left-wing causes, and left/right identity appears to have been a factor in determining a person's vote.
- If a person disliked Prime Minister Albanese then they were substantially less likely to vote yes, whereas if they disliked Opposition Leader Dutton they were more likely to vote yes. The vote ended up being tied closely to the two main party leaders, and the lack of bipartisan support appears to have contributed to a low percentage of yes voters.
- Those Australians that trusted the federal government were more likely to vote yes. Trust in social media, on the other hand, was negatively associated with the voice vote.
- Many Australians feel that special rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are unfair, with a sizable number of Australians also thinking that the reason for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage is a lack of effort. Those Australians who hold these views were far more likely to vote no than those that did not.
- There are also many Australians that feel that the federal government should help improve reconciliation and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should have special cultural protection. Those views were associated with a higher yes vote.
- Caring a great deal about the referendum result was associated with a higher likelihood of voting yes. If people are making a risk/benefit calculation towards referenda and they care less about the benefits, then they are more likely to vote according to the risks.

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- Those who thought land rights and native title had not gone far enough were more likely to vote yes than those who thought it had gone too far or was about right. One of the reasons for the eventual low support for the referendum is that there are many more people who thought land rights and native title did not need to go any further than who thought it should.

Summary

Ultimately, the data presented in this paper suggests that Australians voted no because they didn't want division and remain sceptical of rights for some Australians that are not held by others. The data suggests that Australians think that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians continue to suffer levels of disadvantage that is both caused by past government policies and that justified extra government assistance. They did not see the Voice model put to them as the right approach to remedy that disadvantage.

1 Introduction and overview

The October 2023 referendum on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament (hereinafter referred to as the ‘Voice’) was the 45th constitutional referendum held since federation in 1901.¹ The referendum proposal failed to meet the dual thresholds of winning a majority of the national vote and a majority of the six states. The Voice therefore joined 37 other proposals which have been defeated, or 82 percent of all the proposals brought before voters. Of the eight successful proposals, all had bipartisan support and only one—the 1946 social services referendum—was held during a period of Labor government.

It is a truism that constitutional referendums in Australia have been notoriously hard to pass. Commentators from constitutional law (Williams and Hume 2010; Irving 2000; Galligan 1990) have seen Australia’s low success rates with constitutional referendums as the result of small ‘c’ conservatism and opposition against the perceived power grab by Canberra. The formal requirement in S. 128 of the Constitution states that in addition to affirmative majorities in both Houses of Parliament, an amendment to the Constitution can only take effect if “in a majority of the States a majority of the electors voting approve the proposed law, and if a majority of all the electors voting also approve the proposed law”.

Australia’s double majority requirement differs from many other countries where only a simple national majority is required. In Ireland, for example, “proposal for an amendment of this Constitution which is submitted by Referendum” is valid if “a majority of the votes cast at such Referendum shall have been cast in favour of its enactment into law” (Renwick 2011). The fact that in Ireland only 23 per cent of the 39 constitutional referendums have been rejected supports the view that the need for a double majority is a barrier to success. Yet, Australia’s double majority, while rare, is not unique. It was inspired by Switzerland and the Swiss Federal Constitution Art 142 stipulates, “Proposals that are submitted to the vote of the People are accepted if a majority of those who vote approve them [and if] ...a majority of the Cantons approve them”.

Yet, the Swiss have been markedly more likely to vote approvingly in referendums. Out of 413 constitutional votes, only 228 resulted in defeat. And of the rejected ones only nine failed due to the double majority requirement. So, only two percent of the referendums in Switzerland were rejected because they did not win the double majority. In Australia, by contrast, eleven percent of the referendums failed due to the double-majority provision.² This is partly because there are many more Cantons in Switzerland than states in Australia. A majority of Cantons means only 54 per cent of jurisdictions must say yes (14/26). A majority of states in Australia, however, means that 67 per cent must say yes (4/6).

Is Australia more conservative than the only other major federation that uses national referendums? Australia’s rejection rate follows another important pattern identified elsewhere: compulsory voting. We know from other countries with similar provisions (e.g., Chile, Brazil, and Luxembourg being but three examples) that this requirement can depress the yes-vote considerably (a point we will pick up later in this paper). Thus, Groot (2014: 424) suggests that referendums historically were “difficult to pass” because voters without “a strong reason to vote ‘yes’, were likely to vote ‘no’”. This proposition is supported by older research from referendums in the 1970s, which concluded that those with little interest in the issue tended to vote against the proposals, which were, consequently, more likely to be defeated as many voters are obliged to vote under Australia’s system of compulsory voting (Woldring 1976).

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Another factor that explains the history of referendum voting in Australia compared to Ireland and Switzerland is that for the most part, the proposals in these countries are supported by both sides of politics. In Switzerland, a consensus democracy with characteristics of Lijphart's consociationalism (Bogaards et al. 2019), only changes agreed by all the major parties make it to the ballot. The same is true in Ireland and bipartisanship is the norm. Tellingly, when a proposal for the reform of the Irish Senate was opposed by the opposition Fianna Fail in 2013, the referendum failed.

Australian voters are, therefore, not uniquely conservative. Australia's referendum experience can be explained in part by reference to what appears to be three explanatory factors in other constitutional referendums, namely the need for a double majority, the use of compulsory voting, and the absence of bipartisanship. Several other specific characteristics of the 2023 Voice referendum that meant a yes vote was going to be a challenge. First, celebrity endorsement usually depress the yes vote. The support of footballer David Beckham and astrophysicist Stephen Hawkins in the 2016 British Brexit referendum did nothing to sway voters (Mckenzie 2017). Nor were Scottish voters more inclined to vote for independence after this was championed by Wimbledon champion Andy Murray (Torrance 2014). The use of business and celebrity endorsements in Australia in 2023 may have provided voters a cue that the elites and the rich and famous were in favour of the Voice and, by implication, that this was against their interests. Second, in contrast to the 1967 referendum to include Indigenous Australians in the census—which was carried by a record majority—the Voice was seen as creating rights for small minority that were not held by others.

This report analyses voting in the Voice referendum, using a major survey conducted immediately after the referendum from a nationally representative sample of 4,219 adults. The main data collection for the October 2023 Australian Constitutional Referendum Study (ACRS)/ANUpoll commenced on the 17th of October and was completed by the 29th of October. The October 2023 survey can also be linked at the individual respondent level to the January, April, and August 2023 ANUpolls, allowing for a detailed tracking of how the referendum vote changed over the campaign period, and the individual-level predictors of that change.

The survey data is available for download through the Australian Data Archive (doi:10.26193/13NPGQ) and is described in detail in Appendix 1 to this paper.

Using this data, in this report we address four questions:

- What were the characteristics of Australians who voted yes to the referendum, and how do those characteristics compare to those who voted no?
- How did interest and attention to the referendum vary across the population, and how did the 2023 Voice referendum compare to previous elections and referendums?
- How did measures of wellbeing change over the election campaign, and what were key political and social views immediately post-referendum?
- To what extent did political and social attitudes explain variation in the yes vote across the population?

To answer these questions, the report is structured as follows. In the next section, we analyse data from the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) to help understand the spatial patterns of the voice vote. In Section 3, we begin our presentation of the results from the survey, by looking at the demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic predictors of the voice vote, as

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well as the change in the voice vote over 2023. Section 4 then looks at the level of attention and interest that people paid to the referendum, and how that related to their vote.

Sections 5, 6, 7, and 8 look at broader attitudes and outcomes held by the Australian population, how they have changed through time, and their relationship with the voice vote. In particular, we look at views on parties and leaders, political attitudes, financial wellbeing and mental health, and views on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. In Section 9, we draw together all the data analysis from the previous sections with an empirical model of the voice vote, and Section 10 provides some concluding comments. The appendices provide more information on the survey, and some background to the data analysis.

2 Spatial patterns and the geographic predictors of the electoral division vote

By the time enrolment had closed ahead of the referendum, there were 17,671,784 adult Australians enrolled to vote. The final tally from the voice indicated a turnout of 90.0 per cent of the enrolled population, or 15,895,231 people casting a vote. A total of 155,545 votes cast were informal, or a little under one per cent of all votes. Amongst those that did cast a valid vote, 39.9 per cent voted yes, and 60.1 per cent voted no. The results presented in this section of the paper look at the spread of yes votes across Australia in terms of State/Territory, Electoral Division, and polling place. We make use of data from the Australian Electoral Commission, as well as the 2021 Census of Population and Housing (provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics).

Table 2.1 gives the number of voters and per cent yes/no for each state and territory, as well as nationally. Apart from the Northern Territory, turnout in the referendum was close to or above 90 per cent. The only jurisdiction with majority support was the Australian Capital Territory with 176,022 yes voters, or 61.3 per cent of votes. Of the six states, Victoria came closest to majority support with 1,846,623 yes votes, or 45.9 per cent. The jurisdiction with the lowest level of support was Queensland, with 1,010,416 yes voters, or 31.8 per cent of votes.

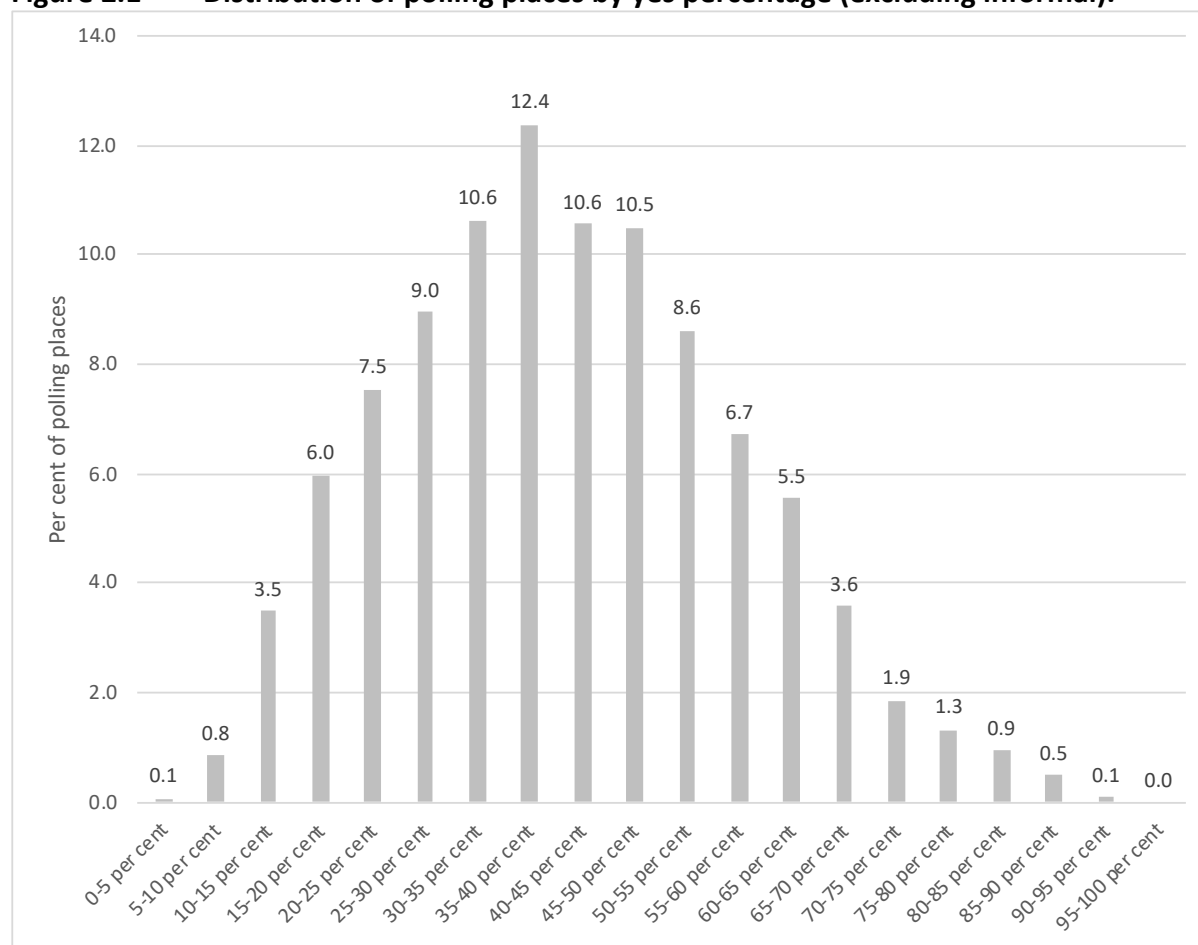
Table 2.1 Voting by jurisdiction (per cent and numbers)

State/Territory	Yes		No		Informal	Turnout (%)
	Number	%	Number	%		
New South Wales	2,058,764	41.0	2,957,880	59.0	57,285	90.8
Victoria	1,846,623	45.9	2,180,851	54.2	39,038	91.0
Queensland	1,010,416	31.8	2,167,957	68.2	27,266	88.3
South Australia	417,745	35.8	748,318	64.2	11,478	91.7
Western Australia	582,077	36.7	1,002,740	63.3	13,454	87.5
Tasmania	152,171	41.1	218,425	58.9	3,967	92.0
Northern Territory	43,076	39.7	65,429	60.3	820	71.5
Australian Capital Territory	176,022	61.3	111,192	38.7	2,237	91.4
Australia	6,286,894	39.9	9,452,792	60.1	155,545	90.0

Source: Australian Electoral Commission - <https://tallyroom.aec.gov.au/ReferendumNationalResults-29581.htm>

Yes, no, and informal votes are also available for individual polling places. There are nearly 9,000 of these across Australia with an average of a little under 1,500 votes per polling place. Figure 2.1 gives the distribution of 8,712 polling places by the associated yes vote. We can see a reasonably symmetrical distribution, with the most common result being 35 to 40 per cent, and 29.1 per cent of polling places recording a majority yes-vote.

Figure 2.1 Distribution of polling places by yes percentage (excluding informal).



Source: Australian Electoral Commission - <https://tallyroom.aec.gov.au/ReferendumNationalResults-29581.htm>

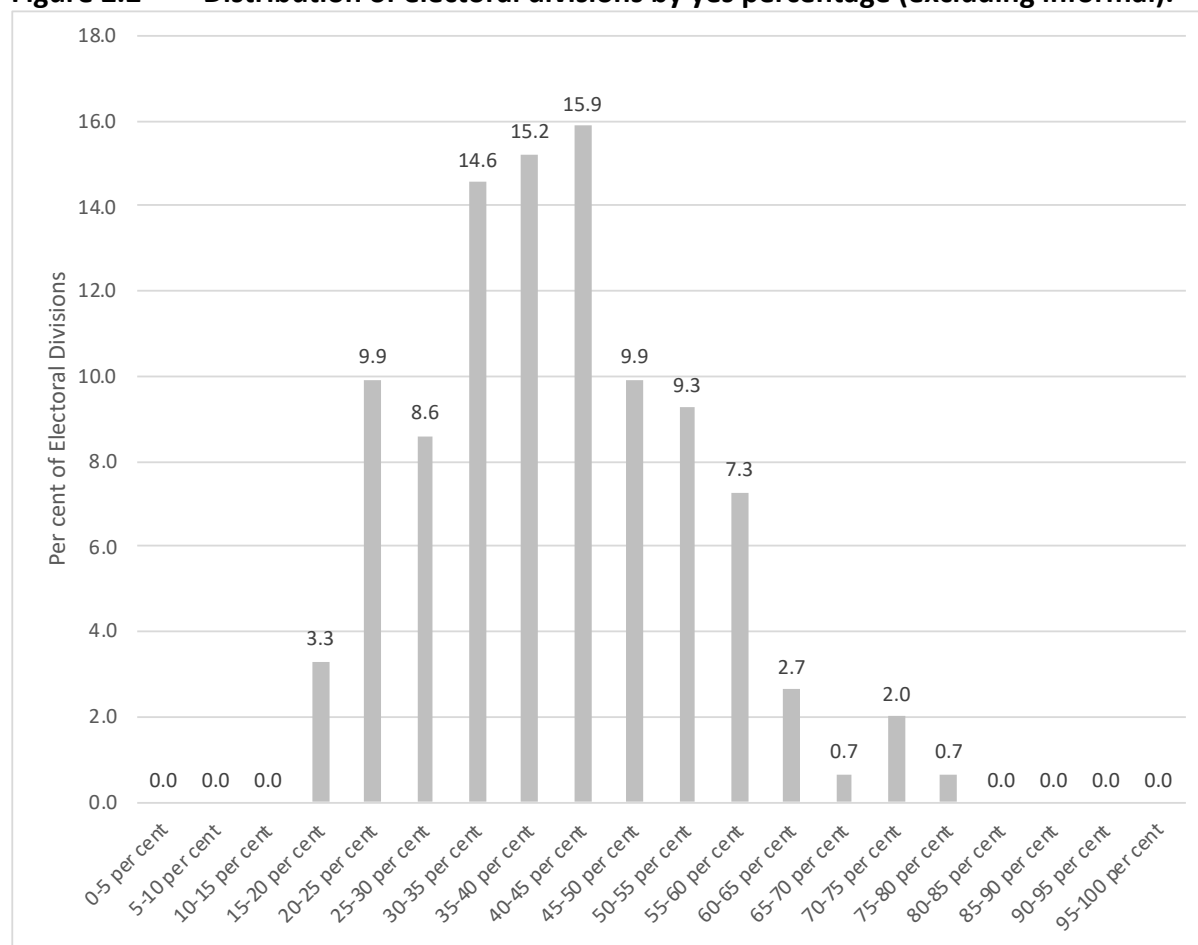
There has been a considerable amount of analysis of the characteristics of polling places that voted yes, compared to those that voted no. The problem with using individual polling places to understand predictors of the vote though is that many people vote at a polling place quite far from their home. Alternatively, many people voted via pre-poll or postal vote, and these votes cannot be linked back to a particular polling place. There is a fair bit of error then when analysing votes at such a small geographic level.

The Australian Electoral Commission does, however, aggregate actual votes by the electoral divisions in which a person is registered. This aggregation can then be linked to characteristics from the Census of people in those divisions (as of August 2021) to see how voting patterns match the characteristics of those in the area.

There were 151 electoral divisions at the time of the referendum, with an average of 105,266 votes in each electorate. The smallest electorate had a total of 57,781 votes, and the largest 125,662. The smallest turnout was 64.4 per cent, and the largest turnout was 94.4 per cent.

The per cent of yes votes (excluding informal) ranged from 15.4 to 77.2 per cent. Figure 2.2 shows that there is a reasonably symmetrical distribution centred around the national voting average, with only 34 electoral divisions (22.5 per cent) reporting a majority of yes votes.

Figure 2.2 Distribution of electoral divisions by yes percentage (excluding informal).



Source: Australian Electoral Commission - <https://tallyroom.aec.gov.au/ReferendumNationalResults-29581.htm>

Figure 2.2 shows a large degree of variation in the per cent of the electorate that voted yes in the referendum (the standard deviation across all districts is 12.6). There are some characteristics that explain that variation in the way that we might expect, given the discussion leading up to the referendum. There are other characteristics though that have an association in the opposite direction to which we might expect, or that have no association at all. One way to explore this is through multivariate analysis, which allows us to look at the relationship between voting percentage and one particular factor, whilst holding constant the relationship with other factors that may also predict the vote.

Results from the multivariate analysis are provided in Table 2.2 at the end of this section. For this analysis, the outcome is the per cent of that electoral district that voted yes, excluding those who voted informally. As shown in Figure 2.2, the outcome follows a reasonable approximation of the normal distribution and therefore ordinary least squares (OLS) analysis is appropriate. The demographic and socioeconomic independent variables come from the 2021 Census, and we also include voting outcomes from the 2022 Federal Election as well as the AEC’s geographic classification as additional explanatory variables. The seven variables in this simple analysis explain almost 88 per cent of the variation in the data.

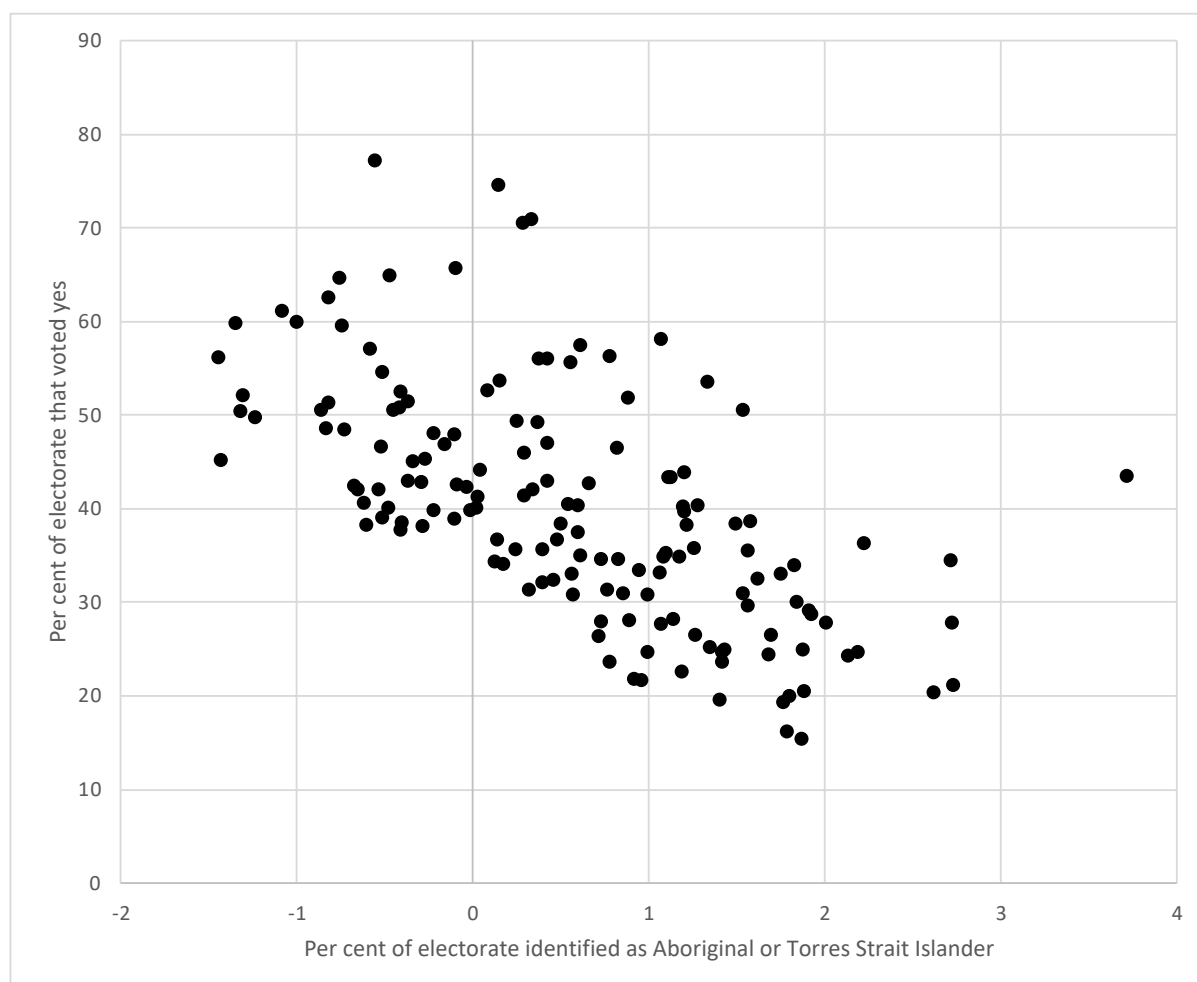
The first variable in the model is the per cent of those aged 15 years and over (as of 2021) in the electoral division that were identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in the 2021 Census. Because this variable has one outlier (Lingiari) and follows a highly skewed distribution, we include the natural log of this variable in the model. The model results, as well as the scatter

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plot in Figure 2.3 suggests that a higher Indigenous share in the area (controlling for other characteristics) is associated with a lower per cent of the population who voted yes.

It is particularly important with this variable to not assume that it relates to the voting patterns of individual Indigenous Australians. There is only one region where the Indigenous per cent is more than around 15 per cent, so the electorate analysis is very much dominated by the vote of the non-Indigenous population. That is, the result does not in any way suggest that Indigenous Australians were less likely to vote yes (a point that is reinforced by the individual-level analysis in the section that follows). Rather, the results are more indicative of non-Indigenous Australians living in areas with a relatively high share of Indigenous Australians being more likely to vote no. This may be because those areas where a change in Indigenous policy is likely to have the greatest material impact on the area are less likely to vote yes. We return to this point in Section 8 when we consider individual level data and the level of interaction a person has with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Figure 2.3 Relationship between per cent of division identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and per cent that voted yes.



Note: Excludes those that didn't vote/voted informal

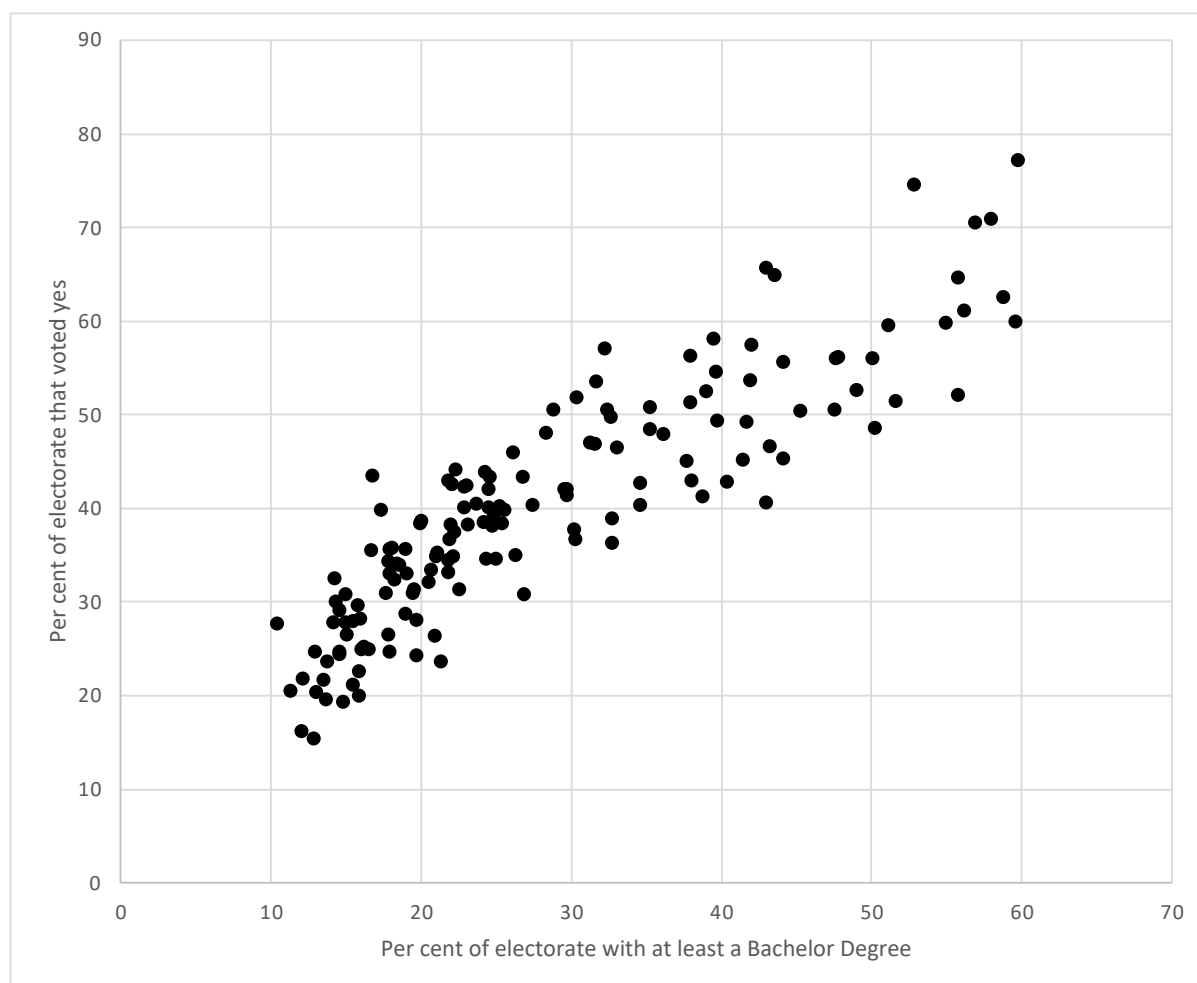
Source: Australian Electoral Commission - <https://tallyroom.aec.gov.au/ReferendumNationalResults-29581.htm> and Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022) 2021 Census of Population and Housing, accessed 16th October 2023.

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The regression results also show that people who live in areas with high levels of people born overseas were less supportive of the voice, as were those who live in areas with an older average age.

Two other variables in the model are important, but need to be analysed together. The first of these shows that the per cent of adults with a bachelor degree or higher in the area is positively associated with a yes vote. Of the seven variables in the model, this is the strongest predictor in terms of the size of the coefficient, as well as from a dominance analysis (Luchman 2021). There is also a very clear relationship when we plot the education and yes votes, as shown in Figure 8.3 below. Education levels in the area matter, and they matter a lot.

Figure 2.4 Relationship between per cent of division with a bachelor degree and per cent that voted yes.



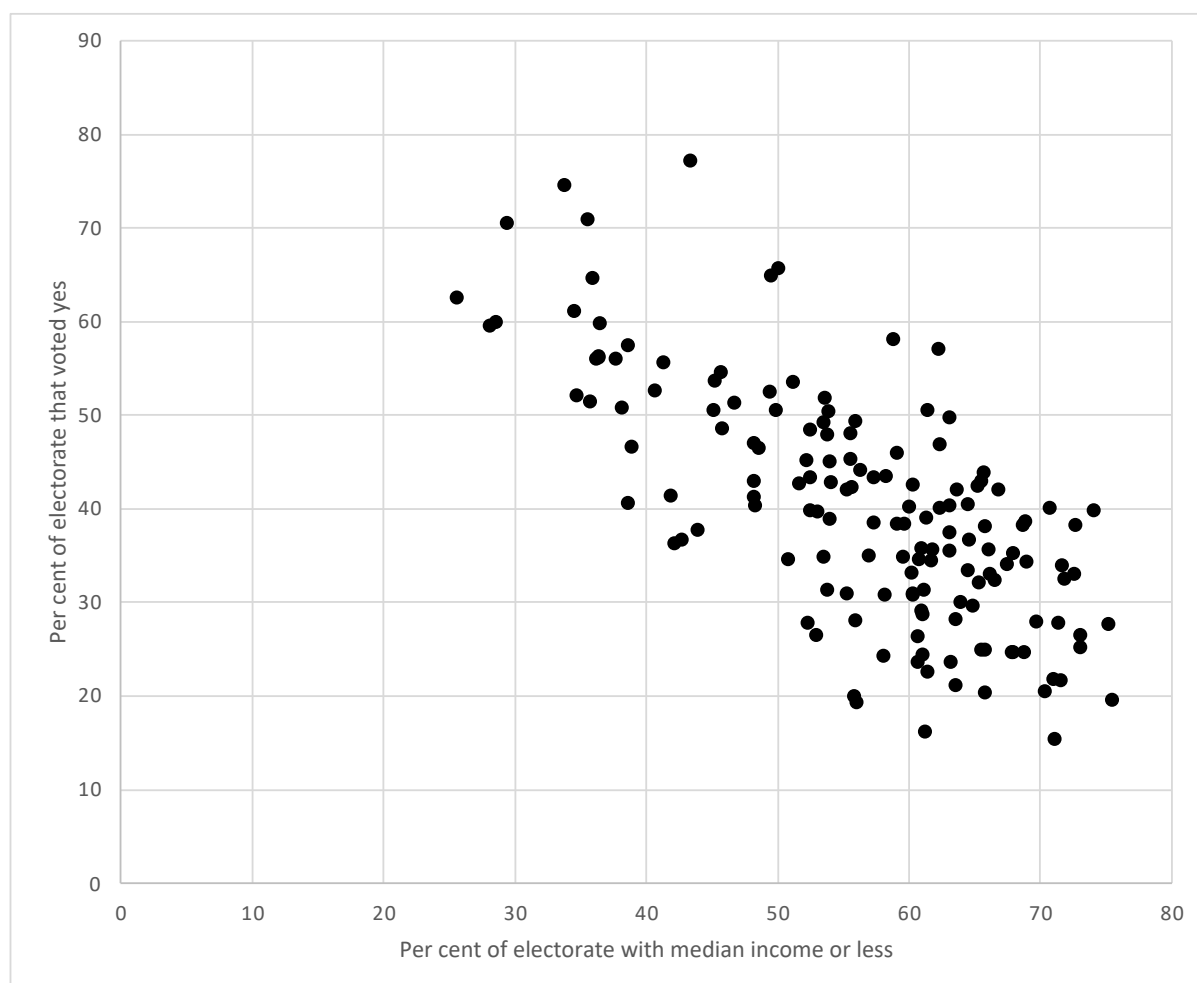
Note: Excludes those that didn't vote/voted informal

Source: Australian Electoral Commission - <https://tallyroom.aec.gov.au/ReferendumNationalResults-29581.htm> and Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022) 2021 Census of Population and Housing, accessed 16th October 2023.

What is more interesting is that when we control for education in the area, area-level income has the opposite association to what is suggested by a simple correlation. Our measure of income is the per cent of people in the area that live in a household with an income in the median income category or below. Based on a simple correlation (with a correlation coefficient of -0.72), and summarised in Figure 2.5, higher values for this measure (which represents a lower average income) is associated with a lower vote. However, in Table 2.2, we can see that

rather than low income being a barrier to voting yes, the detailed analysis suggests that low income in the area, conditional on education, predicts higher support.

Figure 2.5 Relationship between per cent of division median income or lower and per cent that voted yes.



Note: Excludes those that didn't vote/voted informal

Source: Australian Electoral Commission - <https://tallyroom.aec.gov.au/ReferendumNationalResults-29581.htm> and Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022) 2021 Census of Population and Housing, accessed 16th October 2023.

The final two variables in the model suggest that political party matters, but somewhat surprisingly that it is the characteristics of those in the area that predict the vote, rather than where the area is located. With regards to political party, those regions that had a Coalition member had a 7-and-a-half percentage point lower yes vote than those with a Labor member, if we control for other characteristics. What is also interesting though is that having a member from outside the two main parties was also associated with a lower vote than Labor seats. This includes Greens-held electorates.

The final variable in the model is geographic classification. If we don't control for other characteristics, then there are large differences, with outer metropolitan electorates having a lower vote than inner metropolitan ones based on the current count (39.1 and 52.9 per cent respectively), provincial electorates having an even lower vote (35.5 per cent), and rural electorates having a lower vote still (29.6 per cent). However, when we control for the other

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variables in the model, this association essentially disappears. It is characteristics of the electorate that matter, not where the electorate is located.

Table 2.2 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with electoral district voice vote, October 2023

Explanatory variables	M.Effect.	Signif.
Per cent of individuals in electorate Indigenous (natural log)	-1.839	***
Per cent of individuals in electorate born overseas	-0.228	***
Average age in electorate	-0.560	**
Per cent of individuals in electorate with a Bachelor Degree	0.904	***
Per cent of individuals in electorate in a household with income in median category or below	0.157	**
Coalition-held electorate	-7.464	***
Greens/independent-held electorate	-3.076	**
Outer metropolitan electorate	1.337	
Provincial electorate	0.250	
Rural electorate	0.940	
Constant	44.228	***
Sample size	151	

Notes: Linear regression model (OLS). The base case region is a Labor electorate, in an inner metropolitan area.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: Australian Electoral Commission - <https://tallyroom.aec.gov.au/ReferendumNationalResults-29581.htm> and Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022) 2021 Census of Population and Housing, accessed 16th October 2023.

3 Demographic and socioeconomic predictors of the vote

There were very large demographic and socioeconomic differences in the per cent of eligible Australians that voted yes to the Referendum. The results presented in the first part of this section utilise data from the October 2023 Australian Constitutional Referendum Study (ACRS)/ANUpoll to understand the predictors of the final vote. These demographic differences may explain some of the variation by geography described in the previous section. However, given many of these variables are quite evenly spread across electoral divisions, it is perhaps even more the case that they explain the variation within divisions.

In the second part of this section, we look at how individual voters changed their vote over the period. In particular, we make use of data from the January, April, and August ANUpolls alongside the current survey to see how many people changed their vote (from yes to no and vice versa) as well as the factors that predicted this change. This longitudinal data also allows us to look at the prior voting intentions of those who did not cast a valid vote, to get a sense of how variation in turnout may have influenced the eventual vote.

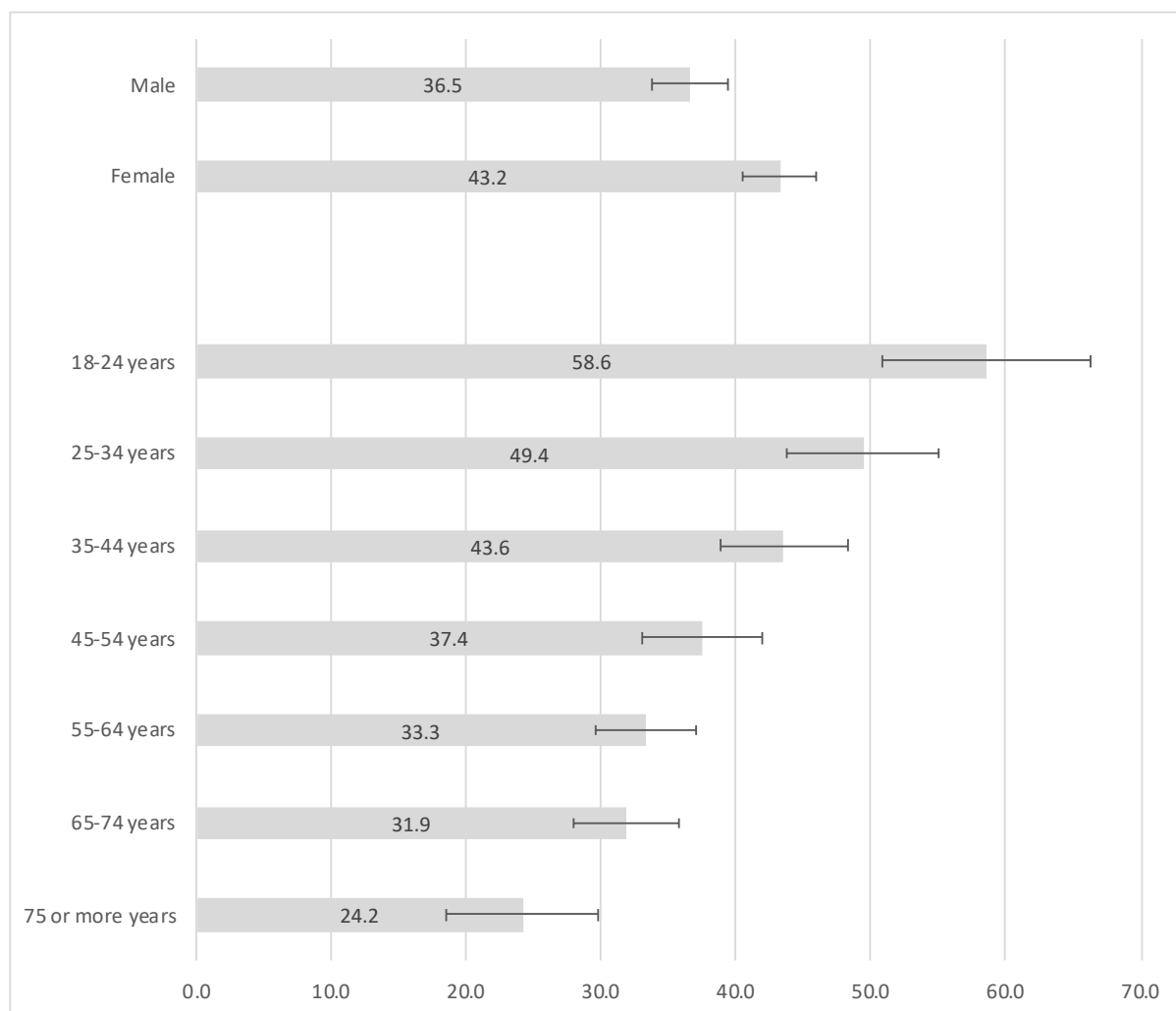
3.1 Demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic predictors of the vote

We begin our presentation of individual-level predictors by looking at variation in the yes vote by sex and broad age categories (Figure 3.1). For the analysis at the start of this section, we exclude those who voted informal, did not vote, or were not eligible to vote. At the end of the section, we return to those who did not vote/voted informally and consider how their characteristics differed from yes/no voters, including by their support for the Voice in August 2023.

Amongst the voting population, females were more likely to vote yes than males, with a roughly seven-percentage point difference in the yes vote by sex (43.2 per cent compared to 36.5 per cent respectively).

Differences by age were even greater still. Those aged 18 to 24 years at the time of the referendum (58.6 per cent) were more than twice as likely to vote yes as those aged 75 years and over (24.2 per cent). Across the rest of the age distribution, the three age groups between the age of 45 and 74 had similar voting patterns (around one-third voting yes), whereas those aged 25 to 34 (49.4 per cent) and those aged 35 to 44 (43.6 per cent) fell somewhere in between the youth vote and those in the middle and upper part of the age distribution.

Figure 3.1 Per cent of Australians who voted yes in the 2023 Referendum, by age and sex.

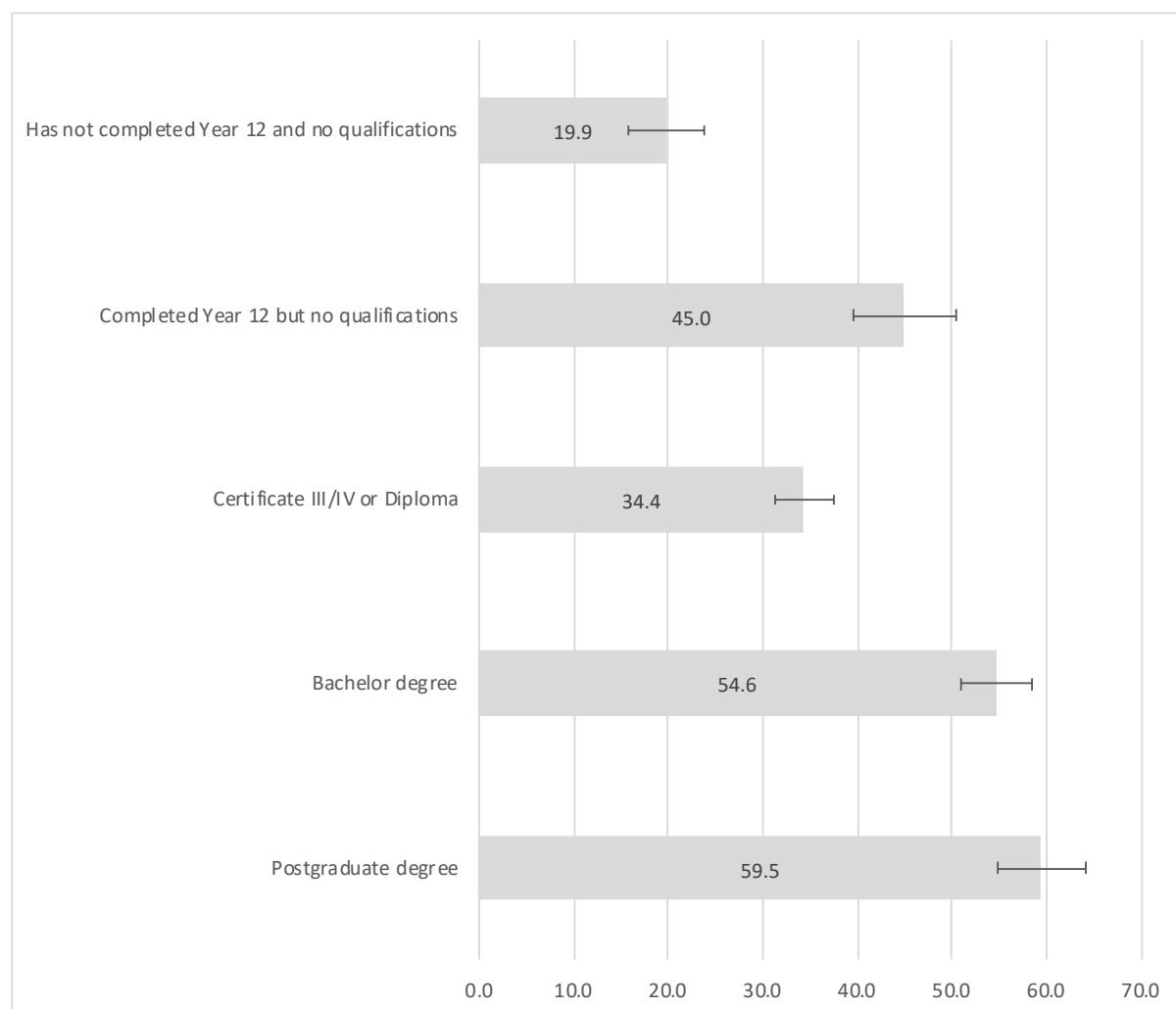


Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll

One of the division-level factors that was shown to have a large association with voting was education. In figure 3.2, we can see that this is also true at the individual-level, with large differences between those with an undergraduate or postgraduate degree on the one hand (54.6 and 59.5 per cent voting yes respectively) and those that had not completed Year 12 and did not have a qualification on the other hand (19.9 per cent voting yes). Between these two extremes, those that had completed Year 12 but did not have post-school qualifications (45.0 per cent) were more likely to vote yes than those who had a Certificate III/IV or Diploma (34.4 per cent).

Figure 3.2 Per cent of Australians who voted yes in the 2023 Referendum, by education.



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll

There are many other factors associated with whether or not a person voted yes in the referendum. To analyse the factors associated with voting outcomes, we use a regression-style approach. The dependent variable in the analysis is whether or not someone voted yes and in this section we present a simple model that includes sex, age, country of birth, education, location, and household income as the explanatory variables. These variables are highly likely to influence voting behaviour, rather than be influenced by voting. That is, the direction of causality is reasonably clear. In later sections of the paper, we present more expanded models where we included attitudinal variables as explanatory variables. For these later models, the direction of causality is less clear.

To estimate these relationships, we use the probit model. This is appropriate for when the dependent variable is binary (yes/no). The relationship with the explanatory variables is presented as marginal effects (in Table 3.1) or the differences in probability of voting yes compared to someone with a different value for that explanatory variable, whilst holding constant all other explanatory variables. We also report statistical significance.

Results confirm that even when we control for other variables, females and young Australians were more likely to vote yes than males and older Australians respectively. There is some

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evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians were more likely to vote yes than non-Indigenous Australians. However, because this is not an Indigenous-specific survey, there are few Indigenous Australians in the sample and therefore it is not possible to obtain a precise estimate of the Indigenous vote, or of differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The marginal effect is quite large though (0.101) suggesting it is far more likely than not that Indigenous Australians were more likely to vote yes than non-Indigenous Australians. Furthermore, it is important to keep this variable in the model, as it helps with the interpretation of other variables that may be correlated with Indigenous status.

There is a large enough sample of Australians who were born overseas and Australians who speak a language other than English to look at variation in vote by these characteristics. We find that those who were born overseas in an English-speaking country were more likely to vote yes than those born in Australia, but there was no difference between those born overseas in a non-English speaking country and those born in Australia. We do find, however, that those who speak a language other than English were less likely to vote yes than those who spoke English only.

The biggest differences in the model, however, are by education. We estimate that the probability of voting yes was around 16 percentage points lower for someone that had not completed Year 12 compared to someone that had completed Year 12 but did not have a post-school qualification (controlling for other characteristics). In the opposite direction, those with a post-graduate degree were around 21 percentage points more likely to have voted yes than the base case.

There were no differences by the socioeconomic characteristics of the area in which a person lived, but there were differences between those who lived in a capital city and non-capital city, with the latter having a roughly five percentage point lower likelihood of voting yes. Household income also mattered, with those in the lowest income households having a roughly six percentage point lower likelihood.

Table 3.1 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with voice vote, October 2023

Explanatory variables	M.Effect.	Signif.
Female	0.068	***
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.198	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.079	**
Aged 45 to 54 years	-0.017	
Aged 55 to 64 years	-0.029	
Aged 65 to 74 years	-0.016	
Aged 75 years plus	-0.091	**
Indigenous	0.101	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.073	**
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.013	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.102	***
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.164	***
Has a post graduate degree	0.212	***
Has an undergraduate degree	0.151	***
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.028	
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	-0.016	
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	0.014	
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	0.017	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	0.017	
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.056	**
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	-0.064	*
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	-0.020	
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	-0.021	
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	0.025	
Probability of base case	0.370	
Sample size	3,480	

Notes: Probit regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; non-Indigenous; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a post-graduate degree; lives in neither an advantaged or disadvantaged suburb (third quintile); lives in a capital city, lives in a household in the middle income quintile.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll

3.2 Predictors of change in voting intentions

Our longitudinal sample indicates a long-term decline in support for the voice referendum over 2023.³ We have data on 2,113 respondents that ended up voting in the referendum, and for which we have voting intentions as of January 2023. Back at the start of the year, 58.9 per cent of this sample (using October 2023 weights) said they would have voted yes in the referendum as anticipated at that point in time. We have even more voters that completed the April and August 2023 samples (3,339 and 3,337 respectively in total). The yes vote stayed high between January and April 2023 (60.2 per cent), but by August 2023 less than a majority of eventual voters said they would have voted yes (47.1 per cent).

This decline in voice support over 2023 is consistent with other published data including Newspann⁴ and a range of vote trackers.⁵ However, where the ANUpoll data is so powerful is the ability to link the pre-referendum voting intentions with a person’s final vote. This allows us to understand individual-level change in voting, as well as what predicted that change. Figure 3.3 summarises the changes in voting intentions between April and August 2023, as well as the differences between voting intentions in August and actual vote in October.

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Focusing on our longitudinal sample, between April and August 2023, of those who said that they would vote no in April 2023, only 4.4 per cent switch to voting yes in August. By contrast, of those that said they would vote yes, 22.9 per cent switched to voting no.

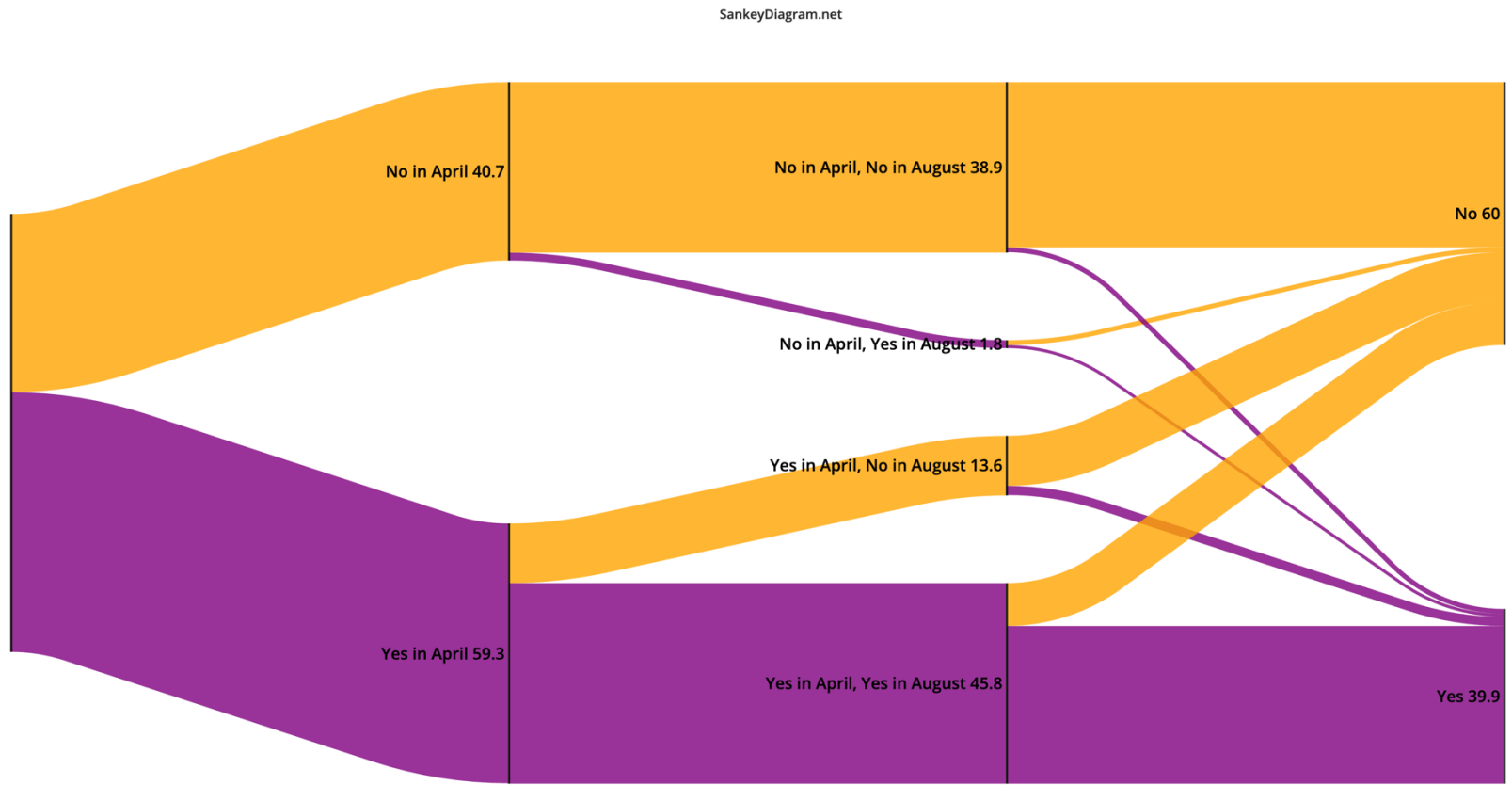
The vast majority (97.1 per cent) of those who said they would vote no when asked in April and August 2023 ended up voting no. There was a slightly higher yes vote amongst those that said that they would vote yes in April but no in August (15.8 per cent), but even then, most of those that started off as yes voters didn't switch back.

Perhaps the most telling group though is those that said they would vote yes when asked in both April and August 2023. The yes campaign may have assumed that this group was quite committed to voting yes and that the campaign could have focused on persuading some of the no voters. However, even amongst this group 21.4 per cent switched to voting no between August and October.

Over the six months between April and October, we can identify four mutually-exclusive groups, with the estimated share of these groups across the population highlighting why the eventual voice vote was so low. We estimate that 37.7 per cent of voters voted no, and never intended to vote yes. This was not too dissimilar to the 36.0 per cent of voters who voted yes, and always intended to do so. In essence, those who were consistent in their views across the three waves of data collection cancelled each other out.

The most important group though for explaining the eventual result was the 22.3 per cent of Australians that eventually voted no, but at some stage either in April and/or August had intended to vote yes. This is more than five times the per cent of voters that eventually voted yes, but at some stage had considered voting no (4.0 per cent). This is a remarkably low level of positive change, and much lower than the normal level of vote switching (Dassonneville 2015)

Figure 3.3 Changes in voting intentions between April, August, and October 2023



Note: Figure created at <https://sankeydiagram.net/>.

Source: ANUpoll, January and August, and October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

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In Table 3.2 we present a detailed exploration of the change in the voice vote over 2023. Of those who said that they would not have voted for the voice when asked in January 2023, only 4.8 per cent ended up voting yes. We do not analyse this group, as sample sizes are quite low, and they were marginal in terms of explaining the result. In the opposite direction though, 42.0 per cent of those who said that they would have voted yes when asked in January 2023 ended up voting no in October 2023. We analyse this group in detail, as well as the similar change between August and October.

Using a similar regression-style approach to the previous table and the same dependent variable (the probability of voting yes), the first column of results focuses on those who said they would have voted yes when asked in January 2023, and the second column of results those who said they would have voted yes when asked in August 2023. A positive marginal effect means they were more likely to have stayed a yes voter than someone with the base case characteristics, whereas a negative marginal effect signifies that they were less likely to stay a yes voter.

Over the course of the campaign, younger and older Australians were more likely to stay as yes voters than those in the middle part of the age distribution. Putting this another way, there was a relative decline in voting yes amongst those aged 35 to 54 years. The difference between younger and middle-aged voters was only apparent for the January to October vote switch rather than the August to October switch, suggesting that the divergence occurred early in the campaign.

It would seem that the yes campaign struggled to reach non-English speakers, as those who speak a language other than English at home were less likely to stay as yes voters over the period than those who speak English only. Looking at raw numbers, in January 2023, amongst our longitudinal sample that eventually voted in the referendum, 73.6 per cent of those who spoke a language other than English at home said they would vote yes, compared to 56.5 per cent of those who spoke English only. By the time people actually cast their vote, this 17-percentage point difference had shrunk to only around 4 percentage points (39.5 per cent for those from a non-English speaking background compared to 35.6 per cent amongst the rest of the population). Given that there was an association between speaking a language other than English and vote change from August 2023, the results suggest that the relative decline in the vote for this group occurred late in the campaign.

The largest divergence over the period appears to be via education. Amongst those who in January 2023 said that they would vote yes, there is a roughly 26 percentage point lower likelihood of eventually voting yes for those that had not completed Year 12 compared to those that had completed Year 12 but did not have a post school qualification. Most of this widening appears to have occurred between August and October 2023, as there was a similar difference when we focus on those who said they would vote yes in our most recent pre-referendum survey.

Table 3.2 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with change in voice vote, October 2023

Explanatory variables	January 2023 yes voters		August 2023 yes voters	
	M.Effect.	Signif.	M.Effect.	Signif.
Female	-0.035		-0.024	
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.201	**	0.050	
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.158	**	0.036	
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.061		0.013	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.123	**	0.117	***
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.180	***	0.157	***
Aged 75 years plus	0.137		0.139	**
Indigenous	-0.062		0.029	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.064		-0.010	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.018		-0.052	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.134	**	-0.153	***
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.257	***	-0.233	***
Has a post graduate degree	0.170	**	0.060	
Has an undergraduate degree	0.064		0.028	
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.145	**	-0.066	
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	0.047		0.019	
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	0.050		0.006	
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	0.096		-0.007	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	0.074		0.029	
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.014		-0.001	
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	-0.087		-0.181	***
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	0.047		-0.016	
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	0.076		-0.007	
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	0.173	***	0.083	**
Probability of base case	0.490		0.784	
Sample size	1,312		1,811	

Notes: Probit regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; non-Indigenous; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a post-graduate degree; lives in neither an advantaged or disadvantaged suburb (third quintile); lives in a capital city, lives in a household in the middle income quintile.

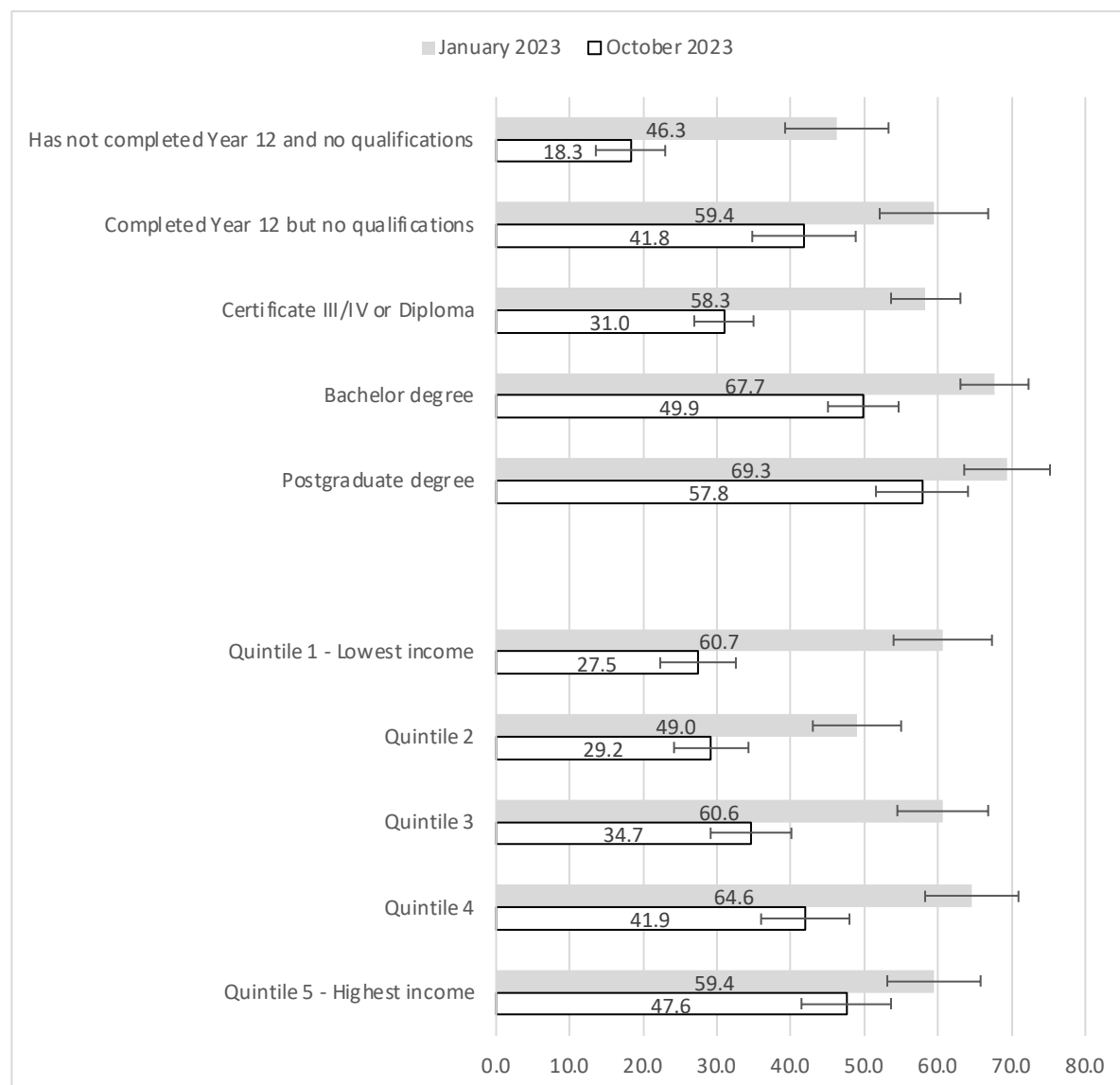
Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: ANUpoll, January and August, and October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

Looking at the change through time using a regression approach can be a little complicated, but the main education and income results hold if we just look at voting patterns at the two points in time, for our longitudinal sample (Figure 3.4). There were large flows from intending to vote yes in January 2023 to actually voting no in October 2023 amongst the less educated and lower income segments of the population (Figure 2). The ratio of the yes vote between the highest to lowest education respondents in the sample increased from 1.5 to 3.2 over the year. In January 2023, 46.3% of those that had not completed Year 12 said that they would have voted yes, but by the time of the referendum just 18.3% of the same group of individuals voted yes; a fall of 28 percentage points.⁶ Amongst those with a postgraduate degree, in January 2023 69.3% said they intended to vote yes with the proportion voting yes in October 2023 falling to 57.8%. So, while there was a decline amongst the most educated, the size of the decline (11.5 percentage points) was much smaller.

The ratio by income (highest to lowest) increased from 1.0 to 1.7. at the start of the year, those in a low-income household were no more or less likely to say they would vote. By the time people made their final vote, however, it is those in the lowest income households that are least likely to vote yes.

Figure 3.4 Per cent of Australians who voted yes in the 2023 Referendum and who would have voted yes when asked in January 2023, by education and income.



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95% confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll: January 2023, and October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll

3.3 The informal vote

Nationally, the AEC estimates that turnout for the referendum (the per cent of enrolled voters that voted, even if informally) was 89.95 per cent. A further 155,545 people voted informally, meaning that they cast a vote, but that it was not sufficiently clear that it was yes or no. The latter represents 1.0 per cent of the total turnout. Amongst respondents to the October ANUpoll that reported that they were eligible to vote, 9.8 per cent reported that they did not vote or that they voted informally, similar to the true value from the AEC.

Based on their responses to the August 2023 ANUpoll, those who voted informally or who did not vote appear to be more likely to be yes voters. Remembering that 47.1 per cent of our longitudinal sample who eventually voted in the referendum said that they would have voted yes when asked in August, the 66.8 per cent of those who voted informally/did not vote that

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said that they would have voted yes represents a sizable number of yes voters that did not end up voting at all.

Another way to look at this data is to look at informal vote percentage by voting intention in August 2023. The data shows that of the respondents who in August 2023 said they intended to vote yes, 12.3 per cent did not vote or voted informally, much higher than the 5.9 per cent of those who intended to vote no (in August) who ended up not voting or voting informally.

Given the gap between the yes and no votes nationally and for each state/territory, this difference in informal voting by August intentions would not have made a difference to the eventual voice outcome. However, it does potentially explain why the yes vote was even lower than expected.

Table 3.3 below shows that there are other observable characteristics that predict whether or not someone did not vote/voted informally. In the first model, we do not control for their August 2023 vote, whereas in the second model we do (confirming that yes voters in August were more likely to vote informal/not vote).

Compared to those aged 18 to 44 years, older voters were less likely to not have submitted a valid vote. There were not, however, any differences within the 18 to 44 population. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians were more likely to not have submitted a valid vote than non-Indigenous Australians. The second model shows that this is partly explained by the fact that as of August 2023 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians were more likely to be yes voters. However, even when we control for August 2023 voting intention, the marginal effect is still large (although the p-value of 0.119 suggests that the small sample size means there is substantial uncertainty around the estimate).

Socioeconomic status at the area and household level is also a strong predictor. Those who lived in the two most disadvantaged quintiles of areas were more likely to not submit a valid vote. In addition, those who lived in the two most advantaged household income quintiles were less likely to vote informal/not vote.

Table 3.3 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with not voting/voting informally, October 2023

Explanatory variables	Basic model		Expanded model	
	M.Effect.	Signif.	M.Effect.	Signif.
Would have voted yes when asked in August 2023			0.050	**
Female	-0.008		-0.020	
Aged 18 to 24 years	-0.021		-0.023	
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.011		0.026	
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.008		0.003	
Aged 55 to 64 years	-0.064	***	-0.066	***
Aged 65 to 74 years	-0.071	***	-0.067	***
Aged 75 years plus	-0.063	**	-0.060	*
Indigenous	0.115	**	0.090	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.031		0.032	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.058	*	0.046	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.068	*	0.059	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	0.013		-0.009	
Has a post graduate degree	-0.032		-0.038	
Has an undergraduate degree	0.000		-0.007	
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.044	*	-0.046	*
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	0.106	***	0.099	**
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	0.115	***	0.100	**
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	0.058		0.049	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	0.046		0.055	
Lives outside of a capital city	0.020		0.021	
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	0.046		0.036	
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	-0.006		-0.013	
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	-0.061	***	-0.063	***
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	-0.064	***	-0.070	***
Probability of base case	0.089		0.090	
Sample size	3,594		3,191	

Notes: Probit regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; non-Indigenous; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a post-graduate degree; lives in neither an advantaged or disadvantaged suburb (third quintile); lives in a capital city, lives in a household in the middle income quintile.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: ANUpoll, August and October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

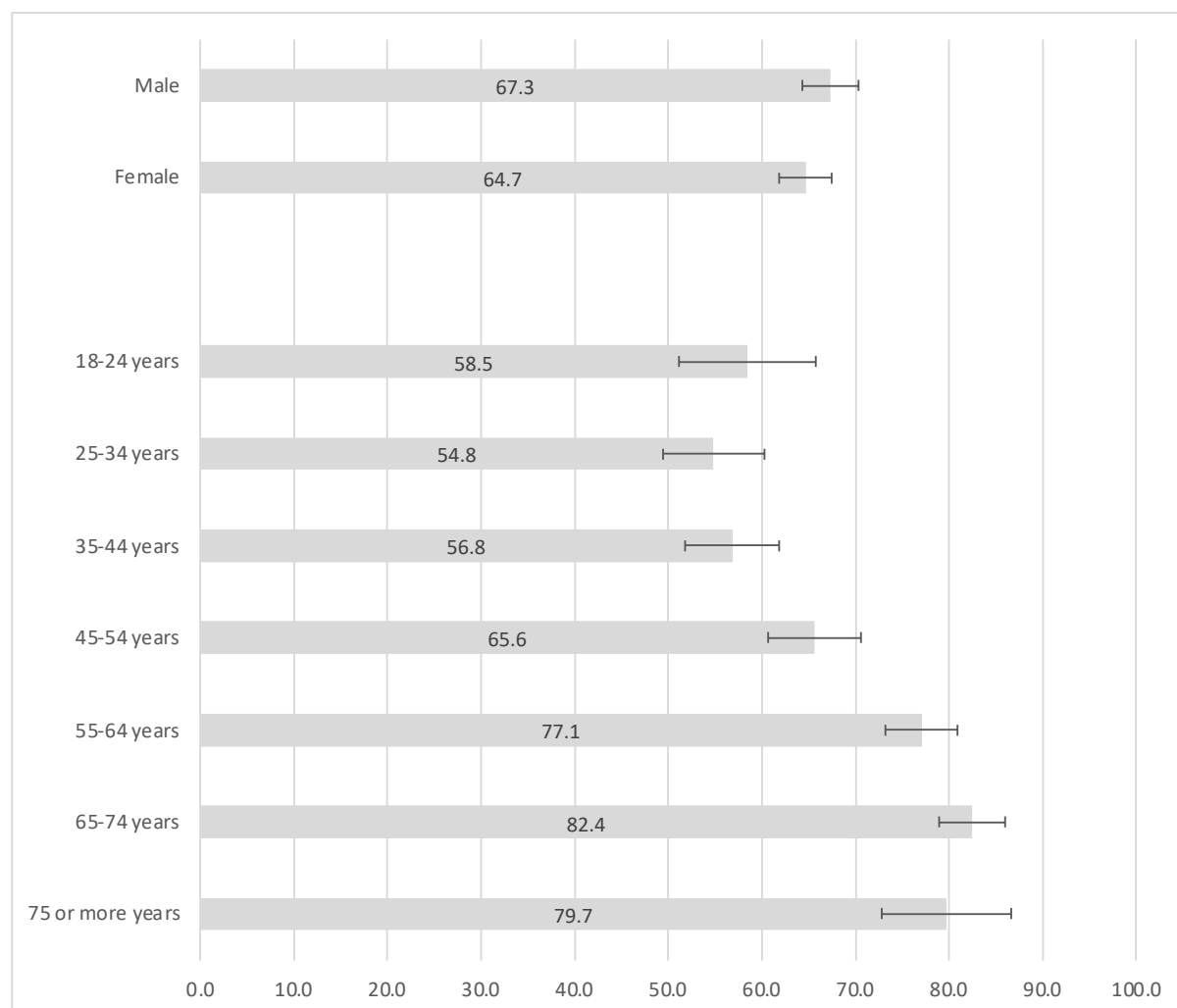
4 Interest and engagement with the referendum

For those who were closely following the referendum debate (or designing surveys to collect data about the referendum), it is easy to assume that the population as a whole had the same level of interest. This is rarely the case though when it comes to elections, and the vast majority of Australians were only ever going to start paying attention as the vote got nearer, and even then, with a fair degree of variation.

We asked ANUpoll respondents: ‘...how much interest would you say you took in the Referendum campaign overall?’ Only a small minority of respondents (10.3 per cent) said none at all, but a further 23.6 per cent reported paying ‘not much’ attention. The most common response was paying some attention (34.2 per cent), but nearly one-third of Australians (31.9 per cent) reported that they paid ‘a good deal’ of attention. This was slightly lower than the 38 per cent of Australians that reported that they paid a good deal of attention to the 1999 Referendum campaign (McAllister 2001).

There are no significant differences in attention between males and females (Figure 4.1). Older Australians, however, were far more likely to say that they paid some, or a great deal of attention than younger Australians.

Figure 4.1 Per cent of Australians who paid some or a good deal of attention to referendum, by age and sex.



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Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll

In addition to age and sex, there are a range of other demographic and socioeconomic factors that were associated with attention paid to the voice referendum, which we can see in Table 4.1, using a regression-approach. Results are again presented as marginal effects, and we can see that those who speak a language other than English at home were less likely to pay attention to the voice referendum. Both the yes and no campaigns tried to engage with non-English speakers,⁷ with the data suggesting that this was not completely successful, at least in terms of attention paid.

Education levels were a strong predictor of attention paid to the referendum, with lower levels of attention amongst those who had not completed Year 12, and much higher levels of education amongst those who had a postgraduate degree. These differences were not driven by socioeconomic status as captured by household income or area-level socioeconomic status. Both of these two measures had their own independent association, and the association with education holds when we control for both.

In terms of area-level disadvantage, much of the difference was at the bottom part of the distribution, with those in relatively disadvantaged areas paying less attention than those in the middle of the advantage/disadvantage distribution. There were not, however, large or consistent differences between those at the top of the geographic distribution and those in the middle. On the other hand, those in high-income households were more likely to pay attention, with no difference between the middle and bottom of the distribution.

Table 4.1 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with attention paid to the voice referendum, October 2023

Explanatory variables	M.Effect.	Signif.
Female	0.019	
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.040	
Aged 25 to 34 years	-0.010	
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.099	***
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.206	***
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.275	***
Aged 75 years plus	0.277	***
Indigenous	0.088	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	-0.002	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.049	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.131	***
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.084	*
Has a post graduate degree	0.102	**
Has an undergraduate degree	0.090	**
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.017	
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	-0.110	***
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	-0.123	***
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	-0.044	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	0.019	
Lives outside of a capital city	0.021	
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	-0.063	
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	-0.024	
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	-0.031	
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	0.091	**
Probability of base case	0.606	
Sample size	3,896	

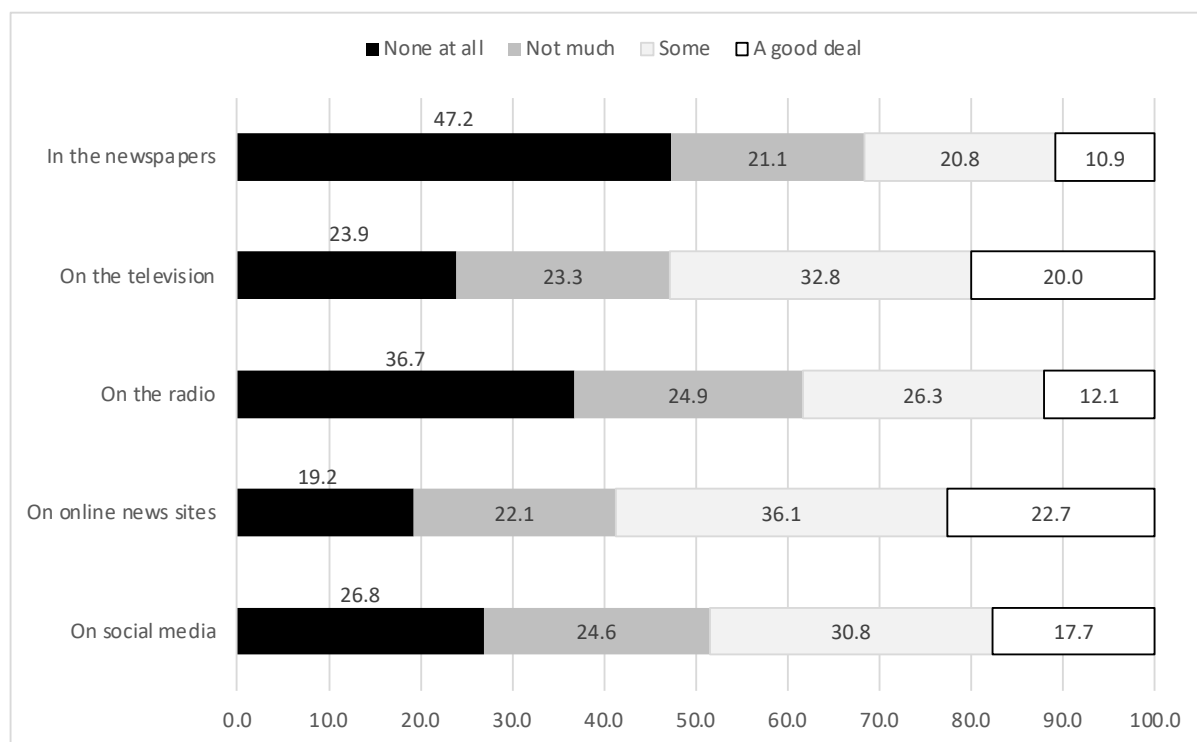
Notes: Probit regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; non-Indigenous; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a post-graduate degree; lives in neither an advantaged or disadvantaged suburb (third quintile); lives in a capital city, lives in a household in the middle income quintile.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

In addition to the general level of attention paid to the voice referendum, respondents were also asked about the extent to which they paid attention across difference sources of media. The most common source of information was online news sites with 22.7 per cent of Australians paying a good deal of attention and 36.1 per cent paying some attention. The least used source of media was newspapers, with 47.2 per cent paying no attention at all, and 21.1 per cent paying not much attention.

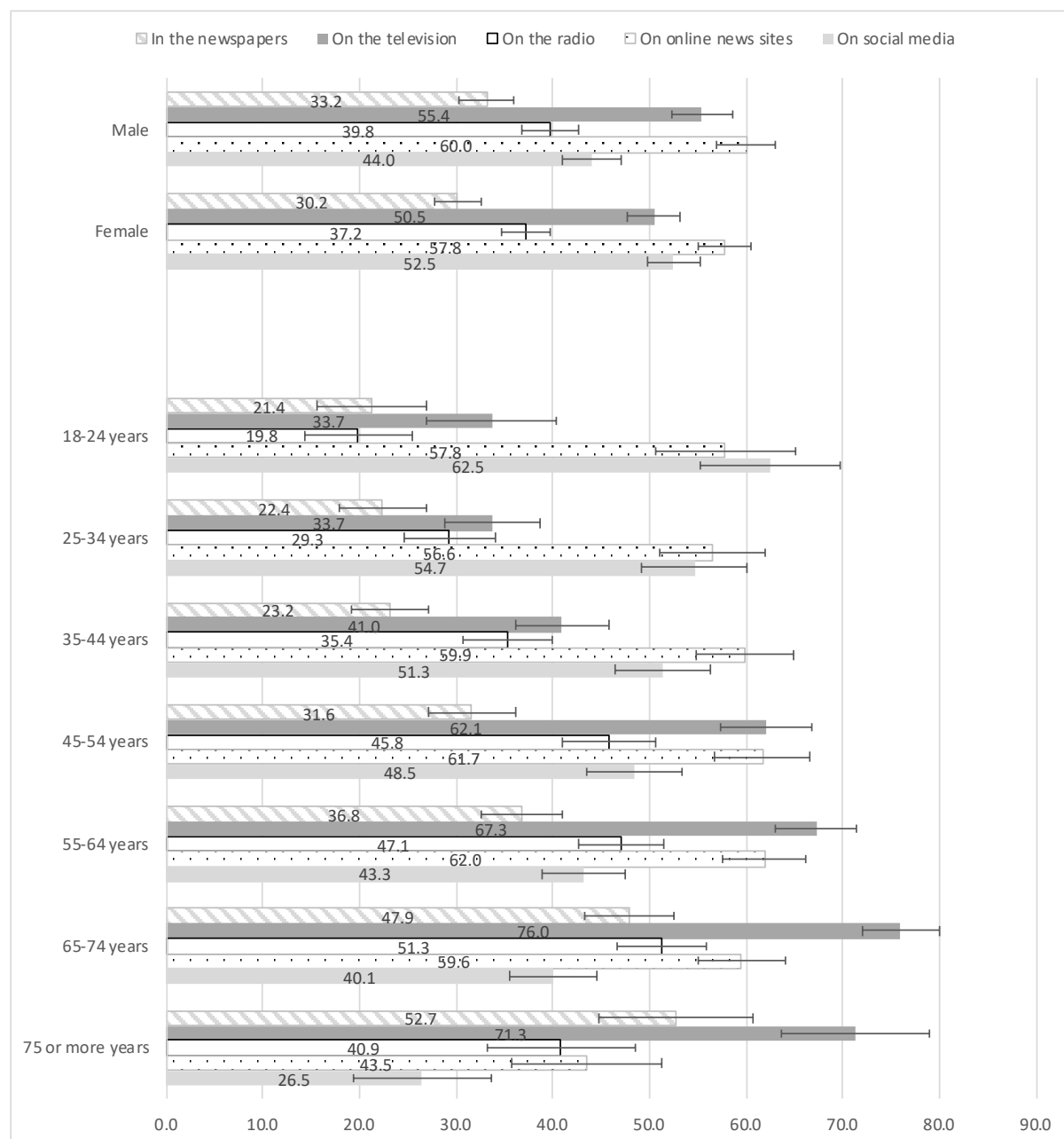
Figure 4.2 Level of attention paid to the voice referendum by media type.



Source: October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

Not surprisingly, engagement with different types of media varied substantially across the population, in particular by age, but to a lesser extent by sex (Figure 4.3). The biggest difference by sex is that females were far more likely to say that they paid some or a good deal of attention to the referendum via social media (52.5 per cent) than males (44.0 per cent). By age, younger Australians were far more likely to pay attention to online news sites and social media, whereas older Australians were more likely to pay attention via television and newspapers.

Figure 4.3 Level of attention paid to the voice referendum by media type, and by age and sex.



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

Even though the attention paid to the referendum was only moderate and for many quite contingent, most Australians still reported that they cared about the outcome. Just prior to asking about people’s ultimate vote, we asked the following question: ‘Would you say you cared a good deal about the outcome of the Referendum or that you did not care very much about the outcome?’ Most Australians (61.5 per cent) said that they cared a good deal. There was only a small minority (7.5 per cent) that said that they did not care at all, with a further 30.9 per cent saying they did not care much.

This was slightly lower again than the 1999 Referendum campaign, when 71 per cent of voters reported that they cared a good deal about the outcome. Combined with the lower percentage

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of Australians that paid attention to this campaign compared to the last referendum, this suggests that an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament was less central to many voters' lives than a republic was.

There is, not surprisingly, a strong relationship between caring about the referendum outcome and paying attention. Of those who said they did not care about the referendum outcome, only 41.0 per cent said that they paid some or a good deal of attention. For those that said they did care about the referendum, on the other hand, 89.9 per cent said that they paid attention.

Given the close relationship between caring about the outcome of the voice referendum and paying close attention, it is not surprising that the predictors are quite similar (Table 4.2). Older Australians, those who speak English only, those that have completed Year 12, and those who live outside the most disadvantaged regions/households were all more likely to say that they cared about the outcome than the rest of the population.

Table 4.2 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with caring a good deal about the outcome of the voice referendum, October 2023

Explanatory variables	M.Effect.	Signif.
Female	0.038	
Aged 18 to 24 years	-0.018	
Aged 25 to 34 years	-0.027	
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.126	***
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.245	***
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.312	***
Aged 75 years plus	0.287	***
Indigenous	-0.029	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.017	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.028	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.132	***
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.163	***
Has a post graduate degree	0.053	
Has an undergraduate degree	0.059	
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.023	
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	-0.089	**
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	-0.066	*
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	-0.041	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	0.006	
Lives outside of a capital city	0.023	
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	-0.057	
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	-0.013	
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	-0.014	
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	0.070	*
Probability of base case	0.553	
Sample size	3,880	

Notes: Probit regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; non-Indigenous; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a post-graduate degree; lives in neither an advantaged or disadvantaged suburb (third quintile); lives in a capital city, lives in a household in the middle income quintile.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

One of the aspects of the debate around the voice referendum was the level of complexity of the change to the constitution. The no campaign, including in the official referendum pamphlet, used the simple slogan – *if you don't know, vote no.*⁸ Prime Minister Anthony

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Albanese attempted to counter this, by arguing that the referendum was not complicated, arguing that ““We are seeking a momentous change – but it is also a very simple one.””⁹ ANUpoll respondents that voted in the referendum were asked in the survey “When you voted in the Referendum, would you say that you knew enough about the issue, or would you have liked to have had more information about it?”

Respondents were somewhat more likely to say that they knew enough (60.1 per cent) than that they didn’t, with the remainder of the sample reasonably evenly split between those who said that they would have liked a lot more information (19.4 per cent) or would have liked a little more information (20.5 per cent). Females were less likely than males to say that they knew enough (56.0 and 64.0 per cent respectively), but there were few other differences by demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

Attention, interest, and knowledge about the referendum were all related to a person’s vote. It is difficult to establish a causal relationship with such attitudinal variables, as it is just as likely that a person’s voting intentions influences their level of attention/care/knowledge as it is that the causal pathway runs in the opposite direction. We will return to this in later section of the paper once we have introduced a greater range of explanatory variables and with our longitudinal data. Table 4.3, however, shows that cross-sectionally and controlling for demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, there was a higher likelihood of a yes vote for those who paid attention to the referendum through online news sites and through social media, as well as those who cared about the result of the referendum and felt that they knew enough about the issue to make a decision.

Table 4.3 Expanded regression model estimates of the factors associated with voice vote, attention and care, October 2023

Explanatory variables	M.Effect.	Signif.
Some or a good deal of attention - In the newspapers	-0.025	
Some or a good deal of attention - On the television	-0.017	
Some or a good deal of attention - On the radio	-0.002	
Some or a good deal of attention - On online news sites	0.045	**
Some or a good deal of attention - On social media	0.038	**
Cared a good deal about the outcome	0.139	***
Knew enough to be able to vote	0.051	***
Female	0.050	***
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.187	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.082	**
Aged 45 to 54 years	-0.014	
Aged 55 to 64 years	-0.037	
Aged 65 to 74 years	-0.028	
Aged 75 years plus	-0.070	**
Indigenous	0.086	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.060	**
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.004	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.056	**
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.103	***
Has a post graduate degree	0.176	***
Has an undergraduate degree	0.116	***
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.020	
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	-0.009	
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	0.016	
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	0.009	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	0.002	
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.046	***
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	-0.039	
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	-0.012	
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	-0.011	
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	0.015	
Probability of base case	0.215	
Sample size	3,461	

Notes: Probit regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; non-Indigenous; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a post-graduate degree; lives in neither an advantaged or disadvantaged suburb (third quintile); lives in a capital city, lives in a household in the middle income quintile.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

In many countries, voter turnout is used to measure interest in an election/referendum (Blais 2006). In Australia, however, the use of compulsory voting means that voter turnout is always very high. We can however, ask respondents how likely they would have been to vote if it had not been compulsory, and use this as a proxy for what voter turnout might have been under such circumstances. Most Australians (63.6 per cent) said they definitely would have voted even if it were not compulsory, with a further 15.7 per cent saying they probably would have. There were only a small minority of voters (3.6 per cent) that said that they definitely would not have voted, with an additional 10.1 per cent saying they probably would not have. The remaining 7.0 per cent said they ‘might, might not’ have voted.

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In the 1999 Republic referendum, 66 per cent of respondents said that they definitely would have voted if voting was not compulsory. By this measure then, the 2023 referendum was not that different to previous votes.

Importantly, yes voters were more likely than no voters to say they would have voted if voting was compulsory – 88.4 per cent compared to 73.1 per cent. Putting this another way, the presence of compulsory voting in Australia likely led to a lower yes vote than would otherwise have been the case. However, even amongst those that said they definitely or probably would have voted if voting was not compulsory, only 44.9 per cent of voters voted yes. So, compulsory voting was a factor in the low yes vote, but it wasn't decisive in terms of the result.

5 Political party and the referendum result

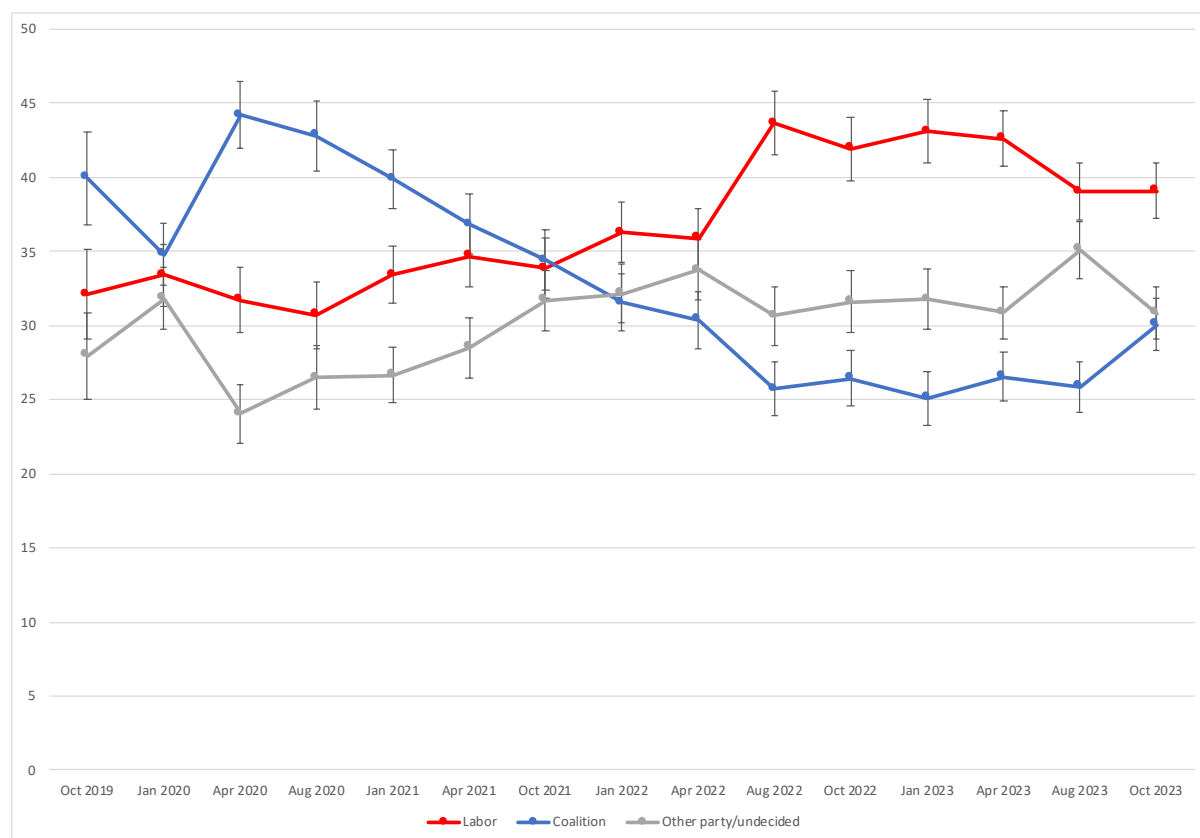
One of the core explanations for the failure of the voice referendum was the lack of bipartisan support. As noted in the introduction, referendums in Australia are highly unlikely to succeed if the two main parties do not actively support the change. This section of the paper confirms that political party affiliation was strongly predictive of the voice outcome.

Before looking at the relationship between political parties and the voice outcome, Figure 5.1 plots voting intentions using ANUpoll data back to October 2019. This is based on a consistent question asked in each of the relevant waves of data collection as follows: “If a federal election for the House of Representatives was held today, which one of the following parties would you vote for?” We group responses into three categories – the Coalition (which includes the Liberal Party, the National Party, and in some jurisdictions the combined Liberal National Party), Labor, and Other party/undecided. The largest party in the latter group is the Greens, but also includes a number of other minor parties, as well as those who do not know who they would vote for.

Leaving aside the longer-term trends, we can see that the outcome of the voice referendum appears to have had no impact on the per cent of people who said that they would vote for Labor, which has remained steady at 39.1 per cent between August and October 2023. The decline in the Labor vote between April and August 2023 could potentially be attributed to the outcome that was already expected at the time or views on how the referendum was being handled. However, that is different to attributing Labor’s October 2023 support to the outcome itself.

Between August and October 2023 there was a large increase in the proportion of people who said that they would vote for the Coalition (from 25.9 to 30.1 per cent) and a corresponding large decline in the per cent who said that they would vote for another party or who were undecided (from 35.1 to 30.8 per cent). These latter two changes could more plausibly be attributed to the voice outcome.

Figure 5.1 Political voting intention by wave, October 2019 to October 2023



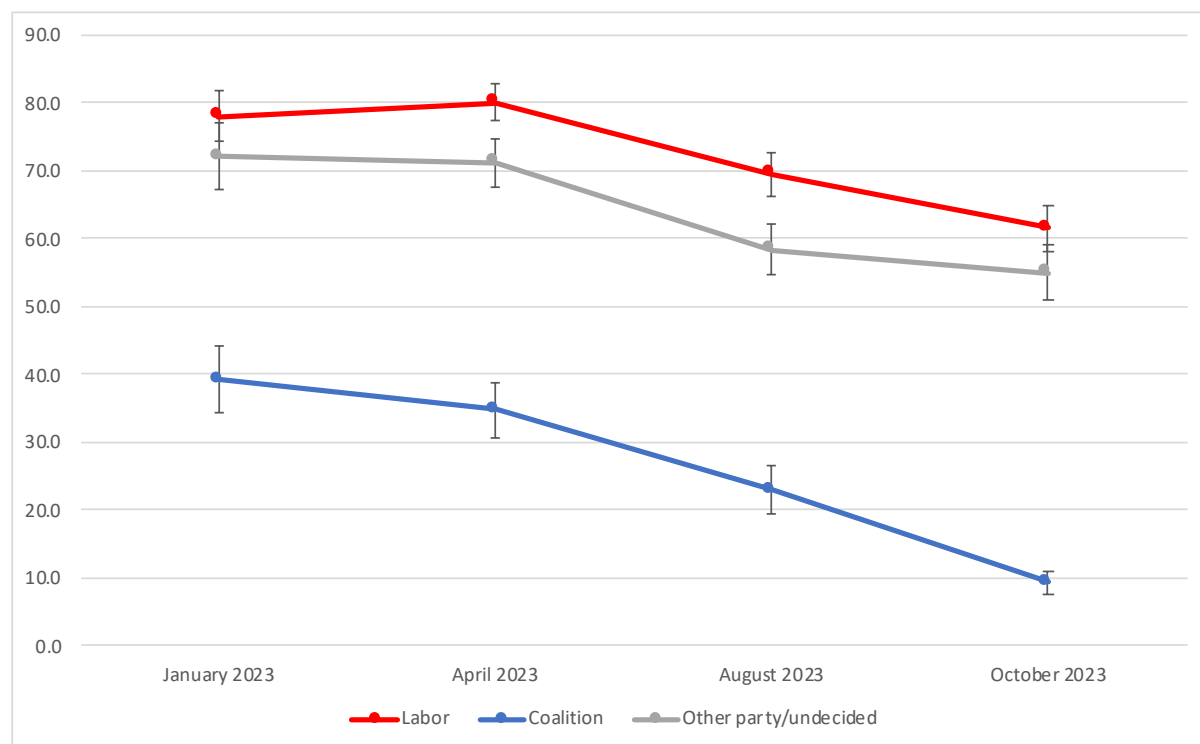
Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll: October 2019; January, April, and August 2020; January, April, and October 2021; January, April, August, and October 2022; January, April, and August 2023; and October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll

There were very large differences in support for the voice across voting intentions, though as Figure 5.2 shows these widened substantially across the year. Looking at the final vote, those that said that they would vote for Labor were the most likely to say that they would vote yes – 61.6 per cent of all those Labor supporters that voted. Minor party/undecided voters were also quite likely to say yes (55.0 per cent), but Coalition voters were very unlikely to vote yes (9.4 per cent).

Looking over the entirety of the year, the yes vote declined much more for those who would have voted for the Coalition than for the two other party groups. The yes vote amongst Coalition voters in October 2023 was roughly one-quarter of what it was in January 2023 (39.2 per cent). There were also significant declines for Labor voters (down from 78.0 per cent in January 2023) and other/undecided voters (down from 72.2 per cent). However, even if there were no declines in the per cent of Labor voters who said that they would vote yes (that is, 78.0 per cent of the October 2023 Labor voters voted yes in the referendum), then we estimate that there would have only been a bare majority of support for the voice (50.2 per cent). This is unlikely to have led to a double-majority with yes voters in Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania unlikely to be in the majority. That is, it was the large decline in the Coalition vote that led to the referendum not passing, rather than the smaller decline amongst Labor voters.

Figure 5.2 Referendum vote/vote intention by political voting intention, January to October 2023



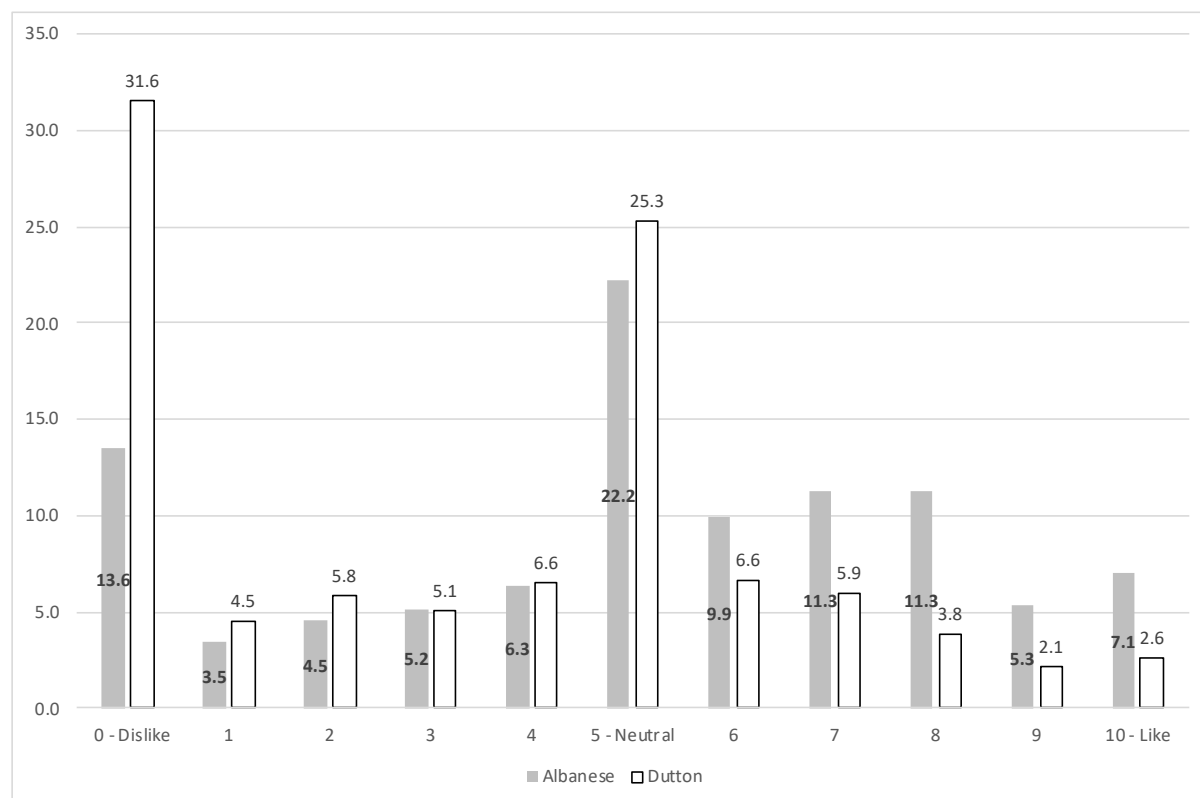
Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll: January, April, and August, and October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll. Only includes those who completed the October 2023 survey and voted in the referendum

Although the leaders of the two main parties were not as central to the referendum campaign as they would be in a normal election, both Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Opposition Leader Peter Dutton featured heavily in making the case for and against the referendum (respectively). Views of the leaders themselves, therefore had the potential to influence people’s votes. Furthermore, given the outcome of the referendum, it is possible that views towards the party leaders were influenced by the referendum process.

Respondents to the survey were asked ‘using a scale from 0 to 10, how much do you like or dislike the following party leaders. If you don't know much about them, you should give them a rating of 5.’ Figure 5.3 shows that even after being on the losing side of a quite comprehensive referendum loss, Australians were much more likely to rate Mr Albanese favourably than Mr Dutton (an average of 5.1 compared to 3.4 respectively). The most common response given towards the latter was 0/10, given by 31.6 per cent of respondents. By comparison, only 13.6 per cent of respondents gave Mr Albanese a score of 0/10. Furthermore, more than half of Australians rate Mr Dutton as less than 5 (53.5 per cent) compared to only around one-third of Australians (33.0 per cent) that rate Mr Albanese that low. Even after the referendum loss, Australians were far more likely to dislike the Opposition Leader than the Prime Minister, despite the former being on the winning side of the campaign, and the latter on the losing side.

Figure 5.3 Likeability of Prime Minister Albanese and Opposition Leader Dutton, October 2023



Source: October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll

Because Mr Dutton was not the leader of the Coalition at the May 2022 election, we do not have time-series data on his likeability. We can, however, compare Mr Albanese’s likeability now to when he became Prime Minister just after winning the May 2022 election (in the ANUpoll/CSES data). Doing so, we can see that there has been a statistically significant decline, from an average of 5.6 just after the election to 5.1 in October 2023. In May 2022, 27.5 per cent of Australians gave Mr Albanese a value of 0 to 4, significantly lower than the 33.0 per cent in October 2023. On the other hand, more than half of May 2022 respondents (53.7 per cent) gave him a value of 6 to 10, much higher than the 44.8 per cent in October 2023. On balance, while it is not possible to attribute that drop to the referendum campaign, there has been a decline in Mr Albanese’s perceived likeability, even if it is still well above that of Mr Dutton.

In the results presented in Table 5.1, we can see that views towards the party leaders not only were strongly associated with a person’s vote (and the change in their vote), but also that this operated independently of and within each of the party voters. We present five models, expanding on those presented in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2. All the models have the October 2023 Referendum vote as their dependent variable. It is the same as the model presented in Table 3.1, but includes variables for the party a person would vote for if an election were held at the time of the survey. In Model 2, we expand the range of independent variables slightly and include whether the respondent gave Mr Albanese and Mr Dutton values of below five or above five (that is, four separate likeability measures). The third and fourth models include similar explanatory variables, but are estimated for Labor and Coalition voters separately (and respectively). The final model includes the same explanatory variables as the first, but is

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estimated for those who would have voted for the voice when asked in January 2023. That is, it looks at the change in the vote through time.

The first model confirms that even controlling for other characteristics, Coalition voters were less likely to have voted for the voice than Labor voters. Reinforcing the results presented in Section 2 using area-level data, this model also shows that minor party voters or those that are undecided are still less likely to have voted yes to the voice than Labor voters, even when other characteristics are controlled for.

Moving onto the second model, the difference between Coalition and Labor voters is still significant, but the marginal effect has declined substantially. Much of the difference between Coalition and Labor voters was due to the views of the party leaders. Furthermore, when we control for views of the party leaders, minor party/undecided voters were more likely to have voted yes than Labor party voters.

Likeability of the leaders was shown to have an independent association, though the association varied somewhat depending on who a person would vote for. Amongst Labor voters, those who liked Mr Albanese (that is, they gave a score of 6 to 10) were more likely to have voted yes than those who were neutral. However, there was no difference between those who disliked Mr Albanese and those who were neutral. For Labor voters, liking or disliking Mr Dutton had a negative and positive association respectively.

For Coalition voters, disliking Mr Albanese had a negative association with the vote (the marginal effect is small, but that is because the probability for the base case is also small). However, for Coalition voters, disliking Mr Albanese did not have a significant association with the vote, but nor did disliking Mr Dutton.

In the final model, which looks at those who would have voted yes for the referendum when asked in January 2023, views on Mr Albanese have a strong association with staying as a yes voter, but views on Mr Dutton have more of a mixed association. Disliking Mr Dutton is strongly associated with staying as a yes voter, but liking Mr Dutton seems to have had no association.

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Table 3.3 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with voice vote, political parties and leaders, October 2023

Explanatory variables	All respondents (reduced model)		All respondents		Labor voters		Coalition voters		Would have voted yes in January	
	M.Effect.	Signif.	M.Effect.	Signif.	M.Effect.	Signif.	M.Effect.	Signif.	M.Effect.	Signif.
Coalition voter	-0.477	***	-0.151	***					-0.105	***
Minor party/undecided voter	-0.081	***	0.085	***					0.074	*
Dislikes Mr Albanese (score 0 to 4)			-0.180	***	-0.092		-0.039	***	-0.151	***
Likes Mr Albanese (score 6 to 10)			0.182	***	0.257	***	0.018		0.172	***
Dislikes Mr Dutton (score 0 to 4)			0.272	***	0.197	***	0.098	***	0.321	***
Likes Mr Dutton (score 6 to 10)			-0.094	***	-0.165	***	-0.012		0.002	
Female	0.058	**	0.050	**	0.034		0.050	***	0.000	
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.230	***	0.199	***	0.234	**	0.027		0.110	
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.081	*	0.052		0.123	*	-0.019		0.113	*
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.045		0.023		0.025		0.032		0.081	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.037		0.011		0.087		0.001		0.059	
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.103	**	0.073	*	0.179	***	0.012		0.136	**
Aged 75 years plus	0.028		-0.007		0.037		-0.008		0.055	
Indigenous	0.053		0.061		0.005		0.253	***	0.029	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.062	*	0.073	**	0.166	***	-0.007		0.048	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.003		0.014		0.025		0.050	*	0.023	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.100	**	-0.062	*	-0.071		-0.026	*	-0.071	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.216	***	-0.125	***	-0.142	**	-0.018		-0.109	**
Has a post graduate degree	0.173	***	0.150	***	0.161	**	0.046		0.166	**
Has an undergraduate degree	0.145	***	0.131	***	0.112	*	0.046		0.119	*
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.043		-0.008		-0.025		-0.002		-0.053	
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	-0.027		-0.018		0.007		0.004		0.018	
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	0.009		-0.003		-0.016		-0.012		0.044	
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	0.054		0.025		0.012		0.040		0.081	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	0.047		0.001		-0.041		0.035		0.030	
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.042		-0.042	*	-0.053		0.017		-0.007	
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	-0.111	***	-0.078	**	-0.151	***	0.001		-0.046	
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	-0.044		-0.016		-0.038		0.011		0.036	
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	-0.014		0.011		-0.038		0.015		0.079	
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	0.062		0.047		0.038		0.039		0.167	***
Probability of base case	0.536		0.247		0.268		0.045		0.199	
Sample size	3,381		3,365		1,418		964		1,276	

Notes: Probit regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; non-Indigenous; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a post-graduate degree; lives in neither an advantaged or disadvantaged suburb (third quintile); lives in a capital city, lives in a household in the middle income quintile.

Analysis of the 2023 Voice Referendum and related attitudes

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: ANUpoll, January and October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

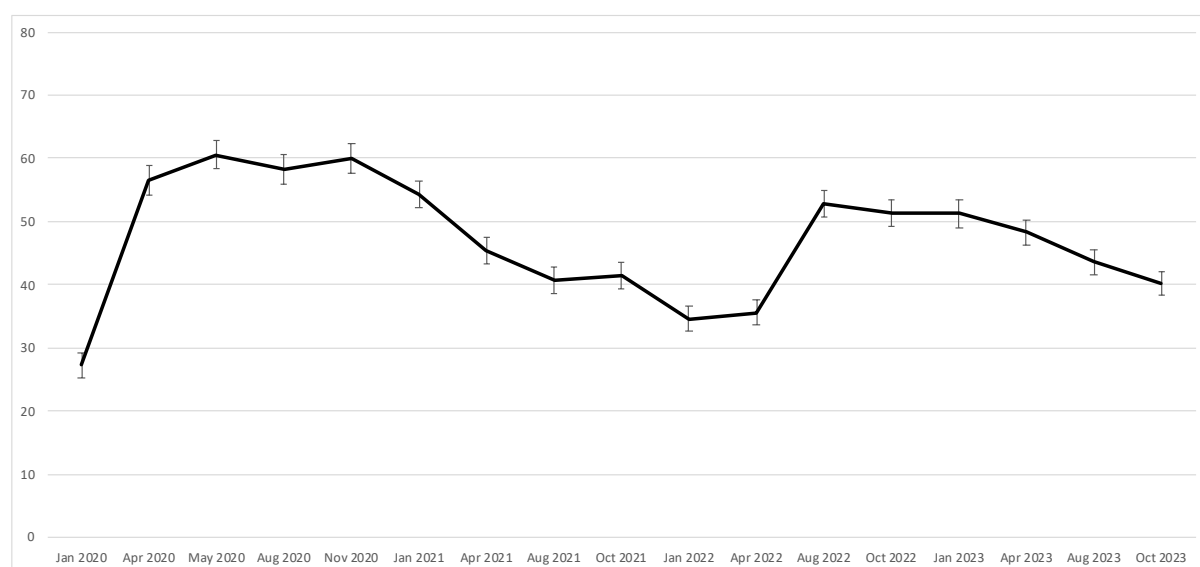
6 Political attitudes and the referendum result

Voting intentions are important, but narrow measures of someone’s political attitudes. Although the political parties took quite clear positions on the voice referendum, there are many other factors that are likely to have influenced a person’s vote, as well as other attitudes that may have been influenced by the outcome or the process of the referendum. In this section, we begin by looking at change through time in some of these attitudes and then relate these changes to the voice outcome.

6.1 Confidence in government

Figure 6.1 gives the per cent of Australians who had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the Federal Government between January 2020 and October 2023. Between January and April 2023, confidence declined from 51.2 per cent to 48.3 per cent, and it declined again from April to August 2023 to 43.6 per cent. Following the conclusion of the referendum, confidence declined again, reaching 40.2 per cent, the lowest value since just prior to the May 2022 election when only 35.6 per cent of Australians had confidence in the then Morrison government.

Figure 6.1 Per cent of Australians who had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the Federal Government in Canberra – January 2020 to October 2023



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll: January, April, May, August, October, and November 2020; January, April, August, October 2021; January, April, August, and October 2022; January, April, and August 2023; and October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll

It is not really possible to attribute the change in confidence to the voice referendum, as there were many other policy debates taking place over the period that may have impacted on confidence in government. To name just a few examples, between January and October 2023 inflation has continued to stay at levels that are quite high by recent historical standards, there was unease amongst segments of the population regarding the government’s response to Hamas’ terrorist attack on Israel on October 7th (with some people thinking the government too pro-Israel, and others too pro-Palestine), and the government made a controversial decision to not allow Qatar Airways to increase flights into Australia. These are all equally plausible explanations for a drop in confidence in the government.

Analysis of the 2023 Voice Referendum and related attitudes

What we can say, however, is that changes in confidence were different depending on how a person ended up voting. If we look at those who voted yes in the referendum, their confidence in government declined from 69.3 per cent in January 2023 to 60.0 per cent in October. This is a statistically significant, and reasonably large decline. However, the decline over the same period for those who ended up voting no was from 37.3 to 23.9 per cent – a much larger decline in absolute terms, and even larger when you consider the low base.

Presenting the data in a slightly different way, those who were not confident in government in January 2023 were far less likely to end up voting for the voice in October 2023 – 21.1 per cent compared to 51.3 per cent for those who were confident. Even more importantly though, over the referendum period, those who ended up voting no lost far more confidence than those who voted yes.

6.2 Satisfaction with democracy

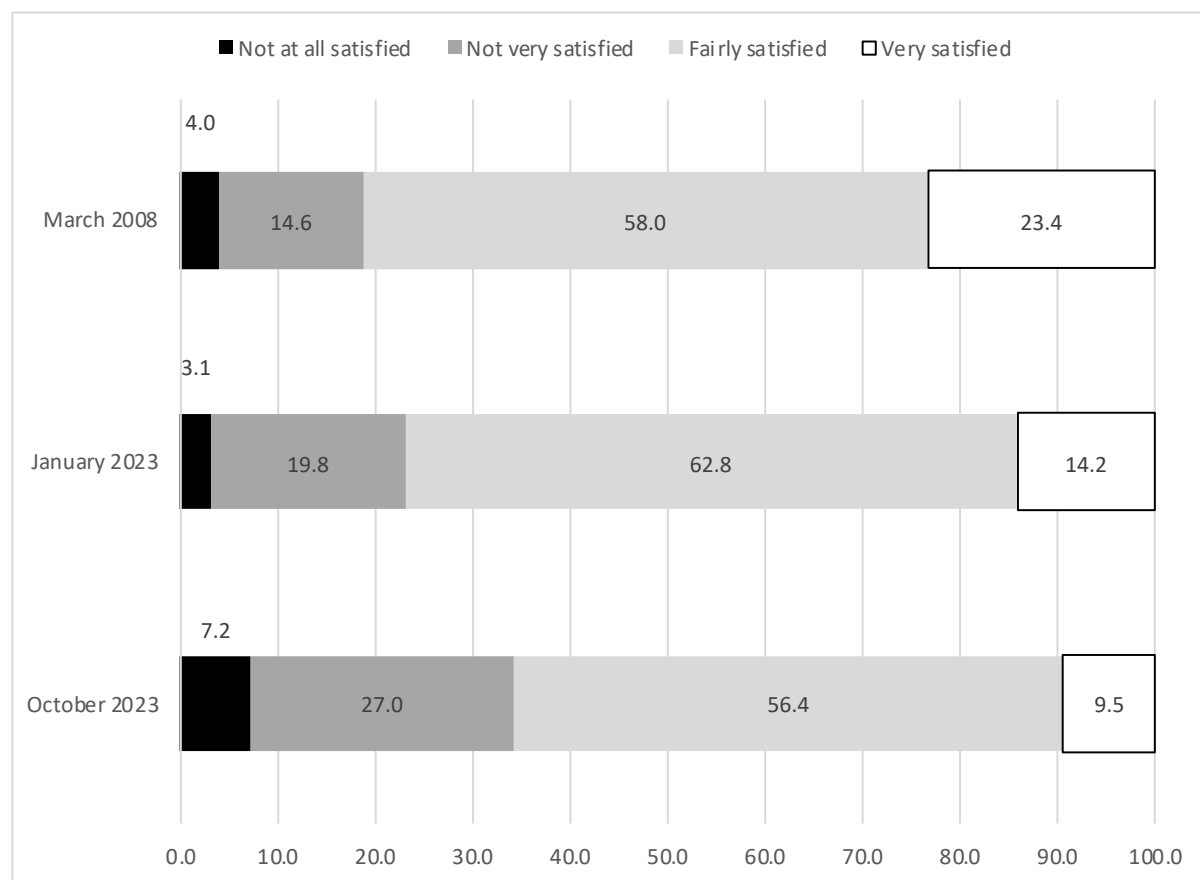
One of the risks of a referendum campaign that loses by quite a large margin is that it undermines people's satisfaction with the way democracy works in the country. For those that were against the proposal, the fact that the campaign happened at all is a sign that their political leaders are out of touch with their view. On the other hand, those that support the campaign and lose are inevitably frustrated that something that they care passionately about has been rejected.

The overall trends in satisfaction with democracy mirror those for confidence in government, but the relationship with voice-vote was quite different. Respondents to the October 2023 ANUpoll were asked 'On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia?' This question was also asked in the March 2008 ANUpoll, as well as the January 2023 ANUpoll, with the same response options.

Over the longer term (March 2008 to the start of the year) there has been a marked decline in the per cent of Australians who were very satisfied in democracy (from 23.4 per cent in 2008 to 14.2 per cent in 2023) (Figure 6.2). However, there has not been a corresponding increase at the other extreme (there was actually a decline from 4.0 to 3.1 per cent 'not at all satisfied', though this difference is not statistically significant), with increases instead found in the middle two categories. On balance though, in early 2023 in Australia 77.0 per cent of adults were fairly or very satisfied, compared to 81.4 per cent in 2008.

For whatever reason though, the referendum period appears to have coincided with and acceleration in the decline in satisfaction with democracy. From January to October 2023, there was a more than doubling in the per cent of Australians who were not at all satisfied (to 7.2 per cent), a small increase in those who were not very satisfied (to 27.0 per cent), and a small decline in those who were fairly satisfied (to 56.4 per cent). Furthermore, there was an additional decline to 9.5 per cent in the per cent of Australians who were very satisfied with democracy.

Figure 6.2 Long-term change in satisfaction with democracy, March 2008, January 2023, and October 2023



Source: ANUpoll: March 2008 and January 2023, October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll

From March 2008 to January 2023, there was only a 4.3 percentage point drop in the share of Australians who were fairly or very satisfied with democracy. However, in only 9 months from January to October 2023 there has been a further drop by 11.5 percentage points. Focusing on our longitudinal sample, we have observed a much larger decline amongst those who voted yes during the referendum – 85.3 to 72.2 per cent – compared to those who voted no – 71.8 to 67.5 per cent.

There are a number of ways to interpret the differential decline in satisfaction with democracy. The most cynical is that yes voters are not becoming less satisfied with the structure of democracy in Australia, but with the outcomes of the democratic process. An alternative interpretation, and one given by many commentators after the vote (Twomey, Williams) was that the result highlighted the difficulty in obtaining a change to the constitution and the ease with which opponents to change could convince the voting public.

6.3 Left and right-wing leanings in Australia

Because the parties that was most strongly against the voice referendum were on the right or centre-right of politics (the Liberal Party, the Nationals, and One Nation), and the parties most strongly in favour of the voice on the left or centre-left (the Greens and Labor), many have interpreted the defeat of the referendum as a movement to the right of the Australian population, at least since the last election when the Coalition won the fewest number of seats in generations. That is, one interpretation of the referendum result is that ‘the project of progressive politics in Australia, in fact, remains brittle.’¹⁰ However, that is not supported by

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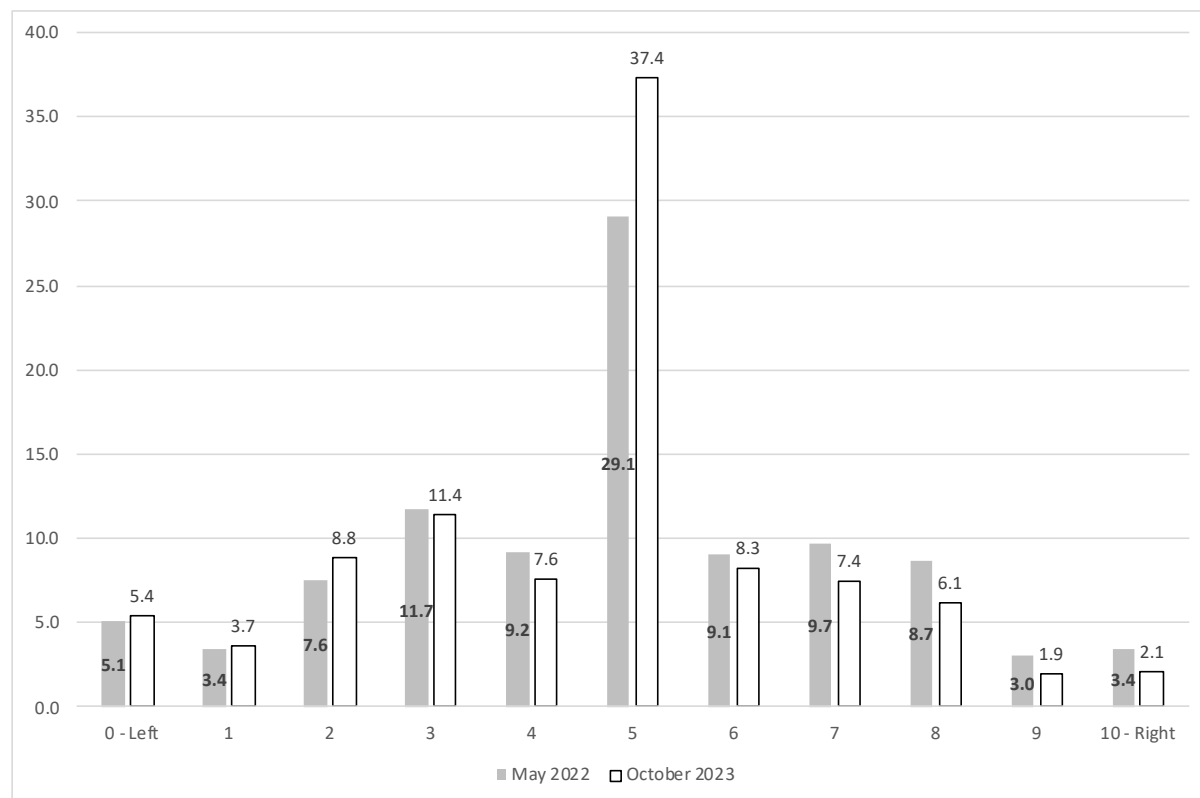
the ANUpoll data, especially when compared to the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)/ANUpoll survey that took place after the May 2022 election.

In that survey, which was also undertaken on the ANU sample of the Life in Australia panel, respondents were asked 'In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right... Where would you place yourself on this scale?' In that survey (Figure 6.3), the mean value was 4.9, with 37.0 per cent of people giving a value between 0 and 4, 33.9 per cent a value between 6 and 10, and 29.1 per cent of Australians placing themselves in the centre.

In the October 2023 survey, when we asked the same question, the mean value was 4.6, a statistically significant decline. After the voice referendum, 37.4 per cent placed themselves at the centre, and there was no real change in the per cent of people who placed themselves to the left (down to 36.8 per cent). However, there was a large decline in the per cent of people who placed themselves to the right of centre, down to 25.8 per cent, with declines for every value to the right of the midpoint.

It is not possible to attribute the change from just after the election to just after the referendum to the referendum itself. There are likely to have been many other factors that influence whether or not a person sees themselves as to the left, in the centre, or to the right. However, there is no evidence that the defeat of the voice referendum reflects a movement to the right of the Australian population, and strong evidence that if anything Australians have moved themselves further to the left or at least to the centre over the period since the last election.

Figure 6.3 Self-identified point on the left-right distribution, May 2022 and October 2023



Source: May 2022 CSES/ANUpoll, and October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll

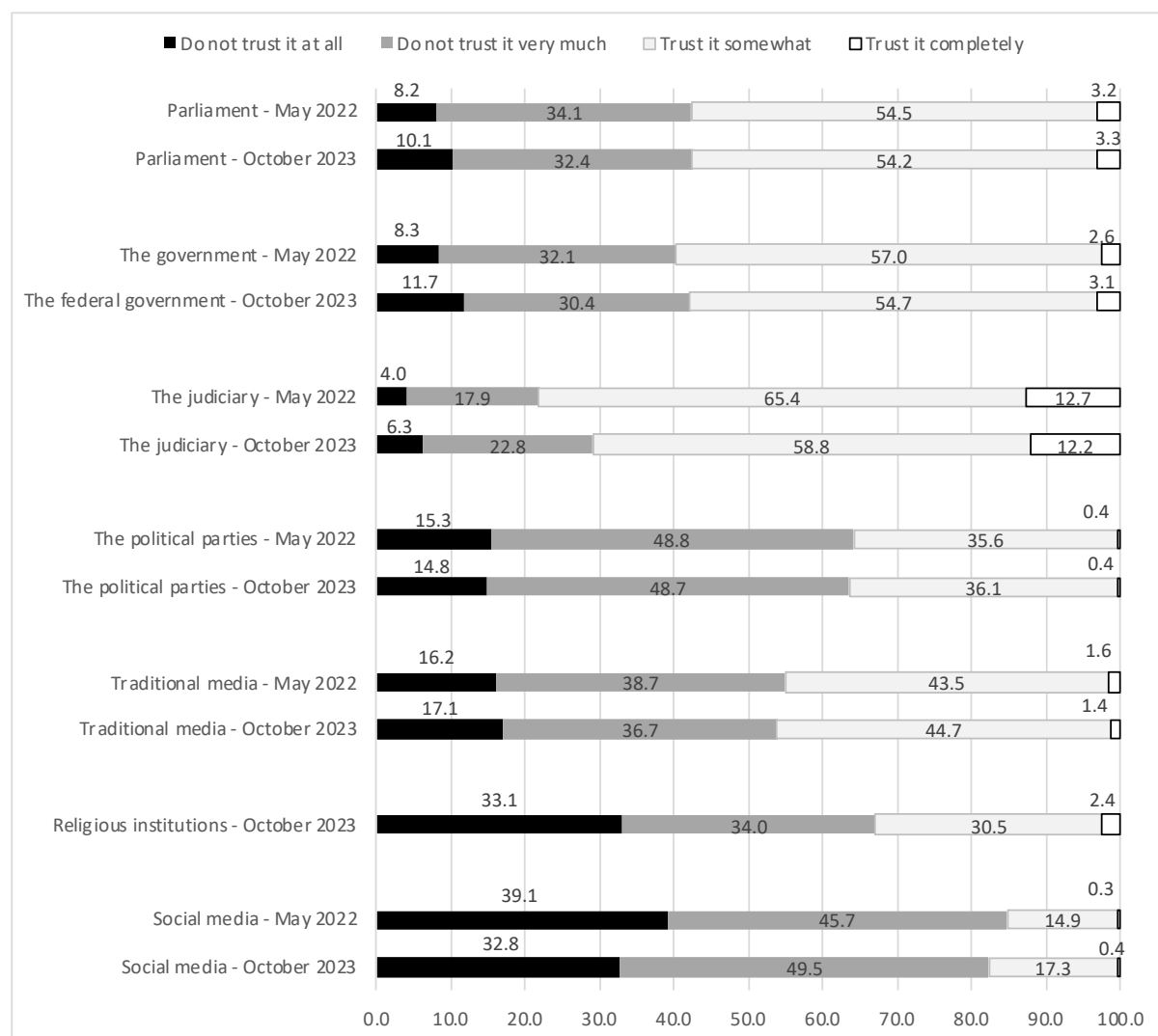
6.4 Trust in institutions

In addition to confidence in government (which we ask at the start of every ANUpoll), in October 2023 we asked respondents about their level of trust in seven important institutions, with four possible response options – Do not trust it at all; Do not trust it very much; Trust it somewhat; and Trust it completely. We asked about six of these institutions in May 2022, and Figure 6.4 gives the level and change through time in this trust (as well as one time-point for trust in religious institutions).

The most trusted institution in Australia (of the seven asked about in October 2023) is the judiciary, with 70.9 per cent of Australians saying that they trust it somewhat or trust it completely. However, the judiciary is the only institution that experienced a statistically significant (and substantial) decline in trust from just after the 2022 federal election to just after the referendum (down from 78.2 per cent in May 2022). It is beyond the scope of this paper to identify all the potential causes of this decline in trust. However, it is worth keeping in mind that current and former members of the judiciary and people with legal training featured heavily in the debate about constitutional recognition (for example, the former Chief Justice Robert French for the yes campaign).

There was one institution that experienced a small increase in trust between May 2022 and October 2023 – social media. This is particular the case at the bottom of the distribution, with 39.1 per cent of Australians saying that they did not trust social media at all in May 2022, declining to 32.8 per cent in October 2023. There was a smaller, but still important change in the per cent of Australians who trusted social media somewhat – from 14.9 per cent in October 2022 to 17.3 per cent in October 2023.

Figure 6.4 Level of trust in key institutions, May 2022 and October 2023



Source: May 2022 CSES/ANUpoll, and October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll

6.5 Using political attitudes to explain the voice vote

Left/right affiliation and trust in institutions is strongly predictive of someone’s voice vote. In Table 6.1 we present our third model on the voice vote, this time with two binary variables for whether or not someone identifies as being to the left of centre, or the to the right of centre (the base case is someone who gave a value of 5 in the left/right question). We also have additional binary variable for whether or not someone trusted somewhat or trusted completely each of the institutions, with the omitted group those who did not trust any of the institutions.

Given the way the debate took place and particularly the discussion at the end of the campaign period, it is not surprising that those who identified as being left of centre were more likely to vote yes and those that were right of centre were more likely to vote no. However, that need not have been the case, and one of the more prominent voice architects Noel Pearson consistently framed the voice proposal as a conservative one in the 2022 Boyer Lectures.

There were many on the far-left including Senator Lidia Thorpe formerly of the Greens who campaigned against the voice because it did not go far enough or that it was tokenistic. Senator Thorpe, in her address to the National Press Club¹¹ stated that “We will continue to fight for

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treaty, we will continue to fight to have our sovereignty acknowledged in this country. I don't think a yes or no result is going to make any difference ... I think even with a yes vote outcome then it's still a denial of what the Blak sovereign movement is about and it's hand-on-heart do-gooders who think they know what's best for us ... So that's a form of racism as well."

The regression analysis, and averages across the left-right distribution suggest that the arguments made by Pearson were unable to convince conservatives to vote yes, and the arguments by Thorpe were unable to convince those on the left to vote no. Specifically, for those who gave a value of 0 to 4, 79.3 per cent voted yes, and even those who most strongly self-identified as being to the left were more likely to vote yes than those in the centre or those to the right. As an example, 91.6 per cent of those who gave a value of zero or one on the left/right scale voted yes.

Very few of those that gave a value of 6 to 10 on the left/right divide voted yes (only 13.5 per cent). What is perhaps a little surprising though, and may explain the overall low vote for the referendum, is that only 26.2 per cent of those that gave a value of 5 (i.e., they are exactly in the centre) voted yes. The Yes campaign was always likely to keep the left-wing voters, and always unlikely to persuade right-wing ones. What was unclear was how those in the centre would vote. After the referendum, it is clear that they voted no.

Trust in institutions also had an association, although not for all institutions and not always in a positive direction. There was no association with trust in Parliament, political parties, or traditional media. Those who have a high level of trust in the federal government specifically though, are far more likely to have voted yes. In addition though, those who have trust in the judiciary are more likely to have voted yes. This is perhaps not surprising because one of the arguments against the voice is that it would lead to 'judicial activism.'

Trust in two of the institutions were negatively associated with voting yes. Controlling for other factors, those who had trust in religious institutions or social media were less likely to vote yes than those who did not have trust in these institutions. The first of these findings is interesting because many religious organisations strongly backed the voice and encouraged their members to vote yes. The finding that trust in social media is strongly negatively associated with vote for the voice is interesting in a different way, remembering back to Section 4 which showed that almost half of Australians reported that they paid some or a good deal of attention to social media specifically when it came to the voice.

Table 6.1 Expanded regression model estimates of the factors associated with voice vote, trust and political position, October 2023

Explanatory variables	M.Effect.	Signif.
Identifies as being left of centre	0.436	***
Identifies as being right of centre	-0.108	***
Trust in parliament	-0.010	
Trust in the federal government	0.202	***
Trust in the judiciary	0.077	***
Trust in political parties	-0.019	
Trust in traditional news media	0.016	
Trust in Religious institutions	-0.068	***
Trust in social media	-0.082	***
Female	0.046	**
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.095	**
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.029	
Aged 45 to 54 years	-0.003	
Aged 55 to 64 years	-0.024	
Aged 65 to 74 years	-0.030	
Aged 75 years plus	-0.072	**
Indigenous	0.078	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.044	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.018	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.035	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.074	**
Has a post graduate degree	0.127	***
Has an undergraduate degree	0.086	***
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.013	
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	-0.022	
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	0.002	
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	-0.013	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	-0.025	
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.045	**
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	-0.027	
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	0.002	
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	-0.001	
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	0.020	
Probability of base case	0.185	
Sample size	3,415	

Notes: Probit regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; non-Indigenous; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a post-graduate degree; lives in neither an advantaged or disadvantaged suburb (third quintile); lives in a capital city, lives in a household in the middle income quintile.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

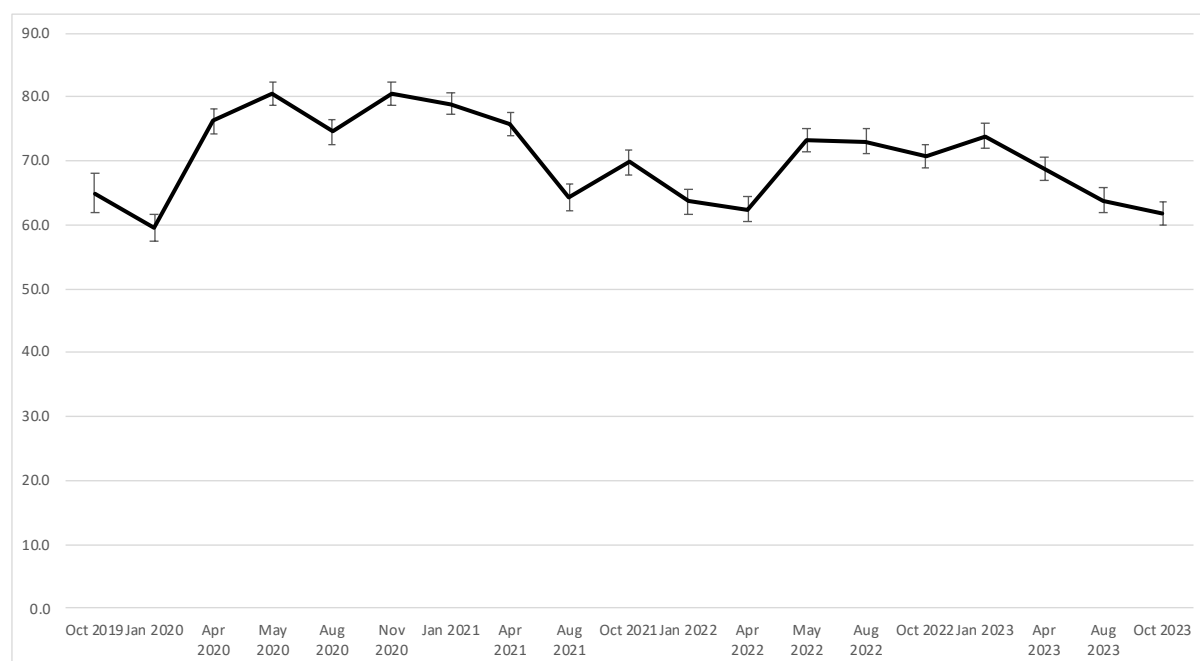
7 Wellbeing and the voice vote

7.1 Satisfaction with direction of the country

At the start of each ANUpoll, respondents are asked how satisfied they are with the direction of the country. One of the claims made about the referendum is that it led to serious division within the country and therefore we might expect that satisfaction would decline in the final months of the campaign. There does not appear to be much evidence of this within the data though.

Combining those who were satisfied or very satisfied with the direction of the country (Figure 7.1), the level of satisfaction in October 2023 was slightly below the level of satisfaction in August of that year, but the difference was not significantly different (p -value = 0.112). It is true that after January 2023, satisfaction with the direction of the country declined quite precipitously, down from 73.9 per cent at the start of the year to 61.7 per cent by October. This is similar to the level of satisfaction just prior to the May 2022 election (62.4 per cent), and not much above the low observed over the last four years of 59.5 per cent during the black summer bushfire crisis. However, this decline over the year is as likely to be attributed to other factors, including the financial situation in the country (Biddle and Gray 2023). To be a little more circumspect, it may have been the case that the referendum campaign led to a decline in satisfaction, but it doesn't appear that in aggregate the result itself did.

Figure 7.1 Per cent of Australians who were satisfied or very satisfied with the direction of the country – October 2019 to October 2023.



Notes: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll: October 2019; January, April, May, August, November 2020; January, April, August, October 2021; January, April, May, August and October 2022; January, April, and August 2023; October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

The voice result may not have led to a significant decline in satisfaction with the direction of the country in aggregate terms, but there is some evidence that it had a different impact depending on a person's vote. For those who voted yes, there was a decline from 69.3 per cent in August 2023 to 61.5 per cent in October 2023. However, for those that voted no, there was a small (but not statistically significant) increase from 57.7 to 60.8 per cent.

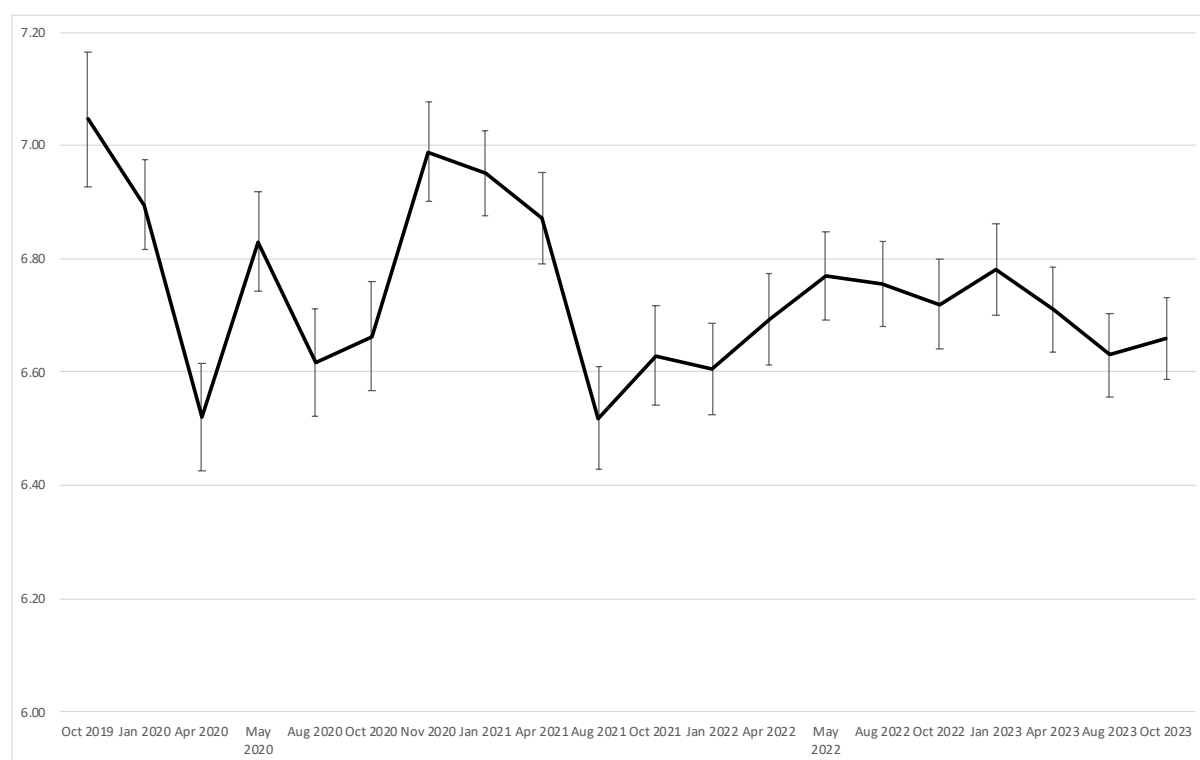
7.2 Life satisfaction and psychological distress

Changes in life satisfaction are similar, though in some ways even more muted than the changes in satisfaction with the direction of the country. Life satisfaction has been measured consistently in ANUpoll across the COVID-19 period, and in each wave including October 2023 respondents have been asked:

‘The following question asks how satisfied you feel about life in general, on a scale from 0 to 10. Zero means you feel ‘not at all satisfied’ and 10 means ‘completely satisfied’. Overall, how satisfied are you with life as a whole these days?’

Figure 7.2 shows that levels of life satisfaction were very similar in October 2023 (6.66) compared to August 2023 (6.63). What’s more, neither the slight increase in life satisfaction for those who voted no (from 6.63 to 6.68) or the slight decrease for those that voted yes (6.74 to 6.68) were statistically significant.

Figure 7.2 Life satisfaction, October 2019 to October 2023



Notes: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUPoll: October 2019; January, April, May, October and November 2020; January, April, August and October 2021; January, April, May, August and October 2022; January, April, and August 2023; and October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

The final variable that we use to capture broad wellbeing across the country is the average level of psychological distress. All of the waves of the COVID-19 Impact Monitoring surveys (i.e., since April 2020) have measured mental health using the Kessler (K6) module (Kessler et al. 2002) and we have continued to ask these questions throughout 2023. Although the K6 module was not asked just prior to the pandemic in the January and February surveys, comparable data is available from the Life in Australia™ panel for February 2017.

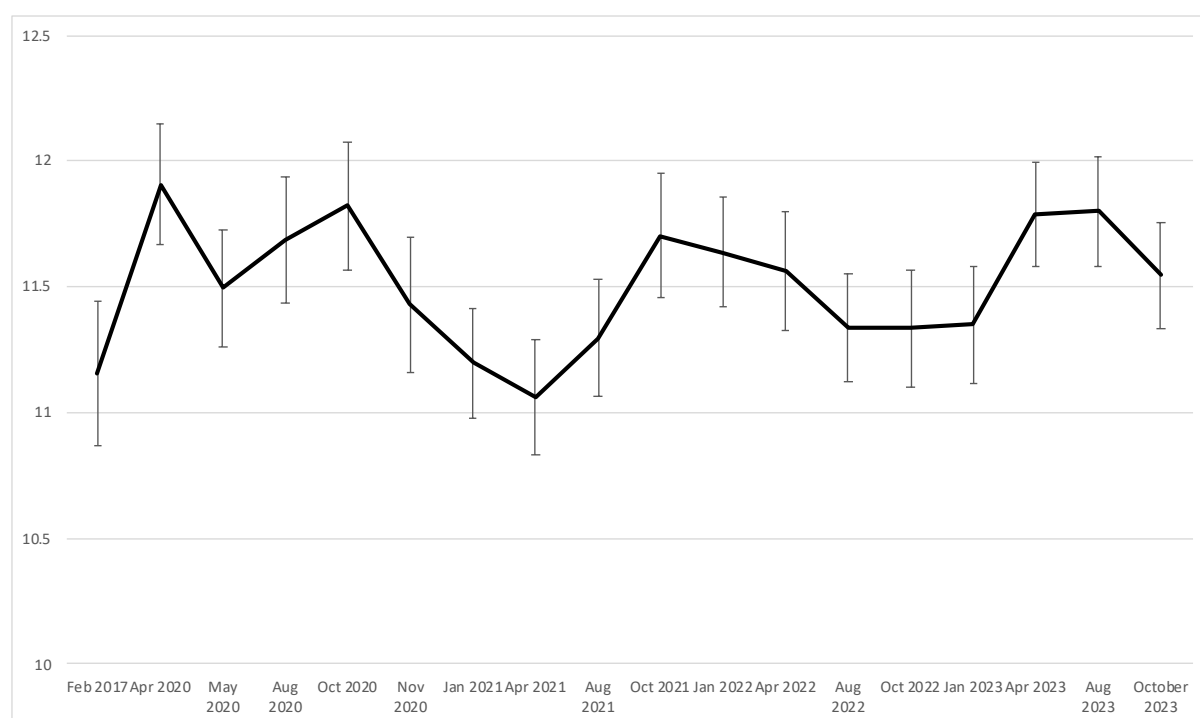
The K6 questions ask the respondent how often in the last four weeks they felt: ‘nervous’; ‘hopeless’; ‘restless or fidgety’; ‘so depressed that nothing could cheer you up’; ‘that

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everything was an effort'; and 'worthless'. There were five response categories, from "none of the time" to "all the time", with values ranging from 1 through 5. Respondents who score highly on this measure are considered to be at risk of a serious mental illness (other than a substance use disorder). It is important to recognise that while the K6 screens for the risk of serious mental illness, it is not a clinical diagnostic measure.

The K6 items can be summed to produce an index, with potential values ranging from 6 to 30 with higher values indicating higher levels of psychological distress. Figure 7.3 shows that there was not a statistically significant increase in psychological distress between August and October 2023. Rather, there was a slight decline in psychological distress (from 11.80 to 11.54), though the difference was only just statistically significant at the 10 per cent level of significance (p -value = 0.099). Furthermore, the change over the period was of a very similar magnitude for those who voted no (11.03 to 10.78) and those that voted yes (11.84 to 11.65).

Figure 7.3 Psychological distress (K6), February to October 2023



Notes: The "whiskers" on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll: February 2017; April, May, August, October and November 2020; January, April, August and October 2021; January, April, August and October 2022; January, April, August, and October 2023.

7.3 Financial stress

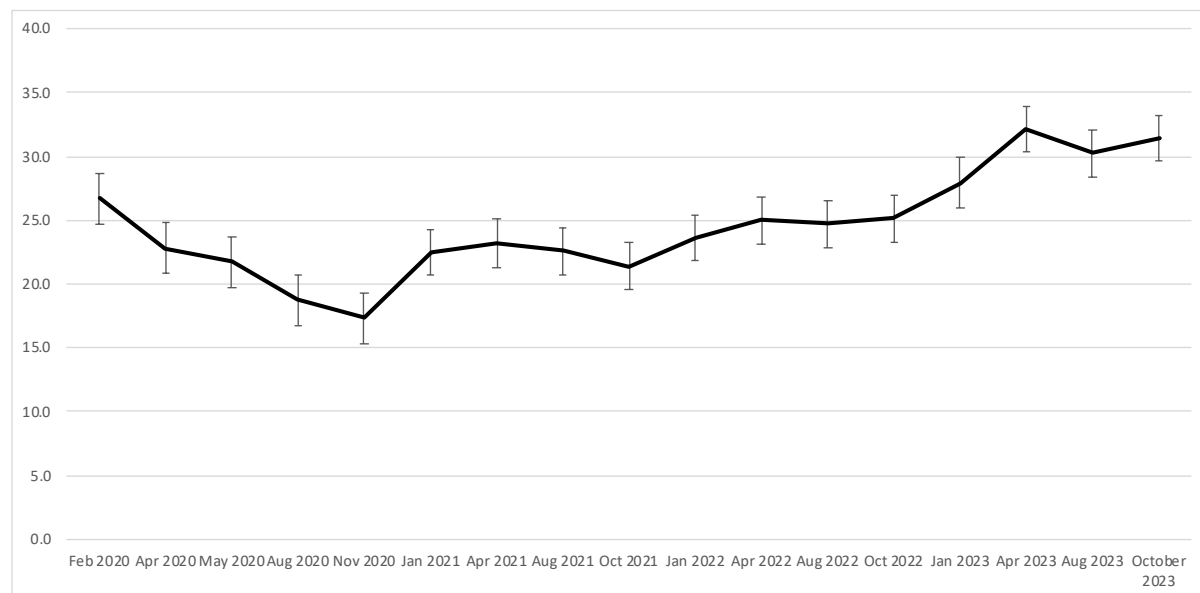
Separate from the voice, one of the potential causes of low life satisfaction and high levels of psychological distress (relative to October 2019 and February 2017 respectively) is the inflationary environment and high levels of financial stress that people have been experiencing since at least the start of the year. The key measure of financial stress that we have been tracking as part of ANUpoll since prior to the pandemic relates to whether the person's household income is adequate to meet their needs. Respondents were given four potential descriptions and asked to choose which comes closest to how they feel about their income nowadays: living comfortably; coping; finding it difficult; or finding it very difficult.

In October 2023, it is estimated that a little under one-quarter (22.7 per cent) of Australians were living comfortably on their present income, almost half (45.9 per cent) were coping, a

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little over one-in-five (21.7 per cent) were finding it difficult and about one-in-ten (9.7 per cent) were finding it very difficult. Figure 7.4 shows the proportion of the population finding it difficult or very difficult on their current income since the start of 2020, highlighting an elevated level of financial stress since April 2023.

Figure 7.4 Per cent of Australians finding it difficult or very difficult on their current income, February 2020 to August 2023



Notes: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: Australian Social Survey International-ESS, February 2020. ANUpoll: April, May, August and November 2020; January, April, August and October 2021; January, April, August and October 2022; January, April, and August 2023; and October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

Both before and after the referendum, it has been claimed by many that the so-called cost of living crisis was a factor in explaining the voice outcome. That is, because people were focused on their own financial concerns, they were less inclined to support a change to the constitution that would result in benefits to one group over another, and that people were angry with the government for focusing on what is seen as a niche issue when more pressing issues are being ignored. For example, Tony Barry from consulting firm RedBridge Group concluded immediately after the referendum that “I think it is pretty clear patterns about income earning and its impact on the vote, especially in the cost-of-living crisis where it's really hard to communicate through that prism”.¹²

If that was the case, then we would expect that those who were experiencing financial stress would be significantly less likely to have voted no. However, there is not very strong evidence for this in the data. When we re-run the model from Table 3.1 and include the financial stress measure from Figure 7.4, we do not find a significant difference between those who were experiencing financial stress and those who were not, controlling for other characteristics (p-value = 0.143). The cost-of-living crisis may well have been a small part of the reason for why some people were more likely to vote no. But the data doesn't suggest it was one of the dominant reasons.

8 Views on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues

It is natural to make conclusions about attitudes towards broader issues related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians based on the outcome of the referendum. Those who advocated for a no vote may well think that it signals that Australians think the pendulum has swung too far. Writing after the vote, former Prime Minister Tony Abbott stated in a column for the Australian that¹³:

Meanwhile, if the people's vote is to be respected, it should mean abandoning, or at least scaling back, recent concessions to separatism: such as flying the Aboriginal flag co-equally with the national one (as if Australia is a country of two nations) and the routine acknowledgement of country by all speakers at official events (as if those whose ancestry here stretches beyond 1788 are more Australian than everyone else).

Perhaps more cautiously, but still based on the result of the referendum, current Coalition Senator and prominent Indigenous no campaigner Jacinta Nampijinpa Price argued in the same paper¹⁴ that 'It [the no vote] was an affirmation of every Australian's equal right to be heard, of every Australian's equal right to have a say – of every Australian's equal right to a voice.'

On the other side of the debate, those who advocated strongly for a yes vote may think that the vote was a rejection of many other positions that they hold dear, and even a rejection of them as individuals. For example, in an open letter to the Prime Minister and other parliamentarians,¹⁵ a large number of (unsigned) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians made clear that they felt that the vote was a 'repudiation of our peoples and the rejection of our efforts to pursue reconciliation in good faith,' that 'the majority of non-Indigenous voting Australians have rejected recognition in the Australian Constitution,' and that 'Australia chose to make itself less liberal and less democratic.'

Those feelings and sentiments (both from no and yes supporters) are no doubt genuinely held. However, there is a real risk of reading too much into a single vote on a very specific and narrow question about a Constitutionally enshrined Voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. All we can be really sure about after the vote has been counted is what per cent of enrolled voters answered yes, what per cent answered no, the number of informal votes, and quite broadly where those people lived. Surveys like the one discussed in this paper can give more information about the individual-level characteristics of those that voted yes or no. However, without asking questions directly about people's views towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, it is not really possible to infer what those views are, let alone whether those views have changed during or because of the campaign.

8.1 Attitudes towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues

At the end of the survey, respondents to the October 2023 ANUpoll were asked about their views towards a range of issues related to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. These questions were taken either from previous versions of ANUpoll (Gray and Sanders 2015), or the Reconciliation Barometer (RB),¹⁶ which according to Reconciliation Australia which funds the survey 'is a national research survey – conducted every two years – that looks at the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians, and how perceptions affect progress towards reconciliation.'

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The methods for these surveys (particularly the sampling and particularly the RB) are somewhat different to the October 2023 ANUpoll. Comparisons across those surveys should therefore be made with some caution.

It is also important to note that reporting the per cent of Australians that hold that view is not in any way an endorsement of those views, even if those views are held by a majority of the population. Nonetheless, understanding those views and the relationship with the voice outcome is vitally important for future policies towards reconciliation, Closing the Gap, and other related policies.

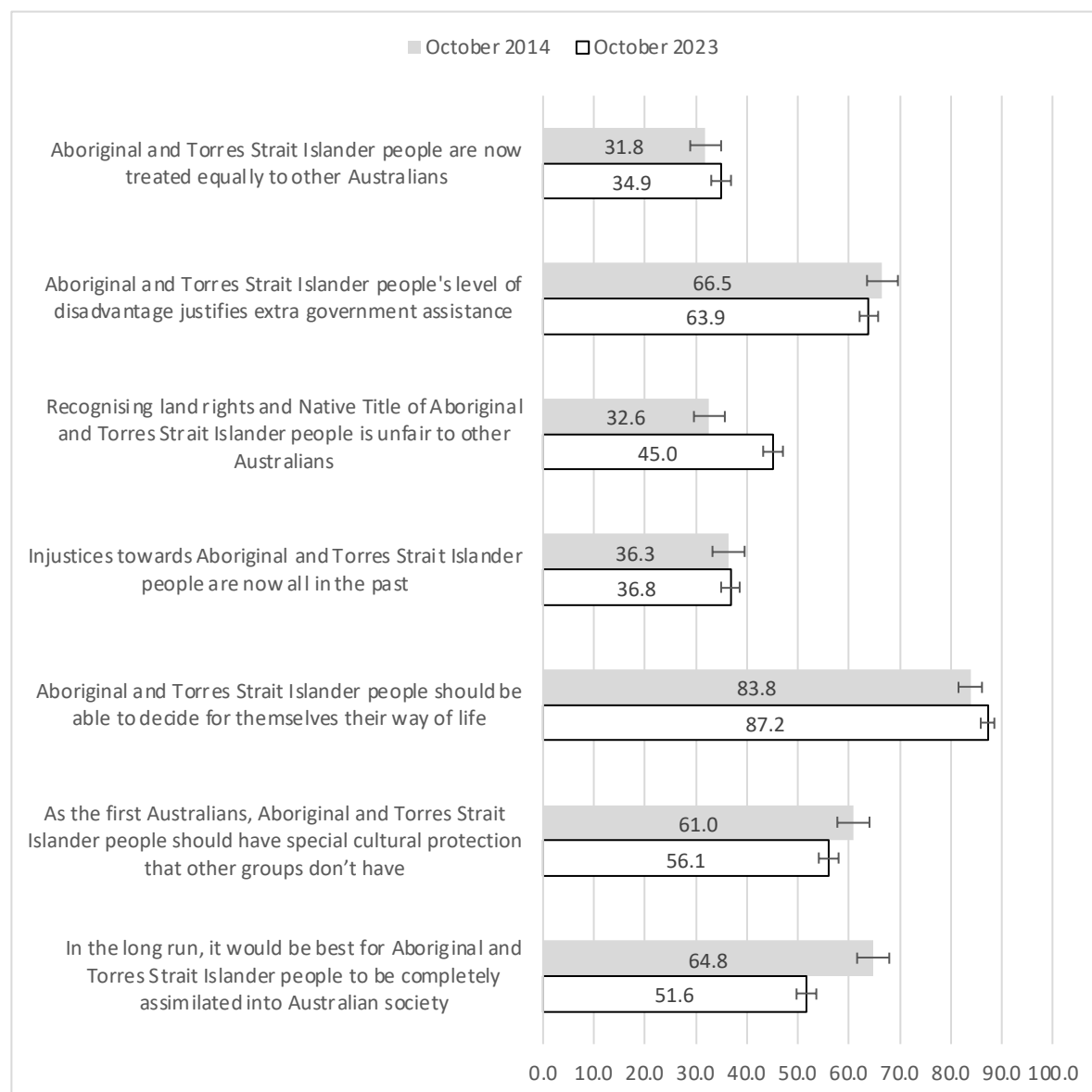
Based on questions from the October 2014 ANUpoll,¹⁷ respondents were asked “Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the situation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia today?”. Figure 8.1 gives the per cent of respondents that agreed or strongly agreed, in each year.

There has been some shifting in views over the years, but not always in a consistent direction. In some ways the data presented in Figure 8.1 shows an evolving view of the general Australian population, rather than a necessarily more positive or negative view. Australians are now more likely to think that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are treated equally to other Australians (34.9 per cent compared to 31.8 per cent in 2014) and that recognising land rights and Native Title of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is unfair to other Australians (45.0 per cent compared to 32.6 per cent). These views are much closer to those held by proponents of the no case than the yes case, but are held by less than half of the population. Furthermore, there was a decline in the per cent of Australians that agreed or strongly agreed and that as the first Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should have special cultural protection that other groups don't have (56.1 per cent compared to 61.0 per cent), a trend that aligns more closely with the views of the no campaign.

Australians are more likely to think that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be able to decide for themselves about their way of life (87.2 per cent compared to 83.8 per cent), but less likely to think that in the long run it would be best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be completely assimilated in Australian society (51.6 per cent compared to 64.6 per cent). These views are closer to the yes campaign than the no campaign.

Some views have not changed though in terms of the extent to which they are held by the Australian population. There has been minimal change in the per cent of Australians that think that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's level of disadvantage justifies extra government assistance (63.9 per cent in 2023 and 66.5 per cent in 2014), Injustices towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are now all in the past (36.8 per cent compared to 36.3 per cent).

Figure 8.1 Level of agreement with statements about the situation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.



Notes: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: October 2014 ANUpoll and October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

In a follow up module, mostly based on questions from the RB but also using some new questions, respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed about a slightly broader set of statements. The responses (in Figure 8.2) indicate very little support (8.3 per cent) for the view that non-Indigenous Australians are superior to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, with less than one-in-ten Australians supporting what would historically have been treated as a core racist belief, and a view that was likely held by a much larger per cent of non-Indigenous Australians throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

By contrast to those negative views (held by a small number of Australians), the vast majority (79.1 per cent) of Australians feel proud of First Nations cultures. This is quite similar to the 89.1 per cent of Australians that feel proud of the country’s multiculturalism, both of which are more than the 69.0 per cent that feel proud of British/European cultures, and

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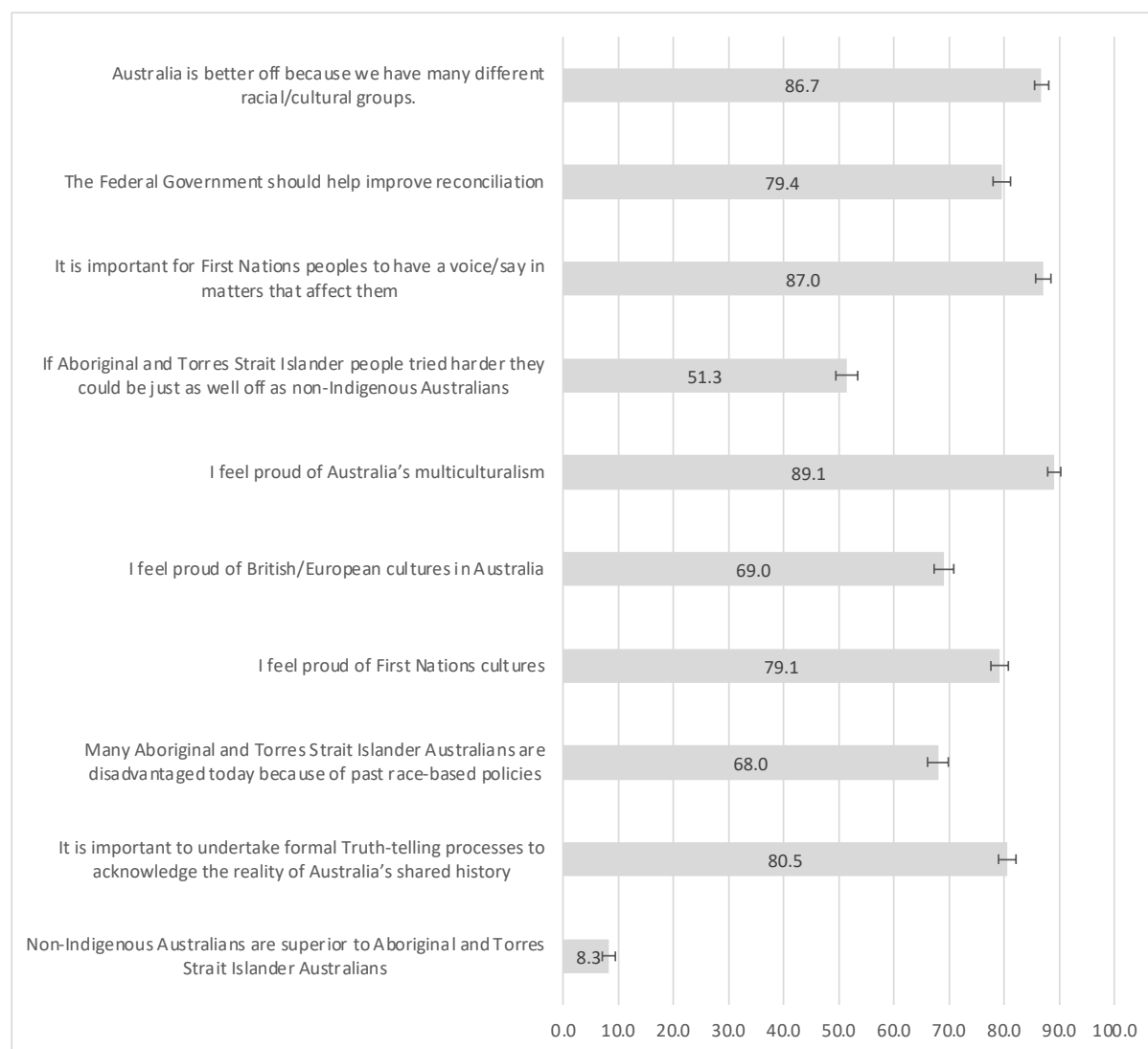
From a public policy perspective, most Australians support the broad set of policies advocated by those associated with the yes campaign. The vast majority of Australians (79.4 per cent) think that the Federal Government should help improve reconciliation, and roughly the same number (80.5 per cent) think that Australia should ‘undertake formal Truth-telling processes to acknowledge the reality of Australia’s shared history.’ What is perhaps most interesting is that 87.0 per cent of Australians think that ‘It is important for First Nations peoples to have a voice/say in matters that affect them.’ Not surprisingly, almost all those who voted yes agree or strongly agree with this statement (98.4 per cent). However, around three-quarters of no voters (76.0 per cent) also agree with the statement.

This question was asked slightly differently in the 2022 RB, with respondents asked whether it was important, not whether or not they agree. With this in mind, and noting that the RB is not based on a probability sample (it would appear it is based on a non-probability sample, though that is not completely clear), the fact that the per cent who agreed/disagreed after the referendum was not that different from those that thought it fairly/very important in the 2022 RB gives reasonably strong evidence that the campaign has not shifted to a large extent (or perhaps not at all) general community support for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice. It reinforces the notion that it was a rejection of the specific proposal in the constitution that was rejected, not the concept of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians having a say over their own affairs *per se*.

The question that is most evenly split across the population is whether or not ‘If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people tried harder they could be just as well off as non-Indigenous Australians.’ Slightly more than half (51.3 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. This is despite more than two-thirds of Australians (68.0 per cent) agreeing or strongly agreeing that ‘Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are disadvantaged today because of past race-based policies.’

Taken together, these two responses suggest some complexity in the way the general population views Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage and, it should be recognised, a set of views that are likely to cause some hurt to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. It would seem from this data that Australians recognise the ongoing impact of previous policies, but also that many Australians place the onus on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population to overcome these past policies.

Figure 8.2 Level of agreement with additional statements.



Notes: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

Whether one agrees or disagrees with any of the statements summarised in Figures 8.1 and 8.2, it is clear that they represent a complex view of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. This is further reinforced by some of the specific additional questions that were repeated from the 2014 ANUpoll. First, the data does not in any way support the assertion that Australians think that the government should reduce their support for the Indigenous population (Figure 8.3). When given the option of having gone too far, not gone far enough, or about right, the most common response for each of the following statements was that more should be done. Specifically, we asked three questions with three response options each, and found that in 2023:

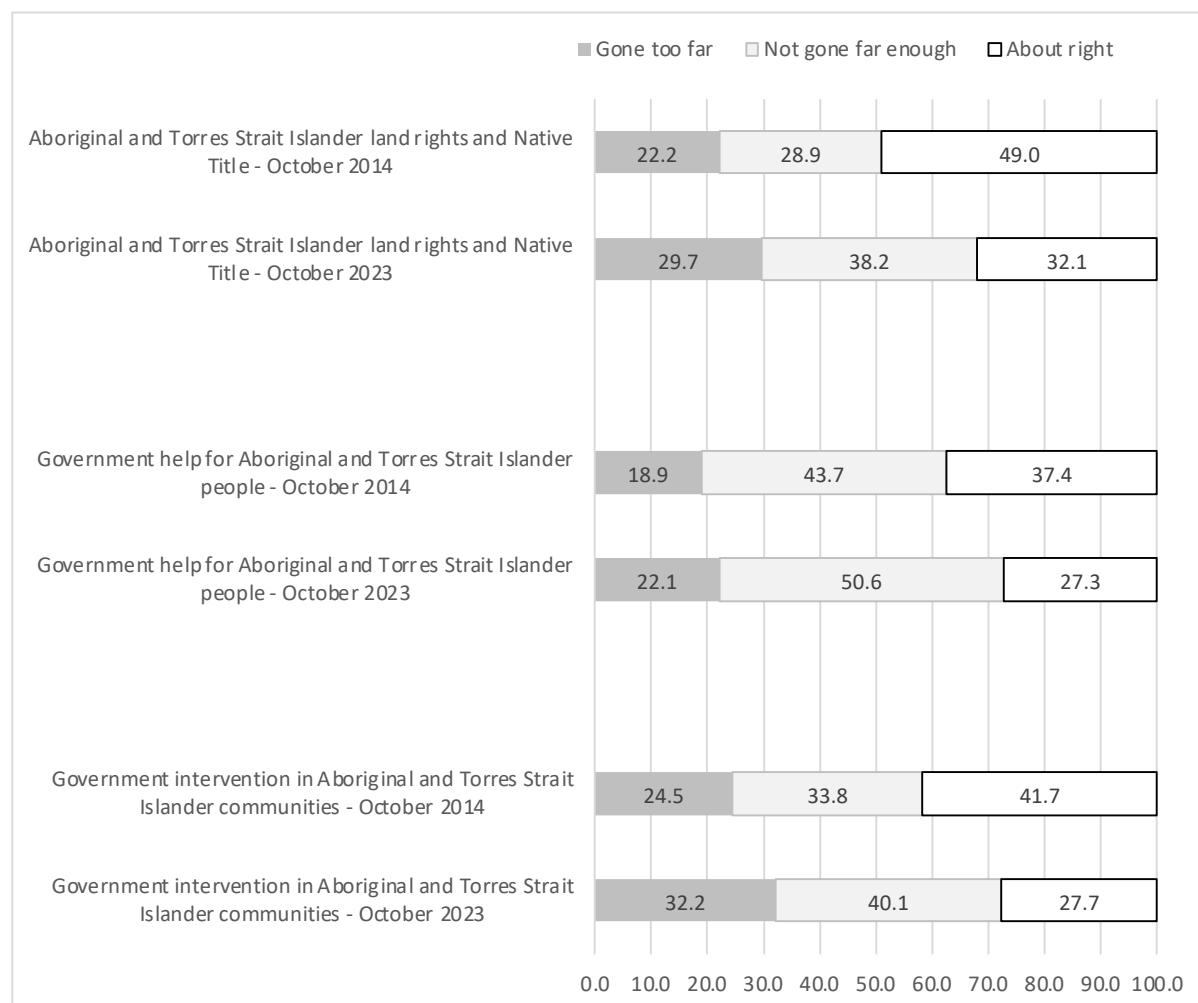
- 38.2 per cent of Australians think that ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land rights and Native Title’ has not gone far enough (29.7 per cent think it has gone too far);
- 50.6 per cent of Australians think that ‘Government help for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’ has not gone far enough (22.1 per cent think it has gone too far); and

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- 40.1 per cent of Australians think that ‘Government intervention in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities’ has not gone far enough (32.2 per cent think it has gone too far).

In many ways, views on support for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population have become more in favour of additional support since the last time they were asked in October 2014. In that survey, only 43.7 per cent of respondents thought that government help had not gone far enough, much lower than the majority support (50.6 per cent) for that statement in October 2023.

Figure 8.3 Views on whether aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy have gone too far or not far enough.



Source: October 2014 ANUpoll and October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

In a further question in the module, respondents were asked ‘In your opinion, have Aboriginal and Torres Strait people in Australia largely caused their own problems or have the problems been caused primarily by the attitudes of other Australians and the policies of governments?’ Very few Australians (13.1 per cent) think that ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia have largely caused their own problems.’ However, while there are many more Australians that think that the ‘problems have been caused primarily by the attitudes of other Australians and the policies of governments’ (37.4 per cent), the most common response given by 49.6 per cent of respondents is that the problems have been caused by ‘Both equally.’

These views are also quite stable through time. Slightly fewer people in October 2023 think that problems have been caused by Indigenous people than in October 2014 (13.1 and 17.4 per cent respectively), but there has also been a decline in the per cent that think the problems were caused by other Australians and government (37.4 per cent in October 2023 compared to 51.2 per cent in October 2014). Where there has been an increase though is the per cent that think the problems are attributable to both equally (31.4 per cent in October 2014 compared to 49.6 per cent in the most recent survey).

8.2 An index of views towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues

Although the views expressed in the module on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues reflect a complex and diverse set of views, responses to many of the individual questions correlate quite highly with responses to other questions. One data analytical technique that is suitable for such a situation is factor analysis. Making use of the correlation across the answers to the questions summarised in Figures 8.1 and 8.2, we create an 'Index of Attitudes towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Issues.' The details for the creation of this index are given in Appendix 2, though the main points to note are that:

- We take into account the categorical nature of the data by estimating a polychoric correlation matrix;
- We scale the index to have a mean of zero and standard deviation of one;
- The data strongly suggests a single factor captures much of the variation in the seventeen underlying variables; and
- higher values of the index suggest that people are more likely to agree with the statement that 'It is important for First Nations peoples to have a voice/say in matters that affect them' (the variable with the most positive factor loading) and lower values mean that people are more likely to agree with the statement that 'Injustices towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are now all in the past' (the variable with the most negative factor loading).

In essence, higher values of the index are related to a greater support for government intervention to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, lower values are related to a belief that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians should be treated equally and injustices are mostly in the past. We can use this variable to analyse how views towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues vary across the population.

Using a linear regression model and the same explanatory variables we introduced in our first model predicting the voice outcome (in Table 3.1), we estimate a higher index value for females, younger Australians, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. There was a somewhat complicated relationship with country of birth and language spoken at home, with no difference between those born in Australia and those born overseas in an English-speaking country, but a lower value for those born overseas in a non-English speaking country and those that speak a language other than English at home (compared to those that speak English only).

Education once again had a strong association with the dependent variable. That is clear both from the regression model, but also from simple comparisons of means. Keeping in mind that the index has a mean of zero and standard deviation of one, there is a very big differences between those who have not completed Year 12 (average value of -0.523) and those that have a Certificate or Diploma but no degree (-0.233) compared to those with a postgraduate degree (0.119) or an undergraduate degree (0.087).

What is interesting, and perhaps surprising is the relationship between someone's self-reported interaction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the index value. Respondents were asked which of three possible statements best reflected their situation. The most common response, given by 48.2 per cent of respondents was that 'I know Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but do not regularly mix with them.' The next most common response, given by 34.2 per cent of respondents was that 'I do not know any Aboriginal and

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Torres Strait Islander people personally,' with the remaining 17.7 per cent of Australians saying that 'I mix regularly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on a day-to-day basis.'

In the second model presented in Table 8.1, those who say that they do not know Aboriginal and Islander people do not have a different value to those that know Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but do not mix regularly. There is a slightly lower index value, however, for those that mix regularly (p-value = 0.068)

Table 8.1 Factors associated with index of attitudes towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations and issues, October 2023

Explanatory variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Mixes regularly			-0.101	*
Does not know any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people			0.000	
Female	0.347	***	0.349	***
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.402	***	0.402	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.143	**	0.139	**
Aged 45 to 54 years	-0.002		-0.002	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.031		0.024	
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.103		0.091	
Aged 75 years plus	-0.001		-0.021	
Indigenous	0.305	**	0.355	***
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.078		0.071	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.121	*	-0.127	*
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.188	***	-0.189	***
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.363	***	-0.360	***
Has a post graduate degree	0.371	***	0.372	***
Has an undergraduate degree	0.244	***	0.245	***
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.054		-0.049	
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	-0.117	*	-0.114	*
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	-0.040		-0.038	
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	-0.028		-0.035	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	0.051		0.048	
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.055		-0.046	
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	-0.094		-0.093	
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	-0.071		-0.073	
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	-0.143	**	-0.144	**
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	0.023		0.021	
Constant	-0.290	***	-0.270	***
Sample size	3,634		3,623	

Notes: Probit regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; non-Indigenous; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a post-graduate degree; lives in neither an advantaged or disadvantaged suburb (third quintile); lives in a capital city, lives in a household in the middle income quintile.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

8.3 The relationship between attitudes and the voice vote

While there is a relatively weak relationship between the index and respondent interaction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, there was a strong association with the voice vote. However, the association is not in the direction that we might assume *a priori*.

Noel Pearson, in his 2022 Boyer Lectures made the point that, unlike in the debate and plebiscite on same-sex marriage, very few non-Indigenous Australians had close personal

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relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (as backed up by ANUpoll data) and that this would impede the yes campaign. He stated that¹⁸:

We are a much unloved people. We are perhaps the ethnic group Australians feel least connected to. We are not popular and we are not personally known to many Australians. Few have met us and a small minority count us as friends... Unlike same-sex marriage there is not the requisite empathy of love to break through the prejudice, contempt and yes, violence, of the past. Australians simply do not have Aboriginal people within their circles of family and friendship with whom they can share fellow feeling

However, in results presented in Table 8.2, we can see that those who report that they mix regularly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were significantly (and substantially) less likely to vote yes to the voice. On the other hand, those who say that they do not know any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were more likely to vote yes.

Table 8.2 Expanded regression model estimates of the factors associated with voice vote, interaction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, October 2023

Explanatory variables	M.Effect.	Signif.
Mixes regularly	-0.076	***
Does not know any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	0.066	***
Female	0.070	***
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.196	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.079	**
Aged 45 to 54 years	-0.012	
Aged 55 to 64 years	-0.030	
Aged 65 to 74 years	-0.023	
Aged 75 years plus	-0.116	***
Indigenous	0.155	**
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.063	*
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.006	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.107	***
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.165	***
Has a post graduate degree	0.223	***
Has an undergraduate degree	0.152	***
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.020	
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	-0.012	
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	0.015	
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	0.008	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	0.011	
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.044	*
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	-0.063	*
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	-0.021	
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	-0.022	
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	0.022	
Probability of base case	0.361	
Sample size	3,464	

Notes: Probit regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; non-Indigenous; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a post-graduate degree; lives in neither an advantaged or disadvantaged suburb (third quintile); lives in a capital city, lives in a household in the middle income quintile.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

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It has been assumed that attitudes towards broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and the population were factors in influencing a person's referendum vote. There is very strong evidence for this in the data, and when we look at the voice vote across the index described above, we find that only 2.1 per cent of those in the lowest quintile voted yes, increasing to 15.7 per cent for those in the second quintile, 44.8 per cent for those in the middle quintile, 84.7 per cent for those in the fourth quintile and 96.9 per cent for those in the fifth quintile.¹⁹

A model that (only) shows that support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues are more likely to have voted for a Voice to Parliament is not overly informative. Rather, to understand the drivers of peoples vote, and what the vote may or may not mean for future debates, it is important to look at the relationship with individual questions. Because there are so many variables though, including all in a model makes it quite hard to interpret. So, after running a first model with binary values for all of the variables in the model, we remove those that have a p-value of more than 0.1. We then re-estimate the model dropping those remaining variables that do not have a p-value of less than (or equal to) 0.05. For the re-estimated model, all variables have a p-value of less than 0.01, and therefore we keep this as our final model. Variables that were not found to have a significant association with the voice vote is someone agreeing or strongly agreeing that:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be able to decide for themselves their way of life;
- Australia is better off because we have many different racial/cultural groups;
- In the long run, it would be best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be completely assimilated into Australian society;
- I feel proud of First Nations cultures; and
- Non-Indigenous Australians are superior to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Those variables may have dropped out of the model because they are held equally by those who voted yes or no, or because they are correlated with other explanatory variables in the model. Either way, we can make the tentative conclusion that attitudes towards the above statements were not the main determinants of the voice vote. Of the remaining statements (Table 8.3), given the point on the distribution of the base case is quite low (that is, the probability of voting yes for those that do not agree with any of the statements), the magnitude of the marginal effects for those that have a negative association should be treated differently to the marginal effects for those that have a positive association.

Views that are most strongly associated with a higher probability of voting yes are that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should have special cultural protection, that the Federal government should help with reconciliation, and that it is important for First Nations peoples to have a voice/say in matters that affect them. The attitudes that have the strongest negative association are that recognising native title is unfair to the rest of the population and that 'If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people tried harder they could be just as well off as non-Indigenous Australians.'

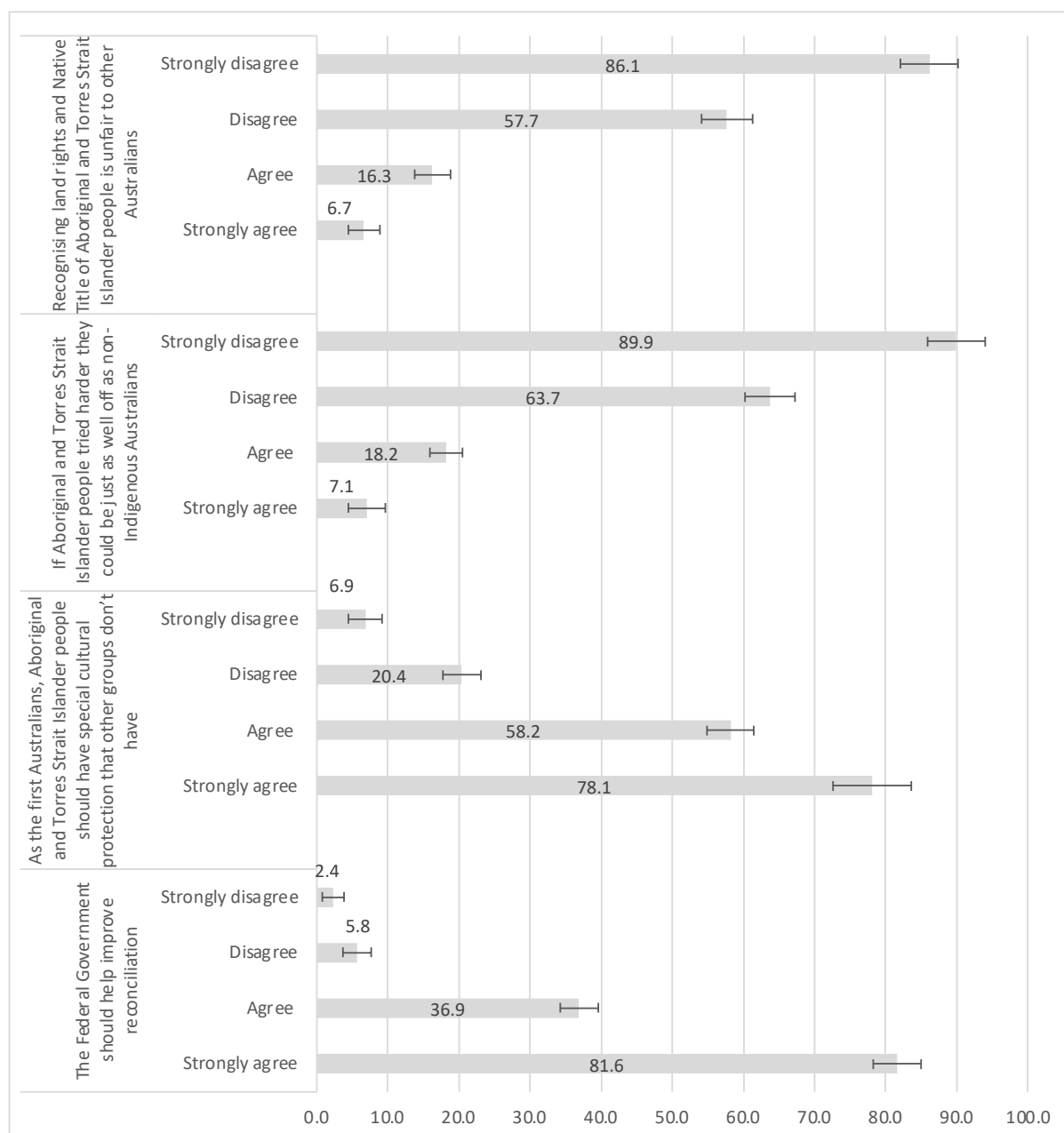
The scale of the relationship between a person's voice vote and their attitudes on key issues related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is demonstrated in Figure 8.3 Focusing on the two variables with the largest negative marginal effect in Table 8.3, as well as the two variables with the largest positive marginal effect, we give the respondent's voice vote by whether they strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree with the statements.

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At one extreme, only 6.7 per cent of Australians who strongly agree that native title/land rights is unfair voted yes at the referendum. At the other extreme, 86.1 per cent of those who strongly disagreed voted no. There is a similarly large range for the view that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians just need to try harder with a 7.1 per cent yes vote for those that strongly agree and a 89.9 per cent yes vote for those that strongly disagreed.

There are roughly equally large differences by attitudes towards the statements that have a positive marginal effect. Only 2.4 per cent of those that strongly disagreed that the federal government should help with reconciliation voted yes, compared to 81.6 per cent for those that strongly agreed.

Figure 8.3 Relationship between voice vote and specific attitudes towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues.



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Notes: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

In addition to the relationship with the attitudinal variables, it is interesting to note the variables that were significant in previous models that are no longer associated with the voice vote in Table 8.3 when we controlled for attitudes towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Issues, or which have changed the direction of association. Without controlling for the rich set of attitudinal variables, females were more likely to vote yes. Controlling for them, however, leads to a negative association with the respondent being female. Education still matters though, suggesting that those with a degree were more likely to have voted yes even if they had the same view on these issues compared to someone without a degree, and that those that had not completed Year 12 were less likely to vote yes.

Table 8.3 Expanded regression model estimates of the factors associated with voice vote, attitudes towards Indigenous issues, October 2023

Explanatory variables	M.Effect.	Signif.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are now treated equally to other Australians	-0.050	***
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's level of disadvantage justifies extra government assistance	0.086	***
Recognising land rights and Native Title ... is unfair to other Australians	-0.069	***
Injustices towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are now all in the past	-0.044	***
... Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should have special cultural protection ...	0.137	***
The Federal Government should help improve reconciliation	0.119	***
It is important for First Nations peoples to have a voice/say in matters that affect them	0.117	***
If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people tried harder they could be just as well off ...	-0.060	***
I feel proud of British/European cultures in Australia	-0.039	***
... [Indigenous Australians] are disadvantaged ... because of ... race-based policies	0.096	***
It is important to undertake formal Truth-telling processes ...	0.098	***
Female	-0.027	**
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.036	
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.024	
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.008	
Aged 55 to 64 years	-0.010	
Aged 65 to 74 years	-0.014	
Aged 75 years plus	-0.031	
Indigenous	-0.007	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.010	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.025	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.024	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.040	*
Has a post graduate degree	0.074	**
Has an undergraduate degree	0.042	*
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.005	
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	0.028	
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	0.017	
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	0.000	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	-0.007	
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.027	**
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	-0.033	**
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	-0.004	
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	0.010	
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	0.017	
Probability of base case	0.090	
Sample size	3,311	

Notes: Probit regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; non-Indigenous; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a post-graduate degree; lives in neither an advantaged or disadvantaged suburb (third quintile); lives in a capital city, lives in a household in the middle income quintile.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

8.4 Constitutional recognition after the voice

At the start of this section, we quoted from the open letter to the Prime Minister and parliamentarians which stated that through the comprehensive rejection of the voice vote that Australians had rejected recognition. It is true that the vote was a clear rejection of the form of constitutional recognition that was preferred by the majority of signatories to the Uluru Statement from the Heart (i.e., ‘constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country’).²⁰ However, it does not follow that the Australian population

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voted against constitutional recognition *per se*. Rather, the survey data suggests that there is still widespread support for a broad definition of constitutional recognition, including amongst no voters.

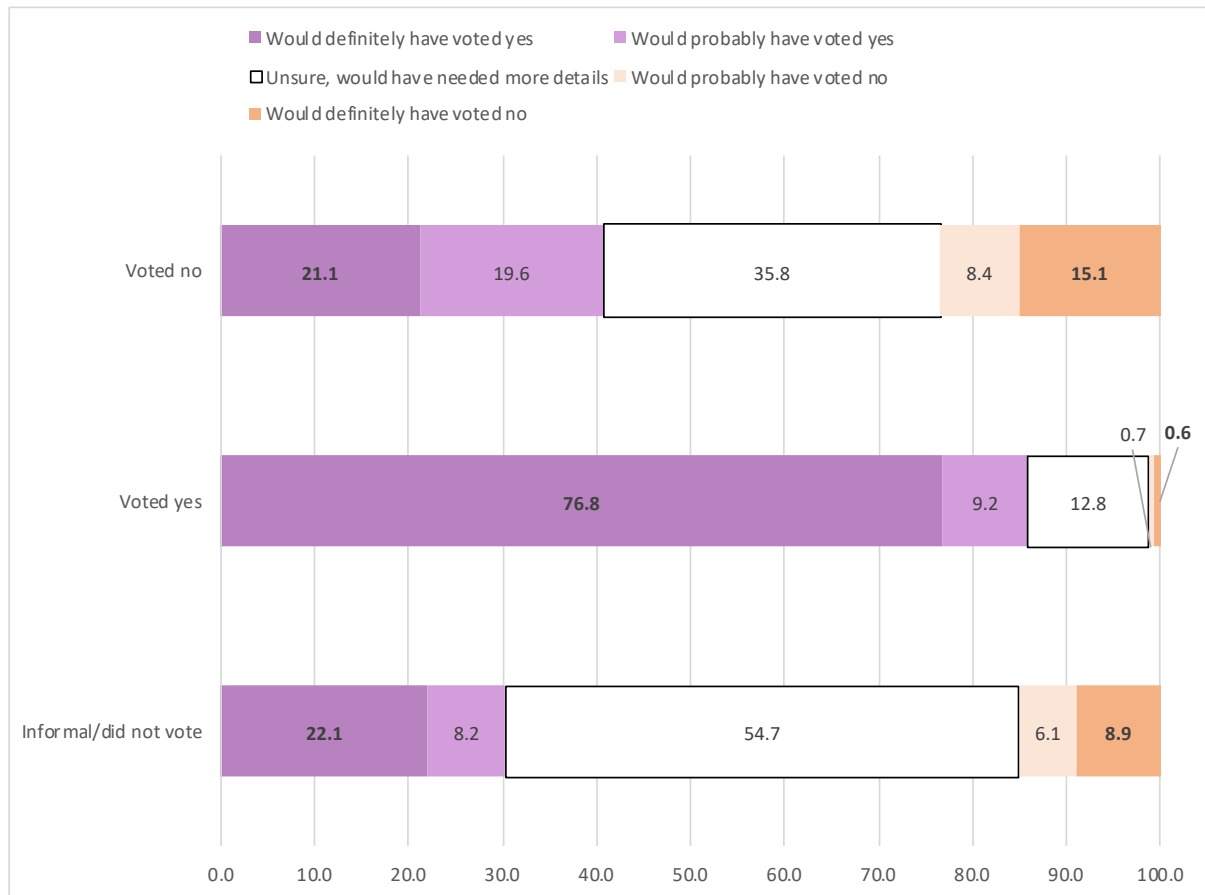
Respondents were asked 'If the Referendum question was not to establish the Voice to Parliament but instead to recognise Indigenous people in the Constitution only, would you have voted YES or NO?' Around three-in-ten Australians who were eligible to vote in the actual referendum (29.3%) responded that they were unsure and would have needed more details. However, of those who felt able to give a yes or no response, about five times as many people who said that they would definitely have voted yes (41.5%) or would probably have voted yes (14.7%) than those who said that they would probably have voted no (5.4%) or would definitely have voted no (9.2%).

Not surprisingly, there was a strong correlation between someone's actual vote in the referendum and how they say they would have voted if it was on recognition only (Figure 8.4). Using a very conservative measure of support (that is, treating all those who were undecided as no voters), amongst those that voted yes in the Voice referendum, 86.0% said that they would have voted yes if the question was on constitutional recognition only. Of those yes voters that didn't say yes on constitutional recognition, the vast majority (12.8%) were undecided.

Even amongst no voters, however, there was quite substantial levels of support for constitutional recognition with 40.8% saying they probably or definitely would vote yes. Many no voters were undecided about constitutional recognition (35.8%), but there was also a sizable minority (23.4%) that said they would vote no.

The lowest level of yes support is amongst those that voted informal or did not vote (30.3%). However, more than half of this group were undecided (54.7%) with only 15.0% saying they probably or definitely would vote no.

Figure 8.4 Likely vote if referendum was on constitutional recognition only, by actual referendum vote.



Notes: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

9 Safety or Change? Views and attitudes that explain voting in the 2023 Australian Referendum

Previous sections of the paper have introduced a range of geographic, demographic, socioeconomic, political, and attitudinal factors that are associated with whether a person voted yes or no during the voice referendum. We have also highlighted where factors that we might have assumed to have been associated with the vote did not turn out to have an association, or which did not have an association once we controlled for a few additional characteristics. We have also examined in detail how some of the explanatory variables have changed over short, medium, and long-term.

In this final section of empirical results, we bring all this analysis together by looking first at voters' self-reported reasons for voting the way they did, and then presenting a consolidated model of the voice vote. We estimate this model first for the entire voting sample, and then for those who said that they would have voted yes in January 2023 in order to examine the factors associated with change over the campaign period.

9.1 Self-reported reason for a person's vote

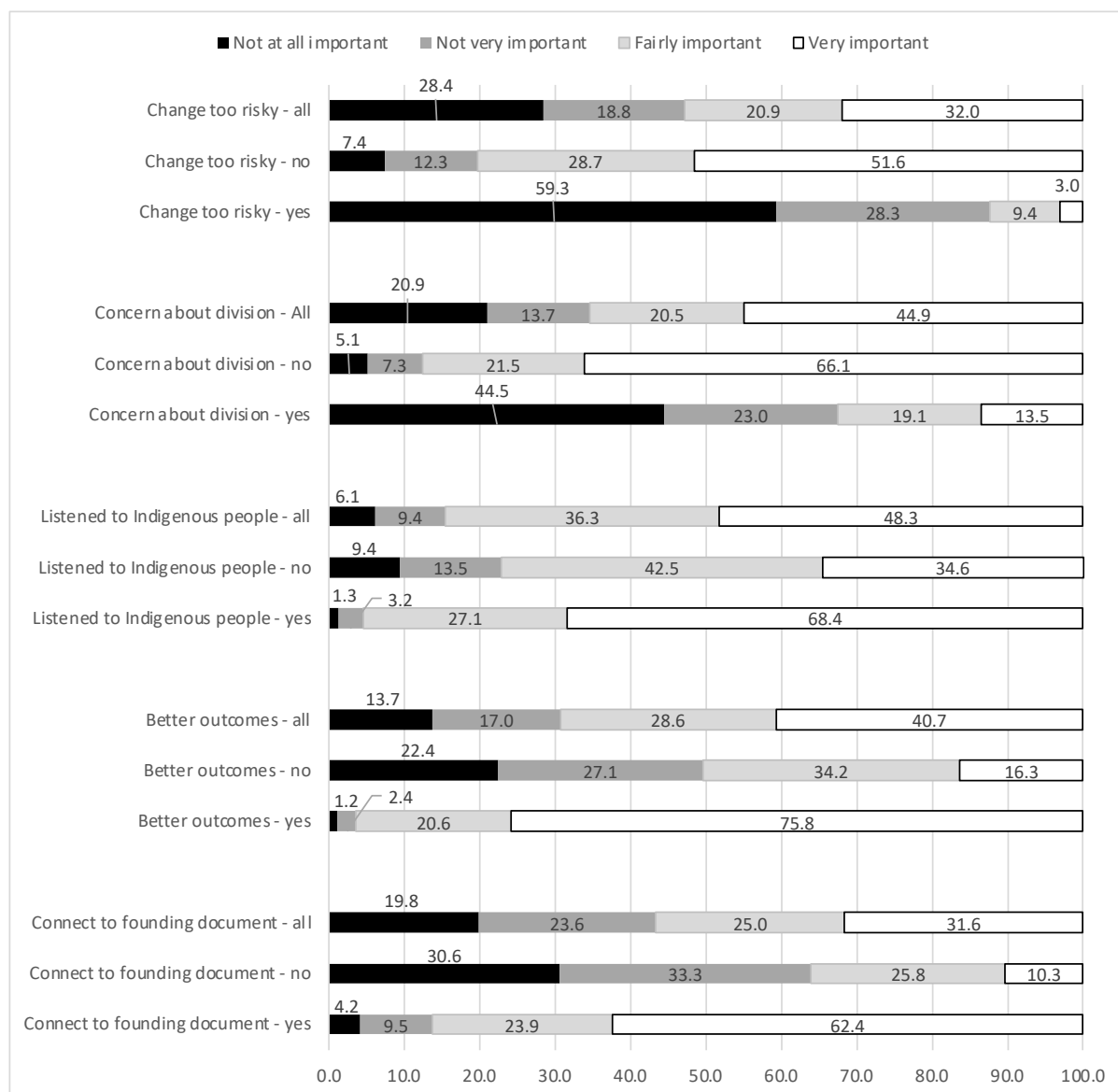
In addition to analysing the factors associated with a person's vote, it is instructive to ask directly what factors influenced a person's decision. It is not always easy to know the underlying reasons for one's own choices, but there is information in people's perceptions about their own choices. For those who voted in the referendum, regardless of whether they voted yes or no, we asked: 'Which of the following, if any, were important factors in how you voted in the Constitutional Referendum about the Voice?' Five factors were offered as listed below, and people were able to answer very important, fairly important, not very important, and not at all important to as many or as few of the factors as they would like.

- The change was too risky.
- I was concerned about dividing our country.
- I listened to the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- I thought it would help deliver better outcomes for First Nations communities.
- It would connect Australia's founding document with 65,000 years of First Nations history.

Figure 9.1 gives the average level of importance for each of the five factors, first for all voters, and then separately by whether or not the person voted yes or no. Amongst those who voted no, the factor that was most likely to be given as very important was concern about dividing the country. This was given by 66.1 per cent of no voters. Amongst those that voted yes, the most important reason was that it would deliver better outcome, given by around three-quarters (75.8 per cent) of relevant respondents.

There were clearly different factors depending on whether or not someone voted yes or no. This was in many ways by design, as the factors identified prior to the referendum as part of the survey design process were from arguments presented by either yes or no proponents. However, there was also a sizable minority of voters that gave factors that tended to be associated with the opposite vote. For example, although 95.5 per cent of yes voters said that it was very or fairly important that they listened to the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, this was also listed as a factor for 77.1 per cent of no voters. Many people clearly weighed up the opposing arguments, or used the same factor to come to different conclusions to someone else.

Figure 9.1 Self-reported importance of factors in referendum vote, all voters and by yes/no, October 2023.



Source: October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

9.2 A consolidated model of voter choice

In this final section of results, we present a consolidated model of voter choice, building on the models presented in previous sections of the paper. The choice of variables to include in a consolidated model of voter choice is inevitably subjective. First, there was subjectivity in the variables chosen for inclusion in the survey, and then how the questions were worded. Next, there was some subjectivity in the initial models estimated in the previous sections, including which variables were included together in those preliminary models. Finally, there was some subjectivity in terms of which variables we tested for this final model.

Despite this subjectivity, we have followed a somewhat systematic approach with regards to final selection of variables. First, we were guided by the existing literature, and the public debates that occurred prior to, during, and after the campaign. Second, we only chose variables to be tested for the final model if they were found to have a significant association and a reasonably large marginal effect in preliminary models controlling for basic demographic,

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socioeconomic, and geographic factors. Finally, we removed from the final model those variables that did not remain statistically significant when all other variables were included. So, while we do not claim that this final model is definitive, the process that we followed does at least mean that it is comprehensive.

Our resultant model included twelve explanatory variables in addition to the background variables from Table 3.1. There were a number of variables or categories of variables that did not turn out to have a strong association with someone's eventual vote once we controlled for other factors, even though they were significant in previous models. This includes attention to the referendum; feeling that one knew enough to vote; being right-wing; voting intentions; liking either the Prime Minister or Opposition Leader; experiencing financial stress; having trust in a range of institutions; and interaction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The fact that the above list of variables did not make it into the final model does not mean that they are not important. Causal inference is not possible with cross-sectional data, and some of the variables that were dropped may have directly impacted on some of the variables that are in the final model. However, what we are able to conclude with some confidence is that the variables that remain are strongly predictive of whether or not someone voted yes in the referendum, and therefore are important in explaining the referendum outcome.

Looking down the table of marginal effects (the explanatory variables are presented in no particular order), we can see that those who identify as being to the left of the standard left/right divide were far more likely to vote yes than those in the centre or to the right. This is not just because of political affiliation, as voting patterns were not statistically significant, and the left-of-centre variable was still significant in a model that included voting. One potential explanation is that above and beyond party alignment, the voice referendum came to be associated with other left-wing causes. This need not have been the case, and Noel Pearson tried to make a conservative case for the voice. This did not appear to have succeeded.

In addition to a person's status on the left, if a person recorded that they disliked Prime Minister Albanese then they were substantially less likely to vote yes, whereas if they disliked Opposition Leader Dutton, they were more likely to vote yes. It is an unknowable counterfactual question of what would have happened in the referendum if there was bipartisan support for it. Even before then, it is unclear whether there was a model for the voice that could have attracted support from both main political parties. However, the vote ended up being tied closely to the two main party leaders, and this appears to explain why some people were not yes voters.

Trust in two key institutions was also associated with the voice vote. Those Australians that trusted the federal government were more likely to vote yes. This is separate from voting intentions (which, remember, was not significant) as people can see Labor as a better alternative than the Coalition but still not trust the government, or alternatively prefer to vote for another party but still trust the government. Because trust is low and falling, whenever trust is a strong predictor of a yes vote, it is going to continue to be difficult to prosecute a successful referendum from government.

It is also interesting that trust in social media was negatively associated with the voice vote. Both the yes and the no campaign attempted to convert voters via social media. This finding gives some evidence that the no campaign was far more successful in doing so.

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The next four variables relate to attitudes towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. As mentioned in the more detailed discussion in the previous section, there are very few Australians that hold the view that non-Indigenous Australians are superior to Indigenous Australians (what would have been considered a standard definition of a racist attitude) and holding this view did not appear to predict voting yes or no above and beyond other characteristics. However, there were four other views that did end up being strongly predictive, and which more evenly divided the country.

Taken together, it would appear that many Australians feel that special rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are unfair, with a sizable number of Australians also thinking that the reason for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage is a lack of effort. While these views persist, it is unlikely that special measures within the constitution will be supported by the Australian population.

At the same time, there are also many Australians that feel that the federal government should help improve reconciliation and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should have special cultural protection. Although those views were associated with a higher yes vote, this association was clearly not strong enough, nor were there enough people who held those views for the referendum to pass.

Another variable that ended up being significant was caring a great deal about the referendum result. It is common with referendums that those who care about the issue the most are the most likely to vote yes. If people are making a risk/benefit calculation towards referenda and they care less about the benefits, then they are more likely to vote according to the risks. While caring about the referendum was important though, there were not enough people who cared to guarantee a yes majority (plus there were still many who cared that voted no).

The final variable in the model was whether a person thought land rights and native title had gone too far, not far enough, or was about right (the base case).²¹ Interestingly those that thought that land rights/native title had gone too far did not have a different probability of voting yes compared to those who thought it was about right. This may be because this view was captured by the earlier unfairness question. However, those who thought land rights and native title had not gone far enough were more likely to vote yes than both of the other two groups. Many people who voted yes may have seen the Voice as a mechanism for expanding land rights and native title. However, those who voted no may also have seen that as a potential outcome, and voted no accordingly. One of the reasons for the eventual low support for the referendum is that there are many more people who thought land rights and native title did not need to go any further than who thought it should.

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Table 9.1 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with vote and change in voice vote, final model, October 2023

Explanatory variables	All voters		January 2023 yes voters	
	M.Effect.	Signif.	M.Effect.	Signif.
Identifies as being left of centre	0.169	***	0.177	***
Dislikes Mr Albanese (score 0 to 4)	-0.091	***	-0.097	***
Dislikes Mr Dutton (score 0 to 4)	0.166	***	0.171	***
Trust in the federal government	0.062	***	0.096	***
Trust in social media	-0.065	***	-0.066	**
Recognising land rights and Native Title ... is unfair to other Australians	-0.072	***	-0.083	***
... [Indigenous] people should have special cultural protection ...	0.143	***	0.122	***
The Federal Government should help improve reconciliation	0.166	***	0.151	***
If [Indigenous Australians] tried harder they could be just as well off ...	-0.079	***	-0.094	***
Cared a good deal about the outcome	0.072	***	0.194	***
... land rights and Native title gone too far	-0.031		-0.013	
... land rights and Native title not gone far enough	0.160	***	0.176	***
Female	-0.014		-0.051	**
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.032		0.045	
Aged 25 to 34 years	-0.003		0.098	*
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.012		0.053	
Aged 55 to 64 years	-0.025		-0.043	
Aged 65 to 74 years	-0.033		-0.037	
Aged 75 years plus	-0.056	*	-0.039	
Indigenous	0.012		0.041	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.018		0.036	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.007		0.052	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.023		-0.048	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.022		-0.036	
Has a post graduate degree	0.065	*	0.039	
Has an undergraduate degree	0.034		-0.025	
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	0.018		-0.035	
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	0.005		0.037	
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	0.013		0.045	
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	-0.009		0.029	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	-0.025		-0.021	
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.043	***	-0.010	
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	-0.031		-0.018	
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	0.013		0.016	
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	0.041		0.120	**
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	0.046		0.243	***
Probability of base case	0.114		0.119	
Sample size	3,285		1,219	

Notes: Probit regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; non-Indigenous; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a post-graduate degree; lives in neither an advantaged or disadvantaged suburb (third quintile); lives in a capital city, lives in a household in the middle income quintile.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: January 2023 ANUpoll and October 2023 ACRS/ANUpoll.

10 Concluding comments – The 2023 Referendum and the aftermath

On the 14th of October 2023, Australians voted on a proposal ‘To alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.’ Only 39.9 per cent of legal votes were in favour of this change, there was not a majority or close to a majority in any of the six Australian States (there was a majority, however, in the Australian Capital Territory).

Leading up to the election, and particularly in the immediate aftermath, there were a range of potential explanations given for why the referendum failed, and why it failed by such a large margin. There were also competing explanations for what the result meant for Australia’s democracy and for future referenda, as well as for Reconciliation in Australia and the position of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

There is a real risk of reading too much into a single vote on a very specific and narrow question about a Constitutionally enshrined Voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. All we can be really sure about after the vote has been counted is what per cent of enrolled voters answered yes, what per cent answered no, the number of informal votes, and quite broadly where those people lived. Furthermore, no matter what data is collected, people will continue to differ in their opinions about what determined the referendum outcome, and what it means for Australia. However, primary data collection, through carefully designed representative surveys can at least put some bounds around what are plausible interpretations, and which are far less supported by the evidence.

In order to support an informed discussion about the referendum and its aftermath, the Australian National University collected a detailed survey immediately following the referendum from a broadly representative sample of over 4,000 adult Australians. Importantly, this sample was based on probability recruitment, which means inferences can be made about the attitudes and behaviours of the Australian population, and it is also able to be linked at the individual level to surveys conducted in January, April, and August 2023 when voting intentions regarding the referendum were also asked.

The data seriously challenged a number of narratives about the referendum, many of which had scant support in the data. There is no evidence in the data to suggest that Australians are against the idea of constitutional recognition in general. Of those who were willing to give an opinion as to what their vote would have been if the referendum was just about recognition those who would vote yes outnumber those who would vote no by a margin of almost five-to-one.

The vote also did not signal a lack of support for reconciliation, for the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders having a voice/say in matters that affect them, truth-telling processes, or for a lack of pride in First Nations cultures. All of these notions were supported in our survey by around eight-in-ten Australians, or even more. Some advocates for the no-case have also argued that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are better off because of European invasion and colonisation. We don’t find evidence for this view amongst the general Australian population, and rather the overwhelming majority of Australians agree that the Indigenous population is disadvantaged today because of past race-based policies.

Beyond Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, some have claimed that the failure of the voice campaign signals a return to conservative values, or a movement to the right of the

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Australian electorate. Once again, there is no evidence for this with fewer Australians placing themselves to the right of the political spectrum immediately after the referendum than did so after the May 2022 election when the Albanese government came to power. Indeed, the Labor party vote has not shifted in our surveys since August 2023, and is still well above the levels observed just prior to the last federal election.

Having said all of that, the referendum has coincided with some shifting views. Compared to start of the year, Australians are far less satisfied with democracy, less confident in the government, less satisfied with the direction of the country, and less satisfied with their own life. Not all of these changes can be attributed to the referendum. However, these changes have been greater for those who voted yes than those who voted no.

In addition to highlighting some of the changes that have occurred over 2023 that may potentially be attributed to the referendum, what can we say about the reasons for the referendum vote being so low? Our survey data tells us a few things about who was more likely to vote no, based on stable background characteristics. No voters were more likely to be male, older, speaking a language other than English at home, with low levels of education, living outside of capital cities, and living in low-income households. These are the groups that the yes campaign failed to convince. Furthermore, a higher proportion of people who didn't end up voting said that they would have voted yes when asked in August, implying that low turnout suppressed the yes vote.

There were also a number of attitudinal variables that predicted a no vote. Trust in social media, disliking the Prime Minister, thinking that land rights/native title unfair, and thinking that if Indigenous Australians tried harder they could be just as well off as the non-Indigenous population were all associated with voting no in the referendum. None of these views were held by more than a bare majority of the population (and the first three were only held by a minority). However, the associations were large enough, and the views of the rest of the population were ambiguous enough, that the positive predictors did not outweigh the negative predictors.

It is instructive to consider these positive predictors, even if they did not end up being decisive. Those Australians who were left-of-centre, those who disliked the Opposition Leader, those who trusted the federal government, those who thought that Indigenous people deserve special cultural protection, those that supported reconciliation, and those that thought that land rights/native title had not gone far enough were all more likely to vote yes.

Ultimately, our data analysis and our direct questioning suggests that Australians voted no because they didn't want division and remain sceptical of rights for some Australians that are not held by others. All the data suggests that Australians think that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians continue to suffer levels of disadvantage that is both caused by past government policies and that justified extra government assistance. They did not see the Voice model put to them as the right approach to remedy that disadvantage. They may have voted for recognition if framed more symbolically, but of course that was not what the process that led to the Uluru Statement from the Heart asked for.

No voters saw the proposal as being too risky. The yes campaign tried to overcome this by downplaying the magnitude of the change, but this led to too many regarding the proposal as being marginal to their lives for there to be sufficient enthusiasm to balance against the risk.

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Appendix 1 About the survey

Data collection for the October 2023 ANUpoll commenced on the 16th of October 2023 with a pilot test of telephone respondents. The main data collection commenced on the 17th of October and was completed by the 29th of October. The final sample size for the survey is 4,219 respondents. 65.7 per cent of the sample had completed the survey 19th of October. The average survey length for those completing the survey was 24.1 minutes. The survey data is available from the Australian Data Archive (doi:10.26193/13NPGQ).

The Social Research Centre collected data online and through Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) in order to ensure representation from the offline Australian population. Around 1.3 per cent of interviews were collected via CATI.

The contact methodology adopted for the online Life in Australia™ members is an initial survey invitation via email and SMS (where available), followed by multiple email reminders and a reminder SMS. Telephone follow up of panel members who have not yet completed the survey commenced in the second week of fieldwork and consisted of reminder calls encouraging completion of the online survey. The contact methodology for offline Life in Australia™ members was an initial SMS (where available), followed by an extended call-cycle over a two-week period. A reminder SMS was also sent in the second week of fieldwork.

A total of 5,655 respondents were invited to take part in the survey, leading to a wave-specific completion rate of 74.6 per cent. Taking into account recruitment to the panel, the cumulative response rate for this survey is around 2.8 per cent. Of those who had completed the October 2023 survey, 3,807 respondents (90.2 per cent) had completed the August 2023 survey.

Unless otherwise stated, data in the paper is weighted to population benchmarks. For Life in Australia™, the standard approach for deriving weights generally consists of the following steps:

1. Compute a base weight for each respondent as the product of two weights:
 - a. Their enrolment weight, accounting for the initial chances of selection and subsequent post-stratification to key demographic benchmarks
 - b. Their response propensity weight, estimated from enrolment information available for both respondents and non-respondents to the present wave.
2. Adjust the base weights so that they satisfy the latest population benchmarks for several demographic characteristics.

Given the subject matter of the survey and the difference from the benchmark, an alternative weight was calculated that included referendum vote in the set of demographic characteristics used to adjust weights. To capture the different voting patterns across Australia, referendum vote was cross classified with state. Due to small cell-sizes, categories of the cross-classified variable were merged. All respondents who were not eligible to vote, submitted informal votes, or didn't vote, were merged into the same weighting category. Northern Territory yes or no voters were merged. Due to merging of categories, national vote was also included in the set of characteristics for weight adjustment, to ensure that the final weighted response proportions would add to the national proportions.

The benchmarks for referendum vote were derived using state-wise voting counts from the Australian Electoral Commission, with contrast categories derived using the latest Estimated

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Resident Population (ERP) counts, and then scaled to match other benchmarks.

The ethical aspects of this research have been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee (2021/430).

Appendix 2 Creating the index of attitudes towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations and issues

In order to create a summary of respondents’ attitudes towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations and issues, we use the seven measures taken from the 2014 ANUpoll and the ten measures taken mainly from the 2020 and 2022 Reconciliation Barometers (17 variables in total).

From these 17 measures, we construct a polychoric correlation matrix. This technique takes into account the categorical nature of the variables, assuming that there is an (unobserved) normally distributed variable that determines which of the four categories a person falls into in terms of their agreement/disagreement with the statement (Holgado-Tello et al. 2010). While it doesn’t have any impact on the correlation matrix, we assign a value of 1 if the person strongly disagreed to the statement, 2 if they disagreed, 3 if they agreed, and 4 if they strongly agreed. Table A1 gives the label and statement for the variables, Table A2 gives the correlation matrix using those labels.

Table A1 Label and statements for views on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations and issues

Label	Statement
1a	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are now treated equally to other Australians
1b	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s level of disadvantage justifies extra government assistance
1c	Recognising land rights and Native Title of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is unfair to other Australians
1d	Injustices towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are now all in the past
1e	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be able to decide for themselves their way of life
1f	As the first Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should have special cultural protection that other groups don’t have
1g	In the long run, it would be best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be completely assimilated into Australian society
2a	Australia is better off because we have many different racial/cultural groups.
2b	The Federal Government should help improve reconciliation
2c	It is important for First Nations peoples to have a voice/say in matters that affect them
2d	If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people tried harder they could be just as well off as non-Indigenous Australians
2e	I feel proud of Australia’s multiculturalism
2f	I feel proud of British/European cultures in Australia
2g	I feel proud of First Nations cultures
2h	Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are disadvantaged today because of past race-based policies
2i	It is important to undertake formal Truth-telling processes to acknowledge the reality of Australia’s shared history
2j	Non-Indigenous Australians are superior to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians

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Table A2 Polychoric correlation matrix of attitudes towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations and issues

Label	1a	1b	1c	1d	1e	1f	1g	2a	2b	2c	2d	2e	2f	2g	2h	2i	2j
1a	1																
1b	-0.438	1															
1c	0.550	-0.590	1														
1d	0.652	-0.618	0.729	1													
1e	-0.281	0.392	-0.360	-0.348	1												
1f	-0.411	0.615	-0.595	-0.559	0.440	1											
1g	0.464	-0.449	0.591	0.589	-0.299	-0.466	1										
2a	-0.219	0.357	-0.294	-0.293	0.256	0.281	-0.224	1									
2b	-0.468	0.647	-0.626	-0.649	0.360	0.600	-0.439	0.434	1								
2c	-0.507	0.638	-0.645	-0.652	0.492	0.623	-0.500	0.416	0.696	1							
2d	0.552	-0.650	0.672	0.708	-0.349	-0.572	0.575	-0.262	-0.597	-0.613	1						
2e	-0.089	0.238	-0.164	-0.159	0.174	0.169	-0.124	0.719	0.331	0.312	-0.111	1					
2f	0.323	-0.301	0.392	0.382	-0.217	-0.343	0.314	-0.026	-0.261	-0.306	0.418	0.132	1				
2g	-0.351	0.491	-0.484	-0.487	0.407	0.547	-0.407	0.399	0.612	0.634	-0.475	0.390	-0.157	1			
2h	-0.538	0.670	-0.623	-0.692	0.406	0.595	-0.473	0.348	0.702	0.701	-0.640	0.228	-0.358	0.532	1		
2i	-0.465	0.537	-0.595	-0.600	0.417	0.605	-0.459	0.391	0.693	0.696	-0.537	0.314	-0.326	0.630	0.652	1	
2j	0.326	-0.319	0.350	0.395	-0.283	-0.228	0.300	-0.367	-0.360	-0.460	0.404	-0.272	0.172	-0.394	-0.336	-0.373	1

Source: ANUpoll, October 2023.

Analysis of the 2023 Voice Referendum and related attitudes

Based on this correlation matrix, we then undertook an exploratory factors analysis (Cudeck 2000). This technique aims to establish the relationship between the observed variables and one or more (but a smaller number) of unobserved factors. Based on the correlation matrix, the estimated eigenvalue for the first factor was 7.97, explaining 85.2 per cent of the variation across the 17 variables. The eigenvalue for the second factor was much lower, 1.33, explaining 14.2 per cent of the variation across the variables. The third factor has an eigenvalue of 0.40, explaining only 4.3 per cent of the variation across the variables. This suggests that while there may be a second factor that captures some additional variation,²² a single factor solution is sufficient for understanding most of the variation in attitudes.

Table A3 gives the factor loadings for each of the variables, ordered from the variable with the strongest positive relationship through to the variable with the strongest negative relationship.

Table A3 Label and statements for views on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations and issues

Label	Statement	Factor loading
2c	It is important for First Nations peoples to have a voice/say in matters that affect them	0.843
2h	Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are disadvantaged today because of past race-based policies	0.815
2b	The Federal Government should help improve reconciliation	0.811
2i	It is important to undertake formal Truth-telling processes to acknowledge the reality of Australia's shared history	0.785
1b	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's level of disadvantage justifies extra government assistance	0.759
1f	As the first Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should have special cultural protection that other groups don't have	0.732
2g	I feel proud of First Nations cultures	0.695
1e	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be able to decide for themselves their way of life	0.507
2a	Australia is better off because we have many different racial/cultural groups.	0.484
2e	I feel proud of Australia's multiculturalism	0.343
2f	I feel proud of British/European cultures in Australia	-0.406
2j	Non-Indigenous Australians are superior to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians	-0.487
1g	In the long run, it would be best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be completely assimilated into Australian society	-0.633
1a	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are now treated equally to other Australians	-0.633
2d	If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people tried harder they could be just as well off as non-Indigenous Australians	-0.782
1c	Recognising land rights and Native Title of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is unfair to other Australians	-0.792
1d	Injustices towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are now all in the past	-0.822

The final step is to create an index using these factor loadings. The index is essentially a scaled sum of the product of each of the variable values for that individual, multiplied by the factor loadings. We then subtract the mean of the raw index created from the factor analysis from each individual's own value, and then divide by the standard deviation from the sample. This results in an adjusted index that has a mean of zero and standard deviation of one across the entire sample of individuals with complete responses.

Endnotes

¹ There have also been three plebiscites, two (in 1916 and 1917, respectively) on conscription, both of which failed to win a majority, and one (in 1977) on changing the national anthem. In addition, there was one postal survey (in 2017) on same sex marriage.

² The five instances are twice in 1946, and once in, respectively 1937, 1977 and 1984.

³ The question asked on voting intention in January, April, and August 2023 was preceded by a question on how much a person felt they knew about the idea of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.

The specific question in January was as follows: 'In Australia, referendums are sometimes held to ask people to vote on changes to the Constitution. If a referendum were held today, how would you vote on the proposal to alter the Constitution to establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice?'

Before giving their answer, respondents were informed that 'An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice would include representatives to advise Parliament and the Executive Government on topics related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.' They were then given two options only to choose from: 'I would vote yes to including an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice in the constitution' or 'I would vote no to including an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice in the constitution.'

In April and August 2023, reflecting the firming of the wording of the question, respondents were given a n expanded amount of information before being asked whether they approved the proposed alternation. Specifically, they were told that the proposed addition to the Constitution is:

"In recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia:

1. There shall be a body, to be called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice;
2. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice may make representations to the Parliament and the Executive Government of the Commonwealth on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
3. The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws with respect to matters relating to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, including its composition, functions, powers and procedures."

⁴ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/indigenous/voice-referendum-newspoll-late-swing-for-yes-campaign-but-nation-poised-to-say-no/news-story/7096dcf9234291d496ba016cca5142c>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/ng-interactive/2023/oct/13/indigenous-voice-to-parliament-referendum-2023-poll->

results-polling-latest-opinion-polls-yes-no-campaign-newspoll-essential-yougov-news-by-state-australia

⁶ This is slightly different to the cross-sectional data from October 2023. However, the conclusions are the same if we compare the two cross-sectional samples separately.

⁷ <https://www.mq.edu.au/research/research-centres-groups-and-facilities/groups/radical-centre-reform-lab/media/opinion-exp-content/this-article-is-more-than-1-month-old-the-no-side-in-the-voice-referendum-has-misread-the-mood-among-migrants>

⁸ <https://lens.monash.edu/@politics-society/2023/10/24/1386245/voice-referendum-if-you-dont-know-vote-no-an-old-slogan-for-modern-politics>

⁹ <https://theconversation.com/albanese-releases-draft-wording-for-indigenous-voice-to-parliament-referendum-187933>

¹⁰ <https://theconversation.com/voice-referendum-results-point-to-shifting-faultlines-in-australian-politics-215673>

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/aug/16/lidia-thorpe-calls-for-referendum-called-off-indigenous-voice-to-parliament-no-campaign>

¹² <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-10-15/nsw-votes-no-indigenous-voice-referendum-demographics-result/102976968>

¹³ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/voice-defeat-delivers-opening-salvo-against-identity-politics/news-story/e8bbab6b2d88e5bf8745dbf4232c773b>

¹⁴ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/inquirer/the-message-australians-sent-is-clear-we-wont-be-divided-by-race/news-story/2211a2e0714068692059098498b55503>

¹⁵ https://ugc.production.linktr.ee/2e09849a-25e6-4743-8317-e33dfb437728_Statement-for-our-People-and-Country.pdf

¹⁶ <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/publication/2022-australian-reconciliation-barometer/>

¹⁷ The only difference between the questions in the two waves of data collection is that in October 2014 respondents were asked about Aboriginal people, whereas in the 2023 survey we asked about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

¹⁸ <https://about.abc.net.au/speeches/noel-pearson-boyer-lecture-series-who-we-were-and-who-we-can-be/>

¹⁹ These results hold in a regression model when we control for other observable characteristics.

²⁰ <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement/>

²¹ We also estimated the model with the similar variable for Government help for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This was highly correlated with the land rights/native title question, but alone explained less of the variation.

- ²² The factor loadings suggest that the second factor predicts agreement with the following two statements broadly related to multiculturalism in Australia, but not specific to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population: 2a – Australia is better off because we have many different racial/cultural groups; and 2e – I feel proud of Australia’s multiculturalism.