



Indigenous Voice to Parliament Poll

March 2023



Voters have limited understanding of the upcoming referendum process and topic

In advance of the vote on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament later this year, there is a knowledge gap to be filled regarding how a national referendum actually works.

Only a minority of voters claim to have a complete understanding of the referendum process (45%, higher among men and university educated voters) – specifically, that this:

- is a vote on Parliament-proposed changes to the Australian Constitution
- is a compulsory vote
- requires a “YES” or “NO” answer to the referendum question(s)
- requires a double majority of “YES” votes (nationally, and in a majority of states) to be approved.

Just over half of Australian voters have only a partial understanding (34%) or no understanding (21%) of how a national referendum works – and this does not differ by voter experience.

With the last national referendum being held more than 20 years ago, those old enough to have voted at the November 1999 Republic referendum are no more knowledgeable about the referendum process than first time referendum voters.

Community understanding of the referendum issue, establishing an Indigenous Voice to Parliament, is similarly limited – but improved since our national survey of Australian adults in August.

Most voters have heard about the idea of forming a body representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to advise the Australian Parliament and Government on laws and policies related to Indigenous Australians (86%, up from 79%).

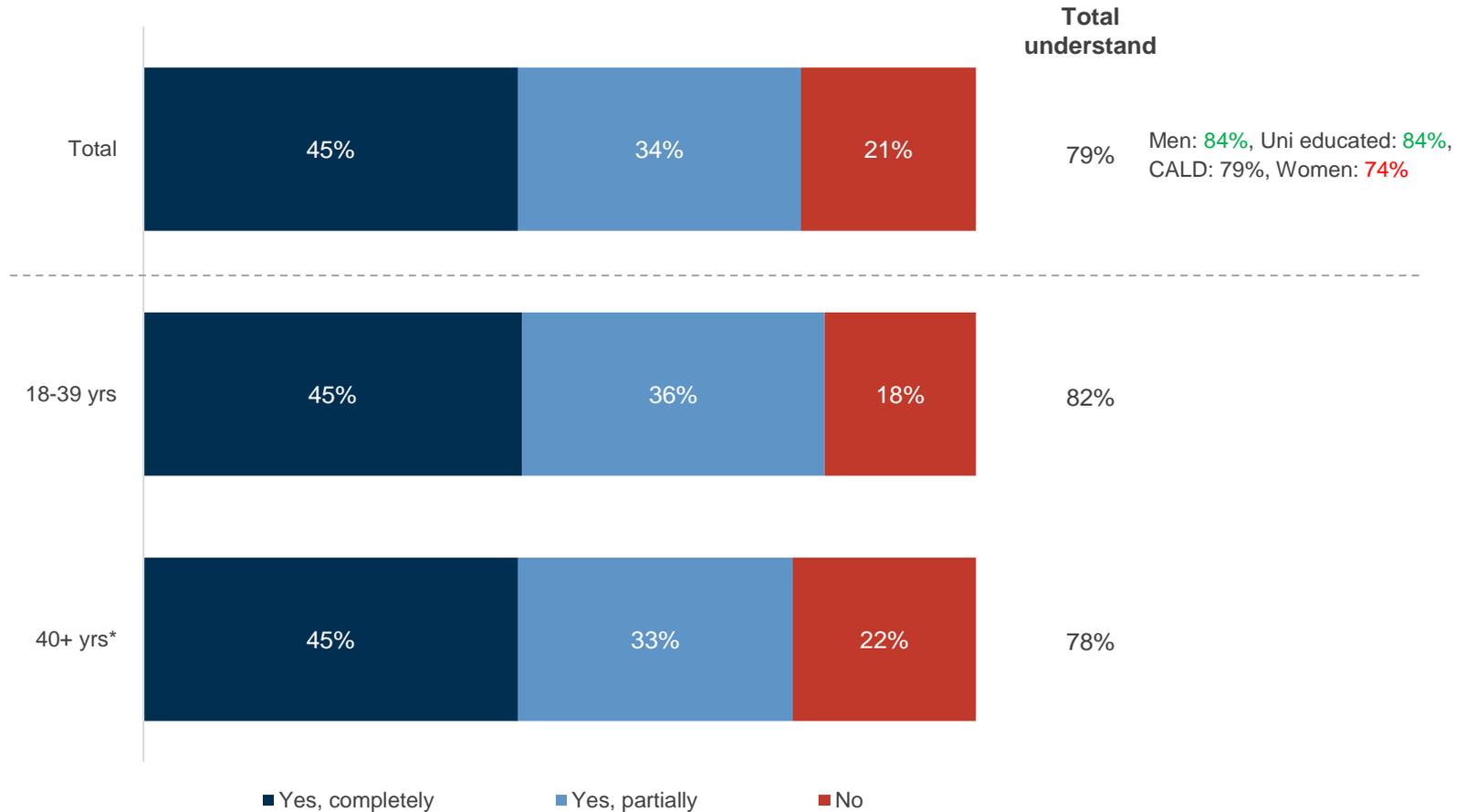
However, voters largely know only a little (50%, up from 37%) or nothing (26%, down from 34%) about this. Just one in ten voters claim to know a lot about the idea of an Indigenous Voice to Parliament (10%).

Knowledge and awareness has improved among both men and women and across all age groups since August but remains strongest among older voters (55+ years). Among young voters (18-34 years), awareness is a little lower than average but still at almost eight in ten.

Voters have limited understanding of how a referendum works, even those old enough to have voted in the last one



Understanding of how national referendums work



*Those of voting age at the last referendum held 6th November 1999 currently aged approx. 41 years and over.

Significantly higher / lower than the total at the 95% confidence interval.

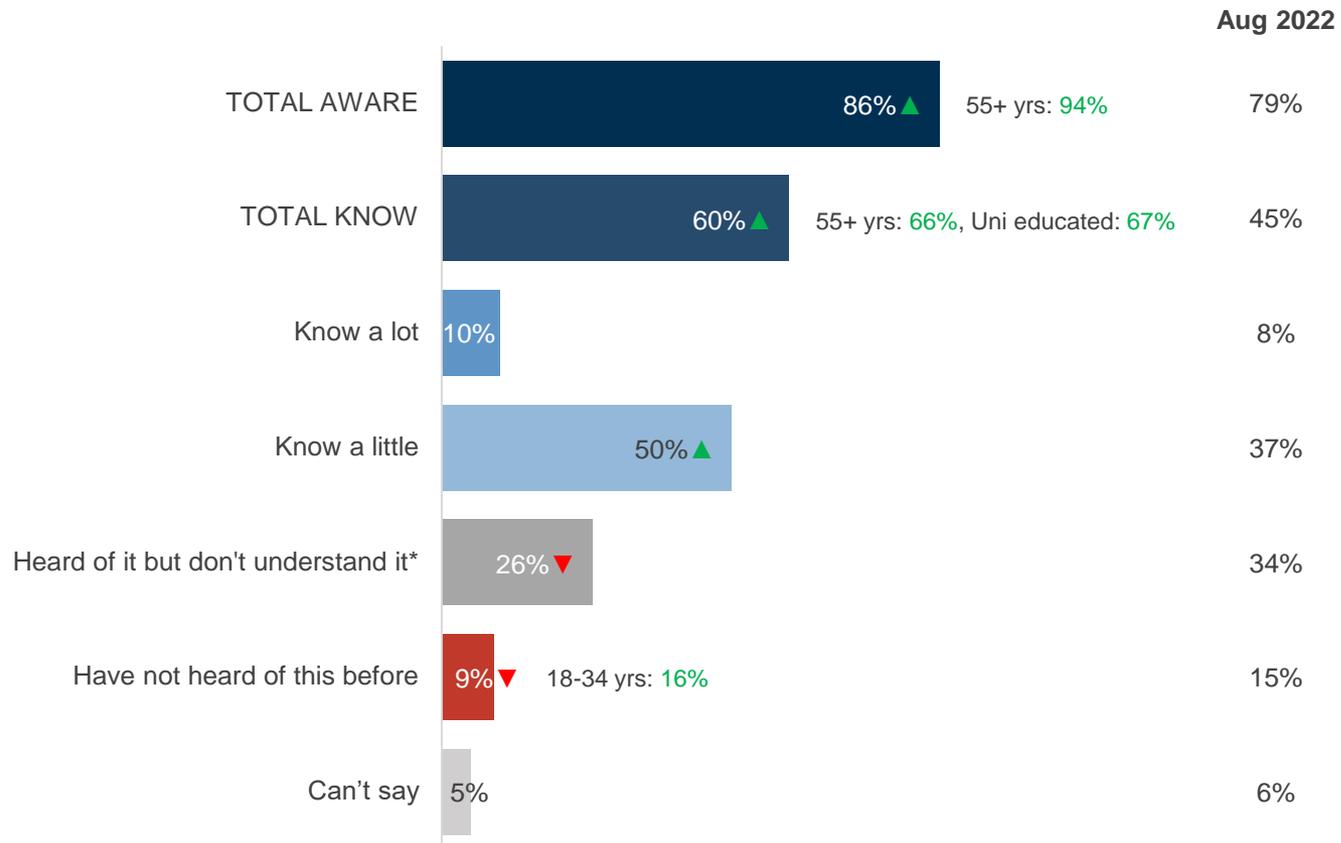
Q. National referendums are held for Australians to vote on Parliament-proposed changes to the Australian Constitution. Similar to elections, it is compulsory to vote. Voters must write either "YES" or "NO" on the ballot paper in answer to the referendum question. For the constitutional amendment to be approved, a double majority of voters is required, that is: a majority of voters nationally vote "YES"; and a majority of voters in a majority of the states (at least four of: NSW, Vic, Qld, WA, SA or Tas) vote "YES". Before today, did you understand this is how a national referendum works?

Base: Eligible voters (n=940).

Community awareness and understanding of an Indigenous Voice to Parliament has increased over the past 6 months



Awareness of the idea of establishing an Indigenous Voice to Parliament



* Previously 'Heard of it but know nothing more'.

Significantly higher ▲ than August 2022 at the 95% confidence interval.

Significantly higher than the national total at the 95% confidence interval.

Q. Now about establishing an Indigenous Voice to Parliament. This is the idea of forming a body representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to advise the Australian Parliament and Government on laws and policies related to Indigenous Australians. How much would you say you know and understand about this idea?

Base: Eligible voters – Feb 2023 (n=940), Australian adults – Aug 2022 (n=1,000).

Voters have seen the YES case feature more prominently in public debate than the NO case



Information, ads, media and social media about the proposed referendum are widely recalled, but across all age groups more has been seen in support of an Indigenous Voice to Parliament than against it.

Seven in ten voters definitely recall (44%) or may have seen (28%) something about this, higher among men and older adults (55+ years), fewer but still six in ten among young adults (18-34 years) and CALD voters.

Among this group, almost half (49%) say this was mainly related to supporting the Voice / the YES vote – far more than have seen content mainly related to opposing the Voice / the NO vote (6%). A further one in five (20%, higher among CALD voters) have seen about an equal amount from both sides of the debate.

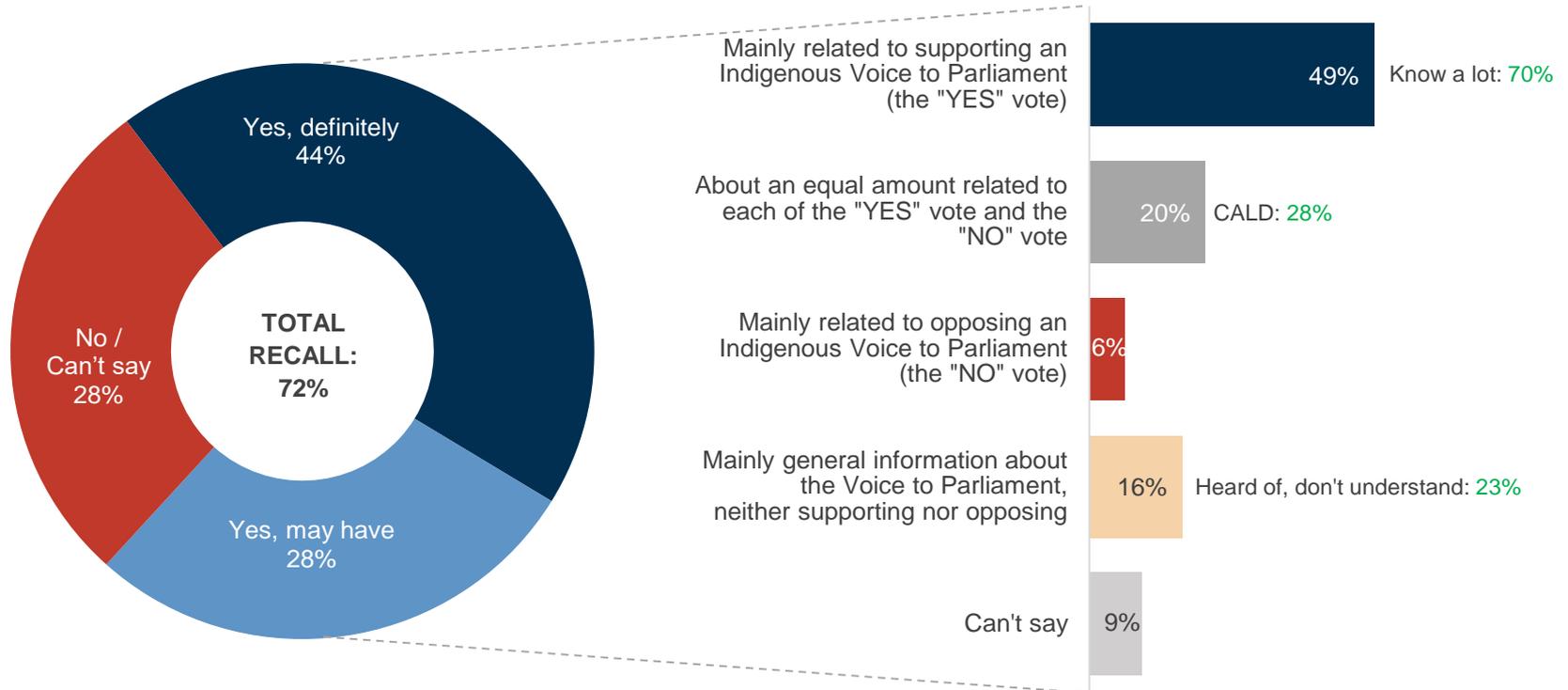
Others (16%) recall mainly general information about the referendum, neither supporting nor opposing the proposed change.



Most voters recall information, media or ads about an Indigenous Voice to Parliament – mainly from the YES case



Recall and overall tone of information, ads, media stories, social media posts about proposed referendum on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament



Total recall significantly different among:
 55+ yrs: 84%, Men: 77%,
 CALD: 64%, 18-34 yrs: 61%

Significantly higher / lower than the total at the 95% confidence interval.

Q. Now about establishing an Indigenous Voice to Parliament. Do you recall seeing any information, advertising, media stories or social media posts recently about the proposed referendum on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament? / Q. Overall, how would you describe the information, ads, media and social media you have seen on this issue?

Base: Eligible voters (n=940), recall proposed Indigenous Voice to Parliament media (n=688).



YES votes currently outweigh NO votes, with a double majority looking to be within reach

Currently, YES votes outweigh NO votes on establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, despite a small increase in the NO vote since August. However, lack of information remains an issue.

Four in ten voters would support an alteration to the Constitution that establishes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice and vote YES in a referendum if it were held now (42%, similar to 43% in August). A smaller but increased proportion do not support this change and would vote NO (28%, up from 23%).

Significant increases in the NO vote among men, older adults (55+ years) and in Victoria over the past six months have contributed to this overall increase.

While three in ten voters continue to be in need of more information or undecided (30%, similar to 33% in August), a majority of this group are already leaning toward a YES or NO vote. Taking these leanings into account, overall, a slight majority (51%) of Australians would vote YES in this referendum and 36% would vote NO. Just 13% are still undecided, higher among 35-54 year olds and regional voters.

Similarly, a slight majority would vote YES in Victoria (54%) and NSW (52%). Half (50%) of voters would vote YES in WA, and just short of a majority in Queensland (48%) and SA (46%).

Younger adults are most supportive, with the YES vote at two-thirds of 18-34 year olds and half of 35-54 year olds. In contrast, slightly more voters aged 55+ years would vote NO than would vote YES. By gender, the NO vote is stronger among men than women but the YES vote still leads among both groups.

Most voters expect to turn out for this referendum, and the YES vote among those likely to do so suggests a double majority is within reach.

Eight in ten voters (82%) say they are likely to turn out and cast a formal vote in this referendum, a stronger 92% among YES voters but still a high 82% among NO voters. Fewer than one in ten voters are unlikely to do so (8%, higher among 35-54 year olds, in WA and voters with a lack of knowledge about the Voice issue). A further 10% are currently unsure.*

Compared with the wider electorate, young adults (18-34 years) and CALD voters appear a little less enthusiastic to participate, with fewer 'extremely likely' to turn out for this referendum.

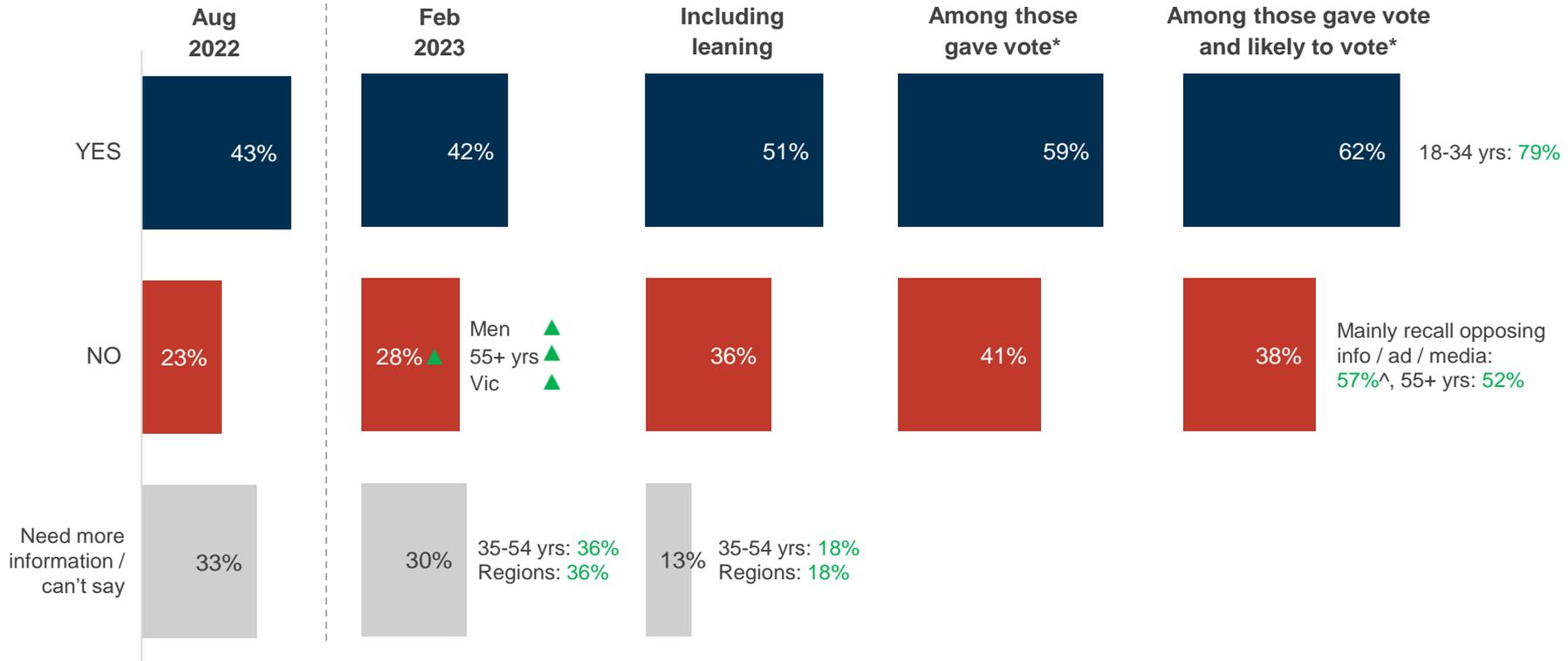
However, among those who have decided on or are leaning towards a YES or NO vote, 62% nationally and a majority in each mainland state (65% in Vic, 63% in NSW, 61% in WA, 59% in Qld and 54% in SA) would vote YES. This suggests a double majority is currently within reach.

* Compares with 90% voter turnout at May 2022 federal election.



YES votes outweigh NO votes on an Indigenous Voice – despite a small increase in the NO vote since August

Voting intention in the proposed referendum to establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice



* Excludes 'Can't say'

[^] Small base size n<50

Significantly higher [▲] than August 2022 at the 95% confidence interval.

Significantly higher than the national total at the 95% confidence interval.

Q. The Australian Government is proposing to add the following points to the Australian Constitution. This would ensure an Indigenous Voice to Parliament that continues under future governments.

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 Parliament and the Executive Government 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 the composition, functions, powers and procedures of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.

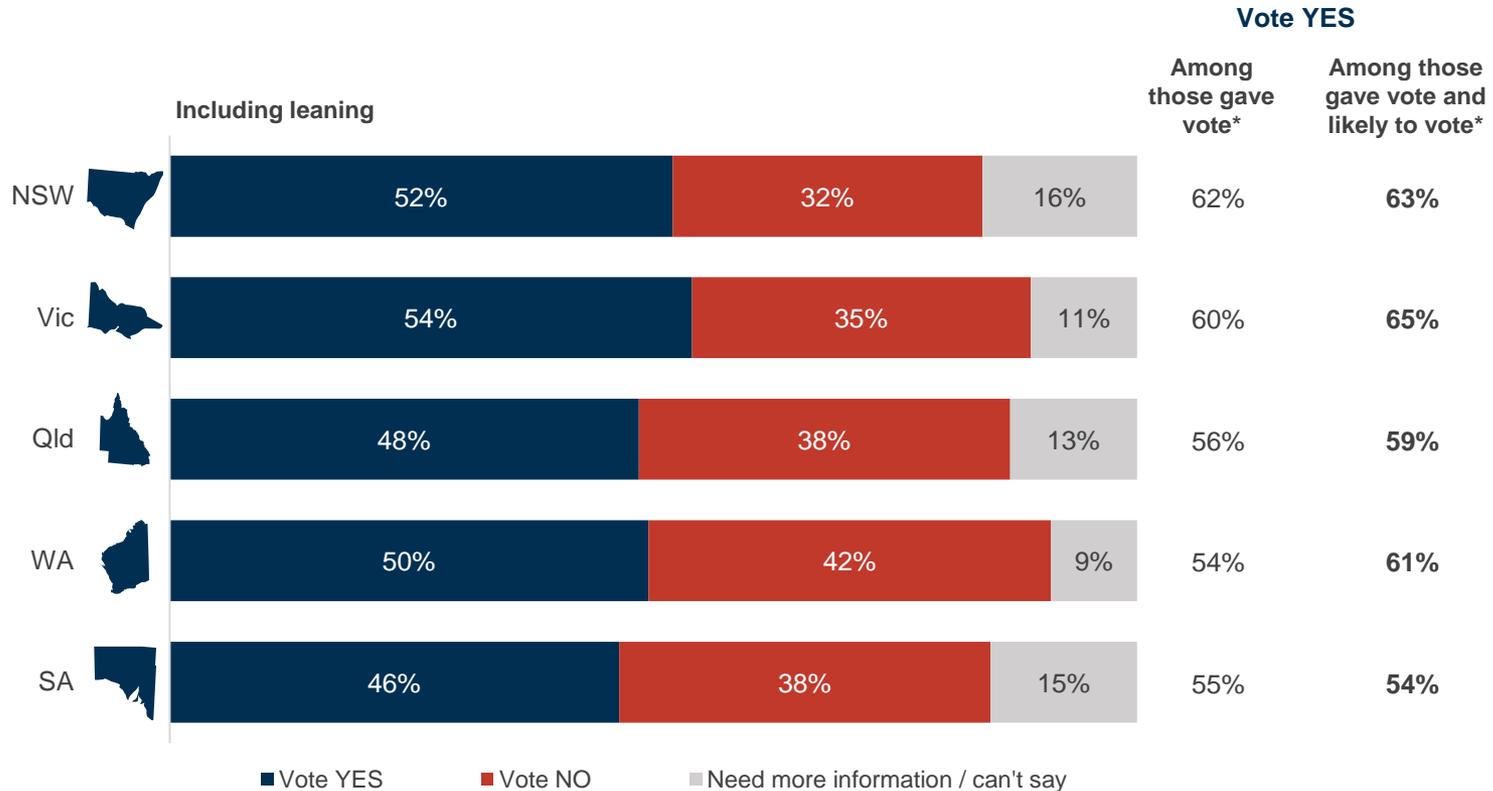
If the proposed referendum was held today, how would you answer the referendum question: "Do you support an alteration to the constitution that establishes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice?" Even if you're not sure, which way are you currently leaning? [August 2022: A referendum (national vote) must be held to make these changes to the constitution. Even if it is just a leaning, do you support an alteration to the constitution that establishes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice? Yes / support, No / do not support]

Base: Australian adults – Aug 2022 (n=1,000). Eligible voters – Feb 2023 (n=940), Gave vote (n=822), Likely to vote (n=725).

Majority YES votes in the mainland states among those decided and likely to vote



Voting intention in the proposed referendum to establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice – by state[^]



* Excludes 'Can't say'

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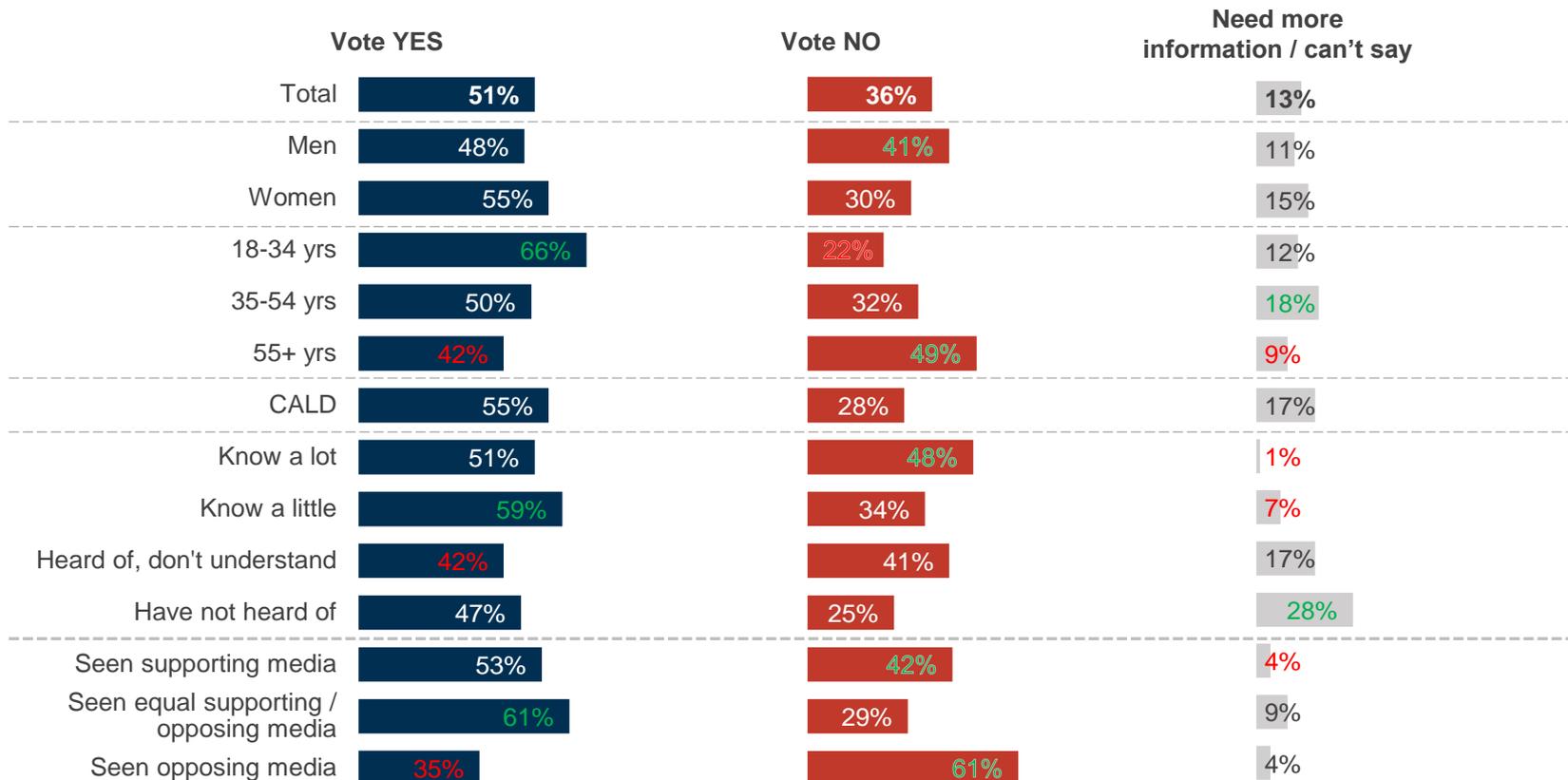
A referendum (national vote) must be held to make these changes to the constitution. Even if it is just a leaning, do you support an alteration to the constitution that establishes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice?

Base: Eligible voters (n=940), Gave vote (n=822), Likely to vote (n=725). ^Tasmania excluded due to small sample size.

Generational divide with 18-54s supporting an Indigenous Voice but more NO than YES votes among the over 55s



Voting intention in the proposed referendum to establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice (including leaning) – by demographics



Significantly higher / lower than the total at the 95% confidence interval.

Q. The Australian Government is proposing to add the following points to the Australian Constitution. This would ensure an Indigenous Voice to Parliament that continues under future governments.

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 Parliament and the Executive Government 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 the composition, functions, powers and procedures of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.

A referendum (national vote) must be held to make these changes to the constitution. Even if it is just a leaning, do you support an alteration to the constitution that establishes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice?

Base: Eligible voters (n=940).



Why Australians would vote YES to establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were in Australia before us and it is a sign of respect to have their opinion on changes we make in Parliament.”

“European settlement and the displacement of first inhabitants is part of our history. We can't change it but we can make amends, restitution and this is a major step towards that goal.”

“We need to move forward and include indigenous people to have a say in things that affect them. If the YES vote does not get up, it will be a lost opportunity.”

“I think recognition of Indigenous people in the Constitution is very important... I think enshrining a Voice to Parliament in the Constitution is also important so that it cannot be fully abolished by the government of the day the way ATSIC was.”

“Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples is long overdue.”

“Just feel it is the right thing to do.”

“I am a very proud indigenous lady from Alice Springs, watching my hometown get destroyed... Maybe establishing a vote for our first nations people may help areas like Alice Springs.”

“Providing an opportunity for indigenous people to have a genuine say in their own lives.”

“I think it would be a good step towards ensuring that an historically underrepresented portion of our population is heard and that issues which disproportionately affect them are better examined and debated.”

“So that their voice is directly heard and represented at the very top level of things.”

“Australia needs to be inclusive of all Australians. For too long the indigenous voice has been ignored.”

“I want all Australians to benefit equally and I do not think they are now.”

“I believe we need to have a better balance in decision making between white and indigenous. I understand this is advisory not legislative.”

“1: It's only going to be non-binding suggestions to Parliament. 2: Any laws passed as a result of these suggestions are only going to affect ATSI Australian citizens, not the rest of the population. 3: Because I'm not a racist. 4: The people most vocal for the NO campaign are, not surprisingly, the same people I disagree with on a lot of other issues.”



Why Australians would vote NO to establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice

"I do not vote for something that I do not understand, and the PM is refusing to explain what voting YES is for. We are just told to vote YES and, although he has been asked numerous times to explain what the YES vote entails, he has still not enlightened anyone as to why we should vote YES."

"I have not heard enough of how this is going to work and / or make any difference to how it is now."

"A 'Voice' is fine but it does not belong in a Constitution! AND a voice can easily be created right now, just like any / every other lobby group."

"You can't just change these things to satisfy one section of the community."

*"1: I see no purpose to an advisory role. Politicians propose something, Voice advises, politician does whatever he or she wants anyway.
2: I see no benefit to the country as a whole by voting YES."*

"The poorly explained concept appears to consist of a token change to the Constitution."

"This will do exactly nothing, wastes time and energy which could be used to make effective changes in the lives of Aboriginals."

"Everybody has a voice and a vote now. We should not be dividing people on race. Everybody is the same."

"I do not believe it is necessary. There are already enough bodies that allow them to communicate with the Parliament."

"Dividing the community on racial lines: bad. Our society functions best when everyone is treated equally. Already 11 Aboriginal MPs or Senators in Federal Parliament. I don't like how 'the Voice' representatives would constantly challenge legislation: a minefield, and costly."

"What the government is proposing to do is give one lot of people more of a say in what happens with laws proposed and passed by Parliament than the rest of the community."

"They're our indigenous people, yes, but there are plenty of other nationalities in the Australian population that don't get a special seat in Parliament."

"I do not believe we should live in the past. We need to move forward united. This divides Australia forever..."

"I believe it is racist to establish a special Voice to Parliament based purely on a person's race. There are many more deserving groups who need a voice like women, the elderly and the disabled but the government is obsessed with an Indigenous Voice."



Why Australians are undecided about establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice

"I am unsure, I would need more information than what has been given."

"Don't know enough about it all – the media keep talking about it but don't explain how it all works and what it means."

"I really don't know the scope of the issues they would relate to and the level of power they would have."

"There are NO details who, why and how participants would be selected and / or appointed."

"I want to know more what they will represent and how will it work in Parliament."

"How much power does this give to the first nation people? Does it give a greater say than other voters?"

"I don't know how it will benefit all Australians... I don't have all the information to make an informed choice."

"Anything that is proposed to make changes to our Constitution needs careful consideration."

"I work at an ACCO and even they haven't decided yet."

"I'm not sure what benefit it will provide. It seems a very extreme way to provide a 'nice gesture'. What if it becomes like ATSIC?"

"Because I'm not indigenous, I don't know how it would affect them."

"I don't really care about it, so I didn't read anything about it."

"1: We have representatives. I need to better understand how this addresses representative deficits. In some places there are seats reserved for indigenous groups. How is this different or better?"

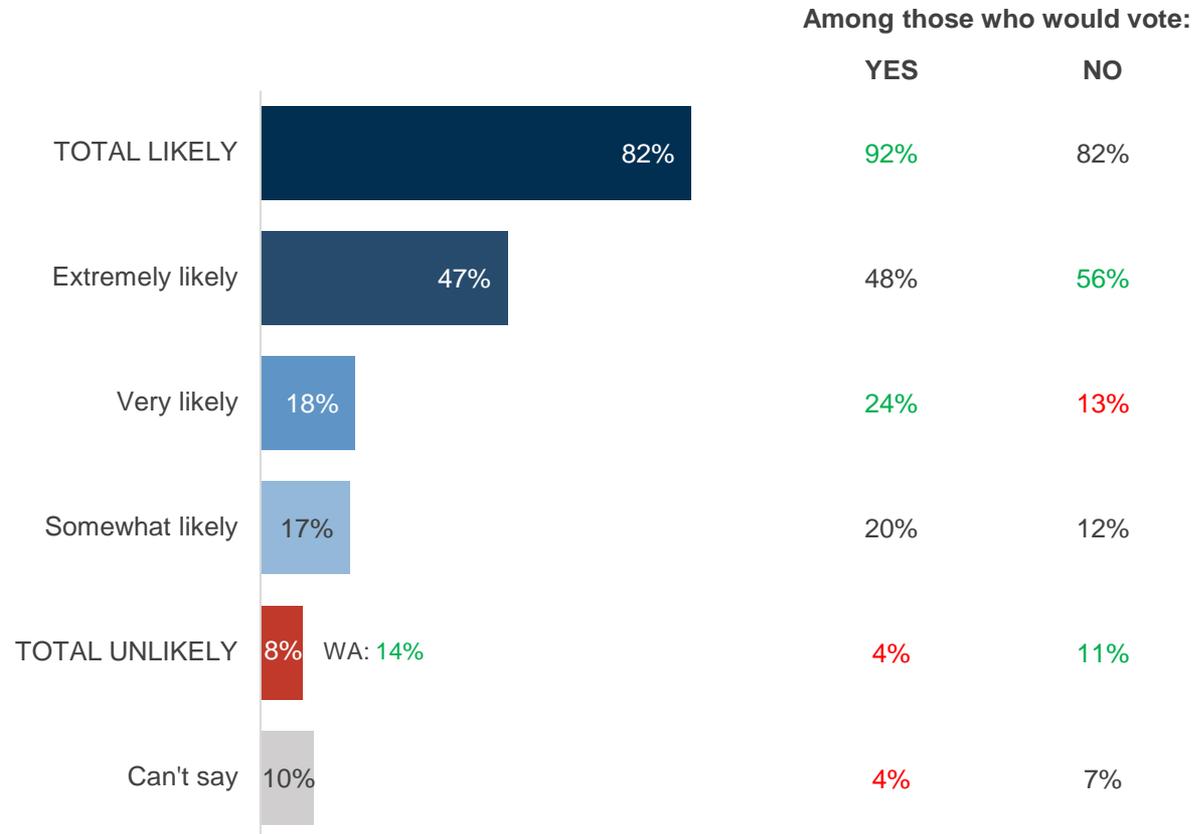
2: Is this just an additional advisory body suggesting legislation that still has to be approved by Parliament? How effective will it be in transforming issues into policy outputs?"

3: How could it be manipulated by domestic and foreign actors? Foreign actors do target our indigenous communities online."

Most voters on both sides of the Indigenous Voice debate are likely to turn out for the referendum later this year



Likelihood to vote in the referendum about establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice



Significantly higher / lower than the total at the 95% confidence interval.

Q. The Prime Minister has said a referendum about establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice will be held between October and December this year. How likely are you to attend a polling booth (or source a postal vote) and cast a formal vote in this referendum?

Base: Eligible voters (n=940).

Over 55s and more knowledgeable voters are most likely to turn out to vote, younger adults and CALD voters less so



Likelihood to vote in the referendum about establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice

	Total	18-34 yrs	35-54 yrs	55+ yrs	CALD	Know a lot	Know a little	Heard of, don't understand	Not heard of
TOTAL LIKELY	82%	81%	76%	89%	79%	99%	90%	77%	64%
Extremely likely	47%	29%	43%	64%	34%	88%	51%	40%	21%
Very likely	18%	21%	18%	17%	23%	7%	24%	14%	19%
Somewhat likely	17%	31%	15%	8%	22%	4%	15%	22%	23%
TOTAL UNLIKELY	8%	8%	11%	4%	10%	1%	5%	12%	8%
Can't say	10%	11%	13%	7%	11%	0%	5%	11%	28%

Significantly *higher* / *lower* than the total at the 95% confidence interval.

Q. The Prime Minister has said a referendum about establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice will be held between October and December this year. How likely are you to attend a polling booth (or source a postal vote) and cast a formal vote in this referendum?

Base: Eligible voters (n=940).

The Voice is seen as an opportunity for formal recognition and sustainable, structured advice which can't be ignored



Arguments which resonate most strongly in support of amending the Constitution to establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament are that this will:

- provide Indigenous people and communities with a formal process to help inform national policy and legal decisions that impact their lives (50% agree)
- help make government consider policy impacts on Indigenous communities (49% agree)
- provide official recognition in the Constitution of the special place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia's history (48% agree)
- provide an ongoing voice to government over the longer term, instead of Indigenous advisory bodies changing with different federal governments (46% agree).

Positive experiences of other countries may be another potentially impactful theme. Currently, a majority of voters are neutral (28%) or undecided (24%) on the argument that versions of Indigenous political participation already operate in other countries.

This suggests low community knowledge of the international experience. However, among those with an opinion, agreement that this is a reason to establish an Indigenous Voice already outweighs disagreement by 3:1.

Arguments with the most mixed response (and highest levels of community scepticism) are around an Indigenous Voice's ability to improve outcomes for:

- Indigenous people and communities, helping to 'close the gap' (41% agree vs 31% disagree)
- government and parliamentary decision-making, enabling more efficient and effective use of resources (39% agree vs 30% disagree).

Older adults (55+ years) are most sceptical about these potential benefits, just one in three agree these are reasons to vote YES.

Mixed views also extend to the related area of an Indigenous Voice's role and powers:

- It will not interfere with the established parliamentary hierarchy – it will provide advice but will have no program delivery function or any veto power on government decisions (39% agree vs 25% disagree).

Overall, key arguments for the YES case resonate most strongly among those more knowledgeable about an Indigenous Voice to Parliament and who best recall information, advertising and media on this issue.

Lack of information is a key barrier to support for the Voice and questions around necessity and impact also resonate



The argument which resonates most strongly against amending the Constitution to establish an Indigenous Voice to Parliament is that not enough detail has been provided about who will have a voice and how this will work (60% of voters agree).

This resonates strongly with both NO (81% agree) and YES (48% agree) voters, and with a majority of Australians regardless of gender, age, location, education or CALD status. (The exception are 18-34 year olds at 49% agree).

Other arguments from the NO case which resonate well with voters question the necessity of Constitutional change and the representativeness and efficacy of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, including:

- There are other ways to recognise the special place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia's history (47% agree) and for them to have a voice (47% agree) without changing the Constitution.
- It would not include the diversity of Indigenous circumstance and experience, just create another layer of bureaucracy and interference by 'elites' in the lives of Indigenous people (45% agree).

However, the related concern that a referendum would be needed to make further changes when this would be

quicker and easier to do via legislation (32% agree, 22% disagree) does not resonate as well.

Also eliciting a more mixed community response (one in four disagree) are criticisms that the Voice is:

- divisive and will give unequal representation to one group of people (46% agree, 26% disagree)
- a waste of government funds which would be better diverted into Indigenous communities, Indigenous-led organisations, or programs and services to improve opportunities for Indigenous people (46% agree, 24% disagree).

The 'third chamber' argument, that over time an Indigenous Voice may come to be seen as a third chamber of Parliament, also resonates less well (36% agree, 26% disagree).

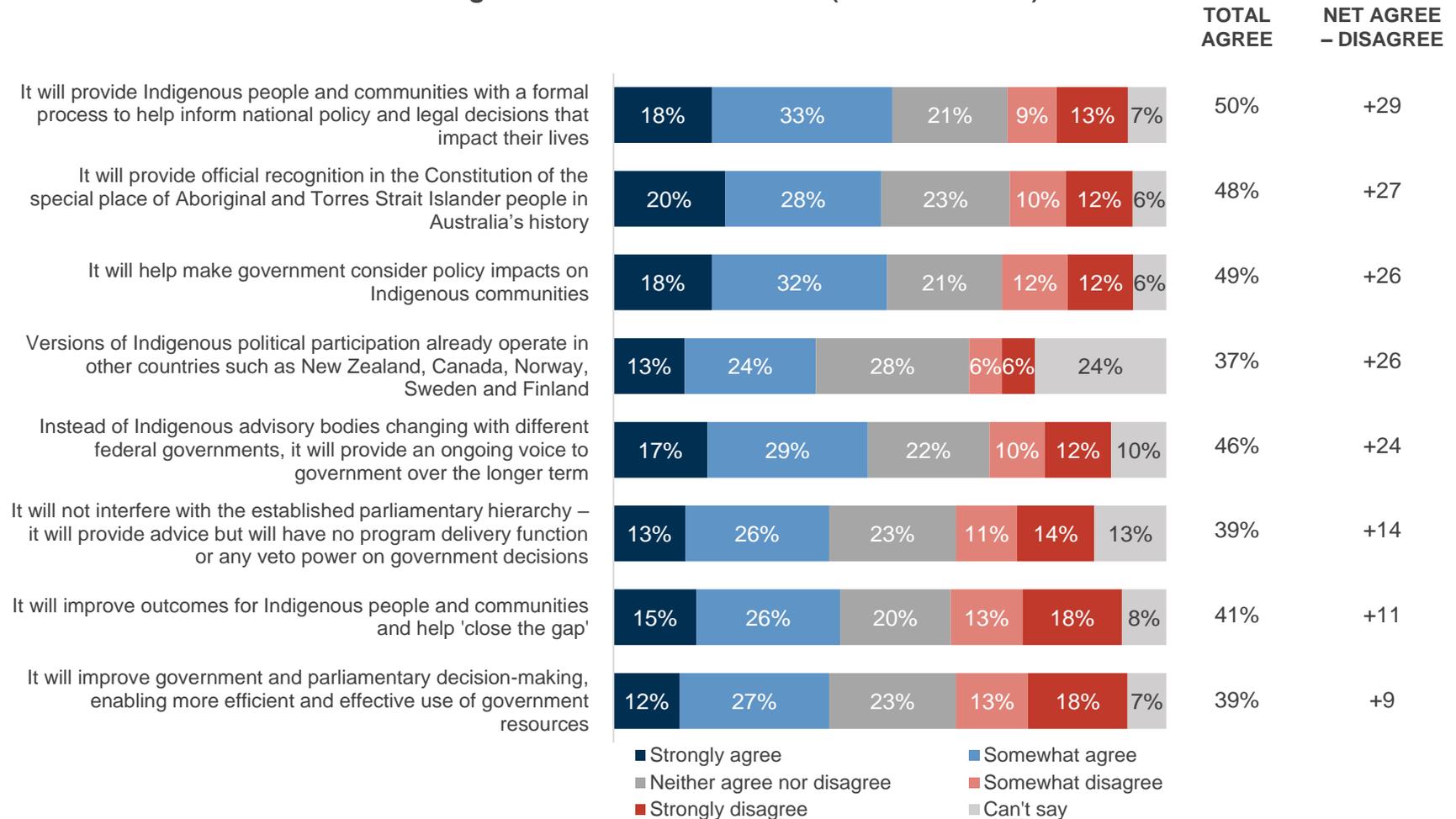
Overall, key arguments for the NO case resonate most strongly among older voters (55+ years), who are overrepresented in the NO vote.

Voter opinion changes little after considering key arguments from both sides of the debate, with YES votes (48%) still outweighing NO votes (37%) and more than one in ten (15%) in need of more information or undecided. Demographic trends mirror those identified on the initial vote measure.

Providing an ongoing, formal process to inform government and constitutional recognition resonate for the YES case



Agreement with reasons to support amending the Constitution to establish an Indigenous Voice to Parliament (the “YES” vote)

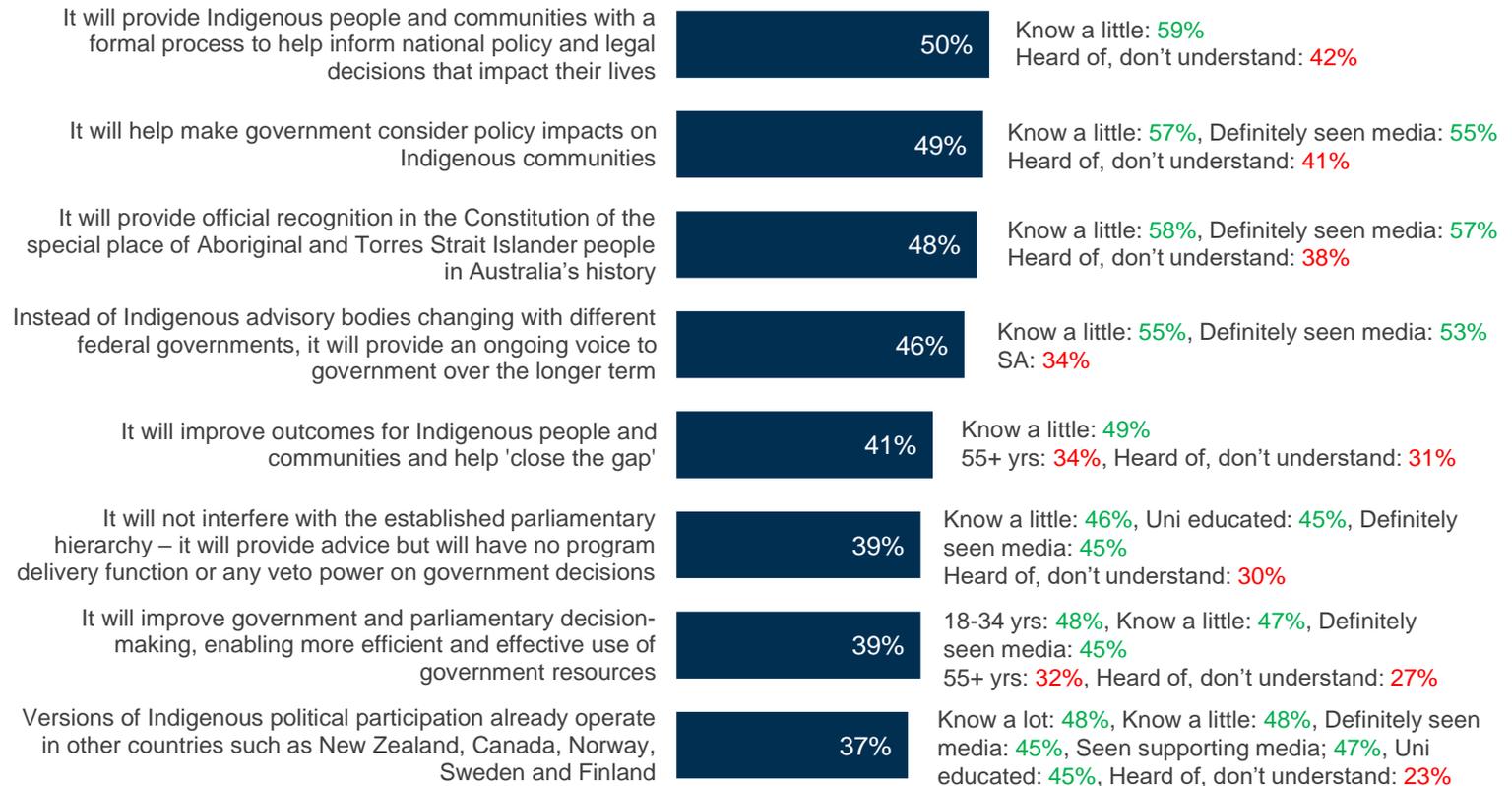


Q. Following are some statements people have made in support of amending the Constitution to establish an Indigenous Voice to Parliament (the “YES” vote). IF SHOWN FIRST: In the next question we’ll ask you about statements people have made in opposition (the “NO” vote). For each statement, do you agree or disagree it is a reason to support amending the Constitution to establish an Indigenous Voice to Parliament?
 Base: Eligible voters (n=940).

Key arguments for the YES case resonate among more knowledgeable, informed voters and less so among over 55s



Agreement with reasons to support amending the Constitution to establish an Indigenous Voice to Parliament (the “YES” vote) (strongly + somewhat agree)



Compared to the wider electorate, voters aged 55 years and over are also more likely to disagree with these arguments.

Significantly *higher* / *lower* than the total at the 95% confidence interval.

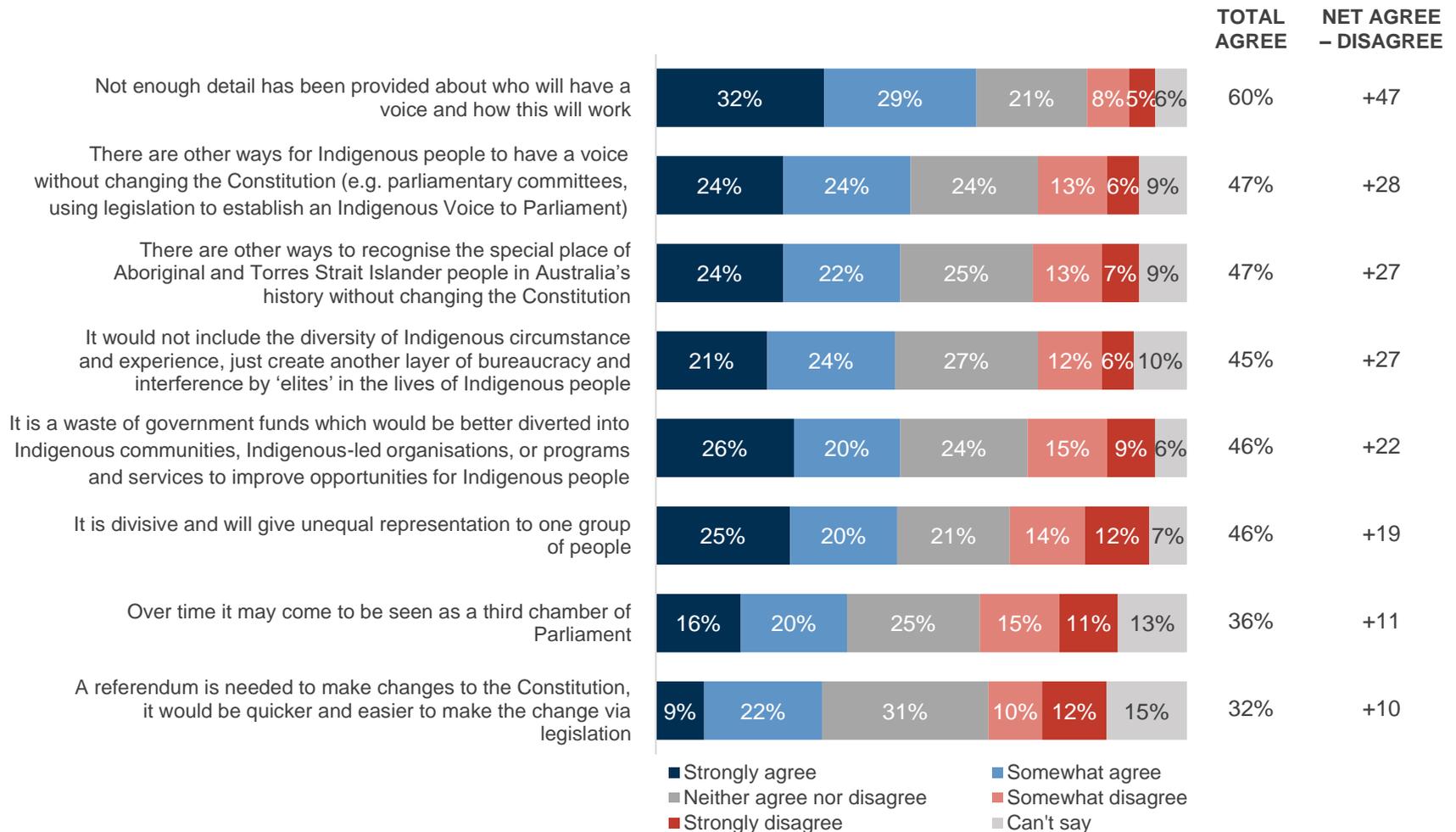
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Base: Eligible voters (n=940).

Lack of detail, alternatives to constitutional change and limited representation and impact resonate for the NO case



Agreement with reasons to oppose amending the Constitution to establish an Indigenous Voice to Parliament (the “NO” vote)

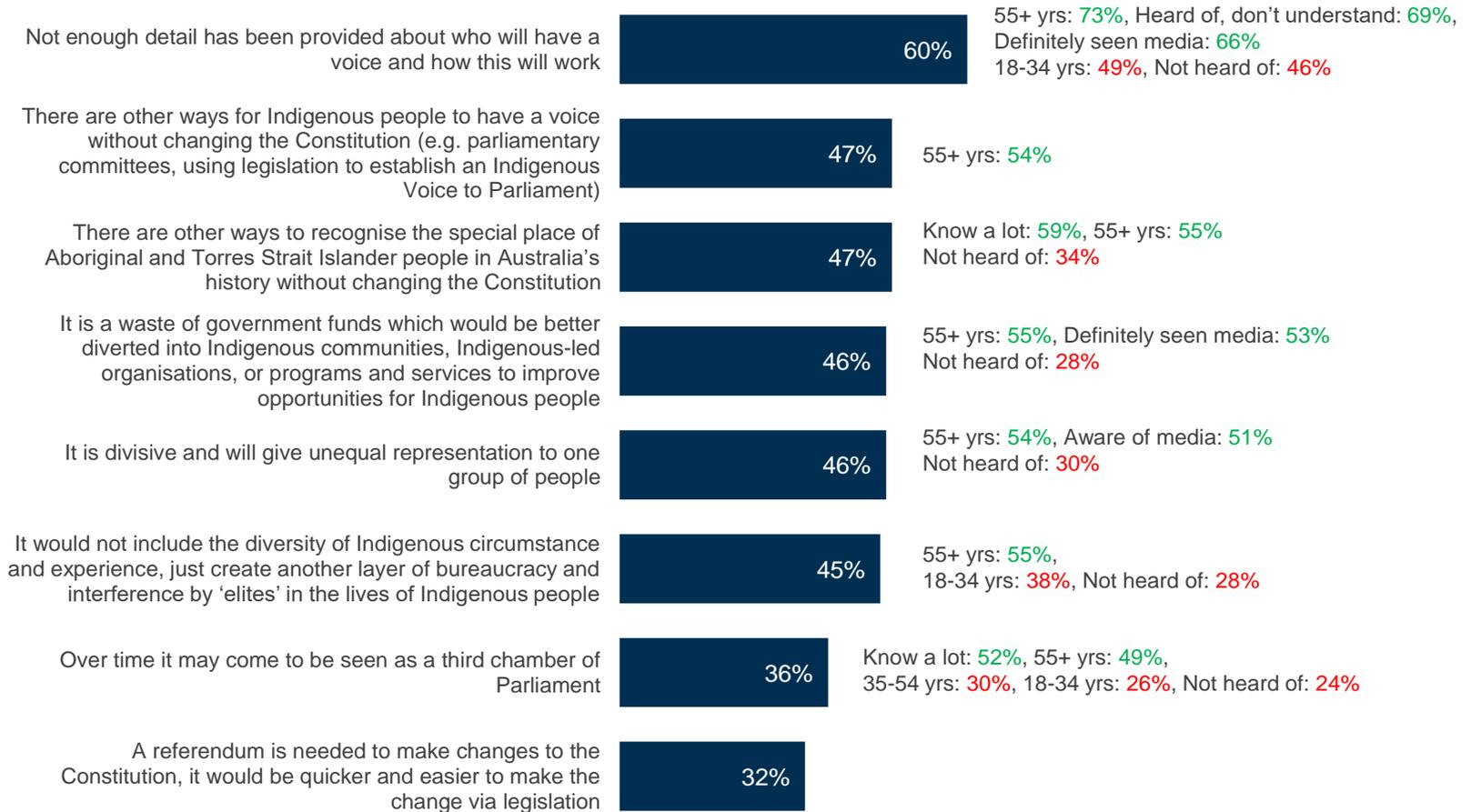


Q. Following are some statements people have made in opposition to amending the Constitution to establish an Indigenous Voice to Parliament (the “NO” vote). IF SHOWN FIRST: In the next question we’ll ask you about statements people have made in support (the “YES” vote). For each statement, do you agree or disagree it is a reason to oppose amending the Constitution to establish an Indigenous Voice to Parliament?
 Base: Eligible voters (n=940).

Key arguments for the NO case resonate most strongly among older voters



Agreement with reasons to oppose amending the Constitution to establish an Indigenous Voice to Parliament (the “NO” vote) (strongly + somewhat agree)



Significantly higher / lower than the total at the 95% confidence interval.

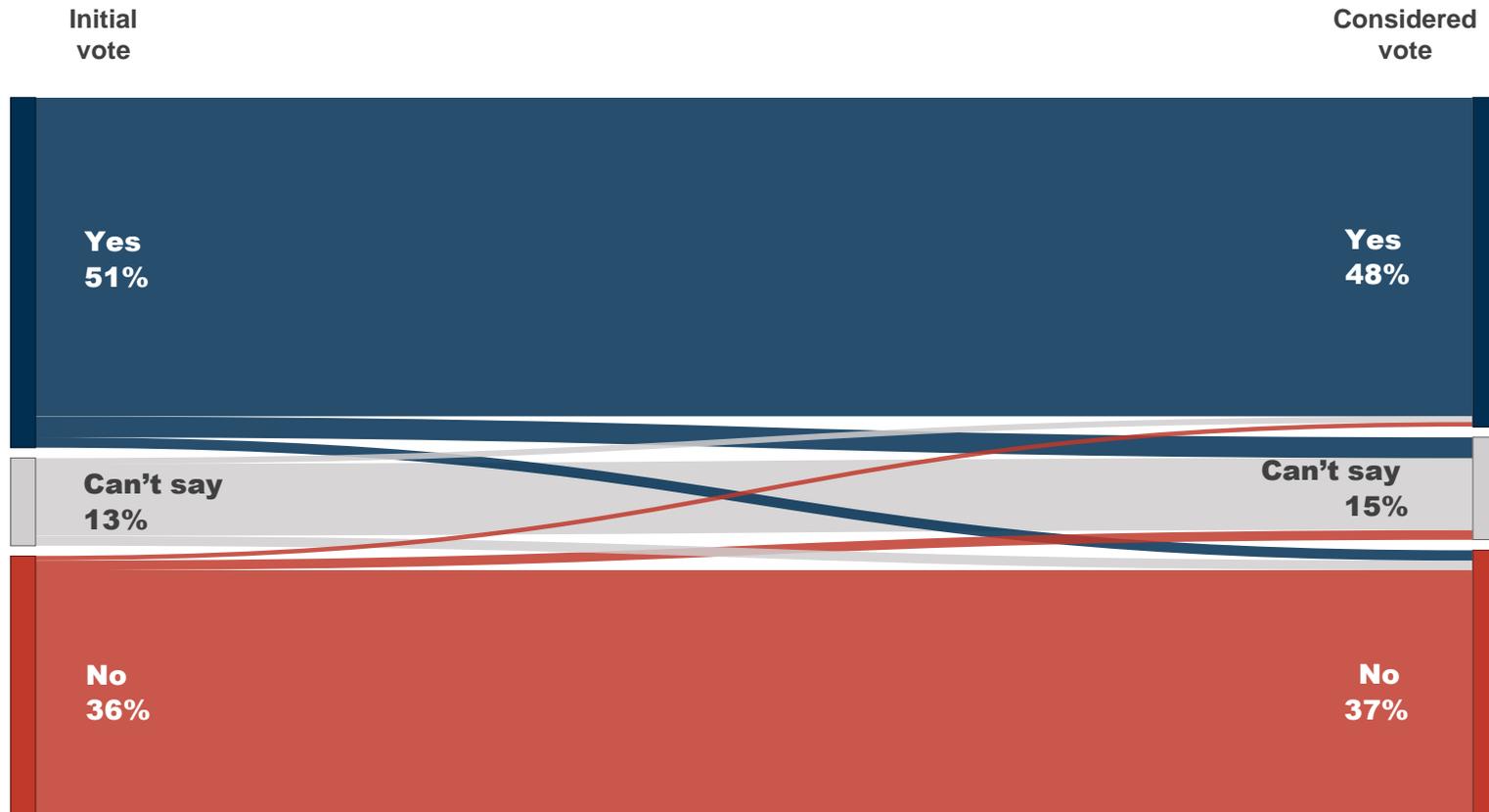
Q. Following are some statements people have made in opposition to amending the Constitution to establish an Indigenous Voice to Parliament (the “NO” vote). IF SHOWN FIRST: In the next question we'll ask you about statements people have made in support (the “YES” vote). For each statement, do you agree or disagree it is a reason to oppose amending the Constitution to establish an Indigenous Voice to Parliament?

Base: Eligible voters (n=940).

Views change little after considering key arguments from both sides of the debate – YES votes still outweigh NO votes



Change in voting intention (including leaning) in the proposed referendum after considering reasons to support / oppose establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice



Q. After reading those statements people have made about the Indigenous Voice to Parliament, even if it is just a leaning, how would you now respond to the referendum question: "Do you support an alteration to the constitution that establishes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice?" / Q. Even if you're not sure, which way are you currently leaning?
 Base: Eligible voters – Feb 2023 (n=940).



Survey methodology

National online survey of eligible voters

n=940 Australian voters

- Conducted Friday 24th – Monday 27th February 2023.
- Sample quotas on age, gender and location, with post-survey weighting to actual age / gender / location proportions from Census data.
- Maximum margin of error on n=940 is +/-3.2% at the 95% confidence level.
- Differences of +/-1% for net scores are due to rounding.

**THERE ARE
OVER
26 MILLION
PEOPLE
IN AUSTRALIA...**

**FIND OUT
WHAT THEY'RE
THINKING.**



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