

# SEEKING TO BE HEARD

Growing support for the  
Uluru Statement from the Heart





Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.



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# About this report

In May 2017, delegates to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Referendum Convention released the Uluru Statement from the Heart. The Statement called for a First Nations Voice to parliament, as well a Marrakatta Commission to oversee agreement-making between governments and First Nations, and truth-telling about their history.

The Statement has taken a long journey to where it is today – from an initial rejection by the Turnbull Government on the basis that it would create a “third chamber to the parliament”, to the more recent promise by the Liberal Government to further explore and clarify a potential constitutional amendment, with the future possibility of a referendum.

This report sheds some light on the key media discussions of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and the bylines and media outlets covering the Statement, from May 2017 to today.

## Why are we analysing its profile?

Due to the lack of polling and divided opinions on the issue, Isentia has sought to take a look at how the issue is presented in the media, to gauge its prominence, and to understand the voices in support and in opposition. We have analysed data on media coverage of the Statement from May 2017 to June 2019.

A sample of coverage from July 2018 to June 2019 was also qualitatively analysed for messaging and support/opposition over time. This sample included 50% of all press and broadcast coverage, and all internet coverage from the *Guardian*, *ABC Online*, *Crikey* and *National Indigenous Times*.

Giving back to the community is an important aspect of who Isentia is as a business and a team. This report, developed by our insights team, is the result of our ongoing commitment to contributing to the communities in which we live and work.

# Uluru Statement from the Heart

**The Uluru Statement from the Heart, released in May 2017, has taken a long journey to where it is today.**

## **What is the Statement from the Heart?**

The Statement was initially released by delegates to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Referendum Convention. It was drafted and signed by over 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders. The Statement called for a First Nations Voice to parliament, and a Marrakatta Commission to oversee agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about their history.

## **Why is it important?**

These recommendations are seen as important in ensuring that Indigenous communities have a voice in the creation policies that affect them, and that Australia as a nation can move towards reconciliation. The aim of the recommendations is to move beyond symbolic recognition and impermanent legislative change.

As part of this, the First Nations voice is a key element of the Statement, as it aims to enshrine in the Constitution First Nations' involvement in policy decisions that affect their communities.

An online survey in 2015, conducted by IndigenousX, found that the majority of Indigenous respondents did not support symbolic constitutional recognition (75%). Additionally, 62% did not believe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities would be better off with mere recognition in the Australian Constitution. However, 54% supported an Indigenous Parliamentary body.

This provided a signal that Indigenous Australians, were not looking for symbolic measures, but instead sought a voice in policy-making when it involved their communities. The Uluru Statement from the Heart, which is built upon regional dialogues across the country, reflects that desire.

# Response and opinions

**Growing support, with troubling undercurrents in the polling data.**

## **How has it been received?**

The Statement was presented to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Opposition Leader Bill Shorten in August 2017.

However, Malcolm Turnbull rejected the proposal several months later, stating that it was unlikely to pass in a referendum and would create a “third chamber of parliament”.

Since then supporters have travelled the country promoting the ideas in the Statement.

Pronouncements of support have increased over the past two years, with many public figures and corporations – including Rio Tinto, BHP and Qantas – stating they support the provisions in the Statement and a referendum.

Having been promised a referendum on the issue by Labor going into the 2019 federal election, the movement has currently had to settle for a promise by the Liberal Government to further explore and clarify a potential constitutional amendment, with the future possibility of a referendum.

The Liberal Government’s response may not be everything that supporters had hoped for, but it is an improvement on the initial response by the Turnbull Government.



## Kerry O'Brien

Journalist

**June 2019**

*"We all have an opportunity together in this term of the Federal Parliament to make a genuine effort to understand and support what is embodied in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, a remarkable document, forged in unity by more than 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders representing the oldest surviving culture on the face of the Earth, a culture that adds a richness that is unique to this continent. And yet we other Australians are mostly ignorant of it."*



## Thomas Mayor

President – NT Trades & Labour Council

Branch Secretary – Northern Territory Branch of the Maritime Union

**March 2018**

*"I envision that when First Nations representatives are chosen by, and therefore accountable to, their own First Nation Peoples, not appointed by the Prime Minister or the media; and when those representatives can come together regularly, able to hold informed debates toward determining collective positions on matters that are common: we will see major change because that type of Voice will be a force to be reckoned with. A Voice that is organised to win."*

The BHP logo is displayed in orange capital letters within a white circle that has a light gray border.

## Andrew Mackenzie

CEO – BHP Billiton

January 2019

*“The establishment of a national Indigenous representative body, a First Nations voice to Parliament, is a meaningful step towards reconciliation. It would empower Indigenous Australians. It would make sure Indigenous people have a say on the legislation, policy and programs that shape Indigenous lives, families and communities. And it would create new opportunities for social and economic progress.”*

The Rio Tinto logo is displayed in white capital letters within a red circle that has a light gray border.

## Joanne Farrell

Group Executive, Health, Safety & Environment – Rio Tinto

January 2019

*“Enshrining the First Nations Voice in the constitution is important to ensure continued participation in decisions about Indigenous rights and interests. We believe national conversations around constitutional reform must continue as a priority for our country.”*





# Liberal Party Policy Document

May 2019

*We are committed to recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in the Constitution at the same time as delivering practical outcomes to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. But there needs to be more work done on what model we take to a referendum and what a voice to parliament would be – which is why we are funding a consultation process with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. This process will develop up a question for a referendum and what a referendum will deliver – because no one can answer what a voice to parliament actually is at the moment.*

*The key issue that we keep hearing is what is this Voice, the ALP cannot tell us what the Voice might look like and how it might operate. We believe if Australians don't understand what they're voting for in a referendum, they will vote no, and endanger this important issue for another generation.*



## Janet Albrechtsen

Columnist – The Australian

**June 2019**

*“It is dividing Australians into two classes instead of unifying us a nation. It confers a special class of governance privileges on a small group of Australians. Whereas the Senate is a house of review for the interests of all, the voice is a house of review for one class of people only. Worse, it divides Australians on racial grounds. The criterion for these special governance privileges depends on the colour of a person’s skin. To repeat my favourite quote from US Chief Justice John Roberts, “the way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race”. Advocates of the voice want to entrench permanent discrimination on the basis of race in our Constitution. They have no answer to that fundamentally retrograde step.”*



## Anthony Albanese

Leader of the Labor Party

**December 2018**

*“The voice to parliament could also be a unifying moment. It’s not a third chamber; it plays no role in the legislative process in terms of making law. It is simply what the title implies: a voice whereby First Nations people would be consulted on legislation that affects them. It would provide a structure for that consultation and input. It wouldn’t determine what way any one of the 150 members of the House of Representatives or 76 senators would vote on legislation, but it would allow for appropriate democratic input. That is why it is critical. That is why we have committed to consulting with First Nations people to design the voice to parliament.”*



# Key findings

**Strong media coverage since May 2017, with four notable peaks.**

## What has the data shown?

Media coverage has been strong since the release of the Uluru Statement from the Heart in May 2017.

There have been four notable peaks during that period, where coverage has spiked as the issue has been drawn in and out of prominence. These peaks included the time of Tony Abbott's appointment as special envoy on Indigenous affairs, and the May 2019 federal election.

Across the sampled coverage support has increased as a share of total voices in media over the past year (July 2018 – June 2019). Opposing voices accounted for approximately 30% of all spokespeople discussing the Statement in July 2018, but in June 2019, they only accounted for 15%.

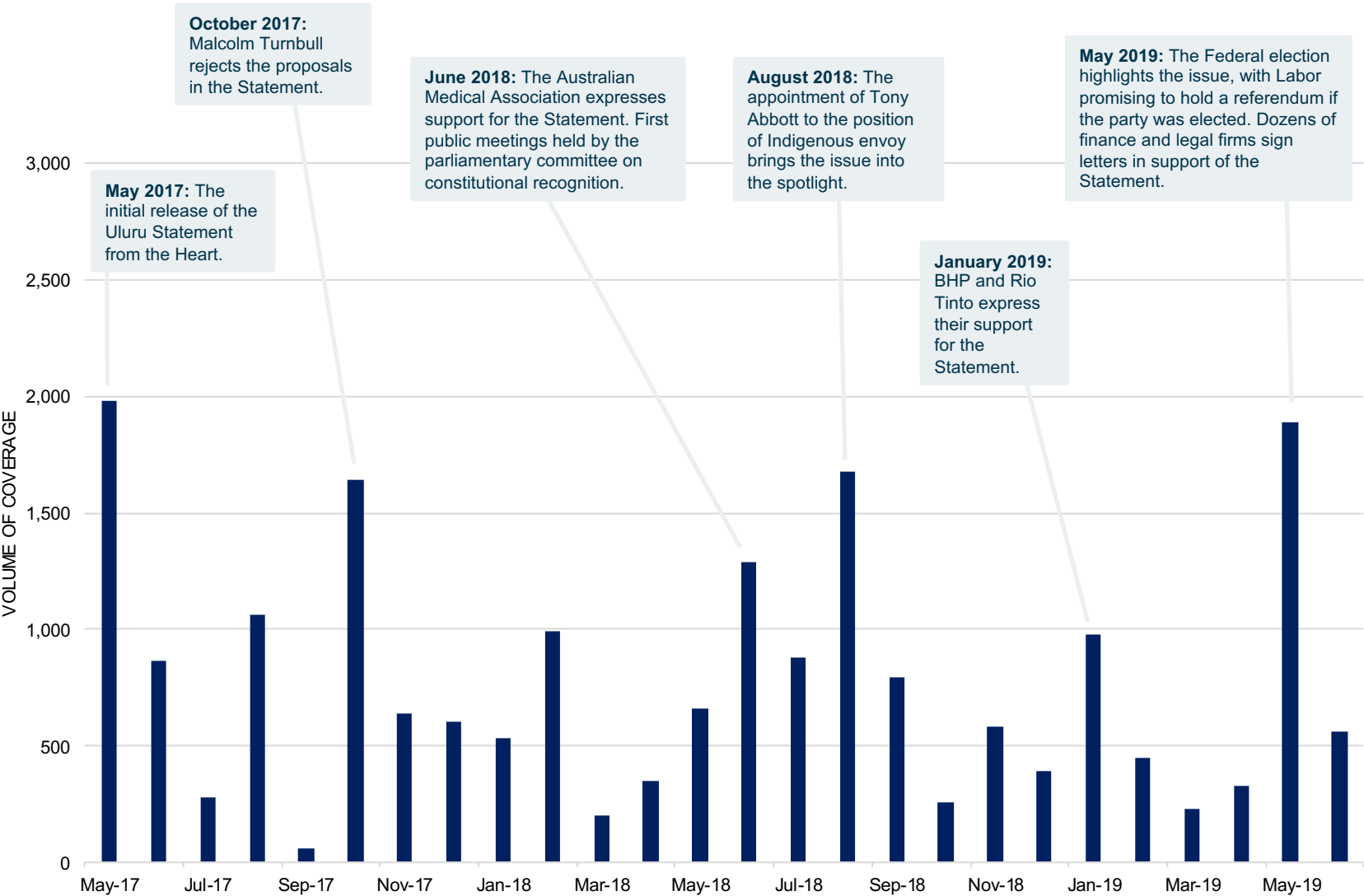
Among supporters, Indigenous voices are the most prominent, with Thomas Mayor, Noel Pearson and Megan Davis receiving the most coverage. Opponents tend to be from the Liberal Party, with Malcolm Turnbull is the leading voice.

Opponents have predominantly focused their criticism on arguments that the proposed changes to the constitution would create a “third chamber of parliament”. However, following the federal election, there has been a rise in discussion of “reverse racism” and implications that the recommended changes would enshrine inequality in the constitution.

# Media coverage

Media coverage of the Statement has been generally high since its release, averaging 775 reports a month; there were only nine months with fewer than 500 reports.

There have been four notable peaks when coverage eclipsed 1,500 reports in a single month.



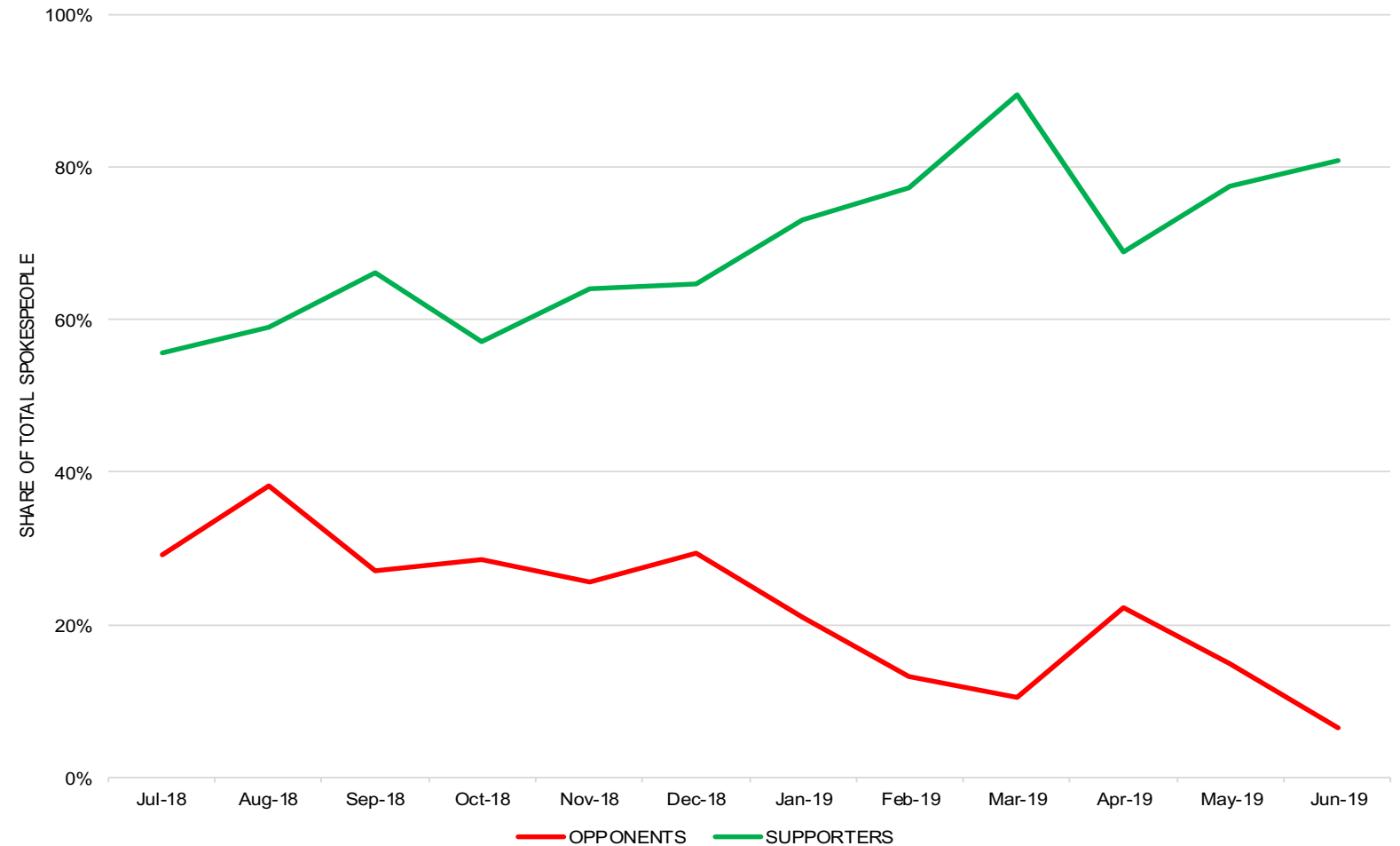


## Voices of support

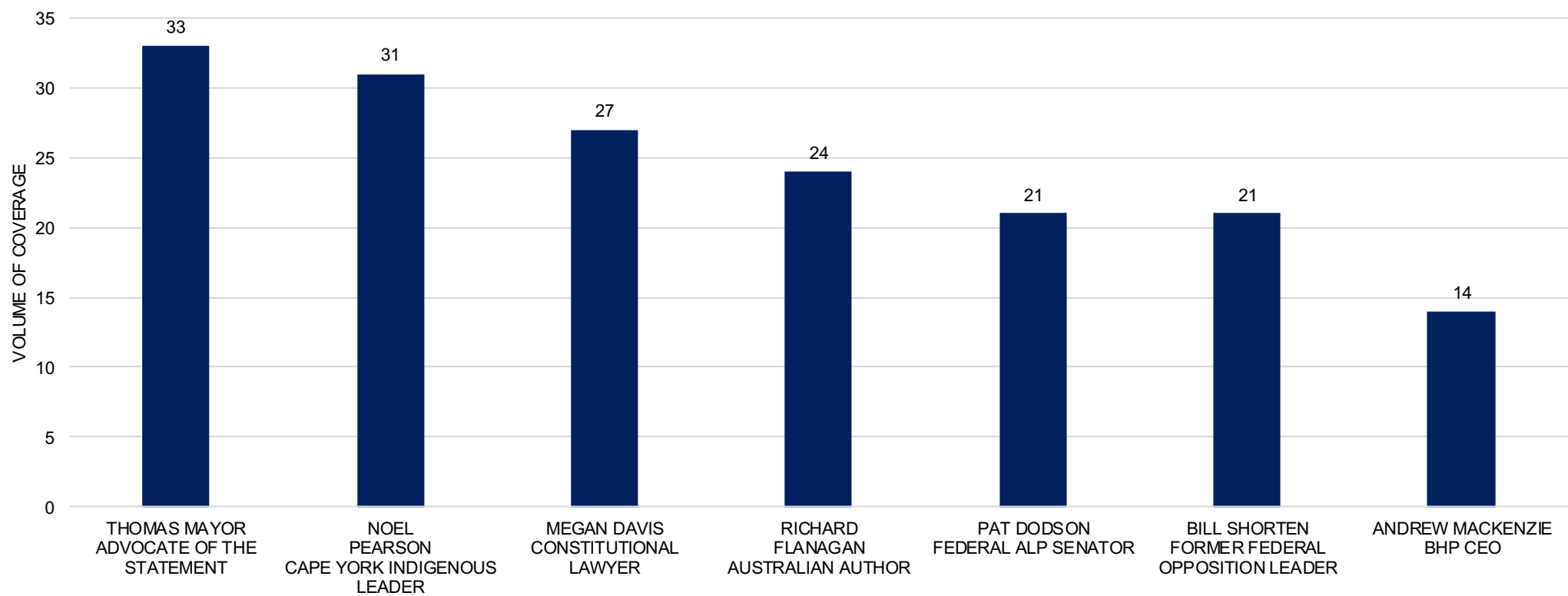
Despite no clear trend of rising media coverage, the consistent campaigning on this issue has created significant progress in terms of support. Over the past year, support in the media has been steadily building.

The number of supporters in media coverage has steadily tracked upwards over the past year, with major corporations like BHP and Rio Tinto expressing their support.

Meanwhile, detractors as a share of total commentators have trended downwards, dropping from an average of approximately 30% of voices in the second half of 2018, to approximately 15% in the first half of 2019.

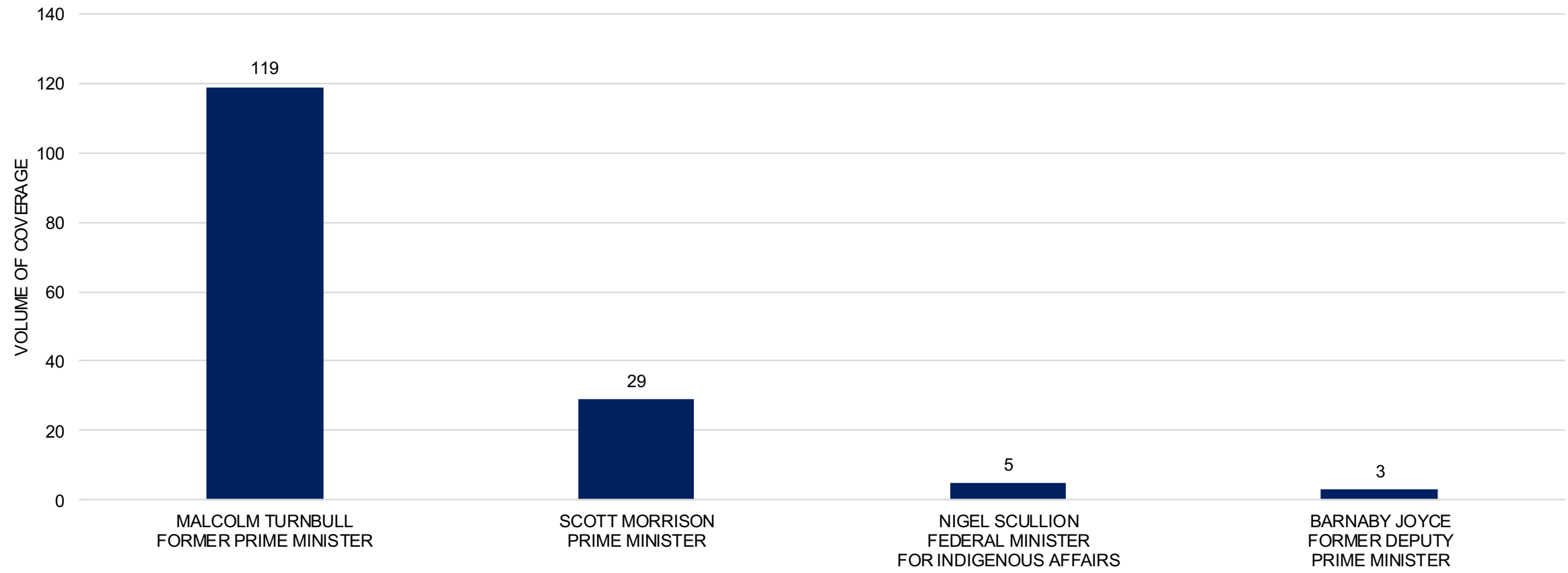


# Leading voices of support July 2018 – June 2019





# Leading voices of opponents July 2018 – June 2019

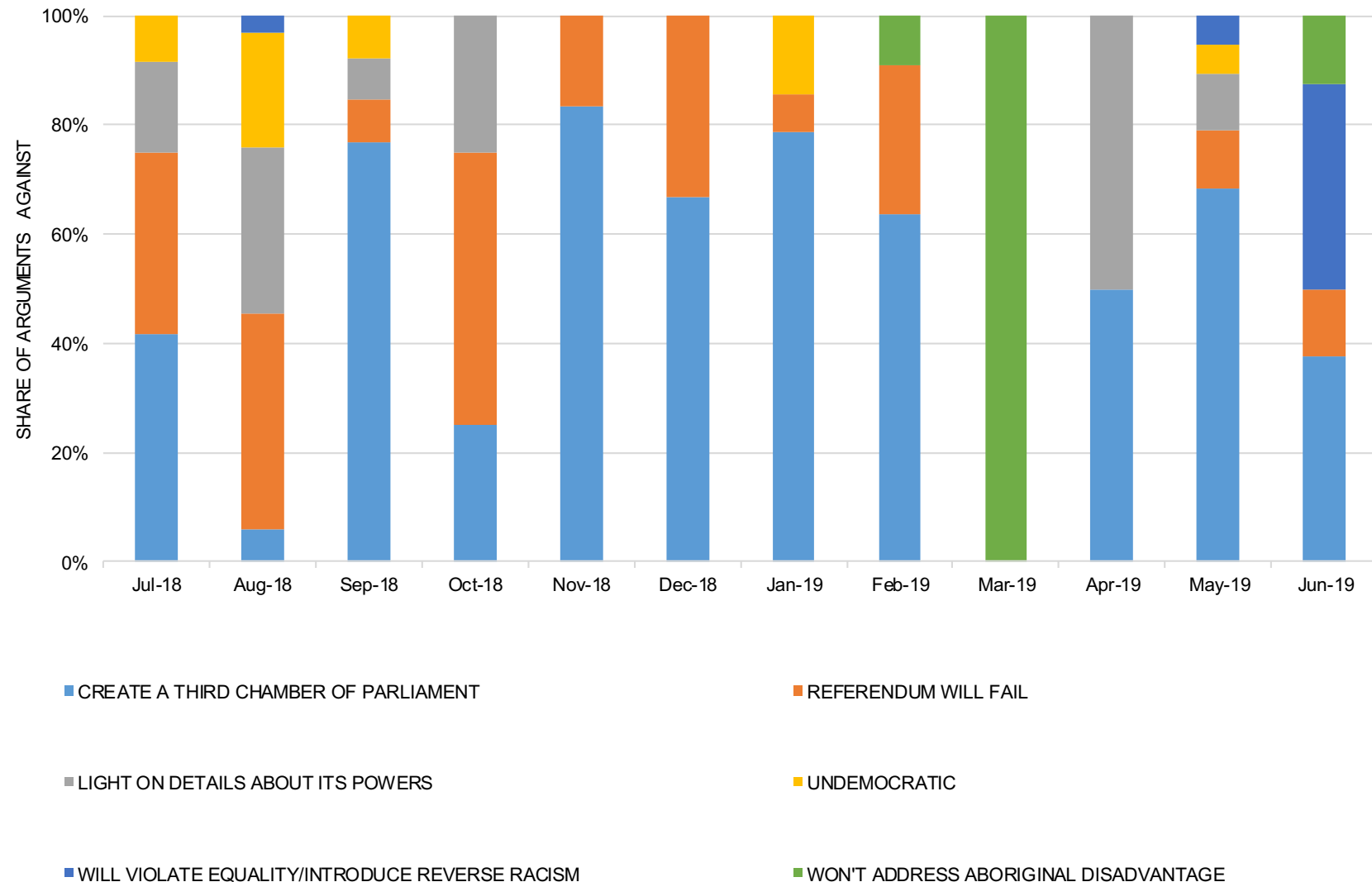


## Opposing views

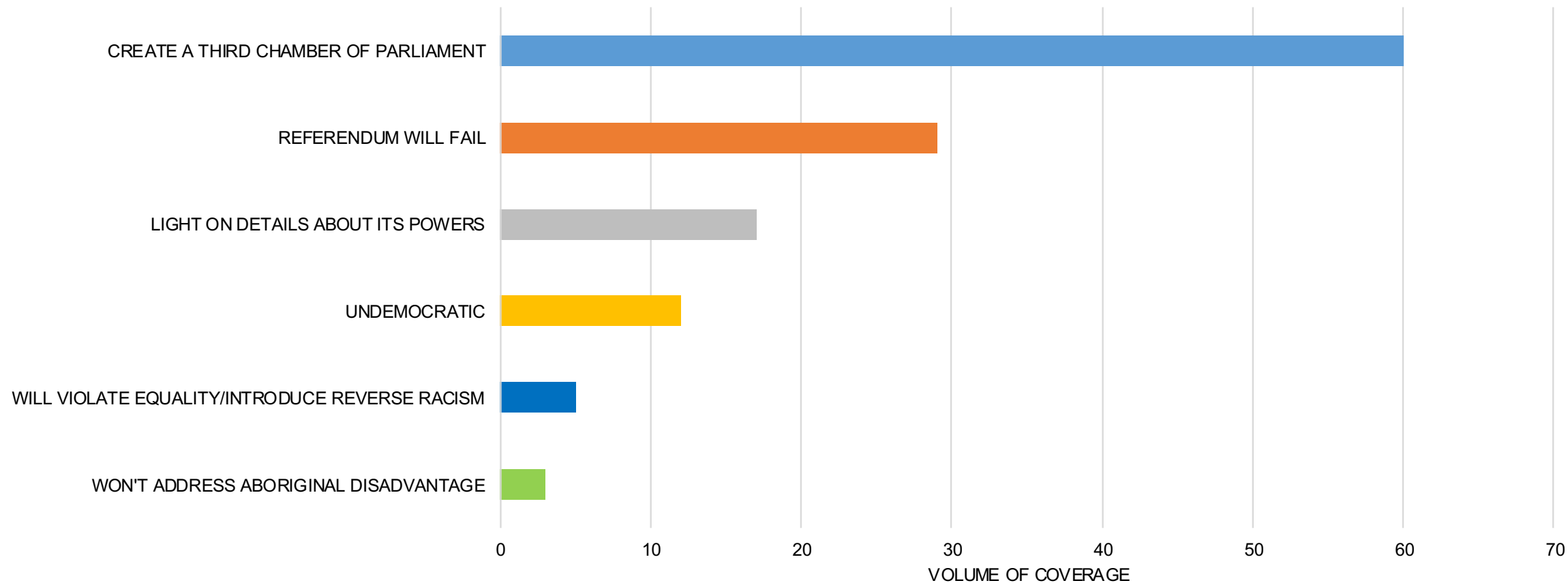
The issue appears to be gaining momentum, but there are some troubling undercurrents in the media and the polling data.

One of the more concerning media trends for proponents of the Statement should be the consistent dominance of the leading opposition message, that the proposed advisory body would create a “third chamber of parliament”.

Equally worrying is the rise in arguments, following the election, characterising the advisory body as something that would increase inequality and be a proponent of “reverse racism” by dividing Australians along racial lines.

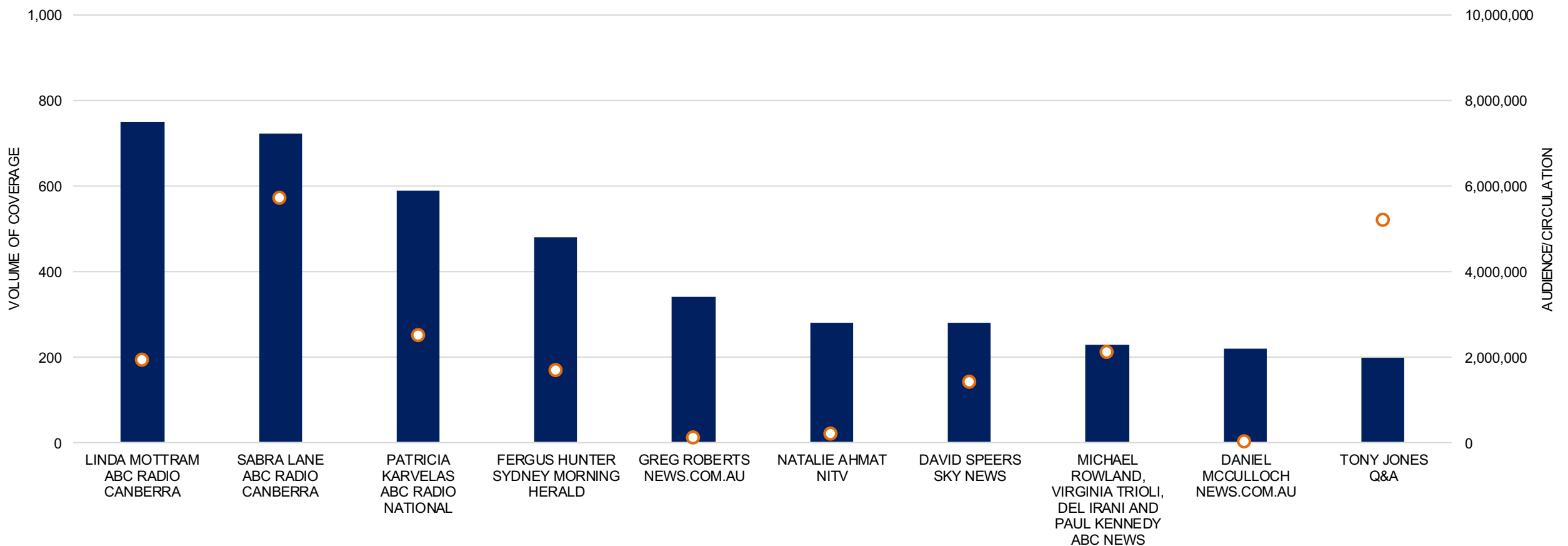


# Leading opposing messages July 2018 – June 2019

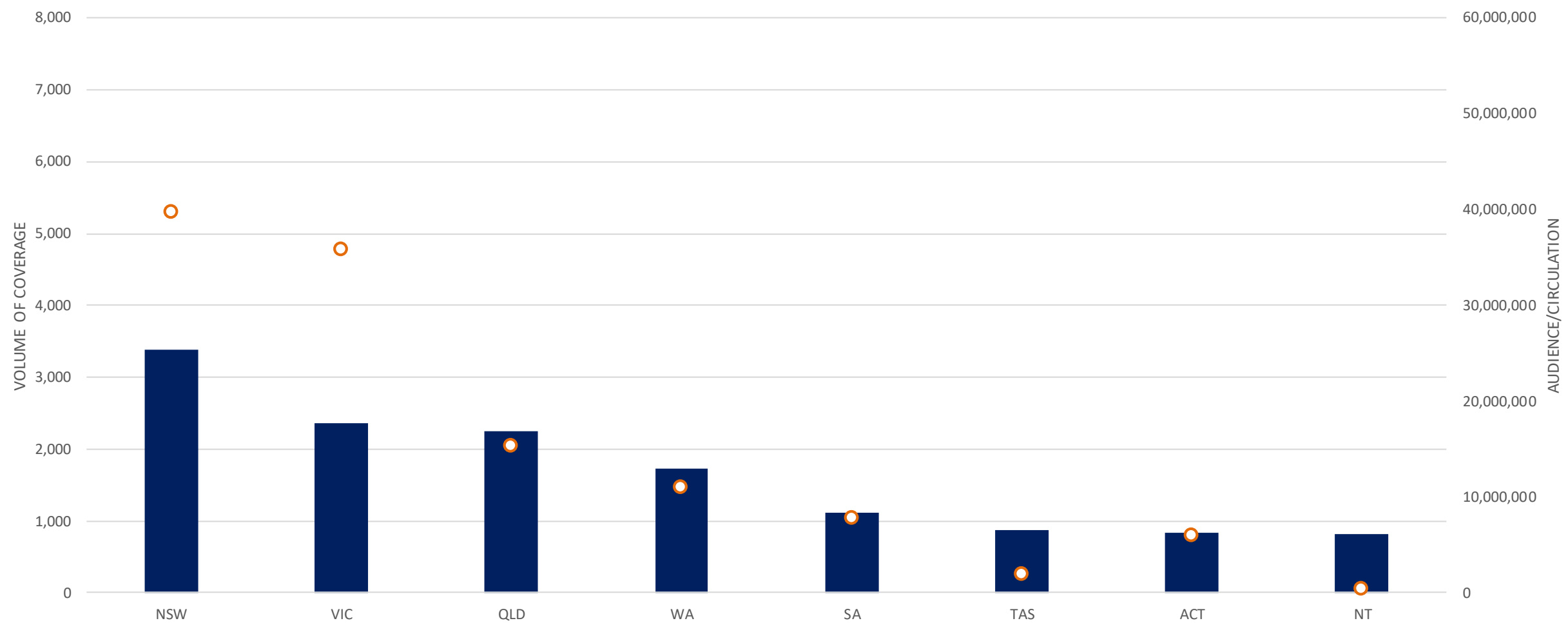




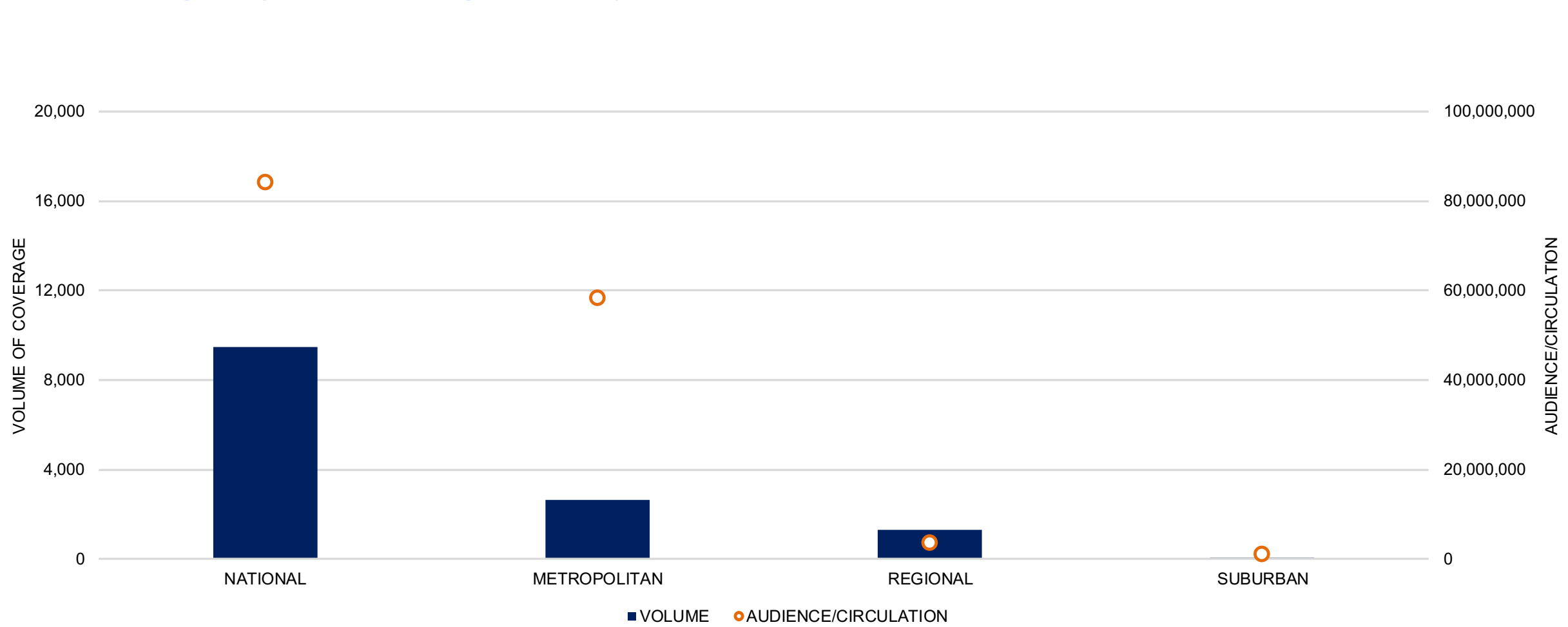
# Leading bylines/presenters July 2018 – June 2019



# Coverage by state/territory May 2017 – June 2019



# Coverage by outlet region May 2017 – June 2019





## For more information

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**T:** 1300 136 806

**E:** [brand@isentia.com](mailto:brand@isentia.com)

**W:** [www.isentia.com](http://www.isentia.com)

