

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the extent to which News Corp's dominant position in the Australian media landscape influenced the balance of competing narratives surrounding the 2023 Indigenous Voice to Parliament Referendum between August 30–October 14, 2023. Conceptualizing mainstream media as a site of discursive power, this study applies qualitative discourse analysis to assess how narrative visibility, framing practices, and ideological authority were distributed across major news outlets. The research draws on 381 manually coded news articles published by News Corp-owned outlets (News.com.au and The Australian) and The Guardian Australia. The study situates News Corp's structural dominance within Australia's media ecosystem as a prerequisite for its capacity to shape public discourse. It then examines three comparative cases. News.com.au is analyzed as a mass-market platform that saturated public debate with frames of uncertainty, division, and conflict, effectively normalizing opposition to the referendum. The Australian is examined as an elite-oriented outlet that translated these same frames into constitutional, legal, and governance-based arguments, legitimizing the "No" position for political and policy audiences. In contrast, The Guardian Australia is analyzed as a counter-hegemonic actor that foregrounded Indigenous agency, historical context, and constitutional justice, while actively contesting misinformation. Through comparative analysis, this study argues that News Corp's influence operated not merely through volume or bias, but through an integrated, multi-level narrative strategy that marginalized alternative perspectives and stabilized hegemonic interpretations of the referendum. The findings highlight the democratic implications of media concentration in Australia, particularly in contexts involving Indigenous rights and constitutional change, and contribute to broader debates on media power, narrative dominance, and democratic deliberation.

Keywords: News Corp, Indigenous Voice to Parliament, News.com.au, The Guardian