

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee**  
**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**  
**ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES 2016-17**

Finance Portfolio  
28 February 2017

**Department/Agency:** AEC  
**Outcome/Program:**  
**Topic:** Early voting

**Senator:** Farrell

**Question reference number:** F66

**Type of question:** Hansard Proof, F&PA Committee, Pages 118 and 119 28 February 2017

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** Thursday, 13 April 2017

**Number of pages:** 2

**Question:**

**Senator FARRELL:** I suppose the conclusion I am asking you to give an opinion about is: if it is true that more people are voting earlier, then that suggests, to me anyway, that perhaps they are less likely to vote informal. And given that the informality rate has in fact gone up, particularly in respect of the Senate, perhaps the informality rate for people voting on the day is higher than the figures lead us to believe.

**Mr Rogers:** I am not aware of a causal link between those two things, and I am not sure we have done that study. But I am happy to take it on notice to see whether we have got any extra information that might shed light on that for you.

**Answer:**

While informal voting rates for electors voting on election day tend to be higher than those for electors casting early votes, results vary substantially between individual vote types, and AEC analysis indicates that other factors have a far greater influence on changes in informality. Election results by vote type and polling place (used to derive early versus election day votes) are publicly available on the AEC's Tally Room (<http://results.aec.gov.au/>).

At the 2016 Senate elections, 32 per cent of all votes were cast prior to election day (comprising pre-poll votes, pre-poll ordinary votes, postal votes and votes cast through mobile polling teams), while the remaining 68 per cent were cast on election day (ordinary votes, absent votes and provisional votes).

For the 2016 Senate elections, the informality rate for votes cast prior to election day ('early votes') was 3.0 per cent, while the informality rate for election day votes was 4.4 per cent. For the 2016 House of Representatives elections, the informality rate was also lower for 'early votes' (3.9 per cent, verses 5.6 per cent for election day votes).

AEC analysis suggests that the lower informality rate for early votes is mostly associated with a higher level of voter engagement amongst people who vote early, rather than anything intrinsic to the early vote itself. Various indicators of electoral engagement (such as

‘willingness to vote even if it wasn’t compulsory’ and ‘interest in politics’) were higher on average in 2016 for people who voted early than for people who voted on election day.

The link between informality and electoral engagement is also supported by analysis of the 2013 House of Representatives elections. The rate of unintentional informality was lower for pre-poll ordinary votes than for election day ordinary votes. For example, 27.7 per cent of informal pre-poll ordinary votes had a number ‘1’ only, compared to 30.2 per cent of informal ordinary votes cast on election day. This is likely to reflect higher levels of electoral awareness and engagement, on average, among people casting early votes in 2013.

Previous AEC analyses of informal voting at House of Representatives elections have indicated the following as the key features of informal voting:

- A wide range of socio-demographic and socio-economic factors are associated with geographic areas recording higher rates of informal voting. When taken together, these could be associated with higher levels of social exclusion or disadvantage (for example, due to poor English language skills or lower levels of educational attainment)
- A change in the numbers of House of Representatives candidates between elections is a significant predictor of changes in informal voting
- In some states and territories, voter confusion about the differences between state and federal voting systems may influence the numbers of House of Representatives ballots ruled informal due to incomplete numbering or ticks and crosses
- As some informal votes represent a deliberate choice on the part of the voter, attitudes to and opinions of the electoral system or politics in general may contribute to (or even override) other factors influencing informal voting.