



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on the Integrity
Commission and Statutory Office
Holders

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the operation of the 2024 ACT Election and Electoral Act 1992

Submission number: 006

Submitter: Jordan Locke

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Good morning,

My name is Jo Rocke, and I am making this submission as an individual. For the purposes of disclosure, I am a policy advisor for Laura Nuttall MLA, I am a member of the ACT Greens, and I volunteered for the ACT Greens in all five electorates during the 2024 election (mostly Kurrajong and Brindabella). I do not make any representations in this submission on behalf of the ACT Greens or Laura Nuttall MLA.

I will not be writing about all the elements of the inquiry. Here are the key points I want to make:

2d - Increasing voter turnout and participation in elections and encouraging political activity-

I fundamentally believe that there needs to be an overhaul in the way civics education is done. To my knowledge, no public college has any form of mandatory civics education. I have a deep love for the ACT college system and the freedom to pursue a wide range of educational pathways there, but we need young people to be informed about the voting and political systems during years 11 and 12. Additionally, there needs to be focused teaching done on the ACT political system. The media young people are exposed to is not discussing the ACT in any capacity, including our voting system. If young people are politically engaged, they are likely to only know how to vote in the federal elections. Ensuring young people understand Hare-Clark is essential to making sure our system is accessible and functional. Basic misunderstandings, such as the fact that putting down 5 preferences is not the same as having your vote count 5 times, pervade our system.

2e - Expanding voter franchise -

On the campaign trail, I witnessed young people coming out and getting involved from all political persuasions. These young people, many of whom are unable to vote, should absolutely have that right. Lowering the voting age to 16 just makes sense, and I think it should be explored seriously and immediately. Additionally, this is an election where the major issues are transport, health and public infrastructure. It does not make sense to me that permanent residents, even if not citizens, are denied the right to vote in territory elections. Potholes, hospital wait times and bus routes do not magically impact their lives less because they are not citizens. They should be granted the right to vote in the ACT.

3b - Vote exhaustion rates

Although it would impact my own party negatively if it was imposed in the previous election, I truly believe all material indicating a voting order preference must list a minimum of 5 people to vote for, even if it involves recommending voting for other parties to fill out the list. We cannot risk people misunderstanding how to fill out a ballot correctly, and my observations from both the ACT election and the federal election lead me to believe that voting order preference cards play a significant role in that. I also believe that improved civics education would help this issue.

4b - Restrictions on road side signage

We need to end roadside corflutes like South Australia. They are visual clutter, completely uninformative, and actively dangerous. In Tuggeranong I witnessed a poorly installed corflute blow into traffic, and thankfully missed hitting windscreens or anything that could have caused an accident.

My proposed alternative is a very small number of corflutes be installed tactically by the electoral commission simply informing constituents that there is an upcoming election, telling them what day it is, and possibly where their local pre-polling location is. They should be non-partisan and purely informative, and the only real downside of banning partisan roadside corflutes is that they inform people that an election is happening. Electoral Commission corflutes could do exactly that but with far less clutter and with a much better managed system that allows for proper installation.

4d - Restrictions on campaigning activities outside polling places

The limitations on volunteers during pre-poll and election day is truly the worst possible compromise. We end up too far from polling booths to provide any actual assistance or information to voters, and particularly during pre-poll, we seem to more often end up in shopping areas where we are a nuisance to people who are not voting.

My personal opinion, shaped partially from the ACT election and partially from the federal election, is that we should not have volunteers handing out How To Votes at all. Increasingly voters are finding volunteers to be a nuisance, and I fear the “gauntlet” of volunteers is increasingly dissuading people from voting. For more shy, socially anxious voters, I think it is going to be dissuasive, but for more assertive voters, I genuinely worry about harassment, intimidation or even violence towards volunteers. Politics is an area where passions run high, and people can fall into fight or flight very easily. I would suggest simply allowing each party to provide a pile of how to vote flyers inside each polling place for voters to take if they choose to.

However, I am aware I may be in a minority who would actually want that outcome. As an improvement, I will argue that volunteers being allowed within a few meters of polling places is a better outcome than the current system. Right now we are forcing volunteers into interactions with people who are not planning to vote at that time, and they find the intensity of dealing with a “gauntlet” of volunteers while just trying to shop or get to work deeply off-putting. Let volunteers stay nearer to the polling places, and allow everyday Canberrans to get on with life as usual during pre-poll.

These are, from my experiences, the main changes that the ACT should explore for upcoming elections. I am open to any further questions or clarifications.