



INFORMAL BALLOT PAPER REVIEW

2025 Federal Election

Introduction

The number of ballot papers determined as informal for each polling location and count is published as part of the [official results](#) for each electoral event. The national rate of informal voting in the House of Representatives for the 2025 federal election at 5.6 per cent is broadly comparable to the national rate at past federal elections (5.19% in 2022 and 5.54% in 2019).

The AEC employs an extensive range of measures to help ensure voters understand how to cast a vote formally and maximise their enfranchisement. These measures include information at all polling locations (including on ballot papers), information and tools on the [AEC's website](#), the national election media campaign including the printed 'official guide' delivered to every household, translated and accessible materials, and targeted communications and engagement work.

Following the 2025 federal election, the AEC conducted a targeted review of approximately 250,000 informal ballot papers (of the 919,512 total determined informal at the 2025 federal election) to understand any relevant trends and drivers. The review outcomes will be used as an input to formality products, tools, communication and engagement going forward.

Methodology

Divisions selected

The review examined all informal House of Representatives (HoR) ballot papers from 25 divisions. The divisions were selected based on higher informality outcomes, rather than an overall representative approach, to enable the AEC to best direct future efforts. The selection also took into account specific locations and mobile teams that had high informality rates.

The survey included:

- The top 10 divisions with the highest informality rate (by percentage):
 - Werriwa (17.26%), Watson (17.01%), Fowler (13.96%), Chifley (13.55%), Blaxland (12.86%), Riverina (11.27%), Lindsay (10.91%), Calwell (10.61%), McMahon (10.58%), Parkes (10.15%)
- Those with one or more polling locations returning an informality rate over 25% and over 50 total ballot papers:
 - Banks, Berowra, Calare, Cowper, Farrer, Grayndler, Hindmarsh, Lyne, Lyons, Page, Sydney.
- Divisions of Bean, Durack, Reid and Tangney for comparison.

Given the targeted approach to selecting divisions with higher overall or specific informality, more of the sample was skewed towards NSW, which had 19 of 25 divisions fall into these categories.

Categorisation

As part of the analysis, informal ballot papers were sorted into six categories of informality, to draw out insights regarding intentionality and likely causes:

Category	Inferred intentionality
Blank	Intentionally informal
First Preference Only	Unintentionally informal – may indicate voting using rules from a different voting system
Numbered 1-6 Only	Unintentionally informal – may indicate voting using rules from the Senate voting system
Incorrect numbering / method	Unintentionally informal – made a mistake
Voter identified	No intentionality can be inferred
Other	No intentionality can be inferred

Key findings

Overall, the 2025 review reiterated trends seen at previous events such as potential confusion around different voting instructions and higher informality in specific divisions with greater numbers of candidates.

Of the ballot papers included in the review, the vast majority showed an intent to vote formally where this could be prescribed. There is evidence from the outcomes that some voters may have applied incorrect voting rules for the House of Representatives, however a much larger number were excluded due to issues with achieving a full sequence of preferences in accordance with requirements of the Commonwealth Electoral Act.

Finding 1 – Intentionality

Of the HoR ballot papers included in the review, around 73 per cent of informal ballot papers showed intent to vote formally where this could be prescribed.

The most common categories of unintended informality were ‘incorrect numbering / method’ and ‘first preference only’. Around 25 per cent of HoR ballot papers did not show intent to vote correctly where this could be prescribed.

It is worth noting there will always be a level of deliberate informality in a compulsory voting system, where electors may attend a polling location, have their name marked off, are issued a ballot paper and place it in the ballot box, but do not wish to participate by casting a formal vote on their ballot paper.

Informality type	Blank	First preference only	Numbered 1-6 only*	Incorrect numbering/ method	Voter Identified	Other
Count	61449	41291	30103	90256	291	20466
Percentage	25.2	16.9	12.3	37	0.2	8.4

Figure 1: Counts of informal HoR ballot papers by informality type. Noting these figures are drawn from divisions selected for the review due to their high levels of informality and are not representative of all divisions nationally.

*Only applies for divisions with more than 8 candidates.

Finding 2 – Number of candidates

A higher number of HoR candidates on the ballot paper may be associated with an increase in incorrect numbering/method, and greater informality overall. There is a significant correlation between the number of candidates and overall informality percentage.

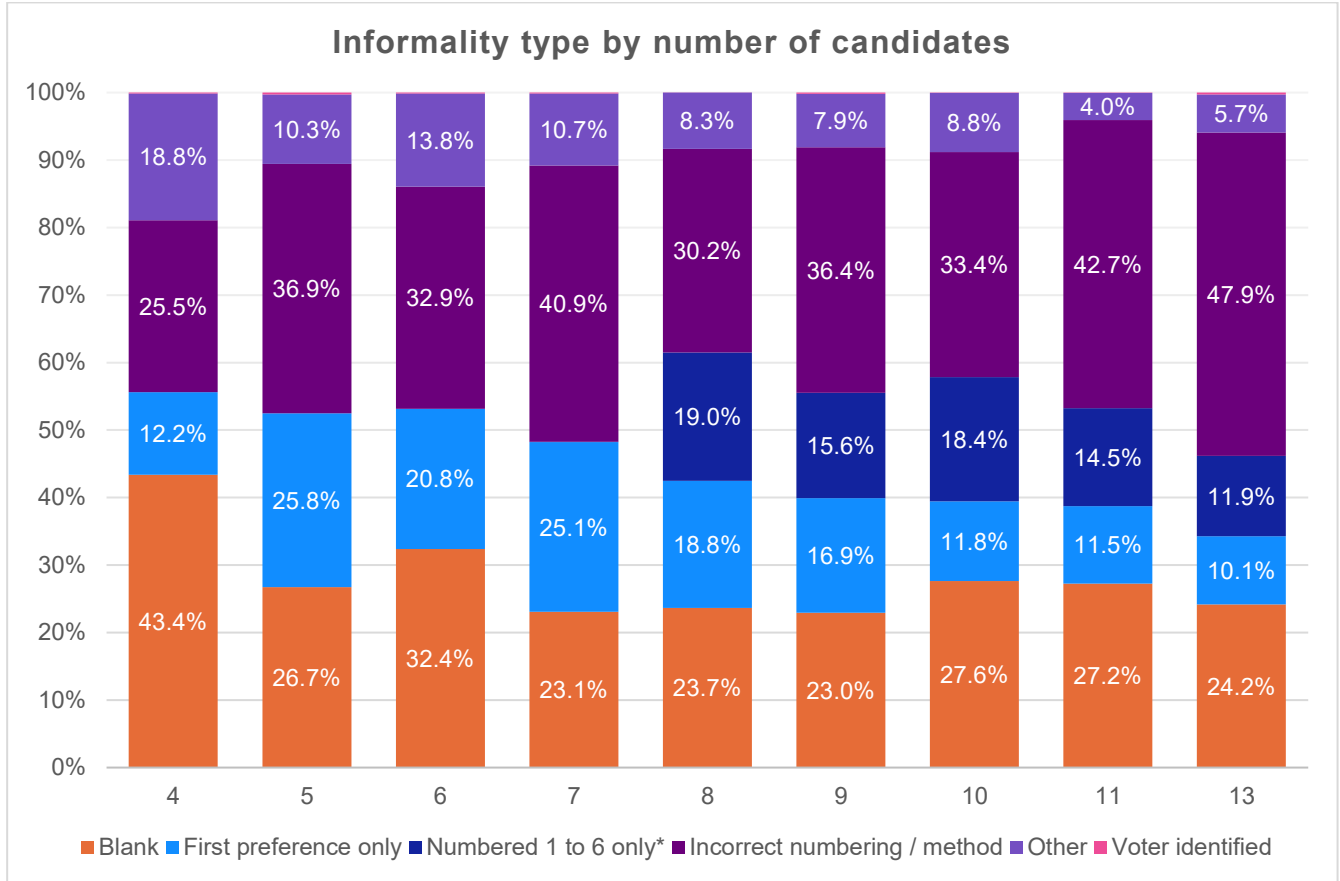


Figure 2 Informality percentage and type for each division in this review, by the number of candidates on the HoR ballot paper.

Finding 3 – NSW voting system

NSW saw a large number of informal HoR votes labelled with only a first preference, which is formal in NSW state elections given their optional preferential system.

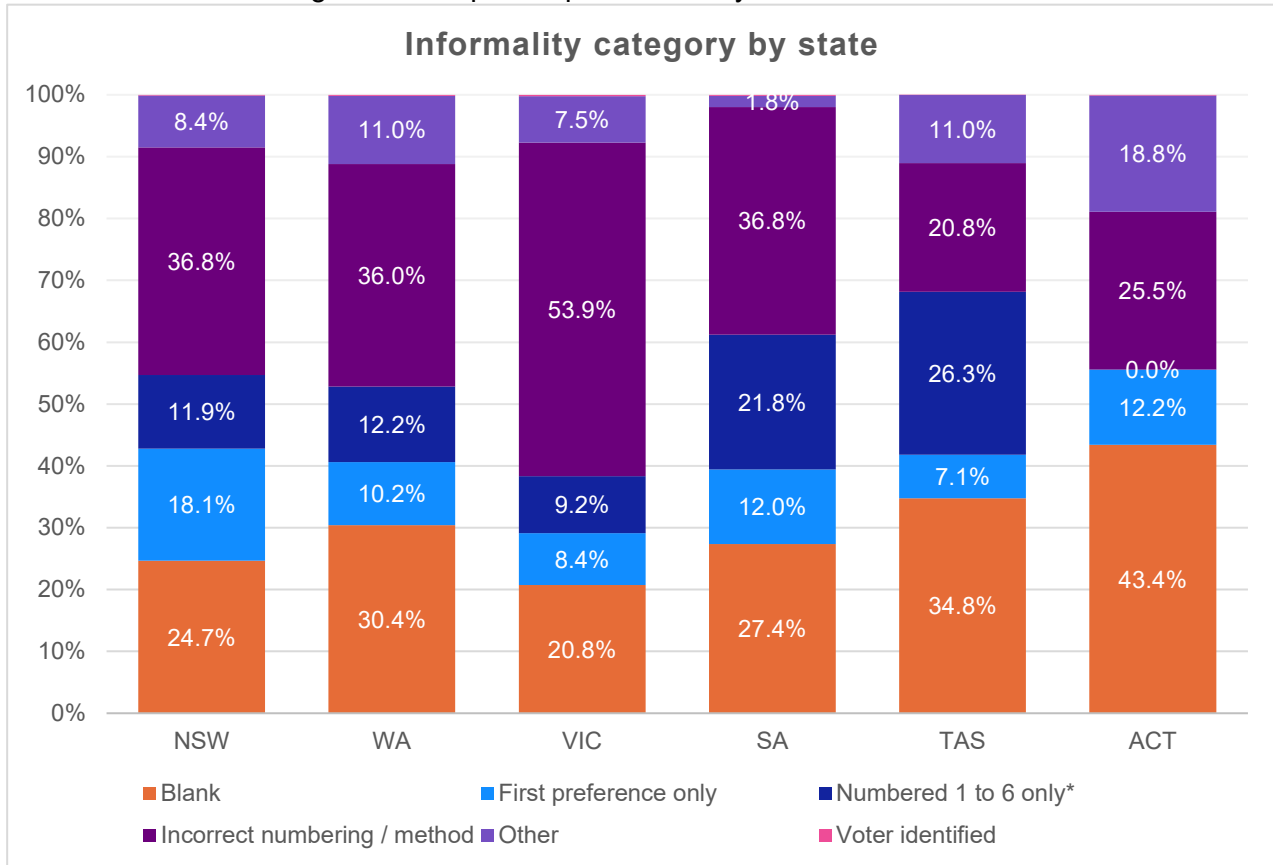


Figure 3: Percentage of HoR informality by type, across states included in this review.

Finding 4 – Confusion regarding instructions

The AEC analysed outcomes from particular polling locations and mobile teams with higher informality which pointed to possible confusion regarding instructions.

The polling place at Missabotti in the NSW Division of Cowper, for example, received media attention during the federal election suggesting some voters may have been provided incorrect voting instructions by temporary AEC staff. It had a high level of informal HoR votes categorised as ‘Numbered 1-6 only’, which often indicates confusion between HoR and Senate ballot paper instructions.

As reflected in Finding 3, mobile polling teams in NSW saw a higher proportion of informal HoR votes labelled with only a first preference, which is formal in NSW state elections given their optional preferential system. The AEC reviewed all counts, including mobile voting teams, with an informal HoR voting rate over 25%, with the outcome captured at Figures 4 and 5 below.

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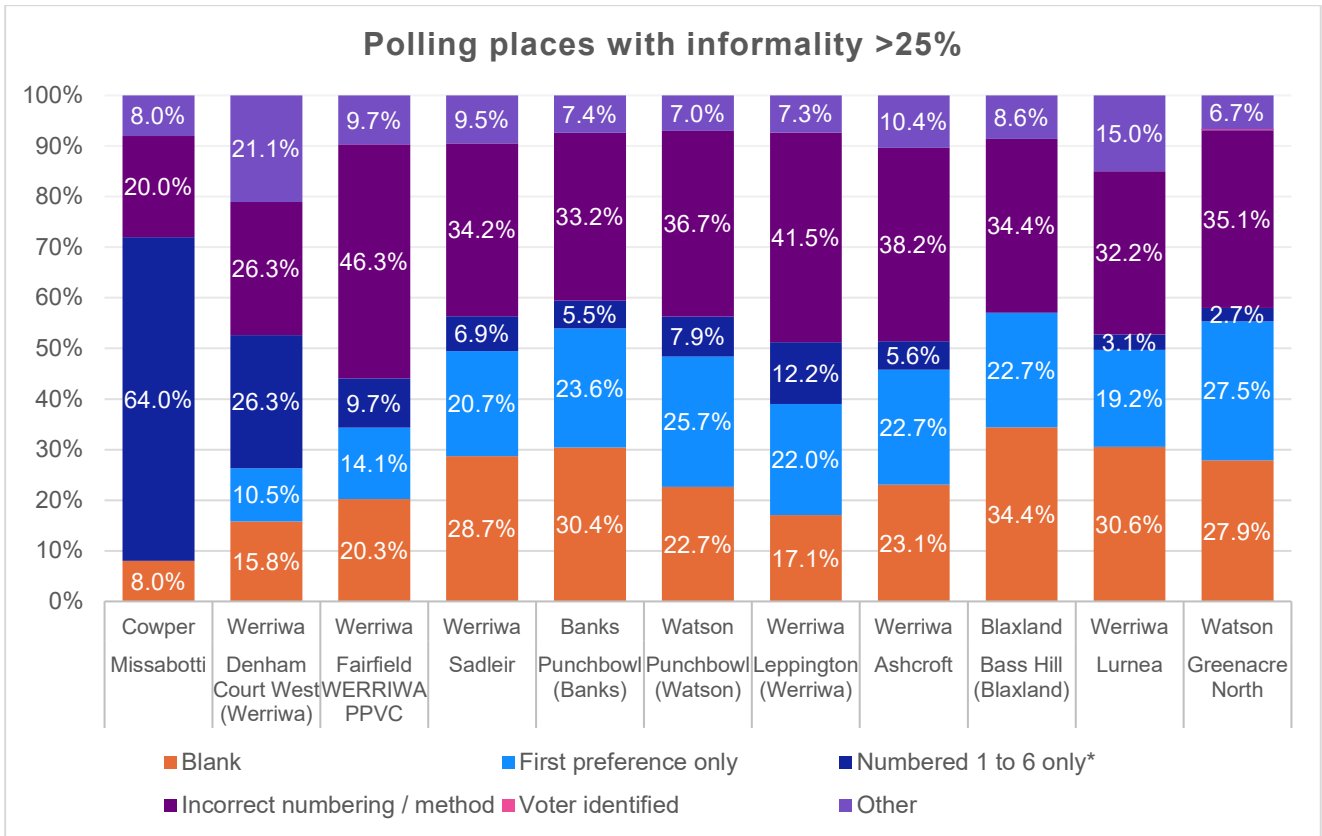


Figure 4: Informality percentage and type for polling places included in this review, with an informal HoR voting rate over 25%

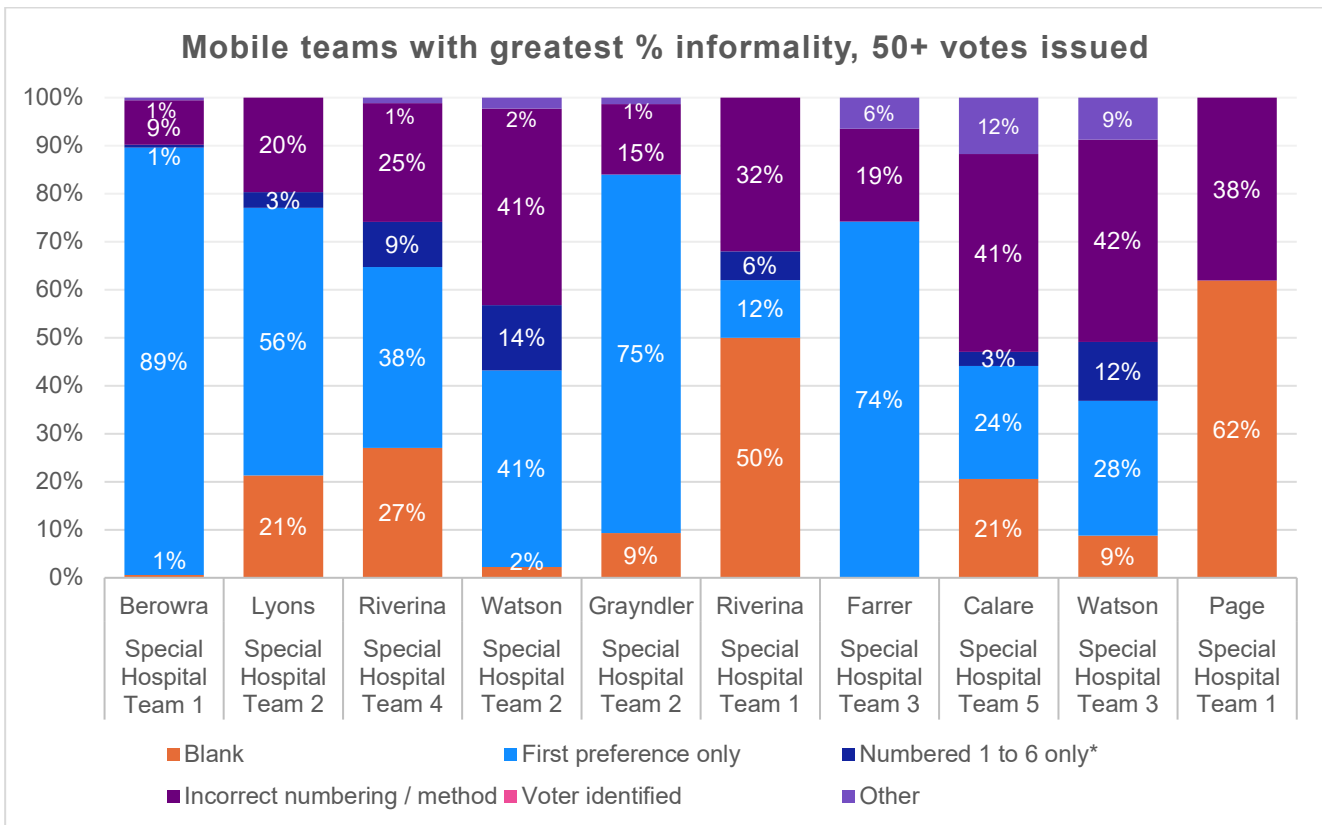


Figure 5: Informality percentage and type for mobile teams included in this review, with the greatest informality rates and more than 50 votes issued.

Next Steps

Outcomes of the targeted formality review will help inform future electoral event planning. This will include consideration of:

- Differences between federal and state/territory voting systems and consideration of measures to reduce informality.
- The extent to which instruction about completing ballot papers formally is being effectively reinforced at the point at which the person is issued their ballot paper/s and casts their vote.
- Measures to reduce inadvertent informality through numbering sequence breakdown, particularly when there is a large number of candidates.
- Targeted strategies tailored to support specific divisions to improve formality outcomes.