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## 'Voting Attitudes and Behaviour Among Aboriginal Peoples: Reports from 29 Anangu Women.'

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In this paper we address the issue of lower than average turnout rates among Aboriginal Peoples in remote regions of South Australia. A number of hypotheses have been offered to explain the low voting participation of such constituencies: Some have asserted that Aboriginal Peoples do not, in fact, wish to vote; others have suggested that first order elections generally have low salience for Aboriginal Peoples, thereby depressing turnout while the low political efficacy thesis has also been proposed. We explore whether any of these hypotheses are plausible using data obtained in group interviews with 29 Anangu women. The paper begins by providing some historical background to the development of the Aboriginal franchise after which there is some discussion of the problems of determining turnout levels in remote Aboriginal communities. After assessing the significance of the fieldwork results we close by reflecting on means for stimulating turnout within this constituency.

**Background: Aboriginal Voters and the Franchise**.

It is commonly assumed that Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders acquired the right to vote in the 1967 Constitutional Alteration referendum but this is a misconception. Rather, the referendum empowered (but did not require) the Commonwealth to enact 'special laws' for members of 'the Aboriginal race' and stipulated that Aboriginal people should now be counted in official population statistics (Attwood et al, 1997. p. X). The history of the Aboriginal franchise has a different timeline. The Australian Constitution nowhere denies the citizenship or the right to vote of Aborigines; it was denied by a parliamentary act. In line with practice in Queensland and Western Australia, the 1902 *Commonwealth Franchise Act* excluded any 'aboriginal native of Australia' from the right to vote. The Act provided that: 'No aboriginal native of Australia, Asia, Africa or the islands of the Pacific, except New Zealand, shall be entitled to have his name placed on the electoral roll, unless so entitled under Section 41 of the Constitution'.

In 1902, neither South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales nor Tasmania formally prohibited Indigenous people from voting in state elections since all adult male British subjects were entitled to the vote in those jurisdictions at that time. But few Aboriginal men actually participated in elections, partly because many were unaware of their rights and partly because of other exclusionary requirements such as property qualifications and the condition that only those not in receipt of charitable aid were entitled to vote (Brooks, 1993, p. 225; Sanders, 2001, p. 158). Section 41 of the Constitution should have protected the Federal voting rights of eligible Aboriginal people residing in these states but failed to because the Solicitor-General decreed that this constitutional guarantee was to be interpreted as applying only to those who had 'acquired' the vote prior to the passing of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act* in 1902 (Attwood et al 1997, p. 13). In other words, this narrow reading of section 41 restricted the right to vote in Commonwealth elections to those who were already on State electoral rolls in 1902 (Sanders, 2001, p. 159; Stretton and Finnemore 1993.) Over time, those who were, in fact, eligible either died or were removed from the State electoral rolls for other reasons to the point where the numbers of Indigenous Australians with Commonwealth voting rights declined to almost nil (Sanders, 2001, p. 59).

During WWII there was some discussion about whether the franchise might be extended to Indigenous Australians who could pass a test set by the Electoral Registrar. Aborigines in the defence force were enfranchised during WWII but this entitlement only lasted until 6 months after the war had ended (Chesterman and Galligan, 1997, p. 157). But it was not until 1949 that the first significant changes impacting on Aboriginal Australians were made to Commonwealth electoral law. Introduced by the Chifley Labor government, the *Commonwealth Electoral Bill 1949* enacted voting rights to former and serving Indigenous members of the armed forces and affirmed the right (thought by some to have already existed under s 41) of Aboriginal Australians entitled to vote at State elections (Norberry, 2003, p. 85). But more far-reaching reforms did not eventuate until the 1960s. In early 1961, the ALP sought to enfranchise all hitherto excluded 'aboriginal natives of …Asia, Africa, or the Islands of the Pacific' but the bill was defeated pending the advice of a House of Representatives Select Committee on the advisability of such a reform. Later that year the Select Committee on Aboriginal Voting Rights published its unanimous finding that all Aboriginal and Islander people should gain the Commonwealth right to vote. The *Commonwealth Electoral Act No. 31* (Cth) was passed in 1962 with little debate with the Menzies' Liberal-Country Party government describing the exclusion as 'objectionable and outmoded' (Norberry, 2003, p. 89. Sanders, 2001, 159). More controversial, perhaps, was the proviso that enrolment should be voluntary for Aborigines (once enrolled voting would

thereafter become compulsory). The reasoning here was partly based on claims about the difficulties involved in enrolling nomadic people (the Opposition responded by pointing out that the 'difficulties in aborigines voting are exactly the same as the difficulties attending all outback voting' (See Brooks, 1993, p. 221)). It was also suggested that Aboriginal people 'have not perceived the relevance of parliamentary elections to their lives'. The Select Committee had recommended that, because NSW and Victorian Aaborigines were not nomadic, enrolment should be compulsory in those states. But this proposal was rejected by both Houses of Pparliament. For many observers, voluntary enrolment symbolized that Aborigines had not yet achieved formal equality with non-Aboriginal Australians (Brooks, 1993, 213; Sanders, 160, Orr et al 2002, p. 389). It is likely that voluntary registration for indigenous people was a significant obstacle to their participation in State and Federal elections since it is known to have inhibited turnout at NAC, NACC and ATSIC elections (Sanders, 2001). In any case, it wasn't until 1983 that formal equality was finally achieved when voting and registration was made compulsory for all Australian citizens (Norberry, 2003, p. 86). With this amendment any reference to 'Aboriginal natives' was removed from Commonwealth electoral legislation and Aborigines thereby became the legal equals of other Australian voters (Sanders, 2001, pp. 158-60).

**Indigenous Voting In Remote SA.**

It is worthy of note that formal equality in electoral terms has not translated into equal rates of electoral participation for Aboriginal citizens. There is evidence that despite the considerable efforts of electoral offices, Indigenous Australians continue to exist outside mainstream civic life. In Australia, people living in remote areas, specifically anyone who does not live within 8 km of a polling station, are automatically excused from voting. The Aboriginal citizens interviewed in the fieldwork discussed below reside in a remote region of South Australia.

It is not easy to establish precise or even approximate figures for Aboriginal electoral participation. In South Australia, for example, the State Electoral Office estimates that as many as 50% of the eligible Aboriginal population in some remote areas fail to either enrol or vote in first order (i.e., State and Federal) elections (Hill and Alport, 2006). It has been asserted by Tasmanian Aboriginal lawyer, Michael Mansell, that Aboriginal people do not actually want to vote (Mansell 1993) and that their voting abstention should be understood as a form of political protest at white control over Aboriginal affairs: 'Civil disobedience comes in many forms and can have significant impact. Refusing to vote in the white electoral process, refusing to pay the resulting fines, going to jail if necessary, is part of that commitment' (Mansell 1995). For Aden Ridgeway it is not antipathy to voting *per se* but lack of critical mass that is the real problem: 'It is no secret that Indigenous people in this country do not vote in such numbers to make a difference to any side of politics. We do not decide the outcome' (Ridgeway, 2004). Thus the problem may not be antipathy to voting so much as low political efficacy borne of the rational calculation that the Aboriginal vote is not generally decisive at election time. We know that a strong sense of efficacy, both internal and external is an important motivator for voting in voluntary voting systems (Utter and Strickland 1997, 13) and this may be a factor in the Australian context given that failure to comply with our CV laws is not strictly policed in remote Aboriginal communities (for means of ameliorating this pathway – i.e. lack of critical voting mass-leading to a low sense of political efficacy see discussion of fieldwork below).

Alport's informants suggest that a significant factor in voting abstention is the perception that elections have no relevance to the lives of Aboriginal people. It was suggested that many feel that it is 'pointless…Its hard for them to keep thinking that their voices count.' Despite this, when an issue arises that affects their area, such as a Native Title claim people become keen to

vote, especially for any politician who is perceived to represent their interests.

But even if Aboriginal people voted at the same rate as Australians in general (about 95% of Voting Age Population) it would still be extremely difficult for their interests to be represented due to the fact that they comprise less than three per cent of the population. Outside of the Northern Territory indigenous candidates and Indigenous parliamentarians are rare because 'the Indigenous population was decimated and swamped by immigration' and 'Indigenous people find it hard to win preselection in a political culture based on the model of a– parliamentarian who is a '35-60 year old white male' (Orr, 2003, -p. 37).

### Reserved Seats?

One way of protecting the interests of this vulnerable minority group is through the development of a separate electoral roll for indigenous people (Sanders 2001) and the institution of reserved seats in parliament. The idea of reserved seats was considered in 2003 by the Queensland Legislative Assembly's Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee but it ultimately rejected the idea on the grounds that during public consultation there was a high degree of opposition to the idea. The Committee did, however, indicate that it was prepared to reconsider the idea if the political participation of Aboriginal people had not improved within the ensuing decade (Chesterman, 2006, pp. 272-3). Orr has supported the idea of reserved seats but admits there would be problems associated with it. One is the miniscule size of the Indigenous population _which means that only three seats in the House of Representatives would be reserved. Secondly, because the indigenous population is not monolithic '[i]t has no single geographical or political voice'. Although Orr reckons that there have existed 'at least seven' Indigenous parties since the 1960s, none are registered today. Orr wonders whether the reserved seats would become captured 'by the major parties, particularly the ALP.' Nevertheless, the idea is an attractive one, particularly to aAboriginal people (see below). And, contrary to claims made in the past about the unconstitutionality of such a measure, John Chesterman has argued that federal seats for indigenous Australians could be reserved without having to change the constitution (Chesterman, 2006, 269-6).

In New Zealand there is a Maori roll and Maoris have the option at census time to be placed on either the Maori roll or the general roll in order to guarantee indigenous New Zealanders representation. Such special representation is justified in recognition 'of historical dispossession' and the fact that 'Indigenous populations are not simply another ethnic group.' This idea was recently considered by a Queensland parliamentary committee but the committee ultimately rejected the idea. Any suggestion that this latter reform violates the equality principle can be met with the argument so aptly put by Graeme Orr that '[s]o extreme has been the dispossession and silencing of indigenous voices in Australia that a special case, from political equality, can be made for reserved seats' (Orr, 2003, p. 37). As Chesterman has argued '[a] political system has legitimacy problems when the…most marginalised and disadvantaged minority group is unable to have a single representative in the federal Parliament' (Chesterman, 2006, p. 284). At present there are no Aaboriginal people are in the Federal parliament. Further, Aborigines lost what representation they did have with the demise of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Commission in March 2005.

Feedback from the focus group reported below shows that the idea of reserved seats is an attractive one. Reserved seats would probably increase the sense of internal and external political efficacy among Aboriginal people, significantly heighten the salience of Federal elections, and thereby stimulate turnout (we know that a major source of voting abstention is low electoral salience and low levels of internal and external efficacy (e.g. Utter and Strickland 1997: 13)).

Salience refers to how significant, visible, consequential and meaningful an election is to voters. Political efficacy denotes a 'person's belief that political and social change can be effected or retarded and that [her/]his efforts, alone or in concert with others can produce desired behaviour on the part of political authorities ( Prewitt, 1968, 225).  Efficacy thus has two components; 'internal efficacy', which refers to subject's sense of political competence, and 'external efficacy' which refers to the belief that government is responsive to 'attempted influence' (Finkel, 1985, 893). It is known that abstainers tend to perceive government as unresponsive and, believing that their vote will be ignored, they abstain (see, for example, Parenti, 1974: 160 and Kimball 1972, 17). Certainly the focus group interviewed in our fieldwork reported low levels of internal and external efficacy however they did express great interest in voting in elections with reserved seats.

Under-enrolment of Aboriginal people seems to be another key 'cause' of non-voting. This was recognised by the Australian Electoral Commission when it established the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Electoral Information Service (ATSEIS) in 1979, a field service for electoral education, targeting both remote and urban Aboriginal communities. In South Australia, one Field Officer was stationed in Port Augusta and one in Adelaide. These officers were responsible for training local Community Electoral Assistants. One of their responsibilities was to encourage enrolment.

The ATSEIS program was probably quite useful; a series of workshops 'to gain insight into AEC customers' perceptions about enrolment, voting and AEC services', conducted by the AEC in 2002-3, found that indigenous electors 'want information about how they can participate in enrolment and voting [and] value receiving information presented in their own languages and in culturally sensitive ways' (AEC 2003). This finding is strongly borne out in the focus group research discussed below. However, funding was cut from this program by the former Coalition government (AEC 2006). The AEC does send education teams out to remote aAboriginal communities but only during election time. The focus group indicated that they would like electoral education on a more regular basis (see below). According to Warren Snowden (2004) (Member for Lingiari and former Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern Australia and Indigenous Affairs) when the Howard Government, in one of its first acts after winning office in 1996, abolished the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Electoral Information Service this 'led to a significant under-enrolment of Indigenous people.' He further noted that more recent proposals 'build upon that initial attack and are clearly designed to punish voters that this government believes are less likely to vote for it.' The new 'proposals' he adverts to were embodied in the *Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Electoral Integrity and Other Measures) Act 2006* which strengthened identification criteria for enrolment. The provision of a driver's licence or bankcard are among those ID now required, the assumption being that most Indigenous people have such forms of identification. As the then Special Minister for State, Gary Nairn, asserted:

> People have to provide identification every day of the week to carry on their life, and you would think that simply providing some form of identification as to who you are before you went on the roll, would be, just sort of taken for granted, but it hasn't been the case, it's been a lot harder to go and hire a video or a DVD than it has been to get on the roll (Nairn 2006).

This assumption seem to be flawed: Although 80% of the eligible Australian population has a driver's licenses (Danby 2006) in remote Aboriginal communities the same cannot be assumed

because all forms of identification documents are problematic. According to a Health industry informant (Chong 2004), not all Aboriginal people are in possession of even a Medicare card, although those who have been involved in medical procedures in public hospitals have been allocated a registration number. Many Aboriginal people do not carry a wallet, therefore there is nowhere to keep any cards and they are easily lost. Bankcards are similarly difficult to keep safe. Alport's informant - who was stationed at Yalata for many years - believes there are a number of other ergonomic and cultural factors inhibiting Aboriginal people from enrolling. If they are given an enrolment card to fill in, but cannot read and write, they are reluctant to admit it. If they are directed to pick up an enrolment card at the Post Office, there is resistance related to the fact that the post office is widely perceived as an intimidating place; further some people are unsure about what to ask for and post offices are often long distances from communities.

There are also cultural factors affecting turnout. It is common for people move out of their houses and communities when a family member dies. They may go to relatives over the border, and therefore out of the electorate, for up to a year or more. It sometimes happens that no one turns up to vote at the remote mobile Polling Booths because someone has died and potential voters are out in the bush in 'Sorry Camp'. For example, when a prominent Anangu man died at Yalata, only 8 people voted at the related community of Oak Valley because they had moved to Sorry Camp at Yalata and were probably unaware that they could vote there.

It is undoubtedly true that there are some Aboriginal people who do not want to vote but it should also be appreciated that the voting abstention of Aboriginal people may have a number of other sources; it may be a form of protest but it may also be a function of low internal and external political efficacy; cultural difficulties (like the intervention of Sorry Business or name changes); under-enrolment; language literacy problems; practical and ergonomic obstacles (such as remoteness) or the result of insufficient civic education. We explored  some of these hypotheses in the fieldwork outlined below.

## SECTION 2.
### The Fieldwork: Attitudes to Voting and Related Issues Among Anangu Women

The fieldwork was conducted in October 2007 on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands among the Iwantja Community at lndulkana.
Indulkana is situated in a remote area approximately 1200 km northwest of Adelaide and 360 km south of Alice Springs.  It has a population of between 200 and 250 people, including outstations. The area sits within the Federal electorate of Grey and the State electorate of Giles.

The focus group interview took place in the Iwantja Art Centre.  Twenty-nine women attended (there are 27 households in Indulkana so 29 subjects was a good turnout). Men could not be interviewed due to the APY Executive Council's insistence that a male Anangu Interpreter be employed to interpret any interviews undertaken with men.  We attempted to engage the services of a male interpreter for the period of fieldwork but were unable to do so due to demand created by the Federal Government's Intervention program in the Northern Territory.

Women across all age groups attended. There were four aged between 18-20, 17 in the mid-age group of 21 to 59 and 8 who were over 60 years old. Each were paid an honorarium of $50.00 for their time, which is standard practice. In order to protect the privacy of the interviewees no identifiers were used other than age group.

### Preparation and Permissions.
In July 2007 Alport presented the project to the APY Executive Council and received permission

to ask Councils if community members could be interviewed. Permission was conditional on the use of both male and female Anangu (not just Anangu-*speaking*) interpreters. In July 2007 Alport received an invitation from the Chairperson of the Iwantja Community Council to conduct research at Iwantja. In September 2007 permission to conduct the research was granted by the University of Adelaide Ethics Committee after the application had also been reviewed by the Aboriginal Health Research Ethics Committee.

Adapting guidelines laid down by AIATSIS (1999) Alport made the following commitments in the preparation and conduct of the fieldwork.

> I acknowledge the fundamental principle of Aboriginal people's right to self-determination, self-management and respect for the maintenance and continuance of culture and heritage.

> I will seek guidance about the proposed research from individuals who are familiar with the people I will be interviewing and also supply information to the interviewees, in order to obtain informed consent to interview them. I will ensure that interviewees know that there is no obligation to answer any or all of the questions, should they not wish to do so.

> I understand that traditional land owners have an obligation to protect the sacredness and integrity of their land, so I will ask for permission to visit on Aboriginal Land and will go only where I have permission from the Council to go.

> I respect the rights of Aboriginal people to privacy and will not enter personal names onto a database or make any other record that breaches that right.

> I will keep the people informed of the results of my research that is of concern to them, through communication with their Council(s).

In line with Tregenza's (2002: 99-106) guidelines Alport sought permission from the interviewees to make the records public. She undertook to submit for approval by the community a copy of the report before making it public; that permission has since been granted. Prior the interviewss the Informed Consent form was signed by the interpreter, Lena Taylor, on behalf of the participants; this is usual because many Indigenous people are suspicious about signing forms. Nevertheless, individual signatures were submitted on the receipts for the honorariums. We employed an interpreter to assist with the research. Lena Taylor is an accredited Interpreter with the Aboriginal Translating and Interpreting Service, Enterprise –Services, Institute for Aboriginal Development, Alice Springs, but was employed in this instance as a private consultant. She also assisted in planning and follow-up after the interviews. Ms Taylor is an Anangu community member Pitjantjatjara person, born at Maralinga, educated in Adelaide, fluent in English and with a Diploma in Interpreting for the Pitjantjatjara language. Ms Taylor is related to the Chairman of the Indulkana community and the major artists there and this, undoubtedly, facilitated the research and enhanced Alport's acceptance within the focus group.

**Interview Method.**
The method used is focus group qualitative research. For research such as this an unstructured

and informal style of interview is recommended as it is consistent with a culture which values the oral transmission of knowledge. The interviews were electronically recorded (with permission) and were later transcribed. The interviews were held in a familiar and comfortable environment (the local Arts Centre) and refreshments wer served prior to the interview.  Due to time constraints imposed by unforeseen events (the details of which we are not permitted to disclose) all 29 people were interviewed as a group rather than in smaller groups as originally planned. The questions devised by Hill and Alport were posed by the translator in Anangu and then reported back to Alport in English.  Questions were put to the whole group with Alport repeatedly checking with the interpreter about the extent to which a particular view was shared (or rejected) by the group. The group was told that the results of the interview would be transmitted to the SA Electoral Office and that it would be used to facilitate remote Aboriginal voting participation.

Following Arthur Shadforth's lead (2002) Alport encouraged people to tell their own stories and allowed the conversation to flow. She  also used direct questioning, but in a way that introduced a topic for discussion, rather than as an interrogation. When Shadforth asked questions of a group of Anangu men seated in a circle (after an information session in 1997 about a shared  management plan for  the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park) he posed his questions in 'plain' language and a conversational style:

> The questions were asked – just plain simple questions like you are only talking, not giving the real impression that you are doing an interview. The method I used was just talking to the crew, in a normal conversation to get them going. Then one bit at a time I would give one of the twelve questions for them to answer. (Shadforth, 2002: 176).

Alport used a similar style. Further, in line with Fiona Walsh's (in Walsh and Mitchell, 2002: 170-175) suggestion to use visual props in order to stimulate discussion, she showed the interviewees photographs of the DRE machines used in the ACT E-voting trials when questioning them about their receptivity to such technology.

**Overview of Results:**

The overwhelming impression is that the group do want to vote. But in order to facilitate this what they seem to want most is not more technology (in the form of technological innovations like E-voting) but electoral education and better representation (possibly in the form of reserved seats). They would like information about *how* to vote and what the different candidates represent *in written (Anangu) language*. They want to have electoral education, *using interpreters*, and they want to be sure they have voted formally.

The group indicated that they would like candidates to come to town meetings with interpreters to identify and explain their policies. The word 'Explain' came up often. The group said that they would like electoral officials to visit and undertake electoral education between elections, not just at voting time. There was agreement that an interpreter should always accompany the official. Many said they 'don't believe government listens to them' and reported poor communication with government and general poor communication connections with the outside world.  Some of the group were emphatic that they need consultation with government representatives about anything that affects them. There were statements such as these: 'Nothing should be done without talking to us'; 'When government comes, they should let us know before, not just come' and '[at meetings] we need to understand what government is saying –

need an Interpreter'. It would be fair to say that all the people in the room agreed that they wanted to be consulted, in their own language, and to have the opportunity to speak with government in the 'normal way', that is, personally or though a town meeting

**Language and an Informed Vote.**

The group expressed a desire to have election information and candidates' speeches broadcast over the CAAMA radio, local radio station, Indulkana radio (5NPY 101.3FM) and Imparja TV, in Anangu language. Most of the people in Indulkana have learned to read and write in Anangu language. In general discussion they expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that nobody comes before the election to explain what they should do at the election. 'They just come on the day' (probably referring to the Party scrutineers) and speak English, which 'doesn't mean anything'. They say they need to hear instructions through an Interpreter or have instructions translated in written form. (*Having photographs of the candidates would make it easier to remember if they have visited the community or if they have seen the candidate on television or even heard the candidate speak on CAAMA radio*). In the context of further general discussion about election education some senior people said: 'Its important that everybody has an informed vote'. (*While both State and Federal Electoral Commissions make considerable efforts to employ Indigenous staff for enrolment campaigns and for actual elections, if such staff don't speak the local language, they will still be considered 'strangers', the term used for any Indigenous person from another group. Similarly, non-Indigenous language speakers are not as acceptable as people from the same community. This is reflected in the requirement of the APY Executive Council that we employ qualified interpreters who were also Anangu people from the community to assist in the field work*).

**Parties, Candidates and Electorates.**

The group communicated that they would like candidates to visit and explain which party they represented. They reported (with disapproval) that their Federal Member for Grey, Barry Wakelin, came without an interpreter (Wakelin retired at the 2007 election). One person said: 'When a Member of Parliament is coming here, they should send a poster to Council' and another said: 'They should treat us with respect.'

At the last Federal election there was confusion over which level of government people were voting for. 'Nobody explained which government'. Some reported being unsure about who they had voted for in the past. Many in the group seemed unaware that they were situated in the electorate of Grey ('What is Grey?'; 'What does that mean?').

For the purposes of electoral education Alport recommends showing a map of the electorate with the major towns indicated on it. There are Anangu people in different places in the electorate, including Coober Pedy and Ceduna. Doing this would demonstrate that although Anangu people are dispersed in a variety of locales they are all in the same electorate and that voting can, therefore, take place easily in those other places.

**Formal Voting.**

The importance and desirability of lodging a formal vote was repeatedly emphasised. Many reported that they are unsure of how to vote formally. Some said that they 'don't know what they are doing' when they vote, just 'put numbers down 1, 2, 3 fold and put it in the box'. There was a consensus that they 'just mark the paper' and there was unanimous agreement with one respondent's statement that we 'just vote anyhow' (meaning in any manner that strikes them without checking that the vote is being completed in the required manner). Remote Mobile Polling Team 1, which visited Indulkana at the 2004 Federal election, processed 245 votes, of which 6.94% were informal (at the last State election 7.8% of the 386 votes taken by Mobile

Team 2 – which operated within the seat of Giles – were informal). The average informal voting rate across Australia in the last Federal election was 5% of the total votes cast.

**Voting Participation.**

When asked whether or not they wanted to vote all 29 women responded in the affirmative. When the question was asked another way ('Would you rather not vote?') all 29 disagreed and said that they did wish to vote.

When asked: 'Do you think it is important to vote in the State and Federal elections?' all replied 'yes' adding comments like 'We want to be able to talk to government' . 'Things are being done without us being told'. '[We should] be aware of when government is coming.'

When asked whether they voted at the 2004 Federal election all said they had but at least three of them, by their own accounts, could not have (see below).We know that 245 people voted at Indulkana in that election but it is impossible to determine how many locals made up that number as the mobile polling team serviced people from a wide area.

When asked if they had voted in the 2006 State Election all said they had. When asked where they voted all said they voted at Mobile Polling places (and none by postal vote).

When asked if they found it easy to vote this way (by Mobile Polling) all agreed with the statement: 'No, it was hard'. [There are] 'too many things to do'.  'We didn't know who these people were' *(meaning the candidates and what they stood for).*  When asked whether or not they had voted at the last ATSIC election no-one wanted to talk about ATSIC elections. There was no interest or apparent awareness of the ATSIC elections. *(This was surprising, considering that ATSIC provided services to remote communities, and that its abolition only occurred in 2004.)* Many said they vote because they have been told they must and are worried about being fined, though none reported knowing anyone who had, in fact, been fined. They believe the fine is variously '$40', '$50', '$100' and '$1000'.


  Two people said that they got a letter [from the Australian Electoral Commission], asking why they did not vote at the last Federal Election, but 'threw it in the bin'. Three people (all from the 18-25 year age group) did not vote at the last election because when they turned up to vote they found they were not on the electoral roll, but didn't understand why *(these people may have been away for education purposes when they turned 18 but 2 of them were those who had said that they had thrown their 'please explain' letters 'in the bin').* They were given an enrolment form for 'next time' and were asked by electoral officials to fill them in while the team was still there. *( In 2004, Alport observed several people being given the enrolment forms at Aboriginal communities in far Western South Australia. Also, in her observations as a member of a Remote Polling Team in Central Australia for the 2007 Federal elections, it was obvious that this process took longer than it had at the 2004 election because the new requirements for identification made it more difficult for voters to fill in the form and hand it back to Electoral Officers before the Mobile Polling Team moved on to the next location. At some of those places the Community Council Chief Executive Officers offered to make sure the forms were sent back to the AEC).*

    When asked directly whether or not they were currently enrolled, all 29 said that they were. The group said that they fill in their own enrolment forms. Forms were given to them by Community Office workers. *(Given the low level of English literacy among this group, it is likely that some help was given by Anangu office staff to understand and respond to the questions on this form, even if they did fill it in themselves).*

No-one downloaded the form from the Internet, although it is available on the APY media web

site, along with a message in Anangu language encouraging them to enrol and vote.
**Stimulating Voting Turnout.**
**Electoral education** is probably the best way to go about stimulating both turnout and formality levels within communities such as this. There was no desire expressed by the group to have a practice vote before the election, but it could be incorporated into an educational program. (*Interestingly, an Anangu language CD was played before the local Council elections in 2004, but Alport's observation was that it seemed to be ignored. In that case, the election was considered very important and it was obvious that people knew for whom they wanted to vote.*)

All the respondents were *extremely* enthusiastic about the idea of **reserved seats** for Aboriginal Senators and a separate Aboriginal roll. Such a measure would undoubtedly ~~increase~~ raise the salience of Federal elections among the Aboriginal population and this would likely stimulate turnout and enhance a sense of both internal and external efficacy, as discussed in Section 1.

For the purpose of enrolment all respondents were very keen on the idea of a **photo ID** card because only a few people (5 out of the 29 respondents) had driving licenses and most experience difficulty accessing banking in the big towns. Support for this idea was reiterated several times over the course of the interview. The photo ID card is attractive for other reasons: First, very few have driving licences, so those that do are the only ones with photo ID cards. When people go shopping in Alice Springs, they are often asked for ID but have no acceptable form for transactions. Second, the photo ID card would be useful, not only for enrolment but at the time of polling. Many say they would rather use it than utter their legal names. This is related to the cultural practice whereby whenever a relation has died, many change their names completely, including their surnames. This means that the name recorded on the roll will not match their new name. Further, it is taboo to utter the name of a deceased person so when a relation has died it is not proper to mention one's surname if it is in common with that relative. It is usual for an Indigenous person to speak their name quietly in any event, so some form of ID would also help the Election official find the name of electors on the Electoral Roll.

Some communities in the Northern Territory issue a 'proof of age card'. This type of card, issued by the Council, with a photo of the person on it, and signed by the Council Chairperson, would be useful for voting and more general purposes. Thus photo ID cards would take out a good deal of stress from the voting process and possibly stimulate turnout among indigenous voters.

There was little support for the idea of **E-voting**. After prompting discussion about using computers for elections, enrolment and change of address (possibly though Transaction Centres) and attempting to determine who uses computers in this community it emerged that only a few, mostly younger people under 25 years of age, had access to a computer. These people used the Internet for e-mail. The idea of using the Internet to get a petition out or to express support or opposition to an issue was foreign to to the group. Though many use the ATM in the community, the majority are unfamiliar with computer technology.

The group was shown a picture of the DRE kiosks used in the ACT E-voting trials (see Alport and Hill, 2007). Ms Alport explained that the method was secure and accurate; that she had witnessed non-English speaking people using the machines in the ACT; explained how the machine operated and assured the group that instructions in Anangu would come through the headphones were it to be used in Indulkana. Nevertheless, the respondents still thought it would be 'a bit hard' to vote electronically. The group suggested that 'younger people would be okay, [using the machines] but older ones not.' However, the interpreter, who knows this community

extremely well, indicated that the use of DRE machines could be effective, particularly because of their minority language capabilities (such systems are able to provide instructions through headphones in minority languages and are also helpful in overcoming literacy obstacles). She suggested that many could be convinced to use a DRE machine if they were given a demonstration *in situ.* Demonstrations such as this have worked well in other settings. Furthermore, the fact that Indian electors in remote regions with low-to- nil experience of computer technology proved to adapt readily to E-voting machines augurs well for this comparable Australian constituency (see Alport and Hill, 2007).

In terms of the salience of elections it is worth bearing in mind (especially when planning for the deployment of scarce electoral resources) that the pattern of perceived election salience is different from that reported among non-Aboriginal people. The focus group rated the Iwantja (Indulkana) Council elections as the most important, with Federal Elections second in importance; State elections were not considered to be very important. This perception of salience is reflected in the fact that turnout for council elections tends to be much higher than Federal elections. For example, among the 9 communities in the Pitjantjatjara Lands there was a turn-out of 853 for the Pit Council election in 2002, compared with much lower figure of 240 for the 2001 Federal election. Similarly, in the 2005 council election, turnout was 595 compared with 245 for the 2004 Federal election.

**Concluding Remarks.**
From what the focus group is telling us many Aboriginal people do wish to vote but often feel unsure about the context and mechanics of voting due to language and literacy difficulties; nor do they always feel confident that the votes they cast will be formal. On the basis of our focus group interview we make the following conclusions about how turnout might be stimulated among aAboriginal people in this and similar communities: Appropriate means for stimulating turnout seem to lie in regular electoral education in local language (to increase salience and reduce informal voting) and the introduction of a separate Aboriginal roll and reserved seats for Aboriginal Peoples. Greater use of translators and the use of local languages to disseminate electoral information and assist with voting would also be efficacious. A special photo ID card for use in enrolment and voting might also be helpful in overcoming some of the cultural and ergonomic barriers to voting. It is also highly likely that E-voting solutions could be effective for connecting or re-connecting young Aboriginal people who are more familiar with the technology involved. Further it is possible that acceptance of E-technologies, particularly the use of DRE kiosks, could be enhanced with a practical demonstration of the machine prior to the next election and with the aid of an interpreter.

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