

# **Voters and Politicians: three papers in applied political-economics**

by **Eamon Gilbert McGinn**

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

under the supervision of Shiko Maruyama, Peter Siminski,  
and Kentaro Tomoeda

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## Certificate of original authorship

I, Eamon McGinn, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Business School at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise indicated in the references or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

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This is a thesis by compilation, as of submission for examination, no chapter has been submitted for publication. Chapter 1 was co-authored with Shiko Maruyama. This thesis has been copy-edited and proof-read by Abigail Bergman.



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THIS THESIS IS DEDICATED TO HOLLY AND ASTRID.

# Abstract

THIS THESIS CONSISTS OF THREE PAPERS unified by a common focus on the behavior of voters and politicians in elections.

Chapter 1 considers informal voting in Australian elections. In Australia, there are around 5-6% of voters who submit an informal vote, which doesn't count towards the total. In this chapter, I make use of a natural experiment, based on exogenous changes in electorate boundaries, to identify what factors influence the number of informal votes. I find that factors that feature in the traditional theory on voter decisions, competitiveness and number of other voters, do not affect the rate of informal voting. Instead I find that more candidates on the ballot results in higher levels of informal voting. Halving the number of options would reduce informal voting by 27%. This effect is present regardless of the level of education, indicating it is likely a decision to abstain rather than an error.

Chapter 2, deals with the role of politicians' personal ideology in determining their voting behaviour. I extend recent empirical findings by applying a text-as-data approach to analyse speeches in parliament following a recent politically charged moment in Australia -- a national survey on same sex marriage (SSM). I estimate opposition to SSM in parliamentary speeches and measure how speech changed following the SSM vote. I find that Opposers of SSM became stronger in their opposition once the results of the national survey were released,



regardless of how their electorate voted. No consistent and statistically significant change is seen in the behavior of Supporters of SSM. This result indicates that personal ideology played a more significant role in determining changes in speech than did the position of the electorate.

In Chapter 3, I analyze the transition to instant run-off voting (IRV) that is occurring in some jurisdictions in the U.S. There are mixed findings in the literature on the benefits of IRV for voters and politicians, making informed debate around its adoption challenging. Analysis of the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metro Area, which has strong natural experiment characteristics, indicates that the introduction of IRV caused a 9.6 percentage point increase in turnout for Mayoral elections. The effect is larger for precincts that have higher poverty rates. Text based sentiment analysis of mayoral debates across the U.S., a new approach in this area, indicates that the introduction of IRV improved the civility of debates with candidates substituting negative or neutral words for positive words.

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