

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE****Inquiry into the Administration and Management of the 2017  
State General Election**

Submission of:

Cassandra Taylor



## **Inquiry into the Administration and Management of the 2017 State General Election**

### **The operation of polling places, including early voting centres, campaign advertising and the distribution of campaign material**

- What were the experiences of electors, candidates, campaign workers/volunteers and polling place officials on election day and at early voting centres?

I just wanted to say that it was a little disconcerting to walk into the polling booth and see a CCTV camera on the ceiling of the room we were voting in. I knew it would have had to have been turned off by law, so I tried to shake it off as best I could and carry on, but even knowing it was off, I still felt its presence while I was voting. As it is, I'm always wary that someone could look over my shoulder while I'm voting due to the lack of curtains, but that camera on the roof added another dimension to that. I shielded my vote as best I could, but it wasn't a pleasant voting experience and it shouldn't be like that. It's intimidating as a voter to feel like there's a camera filming you as you're voting, even if you know it has to be turned off. There were no signs up to tell us it was switched off, incidentally.

On a similar theme, I note from the WAEC website that they were offering desktop CCTV magnifiers at some booths for voters with a visual impairment. From what I understand, the cameras in these point straight down at the text they're magnifying and pose no risk of capturing anything else in the background. That's good. The problem though is that I only know that because I Googled them, whereas someone else might have just read the phrase "desktop CCTV" and believed them to be a privacy threat. It isn't only actual privacy threats that matter, but also the perception of them, real or not. Perhaps some explanation of what they are could be included with future references to them?

Both of those issues, though, come back to the lack of curtains around individual voting stations. With the increasing prevalence of CCTV cameras, and with people starting to take selfies in polling booths, being able to pull a curtain around you as you vote would feel a lot more private and make for a much more comfortable voting experience. Is there any chance of curtains being introduced to voting booths any time soon? I know it would cost a bit, but isn't democracy worth that amount?

### **Ballot security, including paper ballots and electronic ballots**

- What measures did the Commission employ to secure paper ballots and electronic ballots during the 2017 election?
- What is best practice in ballot security (both paper and electronic)?

Best practice is to not have electronic voting at all, or at the very least, for it not to be connected to the internet. I understand the reasons why you've brought it in for people with a disability who would otherwise need assistance in voting, but they're being sold a lie. Far better to trust one person than to have to trust 7 billion when the system gets hacked and their votes compromised. That's the reality. As much as you try to convince the public that online systems are safe and secure, that doesn't make it so. We know the truth. It's not secure. To say otherwise is a lie.

And again, perception matters as much as reality. Even if by some chance you could devise an online voting system which was genuinely secure and private, it still wouldn't be seen that way by a



sceptical public. The trust just isn't there.

With regards to the disability issues specifically, I would worry that some of the people who were oversold those claims of security may have been people who were more trusting due to their disability. How fully did they understand the risk of hacking? And how aware were they of their options? Could a carer have either pressured them into online voting, or only offered them that one option? Even for those who fully comprehended and freely consented, they were still sold a lie. From the WAEC website<sup>1</sup>:

### **How secure is it to use the iVote system?**

Extremely safe and secure. There are safeguards in place to protect your vote from risks including hackers and fraud, with multiple layers of protection and monitoring to ensure voter secrecy, privacy and security.

### **Is it safe to vote online?**

Yes. Your online vote is fully encrypted and safeguarded. Your electronic vote will arrive at the WA Electoral Commission encrypted and cannot be tampered with or changed. It will be unlocked by a group of officials who will print and count your vote record, along with all other votes received. Your vote is completely secret, and your name is not associated with your submitted vote.

Does that really convey the risks? Extremely. Completely. Fully. Cannot. Those are very strong, definite words with no uncertainty in them, whereas in reality, there is a very real chance that this voting system could be hacked. The WAEC has oversold the security here, and at the expense of providing voters with all the information necessary to make an informed decision. People with a disability have as much right to a private ballot as anyone else, but online voting just isn't that. Any technology-assisted voting they require should be kept disconnected from the internet.

The other point I wanted to raise is more a question, which is about the amount of scrutineering done for the upper house below-the-line data entry, and also, if that data is then transmitted to the electoral commission online or by other - safer - means such as by phone or by road? From the post-election coverage in the days after the election, I got the impression that only a small handful of booth staff are left to enter the BTL data into a computer for counting and that scrutineers may not still be present by that stage? How many election officials supervise that data-entry process, and are party scrutineers generally present? And how is the entered data transmitted to the electoral commission from the polling booth? Because if it's delivered to them over the internet, then it would carry the same risk of being hacked that online voting does.

Just my thoughts anyway. I saw this inquiry advertised in the newspaper and thought it was worth a comment. Please stop pushing online-everything, and especially for something that matters as much as the integrity of our democratic process. And if you could look into that privacy issue with CCTV cameras in polling booths too, that would be great. We need curtains.

Sincerely,

Cassandra Taylor.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.elections.wa.gov.au/ivote>

