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Victorian local government election was held in October 2016. It's a pleasure to see some of our community members had courage to come forward and contest the election in some city councils. Regardless of the unsuccessful outcome, their participation ought to be appreciated.

OUR PLACE IN LOCAL POLITICS?

I was heavily involved in 2008 and 2012 Hume council election campaign for our friend Dayasoma Bamunusinge. Therefore I had the opportunity to gather some information, fact and figures about local government elections. I thought it would be valuable to share some of these with interested parties perhaps.

Party elections

In state and federal level elections it appears that people vote for the political parties. Majority of people even don't know who their candidate is. Voting mainly depends on the policies of a particular political party and quality of the leader.

In local government elections however it appears that voters vote on personal preferences. Although some candidates represent a particular party, that has a lower weight on voter's preference. It's more or less a community/ethnicity based choice. People vote for the candidate they can relate to.

Global terrorism

The result of the recent local government election suggests that global terrorism has become a factor in voter's mind on the ballot paper. I spoke to some of my native Australian work colleagues and one of them very determinately mentioned that he would put last preference to one particular group of candidates. I would not name the group he mentioned here as it would be offensive for some sectors of the community.

There is no doubt that Lindt café incident had a heavy toll in the way the people think politically. Although there had been similar incidents, media coverage that attracted Lindt café siege has changed the political mind of voting public. No one should blame for this natural feeling of white Australian (Anglo Saxon) to favour white Australian candidates over other nationalities. Although it appears that there is no immediate effect, one should not be surprised if this tendency reach the ballot box at federal and state level election too in the long run.

Hume council election

There had been a much of hoo-ha about the candidacy for Hume City Council "Aitken" ward. There were twenty candidates including three Sri Lankan Australians for Aitken ward for the election of 4 councillors. The controversy surrounding it prompts me to write this article. Firstly, it's sad to see that we lost the Sri Lankan born, only representative in recent past, at local government level. That was Dayasoma Bamunusinge. Some elements of our community pointed the fin-

ger at other candidates for his defeat. It could have been the case, but real reason is somewhat different. Let us look what happened in 2012 election first:

In 2012 Dayasoma had three factors in favour for his victory.

1. He had adequate primary votes to be in a strong position in ballot counting process. (Thankfully these ballots were mainly from voters of Sri Lankan origin.) and

2. First elected councillor who had given him 2nd preference received 7956 primary votes. That is 2821 votes more than the required quota of 5135 in 2012 election. So from this excess votes, Daya was fortunate to get 1448 votes, lifting him up to a very strong position. And in the counting process he got elected 3rd in 2012.

3. In 2012 how to vote cards were posted to the voters by Victorian Electoral Commission. So, voters who didn't have a particular preferences, voted as it was indicated on how to vote card of their first choice of candidate. In this case first elected candidate's 2nd preference was Dayasoma

In 2016 election however, how to vote cards was not included in the ballot paper envelope. At this election no one reached the required quota of 7013 votes to be elected with primary votes. Therefore all the elected councillors depended on the merit of preferences.

What is noticeable at this election is that Anglo Saxon voters have strongly favoured the candidates of their own ethnic origin. Naturally, this trend is commonly seen on minority migrant communities. But things have changed. One thing very clear here is that, what's happening in Australia recently, as mentioned earlier has caused some concerns for many people and it reflected at the ballot box too.

Now let us look at the 'Would have been results' without the two new comers in Aitken ward. Dilshan Fernando and Kevin Silva received 469 and 391 primaries respectively. Two put together would be 860 primary votes. Although all these votes have not come from the Sri Lankan Australian community, we will add all these 860 votes to Dayasoma and see what would have been the possible outcome. In this scenario Dayasoma would have had 2741 primary votes (1881+860) putting him yet in the 5th position on primaries. It's interesting to see in this scenario that third elected councillor Joseph Haweli was in the 6th position with 2495 primaries, 246 votes fewer than Dayasoma. That's why it is very important to get strong preferences on the ballot paper. (2nd or 3rd preference would be ideal.) It is very clear that voters have not followed the how to vote card indications. This I noticed at the opening of ballot papers

Istar Samet who was in the 3rd place at the first count with 2858 primary votes could not win due to lack of strong preferences. So, even with the absence of the new comers, final outcome would have been the same for our friend Daya for the same reason and that is the deficiency of strong preferences.

So, our future candidates for local government elections would have to change the



campaign strategies to win the heart and mind of voters of wider community for a successful outcome.

Hume Election results can be viewed on: <https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/Results/Council2016/HumeResult.html>

Different individuals can have different opinion on this. But fact and figures stay

the same! Before I finish I also have to mention here, a handful of individuals made some disgusting comments on social media to attack other candidates who exercised their privileges. We like to see some maturity from matured people. It's also sad that Hume council election lead to break decades long friendship of some group of our community.

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