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**Australians of Indian Origin in Politics:
Interrogating the ‘Representation Gap’ in Australia**

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Note

The views expressed in this study are those of the author, and do not reflect the views of the Asia Institute or the University of Melbourne.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australian citizens who trace their ancestry to India (hereafter Australians of Indian origin) account for approximately 1.6 percent of the total Australian population. They participate in many sectors of the Australian economy and society. Many are highly educated and earn high incomes. Most speak English and, coming from a democratic country, understand democratic political processes. But, so far, Australians of Indian origin have made few in-roads into Australian legislative institutions, despite meeting a key eligibility criteria for holding Australian political office, namely holding Australian citizenship. In recent elections across the three tiers of Australian government—the 2019 federal election, the 2019 New South Wales state election, the 2018 Victorian state election and various local government elections—only a handful of Australians of Indian origin were elected to parliament or local government councils. This is far less than might have been expected.

What explains this ‘representation gap’ in all the three tiers of Australian government? How can this gap be narrowed? This Paper reveals two broad groups of factors that contribute to the ‘representation gap.’ The first group is at the individual/community level and the second at the systemic level.

At the individual level, most Australians of Indian origin who become candidates for political office acquired political party membership just before they sought endorsement for candidature in federal, state and council elections. Consequently, they found navigating internal political party mechanisms cumbersome, daunting and time consuming. They lacked durable bridging social and professional networks with politicians and long-standing party members as well as access to political mentors. At the community level, they have faced the difficult task of cultivating strong networks with heterogenous, geographically-dispersed communities. Many Australians of Indian origin who become candidates have difficulty articulating a policy agenda convincingly and also lack sufficient financial resources to publicise political causes and/or fight negative mainstream media publicity.

Yet, these individual/community level factors alone do not fully explain the existing 'representation gap' of Australians of Indian origin in Australia's political institutions. Systemic hurdles also present a big challenge. A major finding of this research is that the complex process of preselection is a significant major hurdle. Australians of Indian origin are ill-placed to deal with the complex internal mechanisms and factional competitions within the mainstream political parties. Party gatekeepers determine who gets preselected, who gets placed where on the ballot papers of the Upper Houses, and whether candidates are placed in 'winnable', 'marginal' or 'unwinnable seats—all these matters are beyond the candidates' personal control. The other contributing factors are occasional discrediting of potentially strong candidates by their own party members, and candidates having limited available resources to counter such allegations. The strong perception among members of the Indian diaspora in Australia is that political parties are mainly concerned with ingratiating themselves with the community when it suits them, such as in the lead-up to elections, rather than genuinely representing the community's interests or proactively incorporating ethnic diversity into party structures. While these factors are not unique to the experience of Australians of Indian origin, they nevertheless jointly contribute to the under-representation of Australians of Indian origin in Australia's political institutions.

Comparatively, Australia lags other post-World War II immigrant nations with Indian diasporas. In fact, politicians from Indian migrant backgrounds in Britain and the USA had been elected to government as early as the 1890s and 1957 respectively, at a time when the Indian diaspora was minuscule in these nations. The fact that there are only a handful of Australians of Indian origin currently in State Parliaments and one in Federal Parliament fails to reflect the reality of the growing presence of the Indian diaspora in Australia, which we define for the purposes of this paper as people in Australia (citizens or not) who trace their ancestry to India. According to the 2016 Census, over 600,000 people, or 2.6 percent of the Australian population, met this definition—and the number appears to be growing strongly. Upon the dismantling of the White Australia Policy in 1973, Australian political institutions made significant changes to accommodate post-WWII migrant groups. Yet, unlike other settler-nations, Australia has neglected to embrace cultural and ethnic diversity wholeheartedly within the political sphere. Whether Australians of Indian origin will have to undergo similar challenges and trends in terms

of political representation as those of earlier migrant groups, such as Greeks and Italians, remains to be seen.

In the land of the so-called 'fair go', it is both prudent and timely that political parties explore innovative strategies to better include Australians of Indian origin (and, for that matter, members of other under-represented ethnic groups) in the political arena. Such moves could assist in broadening the talent pool of political representation and extend communication beyond that of notional community leaders. Their presence, visibility and input into the political policy-making processes that directly impact their lives would also enrich their feelings of belonging through a shared common identity, one that goes beyond their economic contribution and aligns the Indian diaspora's visibility and inclusion with that in other migrant-settler nations.

To address the under-representation of Australians of Indian origin, this paper recommends that Australian political parties:

- address the under-representation of ethnic minorities in legislative institutions;
- initiate programs such as communications training to broaden the pool of talent amongst Australians of Indian origin as well as other minority ethnic groups;
- harness the talent of future generations of Australians of Indian origin and other minority ethnic groups by channeling resources to initiatives that act as pipelines to future candidates.

1. Introduction

Australia has one of the world's most diverse populations as a consequence of mass immigration programs that have been in place since 1947 (Lopez, 2000, Chapter 1; Freeman & Jupp, 1992). Historically, the UK has been the primary source country for migrants to Australia. However, Asian countries—especially India and China—have become increasingly important sources of migrants in recent decades. This significant growth in Chinese and Indian immigration is largely attributed to temporary immigrants entering Australia as skilled migrants and as international students. The two countries remain the main source for both classes of immigration, followed by other Asian countries.

Yet, despite the ethnic heterogeneity of contemporary Australian society, representation in Australia's three tiers of government remains predominantly of Anglo-Celtic and European descent. A recent study by the Australian Human Rights Commission (2018: 12) found that 94 percent of members of the federal parliament had either Anglo-Celtic or European heritage. According to journalist Eryk Bagshaw (2017), 'if Parliament was a suburb, it would be among the least diverse in the country'.

Australians of Indian origin—that is, Australian citizens who trace their ancestry to India—are distinctly under-represented. The 2016 Census found that 619,170 people, or 2.6 percent of Australia's total population of 23.4 million, traced their ancestry to India. Of this number, 375,836 people, or 1.6 percent of the population, had taken out Australian citizenship. This group corresponds to our definition of Australians of Indian origin. Yet, despite constituting a significant share of population and holding Australian citizenship (a key eligibility criteria for holding political office in Australia), very few Australians of Indian origin have been elected at federal, state or local levels. For instance, only one candidate of Indian origin (Dave Sharma) was elected in the 2019 federal election, two were elected in the 2019 New South Wales state election (Daniel Mookhey and Gurmeh Singh) and one was elected in the 2018 Victorian state election (Kaushaliya Vaghela). In percentage terms, Australians of Indian origin account for 0.4 percent of representatives in the federal parliament, 0.8 percent in the Victorian state parliament, and even lower proportions for local councils in NSW and Victoria (see graphs). They do

relatively well in the NSW state parliament where they account for 1.5 percent of elected representatives. But the broad picture is clear: Australians of Indian origin are under-represented in all three tiers of Australian government.

1.1 Aims of the study

This paper seeks to identify plausible reasons contributing to the under-representation of Australians of Indian origin in Australian government and make recommendations as to how the existing ‘representation gap’ can be narrowed. In particular, it:

- Analyses the composition and demography of the Indian diaspora in Australia for insights into individual and group characteristics that aid or hinder political representation;
- Examines the experiences of Australian candidates of Indian origin and perspectives of community leaders to identify other factors that explain the representation gap; and
- Identifies strategies that may enhance the representation of Australians of Indian origin, and candidates from other cultural backgrounds, to overcome the existing representation gap.

1.2 Data and methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, embracing both quantitative and qualitative data. Data on the Indian diaspora in Australia was collected from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. There is little systematic data on foreign-born candidates who stand for elections because the Australian Electoral Commission does not collect data based on candidates’ ethnic backgrounds. The quantitative data for this project was compiled by the author based on information publicly available from the Australian Electoral Commission’s website, Parliamentary Handbooks, parliamentary websites (including biographical information on current members), maiden

speeches by newly-elected representatives, and mainstream media. Based on the names of individuals, the data was triangulated with online media to ascertain Indian heritage. While care has been taken in compiling these figures, total accuracy cannot be guaranteed due to the limitations of the source data.

The study also uses qualitative data to augment the quantitative data. Qualitative data is more useful for understanding the experiences and perspectives of individuals and community members. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight Australians of Indian origin, some of whom were elected to parliament and others who were unsuccessful, to find out what opportunities, barriers and challenges they had experienced in recent elections across the three tiers of Australian government. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with nine leaders and members of the Indian diaspora in Australia who were willing to share their views about Indian-Australian political representation in Australia. Using personal and community social networks, participants were invited via telephone and email to an interview. The respondents' comments have been de-identified in this paper at their request.

1.3 Structure of the paper

The paper consists of seven sections, the first being this introductory section. The second section provides an overview of a selection of recent election results at the federal, state and local levels in Australia, focusing on the role of Australians of Indian origin. It provides a list of successful Australian candidates of Indian origin in those elections. The third section provides a brief overview of the Indian diaspora in Australia, focusing on its history. The fourth and fifth sections identify plausible reasons for the under-representation of Australians of Indian origin in Australian legislative institutions, focusing on individual/community and systemic factors respectively. The sixth section proposes that in light of these reasons, the Indian-Australian diaspora should be understood as a 'devalued' diaspora. The seventh, and final, section concludes by providing recommendations both for narrowing the representation gap and for future research.

1.4 Definitions

Before beginning with this analysis, it is necessary to briefly define several key terms used in this paper.

Australians of Indian origin	Australian citizens who trace their ancestry to India
Indian-Australian diaspora/Indian diaspora in Australia	People in Australia who trace their ancestry to India, including both Australian citizens and non-citizens.
First-generation migrants	People who were born overseas and were the first in their immediate families to move to Australia.
Second-generation migrants	Children of first-generation migrants.

2. Australians of Indian origin and recent elections

This section provides an overview of electoral results in recent federal, state and local government elections, focusing in the latter cases on New South Wales and Victoria. The focus is on these two states because the Indian diaspora in Australia is concentrated in those states. In the 2016 Census, of the 619,170 people who traced their ancestry to India, 211,928 lived in NSW and 209,259 lived in Victoria—collectively 68 percent of the diaspora (ABS, 2016a; 2016b). These states comprise almost 60 percent of the total Australian population.

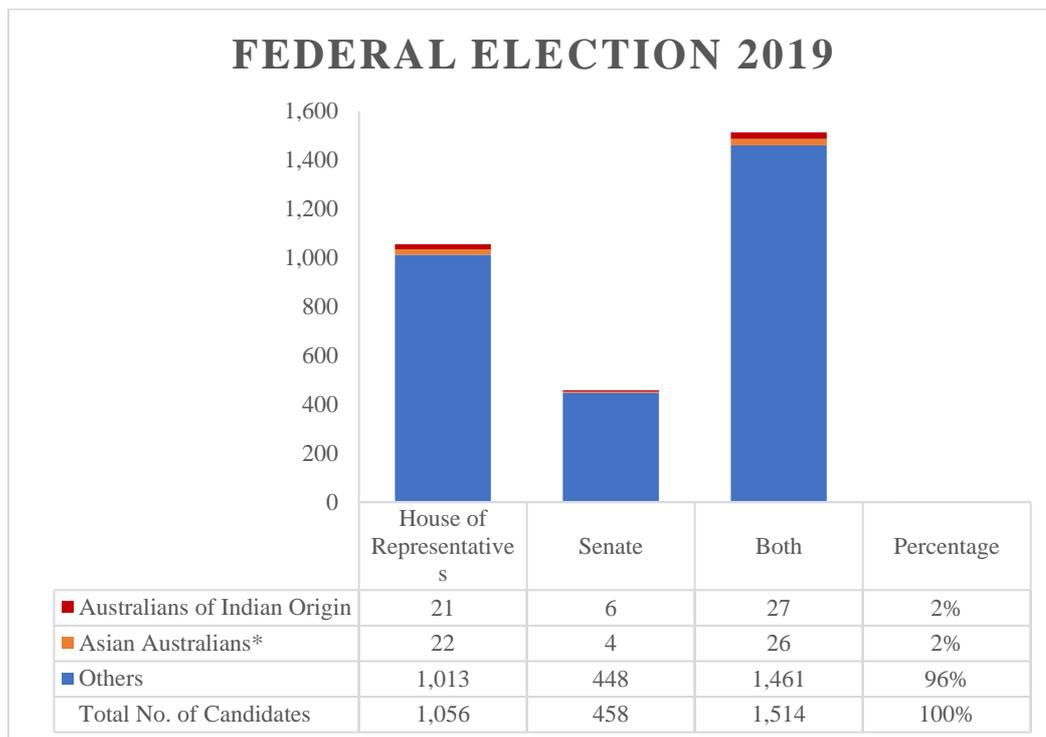
Australian candidates of Indian origin in these elections were identified by reviewing information publicly available from the Australian Electoral Commission's website, parliamentary websites (including reviewing maiden speeches by newly-elected representatives), and the mainstream media. Based on personal knowledge, the selection criterion was to ascertain whether candidates' first name and surname revealed Indian heritage.

This selection data was then triangulated with mainstream and ethnic media to further ascertain Indian heritage. Candidates were presumed to hold Australian citizenship since this is an eligibility criterion. Whilst care has been taken in compiling these figures, total accuracy cannot be guaranteed due to the limitations of the source data. Asian names were shortlisted in the same manner.

2.1 The 2019 Federal Election

The 2019 Australian federal election was held on May 18 to elect MPs and Senators of the 46th Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. Voters selected candidates to represent them in all 151 electorates in the House of Representatives and 40 of the 76 Senate seats.

Graph 1: Total candidates—2019 Federal Election



Source: Author’s calculations; Australian Electoral Commission, 2019

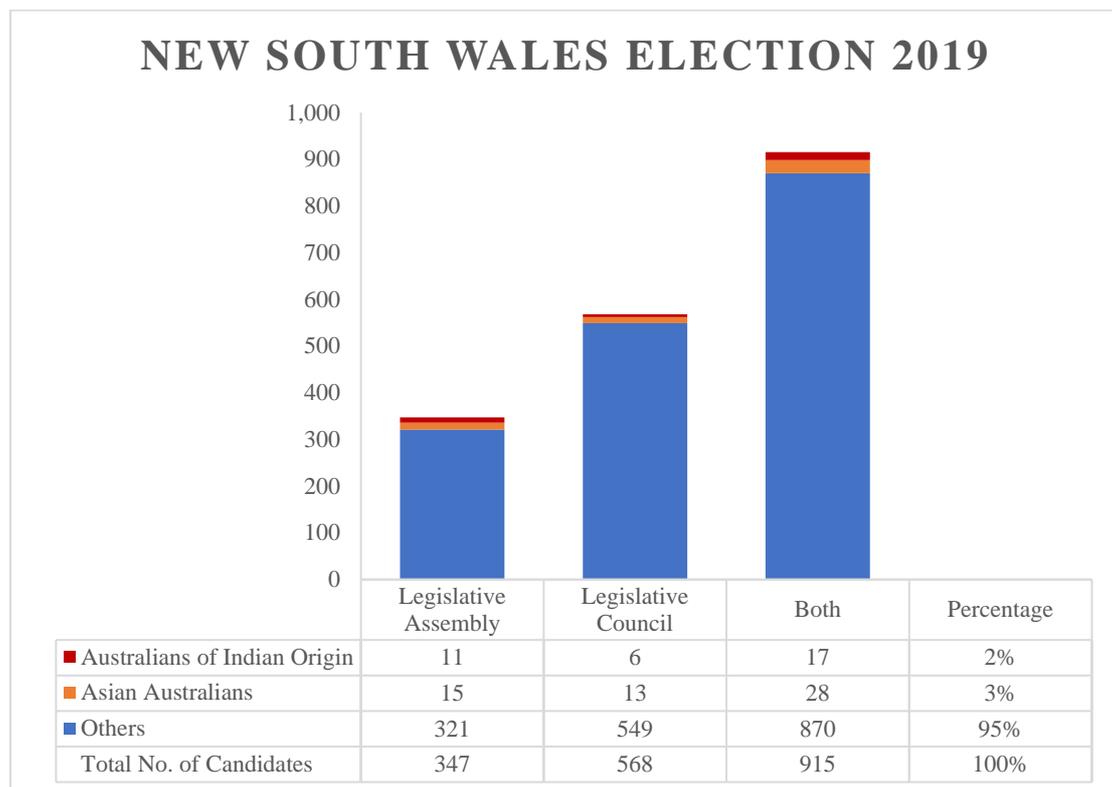
*Denotes Australians identified as originally from the following countries: China (including Hong Kong), Singapore, Malaysia, Cambodia, Taiwan, Laos and Vietnam.

Of the 1,056 candidates in the federal election for the lower house, 21 were Australians of Indian origin. Devanand (Dave) Sharma (Liberal Party, House of Representatives (NSW)) was the only one elected.

2.2 The 2019 NSW State Election and 2018 Victorian State election

The 2019 New South Wales Election was held on March 23 to elect the state’s 57th Parliament. New South Wales has a 93-member Legislative Assembly (lower house) and a 42-member Legislative Council (upper house).

Graph 2: New South Wales Election 2019



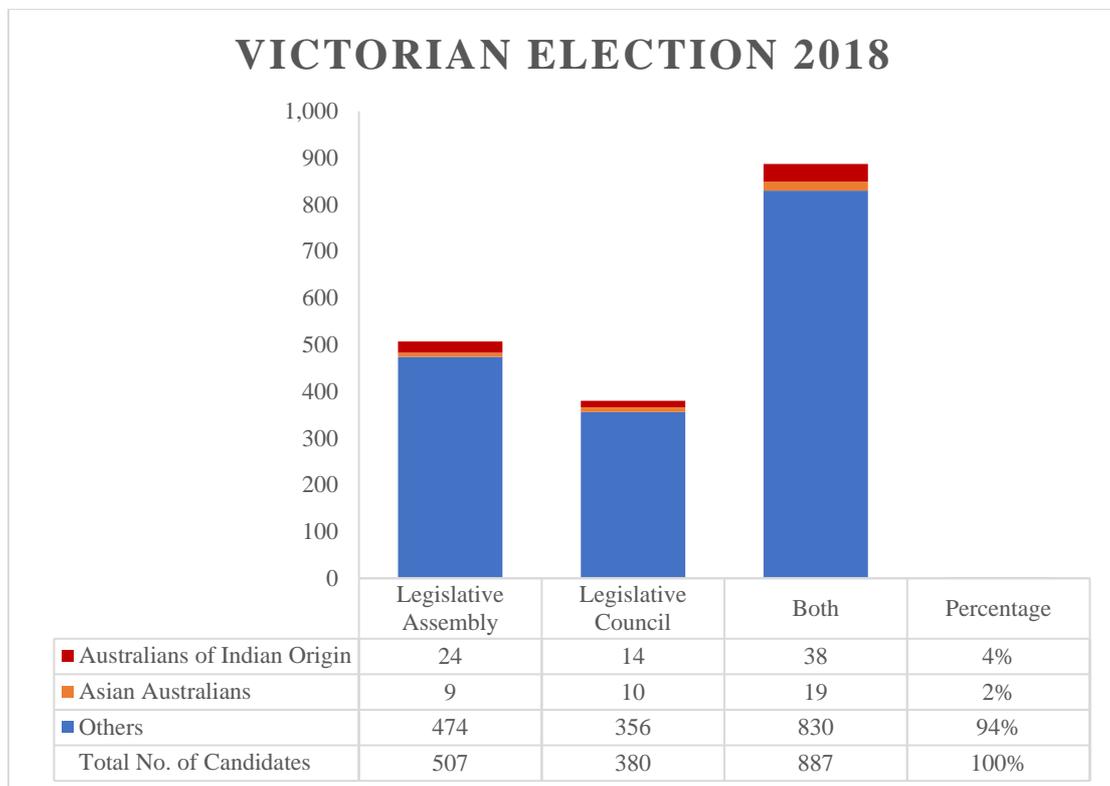
Source: Author’s calculations; Australian Electoral Commission, 2019

*Denotes Australians identified as originally from the following countries: China (including Hong Kong), Singapore, Malaysia, Cambodia, Taiwan, Laos and Vietnam.

Graph 2 shows that out of a total number of 915 candidates for election to the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council (Sloane 2019), 17 are Australians of Indian origin. Two of these were elected: Daniel Mookhey (Australian Labor Party, Legislative Council, re-elected) and Gurmeh Singh (National Party, Legislative Assembly).

The Victorian State Election was held on November 24, 2018 to elect the 59th Parliament of Victoria. All 88 seats in the Legislative Assembly (lower house) and all 40 seats in the Legislative Council (upper house) were up for election. Out of a total number of 887 candidates for both houses of parliament, 38 were Australians of Indian origin. Of this 38, only one candidate was successful: Kaushaliya Vaghela (Australian Labor Party, Legislative Council).

Graph 3: 2018 Victorian State Election



Source: Author’s calculations; Australian Electoral Commission 2019

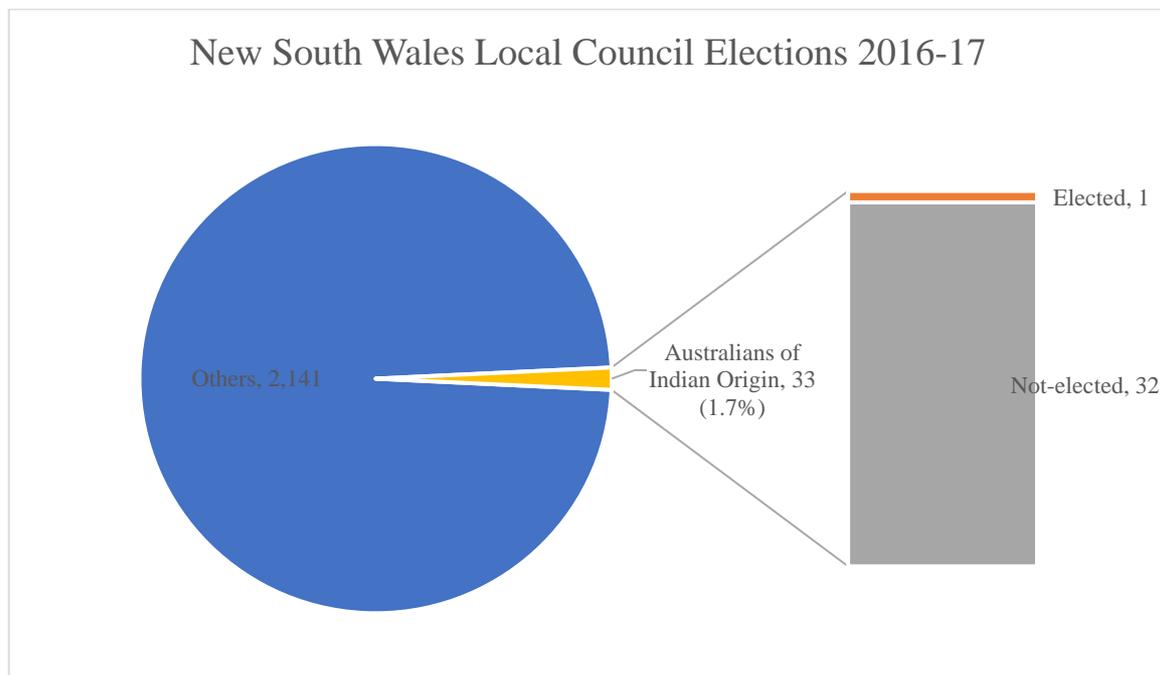
*Denotes Australians identified as originally from the following countries: China (including Hong Kong), Singapore, Malaysia, Cambodia, Taiwan, Laos and Vietnam.

2.3 New South Wales and Victorian local council elections

Local governments are the third tier of government in Australia. Elections for local government councils are held every four years as stipulated by each state's *Local Government Act*, but election dates vary from one state or territory to another.

In New South Wales, the most recent local government elections were held on September 9, 2017 for most councils, although some were held in 2016. In Victoria, I examined the results of local council elections held on October 22, 2016. In both cases, hundreds of council seats were contested.

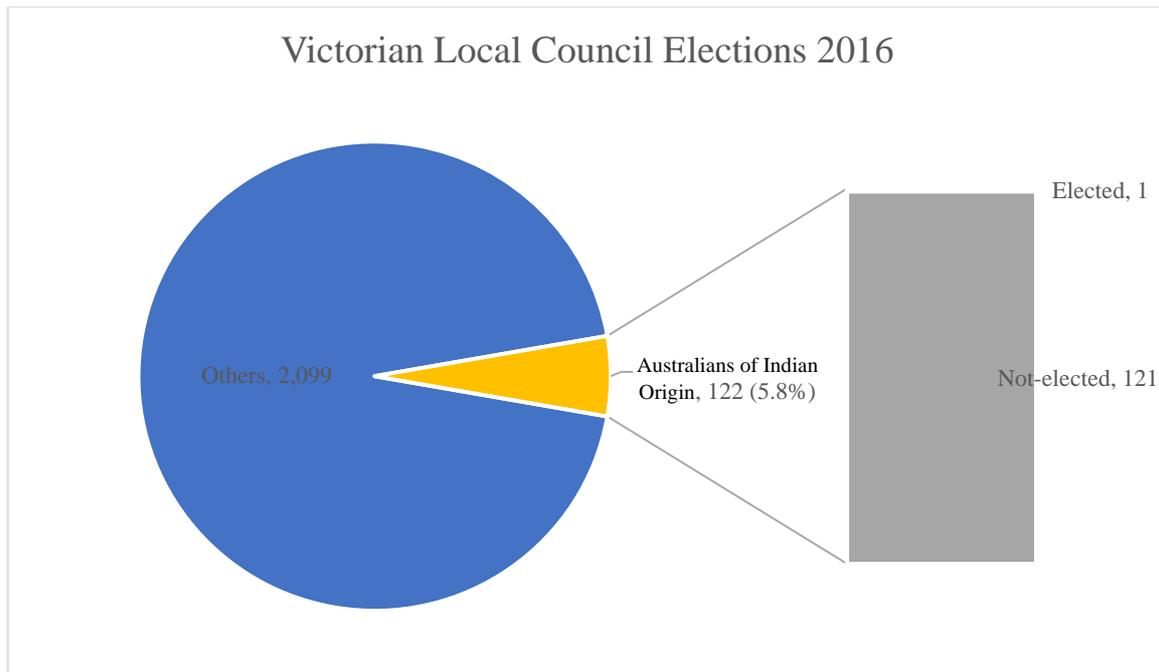
Graph 4: New South Wales Local Council Elections 2016-2017



Source: Author's calculations; New South Wales Electoral Commission, 2016-17

More Australians of Indian origin ran for election in Victoria's state and local council elections than in the New South Wales state and local council elections. One reason for this is that people who trace their ancestry to India account for a higher proportion of the population in Victoria than NSW. Whatever the case, the outcome in terms of the proportion of elected representatives of Indian origin was similar in both states.

Graph 5: Victorian Local Council Elections 2016



Source: Author's calculations; Victorian Electoral Commission 2016

There was only one successful Australian candidate of Indian origin out of a total of 2,141 candidates in New South Wales, and only one in Victoria out of a total 2,099 candidates (see following graph). These were Moninder Singh, who was elected as a councillor for the Blacktown City Council (NSW) in 2016, and Intaj Khan who was elected as a councillor for the Wyndham City Council (Victoria) in 2016.

2.4 Summary

While Australians of Indian origin have participated actively in recent Australian elections as candidates in Victoria and New South Wales, they have rarely been successful in getting elected. Only six Australians of Indian origin won seats in the most recent federal, state and local government elections, emphasising that the diversity within contemporary Australian society is not reflected in the Australian federal and state parliaments or at the local government level.

The next section of this paper provides an overview of the Indian diaspora in Australia.

3. The Indian diaspora in Australia

3.1 Overview

Contemporary Indian immigration to Australia dates to the 18th century. Indian seamen (lascars) manning British ships en route to Australia and small contingents accompanying ex-India colonial British staff settled in Australia (Maharaj, 2008; Westrip & Holroyde 2010:102). In the 19th century, Indian Sikhs and Muslims from Punjab travelled to Australia to work as agricultural laborers and as hawkers. The contemporary Indian diaspora in Australia arrived in two main periods: the 1970s-1990s and the 1990s-2010s (Dhanji, 2016). This pattern of migration has yielded three main groups within the Indian diaspora in Australia, each of which has its own characteristics.

3.2 First-generation migrants: 1970s-1990s cohort

Indian immigrants arrived as part of the first significant migrant intake in the 1970s, after race as a criterion for immigration to Australia was abandoned following enactment of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*. The Act removed the last traces of the 'White Australia' policy which had severely restricted non-white, particularly Asian, immigration to Australia (Tavan, 2005; DIMA, 2001; Hugo 2008a). Rather than focus on race, Australia began to attract economic immigrants with skills in demand in the Australian economy, as it shifted from a manufacturing to a knowledge-based economy, in order to compete successfully in global markets.

Indian immigrants during this period were mostly aged in their 30s and 40s at the time of immigration. They were also predominantly male, married, well-qualified and worked in well-paid professional occupations in medical fields, government, academia, and business (Dhanji, 2016). Another group, Indian engineers and IT specialists, arrived in the 1980s-1990s under the

skilled migrant program to meet the needs of Australia's emerging knowledge-based economy (Voight-Graf C & Siew-Ean Khoo, 2004). The two groups wanted to settle their families in Australia and invested in their children's education. Those children are now second- and third-generation migrants. The number of persons of Indian ancestry increased from 29, 211 (0.23 percent of Australian population) in 1971 to 60,598 (0.36 percent of Australian population) in 1991 (DIMA, 2001).

The Australian government declared 1989 the Year of Citizenship and encouraged eligible immigrants to apply for citizenship. A sizeable portion of Indian migrants did so, giving up their Indian citizenship. They invested in home ownership and engaged in business ventures. They also joined Indian community organisations and events in order to maintain their cultural and religious practices while integrating into Australian society as best as they could. Seeking political representation was therefore not high on their agenda even though some Indian immigrants in Australia did participate in senior public service and policy advisory roles. For example, Indian-born Professor Bhajan Grewal, an economist, advised the Victorian Premier and Treasurer on fiscal federalism issues in the 1980s; Peter Varghese, an Australian of Indian origin, held positions in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in the late 1990s and went on to hold very senior roles including Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in 2012-2016. He is currently the Chancellor of the University of Queensland; and Indian-born Abul Rizvi, was a senior official in the Department of Immigration from the 1990s and formulated Australia's current points-based skills migration policy.

3.3 First-generation migrants: 1990s-2010s cohort

In the late 1990s, the Indian diaspora in Australia experienced substantial growth with the arrival of a second cohort of first-generation migrants. This second cohort comprised more skilled migrants to address rising labor shortages in the information technology and engineering sectors, and also international students. The Indian-born population in Australia more than doubled in 25 years from 29,211 in 1971 to 77,522 in 1996. It grew exponentially in the subsequent 23 years, reaching 2.4 percent of the population in 2016. This growth is attributable to tailored temporary migration programs. For example, from 2000 onward, vigorous marketing campaigns mounted by Australian higher education institutions and the Vocational Education and Training sector

attracted large numbers of Indian students. The most significant growth in their numbers took place between 2006 and 2016 (Dhanji & Rangan, 2018), despite a drop in 2009-2012 following a series of attacks on Indian students in Australia.

The Employer/State Sponsored Migration program and the 'two-step migration program' (Rizvi, 2004) offered permanent settlement to temporary migrants under specified conditions. The two-step migration program allowed Australian employers or the State Governments to recruit temporary migrants to work in jobs where local labor was in short supply; and allowed international students to study, seek work upon completion of education and then move to permanent status. For example, under the Employer/State sponsored scheme, migrants could apply for citizenship after four years of permanent residency (Larsen 2013; Collins 2013). International students could transition from temporary to permanent settlement in Australia (Birrell & Perry, 2009; Larsen 2013). Within six months of graduating they could be eligible to attain citizenship whilst on-shore (Hawthorne, 2010).

On average, this cohort from India were younger (in their late 20s-30s) upon arrival than earlier cohorts, particularly the international students (DIBP, 2013). They are now in their 30s-40s. They come from an India that had initiated a program of liberal economic reforms in the 1990s and experienced a broadening of its middle-class base. However, they too seek better economic and social opportunities abroad. This cohort took advantage of the *Australian Citizenship Act 2007* and the *Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Testing) Act 2007* which introduced new test requirements for Australian citizenship applicants. Essentially, these new measures encouraged prospective citizens to attain improved education and skill levels relevant for successful integration into Australian society (Australian Government, 2006). Substantial numbers of Indian migrants in this second cohort have since become Australian citizens while retaining 'non-resident Indian' status under Indian citizenship laws. However, as the period required to attain citizenship conferral has increased substantially since 2000, many Indians have only recently been granted citizenship. Since 2000, the *Australian Citizenship Amendment Act*

1993 (*Australian Citizenship Act 1948*) has undergone several changes¹ (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011).

3.4 Second-generation migrants

There are also second-generation Indian migrants—children of the first and second cohorts mentioned above. This group is aged from 25-44 years. They are born and bred in Australia and are proficient in English. Many have completed Australian tertiary education and are in the prime of their careers. Compared with immigrants from other Asian backgrounds, they have relatively high levels of university graduation and professional occupation (ABS, 2017c). Many have higher incomes than the rest of the population. (ABS, 2019a; Dhanji, 2016; Thakur, 2019).

1. Plausible reasons for under-representation of Australians of Indian Origin in Australian legislative institutions I: individual/community level

In this section, I identify plausible reasons for the under-representation of Australians of Indian origin in Australian legislative institutions that relate to characteristics of members of the Indian diaspora in Australia. These include factors related the different migration cohorts, socio-economic status, knowledge about Australian politics, the calibre and motivation of candidates, social and professional networks, and the extent of geographical concentration of the Indian diaspora in Australia.

4.1 Migration generation

¹ These include introduction of dual nationality for Australian Citizenship; of citizenship tests to ensure applicants have appropriate English language skills, and knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of Australian citizens; extension of the residency requirement from two to four years including a 12-month period of permanent residence before making the application

One reason for the under-representation of Australians of Indian origin in Australian legislative institutions is that much of the Indian diaspora in Australia is not highly engaged with politics, reflecting the relative importance of other priorities borne of their migration experience.

Many members of the Indian diaspora in Australia avoid involvement in politics for fear of reprisal against themselves and their families. They are reluctant to have their private life and that of their children in the glare of the Australian media. Moreover, they feel that a political career is demanding and encroaches on family time.

A second group is more focused on their careers and business activities. Members of this group already have access to politicians through their personal standing and do not need to aim for endorsement from a political party. Within this group, some members participate in politics via consultative forums such as the Australia-India Business Council, the Victorian Multicultural Commission, the Federation of Indian Associations of Victoria, or local community and professional groups. But, generally speaking, they are not inclined to do so through participation in party politics and elections.

Such an orientation away from politics is particularly apparent among first-generation Indian migrants, who are relative newcomers to Australian social and political conventions. Their primary focus has been on gaining socio-economic security and citizenship. Only then have they been likely to take an interest in politics. This is because citizenship and resources are important preconditions for winning endorsement as political candidates.

The most politically engaged component of the Indian diaspora in Australia has been second generation migrants. As individuals born and raised in Australia, they are more familiar with Australia's political culture and institutions than first-generation migrants. As Australian citizens from the outset, they have also perhaps had a greater stake in issues of representation. In this context, many have believed that Australia is lagging behind the USA, Canada, the UK and New Zealand in terms of cultural diversity in political representation and have striven for similar representation in Australia (Austin 2015; Tasker 2019; Mehta & Moore 2019; Press Times of

India 2018; 2014; Raj 2017; NDTV 2018). They have accordingly exhibited a greater enthusiasm and energy for politics. Ambitious for endorsement by a political party, this group has been the most interested in running for political office.

4.2 Socio-economic status

At the individual level, socio-economic status (SES)—education, employment and income—are established predictors of political participation (see Mayer, 2011; Persson 2011; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Studies indicate that people from higher SES backgrounds are likely to be more successful in politics. However, other scholars (Ramakrishnan, 2005; Fennema & Tillie, 1999) have found that SES predictors do not perform as consistently as indicators among immigrants in Australia as they do among those born in Australia. While socio-economic resources do play a role in helping to secure endorsement by a political party in an election, the length of residency and citizenship are more positively related to the probability of gaining meaningful endorsement by a party (Wong et al. 2011).

Socio-economically, the Indian-Australian community is well-established. According to census data on the Indian-born population of Australia, its members are among the highest educated ethnic groups in Australia (ABS, 2017c). Comparatively, personal, family and household median income is higher than ‘other overseas-born’, ‘Australian-born’ and ‘total Australian’ populations.

4.3 Knowledge of Australian politics

To be involved in politics and to seek endorsement from political parties requires a sound knowledge of the Australian political system and political culture. A majority of candidates interviewed—both first-generation and second-generation—found it difficult to navigate the Australian conventions and factions within Australian political parties. Australians of Indian origin as new party members often lacked first-hand or inside knowledge of how party conventions and factions operate.

For migrants, the length of residency in Australia also plays a role in understanding the intricacies and nuances of Australian politics. Many Australian youth of Anglo-European background are initiated into politics and party affiliation from a young age and some are influenced by their parents' party affiliation as well as their social and professional networks to the extent they pursue political careers (Brook, 2020). In this manner, there is a generational political transference of both affiliation and knowledge about politics. In contrast, many first- and even second-generation Indian migrants to Australia (and ones from other migrant communities such the Chinese) are just beginning to learn the ropes of Australian politics; they do not have a template to work from.

4.4 Calibre and motivations of candidates

Community members and leaders I interviewed criticised the calibre of Australians of Indian origin who stood as candidates in the 2018 and 2019 elections. One of the underlying deficits they highlighted was that many lacked the requisite skills to handle media communications, image management, and the capacity to stand out as serious political contenders.

Community leaders stated that several Australians of Indian origin who stood as candidates in recent elections lacked the ability to succinctly articulate a plausible policy agenda to enable them to win debates with their opponents or garner voter support. According to the community leaders, most found it difficult to deal with public controversies about themselves or defend their political agenda, as expressed below:

'... candidates must have special traits ... interpersonal skills, good communication skills, diplomacy ... the ability to remain calm yet passionate ...' (Community Leader D).

Furthermore, some candidates made public statements that were politically and culturally unacceptable in Australia. For instance, Liberal candidate Gurpal Singh, standing for the federal

seat of Scullin in Melbourne's northern suburbs, was asked to resign because he dismissed a woman's rape allegations related to her former husband (Conifer, 2019). He also made homophobic comments linking same sex marriage to pedophilia in a 2017 SBS interview (Bolger, 2019). Another Liberal in New South Wales, Sachin Joshi, candidate for the federal seat of Paterson, made insensitive comments on the gender wage gap (Dent, 2019).

The difficulty may be attributable to differences between first-generation and second-generation migrants. First-generation migrants have grown up in other nations with a different set of political values and are less equipped to familiarise themselves with the nuts and bolts of Australian politics, whereas the second-generation who were born in Australia are more familiar with expectations and acceptable political discourse. Several Australian candidates of Indian origin in the 2019 federal election—Lisa Singh, Shireen Morris, Dave Sharma and Gurmeh Singh—presented themselves well in the media. All are Australia-born with the exception of Sharma, who was born in Canada.

Candidates were also criticised by community leaders and members I interviewed for failing to adhere to the policy platforms and fundamental values of the political party that had endorsed them or values generally held by Indian immigrants. For instance, some Australians of Indian origin stood as candidates for Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party (PHON) and other right-wing parties, despite the fact that their leaders are notorious for making inflammatory comments against non-white immigrants. Some candidates endorsed by the Australian Labor Party (ALP) for Victoria's most recent state election publicly supported then US President Donald Trump's more controversial policies. Other ALP candidates supported the undermining of India's founding ideals of pluralism and secularism by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party.

'... they can't identify their own moral compass ... which is superseded by an underlying desire to stand as a candidate ... the result is 'half-baked' or 'half-prepared' candidates standing for election and invariably losing ...' (Community member C).

Finally, some candidates were perceived to have stood for elections merely to boost their own social and business profile rather than representing the interests of their potential constituents.

For these candidates, participating in elections is:

‘... the cheapest way of getting publicity ... many real estate agents do it ... mostly at council levels and in some electorates. They just need an endorsement from a reputable party but don’t necessarily see themselves in parliament ... they can project this image back home in India ... that economically they are doing well ... to develop the whole persona of self-importance ... issue of status only ...’ (Community member B).

Candidates seek endorsement from a political party because this gives them the reputation of being someone who has been successful in achieving status in the Indian diaspora community in Australia, while boosting their standing in India.

‘... You see, back in India, you need crores and crores [approximately ten million] of rupees ... and you have to be a somebody, a well-known person, a wealthy person. Here the party ticket gives them that same aura ... far more cheaply, without the money’ (Community member A).

Even though the vast majority of these candidates were resoundingly defeated, in Australia they are nonetheless treated with deference by some in the Indian community:

‘... the ‘very-nearly’ politicians receive VIP treatment ... kind of the ones who hob nob, take photographs, handshake with MPs, the ones we don’t want ... they are there for the wrong reasons, just status ...’ (Community member C).

Some even print ‘nominated party candidate’ or ‘stood for election’ on their business cards to promote their businesses. They tend to be regarded by critical elements within the broader Indian community as ‘opportunists,’ rather than as serious political candidates.

Candidates standing for local government elections attracted the most criticism from respondents from the Indian Australian community. Local government elections can be a springboard to a

political career at higher levels of government and the qualification for candidature is less demanding than those for federal or state elections. The numbers of Australians of Indian origin standing as candidates at local council level suggests that they view local government as an entry point into politics.

However, there is a strong perception within the Indian Australian community that opportunism by low quality candidates or individuals with questionable motives can harm the chances of Australians of Indian origin being elected. First, standing large numbers of candidates from the same ethnic background within the same electorate can weaken the chances of any single candidate gaining a substantial proportion of votes. Second, a sudden influx of Australians of Indian origin standing for local elections can be disquieting for non-Indian. Thirdly, some respondents intimated that in addition to finding their accents difficult to understand, many voters were unable to assess what the candidates of Indian origin were aiming to achieve in their local government areas. Not having worked through the hierarchy of local council committees, these newcomers were often treated with a degree of suspicion about whether they could be trusted with local council funds, or whether they could provide sound leadership.

4.5 Missing stepping-stones

Political parties often develop potential candidates by appointing them to roles that can lead to future candidature. In this manner, potential candidates can work their way through the rank-and-file of party politics whilst establishing political networks and experiencing first-hand what it takes to be endorsed as a candidate.

4.5.1 Party Membership

For aspiring political candidates, membership of a political party that aligns with their values and policy preferences can be an obvious first step. Being well acquainted with the policy platform of their preferred party, as well as the demography of the electorate for which they are

likely to seek endorsement, is essential knowledge for potential candidates. They must also be familiar with the inner functioning and factional structure of their preferred party. Of those respondents who were interviewed, only two Australians of Indian origin (both second-generation) obtained party membership in the early 1990s. The majority became party members over the last decade or so, some only when they sought endorsement to stand in recent elections. Thus, many Australians of Indian origin who stand as candidates are relative neophytes within the Australian political party system.

4.5.2 Professional and Social Networks

Adeptness at social networking has a strong influence on the ability of prospective candidates to win endorsement by a political party (McLurg, 2003). Social networks can facilitate entry into politics for recently naturalised citizens in their new country. For members of the Indian diaspora in Australia, social networks typically radiate from community cultural organisations, particularly those addressing migration policy concerns and securing government grant applications for community needs (Jupp, 1989; Jupp et al. 1990). Based on these networks, some ethnic minority members take on leadership roles as spokespersons for the community. As ‘cultural translators’ for the community, these leaders develop social connections with political parties whether in government or in opposition. This usually follows undertaking part-time volunteer work for politicians or groups closely associated with political parties that may ultimately lead to future candidature. A small number of Australians of Indian origin are able to develop professional networks through employment with political parties or affiliated groups.

For example, a current member of the Victorian Legislative Council, Kaushaliya Vaghela (ALP), previously worked as an advisor for the former Minister for Multicultural Affairs, the Hon. Robin Scott. Another example is Daniel Mookhey who was a chief of staff at the Transport Workers Union (TWU) and a key colleague of former TWU national secretary, Tony Sheldon (currently an ALP Senator for NSW and Mookhey is an ALP member of the NSW Legislative Council). The member for the federal seat of Wentworth, Dave Sharma, briefly worked as a staffer for then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer. Lisa Singh was an advisor to then ALP Senator for Tasmania Sue Mackay before being elected to the Tasmanian Parliament as the Member for Denison, after which she was elected to the Senate.

Some Australians of Indian origin who have become members of parliament have developed other useful professional and social networks. For instance, Dr Shireen Morris, a Labor candidate for the seat of Deakin in the 2019 federal election, worked as a senior policy advisor on constitutional reform and Indigenous constitutional recognition at the Cape York Institute. A member of the NSW Legislative Assembly, Gurmeh Singh, is from a family with a long lineage of membership of the National Party, but he had ever previously worked for a Nationals' member of parliament (MPs).

Australians of Indian origin in their mid-20s have also begun considering political candidature. They have joined the Liberal and Labor parties, sometimes as advisors to MPs (Richardson, 2019). This cohort of early career politicians has been born in Australia, studied in Australia, understands Australian politics and wishes to participate in politics in the future. It is possible that in due course these committed people will contest elections and win.

Yet, in general, both first- and second- generation Indian migrants in Australia lack the social and professional networks that connect them with politicians and political parties beyond lobbying purposes or symbolic attendance at social events. Some are developing networks that are more enduring and could ultimately lead to successful endorsement as candidates. They wait for an invitation from political parties to make an entry in politics after being 'noticed' through their communities and work as volunteers. Thus, opportunity structures for access into politics is a challenge and a likely cause of their under-representation.

In an interview, one candidate remarked:

'... Party powerbrokers often 'pluck' or handpick sharp, bright scholars from Melbourne and Monash Universities to become policy advisors to politicians: [...] Eventually, party faction powerbrokers endorse them as party candidates.'
(Respondent A).

This trajectory has become a conventional route for political parties in the selection of candidates. Though many Australians of Indian origin have tertiary qualifications, few have been successful in securing seats in any of the three tiers of Australian government. Few, if any,

appear to have been ‘plucked’ from universities, though some of those in the Indian Australian community who were active in international Indian student politics at the time of student-related violence in Victoria and New South Wales in 2007-2008, did succeed in getting elected as councillors.

4.6 Demographic concentration

Demographic concentrations of specific ethnic communities within particular electorates can be valuable sites for effective social networking and voter support. For political parties, this can provide opportunities for mobilising new voter support, particularly if parties have previously performed poorly in those electorates. However, the Indian diaspora in Australia is not concentrated in ‘ethnic ghettos’—disproportionate concentration of people from the same ethnic background living in the same suburb (Jupp et al. 1990)—although there are pockets of concentration in areas such as Parramatta in Sydney and Tarneit in Melbourne (ABS, 2016c). Thus, it is difficult for Australians of Indian origin who stand as candidates to rely solely on community ethnic votes to secure electoral success. In this respect, new migrants also have to compete with candidates of Anglo-Celtic or European background whose families might have lived in the area for generations and/or who are relatively well-known to members of the electorate. The paradox is that whilst ‘ethnic ghettos’ are discouraged in Australia, their absence may limit opportunities for Australians of Indian origin to secure endorsement or, if endorsed, to mobilise voter support.

2. Plausible reasons for under-representation of Australians of Indian origin in Australian legislative institutions II: systemic level

Australians of Indian origin struggle to deal with complex internal mechanisms and factional competition within major political parties. As noted earlier, political party gatekeepers determine

who gets pre-selected, who gets placed where on the ballot paper of the Upper Houses, and whether candidates are placed in ‘winnable’, ‘unwinnable’ or ‘marginal’ seats. The other contributing factors are the discrediting of potentially strong candidates by their own party members through public allegations of questionable conduct and candidates having limited available campaign resources to fend off such allegations. These issues are all examined below.

5.1 Factionalism within the major political parties

Factions are present in all the major political parties in Australia. Some are more formalised than others, with rules about membership and procedure. They are constituted by blocs or supporters of MPs and party officials who vote together to advance certain policies, strategies and interests. Substantial policy differences exist between factional groups within each party and across states. As party factions are influential in candidate-selection processes, these variable mechanisms make it even more complicated for newcomers with political ambitions to navigate their way as candidates (Cross & Gauja, 2014: 2). Some of these systemic difficulties and challenges are discussed next.

5.1.1 The Australian Labor Party (ALP)

The Labor Party was founded by trade unions and remains closely affiliated with a number of them. However, the ALP also attracts support from upwardly mobile middle-class professionals without a union background, working in the teaching, health and public sectors, thus making the Party more appealing to a mass electorate. Some of its factions are based on alliances with particular unions. For example, the right-faction of the ALP is affiliated with the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association. Unions make up 60 percent of delegates to State Conferences where key policy platform decisions are made. Further, most but not all Labor MPs belong to factions. Leaders of factions exercise varying degrees of power through their ability to influence party votes as a factional bloc; and their influence over the choice of candidates for

key positions, including the endorsement of candidates for parliament or positions in the party organisation.

Factional leaders can also be influential in the allocation of electoral seats among the factions (Kelly, 1992:30; Simons, 2019). ALP factions are, in many respects, a party within a party. They are led by power brokers who can exercise tremendous influence and are often secretive. Neither the membership nor finances of such factions are subject to public scrutiny (Allan, 2002).

Australians of Indian origin appear to have had particular difficulties in dealing with the politics of Labor factions, and factions with the Greens party, for three reasons. First, factions are constantly evolving, amalgamating and re-grouping to challenge or protect vested interests. Australians of Indian origin who are new to Australian style politics find it hard to keep abreast of the evolving groupings with the ALP and the Greens. Secondly, few Australians of Indian origin are members of the three larger trade unions—construction, education, and manufacturing (Victorian Labor, 2019)—who influence party endorsements within the ALP. Third, much of the work of factions is closely guarded. Australians of Indian origin have not yet penetrated the inner clique of power-brokers where most decisions are made. Factional agreements about pre-selection, cabinet posts and policy positions (sometimes controversial) are made behind closed doors. Even experienced candidates with majority first-preference votes at pre-selection can be relegated to the lower position on ballot papers with no reason being given.

With the exception of Daniel Mookhey, who held a senior role in the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and was a shop steward in the union movement, no known candidate of Indian origin has had professional connections with trade unions. Members of the Indian diaspora in Australia tend to be professionals, business entrepreneurs, or workers in poorly-unionised service sector industries (for instance, many work as IT technicians, taxi- and Uber-drivers, couriers, and tradespeople). However, levels of trade union membership may be changing. For instance, some are joining the recently established Hospitality Workers Union (Hospitality Workers Union, 2019) to combat wage theft in the hospitality industries in Australia, reflecting the concentration of many recent migrant workers in that sector. Another sector where members of the Indian diaspora in Australia may also consider becoming union members is in aged-care. In 2016, 37 percent of employees had migrant backgrounds and are frontline care workers with

poor working conditions and earning below the minimum wage (Charlesworth, 2018; Howe et al, 2019; The Weekly Source, 2019).

5.1.2 The Liberal and National Parties

The Liberal and National parties are also factionalised, but in a less structured way than the Labor Party or the Greens. Factions in both parties tend to cluster around potential leaders and ideological inclinations, as demonstrated by the grouping of the Liberal Party's right wing under the leadership of former Prime Minister Tony Abbott and of the party's moderate factions around former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, for much of the past decade or so. The ideological rifts between the factions in the Liberal Party, especially between the right faction and the moderate faction, are becoming more pronounced over issues such as climate change and the continued development of coal and other fossil fuel industries.

The Liberal Party's publicly stated aim is to help small businesses to invest, employ more workers and grow their businesses (Liberal Party of Australia, 2019). As many members of the Indian diaspora in Australia are small-to-medium-sized business owners, we may find that greater numbers of these individuals join the Liberal Party. This is because they are keen to support political parties that promote economic and business management policies conducive to their businesses. Thus, conservative and especially Liberal Party politics may be more accessible when navigating the difficult pathways to endorsement. In terms of the Nationals, to date there has only been one Australian candidate of Indian origin, Gurmeh Singh, who has been elected representing that party.

5.1.3 The Australian Greens

The Greens are also factionalised. In 2018, the Greens failed to retain the House of Representatives' seat of Cooper (formerly Batman), possibly partly due to factional politics

within the party which resulted in the undermining of its candidate Alex Bhathal (an Australian of Indian origin). Bhathal, a sixth-time candidate for the seat (2001, 2004, 2010, 2013, 2016 and 2018) was endorsed as candidate in the 2019 federal election. However, internal divisions within the Party and bullying claims against her by a Greens faction derailed her campaign (Hall, 2019). Bhathal resigned from the Greens, and the Party failed to win the seat. This occurrence highlights how discord with party factions can become counter-productive even for endorsed candidates. Ultimately, such discord becomes detrimental to the party.

5.1.4 Pre-selection hurdles

Factionalism within the major political parties means that winning endorsement as a party candidate can be particularly arduous for Australians of Indian origin. ALP and Greens candidates must meet all factional leaders and delegates to win their approval for candidature. Even then, prior formal party endorsement does not necessarily assure a winnable place on the ballot paper.

‘... there is a problem with pre-selection, it is filled with factional business. Shouldn’t it be more like on professional qualifications? Advertise in paper for candidates, etc. as we do for a job?...’ (Community Leader A)

Community leaders within the Indian diaspora in Australia, individuals and candidates alike, would prefer a more transparent vetting and screening system that would also be inclusive of candidates from diverse backgrounds.

‘... if it were [like recruiting the best talent ... professionals for a job] ... ask candidates to put Labor/Green/Liberal values on the application, select the top five candidates, ask them to give a five-minute thesis ... judge them on local connections, public speaking ability, communications ... policy agenda ... we would get a lot of

Indians and Chinese ... we need to have an overall mix of diversity but do not compromise talented professionalism.’ (Community Leader A).

Despite having many strengths as a candidate, Jasvinder Sidhu, an Australian of Indian origin, failed to secure ALP endorsement as candidate in the electorate of Tarneit, before the 2018 Victorian election. He was highly engaged with the Indian diasporic community, he had initiated several projects of interest to members of his electorate and had cultivated both social and professional networks with the community, with members of the electorate as well as with members of the ALP.

However, Sidhu was not pre-selected by the party. He was accused of branch-stacking and the allegations were the subject of a subsequent internal Labor Party review (Ilanbey & Preiss, 2020). Sidhu continues to deny the allegations.

Within the Indian diaspora, Sidhu’s failure to be pre-selected was perceived as his ‘being dumped’ unfairly on the basis of his ethnicity:

‘... he (Sidhu) did everything that is required to become a Labor Party candidate for Tarneit ... nothing to do with not having knowledge of the workings of the ALP or getting requisite support or his experience or leadership capability and potential ... The ALP factions were simply not interested ... Why?’ (Community Leader B).

5.1.5 ‘Unwinnable’ seats vs. ‘safe’ or ‘marginal’ seats

When Australians of Indian origin do gain pre-selection, it is often in ‘unwinnable’ seats. There is a prevailing perception among respondents that regardless of the contribution of these candidates to the community, first preference in winnable seats is given to candidates with Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. This systemic barrier is a serious hurdle.

‘...Political parties put Asian and Indian-Australian candidates in seats where it really does not make a difference because it is a safe opposition seat...’ (Community member B).

‘... There is ‘almost a mechanism within the party that says ... you Indians are great, you give us support, are able to get votes and community to us and that is where you are always going to remain.’ (Candidate E).

Factional machinations can exacerbate this problem, as illustrated by the case of former Labor Senator for Tasmania Lisa Singh. Singh failed to get re-elected at the 2019 federal election, despite having received 19,984 first-preference votes (5.7 percent) (Australian Electoral Commission, 2019), which was far higher than any other Tasmanian Senate candidate. She was placed fourth on the Labor Party’s ticket, generally considered to be an unwinnable position. Singh stated that factional arrangements are undemocratic, and that if an individual is not aligned to a faction, they are likely to lose one’s seat regardless of how active and committed the party member is (Coulter & Whitson, 2018).

The experience of Manoj Kumar during the 2018 Victorian state election is possibly another example of a candidate being under-valued by his party. Nominated to stand in Forest Hill District—a seat the ALP regarded as unwinnable because it had been held by the Liberal Party for some time—he did not have to undergo the formal endorsement process. Despite the seemingly unfavourable situation, Kumar secured 48.8 percent of the vote after the distribution of preferences against the 51.2 percent votes of the Liberal Party candidate Neil Angus (Victorian Electoral Commission, 2018), contradicting the ALP’s thinking that Forest Hill would remain a safe Liberal seat or that it could not be made a marginal one.

In some cases, factionalism can result in the ‘parachuting’ of candidates into winnable electorates. This has sometimes been to the detriment of Australians of Indian origin standing for election. For instance, in 2018, Sarah Connolly, a lawyer and Transport Union Member was pre-selected for the safe Labor seat of Tarneit in the lead-up to the Victorian state election, displacing Jasvinder Sidhu.

As many members of the Indian diaspora remarked:

‘... When the party intervenes with parachuted candidates, this demoralises the residents as well as candidates within the party ...’ (Community member E).

... In future there may be a backlash because Labor will be seen as paying lip-service to residents of Tarneit ...’ (Community member A).

Intervention by party headquarters makes it difficult for high quality local residents to be selected, particularly those who are active in the community and the party, and those who are endorsed by local branches. This suggests that political parties are yet to fully support ethnic candidates, focussing instead on internal factional politics and/or the fear of losing the seat. Such actions augur unfavourably for Australians of Indian origin particularly in electorates such as Tarneit where they have a comparative concentration.

5.2 Problems with alternative pathways to candidature

Evidence gathered through my interviews indicates that some Australians of Indian origin have opted to stand for an array of minor parties, partly to overcome the hurdles of gaining pre-selection as a candidate for the major parties and partly because their views aligned better with minor parties. For example, some turned to Clive Palmer’s United Australia Party (UAP), and the Animal Justice Party also attracted some Australian candidates of Indian origin. Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party, a party that advocates cutting annual immigration targets to 70,000 people per year (One Nation, 2019), attracted Nikhil Reddy, an Australian of Indian origin to stand as its candidate for the federal seat of Petrie in Queensland. Others joined parties such as the Transport Matters Party (Victoria) and Keep Sydney Open (NSW), to promote their own agendas on matters they believed the two main parties had failed to adequately address.

Nonetheless, joining a minor party certainly does not equate to electoral success. For instance, Clive Palmer's UAP placed Australians of Indian origin for both the House of Representatives and the Senate on the lower half of the ballot paper in 'unwinnable' positions. With Australia's preferential voting system, this had the effect of providing preference flows advantaging the Liberal and National parties (Salisbury, 2019; Scales, 2019). The manoeuvre was designed to serve UAP's own political agenda: to assist the Coalition to win the election. These actions have reinforced the view of many in the Indian diaspora in Australia that such candidates are not valued.

Australians of Indian origin who ran for minor parties found these parties were more welcoming because they were less hierarchical, less factionalised, smaller in membership size and more focused on specific agendas. Nevertheless, a major downside to endorsement by the minor parties is that in most cases candidates are required to secure all funding for registration and campaigning from their own resources.

Some Australians of Indian origin stood as Independents. Independent candidates generally come from diverse backgrounds and many are first-timers in politics. Some stood as Independents because they were dissatisfied with the two main parties or because they decided to stand at a very late stage in the run-up to the election. The majority of these Independent candidates performed poorly, winning only a few thousand votes in their respective electorates. One reason for this was a lack of resources: most had to spend their own money to finance their political campaigns. Furthermore, independent candidates find it difficult to win unless they have a substantial pre-existing public profile.

5.3 Branch-stacking allegations

Branch stacking has historically taken place in all Australian political parties and in all states. It refers to situations where individuals are 'recruited into a branch of a political party to influence

who is pre-selected to represent that party as its candidate' (Sakzewski, 2020). A 2002 federal ALP report described branch-stacking as a problem because 'when membership lists are artificially inflated with large numbers of 'members' lacking commitment to the Party, internal democratic processes are distorted' (Hawke & Wran, 2002).

Branch stacking allegations have been made in relation to Australians of Indian origin. In Victoria in 2016, a former adviser to Premier Daniel Andrews, Jasvinder Sidhu, was accused of involvement in a Labor branch-stacking scandal in which members of the community were being signed up as ALP members (Tomazin & Willingham, 2016). In 2020, Sidhu was found by an internal Labor Party review to have been involved in branch stacking (Towell & Ilanbey, 2020). He continues to deny the allegations.

Of course, branch stacking allegations are not confined to Australians of Indian origin (or other ethnic communities). In 2020, there were other allegations of branch stacking within the Victorian branch of the ALP, which resulted in then Minister for Local Government Adem Somyurek being expelled from the Party in June. In August, Liberal Party powerbroker Marcus Bastiaan resigned from the party after he was accused of branch stacking for two federal MPs from Victoria (Willingham, 2020; Murphy & Hurst, 2020). Bastiaan denies the allegations.

Analysis of interviewees' views on branch stacking reveal there is a strong perception among members of the Indian diaspora in Australia that political parties take advantage of particular individuals to ingratiate the party among an ethnic group. My research also indicates a degree of political naivety among some aspiring candidates in the Indian Australian community.

5.4 Negative media coverage

There is a strong perception among respondents that mainstream media coverage of Australians of Indian origin who stand for election is generally negative in nature, except in relation to Dave Sharma, the Liberal member for the federal seat of Wentworth. Commenting on negative media publicity, one failed candidate's perception was that:

'Although Indians are 'good workhorses' we don't see them in leadership positions in the media ... just as economic workers ... not as leaders or politicians. Are they saying ...[this is] not the image of what Australia looks like?' (Candidate E).

'... Media can make or break a candidate in politics, in modern times you can't do politics without media. But media only reaches out for newsworthy items ...' (Candidate C).

However, it is difficult to prove whether these perceptions are well-founded. More research needs to be done into whether mainstream media fails to report on Australian candidates of Indian origin, and whether there is unjustified and sustained negative reporting of these candidates. An example of negative media reporting may include false claims being made in relation to Shireen Morris (ALP candidate for Deakin) in the lead-up to the federal election in 2019, to the effect that she held Fijian citizenship (Harris and Galloway, 2019), despite the Fijian government declaring otherwise.

Consistent and unjustified negative media attention raises questions about just treatment in politics. Sociologist Andrew Jakubowicz (1994; 1996) has drawn attention to the 'valorisation of Anglo-Australian people, culture and values' in media that tends to prioritise them while largely excluding ethnic minorities' representation in politics.

Australian candidates of Indian origin have not generally had access to resources—wide social or professional media connections, or funding for media spokespeople—that would allow them to generate positive media coverage and potentially counteract unfavourable coverage.

Funding remains a problem for candidates of Indian origin at all levels, who had to supplement their campaigns with private donations and personal resources. These limitations meant that they could not hire full-time staff or the services of spokespersons who were able to advocate favourably for them in the public domain. Some candidates of Indian origin had to take leave from full-time employment to campaign; others could only campaign on the weekends. Still others withdrew altogether because they could not sustain the campaign from their own resources.

In contrast, the Indian diaspora in the USA and Canada are more established and relatively well-off financially: even unsuccessful candidates raised more funds than some of their competitors Anglo-European background (Mehta & Moore, 2019). In Australia, the two main parties allocate nominal sums for their endorsed candidates' campaigns for the creation of social media profiles. A lack of resources thus acts as a systemic hurdle in Australia for most candidates of Indian origin.

3. A devalued diaspora

Many members of the Indian diaspora in Australia are conscious that Indians in other parts of the world have accomplished more, not only in political representation at all levels but also in public roles. In the US, Americans of Indian origin are represented in all tiers of government: from Senators, state representatives to mayors and city council members (Dutttagupta, 2018, *The Economist*, 2019, *The Economic Times*, 2019). In the lead up to the 2020 US presidential elections, several politicians of Indian origin—the Democrats' vice-presidential running mate Kamala Harris (now Vice President); former Louisiana governor and 2016 Republican presidential nominee hopeful Bobby Jindal; and Nikki Haley, former Governor of South Carolina and former US Ambassador to the UN—featured prominently. In 2016, four Americans of Indian origin known as the *Samosa Caucus* made it to Congress (Raj, 2017).

Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, the only American woman lawmaker of Indian origin in the American House of Representatives remarked in 2018 (NDTV, 2018):

‘... with ‘new and diverse voices joining our ranks, we are building a movement that truly represents the people of this country’...

The position is similar in Canada where Canadians of Indian origin are present in the House of Commons, in the federal cabinet, as leaders of political parties as well as at council level (Hindustan Times, 2019). The underlying premise within Canadian political institutions is that the House of Commons and the Senate should be broadly representative of the population they serve (Griffith, 2017). After losing the 2011 election, the Canadian Liberal Party spent a lot of time and effort rebuilding the party from the ground up and made a concerted effort to recruit a broad spectrum of candidates from ethnic and indigenous backgrounds (Woolf, 2015). A record number of Canadians of Indian origin (23) won seats in the 2019 elections, enabling the Liberal Party led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to remain in power with the assistance of Jagmeet Singh, leader of the New Democratic Party (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2019).

The British parliament, too, is among the most diverse in terms of gender, race and sexuality (BBC.com, 2019). For example, the current Chancellor of the Exchequer is of Indian-background and several British Asians (of Indian heritage) have been awarded peerages to sit in the House of Lords: Lord Paul, Baroness Warsi, Lord Desai, Lord Bilimoria, Lord Dholakia and Lord Gadhia (Parliament U.K., 2019, Betigeri, 2019).

Unlike in other immigrant nations, Australian political parties are struggling to establish diversity in their ranks and hierarchies. Mainstream political parties understand the need to broaden their appeal: to reach out to first- and second-generation migrants, and to invite this new diversity into their membership and leadership ranks. In Australia, political parties have made few clear and sustained attempts to include diversity within their membership. The inclusion of Indian-heritage background candidates at all levels in the USA, Canada, the UK and New Zealand governments is not lost upon the members of the Indian diaspora in Australia.

There is the perception among members of the Indian diaspora in Australia that politicians and political candidates do not pay much attention to the community except in the lead-up to elections, when they make promises with the expectation of gaining ethnic support—promises that are not always honoured. This tends to leave the impression that political commitments made to ethnic communities during election times are little more than token gestures. Candidates and community leaders stated:

‘White Australians see ethnics as a ‘vote bank’ ... where their presence is consciously made at festivals, cultural events but otherwise not as involved ... (Community member C).

‘... they need to realise we are no longer the back-end IT office or IT companies ... India has more start-ups than Australia ... who invented Hotmail, who heads Google? We don’t drum up our own profiles, we are sometimes media-shy’ (Community Leader A).

Additionally, respondents suggested that what they described as ‘real empowerment’ meant assistance toward more diverse representation:

‘... pulling along Indian-Australians ... educating them and making them part of the local, state and federal governments, that is where Australia is lagging ...’ (Candidate B).

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this paper, Australian political parties need to invest in programs to narrow the ‘representation gap’ of Australians of Indian origin across Australia’s political institutions.

Key suggestions include that Australian political parties should:

- **Address** the under-representation of ethnic minorities as some have pursued the under-representation of women;
- **Initiate** programs such as communication training to broaden the pool of talent amongst Australia’s diverse Indian diaspora as well as other minority ethnic groups;
- **Harness** the talent of future generations of Australians of Indian origin and other minority ethnic groups by channeling resources to initiatives that act as pipelines to future candidates vying for public roles.

A recent initiative that incorporates some of the foregoing suggestions is that of the ALP, which has instigated initiatives to incorporate youth from diverse backgrounds into the party and to nurture a pool of competitive culturally diverse political talent. Some of these young people are working with members of parliament in Victoria as personal assistants. They also attend functions where the MPs may be presiding that would offer insights into what participation in politics entails. The Party is also currently piloting *Poliversity*, a program that advocates culturally diverse leadership. Other parties should consider similar initiatives. In designing such initiatives, Australian political parties should take note of programs such as Canada’s *Prime Minister’s Youth Council* and the US’ *The New American Leaders Project* (NALP).

Canada’s *Prime Minister’s Youth Council* (Government of Canada, 2019) is made up of a diverse group of young leaders who have different lived experiences, and who represent communities from all regions of Canada. Successful applicants provide the Prime Minister and the Government with advice on issues of importance to young Canadians whilst interacting with their political peers about issues that matter to them. They actively engage with local and national

organisations, policy-makers and decision-makers in the Canadian government. In this manner, the Government not only inducts and encourages Canadian youth to participate in political, economic and social issues, but also mentors future potential leaders.

The New American Leaders Project (NALP) (New American Leaders, 2019) strives to bring new voices from migrant backgrounds into American government. This non-partisan organisation is specifically focussed on preparing first- and second-generation migrants for civic leadership in order to help strengthen the fabric of American democracy.

Political parties in Australia should harness the expertise of existing organisations—such as the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia (FECCA), the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) and the Diversity Council of Australia—which already work in areas of diversity and inclusion, so the parties can create a new generational pool of talent that would help diversify political representation.

APPENDIX

Name	Position	Party
Alex Bhathal	Candidate, Batman, House of Representatives (multiple)	Greens
Sunny Chandra	Candidate, Senate, Victoria, 2019	Ind.
Nildhara Gadani	Candidate, City of Whitehorse Council, Victoria, 2016	ALP
Shireen Morris	Candidate, Deakin, House of Representatives	ALP
Monica Raizada	Candidate, Wyndham Shire Council, Victoria, 2016	ALP
Gurmesh Singh	Member for Coffs Harbour, NSW Legislative Assembly	Nat.
Lisa Singh	Former Member for Denison, Tasmanian House of Assembly Former Senator for Tasmania	ALP
Kaushaliya Vaghela	Member for Western Metropolitan, Victorian Legislative Council	ALP

There were also nine community leaders and members of the Indian-Australian diaspora interviewed for this study. Names have been withheld at their request.

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