

Millions vote in NSW local elections amid backdrop of controversial council mergers

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INDEPENDENT politician Clover Moore has won an unprecedented fourth term as Sydney Lord Mayor in what she has dubbed a “people’s victory” against the policies of Premier Mike Baird’s Coalition Government.

While derided by critics who claim she is focused more on cycleways, public art and climate change than the needs of business, her vote actually increased — even more extraordinary given the introduction of new voting system that some say was designed specifically to oust Ms Moore from the Sydney CBD council.

Talking to news.com.au after she claimed victory, Ms Moore said the recent voting reforms were a “gerrymander” and the Government should immediately reverse them.

Results are coming in from across the state and the indications are Mr Baird has been given a bloody nose at the ballot box with Labor boosting its councillors, particularly in Western Sydney.

The forced council mergers, described as a “toxic” issue by one expert, is thought to have hurt the Liberals.

Of the 129 local councils in NSW, the councillors in just 78 were up for re-election, with a number also handing it to their residents to elect a mayor.

One of the most closely watched fights was in the City of Sydney where the Liberals were looking to kick Lord Mayor Clover Moore out of the town hall throne she’s occupied for 12 years.

That won’t be happening.



Lord Mayor Clover Moore at her victory party with Sydney MP Alex Greenwich and other supporters. Source: News Corp Australia

LONGEST SERVING MAYOR

With more than half the vote counted, Ms Moore has 61 per cent of the vote, up from the 51 per cent she received in 2012. The Liberal’s Christine Forster, sister of former prime minister Tony Abbott, is in second place with 15 per cent while Labor’s Linda Scott is on 11 per cent.

Ms Forster said she called Ms Moore to congratulate her on her win but the final result, including pre-poll and postal votes, would not be known for several days.

“I will continue to hold the Lord Mayor accountable for the decisions that the council makes on behalf of the residents and businesses of Sydney,” she said on Facebook.

If Ms Moore sees the next four years through she will become Australia’s longest serving capital city mayor.

Candidates of Clover Moore’s Independent Team are almost mirroring Ms Moore’s mayoral result polling around 60 per cent of the vote so far which could give the political veteran a majority of councillors in the city chamber.

The Liberals are polling at 18 per cent, Labor is on 10 per cent, the Sydney Matters independents and the Greens have polled 7 per cent each.

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[Clover Moore](#)

I am so proud to announce I have been re-elected Lord Mayor and it looks like the independent team has increased its majority! [#teamclover](#)
[9:14 PM - 10 Sep 2016](#)

A contentious voting reform introduced in 2014 by the Baird Government meant businesses in the city got two votes to the residents’ one. Supporters of the change said businesses were critical to the success of the CBD and deserved a bigger say.

But it’s a voting system that only exists in the City of Sydney and many had interpreted it as a blatant attempt to dislodge Ms Moore.

The Lord Mayor said anger at the voting reforms, along with the city government’s track record, were the two major reasons she and her team were re-elected.

“People are outraged about the gerrymander that only exists in the City of Sydney (and) if it was logical business should get more votes in the city it would have applied in Newcastle, Wollongong and Parramatta. But no, it just applied to the City of Sydney.

“There’s a very strong message to the Baird Government to change that legislation back so we have the same vote that exists everywhere else in NSW,” she said.

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My word for tonight is "Clovered" - definition: "when a gerrymander backfires" [#TeamClover](#) [#nswpol](#)

[6:16 PM - 10 Sep 2016](#)

Sydney MP, and staunch supporter of Ms Moore, Alex Greenwich coined the term "clovered" for "when a gerrymander backfires".

Revitalising the CBD thoroughfare of George St as the city's new light rail is built, boosting infrastructure spending and reducing emissions were the top of her to do list, said Ms Moore.

A new face on Sydney council will be the former head of the Australian Medical Association, and frequent media commentator on health issues, Dr Kerryn Phelps who is part of the Clover Moore Independent Team. She said voters wanted the Government to stop meddling in the city.



Dr Kerryn Phelps (left) with her partner Jackie Stricker is set to become a City of Sydney councillor. Source: News Corp Australia

SLOW LEARNERS

"They're starting to look like slow learners," she said. "They really need to get the message and let the people make their own decisions about who they want running the city and not try and interfere in a way that seeks to manipulate the will of the people."

Ms Phelps has been touted as a possible successor to Ms Moore. She did not deny she had ambitions to one day try on the mayoral robes.

“The first order of business is to settle this new council in and get work started and then we’ll see what happens but certainly I’m in for the long haul.” she told news.com.au.

Dr Bligh Grant, a senior lecturer at UTS’ Institute for Public Policy and Governance, told news.com.au the results in Sydney — and the swing towards Ms Moore — were “very, very interesting”.

Ms Moore’s success was due to “the power of incumbency and the (positive) sentiment towards Clover but the fact of the two votes (for business) has played a role as well.” he said.



Campbelltown Council election returning officer Andrew Bzadough holding the massive ballot paper for the council elections — the biggest ballot paper in NSW. Source: News Corp Australia

LABOR WINS IN THE WEST

However, Dr Grant said the fact the Ms Moore is heading to victory despite the voting changes may actually legitimise them and ensure they stay in place.

Western Sydney has led a major backlash against Mr Baird, with voters booting out scores of Liberals.

Blacktown, Campbelltown, Camden and Penrith have all seen the Liberals lose seats. In Blacktown, Labor went from seven councillors to 10, the first time this has happened since 2004.

The Liberals went from seven to five councillors.

“This is the highest result we have had in more than a decade,” Labor Blacktown Mayor Steve Bali told the [Daily Telegraph](#).

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[9:05 PM - 10 Sep 2016](#)

“People are sick of Baird ignoring Blacktown by concentrating on Parramatta.

The Liberals also declared Blacktown Council not fit for the future, which people reacted against pretty angrily.”

Mr Bali said Labor has had an 11 per cent swing towards it in Blacktown.

The first council elections in NSW since Mike Baird took over as a premier in 2014, the poll proved to be an unofficial referendum on his leadership.

While initially popular, the Premier has ruffled feathers with his support of the controversial Sydney pub and lockout laws and his ban on greyhound racing.

Dr Grant said the Government labelled ‘Fit for the Future’ council mergers could bite the Coalition on the electoral bum.

“The Fit for the Future reform process has been one the most contentious and expensive structural reforms probably in Australia’s history, so I would expect some significant local government ramifications.”

NO ELECTIONS IN ALMOST 50 COUNCILS

Up to two million people, living in 49 local government areas including Newcastle, Wollongong and much of inner Sydney, have been denied a vote because their councils have either been merged or have been earmarked for amalgamation.



Almost 50 councils across NSW — including Sydney's newly created Inner West Council — won't have elections until 2017, angering many residents. Picture: Benedict Brook. Source: Supplied

These councils will be run by administrators (dubbed “Mr Baird’s unelected dictators” by Opposition Leader Luke Foley) until elections in September 2017.

“It’s (caused a) ruction, it’s made the whole notion of local government, some would say, very controversial but other people would say very toxic,” said Dr Grant. He predicted that it could lead to some voters rejecting the Coalition.

Despite the changes a huge range of councils did go to the polls on Saturday from Blacktown, once the largest authority in NSW with 300,000 residents, to tiny Brewarrina Shire which services just 1700 locals.

A famous face who wasn’t up for election was property developer and former Auburn deputy mayor Salim Mehajer. The entire Auburn council was sacked by the Government and an inquiry is currently underway into decisions made by councillors.

As if to ensure Auburn could never return, the Government then split the authority in two and divided it between it’s neighbouring councils.

Other councils to watch included [Liverpool](#) where a bitter battle has seen a number of likely candidates fall by the way side including former mayor and

one-time rising Liberal star Ned Mannoun, who was one of Australia's youngest mayors.



City of Sydney mayoral candidates from left Angela Vithoulkas, Christine Forster, Clover Moore and Linda Scott outside Sydney Town Hall. Picture: Jonathan NgSource:News Corp Australia



Labour Opposition Leader Luke Foley hands out how to vote cards on Saturday with Blacktown Mayor Stephen Bali.Source:News Corp Australia

Plans for an ice smoking room in the area were a hot topic.

Meanwhile in Blacktown an infamous face is hoping for election success with the Liberal's Jaymes Diaz standing. You may remember the face because he's the chap who stood in the 2013 Federal Election and when asked by a reporter what the Coalition's six point plan was to limit asylum seekers, he got stumped after one.

Whether Mr Diaz makes his political comeback might not be known for several days with the councillor counts likely to take several days to complete.

The final results will be known early next week.

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<http://www.news.com.au/finance/work/leaders/millions-vote-in-nsw-local-elections-amid-backdrop-of-controversial-council-mergers/news-story/d7d4bbc7e80f54d2b4c3cfc2a33f7b8e>