

**POTENTIALITIES AND LIMITS CREATED BY PROPOSED MIXED
ELECTORAL SYSTEM ON DEMOCRATIC LOCAL GOVERNANCE:
A CASE STUDY OF COLOMBO MUNICIPAL COUNCIL**

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ABSTRACT

Many academics and practitioners are advocating that constituency representation (which prevailed prior to 1978) is more appropriate at the local government level than proportional representation; the latter is considered the most appropriate system for the national Parliament in view of its tasks and functions. In addition, Report of the Commission inquiry on Local Government Reforms 1999, also concluded that local authority election under the ward system is the most desirable. On this background, the Government of Sri Lanka presented electoral reform bill on 10th October 2012: A proposed mixed electoral system ('first past-the post' – 70% and the proportional representation - 30%) bill has been passed in the Parliament. The central objective of my study is to understand some recommendations on how potentialities can be further capitalized and how the limits can be mitigated for the betterment of local governance. This study was an exploratory research which aims at examining aspects that influence the performances and results of democratic local governance.

The following are some key findings and conclusions; the proposed system can ensure high ward orientation, frequent contacts and interactions will enrich the relationship between voters and elected members. Also, tendency for racial, religious and caste distinctions to surface greater under the PR system will diminish. The voter turnout for local government under ward system will increase. Nevertheless, upper class of the society does not recognize council members as essential contacts who can be reached for their local needs. The absence of preferential voting will drastically reduce election violence. Moreover, it was stated that the ward system will set the right platform to enhance the stated key attributes of the local governance; though does not necessarily mean that assigning a ward member will strengthen the local governance; but some institutional arrangements and capacitating the community leaders on social accountability tools are pre-requisite to achieve highly strengthen democratic local governance. There should be a change in the mindset of the municipal officers from local government to local governance. Further, independent candidates will be at a disadvantageous position due to the following reasons; competitive disadvantages (absence of party positioning, networks and power relations and resource base) at a ward, inability to do canvassing for other areas, increment of candidate refundable deposit by 80 times of that previous and possibility public attention towards main political opponents in the elections. Furthermore, also stated that if properly planned and executed community contract can be a good tool in brining community participation amidst of citizen alienation from the council.