

Australia: 'A bit of a scare': New Muslim group to pressure Labor in a dozen Victorian seats

From [The Age](#)

Nail Aykan is sick of politicians getting photo opportunities at a Turkish restaurant or speaking to one kebab shop owner and thinking they can rely on Muslim people for their votes. "It's just your campaign propaganda. It's window dressing. We want substance."

It's why Aykan organised the Muslim Voices of Calwell group to engage with candidates in the electorate in Melbourne's northern suburbs.

And it's why he will argue the merits of a hung parliament at the campaign launch of another group – Muslim Votes Matter – at Broadmeadows Town Hall on Sunday. The group is looking closely at 12 federal seats in Victoria at the next election, which is due by May: Calwell, Wills, Bruce, Scullin, Holt, Lalor, Gorton, Gellibrand, Fraser, Isaacs, Cooper and Hawke.

All of them are held by Labor. "With enough momentum we need to give every candidate a bit of a scare to say, 'Do not take us for granted'," Aykan said. Where have we heard this before? *England July this year, Ilford, Rotherham, Batley...*

Labor has been trying to contain anger over the war in Gaza in key electorates that have thousands of Muslim voters. At the 2021 census, such voters constituted about 24 per cent of people in Calwell and 10 per cent in the at-risk seat of Wills.

“The unfortunate consequence ... for the Labor Party is that most of our community resides in seats held by the Labor Party, so most of our advocacy work is going to be against Labor,” Muslim Votes Matter national representative Ghaith Krayem said.

Krayem said the new group would not field candidates and was independent. But he said it would devise how-to-vote cards for a smaller list of target seats, with rankings more focused on the policies of parties than the individual views of candidates.

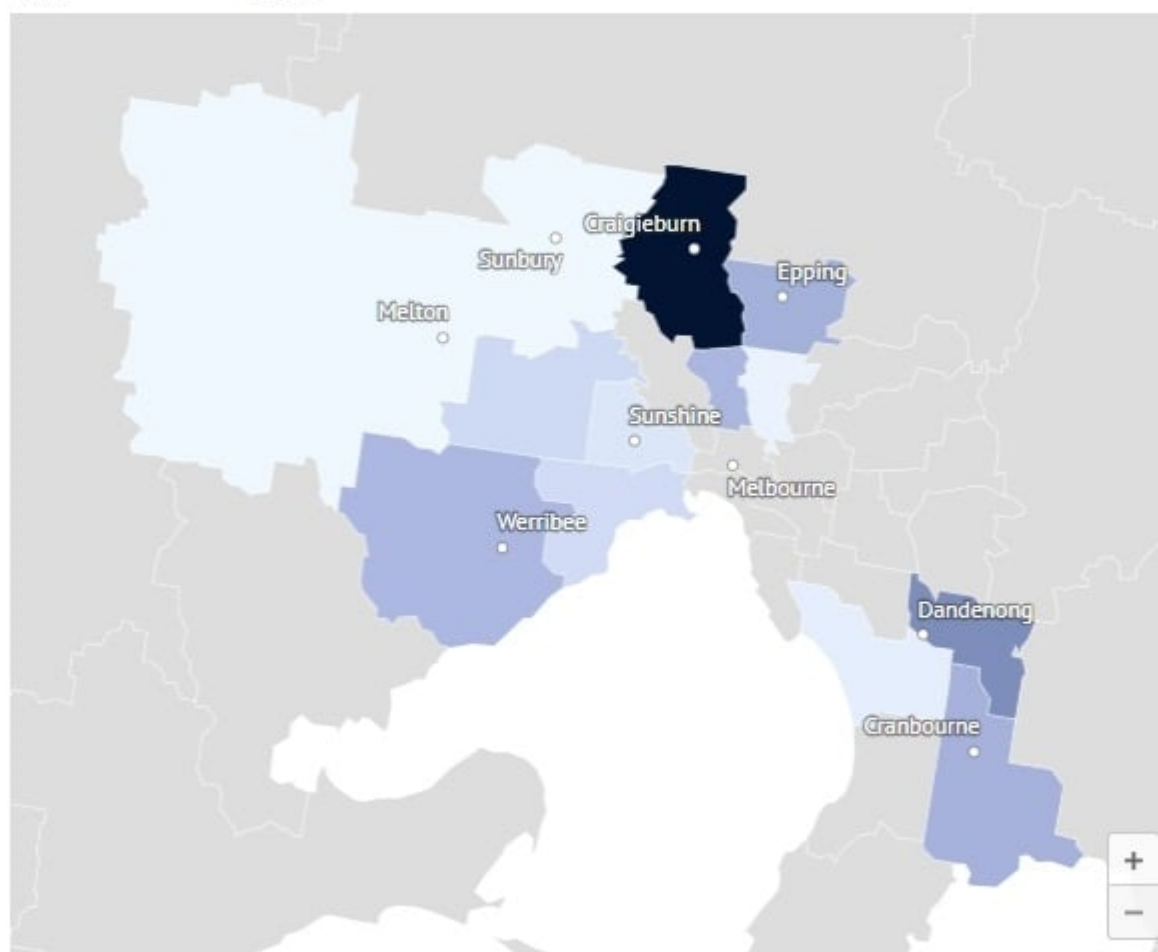
A separate group, the Muslim Vote, is also organising and could field independent candidates. *That's how it started...*

Labor MP Peter Khalil, whose Wills electorate office in Coburg has been repeatedly targeted by pro-Palestine protesters, has [publicly come out against that organisation.](#)

Krayem, who was previously president of the Islamic Council of Victoria and chief executive of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, said Muslim Votes Matter hoped for a hung parliament.

Muslim Votes Matter's target Victorian seats

% of electorate that is Muslim



Source: Muslim Votes Matter analysis of ABS and AEC data | Map data: ABS | MAP: STEPHEN KIPRILLIS

“That gives more influence to minor parties and independent candidates. In that environment, the interests of communities like ours is better served,” Krayem said. “The two major political parties have taken our community for granted for quite some time.

Outgoing Labor MP Maria Vamvakinou has held Calwell since 2001, during which time she has loudly supported Palestine. Her successor is likely to be [Palestinian man Basem Abdo](#), defending a comfortable 12.4 per cent margin, two-party preferred.

Krayem said Muslim Votes Matter was self-funded and had started taking donations that would be publicly disclosed. He

said the lobby group had hundreds of members around the country. "We want our own community to understand that it has political power ... and we've succeeded at that If any of those seats turn, well, that's a bonus."