

Labor minister Anne Aly clashes with pro- Palestinian protesters as polling shows Gaza pressure building on Labor



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ABC Premium News (Australia)

March 19, 2024 Tuesday

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# NEWS

**Length:** 909 words

**Byline:** By Q+A and RN Breakfast host Patricia Karvelas

**Highlight:** Pressure is building on the Labor government over its stance on Gaza, with Labor minister **Anne Aly** confronted by pro-Palestinian activists who attended a constituent meeting on the weekend and new polling showing the extent of community anger.

## **Body**

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Muslim voters are turning against the Labor government over its stance on the war in Gaza, new polling has revealed, as a video released on social media shows Labor frontbencher **Anne Aly** being harassed by pro-Palestinian activists.

Five months into the conflict, polling group Redbridge ran two focus groups with 18 people from the Arabic and Turkish communities in the Labor heartland seat of Calwell in Melbourne and found they were ready to swing hard against the government.

It comes as footage of a heated clash between Labor MP **Anne Aly** and pro-Palestinian activists who attended a meet and greet she held with constituents in Perth on the weekend was posted to Facebook.

The footage reveals how the conflict has boiled over into Australian communities, with MPs getting extra federal police resources to ensure they can do their jobs.

### **'A sense of betrayal'**

At the 2021 census, 813,392 people identified as Muslim and they are an increasingly important voting bloc in **Australia**, particularly in some seats.

Kos Samaras, who used to run campaigns for Labor and is now a director of Redbridge, said the anger among voters in the focus groups was intense, with many saying they could no longer support the Labor Party.

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He added, however, that participants held greater disdain for the Liberal Party and said they would prefer to vote independent.

In Calwell, 13 per cent of the electorate has Middle Eastern ancestry and local member Maria Vamvakinou's margin has already been slashed by 8 percentage points in the past few elections.

"For both female and male participants, the Labor government's response to the conflict in Gaza is a reminder of why they, as a community, have decided to stop voting Labor. Both groups share a sense of betrayal by Labor, over several years, economically and now via the conflict in Gaza," Mr Samaras said.

He told ABC News female participants were, qualitatively, angrier than their male counterparts in their attitudes around the government's response to the conflict.

He said the women in the group described consistent and long-term experiences of racism, such as stares and comments in public about "how you dress" or family members being knocked back on job applications because of the perception of their ethnicity and religion.

The men, by contrast, were far more comfortable that racism was improving in Melbourne, and none described experiencing any systemic discrimination.

Mr Samaras said the women see a long-term abandonment of their local communities — not just their religious community — by all governments, of all persuasions.

"The simmering rage from these experiences/perceptions now finds a lightning rod in the Gaza conflict — it becomes totemic of both the discrimination they face and the perceived neglect of 'people like them' by governments," he said.

But incumbency is still a factor and local member Ms Vamvakinou — herself an immigrant from Greece — was singled out by participants as someone who respects them and their culture.

"Numerous participants, unprompted, also made it clear that they would find it hard voting against Labor whilst she was there. Their references to the local MP were more profound as many participants constantly listed examples of how Labor tends to only have MPs from non-diverse backgrounds," Mr Samaras said.

Ms Vamvakinou told the ABC that seats like hers have shown, over the past few elections, "a willingness to send all politicians a clear message" that they should not be taken for granted.

"Hence why I work tirelessly to ensure that all parts of my electorate are represented — and that this representation extends to not just local issues," she said.

"I have a long history in working for a peaceful resolution to the conflict and will continue to do so. I'm heartened that parts of my community are aware of this work. However, it's clear that voters in electorates like mine from diverse communities are far more politically alert as to who represents them than ever before."

Mr Samaras said that as the federal election looms and the war in Gaza continues to disrupt the political scene, particularly in seats where constituents have strong links to the Middle East, Labor must be cautious about potentially parachuting in outsiders who don't have diverse backgrounds and links with the community.

### Fiery confrontation in Perth

The focus group results came as video emerged of Labor frontbencher and Muslim woman Dr Anne Aly being harassed by protesters, demanding she call what is happening in Gaza a genocide.

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In the video of the clash, which occurred on Saturday at a reserve in the Perth suburb of Stirling, Dr Aly was approached by pro-Palestinian protesters who asked about malnutrition in Gaza and Labor's decision to cut UNWRA funding, which the [government had overturned](#) the day before.

The conversation became heated, with both sides talking over each other, switching between English and Arabic.

Plain-clothes police officers interrupted and escorted Dr Aly and her team away, as protesters chanted "will you call it genocide?" and "ceasefire now".

Dr Aly told the ABC she will not be stopped despite the activism she faces at community events.

"I hold these events so that people in my community can have an opportunity to come and speak with me. I'll continue to do that. This kind of behaviour won't stop me," she said.

**Patricia Karvelas is the presenter of Q+A, which returns tonight at 9.35pm on ABC TV, RN Breakfast and co-host of the Party Room podcast.**

**Load-Date:** March 19, 2024

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