



Our new government's force for change

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Body

In fashion history, a red and purple outfit has only been pulled out to send some poignant, albeit pointed, messages. Princess Diana donned a red blazer and purple skirt when she sat alone outside the Taj Mahal in 1992 as her marriage crumbled. Her daughter-in-law, Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, recreated the look for one of her final official duties as a working royal in 2019. And in 2022, clutching a pink Qur'an, **Anne Aly** wore a red Acler skirt and purple blouse to Government House where she was sworn in as **Australia**'s first Muslim female minister.

Aly's appointment comes on the heels of a significant changing of the guard in Australian politics. For the first time in our political history, there will be a record number of Carla Zampatti dresses, as opposed to the once prevalent MJ Bale suits, in both houses of parliament. The federal election was a win, not just for the Greens and the teal wave, but also for a new world order of sorts.

There is a new guard looming. One that is all about difference, diversity and diverging from a place of "that's just the way it is" to a new chapter in Canberra that champions equality. Climate change was front of mind for many voters, who backed independents including Allegra Spender - daughter of the late Zampatti - in the seat of Wentworth and Kate Chaney in Curtin, to speak up for the environment.

This is in keeping with what ANU climate scientist Joëlle Gergis so aptly sums up in her new book, *Humanity's Moment: A Climate Scientist's Case for Hope*, on sale this month: "What an extraordinary time to be alive; we are part of the generation that will help heal the world." The age of societal sustainability is upon us.

The 47th parliament will be one of the most representative we've had, thanks to a new government and a collection of MPs who accurately represent modern **Australia**. A record number of women will take their seats in the House of Representatives. Many are not aligned to the traditional parties and make up the super-sized crossbench. Women count for 51 per cent of the Australian population and now comprise 38 per cent of the chamber in the new parliament - the highest ever proportion on record - after 58 women were elected to the lower house, including 19 debutante MPs. The Senate reached and exceeded 50 per cent gender parity in the last parliament, and maintains this in the new parliament.

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We've come a long way since Edith Cowan, our first female politician, was elected to the Western Australian parliament in 1921. Her colleagues were so opposed to her being there, she had to make several attempts at presenting her first speech, because the men kept interjecting as she spoke of wanting equal access to education for young Australian women.

Still, in 2003, the then newly minted cabinet minister Julie Bishop was infamously told how to dress by her male peers. "When I was first appointed to the ministry, I was asked to be the Minister for Ageing. And one of the prime minister's senior advisors rang me and said 'Julie, take this the right way, but forget the Armani suits and forget the corporate look. You're the minister for the ageing, you're going into aged- care homes, you've got to dress appropriately,' Bishop has shared. "I said 'What? You mean like cardigans?' And he said, 'Yeah more prints, more colour. Just not corporate.'"

Not too long after this sermon from a "faceless man", Bishop went on to become Minister for Foreign Affairs and a three-time deputy leader of the Liberal party. And she did it all in good shoes and some of the best of Australian fashion, including Rachel Gilbert, Rebecca Vallance and Dion Lee, and coined the phrase "fashion diplomacy" by exclusively wearing homegrown Australian labels when on official visits.

Her work, putting fashion on the agenda, also helped put the wheels in motion for the Australian Fashion Council to secure a federal grant to establish an Australian Fashion trademark in 2021. The world-first campaign hopes to promote the industry and create more local jobs. "The Australian Fashion trademark will be a driving force in building the industry's growth trajectory to deliver substantial economic, social and environmental gains over the next 10 years," CEO of Australian Fashion Council Leila Naja Hibri said in a statement.

"We can show the world how prioritising people and the planet together with profit can lead to a legacy of thriving prosperity."

We've also come a long way since the ministerial wing was trodden, pretty much exclusively, by men in R.M. Williams boots in the first part of this century. R.M. Williams was, during those days, owned by luxury conglomerate LVMH. But in 2020 the brand was brought home when it was acquired by Perth billionaire Andrew 'Twiggy' Forrest and his wife Nicola.

Since Australia's richest man has taken over the bootmaker, vegan materials have been introduced and demand is skyrocketing. And Prime Minister Anthony Albanese seems keen to tread new paths. One that is more female-focused, family-friendly and awake to the Australia we want to become.

Now, almost 10 per cent of the Senate identifies as Indigenous after the record number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives elected, including four new Indigenous MPs, three of whom are women. Indigenous Affairs Minister Linda Burney was bestowed her new job on election night. Burney, a proud Wiradjuri woman, knows the power that culture, and more specifically fashion, can have in politics. Since serving in federal politics from 2016, she has regularly been spotted on the shadow front bench in the odd Albus Lumen piece and Anna Quan skirt.

Another fashion force has also joined the Albanese government's inner sanctum. The aforementioned Anne Aly, Minister for Early Childhood Education and Minister for Youth is as passionate about her portfolio as she is about fashion, the statements style can make and where that style is made.

Dr Aly is Australia's first Muslim woman elected to parliament and is also the first Muslim woman MP who will sit in the outer ministry. Serendipitously, she represents the seat of Cowan - named after Edith Cowan - in Perth's outer suburbs. Born in Egypt, Aly's family moved to Sydney's southwest when she was two. She is a survivor of domestic violence and an academic specialising in counter terrorism. She's still considered a global authority into why children are lured into extremism. She also achieved all this after spending her 20s working for the minimum wage as a single mother of two boys.

Aly has a deep love and appreciation of fashion and since being elected in 2016 has regularly worn local labels that have a strong sustainable ethos including KitX and Flannel to parliament and official functions. In 2017 she made

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her catwalk debut for then 23-year-old designer Thomas Puttick, a designer who was showing sustainable clothes before it went mainstream and cast 'muses' such as Aly instead of models for his runway show.

"It's in my nature to disrupt because it is more often the case that I just end up being somewhere where I am not expected to be - like parliament or the catwalk of Australian Fashion Week," Dr Aly tells Vogue. Fashion is in her blood. "My dad studied textiles engineering. But when my family migrated to **Australia**, he couldn't find work in his field so he drove buses," Aly shares. "A story typical of so many who choose to make **Australia** home. Dad would spend hours at the sewing machine making our school uniforms. He never lost his passion for design. My mum tells me I've inherited his passion."

She says that it was only after she was first elected that she realised what her career and success represented when a constituent in Perth said she had told her young daughter that Dr Aly's victory was proof girls, Muslim girls especially, in **Australia** could achieve anything.

"The significance of it to other people, to the people watching really struck me at that point," she continues. "I made a very conscious decision that, coming in here, I would do everything I could to not just open the door but break down the wall. I feel so heartened by the fact that I may have been the first, but I'm certainly not going to be the last."

*This article appears in the August issue of Vogue **Australia**, on sale now.*

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