

Australia | Editor's Picks

## 'The major parties have taken their electorates for granted for a long time'

 By Paula Towers August 23, 2022

**Nomi Kaltmann says her success in leading the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance gave her the confidence to stand as a teal candidate in Caulfield.**

Nomi Kaltmann reveals a gift for understatement when asked to describe her life. "I am quite busy," Kaltmann, 30, the Melbourne lawyer, feminist, journalist, Orthodox, mother of three told *Plus61J*. "I have three children under the age of five. I work – I have a job as a legal interpretation analyst, I run the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA Australia)."

She forgot to say she is also a grant writer for charities, a contributor to the US Jewish magazine *Tablet*, and *Plus61J*.

Kaltmann has announced she will stand as a teal independent candidate for the seat of Caulfield in the Victorian state election in November.

With everything else in her life, was it hard to decide whether to run?

"Agonising!" she responds. Kaltmann wasn't looking to run, though she had been invited before: "I'd had previous opportunities wherein the idea had been floated by the Labor Party but each time I turned it down."

She formally resigned from the ALP earlier this month, having previously worked as an adviser to now federal Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus and former state minister Marsha Thomson.

The Caulfield electorate is a marginal seat, held by deputy Liberal leader David Southwick by just 0.1% and is viewed as crucial to the Coalition if it is to have any chance of winning government. The ALP candidate is Lior Harel. Both Southwick and Harel are also Jewish.

Kaltmann was approached by a group of locals, many of whom were involved in Zoe Daniel's successful Voices for Goldstein federal campaign.

**When I looked at the federal results from May and saw that 11 women had been able to secure seats that had been Liberal, that was an inspiring moment.**

But why the teals, not the ALP? "I think the mood has shifted in Australia," she observes. "I think that major parties have a lot of inherent problems – with integrity, corruption, not focusing on the right policy issues. They have taken their electorates for granted for a long time."

Since the last state election in Victoria there's been a lot to reflect on, which Kaltmann feels has affected the way Australians view politics: "We've had catastrophic bushfires, intense heatwave, years of pandemic with extensive lockdowns, high profile cases involving discrimination and sexual

assaults of women in Australia's Parliament, and corruption involving politicians of all stripes – which I think really shapes the way people see major parties, and [how they] think about their ability to shape power through their votes.”

She believes urgent policy action is needed to address that and traditional party politics and major parties have been unable to deliver to the needs of people in her electorate.



David Southwick (Liberal member)



Lior Harel (ALP)

“So having a viable alternative like the teals – which are community-backed, independent candidates – is very attractive,” she explains.

So why now? “When I looked at the [federal] electoral results from May and saw that 11 women had been able to [secure] seats that historically had been [held by] the Liberal Party and had been expected to be there for the taking, that was an inspiring moment.

“It helped me understand that things don't always have to be the same– and that change can occur.”

Kaltmann lives in the Caulfield electorate, was born into an Orthodox Jewish family and is a regular attendee at synagogue. “My husband and I are Orthodox and raise our children Orthodox. Every week we go to shule, we take the kids – we have a good time, we go to the children's service.”

She says another catalyst to taking on this role was her work for JOFA. “I think the decision to run was largely informed by 15 months of running JOFA, where I saw the incredible changes that I was able to implement in a really short amount of time, with a very dedicated board, and build something from the ground up.”

She trained for her role as president of JOFA by undertaking a fellowship with the Office Of Innovation, which is based in New York and promotes community building.

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“It was a 12-month incubator that helped me launch JOFA; a workshop from the ground up: how you gain supporters; having one-on-one conversations and recording the issues that are important to people in your community.

“I got very lucky because they don’t usually take people outside of New York, but it was the peak of the pandemic: New York was in a very bad place, Australia was in lockdown and it was, at times, brutally early in the morning but, for one year only. I was the first Australian they’ve ever taken, and they haven’t taken another since.”

Kaltmann founded and launched JOFA in Australia in Melbourne in *May 2021*. Since then, it has raised money to fund 64 scholarships that have been awarded to Orthodox women to assist with education in a variety of areas including journalism, *mivkavah* training, and Jewish law. A further 20 are due to be awarded in October for training in mental health.

The success of JOFA Australia helped build her confidence and expertise. “It was really my first indication that I am someone who can lead a social change movement effectively. I feel like I could really be in a space where I have the training and skills to be an effective change-maker in parliament.”

If elected to the Victorian parliament, Kaltmann hopes to achieve change on a number of platforms:

“Integrity in politics, holding people to account, transparency, better climate change policy and incentives towards improving the environment, and gender equality.

Though these sound like lofty goals, Kaltmann has demonstrated that she has a track record of getting things done for the communities she cares about, whether it is women, Jewish or beyond. The battle for Caulfield just got a lot more interesting.

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[Nomi Kaltmann to run as ‘teal’ independent for Caulfield](#) (*Age/Plus61*)

[Australian Orthodox women’s alliance launches speakers bureau](#) (*Plus61*)