# John Swinney condemns Reform UK Facebook ad as racist disinformation against Anas Sarwar



Scotland's First Minister, John Swinney, has publicly condemned a Facebook advertisement disseminated by Reform UK, describing it as an instance of "racist" political disinformation aimed at Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar. Speaking during a campaign event in Hamilton, Swinney rebuked the ad, which claims Sarwar will "prioritise" the Pakistani community in Scotland. The advertisement features clips of Sarwar advocating for increased political representation for individuals of South Asian descent, yet Swinney argues it distorts Sarwar's genuine calls for more inclusivity.

Swinney urged Meta, the parent company of Facebook, to take immediate action against the advertisement, labelling it an "unacceptable" tactic that misuses Sarwar's race in the ongoing political contest. The First Minister asserted, “What’s important here is that the advert that’s been put up clearly distorts and presents an impression which is not borne out by the contents of the material that is in the film.” This sentiment underscores growing concerns regarding the impact of misinformation on public discourse, a topic Swinney has consistently highlighted. He remarked, “Disinformation is debasing our politics in Scotland... People can’t make informed judgments because they’re having disinformation.”

As the by-election for Hamilton, Larkhall, and Stonehouse approaches, the contest is expected to be fierce, involving the SNP, Labour, and Reform UK. Swinney emphasised that a vote for his party is the best way to prevent Nigel Farage from establishing a foothold in Scotland. Responses from both Reform UK and Scottish Labour have added layers to the unfolding narrative. Thomas Kerr, a spokesman for Reform UK, dismissed Swinney's criticisms, asserting that the ad merely reflects Sarwar’s own words. Meanwhile, Labour deputy leader Jackie Baillie characterised the advert as a "blatantly racist" attack on Sarwar's identity and loyalty, shifting the narrative to focus on political failures rather than on Reform UK's growing presence.

The emergence of Reform UK as a formidable player in Scottish politics has not gone unnoticed. Observers suggest the party's rising popularity—potentially reaching 20% in polls—has instilled fear in both the SNP and Labour. Richard Tice, deputy leader of Reform UK, emphasised the party’s growing membership in Scotland, paralleling it with Labour's to underscore their increasing traction among voters. This scenario is compounded by recent events where Swinney conducted an anti-far-right summit that notably excluded Reform UK, leading to protests outside the venue. Such exclusions have sparked claims from Farage that the Scottish political establishment fears their burgeoning influence.

Concerns about the proliferation of far-right rhetoric in Scotland are growing, with Sarwar interpreting the emergence of such sentiments as a result of government failure and disillusionment with existing political structures. At a recent summit convened by Swinney to address far-right extremism, Sarwar positioned the rise of such factions as a consequence of disenfranchisement, urging immediate governmental action to address the underlying causes of this political malaise.

In this precarious political landscape, John Swinney's denunciation of the Reform UK advert signifies more than just a response to a single campaign tactic; it reflects a broader anxiety about the nature of political discourse in Scotland. As various parties approach the upcoming by-election, the focus will undoubtedly be on how issues of identity, race, and disinformation will shape voter sentiment.

Amidst this turbulence, it appears the challenge for all political entities will be to foster a dialogue that encourages inclusivity while resisting the division that has increasingly defined contemporary Scottish politics.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/john-swinney-reform-advert-scotland-b2758067.html), [[2]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/john-swinney-reform-advert-scotland-b2758067.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/john-swinney-reform-advert-scotland-b2758067.html), [[5]](https://news.stv.tv/politics/john-swinneys-anti-far-right-summit-didnt-invite-reform-but-they-were-the-elephant-in-the-room), [[3]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/anas-sarwar-uses-john-swinneys-far-right-summit-to-blame-extremism-rise-on-snp-failures-5096607)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://news.stv.tv/politics/swinney-and-sarwar-terrified-of-nigel-farages-reform-uks-rise-in-the-polls-tice-claims), [[6]](https://www.gbnews.com/politics/nigel-farage-john-swinney-reform-uk-snp-protests)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.usmuslims.com/scottish-leader-calls-for-unity-against-far-right-racist-views-of-287560h.htm)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/john-swinney-reform-advert-scotland-b2758067.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/john-swinney-reform-advert-scotland-b2758067.html> - Scotland's First Minister, John Swinney, has accused Reform UK of disseminating 'racist' political 'disinformation' through a Facebook advertisement targeting Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar. The advert alleges that Sarwar will 'prioritise' the Pakistani community in Scotland, featuring clips of him advocating for increased political representation for individuals of South Asian descent. Swinney condemned the advert's framing of Sarwar's comments, arguing it misrepresents his calls for broader inclusivity. He urged Meta, Facebook's parent company, to remove the advert, describing it as an 'unacceptable' attempt to use Sarwar's race against him ahead of the Hamilton, Larkhall, and Stonehouse by-election on June 5.
3. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/anas-sarwar-uses-john-swinneys-far-right-summit-to-blame-extremism-rise-on-snp-failures-5096607> - At a summit convened by John Swinney to counter the far-right, Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar accused the SNP government of driving people towards divisive rhetoric and political parties due to 'government failure'. Sarwar suggested that the rise in far-right support was a consequence of public disillusionment with institutions and political parties, urging the government to address these challenges to prevent further disenfranchisement.
4. <https://news.stv.tv/politics/swinney-and-sarwar-terrified-of-nigel-farages-reform-uks-rise-in-the-polls-tice-claims> - Reform UK deputy leader Richard Tice claimed that both John Swinney and Anas Sarwar are 'terrified' of the party's rising support in Scotland. Tice stated that Reform UK could reach 20% in the polls by summer and has nearly as many members in Scotland as the Labour Party. He accused Swinney and Sarwar of being 'terrified' of the party's growth and suggested that their policies are resonating with voters.
5. <https://news.stv.tv/politics/john-swinneys-anti-far-right-summit-didnt-invite-reform-but-they-were-the-elephant-in-the-room> - John Swinney's summit aimed at countering the far-right did not invite Reform UK, leading to protests outside the venue. Reform UK leader Nigel Farage responded by stating that the exclusion indicated the Scottish political establishment's fear of the party. Swinney had previously described Farage as 'repulsed by' and 'fundamentally racist', highlighting the tensions between the SNP and Reform UK.
6. <https://www.gbnews.com/politics/nigel-farage-john-swinney-reform-uk-snp-protests> - John Swinney's anti-Reform summit was disrupted by protesters accusing the SNP of being 'democracy deniers'. Demonstrators wore T-shirts stating 'not far-right' and held banners branding Swinney and Anas Sarwar as 'democracy deniers'. Farage commented that the exclusion of Reform UK from the summit suggested the Scottish political establishment is 'scared' of the party.
7. <https://www.usmuslims.com/scottish-leader-calls-for-unity-against-far-right-racist-views-of-287560h.htm> - Scotland's First Minister John Swinney called for unity against the 'racist' and 'far-right' politics of Reform UK. He condemned the party's views, particularly on immigration, and criticised leader Nigel Farage's stance on Russia as 'apologetic'. Swinney urged the public to unite around core values of 'decency, democracy, and respect' to counter the growing influence of Reform UK.