# Birmingham’s independent mayoral candidate stirs political shift among Muslim voters



In recent weeks, Birmingham's political landscape has been dramatically reshaped by the emergence of Akhmed Yakoob, a criminal lawyer turned independent candidate for West Midlands mayor. Charged with money laundering following a National Crime Agency investigation, Yakoob has taken to TikTok, using his 212,000 followers to proclaim his innocence. In a fervent video, he suggests that his arrest was ‘politically motivated’, linked to his vocal stance on the recent crisis in Gaza. "This is about silencing me, not justice," he claims. This transition from flamboyant displays of wealth, featuring supercars and lavish jewellery, to a campaign steeped in political activism marks a significant turn in his public persona.

Yakoob, whose father emigrated from Pakistan in the 1970s, has rapidly gained traction within the city’s deep-rooted Muslim community, particularly following the harrowing events of October 7, 2023, when Hamas launched a devastating attack that claimed over 1,200 Israeli lives. Observers have noted a perceptible shift in his narratives from showcasing his luxury lifestyle to fervently advocating for Palestinian rights. This not only presents an intriguing case of individual ambition but also reveals the complex dynamics at play within Birmingham's socio-political fabric.

Upon travelling to Small Heath, a neighbourhood indicative of Birmingham's diversity—85.9% of its 21,970 residents are Muslim—it becomes clear that this area exemplifies broader national trends. The 2021 census revealed that over half of Birmingham’s population identified as ethnic minorities, with Muslims making up approximately 30%. Small Heath itself has transformed from an industrial hub, once populated by Irish immigrants, to a vibrant community shaped significantly by South Asian Muslim immigration. The local businesses, from halal food shops to Islamic lifestyle stores, reflect a unique cultural landscape that is not only economically significant but also politically active.

Yakoob's rise has elicited mixed responses. While some community members initially dismissed his political aspirations as foolish, engagement has steadily increased, particularly in light of his focus on Palestine. Nadeem Afzal, a family support worker in Birmingham’s child services, noted, “I dismissed it as clownish behaviour, but people from the community started paying attention.” This sentiment indicates a tilt in the community's priorities, as foreign politics heavily colour local allegiances.

The impact of Gaza on local votes has been profound. Although Yakoob ultimately placed third in the recent mayoral election, garnering nearly 70,000 votes, his visibility underscores a troubling shift within the Labour party's traditional support base among Muslims. Presently, some Labour MPs find themselves increasingly at odds with their constituents, who feel that issues closer to home are being overshadowed by international conflicts. The Labour Muslim Network highlights a stark decline in Muslim electoral support; in constituencies with over 10% Muslim populations, Labour's share fell by an average of 11 points.

The political climate has further evolved with other independents, like Ayoub Khan, winning seats on pro-Gaza platforms. Khan's victory in Birmingham Perry Barr exemplified a growing discontent with Labour’s stance on Middle Eastern affairs, demonstrating an increasingly politicised Muslim electorate. Khalid Mahmood, a Labour MP who lost his seat, pointed to the varied demographics as instrumental in these shifts. He noted, "In the four seats we lost, it's noticeable that all of them had a reasonable proportion of Gujarati Muslims from India and Pakistan," reflecting the local demographic's influence on voting behaviour.

While the focus typically centres on geopolitics, local voices such as Nadeem Afzal argue for a more nuanced understanding of community issues. “Now the perception is growing that Birmingham's MPs are more interested in airports in Pakistan than infrastructure at home,” he lamented. This disconnection poses a significant challenge for the Labour party as internal strife continues to evolve alongside external pressures.

As Birmingham grapples with these complex changes, the dynamics of its diverse Muslim communities are being tested. Political factions increasingly utilise issues like the Palestinian cause as mobilising forces for electoral success, which may lead to sectarian divides and a fracturing of previously united fronts. In this environment, moderates like Afzal strive not only to counter these emerging narratives but also to uphold the values of integration and tolerance that are essential for the city's future cohesion.

The implications of these developments stretch beyond local politics, raising crucial questions about identity, loyalty, and community integration in an increasingly fragmented society. As the 2024 local elections loom, the potential for upheaval remains high, prompting fears of a bloodbath for Labour while independent candidates may seize the momentum from the growing dissatisfaction rooted in global conflicts. In this landscape, the answer may lie in fostering unity among diverse communities, as the fallout from deepening sectarian politics could profoundly shape the future of Birmingham and its residents.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14769651/birmingham-muslim-pakistan-london-uk-britain-david-patrikarakos.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Small_Heath)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14769651/birmingham-muslim-pakistan-london-uk-britain-david-patrikarakos.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.citypopulation.de/en/uk/westmidlands/wards/birmingham/E05011167__small_heath/), [[5]](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20057/about_birmingham/1294/population_and_census/5)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Birmingham), [[6]](https://www.propertyinvestmentsuk.co.uk/birmingham-population/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14769651/birmingham-muslim-pakistan-london-uk-britain-david-patrikarakos.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Birmingham), [[7]](https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E08000025)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14769651/birmingham-muslim-pakistan-london-uk-britain-david-patrikarakos.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.propertyinvestmentsuk.co.uk/birmingham-population/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14769651/birmingham-muslim-pakistan-london-uk-britain-david-patrikarakos.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20057/about_birmingham/1294/population_and_census/5)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14769651/birmingham-muslim-pakistan-london-uk-britain-david-patrikarakos.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Small_Heath), [[5]](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20057/about_birmingham/1294/population_and_census/5)
* Paragraph 8 – [[2]](https://www.citypopulation.de/en/uk/westmidlands/wards/birmingham/E05011167__small_heath/), [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Birmingham)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14769651/birmingham-muslim-pakistan-london-uk-britain-david-patrikarakos.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.citypopulation.de/en/uk/westmidlands/wards/birmingham/E05011167__small_heath/> - This webpage provides detailed population statistics for Small Heath, a ward in Birmingham, UK. According to the 2021 census, Small Heath has a population of 21,970 residents. The demographic breakdown includes 10,794 males and 11,177 females. The age distribution shows that 7,131 individuals are between 0-17 years old, 13,012 are aged 18-64, and 1,828 are 65 years or older. The ethnic composition is predominantly Asian, with 16,330 individuals identifying as Asian, 2,259 as Black, 1,297 as White, and 668 as Arab. In terms of religion, 18,862 residents identify as Muslim, 1,109 as Christian, and 544 have no religion. The data also highlights that 36.3% of residents do not have English as their main language, while 15.9% cannot speak English or speak it poorly.
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Small_Heath> - This Wikipedia article offers an overview of Small Heath, a district in Birmingham, UK. Historically, Small Heath was an industrial and manufacturing hub, attracting Irish immigrants in the early 20th century. Following the collapse of the British motorcycle industry, the area experienced economic decline. In recent decades, Small Heath has seen significant South Asian Muslim immigration, particularly from Pakistan, leading to a demographic shift. The district is known for its diverse Muslim community, with numerous mosques and businesses catering to the community's needs. The article also touches upon the area's political landscape and housing developments.
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Birmingham> - This Wikipedia page provides demographic information about Birmingham, UK. According to the 2021 census, the city's population is 1,144,900, marking a 6.7% increase since 2011. Ethnically, 48.7% of residents are White, 31% are Asian (including 17% Pakistani), 10.9% are Black, 4.8% are of Mixed race, and 1.7% are Arab. The religious composition shows that 34% identify as Christian, 29.9% as Muslim, and 24.1% have no religion. The page also highlights the city's cultural diversity and the significant presence of various ethnic and religious communities.
5. <https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20057/about_birmingham/1294/population_and_census/5> - This page from the Birmingham City Council provides insights into the city's population and census data. The 2021 Census recorded a population of 1,144,900 residents, a 6.7% increase from 2011. The page offers detailed demographic information, including ethnic groups, religious affiliations, and housing statistics. It also provides links to various census profiles and data tools for further exploration of Birmingham's demographic landscape.
6. <https://www.propertyinvestmentsuk.co.uk/birmingham-population/> - This article discusses Birmingham's population and housing statistics. The 2021 Census recorded a population of 1,144,919 residents, marking a 6.7% growth since 2011. The city's overall population density is 4,275 people per square kilometre, substantially higher than the West Midlands (457) and England (433) averages. The article also highlights densely populated areas like Small Heath (B10), which has over 24,000 people per square mile. Additionally, it provides insights into homeownership rates, rental statistics, and housing market trends in Birmingham.
7. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E08000025> - This Office for National Statistics (ONS) page presents visualisations of census data for Birmingham. It highlights changes in the city's population, age distribution, and religious affiliations between the 2011 and 2021 censuses. Notably, the Muslim population in Birmingham increased from 21.8% in 2011 to 29.9% in 2021, marking the largest increase among religious groups. The page provides interactive charts and maps to explore these demographic changes in detail.