# John Swinney accuses Reform UK of racist disinformation targeting Anas Sarwar ahead of crucial by-election



Scotland's political landscape is witnessing intense scrutiny as First Minister John Swinney raises alarms about what he describes as "racist" disinformation propagated by Reform UK. The controversy centres around a Facebook advertisement targeting Anas Sarwar, the Scottish Labour leader, which claims he would prioritise the needs of the Pakistani community. This ad misinterprets Sarwar's advocacy for greater political representation of South Asian individuals, a charge Swinney vehemently contests.

During a campaign event in Hamilton, Swinney called upon Meta, the parent company of Facebook, to remove the advertisement, labelling it an "unacceptable" misuse of Sarwar's identity. He contended that the advert distorts the truth of Sarwar's words, advancing a narrative that seeks to deceive voters. "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," Swinney asserted. He expressed a deepening concern that such disinformation could undermine informed political decision-making in Scotland, contributing to a "debasing" of politics that leaves the electorate confused.

As the by-election for the Hamilton, Larkhall, and Stonehouse constituency approaches on June 5, the stakes are high. Swinney described the contest as a "very tight" three-way race involving the SNP, Labour, and Reform UK. He firmly believes that a vote for the SNP is crucial in preventing Nigel Farage's party from gaining a foothold in Scotland—a view echoed by his previous criticisms of Reform UK's political stance. Reinforcing his position, Swinney remarked that he would not engage with Farage directly, stating, “Nigel Farage has got to explain himself and the politics that he represents,” emphasising his opposition to what he perceives as harmful ideologies.

Reform UK's spokesman, Thomas Kerr, countered Swinney's claims, arguing that the advertisement simply reflects Sarwar’s own statements. He accused both the SNP and Labour of creating an "anti-Reform coalition" and deflected accusations of racism back at Sarwar, suggesting the criticisms were an attempt to sidestep Reform UK's rising popularity. Jackie Baillie, the Scottish Labour deputy leader, echoed concerns about the ad, condemning it as a "blatantly racist" attempt to challenge Sarwar's legitimacy within Scottish politics. Baillie also highlighted that the by-election should be framed as a direct contest between Labour and the SNP, asserting that they alone can address the political polarisation stemming from the SNP's governance.

This rising tension underscores broader concerns within Scotland regarding populist politics and its implications for democratic engagement. During a special summit initiated by Swinney to discuss countering far-right influence—and notably excluding Reform UK—the atmosphere intensified, leading to protests where demonstrators labelled Swinney and Sarwar as "democracy deniers." Critics argue that the SNP's focus on Reform UK serves primarily to distract from its own perceived failures to manage pressing issues like the NHS and education.

The political climate in Scotland is increasingly charged, with accusations of disinformation and manipulative tactics colouring the upcoming election. As these narratives unfold, the electorate must navigate a complex web of political communications where genuine concerns about representation intersect with strategies aimed at discrediting opponents.

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

## 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 and features 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.
3. <https://www.gbnews.com/politics/reform-uk-john-swinney-nigel-farage-anti-reform-summit> - Scottish First Minister John Swinney has been accused of acting as Nigel Farage's 'recruiting sergeant' ahead of an SNP anti-Reform summit. Swinney plans to gather political leaders to discuss how to 'lock out' Reform UK from winning seats in the next Scottish Parliament election. Critics, including Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar, argue that the surge in support for Reform UK is due to the SNP's political failures, particularly in managing the NHS and education.
4. <https://www.johnogroat-journal.co.uk/news/national/protesters-gather-as-swinney-chairs-special-summit-to-tackle-far-right-131975/> - Protesters gathered in Glasgow as John Swinney chaired a special cross-party summit aimed at tackling the far right. Demonstrators held signs and banners accusing Swinney and Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar of being 'democracy deniers.' Reform UK was not invited to the summit, although councillor Thomas Kerr, who joined the protest, stated he would not have attended. Swinney warned of the 'polarising forces' exploiting Scotland's democratic 'weaknesses.'
5. <https://newsvoice.info/article/page/dailyrecord/news/politics/john-swinney-accuses-anas-sarwar-34630050> - John Swinney has accused Anas Sarwar of 'opening the door' to Nigel Farage in a 'desperate' bid to become First Minister. Swinney stated he would not accept any support from Farage and believes such politics are damaging to Scottish society. He also expressed concerns about the rise of populist politics and called for turning away from such politics.
6. <https://news.stv.tv/politics/swinney-using-farage-as-bogeyman-to-distract-from-snp-failure-sarwar-says> - Anas Sarwar has accused John Swinney of using Nigel Farage as a 'bogeyman' to distract from the SNP's failures in government. Sarwar stated that the election next year should focus on issues like the NHS and education, not on Farage. He also expressed concerns about the SNP's record on various issues and the need for change in Scotland.
7. <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.' The summit aimed to tackle the rise of Reform UK, but critics argue that the SNP is using the party as a scapegoat to deflect from its own record. Demonstrators held signs branding Swinney and Anas Sarwar as 'democracy deniers.'