# How Akhmed Yakoob's pro-Palestine campaign reshaped Birmingham's political landscape



Last month, Birmingam's Perry Barr district made headlines as a local criminal lawyer faced money laundering charges stemming from a National Crime Agency investigation. Akhmed Yakoob, widely known as the 'TikTok lawyer,' is scheduled to appear in Westminster Magistrates' Court next month. Yet, in a striking turn of events, Yakoob has adopted a combative stance on social media, where he boasts over 212,000 TikTok followers. He claims his arrest is part of a politically motivated attempt to stifle his rising prominence and vocal opposition regarding the ongoing situation in Gaza. “This is about silencing me, not justice,” he asserted in a recent video.

Prior to the escalation of tensions in Gaza following Hamas's brutal attacks on October 7, which resulted in the tragic loss of 1,200 Israeli lives—the most significant mass killing of Jews since the Holocaust—Yakoob garnered attention more for his ostentatious lifestyle than for political aspirations. The 37-year-old solicitor, whose father emigrated from Pakistan to the UK in the 1970s, was often filmed beside luxury vehicles, flaunting his wealth and flair. However, the October 7 attack significantly shifted his social media narrative, propelling Palestinian advocacy to the forefront of his message.

In a month’s time, Yakoob announced his bid to stand as an independent candidate for the West Midlands mayoralty. Though many might initially dismiss the prospects of his campaign, particularly given his lack of traditional political experience and ground operation, Birmingham's political landscape presents unique challenges and opportunities. The city, previously dominated by Labour, has seen demographic shifts reflected in the 2021 census, which revealed over 50% of residents belong to ethnic minorities, 30% identifying as Muslim.

Yakoob's rapid transformation into a legitimate political contender shines a light on the rising sectarian divide and shifting allegiances within British politics, as the pro-Palestine sentiment continues to gain traction among many constituents. Observations in Small Heath—one of Birmingham's most densely populated Muslim wards—illustrate a distinct demographic reality where symbols of Palestinian identity are prominently displayed. Shops, mosques, and community hubbubs pulsate with signs reflecting the community's cultural connection to both their heritage and the ongoing crisis in Gaza.

Despite initial scepticism from moderate Muslim representatives like Nadeem Afzal, who once viewed Yakoob's ambitions as ludicrous, the sentiments within the community began to evolve. “At first, I dismissed it as clownish behaviour,” said Afzal, a family support worker. “But people started paying attention.” Yakoob's campaign pivoted to increasingly leverage Gaza as a primary theme, marginalising local issues within his messaging.

His unconventional approach bore fruit; during the mayoral election, he secured almost 70,000 votes, coming in third place. His gains, however, were indicative of broader electoral dynamics, as Michael's victory in Birmingham Perry Barr demonstrated—Ayoub Khan, having abandoned Labour due to perceived anti-Semitism training, successfully campaigned as an independent for pro-Palestine causes, highlighting the discontent with traditional political narratives.

The implications of this profound shift resonate deeply across Birmingham, where Labour has historically enjoyed robust support among Muslim voters. Yet, data reveals a concerning trend: dissatisfaction with Labour's perceived inaction regarding Gaza has led to considerable electoral losses in diverse constituencies, as discontent manifests in voting patterns. Notably, in areas where the Muslim population exceeds 30%, Labour's support plummeted by as much as 29 points during the recent elections.

The rise of Yakoob and others with a decidedly pro-Palestinian platform signals a political landscape rife with complexities. Khalid Mahmood, a Labour MP who lost his Birmingham seat, emphasised the nuanced nature of Muslim voter demographics at play, particularly with the increasing influence of groups like The Muslim Vote. Some activists articulate a view opposing traditional party lines, asserting they must prioritise issues that reflect collective concerns over wider foreign conflicts, drawing attention instead to matters pivotal to their local communities.

This shift demonstrates how local politics is intricately intertwined with global issues, as the Gaza conflict increasingly influences the political sentiments within Birmingham's ethnic and religious communities. However, amidst this turmoil, voices advocating for unity and integration emerge. As Nadeem Afzal articulates, many within the British Muslim community are keen to challenge the growing influence of sectarianism, seeking a return to governance that prioritises local needs over external agendas.

The encroachment of sectarian politics within Birmingham serves as a somber reminder of the nuanced challenges facing the UK's communities. As Yakoob and similar candidates navigate this complex landscape, the necessity for constructive dialogue and inclusive platforms becomes ever more crucial. The upcoming local elections will serve as a litmus test, revealing whether Birmingham can reconcile these shifting allegiances in a manner that champions communal integrity over divisive sectarianism.

In reflecting on the dynamics at play, it is clear that the repercussions of electoral shifts extend beyond Birmingham’s borders, encapsulating the intricacies of how domestic politics can be influenced by international dilemmas. The voices of British Muslims, who advocate for tolerance and integration, deserve amplification in this increasingly polarized dialogue—otherwise, the cost of defeat in the political arena could prove too great for all.

## 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), [[6]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13546317/birmingham-muslim-pakistan-london-uk-britain-david-patrikarakos.html)
* 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), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/32fc13d1-2ae4-45a7-b950-ad2325bcbe14), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/04/20/galloway-west-midlands-mayor-allah-zionism-akhmed-yakoob/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/jun/24/birmingham-election-candidate-akhmed-yakoob-apologises-for-deeply-disturbing-remarks-about-women), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/11b72eb2-6ccc-41a1-ba87-387f2929ba9d), [[6]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13546317/birmingham-muslim-pakistan-london-uk-britain-david-patrikarakos.html)
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* Paragraph 6 – [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/11b72eb2-6ccc-41a1-ba87-387f2929ba9d), [[6]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13546317/birmingham-muslim-pakistan-london-uk-britain-david-patrikarakos.html)
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* Paragraph 8 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/jun/24/birmingham-election-candidate-akhmed-yakoob-apologises-for-deeply-disturbing-remarks-about-women), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/may/31/labour-will-struggle-birmingham-ladywood-voters-gaza-poverty)
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2. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/jun/24/birmingham-election-candidate-akhmed-yakoob-apologises-for-deeply-disturbing-remarks-about-women> - Akhmed Yakoob, an independent candidate in the Birmingham general election, apologised for comments deemed 'deeply disturbing' by the Muslim Women's Network UK. During a podcast, Yakoob made remarks about women that were widely criticised. He expressed regret, stating that the tone of the discussion contradicted his values, and pledged to support efforts against misogyny. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/jun/24/birmingham-election-candidate-akhmed-yakoob-apologises-for-deeply-disturbing-remarks-about-women?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/32fc13d1-2ae4-45a7-b950-ad2325bcbe14> - Labour's strong performance in the 2024 local elections was overshadowed by losses in areas with significant Muslim populations, attributed to the party's stance on the Gaza conflict. Dissatisfaction with Labour's response led to substantial losses in inner-city Birmingham and other regions, raising concerns about the party's prospects in the West Midlands mayoralty contest and the upcoming general election. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/32fc13d1-2ae4-45a7-b950-ad2325bcbe14?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/11b72eb2-6ccc-41a1-ba87-387f2929ba9d> - Labour deployed activists to secure votes in 24 constituencies with significant Muslim populations amid challenges from pro-Palestine candidates. These candidates, from Green, independent, and Workers parties, aimed to pressure Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer to adjust the party’s stance on the Middle East conflict. Despite these efforts, pro-Palestine sentiment remained strong due to the ongoing conflict in Gaza and the party's perceived slow response. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/11b72eb2-6ccc-41a1-ba87-387f2929ba9d?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/04/20/galloway-west-midlands-mayor-allah-zionism-akhmed-yakoob/> - Akhmed Yakoob, a TikTok lawyer endorsed by George Galloway for the West Midlands mayoral election, claimed he was chosen by Allah to challenge the 'Zionist regime'. He described Zionism as a 'fascist ideology' and alleged that Zionists 'control everything'. These statements led to concerns that his rhetoric could damage social cohesion. ([telegraph.co.uk](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/04/20/galloway-west-midlands-mayor-allah-zionism-akhmed-yakoob/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13546317/birmingham-muslim-pakistan-london-uk-britain-david-patrikarakos.html> - Akhmed Yakoob, a Birmingham-based solicitor, gained prominence for his pro-Palestinian stance following the October 7 massacre of 1,200 Israelis by Hamas. He announced his candidacy for West Midlands mayor as an independent, focusing on the plight of Palestinians in Gaza. Despite lacking political experience, Yakoob's campaign highlighted the influence of sectarian issues and Islamist entryism in British politics. ([dailymail.co.uk](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13546317/From-Tiger-Patel-Gaza-geezer-Meet-candidates-aiming-seats-Labour-tapping-pro-Palestine-support.html?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/may/31/labour-will-struggle-birmingham-ladywood-voters-gaza-poverty> - In the Birmingham Ladywood constituency, independent candidate Akhmed Yakoob's campaign, centred on support for Gaza, gained significant traction. His strong social media presence, with 195,000 TikTok followers, and focus on local issues resonated with voters. Yakoob's approach reflects a shift in political campaigning, leveraging digital platforms to mobilise support. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/may/31/labour-will-struggle-birmingham-ladywood-voters-gaza-poverty?utm_source=openai))