# Birmingham’s waste crisis highlights tensions over local issues and identity politics in British elections



Bins remain uncollected and piles of rubbish continue to mount on the streets of Birmingham more than six weeks after binmen went on strike, casting parts of the city—the UK's second largest—into a state described by some as reminiscent of a "Third World slum." The city's visible waste crisis has coincided with a surge in fly-tipping and a rat infestation, with some rodents reportedly growing as large as cats.

Despite the scale of the local crisis, Birmingham's Labour MP for Hall Green and Moseley, Tahir Ali, has been criticised for focusing his efforts on a campaign far from his constituents' concerns. Last week, at an event in Birmingham attended by a predominantly male audience and held before a large Kashmiri flag, Ali was seen advocating in Punjabi for the construction of a new airport in Mirpur, a city in the Pakistani region of Kashmir. He highlighted the inconvenience for constituents who presently must travel three hours to Islamabad for international flights.

Ali's ongoing campaign for this airport, which he first raised in Prime Minister’s Questions in October, includes having signed a letter alongside 19 other MPs to the Pakistani Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif, seeking funding support for the project. Ali’s stance has drawn particular attention as it has intensified during the worsening local waste strike in Birmingham. Fellow Labour MP Zarah Sultana similarly attracted scrutiny for opposing a third runway development at Heathrow Airport in London while lobbying for a major airport project in Pakistan, raising questions around environmental policy consistency.

Political commentators have linked these actions to a broader trend of what they term "sectarianism" in British politics—where identity politics based on religion or ethnicity influence political affiliations and campaigns. This development was underscored during last year’s general election when two Labour MPs lost their seats to independent pro-Palestine candidates campaigning on Middle Eastern issues rather than local or national policies.

In north Birmingham’s Perry Barr, Khalid Mahmood was unseated by Ayoub Khan, an independent pro-Palestine activist who publicly dismissed outrage over grooming gang scandals as a 'false Right-wing narrative.' Similarly, in Leicester South, Shadow Cabinet Minister Jonathan Ashworth lost to Shockat Adam, another pro-Gaza independent candidate, who celebrated his victory by prominently displaying a Palestinian keffiyeh.

These election results highlight how parts of the UK’s political landscape are shifting along racial and religious lines. While many Muslims and individuals of other faiths actively participate in British politics without sectarian organisation, campaigning groups like The Muslim Vote openly aim to influence electoral outcomes through mobilisation of Muslim voters, asserting their long-term presence in the political process.

A survey by the Henry Jackson Society last year indicated that approximately 40 percent of British Muslims considered the formation of a political party exclusively for Muslims as a "desirable" development. Such figures reinforce perceptions of growing identity-focused political engagement.

The challenges of such divisions are compounded by demographic realities. Birmingham, for instance, is noted for high levels of ethnic and cultural diversity, with significant portions of residents not identifying as British or English, according to the 2021 census. Some commentators attribute these developments to the policy of state multiculturalism, which was originally intended to allow different cultures to coexist but is now criticised for fostering separate communities and institutions rather than integration. Former Prime Minister David Cameron has previously acknowledged that this approach had "failed."

Researchers, such as Sam Bidwell from the Adam Smith Institute, have observed an increase in independent candidates leveraging Middle Eastern geopolitical conflicts during campaigns rather than focusing on local issues. This phenomenon is considered by some analysts as a sign that Britain’s Muslim population has reached sufficient scale to influence politics independently from traditional national parties.

The ongoing situation in Birmingham exemplifies tensions between local governance challenges and international political advocacy by elected representatives. As the city confronts significant public health and environmental concerns amid the waste strike, questions have been raised about political priorities and representation.

Matt Goodwin, Senior Visiting Professor of Politics at the University of Buckingham, who wrote on this topic in the Daily Mail, drew attention to the potential for heightened sectarianism to further influence upcoming local elections. He urged recognition of the impact of identity politics on governance and community cohesion in the UK.

The current state of Birmingham's streets and the debates surrounding local versus global political focus illustrate the complex intersections between domestic issues, voter identities, and international concerns within contemporary British politics.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2025/04/23/kpcj-a23.html> - This article reports on the ongoing Birmingham bin workers strike, highlighting the duration of the strike exceeding six weeks, the disputes over job cuts and pay reductions, and the severe impact on waste collection services in the city.
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5m4hta_AIA> - This video documents the visible crisis in Birmingham with piles of uncollected rubbish accumulating on streets amid the bin workers strike, visually supporting claims of the city being overwhelmed by rubbish.
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birmingham_bin_strike> - The Wikipedia page details the 2025 Birmingham bin strike, including the council declaring a major incident due to 17,000 tonnes of rubbish remaining uncollected, and the involvement of government and military planners to assist logistics.
4. <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/birmingham-rat-infestation-worsens-city-26608191> - This news article discusses the worsening rat infestation in Birmingham coinciding with the waste strike, including reports of rodents growing unusually large, corroborating the article's mention of a rodent surge.
5. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/tahir-ali-birmingham-labour-kashmir-airport-b1076244.html> - This report covers Birmingham Labour MP Tahir Ali’s campaign for the construction of an airport in Mirpur, Kashmir, his lobbying efforts including a signed letter to Pakistani PM Shehbaz Sharif, and the political scrutiny he faces amid local issues.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/dec/20/sectarianism-british-politics-muslim-candidates-elections> - The Guardian article analyzes the rise of sectarian identity politics in Britain, including the impact on elections with pro-Palestine independent candidates unseating Labour MPs, echoing the article's discussion of religious and ethnic identity influencing British political landscape.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMi7AFBVV95cUxOczBaOF9NZFNPdGE4RW9SZ3Q3M2swRWlNVUxnSU5vUS1VWEVkTFJRQWFVOHk5bldVUGZKYUVhbkVaclR3LV9ycGZ5dWd2Y3daaWFCS25lZXFKVFJQWEVVSVlUc0t1Mk13RGRHSTZzYWhTQmtFM19oTnptcTMzWEJFVGhXWUZ3SVZNbjRsMENyQWJKY19EX1JhaUxPQW5NWF9JSGRocjZvcDZ6M2JfMHB3NGozZ0dVSzNzVWt0OEd0dFZZUVlmRU1OWDRsYV9DV1NJZ1BDNEh1TVpmeDUwZGEwbk5HMTlWdGQzdjNnTw?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data