



# 2026 LOCAL ELECTIONS:

*A MEND GUIDE ON WHY THEY MATTER AND HOW TO ASSESS CANDIDATES*

**mend**



On May the 7th, voters across England will elect over 4,850 councillors in the local elections. The outcome of these elections will be critical in determining how your local area is governed across a range of areas, from essential infrastructure like roads and waste collection to social services like education, social care and housing. Local authorities also play a leading role in local planning, community safety and supporting local businesses. Beyond these important policy areas, councillors should also play an active role in representing the viewpoints of the constituents they serve in the chambers of local government. This short how-to guide aims to inform the Muslim community about the importance of voting and how Muslims should go about researching their local candidates in order to come to an informed decision about who to vote for.



## LOCAL ELECTIONS: WHY SHOULD MUSLIMS VOTE?

British Muslims should understand one important fact: the electoral significance of Muslim voters is increasing in both local elections and general elections. Muslims currently make up [6.5% of the UK population](#) and are a growing demographic. Muslims typically live concentrated in and around cities, which in Britain's first-past-the-post system means that in major constituencies they can have a big influence over who wins in elections. Available data shows that there are around 20 constituencies out of 650 with an electorate that is [more than 30% Muslim](#).

Across the UK there are about [500 Muslim councillors](#), around 75% of who belong to Labour. Although the majority of voting Muslims have traditionally voted Labour, in recent years many rejected the party over its dismal record on the genocide in Gaza - specifically [Keir Starmer's claim](#) that Israel had the right to withhold water and power from Gaza and his refusal to call for an immediate ceasefire until February 2024, by which point over 30,000 Palestinians had been massacred by Israeli forces.

Labour has continued to pay for this in elections. In the May 2025 local elections, Muslim independents took what were previously Labour safe seats from the party's candidates. For example, in Burnley Central East independent Maheen Kamran won with 38% of the vote against Labour's 14% decline from 2021. Labour then lost its safe seat in the February 2026 Gorton and Denton by-election to the Green Party,

buoyed by the area's Muslim community, who make up about 30% of the electorate. In the May 2024 local elections - where the impact of the Muslim vote was most visible - [Labour's vote share fell](#) around 21% in council areas where more than 20% of residents are Muslim. [Other analyses showed](#) that Labour lost 33% of the vote in Muslim-majority council zones. In places like Leeds, Oldham and Kirklees, Muslims election candidates standing as independents or for smaller parties like the Greens toppled Labour councillors.

While some Labour officials tried to play down the significance of Muslim voters following the 2024 local elections, their losses grew in the July 2024 general election, where Labour [lost 5 assumedly safe seats to 5 independent candidates](#) - 4 of whom were Muslim - [running on pro-Gaza tickets](#). There are now around [25 Muslim MPs](#), an increase from 2019 when there were [19 Muslim MPs](#). Successful grassroots campaigns like [The Muslim Vote](#) are also helping to organise Muslim voters by providing them with the data they need to make informed voting decisions.

Muslims are now becoming a force to be reckoned with in British elections. Parties who want to win - especially in big city constituencies - need to take the voices of Muslim voters seriously.

But for this to happen **YOU NEED TO VOTE!**

**YOUR VOTE** is critical to ensuring that Muslims are properly represented in the halls of local government across the issues that they care about, from improving the economy and public infrastructure to tackling Islamophobia and ending war in the Middle East.

# The Muslim Vote in the UK

In recent elections, the Muslim community's shift away from traditional Labour loyalty has reshaped British politics at every level — from council chambers to Westminster.

## May 2024 Local Elections

Labour's vote share fell ~21% in council areas where more than 20% of residents are Muslim. Independents toppled Labour councillors in Leeds, Oldham and Kirklees.

## May 2025 Local Elections

In Burnley Central East, independent Maheen Kamran won with 38% of the vote against Labour's 14% decline from 2021.

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## July 2024 General Election

Labour lost 5 previously safe seats to independent candidates — 4 of whom were Muslim — running on pro-Gaza platforms.

## February 2026 By-Election

Labour lost its Gorton and Denton seat to the Green Party, buoyed by a Muslim electorate making up roughly 30% of the constituency.

Campaigns like **The Muslim Vote** ([themuslimvote.co.uk](https://themuslimvote.co.uk)) are organising Muslim voters with the data they need to make informed decisions. But none of this works without **you** turning out to vote.

# 6.5%

## UK Population

Muslims now make up 6.5% of the UK population — a growing and increasingly influential demographic.

# 30+

## Key Constituencies

Around 20–30 constituencies have electorates that are more than 30% Muslim.

# 500

## Muslim Councillors

There are currently around 500 Muslim councillors across the UK — up significantly in recent years.

# 25

## Muslim MPs

There are now 25 Muslim MPs, up from 19 in 2019 — reflecting growing political representation at Westminster.

# WHAT DO LOCAL ELECTIONS SHOW US?

Local elections are seen as a test of the popularity of political parties.

However, there are some cautionary points to keep in mind. Firstly, local election turnout is typically lower than general elections. Broadly speaking, it tends to be only the most politically conscious who turn out to vote.

Also, people can sometimes vote differently in local elections compared to how they vote in general elections. For example, [research shows](#) that 1 in 5 voters vote for a different party at the local elections than in national elections. Also, local elections are held at different times for different regions of the UK. Only certain groups of council seats are up for grabs at any given local election. We do not necessarily get an accurate picture of nation-wide opinion on the parties, which means you should be cautious in comparing the results of past local elections with the upcoming May 2026 election.

However, none of this should be taken to mean that local elections are unimportant - in fact, for communities like Muslims trying to make a mark on the political landscape, they are **VERY** important.

For such groups the significance of local elections cannot be overstated, as independent candidates and smaller parties tend to perform better at local elections, giving grassroots movements a stronger chance of winning. For example, in the 2024 local elections the Liberal Democrats - a relatively small Parliamentary party - won more seats than the Conservative Party.

# HOW TO DO YOUR HOMEWORK ON WHO TO VOTE FOR

The most important question you will face in the local elections is: who should I vote for? MEND is not going to tell you who to vote for, but we will inform you how to go about researching your candidate to make sure that you can make an informed decision when voting day arrives.

## Why They Still Matter

For communities like British Muslims, local elections are **especially** important. Independent candidates and smaller parties perform better locally — giving grassroots movements a real chance of winning. In 2024, the Liberal Democrats won more local seats than the Conservative Party. Change is possible at this level.

## Important Context

Local elections are widely seen as a barometer of national party popularity — but they come with important caveats worth understanding before you interpret the results.

## Lower Turnout

Local election turnout is typically lower than general elections. Those who do vote tend to be the most politically engaged — which means your vote carries even more weight.

## Split Voting

Research shows that 1 in 5 voters choose a different party in local elections compared to general elections.

## Staggered Elections

Not all areas vote at the same time. Only certain council seats are contested in any given year, so results may not reflect nationwide opinion.

**FIRSTLY**, you should visit The Electoral Commission's official website by clicking [HERE](#). At the top of the page you can enter your postcode, after which you will be notified if an election is taking place in your areas - remember: local elections **DO NOT** take place across the country in all constituencies at the same time; different areas hold elections at different times.

**IF AN ELECTION IS TAKING PLACE IN YOUR AREA**, then you will be presented with a list of the candidates running for office. This service will also tell you the different methods of voting that are available to you, such as in-person voting at a polling station (along with the address of the station), postal voting and voting by proxy.

You can also use the who can I vote for service by clicking [HERE](#), or Democracy Club [HERE](#). Similarly, these services will give you a list of your local candidates, along with links to their social media profiles.

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO ASSESS THE RECORD OF COUNCILLORS CURRENTLY IN OFFICE**, you can simply go to your local councils website, where you should find a function that allows you to search for your councillor by postcode or name.

For example, [HERE](#) Birmingham City Council's website allows you to search for your candidate by postcode, along with the ability to access voting records, past and upcoming committee meetings, which will give you an insight into the positions your serving councillors have taken on different issues.

Once you have acquired the names of those candidates running in your area, you should then carry out your own research online. If your candidate has a public profile, then Googling their name may reveal articles about certain opinions he/she may have expressed in the past, or certain causes that they may be involved in.

It is also highly recommended that you utilise search functions on social media platforms, such as those found on X, Facebook and Instagram. By looking through the type of content that your candidate is posting, you should be able

to develop an idea of how closely you feel they represent your own positions.

Candidates running for office are accountable to the public and constituencies who they serve if they already hold office, or who they are planning to serve should they be elected.

As a voting member of the public, **YOU HAVE THE RIGHT** to contact them to directly ask questions around the issues you care about.

It is also important that you do not vote for a candidate simply because they are Muslim. Sometimes, non-Muslim candidates may be more aligned with your political views. Therefore, **ALWAYS MAKE SURE YOU CHECK** the records of the candidates running in your area.

The contact details - usually the email address - of those already in office will be available via your county or city council's website. Websites such as the above-mentioned [whocanivotefor.co.uk](#) also provide the social media pages of candidates once you have entered your postcode if there is an election running in your area. This allows you to also contact candidates through their social media profiles.

Beyond individual candidates, you can, and should, also check to see what a particular political party's stance is on the issues that you care about. The main way that this can be done is through accessing and reading through a given party's manifesto. A manifesto is a document that parties release setting out their policies and plans of action for governance. The Labour Party's manifesto can be found [HERE](#). The Conservative's [HERE](#), Liberal Democrats' [HERE](#), The Green Party's [HERE](#) and Reform's [HERE](#). Manifestos are long policy documents which can be anywhere between 60 to over 100 pages long.

However, we recognise it is unlikely that you are going to read through the entire manifesto document (although, for those who are politically active, doing so would be recommended). To make things easier, we have summarised below which parties you can consider voting for, as well as some of their key policy positions.

# Key Party Positions: What You Need to Know

Each party takes a distinct stance on the issues British Muslims care most about. Use this overview as a starting point — always read manifestos and research local candidates directly.



## □ Green Party

**First major UK party to recognise Israel's actions as genocide. Supports a full arms embargo and BDS. Committed to scrapping Prevent, adopted the APPG Islamophobia definition, and strongly supports equality protections.**



## □ Labour

**Supports Equality Act 2010 and increased NHS/housing investment. Introduced a non-statutory anti-Muslim hostility definition (short of "Islamophobia"). Delayed response on Gaza; partial arms licence suspension. Non-engagement policy with the Muslim Council of Britain.**



## □ Conservative

**Focus on economic stability and council financial control. Established mosque security funding. However: consistently refused to adopt an Islamophobia definition, and their Prevent review disproportionately targeted Muslim communities. Non-engagement with Muslim organisations.**



## □ Liberal Democrats

**Consistent outreach to mosques; party chair has urged members to "amplify Muslim voices." Supports Gaza arms embargo, APPG Islamophobia definition, and abolition of Prevent. Strong civil liberties and refugee protection record.**









## □ Reform UK

**Proposes repealing the Equality Act 2010, scrapping Indefinite Leave to Remain, and refocusing Prevent almost exclusively on "Islamist extremism." Senior figures have called for a burqa ban. Opposes any Islamophobia definition. Poses a direct threat to Muslim community cohesion.**

# KEY POLICIES Party Positions at a Glance

Different parties take very different approaches to the issues British Muslims care about most. Here is a concise overview of where each major party stands on key concerns.

Issue	 Labour	 Conservatives	 REFORM UK	 Green Party  Liberal Democrats
<b>Gaza / Palestine</b>	Delayed response; partial arms suspension; pledges to recognise Palestinian state "when appropriate"	Limited engagement; no arms embargo	Strongly pro-Israel; opposes arms restrictions	Greens: first party to name Israeli actions as genocide; Lib Dems: support arms embargo
<b>Islamophobia Definition</b>	Introduced non-statutory definition; did not adopt "Islamophobia" label	Refused to adopt APPG definition	Opposes any definition; cites free speech concerns	Both parties adopt APPG definition
<b>Prevent Strategy</b>	Broadly maintains existing framework	Review disproportionately targeted Muslims	Plans to refocus almost entirely on "Islamist extremism"	Greens: scrap Prevent; Lib Dems: reform it
<b>Immigration &amp; Rights</b>	Stricter controls; longer settlement routes	Strict controls; proposals to weaken ECHR	Repeal Equality Act; scrap ILR; proposed burqa ban	More humane; supports refugee rights and ECHR
<b>Muslim Organisations</b>	Non-engagement with MCB and Muslim bodies	Non-engagement with MCB and Muslim bodies	No engagement; hostile rhetoric	Lib Dems: active mosque outreach; Greens: inclusive community policy

 This overview is a starting point. Always read party manifestos and research your local candidates directly — what matters locally may differ from national party positions.

# Which Parties to Consider— and Why

MEND does not tell you who to vote for. But we do offer this honest assessment of your main options, depending on your priorities.



## Liberal Democrats

Consider if your priority is civil rights and social justice. Strong alignment on Gaza arms embargo, the APPG Islamophobia definition, and abolition of the Prevent duty. Active outreach to mosques and Muslim communities. Strong record on equality and refugee protection.



## Independents

Consider if you believe community-led politics is more effective. Independent councillors are free from party whipping — they vote based on the demands of their local residents, not their party leader. Many have spoken out on Gaza, hate crime, and housing without fear of discipline.



## Green Party

Consider if Palestine, civil liberties, and equality are your top priorities. The first major UK party to recognise Israeli actions as genocide. Supports full arms embargo, the APPG definition of Islamophobia, and scrapping Prevent entirely.



## Labour / Conservative

Consider only if you believe in influencing from the inside — but do so with caution. Trust in Labour is at a historic low due to its Gaza record. The Conservatives face criticism for rhetoric on "integration" and refusal to adopt an Islamophobia definition.

## Reform UK — Oppose



Reform's platform — including mosque conversion bans, hardline surveillance of religious leaders, proposed burqa bans, and mass deportations — is viewed as a direct threat to Muslim communities. Where Reform is competitive, tactical voting may be essential to keep them out.

**Always assess the local candidate, not just the party label. A non-Muslim candidate may be more aligned with your values than a Muslim candidate from a party you distrust.**



## THE IMPORTANCE KEEPING REFORM UK OUT OF OFFICE

Since the May 2024 local elections and the July 2024 general election, the far-right party Reform UK has continued to dominate opinion polls. In the 2024 local and general elections, and then in the 2025 local elections, Reform won many seats from both Labour and the Conservatives, marking its transition from a protest party into the mainstream. In 2025, it secured what the BBC called a “sweeping victory” by winning 677 council seats and securing 31% of the overall vote share, compared to Labour’s 22% and the Conservatives’ 15%. The Conservatives also lost control of all 16 councils they held before the election, while Reform were also able to take control of 10 councils, 8 of which were previously under Conservative leadership. In the buildup to the May 2026 local elections, polling puts Reform at 24-30%, Labour 17-21%, Conservatives 17-19%, Green Party 15-18% and Liberal Democrats 17-19%.

The success of Reform UK should be a cause of deep alarm to British Muslims. The party and its officials have a long record of Islamophobia and outright racism. Reform leader Nigel Farage has [made numerous Islamophobic statements](#), along with [other senior members of the party](#). Reform officials have also proposed several policies that would have a direct impact on British Muslim communities and families. For example, they

have proposed mass deportations and the elimination of Indefinite Leave to Remain, both of which would have a negative affect on Muslim families and individuals who are hoping to settle permanently in the UK. They have pledged to strengthen stop-and-search powers and refocus the widely discredited Prevent counter-extremism strategy, which would likely mean further policing of Muslim communities. Some Reform officials have also called for the banning of the burqa and face veils worn by some Muslim women. It is clear that life for British Muslims would become even more challenging under a Reform government.

### So, how can you keep Reform out?

Firstly, you can consider something called tactical voting. Tactical voting is where a voter chooses to vote for a candidate they think has the best chance of winning, even at the expense of voting for their preferred candidate, in order to influence the overall result. It is voting strategically to prevent an unwanted outcome to to increase the chances of a preferred outcome. You can [click here](#) to find out which candidate you can tactically vote for in your area to keep Reform out of office. Make sure that you coordinate locally by sharing guidance with community networks (mosques, WhatsApp groups etc) around who to vote for to keep Reform out in order to consolidate votes behind one candidate. Make sure that you encourage people in your community to vote! Low turnout could increase the chances of Reform winning in your area and beyond.

# Keeping Reform UK Out of Office

Reform UK's rapid rise should be a cause of deep alarm for British Muslims. In the 2025 local elections, Reform secured a **"sweeping victory"** — winning 677 council seats and 31% of the overall vote, compared to Labour's 22% and the Conservatives' 15%. They now control 10 councils.

## Proposed Burqa Ban

Senior Reform figures have called for a ban on the burqa and increased surveillance of those who wear face veils.

## Repeal Equality Act

Reform proposes scrapping the Equality Act 2010 — removing core protections against discrimination for Muslim communities.

## Scrap Indefinite Leave

Plans to eliminate Indefinite Leave to Remain would directly harm Muslim families seeking to settle permanently in the UK.

## Islamist-Focused Prevent

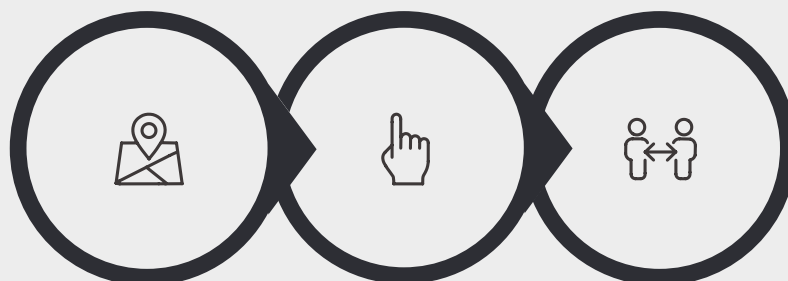
Reform plans to redraw Prevent to focus almost exclusively on "Islamist extremism," further stigmatising Muslim communities.



**Tactical Voting:** In areas where Reform is the strongest opposition, consider voting for whichever non-Reform candidate has the best chance of winning — even if they are not your first preference. Visit [tacticalvote.co.uk](https://tacticalvote.co.uk) to find out who to back in your area. Share guidance through your mosque, WhatsApp groups, and community networks to consolidate the vote.

## Tactical Voting: How to Keep Reform Out

Tactical voting means choosing the candidate most likely to beat Reform UK in your area — even if they are not your first preference. It is a legitimate and effective strategy used across British politics.



Find area

Pick strongest

Vote & coordinate

Coordinating locally is just as important as your individual vote. Share guidance through your mosque, WhatsApp groups, and community networks to consolidate votes behind the candidate best placed to beat Reform. A split opposition vote is exactly what Reform needs to win.

**Low turnout is Reform's best friend.** Encouraging every eligible Muslim voter in your community to turn out on 7th May could be the difference between Reform gaining or losing a council seat in your area.

# Don't Waste Your Vote

Elections only mean something if you take part in them. Your vote is not just a right — it is a tool for change in your community and across Britain.

To tackle the challenges facing Muslim communities — from structural Islamophobia and welfare cuts to the silencing of voices on Gaza — you must make yourself heard through voting. Low turnout helps no one more than those who wish to exclude you from the political process.

## Vote on 7th May

Check your polling station address at the Electoral Commission website and set a reminder — polling stations are open 7am to 10pm.

## Encourage Others

Share this guide with your mosque, family, and WhatsApp networks. Collective action amplifies the Muslim voice in every ward and borough.

## Stay Informed

Follow [The Muslim Vote](#) for data and guidance. For further questions, contact MEND at [info@mend.org.uk](mailto:info@mend.org.uk).

✔ **Your vote matters.** British Muslims are a growing force in local and national politics. Use your vote wisely, encourage your community to do the same, and help shape the future of your local area.

## → Electoral Commission

Enter your postcode at [electoralcommission.org.uk](http://electoralcommission.org.uk) to check if there is an election in your area and see who is standing.

## → Who Can I Vote For?

Visit [whocanivotefor.co.uk](http://whocanivotefor.co.uk) or [Democracy Club](#) for candidate lists with social media profiles.

## → Your Council's Website

Check your local council website — such as [Birmingham City Council](#) — to access voting records and committee involvement of sitting councillors.

## → Party Manifestos

Read key sections of manifestos: [Labour](#) | [Conservative](#) | [Lib Dems](#) | [Greens](#) | [Reform](#)

For further guidance on elections, voting, and getting more involved in politics at local and national level, contact MEND at [info@mend.org.uk](mailto:info@mend.org.uk).



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