

# [***London, meet the new boss, same as the old boss. Mayor Sadiq Khan wins historic third term***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BY9-GP71-DYMD-643Y-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

LONDON — London [*Mayor Sadiq Khan*](https://apnews.com/article/london-elections-khan-sunak-starmer-8f6370ac75cc3ac3b0270764fb1eac36) has a lot of cleaning up to do.

Khan, who made history Saturday by becoming the city's first mayor elected to a third term, has pledged to make the River Thames swimmable.

It wasn't a top campaign issue but it's an audacious goal considering the waterway was declared biologically dead not long before his birth in the city in 1970 and flows as an open sewer of sorts when heavy rains overwhelm London's ancient plumbing system.

Taming the Thames would not be Khan’s first swim upstream. His narrative is built around overcoming the odds.

As he frequently points out, he is the son of a bus driver and a seamstress from Pakistan. He grew up in a three-bedroom public housing apartment with seven siblings in South London. He attended a rough school and went on to study law. He was a human rights attorney before he was elected to Parliament in 2005 as a member of the center-left Labour Party, representing the area where he grew up.

In 2016, he became the first Muslim leader of a major Western capital city, overcoming an opponent whose mayoral campaign was “at least somewhat Islamophobic,” said Patrick Diamond, a public policy professor at Queen Mary University of London.

“It was seen as an affirmation of him in terms of his status as a leading Muslim politician, but also as an affirmation of London in terms of its diversity, its liberalism, its cosmopolitanism,” Diamond said. “That was significant in a country which doesn’t historically have a very strong track record for having diversity in its senior politicians.”

Khan has faced subtle and overt discrimination throughout his career due to his ethnicity and religion. Some of the sharpest barbs have come from former President Donald Trump, who has [*feuded with him*](https://apnews.com/article/cd42089c56a14c7cae777df01d754f6b) since Khan assailed Trump's campaign pledge in 2015 to ban Muslims from entering the U.S.

During a campaign rally Wednesday in Wisconsin, Trump said London and Paris were “no longer recognizable” after they “opened their doors to jihad.”

Khan, who has referred to Trump as the “poster boy for racists,” responded by saying Thursday's election was a chance to "choose hope over fear and unity over division.”

“One of the things that he does incredibly well, and I would defy anyone to disagree with this, is representing London’s different and diverse communities,” said Jack Brown, a lecturer in London studies at King's College London. “He hasn’t got absolutely everything right, but he is kind of a bringer together of different communities.”

Khan, who was ahead of the national Labour Party in calling for a cease-fire in Gaza, has taken a lot of flak for large pro-Palestinian marches in the city since the [*Israel-Hamas war*](https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war). But he's also known for speaking out against antisemitism and for building bridges with Jewish leaders, Brown said.

Despite his success at the polls, Khan is not an incredibly popular mayor. He’s been blamed for a lot of problems, many of which are beyond his control.

The mayor of London doesn’t have the authority of mayors in Paris or New York because power is shared with the city’s 32 boroughs and the financial district.

Khan has a 20-billion-pound ($25 billion) budget that primarily goes on transport, policing and working with councils and developers to achieve his affordable housing targets that he has fallen far short of meeting. Borough councils are responsible for schools, rubbish collection, social services and public housing.

His time in office has been overshadowed by crises: first the [*U.K.'s break from the European Union*](https://apnews.com/article/brexit-ap-top-news-london-boris-johnson-international-news-e48bf51838ced94e2d92adba189b4944) that weakened London's thriving financial services industry, and then the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a cost-of-living crisis.

He has touted measures he put in place such as freezing rail and bus fares and providing free meals for all primary school pupils among his biggest achievements.

Khan has deflected a lot of criticism by blaming his difficulties on a Conservative government that has impeded his plans. He said a projected win by Labour in a national election later this year would change his fortunes.

“For too long we’ve had a government that appears to be anti-London, that thinks the way to level up our country, to make it more equal, is make London poorer,” Khan told The Associated Press. "And that’s cutting off its nose to spite its face.”

But Diamond said a Labour government will face the same fiscal problems as the current administration and is unlikely to suddenly make Khan's life easier.

“You can’t always play the party ***politics*** card,” Diamond said. “The general sense in London is that Sadiq Khan does that too often. Or you can blame the Conservative government once or twice, but if it’s your only message, I think people maybe get a little bit tired and switch off to some extent.”

Khan has been criticized by opponents for a rise in crime — particularly incidents involving knives. He has responded by pledging more support for programs that work with youths to prevent crime while blaming government funding cuts.

In the outer suburbs, Khan has come under fire for expanding the city’s [*Ultra Low Emission Zone*](https://apnews.com/article/london-car-pollution-tax-older-politics-labour-conservatives-climate-8d8b97be250d8c18b7a0220f2dd3477b) that fines drivers of more-polluting older cars 12.50 pounds (about $16) a day. Although the policy was introduced in central London by his predecessor, Boris Johnson in 2015, it has widely been attributed to Khan because of its unpopular expansion, though it only applies to a small fraction of vehicles.

His main opponent, Susan Hall, a London Assembly member, had vowed to “stop the war on motorists” and scrap the program on her first day in office if elected.

Khan, who has made cleaning up London's air pollution a personal mission since he developed asthma as an adult, considers those efforts among his biggest wins.

Making the Thames swimmable in the next decade would expand his mission from clean air to clean water. Brown said that might be a more tangible achievement — given that air pollution is often invisible — but it's probably not something that won over a lot of voters.

“I don’t think many Londoners are calling out for a dip in the Thames, but why not?" Brown said. "You know, green policy’s all good."

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Associated Press writer Jill Lawless contributed.

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