

# [***Veteran British left-wing disruptor George Galloway wins a special election dominated by war in Gaza***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BFM-DHP1-DYMD-61J8-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Associated Press

March 1, 2024 Friday 8:40 PM GMT

Copyright 2024 Associated Press All Rights Reserved

**Section:** INTERNATIONAL NEWS

**Length:** 907 words

**Byline:** PAN PYLAS, Associated Press

**Dateline:** LONDON

**Body**

LONDON — A veteran left-wing British political disruptor has won a special election in a town in northern England with a big Muslim minority following a contest that was mired in [*chaos and controversy*](https://apnews.com/article/uk-labour-candidate-israel-gaza-a410e551de7bb8c8fdec1f7f386f94bb) and dominated by [*the Israel-Hamas war*](https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war).

George Galloway's victory was described as “beyond alarming" by Conservative Prime Minister [*Rishi Sunak*](https://apnews.com/hub/rishi-sunak), who used a Friday evening address to the nation to warn that British democracy was being targeted by extremists.

Galloway, 69, swept to victory in Thursday's contest, winning almost 40% of the vote in the parliamentary seat of Rochdale.

In his victory speech, the fedora-wearing Galloway took aim at Keir Starmer, the leader of the main opposition Labour Party, who according to opinion polls is likely to become the United Kingdom's prime minister in the [*general election this year*](https://apnews.com/article/uk-election-labour-party-starmer-sunak-2dc74d6ef3624958756b10ce0319aab1).

“Keir Starmer, this is for Gaza," he said. "You have paid, and you will pay, a high price for the role that you have played in enabling, encouraging and covering for the catastrophe presently going on in occupied Palestine in the Gaza Strip.”

Galloway, a former Labour member of parliament who was expelled from the party in 2003, also declared “Labour is on notice” and hailed what he called a “shifting of the tectonic plates."

Labour said that Galloway only won because the party pulled its support for its candidate, Azhar Ali, for suggesting that Israel was complicit in Hamas’ attack on Oct. 7, which saw militants kill around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and take about 250 others hostage.

In the absence of Labour's backing and with many of Rochdale's Muslim voters dismayed at the party's reluctance to call for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza, Ali ended up coming in fourth.

“Galloway only won because Labour didn't stand a candidate,” Starmer said. “Obviously we will put up a first-class candidate, a unifier, before the voters in Rochdale at the general election.”

Galloway's victory means that from next week, Parliament will once again be home to one of the most eloquent orators from the left wing of U.K. ***politics***, who will clearly use his position to raise his opposition to Israel's operation in Gaza, which, according to the Hamas-run health ministry, has led to [*the deaths of more than 30,000 people*](https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-war-latest-02-29-2024-ae3d114b28cafd3b1a806bfaa9f83cab).

The Board of Deputies of British Jews, the largest Jewish community organization in the U.K., said that Galloway’s victory marks “a dark day” for the U.K.’s Jewish community.

“George Galloway is a demagogue and conspiracy theorist who has brought the ***politics*** of division and hate to every place he has ever stood for Parliament," it said in a statement.

The constituency of Rochdale has traditionally been a Labour seat. Galloway said that his Workers Party of Britain will contest similar seats in constituencies where there is a sizeable Muslim minority in the upcoming general election, which must take place within the next 11 months.

The governing Conservative Party, which hasn't historically performed well in Rochdale, came in third and voiced worries that Galloway's victory will stoke tensions in the town and beyond.

In an unexpected statement on Friday evening, Sunak made a call for unity while claiming that Galloway was a “candidate that dismisses the horror of what happened on Oct. 7, who glorifies Hezbollah.”

Linking his victory with other divisive developments on the U.K. political scene since Hamas launched its attack and Israel's subsequent response, Sunak said “our democracy itself is a target” for extremists, noting how some lawmakers in Parliament don't feel safe in their homes and that local political meetings have been stormed.

“In recent weeks and months, we have seen a shocking increase in extremist disruption and criminality," he said. “What started as protests on our streets have descended into intimidation, threats and planned acts of violence. Jewish children fearful to wear their school uniform lest it reveals their identity. Muslim women abused in the street for the actions of a terrorist group they have no connection with.”

He urged those joining the almost weekly [*mass protests*](https://apnews.com/article/london-israel-palestinians-protests-70dbc6345ce40c5311f9bd2b943328d2) against Israel's offensive in central London and other towns and cities in the U.K. to do so respectfully, and said that his government would support police.

Galloway poured scorn on a prime minister warning about democracy after he’d won an election. He dismissed Sunak's central charge, telling Sky News that he does “not respect the prime minister at all” and that “millions and millions of people in this country despise the prime minister.”

It's not the first time that Galloway has created a stir since he began his political career a half-century ago as a firebrand left-wing Labour member of Parliament for a constituency in Glasgow, Scotland.

In 1994, he faced widespread opposition for meeting then Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and telling him: "Sir, I salute your courage, your strength, your indefatigability.”

In 2004, he returned to Parliament as a lawmaker for the anti-war Respect Party after a special election in a heavily Muslim seat in east London, but was defeated in the general election the following year.

He was elected again in a special election in 2012, but lost his seat once more in the election of 2015.

As well as being an eloquent advocate for his political views, which saw him [*take U.S. senators to task in 2005*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVdYp2GDC-4), Galloway has also courted ridicule, most notably in 2006 when he impersonated a cat in the reality television show “Celebrity Big Brother.”

**Load-Date:** March 1, 2024

**End of Document**