

Sir Sadiq Khan interviewed by Fraser Nelson

Labour party conference, Leonardo Hotel, 29 September 2025

Sir Sadiq Khan: I'm incredibly proud of the city. I'm the mayor of the capital city, and I think it's the greatest city in the world. And I think there's a reason why politicians and commentators, both in the UK and across the globe, attack London. I think they recognise that we bust the myth that exists that integration can't be successful. They bust the myth that exists that you can't be an ethnic minority and be proudly British or proudly English, that you can't be liberal, that you can't be successful, that you can't be multicultural. And I think what's important is for us to recognise what is going on. And actually, I think it's a badge of pride that bad people hate London. But we've got to recognize, though, that there are people who've never experienced London who may believe that stuff. And that's why telling stories is so important. So, to explain to people, in a non-patronizing way, that one of the reasons we are successful economically, culturally, socially is because of immigration. It's because whether you go back to the Vikings, the Normans, the Saxons, the Huguenots, the Jewish population, the Irish, the Windrush generation, those from the subcontinent, those from East Africa, and I could go on. It's been successive waves of migration that have helped make London what it is. And we can't assume if you live in other parts of the country or other parts of the world, and you just see through the prism of could be social media - it could be President Trump or whatever - that people draw conclusions that are unreasonable. That's what they've seen. And so, one of my jobs as the mayor of our capital city is to talk up, based on the evidence, why we are a great city. I suspect that is one of the reasons why I'm living rent-free in the head of President Trump. I'm slightly concerned he might send me an invoice!

Fraser Nelson: But it's not just America, though. I mean, even within the British debate, it seems that race started off when you were growing up in a bad place, got to a better place, but now all of a sudden it seems to matter a lot more if you're Muslim or if you're not white. I mean, first of all, you could argue that this came with the identity politics of the left, of the idea of white privilege, basically re-racializing the debate. And now we're getting, which I genuinely hadn't heard of before the start of this year, the idea that you can't be English if you're not white. And Suella Braverman, a former Home Secretary who you have had dealings with, she was even saying, look at me, I can't possibly be English. Now, this is something new and it's not American.

Sir Sadiq Khan: Well, I think it's possible to, on the one hand, say that this is the greatest country in the world if you're an ethnic minority or religious minority, which I passionately believe it's possible to say. On the one hand, we've made massive progress since I was first born in south London 55 years ago. But there are challenges, and we mustn't be complacent about the progress we've made. So, when I was growing up in south London, it wasn't uncommon to use the P-word to

describe somebody like me or the N-word for somebody who's African-Caribbean or the Y-word if you are Jewish based on the colour of our skin. I then moved on to people talking about your ethnic origin, and then it's moved on to religion more recently. But the idea that you define somebody's nationality, being English or British or American, by either the colour of their skin or where their great-grandfather was born is ridiculous to me. I'm incredibly proud that Rishi Sunak made history by being the first Prime Minister who is a Hindu. But also the fact that he is of that political persuasion shows we've got diversity within ethnic groups, and that's something we should celebrate. And the idea that Rishi, for his sins being a Tory, isn't English, I just find ridiculous. I mean, he's quintessentially English. Or to say that Mo Farah, one of the most successful track and field Olympians isn't British, or that Dua Lipa, one of the most successful singers isn't British because her parents were asylum seekers from Kosovo - I just find that ridiculous. But it shows why those of us who believe passionately in progressive politics and about being proud in our city, our country, our nation should talk up why it's important. And I think it goes to your values being British, because obviously you have a British passport. A passport goes to a sense of contribution. It goes to all the things that make us part of this team that is being British.

Fraser Nelson: Now, you mentioned problems and tensions. What are the problems that you see in the integration of London, for example? Are you concerned about Sharia courts and things like that?

Sir Sadiq Khan: Less so than others. But there is there is a serious point about about Sharia courts and indeed some of the Orthodox Jewish Brits have for years had Jewish courts to deal with differences in private property matters and to do with divorce. There are Sharia courts across the country, but I'm quite clear, I speak as a former lawyer, as a British citizen, and as the Mayor of London, English and Welsh law is supreme not just in London but in our country. And it's got to be. And any other laws that come from religion are going to be subordinate to the laws of the land. And by the way, these Sharia courts and Jewish courts have been around for decades across the country, but it's been picked up in recent times only in the context of London, which makes you beg the question: Why? And it's a proxy for the culture war that's taking place. And it's a proxy for some of the views people have, which is the legitimacy I claim as a proud Londoner, a proud Englishman, a proud Brit is compromised because of the colour of my skin and the religion I'm proud to belong to, which is a Muslim.

Fraser Nelson: And how Muslim are you? [laughter].

Fraser Nelson: I ask because religious people vary in their answer. For example, we now have a Muslim home secretary: Shabana Mahmood. She says faith is the most important thing in her life. Others who say they're from a Muslim background - or a Christian background - but they don't particularly believe, or practise. It's not part of

their life, doesn't really shape their worldview. Where would you place yourself on that spectrum of faith?

Sir Sadiq Khan: Well, I've got friends who are Muslim in all political parties. I don't quite know Zia Yusuf, but I know very well Sajid Javid in the Conservative Party. Of course, Shabana is a dear friend of mine. I'm pretty Muslim. Look, you know, I pray, I fast. I try not to do bad things. I'm respectful to women and to people who are my elders and stuff. I think the point Shabana was making, I think, is, you know, being a Muslim is intrinsic to who we are. So, I only eat halal, I don't drink and those are the values that are instilled in me. And by the way, the overlap between those who are Muslim or Jewish or Christian is huge. And that's why people who are members of an organised religion have far more in common than people otherwise think. And so, these words you hear from the right - flag, faith, family - are important to people who are members of organised religion as well. What's wonderful about Shabana as well as Saj and others is the pluralism within the followers of Islam, because we're not one-dimensional as Muslims. The fact that Zia - I may disagree passionately with some of the things his party stands for - but I think we should be incredibly proud that in this country of ours, you've got somebody one of the most senior positions in the Reform Party who is Muslim.

Fraser Nelson: Anas Sarwar made exactly this point in Scotland. But his speech was selectively edited by Reform in a way that basically inverted its meaning. He was saying: Look at the integration, you've got people, Asians, Muslims and all sorts of political parties, and that's because we are diverse people. This is the point and Reform cast that is talking as if we are somehow rising up in the country. Tell me. Talk to me about Reform a little bit. I mean, would you regard the policy on indefinite leave to remain as being racist as Keir Starmer has said? Or do you think that's a word too far?

Sir Sadiq Khan: Well, the other three points related to your question. The first point is the importance of rebutting misinformation, disinformation and lies. And it's really important in the context of speaking to leading Times journalists, we've got to recognise now that when we were growing up, in our sources of news, whether it's TV or newspaper or radio, there'd be balance, there'd be fact checking. That doesn't exist anymore. That worries me because sometimes, you know, if you're a follower of certain YouTube channels or a follower on social media, your algorithms mean you're getting information that's not fact checked. And that goes to the Sharia point about London being the Sharia capital of the world, all that nonsense and stuff. So, it really is important that we rebut things that we know are blatant lies. And you pointed out that the video of Anas was a blatant editing, selectively to make Anas say things he wasn't really saying...

Fraser Nelson: The opposite of what he was saying.

Sir Sadiq Khan: Quite, quite. The second point I make, which is linked to the reform point, is I've been very careful. Two weeks ago in London, Fraser, there was a huge march. There were - objectively, it's been checked - more than 150,000 people on this march. Many of them were decent British people who've got concerns. And they were on that march. The march was organised, though, by a violent racist who's a convict, and nearly all the speakers were far right, many of them racist. Racists from France, from Amsterdam, from Belgium had come in to take part in that protest. And so, I distinguish the organizers of that march, who are racist and members of the far right, and those who went to the march, whose fears are being played on rather than addressed by Yaxley-Lennon and others. The third point I make is in relation to Reform, dealing with your point substantively, which is, you know, it's really important to have this debate without unnecessary name calling. So, I don't call the funders of the Reform Party racist. I don't call Nigel Farage racist. I am concerned about his policy in relation to indefinite leave to remain. Let me explain why I'm concerned about this policy. You know, Shabana and myself and many of us who are members of the Labour Party are ethnic minorities, are children of immigrants, are passionately against illegal migration. Immigration is very complicated, though. You've got asylum seekers and refugees, you've got students, you've got work visas, you've got family reunion, and I could go on. And we're against illegal migration. Somebody who's got indefinite leave to remain has come here lawfully, played by the rules of the game, often worked five, six, seven, twelve years and not broken any rules, and has, for a variety of reasons, maybe delayed applying for their British passport or is waiting to apply for a British passport. The idea that you would deport them is the most un-British thing I can imagine, because we're all about rule of law and we're all about equality. And I think it's wrong. And I think we should call it out for what it is. What Shabana is talking about today is actually contribution. You don't get indefinite leave to remain without contributing. And that's why it's really important to call that out and so I've been quite careful in my language. Here's my nervousness, Fraser, when you use the R-word. I've been the recipient of racist behaviour, both physically as a boy growing up, but also recently in some of the things people have said. I think it's a really loaded word. And so, I'm very careful when I use it for the obvious reason that I don't want to devalue this really powerful word, but also, I'm a bit nervous about people who may follow the Reform Party thinking I'm inadvertently or advertently calling them racist. And I'm not. Because I'm somebody who, as a 22-year-old, went to Tower Hamlets to campaign against the BNP which had won a seat in 1993 there. And so, I understand that sometimes people can be led astray and voted for a racist party. I'm somebody who's a good friend of Margaret Hodge, Jon Cruddas and the team that really worked hard in 2010 to win those seats of the BNP. And so, I'm always nervous at giving the impression that, somehow, I'm name-calling, because we've got to have this debate, because I want to explain to people why Nigel Farage is selling you something dodgy, as indeed is Yaxley-Lennon.

Fraser Nelson: I spoke to Margaret Hodge about this earlier, and she was saying that there's a risk of sort of forgetting the lessons that were learned fighting the BNP in the first time. And one of them is the language. Do you think there is a risk that the party simply does forget some of the tactics that work, how some of the language, if it's too strong, can be self-defeating?

Sir Sadiq Khan: Well, you've got to call out people when they are behaving in a certain way. That's why I wasn't afraid to say a few days ago that I think President Trump is a racist, he's sexist, he's misogynistic and he's homophobic. So, I'm quite clear relation to Donald Trump.

Fraser Nelson: You didn't say that about Farage, though, right?

Sir Sadiq Khan: No, but it is important to debate with him. You've got to be on the pitch. And so if you are concerned about the fact that you can't get you know, a hospital appointment as soon as you want, if you're concerned about your kid not getting into a decent school, if you're concerned about the lack of council housing and you're blaming the Other, I want to explain to you why it's not the Other's fault. The fault is because successive governments haven't built enough council homes. The fault is because we've not invested in the NHS. The fault is because we've not made sure our schools are fit for local children. And actually, blaming the other is the oldest trick in the book. And we've got to call that out.

Fraser Nelson: But you can look at levels of immigration and be concerned about them, as many people are, especially in the Labour Party, in all parties. And some of the things you point to is housing pressures, which of course you've covered, but also crime. Now there are figures and you quote them saying that the hospital figures show that knife crime assaults are going down in London. But then again, there is what you might call high-visibility crime. So, we've got shoplifting, which is absolutely surging in London, as it is nationally right now. And there's the feeling that the police basically don't really intervene. Then there's also people tailgating the Tube, crashing the barriers. Now that doesn't seem to be policed or enforced. So you can understand why it gives people the impression of lawlessness as a brazenness about it, which makes people think that this is a proxy for wider crime.

Sir Sadiq Khan: Spot on. Look, I think we've got to recognise politicians that there is crime and there is fear of crime. Often the perception is worse than the reality. Now, if you're somebody who is doing the right thing and paying your fare to get on the Tube and you see somebody breaking the rules, it's unfair. And that is your perception that everyone is a fare evader, and it's really important to understand people's perception. I've met too many victims of crime or too many bystanders of crime, too many grieving families, and I understand the importance of these issues. But it is a fact. And you've talked about this a lot recently, but crime has gone down hugely in our capital city. It's still too high. So, I'll give you an example, which the

police published today. In every borough in London - we have 32 boroughs - a violent crime with injury has gone down. Every borough in London. Homicides, which you can measure objectively, are at a ten-year low in London. Teenage homicides are at a 20-year low in London. It's still too high. One grieving family is one too many. Burglaries are down. Gun crime is down. Personal theft, personal robbery, stealing mobile phones is down. But what happens now is, not unreasonably, you see people videoing this and it's on social media, so you could be in your living room safely, and because you see this stuff, you fear this is taking place all across our city. Now, that's perfectly reasonable to be letting people know there is crime and we can address that crime, but to use it to try and win votes or to give an impression that there's a link between that fare evader and immigration, or to give misinformation that crime is going up because of immigration is just not factually true. I mean, you did this wonderful graph a few days ago, this really interesting graph that Fraser published which showed immigration going in one direction and crime going in another direction. So, there's no correlation. There's no causation between immigration and crime. That's not to say every person who comes here has come here lawfully. That's not to say everyone has come here lawfully is still lawful when they're here. There are obviously exceptions to that. And so that's why I made the point, you've got to be on the pitch to have those arguments and those debates. That's why when you use the R-word, when you call somebody racist, it almost makes people cower, not feel confident to raise their concerns. I want you to raise your concerns so we can talk about it in a non-patronising way. I can educate you and we can if there are common problems, we can solve them.

Fraser Nelson: But what is going wrong with shoplifting and tailgating, for example? I mean, how much power do you have as mayor? You will see this strange juxtaposition if you want to show a graph of things going up and going down. Murders are going down - I think the lowest in 22 years in London, actually, and the 12-month rolling basis - but when you look at shoplifting, it is surging. So it's almost as if the police have been told, don't worry about the low-level crime and that the shopkeepers don't bother reporting it. And also, the staff in the London Underground quite often ignore people trying to get through. I was in Westminster Tube recently. I was a guy trying to take a Lime bike down the down the Tube right now. He was stopped by the woman, and I spoke to her afterwards and she was saying it was really difficult because these things are never enforced and the guys who are doing it know it's not enforced.

Sir Sadiq Khan: So, there's two issues. One is shoplifting. One is fare evasion.

Fraser Nelson: And the idea that certain crimes are not enforced if a low enough level.

Sir Sadiq Khan: I'm not in any way excusing criminality, I'm explaining what is going on. So, in terms of shoplifting, the LSE did a piece of research three years ago

showing that, during a cost-of-living crisis, acquisitive crime goes up. I'm not excusing criminality. Acquisitive crime goes up. What's also happened, twinned with that, is that, a few years ago, the previous government said any shoplifting where the value is less than £200 is a magistrate-only offence rather than a Crown court one, which means many police officers weren't arresting. But then the shops got the impression they're not reporting it because the police won't turn up. And if they do turn up, the person who is responsible will be let off with a slap on the wrist. And the fourth thing that happened, being crude and frank, is the Met Police - we're talking about London - had a £1.1 billion cut in their budgets, a third of their core budget. So, they were rationing services. The police made an operational decision: look, we've got limited resources, let's prioritise these sorts of crime and de-prioritise - and almost, I hate to use this word, decriminalise - the issue of shoplifting. What's happened since we've had a new Commissioner and we've been investing from City Hall, we've made it quite clear: report everything. Report everything, because we want to take action. We've got new town centre teams that are going into shops to build a relationship with those shops. So yes, we've seen an increase in crimes reported. We've also seen an increase in people arrested and prosecutions for shoplifting as well. So, we're making progress in relation to shoplifting. We'll make more progress going forward because it goes to not just those shops losing lots of money, but reputational damage to our capital city. In relation to fare evasion, half - half! - Of transport workers who were assaulted are because they're challenging somebody who is fare evading.

Fraser Nelson: So, have they been told not to intervene then?

Sir Sadiq Khan: What we've done is we've introduced transport enforcement officers, 500 enforcement officers. We've introduced working with British Transport Police officers on public transport. And we're spending money to get Met police officers down there. And here's the good news: fare evasion, which was north of 4%, was then down to 3.8% and now to 3.5%. Our target is to get to 1.5% over the next few years. Compare and contrast. I'm not excusing any lawbreaking. Fare evasion is less in London than in Manchester and Newcastle, less in London than in New York, Paris and Washington. But it goes to this thesis that London is the criminal capital of the world. And again, when you see people like Robert Jenrick making this video - and he's right and proper to call out lawbreaking - the question is whether he is doing it because he's a good citizen or is he trying to feed into this narrative that London is lawless. I think it's important to say any lawbreaking is wrong, it leads to the perception of unfairness, but we're taking action to address it.

Fraser Nelson: But the issue of unfairness is getting resonance. Some people use the phrase two-tier justice. We hear that quite a lot now. For example, one of your objectives as mayor is to get 80% of journeys on foot or by bike by 2040, and you've introduced what they call low traffic neighbourhoods and you've got something like 100 of these. And in The Spectator this week, my colleague Mary Wakefield, she

described it - and I want to know if she's described it right - if you drive just four miles an hour over the 20 mile an hour limit, you get a £100 charge notice, three points on your licence, and there are fines for pausing at the wrong place, for turning into one of the increasing number of restricted zones, for doing a U-turn. The cameras are everywhere. The eyes of the state and the sky.

Sir Sadiq Khan: Are you now advocating letting people off and not enforcing the law?

Fraser Nelson: I'm asking you if that's a fair description of the transport system.

Sir Sadiq Khan: It's not, I think, whether you are a fare evader, whether you're a shoplifter, whether you break the laws on the road, we should enforce them. Do you not agree? And so, and here's the reason why. So, we are a city now of 10 million. We are growing. Nothing wrong per se with growth. You've got to plan for that growth. If all 10,000 people jump in a car and drive around, we get gridlocked. That's point number one. Point number two, if you drive a car more than 30mph...

Fraser Nelson: This is 22 miles an hour in this case

Sir Sadiq Khan: ... In this case, more than 30 miles an hour, you're six times more likely to kill or seriously injure somebody than 20mph. Each year in London, there are more than 3000 Londoners, more than 3000 Londoners killed or seriously injured. So, what's happened? Local councils, who control 95% of the roads, and TfL who controlled 5% of roads, have tried to introduce in certain areas a 20mph speed limit. Why is that important? Because if you're driving at three miles per hour A, you're less likely to be involved in a collision, and if, God forbid, you are, the child or the adult isn't likely to be killed or seriously injured. And here's the great news. In the first year of bringing in 20mph in some parts of London in those streets, comparing and contrasting that street to previously, there's been a reduction by 25% in collisions and a reduction in 24% of those killed and seriously injured. That means in London there are dozens and dozens of parents this year who are not grieving the loss of their child compared to last year. That's a win-win.

Fraser Nelson: So, you've got a system there which is working. It's bringing in lots of money for the government and local authorities.

Sir Sadiq Khan: It's about saving lives. It's saving lives.

Fraser Nelson: Lambeth got £1 million in six months. That's not insignificant.

Sir Sadiq Khan: Well, by that logic, we shouldn't go after fare evaders because it brings money to TfL.

Fraser Nelson: My point is, what Mary went on to say was that in her low traffic zone, she saw a Mercedes G-wagon come along, driving on the wrong side down the street. Now, people, if you live in that part of Islington, you know those G-wagons are a sign of a gang leader. This is a place where the Tottenham Turks and Hackney Turks are having it out. I think one of them shot a nine-year-old girl near her street recently. She was pointing out the juxtaposition between having to acclimatise to a system where the elites are struggling to get hold of gangland crime, struggling to get hold of shoplifters - cameras everywhere, shoplifters aren't being apprehended but for the smallest offence for a motorway, the cameras get them - the point is the unfairness there. You've described a very successful system of implementing and policing 20 mile an hour zones with all the benefits you describe. But the same technology does not seem to apply to getting control of gang crime or of a low-level crime, which gives people the fear, so that's the idea of there being two different standards.

Sir Sadiq Khan: I get that. And it goes to her perception. She feels scared. Right?

Fraser Nelson: She feels that she feels there's an imbalance in who's being policed and who's not.

Sir Sadiq Khan: At one extreme you mentioned homicides. As we've discussed a few moments ago, homicides are at a ten-year low in London. Teenage homicides, the last time we had the number of teenage deaths we've had is 2003. So, we're making progress on homicides and teenage homicides. The number of young people hurt with a knife is down by 24%, since when I first became mayor. People who die by gun crime is down by 41%. So, we're making really good progress. It's still too high on serious crime and serious violence. But I agree with you. We've also got to bear down on other crimes which the police call high-volume crimes, shoplifting, mobile phone thefts and so forth. And we're making progress there as well. But I've got to say, Fraser, when you remove a third of the police's budget, when you close down youth clubs, it's a challenge. So, what have you done? We believe in early intervention. I think no crime is inevitable. I think it's preventable. And so, we're investing in young people. We're investing in youth clubs. We're also investing in the police as well, to bear down on the stuff that Mary is concerned about. But we are taking action against fare evaders, shoplifters and those who break the law as well when it comes to driving.

Fraser Nelson: Right. But the figures show zero for shoplifting is still going up a lot. And there's cameras everywhere. You see the paradox there? If you're a motorist, absolutely, very good law enforcement there. If you're a shoplifter, there might as well not be any cameras or any police.

Sir Sadiq Khan: But that's not acceptable. We've got to make more progress on shoplifting. In the last year more people have been arrested over the last year for

shoplifting than in any previous year. In recent times, the police are also - controversial, but I support them - using live facial recognition to deal with thefts from shops as well. And we build up confidence so that shopkeepers have confidence to report these things. I'm also worried, by the way, about assaults on shopkeepers. I don't want any impression to be given that that is acceptable or that the figures are not too high.

Fraser Nelson: Okay. Quick question on housing. Big target for London. 88,000 new homes. And you said you like to get as close as you can towards it. Is that basically saying that the way things are going the target not going to be met? Here's one of my graphs here, you've probably seen it: housing starts are falling a lot. This does not seem to me like a capital that is gearing up to meet that target.

Sir Sadiq Khan: So, a few things. I think housing is the single biggest issue facing London. We face a housing crisis. So, there's good news and there's bad news. The good news is we have had more house completions since I've been Mayor than at any time since the 1930s. The good news is council house building is at levels not seen since the 1970s. The bad news is the supply of housing is nowhere near meeting the demand. We will not build 88,000 homes a year for the foreseeable future. It's never happened before in London's history. In the 1930s, we got near 80,000. But it needs a big, big transformation in planning rules, in regulation, in land use. But the good news, we're working with Steve Reed and, before him, Angela Rayner. Over the course of the next few weeks, we'll be announcing a package to try and work with councils, developers and others to build the homes we need. I'll give you some examples of what we've been doing. We recognise there isn't enough brownfield site in London to build the homes, 88,000 homes a year. So, there are parts of London that are green belt. Not all of this is lush and green as you'd expect from the green belt. Some is poor quality, badly maintained, inaccessible. With the right infrastructure going into that greenbelt, we can help address the housing.

Fraser Nelson: The collapse in housing starts seems as though something recently has gone badly wrong.

Sir Sadiq Khan: Across the country, if you speak to the Housebuilders Federation, it's the worst time since the Second World War. It's been a perfect storm. A combination of Brexit, which led to construction inflation and a shortage of construction workers, the pandemic, the mini budget with interest rates and inflation, the building safety regulation concerns and the delay that's been in the building safety regulation coming through, the two staircases rule when it comes to tall buildings. And I could go on. And so, there's been a perfect storm, which has affected the entire country and London's not being excluded. The good news is people still want to come to London. So, there's nothing wrong in terms of that. We're going to plan for that growth, and that means building the homes we desperately

need. Yes, market value homes, but also council homes and genuinely affordable homes as well.

Fraser Nelson: Okay. Final question about before we open it up onto Labour and general. The last time Donald Trump attacked you, when he was up in Scotland, the Prime Minister leapt to your defence, saying, basically, that's a friend of mine. Keir Starmer is your friend and has been for quite some time. When you look at the latest polls, his net approval rating of -66 is pretty low. What do you think the country isn't seeing about Keir Starmer? What is it that you see him as a friend which doesn't seem to be getting across?

Sir Sadiq Khan: We can't pretend things are better than they are. We won the general election last July, and there was an expectation that things would change pretty quickly. And because of the inheritance, because of the legacy, we've not managed to change things as quickly as voters have expected us to do. We've got to recognise that. And I think we've got to accelerate the pace of delivery. We've also got to be better at telling the story of what we're trying to do. If this is a game of football, what I'd say is it's a 90-minute game and we've played almost 20 minutes and we're two nil down. We're two nil down, and we've got to make sure that we use the rest of the time in this game - three and a half years - to turn it around. I think it's possible. I support Liverpool, the greatest team in the world, and I remember very well Istanbul when we had been three nil down at half time and we fought for another 45 minutes, and the rest is history.

Fraser Nelson: Politics is also about narrative. What would you say is the narrative of your mayoralty?

Sir Sadiq Khan: Somebody who's tried his very best to build a greener, safer, healthier, more prosperous, more affordable city over the last nine years. We've managed to increase fivefold the amount of safe cycling, build record numbers of council homes. When I was running to be mayor, I was told it would take 193 years to bring the air in London within normal limits. We've done 185 years early. Invested in our city. More electric buses in London than any city in Europe. More than 60% of our taxis are electric. Impatient for change. The key thing I'd say is this phrase in terms of my record in London. I'm somebody who has seen the joys of London, and that led to me being a firm believer in the London promise. The London promise is very simple, actually. My family is a good example of this. You work hard, you get a helping hand, and you can achieve anything. I hope, you know, in 30 years' time when I retire, [laughter] people will think of me and my mayoralty as that helping hand.

Fraser Nelson: Is there a fixed term of mayoralties?

Sir Sadiq Khan: Thankfully not.

Fraser Nelson: We could be here in 30 years' time.

Sir Sadiq Khan: You and I will definitely be here and some of you [audience] will be here.

Fraser Nelson: My point is about narrative is that surely the Labour government deserves a slightly better narrative than the one it's got right now. You would struggle to say, what is the story of this government? You've told the story of your mayoralty. What should the story of the government be?

Sir Sadiq Khan: I think when when we ran - I say we because I'm Team Labour - last July, the one word on the manifesto was 'change'. I think we've got to show change, Fraser. I think not enough people have seen positive change. And I think we either are the disruptors, or we will be disrupted. We either are the change makers, or we will be changed. Over the next few months, we've got big speech tomorrow, but also a really big budget on November the 25th. I think the budget is really, really important. Why? Because you've got to allow sufficient runway for the budget to bear fruit. You know, a giveaway budget for an election, people see it for what it is. I think this budget gives the Chancellor, the Prime Minister, Team Labour, enough time to bring about that change. It's a really important budget. I think it's the most pivotal event since the election on July the 4th. It's that important.

Fraser Nelson: As you see, your main opponent now is going to be Reform. We've seen their story. Labour would need a counter story, and I guess that's what the Prime Minister is trying to do, a story about Britain. People have been discussing whether to come up with a formal definition of Islamophobia, to basically outlaw it, as it were. More formally, as I understand it, Shabana Mahmood is against that. She thinks when you try to specifically protect anything, things can backfire. What's your position on this?

Sir Sadiq Khan: I'm quite clear. Listen, Islam, the religion, does not need protection. God does not need man-made legislation to protect Him. The followers of Islam, Muslims, do need protection. So, we've got great laws in this country that ostensibly protect people of colour - the Race Relations Act - from hatred, from incitement to hatred, and the courts have got really good powers to give additional sentences of their aggravating features.

Fraser Nelson: And people of faith, too.

Sir Sadiq Khan: To come to that. What's happened is this: you can have a sentence for religiously aggravated offences if there's religious aggravating factors. The law has been very good, rightfully so, about protecting Jewish people who are both members of religion and - the case law says - members of a race. I think some

clever members of the far right - it's not an oxymoron, by the way - are using the loophole that exists to lawfully incite hatred against Muslims because they know there is this loophole in the law. And I make this point gently, you know, they will come after the Muslims today because they're allowed to do so. They'll be going after Hindus and Sikhs and others in following periods. But I think this loophole does need to be closed. I'm not saying blasphemy by the back door. I'm not saying Islam needs protection. I'm not saying God needs protection. I'm saying there are people who are Muslims who currently are protected by the law, and there are currently people who are inciting hatred against Muslims and action not being taken against them.

Fraser Nelson: But you see, the problem with the word 'Islamophobia' can be taken by those people to saying...

Sir Sadiq Khan: I deliberately use the phrase 'anti-Muslim hatred' because I understand the concerns. I'm somebody who loves satire. You know, I grew up on Spitting Image. I get the importance of humour. But also, I think the joy of religion is you should be able to debate it and argue it. Whether you're a secularist or whether you're debating Judaism versus Christianity versus Islam, that's the joy of debate. The great prophets debated about religion and stuff - that does not need protection. So I'm not saying the religion of Islam needs protection, I'm not saying we should bring blasphemy laws in through the back door. I'm saying there is a loophole when it comes to Muslims not being currently protected by the great laws we have.

Fraser Nelson: But overall, I mean, Kemi Badenoch once said Britain is the best country to be black. Quite controversial her saying that, but you can see what she was getting at. When you look at the success of Muslims in public life...

Sir Sadiq Khan: I've been quite clear, Fraser, that not only is this the best country, in my view, to be a Muslim, there is no other country in the world I'd raise my two daughters. That's not saying it's perfect, though. You know, I say this to you, Fraser, in a gentle way. Two weeks ago, not only was I scared because of the march taking place in central London, I've spoken to people across the country who were scared because that march, the ripples of hatred that march spread. Now, I'm not saying we should ban that march. Protest is very important. It's one of the joys of democracy. But some of the messages coming out from that march, from some of the racists - not the very many, many tens of thousands of decent, law abiding people - were anti-Muslim hatred, and you're mainstreaming and normalizing people to think it's okay to go after somebody because they are Muslim. I'm not saying protect the religion of Islam. I never said that. What I am saying is we got to protect those Brits, those Londoners, those English people, those Scots, Welsh and Irish who are Muslim, who currently have no protection from the law.

Fraser Nelson: I'll now open this to questions. So we'll do groups of three. I can see lots of hands up.

Speaker3: I'm James, I'm the cabinet member for transport in the London Borough of Southwark. I just want to say that I think that ULEZ is possibly the best policy that was introduced in recent years. Absolutely transformational. I'm always trying to get people out of their cars. A lot of people tell me that they want to, but that public transport isn't good enough. What can we do to improve transport in our city?

Fraser Nelson: Lime bike.

Speaker3: And it's slightly controversial.

Speaker5: Question for you both. When you were talking about the mainstreaming of anti-Muslim thoughts - Fraser, in your previous job with *The Spectator*, you published very openly anti-Muslim articles by people like Rod Liddle or Douglas Murray, etc. Do you think perhaps the respectable media, as it was, needs to have a look at itself and what it's done in spreading this kind of thing?

Speaker6: Hi, my name is Simran. I'm a Patchwork Foundations Delegate. And my question for you is, as someone who is from the north and currently at uni, I find that a lot of the opportunities, whether it's internships or grad schemes, take place most in London. However, given my financial background, I find that that isn't as much of an opportunity for me. So, my question for you as the Mayor, what are you doing in place to make these opportunities not just exclusive to people who are from the Greater London region?

Sir Sadiq Khan: So, listen, I'm quite clear in my nine plus years as mayor, I'm not anti-car I'm not anti-motorist. It's really important that I say that. It's really because people misunderstand what we're trying to do in London and assume we're anti-motorist anti-car. But Fraser was right to refer to my ambition is by 2040 over 80% of people to use active travel, walk cycle and public transport to get from home to work, to leisure, university, whatever. It's currently at 65%. And the genesis of your question is really important. We're only going to encourage people to do so by making it more attractive to use public transport, to make them feel safer, cycling, to make them feel safer using the pavements in terms of the point I made about those who are killed or seriously injured by fast cars going down the road. An example of the difference we're making, James - you're from Southwark - is this Saturday we've launched the Bakerloop. I'm lobbying the government for the funds to extend the Bakerloo line to go from Waterloo to Lewisham town centre. I'm somebody who was the minister that took through the business rates bill for Crossrail and then was the mayor that opened the Elizabeth line. I know it takes years to build a line. The Northern line extension took years. I'm impatient to wait for the Bakerloo line extension, which is why we've introduced the Bakerloop this Saturday. So we're

doing more and more to improve public transport with the Superloop. The cheapest fares in the country are - guess where? - London, £1.75 to use a bus hopper fare. So, James you're right to throw a challenge to me that I've got to improve public transport to make it attractive to leave your car at home. Simran, can I just say it's a really good question? I'll answer it not in a flippant way. I'm the Mayor of London. There are other mayors that are trying to increase the size of their empire. I'm quite happy to be the mayor of this city. So, you'll appreciate my priorities in London. But the point you make is an important one. Not everyone can afford to use the opportunities we're creating, whether it's apprenticeships, whether it's vocational training, with all the stuff we're doing, we're really cognizant about making it affordable for people in relation to training. So, we've got a number of schemes at the GLA, which I'm responsible for, that supports people from backgrounds like the one I grew up in council estate. I don't talk about it much, but my dad was a train driver. And so, I recognise that but for the helping hand I wouldn't have had the opportunities that I got. So we are, Simran, in London helping those from those communities that are in deprived to help them take advantage of the opportunities. But you're right. If we're not careful, those who've got support, got the networks, will carry on succeeding. And those that haven't can't use the opportunities to work in. The last question is what I'm really enjoying, up to you Fraser.

Fraser Nelson: Where do we start? And I think for a long time, people have had the idea of these terrible ideas come through the published media. Have a look at social media. That's the alternative. I'm not sure it's an improvement. And when it comes to satire, I completely agree with everything Sadiq said about that. I think the great thing about Britain is we can discuss things robustly and we can make jokes each other's expense. Well, I think one of the best things about this country is that I think we've created the most successful multi-faith democracy in the world. I genuinely believe that. When the King was crowned, we had a Muslim Mayor of London, a Buddhist home secretary, a Hindu with a Ganesh idol on his desk as Prime Minister. And nobody in this country cared about that. Can you think of any other country where that's possible? But with multi-faith democracies comes the ability to discuss it and even poke fun at each other. So, the question is, where is the balance drawn? *The Spectator* has been a satirical magazine for 200 years. I think we've always had the balance in the right place. Others may disagree, but that's my point. But I do think, though, that if we lose that, the ability to discuss and laugh and we lose something important. Sadiq, you said you think Britain's the best country in the world to be Muslim, and we're talking including the Muslim countries?

Sir Sadiq Khan: Spot on. I'm the father of two daughters. I'm really aware of some of the laws that exist in Muslim-majority countries. I say passionately, hand on heart, there is no other city in the world I would raise my daughters but London. In a previous life I practised human rights law. Freedom of expression, which is article ten of the Human Rights Act and the European Convention of Human Rights, includes the right to offend. And that's the joy of freedom of expression, the right to ridicule.

And of course, we mustn't incite hatred. There are laws. There are limitations on freedom of expression. But it's really important that we are able to cause offence and to ridicule and to mock. And that's why I'm so surprised that the Conservatives want to withdraw from the European Convention of Human Rights. I mean, it's the best safeguard for some of the things we are talking about. So, I'm hoping next week Kemi Badenoch does a U-turn and she's a passionate advocate of this supranational system that is the European Court of Human Rights that enforces the European Convention.

Fraser Nelson: Let's take another three questions.

Speaker4: Hello. I'm a Councillor in Lewisham and officer for Unite Union. I was really keen on your answers around debunking the misinformation that's out there, particularly in terms of how social media is fuelling racial tensions. But I think fundamentally, for me, the most intrinsic British value is one of fairness. And that's one very unifying value that I think this government has a real opportunity to bring forward. So what policies are you advocating for in terms of the fairer economy, and does that include looking at things like the housing crisis for young people in our city? Around measures like rent controls?

Speaker7: Not to overrepresent Lewisham, but hello, I'm Sakina, Cabinet member. We did not plan that! Sadiq, Fraser, thank you for a really fascinating conversation. And Sadiq, particularly your sort of drawing on the fact that the narrative, the story that the Labour government is trying to talk about is change: someone said to me recently, politics is the competitive art of storytelling, but I don't think we're winning that competition, I think Reform is winning that competition. And you have been a really fantastic storyteller when it comes to London. It's a place where people come and feel safe and feel like it's a land of opportunity. But I feel like we've lost that on the national level. So, I wondered what lessons you could help us draw out, particularly when it comes to winning people who are drawn to Reform in that we are the change makers, and how do we build that story?

Fraser Nelson: Well, actually, that's such an important question. Can you answer that and then we'll go on.

Sir Sadiq Khan: Yeah. I think one of the things that, you know, when I campaigned to be the mayor, I campaigned to be the mayor for all Londoners, and I've tried to be the mayor for Londoners. And I don't like this language of our people and then everyone else. And I think, I think as a party, as a national party, we've got to be a party for the entire country. I want people who are thinking about voting Reform or voting Reform to vote Labour. And same for the Conservatives, the Greens, the Lib Dems, SNP and other flavours across the political spectrum. One of my criticisms of the Labour Party - Fraser mentioned my friendship with Keir, but I'm not going to personalise it - is I think we campaigned in prose not poetry. I'm a great believer in

the art of storytelling. I've tried to unsuccessfully govern in poetry, forget campaigning in poetry. It's really important to tell stories. One of the things my wife whispered in my ear when I came in: "Don't start listing off stats!" Because I tend to do that because it's the lawyer in me. I've not spoken to Keir about his speech, but I'm hoping in Keir's speech tomorrow he'll tell a story about the country we were, the country we are, the country we want to see. And the best politicians are the best storytellers. I had the pleasure to spend time last week with a friend of mine, Barack Obama. He's the president who received a rapturous welcome in London last week.

Fraser Nelson: Did you pay to see him?

Sir Sadiq Khan: No. But he was he was a brilliant storyteller, right? I know not everyone's going to be Barack Obama, but I don't think you need to be. The point being, I think you'll see this tomorrow with Keir explaining what our vision is and what we need to do. At this point it goes to social media, I think a lot of us now see ourselves as consumers, not citizens, and what that means is a lot of us want instant gratification. A lot of us think we can get things overnight, often without working hard. And I think, you know, we've got to explain that it takes time. It takes graft. Things don't happen overnight. And that's part of the storytelling. I'm a firm believer in addressing people's concerns, addressing people's fears rather than playing them. You mentioned that Reform are better storytellers. I'm not sure they are. I think what they're good at is playing on people's fears, and what they're good at is salesmanship. Now, being a good salesperson is okay in the campaign, but when you govern, being a good salesperson is only good if you can have policies that you can sell because you're judged on delivery. And that's my point about this government. There isn't a general election this week. Some would say, thankfully we have a five-year term. I mean, the manifesto has given us a mandate for five years. And Fraser and a number of people have talked about how the Conservative Party over the last few years had regicide. They would get a leader out because they thought a new leader would be a better salesperson, but there was nothing to sell, and so they didn't make a difference. So, it's not about having a better storyteller. We need a better story to tell. And I think as time goes on, over the next three and a half years, we will have the story to tell and that'll make it easier for us to do so. And I'm confident we can do so. I support Liverpool and I know how we can make comebacks and stuff.

The question at the back, really good question about fairness, and it goes to actually Fraser's first couple of questions about two-tier criminal justice about fare evasion. There is a sense of unfairness. I work really hard. I do a ten-hour day. If I see somebody three doors down has got a 42-inch TV and he's not working, and then that can be amplified - sometimes mischievously - on social media without fact checking and verification. You know, the asylum seekers get everything. The asylum seekers are getting benefits, they're getting council housing and so on and so forth, which we know is factually incorrect because the law prohibits that, and there's no recourse to public funding. I think we've got to, firstly, when it comes to the sense of

fairness, educate in a non-patronizing way, what the rules are, what the rules of the game are, but also, we've got to have offers that address the issue of fairness. And your question about rent controls: Fraser asked a legitimate question about how the number of starts is not great and it's fallen through the floor. It will take some time, even with the best will in the world for supply to meet demand. So, we now have in London 2.7 million Londoners living in private accommodation, there are three big things they complain about: quality of accommodation, security of tenure, and the amount of rent they pay. The great news is the legislation passed by this government addresses two of those three things. And it's the key point about: Are we celebrating the fact that, now, tenants have rights not to be evicted without good reason? Are we celebrating and talking about how tenants can now ask their landlord to improve the quality of their accommodation? We're not telling that story. There's the third part of the equation, which goes to your question about the amount of rent that goes up year after year after year. There is an issue in relation to the rents in London. My ask to the government is: Don't you, from the centre, prescribe what the rent should be? Give cities like Edinburgh and London and Bristol and Manchester the power, if they want to do so, to bring in rent stabilisation or rent control.

Fraser Nelson: On the subject of eviction, I think our time is up. So thank you all for your questions and please join me in thanking Sadiq Khan.