

# Vote-rigger's role casts doubt over Labour win in Peterborough

A [Mail on Sunday](#)

Voting practices in the Peterborough by-election won by Labour were worthy of corrupt ex-Soviet state Kazakhstan, independent observers ( election experts Democracy Volunteers ) warned last night. They said the sight of people photographing their completed ballot papers was something they had only ever seen in Kazakhstan 'many years ago'.

John Ault, director of the organisation, said he had seen people photographing their completed ballot papers in what he suggested could show they were fulfilling a 'contract' to prove how they had voted.

He told The Mail on Sunday: 'I have observed many elections across Europe and only once in Kazakhstan many years ago did I see what I saw happen three times in Peterborough. There are signs up warning you not to take photographs and these were not selfies celebrating having voted but people photographing their cross on the ballot paper.'

'One can only speculate as to why some voters feel the need to do this, although this can, in some cases, point to a contract being fulfilled or an inducement having been given. It needs to be discouraged and, in the cases I saw, they were either not noticed or not challenged by polling station staff.'

Democracy Volunteers sent a team of four experienced observers to observe 23 of the polling stations used in the by-election. They watched as about 700 of the 27,000 who voted at a polling station cast their vote and witnessed so-called 'family

voting' – where more than one person goes into the same voting booth – in half of the stations.

The practice has in the past raised fears that voters were being told by other family members where to put their cross. Mr Ault said: 'To the great credit of the polling staff, this was challenged persistently whenever it occurred. It is everyone's right to vote in private.'

[involved in Labour's winning](#) campaign. . . Mahmood, 51, a numberplate salesman and former taxi company owner who received a 15-month sentence for his part in a "systematic campaign of electoral fraud" in 2008, had denied involvement in the campaign to elect Lisa Forbes 10 days ago.

He said he had met Jeremy Corbyn briefly on the campaign trail but had not known in advance that the Labour leader would visit. Labour said Mahmood, who also manages property, did "not play any role in its campaign".



*That's Mahmood in the middle under the soft and quilted.*

However, a Sunday Times investigation reveals that Mahmood:

- \* Campaigned extensively with Forbes and at least five MPs in Central Ward, where, a court heard, he had once been “the spider at the centre of the web” of a massive campaign to “hijack” ballot papers and forge postal votes
- \* Accompanied Corbyn during his tour of the ward’s mosques, community centres and high street days before the vote
- \* Spent election day at the entrance to a local polling station.

In social media posts, Labour activists described Mahmood as “the mastermind”, “a tireless Labour comrade” and “at the heart of Labour Peterborough”.

The businessman, who was expelled from the party in 2008, has spoken of his continued activism in Labour and last month boasted of his “magic pen” – a twist-action ballpoint that he used to conduct exit polls and estimate street-by-street turnout using an official Labour Party teller’s form hours before the close of polls during the local elections.

Mahmood spent the day of the contest, June 6, outside Gladstone Park Community Centre, a polling station that serves North Ward.

At first he insisted he had visited to help his wheelchair-bound mother vote. Asked how long he had been there, he said: “I don’t know, I can’t confirm that, I’ve got so much going on in life at the moment.” Later, he said he had been in the area “throughout” the day, but only because he ran nearby flats and his son was a teacher at a local school. He denied being a teller – someone who reports to Labour on who has yet to vote, and encourages residents to do so.

...later (he) celebrated with his close friend, Shaz Nawaz, head of the Labour group of Peterborough council. Last week Nawaz said on Facebook: “Tariq is not a member of Labour – he, therefore, was not part of the campaign.”

In the run-up to the poll, however, the pair campaigned

together repeatedly. Forbes also campaigned with Mahmood and reacted with “hearts” to Facebook pictures of the two together. Mahmood appears with the candidate and Corbyn in a Labour Party video that has amassed 132,000 views.

Last night he denied any wrongdoing. He said the Tories had raised his involvement in the campaign because “they fear me”. Of his tour with Corbyn, he said: “I used my knowledge to introduce him to the local business community.”

Labour said Mahmood “just joined” the tour and “did not help to organise it”.

Last week police confirmed they were investigating five allegations of fraud at the by-election, including a claim that two men boasted that they had “burnt” more than 1,000 votes for Nigel Farage’s Brexit Party, which came second in the Leave-voting city. However, the council has sought to play down racist claims about Muslim vote rigging, including the allegation that “thousands were bussed in and paid £10 to vote for the Labour candidate”.

In 2008 a £1m police investigation resulted in prison sentences for Mahmood, then secretary of the local Labour party, Mohammed Choudhary, Peterborough’s first Asian mayor, and Labour candidate Maqbool Hussein. Also convicted were Abdul Razaq and Mohammed Khaliq, both Tory candidates. Of his magic pen and his role as a teller during the local elections, Mahmood said: “A-plus in maths. I’m good at maths. What’s wrong with that?”