

The BNP:

the roots of its appeal

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Published by Democratic Audit, Human Rights Centre, University of Essex, Colchester, Essex CO4 3SQ, and based on research carried out at the School of Public Policy, University College London, The Rubin Building, 29-30 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9QU. The research was sponsored by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, The Garden House, Water End, York YO30 6WQ. Copies of the report may be obtained for £10 from the Trust office.

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PART 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. This report offers a comprehensive and objective analysis of the rise of support for the British National Party in the UK, using a range of data sources to understand the reasons behind it.

1.2. One conventional wisdom of British politics is that there is no room for the extremist views of the far right. The traditional view is that Britain's constitutional arrangements, having withstood the flash flood of racist and anti-immigration feeling set loose by Enoch Powell's notorious 'rivers of blood' speech in April 1968, are a 'rock' against which such waves of popular emotion break and go down over time.¹ Classic accounts of British political culture stress its tolerant disposition, which derives from the tradition of accommodation between social groups rather than a belief in radical social change either from the right or left. British people are thought to be proud of a political tradition that accepted immigration from Jews in Eastern Europe during the 20th century, for example. Roger Eatwell, a leading authority on fascism, summarised this view as 'pervasive, consensual, differential and non-violent, nourishing a deep rooted civility which seems to militate against radical and activist philosophies' (1996: 184). The occasional electoral outbreaks of the National Front and now the British National Party are regarded, not as a danger to the body politic, but the temporary efflorescence of a minor party on the fringe of the political system. Far right support ebbs and flows, but such parties will never be a significant force in UK politics (see Eatwell, 2002, for a review of academic commentary). This view is backed up by comparative studies of extreme right parties across western Europe, such as that of Ignazi (2003: 173-186) which cites Britain as 'A Case of Failure' of the extreme right.

1.3. This report questions the conventional wisdom. Our evidence suggests that a significant minority, as many as 18 to 25 per cent of the population, would consider voting for the British National Party even if they do not do so currently. Within this group of potential voters for the BNP is a solid and long-standing sub-section of people who have strong views on immigration and asylum. Our figures plainly exceed the electoral support that the British National Party and UK Independence Party have won in the 2004 elections and 2005 general election. But at the same time no far-right party has ever registered the electoral successes of the BNP and the party is in a strong position to take advantage of this potential support in forthcoming elections.

1.4. This report is in seven parts. Part 2 reviews previous evidence and commentary on the far-right in Britain and the progress of the British National Party since the 1970s, incorporating election results and opinion poll evidence from the European and London elections of 2004. We

examine the party's cultivation of a 'respectable' image and discuss evidence that contradicts such an image. Part 3 examines the socio-demographic origins of far-right support, based largely on our ward-based data (see 1.4. below), with supporting evidence from focus groups in various localities, and also reviews relevant national opinion poll results. Part 4 examines the relationship between electoral turnout and BNP support, testing the theory that low turnout in a ward in one election will provoke increased BNP support in a subsequent contest in the same locality. Part 5 looks at the relationship between support for the BNP and for other parties. Part 6 explores local variations in BNP support, both within and across regions and considers some case studies. Part 7 draws some conclusions.

1.5. Evidence here is gathered from a range of sources. Especially important were surveys held before and after the 2004 European, London and local elections, giving an opportunity to produce a detailed breakdown of preferences for UKIP and the BNP and the preferences of their supporters:

- First, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT) funded the authors to commission eight exit polls from the polling company, ICM, for the 2004 local and European elections in Folkestone, Bristol, Birmingham, Walsall, Newport, Glasgow, Basildon and Luton. The localities chosen encompassed areas that have recorded high levels of BNP support in the past as well as areas that have not. The exit polls provided a base of 567 voters. The data have been weighted by the socio-economic composition of these areas to make the inferences as if they were in a national sample.
- Second, the authors have analysed the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust's 2004 *State of the Nation* poll, which questioned 2,373 citizens across Britain about a range of views and political preferences between 26 May 2004 and 4 June 2004.
- Third, the authors compared the above responses with a longer questionnaire presented to 1,474 voters straight after the European and London elections on June 10 2004, as part of the 2004 London Elections study, funded by the ESRC and co-funded by JRCT for this study.

1.6. A second major source of information was aggregate local authority and ward-level data (used in Parts 4, 5 and 6). We drew a sample of 158 wards in 26 local authorities in England where the BNP stood two or more candidates in the 2003 local elections as this was one of the main breakthrough points for the BNP. We collected data from all wards in the local authority area, which gave us variation on the main variables – social class, income and poverty, age, etc – that we were interested in. We gathered data for 2003 and then for the previous elections in 1999.

The election data came from the 1999 and 2003 election studies of Colin Rawlings and Michael Thrasher, of the Elections Centre at the University of Plymouth (1999, 2003). For comparison, we also looked at the electoral support for the UKIP, choosing those councils where UKIP achieved their top 40 best election results and where they stood two or more candidates. This information was taken from the UKIP website. The socio-demographic data were drawn from census data kept by the Office for National Statistics. Details of the socio-economic data (age, income, and ethnic group) are provided in Part 3 below.

1.7. Focus groups were another important source of information. We carried out two focus groups in Northampton shortly before the 2004 elections and two in Dagenham in London during March 2005. We draw on evidence from these focus groups in Part 3 and at various points throughout the report.

PART 2

THE PROGRESS OF THE BRITISH NATIONAL PARTY

2.1. The BNP was founded in 1982, but spent its first ten years in the shadow of the National Front. When the National Front split, the BNP became the main far right party in Britain, winning a council by-election in Tower Hamlets in 1993, which some commentators pinpointed as an ‘electoral highpoint’, with support returning to more ‘normal’ levels of 0.1 per cent in the 1997 general election (Eatwell, 2000: 409); and then 0.19 per cent in the 2001 general election.

2.2. In 1999 Nick Griffin took over as BNP chairman, proclaiming that the party would become ‘the focus... of the neglected and oppressed white working class’. Richard Barnbrook, then BNP candidate in Barking and Dagenham and London organiser, told us that the BNP was ‘more Labour than Labour’, which had abandoned the working class; and it is in Labour’s traditional heartlands that the BNP has made most inroads. Griffin threw in his lot with the BNP’s ‘modernisers’, working to give the party a more respectable image (with Le Pen’s Front National as a model) and to rid the party of the ‘careless extremism’ which made them unelectable. In the 1999 European elections the BNP gained 1.0 per cent of the national vote, a major advance on any previous performance by a far-right party in national UK elections (although turnout was low). In that election, the party won 11 per cent and 10 per cent of the vote in the two Oldham constituencies and 10 per cent in Burnley. In 2002 the party won three council seats in Burnley and 28 per cent of the vote; in Oldham it took an average of 27 per cent of the vote across the five wards it contested. The BNP entered the 2004 European and local elections with 17 council seats and fielded a record number of candidates. There were predictions that the party would do well and might even win seats in the European Parliament. A report by Vision 21 for the Rowntree Charitable and Reform Trusts (2004) on three by-elections in Burnley, Calderdale and Oldham in 2003 suggested that the BNP’s ‘grassroots face-to-face campaigning’ all year round was popular with residents and contributed to the party’s successes.

2.3. In the European elections of 2004, the BNP won 4.9 per cent of the vote in the UK, up by 4 per cent on 1999. They gained a similar share of the vote in the London-wide elections for the London Assembly and almost gained a seat. In the mayoral election, they gained 3 per cent of first preferences and 3.7 per cent of second preferences. After the European and London Assembly elections in June 2004, the BNP decided to concentrate their efforts on the east London borough of Barking and Dagenham, where the party had no branch and few, if any, paid-up members. In a by-election in 2004, the BNP candidate came a close second to Labour with 31.5 per cent of the

vote in the first of three by-elections; in September its candidate, David Kelley, won Goresbrook ward with 51.9 per cent of the vote; three weeks later, the BNP candidate again came a close second with 38.5 per cent of the vote. Also in 2004, the BNP won West ward in Keighley, with 51 per cent of the vote.

2.4. In the 2005 general election, the BNP won 4.3 per cent of the vote across the 116 seats that they contested. The party polled 16.9 per cent in the Barking constituency, its main target and its highest share of the vote anywhere in the country, and 9.6 per cent in neighbouring Dagenham. In 33 of the seats they contested, they obtained more than 5 per cent of the votes (see Table 1).

Table 1: The BNP’s Results in the 2005 General Election

No. of seats where BNP got more than 5%	33
No. of seats where BNP got more than 6%	21
No. of seats where BNP got more than 7%	10
No. of seats where BNP got more than 9%	7
No. of seats where BNP got more than 10%	3

The election results signal that the party has built up a significant electoral base and illustrate the potential for it to be even more successful in future elections, such as the local elections of 2006. Nigel Copsey, contemporary historian of the BNP, has noted, ‘For the first time in its history, the British National Party stands on the brink of entering the political mainstream’ (Copsey 2004).

2.5. From interviews with BNP organisers, we are aware that the BNP’s main aim in the election was to prepare the way for a targeted campaign to win seats in the 2006 local elections in the London ‘doughnut’ – the ring of outer London boroughs, such as Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Hounslow, Erith and Crayford – and parts of Lancashire, Yorkshire and the West Midlands. The tally of BNP-held seats on local authorities fluctuates and they currently hold 20.² They are said to reckon on 40 ‘target’ seats.

UNDERLYING PATTERNS OF RIGHT-WING SUPPORT

2.6. This report argues that underlying patterns of voter preferences in the European and London elections of 2004 indicate a higher level of right-wing support than the actual BNP vote or commentary (media, political or academic) on parties of the extreme right in British politics would suggest. Indicators of this support include the performance of the BNP and UKIP in the European elections and in London and responses to our survey questions after these elections. The figures suggest that, beyond actual voters, there is a penumbra of others who are more sympathetic to the party than would be expected from its reputation.

2.7. Some of the data does support the conventional wisdom. In all three polls (detailed in the introduction), we asked a question in which respondents were asked to rank various parties on a seven-point ‘thermometer scale’, running from ‘Like a lot’ (+3) to ‘Dislike a lot’ (-3), with Neutral in the middle (0). The nationwide European election exit poll found that 64.2 per cent of respondents said they disliked the BNP ‘a lot’, which seems to confirm the existence of a large majority of voters for whom extremist parties, advocating racist ideas, are an anathema. Also the earlier *State of the Nation* poll in 2004 found that 76 per cent of respondents said that they ‘could never vote’ for the BNP, with trade unionists (83 per cent ‘never’) and the managerial and professional social classes, A, B, and C1 (80 per cent ‘never’) standing out. (For detailed social class definitions, A, B, C1, C2, D and E, see Appendix A.) Proportions of voters who could ‘never vote for’ the BNP were high in Scotland (88 per cent), Wales (85 per cent) and the South West (87 per cent). The BNP were easily the most unpopular party, with nearly half of respondents (47 per cent) saying that they disliked them a lot, and 72 per cent disliking them overall. Turning to the London poll and a more detailed analysis of responses to the like/dislike question, we found the following comparisons for positive and negative feelings for the main parties in London:

Table 2: Public Feelings Toward the Political Parties – London

	Positive %	Neutral/DK %	Negative %	Net positive %
Lab	45	18	36	+9
Lib Dem	33	38	29	+4
Green	22	41	38	-16
Con	28	29	43	-15
UKIP	19	33	47	-28
BNP	8	27	66	-58

Source: London poll, 2004

2.8. The final column of the table shows the ‘net’ percentage of voters expressing positive feelings for the parties (that is, the percentage with positive feelings minus the percentage with negative feelings), showing that only two parties, Labour and the Liberal Democrats, receive a ‘net positive’ score. The table shows that the ‘net’ scores for the UKIP and BNP are strongly negative. The -58 per cent score for the BNP supports the conventional view that their substantial unpopularity places them as outsiders from the party system.

2.9. In contrast, other indicators within the data support the idea that a smaller but significant section of the population are intolerant of minorities and are hence susceptible to the possibility of voting for the far-right. The European election exit poll found that 25.2 per cent of respondents felt that immigration was ‘the most important issue facing Britain today’, above unemployment (4.8) and the fight against terrorism (19.6) exceeded only by

public services (46.9). This finding indicates the extent to which immigration was the top concern of many voters in 2004. If someone does think that this issue is the most important facing the country they probably have negative views about these groups – though of course it is possible to answer the question believing that immigration needs urgent solution in terms of more integration and resources for immigrant groups. There is good reason to believe this figure has historical precedent, for example the 23 per cent in the British Election Study in 1970 who believed ‘the government should assist immigrants home’ (Studlar 1978: 54) and 21 per cent of respondents in a 1978 opinion poll who mentioned immigration as one of the two most urgent national problems (Ignazi, 2003: 179).³ We examine the pool of attitudes on immigration and race on which the BNP can possibly draw support in Part 4.

2.10. Unsurprisingly, those respondents in our poll who had supported the BNP were more likely to believe that immigration was the most important issue. In the European election exit polls, 77 per cent of BNP voters give this option, 24 per cent of Conservative supporters (no different from the average), 24 per cent of Liberal Democrats and 10 per cent of Labour supporters. Exit polls in the Vision 21 report on the three by-elections in northern towns found that BNP voters were four times as likely as voters for other parties (12.3 per cent as against 3.2 per cent average across the parties) to mention ‘immigration and asylum’ as priorities to be dealt with by incoming local councillors.

2.11. The main party that stood out as close to BNP on attitudes towards immigration in the European election exit polls was UKIP. More than half (53 per cent) of its voters opted for the immigration tag. This similarity in terms of views between UKIP and BNP supporters emerged as a theme in our focus groups (see John et al, 2005). They draw upon the same well of social and political attitudes among the public as the BNP and have the potential to convert such attitudes into votes – especially among dissatisfied Conservatives. Those voters in the London poll for either the BNP or UKIP were also more likely to ‘like’ the other and to be ready to vote for it (see Table 2). The more respectable UKIP could act as a bridge to the supporters of the main parties who have strong feelings about race. In his interview with *The Times* 19.08.04, Nigel Farage, leader of UKIP’s MEPs, expressly stated that his party could allow voters to ‘express their anxieties about immigration, but without having to vote for a party that is violent and racist’.

2.12. A striking indicator of the latent support for the far-right comes from the question (asked of each party in all the opinion polls we used) which asked respondents whether they ‘might vote’ or ‘could never vote’ for this party in the future. In the London 2004 poll 23 per cent of respondents claimed that they ‘might vote’ for the BNP in the future, indicating greater levels of potential support than previously recorded. The proportion of respondents

suggesting that they 'might vote for the BNP in the future' was consistent across all the polls reported here. *The State of the Nation* 2004 poll found that even while the BNP is most unpopular party, some 18 per cent of the British population, rising to 20 per cent across England and 24 per cent in London, say that they 'might vote' for them in the future. In the European exit polls, we found that 18.7 per cent of respondents said that they might.

2.13. The proportions of respondents claiming that they 'might vote for' far-right parties in the future were higher than the figures for those who 'liked' the parties, suggesting that people contemplate voting for far-right parties even though they do not have positive feelings towards them. We found evidence of such attitudes in the London focus groups where one woman spoke of a friend who had voted for the BNP, but then found that 'there were certain issues that made her feel embarrassed that she voted for them. I think that can still be the case for other people.' While 45 per cent of respondents in the London poll said that they might vote for the BNP and/or UKIP in the future, only 24 per cent expressed positive feelings for either or both of the parties. The figures for 'might vote for' were more than twice as high as 'like' for all parties except for Labour (where the figure was just less than half) and the 46 respondents who had voted or 'would have voted' BNP in the European elections, for which the figure was the same. Note that 8 per cent of these BNP respondents did not say that they 'might vote for the BNP in the future', apparently seeing their vote here as a one-off, 'a wake-up call', or a message to Tony Blair, as participants in our focus groups saw it.

Table 3: Views on the BNP and/or UKIP in London

Party voted for in Euro-elections	'Might vote for' BNP and/or UKIP in the Future %	Positive feelings towards BNP and/or UKIP %
Conservative	47.9	21.5
Labour	36.0	17.2
Liberal Democrat	36.9	9.3
UKIP	87.0	75.0
BNP	91.3	91.3
Total	45.2	24.4

Source: London Poll, 2004

2.14. For the 2004 London poll, we also tested whether voters had voted (or would have voted, in the case of non-voters) for the BNP with any of their five votes or preferences in the European elections, the Mayoral election (first and second preferences) and either of the votes for the London assembly (constituency member and top-up member), by creating a composite variable. We also added respondents who claimed the BNP as their party identification or who said that they would vote for the BNP 'if there was a general election tomorrow'. We found that 7.3 per cent of respondents had actually chosen the BNP as

one of their five votes or preferences. A further 16.4 per cent said that they 'might vote for' the BNP in the future, although they hadn't in any of the tests applied here. Thus about a quarter of respondents either had voted for the BNP, identified with them or considered that they might vote for them in the future. Breaking down these figures by age, we found that in London 9.6 per cent of 18-24 year olds had voted for the BNP with one of their preferences, and a total of 34.9 per cent of this age band feeling that they 'might in the future'. This figure contrasted with the 35-44 age range, where only 7.2 had voted for them and 15.1 per cent felt that they 'might in the future'. Perhaps surprisingly given the overwhelmingly male dominated image of the BNP, there were no significant gender differences.

2.15. All these various indicators of potential support for the BNP have to some extent been realised in actual elections since 2004 (as we report above in para 2.3). In London, the BNP won 4.7 per cent of the London-wide vote in the London Assembly, narrowly missing gaining a seat and losing out by only a handful of disqualified votes. In the mayoral election, they gained 3 per cent of first preferences (compared with 0.9 per cent in 2000) and 3.7 per cent of second preferences (compared with 2.6 per cent in 2000). In the European elections of 2004, they won 4.9 per cent of the vote in the UK, compared with only 1 per cent in 1999; a total of 808,200 UK citizens voted BNP in these elections. Regional vote shares are shown in the following table, showing that the BNP gained more than 5 per cent in five of the eleven regions with significant increases in support from 1999.

THE BNP'S CAMPAIGNING STRATEGIES

2.16. This report is being published on the eve of the local elections in May 2006. It is important both to regard the British National Party as a social movement that articulates, albeit in a perverted and exploitative manner, genuine economic and social concerns within the communities where they establish bridge-heads, and at the same time to question the mask of 'respectability' that might well cloak not only violence and other manifestations of 'reckless extremism', but also a long-term hidden commitment to revolutionary nationalism, or fascism. Griffin has sought to reassure his 'cadres' that short-term political expediency did not mean abandoning the 'full implications of our struggle' (Copsey, 2005). It is also important not to under-estimate the political intelligence of core leaders, such as Griffin and Eddie Butler, their elections strategist. The party is, as we shall show, opportunistic and deceitful in its local campaigning. But its local initiatives are developed within general themes and a 'common sense' populism that feeds off the deep disillusion with mainstream politics identified by the Power Commission (Power, 2006). Thus the BNP is the party that 'tells the truth' about immigration, race and Europe, as opposed to the main parties' weakness and duplicity on these issues. The BNP demands a 'crackdown on crime' and is forever

on the look-out for local examples, real or exaggerated. The BNP wants to restore community, local identity, tidy neighbourhoods free of intimidation and local democracy. The BNP opposes corruption and is angry at preferential treatment for minorities.

2.17. One significant sign of the party's political sophistication lies in its website. Like many smaller political parties, the BNP has turned to the internet with alacrity, believing that it offers them a more level playing field than other media outlets. A BNP organiser claimed that their web site was 'the most viewed political website in the country', receiving around 20,000 unique hits per day during the 2005 general election. Certainly their site (at www.bnp.org.uk) for the general election was as professional as that of many of other larger political parties, with the same features and options for users to have 'Your Say'. A casual glance would suggest that on-line at least they have entered the mainstream of British politics. The site maintains its own 'Internet TV channel' BNP TV (which during the election ran footage of BNP candidates accompanied by a resonant playing of 'Jerusalem') and their strategy is to expand the offering as more people get access to broadband: 'we've got reporters all over the country now with broadcast quality equipment and our aim is to create an entirely alternative media.' BNP activists are extremely enthusiastic about the internet and their web site is clearly an important and growing part of their strategy: 'Most of the BNP's recruitment now comes from the website'. They claim a 'massive increase in traffic' when there are national events of relevance to their policies, for example 'when you get a major event such as the terrorist outrages', as one organiser put it.

The BNP is also behind a weblog, www.civilliberty.org.uk, a neatly designed and low-key blog which promotes an organisation, Civil Liberty, as independent of any political party. The site has links to Amnesty International, Liberty and other mainstream organisations. However, Civil Liberty is led by Kevin Scott, the BNP north-east regional organiser, and below the surface of concern for free speech in the UK it contains trace elements of the BNP's obsessions, such as its desire to defend anyone who is 'persecuted' for 'following the indigenous and ancestral religions of Britain.' The weblog suggests that the BNP are seeking to place themselves among groups that promote human rights; and it is notable that the weblog encouraged its members to take part in the 25 March Rally for Free Speech, an event at which Evan Harris MP, the Liberal Democrat spokesperson on civil liberties, and Peter Tatchell were among a wide range of speakers.

2.18. The BNP have also developed effective campaign strategies for elections, targeting areas where they have hopes of making a breakthrough and concentrating scarce human resources on 'target' seats or council areas. They pile volunteers in from other areas, often from long distances, for leafleting and door-step canvassing. On canvasses, their volunteers are instructed not to canvass any

Table 4: BNP Support across British Regions in the European Elections, 2004

Region	BNP support, 2004 %	Rise since 1999 %
Yorkshire	8.0	6.8
& Humberside		
West Midlands	7.5	5.8
East Midlands	6.5	5.2
North East	6.4	5.5
North West	6.4	5.1
East	4.3	3.4
London	4.0	2.5
South West	3.0	2.1
Wales	3.0	3.0
South East	2.9	2.1
Scotland	1.7	1.3

Source: BBC Election Results, www.bbc.co.uk

ethnic minority households, not because they are sensitive to their feelings, as they say, but to avoid alerting them to their electoral presence. They can be very canny, as in the May 2002 local elections in Burnley. They recognised that the character of the 'all-out' elections offered a particularly attractive opportunity. May 2002 was the point in the electoral cycle of Burnley when every single council seat was up for election – three in each ward. The BNP decided to stand just one candidate in each ward – other than the ward with a majority black and minority ethnic population, where they did not stand. The BNP's official election slogan was 'Use One Vote – Make It Count!' But, in practice, their canvassing tactic was to ask people whether they might consider voting for the BNP and where an opening was glimpsed, to imply that nothing was to be lost were voters to use two votes for the mainstream party of their preference, 'giving' their third vote to the BNP. Phrases like, 'Give us a chance, what do you have to lose' and suggestions that the three votes were not of equal value, and that people should give their votes as if to the different political parties in order of preference, were reported back from residents who had been canvassed. The general pattern was for the ballot papers that carried a vote for the BNP – ten thousand of them, over 30 per cent of the ballot papers cast – to be ballot papers carrying two votes for Labour and one for the BNP (Private information). Two votes for the party that – linked to government – could bring the regeneration funding into the town, and one for the organisation 'fighting for fairer funding', demanding a 'level playing field', so that all Burnley's needy areas could get their 'fair share', not just 'certain areas' (code for Asian areas which were seen as being privileged by council funds, see paras. 6.7-6.8 further).

BEHIND NICK GRIFFIN'S 'WINDOW DRESSING'

2.19. The BNP is presenting the upcoming local elections as a referendum on what they call 'the creeping Islamification of Britain'. The party set out to exploit what it saw as the unpopularity of Muslim communities in advance of the 2005 general election, as the BBC TV

undercover documentary, *The Secret Agent*, broadcast in July 2004, made evident. The BBC's reporter, Jason Gwynne, filmed Nick Griffin and party member Mark Collett making inflammatory speeches against Islam, Muslims and asylum seekers. Griffin for example told BNP members that they had to stand up and act for the party, or 'they [Muslims] will do for someone in your family'. He alleged that Muslim men were grooming white girls for sex and raping young women, quoting the Koran as authority for rape and condemning Islam as 'a wicked vicious faith' that 'has expanded through a handful of cranky lunatics' and 'is now sweeping through country after country'. Asian crimes against whites had turned Britain into a 'multi-racial hell-hole'. Collett declared that Asians were 'trying to destroy the whole country' and asylum seekers were 'cockroaches' who 'multiply rapidly and take everything'. A high proportion of them were terrorists. 'Let's show these ethnics the door in 2004.' In London, Richard Barnbrook, the BNP's lead candidate in the 2005 election, defended Griffin's speech, telling us,

'If you look at the Bible, if you don't like your neighbour, you accommodate them, you turn the other cheek. The Koran says you must do battle with them until they agree . . . [and with regard to Griffin's allegations of rape] it says, "with your right hand, you may take what can be taken." There are two different frameworks that stand at loggerheads. It is this aspect of Muslim immigration that concerns me – the influence of radical Muslims, that conflict is inevitable.'

2.20. The BNP portrays itself as the party of free speech, unlike mainstream parties, in defiance of political correctness. This was the nub of the defence of Griffin and Collett, the 'Free Speech Two' as the BNP website presented them, when they were tried and acquitted in February 2006 on six charges of incitement to racial hatred arising from the filmed speeches. Their defence both within and outside the court rested heavily on portraying them as two men who believed in the democratic right to 'free speech'.⁴ Phil Edwards, the party spokesman, still defends these statements and anti-Muslim campaigns on the same grounds, saying that 'Islamification' is a serious problem that 'no-one else will talk about'. 'People who live in a democracy have the right to speak up and air their concerns.' Barnbrook says with feeling:

'Britain created the modern democratic state with America and France, we led the rest of the world. Now it's like bloody McCarthy over here. You can't tell the truth. I believe in freedom of speech. That means you can say what you like and I can't stop you. And I can say what I like and you should not try and stop me.'

2.21. It is this stance that allows them to campaign so viciously on race and especially against Muslims while retaining an outward air of respectability. 'All the morons who were in the party in the days of John Tyndall have been removed, they have been whipped out of the party'

says Barnbrook. He says that it is, 'Three strikes and you are out,' for members who intimidate members of the public or make racist remarks. 'I'd have it one strike and you're out, but that is the party policy.' He adds: 'It is only through common decency and elections that we can get the view of the ordinary British citizen across.' The party maintains strict discipline in most public situations and vigorously denies allegations of violence. 'What evidence is there that we use violence?' demands Phil Edwards. 'Certainly we have violence thrust upon us, it is a Pavlovian response.' Perhaps thanks to their discipline, it has typically been undercover journalists who have infiltrated the party that have exposed violence, racist conduct and speech and even overt signs of Nazi sympathies within their ranks. The BNP are always on their guard against infiltrators now. David Johnson, who infiltrated the BNP for the London *Evening Standard* in the guise of a South African sympathiser during a by-election campaign in October 2004, said that he was frightened of being exposed: 'the [BNP] members are obsessed with ruthlessly rooting out infiltrators and I am constantly on edge' (*Evening Standard*, 6 October 2004).

2.22. The BBC's *The Secret Agent*, the programme that broadcast excerpts from the Griffin and Collett speeches, also contained evidence of violence and misconduct on the part of party members in West Yorkshire. Dave Midgley, a council candidate, was shown boasting of squirting dog faeces through the letter-box of an Asian take-away. Another member said that he wanted to 'blow up' Bradford's mosques with a rocket launcher. Another member said that he had beaten up a young Asian man during the Bradford riots and declared that he was not prosecuted, as his victim could not identify him from the police photographs. During the by-election campaigns in Burnley in 2001, BBC TV screened a *Panorama* documentary that, in Nigel Copsey's words, exposed Nick Griffin's claims 'that the party had abandoned its racist, violent and anti-Semitic past' as sham (Copsey 2005; see also *Searchlight*, No. 319, January 2002). David Johnson's article in the London *Evening Standard* on the eve of polling in a local by-election in Dagenham on 6 October 2004 also told of racism, anti-semitism and Nazi sympathies among high-ranking party members. Johnson infiltrated the BNP electoral campaign for two weeks and recorded exchanges about Lawrence Rustem, the half-Turkish BNP candidate. He was openly described as a 'wog' or 'half wog' and treated with contempt and derision, but on Johnson's account, Julian Leppert, the BNP mayoral candidate, was reported as defending Rustem as he was only 'half wog'. Out canvassing, two BNP men assure Johnson that the party's acceptance of Jews is 'typical Griffin window dressing' and that 'most of us hate Jews.' In the pub after canvassing, Johnson talked to Tony Lecomber, the 'second most powerful man' in the BNP who had a string of criminal convictions, including five under the Explosives Act and a three-year prison sentence for unlawful wounding for his part in an attack on a Jewish

school teacher who he caught trying to peel off a BNP sticker at an underground station. He asked Lecomber what was the difference between UKIP and the BNP. He says that Lecomber replied, 'UKIP accept f---ing anyone. At the end of the day, it's a racial thing. We're the BNP, we are who we are because of race. We don't want blacks here.' What about Rustem? 'Don't like Turks.' Johnson also describes Lecomber's praise for a scene in the film *Cabaret* when 'one by one, the Hitler youth, our fellas, stand up and start saluting and singing' as 'right stirring . . . gets the blood up every time.' (*Evening Standard*, 6 October 2004). (In January 2006, it was reported by Indymedia UK that Lecomber, who was Group Development Officer for the BNP, appeared to have either been sacked or resigned after 'making a serious error of judgment in speaking to a non-member about matters which could be misconstrued and which could thereby possibly have caused embarrassment to the party'.)

2.23. On 4 May 2005, the *Yorkshire Evening Post* published an account of a film of a BNP celebration in Scotland in which members and supporters sing neo-Nazi songs, praise the leadership of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich, and give Sieg Heil salutes accompanied by shouts of Auschwitz. The newspaper reported that, as part of the celebration they set fire to a Pagan cross – traditionally burned by Nazis at Volk festivals – 'whooping and throwing petrol onto the flames.' Two BNP security guards stood guard at the door of the building and gave Sieg Heil salutes; on the door of the building was a poster bearing the silhouette of a black man with a diagonal line drawn through it – meaning no entry to black people. Inside, a singer sang neo-Nazi songs to a guitar, one of which praised Rudolph Hess and referred to the Brothers' War – apparently the neo-Nazi way of describing the Second World War. A further song was a re-write of the Kenny Rogers 1969 chart hit 'Ruby, don't take your love to town,' except that the words were changed to 'Nigger, get the f--- out of my town.' The dozen or so BNP supporters at the party laughed and applauded the song. Those present include small children, according to the *Post*. The newspaper reported that the film was made by one of the BNP members present at the party. Several copies were made, one of which was leaked to anti-racism campaigners.

2.24. These reports from a variety of sources are naturally sporadic, but they appear to reveal a British National Party that is far from throwing off the violence, racism and fascist sympathies that Griffin seeks to disown. Newspaper reports constantly also show that the convicted criminal Tony Lecomber was not an isolated presence in the party. The BNP has had many convicted criminals and football hooligans in its ranks. Even the man chosen as body guard to Jean-Marie Le Pen, on his high profile visit for a BNP conference and dinner in 2004, was a violent football hooligan with convictions for public disorder, one Warren Bennett. Bennett was a prominent member of Edinburgh BNP.

2.25. Even in Barking and Dagenham, where the BNP has polled well, the party is disliked and distrusted. The BNP was seen as a racist, anti-immigrant and deceitful party and voting for it as an aberrant or embarrassing act. For participants in our focus groups there, voting for the BNP was seen as a 'kick up the backside', or a wake-up call, for the major parties which were also regarded as opportunist parties who were difficult to distinguish, willing to say what pleased, to tell lies and to make promises on which they did not deliver. There was a view that it was 'safe' to vote BNP and they 'knew' that the BNP could only win a few seats, not a majority. The BNP were seen as a party apart. One woman said she had voted BNP because of asylum seekers ('I'm not racist') but realised that she should not have done so. Another woman voted BNP in the hope that Blair would realise that that the people had had enough and he had to sort it out. But would she have been shocked if they had got in? Yes, actually. BNP was seen as racist party, which wants 'to get rid of the blacks'. A man complained that a BNP leaflet had been put through his door, which was inappropriate, as he may have had black people living in his house. The distaste for the BNP is reflected in these remarks from the groups:

- 'If we actually let those jokers in, we'd be in a worse state than we are now.'
- One man said the BNP were basically racists who got votes from people who were not racist, but who were fed up with 'the whole asylum thing'.
- Another man said, 'If you say BNP to me, I think National Front.'
- Another man complained about a misleading British National Party leaflet about African couples receiving grants to buy houses. He observed, 'It's just how close they can get to the British nerve as possible without being racist.'
- A woman said she knew a woman who had voted BNP, but then 'there were certain issues that made her feel embarrassed that she voted for them.'

2.26. The presence of individual British National Party members and small BNP groups of councillors in local authorities has raised particular issues and challenges for the elected members of other parties, and for the paid officers of those councils. For example, in Burnley, where the BNP has its largest group of councillors (eight after the 2003 elections, down to six as at February 2006), there was a brief period in 2005 during which leading officers needed to carry out the functions usually taken by the elected political leadership of the council. This followed a vote of no confidence in the Labour administration being carried, but without the possibility of the smaller groups being able to form an alternative administration, as this would have meant the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives relying on BNP support, which they were not prepared to do. More generally, councils on which the BNP is represented face particular challenges in relation to their legal duties

to promote good race relations and their work on community cohesion, as these have evidently become politically contested goals in these local settings.

PART 3

WHO VOTES FOR THE BNP?

3.1. The levels of BNP support suggested in Part 2 prompt the question: who is it who supports the far right in British politics? What political and social conditions create the environment that favours far-right parties? How far is it right to suggest, as Nigel Copsey does, that ‘so long as popular racism continues to flow through the reins of Britain’s public, the potential for a rapid growth in support for an extreme-right wing party will always remain?’ (Copsey 2004)

3.2. Various attempts have been made to tackle this question in historical context across countries, one of which recently, for example, tackled the similar question of ‘Who voted for Hitler?’ (King et al 2004).⁵ Evidence in the contemporary British context is more limited, particularly since the levels of support for the far-right have usually been underplayed. Any analysis has to recognise that the economic and social worlds that created far-right movements in the early part of the twentieth century have changed beyond recognition, with changes in the structure of market societies since the 1930s, a smaller working class and the rise of new classes based on new technologies all challenging the assumptions of earlier work. For example, the prosperity of many European countries during the 1990s and 2000s challenges the idea of a simple relationship between mass unemployment and the support for the far right which dominated the politics of the interwar period.

In Part 3, we examine the evidence from our own sources for a relationship between BNP support and social class; income and deprivation; age; and race/levels of immigration.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SOURCES OF BNP SUPPORT

3.3. We present our own evidence at two levels. In each sub-section, we first look at the individual level, from the surveys detailed above. Second, in each section, we look at the aggregate level, from our dataset of ward-level local election results, thereby testing whether the new parties draw their support from similar locations, as well as groupings, as the traditional far right parties? Both types of evidence have strengths and weaknesses. Survey-based tests allow us to investigate the political psychology of individuals, which aggregate data cannot address, but these are usually one-off tests which do not allow for comparison over time. Aggregate data make comparisons over time much more possible and have been used for data in the 1930s, as well as analyses of far right support in the 1970s (Whiteley 1979, Taylor 1979). Aggregate data also overcome the weakness of survey research that voters often find it hard it to admit to supporting the far right; most surveys, especially those in the UK, have small numbers of respondents who say they vote for far-right parties.

3.4. To obtain our aggregate data, we drew a sample of 158 local authority wards in 26 local authority areas, selecting those wards where the BNP stood two or more candidates in the 2003 local elections (as this was one of the main breakthrough points for the BNP). We also sought data from all wards in the 26 local authority areas, which gave us variation on the main variables we were interested in. We gathered election data relevant for 2003 and 1999, the year of the previous elections for the councils we examined (from Rawlings and Thrasher, 1999 and 2003). For comparison, we also looked at the electoral support for the UKIP, choosing those councils where UKIP achieved their top 40 best election results and where they stood two or more candidates. This information was taken from the UKIP website. The socio-demographic data were downloaded from the Office for National Statistics website; ⁶ additional data on asylum seekers supported by the National Asylum Support Services (NASS) in each local authority area came from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's annual publication on asylum and immigration.

3.5. To investigate the relationships between various characteristics (such as social class or age) and support for the BNP, we measured relationships using an indicator of 'correlation' which varies from 0 (no relationship) to stronger relationships as the figure gets nearer to one. Given the wealth of variables that we are exploring, the figures are low as we would expect, but the correlations we cite remain significant. That is, they cannot be explained by chance. It should be emphasised that we are not able with the aggregate data to say exactly who voted for the BNP, but about the kinds of locations and conditions that are most likely to support the BNP.

SOCIAL CLASS

3.6. A key theme of previous commentary, especially in post-war sociology (see Lipset, 1960), is that it is the lower middle classes who tend to support the far right. This view focuses on the fact that these classes are more affected by social changes generally, such as changes in employment patterns and increases in immigration. Other studies stress the attraction of the far right to the working class or less well-off groups who have experienced the loss of collective forms of support, such as trade unions. Working class support was seen as particularly important to the National Front in the 1970s in the east of London (Whiteley 1979).

3.7. We have some individual-level information on the relationship between social class and BNP support from our survey evidence. In the European exit poll, we can find evidence to support the hypothesis that it is the lower middle classes, C1s and C2s, who vote for the far-right. The numbers are small, but about half of the 22 BNP voters (54.5 per cent) came from classes C1 and C2; 45.5 per cent came from the manual working class, D, and very poor, E, and none from the professional and managerial classes A and B. ⁷

Table 5: Voting BNP by Social Class

	Not vote BNP	Vote BNP
A, B, C1	48.5%	27.3%
C2, D, E	51.5%	72.7%
Total	100%	100%
Sample	509	22

Source: European Election Exit Poll, 2004

Note: The cross-tabulation is just statistically significant, but has small numbers

We found similar evidence in the London poll, where a higher proportion of C1 (8.1 per cent) and C2 (11.2 per cent) had voted or identified with the BNP than ABs (4.7 per cent) and DEs (7.4 per cent).

3.8. Next we examined our ward-level data to see if areas with higher proportions of citizens from certain social classes tend to exhibit higher levels of BNP support. We assumed first that the BNP were most likely to put up candidates in wards where they judged they had the best prospects of success. In looking at wards where the party did field candidates, we found higher levels of social classes C2 and D, with a slightly higher correlation (0.237) for C2 than D (0.224). Likewise, there were significant but negative correlations for classes AB (0.208) and C1 (0.174). Social class E was not significant, suggesting that the BNP believe that it is the lower middle rather than the poorest social classes which are drawn to the far-right.

3.9. We also examined the election results in the wards where the BNP stood a candidate and investigated the relationship between the social class mix of the ward and the level of support attained by the BNP. Here, we found a significant positive correlation (of 0.218) only for social class C2 which confirms the view that the roots of their appeal are among the lower middle classes. For social class E, we found a negative correlation of 0.251 which indicates that they receive little or no support in places with high numbers of state beneficiaries and the poorest workers. Certainly, where the BNP did stand, they were less likely to do well in wards with the highest level of residents in this group.

INCOME AND POVERTY

3.10. We also explored the possibility that the roots of BNP support lie in deprivation, low incomes and unemployment. This is a complex area in which changes in social conditions may be exacerbated by shifts in unemployment, and lessened by changes in social policy, such as more welfare state spending. If the roots of BNP support are to be found here, then it should be the case, in aggregate terms, that levels of unemployment or changes in levels of unemployment should predict votes for the far right (e.g., Jackman and Volpert, 1996), as would levels of deprivation.

3.11. First, we tackled the argument that it is poverty and unemployment that causes the emergence of the far right by examining the average income of the wards. Here

we found that BNP were more likely to be standing in low income wards, with a modest negative correlation of -0.101 ⁸ – which appears to support the deprivation hypothesis. However, the results for the wards where the BNP stood show the opposite: where the income of the wards increases, so the BNP vote increases, with a correlation of 0.248 for the net weekly household income and 0.183 when housing costs are taken into account. This finding contradicts the deprivation hypothesis.

3.12. The findings were similar with respect to the proportion of people claiming benefit. The BNP's decisions to stand candidates in wards in our sample areas were unrelated to the proportion of benefit claimants in those wards. But for the 158 wards where the BNP stood, we found a negative correlation of 0.301 , indicating that as the proportion of claimants in a ward goes down, so the BNP vote goes up, again appearing to reject the deprivation hypothesis. Likewise, if we look at the Multiple Index of Deprivation score (which measures deprivation from income, employment, health, education and child poverty data) we again find no relationship between deprivation and the likelihood of the BNP standing. But there is a modest but significant negative correlation of -0.171 when we look at levels of electoral support for BNP candidates. Overall, it seems, the poorer the ward the less likely the BNP are to do well.

EDUCATION

3.13. We also tested a third hypothesis: the argument that intolerance is linked to support for far right parties, with education being the key factor in determining intolerance. Extensive previous research, particularly in the US, identifies support for right wing movements with lack of education (originating with Stouffer, 1955) and links more generally to work on the authoritarian personality, which influenced accounts of the support for right-wing movements following the Second World War. It may be the case that religious orientation has an effect here, with secularism as a constraint on fascist/racist ideas, though religion can also act as a protection against extremist movements.

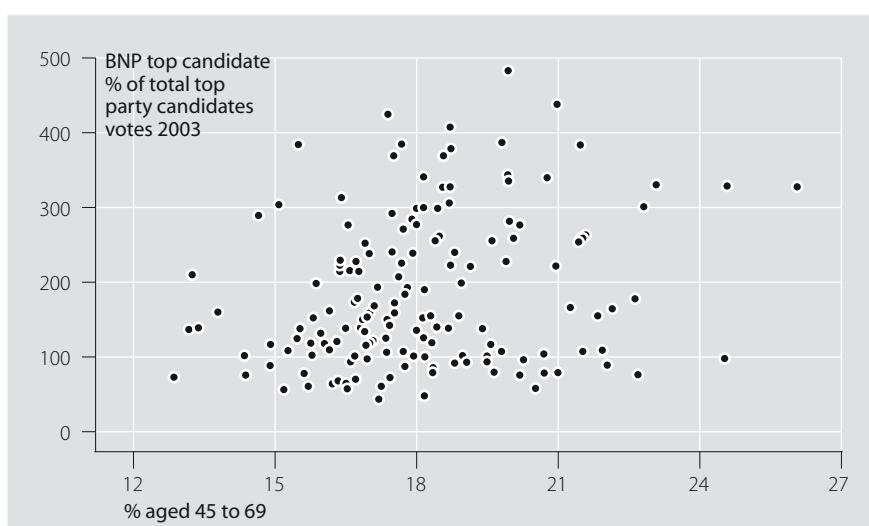
3.14. In our aggregate data, we did find evidence of a relationship between the education levels of a ward and the likelihood of the BNP standing. The BNP were more likely to stand candidates in wards with a higher proportion of people with no qualifications (with a significant but small correlation of 0.115) and of people with fewer than five 'basic' CSE/GCSEs, or in the terminology used in the census data, 'level 1 qualifications' (with a slightly higher correlation at 0.149).⁹ As the intolerance hypothesis would lead us to expect, the BNP were less likely to stand in wards with higher proportions of more highly educated people – their presence was negatively associated with the proportion of people with A levels or their equivalent (level 3) and with degrees (level 4). The negative correlations are -0.210 and -0.192 respectively.

3.15. We found similar relationships between education levels and the levels of BNP support in the wards where they did stand. BNP candidates won more votes in wards where more people were only educated up to 'qualification level 1, or fewer than five 'basic' CSE/GCSEs (with a modest positive correlation for the proportion of people educated to this level of 0.183), but did less well as the proportions of people with qualifications rose (with really quite strong negative correlations for the proportion of people with A level and degree level qualifications (level 3 and 4 qualifications in census terms) of -0.410 and -0.305 respectively. These findings are supported by our previous study of aggregate data in London which found that BNP support was higher in wards with higher proportions of residents with no qualifications with a correlation of 0.624 (John et al, 2005). This combination of evidence goes some way to support the tolerance hypothesis, that lack of education rather than social class or poverty is a key factor.

AGE

3.16. It is also possible that wards with older voters will vote BNP, possibly out of social conservatism and a sense of threat from new waves of immigration and the changing character of familiar neighbourhoods. In our

Figure 1: A Scatterplot of the Proportion of Older Voters in a Ward and the BNP Vote



micro-level survey evidence, we did not find evidence for this hypothesis, as shown in table 6 below.

Table 6: Voting BNP by Age Group

Age group	Not vote BNP	Vote BNP	Total
Younger than 45	36.7	59.1	37.6
45 and older	63.3	40.9	62.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sample	545	22	567

p=0.03

Source: European Election Exit Poll

3.17. In our ward level data, however, we did find support for this viewpoint. First, wards with higher levels of younger people were less likely to show support for the BNP, particularly among people aged 20 to 24, with a significant correlation of 0.110. The pattern of levels of support in the 158 wards where the BNP stood reveals the same pattern, but in addition the wards with high numbers of 45-69 year olds were more likely to show higher levels of BNP support, with a correlation of 0.234. This relationship is shown in the scatterplot (Figure 1, see page 15)).

This finding is supported by our research in London, where we found a negative relationship between wards with larger numbers of young voters and the BNP vote in the London elections, with a correlation of -0.432. (However, as we report in para. 2.15 above, the London poll suggested that young people were more likely to vote BNP or to consider doing so the future. This finding may represent a ‘London effect’, whereby BNP support in London is different.)

ETHNIC COMPOSITION AND NUMBERS OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

3.18. A fifth hypothesis is that support for far right parties in Europe since the 1970s needs to be understood in the context of the changing experience of migration, which exceeds or at least appears to exceed that experienced in previous periods. As many western countries become more like the US, in terms of the emergence of a multi-cultural society, the transition imposes strains for certain groups in society and the experience of immigration affects the local identification and voting patterns that is the core of the support for racist parties. In one view it is the direct experience of new groups in local communities that is the basis of support for the far right; another view regards the support for racist ideas as a function of contact or lack of contact with other groups themselves (see Forbes 1997 for a review of the debate). Here the argument is that in the absence of day-to-day contacts with different groups, people are more receptive to racist stereotypes as conveyed by the media and other sources of information. It is likely that these factors will interact with some of the others mentioned above, such as age and social class.

3.19. The way to test these hypotheses is to see whether voters who vote BNP do so because they are more likely

to be exposed to other ethnic groups or are not, or is it the case that relatively homogenous white wards vote BNP? But such a test must accommodate the fact that more ethnically diverse wards are less likely to show high levels of BNP support because there are fewer white voters and therefore a lower pool of voters who are likely to vote for the BNP (see Taylor 1979 for an account of this argument).

3.20. Looking at all the wards in our sample, we get a positive correlation of 0.129, which suggests that the BNP vote is slightly more likely to occur, when it occurs, in white wards with higher proportions of white electors, a finding we replicated in London (see John et al, 2005). But looking at just the wards where the BNP stood, we found no relationship between ethnic mix and BNP support, which indicates that the BNP vote does not go up the more homogenous the ward is. However, when we looked for relationships between the BNP vote and the presence of specific ethnic groups in the wards where the BNP stood, we did find some relationships. We found that in wards with higher proportions of Pakistani residents, BNP support was likely to be higher (with a positive correlation of 0.224). But there were signs that the BNP vote was likely to be lower in wards with higher proportions of Chinese and Black African people, though the percentages involved were too small to come to any strong conclusion for these or any other ethnic groups.

3.21. We also tested for a ‘local authority effect’, by comparing the results for individual wards with the figures from the council level. Here the relationship between the BNP vote and the council level ethnic composition seemed to be positive. Thus, in contrast to the ward level statistics, greater ethnic diversity at the council level increases the BNP vote, with a correlation of 0.169, indicating that the overall ethnic makeup of a local authority area does have an effect on the BNP vote.

3.22. Again, the relationship is complex. The relationship differed for different ethnic groups – and the correlations at local authority level are even stronger than at ward level. Looking just at the wards where the BNP stood once again, we found that they did better where there was a noticeable Asian population at council level, with a positive correlation of 0.346. This suggests that the BNP is strongest in areas where there is a higher proportion of Asian residents. Once we distinguish between different types of Asian groups, we find that the strong relationship actually relates to Pakistani (with a correlation of 0.380) and Bangladeshi (correlation of 0.346) groups, but that there is no relationship for the presence of Indian Asian groups.

3.23. Although the correlation is powerful enough (and considerably more so than other correlations covered here), the picture for the percentage of Asian groups in each council area is more complicated. It seems that up to a certain percentage (around 7 per cent), electoral support for the BNP increases with the percentage of Asians in the local population. Above that level, however, the level of

BNP support actually goes down, particularly for Leicester and Birmingham which have very high proportions of Asian residents, but lower levels of BNP support than, say, Burnley.

3.24. It might be expected that the BNP would prosper where there are numbers of asylum seekers in an area. However, one of our most puzzling findings is that there is a negative relationship between the BNP vote and the proportion of asylum seekers, not positive. That is, the higher the proportion of asylum seekers allocated to a locality, the lower the levels of BNP support. The correlation between BNP support and the number of asylum seekers supported under NASS per 10,000 of council population is strongly negative for 2003 (with a correlation of -0.307) and equally negative for 2002 (-0.308). When we control for non-white voters in the population as above, the correlations are even more strongly negative at -0.394 for 2003 and -0.365 for 2002. The most likely explanation for this finding is that the government may not have sent asylum seekers to areas with high actual or potential levels of BNP support because of the fear of inflaming race relations, preferring to send them to areas that did not have a large ethnic population and BNP support.

3.25. When looking at the proportion of groups from other religions in a council area, it is Muslims that would appear to stimulate most BNP support, with a correlation of 0.355, rising to 0.363 when we look at BNP support in votes in the white population. These figures are stronger than the figures for race that we show above. They indicate that the BNP is able to capitalise upon 'Islamophobia' (Runnymede Commission 1997) and that the strategy of exploiting the role of Muslims in terrorist attacks, such as the 7 July London bombings, may very well have a particularly strong effect at the local level. Certainly, the sudden upsurge in 'race hate' assaults, including one murder, verbal abuse and spitting, directed at Muslims, increased dramatically in the weeks after the bombings, with figures for increases in such crimes rising, often very substantially, over the 24 per cent national figure, in London, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, the West Midlands and Merseyside (see further, CAABU, August 2005). On the other hand, a flagrant BNP attempt to exploit the bombings in a council by-election in Barking and Dagenham, with a leaflet entitled, 'If only they had listened to us', failed miserably (Lowles, N., in John et al. 2005).

PART 4

POPULAR ATTITUDES TO IMMIGRATION AND RACE

4.1. A review of recent evidence on the attitudes of people in the UK to immigration and race relations, and especially towards the Muslim communities, gives some idea of the scale of public concerns upon which the BNP feeds. There is a wealth of opinion poll data, including tracking questions over time, which give some idea of changes in attitudes.

OPINION POLL EVIDENCE ON ATTITUDES

4.2. In this brief indicative review, we have however relied largely on three key sources: the British Social Attitudes Survey, MORI opinion poll surveys and surveys by the European Commission's Eurobarometer. The 2004 British Social Attitudes survey focuses on attitudes as they changed and became more hostile towards immigration between 1995 and 2003 (McLaren and Johnson). Responses to two questions serve as summary measures of general attitudes to immigration:

Table 7: Attitudes towards the Scale of Immigration
Do you think that the number of immigrants to Britain nowadays should be increased a lot, increased a little, remain the same as it is, reduced a little, or reduced a lot?

	1995 %	2003 %	% Change
Increased a little/a lot	3%	5%	+2
Remain as is	26%	15%	-12
Reduced a little	24%	23%	-1
Reduced a lot	41%	51%	+10
Base	970	793	

Table 8: Attitudes towards Measures to Exclude Illegal Immigrants
Do you agree or disagree that Britain should take stronger measures to exclude illegal immigrants?

	1995	2003	% change
Agree Strongly	49%	53%	+5
Agree	29%	28%	-1
Neither Agree nor disagree	13%	10%	-4
Disagree/disagree strongly	6%	5%	-1
Base	970	793	

Thus in 1995, around two thirds of the population thought that the number of immigrants should be reduced; by 2003 this had jumped to almost three quarters. In 1995, over three quarters (78%) of respondents wanted stronger measures to exclude illegal immigrants, by 2003 the figure had risen to 82 per cent.

4.3. What best explains this change? McLaren and Johnson listed a number of possible explanations:

- an increase in national pride

- an increasing conservatism in the conception of British identity
- an increase in racial prejudice
- an increase in concern about Muslims
- changes in the perception of the social and economic consequences of immigration
- the impact of elite opinion formers and the media.

AN INCREASE IN NATIONAL PRIDE

The authors found that most aspects of national pride are either unrelated or correlated in the wrong direction with attitudes to immigration. The relatively small increase in national pride between 1995 and 2003 could not sufficiently explain the increase in hostile attitudes to immigration.

BRITISH IDENTITY

Does the increase in hostility towards immigration lie in increasingly conservative notions of what it means to be British? Four components of 'Britishness' are strongly related to hostility towards further immigration:

- being born in Britain
- having British ancestry
- having lived most of one's life in Britain
- agreeing that 'it is impossible for people who do not share Britain's customs and traditions to become fully British.'

These conceptions can be understood as the 'ethnic' or 'exclusive' dimension of national identity. A more civic or inclusive conception of national identity is on the other hand not significantly related to hostility to further immigration.

However, McLaren and Johnson report that the number of people who share an 'ethnic' or exclusive' conception of national identity have tended to decrease over time. Thus, although those who share an ethnic conception of national identity are likely to be hostile to increased immigration, this cannot explain the increase in hostile attitudes, as there has been no increase in these elements.

RACIAL PREJUDICE

As might be predicted, self reported racial prejudice had a very strong relationship with anti-immigration views. But has racial prejudice increased over time? Between 1983 and 2001 the proportion of respondents who reported that they were either very or a little prejudiced dropped from 35 per cent to 25. An increase did occur in 2002, to 31 per cent and the latest figure stood at 30 per cent. A BBC 'Multicultural Poll, conducted by MORI on 8-9 August 2005, after the London bombings however found that self-reported racism stood at 25 per cent. Another aspect of racial prejudice in society is not self reported racial prejudice but perceptions of how much racial prejudice occurs in society as a whole. Overall, the number of

people who believe there is more prejudice compared to five years ago, increased from 34 per cent in 1994 to 45 per cent in 2003 and those who believed that prejudice would increase over the next five years, increased from 39 per cent in 1994 to 52 per cent in 2003 (BBC, 2005).

Eurobarometer, the European Commission's public analysis section, also asked people throughout Europe in 1997 whether they were racist. In the UK 35 per cent described themselves as not at all racist, 34 per cent described themselves as a little racist, 24 per cent described themselves as quite racist and 8 per cent described themselves as very racist. These figures were similar to the overall figure in the EU where 33 per cent of those interviewed openly described themselves as 'quite' or 'very' racist (Eurobarometer 1997).

PREJUDICE AGAINST MUSLIMS

We have highlighted above (para. 3.22) evidence of a link between the presence of Pakistani or Bangladeshi communities and a higher vote for the BNP, with the obvious inference of potential anti-Muslim attitudes. Opinion poll questions relating to Muslims were only asked in 2003, so there are no over time data. (But see para.4.9. for a snapshot of attitudes towards Islam taken after the July 2004 bombings). There was, however, a strong relationship between attitudes to Muslims and anti immigration views. Thus half the population (51 per cent) agreed that England (or Scotland or Wales) would start to lose its identity if more Muslims came to live here, and these respondents were 40 percentage points more likely to think that immigration should be reduced than the 30 per cent who did not think that their country would lose its identity. One in four people would be unhappy if a close relative married a Muslim, and almost nine out of 10 of them would like to see a reduction in immigration, whereas the figure among the 29 per cent who would be happy to see such a marriage, the figure was three-fifths

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF IMMIGRATION

The authors find, unsurprisingly, that those who see adverse economic consequences of immigration, also believe that it should be reduced. However, there is no indication that there is an increase in the number of people who believe that immigration has negative economic consequences since 1995.

There is however a relationship between those who believe that government spends too much on immigrants and those who want immigration to be reduced. Again those who believed that immigrants caused social problems such as increased crime rates also believed that immigration should be reduced. What has increased since 1995 is the idea that immigrants increase crime rates. Thus in 1995 25 per cent of the population agreed with the idea that immigrants increased crime rates, by 2003 this had grown to 39 per cent. Similarly there has been a decline in the proportion of the population who agree with the idea that

immigrants make Britain open to ideas and culture from 51 per in 1995 to 31 per cent in 2003.

THE PORTRAYAL OF IMMIGRATION BY POLITICIANS AND IN THE MEDIA

The authors sought to test the hypothesis that those who read ‘anti-immigration’ newspapers should have a higher level of hostility to immigrants than those who read pro immigration newspapers or those who read none at all. However, the increase in anti immigration sentiments among readers of pro and anti immigration papers is rather similar. A similar increase is also found in those who do not read any paper.

4.4. The polling company MORI produces an annual

‘Political Monitor’ which compiles data on the importance of issues to the electorate. Figure 2, below, illustrates our analysis of data on the importance of ‘race relations/immigration/immigrants’ as an issue.

MORI was also commissioned by the United Nations Population Fund to examine changes in the domestic concerns of Europeans in 2001. The survey asked respondents what they thought were the two or three most important problems facing Britain today. This was a repeat of a survey conducted in 1996. In Britain, far fewer people thought that unemployment was in the top two or three issues (it fell from 48 per cent in 1996 to 23 per cent in 2001), but those who thought that race relations and immigration were top two or three issues of domestic

Figure 2: Ranking Race Relations and Immigration as Important Issues

Source: ‘MORI Political Monitor: Long Term Trends The Most Important Issues Facing Britain Today’, www.mori.com

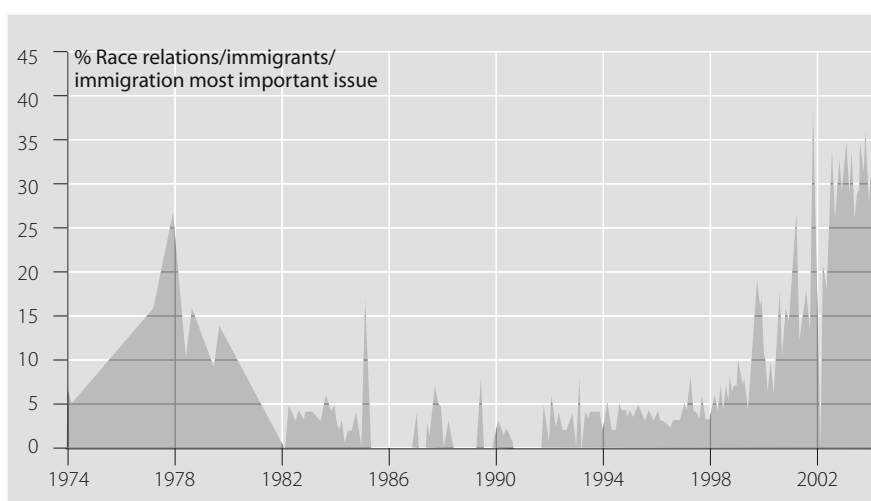


Table 9: Attitudes towards Immigrants in Britain, 2000

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	n/a	Refused
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Too much is done to help immigrants at present	32	31	13	15	7	3	*	*
There are too many immigrants in Britain								
MORI/Socio-consult								
1989	37	26	18	10	8	1	-	-
1994	24	40	-	24	9	3	-	-
1997	25	36	-	24	11	4	-	-
1999	22	33	-	22	11	13	-	-
Readers' Digest/MORI								
2000	35	31	13	11	6	3	*	*
Refugees come to Britain because they think Britain is a 'soft touch'	50	30	6	8	4	2	*	*
Those settling in this country should not maintain the culture and lifestyle they had at home	16	22	17	28	16	2	*	*
It would upset me if a family of asylum seekers moved into my street	13	14	17	30	22	3	*	*

Base: All white respondents (1,968)

Source: MORI

concern rose from 3 per cent in 1996 to 19 per cent in 2001 (MORI 2001).

4.5. MORI has also conducted more in depth research into attitudes towards immigration and race relations. In October 2000 a poll for *Reader's Digest* examined the levels of tolerance amongst the British public and attitudes towards immigration (MORI 2000):

The survey found that those more likely to believe that 'there are too many immigrants in Britain' were:

- those aged 65+ (83 per cent) compared with 62 per cent of 15-64 year olds
- those living in the North East (78 per cent) compared with 47 per cent of Londoners
- Conservative supporters (75 per cent) compared with Liberal Democrats (54 per cent) and Labour (62 per cent)

4.6. A further survey published by MORI in February 2003 for Migration Watch found that seven in 10 people (71 per cent) said that asylum seekers who have arrived in this country from a safe country in Europe should be sent back. There is also support for a toughening of immigration laws with two thirds saying laws should be 'much tougher' (although only 13 per cent said immigration should be stopped altogether). A similar number (12 per cent) said that immigration laws should stay the same as they are, 6 per cent said they should be relaxed or abolished altogether (MORI 2003).

4.7. There were however, key regional differences. In terms of attitudes towards multiculturalism, immigration and asylum it was possible to divide Great Britain into 3 groups:

- The North East, West Midlands and the South West
- London
- The remaining regions of Great Britain

The North East, West Midlands and the South West showed the most opposition to multi culturalism, immigration and asylum and London had the least opposition to these issues, with the remaining regions falling in between.

4.8. Some participants in our focus groups complained that ethnic minorities were 'taking over' neighbourhoods or town centres (see the panel above). Two recent MORI polls look at this feeling on a national basis. A 2004 poll on ethnic diversity asked the following question: *To what extent do you agree or disagree that you would rather live in an area where people are from the same ethnic background as you?* Those who 'definitely' agreed or 'tended to agree' (39 per cent) were out-weighted by those who 'definitely' disagreed or 'tended to' disagree (53 per cent), two thirds of whom came from the 16-34 age group. Those who agreed were older, thus suggesting that younger people were much more likely to accept living in ethnically diverse communities than older people (MORI

'It's not our country any more'

The two focus groups in Dagenham, divided between people aged below and above 45, regarded immigration and asylum as dominant issues in the imminent general election. The discussions revealed how the presence of 'immigrants' and 'asylum seekers' locally became the focus for a wide range of discontents and fears about the shortage of affordable housing, pressures on schools, constraints on the NHS, the decline of the neighbourhood, and so on. In particular, participants felt that 'asylum seekers' took away state resources that would otherwise be spent on the NHS, education and other services. 'Because if you're spending your money on asylum seekers, you've got to take the money from somewhere. So it's going to come from education, it's going to come from pensioners' pockets. . .'

Dynamic changes are taking place in Barking and Dagenham and the public services on which the original white working class communities relied are simply not sufficiently resourced or responsive enough to cope with the rapid new diversification and historic legacy of poverty and under-

investment (see Cruddas, 2005). For the working class participants in the focus groups, the ethnic minorities thus became a symbol for their frustrations and feelings of powerlessness and neglect. The tone of discussions veered between expressions of sympathy for oppressed people abroad and respect for 'hard-working' local minorities to heated outbursts from some members about 'immigrants' and 'asylum seekers'. The under-45s were the more tolerant and tried to take a balanced view. Both groups felt that the government was deliberately not being honest about the extent of immigration and 'fudged' the figures.

The visible presence of ethnic minorities – 'asylum seekers' and 'immigrants' – on the streets created alarm and anger for some participants who said that they had 'taken over' the area with their different culture and languages:

'In Ilford, the ethnic minority is the indigenous people now . . . I think it is frightening when you think that whole wads of your country are being taken up by an entirely different culture . . . It's schools and everything.

2004). In 2005, MORI asked respondents for the BBC Multiculturalism Poll, whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that 'my *area*' or 'parts of the country' did not feel like Britain any more because of immigration. 86 per cent of respondents in the national survey disagreed that their *area* no longer felt 'like Britain' (12 per cent did), but a small majority – 54 per cent to 40 per cent – agreed that parts of the country no longer felt 'like Britain' (BBC, 2005).

Respondents in 2004 were also asked why they thought there is less community spirit in Britain today. Two fifths of people selected people working long hours, a third spending more time watching television or on the internet, one in five moving home more often, and 17 per cent suggested that 'there are more newcomers to the country, including immigrants and asylum seekers'. Among poorer social groups, C2, D and E (see above), 23 per cent of

I don't dislike these kids or anything like that, but I do think I never had a choice about who came into the country.'

There was discussion about the visibility of ethnic minority people in East Ham, Dagenham, Birmingham (they've got loads'), Bradford ('look at the trouble they've had up there') – 'they're definitely pushing people out.' A woman remarked, 'I shouldn't say it but it's not our country any more. The Asians have become the new Jews, haven't they, really.' The older group especially blamed 'immigrants' and 'asylum seekers' for the degeneration of their neighbourhoods and falling community standards. 'I was born in Barking and lived in Barking all my life and it's a shame how it's degenerated.' 'It's all the hanging about . . . around the bandstand, it's like a congregation.'

Those who expressed their fears most vehemently were at pains to stress that they were not racist and felt resentful that if they expressed their concerns they were liable to be unfairly accused of being racist. Though some participants expressed sympathy for the plight of people forced out of their own countries by oppression, most were sceptical about the genuineness of asylum seekers who actually came to Britain. They were the focus of varying resentments, exploiting food

vouchers, buying CDs and DVDs – 'while our youngsters have got no money' – possessing mobile phones, getting 'gift vouchers' from social services, eating luxury food. A woman complained, 'But then we are told that we are getting it all wrong and what you see with your own eyes isn't the truth. You're racist.'

No-one trusted the main parties to tell the truth on immigration (or much else for that matter). The parties should 'get out in the real world . . . Let them get off their backsides, come into places and listen to the people and see what goes on.' A woman asked the facilitator to send the transcript to Tony Blair or his party members. 'Let them struggle for six months, pay council tax, on a budget like everyone else!' She said that only those who 'are beneficial to our society' should be let in: 'doctors, nurses, all the resources that we need, let them in. Let the rest be put up against the wall. No I'm only joking.'

The focus group in Northampton was primarily focused on the June 2004 elections for the European Parliament, voting from party lists and postal voting. Robert Kilroy-Silk had visited the town on behalf of UKIP. People in the group agreed that they had voted on both European and national issues. And a woman

promptly said,

'I seem to have heard various comments about there being too many people in the UK that aren't nationals, and it's becoming too much, and so any party that said we'll get them out, i.e. Kilroy-Silk, some people just put their cross there because that's what they wanted. Nothing else came into it. It was just that one thing.'

Others agreed: 'It was about immigration as well, not only Europe;' 'Yes, I heard a lot of comments made about that;' 'I think a lot of people have concerns that if we do stay in Europe the barriers that we've currently got, to a certain extent, are going to be totally destroyed and we're just going to be the dumping ground for these Eastern Europeans;' 'I think it goes back to what you were saying earlier: it's starting to impact on every town now and I don't think anybody can ignore that. I think that's why people are homing in on that particular aspect.'

There was discussion about whether media stories about asylum seekers and illegal immigrants aroused popular concerns and one man blamed 'a lot of bad press about asylum seekers.' Another said, 'It's not only bad press. A lot of people are seeing it for themselves. They've had experiences . . . I

work a lot in Peterborough, in the town centre, and you can hardly find anyone who speaks English in a restaurant. It's all asylum seekers in the town centre at lunch time. And that is affecting me.'

Later on other men said:

'We've had agency workers working for us. We started off some years ago with Polish people and Ukrainians which was fine, but then they started getting the Kosovans and now we're having South Africans in too. So there's a whole range of these people from all these different countries who are coming over and finding work. Two or three months ago we had a raid by immigration at six o'clock in the morning. They had unmarked cars, etc. You just saw these armed police, and although we made a joke of it, they took a lot of these Kosovans away. You wonder if they will do the same with the South Africans. You just don't know. There are so many of them around. Not just in this town. It's a national thing, really.'

'You can see here that whether we want to or not we have a concern, and now that somebody has come along and said they are going to address that concern – whether they can or can't – they get your attention.'

Two women responded: 'That's right.' 'Yes, every time.'

respondents answered that 'there are more newcomers to the country, including immigrants and asylum seekers'.

4.9. A 1997 report by Eurobarometer, the European Commission's public analysis section, asked respondents for their views on the integration and assimilation of minority groups into society. In the UK 45 per cent of people agreed with the statement that 'in order to be fully accepted members of society, people belonging to these minority groups must give up such parts of their religion or culture which may be in conflict with the law'. But more than a quarter (26 per cent) agreed that 'in order to be fully accepted members of society, people belonging to these minority groups must give up their own culture'. Moreover two thirds (66 per cent) tended to agree with the statement that 'our country has reached its limits; if there were to be more people belonging to these minority groups we would have problems' (Eurobarometer 1997).

A survey in 2003 examined in greater detail majority attitudes towards minorities and found that one in five people in Great Britain (Northern Ireland was treated separately) agreed with the statements that 'it is a good thing for any society to be made up of people from different races, religions or cultures' and that 'Great Britain's diversity in terms of race, religion or culture adds to its strengths'. Yet once again two thirds (68 per cent) agreed with the view that 'there is a limit to how many people of other races, religions or cultures a society can accept' and that Great Britain has reached its limits: if there were to be more people belonging to these minority groups we would have problems (Eurobarometer 2005). Our focus groups in Dagenham (15 March 2005) and Northampton illustrated just how strongly ordinary people feel about immigration and asylum when it has, in their view, reached the limit (see Panel, 'it's not our country any more').

4.10. There is not a great deal of opinion poll material on whether the July 2005 bombings have altered popular views on immigration, race and Islam. The BBC Multiculturalism Poll of August 2005 found that a small majority felt that Britain was becoming less rather than more tolerant – by 39 per cent to 34, with 22 per cent perceiving ‘no change’. Muslims in the national and a booster poll split a third each way (BBC, 2005). Two thirds of all respondents (68 per cent) and three quarters of Muslims (74 per cent) disagreed with the proposition that ‘the policy of multiculturalism in Britain has been a mistake and should be abandoned’; some 21 per cent of all respondents (14 per cent of Muslims) agreed. There was a two-to-one majority (62 per cent to 32 per cent) in favour of the proposition that ‘multiculturalism makes Britain a better place to live’ over the idea that it ‘threatens the British way of life’. A Populus poll more immediately after the bombings, published in *The Times* on 26 July 2005 found considerable support for the proposition that ‘The fact that three of the London bombers were British-born Muslims shows that multiculturalism has gone too far’, rising from 27 per cent of ABs and 32 per cent of C1s to 46 per cent of C2s and half DEs. 10 There was strong support for integrationist ideas, such as immigrants who become British citizens should ‘pledge their primary loyalty to Britain’ (73 per cent more; 76 per cent of Muslims) and ‘accept the rights of women as equal citizens’ (96 and 95 per cent). But respondents in the national survey split roughly one half against the statement that ‘Islam is incompatible with the values of British democracy’ (Muslims were two thirds against), one quarter for the statement, and one quarter ‘don’t knows’.

4.11. Summarising the opinion poll data, it would seem that the British people broadly accept the multicultural country in which we all live, and that they believe by a two-to-one majority that multiculturalism makes Britain ‘a better place to live’ rather than poses a threat to the British way of life. But there is clearly rising concern about the scale of immigration and asylum. Two thirds of people believe that Britain has reached the limit to how many people of different races, religions and cultures

the country can accept. There is a significant minority – ranging from about a fifth to nearly a third of people – who are not content with multicultural Britain and who do feel that it threatens the country’s way of life. Between about 24 and 34 per cent of British people acknowledge at various times being at least a ‘little racist’. As we have shown also, roughly 18-24 per cent of people in different areas of the country might consider voting for the BNP and the opinion poll evidence shows that there are sensitive issues – most especially the feeling that the country or a specific neighbourhood is under threat – where the party can (and in fact does) exploit the fears of a significant minority of white Britons.

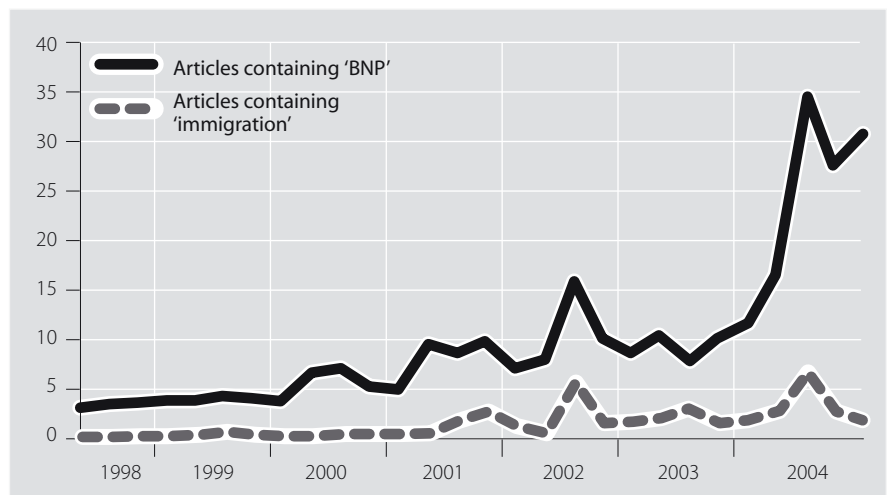
PARTY AND MEDIA INFLUENCE ON ATTITUDES TO IMMIGRATION AND RACE

4.12. The media plainly exert a major influence on popular attitudes towards immigration and race, as the frequent references largely to press reports in our focus groups tend to confirm. It is indeed often argued that whenever ‘race’ is politicised by the mainstream parties and media, it is more often than not the far right parties that benefit (across Europe and not simply in the UK). The argument is that the ‘hysterical’ political debate on asylum and immigration at national level constructs both as a ‘problem’ and legitimates the BNP’s emphasis on race and identity (see, for example, Copsey 2004). We can provide one indicator of the relationship between the BNP and national debate on immigration by an analysis of the coverage of both in the press. Figure 3 below shows the press coverage of immigration in the UK press over the five years between 1998 and 2003 and the press coverage of the BNP during the same period. The graph shows evidence of a relationship between the two: obviously, there is far more coverage of immigration than the BNP, but when the former peaks, so does the latter.

4.13. The media can however also play a more positive role in informing people about the real nature of the BNP (as paras. 2.18-2.23 above suggest). A comment from a participant in one of our focus groups (in Barking and Dagenham) who had actually voted for the BNP further

Figure 3: The Relationship between Coverage of Immigration and the BNP in the Press, 1998-2004

Source: Lexis Nexis



illustrates the linkage between the media and BNP, while also highlighting the importance of negative television coverage of the party, such as the BBC-TV documentary, *The Secret Agent*, showing undercover recordings of BNP leaders, that was broadcast in July 2004 (see para 2.22 above):

‘The only reason I voted BNP was because of the asylum seekers. I’m not racist. I’ve worked with all different types of people but I read an article that came through the door and it was asylum seekers. But then after I voted I got the answer. I saw that guy [Nick Griffin, the BNP leader] on the TV and straight away I thought I shouldn’t have done that.’

PART 5

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE BNP AND OTHER PARTIES

5.1. In this section, we describe our attempts to test the relationship between the electoral support for the BNP and for other parties, as well as examining the effect of competition between the main parties on BNP support, and to examine the theory that low turnout in a ward gives the BNP an incentive to stand and has a positive effect on the party’s performance.

5.2. First we investigated the relationship between the strength of the BNP vote in 2003 and the performance of the other parties in 1999. We found that the BNP was more likely to stand in 2003 in wards where in 1999 Labour was strongest (with a correlation of 0.187) and where the Conservatives were weakest (with a modest correlation of 0.087). This finding confirms a conventional view of the British far right in the 1970s: that it seeks – and finds – electoral success in Labour areas. But this may be just a feature of the urban character of right wing movements – it just so happens that this is where the Labour party’s heartlands are rather than a vote away from the party.

5.3. In any case, when we investigated these relationships for the wards where the BNP stood, we found evidence to challenge this conventional view. Where Labour was strongest in the 1999 elections, the BNP was at its weakest in 2003 (with a correlation of -0.217). For the 2003 vote, the BNP also did less well in those wards where Labour remained strong, with a stronger correlation of -0.273, and also where the Conservatives did well (although with a weaker correlation of -0.130). This suggests that the BNP does best in wards where the two major parties do less well.

5.4. Our analysis also suggests that the BNP gains its electoral support from all three of the largest parties, and not just Labour; and in fact that it gains most from the Conservatives and least from Labour. We investigated the relationship between support for the BNP and the change in support between 1999 and 2003 for the three largest parties, Liberal Democrat, Conservative and Labour. First, we found that the BNP was more likely to have a presence in areas where one or more of all three larger parties did less well than in 1999. In wards where the BNP stood, we also found three negative correlations between its electoral support and that for the three parties, varying from -0.251 for the Conservatives to -0.117 for Labour. These figures suggest that the BNP appear to be gaining their support from all three parties, but most from Conservatives and least from Labour (although they should be treated with caution as we are presenting aggregate level statistics, which may hide the complexity of vote-switching within each area).

5.5. Our focus group evidence supports the finding that the BNP (and UKIP in London) are gaining support from all three largest parties. People participating in the groups claim to have voted for several parties before turning to the far right:

‘I’ve thought to myself, oh, well, I’ll just vote UKIP because I don’t trust Labour, I don’t trust the Conservatives, I don’t think anything of them and so that’s what I’ll do. I think there’s a lot of other people in this area that would do the same thing.’ (First focus group participant, Dagenham)

‘After voting a few times for them [the larger parties], you think, what’s the point? Do you know what I mean? That’s rubbish. It’s a false promise.’ (Second focus group participant, Dagenham).

‘At the end of the day they’ve [the larger parties] all got the same set of ideas – they’re all concerned about immigration and they’re concerned about the health service and the economy. They all come across with much the same message and at the end of the day the one that conveys that message in the way I want to hear it – convincingly – is the one that I vote for.’ (Focus group participant, Northampton).

5.6. Another possibility is that the level of party competition (in 1999) will influence the propensity of the BNP to stand (in 2003) and will make a difference to the strength of the BNP vote. We found that the BNP were more likely to stand in wards in 2003 where there were fewer parties competing in 1999, although the correlation is very modest at -0.056 . In 2003, for the wards where the BNP did stand there is a much stronger correlation of -0.254 , which does support the theory that the BNP does better in elections where fewer parties stand.

5.7. But simply to count the number of parties standing in a ward is a very crude measure. It does not distinguish between large and small parties. Another way of measuring party competition is the Effective Number of Parties in Terms of Votes (NPV), which allows for the size of parties as those with very small vote shares will hardly affect the result once the calculation is made.¹¹ We found a very modest negative correlation (-0.077) with change in BNP support and the value of NPV in 1999 across all wards, suggesting again that the BNP was more likely to stand in wards with lower levels of party competition in the previous election. For those wards where the BNP did stand, we found the most surprising result – a positive correlation of 0.182 , suggesting that where more parties competed elections in 1999, the BNP were more likely to do well in 2003 (there was no correlation with NPV in 2003). Labour benefited even more than the BNP from a higher level of competition (with a correlation of 0.235) while the Conservatives fared less well (with a correlation of -0.239).

5.8. There are various other ways of measuring party competition: one is the difference between the share of

the vote gained by the first and second parties in each contest. We used this test for the 1999 elections. Here, we found that BNP did better in close-run contests, with a correlation of -0.249 . It seems that where the votes for the two leading parties in an elections were closer, the BNP was more likely to do well. Thus the BNP seems to do well where there is evidence of party volatility rather than in quieter well-defended seats.

5.9. One key party which did well at the same time as the BNP was the United Kingdom Independence Party. As we discuss below, the UKIP used some of the same symbols as BNP and voters responded in the same way in both the European and London Assembly and Mayoral elections of 2004. In the London study, we found that there was a very high correlation between the BNP and UKIP votes of 0.89 , which is about as high as it imaginable in this kind of aggregate data research (John et al 2005). In other words, where they stood against each other in the city-wide elections, both parties polled well – a counter intuitive finding.

5.10. Outside London we found evidence for this link between the appeal of both parties in the Northampton focus groups. But we could not test the relationship in any depth, because there were only seven wards in our dataset where the BNP and UKIP stood against each other. In those wards we found no relationship between their votes.

TURNOUT AND THE BNP VOTE

5.11. Another theory about the BNP’s electoral strategy is that the party targets areas where there is a decline in the general level of support for the established parties, as expressed by low turnout in elections. The idea is that the BNP, and other smaller parties, have an extra incentive to stand and may perform better in these areas.

5.12. The way to test such a theory is to examine the relationship between turnout in previous elections and electoral support for the BNP. We found that there was no relationship between a low level of turnout and the BNP in elections across all wards. However, the BNP was more likely to stand in wards in 2003 where turnout in 1999 was lower, with a correlation of -0.197 . But the figures show no relationship between the low turnout in these wards and the performance of the BNP four years later on in 2003. It seems that low turnout can help to explain where the BNP stand, but not how well they do in mobilising disaffected voters.

PART 6

LOCAL VARIATIONS IN BNP SUPPORT

6.1. Finally, we investigated the relationship between location and BNP support – testing the hypothesis that the regional or local authority characteristics have an effect on the level of support. With respect to regions, we found the following distribution of BNP support:

Table 10: Distribution of BNP Support across English Regions, 2003

Region	No. of wards in sample contested by BNP	Average level of BNP support (%)	Standard Deviation
North East	43	13.1	5.0
Yorkshire & Humberside	38	18.1	8.3
North West	33	26.8	10.9
West Midlands	19	23.8	9.1
South West	11	16.0	12.8
South East	11	11.7	4.7
East Midlands	3	10.6	3.3
Total	158	18.5	10.0

Table 10 shows variation across regions, with 114 of our 200 seats where the BNP stood concentrated in the three northern regions, the North East, Yorkshire and Humberside and North West, with a further 19 in the West Midlands. Three of these regions – the North West, West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside – have average levels of BNP support at or above our average for wards across England, of 18 per cent. In contrast the East Midlands, South West and South East have only 25 wards where the BNP stood between them and average levels

Table 11: Distribution of BNP Support across Local Authorities

Local Authority Area	Region	Average BNP support at ward level %	N
Basildon	South East	17.5	3
Birmingham	West Midlands	14.2	5
Bradford	North West	20.5	8
Bristol	South West	8.9	4
Broxbourne	South East	35.8	6
Burnley	North West	34.7	10
Calderdale	Yorkshire	27.7	7
Darlington	North East	10.1	8
Doncaster	North East	13.6	4
Dudley	West Midlands	27.9	4
Gateshead	North East	11.7	8
Kingston Upon Hull	North East	7.4	3
Kirklees	Kirklees	20.4	7
Leeds	Yorkshire	12.2	8
Leicester	West Midlands	10.6	3
Liverpool	North West	5.7	3
Medway	South East	12.4	3
Newcastle	North East	9.9	3
Oldham	North West	26.8	10
Pendle	North West	26.1	4
Sandwell	West Midlands	26.6	5
Southampton	South East	7.8	5
Stockton	North East	12.6	3
Stoke-on-Trent	West Midlands	27.2	5
Sunderland	North East	14.6	25
Torbay	South West	11.4	4
Total		18.5	158

‘The youngsters can’t afford to buy’

The shortage of affordable housing in Barking and Dagenham, either to rent or to buy, is a cause of great anxiety and anger among residents of the borough. But blame for such failures in public policy are readily displaced onto immigrants and asylum seekers. These excerpts from the focus group discussion in Dagenham on 15 March 2005 give some insights into this process:

‘I know for a fact, and I’m sure we all know, that most of the asylum seekers that live in our boroughs or near us where we live, they’ve been allocated property and it’s council property at that.’

‘That’s why they’re bringing into force this new thing about

you’ve got bid with your points for a house and if your bid isn’t the highest bid, you don’t get a property now.’

‘I work for the youngsters and they can’t afford properties. They really can’t. If you think, the cheapest property is £130,000 that I know of. They can’t afford to buy and they go to council and they say, “We’re not entertaining.” It’s annoying. Then you think you’ve got the asylum seekers, they’re giving them properties and they don’t look after them and your own can’t get on the property ladder.’

‘You’ve got points allocated to you. This is what I’m told because I’m waiting on a place. Your points would be

if there’s a place going free, you can bid for that property with your points. Now, take us now. I’m in a two-bedroom flat, my boy, most of the time he has to move back in with me. He’s waiting on a place of his own. I haven’t got a lot of points because I’ve been told if I haven’t got no young children I haven’t got points. So, I’ve got nowhere because I haven’t got no points to bid.’

‘My son and his girlfriend got a place. . . She’d already been on the council for three years because she was in a two-bedroom flat with her mother and her father and her sister. As soon as she found out she was pregnant . . . we said you’re not going to live with us and

she couldn’t live with her mum and dad. So, she went around there. They made her apply for weeks, like yourself, thinking the asylum seekers are going to get all the good stuff and we’re going to be shut up in a flat somewhere. She’s been lucky, got a lovely ground-floor flat. So, she’s done it that way.’

‘You’ve got the immigrants that are coming into London and the council are being paid to give those immigrants that come from the different boroughs the houses. They aren’t paying. It’s the council. So, have you got a chance to get a place from one borough to another borough?’

6.3. There were often wide variations in the BNP share of the vote in wards they contested within the local authorities. The measure of such variation, standard deviation, rose to 11.5 in Broxborne and 10.7 in Dudley (where the mean was 27.9), which is high. In Burnley, where the BNP ran 10 candidates, the mean was 34.7 and the standard deviation was far lower, at only 4. In Oldham, where ten BNP candidates stood, the mean was 26.7 and the standard deviation was 5.2. The BNP put up candidates in 25 wards in Sunderland, where the mean percent the BNP gained was 14.6 and the standard deviation was 5.

6.4. These differences in the BNP vote share are plotted in Figure 4, below, a box plot that shows the spread of voting within each local authority area. 12 For example, the spread of their vote between six candidates is wider in Broxbourne than in Basildon where their three candidates are more ‘bunched’. Overall, however, these findings suggest that the greatest variation is between local authorities (rather than at regional or ward level), emphasising the importance of local issues in framing BNP support. These results substantiate our earlier qualitative research in London, published in *The Far Right in London* (John et al, 2005), which highlighted the importance of the housing issue in attitudes towards immigration and the far-right in Barking and Dagenham.

6.5. As we indicate above (para. 2.16), the BNP is adept at ‘localising’ its general themes and exploiting national economic and social feelings by picking up and often exaggerating local issues and ‘myths’. They have proved themselves to be opportunistic and they play on the way in which immigration has become associated in many people’s minds locally with, for example, neighbourhood decline, housing problems, scarce school places, criminality, and so on. In doing so they often exploit or create ‘myths’ and misconceptions linking the presence of ethnic minority communities to particular problems and peddle lies across communities.

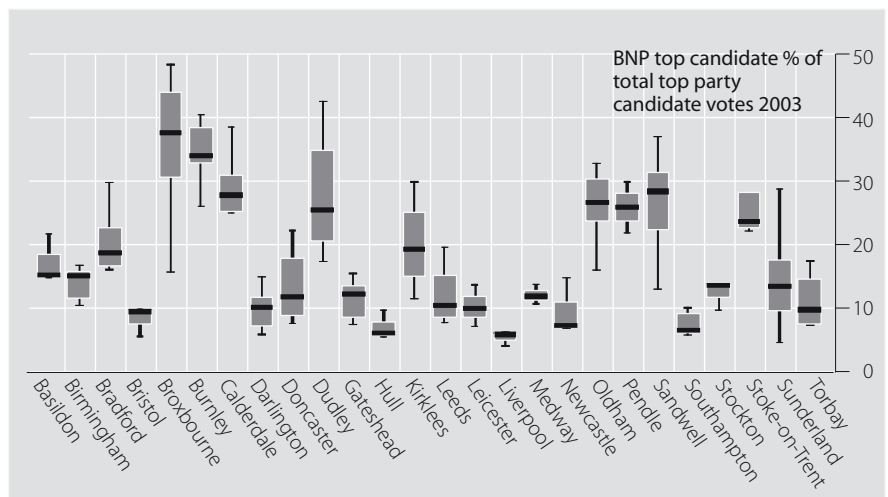
6.6. In Barking and Dagenham, for example, the BNP tapped into the shortage of social housing and the intense competition for cheap private housing from ethnic minority buyers in London. They racialised the issue

by popularising an ‘Africans for Essex’ myth that other London councils had ‘cash incentive schemes’ to enable ethnic minority families to move out of their areas and buy houses in Dagenham and the government gave them £50,000 grants (plus 75 per cent mortgages) also to buy in Dagenham. Their leaflets also claimed that ‘immigrants and asylum seekers who have only been here five minutes’ were jumping the queue for council housing ahead of ‘desperate local families’. These myths won local credence, as we found in a focus group discussion for people aged over 45 which also highlighted the desperate housing difficulties that their grown-up children faced (see panel). BNP canvassers were prepared to back up campaign myths with lies on the doorstep, according to David Johnson, the undercover *Evening Standard* reporter who joined them for a by-election in Village ward in October 2004. He accompanied a canvasser who told a woman on her doorstep that ‘African asylum seekers’ received free colour TVs, mobile phones and, ‘This lady from the benefit office told us they give asylum seekers £5,000 to buy a car so they don’t get discriminated against on public transport.’ (*Evening Standard*, 6 October 2004).

6.7. Burnley in the 1990s was suffering from the after effects of the collapse of the town’s traditional cotton and engineering industries and coal-mining and large numbers of white working class men moved onto invalidity benefit rather than take the low-paid service industry jobs being set up in the borough. A Muslim community, created in the first place by immigrants from poor areas in Pakistan who took unwanted jobs in the declining cotton industry, was established in the inner urban areas. Overall economic decline was matched by and expressed through growing problems in inner urban neighbourhoods: stagnant then falling property values in formerly ‘decent’ neighbourhoods; neighbourhood abandonment; and cuts in familiar and mainstream public services. These are the general conditions in which the BNP can prosper. But it seems to take a particular local issue for them to do so.

6.8. In Burnley, a growing ‘Independent’ group in the late 1990s created a new political space on the traditionally Labour council, expressing right-wing populist themes

Figure 4: Variation in the BNP Vote at Ward Level within and across 28 Local Authorities



with increasing coherence and confidence and articulating patterns of racialised frustration and neighbourhood chauvinism. Critically, they spread the perception that ‘certain areas’ – Asian areas – received preferential treatment through council-managed regeneration programmes. These programmes became a particular focus for popular resentments fed by half truths and distorted logic. Mainstream politicians failed to challenge the rise of the new populist anxious right wing politics and no Independent stood in the June 2001 general election. The candidate for the BNP, which as late as May 1999 had no organisation in the town, won nearly 11 per cent of the vote with scarcely any assistance from the national party. Within days of the general election, national BNP organisers were active in Burnley where serious social disturbances broke out in late June 2001 – an event that the BNP was ready to exploit within the context of the resentments over preferential treatment for Asian areas.

6.9. Our researches suggest that it is very often local issues that give the BNP the opportunity to make a breakthrough in this way. In Oldham, a town with a socially segregated Muslim population principally of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, a general sense of decline and fear of crime were features of the kind that assist the BNP. ‘Everyday racism came with the territory,’ Nigel Copsey comments (Copsey 2005). The BNP recognised that circumstances in the town were combining to provide them with an opportunity and began exploiting inter-racial tensions with a campaign ‘in defence of white rights.’ In March to May 2001 these tensions escalated into outbreaks of violence, with a series of Asian attacks on whites gaining headlines in the *Oldham Chronicle*, incursions by football hooligans in an Asian area, unruly visits by National Front outsiders, and finally a response by young Muslim men to their provocations that led to serious rioting and clashes between the young Muslims and the police. The offices of the *Chronicle*, seen by many Asians as racist, were fire-bombed. The *Chronicle* had played a prominent part in the rise of tensions, with sensational reporting of ‘Asian on white’ crime and assaults, reports suggesting that predominantly Asian areas were receiving preferential funding, and readers’ letters, often anonymous, that encouraged anti-Asian feelings.

6.10. In Keighley, where Nick Griffin stood for Parliament in the 2005 general election, the BNP took advantage of a mother’s campaign against the ‘grooming’ of young girls for sex by a local gang. The BNP portrayed her daughter’s case as an issue of race and religion – Asian men preying on local white girls – and secured their foothold there. Angela Sinfield, the mother who led the campaign told the *Guardian*:

‘I know what damage the BNP are doing around here . . . The thing about grooming was that it was about the exploitation of young women . . . it was never about race. But the BNP used it for their own ends without ever doing anything concrete about it

and for me that is unforgivable’ (*Guardian*, 23 March 2006).

Ms Sinfield won the Keighley West council seat for Labour from the BNP at a by-election on 23 March. The BNP, who had previously won the seat with 51 per cent of the vote, came second.

PART 7

CONCLUSIONS

7.1. Our research has demonstrated the growing significance of the British National Party in English politics. A wide range of evidence has shown how the rise in BNP support is a national phenomenon, significant and widespread across several English regions, rather than a change restricted to a few localities such as the East End of London, parts of Yorkshire and Birmingham. This is a party that has used the electoral machine to garner and target support in different locations across England. It is likely to use its base to continue to gather more votes in local and European elections.

7.2. Our findings are at odds with the conventional academic and political wisdom that the far right can and will only occupy a marginal place in British politics. However we believe that it is time to take the challenge from the BNP seriously, especially given the more volatile conditions of British politics and the depth of disillusion and frustration felt about the established political parties – and expressed vividly in our focus groups. Both its electoral successes, especially at local level, and the potential vote for the party found in opinion poll evidence, suggest that the party is no longer merely marginal, as conventional thinking has it. No more can it be regarded as a ‘mainstream’ party, not least because it is not able to contest more than about one in six seats at a general election. But it is at least capable of achieving a ‘mainstream presence’ in localities across England; and wherever it is present, it pollutes political life, divides communities and spreads prejudice and discord. The BNP openly seeks to encourage and exploit anti-Muslim feeling and there are signs from our research that the party gains electoral support in areas with Muslim communities of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin.

7.3. This report has tried to explain where the BNP chooses to stand and why it has done well. We have tested some familiar explanations of far-right support. We have shown that support for the far right does not come from places occupied by the poorest in society, or from places with high levels of deprivation. It seems that the BNP draws its support from areas with skilled or semi-skilled workers. But the party also finds support where there are more people with few educational qualifications, supporting the idea that lack of education may be a more important route to far right support than poverty or deprivation.

7.4. The BNP do well largely in wards where white people live rather than where there are people from the ethnic minorities. Nor do they do well in places with high numbers of asylum seekers. We reject a simple relationship between direct proximity to race and right-wing support. Our focus groups suggest the BNP gets its support from areas that have experienced change nearby rather than in their own immediate neighbourhoods and where

people fear that their area, and indeed the country, is ‘being taken over’. The focus groups also show how immigration and asylum seekers have become symbols for the frustrations and fears of everyday life in largely working class areas, and it is among people like the participants in the groups who feel that they and their neighbourhoods are being neglected that the potential for growth for the BNP lies.

7.5. We investigated the idea that there may be aspects of the character of the other parties’ participation in elections or the attitudes of voters that may contribute to support for the BNP. Do the far right do well in places where there is no effective competition between the parties and where there is voter apathy? Does the BNP foster support where there are large majorities for one party, particularly the Labour party? Our research only shows very limited support for this view outside London. The far right seems to do well in places where competition between the parties occurs, perhaps where the main parties are already under attack and the voters have tried other alternatives. There is no relationship between BNP support and low voter turnout.

7.6. Our focus group evidence suggested that those who had voted for the BNP had tried different alternatives, such as switching between the parties, or trying the Liberal Democrats, but they felt these mainstream parties had failed. A vote for the BNP was often seen as a wake-up call, or ‘kick up the backside’ for the major parties, which was safe as the party could only win a few seats. Participants in the groups disliked and distrusted the BNP – which is still far and away the most unpopular party – but they also distrust the major parties, especially on immigration where people said that they failed to tell the truth and ‘fudged’ the figures. Opinion poll evidence suggests that a majority – some two thirds – of the public nationally believe that immigration is reaching its limits.

7.7. The main lesson from this research is that those who wish to promote community cohesion and protect ethnic minorities from harmful propaganda need to address the types of people who support the BNP. They probably do not have direct contact with non-white people, but gain their views in the media and from direct campaigns from the BNP supporters themselves. This makes challenging the stereotypes in the media an important priority as does campaigning on the ground. Most of all, the main political parties – and especially the Labour Party, for the BNP makes most inroads in traditional Labour heartlands – should seek to re-engage with their former supporters who have deserted them. But as Jon Cruddas MP has written in *The Far Right in London*, New Labour’s policy-making is not directed at the voters to whom the BNP appeals, but to swing voters in swing seats (‘Epilogue’ in John et al, 2005) – who are also the main targets of the other larger parties.

7.8. We found the greatest source of local variation at the level of local authorities, rather than regional or ward

level, suggesting that it is at this sub-national level of government that attitudes towards the far-right are being formed and shaped. Local authorities could do much more, as some like have done, along with racial equality and multicultural advisory groups, to counter 'myths' and misunderstandings about their policies and local conditions at officer as well as council level, at least by explaining the realities of their policies, correcting misleading interpretations of them and above all by doing more to involve local residents in the formulation and delivery of those policies. Officers rightly feel inhibited about acting in 'party political' ways, but ensuring that their authority's policies are understood and command local trust is part of their overall responsibilities. Moreover, the BNP has frequently prospered on the back of myths in ways which seriously damage community relations and local authorities are under a duty to promote good community relations.

Barking and Dagenham council, which found itself on the front line, adopted a policy for strengthening community cohesion in the borough overseen by a multi-party advisory group. The borough's policy is described in Appendix C. The Commission for Racial Equality has also published an information pack, *Defeating Organised Racial Hatred*, which contains case studies of nine initiatives, designed to tackle organised racist activity, and stresses the need for 'Strong leadership from local authorities' (www.cre.gov.uk).

7.9. This research highlights the importance of location above all else. Those who prize human rights and wish to assist in creating harmonious community life in the UK need to gear their strategies towards local issues, as the BNP themselves do.

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APPENDIX A: SOCIAL CLASS DEFINITIONS

A	Upper middle class	<i>Higher managerial, administrative or professional</i>
B	Middle class	<i>Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional</i>
C1	Lower middle class	<i>Supervisory or clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional</i>
C2	Skilled working class	<i>Skilled manual workers</i>
D	Working class	<i>Semi and unskilled manual workers</i>
E	People living at subsistence level	<i>State pensioners or beneficiaries (no other earner), casual or lowest-grade workers</i>

APPENDIX B: EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

The census data information on educational qualifications divides people into five different levels:

Level 1: 1+ O level passes, 1 +CSE/GCSE any grades, NVQ level 1, Foundation GNVQ

Level 2: 5+ O level passes, 5 +CSEs (grade 1), 5 GCSEs (grades A-C), School Certificate, 1 + A levels/AS Levels, NVQ level 2, Intermediate GNVQ

Level 3: 2+ A levels, 4+ AS levels, Higher School certificate, NVQ level 3, Advanced GNVQ

Level 4/5: First degree, higher degree, NVQ levels 4 and 5, HNC, HND, qualified teacher, medical doctor, dentist, nurse, midwife or health visitor.

APPENDIX C: LOCAL INITIATIVES TO STRENGTHEN MULTI-ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

As the Commission on Racial Integration emphasises in its Information Pack, strong leadership from local authorities is crucial to protecting communities, especially within alliances with local agencies and voluntary groups and with cross-party political backing (Commission on Racial Integration, 2006).

Barking and Dagenham council's policies to foster community cohesion and to counter false 'myths' about asylum and immigration are just one example of what can be done. Following the upsurge in far right activity in 2004, the council worked to counter the 'myths', fears and concerns that the far right was exploiting in the area, especially on the 'racialised' housing front. The council reassessed its policies on community cohesion and the leader convened an all-party advisory group to oversee the following programme:

- The council's communications strategy was 'sharpened' to give local communities clear messages;

- Examples of good practice from other areas were collected and meetings were held with community practice Beacon or Pathfinder local authorities;
- A 'be a good neighbour' editorial by the council leader was published in the council's borough magazine, *The Citizen*;
- *The Citizen* was also used to tackle the kind of 'myths' that we describe above through a question-and-answer article;
- Focus groups were convened with all sections of the local community, to find out their concerns and deal with the issues they raised, particular on access to housing and employment;
- Measures were taken to make sure that regeneration leads to community cohesion and speaks to people's fears;
- The borough's ethnic minority citizens were regularly consulted through representative organisations and the local press;
- Community stakeholder groups were encouraged to work with all sections of the community in combating racist far right activity;
- Voluntary groups were funded to focus on building community cohesion 'on the ground'.

Further information is available from
Bcoomber@barking-dagenham.gov.uk

FOOTNOTES

- 1 The image of the constitutional 'rock' comes from the vivid account of the Powell phenomenon in the late Richard Crossman's *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, volume 3.
- 2 BNP seats on local councils: Bradford (3); Broxbourne (1); Burnley (6); Calderdale (3); Epping Forest (3); Kirklees (1); Sandwell (1); Stoke on Trent (2). The BNP also has four town and parish councilors.
- 3 However, the figures rating immigration as the 'most important problem' vary over time, falling as low as 2 per cent in periods when other policy issues, such as inflation and unemployment, are prominent (see King and Whybrow, 2001: 261-273).
- 4 Their defence also rested on the argument that their speeches were directed against a religion – Islam – rather than a racial group and therefore could not be prosecuted under legislation outlawing incitement to racial hatred. In fact, both referred frequently to Asians, Pakistanis and Muslims attacking white people and used the terms 'Muslim' and 'Asian' interchangeably.
- 5 The rise of the Nazi Party in Weimar Germany was spectacular. From less than 3 per cent of the vote in December 1924, the Nazis polled 37.2 per cent in December 1932 following the profound recession of 1928.
- 6 The socio-demographic data follow the standard class classification, taking the approximated social grade numbers for each one for each ward. The income estimates are model based estimates of income for each ward. The age structure calculates percentages for each ward for bands of five years from aged 1-4 to 90 plus. The education variable is a similar ward percent of different levels of qualifications ranging from no qualifications to percentage of people with level 4/5 qualifications. The race variable takes the proportion of whites in a ward and, similarly, that of people from different religions. Because there may be influences on voting beyond the ward, we include statistics at the council level, by aggregating the ward-level statistics.
- 7 Appendix A sets out in full the social classes represented by A, B, C1, C2, D and E.
- 8 The figures for income are adjusted for housing costs.
- 9 The census data contain five levels of educational qualification, to which we refer here. Appendix B sets out the full educational qualifications for each level.
- 10 See Appendix A for a breakdown of these Social Class Definitions
- 11 NPV is calculated by dividing 1 by the sum of the squares of all the vote shares of the parties (expressed as decimals rather than percentages).
- 12 A box plot illustrates variation within a group of cases, showing the middle 50 per cent of cases inside the box, the lowest quarter along the line below the box (with the smallest observation at the end of the line) and the highest quarter above (with the highest observation at the top of the line). The thick horizontal line represents the median score.

The BNP:

the roots of its appeal



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