

The Far Right in London

a challenge for local democracy?



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Contents

About the authors	2
About the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust	2
Foreword by David Shutt	3
Part 1: Background by Nick Lowles, Searchlight	5
Case Study: The Big Lie	8
Part 2: Research findings by Peter John, Helen Margetts, David Rowland and Stuart Weir	11
Part 3: Epilogue by Jon Cruddas MP	21

Images

BNP leaflet: General Election 2005	4
BNP leaflet: Goresbrook by-election September 2004	9
Searchlight newspaper: General Election 2005	10

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About the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust

The Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Limited, founded in 1904 by the Liberal Quaker philanthropist, Joseph Rowntree, is a company which pays tax on its income and is therefore free to give grants for political purposes. It has been doing so since 1904 in order to promote political reform and constitutional change as well as the interests of social justice.

Foreword

The origins of this study can be traced back to October 2004 and a letter from Frank Dobson MP, warning of the threat the BNP posed in outer East London and asking for the Trust's help in organising some opinion research.

The previous month the BNP had won a council by-election in Barking and Dagenham, taking 52% of the vote to Labour's 29% – the party's first victory in the capital for more than ten years. It was feared by some that this was a warning of things to come and that, with all-out London borough elections planned for 2006, large numbers of council seats could fall to the BNP – not just in Barking and Dagenham, but across East London.

The purpose of this research was to assess the strength of the far right in London and to discover who is voting for them and why, in the hope of helping mainstream parties, policymakers and anti-racist campaigners to rise to this new challenge.

The research findings, set out in Part 2 of this report, can make for uncomfortable reading. They show that there are higher levels of support for the far right in London than in the rest of the UK, and more positive views of the BNP. But this report also offers hope to those who want to stem the rise of the far right in London and elsewhere in the UK.

While immigration has become a significant issue for a large subset of Londoners, our findings show that this is in part because in many voters' minds immigration has now become a symbol for a wide range of local problems. Local authorities should tackle such misconceptions about the relationship between immigration and local issues and start exposing the lies circulated by the far right. As Nick Lowles notes in Part 1 of this report, 'The Big Lie' has become the basis for BNP election campaigns in recent years, but many local councils have failed to respond adequately.

Government must also address the sense in some working class communities that nobody cares – that the needs and priorities of their communities are being ignored by a national political class obsessed with appealing to Middle England. As Jon Cruddas writes in Part 3, the way government formulates policy to attract the swing voter in the swing seat and colludes in the demonisation of the migrant, actively compounds the problems faced by places like Dagenham.

It is appropriate therefore that I give the final word to one of our focus group participants, a Dagenham resident: "Could you send Tony Blair or each member of the party...a copy of that tape and just get them to listen?"

David Shutt

Lord Shutt of Greetland

September 2005

Barking & Dagenham
Patriot



BARKING - the way we were



**From
this ..**

■ The Barking & Dagenham Coronation Party in 1953 - the ladies of Barking.



**.. to
this**



■ Ladies in Barking today, thanks to Labour and Conservative immigration policy.

Is this what you really want?

1: Background

by Nick Lowles, Searchlight

Outer East London is the new front line in the battle against the British National Party. In the 2005 General Election the far right group polled 16.9% in the Barking constituency, its highest share of the vote anywhere in the country. In neighbouring Dagenham it polled 9.6%. In the 2004 European Elections the BNP polled 14.8% across the entire borough and this was in addition to the UK Independence Party vote of 18%. If these results were translated into a local election then ten of the borough's seventeen wards would require a swing of 5% or less to fall to the BNP. In September 2004, the BNP won a council by-election in Goresbrook ward with 52% of the vote. It was the first time the BNP had contested the ward, a traditionally safe Labour area, and the first time the party had polled over 50% in its history.

It is against this backdrop that this excellent piece of research was carried out by Professors John, Margetts and Weir with David Rowland for the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Ltd.

The British National Party has been largely invisible in the capital since it captured a council seat in Millwall ward, Tower Hamlets, in a by-election in September 1993. It lost the seat the following May, in the all-out London elections, though it received more votes. Several years of steady decline followed. Internal problems, white flight out of the capital by several BNP organisers and a shift in priority to the north of England in 2001, saw the virtual collapse of the BNP in London. There was the odd blip, such as the party saving its deposit in a few East London constituencies in the 2001 General Election but nothing like the advance seen elsewhere in the country, in places like Burnley.

Many commentators believed that the BNP was finished in London. It is, after all, the most diverse and multicultural city in the world and despite some high-profile incidents, such as the murder of Stephen Lawrence, people live side-by-side in relative harmony. While the picture on the ground might not in reality have been so rosy, it is certainly true that London does not have the depressing racial segregation of so many of our northern towns and cities.

The view that the BNP was finished in London was merely wishful thinking. By 2001 it was clear that there was a vote out there but the party was failing to harvest it. Poor leadership and bad targeting was largely to blame. The BNP was still fighting the old battle of inner East London (Tower Hamlets and Newham) while their vote was moving out. Their recent successes in Barking and Dagenham reflect this shift in demographics and BNP support.

London is now a doughnut for the BNP. Inner London, which ten to fifteen years ago was the frontline, is now a barren wasteland. The BNP did not even bother to stand candidates in the Tower Hamlets or Newham constituencies in the recent General Election despite comfortably saving their deposits in 2001. In the 2004 European Elections the party only managed to poll 4.6% in Tower Hamlets, 4.4% in Newham, 2.2% in Camden, 2.0% in Hackney and just 1.7% in Lambeth.

In the boroughs on the outer rim of the capital their fortunes were quite different. In addition to the 14.8% in Barking and Dagenham, the party polled 9.6% in neighbouring Havering, 7.9% in Bexley and 7.1% in Hillingdon. Across the capital the BNP polled 4.9% in the London Assembly elections, just missing out on representation by 5,000 votes.

The warning signals of the shift in BNP support were evident as far back as 1998 when the BNP polled 9% in the parliamentary by-election following the resignation of Brian Gould. In 2001 the BNP polled 6.1% in Barking and 4.99% in Dagenham with absolutely no campaigning. More

worryingly, this was achieved without the BNP even having a local branch in the area. Anecdotal evidence recall stories of disgruntled voters arriving at the polling stations in the 2002 London borough elections to find no BNP candidates standing.

As the borough and ward breakdowns for the 2004 elections were released, it was clear that Barking and Dagenham would be the BNP's key London target for the General Election but more specifically for the 2006 London elections.

The BNP did not have wait long to test their support. A month after the 2004 elections the BNP stood in a council by-election in Valance ward, in the heart of the huge Becontree estate. They polled 31.5%, only 185 votes behind Labour. Within days another by-election was announced, this time in Goresbrook, the ward where the party had achieved its highest vote in London. "If we can't win here we can't win anywhere," an internal BNP organisers' bulletin read.

The Goresbrook campaign was easily the BNP's best election effort. Dozens of people were drafted in across London and the South East to run a model campaign. Every house was canvassed and those who expressed an interest in the BNP were visited at least three times. A total of nine different leaflets were distributed but the BNP was careful not to deliver to households of identified Labour or Black and minority ethnic (BME) voters so as not to antagonise them. On election day the BNP had 55 activists out, dwarfing anything Labour could mobilise. The BNP romped home with 52% of the vote. The Labour Party, which had held the seat, limped home with 29%. The far right party had tapped into a widespread antipathy towards the council and the Labour councillors in particular. Housing, and the lack of cheap social housing, was the single most important issue vexing voters and the BNP had successfully racialised the matter by claiming that a secret 'Africans for Essex' policy existed whereby the council gave £50,000 grants to African families to move into the borough. With the ethnic make-up of the borough changing so rapidly over the past ten years, and a general backlash against New Labour spin and political trickery, enough voters believed the story to be true. [See: 'The Big Lie' p.8].

A few weeks later yet another council by-election came up on the Becontree estate, this time in Village ward. The Labour Party, which had been shocked by the Goresbrook result, increased its effort and held the seat. The BNP still polled 38.5%, only 151 votes behind.

The BNP went into the General Election in confident mood. Three by-elections had seen them average 40% of the vote and initially Dagenham was made its London-wide priority. Other BNP branches in the capital were told to supply activists to East London and put their own campaign second. Within a few weeks the focus shifted to Barking, which had a bigger BME community, but the Labour Party was considered weaker and more vulnerable on the predominantly white estates. The BNP policy was to use the election as a stepping-stone for 2006 and to establish their presence in four or five key wards, through canvassing, which they hoped to take in the London elections. It was this lack of any real voter ID work that had cost the BNP several council seats in the north of England in 2004.

Their candidate, Richard Barnbrook, got carried away and midway through the campaign believed he could win. The targeted strategy was ditched and mass leafleting occurred. This affected the BNP vote as on election day they did not have any information on who to knock up, but more importantly, they had not counted on the opposition to them. Recognising that a BNP vote of over 25% was quite probable, Searchlight ran its most sophisticated and intensive campaign to date. Two editions of a newspaper were produced for the borough, the first was delivered to 48,000 homes by 168 people over one weekend. In the final fortnight, over 60,000 pieces of literature were delivered, much of it targeted. A personalised direct mail letter was sent to 8,000 BME households in Barking and 4,000 in Dagenham. This was followed up by 9,000 eve-of-poll cards to identified anti-BNP voters. One of the most encouraging aspects of the election was to see queues of BME voters forming outside polling stations early in the morning.

The BNP vote of 16.9% was its highest in the country but well below what everyone expected only a week earlier. It was clear that some voters had been put off from voting BNP but more importantly, the anti-BNP vote had turned out. It was also clear that the BNP had done well amongst older voters who, as shown in this research, were the group most resistant and worried about change. A BNP leaflet contrasting the street scenes of 1953 Coronation Day Barking with a photo of Barking market with Muslim women in traditional dress was their single most effective piece of propaganda.

The fortunes of the BNP have dipped since the general election. Their only councillor resigned his Goresbrook seat soon after and a strong Labour effort, coupled with a local resentment about his lack of activity, handed the seat back to Labour. Three weeks later another council by-election saw the BNP lose heavily again. Encouragingly, this was after the London tube bombings and an attempt by the BNP to exploit this, with a leaflet entitled: 'If only they had listened to the BNP', clearly backfired.

There is no room for complacency. As this report clearly illustrates, there are deep underlying issues which give oxygen to the BNP. The far right party might have experienced some electoral setbacks of late but these underlying issues remain and as long as they do, there is potential for the BNP. If they could run a four-week campaign in Goresbrook and come out with 52% once, then they can do it again. Barking and Dagenham has arguably more acute problems but there are many other outer-London boroughs where similar concerns over a shortage of housing and rapidly changing demographics could prove a potent mix in next year's London elections. But it is important to stress that we are talking about next year's elections.

With London going to the polls only every four years the BNP will not have another chance. Just as they have been forced out of inner East London they will eventually be pushed out of outer London too. In addition to changing demographics we are also witnessing a far greater mixing amongst young people and children in particular. Across the borough young children are playing together in the streets and mixing at school. There is little of the segregation that we find in some northern towns.

Case Study: The Big Lie

Africans for Essex

It was once said that if you are going to tell a lie, tell a big lie. This is certainly the basis for BNP election campaigns in London and Eastern regions in recent years. In Barking and Dagenham the BNP peddled the story of a secret 'Africans for Essex' scheme, whereby the ruling Labour Party were providing Africans with £50,000 grants to buy houses in the borough. This was, their literature claimed, a deliberate attempt to gerrymander in order to buy future council victories.

Housing is clearly the single most important issue concerning local people and the BNP were able to put a racial twist on the issue. This played out well amongst voters who could see rapid change in the composition of the local community. A failure on the part of the council to stamp out this myth meant it soon became a fact.

The Big Lie has now become an integral part of the BNP campaign. The same man behind their Barking and Dagenham campaign has also won council election victories for the BNP in Epping, Broxbourne and Thurrock. In each election, the BNP has peddled a lie. In Broxbourne, the BNP claimed that a local building was going to be turned into an asylum centre. In Thurrock, the BNP claimed that the council had entered into a secret pact with Hackney council to take more than 3,000 asylum seekers.

These claims have proved complete nonsense but like the initial reaction to the 'Africans for Essex' leaflets the prevailing political view was that to answer them would simply give the BNP the oxygen of publicity. Unfortunately the BNP no longer need mainstream political parties to give them a profile - they are very good at getting that for themselves, especially through the pub and club networks where resentment and distrust of politicians ferment. By not nailing the lie the political parties only add to the suspicion that something sinister is afoot.

When Labour's election agent in Thurrock was asked what he would do differently if he was faced with running the by-election campaign again, he answered simply, take on the BNP and nail their lies. It is an important message for election agents of all parties to remember.

Dagenham Patriot



The Voice of Goresbrook

LOCAL HOUSING SCAM?



The British National Party has been approached by desperate local families who are unable to get a council house, even though they've been waiting for years. So why are immigrants and asylum seekers who have only been here five minutes able to jump the queue? The council has replaced the traditional points system with a bidding system, but it seems the only people whose bids are ignored are those of decent local families.

The Labour party treat you with contempt: it's time you treated them the same way!

'AFRICANS FOR ESSEX'

Despite Labour's lies, the truth is clear for everyone to see for themselves: more and more local homes are being bought by immigrants moving in from other parts of London, **funded by British taxpayers' money!**

Hackney Council which started this scheme called it 'Africans for Essex' and Liam Smith, responsible for council housing in Barking and Dagenham, has admitted that boroughs like Newham Hackney and Tower Hamlets have 'cash incentive schemes' which allow immigrants to move into Dagenham. The Labour government also has a similar scheme, offering up to £50,000 together with a 75% mortgage, which allows immigrants to buy houses here in Dagenham.

IT'S TIME TO STAND UP FOR YOURSELF

Would you like £50,000 to buy **your** own home? Homeowners, did you get £50,000 to buy **yours**? If you're white and British then fat chance! Are you happy that your neighbourhood is being changed by uncontrolled immigration? Are you happy that immigrants from all over London are being funded – **with your taxes** – to move here? Are you happy that local families are denied council housing, while immigrants are able to jump the queue and receive everything they want?

**DON'T BE PUSHED TO THE BACK OF THE QUEUE.
STAND UP FOR YOURSELF. VOTE LAWRENCE RUSTEM**

BRITISH NATIONAL PARTY

Searchlight

DEFENDING DEMOCRACY FREE

www.stopthebnp.com



WE ARE DAGENHAM THE BNP ARE NOT!



Bola Okunnuga
project support worker



Fred Othan
retired



Jane Jones
shop steward



John Torrie
Headteacher
Dagenham Park
Community School



Jodie Bushe
shopkeeper



Mohammed Younis
barber



George Brooker OBE
former Mayor



Justin Bowden
GMB senior
regional organiser



Sandra, school
catering manager



Joe Sealey
Dagenham resident



Emmanuel Obasohan
pastor and
school governor



Sandra Vincent
GMB branch secretary



Helen Bloor
GMB worker



Peter Creland
retired



Alok Algow
shopkeeper



Emma Smith
mother



Glen Waker
postman



Paul Murphy
school keeper



Doris Valance
retired



Alf Ott
retired

INSIDE

**BNP slam
Asian quake
relief effort**



**One in the bread-
basket for the BNP**

**Why is the Turkey
voting for Christmas?**



**GENERAL ELECTION 2005
VOTE HOPE
NOT HATE**

2: Research findings

by Peter John, Helen Margetts, David Rowland and Stuart Weir

This summary reports on research into electoral support for the two largest far-right parties in the UK, the British National Party (BNP) and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) carried out by Peter John, Helen Margetts, David Rowland and Stuart Weir for the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Ltd (JRRT) during February and March, 2005. The project ran concurrently with the project 'Electoral Analysis of the Far Right' carried out for the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT) during January – April 2005.

This document is divided into five main sections:

- First, a summary analysis of the 2004 election results in London shows how the BNP have entered the mainstream of London politics and identifies linkages in voting patterns for the BNP and the UKIP.
- Second, analysis of opinion survey evidence from before and after the elections shows a significant subset of Londoners who would consider voting for the BNP in the future (greater than in the rest of the UK) and identifies the left and right blocs in London's new party system.
- Third, qualitative evidence from focus groups in Barking and Dagenham shows how immigration is a major electoral issue for many Londoners – becoming the symbol for many other issues such as health, education and housing. It is seen an issue on which the larger parties have failed, validating protest votes for the BNP and UKIP, although the BNP at least is clearly seen as racist. Interviews with BNP activists supported the focus group evidence, showing how the BNP were aware of local variations in public opinion and were targeting their strategy at reinforcing the type of views held by some of our focus group participants.
- Fourth, the report analyses electoral data at local level in London over the last ten years, to identify key London-wide trends, in particular marked local variation across London at ward level and a strong correlation between BNP and UKIP support.
- Fifth, analysis of ward level electoral data combined with socio-economic data is used to investigate local factors most associated with higher levels of BNP support, showing how social class, age and education levels appear to be the most important. Wards with a higher proportion of older people, of people with no qualifications and with higher proportions of skilled manual workers are likely to register higher levels of voting for the BNP. Conversely, the ethnic composition of wards, the number of asylum seekers and the proportion of benefit claimants in a ward do not appear to be related to high levels of BNP support.

These sections are followed by a number of conclusions which all the alternative forms of evidence appear to support and some suggestions for policy solutions.

2004 Elections in London

In June 2004, Londoners had the opportunity to make five electoral choices simultaneously: first and second preferences for the London Mayor (under the supplementary vote system); constituency and list choices for the London Assembly (under the Additional Member System); and a vote for a party list in the European elections. The results of these elections, combined with analysis of opinion surveys and qualitative evidence derived from focus groups and interviews, provide important insights into patterns of support for the far-right parties, the BNP and UKIP, in London.

Strong showing for far-right in 2004 elections

Both far-right parties did well in the London and European elections of 2004, compared with 2000, with their combined share of the vote more than doubling in 2004.

	2000	2004
Mayoral election (1st pref)		
BNP	0.9	3.0
UKIP	1.9	6.0
BNP+UKIP	2.8	9.0
Mayoral election (2nd pref)		
BNP	2.6	3.7
UKIP	2.5	10.1
BNP+UKIP	5.1	13.8
London Assembly election		
BNP	2.7	4.7
UKIP	2.0	8.2
BNP+UKIP	4.7	12.9
	1999	2004
European Election		
BNP	1.6	4.0
UKIP	5.4	12.2
BNP+UKIP	7.0	16.2

Source: London Election Results, 2004

Linkages between UKIP and BNP

The results of the mayoral contest suggest linkages between UKIP and the BNP in some voters' minds, in that those giving their first preference to the UKIP candidate were more likely than other voters to give their second to the BNP candidate, and those giving first preference to the BNP candidate were more likely to give their second to the UKIP candidate. As shown in the following table, nearly half of BNP voters chose the UKIP mayoral candidate Frank Maloney as their second choice, while over one fifth of UKIP voters chose the BNP candidate Julian Leppert as their second choice:

1st and 2nd preferences for London Mayor, 2004						
		2nd preference				
		BNP	UKIP	Con	Lib D	Lab
1st preference	BNP		49.2	22.0	7.6	7.7
	UKIP	21.9		35.7	14.0	10.1
	Con	6.9	26.8		40.2	10.5
	Lib Dem	2.1	8.3	26.0		33.9
	Lab	1.6	4.8	11.9	45.5	

Source: London Election Results, 2004

Far-right enter the mainstream

With their 8.2% of the vote UKIP won two seats in the London Assembly and with 4.7 % of the London wide vote the BNP narrowly missed gaining a seat in the London Assembly, losing only by a handful of disqualified votes. UKIP also won one of the nine seats in the London region of the European elections. By 2004, there is a sense in which both parties can claim to have entered the mainstream of London politics, in contrast to the conventional view that the far-right plays a role only on the lunatic fringe of British politics.

The far-right and London's new party system

Evidence from the 2004 London elections can be supplemented by two opinion surveys carried out in 2004. First, the State of the Nation poll, commissioned by JRRT and carried out in May 2004 with 2,337 respondents across Britain. Second, the London Election Study, funded by the ESRC with co-funding from JRCT, carried out straight after the 2004 elections on June 11th – June 14th 2004, with 1,474 respondents across London.

Nearly one quarter of Londoners can contemplate voting for BNP

Polling evidence from the London Elections Study suggests that 23% of Londoners either have voted or would consider voting for the BNP in the future. This evidence is supported by the JRRT State of the Nation poll, which found that 24% of Londoners 'might vote' for the BNP in the future. It should be stressed that the BNP was the most unpopular party we asked respondents about, with 58% more respondents having negative feelings towards it (66%) than positive (8%). The equivalent figure for UKIP was 26%, for the Conservatives 17%, and the Green Party 15%. The Liberal Democrats had equal number of respondents 'liking' and 'disliking' them while Labour had a small positive balance of 7%. Overall, 45% of respondents said that they 'might vote' for BNP and/or UKIP in the future while 24% said that they 'liked' BNP and/or UKIP.

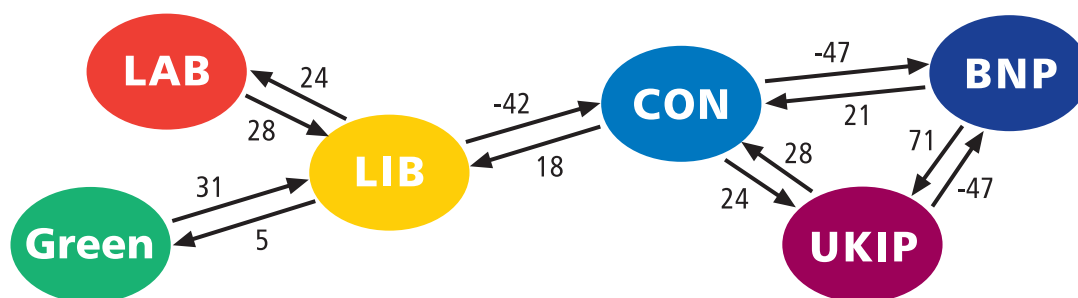
More positive feelings for BNP in London than in England as a whole

Overall, the polling evidence portrays London as distinctive from the rest of England in terms of BNP support. In London, a higher percentage of respondents could contemplate voting for the BNP, a result that emerged both from the State of the Nation poll (comparing London with rest of UK) and the London poll (comparing results with State of the Nation poll). The figures for 'might vote' for the BNP in the future in the State of the Nation poll were 24% for London, 20% for England and 17% for Britain. In London, 15% of respondents reported 'liking' the BNP (that is, a score of greater than 4 on a 1 to 7 thermometer scale from dislike a lot to like a lot) while the equivalent figure for England was 8% (State of the Nation poll).

Linkages between far-right parties

Polling evidence from the London Elections Study also suggests linkages between voters' perceptions of UKIP and BNP. Respondents who expressed a liking for UKIP were also more likely to express 'liking' for BNP and vice versa. Research for another project (Margetts, Dunleavy and van Heerde, 2005) has identified the existence of a 'right bloc' in London politics, consisting of BNP, UKIP and the Conservatives, linked to the other parties only through a (deeply asymmetrical) relationship between Conservative and Liberal Democrat based on responses to the question 'would you consider voting for this party in the future?'

Figure 1: Coalitional potential across six parties (the Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats, the Greens, BNP and UKIP) in 2004.



Notes:

1. The base used here is respondents who voted in the GLA elections 2004 (707 voters). The numbers shown are net percentage of voters for the source party saying that they 'might vote' for a given (arrowed) party, minus the percentage saying that they 'could never vote for' that party.
2. Only relationships where at least one direction is a positive balance are shown. It should be noted that this diagram is an attempt to summarise across the whole of London, whereas elsewhere in this report we show there are strong local variations in BNP support. For example, our focus group identified a sub-group of older ex-Labour voters who were responsive to the far-right parties yet would not contemplate voting Conservative – suggesting that for this group, an arrow between BNP and Labour would be more representative. But such sub-groups cannot show up on 'broad-brush' diagrams like these.

Citizens' views on immigration and the far-right

Our qualitative evidence is based on two focus groups carried out in Dagenham on March 12th, 2005, one with participants over the age of 45, and the other with participants up to the age of 45. We also carried out some interviews with BNP activists in Barking and Dagenham during the 2005 general election campaign.

Immigration the main issue

Both groups in Dagenham identified, without prompting, immigration as the key 2005 election issue. As one participant in the older group summed up 'We are all feeling the same way...we all spoke of it from the first moment...asylum seekers...we haven't spoken of the NHS, nothing else'. People felt particularly resentful that they felt they had been given no choice on this issue: 'I didn't choose to emigrate...I chose to stay in my country...they chose to emigrate....I had no choice as to who came to my country'.

The major parties have failed

Participants felt that the main parties had failed them on this most important of issues. Both groups felt that the government was deliberately not being honest about the extent of immigration and 'fudged' the figures. They didn't trust any of the parties to tell the truth on immigration; the parties were 'bandwagoning' on the issue and once they were in power, all their promises went 'out of the window'. 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'. At the end of the over-45s group, participants asked the facilitator to send the tapes to Tony Blair; 'Let them struggle for six months, pay council tax on a budget like everyone else.' The Labour government was clearly felt to have failed ('they are just not listening'....we're British and we're just not listened to') – but the older group remembered the Conservatives and held them responsible for 'getting to this point'; someone commented, 'They are the ones that let them in'. Several in the younger group however harked back to Margaret Thatcher's decisiveness, considering the two main parties 'so much alike....they don't want to offend anyone, get everyone's vote....You think they are both the same.'

Immigrants seen as 'taking over'

The older group in particular had a sense that some areas were being taken over by other nationalities: as one put it, 'It's not our country any more'; and another commented. 'Ilford is 80% Asian and Bosnian and Somali now'. They expressed scepticism and considerable antipathy towards those who arrived in the UK and were at once given benefits and housing. They felt that locally asylum seekers (the terms asylum seeker and immigrant were used interchangeably) got various benefits, including 'large grants to buy houses' (a myth propagated hard by the BNP) and they all had mobile phones and bought CDs and DVDs. Participants mentioned immigrants selling food vouchers and getting 'gift vouchers' from social services. The high visibility of asylum seekers and immigrants on the streets was associated with the degeneration of the area and falling community standards, with various respondents saying that they had 'taken over the area' with their different culture and languages. They also felt that many of them were not working (though there was respect for Asians who did work hard). Those that were in work were 'taking over' in some areas: one participant commented that in Barking College library everyone was Asian and no-one white could get a job there (it's the 'Asian mafia'). The under-45s were less inclined to blame 'degeneration' of the area on immigrants. Rather there was no money in Barking, the big stores had moved out, indigenous people did not keep up the standards of the previous generation (in terms of upkeep of gardens, cleaning windows, etc.).

Those identifying immigration as key issue do not see themselves as racist

Respondents were at pains to stress they were not racist. They saw immigration as a 'practicality issue' not a 'racist issue'. On being asked about the Conservative election poster with the message 'It's not racist to impose limits on immigration', one respondent (a Labour party activist) said scornfully 'we don't need them to tell us that'. They felt that everyone was scared to do or say anything... 'because of political correctness'.

Smaller parties favoured as protest – but BNP definitely seen as racist

The failings of the major parties had led participants to feel that it would be 'worth a try' voting for smaller parties. As one person put it 'there's more issues now....you need a different party to cope with each thing'. Why were BNP and UKIP doing well here? Because 'we're up in arms about immigration'. Voting for the BNP was seen as a protest vote. Given the BNP's medium-term goal of winning seats in the borough elections in 2006, there were worrying indications that respondents might give their votes to smaller parties like the BNP in an attempt to see whether they could improve matters locally. One participant in the older group had voted for the BNP, hoping that 'Blair would realise that the people had had enough and sort it out' but regretted having done so, considering that 'there were certain issues that made her feel embarrassed that she voted for them', particularly after the BBC's 'Secret Agent' programme. Others pointed to the BNP's by-election win in Goresbrook which 'did send shock waves through the council, so it did to some extent work'. In the younger group, the BNP was definitely seen as a racist party – 'close the door and kick everyone out' (even second generation immigrants). One man said the BNP were 'racists who got votes from people who were not racists, but who were fed up with the whole asylum thing'. Another complained of a misleading BNP leaflet about African couples receiving grants to buy houses and observed it was a matter of 'just how close they can get to the British nerve as possible without being racist'. UKIP was identified as the anti-Europe party rather than anti-immigrant but as in our other focus groups, participants made the linkage between the two: 'France pushes them all over here anyway. We follow all the rules....France/Spain they just ignore them...we're the laughing stock of Europe'.

Immigration as a symbol

Overall, immigration appears to have become a symbol or focal point for various areas of concern, such as stretched resources for the NHS and education; pensions and provision for the elderly; unemployment, even charges for dental treatment at one point; and, in this area in particular, housing. As one participant put it, they saw immigration as linked to these other issues because 'the more immigrants we have...we are spreading our money too thinly'. Another commented, 'Quite a lot of each borough's council tax goes on asylum seekers'...'got to get it from somewhere'. Another said, 'There are so many African children going to school...I don't begrudge the education...but they are taking more and more room in our schools'.

Policy solutions

With respect to policy solutions, the over-45s were in favour of government control of immigration and both groups frequently cited Australia and Canada as examples of countries that had 'got it right': 'we can't go there without 100 grand', commented one participant, while 'here we just have a free NHS'. Another from the younger group said 'they [immigrants to the UK] should have a confirmed job before they are allowed to come....like Australia' and there was general approval. While not a policy solution, a clear policy image emerged from the older group in particular – people had a strong view of preferential treatment in housing for immigrants and this caused the most concern: 'They say they have only allocated 38 properties to asylum seekers....I know for a fact that most asylum seekers in my block have been offered a property....they are fudging us off'. Housing is a major issue in Barking; in the private sphere, houses were too expensive and were being bought up by newcomers and immigrants (a major BNP theme); in the public sphere, the 'points system' for allocation was clearly linked to preferential treatment for immigrants in people's minds (not a point that the BNP candidate or canvassers were making, as yet). Overall, the clearest policy message was that the government should be paying attention to rising BNP support in Barking: 'Blair should be saying, "Look at this....why? What is the cause?" All those people have got issues.'

Interview evidence supports focus group findings

An interview with Richard Barnbrook, the BNP's London organizer and parliamentary candidate for Barking in 2005, showed how aware the BNP are of the type of views outlined above and how they play on the fears expressed and issues raised. He claimed that although immigration is the central focus, the BNP are 'not racist' (in the 'new true' BNP, any member who makes a racist statement in public or who engages in violence is chastised and may ultimately be expelled). They merely wish to protect the community of indigenous white people, they protect common decency and standards from being 'overwhelmed' by immigrants with alien cultures and standards who are 'taking over whole areas' – 'the area becomes untidy and littered, bringing down the general character of decent community'. He claimed the appearance of intimidation: 'they claim it as their territory, they don't join in, they act as if they own it'. He referred to the BNP's strategy of targeting Muslims, claiming that Islam was an aggressive religion (this was before the London bombings of July 2005, after which the strategy became far more blatant, with a theme of 'we told you so'). He also claimed that several London boroughs (Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham) give grants of £18,000 to £50,000 to Africans and other immigrant families to buy houses in Barking and Dagenham, as some of our focus group participants believed. As well as the parliamentary contest (he came third, very close to the Tory who came second and beating the Liberal Democrats into fourth place) the aim was to win council seats in 2006 to 'stop the foolishness here...Otherwise in five years Barking will be swamped, then Dagenham, then Havering'. The BNP's strategy in this traditional Labour area is to target the bedrock Labour

vote, to be 'more Labour than Labour' and to portray Labour politicians such as the MP Margaret Hodge as rich outsiders who 'no longer care about the working class'. For the future, he referred to a strategy of aiming at other 'doughnut' boroughs around central London, where many see their local issues as excluded from policies targeted at the centre of the city.

Support for the far-right in local wards across London

In order to investigate quantitatively the underlying factors contributing to BNP support, we created a dataset of the 2004 election results, census data and performance indicators at ward level across London. Analysis of this dataset provided us with 624 London wards across which we could investigate which local characteristics seem most likely to lead to higher levels of far-right support.

BNP support was high

As noted in part 1, support for the BNP in 2004 was high compared with 2000. In June 2004, across the 624 London wards, the average level of BNP support was 5.2 % in the list element of the London Assembly elections and 4.3 % in the European elections.

High spatial variation in BNP support

There is high variation in this BNP support across London. Looking at the 14 large GLA constituency areas, BNP share of the vote in the Assembly elections ranged from 3% in West Central to 8% in Havering and Redbridge. At ward level, we also found great variation. For example, in the European elections, the lowest ward polled 0.6% for the BNP while the highest polled 22% and there was a higher degree of variation between these extremes. For the Assembly elections, the highest share of the vote attained was 25% and variation across wards was even higher.

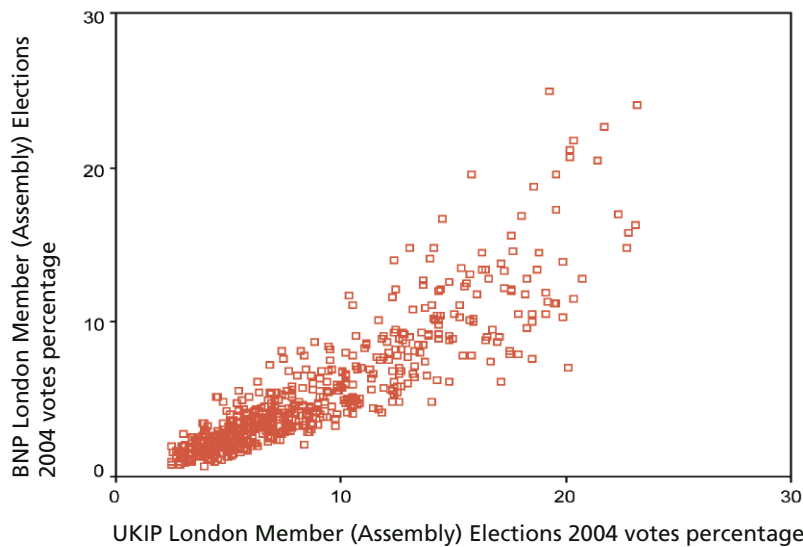
UKIP support higher than BNP

For UKIP, the average levels of support were much higher in London in 2004 than for the BNP, with an average of 12.4% for the European elections and 8.5% in the Assembly elections. The minimum level they attained at any ward in the European elections was 2.9%, while in the Assembly elections it was 2.4%. As with the BNP vote, there was high variation across areas of London, with UKIP gaining 14% of the London Assembly list member vote in Havering and Redbridge but only 5% in West Central.

Correlation between UKIP and BNP support

Looking at the relationship between support for the BNP and for the UKIP, we found a high correlation between the two, higher than expected given what we know about the different demographic bases for the support of the two parties (see below). Where BNP support is high, UKIP support tends also to be high. For example, of GLA constituency areas, support for both BNP and UKIP in Havering and Redbridge was highest of all areas, giving a combined support of 22%, while in West Central, support was lower for both than in any other, giving a combined support of 5.2%. We found this relationship to hold out at ward level, particularly in wards where BNP support is high. We measured this relationship using an indicator of 'correlation' which varies from 0 (no relationship) and indicates a stronger relationship as it gets nearer to 1. This relationship was strongest for the London elections, with a correlation measure of 0.891 for the London Assembly elections, 0.897 for the mayoral first choice and 0.853 for the mayoral second choice.

Figure 2: A 'scatterplot' of the UKIP and BNP vote in the London Assembly elections: the clustering of the votes around a diagonal line suggests the strong relationship.



For the European elections, the correlation between the BNP and UKIP share of the vote at ward level is also high at 0.79, although this is partially generated by a high number of values at lower levels (that is, a large number of areas where support for both parties is very low). When we cut out the cases at less than 5% for BNP support, the correlation goes down to 0.53 which is still high. Lower correlations could be explained for the European elections however, because in these elections voters may well have wished to make a strong statement for an anti-European party and opted for UKIP out of the two. There are some wards where there is high UKIP support but not BNP support, but interestingly not vice versa.

London is different

This relationship appears to be distinctive to London – we find no such correlation for England outside London. In the aggregate data analysis of local election results outside London in 2003, conducted for JRCT, we found no correlation between the UKIP and BNP support. But we believe this difference is due to the difference in electoral systems across the elections. In the London elections, voters are able to use their votes more efficiently under proportional representation and thereby express more directly their (linked) preferences for each party. In the local elections (on which the JRCT research is based) voters are having to select individual councillors at ward level and are more likely to vote tactically.

Socio-economic determinants of BNP and UKIP support

Our next step was to use our ward level data to uncover the socio-economic characteristics of those London localities where support for the far right was high in 2004. In particular, we tested the relationship between far-right support at ward level and the breakdown of social class, age, education, racial mix, proportion of benefits claimants and the number of asylum seekers accepted by the borough.

C2s most likely to vote BNP

We found evidence in London to support one of the most influential sociological accounts of political support for the far-right – the idea that it is not the poorest groups who support far-right parties, but slightly more affluent groups outside the traditional middle classes – groups like the self-employed and the semi-skilled. We found a correlation between wards with high levels of BNP support and the proportion of class D (semi-skilled and unskilled

manual workers), but higher correlations with C2 voters, where the correlation is 0.706 for the assembly election and 0.701 for the European elections. Overall, we found a clear class division in BNP support with the wards with more AB and C1 voters having a strong disinclination to vote BNP, but with the C2s, Ds and Es having a greater disposition to do so. For UKIP we found a weaker relationship with class composition, with correlation measures of 0.531 and 0.672 for the European and London assembly elections. It is probably stronger for the London assembly elections because the European elections generated a wider appeal for an anti-European vote. There are also many areas where there are wards with high numbers of C2 voters but no corresponding UKIP vote.

BNP support drawn from older age groups.

We also found a strong relationship with age and the BNP vote. BNP voters have been drawn from older age groups, although the correlations are not as strong as those noted above. In particular, and positively for the future, there is 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.

Education levels in borough an indicator of BNP support

We did find support for the hypothesis that low levels of education are a predictor of far-right support. BNP support was higher in wards with higher proportions of residents with no qualifications, with a correlation of 0.624. The relationship was much weaker for UKIP, however, with a correlation of only 0.372, suggesting that low levels of education are not a good predictor of UKIP support.

Racial mix of borough apparently not an indicator of BNP support

We found little evidence of a relationship between the BNP vote and the proportion of ethnic minorities in wards. There are two competing hypotheses here. First, support for racism could be the result of proximity to non-white groups and a feeling of being 'crowded out', so the BNP will do better in wards with higher levels of ethnic minorities. On the other hand, the 'contact hypothesis' suggests that contact with other groups can reduce racial prejudice, and so the BNP will do better in predominantly white wards. Testing either hypothesis is difficult as it is necessary to remove non-white people from the calculation of the BNP vote or else a declining BNP vote may just indicate wards with high proportions of ethnic minorities, where people from non-white groups are extremely unlikely to vote BNP. We tried to control for this issue by recalculating the vote share as a percentage of the white population and found no correlation at all between the BNP vote and ethnic composition (although it should be noted that this result could be affected by differential turnout between black and white groups, data we do not have). Alternatively, our focus groups suggested that a 'one step away' proximity to ethnic minorities may foster BNP support; that is living in a predominantly white ward close to a non-white one. Testing that hypothesis would involve a sophisticated spatial analysis for which we do not have the data. In general, there are a number of methodological barriers to investigating this hypothesis.

No link between BNP support and proportion of benefit claimants

We found no support for the hypothesis that support for the far-right comes from unemployment. In 2000s Britain unemployment is too low really to sustain this hypothesis, but it could be that groups left behind by economic advances express hostility to immigrant groups, so we plotted the BNP vote against numbers receiving benefit. We found no relationship, however.

No link between BNP support and number of asylum seekers accepted by council

The most interesting 'non-relationship' we found was between BNP support and numbers of asylum seekers supported by the National Asylum Service per 10,000 population at the council level. In fact, there is a negative relationship of 0.00224 for the 2003 figures and 0.239 for the 2002 figures. This may be, however, related to the practice of richer boroughs of 'farming out' their asylum seekers to poorer boroughs: Tower Hamlets, for example, 'buy' accommodation in Barking and Dagenham for a proportion of their quota of asylum seekers. Further, many people confuse asylum seekers and migrants and so the presence of migrants and established ethnic community persons in any area can lead people to regard them as 'asylum seekers', a perception that may well be coloured by hysterical press coverage of asylum seeking.

Conclusions

All these various forms of evidence – survey evidence; micro-analysis of election results; comparison of London with equivalent research for the country as a whole; and qualitative research (in the form of focus groups and interviews) - support a number of conclusions about support for the far-right in London, as follows:

- In 2004, there are significant and growing levels of support for far-right parties in London, with strong local variation in that support.
- Support for the far-right in London is different from the rest of the UK: there are higher levels of support for and more positive views of the BNP and there is a distinctive and strong positive relationship between support for the BNP and support for UKIP.
- There is a linkage between UKIP and BNP in voters' minds and to some extent the parties are seen as inter-changeable, both a valid protest vote to signal unhappiness about issues on which the larger parties are seen to have failed. With the Conservatives, the two parties form a new 'right bloc' in the London party system that has emerged over the last ten years, particularly since the introduction of the London mayor and assembly.
- The key socio-economic characteristics that seem to foster higher levels of BNP support are social class, education and age. Support for the BNP is most likely to be high in localities with higher proportions of residents in social classes C2, D and E (but especially C2); higher proportions of residents with no qualifications and lower proportions of residents in the younger age groups (up to 29).
- Immigration is the key policy issue for a significant subset of Londoners – an issue on which the main parties are seen to have failed. To some extent immigration has become a symbol for other issues. In Barking, there is a particularly strong linkage in voters' minds between the housing issue and immigration.
- All these factors suggest that a strong showing for the far-right is possible in the local elections in 2006. The BNP are aware of the possibilities and adjust their strategies accordingly.
- Counteracting this growing support for the far-right will involve tackling policy misconceptions, particularly on the relationship between immigration and local issues. These misconceptions are fuelled by BNP activities and feed into electoral support for smaller parties on the far right. Strong local variation in far-right support and in the issues that are linked with immigration suggest that these misconceptions should be tackled at the local level. A clear and subtle series of locally based public relations/information initiatives could make a difference. At the same time groups such as the trade unions and Searchlight could play on the distinct uneasiness that people feel about the BNP, which is clearly seen as a racist party.

3: Epilogue

by Jon Cruddas MP

The British National Party is on the verge of a major political breakthrough. Over the last couple of years its support and membership has risen dramatically. It has 21 councillors; it polled 808,000 votes in the European election and would have had several MEPs and London Assembly Members were it not for UKIP. At the recent General Election the BNP saved its deposit in 34 constituencies.

In London the BNP polled 4.9% in the Assembly elections. In seven wards in the Borough of Barking and Dagenham they polled over 20%. Over the last year in five individual Council by-elections they have averaged some 35%. The BNP polled 14.8% across the whole Borough in the European elections. This amounts to a sustained pattern of support across the community.

In the General Election, in the Barking constituency, they collected 4,916 votes – 16.9%. In the Dagenham constituency it was 2,870 votes or 9.3%.

Yet a week before polling day it was commonly assumed that the BNP would poll at least 25% – in their target wards the BNP were talking of 48-52% support. Personal revelations regarding their candidate on the eve of poll lost them thousands of votes with many staying at home. Moreover, the last week of campaigning saw a massive mobilisation of anti-fascist activists through Searchlight and the trade union movement which acted as a barrier to what could well have amounted to a political earthquake in the Borough.

We have seen a step change in the professionalism of BNP campaigning – the quality of their materials is now very high. They have maintained a large visible presence on the streets; their canvassing is systematic coupled with effective eve of poll materials and sustained polling day activity. The BNP are confidently predicting 12-15 councillors in London after next year's elections.

Yet developments nationally and at local level might well collude to understate the significance of the BNP threat. The development of 40 or so super marginal seats means the gearing of the electoral system will downplay the significance of these inroads by the BNP within Labour's traditional working class communities. Locally many are already suggesting that the BNP have been seen off – a passing protest phenomena.

As such, the real danger is that we ignore and fail to confront the reasons for the strength of the BNP and in so doing reinforce the material conditions that have led to the current state of affairs.

The Context

London's population stands officially at 7.3 million. The Mayor assumes the Capital will expand by some 800,000 by 2016 – 70,000 extra a year. London is a world city with 50 separate national and ethnic communities scattered across it and about 300 languages spoken.

According to figures provided by the Office of National Statistics for the period 1992-2003, the annual inflows of international migrants into the capital more than doubled from under 100,000 to about 200,000. We must also assume that a large majority of the stock of illegal workers are resident in the capital. The government suggest these number up to 570,000 in total, not including dependents. In short, the dynamic at work in terms of population inflows into the capital is extraordinary, but remains unquantifiable in terms of the real levels of immigration, economic activity and the total population of London.

Alongside the movements of populations within the city, dramatic house price inflation has pushed migrant groups, both legal and illegal, into the lower cost housing markets in the capital such as in Barking and Dagenham. This movement of people into and within the capital requires a suitable public policy response. However, the baseline of public policy making severely understates the actual population of London, whilst the speed of change means the decision making powers of the state can never keep pace with the dynamic movements at work within the city.

The Borough of Barking and Dagenham remains the lowest cost housing market in Greater London, with a growing private housing market as a consequence of the right to buy council properties, in an area built on the principle of socialised housing.

With no corresponding social house building programme, many thousands remain in dire need of low rent housing. At the same time the Borough retains an enduring legacy of poverty and an historic under investment in public services.

Rapidly the Borough has become the fastest growing and the fastest changing authority in the capital. The trend decline in the Borough's population has been dramatically reversed over the last couple of years. There are estimates that the population has increased by some 20,000 since 2001; arguably any estimate provides a false impression given the massive amount of people off the formal statistical baseline of the state, living in the lowest cost housing areas of the capital.

It is this stark collision between the long term legacy of poverty and underinvestment and the sheer scale of contemporary change that has created such a rich seam for the BNP. Rapid diversification within what was a stable white working class community fractures community cohesion and poses fundamental questions around identity.

The state cannot keep pace with these dynamic movements of people in global cities such as London. Its decision making is years out of date and is just too slow. The local housing market has a magnetic pull for legal and illegal migrant groups moving into London yet this dynamic is off the radar of national Government, which cannot therefore construct a suitable policy response.

This problem is even more acute when we recognise that Government priorities are focused on a different part of the country – that of Middle England.

Government strategy

The originality of New Labour lies in the method by which policy is not deductively produced from a series of core economic or philosophical assumptions or even a body of ideas, but rather, is scientifically constructed out of the preferences and prejudices of the swing voter in the swing seat.

It is a brilliant political movement whose primary objective is to reproduce itself – to achieve this it must dominate the politics of Middle England. The government is not a coalition of traditions and interests who initiate policy and debate; rather it is a power elite whose modus operandi is the retention of power.

The last election produced a Labour majority of 66 which would disappear on a swing of just 2.5%. We have – even before the boundary shake out – some 40 plus super marginal seats that would change hands on a swing of about 5% or less.

In short, the political priorities and concerns of a specific minority of swing voters in a highly select part of the country will become ever more dominant.

At root the gearing of the electoral system empties out opportunities for a radical policy agenda. On the one hand, policy is constructed on the basis of scientific analysis of the preferences of

key voters; on the other, difficult issues and the prejudices of the swing voter are neutralised. Labour have become efficient at winning elections and being in government yet within a calibrated politics where tenure is inversely proportionate to change.

As a politician for what is regarded as a safe working class seat the implications of this political calibration are immense. The system acts at the expense of communities like these – arguably those most in need. The science of key seat organisation and policy formation acts as a barrier to a radical emancipatory programme of economic and social change.

The pragmatic, incremental investment strategies of national government cannot begin to deal with a community undergoing such dramatic change as that occurring in Dagenham, with such an enduring legacy of need. Arguably it cannot even tread water in terms of investment strategies as lagged population statistics – which themselves underestimate real populations – mean year on year budget increases way out in terms of the dynamic movement of people in global cities like London.

It is not just a question of quantitative resource distribution, however. The national policy agenda is calibrated for a different type of community which actively compounds our problems locally. For example, social housing is not a priority for swing voters in Middle England but is the burning issue locally; we resist the imposition of an academy so we are removed from the school capital programme as punishment; parent power undermines school leadership and the effective comprehensive strategy driven by the LEA; the language of choice heightens expectations but remains a fiction in terms of delivery.

Alongside these quantitative and qualitative policy concerns operates the process of triangulation. Specifically the way we have sought to neutralise negative political issues regarding race, immigration and asylum.

The government has never attempted to systematically announce a clear set of principles that embrace the notion of immigration and its associated economic and social benefits. Yet at the same time it has tacitly used immigration to help forge the preferred flexible North American labour market. Especially in London, legal and illegal immigration has been central in replenishing the stock of cheap labour across the public and private services, construction and civil engineering.

Politically, the government is then left in a terrible position. It triangulates around immigration and colludes in the demonisation of the migrant whilst relying on the self same people to rebuild our public and private services and make our labour markets flexible. Immigrant labour is the axis for the domestic agenda of the government yet it fails to defend the principle of immigration and by doing so re-enforces the isolation and vulnerability of immigrants. The government helps in the process of stigmatising the most vulnerable as the whole political centre of gravity moves to the right on matters of race.

For many of my constituents the value of their social wage is in decline. House prices appear to rise inexorably upwards whilst thousands and thousands seek nonexistent, new social housing. Public service improvements fail to match localised population expansion let alone the long term legacy of underinvestment. At work their terms and conditions are under threat as they compete for work with cheap immigrant labour. In terms of access to housing and public services and their position in the workplace many see immigration as a central determinant in their own relative impoverishment. This remains unchallenged whilst the media and political classes help demonise the immigrant.

The cornerstone of New Labour has been the assumption that working class voters in communities like mine have nowhere else to go as they would never vote Tory. Yet this mixture of population movement and policy failure alongside the national discussion around race has meant that many are now developing a class allegiance with the far right.

Those communities that must accommodate the new immigrant communities are the ones least equipped to do so – they themselves have the most limited opportunities for economic and social mobility. Yet they remain disenfranchised due to the political imperatives of Middle England whilst political elites ramp up tensions in these very communities due to the way they triangulate around race.

It is this mixture of class, poverty and race, together with policy issues around housing, public services and the labour market which has created such a rich seam for the BNP in Barking and Dagenham. Especially when we see a national debate around race and immigration that heightens tensions in our community. The government does not offer up solutions because it cannot deal with the rapid movements in people that is driving many of the local tensions over resources.

Yet this perfect storm for the BNP has also created a new politics of hope where locally people are seeking to positively navigate their way through these waters. Despite local material conditions that provide perfect conditions for the BNP and a national debate that panders to xenophobic politics, the local working classes are resisting the obvious fascist responses.

Locally in Dagenham a new Popular Front politics is developing as anti-fascists and church groups, local union branches, voluntary groups and political parties come together to confront the threat. New alliances are being formed and a new political vitality is emerging – literally hundreds of people are coming together through community activity and local social solidarity against the BNP. This very process is democratically rebuilding a community and a political movement.

The Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust research

It is within this context of rapid change and community tension that this key research by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust has been undertaken. Their research provides much needed insight into what is going on in London both through quantitative as well as focus group work into the motives behind voting patterns.

The findings are significant. By the 2004 European and London Assembly elections they conclude it is legitimate to argue that both UKIP and the BNP have entered the political mainstream rather than being fringe players, with complex linkages between the two parties.

The most important findings relate to why people are voting BNP, emerging out of focus group research in Barking and Dagenham. A widespread disillusionment with all the traditional political parties is found but this is especially directed at Labour who no longer represent their interests. This disillusionment is specifically linked to immigration – the dominant political issue in these communities.

The research grounds the popularity of the BNP in the material realities of the community – stretched public services especially in terms of public housing, economic insecurity and pessimism for the future. Immigration has come to symbolise a more fundamental belief in a deeper malaise in the country overseen by the mainstream political classes.

Most importantly it offers no comfort to those in the Labour Party who see the solution as one of ever more hardline policy positions on immigration and asylum – these are seen as election stunts. Both main parties are seen as deliberately boosting patterns of immigration whilst pretending otherwise.

The political formation in Dagenham is a complex one and the sheer rate of change extraordinary. In many respects it is beyond the power of the state, everything else being equal, to keep pace with such shifts and adapt public policy accordingly. Yet everything else is not equal. The imperatives of Middle England serve to disenfranchise communities like these. The policy agenda fitting the preferences of Middle England turns in on itself in the more traditional

working class community. Some argue these are simply the systemic problems of centre left governments who seek to retain power against the backdrop of a hostile media. This benign interpretation of New Labour cannot be extended to their technical triangulations around the lives of migrants which has helped in the contemporary demonisation of the migrant.

This research by the Reform Trust provides insights into the consequences of this politics in terms of the rise of the BNP. Some might comfortably conclude that the sheer scale of the change occurring in Barking and Dagenham, due to its location in London, means that there are no generalised conclusions to be drawn regarding the BNP. It is a unique combination of forces. Alternatively, one might argue that all of the factors behind the rise of the BNP in the Borough exist in working class communities across the country and this research helps us understand how they can combine to trigger extremism – especially in the context of any future economic downturn.



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