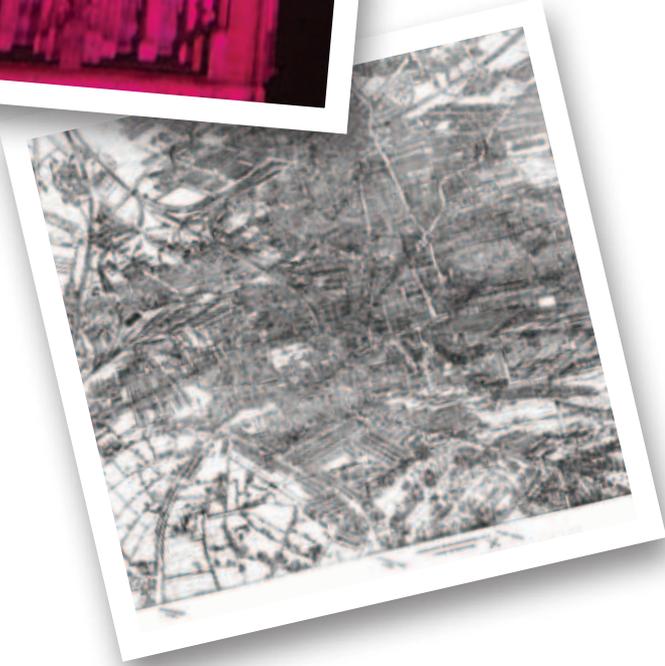


# THE BRADFORD EARTHQUAKE

The lessons from Bradford West for election campaigning  
and political engagement in Britain > Lewis Baston





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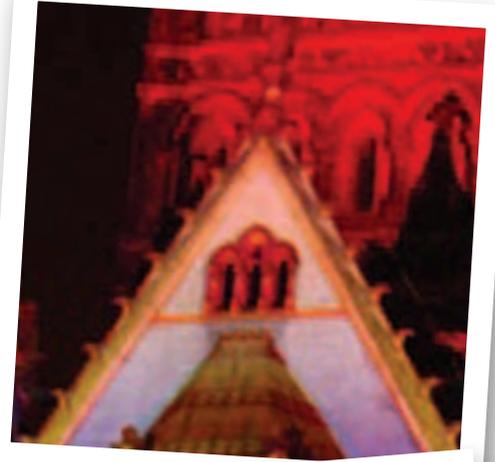
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Designed by Tony Garrett.

## › About this report

Following the March 2012 by-election in Bradford West, which resulted in a dramatic gain for George Galloway of Respect, the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust commissioned a report from Lewis Baston (of Democratic Audit) to analyse what happened. The task was to explain the result and its implications for political parties and campaigners of all parties.

The report is divided into four sections – the context of the election, the campaign, the local elections of May 2012 and the overall meaning of the political changes in Bradford.





# Key findings

## The corrosion of the established political parties in Bradford West

1. The recent political history of Bradford West has been marred by patronage, neglect, bad organisation and even electoral fraud. Both Labour and the Conservatives are implicated in this state of affairs. Local politics in Bradford has been about mutual accommodation between elites of each community ('Asians', city whites and suburbanites) rather than real diversity, and voters have found this alienating.
2. 'Biraderi' (clan-based loyalty) has in the past offered parties an apparently easy mechanism to amass block votes, but the price that parties (Labour and Conservative) have paid has been higher than they anticipated and ultimately led to disaster, particularly when combined with a lack of local political organisation and discussion.
3. Bradford Labour in particular needs to absorb the lessons of the election and change itself radically; the same may apply in other apparently 'safe' seats where local politics is weak. There is a danger of a political vacuum developing in the city and elsewhere which may be filled by fringe politics, despair or violence.
4. As with some other by-elections in which huge shifts of votes have taken place, voters in Bradford West do not

feel they have deserted their usual party but that Labour has failed them and that there has been an option available that better reflects the real values of the party.

## The local roots of Respect

5. Galloway could not have won without a locally-generated upsurge of political activity; the energy of the Respect campaign came largely from local soil and was not a product of a centrally-driven party strategy.
6. That upsurge would probably not have happened had the local Labour Party succeeded over the years in first serving as a suitable channel for political activity in Bradford West, and second in running a selection process that commanded the confidence and support of party members and the broader community.
7. The Bradford Respect campaign itself compares with other protest movements such as Occupy in its self-conception and in its free-form organisational style.

## *Campaign techniques*

8. In terms of campaigning methods there was no revolution, merely a positive rational 'reboot' conducted by Respect of traditional techniques in a modern setting. Bradford's political parties have been held back in their development as campaigning entities

by non-ideological clan politics, and Respect's innovations came as more of a shock than they would have in more engaged politics. The standard set of by-election campaign techniques brought to Bradford by the main parties failed.

9. The interaction of social and traditional media can have a stronger effect than either alone; the effect of the television debate in the last weekend of the campaign in Bradford West is a fascinating example of how messages can be propagated.
10. National messages and campaigning language failed to connect with Bradford West electors' bad experiences of mainstream politics.
11. Bradford itself suffers from a pervasive sense of neglect and decline, hence the power of the symbolic issues of the Westfield Hole and the Odeon during the by-election campaign.
12. International affairs, particularly as they affect Muslims, did play an unusually large part in the by-election. This raises further questions about identity politics and celebrity in an age of plural media, and the way in which feelings of victimhood and resentment are cultivated, not only among young people and Muslims but across the political spectrum.

### **Overall observations**

13. While the circumstances were unique it would be inappropriate to dismiss Bradford West as an unimportant aberration. It indicates the vulnerability of apparent strongholds when a number of

factors come together, and should give both major parties pause for thought about their relationship with the core voters they take for granted.

14. The result should not be dismissed as an emotional spasm or a mistake by the electors of Bradford, but as a very clear repudiation of the local power structure and the way that national politics is conducted.

# Summary



## Setting the scene

The Bradford West by-election of March 2012, in which George Galloway of the Respect party triumphantly won a long-established Labour seat, was one of the most surprising and notable by-election outcomes in recent British history. Few observers among Westminster politicians and the media had a clue that Bradford West would be anything other than a routine Labour hold, and even among Bradford Labour campaigners there was little idea of what was to hit them until the ballot boxes were opened on the night.

The shock by-election result changed the political climate for the Bradford city council elections in May 2012. Respect gained five seats in Bradford, and deprived Labour of the chance of taking overall control of the council. Despite the problems that Respect encountered in the summer and autumn of 2012, something new had clearly taken place in local politics, and that change might well have national significance.

Several explanations have been offered for the revolution in Bradford politics, which Respect supporters quickly and controversially called the 'Bradford Spring' by analogy with popular risings in the Arab world. After the election there was considerable attention on the apparently new and innovative techniques that the Respect campaign used in the by-election, including its superior command

of IT and its ability to mobilise Muslim women and young people, who had previously seemed politically invisible in Bradford. More broadly, the result was seen as a repudiation by the electorate of party politics in general, and Labour in particular, by many commentators. The majority of Westminster insiders, who had written off Galloway as a busted flush, were appalled that he was elected. Many accused Galloway of running an unscrupulous campaign that exploited Muslim concerns and unfairly criticised his Labour opponent Imran Hussain.

However, a deeper look at by-elections, the Bradford political background and the politics of the Pakistani-British community in Bradford makes it clear that the Bradford West by-election was a complex phenomenon, which crystallised several things that were ready to happen in Bradford. Galloway was in the classic position of the rebel leader, summed up by words attributed to Ledru-Rollin in 1848: 'I am their leader. I must follow them'; his campaign was a catalyst for a popular movement against a particularly decrepit local political order in Bradford West. The culture of the campaign was participatory and perhaps chaotically democratic and inclusive, on the conscious model of the Occupy movement.

## The corrosion of the established political parties in Bradford West

Any adequate account of the Bradford West by-election has to start by addressing

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“‘we gave [Labour] a big kick in the backside and we’re waiting to see how they respond to it.’”

the failure of the main political parties in the constituency. Without years of neglect, stemming from an accommodation with power brokers to exploit the clan voting solidarity of biraderi (a social system of kinship that derives from rural Pakistan and Kashmir), there would not have been fertile soil for Galloway in Bradford.

The constituency Labour Party was quiescent, even moribund, for years, with the MP neglectful and ill and hardly any political organisation, education or debate going on within the party. The Conservatives were no better. Politics and representation was dominated by the main biraderi clan. This history of neglect and manipulation resulted in a lot of dammed-up political energy in a constituency with a youthful population with unused campaigning skills and a lot of local (and, admittedly, international) problems to get angry and campaign about. It also led to a build-up of resentment among the smaller clans who were excluded from representation, as well as among Asians not part of the clan system and the local white population.

The decay of organised politics in Bradford West before 2012 may seem an isolated story, but it reflected in exaggerated caricature a common view of mainstream politics held well beyond Bradford. The normal political language of ‘fairness’ ‘opportunity’ ‘hard working families’ and so on deployed by all the main parties rang very hollow in Bradford West, where manipulated clan politics meant that there was little fairness or opportunity in political selection and well-connected mediocrity would always defeat the talented outsider. Party labels themselves seemed interchangeable to many of the power brokers. Politics in Bradford, to many, seemed to conform very closely to a far-left view of how mainstream

party politics works, and if it was true of Bradford, people wondered, might it not be true also at a national level?

In the words of a voter to a Labour activist in Bradford ‘we gave you a big kick in the backside and we’re waiting to see how you respond to it.’ The main parties, particularly Labour, have been put on notice that the way politics has been practiced in Bradford West is unacceptable to the voters. While the party has been vigilant about far left infiltration, it has been slack about guarding against infiltration by others who have no commitment to Labour values. There may be other constituencies where an apparently ‘safe’ hold on parliamentary representation has masked serious problems. Given the decay in active political engagement in many places, the model of winning over block votes by dealing with local power brokers is not unique to Bradford and may be found in other northern and midland urban areas. It would be rational for Labour to deal with them before they reach the sort of crisis that developed in Bradford.

### The local energy of the Respect campaign

The arrival of Galloway started to transform this potential for a challenge to traditional politics in Bradford West, but the Labour selection meeting was the key turning point. Although Imran Hussain was selected by a large majority of those present, there was a sense within Bradford that this merely reflected a good clan turnout and superior manipulative organisational skills rather than a genuine consensus. The selection resulted in the defection of several Labour members, who had come up against the power of the machine before, to the Respect campaign. They took with them the ideas and energy

“ [Online footage of the TV debate] helped make Galloway’s argument that people would be better off sending a Parliamentarian to Westminster than a councillor.”

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that had been unwelcome in Bradford West Labour. There were some innovative aspects of the Respect campaign – particularly in the role of women and its use of social media – but most of it was a sensible adaptation of widely used methods to the Bradford context, and some – such as George Galloway’s bus tour in the final days – was evocative of old-time electioneering. Other than a strong emphasis on international Muslim issues, the campaign centred around local issues such as the Westfield Hole and the Odeon cinema and a broad left of centre prospectus.

On the surface, the Bradford West campaign had seemed to be similar to most of the other by-elections in the 2010 parliament in safe Labour seats – a routine canter to victory for the Labour candidate, helped by the unpopularity of the coalition government (which deepened considerably during March 2012). There was nothing that one could point to in the Labour campaign (or the others) that the party had done particularly wrong; it was just that the procession of visiting dignitaries and press releases on national and local issues seemed irrelevant to the electorate, and this time there was an alternative. The nature of the choice was made very clear by the BBC *Sunday Politics* debate broadcast on the last weekend of the campaign – Galloway was clearly a much stronger orator than his competitors. It helped make Galloway’s argument that people would be better off sending a Parliamentarian to Westminster than a councillor. The video of the debate was widely circulated online in the final days of the campaign; the combination of traditional and social media proved a stronger influence on electors than either could alone.

## Bradford West, candidate selection and collective loyalty

Putting the Bradford West result in context, it has some similarities to past by-elections and constituency contests where there have been huge swings to Independent or centre candidates such as Merthyr Tydfil (1970), Lincoln (1973), Bermondsey (1983), Tatton (1997) and Blaenau Gwent (2005). A normally loyal partisan electorate felt that its allegiance had been tested past breaking point by the party failing in its obligations to run a fair selection procedure with a locally acceptable result. In many of these elections, as in Bradford, there was an unusual amount of discussion among the voters themselves, and a sense of a community coming to a collective decision rather than an individual exercise of consumer choice which is increasingly the model of national politics. Galloway’s campaign made it easier for Labour supporters to switch over by claiming to be ‘real Labour’ as opposed to ‘New Labour’, and carrying on the left and anti-war traditions of the city and the previous West MP Marsha Singh. So while a startling result, it was not the same sort of transformative result as the most consequential by-elections such as Hamilton (1967) and Orpington (1962) which established the SNP and the Liberals as significant electoral forces and changed the whole of British politics.

## Identity politics, celebrity and Bradford

There are several facets of the Bradford result that have wider ramifications. One is that we may be in an age of celebrity politics but that what we understand by celebrity and the media need to be rethought. Galloway was not familiar to the Bradford West electorate because

“The prospect of a complete vacuum in political engagement in this troubled section of a city with more than its fair share of problems should be much more terrifying than the emergence of Respect as a competitor.”

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of Big Brother, but because of his appearances on Iranian Press TV and his Talk Sport radio broadcasts, and his tour de force before a US Senate committee in 2005 which is a YouTube favourite to this day. Galloway's triumph emerged from a segmented, pluralistic and international media landscape. While he was a celebrity, it was celebrity that was earned mostly by political stands that a young politically minded audience liked. The contrast with Esther Rantzen's failure in Luton South in the 2010 general election is instructive, not only in terms of how celebrity translates into politics but also in how it is possible for local mainstream politics to revive itself in a way that Labour failed to do in Bradford West.

There was an element of identity politics in the by-election, without a doubt. At times, particularly during the less savoury interludes in the campaign, it seemed to be about Labour and Respect both trying to claim support based on who was the better Muslim, and Galloway clearly targeted his appeal at Muslim interests and ways of looking at the world. This is hardly surprising, or even – as such – reprehensible. It is surely routine politics when a democratic politician tells the voters what they want to hear, in the sort of language that he thinks they would respond best to, and it is inconsistent – dare one say racist or Islamophobic – to object to pandering to Muslims but not to, say, pandering to other sorts of myths about nationalism, Europe or immigration. While the Respect campaign was to some extent about failing to challenge popular beliefs, and stimulating grievances without doing much to solve them, the same can be said about many other political campaigns.

Labour cannot afford to be complacent about the ructions which have taken

place in Respect since the summer. The party should not, morally or practically, assume that Respect's problems will cause its strength in the majority-Asian wards of Bradford to wither away without Labour doing anything to put its own house in order. The prospect of a complete vacuum in political engagement in this troubled section of a city with more than its fair share of problems should be much more terrifying than the emergence of Respect as a competitor. Bradford Labour probably does not have the resources to throw off the problems that have caused the decay, and the process of rebuilding a mass membership, vibrant and politically engaged local party will require considerable outside help.

### Conclusion: a rational use of the power of the vote

Much commentary after the election was implicitly critical of the electors of Bradford West. But regardless of what they think about Galloway over the longer term, the voters of the constituency used their power in a rational way. It was an opportunity to strike a blow against a local power structure that was widely disliked. It was a cry for help for a constituency suffering not only from manifold social problems (including rapidly rising unemployment) but also a pervasive sense of having been neglected, forgotten and shabbily treated which gave Westfield and the Odeon such symbolic power. The problems of Bradford are much more widely known and discussed because of the by-election. Even if Galloway's populism outlives its usefulness, the by-election will have done the city a service. And having used the ballot to achieve an extraordinary result, the electors of Bradford – particularly women, the young and the marginalised – know that they have the power to do it again.

# A THE CONTEXT OF THE BY-ELECTION

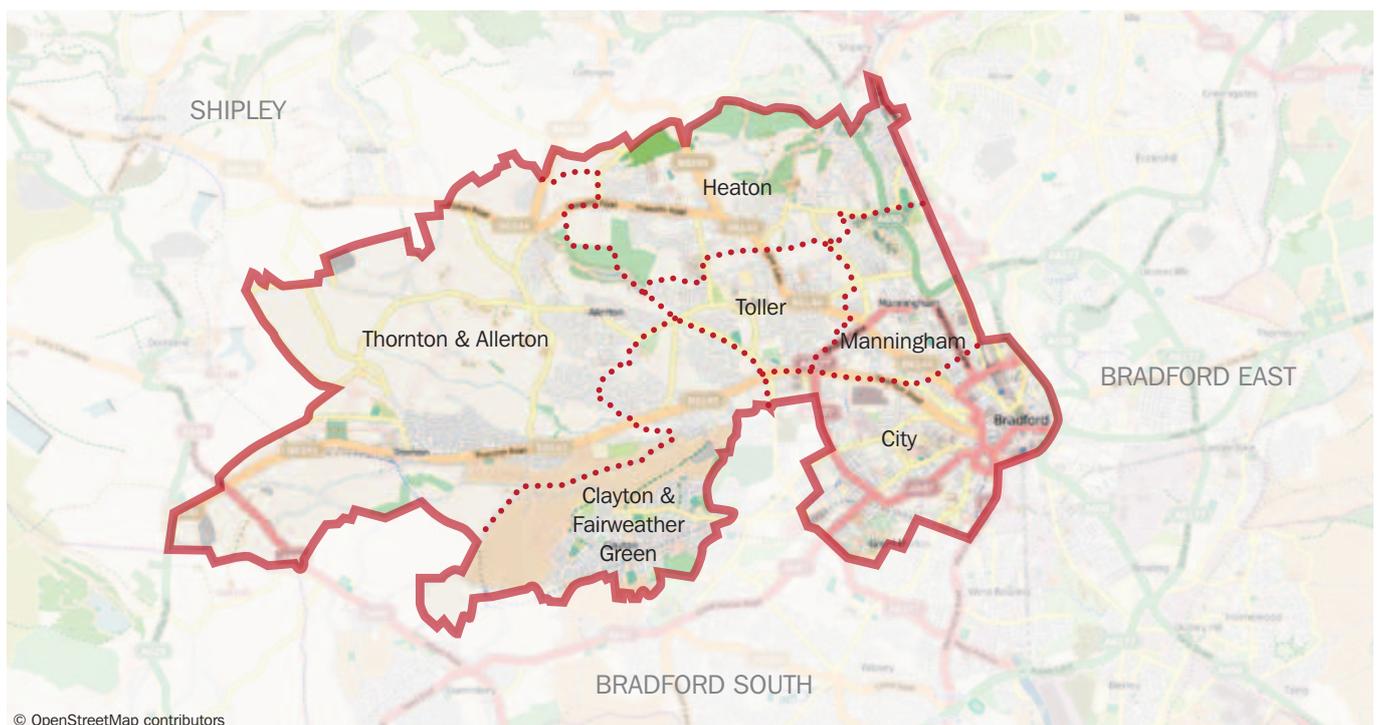
## 1 INTRODUCING THE CONSTITUENCY

The current Bradford West constituency basically dates back to 1974, when the previous Bradford East and Bradford West seats were subject to major boundary changes. The previous Bradford West comprised western suburbs of Bradford, and was Conservative in all but the best national election for Labour (1966) after its creation in 1955, but the new seat took in a substantial area of the inner city. The incumbent Conservative MP since 1970 for Bradford West, John

Wilkinson, was fairly narrowly defeated by the incumbent Bradford East Labour MP since 1966, Edward Lyons. The seat has remained fairly much the same in terms of boundaries ever since, with minor changes in 1983 and 2010 and no alterations in 1997.

The constituency consists of six wards of the city of Bradford, including the City centre and university area (City ward), a northern inner city district with a large proportion of residents of Asian origin and Muslim faith (Manningham and Toller) and an ethnically mixed northern suburb, Heaton. To the west of the city centre there are two mainly white wards, mixing suburban territory and some villages absorbed into the city

### *Bradford West constituency*



© OpenStreetMap contributors

(Thornton and Allerton, and Clayton & Fairweather Green). Geographically, the constituency tends to slope upwards away from the city centre, with Manningham on a ridge and western suburbs at Thornton and Clayton rather resembling moorland villages.

The two basic demographic facts about the Bradford West constituency that are apparent from the 2001 Census are its religious/ ethnic composition and its youthful population. It was 47.4 per cent non-white (13th highest of 650 constituencies), 34.1 per cent Pakistani (comfortably the highest), 38.0 per cent Muslim (second highest, after Bethnal Green & Bow) and 25.7 per cent aged between 0 and 15 (7th highest). The Census also showed Bradford West to be in the top 20 per cent of constituencies for undesirable indicators like unemployment and lack of educational qualifications. Private renting is relatively high, and single-

parent families relatively low, compared to the other Bradford seats.<sup>1</sup>

The Muslim population of Bradford West is a relatively young one, and in City ward in particular it is augmented by a large student population attached to Bradford University or Bradford College – at the time of the 2001 Census 39.1 per cent of people aged between 16 and 74 were students.

Bradford (the metropolitan borough) has one of the youngest populations in England & Wales according to the 2011 census. The proportion of its population aged under 20 was 28.8 per cent, lagging only Barking & Dagenham (31.4 per cent), Birmingham (28.9 per cent) and Slough (also 28.8 per cent).

Bradford West has a unique political history. Even before the 2012 by-election, the voting behaviour of Bradford West

1 House of Commons Research Paper 08/38, 2001 *Census of Population Statistics for New Parliamentary Constituencies*.

Thornton, a – not typical  
– part of Bradford West



had some unusual features. Between 1974 and 2010 the results for each party varied only within narrow bands, regardless of national trends. The Conservative vote was between 31 and 39 per cent, Labour's between 40 and 53, and the Liberal Democrats (and predecessors) between 7 and 19 per cent. The only exception came in 1983, when Edward Lyons (elected as Labour in 1979) defended the seat for the SDP Liberal Alliance and seems to have brought with him a block of votes which reverted to Labour in 1987.

The stability of voting patterns in Bradford West meant that it recorded some results that were startlingly against the national trend. It swung towards Labour in 1979 and 2010, but in favour of the Conservatives in 1997.

Older statistics on ethnicity are unreliable, but in the 1981 Census Bradford West had one of the highest proportions of population in households whose head was born in the New Commonwealth or Pakistan (27.0 per cent, with only 10 constituencies having a higher proportion). From the 1960s onwards Bradford

had been a favoured destination for immigrants to Britain, particularly those coming from Pakistan and India, and by the mid-1980s the city – particularly the inner areas such as Manningham and University – was firmly established as one of the main centres of Britain's Asian population. Its bonds with Kashmir, particularly with Mirpur, were deep and ran both ways.

In Bradford, and in many of the other northern towns with substantial Asian communities, there is not the diversity found for instance among Londoners – London Muslims may be of Bangladeshi, Turkish, Cypriot, Arab, Somali, Indian, East African or other origin as well as Pakistani. But in Bradford ethnicity, shared history and religion run together (with a few exceptions such as the Sikh community).

The political and policy implications of a substantial Asian-British population have been reflected in the politics of Bradford for some time. Both Lyons and Wilkinson served on Commons committees on race relations and immigration in pre-1974

parliaments. In 1981 Edward Lyons joined the Social Democratic Party, but he was defeated in 1983 by the Labour nominee, Max Madden (previously MP for Sowerby 1974-79) who represented the seat until 1997. The Labour selection in 1997 was contentious but it was won by Marsha Singh. Singh, like Madden, was to the left of the Labour Party. He had long been involved in Bradford politics, including the protests in the 1980s during the ‘Honeyford Affair’. As a Sikh, Singh was a member of a significant established minority community within Bradford, but one that is a lot smaller than the Muslim community. For Singh’s generation of activist, religion was much secondary to ethnicity in terms of his personal and political identity – his politics was formed by the struggle against racism rather than that against Islamophobia.

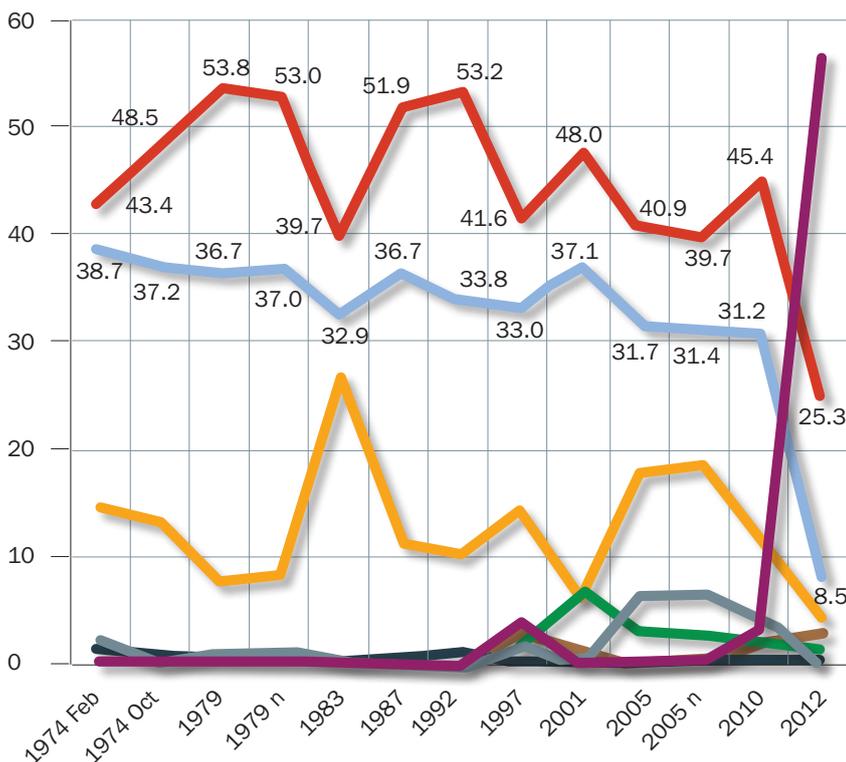
Singh’s first election was unusual, in that

in contrast to nearly everywhere else in the country there was a swing from Labour to Conservative in Bradford West. This was less to do with Muslim hostility to him as a Sikh (this was, Bradford commentators tend to believe, not much of a factor) than the positive appeal of the Conservative candidate Mohammed Riaz. Riaz was<sup>2</sup> a Muslim, and had been one of Bradford’s most prominent councillors for some time – he had defected from Labour to Conservative in 1990 following a leadership challenge within the Labour group. Singh’s majority drifted upwards and peaked in 2010. The fact that Singh won re-election in 2005 and 2010 should instantly rule out the assumption that the by-election was all about the (2003) Iraq war. In most constituencies (such as Leicester South for instance) Muslim hostility to Labour peaked in 2003-05 and after that the community’s Labour loyalties tended to reassert themselves. Bradford West, though, was different.

**Bradford West general election results since 1974**



% vote for each party



The 2005 election in Bradford West was also notable for a successful prosecution for electoral fraud. Five Conservative activists were jailed for conspiring to produce hundreds of false postal vote applications, but the plot was exposed by a newspaper investigation before these applications could be converted into votes. The applications were made in the names of people who had little understanding of the electoral process and who lived in houses in multiple occupation.<sup>3</sup> Two of those found guilty had been elected Conservative councillors in the 2004 elections but were no longer councillors at the time of the trial in 2009-10 – Jamshed Khan for City ward, Reis Khan for Manningham.

2 Riaz is still involved in Bradford politics and stood as Conservative candidate in Bradford East in the 2010 general election.

3 Daily Telegraph, 7 September 2010.

Bradford Interchange station, right, and Bradford Exchange station, below, closed in May 1969



## 2 THE CITY OF BRADFORD

### *An industrial and post-industrial city*

**B**radford mushroomed from a small town to an industrial metropolis during the 19th Century, mostly from the woollen textile industry. The city is in a bowl of hills, with a valley stretching north from the centre to Shipley along Bradford Beck (separating West and East/ North Bradford constituencies) with open moorland visible from many city neighbourhoods, and a hilly landscape making up its suburbs. It has a handsome Victorian centre and some fine villas just to the north around Lister Park (one of Britain's great urban parks), but a great deal of industrial and post-industrial squalor. The housing stock is among the oldest in the country, with over a third of houses built before 1919, and 60 per cent of its private rented sector housing was rated at being below decent standards.<sup>4</sup> Some of its council-built developments from the 1950s and 1960s are also troubled and poor places. The decline of textiles

and heavy industry since the 1970s has scarred the landscape and the economy, leaving low-wage, low-skill and high unemployment problems behind.

Bradford, particularly the west side, has drawn in immigrants throughout its short history as a big city. At the turn of the century German and Jewish communities existed in the city centre and Manningham. In the 1950s and 1960s the mills demanded ever more unskilled and semi-skilled labour, and an influx of people came from the Indian subcontinent, particularly the Mirpur area of Kashmir where people were displaced by the construction of a dam.

### *'Bradistan' and biraderi*

The politics of Pakistan – or, more precisely, the social structures of rural Kashmir – have had their impact on the politics of Bradford. One cannot talk for long to people about Bradford politics without coming across the term 'Biraderi'. Its literal meaning is 'brotherhood' or 'kinship' but in the politics of Pakistani communities in Bradford it means an elaborate, subtle system of clan influence. It is strongest among Azad Kashmiris, most of whose families came from rural backgrounds where the bonds of clan

<sup>4</sup> Jenni Viitanen, *Alike in Dignity? Housing in Bradford*, Newcastle, IPPR North, 2012.

and extended family dominate other loyalties such as ideology, party allegiance or sometimes even religion. Biraderi in Bradford centres around two broad clans, Jaats and Bains, and other clans even among people of Mirpuri origin are often locked out of political power. According to Hill, citing Akhtar:

biraderi is a caste system of social stratification. Each biraderi is not equal but fits into a hierarchy of biraderis or castes. The main biraderis are; the Rajputs who are traditionally the landowners, the Jaats who traditionally work the land, the Gujars who are traditionally livestock herders, the Arains who are market gardeners and the Kammi who are the servant classes.<sup>5</sup>

Biraderi emerged as a kind of sociological compromise between the hierarchical castes that were traditional to south Asian culture and the egalitarian, universal imperative of Islam, and was itself changed by immigration to Britain and moving from a rural to an urban or global frame of reference. It is a complex and, at least in the British context, under-analysed phenomenon.<sup>6</sup>

Such phenomena are far from unknown among immigrant communities the world over. The Tammany Hall politics of New York in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries was not dissimilar. Irish and Italian immigrants would be welcomed by members of extended families and incorporated into the political machine, in exchange for jobs (e.g. in the police) and other benefits such as citizenship. However, unlike the New York immigrant political machine, biraderi (combined with easier long-distance travel and

<sup>5</sup> Eleanor Hill, *Ethnicity and Democracy: A Study into Biraderi*, BA thesis School of Historical Studies, University of Bradford, 2012 p6.

<sup>6</sup> The works of Eleanor Hill and Navid Akhtar stand out in this respect.

global communications) binds people back to the politics of their community's country of origin. Community elders travel between Britain and Pakistan at election times in both countries to advise, even enforce, biraderi obligations. Socially, the Bradford community is held back by its strong ties back to Kashmir that are reflected in traditions such as children spending long periods there, and arranged marriages between rural Mirpuris and Bradfordians. As David Goodhart noted:

A growing number of Pakistanis, especially the better educated, now marry from within their community in Britain. Yet arranged marriages with a partner from Pakistan, often a first cousin, are still the norm and only 15 per cent of Pakistanis born in Bradford in 2009 had two parents who were also born here.<sup>7</sup>

The constant exchange between Kashmir and Bradford has also enabled biraderi to continue to exert influence at a stage when such phenomena have dwindled away almost entirely in other communities based on 1950s/60s primary immigration. The community exists in two worlds, urban and British on the one hand and rural and Kashmiri on the other, and is thus resistant to the usual processes of assimilation.

### ***A radical city***

Bradford has a long tradition of religious and political movements: nonconformist chapels and Victorian philanthropy shape the landscape as well as heavy industry and bad housing. Bradford can claim to be one of the birthplaces of the political Labour movement in Britain, as the Independent Labour Party (ILP)

<sup>7</sup> David Goodhart, 'A tale of three cities' *Prospect* June 2011, <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/bradford-burnley-oldham-riots-ten-years-on/>

was founded in the city in 1893. It has had more recent radical moments, including the first-established (1973) and biggest Peace Studies department in a British university, a Peace Museum, an active Militant Tendency in the local Labour Party in the 1980s and the first stirrings of political Islamism in Britain in 1988-90.

Bradford had also suffered civil disturbances on several occasions, most recently in 1995 and 2001 with rioting in Manningham. These episodes were each preceded by rising inter-ethnic tension and simmering violence. On the latter occasion there were some exemplary sentences handed down for riot-related crime. Ten years later there was a lot of looking back, and discussion of the concepts of integration, multiculturalism and segregation and how they had worked out in Bradford.<sup>8</sup> There was no rioting in Bradford, unlike several other cities, in summer 2011.

Although this is hardly a rigorous social science finding, Bradfordians of all ethnicities seem to have the bone-dry wit, mild arrogance, self-deprecation and laconic pessimism that one also finds in the people of Glasgow and Belfast. Bradford is simultaneously the best and worst of places; it is the true centre of the world, even if it is run by crooked, idiot philistines and even if the rest of the world stubbornly refuses to acknowledge the fact. Even local journalist Jim Greenhalf's mostly affectionate contemporary history of the place is called *It's a Mean Old Scene*.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See for example David Goodhart 'A tale of three cities' *Prospect*, June 2011, <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/bradford-burnley-oldham-riots-ten-years-on/>

<sup>9</sup> Jim Greenhalf, *It's A Mean Old Scene: a history of modern Bradford since 1974*, Bradford, Redbeck Press, 2003.

### ***Branch-line Bradford***

To arrive in a fine Victorian city like Bradford by train, one should really step into a lofty stone palace. But in Bradford one scuttles like a rat into a tin shed, and all its trains – with the exception of the quirky Grand Central direct service to London – are meanly upholstered buses on rails.

Bradford's branch-line status on the railway map is an expression of a more general sense in which the city seems sidelined. Despite its size, its influence peters out remarkably quickly as one leaves the city. The urban revival of the 1990s and 2000s was good for Manchester and Leeds, and their city centres became fashionable places to work, shop and live, but Bradford was off the Manchester-Leeds axis that dominated the North.

### ***Metro Bradford***

The Metropolitan Borough of Bradford was established in the local government reorganisation of 1972-74. It includes the core city of Bradford and a number of outlying communities – Keighley, Shipley, Haworth, Queensbury, Ilkley and Wharfedale. While the city of Bradford had previously usually been Labour-controlled other than for fairly short interludes of no overall control or Conservative control (the longest being 1967-72), the metropolitan authority was won by the Conservatives in its inaugural election in 1973 and controlled by the Tories until 1980. Labour could not gain a firm hold on the council until 1990, following a brief and controversial period of radical Conservative control in the late 1980s when Eric Pickles was council leader. Labour had a majority in Bradford until 2000, and since then it has been under no overall control with the Conservatives taking the leading roles from 2000 to 2010

and Labour since May 2010.

The politics of Metro Bradford are therefore more complicated than many suggested at and after the by-election (including George Galloway and even many Bradfordians). It simply cannot be an example of entrenched and stale Labour dominance. Labour had run the place, without an overall majority but with support from the Greens, for less than two years at the time of the by-election, and had been out of office for ten years before that. The Conservative leaders of the council, Kris Hopkins and Margaret Eaton, were less abrasive than Pickles but were still notable; Hopkins became an MP in 2010 and Eaton was Conservative leader on the Local Government Association. It was also a fairly early Conservative-Lib Dem coalition, founded three years before the municipal coalition in Birmingham, for instance.

While Metro Bradford's boundaries made sense in 1972 (the mills of Shipley were founded by Bradford tycoons, for instance), it was common by 2012 to hear arguments that it was the local government equivalent of a failed state. It was not warmly regarded in Keighley and Shipley, and the increasing strength of the gravitational pull from Leeds meant that these areas had little fellow feeling and linkage with Bradford city. Some of them were enjoying considerable prosperity – in Ilkley for instance house prices doubled in the decade to 2011. The case for a metropolitan borough comprising Keighley, Shipley and perhaps neighbouring areas of Leeds (Guiseley, Horsforth and Otley) has some adherents.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Telegraph & Argus*, 14 April 2012, p17 'Split away richer parts of district' reporting that Keighley MP and former council leader Kris Hopkins suggested a separate Keighley/ Shipley borough. The breakaway concept is sometimes known drolly as 'Wharfe-Aire' after the two river valleys that it would be based upon.

In terms of parliamentary representation, Metro Bradford has five constituencies. Bradford South has been the most consistent of all of them, having been Labour at every election since 1974 (and on previous boundaries back to 1945), although the Conservatives came only 110 votes short in 1983. It is essentially the 'white working class' seat in Bradford. Bradford West was consistently Labour from 1974 until 2012. Keighley is a traditional marginal constituency, being won by the Conservatives in 1970, Labour from February 1974 until 1983, the Conservatives from 1983 to 1997, Labour from 1997 to 2010 and Conservative since then. Other than in 1979 (by 78 votes) it has supported the party that has gone on to form the government ever since 1959. Shipley, north of Bradford and extending into the Wharfedale countryside, is normally Conservative although Labour won it in 1997 and 2001. Bradford East (or North) has been the most changeable, having voted Labour until a surprising Conservative gain in 1983, then reverted to Labour in 1987 and sprung another surprise by going Liberal Democrat in 2010. Labour, therefore, have deteriorated from having five out of five between 1997 and 2005 to having only one (South) after the Bradford West by-election.

Following the by-election, Bradford can claim to have one of the most ideologically diverse parliamentary delegations, consisting of George Galloway (Bradford West, Respect), Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford South, mainstream Labour), David Ward (Bradford East, Lib Dem), Kris Hopkins (Keighley, loyalist Conservative) and Philip Davies (Shipley, right-wing rebel Conservative).

### 3 BRADFORD IN 2012



The by-election took place in a rather peculiar context, locally and nationally. As it began, Bradford was in the news because of the Channel 4 television programme *Make Bradford British*, transmitted on Thursdays 1 March and 8 March. The programme focused on the differences between Asian and white Bradfordians in the context of a 'reality TV' format and was at times uncomfortable viewing, particularly a sequence in which white regulars at a pub criticised a young Muslim woman for her modest dress. Reaction in Bradford was generally hostile, the local *Telegraph & Argus* newspaper saying that it was 'reinforcing a stereotype which is not only completely false but has caused untold damage to Bradford's prosperity' and community relations. It also noted the title's implication that Bradford currently was *not* British.<sup>11</sup> In the by-election the

<sup>11</sup> *Telegraph & Argus*, 2 March 2012, Front page comment.

far-right 'Democratic Nationalist' party used the slogan 'Make Bradford British'.<sup>12</sup>

Tragic events in Afghanistan also intruded on the campaign period. On 9 March the deaths in the Lashkar Gah region of a Bradford soldier, Chris Kershaw, and five Yorkshire Regiment comrades were reported by the Ministry of Defence.

The opening of City Park in Bradford city centre took place late in the campaign on 24 March. This created a large open space near City Hall, with grassed areas, restaurant, a concrete plaza and most arrestingly a huge water feature capable at different times of being a paddling pool, a fountain and an evocation of a New York style streetscape with steam rising from the pavement.

Opinions about City Park are mixed. While there was some complaint about its cost and its design, the opening went well (and was an opportunity taken by Respect and the Lib Dems to do a little

<sup>12</sup> Reproduced at <http://www.electionleaflets.org/leaflets/full/a56e91d3-a77b-4f54-adea-f4c228ec25e4/>

City Park, with City Hall in the background, August 2012



campaigning) and on a summer day it seems a popular feature, with teenagers and children enjoying the water in the middle of the city. Whether it will be as cheery in the middle of a Bradford winter remains to be seen.

National political developments in March were also unusual. The opinion polls since autumn 2010 had, despite some dramatic events (economic crisis and riots among them), not moved much, with Labour usually having a slim lead of a point or two over the Conservatives. Despite cuts, the Conservatives and David Cameron seemed in good shape with public opinion, while Nick Clegg and the Liberal Democrats had absorbed the brunt of government unpopularity. This all shifted with the Budget of 21 March. The cut in top-rate tax to 45p did not go down well, but worse was a series of government embarrassments and reverses over several minor Budget measures, including raising VAT on hot pies and pasties. Immediately before the by-election an atmosphere of farce reminiscent of the television programme *The Thick of It* developed, and suitably enough a term from that programme – ‘omnishambles’ was widely used to describe the sudden collapse in the government’s apparent competence and morale. Labour’s opinion poll lead moved upwards towards 10 percentage points, where it has stayed since. National politics in March 2012 was therefore in transition between two states.

## 4 THE COMING OF THE BY-ELECTION

Marsha Singh won his best percentage majority in 2010 (albeit smaller than Max Madden had won in 1992), but his last term in parliament was inactive and cut short by ill-health. His time in office in 2005-10 had been marred by a number of problems, including a dysfunctional situation in his constituency office which led to an industrial tribunal ruling against him in 2007. Singh was tired, ill and increasingly dependent on alcohol, and – as with many MPs who have had such problems – did not receive sufficient help. He was decreasingly able to attend the House of Commons and in February 2012 he became aware that he would not be able to serve much longer. His colleagues knew he was soon to stand down, but it came as a surprise that he announced the decision as early as 29 February.<sup>13</sup>

The timing of the by-election was a decision taken centrally by Labour, and it was a mistake born perhaps of not understanding the Bradford context. The hope was for a Labour hold to be a ‘springboard’ into the local government elections on 3 May. This was a miscalculation of some dimensions. Even if Labour had done well in Bradford, the extent to which it would affect anywhere else in May was dubious. As it was, the timing of the by-election cost Labour an overall majority in Bradford. The Labour whips decided to fill the vacancy quickly and the by-election was called for 29 March.

<sup>13</sup> *Telegraph & Argus*, 1 March 2012, ‘MP Marsha stands down.’

# B THE BRADFORD WEST BY-ELECTION CAMPAIGN

## 1 THE CAMPAIGN: THE 'ORTHODOX' VERSION

It is difficult to construct a clear narrative of the Bradford West by-election campaign. It was short and confused and in many ways the most important fact about it was that there were two parallel campaigns going on at the same time which only rarely

intersected. The points at which they did, at the Labour selection and the debate on the last weekend of the campaign, were the seminal moments of the Bradford West election.

Let us first look at an 'orthodox' account of the campaign, which seemed to represent the mainstream view of the by-election up until the result. To most politicians and most of the media, the campaign looked like a textbook by-election in a seat that was not going to change hands. The techniques the parties used were all familiar stuff, and reading local newspaper coverage gives one a sense that in many ways it was business as usual. The Liberal Democrats achieved more early coverage than they might have done, helped by two factors. One was that their candidate Jeannette Sunderland was the senior Lib Dem councillor in the city, and already familiar with the traditional business of press releasing her activities before the other parties had got going. The other reason was that broadcasting balance guidelines classified the Lib Dems as one of the three major parties even though it was clear they were not going to do well because of the party's national loss of popularity.

The next entrant to the contest came on 6 March. George Galloway of Respect, formerly an MP in Glasgow (1987-2005) and the East End (2005-10), announced outside Bradford City Hall that he was interested in standing in the by-election.



The media did not take his challenge terribly seriously at this point; one correspondent asked him if his political credibility had disappeared up a cat-flap (a reference to his notorious appearance on *Celebrity Big Brother* in 2006). Galloway was not amused at that point, but he did have the last laugh. Even at that stage, Galloway was still a good subject to write about. Most of those who dislike him, let alone those who support him, recognise that there is star quality about Galloway: outrageous, rude, divisive, controversial, outspoken – but never dull. Even at this very early stage the messages that dominated Galloway’s campaign were already sharp: traditional left-wing concern about poverty, education and deindustrialisation, awareness of the Westfield issue, plus:

- ‘My point is I am Labour, but the difference is I am **Real Labour** rather than New Labour.’
- ‘A lot of **Muslims support** me because I have voiced more strongly than anyone about the intervention and occupation of Muslims in many countries around the world...’
- ‘The by-election is here in just three weeks, but if people decided they want a **councillor in Parliament**, they can have a councillor... I don’t want to insult anyone else but think Bradford lacks a clear strong voice.’<sup>14</sup>

These themes – a claim to be real Labour, Muslim politics and the need for a parliamentarian rather than a councillor – echoed through the campaign.

Labour selected their candidate at a meeting at the Midland Hotel in the city centre on Sunday 11 March. The deputy leader of the council, Imran Hussain, was

<sup>14</sup> *Telegraph & Argus*, 7 March 2012, p4 ‘Galloway vows to fight for residents’. Emphasis added by current author.

overwhelmingly selected by those present. He represented Toller ward, part of the West constituency, and was a known figure in the city’s politics. He seemed to be the classic ‘safe pair of hands’ choice of a party that was starting ahead and not taking risks. However, it was the biggest risk of all, as we shall see.

After Imran Hussain was selected, the Labour campaign geared up and followed the classic by-election model, with one (slightly unusual) local Bradfordian twist. The rhythm of the campaign was defined by the visits from Shadow Cabinet members, particularly Ed Balls (16 March), Andy Burnham and Harriet Harman (22 March), and Ed Miliband (23 March). The nuts and bolts of the campaign were run by the party staff from the Yorkshire and the Humber regional office.

Activists from the constituency and outside were encouraged to prioritise ‘Voter ID’ (doorstep and telephone canvassing). The campaign set up a website which is now pretty standard for a party that is seriously contesting a seat. The local tradition that was established is known by different names in different parties and localities, but in Bradford it involved putting stake-boards in the front gardens of houses where there had previously been Labour promises, often without specific consent for an extra insertion. In the past this had been unobjectionable for voters, but on this occasion it added to the impression that Labour was taking voters for granted. But in the short term it created the impression that parts of the constituency, particularly around Manningham, were a sea of Labour support.

The other parties followed the standard campaign model too. The Conservatives were in a rather different position from

the previous few general elections, in that their candidate was non-Muslim and from outside the constituency. But businesswoman Jackie Whiteley did all the sort of things that could have been asked of her in terms of appearing at events and knocking on doors. She had visits from Conservative Chairman Sayeeda Warsi on 19 March, joining her for a visit to an Islamic women's college in Clayton. On 22 March David Cameron came to Bradford West and he and Whiteley visited a newly opened science-oriented Academy School in Manningham Lane. Cameron was keen to stress Whiteley's Yorkshire credentials but also promote government investment in Bradford including city centre improvements, a rail upgrade and super-fast broadband coverage.<sup>15</sup> The convention that existed at one time, that Prime Ministers did not visit by-elections, seems to have ended in the last couple of decades. On the eve of poll, Wednesday 28 March the Conservatives took out a half-page advertisement in the *Telegraph & Argus*, the only party to have done this in the principal local newspaper. Jeanette Sunderland was also supported by Lib Dem MPs, particularly David Ward (the MP for Bradford East), but also Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) and Party President Tim Farron.

Labour in particular, but also the Conservatives, took the strategic decision to avoid hustings events. This is a standard gambit for a party that thinks it is ahead, and was covered by the standard explanation of spending the time instead 'talking to real voters'. Labour was also concerned because it suspected that the hustings events would be hosted and dominated by causes that were not necessarily sympathetic, particularly the big JUST/ Student Union/ Muslim

Women debate. There may also have been awareness that Hussain was not experienced in the sort of platform cut and thrust that would be involved, particularly once it was clear that George Galloway would be appearing.

The other party campaigns in the election, except for Respect, were even smaller in scale. Green candidate Dawud Islam, despite good media reviews, was left rather to his own devices (he defected to Respect after the election and stood for that party in the local elections in May). Campaigns from UKIP, the right wing Democratic Nationalists, and Monster Raving Loonies were all pretty perfunctory.

The general surprise at the result of most of the media and most politicians outside Bradford is related to the fact that much of the political and media campaign that was so comfortingly familiar turned out to be irrelevant. Labour apparently cruising to a victory in a seat that the party had held since 1974 seemed entirely predictable and events at the level that impinged on most outside observers seemed to confirm that pattern.

And so it was that even journalists who had noticed that something unusual was happening in Bradford, such as Helen Pidd, went to the count expecting Labour to win and Galloway to score a good second. Labour NEC member Luke Akehurst had expressed anxiety about the election a couple of days before the count,<sup>16</sup> but his was a fairly isolated voice of concern. Labour briefers were telling journalists at the count that Ed Miliband would be coming up in the morning to do a press conference with Imran Hussain. And then the ballot boxes were opened, and everything changed.

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<sup>15</sup> *Telegraph & Argus*, 23 March 2012, p7 'PM: Tories have done lots for city.'

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.progressionline.org.uk/2012/03/28/a-call-to-arms/>

## 2 THE LABOUR SELECTION: THE FIRST TURNING POINT

**O**n the surface, as noted above, the selection of Imran Hussain as the Labour candidate looked not only safe but probably as good as the party could have wanted. Hussain was a reasonably experienced local politician, and had strong local roots – he was born and bred in the constituency, and had done well professionally in qualifying as a barrister in 2003. He had been chosen overwhelmingly by the local party at the 11 March selection meeting, with the backing of perhaps 233 out of 290 members present.

The response of Labour’s netroots, such as *Labour List* (<http://labourlist.org/2012/03/bradford-west-candidate-selected/>) reflected the usual meanings that could be read into such a result. However, this was a sign that the standard indicators of candidates’ calibre, in terms of local credentials, political experience and a united local party, were not all that they seemed in Bradford West.

However, in Bradford West the apparently united Labour verdict in favour of Hussain at the meeting did not reflect a real consensus, and reveals problems with the standard ways that parties do candidate selection. Candidate selection is one of the essential functions of party organisation – a gateway and checkpoint whereby political aspirants are filtered and chosen. The process has never been infallible, of course, but dwindling membership and activism have created new problems. The standard coping mechanism has been to rely on the formal machinery of the local party – the ward membership and the General Committee – doing its job on the basis of fewer activists. This can work, but

it is prone to being captured by organised groups, such as the broad new left (as in Newham and Bermondsey in the 1970s and 1980s) and Militant (in several places in the 1980s). In Bradford West it was co-opted by a rather different sort of political machine. But while Militant often used party procedure and activism to achieve control, the Bradford West machine more resembled the previous generation of stitch-up, such as the dockland mafia of Bermondsey or the sectarian machines of the west of Scotland. It depended on a lack of activism and a lack (rather than an excess) of political debate. The Bradford West CLP, according to Labour sources in Bradford, had not met properly for a year before the by-election and engaged in no political education among its members. It was instead captured by networks for whom the political aims and values of the Labour Party were distinctly secondary.

The selection itself, as many party contests do, had its cross-currents. There were suspicions among some aspirants that the party leadership had their preferred option, as well as that Imran Hussain was being strongly pushed by interests within Bradford. Many active Bradford Labour members had no confidence that the NEC shortlisting was operating fairly, pointing to a late decision to increase the shortlist from 7 to 9 aspirants, but the selection meeting itself was far from commanding general support as a fair procedure. Some aspirants spoke of votes that had been promised to them experiencing various forms of pressure and having to abandon that support before the meeting. At the meeting itself, two candidates in particular (Ralph Berry, a councillor from Wibsey in Bradford South, and Rupa Huq from Ealing) were regarded as having made the best speeches, while Hussain was, according to reports, bland and failed to give proper answers to questions

even in this friendly environment. When one member asked a challenging question of Hussain, she was shushed and admonished, in an uncomradely fashion, by audience members.<sup>17</sup> But the result did not depend on performance on the evening.

The dominant machine in Bradford West Labour politics was identified, certainly by members of other communities, with the particular community originating in the portion of divided Kashmir (Azad Kashmir) under Pakistani rule, and especially with the Mirpur area within Azad Kashmir. Bradford is a very diverse community, with English whites, black people, Poles, Jews and a large number of Asian communities (Kashmiri, Gujarati, Punjabi, Bangladeshi, Indian, and many others) sharing the city.

But politically, Mirpur in particular and in practice a couple of extended families 'biraderis', dominated 'Asian' representation and shared power within the local Labour Party with English whites. The problem of Bradford politics was not so much diversity or multiculturalism but the *lack* of diversity of representation on the Asian side of this false dichotomy.<sup>18</sup> There are complex issues involved with 'biraderi', discussed in the conclusion, but what is significant in Bradford is the sense that things were sewn up by a particular subsection of the community by means of influence, organisation, family ties and shadows cast by Pakistani politics, and that victory in selection contests was a matter of successful organisation and manoeuvring rather than legitimately winning a political argument or having the candidate best suited to the task in hand. Having seen representation dominated by a few

<sup>17</sup> Private interviews.

<sup>18</sup> There may well be 'diversity' issues on the 'white' side worthy of exploration, particularly those relating to class.

localised clan networks, anger had built up among many people originating in other areas and minority clans that had been shut out, and among those who wished to dispense with the kinship/ clan model of politics altogether.

Many people in Bradford West were sick of the corruption, parochialism and lack of sincere ideology in politics in Pakistan and wanted nothing to do with it in Pakistan, let alone in Bradford. For those who took Labour values seriously, seeing Kashmiri interests predominate and sometimes in private conversation overtly racist ('you shouldn't seek selection for this seat because you're not Mirpuri') or caste-based arguments used to justify selections for council candidates, was offensive. That these interests dominated council elections was bad enough, but to see its culmination in the parliamentary selection was too much to bear for many of those at the Midland Hotel (and those excluded prior to the meeting). While in the past machine victories had to be regarded as *faits accomplis*, there was an alternative this time in the form of Respect. Dozens of previous Labour activists felt their loyalty had been stretched beyond breaking point and could not accept it as being a valid democratic choice.

In this, the pattern of events in Bradford West is clearly similar to what has happened in several dramatic elections in the recent past. In all of them, the selection process has appeared, to a significant proportion of the Labour Party membership and its broader electorate, to have violated the norms of procedural fairness and sensitivity to local conditions. Voters felt that the party had broken an implicit contract with them, and therefore that the expectation of voter loyalty should not apply.

The first modern example is probably the deselection, and subsequent re-election as Independent Labour, of S.O. Davies, the MP for Merthyr Tydfil, in 1970. Several further dramatic upsets have taken place in other elections, such as Lincoln in 1973-74, Blyth in 1974, the London mayoralty in 2000 and Blaenau Gwent in 2005 (Bermondsey in 1983, though more complex, undoubtedly had some of the same features). In these cases, the victorious candidate portrayed himself as being the 'Real Labour' candidate, with authentic socialist or social democratic Labour values and opposed by machine politicians who had manipulated the selection process.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Note that many of the official Labour candidates in these selections were themselves figures of substance, such as Margaret Jackson (Beckett) in Lincoln and Ivor Richard in Blyth in February 1974, but the perceived unfairness of the behaviour of the local party meant that electors chose Taverne and Milne instead.

### 3 THE RESPECT CAMPAIGN

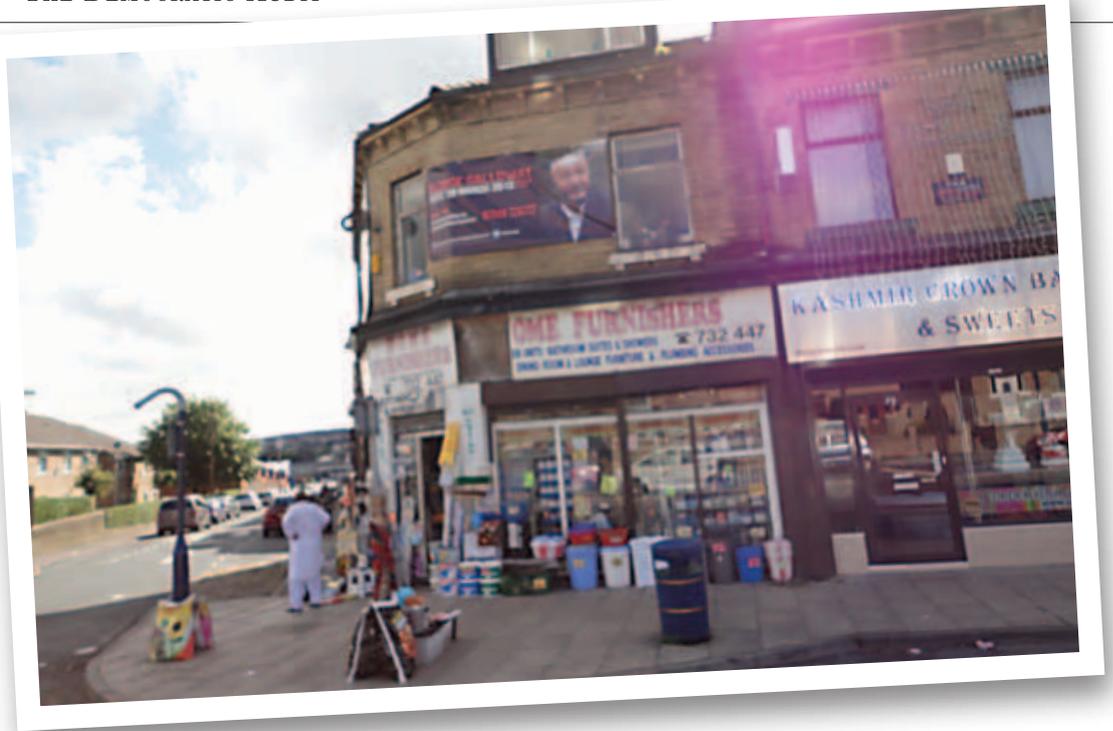
The Respect campaign was foreshortened even in comparison with the other party campaigns, being concentrated effectively into the last two weeks of March. Galloway having made his announcement on 6 March, not much happened for nearly a week. At this point an (unpublished) opinion poll found around 10 per cent support for Galloway, a useful baseline for assessing what changed during the campaign.<sup>20</sup> He started with the advantages of being a recognised celebrity, and being known for his affinity with Muslim and left-wing causes and his forthright manner of putting his case. Even in the early polling, something unusual was happening in that respondents answering the telephone would often interrupt the interviewer before they had finished reading the list of candidates to say that they were voting for Galloway.

This foundation of support was quickly built upon when the Respect campaign began in earnest and the Labour selection had taken place. It is important to recognise that the Bradford West Respect campaign arose in no way from a blueprint brought in by 'outsiders' (the classic tabloid description of any leftist successes). It arose nearly entirely from the soil of Bradford itself.

Although Galloway had his own not inconsiderable resources of oratory and charisma, and brought with him some loyal personal and ideological supporters such as Rob Hoveman and Ron McKay, his main tactical contribution was the idea of an open-topped bus tour. The Bradfordian Respect activists were sceptical about the idea, and not fond of the draughty creaking bus they rented at short notice,

<sup>20</sup> Private interview.

Shop on White Abbey Road, Bradford



but Galloway's instincts were sound. The bus tour, starting late in the campaign, played to Galloway's strengths that were already apparent: the buzz in the streets about the campaign, the excitement that something big was happening in Bradford, and Galloway's abilities as a debater and street-corner orator. The mob scenes around the bus in the final days helped generate a sense of momentum around Galloway.

Most of the campaign, like the bus tour, was old-fashioned, a deliberate return to techniques used when elections had a large component of street theatre. What Galloway was doing was not much different from John Major taking to his soapbox in 1992. Not every candidate can do this – it requires a degree of celebrity to attract a critical mass of electors to a street-corner rally and it also pays to be quick-witted, loud and articulate. Galloway also spoke on the last weekend of the campaign at a packed public meeting at the Rio Grande rooms.

Nor did the campaign conform to a model imposed from above by the Respect party organisation. The national party was weak

organisationally (as shown by its ability only to run one candidate outside Bradford in the 2012 local elections), did not have a strong brand with the electorate or a track record of success other than in the East End of London in 2004-06, and did not have much of a foothold in Bradford. Respect had stood in Bradford West in 2010 and received 3.3 per cent of the vote, and there were a handful of existing members who were useful as a nucleus to the campaign and a way in for Galloway to the local community, but it was not much of a base. Respect did not have the resources or skills to put together a modern by-election campaign from a standing start in the way that the Liberal Democrats had perfected in the 1990s and 2000s.

In the first half of March Respect assembled the core of its Bradford operation. A firm of Bradford solicitors, Chambers, was central to the Respect effort. The firm provided campaign rooms, advertising trucks and cars (often used for advertising its services) to Respect, and an entrée into the Bradford business community. For the first time, according to an old Respect hand, 'we had enough



Derelict building in Manningham

money to run a proper campaign'. As well as money, local businesses supported the campaign in other ways such as by providing services such as printing and poster manufacture, and the Respect campaign was, unusually for a party political campaign, promoted by shopkeepers to their customers. The extent of business interest in the campaign was huge – Galloway could have filled up his diary for weeks with the invitations he received. 'The Bradford business community came to us, and paid for it' said a Respect activist. Their motives, Respect believed, were to get rid of the party-clan power structure and putting some money towards the campaign was a reasonable investment from that point of view.

The secret ingredient of the Respect campaign in Bradford West was enthusiasm, rather than any campaigning technique or organisation. Although livelier than the other parties' campaigns in Bradford, and more successful in its use of social media, there was actually little about the Respect campaign techniques that broke new ground.

The exuberance of the Respect campaign

was the product of the repressed, pent-up political energies of Bradford West that had been ill-served by a machine-dominated local Labour Party that was not interested in political debate and seemed to embody mediocrity and hierarchy. The other big parties were not attractive options, for several reasons – principally the unpopularity of the coalition government in urban communities like Bradford, but partly also the dereliction of their own local structures in Bradford West and the Conservatives' past reliance on communal voting for Muslim candidates rather than winning political arguments. Many of the key Respect election workers, such as Naweed Hussain, were Labour members until the selection meeting. Shortly after the selection meeting Galloway approached Hussain and said, 'We don't have a campaign team. I hear you were in the campaign team for Marsha Singh – will you do the same for us?' The local Labour Party had not been a suitable vehicle for the creativity and political commitment of a more than usually politically conscious constituency, and these energies flowed into a burst of two weeks of intense campaigning for Respect.

The Respect campaign depended a lot on volunteers deciding themselves what to do, and therefore dependent on the skills and energy of those who came forward. To some extent this was channelled through the traditional election campaign machinery, and determined the pattern of doorstep canvassing and leafleting. If someone from a particular neighbourhood turned up and volunteered to do it, then it was done; otherwise it might not be. The pattern of activity in the white areas of the seat in particular was therefore a bit patchy, but probably more covered than not as volunteers did walk in

from those areas too. The model of the campaign was to have a single centre rather than devoting organisational effort to establishing a set of ward or polling district committee rooms. Every night at the centre there was a campaign meeting based on the consensus-forming and decision-making open meetings of the Occupy campaign and the student left. These often wore on well into the night, but gave volunteers a feeling of participation rather than command and control. Galloway reported on the day's activity and inspired the volunteers, while Naweed Hussain handled the administration and the allocation of the next day's tasks. Many appreciated the liberation from a local Labour Party where they had never been consulted about campaign strategy. The sudden death of a prominent Respect supporter, Abu-bakr Rauf, while campaigning on 20 March, and his funeral, also forged emotional bonds within Bradford Respect.<sup>21</sup>

Free participation was also apparent in the extent of non-approved campaign activity that took place around Bradford West. UK election law is based on the model of a campaign controlled by the candidate's agent, who authorises all expenditure, but in the circumstances of Bradford West this was difficult to enforce. Supporters would engage in private enterprise campaigning activities such as producing banners without asking central permission. In terms of campaign finance law this was not a huge problem because of the generous extra expenses limits for by-elections, but in a general election context it might be onerous or even render results open to legal challenge. Banners were particularly popular in Bradford, with some freelance efforts cramming lots of policy (in English, Urdu and even

<sup>21</sup> *Telegraph and Argus*, 21 March 2012, p1; *Guardian*, 4 April 2012.

Polish, despite the fact that most Poles are not eligible to vote in parliamentary elections) on a banner. Other pro-Respect messages were painted onto walls.

Three aspects of the Respect campaign drew particular attention. One was its success in its use of technology, particularly social media. This again was part of the process of the undamming of the voluntary political activity that had been repressed by Bradford politics in the past. The young Pakistani-British population of Bradford West has considerable creative and intellectual talent within it, and much of the Respect social media effort was pioneered by locals who worked for IT departments of large corporations including banks. The Respect campaign caught on rapidly on Facebook in particular (the page's Likes count grew from 30 to 5,000 in a little over a week), and supporters also turned with enthusiasm to Twitter and the possibilities offered by BlackBerry and text messaging (the frontiers between interpersonal communication and broadcasting seem to be dissolving). Messages could be disseminated more rapidly than ever before, and this suited the spontaneous, fast-moving nature of Galloway's campaign and the movement that crystallised around it. It was also instrumental in the success that the Respect campaign made of the opportunity presented by the candidates' televised debate (see below). The only thing that was really new was the 'Gallow-App', an application for smart-phones that relayed press releases, speeches and news about campaign events and Galloway speeches direct to supporters and observers.

**T**he second aspect of the Respect campaign that was noteworthy was the youth of the activists involved, a rare mobilisation of youth political

commitment in the sphere of electoral politics.

The other was its sensitivity as to how to campaign among Muslim women. The answer seems fairly obvious – that the best way of doing so was for women campaigners to talk to other women, at school gates in the afternoon or in small gatherings at people’s houses during the day. The campaign was particularly keen on making contact with parents at primary school gates, sending two-person teams (mostly women) to talk at each of the 52 sites in the constituency.

Some times at the campaign centre were designated women-only to encourage people who were diffident about engaging in political activity to come forward in a comfortable setting.<sup>22</sup> Galloway, with the freewheeling approach to political structure that characterised the campaign, appointed Beenash Faris as Women’s Involvement Strategy Head on the basis of her having asked him an intelligent question, and she and (then) party leader Salma Yaqoob worked on this aspect of the campaign.

The traditional assumption about canvassing Asian households in Bradford (and elsewhere) was that the head of the household would talk to the canvasser and what he said would apply to all the members of the household: six ticks for Labour (or whoever) on the basis of one evening doorstep conversation. Talking to multiple members of the same household on the doorstep is often a logistical and etiquette challenge, and one may not receive fully frank answers from other household members in the presence of the patriarch anyway. In some ways the traditional language of describing political campaigns (‘Respect did this’)

<sup>22</sup> Helen Pidd, *Guardian*, 4 April 2012, is much the fullest account of the role of women in the Respect campaign.

is inadequate, as it is more accurate to say that ‘Muslim women whose political contribution had previously been stifled used their social networks and their knowledge of their communities to help Respect’. What was done was not complicated, but it had obviously been impossible in the patriarchal, hierarchical model of politics usually practised in Bradford West up until now. There is no reason why other parties should not be able to learn from the Respect women’s campaign.

Galloway, at a rally on the last Sunday of the campaign, spoke directly about the importance of women. Student Sumara Bi Sultan told Helen Pidd:

‘It’s something he said directly to the Asian men. He said: “You need to remember that women are half of your power. If you are not going to let your women get involved and stand by your side, you are taking away half of your own strength”. I think that was a very powerful speech.’<sup>23</sup>

While there was a certain amount of the Respect campaign which reflected a spontaneous, creative form of politics there were also occasions when a much lower road was travelled. As Helen Pidd reported:

[Galloway] caused outrage by sending out a letter addressed to ‘voters of the Muslim faith and Pakistani heritage in Bradford West’ appearing to suggest he was somehow a ‘better’ Muslim than Hussain. ‘God KNOWS who is Muslim. And he KNOWS who is not. Instinctively, so do you. Let me point out to all the Muslim brothers and sisters what I stand for,’ he wrote, giving a series of four reasons which included ‘I, George Galloway, do not

<sup>23</sup> *Guardian*, 4 April 2012.



drink alcohol and never have. Ask yourself if the other candidate in this election can say that truthfully.’ Galloway has never converted to Islam, though lots of his supporters in Bradford West appeared to be under the impression he had.<sup>24</sup>

The innuendo about Imran Hussain is unmistakable, and unpleasant (and Respect supporters were even more so after the election, referring to him as ‘thirsty’ and ‘drowning his sorrows’). Even among the many Labour supporters who were against Hussain, there was sympathy for an essentially private matter being used against him in a sectarian manner like this. However, the Respect campaign felt that this was an appropriate response to provocation, in that a local religious leader (the Bradford Muslim community has a traditional role known as ‘pir’ – someone whose guidance is sought in an analogous way to higher Catholic clergy, a phenomenon not found in many other cultures of Islam) had issued an opinion that it was a religious duty to vote for the Muslim candidate in the election. This itself was a sectarian statement that it was reasonable to rebut, if not in the style in which Respect chose to do it. The mention of alcohol was also perhaps a veiled reference to Singh’s incapacity, and a promise that Galloway would not repeat that pattern. Galloway’s language

24 Helen Pidd, *Guardian*, 30 March 2012.

throughout the campaign gave people reason to believe that he was Muslim, for instance his use of terms such as ‘my brother’, ‘ummah’ and ‘Allah’ in the way a Muslim would. The mirror-image practice of using language susceptible to particular Christian meanings is frequent among American religious conservatives.

However, most of the leaflet campaign was more orthodox. The content was designed to complement the word of mouth enthusiasm in the Asian and student areas with some messages with a more universal, political appeal. The content of the leaflet above (via [www.electionleaflets.org](http://www.electionleaflets.org)) is standard left politics – three national issues (cuts, NHS, tuition fees), one international (troops out of Afghanistan) and one local (the Westfield Hole).

### ***‘Wastefield’ and the Odeon***

Part of Bradford city centre consists of a gigantic hole in the landscape. East of City Hall, south of the Midland Hotel there is an empty space, part of which is a temporary park and part of which is a fenced-off scar down to foundation level. It appears on city centre maps as ‘Broadway Shopping Centre, Estimated Completion 2008’ (or sometimes 2010). The hole in the heart of Bradford has a long saga attached to it. It has latterly been owned by the Westfield corporation, who have promised to develop it as a shopping centre, and

The Westfield site, Bradford  
August 2012



the tract of land was assembled by local developers working with the council. With some irony, one of the buildings demolished to create the Hole was Forster House, built by John Poulson with the co-operation of a past Labour boss of Bradford, Eddie Newby, who went to prison for his part in it.

The Hole symbolises a lot that has gone wrong with Bradford. It is a painful reminder of Bradford's branch-line status within the region and even more within the UK – nobody outside the city seems to care that the city is scarred, and nobody in the city seems to know what to do about it. The Westfield connection is a cruel reminder of the city aiming high and failing – that the Australian developers of fashionable centres in Shepherd's Bush and Stratford should abandon dowdy Bradford seems all too predictable. If one wanted an agitprop demonstration of the callous forces of global capitalism and the ineptitude of local elites, one could not do much better than the Bradford Hole. And George Galloway knows a thing or two about how to do agitprop.

The other local issue seized upon by Respect was the derelict state of the much-loved old Odeon building just west of the heart of the city. The Odeon, out of use since 2000, is currently wrapped in plastic, and seems in limbo between demolition and an expensive renewal for who knows what. It is a fine site, looking down across the fanciful new City Park, and there is another restored and cherished fun palace, the Alhambra, just beside it. But the Odeon building reflects, like the Hole, the sense that Bradford is clapped-out and neglected. Most Bradford (and West Yorkshire) citizens who were teenagers in the 1960s and 1970s remember the Odeon and the ice rink with fond nostalgia, for a time when Bradford was a centre that pulled people in. The Odeon, perhaps particularly for working class whites, is a symbol of lost glory.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> In September 2012 the Odeon was reprieved from demolition and the council announced its intention to develop the building using as much of the original structure as possible. See Irna Qureshi 'Why Does Bradford Care So Much About a Derelict Cinema?' *Guardian Northernner*, 21 September 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/the-northerner/2012/sep/21/bradford-georgegalloway>

Odeon and Alhambra from  
the City Park, Bradford



#### 4 THE TELEVISED DEBATE: THE SECOND TURNING POINT

The BBC Yorkshire *Sunday Politics* programme hosted a debate in their television studios on the final Friday of the campaign, for broadcast on Sunday 25 March. Its importance was heightened by being the only occasion on which the rival candidates met face to face, and the only direct way of comparing and contrasting the two main candidates – Imran Hussain and, as was becoming clear, George Galloway.

The contrast was very much to Galloway's advantage. Galloway had been an MP from 1987 to 2010 and even before that was known as a charismatic debater. He was an experienced and powerful Parliamentary and media performer, and even among his many detractors his demolition of a US Senate subcommittee in summer 2005 lives on in legend. The other candidates were all inexperienced and seemed diminished by the direct comparison with Galloway. Bradfordians were already accustomed to thinking of

their local politicians as mediocre, and certainly did not have this impression shaken up by the debate.

The first question was to Imran Hussain, about why thirteen years of Labour government had not delivered more for Bradford West. He answered rather haltingly, claiming improvements in public services, and seemed to focus on somewhat low-intensity recitation of national Labour messages and emphasising his local credentials. The next question, to Jackie Whiteley about the Budget was met with a counter-intuitive claim that Osborne had delivered 'an amazing Budget'. Sunderland did not seem sure whether Clegg was coming to Bradford and made a rote speech about national politics. Then it came to Galloway, who was asked whether he was being an opportunist in fighting the seat despite a lack of local connections. He complained that he had got a nasty question compared to the others (which he hadn't – the presenter pressed each of the candidates on a potential weak point: Labour's record, the Tory budget and the Lib Dems' irrelevance, as well as Galloway's non-local origins). But as soon

as he started speaking, he commanded attention in a way that the other candidates had not. He had a convincing response about his right to stand:

This is a democratic election, I am a democratic politician and I am entitled to stand here. There is no blood test, everybody here came from somewhere, and I am entitled to put my hat into the ring.

He was electric compared to the other candidates; he used language interestingly and hit the local references (the Hole, the Odeon, the football club, shop closures in the city centre), while the others talked in standard politician-speak ('a raft of policies'... 'yes there are issues that need addressing not empty promises'... 'significant progress while we were in government'...). The only tricky moment for Galloway came when he was challenged (by the BBC presenter not by any of his rivals) about what the families of the Yorkshire soldiers recently lost would think about his attitude to the war; Galloway answered a less specific point by saying that some families who had lost their children supported withdrawal.

There was always a distance between Marsha Singh and the Labour leadership, illustrated by his vote against the Iraq war in 2003, which enabled left-wing voters to reconcile voting Labour in Bradford West with opposition to the war. Hussain's answers ('I support getting rid of extremism wherever it may be') closed off the possibility of this continuing. A smarter campaign strategy would have given him more leeway to diverge from national messages, stressing those of interest to his potential constituents, just as in 2005 Labour MPs defending university constituencies were allowed to go as off-message as they liked about tuition fees. He promised a 'strong voice'

but Hussain's voice in the debate was faltering.

One of the key messages of the Galloway campaign came over strongly in response to Jeannette Sunderland trying to move the debate to Bradford local issues: as Galloway himself said:

You can send a local councillor to parliament, or you can send a parliamentarian to parliament.

The debate exemplified how traditional and social media can combine to increase the importance of key events in a campaign. Twenty years ago, the audience for the televised debate would have been restricted to those who watched the regional *Sunday Politics* programme, a considerable number perhaps if the campaign had already engaged the public interest, but still restricted. It would generate a limited amount of follow-up by word of mouth and from local press reports.

The media landscape in 2012 amplified the effect of the televised debate. It was available to view through the BBC i-Player and after that through clips available on YouTube (it can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okKxC4ZNIqw>). By August 2012 the YouTube clip of the debate had received 76,000 views.<sup>26</sup> In 1992 conversations would have been along the lines of 'did you see...?' while in 2012 they were 'go and see...', and when that conversation was by text, email, Twitter or Facebook it would usually include a link. While the leaders' debates during the 2010 general election were 'event television' in that they attracted large audiences and sparked discussion when broadcast, the effect of the Bradford debate reverberated around local politics in the days after.

<sup>26</sup> Galloway also had over 90,000 sign-ups to his Facebook page and 90,000 Twitter followers.

## 5 THE OUTCOME

The last few days of the by-election campaign took on the aspect of a Galloway triumphal procession, with enthusiastic crowds following his bus tour. By polling day the Respect campaign team had enough volunteers to provide a full-scale telling operation with relays of people at all the polling stations in every ward of the constituency. They estimate that about 500 people were involved by the end of the campaign, and the party had about 300 members.

There was little suspense at the count, just a sudden change from one near-certainty to another for most of the press and candidates. At 9.50pm the Conservatives were telling journalists that Galloway might have done enough for second. At 10.05pm Labour admitted that they had been squeezed. Postal votes had been expected to run strongly for Labour – indeed, some Respect supporters report being taunted during the campaign by Labour claims that they had 7,000 postal votes in the bag. When the postal ballots were opened after 10.10pm Respect were well ahead, and when the ballot boxes from polling stations were tipped out it was clear that Galloway would win a huge victory. The plans for Ed Miliband to come to Bradford were quickly scrapped (he came back rather later, to listen rather than to celebrate). At midnight Labour were conceding, and Galloway arrived to do what proved to be victory interviews. The streets of central Bradford were thronged into the early hours with celebrating young Respect supporters. Respect had thought (but not quite dared wholeheartedly to believe) that they would win, and felt that they would either win or, less probably, lose by a majority of about 5,000 rather than squeak into recount

territory. The outcome, a 10,000 majority, was staggering and unexpected to all except a few of the most optimistic Respect supporters and some members of the always uncannily well-informed fraternity of Bradford cab drivers.

Turnout in the by-election was a healthy 50.8 per cent, a modest 14.8 percentage point drop since 2010 which compares favourably with most of the other by-elections so far this parliament.

The by-election result is shown overleaf. A couple of columns on the table may need explanation. ‘Change on 2010 %’ is the straightforward percentage-point loss or gain from the 2010 general election. ‘Vote retention rate %’ is a less standard measure. It is the by-election numerical vote expressed as a percentage of that party’s vote in the 2010 election. Below 100 per cent means the party’s actual vote has fallen, which often happens in by-elections because turnout is lower.

Officially published results do not break down the distribution of the vote in the different wards of the constituency, but the parties keep informal tallies at the count. Because Labour were so shell-shocked by what was happening, and Respect so inexperienced, the tally estimates are perhaps a bit unreliable for Bradford West, but the broad pattern seemed relatively clear. Respect, as one would expect with such a massive majority, won across the board and were probably ahead in every single ward. According to their own tallies, the closest call was in Manningham where the vote was something like 50 per cent Respect, 45 per cent Labour; Respect blamed the continuing strength of the clan system in Manningham for the closeness of the result. They won by wipe-out majorities in City and even in Imran Hussain’s ward of Toller, and by nearly two to one against

**Bradford West by-election result, 2012**

Party	Candidate	Votes	% vote	Change on 2010 %	Vote retention rate %
<b>Respect</b>	Galloway, George	18,341	55.9	+52.8	1473.2
<b>Labour</b>	Hussain, Imran	8,201	25.0	-20.4	44.6
<b>Conservative</b>	Whiteley, Jackie	2,746	8.4	-22.8	21.7
<b>Lib Dem</b>	Sunderland, Jeannette	1,505	4.6	-7.1	31.8
<b>UKIP</b>	McNally, Sonja	1,085	3.3	+1.3	133.6
<b>Green</b>	Islam, Dawud	481	1.5	-0.9	51.2
<b>Dem Nat</b>	Craig, Neil	344	1.0	-0.0	78.5
<b>Loony</b>	Hope, Howling Laud	111	0.3	-	-

**Turnout variations within Bradford West**

	Ward turnout on the day %	Estimated ward turnout with postal votes %	Lowest PD on the day turnout %	Highest PD on the day turnout %
<b>City</b>	35	49	11	53
<b>Clayton &amp; Fairweather Green</b>	30	38	19	42
<b>Heaton</b>	45	57	39	50
<b>Manningham</b>	51	63	38	63
<b>Thornton &amp; Allerton</b>	26	38	18	31
<b>Toller</b>	51	61	44	55

Labour in the white wards, where what was left of the Conservative vote could be found.

Turnout in the by-election was not evenly distributed. Very unusually, given the general relationship between turnout and income, education and home ownership, it was high in the least affluent areas of the constituency in Manningham and Toller, and lowest in the suburban and semi-rural areas in Thornton and Clayton. The politics of the by-election clearly did not interest white suburban Bradford electors very much. However, the more normal pattern of ethnic minority, poor and young people feeling that electoral politics does not address their concerns occurs very frequently with only the most perfunctory comment about it.

Despite the momentum of the Respect campaign among young people, the turnout in the polling districts immediately around Bradford University and Bradford College was low, although areas just to the west of the university

area had high turnout.

In the constituency as a whole Labour's performance was easily the party's worst in the 2010 parliament and the vote drop was on a similar scale to those at the unpopular tail end of the party's spell in government.

Obscured by the Labour disaster, Bradford West was also a pasting for the coalition parties, particularly the Conservatives. The drop in the combined coalition parties vote share was very large - 29.9 per cent. In most by-elections so far this parliament the drop has been between 11 and 15 percentage points, with Bradford beating Barnsley Central (22.2 per cent) as the by-election showing the biggest fall in coalition support. While the Liberal Democrats have always been weak in Bradford West, other than a post-Iraq flicker in Manningham, there was a substantial and stable Conservative vote in Bradford West for decades, which suddenly disappeared in the by-election.

***Labour performance in by-elections 2010-12***

		Lab vote share change %	Lab vote retention rate %
<b>Oldham East and Saddleworth</b>	January 2011	+10.2	103.8
<b>Barnsley Central</b>	March 2011	+13.4	84.2
<b>Leicester South</b>	May 2011	+11.4	92.0
<b>Inverclyde</b>	June 2011	-2.3	72.0
<b>Feltham and Heston</b>	December 2011	+10.8	59.6
<b>Bradford West</b>	March 2012	-20.4	44.6

***Conservative performance in by-elections 2010-12***

		Con vote share change %	Con vote retention rate %
<b>Oldham East and Saddleworth</b>	January 2011	-13.6	38.1
<b>Barnsley Central</b>	March 2011	-9.1	31.3
<b>Leicester South</b>	May 2011	-6.5	51.4
<b>Inverclyde</b>	June 2011	-2.1	61.8
<b>Feltham and Heston</b>	December 2011	-6.3	39.0
<b>Bradford West</b>	March 2012	-22.8	21.7

***Lib Dem performance in by-elections 2010-12***

		Lib Dem vote share change %	Lib Dem vote retention rate %
<b>Oldham East and Saddleworth</b>	January 2011	+0.3	79.2
<b>Barnsley Central</b>	March 2011	-13.1	15.8
<b>Leicester South</b>	May 2011	-4.7	60.7
<b>Inverclyde</b>	June 2011	-11.2	12.5
<b>Feltham and Heston</b>	December 2011	-7.9	20.5
<b>Bradford West</b>	March 2012	-7.1	31.8

The Conservative vote suffered severe losses in several directions – to abstention, reflecting the sense that Bradford West politics simply wasn't about the white suburbs; to Galloway in order to defeat Labour and to make the same sort of points about Bradford politics that other voters were concerned about; and also the withdrawal of the resources the party had in 2010. In that election the constituency had been designated a target seat and received Ashcroft money, and the party had tried to mobilise biraderi and Islamic votes. In the 2012 by-election it did not attempt to compete.

Immediately after the by-election there were many attempts, mostly by baffled Labour people, to divine the meaning of Bradford West. Many of these were

variations on 'Bradford West proves what I have been saying all along was right because...'; some of the best writing was from David Goodhart in *Prospect* who had studied and written about Bradford and its ethnic complexities before.<sup>27</sup> The final section of this report will, hopefully with a little more of the perspective afforded by hindsight, try to draw out a number of conclusions. But the by-election was only the first part of a political drama in two acts; no sooner had the curtain fallen on the by-election than the local election campaign started, with Labour and Respect fighting once again for the votes of the people of inner city Bradford.

27 David Goodhart 'Making Sense of Bradford West' *Prospect*, 4 April 2012, <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/george-galloway-bradford-west-bloc-voting-labour-ethnic-minority/>

# C THE MAY 2012 COUNCIL ELECTIONS

## 1 THE MAY 2012 COUNCIL ELECTIONS IN BRADFORD

**B**efore the by-election had shaken up politics in the city, Bradford appeared to be almost guaranteed to change

to Labour overall control. The party had 43 seats out of 90, and the seats coming up for election had last been fought in 2008, Labour's worst year in recent times in metropolitan borough elections. The four net gains<sup>28</sup> appeared easy – a repeat of the results

in 2006, 2007 or 2010, when Labour had not done particularly well, would have been more than enough. But the arrival of Respect as a serious political force in Bradford threatened Labour in many seats the party had banked upon to gain control.

There were only a handful of days between the by-election result and the close of nominations for the local elections. Given the scale of the by-election win, there was obvious potential for Respect candidates to gain council seats but the

lack of infrastructure and candidates in place, and the anarchic political style of the movement, meant that it was about volunteering as much as any party choice, although the party tried to vet potential candidates, many of them unknown before the campaign. Respect stood 12 candidates in Bradford, five in the West constituency (every ward but Toller), four in East (Bolton & Undercliffe, Bowling & Barkerend, Bradford Moor, Little Horton) and three in South (Great Horton, Tong, Wyke). The situation in Toller was complicated. Respect certainly wanted to stand a candidate, but two prospective nominees dropped out and the third missed the deadline for returning the nomination papers to the council elections office by a few minutes, and was therefore ineligible to stand.<sup>29</sup>

The slate of candidates had eight people of Asian origin and four white candidates. Dawud Islam (a Muslim English white man), the Green Party candidate in the Bradford West by-election, contested Clayton & Fairweather Green this time for Respect, and the other white candidates also stood in wards with the largest white populations (Tong, Thornton & Allerton, Wyke). Three candidates were women, and nine were men. However, the Respect slate was importantly diverse

<sup>28</sup> Relative to the position in 2008; Imdad Hussain of Heaton ward had been elected as Labour but was suspended by the party in April 2012 and sat as an Independent.

<sup>29</sup> Respect threatened legal action against the council, but the election officers could not legally have done other than to disallow a late nomination.

in some respects, as it included Asian candidates from outside the dominant currents of Bradford Labour politics such as Ruqayyah Collector (a Gujarati woman) in City ward, the ward with the most plural Asian community. The Respect candidates won favourable notices for their calibre. They each recorded a short film clip, and these clips show most of the candidates to be articulate people with a strong message about local politics.<sup>30</sup> Their mini-biographies also show that many of them have been active in the voluntary sector and some to have experience of working professionally for local authorities, charities and community campaigns. They lacked experience of elected office (the only marginal exception being Dawud Islam who had been on a Town Council and fought a parliamentary seat, Brent South in 1997).

The council elections attracted considerable regional and national media attention, with reporting focused on the Little Horton ward.<sup>31</sup> This is an inner city ward just south of the city centre, bordering on the West constituency but actually in East, and the contest was particularly important because the Labour council leader Ian Greenwood was defending the seat. Little Horton kept people guessing until the very end of the count; it was close enough for several recounts before a final result. Greenwood was defeated by a margin of 17 votes by Respect candidate Alyas Karmani. Greenwood's loss meant that Labour was stuck on 45 seats out of 90, not enough for overall control. It seemed a fitting cliff-hanger ending to Bradford's strange political season.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.salmayaqoob.com/2012/04/bradford-respect-local-election.html> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGWKVMJiwSw>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2012/may/02/george-galloway-respect-hopefuls-bradford>

## 2 THE COUNCIL ELECTION RESULTS ANALYSED

In total, Respect gained five seats, electing councillors in City, Heaton and Manningham wards in Bradford West plus Bradford Moor as well as Little Horton in Bradford East. Compared to 2008, these were three Labour losses (City, Little Horton, Manningham) and Tory (Heaton) and Lib Dem (Bradford Moor) seats that had previously looked like Labour gains that were in the bag. While Labour did make some gains from Conservative relative to 2008 (Bowling & Barkerend, Clayton & Fairweather Green, Keighley East, Keighley West, Toller) and Lib Dem (Windhill & Wrose), it was not enough. Labour elected a new leader, Dave Green, to replace Ian Greenwood and renewed the pact with the Greens that had enabled a Labour administration in Bradford since May 2010. Perhaps surprisingly, given his crushing defeat in Bradford West, Imran Hussain was re-elected Deputy Leader.

Overall, Respect polled 35.2 per cent in the wards the party contested, with its strongest showings being in the inner city Bradford West wards of Manningham (57.5 per cent) and City (56.1 per cent). Respect also polled very well in inner city Asian areas of the other two city constituencies, reasonably in the white areas of Bradford West and more poorly in the white working class wards it contested in Bradford South.

The evidence of the Bradford local elections is that Respect has a baseline of support somewhere around 10 per cent among the white population in Bradford, which is substantial by the standards of previous parties standing

**Bradford council election results by ward since 2004**

	2004c	2004b	2004a	2006	2007	2008	2010	2011	2012
<b>WEST</b>									
City	Con	Con	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Res
Clayton & FG	Con	Con	Con	Con	Lab	Con	Lab	Lab	Lab
Heaton	Con	Green	Con	Con	Lab	Con	Lab	Lab	Res
Manningham	Con	Lab	LD	Lab	LD	Lab	Lab	Lab	Res
Thornton & All	Con								
Toller	Con	Lab	Con	Lab	Lab	Con	Lab	Lab	Lab
<b>EAST</b>									
Bolton & Uclif	LD								
Bowling & Bark	LD	Con	LD	Con	Con	Con	Lab	Lab	Lab
Bradford Moor	LD	Lab	LD	Lab	Lab	LD	Lab	Lab	Res
Eccleshill	Lab	LD	LD	LD	LD	LD	Lab	Lab	LD
Idle & Thackley	LD								
Little Horton	Lab	Res							
<b>SOUTH</b>									
Great Horton	Lab	Con	Lab						
Queensbury	Con	Con	Con	BNP	BNP	Con	BNP	BNP	Con
Royds	Lab								
Tong	Lab								
Wibsey	BNP	Lab							
Wyke	Lab	BNP	Lab						
<b>KEIGHLEY</b>									
Craven	Con	Ind							
Ilkley	Con								
Keighley Cent	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Con	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab
Keighley East	Con	Con	Lab	Lab	Lab	Con	Lab	Lab	Lab
Keighley West	Lab	Lab	BNP	Lab	Lab	Con	Lab	Lab	Lab
Worth Valley	BNP	Con							
<b>SHIPLEY</b>									
Baildon	Con	LD	LD	Con	Con	LD	Con	Con	Con
Bingley	Con								
Bingley Rural	Con								
Shipley	Green								
Wharfedale	Con								
Windhill & Wrs	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	LD	LD	Lab	Lab	Lab

**The Respect effect on turnout, Bradford council elections 2012**

	Wards	2011 %	2012 %	Change %
<b>Respect contested</b>	12	37.7	38.6	+0.9
<b>Core city – no Respect in 2012</b>	5	36.1	25.8	-10.3
<b>Other urban</b>	8	43.3	37.0	-6.3
<b>Rural</b>	5	46.3	37.5	-8.8

to the left of Labour. After that, its support is closely correlated<sup>32</sup> with the proportion of the population who reported their ethnicity as British-Pakistani in the 2001 Census. Using a pretty crude formula to model the Respect vote in wards where the party did not stand ( $12+0.9*P$ , where P is the Pakistani proportion of the population), it is clear that Respect would have won Toller ward (69 per cent predicted) if it had a candidate, and would have had a very decent chance in Keighley Central (41 per cent predicted vote, although it is debatable whether the formula would work outside the core city). The relationship with ethnicity is almost certainly stronger than it was in the Parliamentary by-election.

The strongest increases in turnout were in two wards in the Bradford East constituency won by Respect, namely Bradford Moor (+17.4 percentage points) and the key contest in Little Horton (+8.1 points) where they unseated council leader Ian Greenwood. While turnout in the Bradford West wards was narrowly the highest (39.1 per cent, down 3.2 on 2011), it rose across Bradford East (38.2 per cent, up 2.1 on 2011). There was some sense among pro-Respect voters in particular that people who lived outside the West constituency had missed out on something important in March.

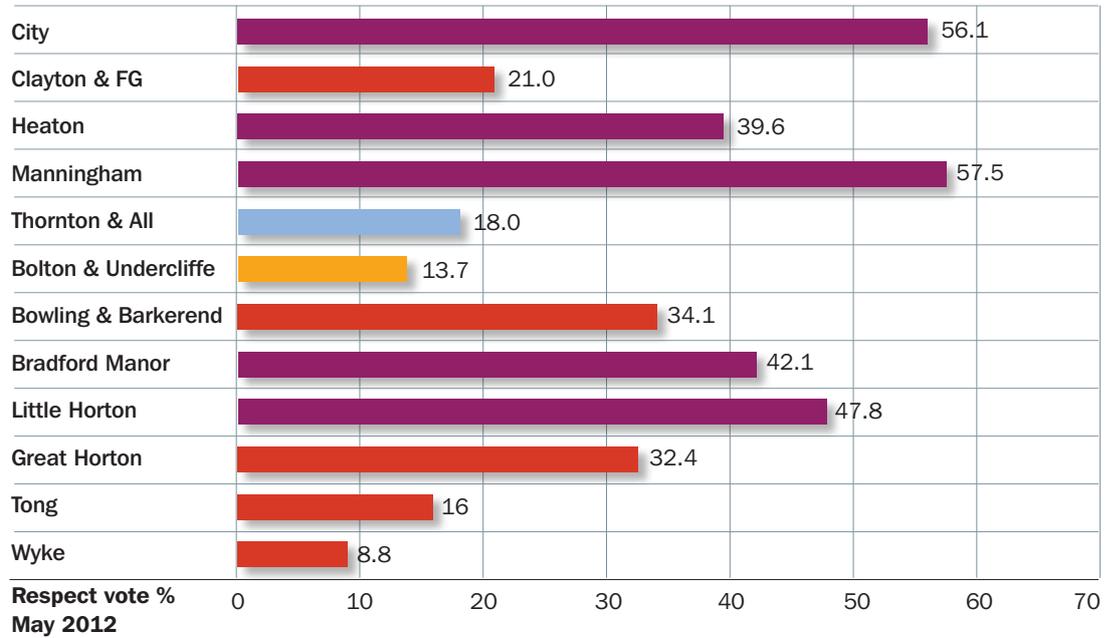
Comparing the wards making up Bradford West to their turnout in the by-election, there was a clear pattern. Turnout plunged in Toller ward by between 14 and 22 percentage points in every polling district, with the steepest drops at the Girlington end of the seat. The lack of a Respect candidate in the May elections was the main factor driving this change. Turnout also fell in most areas across the

32 The R-squared is 0.87, a very close correlation for any social science measure.

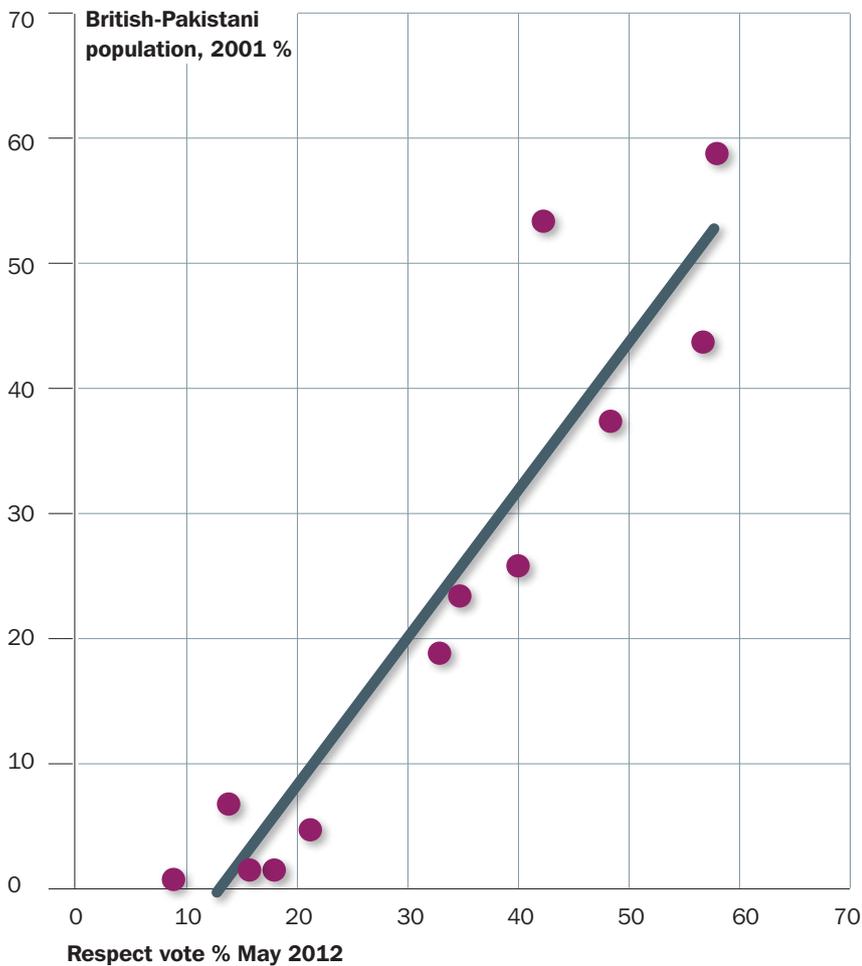
**Respect vote by ward, May 2012**

Colours indicate winning party in May 2012. First five wards Bradford West, then four Bradford East, then three Bradford South.

- Respect
- Labour
- Conservative
- LibDem



**Respect vote and British-Pakistani population, May 2012**



constituency by around 4-6 percentage points. The exceptions were among the most middle class areas of Bradford West – Thornton and Clayton villages, plus Frizinghall (part of the Heaton ward). The political context in May was different – the Conservatives were a serious factor as they were defending all three wards, and although they lost Clayton & Fairweather Green to Labour and Heaton to Respect. Conservative-inclined electors who had sat out the contest between Labour and Galloway at Parliamentary level had some cause to vote in the council elections.

Respect, although the party clearly motivated more electors to come to the polls, drew the largest single part of its support from former Labour supporters. Other parties made a smaller contribution – it attracted the bulk of the previous Green vote but also seems to have gained converts from people who would otherwise have voted Conservative or Liberal Democrat.

**The Respect effect on party fortunes, Bradford council elections 2012**

	Con		Lab		LD	Green		
	2012 %	Change 11/12 %						
<b>Respect contested (12)</b>	10.9	-10.1	37.6	-21.1	12.5	-1.6	1.0	-4.1
<b>No Respect candidate (18)</b>	32.5	-6.4	37.8	+1.1	14.3	+1.6	8.2	+0.2

***Manningham ward in the 2004 council elections***

Candidate	Party	Vote	% of valid ballots	
<b>Mirza, Mohammed Ishrat</b>	Lib Dem	2,415	34.9	ELECTED
<b>Rangzeb, Choudhary</b>	Lab	2,104	30.4	ELECTED
<b>Khan, Reis</b>	Con	1,810	26.1	ELECTED
<b>Hussain, Raza Ghalib</b>	Con	1,731	25.0	
<b>Rooney, Susanne</b>	Lab	1,700	24.6	
<b>Hussain, Shabir</b>	Lab	1,637	23.6	
<b>Sehgal, Mohammed Rafiq</b>	Lib Dem	1,596	23.1	
<b>Miah, Mohammed Ashraf</b>	Con	1,198	17.3	
<b>Islam, Mohammed Shafiq-Ul</b>	Lib Dem	1,150	16.6	

In contrast to the history of the parliamentary seat, recent local elections in Bradford West have seen huge variations. In the 2004 elections, where every seat was up for election because of boundary changes, the Conservatives had the largest share of representation in the wards making up Bradford West, with 13 out of 18 councillors (to three Labour, one Lib Dem and one Green). The Conservatives won two of the three seats in City, and had representation in every ward in 2004.

Although as early as 2004 Labour's dominance in Bradford West council elections had collapsed it was more because the networks of influence within the community were hedging their bets and gaining footholds within the Conservative and Lib Dem groups on the council. In Manningham, for instance, there were massive variations in the vote for each candidate in 2004 and a neat arrangement in which one from each of the three main parties was elected:

Something unusual was clearly going on. The recorded turnout was 66.5 per cent, an astronomical figure for a local election. The 2004 local elections in Bradford, as in the rest of Yorkshire & The Humber, took place using all postal voting, and there was much concern about the possibilities for fraud and

undue influence that this format allowed. During the by-election campaign in 2012, both Galloway and the Conservatives (honourably, given the party's local misconduct in 2005) made efforts to warn against voting fraud and make it clear that people had a right to cast their vote in private. Although there were murmurings during the by-election campaign, and Respect were always suspicious of Labour, there appears to have been no large-scale voting fraud on that occasion.

Labour recovered ground on the city council in 2007, depriving the Conservatives of their majority of representation, and consolidated in 2010 and 2011. There was some sense that in the core of Asian Bradford West (City, Manningham, Toller, Heaton) that party labels were flags of convenience and that although there was nominal change the essential style of politics – clan-based, clientelistic and non-ideological – remained the same. Voting Respect in 2012 was a way of breaking with this pattern. To Respect's most dedicated supporters, mainstream Westminster party politics itself had become nothing more than a more sophisticated version of the mediocre and self-interested world of politics as usual in Bradford West.

### 3 BRADFORD COUNCIL: THE FUTURE

While they did not manage to obtain the balance of power in 2012, Respect are now a group on the council with 5 members and they have reasonable hopes of winning enough wards in the 2014 elections to deprive Labour of overall control and become the third largest party group, overtaking the Lib Dems. A repeat of the 2012 elections, but with a Respect candidate in Toller, would leave Labour with 39 seats, well short of a majority even with the 3 Greens, facing 11 Respect, 9 Lib Dem, 25 Conservatives and 3 Independents. To do better than this, Labour would need to win wards from the Tories and Lib Dems that it could not manage in 2012 (and only one of which, Eccleshill, had previously gone Labour in 2011), or regain ground from Respect.

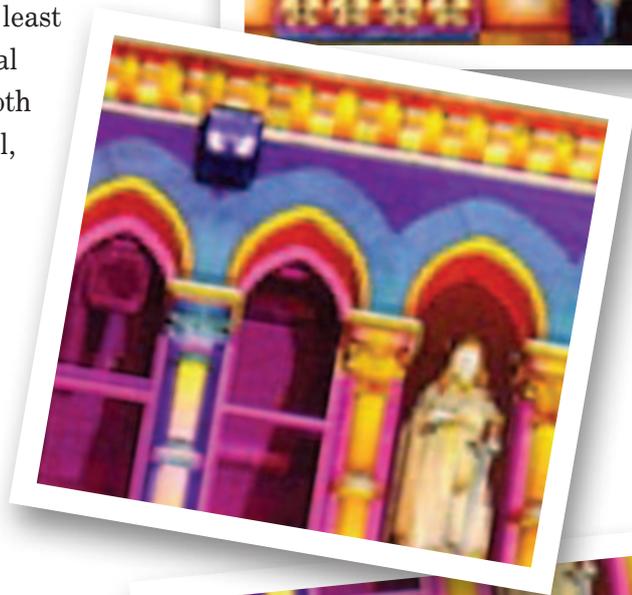
There are several factors, other than of course national politics, that may affect how council politics evolves in Bradford up to and beyond 2014.

- The record of the Respect councillors. The five councillors elected in 2012 are, as a small opposition group on the council, not in a position to achieve the fundamental change to the way Bradford politics, and the council, operates, but they have a platform in addition to that occupied by Galloway. The council group and Galloway's constituency work are integrated through having Ruqayyah Collector as a constituency worker (this pattern is far from unusual in Bradford). If the councillors are able to offer their constituents service, keep out of the networks of influence and mutual benefit, and articulate an alternative vision, they could be a lasting force.

An alternative possibility is offered by what happened after a large Respect group was elected to Tower Hamlets council in 2006. There were large-scale defections, mostly to Labour but also oddly to the Conservatives, and the party was discredited as much by what happened to it in the local power structure as anything Galloway did or failed to do in the years before 2010.

- Triumph is often followed by disaster in the history of small parties, and it came quickly to pass for Respect in summer 2012. Galloway's defence of Julian Assange alienated many women, and pro-feminist men, who had rallied behind Respect. First Kate Hudson their candidate in the Manchester Central by-election resigned, and then even more damagingly party leader Salma Yaqoob left too. The foundations of Bradford Respect do not appear to have been shaken too badly, as it is both Galloway's own stronghold and also – as should be clear from the foregoing analysis – Bradford Respect has an organisational life distinct from Galloway's personal presence. Galloway was in many ways the instrument of strong political trends within Bradford, not the decisive actor himself, and having made the breakthrough it is quite possible to imagine him giving way, more willingly or less so, to a Respect successor. Alyas Karmani and Ruqayyah Collector are both plausible parliamentary candidates.
- But perhaps the decisive factor is how Bradford Labour responds to its humiliation. 'We gave you a big kick up the arse,' a voter told a Labour councillor, 'and we're waiting to see how you shape up.' The task of getting

the Labour Party in Bradford fit for purpose is a stiff one. Its culture has been off-putting to voters and antithetical to Labour values, but if it is to remain the principal party of Bradford it needs to reform and renew itself radically. If Labour fails, the best case alternative, despite the gaudy national difficulties that Respect has faced, is that Respect puts down strong roots and maintains at least some of its open political culture in the city. If both Labour and Respect fail, the future of politics in Bradford could be grim indeed.



# D THE MEANING OF BRADFORD WEST

## 1 'THE MOST SENSATIONAL RESULT': BRADFORD AND OTHER BY-ELECTIONS

**O**n the podium at the declaration in Bradford, George Galloway declared it 'the most sensational result in British by-election history, bar none'.<sup>33</sup> It was in the circumstances understandable hyperbole, but there have been bigger swings and bigger shocks in the past.

Swings between the two main UK parties have not taken place on quite this scale since before 1945; the nearest to this was the Labour gain in Dudley West in December 1994 (29.1 per cent swing) and the largest swing to Conservative was at Walsall North in November 1976 (22.6 per cent swing).

Even in the turbulent periods of party politics before 1945 30-point swings in by-elections were rare. The picture is confused by the major party electoral truce in wartime; if one takes the 1935 Labour vote as a baseline for the Independent vote the swing even in the wartime by-elections only exceeded 30 per cent once (Wallasey, April 1942). Between 1922 and 1939 there were four Labour breakthroughs on more than 30 per cent swings: Liverpool Wavertree in January 1935 (although on that occasion the Conservative vote was split in the by-election), Hull Central

in November 1926 (with the incumbent Liberal MP switching to Labour, who had not previously fought the seat), and Mitcham and Liverpool Edge Hill in March 1923 (although in Edge Hill the swing is a bit illusory as there was no Labour candidate in 1922 and no Liberal in 1923). Only the Labour intervention to win Mitcham on a 34.5 per cent swing from Conservative is really comparable.

A few lesser swings are also worthy of note as historic by-elections, particularly the Plaid Cymru gain in Carmarthen (July 1966), the first SDP outing (Warrington, July 1981), its first gain (Crosby, November 1981) and of course the grandfather of Liberal by-election wins, Orpington (March 1962). Many of these big by-election changes, like Bradford, also had relatively high turnout. Mitcham in 1923 saw a massive 13.5 percentage point surge in turnout, a development associated with the then-new campaign technique of mass canvassing.<sup>34</sup> Christchurch in 1993 was the apotheosis of the Chris Rennard style of Lib Dem by-election campaigning.

Bradford West therefore certainly belongs in the top ten by-election shocks since 1945, and probably in the top five although Orpington, Hamilton, Lincoln and Bermondsey can all claim to have seen larger movements of opinion or more consequential results or both. Orpington and Lincoln foreshadowed national

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/9175133/George-Galloway-wins-Bradford-West-by-election.html>

<sup>34</sup> Chris Cook 'By-elections of the first Labour government', p38 in Chris Cook & John Ramsden (eds) *By-elections in British Politics* London: UCL Press, 1997.

*Thirty-point plus swings in by-elections since 1945, in order of swing*

		Winner	Insurgent party vote change %	Defending party vote change %	Other major party vote change %	Turnout %	Change in turnout %
Bermondsey	Feb 1983	Liberal	+50.9	-37.5	-19.4	57.7	-1.6
Lincoln	Mar 1973	Dem Lab	+58.2*	-27.7	-21.5	72.6	-1.9
Hamilton	Nov 1967	SNP	+46.0*	-29.7	-16.3	73.7	+0.4
Bradford West	Mar 2012	Respect	+52.8	-20.4	-22.4	50.8	-14.8
Christchurch	Jul 1993	Lib Dem	+38.6	-32.1	-9.4	74.2	-6.5
Glasgow Govan	Nov 1988	SNP	+38.4	-27.9	-8.2 Lib	60.2	-13.2
Torrington	Mar 1958	Liberal	+38.0*	-27.7	-10.4	80.6	+11.4
Sutton and Cheam	Dec 1972	Liberal	+39.0	-26.2	-18.6	56.2	-11.3
Liverpool Edge Hill	Mar 1979	Liberal	+36.8	-28.1	-11.4	57.2	-4.0
Birmingham Ladywood	June 1969	Liberal	+30.6	-33.4	-0.6	51.9	-7.8
Isle of Ely	July 1973	Liberal	+38.3	-24.9	-13.4	65.8	-6.1

(\* indicates a party that won despite not standing in the previous general election)

political realignments, although the title of ‘the most sensational result’ probably really belongs to Winnie Ewing’s SNP triumph in Hamilton in 1967.

The swing in Hamilton was larger than Bradford (36.8 per cent), Hamilton saw the arrival of the SNP as a serious political force and it has not been without an MP since then; before Hamilton the prospect of a Scottish Parliament election was remote and the prospect of an SNP majority seemed ridiculous. Hamilton restructured Scottish politics, caused both main UK parties to adjust their policies in the next seven years, and might ultimately prove to have been the first step towards Scottish independence. Bradford was a big deal, but not quite that big.<sup>35</sup>

In order for a huge swing to an independent candidate or a minor party to take place, there first needs to be a fracturing of the voters’ loyalty to their usual party. Normal government unpopularity is not usually enough to do the trick.

A few occasions involve the early stages of a wider political realignment that sees a minor party break through to being a

major force (Mitcham 1923, Orpington 1962 and Hamilton 1967 undeniably, and arguably Sutton 1972 and Crosby 1981 as well). By 1973, Liberal and SNP by-election wins were part of the landscape of political expectations and could no longer be measured in the same scale.

More usually, the snapping of normal party loyalties is a local phenomenon. This is generally the case with extreme by-elections and with those constituency general election results rather resembling by-elections in terms of large swing and their singular nature including:

- Hammersmith North, 1945
- Merthyr Tydfil, 1970
- Antrim North, 1970 (arguably a wider political realignment)
- Blyth, February 1974
- Lincoln, February 1974
- Isle of Wight, February 1974
- Tatton, 1997
- Falkirk West, 1999 (Scottish Parliament)
- Wyre Forest, 2001
- Blaenau Gwent, 2005
- Belfast East, 2010

<sup>35</sup> See also Chris Cook & John Ramsden (eds), *By-elections in British Politics*, London, UCL Press, 1997.

The London Mayor election in 2000, won by Ken Livingstone as an Independent, is also part of the pattern. In these unusual elections there is often an element of popular dissatisfaction with the process or the outcome, or both, of the main party's selection process. This is if anything more of a theme than government unpopularity, although that plays a part in many of the by-election reverses as well.

In Hammersmith, Merthyr, Lincoln, Blyth, Falkirk and Blaenau Gwent voters swung behind local candidates who argued that they had been unfairly treated by the local party selection. In Liverpool Edge Hill and Bermondsey Labour selection disputes were part of the reason for Liberal victories. In Bermondsey there was a double revolt, against the new Labour left and Peter Tatchell that had taken over the constituency and against the old-style Labour leadership of Southwark council exemplified by former MP Bob Mellish and unsuccessful 'Real Bermondsey Labour' by-election candidate John O'Grady. In three more cases the MP was the subject of allegations about their conduct (Isle of Wight, Tatton, Belfast East). In Glasgow Govan (both times) the Labour candidate performed poorly in the by-election campaign and voters complained that Labour locally was practising an unappealing style of machine politics.

Some of these massive swings have taken place in a political environment where there is discussion and deliberation among the voters, to a greater degree than normal, and a cohesive community at the core of the constituency. In places such as Merthyr Tydfil and Blaenau Gwent, close-knit communities in which politics had always been more about solidarity than doorstep campaigning, people moved in large numbers because a collective decision had been taken in

the community before the votes were cast. Bradford West was rather similar to these Welsh valleys seats in this respect. Bradford campaigners reported that discussions among Asian families had an unusual dynamic in the by-election; that the senior family members accepted that the young Respect enthusiasts had a point and that the concerns they were highlighting (locally and internationally) had been neglected too long. Young people were persuading their parents and grandparents in some households.

In order to lose a by-election on a massive swing, the main party needs one or more of the following conditions to apply:

1. Badly flawed local selection procedure
2. Huge unpopularity at national level
3. Beginnings of a political realignment

Christchurch in 1993 was an almost pure case of (2) for the Conservatives; Blyth in 1974 was an almost pure case of (1) for Labour. Hamilton and Orpington were mostly (3) with elements of (2). What was Bradford West?

One can rule out condition (2) for Bradford West – Labour were ahead in the polls, not miles behind, in March 2012. Labour nationally were not hated in the way that the party was in 1968, or the Conservatives were in 1995, but it is reasonable to note that the whole structure of party politics has fallen into more disrepute than it had on those occasions, and even the more popular of the two main parties suffers a weakening of its grip on the electorate in those circumstances.

The relationship between local and more general factors, and between a one-off set of circumstances during the selection and election and wider possibilities of political change, requires some analysis.

## 2 WHAT CAUSED THE BRADFORD EARTHQUAKE?

### *Disaffection*

The most common explanation offered in the national press immediately after the by-election was that it was largely about popular alienation and disaffection with politics and the political establishment. This was a perception shared across most of the spectrum. Max Hastings wrote in the *Daily Mail* to try to explain the Galloway win; strip out the boilerplate partisan criticism and the rest is pretty much common ground:

The immediate answer is that he fought Bradford West as standard-bearer for British Muslims in a constituency with a large Muslim population. Next, confidence in the Labour Party, usual holders of the Bradford seat, has hit rock bottom.

Ed Miliband is regarded by most of his Shadow Cabinet colleagues, never mind Labour voters at large, as less credible than a Greek economic bailout. Indeed, you would find a lot more Labour voters willing to put their savings into drachmas than to believe Miliband will ever be Prime Minister. But beyond this partisan issue, almost everybody interested in British politics agrees that there is a much more deeply-rooted malaise, afflicting every party and indeed almost every institution in Britain.

There is a collapse of trust in those in charge, and especially in our politicians, which should thoroughly alarm all who care about democracy. Voters look at Westminster, and see government in the hands of people who seem to care nothing about their opinions, their

troubles, their hopes and fears.<sup>36</sup>

As well as the injury suffered by the main political parties from their rejection in Bradford West, there was the insult to those parties involved when the voters chose George Galloway. There are few things that unite the main parties, and the journalistic and political establishment, as much as dislike of Galloway, and it would be foolish to imagine that voters in Bradford did not know this. They knew, and felt this was one of the good things about Galloway. Because the sources of the attacks on Galloway's politics and personality were themselves so tainted and distrusted, they were discounted – and even if negative material about Galloway was believed, it was thought less important than the many negative things about politics as a whole. 'My enemy's enemy is my friend' and for the voters the power structure in Bradford and Westminster was the main enemy. And supporting Galloway did not involve embracing a set of values that were abhorrent – international Islamic solidarity, socialism and frustrated pride in Bradford were all mainstream ideas in Bradford West.

This is an important contrast with the limited minor party success enjoyed by the BNP, whose appeal is limited because ethnic minorities are excluded, and because racism and violence are not mainstream acceptable values among whites. Voting BNP may be a blunt insult to the major parties, but it is not something many people can do no matter how cross they are (as the BNP's relative failure even in the propitious circumstances of the 2009 European elections demonstrates). A better comparison is probably with the appeal of UKIP (see below).

<sup>36</sup> Max Hastings, 'The week politics all but died of shame' *Daily Mail*, 31 March 2012.

***It was the Muslims wot won it***<sup>37</sup>

A step beyond the standard ‘anti-establishment’ explanation was offered, predictably enough, by *Daily Mail* commentator Melanie Phillips, who opined that:

This [disaffection] is certainly part of the story – strikingly, a significant section of the Tory vote appears to have gone to Galloway – but it is not the key factor behind this torrid triumph of a discredited demagogue. For this rested principally on something that commentators are too blinkered or politically correct to mention.

Galloway won because young Bradford Muslims turned out for him in droves.

They did not vote for him because he was promising them better public services. They did not vote for him, indeed, on account of any British domestic issues. They did so because he tailored his message to appeal to their religious passions and prejudices about conflicts abroad.

This can be translated as ‘Shock: Politician Tells Voters What They Want To Hear’. Galloway’s pitch in Bradford was certainly tailored to ideas about international affairs that are common currency among Muslims – as one would expect given his often-expressed views on Palestine, Iraq and so on throughout his career. These positions are also widely supported among white Britons, particularly opposition to the war in Iraq (especially in retrospect) and sympathy with the situation of the Palestinians. Neither was the fact that Galloway had a specific appeal to Muslim voters unnoticed by other commentators, for instance Mehdi Hasan argued in the *Guardian* on 2 April:

<sup>37</sup> Title borrowed from Mehdi Hasan, *Guardian*, 2 April 2012.

How can Muslims complain about our rights, our freedoms, our collective future, if we aren’t engaged in the political process across the board as active British citizens? We have an obligation, as Britons and as Muslims, to fully participate in local and national debates and not to stand idly by.

We have allowed ourselves to be defined only by foreign policy and, in particular, by events in the Middle East for far too long. British Muslims can make a positive contribution to British society, but first we have to stop our navel-gazing and victim mentality. We must let the people, press and politicians of this country know that we are as British as we are Muslim, and we care about our shared future.

The Pakistani Muslim community in Bradford is one of the more internationally minded sections of the British population. There are the obvious and somewhat complicated and mixed relationships with Pakistan, particularly with Kashmir, which are frequently reinforced through visits, family ties and marriages. But there are points of intersection with other parts of the Muslim world, including travel and media consumption. It is not simply emotional appeal.

George Galloway was arguably more familiar to the voters of Bradford West through his appearances on the Iranian Press TV channel, until recently broadcast through the Sky satellite system but still available online, than he was for the infamous Big Brother appearance. Satellite, cable and online media give access not only to the international Al-Jazeera network broadcasting from Qatar, but to lesser known Arabic and Urdu media. A Fox News television personality may be unknown, or known principally in

order to ridicule, in San Francisco, but they may be revered in Alabama.

Similarly, a plural and international media has fragmented access to information and ideas of celebrity among some voters in the UK – starting perhaps with Northern Irish, Scots and Muslims, but surely a trend that will gather strength in future. Consumption of foreign and international media as well as UK and local gives a different complexion to people’s perceptions of political issues from that found in Westminster.<sup>38</sup> Islamic concepts such as the ummah, the united international Muslim community, lend themselves to an international outlook, and Kashmiris in particular identify with the problems in the other frozen conflict zone of Gaza.

The politics of identity, victimhood and anger took the form they did in Bradford because of its status as a heavily Muslim constituency, but these are far from Muslim-only phenomena. A modern skill that Galloway possesses is the ability to convince an audience that he understands them and shares their feelings, even if he can’t say precisely what he would do about it. A lot of this is about being able to point to something that the audience deplores, such as the Westfield Hole or the blockade of Gaza, and effectively say ‘Ain’t It Awful?’<sup>39</sup> This creates a sense of fellow feeling among the audience, based on common understandings of events, and a sense of superiority (and often noble victimhood) against an apparently stronger force.

For instance, could Melanie Phillips

38 As a side-note, the USA has a population of 311m people and its electoral politics is exhaustively covered in the UK. Political life in Pakistan, a country of 176m with which the UK has close links, is scantily reported. Those with an interest in events in Pakistan will struggle to find it in ‘mainstream’ media, other than coverage of events related to terrorism or human rights abuses.

39 A borrowing from interpersonal psychology: Eric Berne *Games People Play*, New York, Ballantine, 1964.

criticise Surrey voters for voting for a candidate who ‘tailored his message to appeal to their nationalistic passions and prejudices about the European Union’? Not a sufficient explanation in either case, even if accurate. There are passionate beliefs about international affairs that are common in Bradford mosques or Surrey golf clubs alike that may be based on limited knowledge, or simply wrong, in each case but are still part of the accepted social and political landscape. It may be unfortunate from the point of view of public education that it is easier and more politically advantageous to feed ‘Muslim rage’ or sloganize about ‘Eurocrats’ or ‘political correctness’, but that is politics. If anything, Galloway and Phillips are mirror images of each other, tilting at establishment windmills, talking in tropes and performing variants of ‘Ain’t It Awful’ for different audiences.

### ***Biraderi and the ‘Bradford Spring’***

The term ‘Bradford Spring’ is itself a contested and divisive usage which this paper has avoided. To those who dislike it, it is almost obscene to conflate participation in a democratic election in a section of a northern English city with the physical courage required to confront the forces of oppressive states in Egypt, Tunisia or Morocco, still less tyrannies like Libya. The power structure in Bradford may have had its unpleasant side, but it is not an appropriate comparison. That said, the movement in Bradford did bear some comparison with protest movements such as Occupy and in turn with radical events such as Paris 1968, in its free-form participatory structure and snowballing momentum. Many of its participants did feel part of

a wider movement, which included the release of dammed-up political energies in undemocratic Arab countries.

The power structure associated with biraderi is highly patriarchal, socially conservative and is regarded by its opponents in Bradford as promoting mediocre, ideology-free stooges to the council and holding back the development of an authentic British-Pakistani politics.

Bradford is not short of well-educated, successful, aspiring people of Pakistani origin, but the political expression of this has been dammed up for years by power structures within the community that had a grip on politics. It is not hard to see why educated British women, and politically minded young people, seized on the opportunity provided by Respect to strike a blow against the biraderi power structures.

There are a number of baneful consequences of biraderi as it exists in Bradford. One is the domination of local politics and representation by one localised element of a diverse population, and by a particularly traditional, patriarchal and conservative sub-section of that community.

Before the 2012 council elections, 14 of the 20 BME councillors in Bradford were Kashmiri; the only Bangladeshi represented suburban Shipley for the Green Party. Another is that the traditional screening mechanisms for councillors have been overridden so that councillors with a poor grasp of English or even criminal records have sat on the council. This is spoken of most vehemently by Asians from other communities who not only have been excluded by the system but feel that they as a whole are embarrassed by the performance of their representatives, unnecessarily

given the reserves of talent that do exist. Before the late 1990s Bradford's Asian councillors were perhaps fewer in number, but contained a number of people of leadership calibre such as Mohammed Ajeeb. Much of the damage to the Labour Party seems to have been done during the murky climate surrounding the Bradford West selection leading up to the 1997 election.<sup>40</sup> A BBC report in 2003 noted that:

The continued Biraderi influence means there is a growing frustration within communities that the 'wrong people' are entering politics.

Critics of politicians involved in Biraderi politics say they are hungry for power and prestige rather than the most qualified to lead and make a difference.<sup>41</sup>

For the political parties, biraderi networks help them look good on quantitative measures of how well they are doing at representing ethnic minorities, without doing any of the work involved in making themselves truly representative of complex and diverse communities.

Sometimes clan solidarity is freely chosen by voters, but there has been an element of coercion as well. Biraderi also intersects with electoral fraud. Deference to community elders, and patriarchs within families, is enforced at election time through various mechanisms: sometimes just influence, sometimes through people not understanding the privacy of the ballot, and often with postal voting where the voting act can be supervised by fathers and power-brokers (as may well have been the case

<sup>40</sup> Hill op cit. p16.

<sup>41</sup> 'The Biraderi' presented by Navid Akhtar for BBC Radio 4, 26 August 2003 reported at <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/3181851.stm>

in the all-postal local elections in 2004 in particular).

Candidates and elders have also, it is alleged, been accustomed to collecting and completing blank postal ballots, and there is the evidence of the 2005 fraud case that harvesting of postal votes from often unwitting electors took place. However, the effect of the system is probably stronger on selections within the parties, because mobilising a couple of hundred people through biraderi can decide the entire issue – and much less than that is needed for a ward selection, particularly in the non-Labour parties.

In contemporary party politics, with declining partisan allegiances among voters, low turnout and shrinking levels of membership and activism, it is not difficult to see why the parties tolerate biraderi. There are few block votes around, and to win large parcels of votes on the basis of deals with a few powerful individuals is tempting, particularly as the ‘price’ for doing so does not seem very high – a few council seats, some board memberships, some community facilities and so on. Labour MP for Dewsbury 2005-10 Shahid Malik told the BBC in 2003 that:

The Labour Party and other parties got used to dealing with those [clan] people and there seems to be an unwitting collusion there between the parties and first generation British Pakistanis.

Manipulation of the clan system to keep parties viable and to exercise power at a local level is not confined to Asian politicians in Bradford. But ultimately it corrodes the foundations of politics and exposes the party that practises it to disaster, as in Bradford West in March 2012. It is also, ethically, a system to which a democratic party based on fairness and equality cannot

subscribe without perverting its own principles. The tropes of mainstream politics: ‘opportunity’, ‘fairness’ and so on ring hollow as long as the coercive side of biraderi persists, particularly in the internal cultures of the parties. And even without coercion, there is nothing very glorious about corralling blocks of voters through communal solidarity rather than political argument.

The revolt against clan politics that elected Respect in March and May 2012 in Bradford is an opportunity for the other parties – particularly Labour, but the Conservatives have been just as complicit in the past – to build a better form of politics in Bradford, and heed the example before there are similar disasters in other places. It is not clear yet whether Respect is capable of being a stable alternative; it may fall into faction-fighting, or be too influenced by extremists, or indeed itself fall into the clutches of a more sophisticated version of clan politics. But resentment about electoral defeat should not blind the main parties to the positive possibilities offered by the revolt against biraderi.

### ***A lack of diversity***

Politics in Bradford has evolved into a sort of elite accommodation rather than genuine pluralism and diversity. It is rare inside the city (less so in Keighley and Shipley) to see any successful cases any more of white candidates in mostly Asian wards, or Asian candidates in mostly white wards. There are only two wards out of thirty currently represented by a diverse slate of councillors in terms of ethnicity – Great Horton (one Asian and two white Labour councillors), and Shipley (one Asian and two white Green councillors). As noted, council representation has not reflected the ethnic and class diversity

within the broad headings of ‘white’ and ‘Asian’.

Much of this can be attributed to the electoral system. Under First Past the Post, particularly with single seat vacancies in each ward each year, the incentive for parties is to reflect the local majority in each ward rather than minority communities. Combined with the concentration of power that takes place with biraderi this leads to very unrepresentative outcomes, and segregated representation that is not justified by the demographics of Bradford’s wards. Instead of biraderi among working class white wards, the parties fear that white voters will not vote for Asian candidates and therefore do not put them up.

The all-out elections in 2004 did see some attempts at mixed representation – Suzanne Rooney stood for Labour in Manningham, for instance, and did better than one of her Asian running mates in that strange election. But a majoritarian electoral system does lend itself more generally to a lack of diversity. Proportional representation in local elections would arguably improve political culture and undermine machine domination.

The problem of a lack of pluralism also affects parliamentary seats. The politics of Bradford West revolve around the Muslim community, and many whites feel that they are ignored and shut out of the discussion (and therefore fail to turn out). The perception of Bradford South as ‘the white working class seat’ does a similar disservice to its resident ethnic minorities.

### ***There’s nothing wrong with a bit of ideology***

What happened to the Labour Party in Bradford West is a grotesque example of

the consequences of downgrading ideology and depriving local party structures of a role in policy formation, both of which were associated with the Blairite project. It was a replay of the tolerance towards extreme left entryism between the early 1970s and the mid 1980s, only this time it involved an entirely pragmatic accommodation with local power brokers.

Membership of the Labour Party, access to candidate selection and sometimes even selection for the council itself has been open in Bradford, and elsewhere, to people with little interest in politics and little sympathy with Labour principles. As one Labour member put it to me, the party locally should start saying things like:

‘If you’re a small business owner who doesn’t want to pay the minimum wage, avoids tax and doesn’t like health and safety legislation, go and join the Tories.’

The lack of ideological foundations for party membership makes it more likely, as has been repeatedly seen in Bradford politics and elsewhere, that councillors will defect to other parties if they get a better offer in terms of their own career or business interests.

This is not to say that people who have vaguely formed political ideas should be excluded from membership, just that local parties such as Bradford West have been failing in one of their responsibilities. Political discussion and education should be a considerable part of local party activity, and in Bradford West this was more or less derelict for years before the by-election. It is a role of local parties that is often downplayed in Labour Party culture, dominated by procedure and local government issues that are not the core of political ideology, but it achieved particularly morbid dimensions in

Bradford West. As the Respect campaign demonstrated, there was considerable appetite for political discussion and activism in Bradford that was not being met within the Labour Party (or the other political parties) – although the form it has taken within Respect’s discourse might be based more on affirming existing interpretations of the world than challenging perceptions and applying ideas.

Following the ructions within Respect, there have been internal Labour discussions about the desirability or otherwise of admitting ex-Respect members such as Salma Yaqoob to Labour Party membership, and the question of whether Respect members can be said to be extreme.<sup>42</sup> Many of these miss the point by comparing Respect with 1970s/80s style entryist organisations like Militant. Respect is a much less coherent body, ideologically, than Militant – while there are some people in it who would be ineligible for membership of the Labour Party because they adhere to non-Labour ideologies like Trotskyism or Islamism, many others would not be. In Bradford for instance, Respect activists such as Naweed Hussain and Mohammed Shabbir were previously Labour members in good standing and had grounds for feeling unfairly dealt with by Labour locally, as did many people who were not affiliated to the dominant clans. Their views may be towards the left of the Labour spectrum, but were certainly not deemed incompatible with Labour before the upheavals in Bradford in spring 2012.

### ***‘Real Labour’?***

This is not the place to adjudicate on the claim that George Galloway reflects ‘Real

Labour not New Labour’ – merely to note that this was an important part of his appeal at the election in Bradford. In a subsequent interview Salma Yaqoob said that Galloway was keen to get back into Labour if he could.<sup>43</sup> In the same way that in 2005 people could reconcile being anti-war and wanting a Labour government by voting for anti-war MP Marsha Singh, voting for Galloway in 2012 was reconcilable in people’s minds with wanting Labour to form the next government. In most of the elections where Independent Labour candidates have won (Merthyr, Blyth, Falkirk and Blaenau Gwent certainly, and more complicatedly Lincoln) the winner has claimed to be more in touch with Labour traditions than the official nominee and to support Labour government at a national level. Galloway is another in the same line.

It is a phenomenon which does not only occur on the Labour side, although in recent times it has been more apparent on the right in European Parliament elections rather than by-elections. Voting for UKIP in these elections is not seen, by many Conservative voters and even members, as being disloyal to the real interests of the Conservative Party. Indeed, in its anti-EU and socially traditionalist politics UKIP seems to some to be more authentically ‘Conservative’ than the actual Conservative Party, particularly perhaps in recent periods of Cameron’s liberal conservatism in opposition and the coalition government since May 2010. There are parallels, perhaps, with successes for independent right-wing candidates in several by-elections of the 1918-22 coalition parliament. It is

42 For instance <http://labour-uncut.co.uk/2012/09/19/respect-the-case-against-allowing-extremists-into-the-labour-party/>

43 *Guardian*, 22 September 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2012/sep/22/salma-yaqoob-respect-george-galloway>

probably an inescapable paradox for the two main parties if politics is going to be all about competing at the centre and taking the core vote for granted because they have nowhere else to go. As soon as a plausible option appears, as long as it appears to be 'Real' rather than watered down, the core vote can rapidly disappear because party tribalism is not the same thing as unshakable loyalty to the party nominee.

### ***Celebrity***

Galloway is in many ways an old fashioned politician, but his success in Bradford owed much to two aspects of modernity that have little to do with social media. One is the 'Ain't it Awful' highlighting of grievance, and the other is celebrity, which liberates a politician from seeming like a boring, normal politician and enables mis-statements, gaffes and things which would kill many political careers to wash off. George Galloway and Boris Johnson have much in common. According to Labour MP Toby Perkins:

safety first can be a dangerous game. Galloway's campaign was outrageous and exciting; ours looked comparatively cautious and lacklustre. We were listening to voters; he was telling them what they ought to think. His strategy was to paint Labour's Imran Hussain as a dutiful, dull councillor with a series of very personal and, in some cases, untrue claims. By contrast, he claimed to be a famous 'statesman' who would bring colour to this grey city. His campaign was a masterpiece of show and visibility. Imran had 300 Twitter followers; Galloway's Facebook page had 82,751.<sup>44</sup>

Being 'local' has become an increasingly

44 Toby Perkins MP, 'Our campaign was lacklustre: his was a masterpiece' *Independent on Sunday*, 1 April 2012.

prominent feature of election campaigning, and it does seem to sway some voters, but Bradford West suggests that 'local' is not the trump card that parties often assert.

Celebrity is not, one should remember, an unstoppable force. An interesting contrast to Bradford West is afforded by Luton South in 2010, a place with some similarities. Luton has a large Muslim population of Pakistani origin (18.9 per cent were of south Asian origin in Luton South in 2001) and some of the same political patterns. Biraderi is not unknown, and there have been well-publicised conflicts in the town involving extreme Islamists and the English far-right, which has not contributed to a positive image for Luton. The MP in 1997-2010, Margaret Moran, faced particularly severe expenses allegations in 2009 (she was ruled unfit by reason of mental illness to face criminal charges in April 2012), and Labour organisation in Luton South had been in a state of some decrepitude. A celebrity candidate, Esther Rantzen, came forward to run on a clean politics ticket.

The outcome in Luton South in 2010 was startling, not because Rantzen won but because she fell so far short – she won only 4.4 per cent of the vote. Of course, Rantzen lacked the organisational resources available to Galloway in Bradford, and the instant fervour that his cause attracted from young Muslims, but she had name recognition and a popular case to argue that had a core of validity surrounded by a huge amount of inflamed emotion. The winner was instead, on a rather small swing, the Labour candidate Gavin Shuker. Shuker was a proud Christian who had no difficulty appealing to Muslim and non-Muslim electors in Luton; there was a movement back to Labour among Muslim voters in the 2007 local and 2010 general elections following post-Iraq

disaffection. Shuker's selection and the successful general election campaign followed change and renewal within the local Labour Party in which campaigning and politics assumed a more important position than local power-broking.

### ***Campaigning***

There is relatively little that the Bradford West by-election can teach one about campaigning techniques. Much of what Respect did was a sensible adaptation of age-old electioneering techniques to modern times and the nature of the constituency. There were some interesting innovations in terms of the use of social media, but this was a symptom rather than a cause of other political changes that were taking place, and of the very young demographics of the constituency. But the most significant point to note is the combined effect of a traditional media event with the amplification that social media can provide. 'It's the TV debate, #stupid' is perhaps the broad conclusion on what mattered in terms of campaigning.

### ***'Engagement'***

The political establishment is always bemoaning the lack of engagement in electoral politics by young people, and wishing they would get involved. Bradford West was an example of young people doing exactly this, and then being shushed and belittled by a range of political and media commentators for caring too much, about the wrong sort of thing. This sort of reaction does not do much to encourage young people that they were wrong to regard the political establishment as hostile and patronising.

### ***A cry for help***

One of Galloway's most compelling arguments in the by-election was that it was all very well sending a councillor

to Parliament, but that you could do better with a parliamentarian. This cleverly tapped into Bradford's psyche: the dislike of local government politics, the sense that politics as usual meant jumped-up mediocrity, and the justified self-advertisement as an experienced parliamentarian appealed to frustrated grandeur and a sense that something had to be done. Bradford West was electing an advocate, and Galloway's celebrity and his skills made him seem best cut out for the role.

One of his most important supporters, Mohammed Ayub of Chambers Solicitors, told the *Sunday Times*:

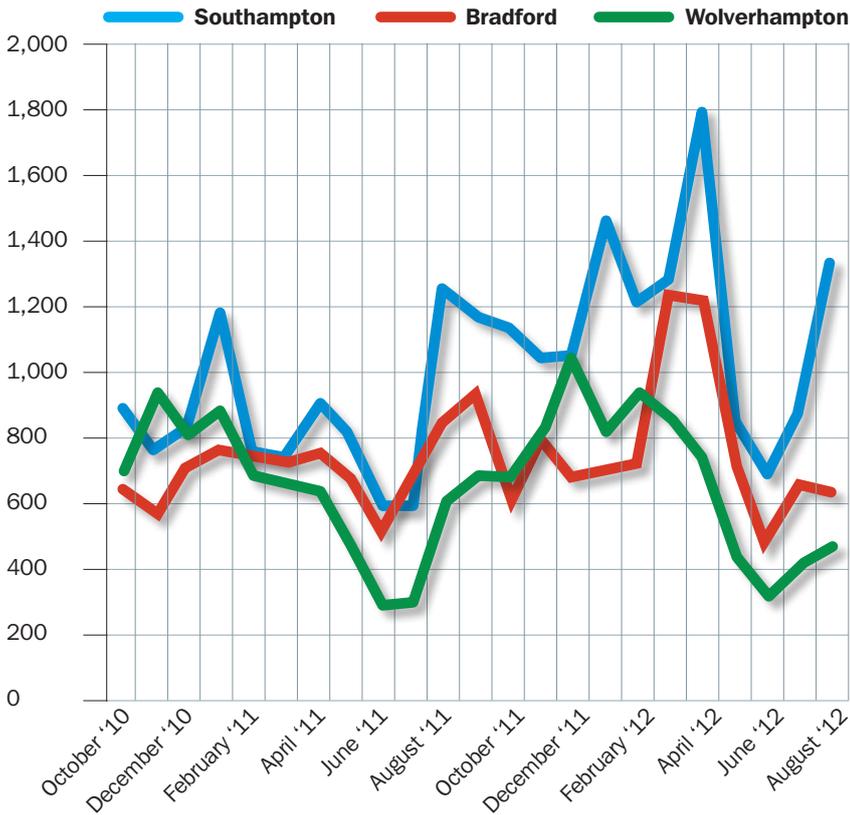
I'm not a politician, I have no political ambition. In a democratic state you need checks and balances. I firmly believe George Galloway is that check and balance. He is a voice of opposition.<sup>45</sup>

Just by the act of electing Galloway, however he performed his representative role over the full term of Parliament, something was done to draw attention to Bradford's problems. His victory caused a surge of interest in the politics of Bradford, of which the current paper is one example, which would certainly not have taken place had Imran Hussain won.

Other by-elections with more orthodox results have had little effect on the national media and political consciousness.<sup>46</sup> Leicester South only had 22 national media citations in May 2011, and Feltham & Heston 113 citations in December 2011. In each case there were hardly any references to it a few days after the event. Oldham East & Saddleworth

<sup>45</sup> *Sunday Times*, 1 April 2012.

<sup>46</sup> These numbers are based on a NewsBank search of 14 UK national newspapers and online media (*Sun*, *Times*, *Sunday Times*, *Independent*, *Financial Times*, *Guardian*, *Guardian Online*, *Mirror*, *Telegraph*, *Economist*, *Observer*, *Star*, *Mail* and *Express*).

**National media citations of three cities, 2010-12**

drew a bit more attention, with 313 citations in January 2011 although this fell off to 20 for the rest of 2011. Bradford West had 91 citations during the actual campaign (March 2012), probably less genuine coverage than the routine campaign in Feltham & Heston when one considers 30 false positives caused by the postal address<sup>47</sup> and 10 duplicate articles. After the result coverage rocketed, with 265 hits (including 10 false positives) in the week after the election and 200 in the rest of April 2012. Although attention to Bradford in general fell back in summer 2012, the peak in March and April 2012 saw more Bradford-related national coverage than at any other time in the last two years, and more than the somewhat comparable city of Wolverhampton managed at any stage (see chart above). If the intention of Bradford West voters was to draw attention to the problems faced by

47 i.e. 'Bradford, West Yorkshire'. Ironically, the *Sun's* campaign against the pie tax by offering a free pasty involved readers writing to a postal address in Bradford.

the city, they succeeded.

**One, two, many Bradfords?**

The big question that arises concerns how many places are like Bradford West in terms of political dereliction. Demographically, Bradford West is an outlier for its youth and its ethnic and religious composition, and Bradford as a whole has an unusual political culture. There is only one George Galloway. A number of unusual elements had to come together for the Bradford earthquake to happen. However, Bradford is far from the only northern city which has seen Labour rely on ethnic solidarity and biraderi block votes in the absence of alternatives as grassroots political activism has withered away.

Respect has ambitions to challenge Labour in a number of northern towns, including Manchester (despite its by-election failure in November 2012), Huddersfield and perhaps Blackburn, and no doubt places like Oldham and Rochdale that have large Muslim communities and, like Bradford, are peripheral to their metropolitan area. Burnley, with the rise and fall of the BNP and the rise of the Liberal Democrats is an example of how Labour can lose its grip on northern multi-ethnic towns. The 2006 report *Whose Town is it Anyway?* pointed out the hollowed-out state of local democracy in Burnley and even in affluent Harrogate. Democratic accountability relationships are weak, and the party structure itself is kept in business by an extremely small number of people – around 100 in each town.<sup>48</sup> Constituency-level political organisation is therefore extremely vulnerable to capture and from being overturned by more energised political movements in many more places

48 Wilks-Heeg, S. and Clayton, S. (2006) *Whose Town is it Anyway? The State of Local Democracy in Two Northern Towns*, York, JRCT.

than Bradford West.

Since the by-election the problems of keeping Respect's electoral coalition together have become more obviously difficult. A movement built on the foundations of a small Marxist socialist party (the SWP), the personality of George Galloway, international Islamic solidarity, peace activists and disaffected Labour leftists was always going to be problematic, and the party has lost its leader and its candidate in Manchester Central. Respect as an organisation may therefore have its limitations. But it, or something like it, do have potential. Rather as the Liberal Democrats can in some places be a 'franchise' party, a loose ideological label for community activism, Respect can perform the same function. It would be foolish to assume that just because the national party has hit some problems, it cannot put down roots in Bradford.

The more general risk for Labour is that the coalition's unpopularity among white and BME electors in northern towns and cities will allow the status quo to continue for a few years longer, and for politics in other areas to deteriorate as it did in Bradford West through lack of competition and lack of active membership – and for similar problems to crop up elsewhere over the next decade.

### 3 A RATIONAL USE OF THE VOTE

The overall conclusion of this report is that the electors of Bradford West used the electoral system in a rational way to achieve some goals that were shared by the majority of those voting. Portraying it as a collective rush of blood to the head by excitable young Muslims is a disservice to the voters as well as being a stereotype. One does not have to support Galloway, or have no reservations about the nature of some of the political forces that were manifested, in order to recognise that very economically, the voters of Bradford West managed to do the following:

- To send a message to the Westminster political establishment that politics as usual was not inspiring or attractive.
- To tell the Labour Party that ethnic minority and working class electors are not to be ignored or taken for granted; that a strategy based on chasing after centre-ground voters and taking the heartlands for granted has its risks.
- To overturn a heartily despised local power structure within the Asian communities in Bradford West.
- To say loudly that politics, while it is always local in some ways, cannot be reduced to a dreary auction of being more local than one's competitors.
- But also to raise the profile of Bradford, and the issues that Bradford voters care about, in politics. The fact that that issues such as the Westfield Hole are now known to a wider audience, suggests that the by-election has successfully drawn attention to Bradford's problems. It makes it more likely that something will be done about these problems.

How many votes cast in elections can be said to be as powerful?

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## A NOTE ON SOURCES

I am grateful to Stuart Wilks-Heeg, Hanneke Hart, Philip Lewis and Anne Czernik for academic consultations of various types during the formulation, research and writing of this paper. I am also immensely grateful to those people in Bradford and London who shared their time and insights with me in summer and autumn 2012, mostly in two stays in Bradford in July and August 2012. I chose, at a fairly early stage in the project, to regard all interviews as being on background terms and have not attributed statements or quotations to individuals in the report. Nor will I list interviewees here. Several people have shared matters of great sensitivity with me, and I am much in their debt for their candour and trust. You have my respect, no pun intended.

Citations in particular traditional and on-line media are given where they arise in the text. I am grateful to the staffs of the British Library, Bradford's Electoral Services department and, in particular, the local studies section at Bradford Central Library for their assistance, and to those in Respect and the BBC who have put so much information in the public domain.

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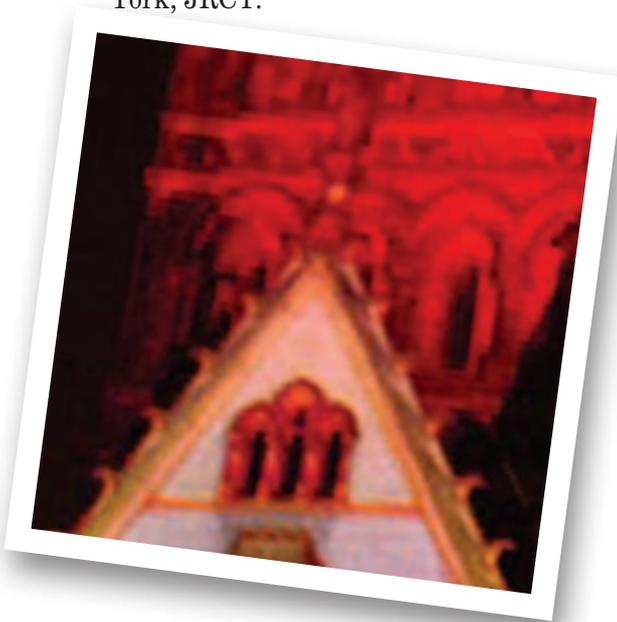
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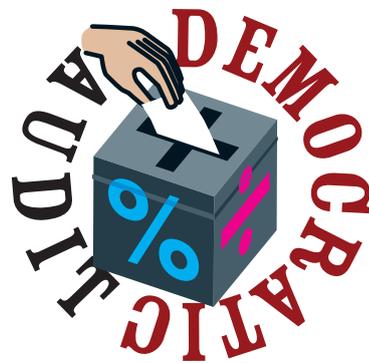




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