

# Understanding the rise of the far right: Focus group results

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ICM Research

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# Contents

- Tables and figures..... i**
- Abbreviations..... ii**
- Acknowledgements..... iii**
- Executive summary..... iv**
  
- 1. Introduction ..... 1**
  - 1.1 Context and relevance of the research ..... 1
  - 1.2 Aims of the research..... 2
  - 1.3 Methodology ..... 2
  - 1.4 Interpreting the findings ..... 5
  - 1.5 Report structure ..... 5
  
- 2. The nature of the communities ..... 6**
  - 2.1 Introduction..... 6
  - 2.2 Relative deprivation ..... 6
  - 2.3 Chapter summary ..... 8
  
- 3. The context of far-right politics ..... 9**
  - 3.1 Introduction..... 9
  - 3.2 What do voters understand by political terminology?..... 9
  - 3.3 Placing the parties in the political space..... 9
  - 3.4 Chapter summary ..... 13
  
- 4. The threat to ‘British’ values ..... 14**
  - 4.1 Introduction..... 14
  - 4.2 The nature of the threats ..... 14
  - 4.3 The failure of the mainstream parties and the filling of the political void.. 21
  - 4.4 Chapter summary ..... 24
  
- 5. The public perception of the far right..... 26**
  - 5.1 Introduction..... 26
  - 5.2 The perceived strength of the far right: the middle-class response..... 26
  - 5.3 The working-class response ..... 27

5.4	The BNP supporter response .....	29
5.5	The perceived image of the far right .....	30
5.6	BNP policies: the battle to establish credibility .....	32
5.7	Chapter summary .....	34
<b>6.</b>	<b>Commentary .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>7.</b>	<b>Discussion guide for far-right research .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>8.</b>	<b>Appendix.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>9.</b>	<b>References.....</b>	<b>43</b>

## **Tables and figures**

Table 1	Focus group schedule	4
Table 2	Report structure	5
Table 3	Social grade definitions	42
Figure 1	Placement of the parties on the left–right political spectrum	10

## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout the report:

The Commission	The Equality and Human Rights Commission
BNP	British National Party
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
BC1	Combination of social and economic groups B and C1. See the Appendix (social grade definitions) for more details.
C2DE	Combination of social and economic groups C2, D and E. See the Appendix (social grade definitions) for more details.

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## Executive summary

This research seeks to identify the reasons for the rise in support for the far right. Focus groups took place in Stoke-on-Trent, Blackburn with Darwen and North West Leicestershire. These areas, or at least pockets within them, are places of high deprivation, low employment and few life chances for many people living there. Local economies based on traditional industries have been severely hit in recent times.

The focus groups found that:

- Respondents referred to three threats in their lives: economic decline and migrant workers taking what they saw as ‘British’ jobs; the disintegration and segregation of communities that were previously ethnically mixed; and white British people reportedly receiving a raw deal in the provision of jobs and services.
- Many people believe their values and the world in which they grew up are under threat. This threat involves the apparent erosion of traditional British ways of life: church, community, employment for local people, and even simple things such as the local bakery being turned into a Polish delicatessen or Christmas celebrations allegedly being banned in schools.
- There is a real detachment between politicians and the electorate. Respondents voiced little trust in political parties. ‘Neglect’ is not just a physical characteristic of the environment: it is a description of how people feel treated by the political system and political parties. In this context, the parties that have not yet had their chance to make a difference – such as the British National Party (BNP) – were viewed more positively.
- Politics itself is not something that registers in most people’s day-to-day lives. Many of the people who took part in the groups have little understanding of the term ‘far right’. While the BNP is placed furthest right on the left–right political spectrum, it is by no means viewed on the far right of it, particularly by those people who have already voted for it.
- Some respondents believe that the main link between rising white resentment and support for the BNP is the perceived failure of the main political parties to represent white British social and economic interests, or even to speak in defence of the British way of life. Some think the Labour party has deserted its working-class roots; others that the other main parties never really represented them in the first place. In the resulting vacuum, many are looking for a political alternative.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Context and relevance of the research

In the local authority elections held in May 2008, the BNP increased its number of elected councillors by 10, to a total of 55 in England (having previously doubled its numbers in the 2006 council elections). The biggest gains in 2008 were in Amber Valley (two) and Stoke-on-Trent (three), where the new total of nine councillors gave Stoke-on-Trent city council the second largest BNP representation nationwide. Thurrock, Three Rivers, Pendle and Calderdale also saw new BNP representatives in their council chambers that year. The June 2009 county council and European parliament elections saw the BNP securing a greater presence in county council chambers, and two seats in the European Parliament.

This research seeks to identify the reasons for the rise in far right support from the public's own perspective. What is already beyond debate is that the concentration of electoral support for the main far-right party in Britain – the BNP – has been in specific geographical areas and among specific types of voter. ICM's own survey of BNP support in 2006 focused on Barking and Dagenham and Sandwell local authority areas, where the party broke through in the local council elections that year (ICM, 2006). We discovered BNP support to be higher:

- in areas with high numbers of ethnic minorities (ethnic minorities comprise 15 per cent of the population of Barking and Dagenham and 20 per cent in Sandwell, compared to 8 per cent nationally)
- in areas of serious multiple deprivation (all wards surveyed across the two local authorities were in the top 30 per cent of deprived wards in England)
- among social classes C2 (34 per cent as compared with 21 per cent nationally) and DE (42 per cent compared with 28 per cent nationally)
- among disaffected former Labour voters
- among those who thought that immigration was the most serious issue facing Britain at the time, and
- among people who supported a range of populist BNP policies rather than simple protest-based issue politics.

## 1.2 Aims of the research

BNP progress in 2008 (alongside considerable media attention) has focused the collective political mind on the possible effect of a sustained far-right presence within specific communities. Given the perceived effect of far-right agendas on good relations, the Commission wishes to understand the extent to which the electoral presence of the far right could generate a threat to good relations. As such, the Commission seeks to better understand the (potential) strength of the far right through a combination of primary qualitative and quantitative research, with this report focusing on the former.

This research will examine the growth in local far-right support, in response to questions such as: Why have voters turned to the likes of the BNP? What particular issues are causing them to abandon traditional voting patterns? What is the far right doing well to persuade people that it has the solution when other parties do not? What do people think will happen within their communities if these are divided along racial grounds because a groundswell of 'pro-British' sentiment accompanies far-right accession to local levers of political power?

## 1.3 Methodology

The three areas chosen for the research were:

1. **Stoke-on-Trent:** considered a BNP heartland with nine BNP councillors on the local council. The local pottery-based economy has largely disintegrated.
2. **North West Leicestershire:** a neighbouring local authority to Leicester city, which has one of the most diverse ethnic mixes in the UK. North West Leicestershire is an area that has suffered considerably from the decline in coal-mining industries. Two councillors currently represent the BNP.
3. **Blackburn with Darwen:** a local population characterised by a high proportion of Asian people (20 per cent), and which has yet to elect a BNP councillor.

At this point, a note about focus groups is in order. These are a small collection of like-minded or demographically similar people from a specific section of the community, whose views on life in general are often unsystematic or partially constructed. We often find it useful when conducting political issue-based focus groups to remind readers that many of these people are not particularly engaged with the political process; that is, they do not tend to think about politics much, if at all. When they do, they focus on things that have direct relevance to their lives: Can I pay the mortgage? Will the local hospital look after me if I'm ill? Are the kids getting a

decent education? As a general rule, they do not think about the merits of individual political parties, or indeed their policies, and as such they come armed to these groups with little more than a vague perception of the subject matter. The challenge for all focus group moderators is to tease out attitudes and perceptions, and to draw conclusions from views which are themselves partially formed.

Eighteen focus groups were conducted: six in each of the three locations between Monday 6 and Thursday 9 April 2009. The groups lasted for approximately one-and-a-half hours and involved between eight and 10 participants; each was paid £40 for attending. Participants were recruited face-to-face and in-home by ICM, in line with a detailed recruitment questionnaire that sought specific types of voter for specific groups. We sought to test a number of hypotheses that might explain the rise of the far right, and clearly each hypothesis had more relevance to some types of voter than others. We constructed a detailed schedule of focus groups (Table 1 overleaf). Each group was comprised of people with similar demographics or predefined similar attitudes that might be of relevance to the rise of far-right views. They included:

- **message carriers:** (predominantly) female members of the white working class with strong community links who may help spread the 'legitimacy' of the far right within the community
- **the unemployed and economically threatened:** men who have or who may lose out during periods of economic decline
- **Asian men:** potential 'scapegoats' and victims of Islamophobia
- **White eastern Europeans:** alternative scapegoats who are perceived to be a threat to the British white working class
- **BNP voters and 'considerers':** those people who say they have already voted BNP at some point in the past or who say they would consider voting BNP in the near future, and
- **middle-class skilled manual and professional people:** the next potential 'targets' of far-right messages.

**Table 1 Focus group schedule**

<b>Stoke-on-Trent</b>	<b>Blackburn with Darwen</b>	<b>North West Leicestershire</b>
<b>Monday 6 April</b> BNP voters/considerers	<b>Monday 6 April</b> White	<b>Tuesday 7 April</b> White
Mix gender, 45–65	Female, 35–55 C2DE	Female, 18–44 C2D
<b>Monday 6 April</b> White	<b>Monday 6 April</b> White	<b>Tuesday 7 April</b> Half BNP/half not BNP
Male, 18–34 C2D	Female, 20–30 C2DE	Mix gender, 18–49 C2DE unemployed/ threatened industries
<b>Wednesday 8 April</b> Half BNP/half not BNP	<b>Tuesday 7 April</b> Asian	<b>Wednesday 8 April</b> White eastern Europeans
Mixed gender, 50+ C2DE unemployed/ threatened industries	Male, 25–54, Male	Mix gender, 18–44
<b>Wednesday 8 April</b> Middle class	<b>Tuesday 7 April</b> Middle class	<b>Wednesday 8 April</b> Middle class
Mix gender, 35–55 BC1	Mix gender, 18–44 BC1	Mix gender, 45–64 BC1
<b>Thursday 9 April</b> Asian/Muslim	<b>Wednesday 8 April</b> BNP voters/considerers	<b>Thursday 9 April</b> Mix gender, 18–34
Female, 25–40	White male, 18–44	C2D
<b>Thursday 9 April</b> White	<b>Wednesday 9 April</b> Half BNP/half not BNP	<b>Thursday 9 April</b> BNP voters/considerers
Female council renters C2D	Mix gender, 50+ C2DE unemployed/ threatened industries	Female, 45–65

#### 1.4 Interpreting the findings

Qualitative research is an interactive process between researcher and participants: its strength is in allowing respondents' attitudes and opinions to be explored in detail, providing an insight into the key reasons underlying their views. However, discussion results are based only on a small cross-section of the public. Therefore, the findings are illustrative and indicative, and cannot be taken to be necessarily representative of the wider population. For that, we would direct the reader to the quantitative research stage that follows.

#### 1.5 Report structure

The remainder of the report contains detailed analysis on the main findings of the study. Each chapter looks includes the following:

**Table 2 Report structure**

Chapter 2	<b>The nature of the communities</b> This chapter provides some background on each environment, focusing particularly on how people live their lives, and how their views and hopes are formed.
Chapter 3	<b>The context of far right politics</b> This chapter lays out the political context in which the far right has developed a support base.
Chapter 4	<b>The threat to 'British' values</b> This chapter explores the main underpinnings of rising support for the likes of the BNP.
Chapter 5	<b>The public perception of the far right</b> This chapter explores the appeal of the far right and determines whether or not the BNP is thought to have softened its image.
Chapter 6	<b>Conclusions and commentary</b>

## 2. The nature of the communities

### 2.1 Introduction

Two of the three communities were selected because they had already elected far-right representatives to the local council chamber (Stoke-on-Trent and North West Leicestershire), and while Blackburn with Darwen has no such representation, the BNP has campaigned hard in the locality. So the areas were selected not because of their physical appearance or nature, but because the BNP had already established a presence. That there are a number of social, cultural and economic similarities between the areas is, however, probably not a coincidence.

### 2.2 Relative deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007 applies seven different measures of deprivation (income, employment, health, education, barriers to housing and services, living environment, and crime) to all local areas across England to establish a ranked order of relative deprivation. It is a universally accepted tool that is used across government departments.

In 2007, Stoke-on-Trent was ranked the 18th most deprived local authority area out of 354 such areas. Blackburn with Darwen was ranked 27th most deprived, and North West Leicestershire 217th. Although the latter is clearly considerably less deprived than the other two, real pockets of relative deprivation still exist within the authority area, including Coalville, in which all six of its specified (Lower Layer Super Output Areas) fell within the top 20 per cent most deprived areas within Leicestershire (Leicestershire City Council 2008).

The residents that we spoke to in each of the three places are under few illusions about the conditions in which they live their lives. Their communities were thought to be run-down, victims not just of the current economic recession but years of neglect:

I think Shelton (Stoke) in particular is quite deprived and kind of neglected, I would say. It's like where all the Asian community is and they just leave it as it is.

Asian female, 25–40

What do I think of Coalville? It's a doss-hole. The outlying places to the area are good, but Coalville itself I think is an awful place. It seems to be dying, my streets are a disgrace. I feel ashamed to sort of tell people where I live, you know?

BC1 female, 45–64

Some people associated the quality and character of their environment with the number of retail shops in their town centres that they would consider visiting. Coalville was thought to have few, or none, with the centre dominated by charity shops or 'pound' shops. Stoke and Blackburn, being much larger urban areas, did not suffer so much on this basis, but there was still considerable gloom about the shopping opportunities available to local people. In these two places, there was disbelief that a large number of local pubs were closing down – previously centres of community and hospitality – leaving people with ever fewer meeting places.

The lack of jobs is thought to be at the heart of this decline. Stoke is thought to have suffered on two levels, with the pottery industry 'completely collapsed' and the mining industry also gone. Coalville was thought to be inappropriately named, no longer having any viable remaining pit. Blackburn was less damaged by the collapse of specific industries, although lace manufacture and steel production were noted as major employers that have closed down.

It's quite depressing and dowdy at the moment. Nobody's got any jobs and you sort of say, 'Oh, how are you', and they say, 'Oh, I've lost my job' or 'I'm on short time' or 'I've only got four days'. It's probably like this all round the country.

C2DE, white female

Crime, however, is not thought to be on the decline, seemingly being an everyday feature of life for many of these people. Younger working-class women living on the council estates in Blackburn were particularly fearful of violent teenagers who they alleged were conducting a stream of burglaries, robberies and assaults. In Stoke, racial violence was a recurring theme, but was not thought to have increased significantly since the BNP had established itself; it was something that they all thought had always been there.

Despite this, people pragmatically get on with their lives, doing as best they can for themselves. Many are very happy with where they live, particularly in Blackburn where there did seem to be more of a general optimistic feeling among the respondents:

I just like living round here. I can't think of bad things about it. I really like it here. It's cold, it's wet, I have to smoke outside but it's home. It's a good place in some parts.

C2DE, female, 20–30



### **2.3 Chapter summary**

- Blackburn and Stoke are areas that officially suffer from high levels of relative deprivation, as does pockets of Coalville. Residents are fully aware of the poverty, lack of jobs and lack of life chances afforded to them.
- Their built environments were thought to have suffered from years of neglect, with entire communities thought to have been largely ignored.
- Lack of employment opportunities are thought to be largely responsible for most of the problems that are evident, with the closure of the potteries, mines and other traditional industries having a significant negative effect on local communities.
- Crime is perceived as a feature of everyday life by many of the people spoken to.

### 3. The context of far-right politics

#### 3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to lay out the political context in which the far right has developed a support base. It will attempt to explain where the political parties are perceived to position themselves in the minds of the voters, and how the BNP fits into the political environment in these three areas.

#### 3.2 What do voters understand by political terminology?

Given that the purpose of this research was to provide understanding on voter attitudes toward the rise of the far right, it seemed reasonable to suppose that voters would have some appreciation of what is meant by the term. But many don't. It is true to say that a considerable number are somewhat confused by the term 'far right', or indeed completely unaware of its meaning. We might suggest now (at least as far as these specific voter types are concerned) that for significant numbers of people politics doesn't even enter their stream of consciousness:

I don't know about politics, I don't know who stands for what. It just goes to show how little attention we all pay to it. We're all a bit, 'We don't really know', because there's not much emphasis on politics in Blackburn.  
BC1, female

If many voters are not thinking about politics at all, it can follow that they have little recognition of the political terminology that residents of the Westminster village take for granted.

What does left wing and right wing mean?  
BC1, male, 18–45

#### 3.3 Placing the parties in the political space

It further follows that if some do not relate to orthodox political terminology, then they will struggle to place different parties on the traditional left–right scale, and by implication they will be unable to distinguish between perceived moderate and extremist politics. This was proven on a number of separate occasions across these groups, where the BNP were often seen on the same terms as the mainstream parties, partly due to a lack of knowledge about the policies they stand for:

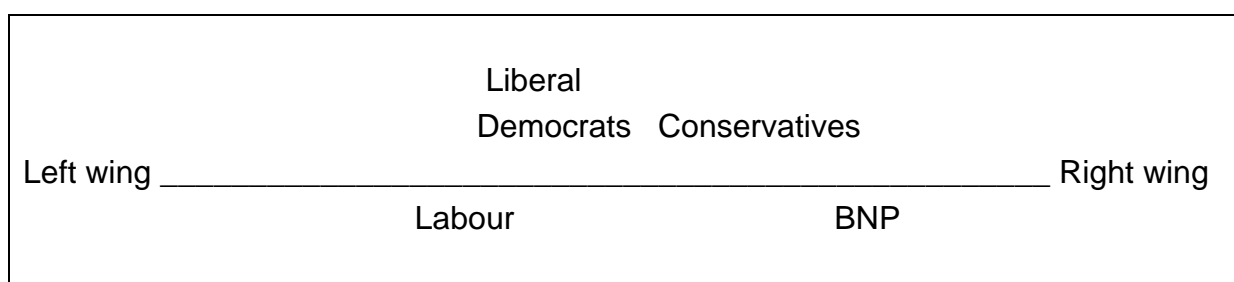
I don't know who's left and who's right. That's why I've put them all in the middle.  
BNP voter/considerer, female, 45–65

To fully appreciate the difficulty people have in placing even the main political parties on a left–right scale, group participants were asked to place the Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and the BNP in a framework reflecting both the left–right political spectrum and extent of parties’ trustworthiness. Some moderators felt unable to undertake this exercise, because they already knew that participants wouldn’t be able to provide meaningful responses. For example, it would be difficult to estimate the political positioning and relative trustworthiness of the Liberal Democrats when the initial response is:

The Liberal Democrats? Never heard of them.  
C2DE, female, 50+

As a general summary, those who have some understanding of politics are able to place the main parties (and indeed the BNP) in more or less the ‘traditional’ left–right order, with Labour (just) to the left of the others, followed by the Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives, and the BNP on the right of the others. Figure 1 represents a ‘reasonable’ summary of party distribution across the left–right space.

**Figure 1 Placement of the parties on the left–right political spectrum**



However, a number of real insights and caveats apply:

- The Labour party may still be seen as centre-left, but their position is open to confusion. Some placed them on the far left of the scale, while others placed them further right than the Conservative party.
- The Conservative party is consistently seen to be in the centre.
- The BNP is thought to be furthest to the right, but few place them on the far right end of the scale: many place them in a central, moderate position. This is particularly true of BNP voters and considerers, some of whom suggest that for every ‘extreme’ racial policy that grabs the headlines, there are other ‘sensible’ policies that don’t tend to get noticed (and yet there was a general inability to

support their assertion with evidence of specific policies, with only a few very local level exceptions).

With the BNP you only tend to hear about their extreme issues but I think they have some very sensible things to say. They've got more respect for this country. They're trying to do good for this country.

BNP voter/consider, female, 45–65

- A small number placed the BNP on the far left, on the basis that they help people at a local level and that this would make them part of a left-wing agenda.

Traditionally, they should be right wing, but they seem more left wing because they're prepared to deal with local issues, maybe, and that's why people are voting for them.

BC1, 35–55

- Similarly, one eastern European also likened the 'protection' of British-born people to policies witnessed in cold-war Poland: putting the interests of the local population before those of 'others'.
- Some of the so-called scapegoats of BNP policy were much more informed of the positioning about the party. Asian participants were particularly conscious of the right-wing agenda (some said they sympathised with it, based on the economic plight of white British people). Eastern Europeans, while familiar with the nature of the BNP message, were less aware of the party itself.
- The exercise failed as far as UKIP is concerned. Few people could place them anywhere on the left–right scale, with the exception of one middle-class group in Stoke, which identified them as a right-wing party, without racist overtones.

There is little embarrassment about any lack of political knowledge, this often being rationalised as the direct consequence of the failure of politics itself. All the parties are thought to be the same: tired, failed, never living up to their promises. The predominant view is that it doesn't matter who gets in as nothing changes, except for the ever improving lifestyles of politicians with expense accounts and second homes.

I was just going to say that unfortunately so many people are disillusioned that they don't bother voting. They've all had a go, but it all goes on the same. It's time for a shake-up.

BNP voter/considerer, female, 45–65

They're just looking out for themselves. They couldn't give a fig about us, could they, really?

C2DE, white female, 35–55

The trustworthiness of politicians – or the perceived lack of it – links in with this. As few people trust the politicians to do what they say they will, or to improve matters locally or nationally, they are all treated as an amorphous group: essentially good for nothing:

They all look after themselves. I think none of them are any better than others, they're all the same.

BNP voter, 45–65

They all make the promises and then when they're in, they don't do what they're promising.

C2DE, 18–34

And we might be hitting on somewhere getting towards the problem because we don't respect MPs, do we? We just don't respect politics.

White female, C2DE, 35–55

The Labour party has particularly suffered from a loss of trust. When considering where Labour fits on the vertical trust line, most participants placed them near or at the bottom, while simultaneously recognising that previously they were the party of hope for the working classes. This finding is important as far as this research is concerned: Labour has lost the trust of a significant proportion of its core supporters in core communities, who are now more inclined to mock it than vote for it. In the resulting political vacuum, it is the likes of the BNP that such people are turning to in order to fill the void.

[The BNP] are saying they listen to us, believe in us and that they will change things. They're saying, 'We stand for the honest, working man.' That's their idea, isn't it, because Labour doesn't any more.

White female, C2DE, 35–55

It is clear that many of the people we have spoken to are disengaged from politics, and are contemptuous of the parties that they perceive to have deserted them. This particularly applies to the Labour party, who would usually consider such people to be natural Labour voters.

Most of these people blame the politicians for this development, rather than, for example, their own apathy or ignorance. They say their views are no longer represented (see Section 4.3), and that politicians merely serve their own self-interest. However, a few participants said that blame lies with both sides. Some said they rarely consider the implications of local and national political developments.

### **3.4 Chapter summary**

- For many people the term 'far right' has little meaning.
- As a generalisation the main political parties are perceived to be positioned on the traditional left–right scale in the order that students of politics would traditionally recognise. However, this disguises some tangible differences in how people think of the main parties, particularly Labour.
- The BNP are placed farthest right, but are not generally presumed to be 'far right', particularly by their own sympathisers. Many of these consider them to be more moderate than extreme.
- Politics and politicians are generally held in low esteem. There is a detachment between these members of the electorate and their representatives, and the vacuum created is thought to allow parties like the BNP to develop their appeal.

## 4. The threat to ‘British’ values

### 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to focus more closely on the perceived ‘threats’ to white British people. It is thought the common exposure to these specific threats allows the BNP to provide solutions that other political parties cannot, or will not.

### 4.2 The nature of the threats

A significant proportion of the white British working class and, to some extent, middle classes (based on the people that we have spoken to) perceive their way of life, their values and their understanding of the world in which they grew up to be under considerable threat. The threat is multidimensional and pervasive, summed up as ‘the erosion of traditional British ways of life’: church, community, local employment. The issues that people mentioned include actual or perceived changes such as the local bakery being turned into a Polish delicatessen, the word ‘Christmas’ being banned in schools, the flying of the St George’s flag being banned, local jobs being lost or given to migrants instead of white British people. The underlying theme that seems to link these ‘threats’ is the concern over an increasing number of immigrants (both white and non-white), fuelling the argument that white British people have become the outsiders looking in:

You feel like a foreigner in your own country.  
BC1, 18–34

There are three main ‘threats’ that emerged from white British groups, blame for which tends to be directed towards migrants:

1. Economic decline and foreign workers.
2. Fewer mixed-race communities.
3. A raw deal for the white British.

The first threat is thought to be **economic decline**, exacerbated by migrants taking jobs that might otherwise have been given to white British workers. There can be little doubt that each of the three communities has felt the effects of decline in the traditional manufacturing industries. Coalville suffered from pit closures, Stoke-on-Trent from the huge decline in the pottery and steel industries, and Blackburn from general economic stagnation. These lost jobs are not thought to have been replaced, and with the onset of a new recession, economic fears for the local communities are real. As such, there is considerable gloom about people’s prospects, particularly the young, and this affects opinions on the state of local economies:

There's communities where there's 90 per cent out of work, where the car factories were and stuff, a lot gone that way.

BNP voter/considerer, 45–65

I'm still there, but you don't know from day to day if you've still got a job. You must turn up and carry on, that's how we are in the pottery industry at the moment.

C2DE, female

However, for the most part the expression of their frustration or anger is directed at 'foreign' workers. Numerous examples were given of cheaper migrants being employed at the expense of white British people, often for reasons that had little to do with individual work-related performance:

I feel like an outcast, I do, yes. In my job, I'm a taxi driver but 90 per cent of my work has gone since the Asians took over. But they don't just take over, they buy the company, all the relations run it, and like I say, they have five or six children; 20–30 years from now we're going to be in the minority.

C2DE, 50+

I know someone who has his own business and is a millionaire, and has just laid off nine white British men who have worked for him for 20 years so that he can employ all the cheaper Polish immigrants who will work for him cheaper. It's scandalous and it p\*\*\*es me off.

BC1, female, 18–45

It's been going on for years. I've worked on a site for years and all the sweeping-up people; they are all big black lads. They're on £10–£15 an hour sweeping up; do you know what I mean? For £15 an hour I'd do that but you couldn't get a sweeping job ...

C2D, male, 18–34

There were some suggestions that Asian participants recognised and sympathised with the white British community. Not only did they endorse the view that white people should be concerned by these issues, but considered themselves to also be victims in some cases. This particularly applied to the economic consequences of eastern European immigration, but also to asylum seekers of any nationality or ethnicity:



It's like, what are they getting the jobs for when the government knows that people in this country are not getting the jobs as it is? Why let other people in?

Asian female, 20–30

Polish people coming like flocks of sheep. All the jobs have gone to third-world countries, so why are they still letting in people into the country if there are no jobs, factories or manufacturers?

Asian male, 25–54

Resentment is sometimes diminished by migrants taking jobs that British people don't want, and that migrant workers often have a reputation for being harder working than many white British people. Blame for some situations is therefore sometimes directed at the inadequacies of the white British community, rather than the immigrants who are merely taking up opportunities that others won't:

We've got a lot of Polish people in our area, and unfortunately they want to work and we've got loads of ours that don't want to work. The children that are going through school see their parents on benefits, and think, 'Why am I going to go to work? My mum gets benefits; I'm going to have benefits'

C2DE, female, 18–44

The second perceived threat to the white British community is **community cohesion**, or the lack of it. There are a number of aspects of this threat, and it would be wrong to order them by some artificial method of relative importance. However, one primary feature is a failure of different communities to mix, in any sense.

The suggestion that white British people should mix with other communities (and vice versa) caused some bemusement. Although some cross-community relationships exist, few of the people we spoke to even considered it to be an option, and this applies to members of all communities:

Blackburn has always been populated by Asians and we've never mixed. It just goes without saying in Blackburn; we don't mix as such. Our community is ours, and theirs is theirs.

BC1, 35–55

I don't get a real community feel from Blackburn; just in that I've got my friends and they've all got friends. Do you know what I mean? I don't really do community-based activities. I don't really have a community.

Asian female, 20–30

You can only get tolerance; and you never get a mix. You get little pockets that are tolerated at best. You can never get integration properly.

C2DE, male, 18–34

However, some think that the segregation of the communities is relatively recent. The suggestion is that just 20 years or so ago there was much more racial mixing and a much more positive interracial community was evident:

Well, the area that I grew up in – Daisyfield – the estate that we lived on, there were whites and coloureds and we got on brilliant. Now that was a community!

White, female, 35–55

Blame for recent community division is attributed to a perceived younger and more violent generation, creating a climate of fear. The advent of political correctness is also thought to have artificially created barriers; one effect of which is a 'siege' mentality among white people. More on this point will follow.

Given the racial segregation, it can be understood how the communities feel threatened by each other. For Asian people in Blackburn, for example, the threat is real and potentially violent, with some examples provided of intolerance spilling over into unjustifiable behaviour:

The Muslim family who arranged the whole street party got it all going, but the BNP refused to come because it was done by them, so they were driving up the street in the middle of this street party, and they just tried to run them over.

Asian female, 20–30

I've got properties down in the Galagreaves area and if I was to move any Asian families in there, before they can even settle in they're already dealing with people coming and throwing cans in their garden and just sat around the house making noises all the way throughout the night.

Asian male, 25–54

For white British people, the threat is both direct and impressionistic; a 'changing of the guard' in a number of senses. Firstly, there is a perceived direct impact of non-white people moving into traditionally white areas, causing the 'white flight' scenario or fear:

There has been white flight from certain areas; they have been pushed out. The whites are moving out because the Asians are moving in and then more whites move out and they've taken over. It would seem like that to me.

BC1, female, 18–45

I lived in Audley for a while and being a white person you do feel quite pushed out. They are all together and do have quite a good community, the Asians there, and you do feel pushed out.

BC1, female, 18–45

... you've now got areas that are divided. There's a lot of areas where I won't go at night, I would say. You read a lot of these stories about people being attacked and it always says by a coloured or Asian; it never says a racist attack, but we always think, 'Well, if it had been the other way round it would be a racist attack.' I'm beginning to feel a foreigner in my own city.

C2DE, female

For Asian people, 'self-segregation' is recognised to be a problem that contributes to a lack of understanding between themselves and their white counterparts. However, they consider self-segregation to be a necessary (and inevitable) self-defence mechanism in reaction to the intolerance and physical threats they face:

It's very hard for an Asian person or family to actually move into these areas, because we get told all the time to integrate with people so we try the best we can just not to upset anybody. But obviously then there's a certain breaking point which anybody can stand, and then it just leads to more crime. If the police get involved, there'll be more trouble.

Asian male, 25–54

The impact of increased ethnic minorities in local areas is thought to create the feeling that the values and social norms that (white) people grew up with are being eroded by the mere presence of foreign immigrants, who, they suggest, have to be appeased or else will be offended. The general feeling is that immigrants who come to Britain should have to live by 'our rules' rather than their own. They argue that this would certainly be the case if British people moved abroad, but instead, it is the white British people who have to moderate their behaviour in their own country:

They come to our country and they don't do what we do, they think they can just carry on; they can live by their rules not by ours.

C2D, male

When they come into this country they should live by our rules and their children should be allowed to choose the same as our children. They should live by our rules and be able to make the same choices that we make. I think that they're living by their own rules; it's causing problems in our society.

BNP voter/considerer, female, 45–65

Crucially, there is a strong feeling that, instead of protecting the traditional social norms of white British people, the authorities encourage immigrants to champion their differences and maintain their own cultural, economic and social values:

I was going to say that society generally feels let down by the government, by the borough councils, the county council, the police force; everybody. Nobody in this day and age will stand up and say, 'Stop, enough is enough. That's not acceptable or whatever.' It's, 'Oh well, you know, you can't really say that, don't worry.'

BNP voter/considerer, female, 45–65

But it's the whole thing that's happening that government is allowing to happen, and it just seems as if we're rolling over and letting everyone walk all over us, and we just can't sustain it.

BC1, female, 45–64

It isn't an equal society any more; it seems to be based on what they can do for anybody else but us ...

C2DE, male

The expression of this 'encouragement' is thought to be 'political correctness', which is uniformly disliked by our white participants. Many of the examples cited are trivial, and many are urban myths, but the picture they help to build is that of a white community, and its associated way of life, which feels it is under siege from the vagaries of 'political correctness':

You can't sing 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' any more.

BNP voter/considerer, female, 45–65

The county council can advertise for a black worker but they can't advertise for a white worker. That's because they want a black worker to work with a specific group of people, but they couldn't advertise for a white worker to do the same thing. Which to me is wrong.

BNP voter/considerer, female, 45–65

My friend went to see her daughter's nativity play. It wasn't a nativity that we know; it was all about Muslims and Buddha and things, and she didn't really understand it.

White female, 35–55

And they're telling you now that you can't have celebrations on St George's Day because of displaying the St George's flag.

BNP voter/considerer male, 45–65

I think it's the do-gooders putting so many rules and that in place. It weren't so long ago it was said we couldn't put a Christmas tree up in the middle of the town centre. We can't have Santa Claus for the kids because it would offend the Muslims; this, what a load of rubbish.

White female, 35–55

The third main threat is the fear that white British people are being left behind, basically given **a raw deal** while the resources, jobs and decisions are all perceived to be stacked up in favour of non-white people.

The idea runs deep among many of the working-class people in the focus groups, although the expression of it is diffused somewhat by the scattergun examples that are reasoned to underpin it. For some, as we have seen, jobs are the key issue, with Polish people in particular being seen as responsible for taking jobs that could easily be given to white British people. Others suggest that a more general allocation of finite resources to non-white groups is the problem. This includes council-house provision, health provision and benefits:

I don't think they cause any problems whatsoever, but whether they're drawing on the resources ... that's a bigger picture, isn't it?

BC1, 45–65

They just walk in and they get it, just like that, and it's not fair.

Male, 50+

Some of the examples that respondents provided to support this premise could be viewed as dubious at best. For example, one suggested that her son went to the Citizens Advice bureau, where the 'Asians were being looked after until it was my son's turn, and they said, "Sorry, we're closed".' Another suggested that hospital staff

provided better care to non-white people because they were scared of being accused of being racist.

Yet whether the examples given do reflect differential treatment or not misses the point: what is important is that white British people feel that they are getting a raw deal, and will post-rationalise their experiences to fit their view of the multicultural environment in which they live.

#### **4.3 The failure of the mainstream parties and the filling of the political void**

The underlying theme of the previous section is wide-ranging social change brought about by rising numbers of non-white immigrants, whose mere existence is thought to challenge the traditional white British way of life. But what is missing so far is the political reaction to this change. The link between white resentment and support for the BNP is the perceived failure of the main political parties to represent white social and economic interests, or indeed to even offer a voice that speaks in defence of 'the British way of life'. Mainstream politicians are thought to have turned their backs on British values, and so ordinary Middle Englanders feel they have no voice: their views and their way of life are not only threatened but left unrepresented, and so are being quickly eroded.

We've seen the Labour party in power, we've seen the Conservative party in power, and we've seen how it's gone. We've not seen the BNP in power so we don't know whether what they say is what they'll do, or whether it will be the same as the others, but they've got more respect for this country, haven't they? They're trying to do a lot more good for this country, aren't they?

BNP voter/considerer, female, 45–65

People are going away from Labour and the Conservatives now; they're looking for something else, somebody to stand up for us. Not because we particularly agree with everything, but again because they're fed up of being pushed out.

BNP voter/considerer, male, 45–65

The question is how and why the mainstream parties have created this void. As far as the Labour party is concerned, it is perceived by some former supporters to be a middle-class party, and has been deserted by those who have voted Labour all their lives (and were encouraged by their parents to vote Labour):

Oh, Tony Blair tried to appeal to the middle classes, didn't he? And he sold out. He sold out the Labour party and everything it stood for.

White female, 35–55

But now it isn't the Labour party no more as we know it. It's just a soft Labour party.

C2DE female, 50+

In particular, Labour is perceived to have failed them by being in power during the latest economic crisis and is therefore seen to be responsible for their job losses:

Ever since Labour has been in, the place has gone kaput, hasn't it?

C2D, male, 18–34

Financial scandals involving Labour MPs' expenses have further damaged their image: payment for things like second homes and patio heaters is resented by those who can't afford even one home with good internal heating. Labour was also criticised for not allowing referendums on immigration: again this was cited as evidence that they're unwilling to listen to the views of the people that have voted for them.

The Conservatives are seen by some as more caring than they used to be (David Cameron and the loss of his son was cited on a couple of occasions), and more pro-British (Boris Johnson was noted as someone who is more likely to present themselves as 'Britain first'). However, they too are perceived to be a middle/upper-class party, not a working-class party that truly reflects the views of the working classes.

The Liberal Democrats, where visible, are thought to be too soft and, again, perhaps too middle class for these respondents.

Importantly, none of the main parties are perceived to be headed by strong leaders like Margaret Thatcher or Arthur Scargill, and many were looking for the BNP to supply that leadership (while the BNP is not considered to have the strong individual leaders, the members are thought to have strong individual views). This is an important point: political failure was seen by many as a leadership failure, not so much on the day-to-day running of things but having a real personality presence: an impression of determination, dedication and strength. It does not perhaps matter whether such leadership is 'left wing' or 'right wing', it just matters that it is seen to be strong:

I know she did a lot of damage ... the Iron Lady, but whatever she worked for, she did what she said she were going to do. Since she went it's all gone to cock.

White female, 35–55

I don't think there's a strong Labour man no more. Gordon Brown to me is the same as that Cameron man; you haven't got like a real strong Labour man who's like Arthur Scargill ... a Labour man, a strong man. Someone who would fight for workers.

BNP voter/considerer, male, 45–65

As a result many were looking for a political alternative.

A final question to ponder, however, is the extent to which the rise of the far right in these communities is a protest against the main parties for their perceived desertion of white working-class communities, and how far it is an actual, ideological shift to the far right.

Implicit within the notion of 'protest', is the prerequisite that there is something specific to protest against. There is a clear defining point that most believe that immigration has gone too far and recognition that the BNP is possibly the only party that is prepared to do something about it. One Asian respondent suggested that support for the BNP was very much a wake-up call to the main parties:

Like I said, for the past 17 years I've lived in a mostly white area and a BNP councillor was elected. And people who actually voted for them came up and chatted to me in the shop and said, 'We voted for the BNP on protest because we don't agree with the mainstream parties. We're not voting for the BNP because they're right or we agree with their policies.' It was actually a protest vote.

Asian male, 25–54

However, many of the participants' statements imply that support for the BNP is not so much a protest against the mainstream parties, it is an appeal; a last chance for a political party to save a way of life that they claim to cherish and a country that they feel is being taken from them. In this sense, they support the BNP:

Because they stand for British people, and put British people first.

C2DE, male



I don't think actually people vote BNP because 'I hate black people, I hate Indians. I hate Polish people.' I think they just think, 'Oh, maybe the BNP has got the answer the others haven't.'

White, female, 35–55

The BNP are trying to get it over to people that they don't want that kind of thing; they want England back as England, Britain back as Britain, don't they? Which is all we're all looking for, isn't it really?

BNP voter/considerer, female, 45–65

Furthermore, there is some scorn for the idea that a vote for any party could be a protest, suggesting that it is pointless to vote for a party that doesn't represent your views as a protest against others. Moreover, there is a view that going to vote is a little bit too much trouble simply to register a protest, and people would be less likely to bother voting at all:

To vote for a party that they didn't want, whose policies they didn't believe in just to make a protest. That is thick, is what that is.

C2DE, female, 20–30

I wouldn't go through all this trouble just to say that. Not me, I wouldn't vote for that just to protest. That's got real issues there. It should mean something to you.

C2DE, male, 18–34

#### 4.4 Chapter summary

- Many white, British working-class voters perceive their way of life, their values and their understanding of the world in which they grew up to be under considerable threat. A threat that involves the erosion of traditional British ways of life: church, community, local employment and even simple things that they take for granted in their daily lives.
- Participants believe economic decline is made worse by migrant workers taking jobs that would otherwise have been given to white British workers.
- They also believe there is a lack of community cohesion, featuring 'white flight' and ethnic minority self-segregation for protective reasons.
- They think they get a raw deal in the provision of resources, and believe non-whites metaphorically 'queue jump'.

- Many people believe that the values and social norms that (white) people grew up with are being eroded by the mere presence of foreign immigrants, who, they suggest, have to be appeased or else will be offended. This creates an environment in which political correctness sustains non-white cultures and further undermines the British way of life.
- Politicians are said to have abandoned the white working classes, leaving them unrepresented and without a voice. They appear ready to turn to the BNP as the only party that can save 'the British way of life'.
- A vote for the BNP may be a protest for a few, but on balance these groups suggest that people are voting BNP for a reason. Many BNP sympathisers do support some of the messages that are being conveyed.

## 5. The public perception of the far right

### 5.1 Introduction

That the far right, most notably the BNP, has increased its vote share locally in places like Stoke-on-Trent, Burnley, Barnsley and North West Leicestershire over the last few years is a given. It follows then, that something ‘different’ must be happening in these places that encourages these kinds of electoral outcomes.

This chapter will explore the perceived appeal of the BNP among the different types of respondent that participated in this research, before moving on to public perceptions of UKIP and the BNP to ascertain whether or not the thing that has changed is the image that each party is attempting to convey.

### 5.2 The perceived strength of the far right: the middle-class response

An assessment of the current strength of the far right as an electoral proposition must begin with a reminder that initial impressions of it are confused by a general lack of understanding of what ‘far right’ means. Moreover, some are unable, or perhaps reluctant, to recognise that UKIP and the BNP are considered by others to hold far-right views. Many do not place the BNP at the far-right end of the political scale, and UKIP does not even register on the political radar.

However, respondents do have gut instincts about the nature of far-right parties, and indeed were able to quickly develop their impressions once they were asked to focus their attention on them. At this point is fair to say that those groups that comprised BNP voters and sympathisers were more developed in their impressions of the BNP (although not UKIP) than others, which might be as we should expect.

Starting first, however, with those respondents who were more middle class, it was quickly clear that an innate suspicion or outright rejection of the BNP was central to their thinking. Their view of the party was largely conditioned by an image of ‘thugs in football shirts’, offering racist views that they themselves had no time for:

I think your traditional three parties have nothing malicious in them. They are not looking to segregate people. They have their own agendas and they’re different – the bits I know – but the BNP have a different sort of agenda; sort of, get all the foreigners out. To look after their own.

BC1, female, 18–45

I think they are a racist party and that's why I'd never vote for them ... If they want to make Britain a white country again and if that's not racist then I don't know what is.

BC1, female, 18–45

However, these same middle-class voters recognised that the BNP represents a tangible electoral force within their communities. These middle-class voters accepted and agreed with many of the same arguments and far-right positions that appealed to the declared BNP sympathisers in other groups. In particular, they recognised that the politicians have deserted certain members of the working classes, and that the BNP were trying to fill the void:

The trouble is that they are trying to represent some areas of Stoke that have been forgotten about and left. Well, whether they have or not, they feel as though they've been left. And it's easy for the BNP, and I blame it on Labour, because they have not helped these people get out of poverty and change Stoke-on-Trent.

BC1, male, 35–55

To fully appeal to those on the margins of society, these middle-class respondents feel that the BNP is, and must, almost trick their way into the hearts of the struggling working classes, via a programme of misinformation and manipulation. That said, they recognise that this is standard practice among all the political parties:

The BNP are spinning a yarn, they are trying to get people to vote for them without knowing what they mean. They all do that though.

BC1, female, 18–45

They also believe that the outlook for the BNP is positive. There is a general expectation that the Labour party will be increasingly supplanted by the BNP as the natural party to vote for in the deprived areas where mainstream politics is seen to have failed:

But BNP are new, and the young people who are coming out of universities with no jobs, young kids who come out of school ... they'll look for alternatives, because none of the others are out there.

BC1, male, 35-55

### **5.3 The working-class response**

But what of the working classes? Before looking at the expectations of BNP sympathisers, we should consider those people who view the activities of the BNP

from a distance, without necessarily being in a position where they are ready to pledge their support.

Firstly, it must be stated that there is a small core number who are hostile towards the BNP and dislike everything they think the party represents. This group could never contemplate supporting the BNP:

Well it's stirring up hatred, isn't it? I mean, we live in that kind of climate as it is. We're all trying to get on, times are hard, jobs are scarce and they just, they don't come out with anything helpful. It's not about positivity is it? They're just thugs.  
C2D, white female

However, that does not imply that these people, or the others who are more ambivalent towards the BNP, don't understand why increasing numbers of people are receptive to the BNP's message. The views they hold can be very similar to those of BNP sympathisers, particularly in relation to the perceived threats to white British people. With this in mind, it seems reasonable to think that the BNP would have real cause to believe that they can boost their levels of representation within communities such as Stoke and Coalville:

From what I understand they have some extreme views, but I trust them all the same.  
White female, 35–55

I've never been racist but I think they need somebody racist to run this country now.  
C2DE, male, 45–65

This even applies to some members of the ethnic minority communities. Previous research by ICM (2006) identified that around 8 per cent of BNP voters and considerers were from ethnic minorities. One Asian person summed up this appeal, reflecting the angst of her own community to the economic threats presented by the new wave of economic migration:

The reason they're voting for them: they class themselves as British. Hopefully, they will have some policy in there that will say all British people are welcome in Britain! We should really vote for them, because we don't agree, as we have said, with immigration and how people are coming in.  
Asian female, 25–40

#### 5.4 The BNP supporter response

As might be expected, BNP voters and considerers agree with this type of sentiment. But before the impressions of BNP supporters are reported in full, it is insightful to describe the nature and profile of the BNP voters themselves.

As far as recruits to these groups are concerned, there appeared to be two distinct types of people who overtly profess their support. The first type is stereotypical: young white men with self-confessed (and proud of it) racist views. There is no escaping this fact, however we might wish to disguise it:

It's always been Labour, Conservative, Labour, Conservative, for years and years. It's never been anyone else; give somebody else a chance and bugger them two off. They can't make a worse mess of it, can they? At best they can get rid of the bloody blacks. Yeah, I'm racist.

BNP voter, male, 45–65

However, there is also an entirely different constituent, perfectly reflected in the profile of the older female Coalville group. Many of these group members were outwardly middle class, articulate and friendly. However, their views differed from what might be expected:

Because there's too many foreigners. I'm not bothered what anybody says because people don't want to be classed as racist or whatever that means, but you've got to be, you've got to protect your country. I mean they're just taking over everything. They are. It's not like, 'Oh, we don't like the colour of your skin; it's the fact that they're coming in our country and taking all the jobs. End of.'

BNP voter, female, 45–65

There are, of course, a number of people whose profile is very different to these two extremes. Those who don't think they are racist, or else don't like to admit they are racist, but typically frame their racism within the uneasy juxtaposition of anti-foreigner sentiment with a protection of British jobs and values:

I'm not racist but I think we're getting too much now and I think it's about time somebody stood up and said, 'That's enough'. It isn't the blacks; it's the others that are coming in; all of them: the Poles, all the lot of them. They're taking all the jobs.

BNP voter, female, 45–65

Yes, you can't say you want all the black people out of the country; you've got to beat around the bush and change your wording to make it sound politically correct.

C2DE, 18–34, male

The grievances held by these white British people are consistent across the different types of respondents we spoke to. As such, there is clearly an opportunity for the BNP to electorally strengthen in these 'stronghold' areas among these core voter types.

### **5.5 The perceived image of the far right**

It is difficult to talk of the image of the far right outside of the BNP context, as only a very small number of respondents could talk with any certainty about UKIP. However, one middle-class participant responded positively to the UKIP proposition, which was perceived to be based on stemming the flow of billions of pounds to the European Union for the benefit of Turks or Romanians, while getting nothing back. His perception, disputed by no one, was that UKIP were an:

... educated man's BNP, not being as racist.

BC1, male, 35–55

'Ambivalence' is perhaps a good word to describe general perceptions of the BNP's image, something that particularly applies to those with limited knowledge of politics in general, or those who reason that there are too many foreigners without trying to sound racist.

More middle-class voters do tend to hold a stereotypical view of the BNP supporter as a football hooligan or skin-headed thug, and this is something that contributes to their innate dislike of the party:

Troublemakers, stirrers; call them what you will; there's an element of evil there, I think.

BC1, female, 45–64

However, the suspicion that the BNP are moderating their image is also developing. For some, it is just a general appreciation developed from news coverage; for others, taking the time to read BNP leaflets:

You'd expect them to be very extreme I think, but they've changed.

BC1, male, 35–55

The guy that was canvassing in Swannington didn't sound in his leaflets as extreme as you imagine a BNP person to be. He was quite liberal in what he said, but whether that's a subtle way of brainwashing you ...

BC1, female, 45–64

I can understand them coming across as seeming racist, but it is because they are very British and that's it.

BC1, female, 35–55

However, there is considerable evidence to suggest that BNP activism within working-class estates is succeeding in fostering the softer image that might bring further electoral success. There are numerous examples (even among those who don't already support the BNP) of people's surprise to see BNP councillors and supporters wearing suits and ties, being removed as far as can be from the malevolent presence they had previously associated with party members. Other politicians and the media are largely blamed for presenting a concerted demonised portrayal of a typical BNP member, which is proving to be false in their own eyes:

They've been classed in a certain way, haven't they? Because like I say, I was influenced by it, so they were classed in a certain way so that people are not interested in them. You know, braces, white T-shirts and that reminds me, skinheads, jeans. But you come along, I could probably say 'hello' to someone who's a BNP member today, who's dressed in a suit, tie and is as normal as anything.

C2D, female, 18–44

Yes, they've got that slick PR guy and they put him up front. He looks more like a politician, as you would imagine, and he spoke about issues that touch people's lives so it touches a nerve, and that's why they are more successful.

C2D, male, 18–34

BNP supporters are fully convinced of the political legitimacy of the party, and that it has moved on from the 'bully-boy' image that might have reflected its past. In Stoke-on-Trent, it was mentioned that three of the six councillors were women, and therefore could not possibly be thugs. Since the BNP had become more powerful in the area, it was argued that there had not been any increase in racial violence:

A gran. She's a gran; she's not going to be a thug, is she? She's probably had enough; she wants her kids to grow up in a safe environment.

C2DE, female



They've mellowed a hell of a lot, haven't they? Because they haven't got all the right-wing stuff where they're associated with beating anybody they saw walking down the street. They're trying to do it a bit more politically, in a more political way.

BNP voter, male, 45–64

### **5.6 BNP policies: the battle to establish credibility**

Few people would deny that one test of political credibility is the possession of policies that have substance, but whether the BNP is perceived to even have policies (other than in relation to race and immigration) depends on relative exposure to the party's lines of communication. Some doubt that they have any other policies at all, considering the BNP to be a 'one-trick pony' and have little else to say:

British jobs for local people. That's about it. That's what they bang on about.

BC1, male, 35–55

However, many wonder if this central policy has the racial overtones that many people have been long associated with the BNP. One line of thinking was that if the Scottish National Party can essentially put Scottish people first (and few accuse them of racism), then the BNP is little different within an English context. Moreover, the prime minister was recently quoted as adopting a line little different to the BNP:

Well, you say British jobs for British people, but so did Gordon Brown say that as well. So you can't accuse them of being racist in that way, for saying British jobs for British people.

BC1, female, 35–55

As for other policies, it is fair to report that only BNP voters, by and large, were able to cite any. However, the mere realisation that the BNP had non-racial policies was itself sufficient to confer real credibility and respect – in fact, some argued that if only more people were made aware of the other things that the BNP were campaigning on, or doing, they would persuade many more people to vote for them:

It'd be OK if people knew more about the policies. I think people would probably vote for them.

C2DE, female

Some people have suggested that BNP councillors have so far failed to take their roles seriously: such as failing to attend meetings. However, that is not the

participants' perception of BNP members and councillors. The impression from them is of hard-working honest people, trying to make lives better for the disadvantaged, or simply trying to make a difference where other parties had failed:

There's young lads – 12, 13 – effing and blinding at him. He [BNP councillor in Stoke] said if I speak to them the same they'll understand me, and then two nights later he goes back and they don't swear at him; they just sit and talk to him and it's only through the BNP that they're getting it done because they're funding everything. Money for schools ... so they are doing good for the community.

BNP, male voter, 45–65

I got a BNP flyer through the post. It was saying how they'd saved a footpath or something like that. It didn't go through my mind, the BNP doing things like that. You think they're just banging on about getting rid of black people out of the country. Well, they're obviously doing more than Labour and the Conservatives, aren't they?

C2DE, male, 18–24

This kind of activity is directly contrasted against the mainstream parties who, as we have seen, are not only perceived to have failed, but who are thought to have given up on these areas and people. Therefore BNP supporters think that there is more to come from the party, both in terms of electoral representation and in contributing positively to the communities that have suffered under the other parties. Participants believe that they could hardly do any worse than the other parties, which, in theory, gives the BNP some leeway. However, the expectation is that the BNP is only just beginning to get its more positive messages across, and that once more people come to understand that, they will no longer negatively prejudge it:

When the union movement first started in this country all the parties were against it ... and look what happened to the union movement and what they did for the country. And the BNP for me are on the same footing as when the union started in this country, and it will grow.

Female, 50+

They're trying to get out and about at the moment, talking about serious issues that do concern the community, that the other camp are not addressing.

Female, C2DE, 18–44

So the impression gained from these groups is that there is more to come. The conditions appear to be right, and the 'softening' of the image is working assiduously. However, we should remember two important things. Firstly, these groups were recruited in the main because the participants were vulnerable to specific BNP-type messages. Second, to conclude that these same messages have hit the target does not mean that local BNP landslides are inevitable. The BNP is working hard to improve its reputation among target audiences in target areas, and those audiences are reciprocating.

## 5.7 Chapter summary

- There are a core number of middle-class and working-class people who cannot contemplate supporting the BNP. But even these groups are conscious of the rising levels of support for it in areas thought to have been discarded by other parties. They think the BNP has yet to reach its electoral peak within these areas.
- A possible source of strength for the BNP is the similarity of views held by people from the working classes who support the BNP, and those who are yet to cast a ballot in their favour. Full electoral support of the far-right agenda might result from the general distrust of politicians, in conjunction with the well-documented perceived socio-economic and cultural threats to white British society.
- A perceived dilution of the 'thuggish' image that may have previously held back the BNP is observable. Supporters are the first to defend party leaders, but the image of a party that is moderating its message and offering a wider range of policies that few would otherwise associate with them is gaining momentum.
- If political commentators or observers believe that the BNP will fail because of the poor quality of its elected representatives, then they might be making a misjudgement. BNP supporters are very quick to offer illustrations of the successful conduct of elected councillors, which is easily and effectively compared to previous failures of mainstream party politicians; local and national.
- The impression gained from these groups is that there is more to come from the BNP. However, it is important to remember that they were conducted among people most susceptible to the party's message, in areas where that message had already garnered support. In this context it might have been surprising if the research had not suggested that the BNP will further establish itself electorally within these communities.

## 6. Commentary

The backdrop against which this research took place is one of people without jobs or the prospect of employment, with low educational attainment, living in deprived areas where crime and physical violence are everyday occurrences, and life expectations are low:

What's good here? Only the sh\*t. Lots of sh\*t, council sh\*t, money sh\*t, jobs are sh\*t. Too much sh\*t at the moment.

C2D, male, 18–34

It's frightening around here; there's nothing for them [the kids] at all ... but nobody seems bothered about us, do they?

Male, 50+

These are undoubtedly the type of conditions in which support for the BNP can prosper. Our first main conclusion then is that economic deprivation and the recognition that life chances are minimal are preconditions for sustained far-right penetration in local communities. This is not to say that components of the far right cannot break out of these areas, or that the far right is guaranteed to generate support in every such area, but to simply suggest that the likes of the BNP are probably more able to develop a core level of support where deprivation fosters fear and resentment.

The second main conclusion touches the nature of such resentment, and in particular from where it stems. Jobs are the prized possession, and not having one – or the fear of not having one – motivates many people more than anything else. This may explain why frustration with the arrival of large numbers of Polish immigrants can be deep and consistent across the (white) British and Asian communities, although somewhat tempered by an understanding that they are here to work hard in jobs not wanted by the British (however ethnically defined). Moreover, there is also a perceptive reasoning that it is not the fault of the Polish if they are employable at a cheaper rate by unscrupulous employers.

Some might argue Polish people escape the full effect of white British aggression (in the way that, perhaps, Asian people do not) because they are also white, but the general impression from these groups is that some admiration for the nature of hard-working Polish people does exist. The blame for them taking jobs that should otherwise be given to British people lies elsewhere.

Jobs are but one facet of more wide-ranging resentment: this also involves perceived threats to 'traditional British values' and 'the British way of life' that these respondents feel they grew up with. One such threat relates to the allocation of resources such as housing, health services, the provision of benefits and public services: non-white immigrants are thought to get priority over those who have lived and experienced problems locally for a long time.

In addition, there is uncertainty about multicultural communities where integration was once the norm, but where physical segregation and self-segregation now appear to be mutually accepted realities. The isolation of the communities is taken for granted in places like Blackburn, but it also increases suspicion and resentment between the communities.

The perceived threat involves a range of claimed challenges to people's accepted way of life: foreign shops, the banning of nativity plays, feeling unable to speak out against such developments for fear of being accused of being racist. Again, it is not so much Asian or Polish people that were blamed for this (although some self-professed racists did so).

Rather, participants blamed the elected politicians who, they believe, have allowed this course of events to go unchallenged, and who are perceived to have abandoned 'white British people'. Some, indeed, blamed the politicians for making them racist, for making them hold views that, if they are to be believed, they would otherwise not hold. Contempt towards political correctness was found to be the primary manifestation of this viewpoint, with the rules, regulations and values of political classes thought to have made participants feel marginalised and unrepresented. Political correctness, they believe, is the means by which non-white people have imposed their rules and values on the white working classes:

You see, I think it's the government that's made us racist.

Male BNP voter, 45–65

We're paralysed by the fact that there are too many bureaucrats, too many people involved who can't make a decision, won't make a decision because they might upset somebody ...

C2D, female, 18–44

But we're supposed to be British, but I think it all comes down to we let people come in and dictate to us and tell us, and then the everyday ordinary person, if we say, 'Oh, hang on a minute, we don't like this', 'Oh,

you're racist, you're this and that.' Like you said earlier, they've made us racist. I would say I was racist.

Male BNP voter, 45–65

These white British people, believing themselves to have no voice, little recognition, and few life chances, are now looking to the BNP to fill the void created by the perceived desertion of the mainstream parties, particularly the Labour party who were once thought to be the natural vote of the working classes. The other mainstream parties were never thought to represent them in the first place.

## 7. Discussion guide for far-right research

April 2009

### Project objectives –

- To understand why the Far Right has become successful in some areas and less in others.
- To understand what the appeal of the Far Right is to those people who show sympathy toward it
- To understand the impact of Far Right parties on community relations and equality between population groups

### A. Background      2 mins

- Introduce self, ICM and the topic of the discussion
- Discussion will take up to 1.5 hours
- Explain reasons for recording and reassure on confidentiality & anonymity
- Explain that we are not here to judge anyone, just to understand what is happening in their community.

### B. Introduction      8 mins

- First name, what they do for a living, if anything, and family situation
- If they could change one thing about their community, or their lives, what would it be, and why?

### C. Local issues      20 mins

- What's it like around here? What reasons would people give for liking their local community? What reasons would they give for disliking it? How are these any different to say, 10 years ago?
- What are politicians (local and national MPs) doing well/not so well?

- If an alien flew in to.....and wanted to know what made people worry their community or fear for its future most, what would they say? What makes people most angry? How is that any different to say, 10 years ago? WRITE ON FLIP CHART. PROMPT FOR: jobs moving abroad/away from the area, collapse of traditional industries, economic migration.
- And what are the most pressing national issues? In what ways are they different to local issues? To what extent are people affected by them more here than elsewhere? Why is that?
- Can you think of ways in which people around here might think they are getting a 'raw deal'? Why here rather than elsewhere? PROMPT FOR: jobs for economic migrants, social housing to economic migrants/foreigners.
- Who is doing most to address these issues? DO NOT PROMPT What are they doing?
- What about the local community? What does 'community' mean to you? PROBE: People sticking together by race, religion, class, other things. In what ways do people around here feel part of anything that brings them all together in any way?

#### **D. Local politics      30 mins**

- Which political parties are strong around here? Which are weak? Why? Is that how it's always been? IF NOT: What's changed – which part(ies) are becoming more popular and why?
- HAND OUT POLITICAL AXIS MAP. I'd like to understand what you really think about each local political party. For each party, I'd like to place it on a map, where you tell me where they fit on the left-right political scale, and how much you think they are trustworthy to look after the interests of people like you. Just think about what you know of the LOCAL party, not the national party as far as you can. WRITE ON FOR CON / LAB / LD / UKIP / BNP (FOR DARWEN in Blackburn with Darwen).
- TAKE THE PRESUMED MOST LEFT WING PARTY: Why do you think .....is the most left wing? What policies do they have that are left wing? Which, if any, any of the others have policies that are similar to these, but which 'get away with it'? Why do you 'trust/not trust' this particular party?
- REPEAT (3) FOR PRESUMED MOST RIGHT WING PARTY.



- What would a typical voter of .....each party.....look like e.g. what are they wearing, what would their attitude toward other people be?
- If each of these voters were a meal, what meal would they be? How has that changed – what meal would they have been 10 years ago, if at all?
- THOUGHT BUBBLES IF APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR GROUP. Imagine this is a voter of .....Con/Lab/LD/BNP. Please write something into the bubble that summarises what they would be thinking when walking down the local high street.
- What, if anything, is wrong with the main parties around here? To what extent are they strong enough to stop the rise of other parties? (If different!) Why do you say that? PROMPT IF NECESSARY: Do they focus on improving things around here, like getting more money for schools etc, or focus on blaming each other/other people? What makes you say that?

**E. The far right      20 mins**

- How popular are UKIP and the BNP around here? Who do they appeal to and why?
- Who do they blame locally for problems? How fair is it fair for them to say these things? Why? How far do people think a BNP vote is a racist vote or just the protecting people who have lived here for longer?
- SHOW CARD: I'd like you to think about different reasons why people might vote for the BNP. Which are the most important as far people you know are concerned? Why is that?
  - Favoured treatment for people who have recently moved into the area, over long time residents e.g. social housing queues
  - Lack of jobs – economic migrants taking jobs
  - Changing local communities/not 'friendly like it used to be'
  - Too many people from ethnic minorities
  - Fed up with traditional political parties/weak leadership
  - Protest voting –send them a message!

- Positive contribution to the community from BNP leaders. Effective campaigning, looking after people.
  - Good BNP policies – now a legitimate party that can really make a difference
- What other things drive people to the BNP? How far is it a protest vote against the main parties and people around here will return to the mainstream parties at some point? To what extent will the BNP surge, both here and elsewhere?
  - How much of a difference can the BNP really make? Is that more/less than other parties? Why?
  - How far are the BNP now seen to be a 'legitimate' political party – the same as Labour, the Tories etc? What have they done well to manage this? PROMPT FOR: Good local politicians serving the community, being honest with people about racist past in order to distance itself from it now. Pavement politics – really helping people directly.
  - If the BNP were the major party on the local council, to what extent do you think they could represent all people- including people who are not white? What difficulties would there be?

#### **F. Where now?      10 mins**

- What do people want to see happen to this area? What, if anything, can politicians actually do to achieve it?
- Where does the Far Right go from here - upwards and onwards or back in their electoral box? Why? Which party has most to lose from the rise of the BNP? Why?
- Anything else?

## 8. Appendix

The grades detailed below are the social class definitions as used by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, and are standard on all surveys carried out by ICM.

**Table 3 Social grade definitions**

<b>Social grade</b>	<b>Social class</b>	<b>Occupation of chief income earner</b>
A	Upper middle class	Professionals such as doctors, surgeons, solicitors or dentists; chartered people like architects; fully qualified people with a large degree of responsibility such as senior editors, senior civil servants, town clerks, senior business executives and managers, and high ranking grades of the services.
B	Middle class	People with very responsible jobs such as university lecturers, hospital matrons, heads of local government departments, middle management in business, qualified scientists, bank managers, police inspectors, and upper grades of the services.
C1	Lower middle class	All others doing non-manual jobs; nurses, technicians, pharmacists, salesmen, publicans, people in clerical positions, police sergeants/constables, and middle ranks of the services.
C2	Skilled working class	Skilled manual workers/craftsmen who have served apprenticeships; foremen, manual workers with special qualifications such as long distance lorry drivers, security officers, and lower grades of services.
D	Working class	Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, including labourers and mates of occupations in the C2 grade and people serving apprenticeships; machine minders, farm labourers, bus and railway conductors, laboratory assistants, postmen, door-to-door and van salesmen.
E	Those at the lowest levels of subsistence	Those on lowest levels of subsistence including pensioners, casual workers, and others with minimum levels of income.

## 9. References

ICM (2006) BNP Voters Survey. 2006 Local Council Elections. Report for the Commission for Racial Equality.

Leicestershire City Council (2008) Deprivation and Change in Leicestershire Priority Neighbourhoods. Research and Information Team. [http://www.lsr-online.org/reports/deprivation\\_change\\_in\\_leicestershire\\_priority\\_neighbourhoods](http://www.lsr-online.org/reports/deprivation_change_in_leicestershire_priority_neighbourhoods) Accessed 2 June 2010.

This report sets out the findings from focus groups that explored participants' views about their local areas, political parties, reasons for the increased electoral success of the far right, and its impact on good relations within communities.

#### WHAT IS ALREADY KNOWN ON THIS TOPIC:

- Support for far right parties in England has increased in recent years.
- Such support is highest in areas with high unemployment and low incomes, but is rising elsewhere.
- The British National Party (BNP) has increasingly sought to expand its support base and gain legitimacy by addressing issues of concern at a local level.

#### WHAT THIS REPORT ADDS:

- The report provides rich detail about the views of people in three localities in England where the BNP has either been successful or fallen back.
- Respondents referred to a range of threats in their lives: economic decline and the view that migrant workers were taking local jobs; white British people reportedly receiving a raw deal in the provision of local services, and traditional values being eroded.
- Many believe that the main political parties no longer represent them, and they feel neglected by the political system. In the resulting vacuum, they are looking for an alternative.