

The BNP and the 2007 elections



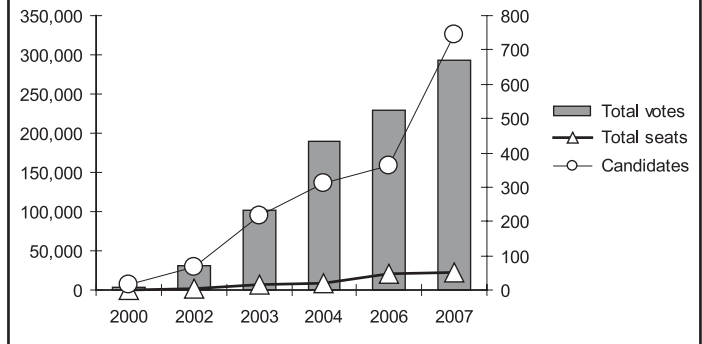
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Introduction

The May 3 elections confirmed the ongoing growth of the British National Party (BNP) over the past seven years. In England it consolidated its presence in local councils, adding one net seat. It entered this election with 49 seats. After the elections it held a total of 50 seats across 18 councils (one BNP councillor Mark Leat has subsequently resigned from the BNP and become an independent, leaving the BNP with 49 councillors). It also made inroads into new areas. This year its advance in the local council elections was at a slower rate than last year; its vote fell by an average of 3.5% in the wards it also contested in 2006. In the Welsh Assembly elections the BNP vote increased ten fold; it polled just short of gaining a regional seat on the Assembly, missing gaining a seat by 0.6% of the electorate (less than 3000 votes).

In the local council elections in England and Scotland the BNP polled 292,911 votes, (a 97-fold increase since 2000) having fielded 744 candidates — double the number it stood last year. This reflects its growing apparatus and activist base, which is spreading geographically, enabling it to mobilise significant new voter bases. The total vote and number of seats contested are both record highs for a fascist organisation in local elections. The BNP expanded its electoral support into the new council

BNP vote in local elections since 2000



areas in which it stood and also achieved significant new votes across regional areas — most notably in Wales where it stood in two of the five regions for the first time, polling over 5% of the vote. It stood full slates for the first time in the regional list sections for the Scottish and Welsh devolved government elections.

This year's reduced pace of BNP advance needs to be understood in the context of the different tone to the pre-election political climate. The extent to which the BNP's racist messages are echoed and reinforced in the media impacts on its vote. Also the degree to which it gains uncritical platforms in the media affects whether it is perceived as a legitimate political party. Both of these aspects of the political climate were less advantageous to the BNP this year compared with last year. Then, the month preceding

BNP vote in local elections since 2000

Year	Candidates	Councils	Votes	Seats won	Total seats	BNP elected 1st place	BNP elected 2nd or 3rd	BNP runners-up	% vote in wards contested	Average % in the top 100 wards
2000	17	12	3,022	0	0	0	0	0	8%	
2002	67	26	30,998	3	3	0	3	5	16%	
2003	217	71	101,221	13	16	12	1	48	17%	25%
2004	312	59	190,200	14	21	8	6	51	16%	24%
2006	363	78	229,389	33	48	28	5	89	18%	30%
2007	744	148	292,911	10	50	9	1	103	13%	29%

BNP votes: local elections 2003–2007									
Region	2007			2006		2004		2003	
	Candidates	Votes	%	Candidates	Votes	Candidates	Votes	Candidates	Votes
Yorkshire & the Humber	179	100,244	14.3%	105	88,148	101	82,381	45	29,177
West Midlands	126	66,093	12.7%	86	64,345	60	45,668	23	15,775
North West	117	36,501	13.5%	53	23,083	56	28,320	44	22,504
East Midlands	83	28,141	17.5%	3	1,293	2	811	12	2,956
North East	95	23,524	10.3%	43	15,139	57	22,336	54	20,848
Eastern	65	20,845	18.2%	23	10,946	16	6,670	8	2,765
South West	34	8,827	11.0%	1	319	2	379	17	3,479
South East	38	7,642	11.4%	13	3,513	15	3,381	14	3,644
Scotland	7	1,094	2.3%					1	73
London				36	22,603				
Wales						3	254		

the election saw a racist frenzy of daily headlines calling for the deportation of foreign national prisoners who had completed sentences, which was a gift to the BNP. This year, the racist tabloid campaigns were not as central to the election. The fascist organisation also received less sympathetic promotion by the media.

The 2007 results confirm that the most effective strategy to date for reversing the BNP's advance has been the one deployed in Oldham, which has seen the BNP's most dramatic reverse over the same period it has been growing around the rest of the country. The strategy used in Oldham challenged

the BNP's racism head on, building a broad coalition to mobilise the anti-fascist vote.

Next year the BNP will target the London Assembly with the aim of taking a seat, as well as targeting the local elections in England and Wales. In 2009 it will contest the European parliamentary elections. Broad based campaigning using the most effective strategy must be expanded to meet these

BNP votes in Welsh Assembly election				
	2007		2003	
	BNP	%	BNP	%
Mid & West Wales	6,389	2.9%		
North Wales	9,986	5.1%		
South Wales Central	7,889	3.8%		
South Wales East	8,940	4.7%	3,210	1.9%
South Wales West	8,993	5.5%		
Total	42,197	4.3%	3,210	0.4%

BNP vote in Scottish Parliament election				
	2007		2003	
	BNP	%	BNP	%
Central Scotland	4,125	1.4%		
Glasgow	3,865	1.9%	2,344	1.1%
Highlands & Islands	2,152	1.2%		
Lothians	2,637	0.9%		
Mid Scotland & Fife	2,620	1.0%		
North East Scotland	2,764	1.1%		
South of Scotland	3,212	1.2%		
West of Scotland	2,620	1.0%		
Total	23,995	1.2%	2,344	0.1%

2007: BNP's strongest results — below are the 17 authorities where the BNP achieved its strongest vote.

<i>Council</i>	<i>Cands</i>	<i>average % of 5 strongest wards</i>	<i>Seats won</i>
Stoke	10	32.4%	3
Sandwell	15	30.9%	
Burnley	10	30.4%	1
Bradford	17	29.9%	1
Kirklees	22	29.4%	
Rotherham	6	27.4%	
Leeds	33	26.6%	
Charnwood	14	26.3%	1
Sedgefield	16	26.1%	
Broxbourne	9	23.5%	
N.W. Leics	5	23.3%	2
Barnsley	18	23.1%	
Dudley	10	22.5%	
Ashfield	6	22.4%	
Calderdale	12	21.9%	
Basildon	11	20.7%	
Tameside	8	20.4%	
Broxtowe	10	19.9%	1

challenges. Europe demonstrates that once fascist parties break onto the national stage, it is difficult to reverse this. Therefore the priority is to stop such an advance in the first place.

The rise in the BNP vote

In seven years the BNP has advanced from 3,022 to 292,911 votes in local council elections. This year that total vote increased by 63,522 (28%) on last year. In elections held simultaneously across the whole country it is achieving record levels — it polled 808,200 votes in the 2004 European Parliamentary elections.

The BNP's average vote share declined from 18.1% last year to 13.4% this year, which still represents more than one in eight votes for the BNP in the areas they stood in. A factor in this reduction was the expansion of their field of candidates to 744, in an increased number of areas.

From being an organisation that targeted isolated local seats, it is standing more than a hundred candidates in three regions and can gain over a quarter of the vote in seats they are contesting in cities in these areas. Its average vote in all regions ranges from 10% to 18%. The number of seats it came runner-up in increased from 89 to 103.

In four years the BNP has doubled the number of councils in which it contests seats and has almost quadrupled its candidates.

BNP vote in English local council elections

This year the BNP won 10 council seats (9 new gains and one re-election), it also lost 8 seats it held prior to the election. New BNP councillors were elected in Stoke (3), North West Leicestershire (2), Charnwood (1), Bradford (1), Broxtowe (1) and Staffordshire Moorlands (1). It lost seats in Burnley (3), Bradford (1), Calderdale (1), Stoke (1), South Holland (1) and Broxbourne (1). The only BNP councillor to be re-elected was in Burnley. This election sees a significant increase in its presence of councillors in the East Midlands.

Yorkshire and the Humber was the BNP's strongest region, polling 100,244 votes, i.e. more than a third of its overall vote. (See regional breakdown table above. See full results on pages 6-7.)

Welsh Assembly

In Wales its vote increased from 3,210 in a single region in 2003 to 42,197 votes with it fielding 20 candidates, 4 in each of the 5 regions on the top up lists, gaining an average 4.3% of the vote. Its highest vote was in the North Wales region where it polled 9,986 votes, within 0.6% of an assembly seat. In South Wales East and South Wales West it came within 0.9% and 1.3% of a seat. It gained access to £410,000 worth of electoral communication including a televised party political broadcast and the distribution of leaflets to every household in Wales. It will next target the 2008 Wales local council elections including Wrexham where it polled its highest vote.

Scottish Parliament and Scottish local elections

The BNP went from standing in a single region for the Scottish Parliament in 2003 to 32 candidates this year, covering all 8 regions, giving it access to £670,000 worth of electoral communication, including a party election broadcast. Its vote rose 10-fold from 2,344 votes to 23,995.

It polled 1,094 votes in the Scottish local council elections fielding 7 candidates across Scotland including four in Glasgow. Its average share of vote in these council elections was 2.3%.

How the BNP utilises the political climate on racism and the media to advance

The political climate surrounding the election influences the level of BNP vote as does its level of exposure in the media.

In the past year there have been a series of racist tabloid campaigns, with some mainstream politicians also making concessions to this. There have been high profile attacks on the freedom of religious and cultural expression of Muslims, an assault on multiculturalism, and campaigns targeting immigration, including the racist scapegoating of migrants who have been falsely blamed for a lack of social housing. Across Europe, fascist parties became embedded in mainstream politics following increased racist campaigns and uncritical platform by elements of the media, which mainstream politicians aided by conceding to this agenda.

In the immediate run up to this year's elections the BNP received significantly less uncritical platforms in the media than last year, the news agenda was not dominated by an equivalent to last year's fever pitch campaign about foreign national prisoners which had the impact of equating black communities with crime. Furthermore, this year some of the tabloid media attacked the BNP's violence and fascist character and called for a vote against it. There was also an increase in calls from mainstream politicians across the spectrum for a vote against the BNP. This year also saw increased anti-BNP campaigning across Britain which will have contributed to restraining its advance.

The BNP exploits local racist myths. In Wrexham where it polled 9.4%, it waged a vicious campaign against asylum seekers who were victims of racist riots in 2003 which resulted in criminal convictions for violence. The BNP claimed those convicted were victims of attacks by asylum seekers.

It placed an advert in a local South Wales paper. The paper later editorialised against the use of free speech to promote intolerance in the elections, following a campaign against the BNP's advert. In Scotland the BNP's party political broadcast presented racist messages around immigration, featuring a graphic of a white person being chased by black people under the heading "Immigration is everywhere" and also included homophobic messages. Its manifesto attacked Eastern Europeans and migrant workers in the NHS.

The political climate in Scotland is less regressive on some key issues such as immigration, which impacts on the ability of the BNP's racist campaigns to gain purchase in elections. Scotland's declining population means there is an increased acceptance of the need for immigration, which is reflected in the policies of significant political parties.

The strategy required to defeat the BNP

The key issue on which the BNP is making its advance is racism. The extent to which the media and politicians promote such an agenda helps the BNP win electoral support.

The BNP can be defeated and driven back — they were removed from Tower Hamlets council in 1994 and have been pushed back in Oldham. Oldham saw the BNP poll its highest vote in the 2001 general election, but it is progressively standing fewer council candidates unlike in most other authorities where it has increased its field of candidates. In Oldham the campaign strategy centred on tackling head-on the racist myths the BNP were taking advantage of, building a broad coalition of all those opposed to fascism, including the communities targeted by the BNP, in order to mobilise the majority who oppose the BNP. The myth that the BNP exploited here was the idea that Asians were the main perpetrators of attacks, creating "no-go areas" for whites, when in fact Asians were the main victims of racist attacks which were being under-reported to the police. The campaign against the BNP tackled these myths head on, in order to assemble a broad coalition against the BNP which turned out the anti-fascist vote. The local paper and local council backed the campaign. Oldham remains the most outstanding example of where the BNP has been driven back. From running 10 candidates in 2003 it decreased to just 4 in 2007, and has failed to get a single councillor elected. This is in sharp contrast to most other areas the BNP targets, where the number of councils and candidates it contests has increased significantly.

Any concession given to a racist agenda helps the BNP's advance. Particular note needs to be taken of the barrage of Islamophobia that has now entered the political climate. Increasing tabloid campaigns equate Muslims with terrorism, using stereotypes of 'extremists' and 'fundamentalists' etc,

which fuels hostilities against Muslims. Anti-fascists need to oppose such stereotyping to maximise opposition to the BNP, and ensure the Muslim community is not isolated from the anti-fascist movement. Pursuit of an agenda that concedes on any aspect of racism in the anti-fascist movement undermines the opposition to the BNP.

Conceding to a racist agenda on housing can only assist the BNP. In Barking and Dagenham the BNP has 12 councillors and racist attacks rose by 30% in the period running up to the election in which the BNP made these gains. It gained its seats following a racist campaign claiming that migrants gain funding for housing which it branded "Africans for Essex". The truth is that, far from jumping queues, allocation policies along with national immigration policies make housing for migrants difficult, even for those in acute need. To roll back the BNP, campaigning will need to establish the truth and demolish this racist myth. In contrast to Barking and Dagenham, racist attacks are falling across London where no such myths are prevalent.

In 1994, the BNP gained a councillor in Tower Hamlets against the backdrop of a campaign urging greater discrimination against the Bangladeshi community's access to housing. The subsequent campaign which defeated the BNP robustly opposed racism in housing allocation policy. Whilst the BNP's vote here increased, the anti-fascist campaign was able to turn out a vote which increased sufficiently to defeat the BNP. Both successful campaigns in Oldham and Tower Hamlets brought together the trade union movement, political parties, and critically, the minority communities who were bearing the brunt of the BNP's racist offensive.

The 2007 elections leave the BNP with significant bases in a growing number of areas and also show that gains for the BNP are not inevitable. The priority remains to prevent the fascists from making a national breakthrough. As part of this, anti-fascists need to increase their campaign on the media and mainstream politicians to play a key role in ensuring that the BNP's racism, violence and danger are highlighted and exposed.

The year ahead

In 2008 the BNP will be targeting the Greater London Assembly. Having narrowly missed gaining a seat by 0.1% of the electorate in 2004, it will be an important battle for the anti-fascist movement as such a breakthrough would significantly increase the BNP's national profile. The BNP will also next year stand in the local elections in Wales and England to secure more seats and build up its support prior to the next European parliament elections in 2009, regionally targetting the North West, West Midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber, and East Midlands. (See page 6 graph).

BNP vote in local council elections*

Council (seats won)	Cnd	2007 votes	%	2006 votes
Yorkshire and Humberside				
Barnsley	18	7,822	15.7%	4,462
Bradford (1)	17	14,130	18.6%	18,212
Calderdale	12	5,569	14.8%	5,162
Craven	1	200	20.1%	
Doncaster	5	2,357	14.1%	
East Riding	4	2,736	16.8%	
Harrogate	15	1,638	6.9%	162
Hull	3	556	10.0%	1,108
Kirklees	22	19,891	16.8%	22,914
Leeds	33	22,387	11.2%	22,642
North East Lincs	1	285	9.3%	577
North Lincs	5	1,362	15.6%	
Richmondshire	2	123	11.3%	
Rotherham	6	4,683	25.8%	1,577
Scarborough	4	798	11.4%	
Selby	3	1,153	20.7%	
Sheffield	7	4,474	13.8%	2,906
Wakefield	12	6,498	14.5%	8,426
York	9	3,582	10.3%	
Total (1)	179	100,244	14.4%	88,148
West Midlands				
Birmingham	40	19,475	7.7%	29,045
Cannock Chase	1	405	23.9%	550
Coventry	16	6,002	9.5%	3,400
Dudley	10	6,601	18.6%	5,116
East Staffordshire	3	989	19.7%	
Herefordshire	2	506	12.0%	
Malvern Hills	1	376	13.9%	
Oswestry				
Redditch	3	1,526	22.0%	890
Sandwell	15	11,646	24.5%	9,268
Shrewsbury & Atcham	4	455	7.8%	266
Solihull	5	2,473	14.6%	2,139
Staffordshire Moorlands (1)	1	594	17.0%	
Stoke (3)	10	8,356	27.6%	6,993
Tamworth	1	395	25.1%	
Walsall	4	2,123	16.8%	4,911
Warwick	1	251	7.8%	
Wolverhampton	6	3,122	15.5%	1,016
Worcester	3	798	13.0%	751
Total (4)	2	66,093	12.7%	64,345
North West				
Allerdale	4	1,102	21.5%	
Barrow	1	100	10.3%	
Blackburn	5	1,841	19.1%	3,234
Blackpool	7	2,371	15.3%	
Bolton	1	524	16.1%	
Burnley (1)	10	4,232	24.4%	3,693
Bury	8	3,162	12.2%	
Carlisle	6	1,252	13.9%	
Congleton	1	245	17.9%	
Crewe & Nantwich				447
Ellesmere Port & Neston				284
Halton	1	111	9.8%	160
Knowsley	2	448	18.0%	188
Lancaster	1	297	18.1%	
Liverpool	9	1,667	6.3%	417
Manchester	2	972	15.9%	641
Oldham	4	1,683	16.5%	3,074
Pendle	6	1,737	18.6%	2,601
Preston				280
Ribble Valley	1	188	17.8%	

Council	Cnd	2007 votes	%	2006 votes
Rochdale				660
Rossendale	4	1,024	20.6%	369
Salford	5	1,372	11.3%	424
Sefton	5	936	7.2%	300
St Helens	4	879	7.5%	308
Stockport	7	2,287	9.2%	461
Tameside	8	3,896	16.3%	3,312
Trafford	1	297	14.1%	
Vale Royal	5	804	16.0%	
Wigan	8	2,572	10.6%	1,948
Wirral				282
Wyre	1	502	19.6%	
Total (1)	117	36,501	13.5%	23,083
East Midlands				
Amber Valley	4	1,048	13.2%	1,116
Ashfield	6	1,990	19.0%	
Bassetlaw				177
Blaby	5	1,469	19.6%	
Bolsover	1	423	44.5%	
Boston	1	194	11.5%	
Broxtowe (1)	10	2,263	14.0%	
Charnwood (1)	14	5,458	21.2%	
East Lindsey	3	733	13.2%	
Erewash				
Hinckley & Bosworth	4	1,806	17.9%	
Leicester	5	3,169	16.6%	
Lincoln	12	3,054	12.4%	
Mansfield				
Melton	1	251	28.0%	
North Kesteven	1	297	18.6%	
N.W. Leicestershire (2)	5	2,665	23.3%	
Northampton	4	1,205	14.8%	
Rushcliffe	1	374	17.6%	
South Derbyshire	2	852	23.0%	
South Holland	3	665	28.4%	
West Lindsey	1	225	20.3%	
Total (4)	83	28,141	17.5%	1,293
Eastern				
Basildon	11	4,114	15.4%	2,553
Bedford				
Broxbourne	9	2,768	19.3%	1,098
East Hertfordshire	3	378	10.0%	
Epping Forest	5	1,093	15.8%	1,679
Huntingdonshire	1	299	13.6%	
King's Lynn & W. Norfolk	2	377	34.1%	
Luton	2	867	13.9%	
Maldon	4	399	15.0%	
Mid Bedfordshire	1	224	21.2%	
Mid Suffolk	1	105	10.1%	
Rochford	1	472	25.2%	
Southend-on-Sea	7	2,334	15.2%	2,140
Stevenage	1	211	12.9%	
Suffolk Coastal	1	55	5.9%	
Thurrock	16	7,149	24.6%	3,476
Total	65	20,845	18.2%	10,946
North East				
Darlington	8	1,479	11.5%	
Derwentside	1	190	9.3%	
Easington				
Gateshead	13	2,701	9.0%	1,941
Hartlepool	1	250	17.4%	

BNP vote in local council elections*				
Council	Cnd	2007 votes	%	2006 votes
Newcastle upon Tyne	12	3,092	9.0%	2,010
North Tyneside	3	734	9.0%	757
Redcar & Cleveland	4	731	8.9%	
Sedgefield	16	3,458	13.6%	
South Tyneside	6	1,942	13.4%	483
Stockton-on-Tees	5	1,075	11.5%	
Sunderland	25	7,653	10.6%	9,948
Wear Valley	1	219	15.4%	
Total	95	23,524	10.7%	15,139
South East				
Arun	4	589	21.5%	
Brighton & Hove				
Bracknell Forest	1	309	15.7%	
Canterbury	1	144	7.2%	
Chichester	2	137	8.9%	
Crawley	4	985	9.6%	1,218
Dartford	1	328	28.6%	
Dover				389
Fareham				
Guildford				
Hart	2	405	14.7%	318
Hastings				354
Horsham	2	420	11.2%	
Maidstone	2	329	8.3%	
Medway	3	836	8.3%	
New Forest	2	393	10.3%	
Portsmouth				
Reigate & Banstead	1	228	9.5%	
Rushmoor	4	867	14.5%	768
Shepway	2	139	12.1%	
South Oxfordshire	1	90	4.2%	
Southampton				466
Thanet	1	116	10.9%	
Windsor & Maidenhead	4	1,004	13.2%	
Wycombe	1	323	12.7%	
Total	38	7,642	11.4%	3,513
South West				
Bath & N.E. Somerset	2	419	9.4%	
Bournemouth	2	458	7.7%	
Bristol	3	1,416	15.2%	
North Cornwall	1	202	7.8%	
North Devon	1	63	7.9%	
North Wiltshire	4	769	9.5%	
Plymouth	2	498	7.6%	
Poole	2	878	10.8%	
Restormel	1	298	17.4%	
S. Gloucestershire	3	1,444	14.4%	
South Hams	3	243	7.0%	
South Somerset	1	305	15.0%	
Swindon	3	597	11.9%	319
Taunton Deane				
Teignbridge				
Torbay	5	1,105	10.0%	
West Devon	1	132	12.9%	
Total	34	8,827	11.0%	319
Scotland				
Aberdeen	1	81	1.6%	
Aberdeenshire	1	87	1.9%	
East Ayrshire	1	86	1.6%	
Glasgow	4	840	2.6%	
Total	7	1,094	2.3%	
National Total (10)				
	744	292,911	13.4%	206,786

* the table shows the 2006 figures for the local authorities which the BNP contested in 2007.

Cnd = candidates stood in local elections
 % = BNP vote as a percentage
 (seats won) = BNP gains next to ward name.

BNP vote in European Parliamentary elections

(the growth of the BNP from 1999 to 2004 and how close they came to gaining seats)

