

# **Latent Support for the Far-Right in British Politics: The BNP and UKIP in the 2004 European and London Elections**

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One conventional wisdom of British politics is that there is no room for the extremist views of the far right. The traditional view is that Britain's constitutional arrangements, having withstood the flash flood of racist and anti-immigration feeling set loose by Enoch Powell's notorious "rivers of blood" speech in April 1968, are a "rock" against which such waves of popular emotion break and go down over time.<sup>1</sup> The occasional electoral outbreaks of the National Front and now the British National Party are regarded, not as a danger to the body politic, but as minor parties on the fringe of the political system. Their support ebbs and flows, but they will never be a significant force in UK politics (see Eatwell, 2002 for a review of academic commentary).

This paper seeks to challenge the conventional wisdom. We argue that there exists what may be called a 'racist rump' of electors who have strong views on immigration and would consider voting for small parties of the right even if they do not do so currently. This group is a solid and long-standing sub-section of the British electorate, present since the 1960s, but masked until the mid-1990s by the impact of the first-past-the-post electoral system across all UK elections and the strategies of the major parties. Using evidence from the 2004 *State of the Nation* poll, the 2004 London Elections Study (funded by the ESRC) and two exit polls and focus groups straight after the 2004 European and local elections (funded by the JRCT), we estimate that the 'rump' extends to around 20 per cent of the electorate. This figure plainly exceeds the electoral support that the British National Party and UK Independence Party won in the June 2004 elections, but it reflects the potential reservoir of backing on which they could draw in terms of popular attitudes, particularly as voters regard the agendas of these two parties as overlapping. These parties are in a strong position to take advantage of new electoral systems that allow voters to express different kinds of choices in one ballot.

### ***British Political Culture, Race and the Impact of New Electoral Systems***

Classic accounts of British political culture stress its tolerant disposition, which derives from the traditions of accommodation between social groups rather than a belief in radical social change either from the right and the left (cf. Barrington Moore 1966). Eatwell summarised this view as ‘pervasive, consensual, differential and non-violent, nourishing a deep rooted civility which seems to militate against radical and activist philosophies’ (1996, 184). British people are thought to be proud of a political tradition that accepted immigration from Jews in Eastern Europe during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, for example. The civic political culture ensures that new groups in society are regarded tolerantly.

Unlike in other political cultures where extremist parties have risen to centre stage at various times, in the UK the far right is often portrayed in the media as the ‘loony fringe’, rejected by large proportions of the British population. Such a view was represented by the BBC television documentary, *The Secret Agent*, 15 July 2004, which challenged the attempt by the BNP to present themselves as moderate and mainstream rather than as extremist thugs. This view is backed up by academic commentators who cite Britain as ‘A Case of Failure’ (Ignazi, 2003: 173-186) in comparative studies of extreme right parties across Western Europe and identify various cultural, political and institutional obstacles to an extreme right breakthrough.

The governing establishment has sought to promote a liberal approach to ethnic relations and has accepted criticism of institutional racism in key governing British institutions. A liberal consensus has dominated discussions about race, which was expressed in the tolerant stance and progressive legislation of the 1960s and 1970s Labour governments, and the elite acceptance of the charge of institutional racism made by the MacPherson Report. Liberal ideas underlie the direction of argument and the underpinnings of much public policy, which is sustained by powerful legislation designed to combat racial discrimination.

But it seems that a significant segment of English culture outside the world of the middle classes has been largely unaffected by such policy developments, and retains a suspicion and distrust of ethnic groups. Enoch Powell's intervention in 1968 illustrates the prevalence of this underlying set of views as his signal helped the Conservatives win the election of 1970 (Studlar 1978). During the 1970s public opinion started to lose its tolerance of minorities and shifted rightwards on law and order and immigration issues even if it remained constant on key welfare state issues (Crewe 1988). In the 21st century the war against terror after the events of September 11 2001, may have legitimized a more defensive stance on issues of national identity and the role of immigrant groups.

Whereas previously the larger parties have moved across policy spaces to maintain support of these voters, as for example the Conservatives led by Thatcher did in the late 1970s (see Ignazi, 2003: 185-6), such a strategy may no longer be so viable at local, European, regional or even UK levels. The British political system is now characterised by a plurality of electoral systems at all tiers of government outside the Westminster Parliament. The new electoral arrangements both facilitate and reflect new developments in the party system at sub-national and supra-national levels. The combination of new party and electoral systems offers voters the chance to express political preferences that have previously existed only as political undercurrents.

### ***British National Party and the UK Independence Party***

The BNP was founded in 1982, but spent its first ten years in the shadow of the National Front. When the NF split, the BNP became the main far right party in Britain, winning a council by-election in Tower Hamlets in 1993, which some commentators pinpointed as an 'electoral highpoint', with support returning to more 'normal' levels of 1 per cent in the 1997 general election (Eatwell, 2000: 409). In 1999 Nick Griffin, the new BNP chairman, proclaimed that the party would become 'the focus... of the neglected and oppressed white working class' and worked to give the party a more respectable image. In 2002 the party won three council seats in Burnley and 28 per cent of the vote; in Oldham

it took an average of 27 per cent of the vote across the five wards it contested. The BNP entered the May 2004 elections with 17 council seats and fielded a record number of candidates. There were predictions that the party would do well and might even win seats in the European Parliament. It may be the case that the BNP had over-reached themselves. A report for the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (2004) on three by-elections in three northern towns in 2003 suggested that the BNP's 'grassroots face-to-face campaigning' all year round was popular with residents and contributed to the party's successes. But the exit polls and focus groups we commissioned found that the BNP made no direct contact with voters, simply leafleting like the other parties.<sup>2)</sup>

However, the UK Independence Party stole their thunder and much of their potential support. UKIP's main policy stance is of course withdrawal from the European Union, but one of the party's five manifesto pledges is 'Freedom from overcrowding', arguing that immigration was clogging up roads, railways, doctors' surgeries and hospitals, and even the countryside. The party would 'put an end to mass immigration'. Moreover, opposition to immigration and EU membership are closely related nationalist concerns. And the UKIP appears to offer a bridgehead into a more socially representative group of supporters. UKIP had already won three European seats in the 1999 Euro-elections and had performed creditably, but not spectacularly, in the 1997 and 2001 general elections, they were cleverly branded and had a war chest of £2 million. But their sudden surge in visibility was in great part due to recruiting as a candidate for the European Parliament the former TV chat-show host, Robert Kilroy-Silk, who had been sacked five months previously by the BBC for describing Arabs as 'suicide-bombers, limb-amputators, women repressors' in his *Sunday Express* column.

Both the UKIP and the BNP made much of 'telling the truth', in contrast to other political parties. Kilroy-Silk was an ideal recruit for UKIP as he was in a sense a martyr of 'truth-telling,' having been dismissed from his popular TV show for having expressed grossly offensive views about Arabs. On resigning in January 2004, he said, 'It is my right to express my views, however uncomfortable they may be'; and on joining UKIP, his new leader welcomed a new colleague who was 'firm in his view, particularly with regard to the

retention of Britain's independence and sovereignty'. On the stump in Northampton, Kilroy-Silk declared, 'People feel they can't say what they really think, you can't tell the truth in this country today'. Later the same day in Corby several people told him 'what they really think' about Britain being 'flooded by immigrants' and 'getting them all out'. Kilroy-Silk, 'being a good listener, simply listened'.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Nick Griffin, addressing the BNP faithful, explained that he could be prosecuted for expressing his fantasies about the Islamic take-over of Britain and when the BBC blew the whistle on him (after, and not as intended, before the May elections) Griffin justified his words on Channel 4 News, arguing that free speech was being eroded in the UK. He said, 'What I am saying is entirely true and I am proud to be the only politician in Britain to be seriously warning about the danger of Islamification of this country.'<sup>4</sup>

### *The 2004 European and London Elections*

In May 2004 voters across the United Kingdom were presented with a range of political choices in the European, London and local elections. They had at least one vote (for the European Parliament) and a maximum of five in London for the European Parliament, the London Mayor (first and second preferences) and the London Assembly (constituency and assembly members). In areas of the country where local elections took place, citizens had between one and four votes depending upon the number of candidates standing in their local ward. The plurality of electoral systems in play gave voters an unprecedentedly wide choice of parties, with both the BNP and UKIP poised to move into prominence on the right of the political spectrum.

Turning first to London, the BNP's hopes were clearly dashed by the UKIP. The BNP mayoral candidate (Julian Leppert) gained 3 per cent of 1<sup>st</sup> preferences and 3.7 per cent of second preferences while the UKIP mayoral candidate (Frank Maloney) gained 6 per cent of 1<sup>st</sup> preferences and 10 per cent 2<sup>nd</sup> preferences (more detailed data on the allocation of these preferences across parties is provided below).

**Table 1: Mayoral election results, London 2004**

<b>Candidate Name</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>1st Preference</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>2nd Preference</b>	<b>%</b>
Livingstone	Labour	685,541	35.7	250,517	13.0
Norris	Conservative	542,423	28.2	222,559	11.6
Hughes	Liberal Democrat	284,645	14.8	465,704	24.3
Maloney	UK Independence Party	115,665	6.0	193,157	10.0
German	Respect	61,731	3.3	63,294	3.3
Leppert	British National Party	58,405	3	70,736	3.7
Johnson	Green	57,331	2.9	208,686	10.9
Gidoomal	Christian People's Alliance	41,696	2.2	56,721	2.9
Reid	IWCA	9,542	0.5	39,678	2.1
Nagalingam	Independent	6,692	0.4	20,391	1.1

In the assembly elections, UKIP leapt over the threshold for seat eligibility from 2 per cent in 2000 to 8.2 per cent in 2004 and obtained two top-up assembly members. The BNP narrowly missed the threshold for seat eligibility, with 4.7 per cent of the vote, up 2 per cent on 2000.

In the European elections, UKIP achieved third place with 16.1 per cent of the vote and won 11 or 12 MEPs. The BNP obtained nearly 5 per cent of the vote and narrowly missed winning a seat in the European Parliament. But their vote was up by 4 per cent on their showing in 1999. The full vote share was as follows in table 2:

**Table 2: European Election Results, 2004**

PARTY	VOTE		MEPs	
	+/- %	%	+/-*	TOTAL
Conservative	- 9.0	26.7	-8	27
Labour	- 5.4	22.6	-6	19
UKIP	9.2	16.1	10	12
Lib Dem	2.3	14.9	2	12
Green	0.0	6.3	2	2
BNP	3.9	4.9	0	0
Respect	1.5	1.5	0	0
SNP	- 1.3	1.4	0	2
PC	- 0.9	1.0	0	1
SSP	0.0	0.4	0	0
Other	3.2	4.6	+1	3

\*Seat change is adjusted to allow a direct comparison with the results from the 1999 election

Source: *BBC election results at www.bbc.co.uk*

The two parties saw themselves as desperate competitors in all these elections, but the media and the public seemed to perceive their support as part of the same phenomenon (similar to the rise of right wing parties in Scandinavia in the 1970s, as observed by Eatwell (2000: 408). What was and remains striking is that both parties adopted and maintain the same discourse: both boast that they ‘tell the truth’ about the dangers of immigration and loss of national identity that mainstream politicians not only suppress but seek also to prohibit. Such rhetoric has a powerful appeal among those who believe that most politicians neglect and talk down to them, as revealed in the focus groups (see below).

Turning to the vote in the elections for the London Assembly, Table 3 shows the variation in ‘list member’ vote for the BNP and UKIP. Even though the mean level for the two parties’ support is clearly different, the standard deviations are similar. In addition, we found that there was a correlation in the levels of support for the two parties across London

constituency (.87 sig at .001), suggesting that UKIP support is higher in areas where BNP support is also higher than the average, and vice versa. Clearly, these findings warrant further investigation of trends in support across the other parties in each area, but they do suggest that voters are using the parties as viable alternatives.

**Table 3. Assembly List Member Vote across Areas in the London 2004 Elections**

<b>Area</b>	<b>BNP %</b>	<b>UKIP %</b>	<b>BNP+UKIP %</b>
Havering & Redbridge	8.2	13.8	22.0
City & East	8.1	9.1	17.2
Bexley & Bromley	6.8	13.6	20.4
Greenwich & Lewisham	6.4	9.8	16.2
Ealing & Hillingdon	5.6	9.1	14.7
Croydon & Sutton	4.8	10.3	15.1
Enfield & Haringey	4.3	7.2	11.5
North East	4.1	6.9	11.0
Southwest	3.8	7.6	11.4
Merton & Wandsworth	3.3	6.1	9.4
Barnet & Camden	3.0	5.8	8.8
Lambeth & Southwark	2.9	5.3	8.2
Brent & Harrow	2.8	5.7	8.5
West Central	2.7	5.2	7.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>13.2</b>
Mean	4.8	8.2	
Std Dev	2.0	2.8	

*Source: London Election Results, provided by London Elects*

### ***Views and Preferences in 2004***

This paper argues that support for the BNP in the European and London elections of 2004 indicates a higher level of right wing support than the actual BNP vote or the classic literature on parties of the extreme right in British politics would suggest. Indicators of this support include the performance of the UKIP in the European elections and in London and responses to our survey questions. The figures suggest that apart from the actual voters are a penumbra of others who are more sympathetic to the party than would be expected from its

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

- First, JRCT funded the authors to commission eight exit polls from the company ICM for the 2004 local and European elections: Folkestone, Bristol, Birmingham, Walsall, Newport, Glasgow, Basildon and Luton. The localities chosen encompassed areas that have recorded high levels of BNP support in the past as well as areas that have not. The exit polls provided a base of 567 voters. The data have been weighted by the socio composition of these areas to make the inferences as if they were in a national sample.
- Second, the authors have analysed the 2004 State of the Nation poll, which questioned 2,373 citizens across Britain about a range of views and political preferences between 26<sup>th</sup> May 2004 and 4<sup>th</sup> June 2004.
- Third, the authors compared the above responses with a longer questionnaire presented to 1474 voters straight after the European and London elections on June 10<sup>th</sup> 2004, as part of the 2004 London Elections study, funded by the ESRC.

Some of the data appears to support the conventional wisdom. For example, the nation-wide European election exit poll found that 64.2 per cent of respondents said they disliked the BNP ‘a lot’, which seems to confirm the existence of a large majority of voters for whom extremist parties, pedaling racist ideas, are an anathema in British politics. Also the earlier State of the Nation 2004 poll found that 76 per cent of respondents said that they ‘could never vote’ for the BNP with trade unionists (83 per cent never) and ABC1 (80 per cent never) standing out. Proportions of voters who could ‘never vote for’ the BNP were high in Scotland (88%), Wales (85%) and the South West (87%). The BNP were easily the most unpopular party, with nearly half of respondents (47 per cent) saying that disliked them a lot, and 72 per cent disliking them overall.

In contrast, to support the idea of an underlying racist set of views among a significant minority of the British population, the European election exit poll found that 25.2 per cent of respondents felt that immigration was ‘the most important issue facing Britain today’, above unemployment (4.8) and the fight against terrorism (19.6) exceeded only by public services (46.9), which indicates the extent to which immigration is the top concern of voters. We contend that this points to a ‘racist rump’ of latent support for extreme right parties focusing on immigration. If someone does think that this issue is the most important facing the country they probably have negative views about these groups – though of course it is possible to answer the question believing that immigration needs urgent solution in terms of more integration and resources for immigrant groups. There is good reason to believe this figure has historical precedent, for example the 23 per cent of the electorate who in the British Election Study in 1970 believed ‘the government should assist immigrants home’ (Studlar 1978, 54).

Unsurprisingly, the immigration figure is linked to party support: in the European election exit poll, 77 per cent of BNP voters give this option, 24 per cent of Conservative supporters (no different from the average), as are 24 per cent of Liberal Democrats, with 10 per cent for Labour supporters. The main party that stands out as close to BNP is UKIP with 53 per cent of its voters opting for the immigration tag. This similarity in terms of views between UKIP and BNP supporters emerged as a strong theme in our focus groups (see below). The two parties may be bitter rivals, especially as the UKIP leadership clearly fears being tarred with the same brush as the BNP and is determined to ‘destroy’ their *alter ego*, or Mr Hyde.<sup>5</sup> But they draw upon the same well of social and political attitudes among the public as the BNP and have the potential to convert such attitudes into votes – especially among dissatisfied Conservatives (as we show later). The more respectable UKIP could act as a bridge to the supporters of the main parties who belong the ‘racist rump’. In his interview with *The Times* 19.0804, Nigel Farage, leader of UKIP’s 11 MEPs, expressly stated that his party could allow voters to ‘express their anxieties about immigration, but without having to vote for a party that is violent and racist’

Another striking indicator of the latent ‘racist rump’ comes from the question (asked of each party) where respondents were asked whether they ‘might vote’ or ‘could never vote’ for this party in the future. In the London 2004 poll 23 per cent of respondents claimed that they ‘might vote’ for the BNP in the future, indicating greater levels of potential support than previously recorded. These proportions of respondents suggesting that they ‘might vote for the BNP in the future’ were consistent across all the polls reported here. The *State of the Nation 2004* poll found that even while the BNP is most unpopular, some 18 per cent of the British population, rising to 20 per cent across England and 24 per cent in London, say that they ‘might vote’ for them in the future. In the European exit polls, we found that 18.7 per cent of respondents said that they might.

Turning to questions about ‘like’ and ‘dislike’ of the parties on a 7 point thermometer scale of like and dislike, running from ‘Like a lot’ (+3) to ‘Dislike a lot (-3), with Neutral in the middle (0), we found the following comparisons for positive and negative feelings for the main parties in London:

**Table 4: Feelings toward the political parties - London**

	<i>% positive</i>	<i>% neutral/DK</i>	<i>% negative</i>
Lab	45	18	36
Lib Dem	33	38	29
Green	32	42	38
Con	28	29	43
UKIP	19	33	47
BNP	8	27	66

*Source: London poll, 2004*

The proportions of respondents claiming that they ‘might vote for’ these parties in the future were higher than the figures for ‘like’, suggesting that people contemplate voting for these parties even though they do not have positive feelings towards them. While 45 per cent of respondents in the London poll said that they might vote for the BNP and/or UKIP in the future, only 24 per cent expressed positive feelings for either or both of the parties. The figures for ‘might vote for’ were more than twice as high as ‘like’ for all parties except for Labour (where the figure was just less than half) and the 46 respondents who had voted or ‘would have voted’ BNP in the European elections, for which the figure was the same (note

that 8 per cent of these BNP respondents did not say that they ‘might vote for the BNP in the future’, apparently seeing their vote here as a one-off).

**Table 5: London Poll: Views on BNP and/or UKIP:**

<i>Party voted for in Euro-elections</i>	<i>Might vote for in the Future</i>	<i>Positive feelings</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Con	47.9	21.5
Lab	36.0	17.2
Lib Dem	36.9	9.3
UKIP	87.0	75.0
BNP	91.3	91.3
Total	45.2	24.4

*Source: London Poll, 2004*

For the 2004 London poll, we also created a composite variable that tested whether voters had voted (or would have voted, for non-voters) for the BNP with any of their preferences in the European elections, the Mayoral election (first and second preferences) and either of the votes for the London assembly (constituency member and top-up member). We also coded the variable as positive if the respondent claimed the BNP as their party ID or whether they would vote for the BNP ‘if there was a general election tomorrow’. We found that 7.3 per cent of respondents had opted for the BNP in one of these choices. A further 16.4 per cent said that they ‘might vote for’ the BNP in the future, although they hadn’t in any of the tests applied here. Thus over a quarter (25.8 per cent) of respondents either had voted for the BNP, identified with them or considered that they might vote for them in the future. Breaking down these figures by age, we found that in London 9.6 per cent of 18-24 year olds had voted for the BNP with one of their preferences, and a total of 34.9 per cent of this age band feeling that they ‘might in the future’. This figure contrasted with the 35-44 age range, where only 7.2 had voted for them and 15.1 per cent felt that they ‘might in the future’. Perhaps surprisingly given the overwhelmingly male dominated image of the BNP, there were no significant gender differences.

Turning to UKIP, again in London, we created the same composite variable testing whether respondents had voted for UKIP with any of their preferences, identified with them

or considered that they would have voted for them in a general election tomorrow – and found that a total of 19.5 per cent of respondents had done so. In total, 41 respondents said that they might vote for UKIP in the future.

Accounts of racist or far right parties have often claimed that their supporters come from marginalised groups, such the unskilled white working class who live in poor areas that have had direct experience of immigration, which again supports a hypothesis that this form of politics appeals to groups out of the mainstream, whose social circumstances have caused them to express extremist views. We can reach back to the classic studies of intolerance: Stouffer (1955) and latterly Die and Ziegler (1992), who examined its prevalence in low education and social class. In the European exit poll, we can find evidence of the social class makeup. About half of the 22 BNP voters (45.5 per cent) came from classes D and E where as none of them came from classes A and B. In contrast, 27 per cent of non-BNP supporters came from classes D and E, and 10 per cent from A and B. This simple cross-tabulation is statistically significant in spite of the small numbers

**Table 6a: Vote BNP by Social Class**

	<i>Not vote BNP</i>	<i>Vote BNP</i>	<i>Total</i>
	%	%	%
A, B, C1	48.5	27.3	47.6
C2, D, E	51.5	72.7	52.4
Total	100	100	100
N	509	22	531

P=.055

*Source: European Election Exit Poll, 2004*

**Table 6b: Vote UKIP by Social Class**

	<i>Not vote UKIP</i>	<i>Vote UKIP</i>	<i>Total</i>
	%	%	%
A, B, C1	49.0	36.2	47.6
C2, D, E	51.0	63.8	52.4
Total	100	100	100
N	473	58	531

P=.065

*Source: European Election Exit Poll, 2004*

In the London poll, we found that a higher proportion of C1 (8.1 per cent) and C2 (11.2 per cent) had voted or identified with the BNP than AB (4.7 per cent) and DE (7.4 per cent). In summary, therefore, it seems that the rise of UKIP with a less extreme image has attracted supporters from a wider socio-demographic background who nevertheless in certain respects have similar views and fears, and likes and dislikes, as those attracted to the BNP, and ascribe importance to the same issues.

In addition, we can observe that less educated groups are more likely to vote BNP, though the differences are not statistically significant. The marginality thesis would indicate that it is older groups who vote BNP, but this does not appear to be the case.

**Table 7: Vote BNP by Age group**

	<i>Not vote BNP</i>	<i>Vote BNP</i>	<i>Total</i>
Younger than 45	36.7	59.1	37.6
45 and older	63.3	40.9	62.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	545	22	567

p-.03

*Source: European Election Exit Poll*

Breaking down by age for the European Election Exit poll, the band with the highest proportion voting or opting for UKIP was 45-54 (85.4 per cent), with the lowest 65+ at 73.9 per cent. There was a slight gender difference, with 18.3 per cent of men voting for UKIP and 20.6 per cent of women. For social class, again C1 and C2 had the highest proportions of UKIP voters but their positions observed in the London poll above were reversed: that is, 26.9 per cent of C1 and 21.4 per cent of C2 voted for UKIP. For AB the figure was 13.8 per cent and for DE, 16.8 per cent. So the parties appeal to different constituencies, which is to their advantage. They can target their different groups, and to a certain extent do not need to compete with each other.

We also examined the relationships between the parties in the voters' minds, investigating the type of linkages observed in the focus groups. First, we examined the

extent to which voters like similar parties. A correlation matrix using Pearson correlation coefficients shows the extent to which party liking either varies together or in opposition to each other.

**Table 8: Correlation Matrix of party like and dislike**

	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>BNP</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
Conservative	-.439**	-.136**	-.209**	-.105*	.288**
Labour		.130*	.014	-.145**	-.292**
Liberal Dems			.534**	-.145**	-.159**
Greens				.020	-.042
BNP					.239**

\* sig at .05 (two tailed), \*\* at .01

*Source: European Election Exit Poll, 2004*

Table 8 from the European exit poll suggests that the Conservatives are naturally opposed to Labour, less to the Liberal Democrats and the Greens. They are also opposed to the BNP, which is surprising but reflects the extent to which the BNP are out of the mainstream of British politics. But look at the link between UKIP and the Conservatives. Labour is differently positioned with positive correlations between their likings and that of the Greens and Liberal Democrats, but has a similar relationship to the BNP and UKIP as the Conservatives. The Liberal Democrats are differently placed as there is negative correlation between liking them and both that of the BNP and UKIP. But in spite of the different attitudes of the political parties to these two small parties, there is a positive correlation between these two, again suggesting that UKIP is a link between the BNP and the Conservatives even though the liking of the Conservative and BNP is negative.

In London, another indicator of voters' views of the two parties is provided by the two preferences cast for the London Mayor, a figure for which we were able to obtain actual election results from London Elects. Table 9 below shows that nearly half of BNP voters who cast a valid second preference gave it to UKIP and that 22 per cent of UKIP voters cast their second preference for the BNP, three times the percentage of Conservatives that did so.

**Table 9. How Voters for the Top Six Mayoral Candidates Cast their Second Preference Votes, London 2004**

	2 <sup>nd</sup> Preference:							
	Hughes	Johnson	Leppert	Livingstone	Maloney	Norris	Other	Total
<b>1<sup>st</sup> choice:</b>								
<b>Hughes, Lib Dem</b>	0	17.6	2.1	33.9	8.3	26.0	12.1	100.0
<b>Johnson, Green</b>	27.0	0	2.3	38.1	6.4	9.0	17.2	100.0
<b>Leppert, BNP</b>	7.6	6.7	0	7.7	49.2	22.0	6.8	100.0
<b>Livingstone, Lab</b>	45.5	21.7	1.6	0	4.8	11.9	14.4	100.0
<b>Maloney, UKIP</b>	14.0	7.5	21.9	10.1	0	35.7	10.8	100.0
<b>Norris, Con</b>	40.2	7.7	6.9	10.5	26.8	0	7.9	100.0

*Source: London Elects (note, includes only voters that cast two valid preferences and excludes repeat preferences)*

The final factor suggesting that party support for UKIP and the BNP is fungible is the willingness for voters to shift their votes between the parties. It may be the case that it makes sense, given the publicity about UKIP, for BNP voters to switch to UKIP in European elections. And the exit poll shows that this is just what happens. We find that about half (48 per cent) of those voting for BNP in local elections voted for UKIP in the European elections.

The other way in which parties relate to each other in the electorate's view that they might vote for them, which creates percentages that exceed those for party liking, as noted above. Creating a similar correlation matrix as with liking, we can observe a similar pattern of relationship, shown in Table 10 below. Because the variables are dichotomous, we present non-parametric correlations. Here we find similar relationships to the party liking table, but with some important differences. The negative correlation between BNP and Conservative disappears, as it does for Liberal Democrat support. It seems that there is more support for extremist parties when considering future voting decisions rather than liking or disliking. When voters say they might vote for a party they do not have to have a positive view about the party but vote for it because it reflects their underlying preferences.

**Table 10. Correlation Matrix of ‘might vote’ Across Parties**

	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Green</i>	<i>BNP</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
Conservative	-.240***	.007	-.123**	.028	.30***
Labour		.259***	.061	-.098*	-.164*
Liberal Dems			.389***	-.171	-.018
Greens				.088	.059
BNP					.291**

*Source: European Election Exit Poll, 2004*

### *Focus-group research after the 2004 European Election*

This section of the paper covers qualitative research which explored the ways in which voters viewed the BNP and UKIP during the 2004 European elections and appraised the salience of the issues the parties raised in the elections. ICM selected two focus groups, drawn to create a representative selection of voters in Northampton. We chose this town because it had a high BNP vote in the European elections and had been visited by Kilroy-Silk; and also because it gave us the opportunity to sample opinion in a postal-vote only area where we could not reach voters through our exit polls. We moderated two groups of eleven and twelve voters each, balanced between men and women. One was of people aged over 45; the other was of younger people.

Members in both groups associated the key issues of immigration and membership of the European Union, through links between opposition to immigration, anger and disquiet about the presence of asylum-seekers, resentment about the control that the EU exerts over UK policies and worries about the new EU constitution. Kilroy-Silk’s anti-Muslim views provided an explicit connection between the two parties. Participants agreed that ‘the big things’ were ‘what was going on in Europe’. As one put it, ‘I think people were talking about [the rise of the BNP] and the UKIP as well. And sort of how that mixed in with what Blair was doing with the European Constitution and he was sort of signing that and going ahead with that’. Similarly, asylum-seekers and immigration are a big issue in Northampton

identified by participants with both the BNP and UKIP. One participant said, ‘a lot of people have told me that they’re voting for BNP. I’ve said I hope BNP don’t get in but I’m going to vote as a statement because I’m angry’; and others then responded, ‘You said you made a statement against that so you voted for the BNP, which is a bit more of an extremist party, but definitely I think a lot of people voted for the UKIP....because it is a massive talking point, this problem with asylum seekers’; and, ‘I think some people might feel more strongly about Europe or about immigration but then they’re all singing from the same hymn sheet as such..’

The sense that both immigration and asylum and Europe were out of control was strongly felt. There was a close link between feelings that there was no control of asylum-seekers and the pervasive control that ‘Europe’ was seen to exert over UK policies. Britain was seen as a ‘pushover’ in both areas while there was some admiration for the French and Australians who in different context stick up for their national interests. France and Germany choose whether or not to obey EU laws which the UK weakly accepts. One exchange went as follows:

‘I think Europe’s going to try and take control of us’

‘They’ll be in control of England’

‘.....In Europe they’re laughing at us, you know, because we’re a joke’.

‘We’re a pushover’

‘Yeah’

‘It’s like with immigration.’

Such statements commanded general assent in phases of the debates in both groups, centring on the presence of asylum-seekers crowding the city centre and speaking foreign languages, with their leather jackets, mobile phones, satellite TVs, and so on, gaining privileges and ‘freebies’ from the authorities, affecting health, education and transport systems, pushing up council and other taxes (‘We’re paying for them to stay here’). Participants readily exchanged urban myths and negative media stories. Immigration, if not checked and controlled, would ‘swamp’ public services, so a party that stood up and said clearly ‘This is our stance’ would influence voters. The tenor of debate often verged close

to overt racism and we noted that no one in the younger focus group attempted to challenge such ideas even with the presence of an ethnic minority woman, who remained silent during the proceedings. In fact, they either agreed or stayed silent themselves, suggesting that in everyday conversation these ideas are not hidden or forgotten. It seems that in Northampton at least and as Leach et al argue (2000: 461), ‘old’ racism is alive and well in Western Europe despite the fact that respondents tend not to endorse such beliefs explicitly’.

Both focus groups revealed a sense of frustrated nationalism; both areas of weakness are perceived as being the fault of a ‘pussy-footing’ political class that denies the dangers of immigration and European power – that lies to itself and hence to the people. The BNP and UKIP rhetoric of ‘truth-telling’ seems to represent a covert expression of solidarity with racist concerns and the fears that fuel them while at the same time defining their politicians as plain-speaking people who will risk persecution for their defiance of liberal hegemony and PC laws and attitudes. Hence:

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

You know, you can’t speak your mind – it’s racist this, sexist that, and everything else, and I think that’s to blame for a lot of things because a lot of things need to be said, but no-one’s had the guts to stand up and say it because it will cost them their career’ [a clear reference to Kilroy-Silk]

He [Kilroy-Silk] stood up and said something. He didn’t say anything that was out of order but . . . it didn’t go down very well with a lot of people. He was shouted down and it cost him his job. But what did he say that wasn’t true?’

‘Yeah, he told the truth’.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has sought to challenge the view that support for far right parties in British politics is limited to a ‘lunatic’ fringe. We have gone beyond the simple voting figures to explore some of the underlying attitudes to the political parties and connections between them in the minds of the voters. We have found some evidence that support for the BNP and UKIP is fungible. Although they tap different segments of the electorate, voters

see the parties in similar terms and to some extent swap their votes between them. What links the parties is their strong views about race with both set of voters stressing the importance of immigration as a policy issue. The focus groups illustrate the reasoning inside the voters' heads – they link their concerns about Eastern European enlargement and the wider immigration issue. With enlargement as part of the spectrum of views, the argument quickly links to the 'threat' that greater EU integration poses. Hence there is a clear connection between the core policy issue for UKIP and that of the BNP. Whereas the BNP lacks the political skills and credibility to appeal to more than a very small minority of voters in their voting choices, what the voters have in UKIP is a much more acceptable party that is skillfully able to play to 'common sense' ideas, and is not overt in using racist ideas, and which the main parties find hard to challenge.

When asked about their views on whether they might vote for these parties and whether they like them or not, much larger segments of the population express this view with regard to the minor parties than would be indicated by the voting figures alone. This would indicate that there is a significant potential support for both these parties. Voters may have picked up the opportunities that these parties have with new voting systems. As voters start to learn to exercise their choices in a sophisticated manner, they may turn their dispositions into voting choices in the future. In this way, Britain's segment of voters who express non-liberal views on immigration may both elect more representatives and drive the policy debate in the media and the policy positions of the larger political parties

Needless to say, we have not proved the existence of a racist rump in British politics, such a thing is almost impossible to detect using survey instruments. The strong views openly expressed in the focus group are hidden with conventional opinion polls. We only get to peek at these views in surveys through the policy preferences of respondents, their party likes and dislikes and from potential voting intentions. That what we see does not conform to the conventional view of British party politics and its political culture is enough to suggest that further research needs to tap into these underlying views.

**Notes.**

1. This research was carried out as part of a wider project looking at the BNP in British politics funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, which includes the European Election Exit Polls and the Northampton focus groups reported here. The 2004 London Elections Study is funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council, with co-funding from the JRCT for questions relating to the BNP. The 2004 State of the Nation Poll, also referred to in the paper, was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust. The authors would like to gratefully acknowledge these sources of support and thank the funders and co-investigators on all three projects.
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<sup>1</sup> The image of the constitutional "rock" comes from the vivid account of the Powell phenomenon in Richard Crossman's *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, volume 3, [CANT GIVE PAGES & publisher as my version is a book club one]

<sup>2</sup> SORRY, PSE OUT REF IN – I THINK HM HAS COPY; OTHERWISE JRCT, 01904 627810

<sup>3</sup> See the account on Scotsman.com

<sup>4</sup> *The Secret Agent*, BBC-TV documentary, DATE?; Channel 4 News, July 2004

<sup>5</sup> In an interview Nigel Farage, leader of the UKIP Group on the European Parliament, pledged that his party would set out to destroy the BNP at the next election and expressed his dislike of the gibe that UKIP are the 'BNP in blazers', *The Times*, 19 August 2004