

Study: More support for BNP in segregated areas

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Study suggests BNP support in Bradford arises out of high level of segregation amongst whites and non-whites

(PhysOrg.com) -- New Oxford University research shows that membership of the British National Party (BNP) is higher where whites and non-whites live in segregated areas.

The research, using the BNP database posted on 'Wikileaks' and widely reported in 2008, located over 12,000 members and matched them with Census data on more than 200,000 neighbourhoods in Britain. Dr Michael Biggs, a sociologist at the University of Oxford, carried out the research with a graduate student, Steve Knauss. Their paper will be presented at the British Sociological Association conference in London today, and will be published online this month by the *European Sociological Review*.

The paper finds that within towns and cities, BNP membership depends on the segregation as well as the number of non-whites. For instance, whites are more likely to belong to the BNP in a highly segregated city

like Bradford where just under a quarter (22 per cent) of the population is non-white, compared to a well-integrated area like Brent in London where over half (55 per cent) of the population is non-white.

Within neighbourhoods, whites are less likely to belong to the BNP where they have a substantial proportion of non-white neighbours, according to the research. When the non-white category is divided into ethnic groups, BNP support is higher in towns and cities where British Asians lived rather than Black British. When religion is analysed, BNP membership responds primarily to Muslim communities.

BNP membership was found to be higher in areas with lower education levels and with more self-employed people and small business owners. Membership is also higher where people live in overcrowded housing and rent from private landlords rather than owning their own properties or living in council houses. White people are more likely to belong to the BNP in Labour constituencies, says the research.

Dr Biggs suggests that some white people feel threatened by segregated minority communities. Close contact among neighbours, however, breaks down racial prejudice. The research, surprisingly, finds that higher unemployment actually reduces the probability of BNP membership. This finding suggests that economic competition is less of a threat than cultural difference. Whites may also perceive a political threat from concentrated non-white communities, with Labour being perceived as favouring minorities.

Dr Biggs said: ‘The BNP thrives where the non-white, particularly South Asian or Muslim, population is large, but only if this population is also highly segregated. Segregation means that white British people are likely less to have contact with non-whites beyond the immediate neighbourhood. It also creates a greater sense of cultural or even political threat.’

Within Britain, the party's heartlands were the Pennines, Leicestershire, and Essex. The researchers note that BNP voters are not always concentrated in the same areas as its members. The membership database reveals significant levels of support for the party in Wales and even in Scotland, which is not apparent in voting figures. Therefore membership will not necessarily translate into electoral success for the party.

Dr Biggs added: 'We have been careful not to identify anyone who appears on the database and all our data appear in an aggregated form.'

Provided by Oxford University

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