

# Explaining Membership in the British National Party: A Multilevel Analysis of Contact and Threat<sup>†</sup>

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**Abstract:** Support for the British National Party (BNP) has grown exponentially in the last decade. Using a leaked membership list, we locate over 12,000 members and match them with Census data on more than 200,000 neighbourhoods in Britain. Two established theories of ethnic hostility—contact and threat—provide opposing predictions about the effect of the proportion of minorities. These predictions are tested with a multilevel analysis of variation in the probability of white British adults belonging to the BNP. The probability is lower in neighbourhoods with a substantial proportion of non-whites. The probability is higher, by contrast, in cities with a larger proportion of non-whites, but only where they are also highly segregated. Within the non-white category, we find that South Asians matter rather than blacks; results for Muslims are similar. These findings show how contact and threat can be disentangled by considering different spatial scales, and also demonstrate the importance of segregation.

## Introduction

Why do some people in the majority denigrate or dislike minorities defined by ethnicity, race, religion, or foreign birth? Why in some does this animosity dominate other political issues, leading them to vote for—or even join—parties of the extreme right? According to an enduring sociological theory, this depends on the majority's perception of threat from the minority. This threat is partly a function of the individual's social position: hostility is more likely to be felt by those who bring few skills or credentials to the labour market and who have low status in the social hierarchy. In addition, threat is a function of the size of the minority: hostility is more likely to be felt by those living in an area where the minority proportion is high. The opposite prediction, however, can be derived from a theory which is strongly supported by social psychology. At its simplest, contact theory holds that prejudice is reduced by social

interaction. By implication, those living in an area where the minority proportion is high are more likely to have regular social interaction with them, and are therefore less likely to feel hostility. In short, two established theories make opposing predictions about the relationship between the minority proportion and hostility felt by the majority: contact implies that it is negative, and threat specifies that it is positive.

Our article tests these contrasting predictions by conducting a multilevel analysis of membership in the British National Party (BNP). The extreme right in the UK has long been exceptionally weak in comparison with the rest of Europe. It is regularly omitted from cross-national analyses (Knigge, 1998; Klandermans and Mayer, 2006; Ivarsflaten, 2008; Arzheimer, 2009), or treated as a case of absence (Norris, 2005; Ignazi, 2006). In the last decade, however, the BNP has garnered increasing support. Almost 50,000 people voted for it in the 2001 Westminster election; more than half a million

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did so in 2010. This number is all the more impressive because the first-past-the-post electoral system discourages voting for small parties. In the European election in 2009, based on proportional representation, the BNP gained over nine hundred thousand votes, winning two seats in the European Parliament.

Quantitative investigation of the BNP, as with other extreme-right parties, focuses on its voters, using electoral results (Bowyer, 2008) or political polls (Ford and Goodwin, 2010; Cutts *et al.*, 2011). Members and activists are much less studied, and interviews are the primary source (Goodwin, 2010). Yet 'it is very clear that extreme right activists do not think like extreme right voters', as Klandermans and Mayer (2005: 272) conclude. The leaking of the BNP's membership list, comprising over 12,000 members, provides a unique opportunity to systematically analyse the most committed supporters of the extreme right. Membership in the BNP is highly stigmatized, more so than in comparable European parties. This stigmatization was manifested when the list was posted on wikileaks.org: hundreds of members suffered harassment and vandalism, and at least one was fired (*Observer*, 22 March 2009; *Guardian*, 1 September 2009). For our purpose, the exceptional spatial resolution of the membership data—much finer than electoral results or political polls—enables us to disentangle the effects of ethnic composition at different scales.

## Theory

An efflorescence of theorizing about ethnic prejudice occurred in the United States after the Second World War, when the memory of Nazism was fresh and where the problem of institutionalized racial oppression in the American South was urgent (Williams, 1947). We can derive contact and threat theories from Blumer's (1958) exposition of 'race prejudice as a sense of group position'. This prejudice can be condensed into two intentional propositions, formulated from the point of view of the majority: first, 'we are different from and superior to them'; second, 'they have designs upon our prerogatives'.<sup>1</sup> This article uses the term 'majority' for convenience, but Blumer's analysis emphasizes that political and cultural dominance matters as much as numerical preponderance.

The first proposition yields contact theory. The majority's sense of difference and superiority should be eroded by social interaction with the minority, at least under certain conditions. In Allport's (1954: 281) classic formulation:

Prejudice... may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit

of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports..., and provided it is of a sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups.

This theory has since been developed primarily by social psychologists (Brown and Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006, 2008). Using experimental treatments or longitudinal designs, researchers have demonstrated that increased contact genuinely causes a reduction in prejudice. Causation also operates in the reverse direction—from lower prejudice to greater contact—but this direction explains less of the association. Contact operates primarily through psychological mechanisms that attenuate anxiety and increase empathy, rather than by enhanced knowledge.

The second belief—'they have designs on our prerogatives'—leads to threat theory. The majority's perception of threat should increase with the numerical size of the minority. 'Migration of a visibly different group into a given area increases the likelihood of conflict; the probability of conflict is greater... the larger the ratio of the incoming minority to the resident population', as Williams (1947: 57–58) proposed. Allport (1954: 227–233) also recognized this theory. It was systematically tested and elaborated by Blalock (1957, 1967: chapter 5), who distinguished competition for resources and for power. We prefer a generic formulation of threat, for the prediction about numerical size should hold whether the majority feels threatened in economic, political, or cultural domains.

Threat and contact theories are both plausible, but they appear to make opposing predictions about the size of the minority population. A larger minority population constitutes a greater threat, but it also means more opportunity for contact. This apparent contradiction could be resolved by differentiating the spatial scale at which these theories operate. Contact involves frequent interaction among individuals, which predominantly occurs over shorter distances: living on the same street, taking children to the same school, joining the same association or club, going to the same shops. Threat, in contrast, can be perceived over a greater distance, because economic and political competition occurs at a municipal, regional, and national level.

Beyond the size of the minority, threat theory makes other predictions. The perception of threat is also a function of the general economic situation and of the individual's own circumstances. Threat should be greater where unemployment is high and economic growth is sluggish (Quillian, 1995). It should also be greater for individuals in the majority who are most

exposed to economic competition from the minority, and for those who have the lowest status in society; in capitalist societies, of course, status and resources are highly correlated.

How do these theories fare in accounting for hostility towards immigrant minorities in Europe who trace their ancestry back to the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, or Asia? We focus on multilevel analyses that take as the dependent variable either prejudice or support for the extreme right. This selective review ignores cross-national differences in political institutions and party organization (Carter, 2005; Norris, 2005), as they are not relevant for our analysis of variation within Britain.

Threat theory successfully predicts individual characteristics. Lower education, for example, is associated with hostility towards minorities.<sup>2</sup> The theory's prediction about economic context, in contrast, is not well supported. In a pioneering analysis, Quillian (1995) does find greater prejudice in countries where economic growth is lower; this interacts positively with the proportion of non-European citizens. Subsequent cross-national analyses do not find a positive effect for unemployment (Knigge, 1998; Lubbers *et al.*, 2002). Arzheimer (2009) finds that a high level of either unemployment or asylum seekers increases voting for the extreme right, as threat predicts—but that high levels of both together reduce such voting. Analyses of variation within a country do not identify an effect of unemployment at the regional or municipal level (Lubbers and Scheepers, 2001; Bowyer, 2008; Rink *et al.*, 2009). Note that as an individual characteristic, unemployment does predict hostility to minorities (Schneider, 2008; Ford and Goodwin, 2010); it is as a contextual variable that findings are ambiguous.

When it comes to the proportion of minorities, threat theory also falls short. Quillian's cross-national analysis (1995) finds that prejudice increases with the proportion of non-European citizens. Some subsequent studies confirm this finding at the national level (Lubbers and Scheepers, 2001; Lubbers *et al.*, 2002; Semyonov *et al.*, 2006; Schneider, 2008), but Arzheimer (2009) finds the negative interaction with unemployment noted above. Below the national level, results are also mixed (Lubbers *et al.*, 2006). Rink *et al.* (2009) identify a surprising non-monotonic relationship in Flanders: once the proportion of people originating from Muslim countries exceeds about 5 per cent, support for the Vlaams Blok declines (see also Savelkoul *et al.*, 2010). Ford and Goodwin (2010) show that support for the BNP increases with the proportion of people of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage within the Parliamentary constituency.<sup>3</sup> Bowyer (2008) makes an important contribution by finding opposing effects at different

scales: voting for the BNP increases with the proportion of people of this heritage in the city, but decreases with that proportion in the ward (a smaller unit of about 8,000 households). The former is consonant with threat theory, and the latter with contact theory.

Contact theory is usually tested by asking respondents the proportion of minorities among their friends, colleagues, and neighbours. As contact theory predicts, having minorities as friends and colleagues reduces prejudice—or is negatively associated with prejudice, as these results are generally cross-sectional (Savelkoul *et al.*, 2010). Schneider (2008) finds also that contact moderates threat: having immigrant friends or colleagues reduces the extent to which the immigrant proportion—at the national level—increases prejudice. As for neighbours, some studies find a similar negative association with prejudice (Turner *et al.*, 2007; Schneider, 2008) whereas others do not (Quillian, 1995). Such equivocal findings could be explained by neighbourhood composition having an indirect effect via friendship (Semyonov and Glikman, 2009). Subjective reports of the ethnic composition of a loosely defined locality, like the 'area where you currently live', are inevitably imprecise.

In sum, empirical research on contemporary Europe has yet to resolve the apparent contradiction between contact and threat theories. We meet this challenge by investigating contextual effects within small neighbourhoods as well as cities. Our explanandum is a measure of extreme prejudice, in action rather than attitude: the proportion of white British adults who belong to the BNP. We test first whether contact and threat theories operate at different scales. Due to enhanced contact, *a higher minority proportion within a neighbourhood makes BNP membership less likely (Hypothesis 1)*. Due to inflated threat, *a higher minority proportion within a city makes BNP membership more likely (Hypothesis 2)*.

While literature has focused on the size of the minority population, we should also consider the degree of segregation. Here contact and threat theories make convergent predictions. For a given minority proportion, greater segregation will reduce the opportunity for contact. Although occupational segregation might reduce the economic threat to the majority (Olzak, 1992), spatial segregation will increase the cultural threat. It makes difference—butchers advertising halal meat, women wearing headscarves—more visible, and it makes assimilation seem more uncertain. Due to reduced contact and increased threat, we hypothesize that *greater spatial segregation within a city makes BNP membership more likely (Hypothesis 3)*.

Turning aside from minority population, we also test threat theory's prediction that *higher unemployment within a city makes BNP membership more likely*

(Hypothesis 4). The theory's prediction about individual insecurity will not be formulated as a hypothesis, because it has been proven by so many studies. Measures of insecurity will be included in our analysis, of course, in order to identify the hypothesized contextual effects.

## Data and Method

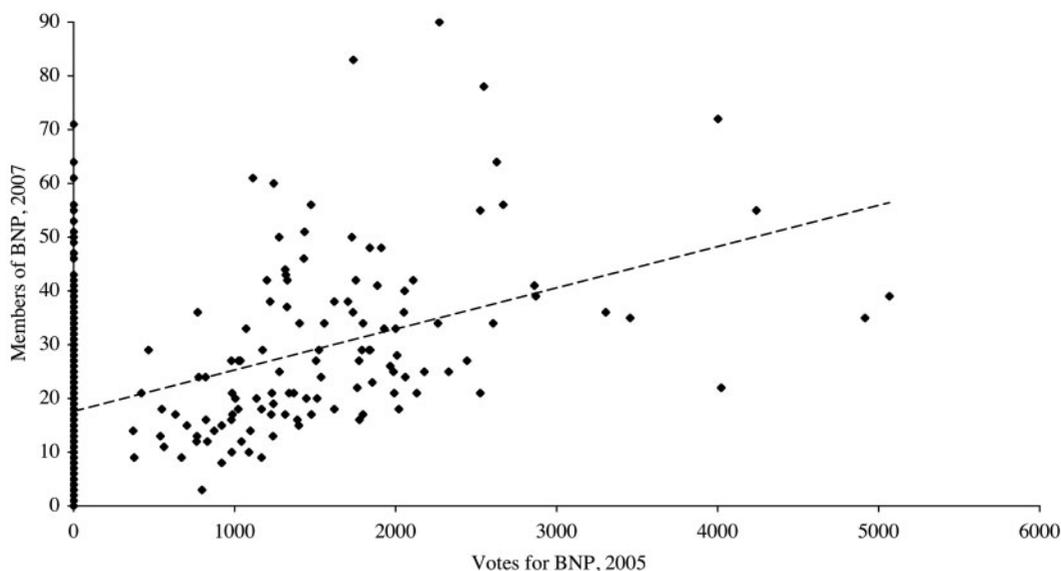
The BNP's membership list was leaked in November 2008 by a disgruntled activist who had been expelled late in 2007; he has since admitted responsibility and been convicted (*Guardian*, 1 September 2009). The BNP never challenged the list's authenticity, merely stating that it was out of date. The list is apparently a complete record of membership at November–December 2007.<sup>4</sup> Of the 13,009 individuals listed, 30 were missing a current address, 138 had a foreign address, and 41 lived in Northern Ireland. Of the remaining members, 12,536 (97.9 per cent) can be precisely located in Britain using the postcode field of their address (Office of National Statistics, 2004, 2008). Postcodes provide exceptionally fine resolution, down to the street level.

The distribution of members diverges significantly from the distribution of voters. Figure 1 compares votes cast for the BNP in the 2005 election to Westminster, when it received almost 200,000 votes.<sup>5</sup> The correlation of votes with membership, across the 628 constituencies in Britain, is surprisingly modest ( $r = 0.46$ ). The party contested only one in five seats, but the correlation is

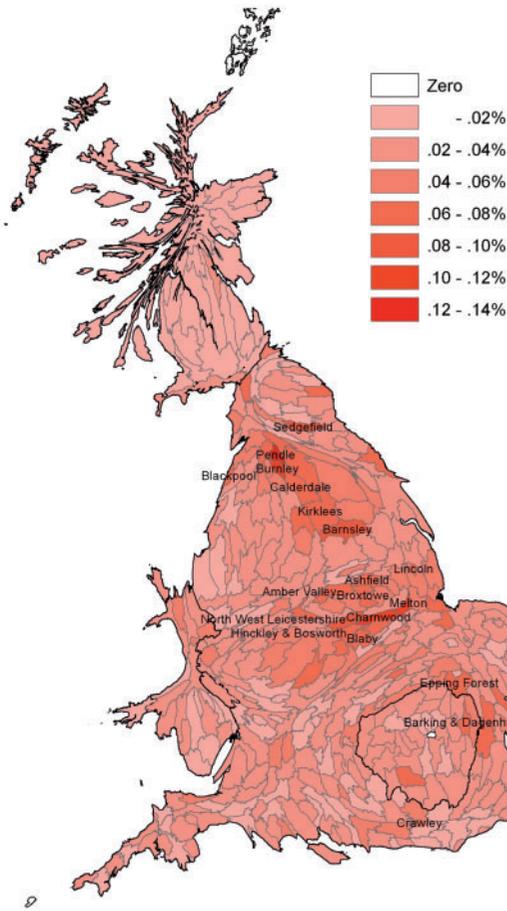
scarcely higher in those alone. Voting also gives a misleading impression of the national distribution of the party's support. Wales and Scotland provide over three times the proportion of members compared with voters.

Members must be matched with a population denominator. Data come from the 2001 Census, conducted in April. The great majority of members on the leaked list had joined since this date, as the BNP had 2,173 members in November 2001 (Copsey, 2008: 137). The BNP recruited only 'indigenous Caucasian' people (Copsey, 2008: 238). We count adults who defined their ethnicity as 'White British', including 'White Scottish'.<sup>6</sup> The proportion of white British adults belonging to the BNP was 0.032 per cent across Britain. Figure 2 depicts the geographical distribution. The cartogram divides Britain into 408 'local authority districts', comprising rural areas, towns, and cities. Each authority is scaled according to the number of white British adults. The Isles of Scilly is smallest, Birmingham is largest; London (outlined in black) is divided into 33 authorities, corresponding to its boroughs. Each authority is shaded to show the proportion of white British adults belonging to the BNP; those with over 0.07 per cent are named. The party's heartlands are the Pennines, Leicestershire, and Essex.

For statistical analysis, we use the finest geographical unit defined by the Census, the 'output area'. This is a very small neighbourhood, the median covers an area of 6 hectares and contains 280 people. There are 218,038 neighbourhoods (as they will be termed) in Britain: the



**Figure 1** Support for the BNP by Westminster constituency



**Figure 2** BNP members as proportion of white British adults by authority

BNP was present in 10,165 (4.7 per cent) of them. Most of those had a single member; 11 was the maximum. The highest proportion was 5.7 per cent.

We begin with independent variables capturing economic insecurity. These are measured ecologically, as the fraction of people in the neighbourhood with a particular characteristic, though they are proxies for individual characteristics predicting support for the BNP.<sup>7</sup> Education is divided into three categories: no qualifications, qualifications below university degree, and degree (denominated by people aged 16–74 years). Class is divided into five categories, from routine and semi-routine to managerial and professional (denominated by occupied population). The unemployment rate is also measured (denominated by the economically active).<sup>8</sup> Alongside these sociological staples, housing is included because the BNP promotes the myth that foreigners are given privileged access to public housing. Housing tenure is divided into three categories: owned or

mortgaged, rented from the local authority, and private rental (including other arrangements). Overcrowding, as defined by the Census, is also measured. (In both cases the denominator is households.) We expect, then, that white British adults are more likely to belong to the BNP in neighbourhoods with lower education, lower social class, higher unemployment, more private renting, and greater overcrowding. Control variables are entered to reflect findings that BNP voters are disproportionately male and middle aged (Ford and Goodwin, 2010; Cutts *et al.*, 2011). Additional controls are population density and the proportion of people living in communal establishments like prisons.

For Hypotheses 1–3, we define minority—from the viewpoint of white British—in various ways. The simplest is non-white. Non-whites comprise 8.1 per cent of the population (whites who do not identify as British comprise 3.7 per cent). A second classification differentiates the largest non-white ethnic groups: South Asian (3.6 per cent) and black (2.0 per cent).<sup>9</sup> For convenience, we refer to South Asians, but it should be emphasized that people in this group are identified as ‘Asian or Asian British’, and half are British born. The BNP has come to define their enemy in religious rather than racial terms, especially since 2001, focusing on Muslims. Most Muslims originate from the Indian subcontinent, and voting for the BNP responds to South Asians rather than to blacks (Bowyer, 2008; Ford and Goodwin, 2010). We can also measure religion directly. Muslims comprise 2.8 per cent of the population.<sup>10</sup> Alternatively, we can measure country of birth. 8.5 per cent of the population were born outside the UK. These four definitions—non-white, South Asian and black, Muslim, and foreign born—will be investigated in separate models because the figures are very highly correlated.

For Hypothesis 1, we measure the minority proportion in the neighbourhood, which approximates the extent to which a white British person interacts with the minority.<sup>11</sup> This is expected to have a negative effect on BNP membership. For Hypothesis 2, we measure the minority proportion in the authority. These 408 cities, towns, and rural areas are the most important units of local government, and the most appropriate level for assessing competition in the labour and housing markets. At the authority level, minority proportion is expected to have a positive effect, the opposite from the neighbourhood level. For Hypothesis 3, we measure segregation—the extent to which minority and majority is unevenly distributed—by the index of dissimilarity:

$$\frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n \left| \frac{m_i}{\sum m_i} - \frac{w_i}{\sum w_i} \right|$$

where  $m$  is the minority population,  $w$  is the white British population, and  $i$  indexes the  $n$  neighbourhoods within the authority.<sup>12</sup> Ranging from 0 to 1, the index is conveniently interpreted as the proportion of minorities who would have to move to another neighbourhood in order to equalize their distribution with white British people (or vice versa).<sup>13</sup> Segregation is expected to have a positive effect on BNP membership.

These three variables are related, of course. The minority proportion at the neighbourhood and authority level is highly correlated. With over two hundred thousand neighbourhoods, however, all four corners of the scatterplot are filled. The correlation of both proportions with segregation is low and negative, as the highest levels of segregation occur where the minority proportion approaches zero. Therefore, we construct an interaction term between the index of dissimilarity and the minority proportion at the authority level (Hypothesis 2 × 3). We expect this interaction term to be positive, because BNP membership should be most likely where contact beyond the neighbourhood is low (due to high segregation) while threat is high (due to a high minority proportion).

For Hypothesis 4, we measure the unemployment rate within the authority. This is only modestly correlated ( $r=0.45$ ) with unemployment at the neighbourhood level, introduced above as a proxy for individual insecurity. Following the literature, we also construct an interaction term between the unemployment rate and the minority proportion within the authority (Hypothesis 2 × 4). We expect that insecurity and threat multiply each other, and so predict this term to be positive.

Social, economic, and demographic variables derived from the Census operate at one remove from the political processes of campaigning and recruitment. Trying to incorporate these processes, however, would introduce problems of endogeneity. For example, even if we had a systematic index of BNP recruitment activity, this would partly reflect the distribution of existing members. Nevertheless, it is worth investigating two political variables. A binary variable is coded for three towns where severe ethnic rioting erupted in the spring and summer of 2001: Bradford, Burnley, and Oldham (Bagguley and Hussain, 2008). This was the worst outbreak of ethnic conflict in Britain since the mid-1980s, and nothing on this magnitude has occurred since. The rioting indicated reciprocal mobilization by people of South Asian heritage and by the extreme right. Indeed, the initial riot at Oldham was preceded by active campaigning by the National Front (an ancestral racist organization) and the BNP; the BNP's leader announced that he would stand for Parliament there. So this variable

compounds two factors: manifest threat, as whites might perceive it, and campaigning by extreme-right activists. Because most of the members at the end of 2007 had joined since 2001, the problem of endogeneity is less pronounced.

The second political variable is support for the Labour Party. White British people could perceive a greater political threat where Labour is strong, because the party captures a disproportionate share of minority votes and is most closely associated with policies promoting multiculturalism and enabling immigration. We measure the proportion of votes received by the Labour candidate at the 2005 Westminster election, which is highly correlated with the proportion in the previous election in 2001 ( $r=0.97$ ).<sup>14</sup> The geographical unit is the constituency. The 628 constituencies crosscut the boundaries of authorities.

Control variables are coded for Wales and Scotland, where peripheral nationalisms compete with British identity.<sup>15</sup>

The method of analysis is multilevel binomial logistic regression (*xtnlogit*, *binomial* in Stata 10). This models the dependent variable, here the number of BNP members, as the number of successes resulting from a series of Bernoulli trials, here the number of white British adults. Thus it estimates the underlying probability of BNP membership, varying across neighbourhoods. The method treats multiple members within a neighbourhood as independent, which is not strictly correct. In the neighbourhood with 11 members, they lived in 5 households; 2 of the houses were next door and another was the next house but one. An alternative would be to collapse the number of members into a binary variable—any BNP members in the neighbourhood—and to enter the number of white British adults as an independent variable. This alternative disregards useful information (half a dozen members differs from one) and so is not reported here, but the results are almost identical. The multilevel model introduces random intercepts at the authority level; authorities contain from 9 to 5,163 neighbourhoods, with a median of 400. The model is estimated with seven integration points.

## Results

In Table 1, Model 1 begins with variables for insecurity, along with control variables. Model 2 adds contextual variables, defining minority as non-whites. Model 3 drops the insignificant interaction term for unemployment at the authority level (Hypothesis 2 × 4), substituting a quadratic term. Coefficients are expressed as odds ratios, indicating how much an increase of one unit in

**Table 1** Probability of white British adults belonging to BNP

Binomial logistic regression	1			2			3		
	Odds	SE	P-value	Odds	SE	P-value	Odds	SE	P-value
<i>Neighbourhood</i>									
1000 people per sq km	0.98	0.00	0.00***	0.98	0.00	0.00***	0.98	0.00	0.00***
Living in communal establishments	0.36	0.06	0.00***	0.35	0.06	0.00***	0.35	0.06	0.00***
Aged: 30–65 years	2.10	0.39	0.00***	2.06	0.39	0.00***	2.07	0.39	0.00***
Male	1.34	0.39	0.32	1.25	0.37	0.45	1.25	0.37	0.44
Education: no qualifications	1.40	0.22	0.03*	1.33	0.21	0.07	1.34	0.21	0.07
Education: university degree	0.20	0.04	0.00***	0.19	0.04	0.00***	0.19	0.04	0.00***
Unemployment	1.14	0.33	0.64	1.11	0.33	0.71	1.13	0.33	0.69
Class: managerial and professional	0.71	0.14	0.09	0.70	0.14	0.08	0.71	0.14	0.09
Class: intermediate occupations	1.14	0.30	0.63	0.98	0.27	0.93	0.99	0.27	0.97
Class: small employers and self-employed	1.42	0.32	0.12	1.66	0.38	0.03*	1.65	0.37	0.03*
Class: lower supervisory and technical	1.28	0.42	0.46	1.27	0.42	0.48	1.27	0.42	0.48
House: owned	0.79	0.06	0.00**	0.80	0.06	0.01**	0.80	0.06	0.00**
House: rented from council	0.62	0.05	0.00***	0.62	0.05	0.00***	0.62	0.05	0.00***
Overcrowded housing	2.59	0.51	0.00***	2.47	0.51	0.00***	2.46	0.51	0.00***
Non-white proportion (H1)				2.43	0.72	0.00**	2.44	0.72	0.00**
Non-white proportion squared (H1)				0.18	0.09	0.00***	0.18	0.09	0.00***
<i>Authority</i>									
Non-white proportion (H2)				0.49	0.67	0.60	0.22	0.22	0.14
Non-white segregation (H3)				0.91	0.30	0.78	0.82	0.27	0.55
Non-white proportion × segregation (H2 × 3)				456	1138	0.01*	595	1460	0.01*
Unemployment (H4)				0.16	0.26	0.27	5578	31815	0.13
Unemployment squared (H4)							0.00	0.00	0.04*
Non-white proportion × unemployment (H2 × 4)				0.00	0.00	0.32			
Ethnic riot, 2001				1.60	0.39	0.06	1.58	0.39	0.06
<i>Constituency and nation</i>									
Labour vote, 2005				1.53	0.20	0.00**	1.49	0.19	0.00**
Wales	0.68	0.07	0.00***	0.72	0.07	0.00**	0.70	0.07	0.00***
Scotland	0.34	0.04	0.00***	0.37	0.04	0.00***	0.38	0.04	0.00***
<i>Random effects (standard deviation)</i>									
Authority	0.405	0.018	0.00***	0.378	0.017	0.00***	0.376	0.017	0.00***
R <sup>2</sup>		0.072			0.079			0.080	
<i>Unexplained variance</i>									
Neighbourhood (%)		88.4			88.3			88.2	
Authority (%)		4.4			3.8			3.8	

P-value for two-tailed test; \*\*\*P < 0.001, \*\*P < 0.01, \*P < 0.05.

N = 218,038 neighbourhoods; 408 authorities.

the independent variable would multiply the probability of white British adults belonging to the BNP (because the probability is so low, probability and odds are interchangeable).<sup>16</sup> As is customary, standard errors and statistical tests are reported even though the data are not sampled from a population. Statistical inference suggests whether an observed pattern could have been produced by chance, or whether that is so unlikely that we may attribute a causal relationship. R<sup>2</sup> is computed assuming that the binary outcome represents an underlying continuous variable (Snijders and Bosker, 1999). Unexplained variance is partitioned between neighbourhoods

and authorities. With a binary outcome, unexplained variance is inevitably high; this is exacerbated here by the use of ecological measures and of course the absence of variables measuring subjective attitudes.

At the neighbourhood level, three control variables have strong effects. Population density has a pronounced negative impact, with BNP membership far less likely in urban areas. The probability of membership is markedly reduced by the proportion living in communal establishments; such people are unlikely to belong to political parties or at least to register with their institutional address. The probability of membership rises with the

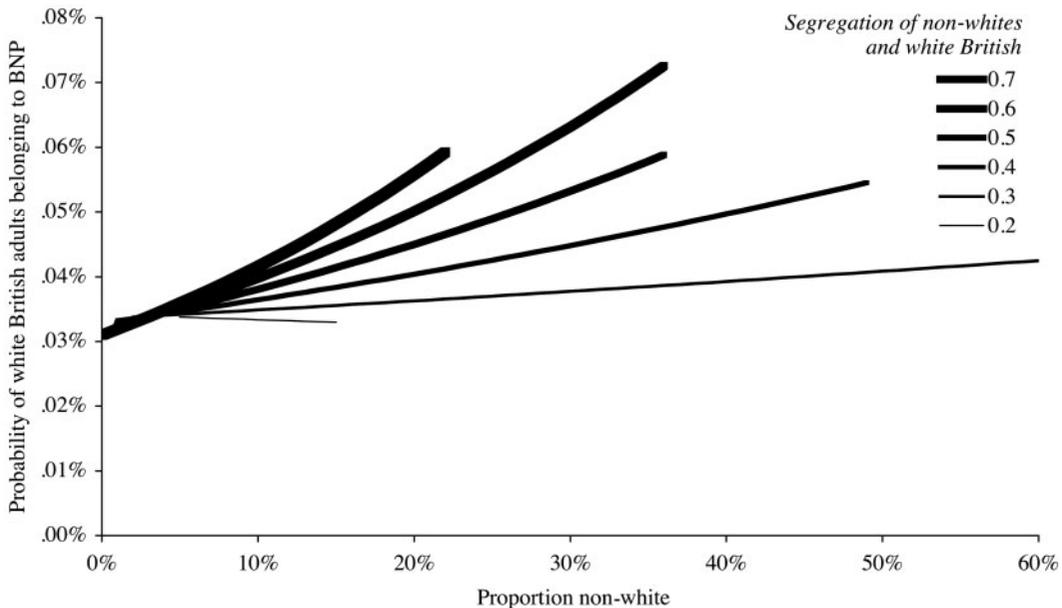
proportion aged 30–65 years. Variables capturing insecurity in the labour and housing markets have similar effects in all models. The probability of membership falls with the proportion having university degrees. The social class most strongly associated with membership is small employers and the self-employed. (Differences among the other classes are not statistically significant.) The unemployment rate has no discernible effect. The probability of membership increases with the proportion owning their house, compared with renting privately. It increases still more with the proportion renting from the council (the difference between the two is statistically significant,  $P < 0.01$ ). Overcrowded housing greatly increases the probability of membership.

Hypothesis 1 is modestly supported, though the effect of contact at the neighbourhood level is non-linear. Setting all other variables at their median and using Model 3, the predicted probability of BNP membership rises marginally from 0.033 per cent, where there are no non-whites to 0.037 per cent where they form one-quarter of the neighbourhood.<sup>17</sup> The probability then falls at an accelerating rate, reaching 0.024 per cent where non-whites form three-quarters of the neighbourhood. (This does not reflect the fact that neighbourhoods with more non-whites have fewer white British people, because the number of the latter is already incorporated into the model.) One interpretation of this finding is that contact only reduces hostility when it occurs on a significant scale. This finding

also has an alternative interpretation, to be discussed below.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 are strongly supported, but jointly rather singly: at the authority level, there is a strong positive interaction between non-white proportion and segregation.<sup>18</sup> Figure 3 shows how both variables affect the estimated probability of white British adults belonging to the BNP. (The graph omits combinations not empirically observed.) The probability of membership is highest in cities where the non-white population is substantial and also highly segregated. Where the non-white population is small, a high level of segregation makes no difference, as would be expected. More surprising is the inverse: where segregation is low, a large non-white proportion does not increase the probability of membership. Where non-whites made up one-third of the city's population, the predicted probability of white British adults belonging to the BNP would be 0.038 per cent if the index of dissimilarity was 0.3, rising to 0.068 per cent if the index was 0.6. Segregation could stand for other characteristics of the minority population—such as poverty—which are not measured here, but we will demonstrate (in Table 2) that it does not merely reflect the proportion of South Asians, Muslims, or foreign born.

Hypothesis 4 is not supported. Model 2 shows that the unemployment rate at the authority level does not increase membership. The interaction of unemployment with proportion non-white (Hypothesis 2 × 4) also has



**Figure 3** The effect of non-white proportion and segregation within authority

**Table 2** Probability of white British adults belonging to BNP

Binomial logistic regression	4			5			6		
	Odds	SE	P-value	Odds	SE	P-value	Odds	SE	P-value
<i>Neighbourhood</i>									
South Asian proportion	1.22	0.47	0.60						
South Asian proportion squared	0.30	0.22	0.10						
Black proportion	2.99	2.18	0.13						
Black proportion squared	0.23	0.47	0.47						
Muslim proportion				2.36	1.01	0.04*			
Muslim proportion squared				0.16	0.14	0.03*			
Foreign proportion							5.19	2.24	0.00***
Foreign proportion squared							0.02	0.02	0.00***
<i>Authority</i>									
South Asian proportion	0.11	0.24	0.32						
South Asian segregation	0.43	0.12	0.00**						
South Asian proportion × segregation	3589	13729	0.03*						
Black proportion	0.98	0.03	0.50						
Black segregation	1.48	0.41	0.16						
Black proportion × segregation	1.04	0.09	0.67						
Muslim proportion				0.01	0.03	0.06			
Muslim segregation				0.66	0.12	0.02*			
Muslim proportion × segregation				186400	751917	0.00**			
Foreign proportion							5.34	6.06	0.14
Foreign segregation							4.08	2.18	0.01**
Foreign proportion × segregation							0.05	0.20	0.46
<i>Random effects (standard deviation)</i>									
Authority	0.369	0.017	0.00***	0.376	0.017	0.00***	0.377	0.017	0.00***
R <sup>2</sup>		0.080			0.079			0.079	
<i>Unexplained variance</i>									
Neighbourhood (%)		88.3			88.3			88.3	
Authority (%)		3.7			3.8			3.8	

P-value for two-tailed test; \*\*\*P < 0.001, \*\*P < 0.01, \*P < 0.05.

Other variables (as in Model 3) omitted. N = 218,038 neighbourhoods; 408 authorities.

no effect. Model 3, however, reveals a non-linear relationship that inverts theoretical expectations. The predicted probability of BNP membership is at its maximum where unemployment is low or average, and at its minimum where unemployment is high. This counterintuitive finding might be taken to imply that the unemployment rate is an unsatisfactory measure, because it includes only those actively seeking work. An alternative measure is the proportion of people (aged 16–74 years) who are economically inactive, excluding students and retired people. This is highly correlated with the unemployment rate, however, and when entered into the model (at neighbourhood and authority levels) it is not significant.

Extending Model 3, Table 2 compares alternative definitions of minority. When the non-white category is disaggregated in Model 4, it is clear that BNP

membership responds especially to South Asians and not to blacks. The effect of contact (Hypothesis 1) is again non-linear (tested jointly, both terms are statistically significantly different from zero,  $P=0.04$ ). The probability of BNP membership falls rapidly when the proportion of South Asians in the neighbourhood exceeds 20 per cent. At the authority level, there is again a strong interaction between segregation and proportion (Hypothesis 2 × 3 and also 3). BNP membership is most likely in authorities where South Asians are highly segregated as well as numerous. With all variables set to the median, the predicted probability of membership is 0.034 per cent. That would increase to 0.082 per cent in an extreme configuration like Leicester, where South Asians comprise 28 per cent of the population and their index of dissimilarity is 0.64. Contrast a cosmopolitan configuration like

Harrow in London, where South Asians comprise 24 per cent but their index of dissimilarity is only 0.32: here the probability of membership would be 0.054 per cent. Model 5 defines minority as Muslims. The results are very similar at the authority level (Hypotheses 3 and 2 × 3). At the neighbourhood level, however, the effect of contact (Hypothesis 1) is not statistically significant (tested jointly,  $P=0.14$ ).

Model 6 defines minority as foreign born. Contact (Hypothesis 1) has a strong effect. The predicted probability of membership falls from 0.039 per cent where foreign born comprise one-quarter of the neighbourhood to 0.011 per cent where they comprise three-quarters. At the authority level, the foreign proportion is not significant; only their segregation (Hypothesis 3) increases the probability of membership. This finding shows that the effect of segregation in Models 2–5 cannot be attributed to immigrants being especially particularly prone to segregation. That can also be tested by adding foreign proportion at the authority level to Model 3: it is not statistically significant, and does not diminish the strong interaction between non-white proportion and segregation.

Variables for political context have very similar effects in all models. The three towns with major riots have a somewhat higher BNP membership, though the effect is not quite statistically significant. The Labour vote has a positive effect. Increasing it from 20 per cent to 60 per cent would raise the predicted probability of BNP membership from 0.031 per cent to 0.036 per cent. The effect is small, but noteworthy given that the model already incorporates most social and economic characteristics that shape a constituency's political complexion. This ecological effect is compatible with the hypothesis of political threat. An alternative interpretation could be that people were drawn to the BNP in constituencies where the mainstream right-wing party was weak, but there is no significant association with the Conservative vote.

National differences are pronounced, though less than might be anticipated. Compared with England, the probability of membership is over two-thirds in Wales, and over one-third in Scotland. Entering a binary variable for London does not reveal any difference.

## Discussion

Before discussing the implications of the results, we should reiterate their limitations. The data are ecological rather than individual. The ecological problem is exacerbated by the fact that BNP members are few relative to the population. It is mitigated, though, by the

small size of the unit of analysis, the neighbourhood. There is a gap of some years between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Despite these limitations, the membership data have the virtue of measuring strong commitment to a stigmatized extreme-right party.

The results for insecurity suggest two differences between members and voters. The petit bourgeoisie rather than the proletariat seem most likely to join the party. Unemployment (in the neighbourhood) has no discernible effect. Both findings could simply reflect the fact that for any party, the average member has more resources than the average voter. The results also reveal the importance of the housing market, which is unduly neglected by sociologists. In Britain, this is particularly important due to the high cost of housing and the cultural prestige of home ownership. White British who live in neighbourhoods with overcrowded housing and with less home ownership and less social housing seem more likely to blame minorities.

Our primary aim is to disentangle the apparent contradiction between contact and threat theories. At the neighbourhood level, we have provided modest support for contact theory (Hypothesis 1): white British adults are less likely to belong to the BNP in neighbourhoods with a substantial proportion of non-whites or South Asians or foreign born. The main qualification is that this takes effect only where the minority proportion exceeds a certain threshold (one-tenth to one-quarter, depending on definition). More seriously, however, this association could be interpreted as evidence of a different causal mechanism: self-selection. White British people who are racist might naturally choose to live in predominantly white neighbourhoods.

Although our cross-sectional data are not able to adjudicate between self-selection and contact, some considerations favour contact. Rigorous studies in social psychology suggest that contact outweighs selection (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006: 757–8). Similar findings come from an American survey on prejudice which elicited preferences for integration at the neighbourhood level (Oliver and Wong, 2003). Whites who live in predominantly white neighbourhoods are less likely to prefer integration, but when preferences are entered as an independent variable—effectively controlling for self-selection—the actual composition of the neighbourhood still has a strong effect on prejudice. The 2001 Census tabulated migration in the preceding year. There was net migration of whites away from non-white neighbourhoods, but at a rate similar to non-whites; this similarity does not suggest 'white flight' (Simpson, 2007). Moreover, migration from deprived areas was most likely for people with higher education;

these are precisely the people who are least likely to belong to the BNP (Bailey and Livingston, 2008). None of these considerations are decisive, however, and so distinguishing contact from self-selection must be left for future research.

Beyond the neighbourhood, the impact of segregation (Hypothesis 2 × 3) at the authority level is also compatible with contact theory. In cities with a substantial minority proportion, we find that BNP membership is less likely where segregation is low. One interpretation is that contact beyond the neighbourhood—in the workplace, for example—mitigates threat. The exposure of white British to minorities within the authority (measured by the interaction index) rises with minority proportion but falls with segregation.<sup>19</sup> In this case, self-selection is an implausible alternative to contact: a racist moving to another city would prefer a tiny minority population over one that is large but evenly mixed. Thus contact theory gains some support from findings at authority and neighbourhood levels. Given that these pertain to opportunity for contact—not to actual contact, let alone friendship—the theory emerges with credit.

Threat theory gains strong support at the authority level, with the important qualification that threat is moderated by segregation (Hypothesis 2 × 3). In cities where minorities are sufficiently numerous to be perceived as a threat, white British adults are more likely to belong to the BNP if the minority population is also highly segregated. Another interpretation of segregation—not incompatible with the mitigating effect of contact—is that threat is predominantly cultural. ‘It just wasn’t the Keighley we knew. It had become a totally different place’ as one BNP activist stated (Goodwin, 2010: 46). (This town falls within Bradford, the country’s fifth most segregated authority.) Certainly segregation, implying less competition in the labour market, does not indicate a greater economic threat. The finding that high unemployment (in the authority) actually reduces the probability of BNP membership also tells against economic threat. A large and segregated minority population could conceivably indicate political threat, insofar as concentration in particular wards increases the chance of electing local councillors. Political threat is also suggested by the positive effect of Labour vote. Where Labour controls the council or borough, it is more easily portrayed as favouring minority communities when allocating amenities like social housing and schools (Goodwin, 2010: 46).

## Conclusion

The leaked BNP membership list is a uniquely valuable source of data. Our analysis advances understanding of

the BNP, and more generally of the extreme right; it also has implications for theories of ethnic hostility and prejudice.

Some of our results reinforce findings from recent analyses of BNP voting (Bowyer, 2008; Ford and Goodwin, 2010; Cutts *et al.*, 2011), albeit with a far more demanding measure of support and with comprehensive geographical coverage. An example is the importance of insecurity in housing. Our multilevel analysis also vindicates Bowyer’s (2008) insight into the opposing effects of minority proportion at different spatial scales; we have developed this further by testing the effects of contact over much shorter distances. The most novel finding is the importance of segregation within each city. 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 less likely to have contact with non-whites beyond the immediate neighbourhood. It also creates a greater sense of cultural or even political threat. Whatever the precise mechanism, segregation aids the BNP.<sup>20</sup>

There are two general lessons for analyses of the extreme right. One is that contextual effects within the smallest geographical units are worth testing, especially given the compelling theoretical reason to expect them. Another lesson is that it is not sufficient to measure the minority proportion within an aggregate unit like the city, even when the proportion is also measured at a lower level (Savelkoul *et al.*, 2010). It is also crucial to measure the degree of segregation within that aggregate unit. Recent methodological developments in spatial analysis (McAllister *et al.*, 2001; Lee *et al.*, 2008) should be exploited in future research. We have analysed variation within a country, but cross-national studies could also measure the degree of segregation, using an index of dissimilarity calculated across cities for instance.

Our analysis, like almost all empirical studies, measures threat by population proportions at a single point in time. Yet threat should also depend on the minority’s rate of growth (Williams, 1947). Measuring growth is complicated by boundary changes, but future research should meet this challenge (Hopkins, 2010). There is also the question of how people in the majority actually estimate the size of the minority. Subjective perceptions do not necessarily correspond to objective numbers. In fact, people in the majority greatly overestimate the minority population (Citrin and Sides, 2008). Our finding on the importance of segregation could suggest that subjective perceptions are influenced by the concentration of minorities in particular areas, by increasing their visibility. This hypothesis is worth testing in future research, and in principle it is readily measured by a

survey question asking the respondent to estimate the proportion of a specified minority within a well-defined geographical unit.

We hope finally that our analysis will encourage the synthesis of contact and threat theories. Because these theories have been developed in different disciplines—social psychology and sociology—they have existed in parallel, largely without reference to each another. Our analysis shows how their apparently contradictory predictions can be reconciled. It also suggests that contact and threat interact: what generates hostility is not just a large minority population, but also a high degree of segregation.

## Notes

- Petersen's (2002) concept of 'resentment' converges with Blumer's propositions, albeit formulated in terms of emotion rather than cognition.
- The effect of education on tolerance has alternative explanations, like indoctrination. Parsing these alternatives is empirically challenging (see Ortega and Polavieja, 2009).
- Earlier analyses of the proportion of immigrants and votes for the National Front in England in the late 1970s are worth noting. Husbands (1979) and Taylor (1979) included no other variables and their results are not easily interpreted; Whiteley's (1979) multivariate analysis found no effect.
- Some on the list claimed to have terminated their membership, whereas others insisted they had only requested information from the party. Given that being identified as a member could have severe repercussions, such assertions should not necessarily be taken at face value.
- Voting data are taken from Norris (comp., 2005), adding results for one constituency where the election was postponed due to a candidate's death (South Staffordshire, 2005). Constituencies are easily matched with Census output areas for England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2004). Scottish constituencies were completely reorganized between 2001 and 2005, but the General Register Office for Scotland kindly provided matching information—for 188 output areas, geographical imputation is necessary. Seventeen output areas spanned two or three constituencies, and these were randomly allocated to one.
- This figure is estimated by multiplying the number of white British people in each neighbourhood by the fraction aged  $\geq 18$  years.
- The Census releases socio-economic tabulations only for the general population at this neighbourhood level, to maintain confidentiality. Ideally, we would use figures pertaining exclusively to white British. This would make little difference, because white British are the majority in over 95 per cent of neighbourhoods.
- The unemployment rate was stable from 2001 to 2007, hovering around 5 per cent.
- South Asian encompasses those identifying as Indian, Pakistani, or Bangladeshi—but not other—within the category 'Asian or Asian British' ('or Asian Scottish' in Scotland). Black includes Caribbean, African, or any other black background. People identifying as 'mixed' are excluded.
- Only a tiny fraction of Muslims (4.1 per cent) identify as white British.
- Assuming homogenous mixing, the probability is:
 
$$\frac{w_i m_i}{w_i t_i - w_i} = \frac{m_i}{t_i - 1}$$
 where  $t$  is the total population (white British and minority and others).
- There is an extensive debate over measurements of segregation, but Massey and Denton (1988) argue that this index is best for measuring the dimension of unevenness (see also Peach, 2009).
- There were no South Asians or blacks in the Isles of Scilly, and therefore the index is undefined. Here 1 is substituted, because the index otherwise reaches 0.97 and 0.99, respectively, in authorities with a tiny minority population.
- This correlation is for England and Wales only, because Scottish constituencies were redrawn between the two elections.
- These binary variables are superior to the proportion voting in 2005 for Plaid Cymru and the Scottish Nationalist Party respectively.
- The odds ratio for an interaction term can be very large because the term is a very small fraction (being the product of fractions) and because it is offset by main effects with odds ratios close to zero.
- This minor non-monotonicity is not an artefact of fitting a curve with two parameters. Segmenting the non-white proportion into categories reveals

that BNP membership is slightly more likely at 20 per cent to 40 percent than at 0 per cent to 20 per cent.

18. An interaction term is sensitive to outliers. This term has its maximum value for Leicester. Even if this city is dropped, however, the interaction is still large and statistically significant. Adding a quadratic term for non-white proportion at the authority level has no effect.
19. The interaction index is defined as:

$$\sum_{i=1}^n \left( \frac{m_i}{\sum t_i} \right) \left( \frac{w_i}{\sum w_i} \right)$$

(Massey and Denton, 1988).

20. We should warn against attributing the BNP's growth in the 2000s to increasing segregation; in the preceding decade, at least, segregation declined somewhat (Simpson, 2004; Peach, 2009).

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