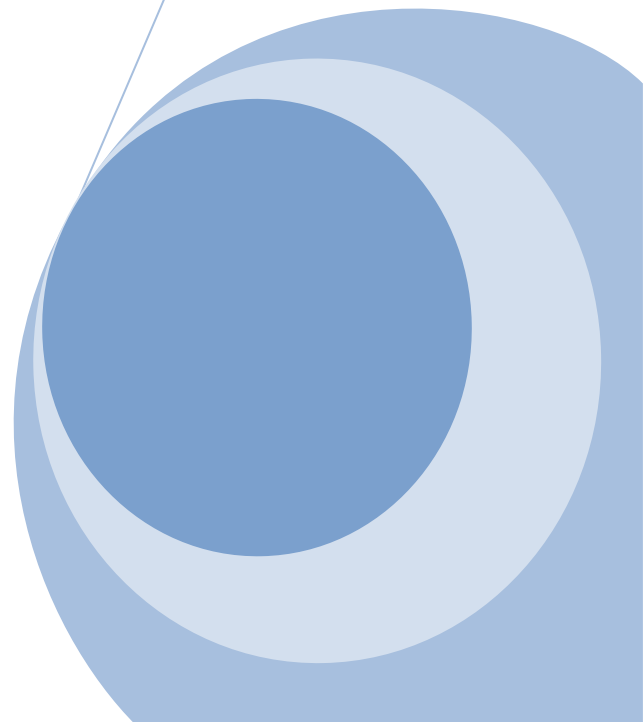


**THE
PERFORMANCE
OF FAR-RIGHT
POLITICAL
PARTIES
IN THE MAY 2007
LOCAL COUNCIL
ELECTIONS**



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Waterhouse Consulting Group is a multi disciplinary management consultancy that brings together the UK's leading experts to deliver services in equalities & diversity, counter-extremism training, research and executive search.

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THE PERFORMANCE OF FAR-RIGHT POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE 2007 MAY LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS

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1. Introduction

This report examines the performance of the British National Party (BNP) and other far-right political groupings¹ which contested local authority elections across the United Kingdom, as well as in the West Midlands, on May 3rd 2007. The performance of the BNP in the 2007 local elections is compared with its performance in the previous local authority (council) elections in May 2006.

To assist in this analysis, the report:

- comments upon national issues and accompanying media attention in the run up to the run up to the elections that may have influenced the BNP's performance.
- describes the areas where the elections took place in May 2007 UK, the main results of the elections, and the national performance of the BNP.

¹ Far right parties are defined as those political parties whose policies derive from an extreme nationalist, racist and authoritarian belief systems

2 Summary

Across the UK, the BNP fielded a record number of 800 candidates for elections to major authorities in England and for the parliamentary elections in Scotland and Wales.

In the local authority elections in England, the BNP received some 300,000 votes and 14.7% of the votes cast in the wards it contested. The number of seats held by the BNP after the elections increased by just one, from 49 to 50. Whilst the BNP gained some new seats and had councillors elected to some new local authorities it also lost most of the council seats that had previously been represented by BNP councillors. The BNP's average share of the vote (14.6%) in the seats they contested:

- was lower than the 19% share of votes cast they received in the 2006 council elections.
- was slightly below the 16.1 % share of the votes cast for it in the council by-elections it had contested in the twelve months prior to the May 2007 elections.

The BNP also expected to double its number of councillors on English local authorities. This did not happen. In the Scottish and Welsh parliamentary elections the BNP did not win any seats although it did poll quite strongly in parts of North East Wales.

In the local authority elections in the West Midlands, the BNP fielded a record number of 126 candidates. It contested 59% of the seats in the urban metropolitan local authorities and 50% of the seats in the urban unitary authority of Stoke on Trent. In the more rural/urban county areas, the number of seats contested by the BNP was very small (less than 2%).

The BNP increased its councillors in the West Midlands from 11 to 14. The BNP had a net gain of two council seats in Stoke and also won a seat for the first time on Staffordshire Moorlands District Council. The BNP now has councillors serving on five major local authorities in the West Midlands.

Across the West Midlands, the BNP received 66,093 votes in elections to major local authorities. Its average share of the votes cast in the election wards it contested was 12.7%. The BNP's average share of the vote in the wards it contested in both the 2007 and the previous 2006 council elections fell in the 2007 elections. In authorities like Birmingham, the fall was quite dramatic, whereas in other authorities like Stoke, the fall was much smaller.

The BNP's best performance in the West Midlands was in Stoke where it received nearly 27% of the votes cast in the wards it contested. In doing so, it won three council seats but lost the one seat that a sitting BNP councillor was defending. The BNP's majorities in the three seats it won were 'wafer thin' (ranging from 13 votes to 68 votes) and in the one seat it lost, it lost by only 45 votes.

In the 2007 elections, the BNP had hoped to increase its number of councillors on Sandwell Borough Council. Going into the elections, the number of BNP councillors

in Sandwell was four. In the one ward (Princess End) where the BNP already had two councillors, its attempt to win the third and remaining councillor seat failed by just 20 votes (the seat was held by Labour). The BNP also failed to win any other seat. However, it still received nearly a quarter of the votes cast in the seats it contested and thus remained well placed to contest and even win council seats in future elections.

One of the BNP's most disappointing performances was in Birmingham where it contested all forty wards in the authority as it had done in the previous 2006 elections. The number of votes received by the BNP fell by a third and its average share of the votes cast was down to 7.7%. A pattern again emerged of the BNP doing less well in multi-racial wards and in wards with significant professional/middle-class populations.

In the few seats contested by the BNP in the rural/urban areas, the BNP's performance was very mixed. What the result in Staffordshire Moorlands, where the BNP won a seat did, show was that where the BNP was able to mount some kind of election campaign, and the campaigns run by the opposition parties were lacklustre, it could achieve a breakthrough.

3 What happened across the UK

Where the elections took place

On May 3rd 2007, there was a major set of elections of local authorities (councils) in England, as well as elections for the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, and elections for all the unitary local authorities in Scotland.

In England some 10500 seats² in 312 local authorities were subject to election. It comprised:

- 36 metropolitan (urban) local authorities in Merseyside, Greater Manchester, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear, the West Midlands, and West Yorkshire. In these authorities, one third of the council seats was subject to election.
- 45 unitary local authorities. In 25 unitary authorities, all the council seats were subject to election. In the other 20 local authorities, only one third of the council seats was subject to election.
- 231 district local authorities in the largely rural /urban county areas. In 153 district councils, all council seats were subject to election. In the remaining 78 district councils, one third of the council seats was subject to election.

There were also elections in three authorities in England for executive mayors. The authorities were Bedford, Mansfield and Middlesbrough.

In **Scotland**, all the 129 seats in the Scottish Parliament were subject to election. It comprised 73 members elected in single member constituencies by a first-past-the -post electoral system and 56 members elected in eight multi-member regions by proportional representation. Also, all council seats in the thirty-two unitary authorities were subject to election. For the first time, councillors were elected by proportional representation (single transferable vote).

In Wales all the 60 seats in the Welsh Assembly were subject to election. It comprised 40 members elected in single member constituencies by a first-past-the -post electoral system and 20 members elected in five multi-member regions by proportional representation.

The run up to the elections

What makes the BNP (and, for that matter, far-right political parties) distinguishable from other mainstream political parties is its belief in the racial and cultural purity of

² Local authority councillors are elected for terms of four years. In some local authorities all councillors are subject to election every four years. In other authorities one third of councillors (usually one councillor in a ward represented by three councillors) are subject to elections in each year when they are held. It means in these authorities that over a four year period elections take place for one third of councillors for three successive years and none in the remaining fourth year.

Britain (which in its view means a white population and a Christian faith) and the primacy of Britain as a nation state. It is also these beliefs that attract some voters to the BNP as it seek to exploit concerns people may have about the multi-racial nature of British society, levels of migration into the UK, and the inability of Britain to control its own destiny due to membership of the EEC and economic globalisation. In the months running up to the May 2007 elections, there were no issues that attracted media coverage where the BNP's stance on race and nationalism could be exploited by it for electoral advantage³. If anything, the opposite was the case with the Government making a virtue of its tough stance on terrorism and any association it might have with the Muslim faith, and extolling Muslim communities to embrace shared British values and reject the small minority of persons within their communities who were using the Muslim faith as a cover for supporting acts of terrorism.

This scenario was in marked contrast to what took place in the month before the local council elections in England in May 2006, when a number of issues arose that attracted media coverage that were to the BNP's electoral advantage. At the beginning of April 2006, a Government minister, representing a London constituency (Barking and Dagenham) being targeted by the BNP, openly admitted in a national newspaper article that many white voters in her constituency were attracted to the BNP. Shortly afterwards, an opinion poll was published showing that an unprecedented 7% of voters were prepared to vote for the BNP and that 24% of voters could consider voting for them. This was followed at the end of April, and just before polling day, by widespread publicity about foreign nationals, after serving terms of imprisonment for criminal offences in the UK, not being deported on their release from prison, even though this was required. Instead, they were allowed to go free and remain in the UK if they wished.

Whilst the BNP in the run-up to the May 2007 elections did not attract the kind of favourable publicity it had enjoyed before the May 2006 elections, it still hoped that the relative unpopularity of the Labour Government and the public perception that the Conservatives were deserting right-of-centre voters in favour of the 'centre ground' would work to its electoral advantage.

Another way in which the BNP has sought to build up public support was to contest and win local council by-elections held outside of established election dates when vacancies for councillors arose from resignations or ill health. It was this approach that helped the BNP to start winning council seats in the major council elections that took place in 2003 and 2004. In the period between the council elections in May 2006 and April 2007, the BNP won no seats in the council by-elections it contested. It contested 38 council by-elections (15% of the total held) and its average share of the votes cast in these elections was 16%. In a quarter of the seats it contested, the BNP received over 20% of the vote and in a few contests it came quite close to winning seats. In the East Midlands, the BNP was able to build upon its relatively high vote in some by-elections to go on to win seats in the May elections to three district councils. In other areas, such as Burnley and Calderdale, relatively high votes in council-by-elections did not lead to the party winning seats in the subsequent May elections. On

³ The BNP were also not entitled to a TV party political broadcast in England for the local council elections as they did not field a sufficient number of candidates.

the contrary, in both areas it lost seats. The BNP has now not won any council by-election it has contested since September 2004.

The BNP manifesto

The BNP manifesto for the May 2007 council elections was entitled 'putting local people first'. Some of its pledges such as re-establishing local democracy, reductions in council tax, saving the health service, and defending green belt land, could have appeared in and, in different guises, did so in the election manifestos and leaflets of more mainstream political parties. However, the BNP's core message around race remained in its manifesto and was reflected in its election leaflets. In the introduction to the manifesto it was stated '(BNP) councils would do all they can to oppose politically correct and multi cultural schemes and target resources at the indigenous community' (by this they meant the white population). In the manifesto section on council tax reductions, it was boldly stated 'the provision of public money to non-British or non-indigenous religious, ethnic or cultural activities would be strictly prohibited (by a BNP council)'. On education, the manifesto stated that a BNP Government would place 'an emphasis on the appreciation of British history and culture' and added 'any study of foreign history, geography and religions should be done in the context that that they are foreign'. On housing, the manifesto stated 'social housing should be preserved for British citizens only' and 'asylum seekers and economic migrants should not qualify for social housing'.

BNP candidates

The BNP contested around 800 seats in the May 2007 elections across the UK. This total was made up of:

- 742 candidates for elections to local authorities in England. This amounted to the BNP contesting some 7% of the seats subject to election. The bulk of the BNP candidates stood in new target areas in the East Midlands, as well as in their more traditional urban target areas of East Lancashire, the West Midlands, West Yorkshire, and the North East.
- 32 candidates for the Scottish Parliament. The BNP candidates only contested the eight multi-member regional constituencies.
- 20 candidates for the Welsh Assembly. The BNP had a full slate of candidates for the five multi-member regional constituencies. It did not contest any of the single member constituencies.
- 7 candidates for elections to local authorities in Scotland. A minute number of candidates, with 4 of the candidates standing for seats to Glasgow City Council.

In the local authority elections in England, the BNP put up a full slate of candidates (contested all seats) in the elections to councils in Birmingham, Leeds, Sunderland, Harrogate, and Thurrock (Essex). There were also large concentrations of BNP candidates contesting seats in elections in Kirklees (West Yorkshire), Bradford, Barnsley, Coventry, Sandwell, Sedgefield (Durham), Gateshead, and Newcastle. The

BNP did not contest the elections in three local authorities for executive mayors. Apart from elections to major local authorities in England, there were also elections for the thousands of town and parish councils largely situated in rural or semi-urban/rural areas. These are minor authorities with very limited powers, which are often not contested by mainstream political parties. In a small number of areas, the BNP has targeted parish councils as a way of getting its candidates elected and providing a base for them to more effectively compete in future years for seats on major local authorities. The BNP fielded 75 candidates for town and parish councils, with the bulk of the candidates standing in the East Midlands and West Yorkshire.

The BNP's 800 candidates in the 2007 elections was a considerable increase on the 363 candidates it fielded to contest the local authority elections in May 2006. The number of seats subject to election in 2007 was, however, considerably more than in 2006 and thus some increase in the number of candidates fielded by the BNP was inevitable. However, when comparisons are made with the number of BNP candidates contesting council seats in England which held elections in both 2006 and 2007, there was an increase in the number of BNP candidates standing. This was certainly the case in the West Midlands and is commented up in more detail in the next chapter.

Election results and BNP performance

Scotland

The share of the vote received by the various parties that stood for the Scottish Parliament was Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) 33%, Labour 32%, Conservative 17%, Liberal Democrat 16%, and other parties (includes BNP) 2%. It produced in the Scottish Parliament 47 seats for the SNP, 46 for Labour, 17 for the Conservatives, 16 for the Liberal Democrats, and 3 for other parties. The SNP gained 20 seats and at the time of writing this report had formed a minority administration. The SNP gained 14 seats from other minor parties and four from Labour. The BNP won no seats and did not come close to winning any. In the eight multi-member regional constituencies where the BNP fielded candidates it received a total of 24,600 votes and its share of the votes cast was just over 1%. The BNP did not win any of the seats it contested in local authority elections.

Wales

The share of the vote received by the various parties that stood for the Welsh Assembly was Labour 32%, Plaid Cymru 22%, Conservatives 22%, Liberal Democrats, 15% and other parties (includes BNP) 9%. It produced in the Welsh Assembly 26 seats for Labour, 15 for Plaid Cymru, 12 for the Conservatives, 6 for the Liberal Democrats, and one for other parties. Labour suffered a net loss of three seats and, at the time of writing this report, had formed a minority administration. The BNP won no seats. In the five multi-member regional constituencies which the BNP contested, it received a total of 42,200 votes and its share of the votes cast was just under 5%. Some of the BNP's best results were in the eastern part of the North Wales regional constituency, where it received 9.4% of the votes cast in Wrexham and 7% of the votes cast in adjoining areas. It is estimated that the BNP was some 2,500 votes short of securing a seat on the Welsh Assembly.

England

In the local authority (council) elections in England in May 2007, the share of the vote received by the various parties was Conservatives 40%, Labour 27%, Liberal Democrats 26%, and other parties (includes BNP) 7%. The only change in these figures from the previous elections in 2006 was that the Liberal Democrats' share of the vote fell by 1% and the Labour party's share of the vote increased by 1%. There was, however, a greater change than in the 2006 elections in the number of seats won and lost by the three mainstream political parties and the local authorities they ended up controlling. This was a product of a greater number of local authorities and seats being subject to election in 2007. The main beneficiaries were the Conservatives who increased by 39 the number of local authorities they ran and who gained council seats at the expense of both Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

In the local authority elections across England, the BNP received some 300,000 votes. The BNP's average share of the votes cast in the wards it contested was 14.6%. This was a lower share of the vote than the BNP obtained in previous council elections⁴.

The BNP's average share of the votes in the wards it contested in 2003 was 17%, in 2004 16%, and in 2006 19%. In terms of council seats, the BNP won nine new seats and lost eight seats it was defending. This gave it a total of fifty councillors in eighteen major local authorities. It was a net gain of one seat. The local authorities where the BNP have councillors and the net changes in seats as a result of the 2007 elections are set out below:

London

Barking & Dagenham 12 (no election)
Havering 1 (no election)
Redbridge 1 (no election)

East Midlands

N.W. Leicestershire 2 (gain 2)
Charnwood 1 (gain 1)
Broxtow 1 (gain 1)
S.Holland 0 (lose 1)

Eastern

Broxbourne District 0 (lose 1)
Epping Forest 6 (no change)
change)

North West

Burnley 4 (lose 3)
Pendle 1 (no

West Midlands

Redditch District 1 (no change)
Sandwell 4 (no change)
Solihull 1 (no change)
Stoke on Trent 7 (net gain 2)⁵
Staffordshire 1 (gain 1)
Moorlands District

Yorkshire

Bradford 2 (no change)
Calderdale 1 (lose 1)
Kirklees 3 (no change)
Leeds 1 (no change)

⁴ The 2005 county council elections are ignored as the BNP contested very seats in these elections.

⁵ Since the election it is reported that one of the BNP councillors has left the party as a result of internal party differences.

In addition to the BNP's 50 councillors, there are now two far-right party councillors from the England First Party (EFP) who are members of Blackburn unitary authority. They were first elected in 2006 and there was no change in the number of far right councillors in Blackburn in the 2007 elections. The BNP also saw some of its candidates for the minor authority town and parish councils win seats (some of its candidates were elected unopposed as seats for these minor authorities are not always contested).

In terms of total council seats on major local authorities, the BNP stood still in the 2007 elections, with a net gain of just one seat. It was widely reported in the run up to the elections that the BNP was aiming to double its number of councillors to one hundred. In the previous 2006 local council elections, the BNP had a net gain of 28 seats and more than doubled its number of councillors. The BNP Chairman, Nick Griffin, in a news message to BNP activists after the election, appeared to recognise that the BNP had not done as well as it had expected. He said 'from the shocked firsts (in previous elections), we (the BNP) have been forced down to shell-shocked seconds. And that is where by and large we shall stay unless we learn the lessons of May 2007 and take our game up a level as well'. In particular, Griffin complained about opposition parties (the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties were specifically mentioned) and their leftist allies concentrating on mobilising their core vote and trying to depress the BNP vote.

There is some truth in this statement by the BNP party chairman. In a number of areas, the mainstream political parties fought more effective campaigns and these included publicly showing their opposition to the BNP. In Broxbourne, where the BNP were defending a seat, the Conservatives produced an election leaflet that highlighted the threat to house prices that any BNP victory would present. In Sandwell, there was a long-running Labour party and anti-fascist campaign against the BNP. The Liberal Democrats also ran strong anti-BNP campaigns in areas like Burnley. Coupled with this, it appears that in some areas the BNP were over confident of electoral success and ran rather mediocre campaigns.

Whilst the BNP's performance was disappointing for it, it still made a breakthrough in the East Midlands (gaining four District Council seats for the first time). Also, in many of its targeted urban areas, the BNP continued to receive a significant minority vote, even if it did not win seats and remain well placed to win council seats in future elections. Outside of the West Midlands (discussed in detail in the next chapter), some of the BNP's best performances were in Thurrock (Essex) where its average share of the votes cast in the wards it contested was a respectable 24.6%, in Burnley (East Lancs) where, in spite of losing seats, it received almost a quarter of the votes cast in the wards it contested, in Rotherham (South Yorks) where it polled almost 25% of the votes cast in the six wards it contested, and in Leeds, where it received over 27% of the votes cast in three wards.

In the local authority elections there was again a pattern of the BNP polling more votes than smaller far right parties in the small number of wards which they both contested. Also, where the BNP in the wards it contested faced candidates from the more moderate but nationalist United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), the BNP

generally obtained more votes than UKIP UKIP can compete with the BNP for electors with similar views. Again, UKIP failed to make any type of breakthrough in the 2007 local authority elections.

4 What happened in the West Midlands?

On 3rd May 2007, elections took place in 33 local authorities in the West Midlands. The authorities were the seven metropolitan urban boroughs of the former West Midlands Metropolitan County Council, the unitary authorities of Stoke on Trent, Herefordshire and Telford & Wrekin and twenty-three district authorities in the counties of Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, and Worcestershire. In the urban boroughs, elections were held for one third of the council seats whereas, in the majority of the district authorities in the counties, all the council seats were subject to election as these authorities only hold elections for the whole council every four years.

Prior to these elections, the only far-right political party with local authority councillors was the BNP. It had a total of eleven councillors in four different local authorities. The BNP fielded 126 candidates for seats in 18 local authorities out of a total of 1023 seats subject to election in the 33 local authorities. The breakdown by type of authority where the BNP contested seats was:

- Seven Metropolitan Boroughs: BNP contested 96 seats (59% of total) in all seven authorities out of the 163 seats subject to election.
- Three Unitary Authorities: BNP contested 12 seats (9% of total) in two of the three authorities out of the 132 seats subject to election. In essence the BNP contested seats in Stoke where it fielded 10 candidates.
- Twenty Three District Authorities: BNP contested 18 seats (1.6% of total) in nine authorities out of the 728 seats subject to election in twenty-three authorities.

The number of candidates fielded by the BNP (126) in the West Midlands was an increase on the 86 candidates it fielded in the May 2006 local authority elections. More local authorities in the West Midlands were, however, holding elections in 2007. A more accurate comparison with what happened in 2006 is with those authorities that held elections in both 2006 and 2007. It shows that in 2007, the BNP fielded 117 candidates, which was an increase of 31 on the 86 candidates it fielded in 2006.

Across the West Midlands, the BNP received some 66,100 votes and its average share of the votes cast in the seat it contested was 12.7%⁶. It succeeded in having three candidates elected in Stoke, but lost the one seat it was defending. It also succeeded in having one councillor elected in the District Council of Staffordshire Moorlands. No BNP candidates, succeeded in being elected to any other authority. Out of the 126 BNP candidates just 4 (3%) succeeded in being elected. As a result of the elections, the BNP now has fourteen councillors serving on five local authorities in the West Midlands, which is a net increase of three councillors.

⁶ If the votes the BNP received in Birmingham where their performance was disappointing is excluded from the analysis of the share of votes cast for them across the West Midlands, their average share of the vote rises to 17.6%. This is higher than the national share of the vote the BNP received in the council seats they contested which was 14.7%.

The BNP's performance in the May 2007 elections compared with those authorities that held elections in May 2006 shows:

- In 2006, 8 BNP candidates were elected in four different local authorities whereas in 2007, 4 BNP candidates were elected in two different authorities.
- In 2006, the BNP's average vote in the wards it contested was 748. In the 2007 elections, its average vote was 541. It was a fall of 28%.

Other far-right political parties contested a handful of seats in Birmingham, but not in any other authority. . The National Front contested two electoral wards in Birmingham, and a breakaway group from the BNP, known as the New Nationalist Party, contested four electoral wards. They received between them a total of 610 votes and were not successful in having any of their candidates elected.

METROPOLITAN URBAN AUTHORITIES

Birmingham

There are 40 electoral wards in Birmingham which elect three councillors for each ward to form a total of 120 councillors on the City Council. In the May 2007 elections, one third of the 120 council seats (forty, or one in each ward) was subject to election. Prior to the election, the City Council had been run by a joint Conservative/Liberal Democrat party administration, with Labour as the main opposition party. The result of the election was that the Conservatives gained 3 council seats from Labour. It produced a political composition of 44 Conservative Councillors, 41 Labour Councillors, 32 Liberal Democrat Councillors, and 3 Councillors from other parties. There was no change in the political control of the authority.

In the May 2007 elections, the BNP contested all 40 seats i.e. every electoral ward that was subject to election. The BNP did the same in the May 2006 council elections. The BNP's performance in the 2007 elections compared with the 2006 elections was as follows:

	2007	2006	Change
Seats contested	40	40	None
Total Vote	19,475	29,045	-9750
Average vote per ward	487	726	-239
Average Share Of vote	7.7%	11.1%	-3.4%
No. of wards where it received more than 20% of vote	1	5	- 4

In the May 2007 elections, the BNP did not come close to winning any council seat. Its total vote fell by a third compared with 2006, as did its average share of the vote. The only ward where the BNP came second was Shard End, where it received 1263

votes and 23.5% of the votes cast. However, it was still 1,264 votes behind the winning Labour candidate.

Other far-right political parties contested a small number of electoral wards. The National Front contested two wards and received a total of 253 votes. The New Nationalist Party (a breakaway group from the BNP associated with a former local BNP activist, Sharon Edwards) contested four wards and received a total of 357 votes. These parties' votes were significantly less than the votes received by BNP candidates. The anti-European Union and nationalist United Kingdom Independent Party (UKIP) contested 7 of the electoral wards. UKIP can compete with the BNP for electors' votes. In six of the seven wards contested by UKIP, its candidates received fewer votes than the BNP.

In the 2001 census, the ethnic make up of the population of Birmingham was 70.4% white and 29.6% minority ethnic (primarily Asian and Black Caribbean). When a comparison is made between the ethnic make up of the population in electoral wards and the votes received by the BNP, it is found:

- In the 21 electoral wards where the population is largely white (over 85%), the BNP's average share of the vote was 11.4%.
- In the 10 electoral wards where the population was more multi racial (white population between 50% and 85% and ethnic minority population between 50% and 15%), the BNP's average share of the vote was 6.0%.
- In the 9 electoral wards where the ethnic minority population formed the majority (over 50%) of the population, the BNP's average share of the vote was 2.7%.

The BNP clearly does less well in areas which are multi-racial, or with significant ethnic minority populations. It does best in areas (electoral wards) with largely white populations. A similar pattern was found in the 2006 council elections. There is also some indication in these largely white electoral wards that the BNP receives a higher vote where the population is more lower-middle or working class. In May 2007, the BNP's average share of the vote in more middle-class wards was 8.6%, whereas its share of the vote in more lower-middle or working class wards was 14.5%.⁷

Coventry

There are eighteen electoral wards in Coventry. Each elects three councillors to form a total of 54 councillors on the City Council. In the May 2007 election, one third of the council seats (18, or one in each ward) was subject to election. Prior to the election, the local authority had been run for a year by the Conservatives with the Labour party as the main opposition. The result of the election was that the Labour

⁷ The wards classified from local knowledge as middle class were Bartley Green, Billesley, Bournville, Brandwood, Kings Norton, Quinton, Sutton Four Oaks, Sutton New Hall, Sutton Trinity, Sutton Vesey and Weoley. The wards classified as lower middle/working class were Erdington, Hodge Hill, Kingstanding, Longbridge, Oscott, Northfield, Shard End, Sheldon, Stechford and Yardley North and Tyburn.

party gained four seats and, in doing so, took seats from the Conservatives and the smaller opposition parties. It produced a political composition of 28 Conservative councillors, 23 Labour councillors, one Liberal Democrat councillor, and one Socialist councillor.

In the May 2007 elections, the BNP contested 16 (89%) of the council wards or seats that were subject to election. This was a significant increase compared with the 2006 elections. It is also worth noting that in the 2004 local elections, it contested just one seat. The BNP's performance in the 2007 elections, compared with the 2006 elections, it was as follows.

	2007	2006	Change
Seats contested	16	7	+9
Total votes	6,002	3,400	+ 2602
Average vote per ward	375	486	- 111
Average vote share	9.5%	12.5%	-3.0%

The BNP did not come close to winning any electoral ward. It was in third place or lower in all electoral wards. The BNP was in a similar position in the May 2006 council elections. In the May 2007 election, the BNP's share of the vote was between 7% and 13% in twelve (75%) of the wards it contested. It obtained just over 15% of the vote in two wards. It included the Woodlands ward which it has now contested in the last three council elections since 2004. The BNP obtained 690 votes, which was slightly more than they obtained in 2006 but less than the 804 they obtained in 2004.

Comparisons with the BNP performance in the seven electoral wards it contested in both the 2007 and 2006 council elections shows:

	2007	2006	Change
Average vote per ward	425	486	- 61
Average share of vote	10.9%	12.5%	- 1.6%

The BNP contested a record number of seats in Coventry in the May 2007 elections. Apart from not coming close to winning any seats, its performance was not as good as in 2006. Its average vote per ward and average share of the vote was down on 2006.

Dudley

There are 24 electoral wards in Dudley of which each elects three councillors to form a total of 72 councillors on the borough council. In the May 2007 election, one third of the council seats (24 or one in each ward) was subject to election. Since the 2004 local council elections, the authority has been run by the Conservatives, with the Labour party as the main opposition. The result of the election was that the Labour Party gained two seats (one from the Conservatives and one from UKIP). It produced a political composition of 39 Conservative councillors, 28 Labour councillors, and 5 Liberal Democrat councillors.

There is a history of far-right and nationalist parties being active in Dudley. In the 2005 General Election, the BNP obtained almost 10% of the vote in the Dudley North constituency and in 2003, the BNP had a councillor elected in the area for a year. UKIP has also been active in Dudley in recent years and has had one councillor. Between the 2006 and 2007 local elections, the local authority had to deal with a planning application to build a mosque and associated community facilities on a derelict site in the centre of Dudley. It became a controversial planning application, with a large public petition being organised with the support of UKIP and the BNP against the proposal. The authority rejected the planning application.

In the May 2007 elections, the BNP contested ten (42%) of the twenty four seats or electoral wards that were subject to election. The BNP's performance in the 2007 elections compared to the 2006 elections was as follows:

	2007	2006	Change
Seats contested	10	5	+ 5
Total vote	6,601	5,116	+1485
Average vote per ward	660	1,023	- 363
Average share of vote	18.5%	25%	- 6.5%

The BNP was in second place in two wards (Brockmoor and Pensnett, and Coseley East) where its share of the vote averaged 28%, and was third in seven wards. The BNP remains well placed to win the two wards where it came in second place, although in Coseley East it did less well than in 2006. In the Coseley East ward, the BNP was just 36 votes behind the winning Labour candidate in 2006, whereas in 2007 it was 441 votes behind the winning Labour candidate. In all the ten wards contested by the BNP, there were UKIP candidates. The BNP obtained more votes than the UKIP candidates in 9 of the wards. UKIP 's average share of the vote in the ten wards was 12.5% and, given that UKIP can compete with the BNP for electors' votes, it is likely that the votes obtained by UKIP adversely effected the BNP's performance.

Comparisons with the BNP's performance in the four electoral wards it contested in both the 2007 and 2006 council elections shows:

	2007	2006	Change
Average vote per ward	762	987	- 225
Average share of vote	20.9%	26.8%	- 5.9%

Whilst the BNP contested more seats in Dudley in the 2007 elections than in 2006, it did less well. Its average vote in the wards it contested and its average share of the vote fell. However, it continues to have a solid and significant minority vote in Dudley and in at least two wards it remains well placed to win council seats in future elections. It is also the case that the BNP suffered from having to compete with UKIP candidates.

Sandwell

There are 24 electoral wards in Sandwell, each of which elects three councillors to form a total of 72 councillors on the borough council. In the May 2007 elections, one third of the council seats (24 or one in each ward) was subject to election. Historically, Sandwell has been run by the Labour Party, which has a significant majority over all opposition parties. The result of the election was that the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties gained one seat each from the Conservatives. It produced a political composition of 51 Labour councillors, 10 Conservative councillors, 6 Liberal Democrat councillors and 4 BNP councillors. There was also one vacant seat. There was no change in political control of the council.

Far-right political parties (primarily the BNP) have been political active in Sandwell for a number of years. In the 2003 local elections, the BNP gained its first seats on the council and in the 2006 council elections, the BNP gained three seats to increase its total number of councillors to four. In the 2005 General Election, the BNP contested all three parliamentary seats in the borough. Its best result was in the West Bromwich West constituency, where its share of the vote was 10%.

In the May 2007 elections, the BNP contested 15 (63%) of the 24 council seats or electoral wards that were subject to election. The BNP's performance in the 2007 elections compared with the 2006 elections was as follows:

	2007	2006	Change
Seats contested	15	9	+ 6
Total votes	11,646	9,268	+ 2378
Average vote per ward	776	1,030	- 254
Average share of vote	24.5%	33%	- 8.5%
Seats won	Nil	3	- 3

The BNP was second in 7 electoral wards and third in 8 wards. In the Princess End ward which the BNP had won in the two previous council elections in 2004 and 2006 its share of the vote fell by a third and it finished 20 votes behind the winning Labour candidate. In the seats where the BNP were second, its average share of the vote was almost 30%. When the BNP's performance in the nine wards that it contested in 2006 is compared with its performance in 2007, it was found:

	2007	2006	Change
Average vote per ward	864	1,030	- 166
Average share of vote	27%	33%	- 6% (fall of 18% on 2006)

The BNP did less well in Sandwell in the May 2007 elections than in 2006. It won no seats and its average share of the vote and average vote per ward was down on 2006. However, the BNP still has a solid and continuing vote in Sandwell. The BNP with an average vote of 30% and second places in seven electoral wards still remains well

placed to defend its existing seats as well as win further seats in future council elections.

Solihull

There are 17 electoral wards in Solihull, each of which elects three councillors to form a total of 51 councillors on the borough council. In the May 2007 elections, one third of the council seats (17 or one in each ward) was subject to election. Prior to the election, no party had a majority of council seats, although the Conservatives were the largest group. The result of the election was that the Liberal Democrats gained two seats from the Conservatives. It produced a political composition of 23 Conservative councillors, 17 Liberal Democrat councillors, 7 Labour councillors, 2 Independent councillors and 1 BNP councillors. There was also one vacant seat. The Conservatives continue to be the largest political group but do not have a majority of council seats.

In the May 2006 elections, the BNP had won its first seat on the council in the Chelmsley Wood ward. In the 2007 elections, the BNP contested five electoral wards, including Chelmsley Wood. The BNP's performance in the 2007 elections compared with the 2006 elections was as follows:

	2007	2006	Change
Seats contested	5 (29% of total)	3	+2
Total vote	2473	2139	+ 334
Average vote per ward	495	713	- 218
Average share of vote	14.6%	23.5%	- 8.9%

The BNP came second in one ward and was third in four wards. There were significant differences in the BNP's performance in the wards it contested. In two wards, the BNP obtained around 30% of the vote whereas, in the other three wards, its share of the vote was only 8.9%. The ward where the BNP came second was Chelmsley Wood (its candidate was 192 votes behind the winning Labour candidate) which it had won twelve months previously with a majority of 19 votes. The other ward where the BNP did well was Kingshurst and Fordbridge which it was contesting for the first time. The BNP was 78 votes behind the winning Labour candidate.

The BNP is still contesting only a minority of council seats in Solihull. In the 2007 council elections, it was not able to add to its councillor and its average vote and average share of the vote per ward was lower than in the 2006 elections. The BNP, however, remains in a good position to win seats in two wards in future council elections.

Walsall

There are 20 electoral wards in Walsall, each of which elects three councillors to form a total of 60 councillors on the borough council. In the May 2007 elections, one third of the council seats (20 or one in each ward) was subject to election. Prior to the

election the Conservatives had run the authority, with the Labour Party as the main opposition. The result of the election was that the Labour Party lost three seats, with the Independents gaining two seats and the Conservatives one seat. It produced a political composition of 33 Conservative councillors, 18 Labour councillors, 6 Liberal Democrat councillors and 3 Independent councillors. There was no change in political control of the council.

In recent years, Walsall has experienced some targeting by the BNP in elections. It first became apparent in 2003 when the BNP achieved 26.1% of the vote in a council by-election and came a relatively close second to the winning Conservative party candidate. In the 2005 General Election, the BNP received 6% of the vote in the Walsall North parliamentary constituency, which was one of its better performances in the West Midlands. In the 2004 and 2006 council elections the BNP received an average of 700 votes in the electoral wards its contested. This suggested that there was a minority of the electorate in Walsall who was consistently voting for far-right parties like the BNP.

	2007	2006	Change
Seats contested	4 (20% of all seats)	7	-3
Total vote	2123	4911	-2788
Average vote per ward	531	702	-171
Average share Of vote	16.7%	20.8%	- 4.1%

In the May 2007 elections, the BNP fought a smaller number of seats than in the previous council elections in 2004 and 2006 and did not come close to winning any seat. The BNP came third in three of the wards it contested and fifth in the remaining ward. The average number of votes it received and its average share of the vote in the four wards it contested was lower than in 2006. This suggests that the relatively small minority of the electorate in Walsall who has been supporting the BNP in recent elections may be in decline.

Wolverhampton

There are 20 electoral wards in Wolverhampton, each of which elects three councillors to make for a total of 60 councillors on the borough council. In the May 2007 elections, one third of the council seats (20 or one in each ward) was subject to election. For a considerable period, Wolverhampton has been run by the Labour party. The result of the election was that the Labour party lost four seats, with the Conservatives gaining three seats and the Liberal Democrats one seat. It produced a political party composition of 36 Labour councillors, 18 Conservative councillors, 4 Liberal Democrat councillors and 2 Independent councillors. There was no change in the political control of the council.

The BNP's performance in the May 2007 elections compared with the 2006 elections was as follows:

	2007	2006	Change
Seats contested	6 (30% of all seats)	1	+5
Total vote	3122	1016	+ 2106
Average vote per ward	520	1016	- 496
Average vote share	15.6%	25.6%	- 10%

In the May 2007 elections, the BNP contested more council seats (wards) than the solitary seat it had contested in the previous council elections in 2006. Presumably, they were prompted to do so because having obtained a quarter of the votes in the one ward it contested in 2006, it thought it had a significant level of support in certain parts of Wolverhampton. In the 2007 elections, the BNP did not come close to winning any council seat. It was third in five of the seats it contested and came last in the remaining seat it fought. The BNP's share of the vote in the wards it contested varied considerably. It ranged from 22% in two wards (Bushbury North and Wednesfield North) to 6% in the Tettenhall Wightwick ward. No reliable comparisons can be made with the BNP's performance in the 2006 elections as it only contested one ward in those elections. It is, however, worth noting that the BNP's share of the vote in the relevant ward (Wednesfield North) fell slightly. For every ten voters in Wednesfield North in 2006 who voted for the BNP, only nine did so in 2007.

UNITARY AUTHORITIES

In the May 2007 elections for three unitary authorities in the West Midlands, the BNP again concentrated on the urban authority of Stoke on Trent. The BNP contested none of the 54 seats subject to election in the Telford and Wrekin authority and only 2 (3%) of the 58 seats subject to election in the Herefordshire authority. The BNP was not successful in winning any seats in Herefordshire and their share of its vote in the two wards it contested was 17% and 10% respectively.

Stoke on Trent

The authority has an elected executive mayor and 60 councillors, consisting of three councillors for each of the 20 electoral wards. In May 2007, elections took place for one third of the councillors. It meant elections for one councillor in each of the twenty electoral wards.

Prior to the May 2007 election, no political party had a majority of councillors on the authority. The Labour party was the largest group and the executive mayor also came from the Labour party. The result of the election was that Labour lost four seats, with the BNP gaining two seats and the Liberal Democrats and Independents one each. It produced a political composition of 24 Labour councillors, 18 Independent councillors, 7 BNP councillors, 6 Conservative councillors, and 5 Liberal Democrat councillors. There was no change in the party political administration of the council.

Stoke has been a key target for the BNP in elections in recent years. The potential electoral support for the BNP first became apparent in 2002, when it received over 8,000 votes (or 18.7% of the votes cast) in the first election in Stoke for an executive mayor. In elections for councillors to the authority in 2003 and 2004, the BNP won the Longton North ward (a ward with an almost exclusively white population and a large social housing estate). In the 2005 general election, the BNP contested all three parliamentary seats in Stoke and received 7,615 votes, or 7.9% of the votes cast. It was one of the BNP's best electoral performances in the UK. On the same day, elections were also held for a new executive mayor. The BNP received 15,776 votes, or 19% of the votes cast. It showed stronger support for the BNP in local council elections, than in parliamentary elections. In the May 2006 council elections the BNP gained three seats in new wards, to give it them a group on the authority of 5 councillors. The BNP received 6,994 votes in the eight wards it contested and its average share of the vote in these wards was 30%

The BNP's performance in the 2007 council elections compared with the 2006 elections was as follows:

	2007	2006	Change
Seats contested	10	8	+ 2
	(50% of total)		
Total vote	8356	6994	- 1362
Average vote per ward	836	874	- 38
Average vote share	27.4%	29.8%	- 2.4%
Seats won	3	3	No change
Seats lost	1	0	- 1

The BNP won the same three seats (wards) it had won in the previous 2006 council elections, namely, Abbey Green, Bentilee and Townsend, and Weston and Meir North. It came second in six wards and third in the remaining ward it contested, but were only 51 votes behind the second placed Labour candidate and received 23% of the votes cast. Seven of the wards the BNP contested in the 2006 elections it contested again in 2007. The BNP's share of the vote in these wards in 2006 was 31% and in 2007 it was 29.4% (a slight fall of 1.6%).

A more Bentilee comparison of the BNP's performance in the three wards (Abbey Green, Bentilee and Townsend, and Weston and Meir North) it won in 2006 and 2007 is set out below:

	ABBEY GREEN		BENTILEE AND TOWNSEND		WESTON MEIR NORTH	
	2006	2007	2006	2007	2006	2007
BNP votes	744	770	735	676	945	1041
BNP majority	131 (over Lab)	38 (over Lab)	58 (over Lab)	68 (over Ind)	130 (over Lab)	13 (over Con)
BNP vote share	24.9%	27.2%	33.3%	29.9%	32.9%	33.5%
Voter turnout	33.7%	31.6%	24.3%	25.1%	30.7%	33.6%
No of candidates standing	5	5	4	5	4	4

In all of these wards, the BNP now has two of the three councillors. The BNP has 'wafer thin' majorities in these three wards and the share of vote it obtained to win these wards in both 2006 and 2007 was low (just above or below 30%). This was due to the number of candidates standing in the wards (apart from the BNP, often Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Independent) and at least two of these other parties attracting a significant number of votes. The voter turnout in two of the wards (Abbey Green, and Weston and Meir North) in the 2007 elections was average for Stoke, but was low in Bentilee and Townsend.

In the Longton North ward, the BNP lost a seat it had originally won in 2003. The BNP candidate was its sitting councillor, Steven Batkin. The BNP lost the seat to Labour. There are now two Labour councillors and one BNP councillor representing the ward. In the previous 2006 election, Labour had, by a narrow margin, successfully defended its remaining seat in the ward against a strong BNP challenge to have all three councillors in the ward. More details of the elections in the Longton North Ward in 2006 and 2007 are set out in the table below:

Longton North Ward			
	2007	2006	Change
Winning labour vote	1463	1432	+31
BNP vote	1418	1350	+ 68
Lab majority over BNP	45	82	- 37
BNP vote share	39.3%	39.2%	No change
Voter turnout	34.3%	32.8%	+ 1.5%
No. of candidates	3	3	No change

In both the 2006 and 2007 elections, the Labour party only just defeated the BNP. In fact, the BNP candidates received more votes and a higher share of the vote in the Longton North ward than their winning candidates in the three other wards. The key outcome, however, was that the Labour party did win because the BNP was seeking to make Longton North an electoral stronghold from which they could reach out to win other seats. There are two further points of interest:

- The electoral turnout in 2006 and 2007 was high for Stoke which suggests that voters were being motivated to turn out to vote not just for the BNP but for parties opposed to them.
- There were only three parties contesting the ward in 2006 and 2007. The Conservatives were the only other party apart from Labour and the BNP and they obtained in both elections a significant minority (19%) of the votes cast. The consequence of this was that it helped Labour to win the ward. For voters opposed to the BNP there was only one party (Labour) to vote for which could clearly beat the BNP. This was not clear in the other wards which the BNP, won. Also, for right-of-centre inclined voters opposed to Labour but unsure about voting for the BNP because of their extremist views, there was a respectable mainstream political party (the Conservatives) which they could vote for.

The BNP contested more seats in the 2007 council elections than it did in the 2006 council elections and again won three seats. In doing so, the BNP lost the one seat it was defending and also experienced a small fall in its average share of the vote and average vote in the wards its contested compared with 2006. The net result, however, was that the BNP group of councillors in Stoke continued to expand. Further, with an average share of the vote of 27% in the wards it contested, the BNP remains well placed to win council seats in future elections. It remains the case in Stoke that, in certain areas, a significant minority of the electorate continually votes for the BNP in local authority elections. It has resulted in the BNP winning council seats.

DISTRICT AUTHORITIES

There were 23 district local authorities in the counties of Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire Worcestershire holding elections on 7th May 2007 and 728 seats in these authorities were subject to election. On the majority of the district authorities, all the seats were up for election.

The BNP only contested 18 seats (2.5% of the total) in nine district authorities. The BNP's performance by county area is set out below.

County	Councils with No.	Elections Seats	Seats Contes by BNP	BNP Vote	BNP Vote Share	Seats Won by BNP
Shropshire	5	140	4 in 1 council	455	7.8%	None
Staffordshire	8	303	6 in 4 council	2383	21.1%	One
Warwickshire	4	115	1 in 1 council	251'	8.1%	None
Totals	23	728	18 in 9 council	5789		One

Shropshire

The only district council where the BNP contested any seats (electoral wards) was Shrewsbury and Atcham. It came last in all the four seats it contested, with a low share of the votes cast (on average 7 to 8%).

Staffordshire

The BNP achieved a relatively high share of the vote in the six seats it contested in four district councils.

In **East Staffordshire** District Council, the BNP contested three seats. It secured nearly a third of the vote in one ward (Stapenhill). The one BNP candidate in a ward that elected three councillors came second behind the winning three Labour Party candidates. In **Cannock Chase** and **Tamworth** District councils, the BNP, whilst not coming close to winning any of the two council seats it contested, nevertheless secured nearly a quarter of the votes cast.

In **Staffordshire Moorlands** District Council, where all 56 council seats were subject to election, the BNP won a seat in the one ward it contested with a single candidate. In the Forsbrook ward, which elected three councillors, the one BNP candidate was elected with 594 votes. The BNP candidate was in third place behind the other two winning Independent candidates.

In **South Staffordshire** District Council the small far right Freedom Party had one councillor, Sharon Edwards, who was elected in 2003 for an area around Womborne. She did not contest the seat in the 2007 elections and neither did any other far right party candidate.

Warwickshire

The BNP contested just one seat in one district council (Warwick). It came last with only an 8% share of the votes cast.

Worcestershire

The BNP contested seven seats in three of the district councils holding elections. The three district councils were Malvern Hills, Redditch and Worcester.

In **Malvern Hills** District Council, where all 51 council seats were subject election, the BNP fielded one candidate in a ward electing two councillors. Its share of the vote was a respectable 20% of the votes cast. The two winning candidates were Independents.

In **Redditch** District Council, the BNP contested seats in three of the ten electoral wards. One third of the council seats (one seat per ward) were subject to election. In the previous council elections in 2006 the BNP had won a seat for the first time in the Winyates ward. It fought this ward again 2007. The BNP achieved a respectable share of the vote in the three wards it contested (it ranged from between 20% to 25% of the votes cast) although it did not come close to winning any seat. In the Winyates ward in the 2006 elections, the BNP received 806 votes, which represented 31.4% of the votes cast to win the seat. In the 2007 elections the BNP candidate came third with 600 votes and 21.6% of the votes cast. The BNP's share of the vote fell by nearly a third. The Winyates ward was won by the Liberal Democrats, with Labour in second place.

In **Worcester** District Council, the BNP contested three electoral wards. One third of the council seats (one in each of the eleven wards) was subject to election. The BNP did not come close to winning any seat and its average share of the votes cast was for it a disappointing 13.1%. In the one ward (Nunnery) which the BNP had contested in the previous 2006 council elections, its share of the vote fell by nearly one third.

In the numerous seats subject to election in May 2007 in the largely rural/urban district council areas in the West Midlands, the BNP contested very few seats. It achieved an isolated success in Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, where it won one seat and, in East Staffordshire District Council, it received nearly a third of the votes cast in one ward. In Redditch (Worcestershire), the BNP obtained a respectable 22% of the votes cast in the wards it contested, although it was not able to repeat its success of the previous year in winning any council seat. Elsewhere, the BNP did not come close to winning any council seats. The results showed that the BNP are relatively weak in rural/urban areas in the West Midlands, and this repeats a pattern that had existed in previous elections in these areas. However, in isolated seats, the BNP can put together some kind of campaign and attract votes. Further, where the opposition party campaigns are lacklustre, the BNP can, very occasionally, win a council seat.