BNP membership in Britain and Yorkshire and Humber

The release onto the internet on Monday 17 November of a detailed list of British National Party (BNP) members by a disgruntled former worker has given a unique opportunity to examine the distribution of individuals living in Britain today who associate with the politics and ideologies of the far right. This article illustrates the geography of BNP support and identifies the types of areas where support is concentrated.

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The BNP membership list caused quite a stir in the press, not least because a number of teachers and police officers appeared among the 12,600 individuals registered. Whilst this information is of interest to some, the inclusion of residential postcodes presented an opportunity to gain insight into a distribution which previously had only been informed, less accurately, by political election results.

To begin with a cautionary note, it is necessary to recognise that, unlike many sources of secondary data used for research purposes, the integrity and accuracy of the data BNP list cannot be completely verified. However, senior members within the BNP hierarchy have publicly given some credibility to the contents, so we can continue with the analysis with guarded confidence.

BNP in Britain

Firstly, the national rate of membership is very low and the gender balance is heavily skewed. As Table 1 shows, across the whole of the UK, only 2.2 people per 10,000 appear on the BNP list compared to around 10 per 10,000 for the Liberal Democrats, 30 for Labour and 50 for the Conservatives

Region	Population	BNP members	Membership rate per 10,000 people	Membership share (%)
East Midlands	4,172,174	1,498	3.59	11.90
Yorkshire and Humber	*4,964,833*	*1,686*	*3.40*	*13.39*
North West	6,729,764	1,725	2.56	13.70
West Midlands	5,267,308	1,327	2.52	10.54
East of England	5,388,140	1,353	2.51	10.74
North East	2,515,442	574	2.28	4.56
South West	4,928,434	986	2.00	7.83
Wales	2,903,085	535	1.84	4.25
South East	8,000,645	1,439	1.80	11.43
London	7,172,091	1,007	1.40	8.00
Scotland	5,062,011	463	0.91	3.68
Britain	57,103,927	12,593	2.21	100.00

Table 1. BNP members across Britain

(www.electoralcommission.org.uk). The occurrence of 'Mr's (and first names of the 41 'Dr' titles) reveals that 81.7 per cent are male. Table 1 gives an overview of the spatial distribution of these members by region.

The distribution of membership rates is relatively even across wards in England and Wales (Figure 1) although rates are much lower in Scotland – perhaps reflecting the particularly Scottish (and not British) flavour of nationalism north of the border as much as a rejection of far right ideology.

Whilst there is broadly an even distribution of members, it is apparent that the rates of membership are higher in the Midlands around Leicester and the north in parts of Yorkshire and Lancashire. The 'hotspot' in Wales reflects a low population in that area rather than a very high count of BNP members.

Looking at the top 20 wards for both rates and counts in Figure 2 also draws attention to the Midlands, but more clearly to areas in Yorkshire and Humber where counts are high.

BNP in Yorkshire and Humber

At a regional level, Yorkshire and Humber exhibits the second highest count of members, rate of membership and the share of total members. At the district level (Table 2), whilst two districts in the

Figure 1. BNP affiliation by ward

Figure 2. Top 20 wards for BNP members

Rank	Top 15 districts - rates	Rate per 10,000 people
1	Pendle	8.74
2	Burnley	8.04
3	Melton	7.94
4	Charnwood	7.69
5	*Barnsley*	*6.65*
6	North West Leicestershire	6.55
7	Sedgefield	6.42
8	Blackpool	5.90
9	Ashfield	5.84
10	Lincoln	5.72
11	Hinckley and Bosworth	5.69
12	Amber Valley	5.67
13	Blaby	5.65
14	*Calderdale*	*5.51*
15	Broxtowe	5.48

Table 2. Districts with highest BNP membership rates
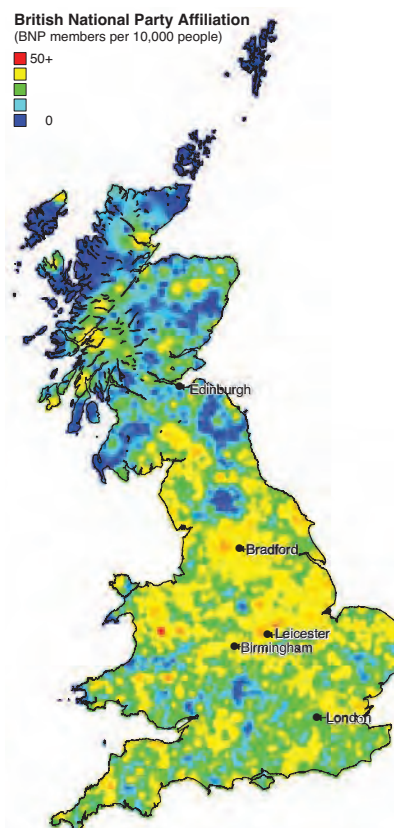
region feature in the top 15 for highest rates of membership, when we look across the whole region, seven of the 21 districts have rates less than one person per 10,000 above the national average, and four districts are on or below the national average.

The concentrations within districts in Yorkshire and Humber are shown in Figure 3. The highest counts of BNP members are found in Morley South ward in Leeds (46) and Dearne South ward in Barnsley (34). Whilst the rate of membership is only around 1.5 per 10,000 in Morley, it remains higher at around 3 people per 10,000 in Dearne South.

A distinct cluster can be seen in the south east of Leeds, bordering the north west of Kirklees, east of Calderdale and south of Bradford.

Geodemographic inference

Whilst we have an idea both nationally and within the region about where those who affiliate themselves with the BNP live, we know much less about the types of area that these people inhabit, and by association, the types of people they are.

We might expect, given the attention that the BNP give to immigration, stating on their website that the main stream political parties "support a level of immigration that is turning our country into a foreign place" that members of the BNP might live in areas where proportions of immigrants
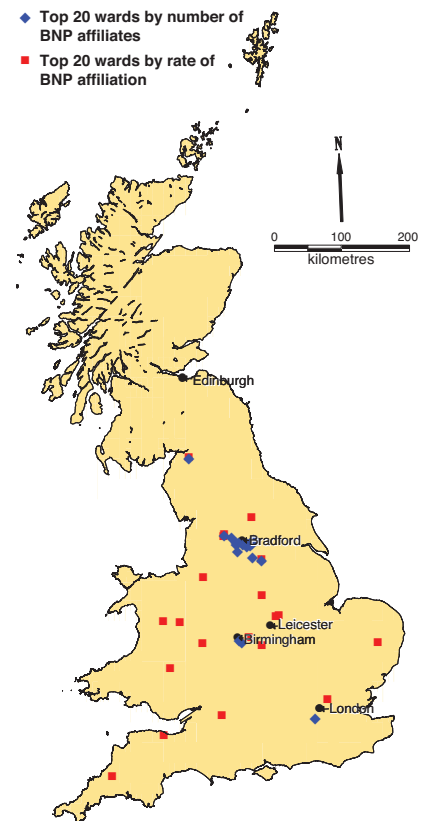
and ethnic minorities are higher. The BNP also claim on their website that they do not appeal just to 'knuckle-draggers', but have support across all sections of society. Is this borne out in the data?

If we know something about the characteristics of the area, we can infer something about the person. 'Geodemographic' inference has proved hugely successful for commercial organisations targeting products, but it is used here to assess typical BNP members. The geodemographic classification used is the national classification of output areas developed for ONS by Dan Vickers (Vickers *et al*. 2005).

Are there types of area in Britain where affiliation with the BNP is more or less likely? And what does this mean for Yorkshire and Humber?

Figure 4 shows membership rates across all types of area in the classification, nationally and regionally. Where rates are above 2 people per 10,000 they are highlighted in red, below 1.5 in green.

At these extremes the areas with more BNP members exhibit generally older (above average numbers over 65) populations, more indicators of deprivation (such as lack of central heating) and below average concentrations of ethnic minority populations and immigrants. The BNP does not appear to have as much appeal to people living in areas of relative affluence and with more educated populations.
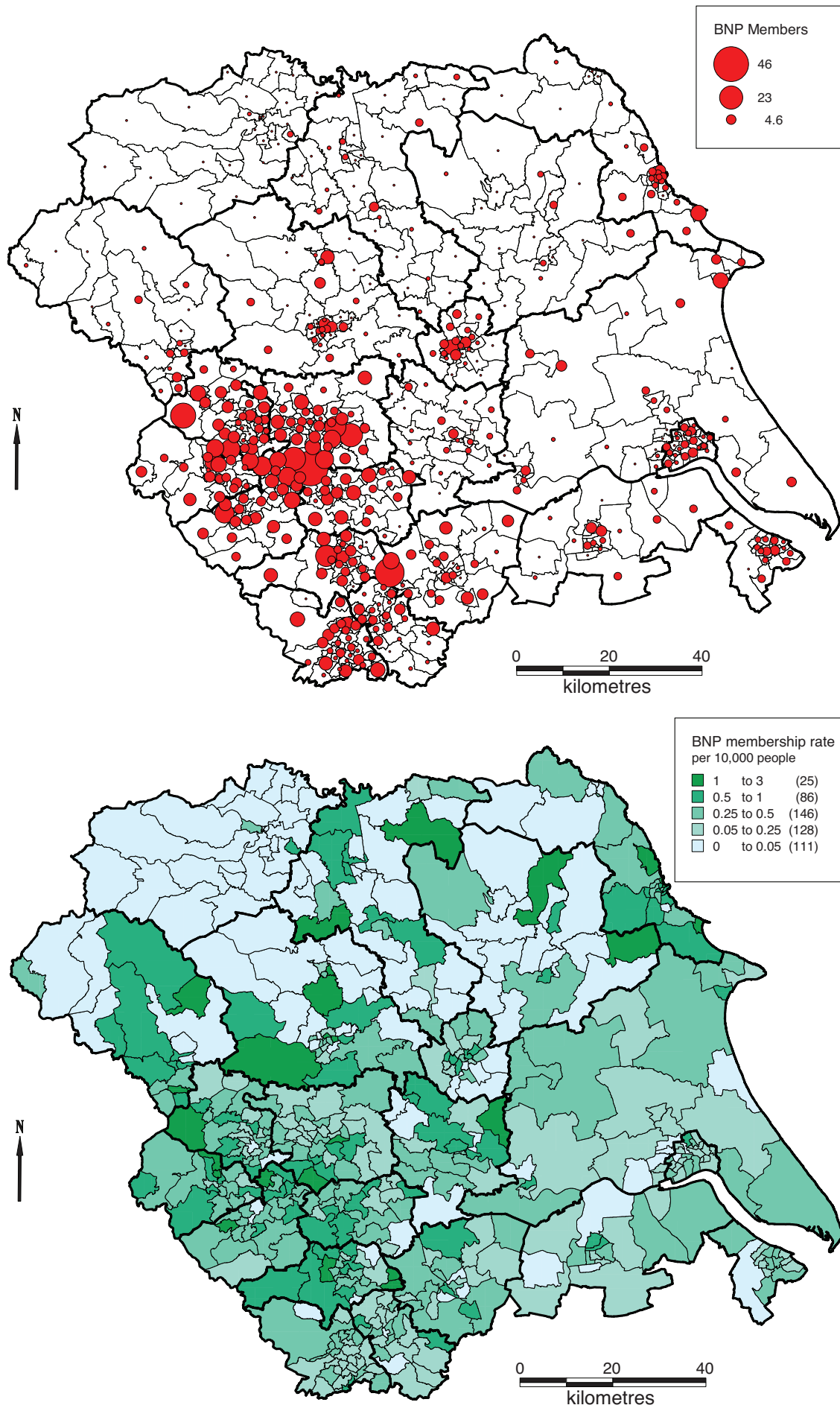
Figure 3. BNP membership count and rates of BNP membership across Yorkshire and Humber
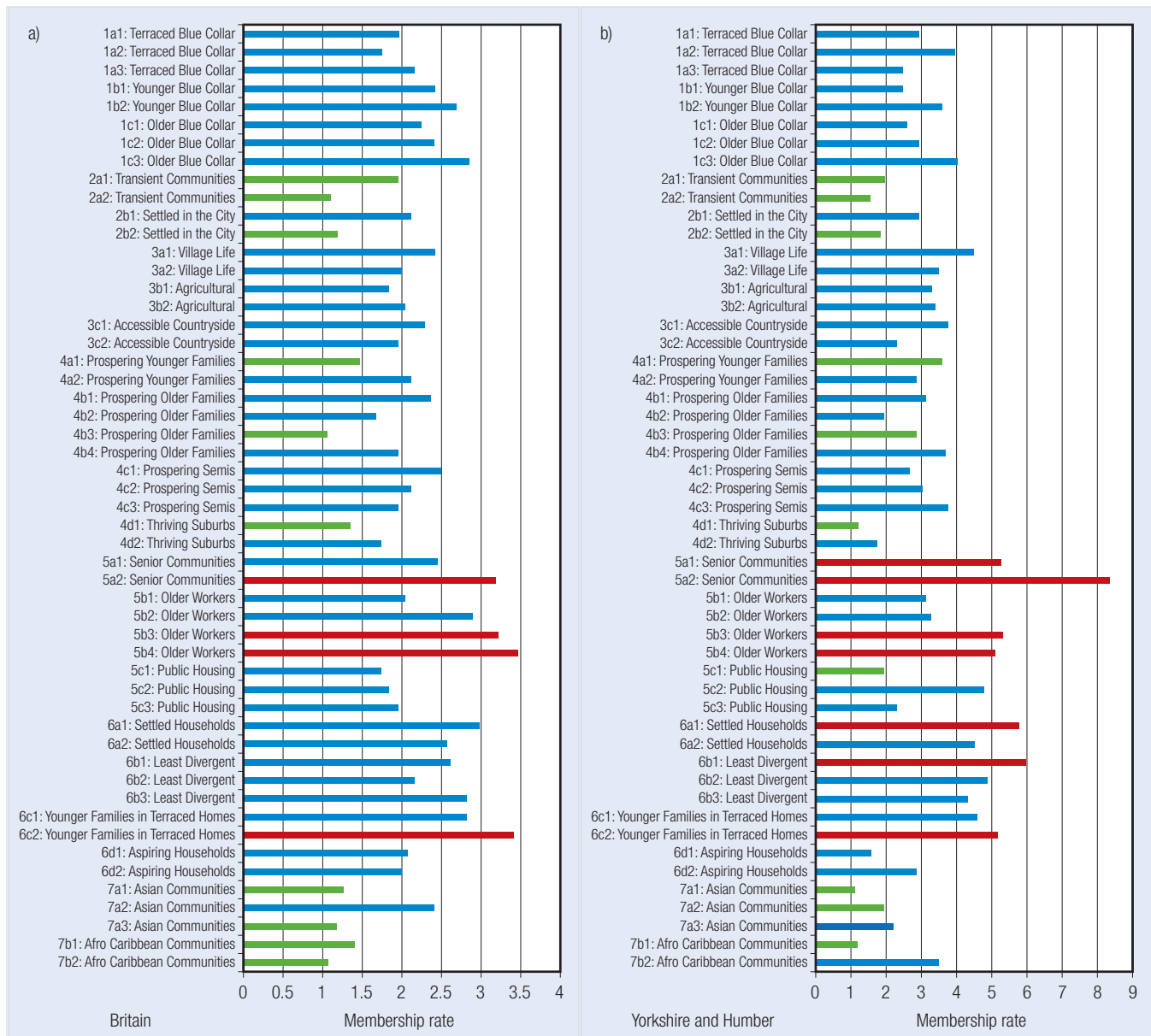
Figure 4. Rates of BNP membership per 10,000 in a) Britain and b) Yorkshire and Humber

In Yorkshire and Humber, the pattern is broadly similar to the national one, but noticeably the peak has almost three times (8 per 10,000) more BNP members per 10,000 people than the national peak.

This peak is seen in Senior Communities (2) areas where there far above the national average number of people aged 65+, single pensioner households and people living in publicly rented accommodation and below average ethnic minority and immigrant groups. It is interesting that three of the other six areas highlighted in red are also characterised by above average older populations and indicators of relative deprivation.

Conclusion

We have seen that BNP members are almost always male and that the national distribution is relatively even across England and Wales, but with higher concentrations in certain parts of the country.

We can also see that whilst support for the BNP is growing (votes for the party have increased at each of the last four general elections), the evidence points to voters being more likely to be old; those living in relatively deprived areas; and the old living in deprived areas.

The main body of support does not appear to be from those living in areas very close to immigrant and ethnic minority populations, or indeed those who are more educated, suggesting that people may be affiliating with the BNP not as a result of lived experience – for example the type of negative experience supposedly caused by increased immigration that BNP officials like to portray – but rather as a result of a perception.

It is difficult to offer a solution to the propagation of far right ideology, both nationally and in the region but analysis such as this may certainly help the targeting of efforts to alter the perceptions of individuals, especially in those areas and types of area identified here.

Reference

Vickers, D., Rees, P. and Birkin, M. (2005) Creating the national classification of census output areas: data, methods and results, *Working Paper 05/2*, University of Leeds, Leeds.