Tips for tackling racism among disaffected white communities in the wake of BNP electoral successes

A Special Briefing from

RaceActionNet
Helping organisations to tackle racial harassment, racist and religious crime

CohesionActionNet
Helping organisations to tackle community conflict and build cohesion

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Tips for tackling racism among disaffected white communities in the wake of BNP electoral successes: a special briefing

1. BNP succeeding among poor white communities

The performance of the racist British National Party in the European elections has severely tested any complacency that may have existed about its ability to turn discontent into votes. Its share of the national vote has increased from 4.9% (just over 808,000 votes) in the European elections of 2004 to 6.2% (just over 943,000 votes). The BNP won its first two seats, in the North West and in Yorkshire and the Humber, for leader Nick Griffin and Andrew Brons, a former chairman of the National Front. While the BNP won fewer votes in the two Euro-regions it now represents than it did in 2004, low turnout and a poor showing by other parties enabled it to creep across the proportional system’s threshold.

Part of the explanation is the BNP’s effort at rebranding. Several people involved in the party have criminal convictions, including Mr Griffin who has been convicted of inciting racial hatred. But in public the BNP now eschews the crassest racism and claims to disavow violence. Instead it peddles Islamophobia and distorts public information. The BNP’s support is drawn largely from poorly educated, white, working-class men, concentrated in ex-industrial towns in Yorkshire and Lancashire. The BNP is one of several beneficiaries of disenchantment with the main parties and Westminster style-politics and campaigns.

Ignoring the BNP and the sources of its electoral support is no longer a viable option. Its specious policies will have to be openly challenged and the sources of discontent among voters will have to be tackled while refuting its prejudices, not pandering to them.
2. Perceptions and resentments among poor white communities

The DCLG in its report *Sources of Resentment and Perceptions of Ethnic Minorities Among Poor White People* (2009) identified a great deal of negativity that related to the work of central and local government and public service providers, the perceived failings of which have been exploited by the BNP.

1. Recurrent **emotional themes** among poor white residents sampled were:

   - Resentment
   - Betrayal
   - Abandonment
   - Loss
   - Defensiveness
   - Nostalgia
   - Unfairness
   - Disempowerment.

2. **Local and central government** were perceived to have abandoned and betrayed white communities who experienced loss and disempowerment.

3. There was a strong perceived **competition for resources** – typically housing, but also employment, benefits, neighbourhood and culture – and that in some situations minorities, especially incoming migrants, were privileged over white residents.

4. The majority of the white interviewees understood ‘integration’ as meaning minorities giving up their identity and merging with the local one, i.e. ‘**assimilation**’. To become a full member of society people who come here must adapt to ‘our ways of life’ and contribute, for example, pay into the welfare system.
3. Perceptions and resentments of racially motivated offenders

London Probation Service in its work on dealing with racially motivated perpetrators looked at the factors that shift these kinds of general and particular grievances into acts of racial harassment and racist offending among white communities.

1. **Scapegoating and release of frustration and aggression.** When individuals fail to achieve certain goals they can become frustrated and this can take the form of anger and violence which is then channelled against a scapegoat rather than the real cause of the problem. Black and minority ethnic populations can become an easy scapegoat because of their visibility and because of racist attitudes perpetuated in poor white communities.

2. Black and minority ethnic people may be resented among poor white young people because of their clear idea about their own culture and because of their higher levels of academic achievement and perception that they are doing well. This has been called ‘resentment towards cultures of strength’. In these instances, the issue of peer pressure of relevant – offences are often carried out in gangs of young people who are disaffected generally.

3. **Reinforcement of identity** – linked to the point above, poor white identity may be bolstered by the tendency to exaggerate attributes and present it as superior to other cultures where their characteristics are stereotypes and portrayed as inferior.

4. **Racism is endemic** – racial harassment may be a logical expression of the underlying racism of society at large where the wider community does not always condemn it. Some victims may be seen as easy and acceptable targets in their own neighbourhoods.

5. **Authoritarian personalities** – some people have a specific ‘personality type’ that includes being hostile to anyone who is not like themselves. These individuals are not ashamed of their racist beliefs, often they are ‘anti-everyone’. 


6. Economic losers – perpetrators of racist offending often target black and Asian people or Eastern Europeans or other economic migrants for their economic situation and scapegoat them for their lack of employment.

4. Race hatred: ‘thrill seekers’ to ‘mission offenders’

In work by London Probation, in particular Liz Dixon, race hate offending is identified as multi-causal and there are different motivations underlining the behaviours. Typologies help provide a framework to understand the purpose of the offending. This typology identifies four groups of offender.

1. ‘Thrill seekers’: Those who are ‘attracted’ to the offending because of the thrill/buzz it provides. They are influenced by a wider peer group and will ‘tag along’, often getting drawn into violence without any regard to victim. Their activities may be considered territorial rather than racist even though the victim’s experience will impact the same. This will resonate with housing workers where children and adolescents act out prejudice that they pick up in adults.

2. ‘Reactive/defensive offenders’: Usually older, frequently with few previous criminal convictions, members of this group will have a sense of grievance and believe that they are acting to protect a perceived threat to their way of life. They will have a sense of due entitlement and look on any service provision to Black people or newcomers (asylum seekers/refugees/immigrants) as preferential treatment. Offences frequently occur when alcohol is abused and victims can be minority ethnic neighbours, shop staff, local authority workers and police.

3. ‘Retaliatory offender’. This is the offender who reacts to the racial aggression he receives and ‘hits’ back. His or her offending is race related and needs addressing but is motivated by a desire to get even and ‘retaliate.’
4. ‘Mission offenders’: The offending of this group is premeditated and targeted. Often inspired by a ‘higher order’, they may have mental health problems; David Copeland, the ‘nail bomber’ may be considered such an offender. We would also include ‘politically motivated offenders’, i.e. British National Party or National Front activists.

The above categories do not automatically dictate or reflect the level of risk, although the last group, while relatively rare, presents the greatest potential danger. In the first two categories offenders frequently do not proceed beyond verbal abuse but in certain circumstances the victim or target could be killed. Equally, thrill seekers' bigoted attitudes could become increasingly entrenched and lead towards ‘mission seeking’ activities.

5. ‘Mission offenders’: signs and symbols

The convictions and beliefs of white extremists and similar ‘mission offenders’ go beyond expression of disaffection and prejudice to serious offending. In order to identify white extremist prisoners, an HM Prison Service internal publication (2007) collected pictures and lists signifiers in the following categories: Symbols, Tattoos, Jewellery, Clothing, Language, Music and Publications.

The photographs contained in its publication, of symbols, tattoos, jewellery and so forth, are derived from the book 'Signs of Hate', a publication by Searchlight/Operation Wedge in partnership with the Association of London Government.

Racists can display their stance overtly and covertly. Displaying the instantly recognisable swastika conveys the wearer's political sympathies overtly, whereas the use of lesser known symbols declare affinities to 'insiders', but might evade the appropriate attention of most people. Less well known is the more obscure language (coded words and numbers), and music and publications commonly used by far right
individuals and groups. Below are some examples of white extremist language, music and publications not readily recognisable and evident.

**Language: Coded numbers, words and abbreviations**

- ‘8’: The eighth letter of the alphabet 'H' often denoting 'Hitler'
- ‘18’: Adolf Hitler (first letter of the alphabet is 'A' and the eighth is 'H')
- ‘88’: Heil Hitler (the eighth letter of the alphabet cited in combination)
- ‘14’: This is code for a Nazi phrase comprising 14 words: 'We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children'.
- ‘1488’: 'We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children. Heil Hitler'.
- ‘777’: Symbolising the broken swastika which will re-emerge whole when Nazism establishes a new world order. Also used to indicate the superiority of the white race over black people and Jewish people who are denoted by the number 666, the mark of the devil.
- ‘1889’: The year of Hitler's birth.
- ‘9 November’: 'Kristallnacht, the 'night of broken glass', the date in 1938 which saw the first concerted assault on Germany's Jewish community.
- ‘6,000,000’: 'Six million lies'. Holocaust deniers use this term to claim no Jews were murdered under Nazism.
- ‘BM’: British Movement. A UK Hitlerite movement with a small and secretive membership.
- ‘Der Tag’: The Day. A German term used by Fascists to describe the day when the broken swastika will be reconstructed and Nazism rise and rule.
- WNP’ White Nationalist Party. A UK fringe race hate party.
- ‘New Christian Crusade Church’: UK fringe group preaching hatred for Jews and black people. Has previously infiltrated the Conservative party.
‘Redwatch’: This is a Nazi website established in 2001 by UK Nazis, which exists for the sole criminal purpose of serving as an intelligence gathering medium for recording personal data on individuals and organisations identified as posing a threat to the British or international far right. It operates under the auspices of Combat 18 and serves to promote the violent targeting of those listed on the site. It evades prosecution by being hosted on three separate sites outside the UK, and thus beyond UK legal jurisdiction.

Music

‘Blood and Honour’: An umbrella organisation for all Nazi rock bands founded by the now deceased lead singer of British Nazi rock band ‘Skrewdriver’, Ian Stuart Donaldson. Over the years it has proved durable and grown as a lucrative worldwide concern.

‘Skrewdriver’: The flagship band for the Nazi music scene founded by Ian Stuart Donaldson who is seen as a martyr to the white cause. His name features heavily in Nazi tattoos and paraphernalia.


‘Mice Trap Records’: US based promotional and merchandising outlet for the international Nazi music scene.

‘Oi!’ or ‘Oi! Oi!’: Both terms originate from the 1970s and were used to proclaim the affiliation between white working class skinheads and the far right within the context of an emerging music scene at the time. Although now dated, they still retain significance within the Nazi music scene and can still be seen in tattooing and on clothing.

Publications

‘Right Now’: Magazine claiming to be a neo Conservative publication.

‘Spearhead’: Monthly magazine.
6. Tackling racism among disaffected communities

DCLG research has examined initiatives using the following typology of objectives:

1. A reduction in racially prejudiced beliefs, often by general awareness raising
2. A reduction of specific types of racial discrimination in specific settings (violence, harassment, intimidation, threatening or derogatory physical attitudes)
3. A reduction of specific types of victimisation - often by victim empowerment or encouraging reporting by the public.

In its report, *Getting the message across: using media to reduce racial prejudice and discrimination*, the DCLG’s main recommendations are:

1. Understand how a campaign message is interpreted
2. Recognise that outcomes may be unintended as well as intended
3. To reduce racially prejudiced beliefs, initiatives should utilise knowledge from studies of the social psychology of attitude change
4. Emphasise how groups are similar rather than distinct from each other
5. Use messages that contradict stereotypes.
6. Each message should highlight only one minority ethnic group at a time
7. Initiatives to reduce victimisation might be best employed as part of a wider campaign rather than as a stand-alone programme.
8. Organisations implementing such initiatives should ensure that surveys to monitor impact are fit for purpose methodologically and in terms of quality
9. Campaigns and programmes must set aims higher than simply awareness raising to measure effectiveness in reducing prejudice and discrimination.
10. Thinking about evaluation at the design stage, and budgeting for it at the outset, will better shape the initiative
11. The precise mechanism by which an initiative is intended to bring about the aims of the programme must be identified
12. The social, political and dynamic context in which a programme is to take place must be understood before initiatives are implemented. This will inform likely replicability.

The DCLG’s report *What Works in Community Cohesion* (2007) suggested the following tips for tackling myths.

1. Accessible language, format and content that tackles local concerns head on - such as using ‘question and answer’ or ‘myth v. fact’ format to directly address common misconceptions.
2. Creative modes of communication to reach groups who are less likely to engage with written information or formal meetings - such as video exchanges, art, drama and debate
3. Interactive media, allowing immediate and direct responses to current and specific concerns - such as radio forums and internet forums
4. Use of existing engagement mechanisms to engage in two-way communication - such as neighbourhood forums

5. Myth busting functions are also provided by other types of initiatives such as those designed to encourage interaction

6. A multi-pronged approach can reach a range of audiences and achieve both breadth and depth of coverage

7. Using evidence about the distribution of resources to combat perceptions of unfairness

8. Targeted communications for particular communities

9. Integrating communications very closely with service development work

10. Making services visible and accountable within communication campaigns - such as using key stakeholders on radio phone-ins to help local people feel services are directly accountable

11. Rapid reaction to local and national events - such as in reaction to the London bombings

12. Myth busting work can be effective on a wide range of issues - such as recruiting people for public sector jobs from under-represented communities.

7. Next steps

Register now for a free no-obligation trial to view further guidance and case studies on these issues and to join a combined network of over 2,000 practitioners:

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