



Beyond a 90-minute nation: **Why it's time for an inclusive England outside the stadium**

Sunder Katwala, John Denham and Steve Ballinger

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British Future
Kean House
6 Kean Street
London WC2B 4AS

www.britishfuture.org
info@britishfuture.org
@britishfuture

Registered Charity Number: 1159291

Authors: Sunder Katwala, John Denham and Steve Ballinger
Editor: Steve Ballinger
Research: Sunder Katwala, Michelle Midzi and Steve Ballinger

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Introduction: An England for all of us

Steve Ballinger

At 2pm this Sunday 13 June, shops and parks across England will fall silent and empty as people tune in to watch Marcus Rashford, Harry Kane and Raheem Sterling take to the pitch in England's opening game of Euro 2021. Few things unite us across this nation like football: England's semi-final defeat in 2018's World Cup, to this Sunday's opponents Croatia, was the most-watched TV moment of the year with an audience of 26 million.

So supporters across the nation will be perched on the edges of their sofas, hoping to see the Three Lions progress to the tournament's Wembley final in July. New research for this report finds that the team's appeal cuts across age, gender, politics and ethnic background, with two-thirds of white (66%) and ethnic minority (65%) respondents in England agreeing that the England football team belongs to people of every race and ethnic background in England today.

As Sunder Katwala of British Future explores in this report, the England football team has been the focus of debates about who could be English from the moment Viv Anderson became England's first black player in 1978. More than 100 black and mixed race players have taken to the field in an England shirt since then. The success of the England women's team, the Lionesses, has also brought ethnic minority players such as Nikita Parris and Demi Stokes to national attention.

The participation of England's largest minority, those of Asian heritage, is notably absent from the football pitch. But football is not the only sport in which England competes: cricket's Moeen Ali, Monty Panesar, Adil Rashid and Nasser Hussain, who captained England from 1999-2003, have played their own part in shifting perceptions of what an England player, or indeed supporter, looks like – long after Norman Tebbit brought race relations to the stands at Headingley and The Oval with his infamous 'cricket test'.

Sport has done much of the work to date in settling debates about whether you could be from an ethnic minority background and be English. The far-right's assertion that 'there ain't no black in the union jack' has long since been rejected by the vast majority of people in Britain today. England's multi-ethnic football team, led to the World Cup semi-finals by a manager in Gareth Southgate who publicly recognised its symbolic power, has done much the same for the cross of St George – or at least for the Three Lions.

Yet English football and race are back in the headlines this week, after players "taking a knee" before the pre-tournament friendlies in Middlesbrough were booed and applauded by different parts of the crowd. Supporters may hold a range of views about this specific gesture, and of the Black Lives Matter anti-racism protests that it supports. But now that Southgate has made clear why the players have chosen to

continue taking this stand, appealing to those in the stadium to consider their impact on young England footballers, one hopes that England fans would reject the booing of their own players as they kick off a major tournament.

Outside of the stadium, efforts to build an inclusive sense of English identity remain a work in progress.

There is consensus today that you don't have to be white to be English – and that this identity can and should be open and inclusive of people of all ethnic and faith backgrounds in England today. Research for this report finds that **three quarters (77%) of white people in England and 68% of ethnic minority citizens agree that being English is open to people of different ethnic backgrounds who identify as English.** Yet this important shift across the generations remains a work in progress, both for white and ethnic minority citizens. Clear majorities of white respondents feel England and its symbols are open to all – yet while ethnic minorities agree that they should be, they still don't quite feel confident that they are fully invited to the party.

Building a more inclusive English identity may have less obvious benefits, too, in helping to bridge other divides, not by ethnicity but by age, place and politics. A small but vocal minority of white people in England – predominantly younger, urban, educated and socially liberal – are reluctant to associate themselves with English identity because they perceive it to be associated with negative, insular values. A more inclusive Englishness will hold stronger appeal not only for ethnic minorities but for this liberal group too – helping to bridge social divides that were highlighted during the EU referendum campaign.

We talk about inclusive English identity in the context of sport because we seldom talk about English identity at all, outside of sport. As John Denham of the Centre for English Identity and Politics argues here, it is time for that to change. Other institutions that engage with and operate in England – in arts and culture, heritage, business and politics – can often fail to celebrate or even acknowledge England. Worse still, they can even perpetuate outdated stereotypes of English identity that make Englishness seem threatening or unattractive.

So others will need to step up and find their voice, to help build an inclusive English identity outside the stadium. Football has laid the foundations of an Englishness that is open to all of us, but sport cannot do it alone. And fans – of every creed and colour – will want the team to focus on getting past Croatia, Scotland and the Czech Republic. Fifty-five years of hurt never stopped us dreaming.

Is there an inclusive England outside the stadium?

- New British Future research findings

Steve Ballinger

As the England team prepares to kick off in the Euro 2021 tournament, new British Future research into English identity and race examines how far we have come with efforts to make Englishness feel open to people in England of all ethnic backgrounds, and where gaps still remain.

Research for this report took place over two phases. Number Cruncher Politics conducted an initial, nationally representative poll of 1,088 white British and 1,000 ethnic minority respondents from the 9th to 17th October 2020. A second nationally representative poll was conducted by Number Cruncher Politics from 15 January to 14 February 2021, with an expanded sample of 2,000 ethnic minority UK adults and 1,501 white UK adults. All figures quoted here refer to this research base, unless otherwise stated.

Most people agree that Englishness is open to all of us

That you do not have to be white to be English is now a settled, majority view, with which only a minority disagrees. Three quarters (77%) of white people in England agree that "Being English is open to people of different ethnic backgrounds who identify as English."

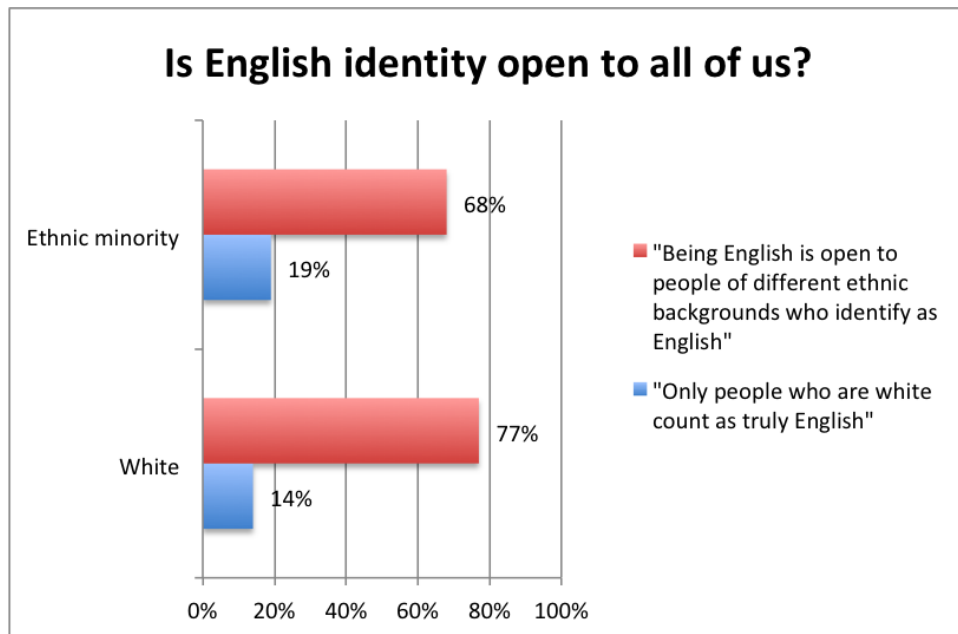
Just 14% agreed with the opposing statement, "Only people who are white count as truly English." Some of these seem likely, based on their other responses, to be voicing an assessment that England is not as inclusive as they would like it to be, rather than an exclusive and racialised view of English identity. One-fifth (22%) said they supported Black Lives Matter, for instance; while 21% said that immigration has had a positive impact on Britain¹. It seems credible, therefore, that the proportion of white people in England holding a racially exclusive view of English identity is closer to one in ten.

This inclusive view of Englishness is shared by most ethnic minority citizens, albeit with a little less confidence. Two-thirds (68%) of ethnic minority citizens agree that being English is open to people of all backgrounds, while 19% feel that English identity is still the preserve of white people.

For white respondents, agreement with an inclusive Englishness is held across generational and political divides. Some 75% of Conservatives and 85% of Labour voters agree that English identity is for everyone in England; while 81% of 18-24-year-olds and 78% of over-65s feel the same. Ethnic minority views on the

¹ When asked 'on a scale of 1-10 (with 1 very negative and 10 very positive), do you think immigration has had a positive or negative impact on Britain and the place where you live?' 21% of this group gave a positive score between 7 and 10.

inclusiveness of English identity, however, vary considerably by age. While three-quarters (73%) of under-24s feel confident that being English is open to all of us, only 60% over over-65s agree, and 3 in 10 (28%) say that only white people can truly be English.



Inclusive Englishness remains a work in progress. But the accepted wisdom, that Britishness is an inclusive identity while Englishness remains more contested, may now be open to question. The gap between British and English identity appears to be shrinking.

Some 85% of ethnic minority respondents feel some sense of belonging to England, with 3 in 10 (28%) feeling this strongly. Only 10% say they feel no sense of belonging to England at all. That puts England level with Britain, to which 87% of ethnic minorities feel a sense of belonging, with 31% feeling this strongly. Some 7% of ethnic minority citizens say they do not feel a sense of belonging to Britain.

Confidence in the inclusivity of British identity remains high. Eight in ten ethnic minority citizens (80%) agree that "Black and Asian people born in Britain are just as British as white people born in Britain," while just 7% disagree. White respondents feel the same (79% agree, 7% disagree). But with 7 in 10 ethnic minority citizens (68%) now agreeing that English identity is inclusive too, an Englishness that feels as inclusive as Britishness may soon be in sight.

What this new research reveals, however, is that once we discount sport, there is still much more work to do before the symbols and moments around which an inclusive Englishness can be built, shared and celebrated, feel equally owned by people from every ethnic background in England today.

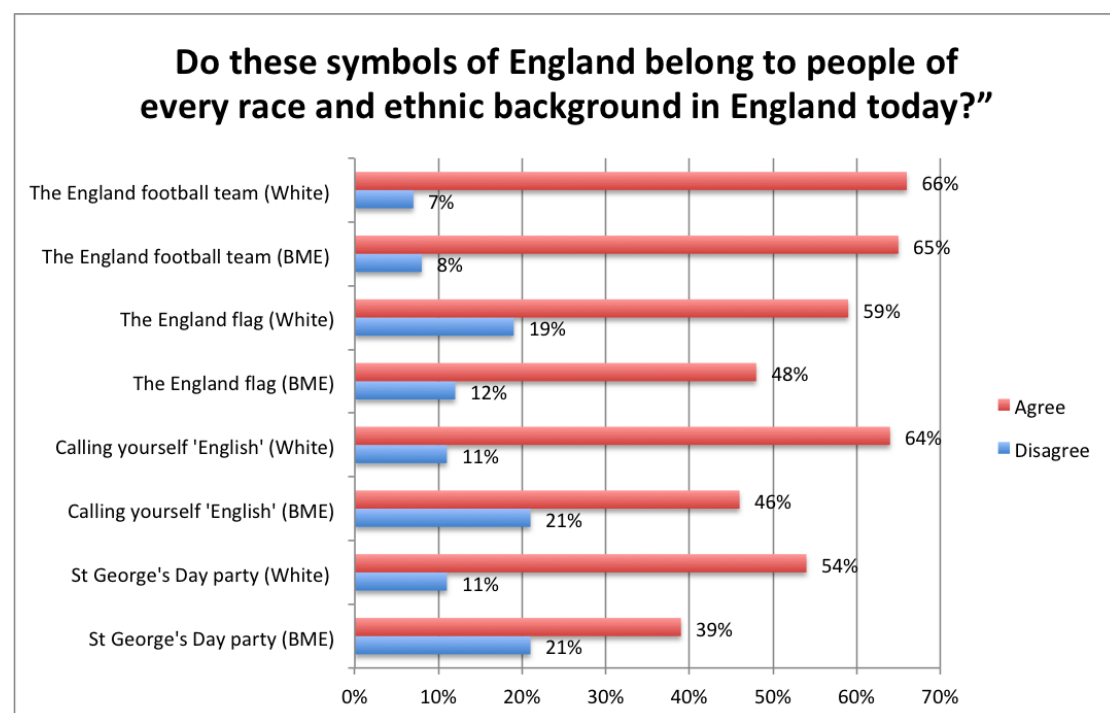
Marcus Rashford's England is our strongest symbol of an inclusive English identity

The England football team has significantly more power to embody and promote an inclusive English identity, belonging equally to people from all ethnic backgrounds in England, than any other symbol of Englishness.

Two-thirds (65%) of ethnic minority citizens in England agree that the England football team is a symbol of England that 'belongs to people of every race and ethnic background in England today.' Just 8% disagree. White respondents felt the same, with 66% agreeing that the England team belongs to all of us and only 7% disagreeing.

The England team appears to have the 'Heineken effect' of reaching all parts of society in England. That the Three Lions belongs to all of us is felt equally by the young and old; by Conservative and Labour voters alike; by both Leavers and Remainers; and by black (67%), Asian (64%) and mixed race people (70%) in England too.

Outside of the football stadium, however, there is a much weaker consensus as to whether symbols of England are open and equally shared.



The full question asked was: "Thinking about the following symbols of England, how much do you agree or disagree with the statement "this belongs to people of every race and ethnic background in England today?"

The England flag

While six in ten white respondents (59%) agree that the England flag is a symbol of England that 'belongs to people of every race and ethnic background in England today,' less than half (48%) of ethnic minority citizens feel the same. A fifth (19%) of ethnic minorities disagree.

Views of the England flag are divided by generation as well as by ethnic background, however. Only half (53%) of white 18-24-year-olds feel that the England flag belongs equally to people of different backgrounds, with 16% saying they disagree. Among white people aged 65+, however, 7 in 10 (69%) say the St George's flag belongs equally to us all. The views of older ethnic minority citizens are quite similar, with 6 in 10 (61%) feeling that the flag belongs equally to all of us in England; while only 45% of ethnic minority 18-24-year-olds agree with them.

Asian (51%) and mixed race respondents (54%) felt a greater sense of shared ownership of the England flag than black respondents, among whom only 41% agreed that the England flag is equally owned by people of all backgrounds.

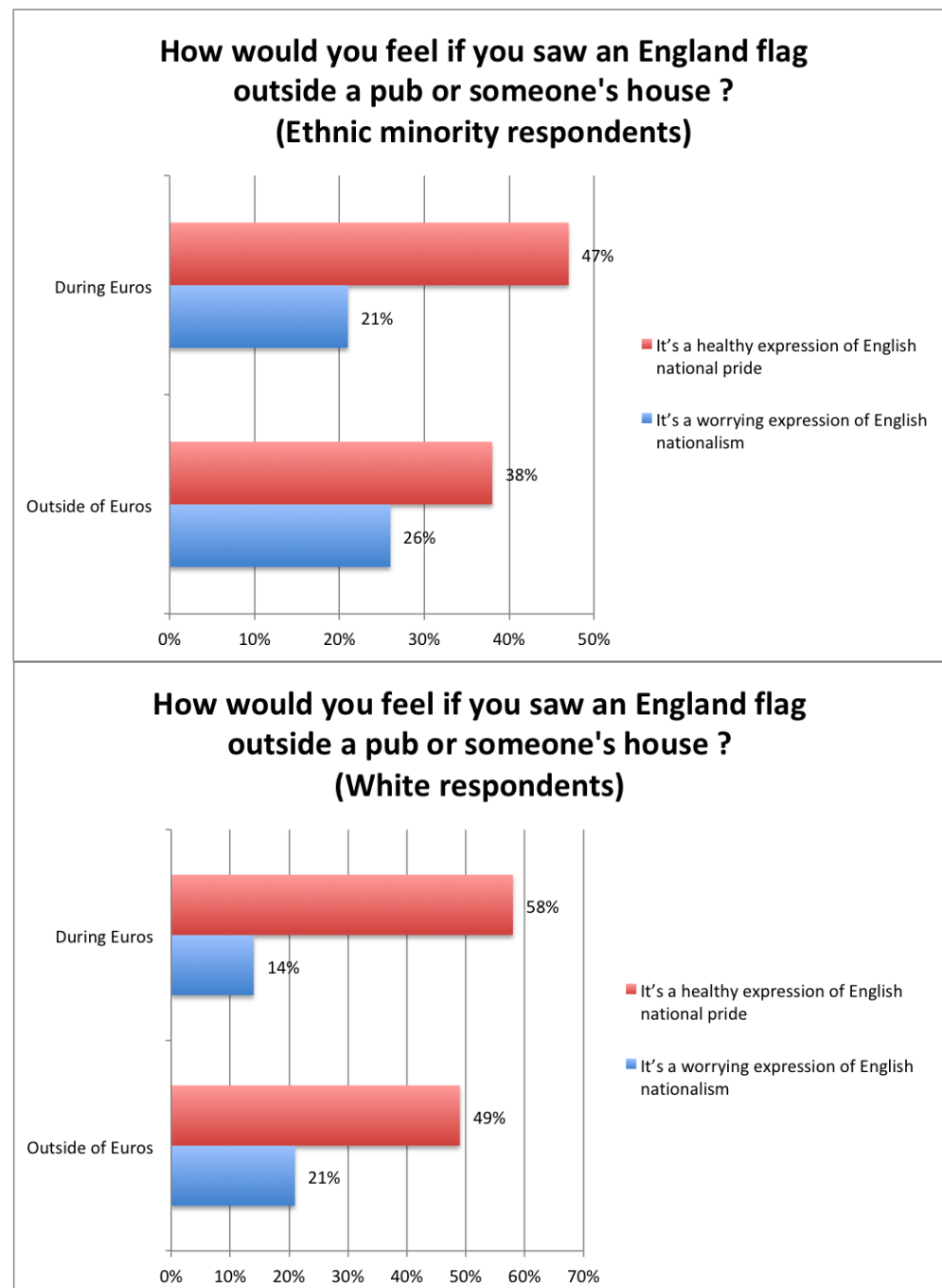
We also asked respondents how they felt when they saw the England flag on someone's home, car, shop or pub – whether they saw this as a healthy expression of national pride or a worrying expression of nationalism. We were interested in finding out, too, whether it made a difference when the flag was flown during a sports tournament like the Euros, compared to any other time of year. The findings show the power of sport to normalise expressions of English identity, and how we still have some way to go before Englishness feels inclusive outside of the stadium.

When we are cheering on the England team at the Euros this summer, six in ten white citizens (58%) and around half (47%) of ethnic minority citizens would see an England flag outside a pub, or hanging from someone's window, as a healthy expression of English pride. Divorced from sport, however, on a normal day of the year, only half of white citizens (49%) and 4 in 10 ethnic minorities (38%) see the flag in such a positive light. A quarter of ethnic minorities (26%) and a fifth of white respondents (21%) would see the St George's flag as a worrying expression of nationalism when it is not associated with sport.

The findings also reveal a striking challenge for those seeking to build an inclusive Englishness for the future. For the youngest group of white respondents aged 18-24, the 'Rashford effect' does not seem to apply when they see an England flag outside the pub: only 38% see it as a healthy expression of national pride, while a quarter see the flag as a negative symbol of nationalism whether there's Euro '21 football on the big screens or not (28% during the tournament, 27% outside of it). This illustrates a wider point about the challenge for English identity in connecting with some socially liberal groups of white people in England who associate it with negative values.

A quarter of ethnic minority 18-24s also saw the flag as a negative symbol, regardless of sport (25% during a sporting event, 27% without). Flying the England flag more often may help normalise it for some audiences, but for young people the effect may equally be to polarise and push them further away.

The context of a major sporting event like the Euros does have an inoculating effect, making people feel warmer towards displays of the England flag. Yet for younger people in particular, there is a lot more work to be done before the St George's flag becomes a shared symbol of an inclusive England on a par with football's three lions.



Full question asked was: 'Which of the following, if either, best describes how you would feel if you saw an England flag on someone's home, car, shop or pub during a summer when England is playing (a) in the European Championships/World Cup? (b) On a normal day of the year?'

Calling yourself English

Most white people in England do not feel that Englishness is their exclusive preserve. Two-thirds (64%) of white respondents in our research agreed that 'calling yourself English' is open to people of every race and ethnic background in the nation. That sentiment is felt most strongly by older white people, with 70% of over-65s in agreement, compared to 56% of white 18-24-year-olds.

When a caller to his LBC radio show recently told David Lammy MP that he could not call himself English because he was of Caribbean descent, his calm response, as he explained why he rightly felt English, won widespread praise. Public and cross-party political support followed the next day, with The Sun running a double-page spread backing the Labour MP and reinforcing the majority view that Englishness is open to all of us. As mentioned earlier, 14% of white people in England say that being white is a pre-condition for being English, compared to 77% who feel the opposite.

When the views of that minority are expressed pointedly in the direction of ethnic minority citizens, however – on social media, in the street or in a radio phone-in – they have an impact.

So while ethnic minorities in England increasingly *feel* English, as noted above – with two-thirds saying that English identity is open to all, and majorities voicing a sense of belonging to England – there is some hesitancy in voicing it. Less than half (46%) of ethnic minorities in England agree that 'calling yourself English' belongs to people of every race and ethnic background in England today, while one-fifth (21%) disagree. There are distinct differences between ethnic minority groups, with Black people (38%) least likely to feel that calling yourself English is open to people of all ethnic backgrounds, compared to half (49%) of Asians and 52% of mixed-race respondents.

This lack of confidence, for ethnic minorities, in calling oneself English may come from worries that someone may contest this point, as happened to David Lammy. It may depend, too, on the form that Englishness takes: ethnic minority citizens will confidently say that the England football team is their team, but clearly feel less warmth towards the England flag.

While the widespread support for David Lammy showed how far we have come, this new research suggests we still have some way to go.

St George's Day

If we wish to take English identity outside of the stadium, we will need moments – like England's Patron Saint's Day on 23 April – that bring people together to celebrate Englishness but don't involve kicking (or bowling) a ball. Yet previous research for British Future by ICM found that only 40% of us could name the date of St George's Day, compared to 71% who know the date of US Independence Day². Two-thirds (66%) of people in England felt that St Patrick's Day is more widely-celebrated in England. So there is work to be done before people see 23 April as time for a party; but if there were one, would everyone feel invited?

Our new research finds that only four in ten ethnic minority citizens in England (39%) currently agree that a St George's Day party is a symbol of England that belongs to all of us, while one-fifth (21%) disagree. That is some way behind white respondents to our poll, among whom 54% agreed that St George's Day is a shared symbol of England, with 11% disagreeing.

There is a big generational gap, too, among white respondents, with only 42% of those aged 18-24 feeling that a St George's Day party belongs to people of all backgrounds and 18% in disagreement – almost identical to ethnic minority sentiment. Yet six in ten white people aged over 65 (63%) feel positive about St George's Day as a symbol of an inclusive England.

Our research found, however, that there is a shared appetite for change. Majorities of both white (66%) and ethnic minority citizens (56%) agree that doing more to mark St George's Day, ensuring those from all ethnic groups are invited to take part, would be a positive way to foster a shared identity in England today. Only 5% of white respondents and 8% of ethnic minority citizens disagree.

Among white respondents there is majority agreement across political divides that celebrating St George's Day could be a moment to bring people together. Remain voters (63%) and Leave voters (70%), as well as Labour voters (66%) and Conservative voters (75%) all expressed support. Younger people, too, can get behind the idea of making St George's Day more inclusive, with 68% of white 18-24-year-olds supportive, along with a majority (51%) of ethnic minority 18-24s. Older ethnic minority respondents were particularly supportive, with 65% liking the idea of investing energy in creating an inclusive celebration on 23 April.

In some places that is already happening. The St George's Day parade in Dartford each year, organised by the Kent Equality Cohesion Council, brings hundreds of children from the area's diverse local schools together to parade through the town centre, cheered on by their parents. Southampton, too, has made efforts to ensure that St George's Day is celebrated in an inclusive way. Our research shows an appetite to replicate such moments all over England: when we have previously asked

² ICM for British Future, 2014 <https://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/British-Futures-Englishness-Poll.pdf>

people why they don't do more to celebrate St George's Day, a common response has been because no-one organises anything.

Building an inclusive Englishness is not straightforward. The symbols of English identity are contested and do not, at present, feel equally owned by people of all backgrounds in England. The dial is shifting and there is an appetite to do more. But one issue is that we simply do not encounter these symbols very often.

The England football team brings people together from all backgrounds in England because when they are playing it is one of the few moments when we ever get together to celebrate English identity. That identity is now widely felt to be open to all of us who feel English. Taking Englishness outside of the stadium may simply be a case of getting the bunting out once the season is over – and making sure everyone feels invited to the party.

Football tells the story of who we, the English, are today

Sunder Katwala

It was that glorious summer when Football Came Home that changed how I felt about England.

That the most confident expression of an inclusive English identity should come from football was a surprising development. During the trials and tribulations of the 1980s, football was more likely to be seen as central to the problem of how national identity could take violent and xenophobic forms.

So, a quarter of a century on, as the England team sets its sights on a Wembley final once again, it is important to understand the significant contributions that England's football team has made in providing a positive vision of a modern, shared English identity – as well as to consider what needs to happen to extend that idea beyond sport and across society.

How football changed who we thought of as English

"The imagined nation of millions is never more real than as a team of eleven named individuals", wrote the historian Eric Hobsbawm. Football has done more than any other sphere of our national life to change who we now think of as English.

Nobody had told my 8-year-old self that there was any question of whether I could be English. As an avid reader of Shoot! Magazine, I would anxiously follow the saga of whether Kevin Keegan would be fit to go to Spain in 1982. But I understood that others found this a more complicated question by the time that I was a teenager. Being a football fan, with an Everton season ticket, introduced me to a scale of overt and public racism that my children's generation will never witness. Yet it was largely football that was to introduce me to anti-racism too.

When Viv Anderson took the field for England against Czechoslovakia in 1978, he had become the first Black English international footballer. The game became the site of a fierce public argument about who could be English. Cyrille Regis has spoken powerfully of how, on being picked for England in 1982, he received a bullet in the post, warning him not to set foot on the Wembley turf. That same year when John Barnes dribbled through the Brazil defence in the Maracana to put England two-nil up, the National Front contingent in the away support chanted "one-nil" instead. This may have been one of the great modern England goals, but the NF argument was that "black goals don't count."

That pioneering generation of footballers had won the argument decisively by the time the 1990s began. When Paul Ince wore the armband to become England's first black captain in 1993, there was no public controversy as to whether he was English. Many people would now be surprised to find out that, when John Barnes came on as

a late substitute in the 1986 World Cup quarter-final against Argentina, he was the first black England player to play in the World Cup finals.

Football's place in our national culture and identity remained rather more complex. Italia '90 – Pavarotti's *Nessun Dorma*, Gazza's tears and penalties – had been a foundational moment in changing the status of modern football. But this was only a year after Hillsborough, and came while English club sides were banned from playing in European tournaments for the five years after the Heysel tragedy of 1985. Euro '96 itself came just months after England's friendly international in Dublin was abandoned the previous Autumn, with the far-right Combat-18 group playing a central role in that riot.

There could be a mixed, edgy atmosphere in the pubs around England matches. I would not have risked following the national team to an away game in the years before Euro '96. But, at home, I took part in the 'Raise the Flag' initiative where 40 volunteers would get to Wembley six hours before kick-off to lay out the white and red cards for a giant St George's Cross, and the flag of our opponents too. The challenge to racism in football culture involved many active efforts around both clubs and country, to foster the confident and inclusive sense of fan culture that broke through on the national stage as England hosted the Euros.

How Euro '96 reshaped a modern footballing Englishness

The magic of Euro '96 was partly about the football. Terry Venables' England team played with a confidence that would have been unimaginable when Graham Taylor's team had failed to qualify for the 1994 World Cup. The magnificent 4-1 victory over the Netherlands has a good claim to be the best English performance of modern times. The semi-final with Germany, ending in a penalty shoot-out defeat, was an epic occasion. Few England fans old enough to remember it will forget the atmosphere of that summer.

Euro '96 changed many things off the pitch too. England thinks of itself as a country of evolutionary rather than revolutionary change. Yet the remaking of Football Englishness at Euro '96 involved several shifts of identity off the pitch that echo the founding moments of modern states. England supporters changed which flag we flew in the stadium – and even adopted a new (unofficial) national anthem.

It had been Union Jacks that fluttered in the Wembley sunshine when England won the World Cup thirty summers before. Now the St George's Flag dominates the Wembley skyline. It is not entirely clear why the flags changed that summer. Being tournament hosts – and the luck of the draw putting England and Scotland in the same group at a major tournament for the first time – had a lot to do with it.

Despite getting the flag right from 1996, English teams continue to officially use the anthem of the United Kingdom, even if playing Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. Yet the inclusive Englishness of 1996 was best captured by a new unofficial anthem, *Three Lions*, encapsulating the spirit with which England would host the tournament.

The song rewrote the narrative of England's football history. A dominant charge against English football had often been that of arrogance: that the country that invented the game had never come to terms with losing to foreigners. Yet *Three Lions* disrupts and rejects this notion. A tournament single sung from the viewpoint not of the players, but the fans, could reveal a different truth. England no longer expects. ("All those oh-so-nears wear you down through the years"). Rather, supporting England involves a triumph of hope over experience. ("Thirty years of hurt never stopped me dreaming"). The nostalgia is not just for that one famous victory – "Jules Rimet still gleaming" – which took place before many fans were born, but about the experiences that we have shared since too.

So *Three Lions* is an anthem that captures what it is to be a nation: the shared moments we experience together, whether of victory or defeat, turn not just into personal memories but into shared stories, legends and myths about who we are, which underpin and inform our ambitions for the future. 25 years on, *Three Lions* could even be understood as an English anthem about how to be at ease with being a middling power.

After Euro '96: race and identity in sport and beyond

In this century, the multi-ethnic nature of a modern England team has simply become an unremarkable norm. More than 100 black or mixed-race players, nearly a third of those capped for England since Viv Anderson, have worn the three lions. The foundational arguments have long been settled – on the pitch by the mid-1990s and, increasingly, off it too in the years since.

This reflects a big social shift – not least because half of ethnic minorities in England are English-born. Many of the first generation of Commonwealth migrants – like my father, from India – were proud to become British, but few felt that they were invited to become English too. Holding a British passport symbolised that this was the shared identity of citizenship. The unspoken assumption was that English, Scottish and Welsh identities belonged primarily to the native population. But that has often felt different to their English-born children, who felt a birthright claim to both identities. This was one reason why Paul Ince and Ian Wright faced fewer challenges to their status as English than Cyrille Regis or John Barnes before them.

More broadly, Gareth Southgate has spoken of his desire that the England team "have the chance to affect something bigger than ourselves."

"We're a team with our diversity and our youth that represents modern England," he said, ahead of England's run to the World Cup semi-finals in Russia. "In England we have spent a bit of time being a bit lost as to what our modern identity is. I think as a team we represent that modern identity and hopefully people can connect with us."

England's team is not entirely a microcosm of our multi-ethnic society: there have been very few Asian professional footballers yet. But the British Future research captures that fans of all ethnic backgrounds feel a sense of connection to the team. And the Raheem Sterling and Marcus Rashford generation, inheriting the progress of the past, has brought a new voice to issues of race and social action.

Racism still exists, in sport and in wider society. It is a small, shrinking minority that believes in an ethnically exclusive England. The problem of the 2020s is that this racist fringe is amplified by a social media presence, while the overt racism that was given a red card in the stadiums still gets a green light from the social media rules. "Black goals don't count – no blacks in the England team" is the kind of indefensible racism that Twitter and Facebook rules currently permit, even as these platforms share anti-racism hashtags in an expression of solidarity. This spring saw a symbolic boycott by football players, clubs and other sports, protesting this failure to tackle racist abuse.

What next? Beyond a 90 minute nation

The power of sport matters. It may matter more in an increasingly individualistic and fragmented age. As they become scarcer, the handful of events that might bring fifteen million or more of us together at one time are even more valuable. Having a multi-ethnic team does not make a national identity that is inclusive, but it offers an idea about who we are now, that most people believe in. It is time for that idea to be projected outside of the stadium too.

We live today in a more consciously multi-national state, where most of us identify with more than one flag. Sporting fans have been used to this pluralism of identities for much longer: supporting our national football teams before cheering for Team GB at the Olympic Games.

Outside of sport, the politics of national identity have become more fraught, playing a central role in major political arguments – like those over Brexit, or the future of the United Kingdom – that can split our societies down the middle. This can undoubtedly make efforts to entrench civic and inclusive national identities more difficult. It should also make national symbols which bridge even the deepest political divides more valuable still. When the England, Scotland and Wales national teams play in Euro 2021 they will command support across political and referendum tribes – offering one reminder that those with opposing views on the biggest political questions need to find ways to disagree and live together.

England could learn from Scotland, once thought of as a '90-minute nation'. The Scotland of the 2020s is much less dependent on the vicissitudes of sporting success for its sense of status, both at home and abroad. In qualifying for Euro 2021, its team will not carry the burden of national identity that the Scottish teams of the 1970s and 1980s once did.

It is harder to find positive recognition of England outside of the sporting sphere.

Our football team has told the story of who we, the English, are today, while other national voices and institutions have failed to speak for England. Our society has seen significant inter-generational progress on an inclusive Englishness – but that remains work in progress. A stronger effort to foster that civic and inclusive Englishness beyond the stadium is long overdue.



Children in Blackburn cheer on England as part of British Future's '#WeAreAllEngland' project

Beyond a 90-minute nation

John Denham

Although much progress has been made, English identity has lagged behind the inclusivity of Britishness. As a *national* identity, rather than a community identity, Englishness must be open to everyone making their lives in England. There are real dangers if we make progress too slowly. Sport has had to carry too much of the weight of projecting an inclusive Englishness. It is now time for many other organisations across civic society, politics and the media to step up and share this national responsibility. This chapter examines the development of Englishness as an inclusive national identity, and then looks forward to suggest some principles that should underlie efforts to articulate Englishness in a diverse nation.

England as a nation

England is a nation with well-defined boundaries. Since UK devolution it has very largely had its own separate domestic policy and legislation across education at all levels, in health and social care, in the provision of water, and in much of transport, agriculture and the environment. It has no national democracy nor machinery of government – that’s for another discussion – but its politics and governance are distinct from the other nations of the union. England is not a ‘cultural idea’, but a political and governmental nation.

English and British identities predominate here. Four out of five say they are strongly English and, with much overlap, a similar number are strongly British. Most hold these identities proudly. There is a slight tilt towards Englishness over Britishness, with around 35-40% saying they are equally English and British; 25%-30% ‘more English than British’; and 20-25% ‘more British than English’.

No one should feel they ‘ought’ to have a particular identity; nor that a particular identity is ‘not for them’. Major public policy debates should not be distorted by any sense that national identities are proxies for other divisions. In building strong and inclusive local communities in England, English and British must available as shared national identities, not stand-ins for communitarian or ethnic identities.

There has been much positive progress but there is no room for complacency. In the coming years England may well become more fragmented by geography, income and education. Major cities are rapidly becoming ever more diverse and the chosen home of graduates. Other parts of England are changing more slowly. A nation – or town – in which these divisions were reflected in different national identities would not be a happy or cohesive place.

It is true that over the past twenty years the extent to which an individual identifies as English or British has become associated with different views about the governance of England and Britain, and England’s relationship with the Union and

the EU. But debates about England's governance, the future of the union and the UK's relationship with Europe and the EU will rage around us for some time. Whatever our views on these questions, a healthy political nation needs both of England's national identities to be open to all.

The current state of play

Britishness is more widely adopted by BAME residents than Englishness, but the difference is not as stark as some suggest.³ Around a third of BAME residents identify strongly as English and are proud to do so. That's half the rate of the white majority but not an insignificant number. It demonstrates the potential for Englishness to become a much more inclusive identity. That potential is underlined by British Future's most recent polling which asked BAME respondents about their 'sense of belonging' to both Britain and England: the responses at 30% 'strongly' and 35% 'somewhat' were identical.

In recent years the majority population has become dramatically more open to a diverse English identity. Over the 7 years from 2012-2019, the number saying that English was a white identity fell from one in five to one in ten with the fall being most marked amongst older voters⁴.

In 2021, a significant minority of visible ethnic minorities already identify as English. The majority population, including those who emphasise their English identity, are more open to an inclusive English identity than ever before. Before looking at how to make Englishness more open to ethnic minorities, it's important to understand why Britishness is currently the more inclusive identity.

Englishness, Britishness and multiculturalism

A common myth claims that the British Empire's cosmopolitanism makes Britishness the more natural identity for minorities originating from former colonies. But as late as the 1980s, British identity was widely seen in England as inherently racist, colonialist and imperialist. Today's more inclusive Britishness was forged by the promotion of British multiculturalism by grassroots campaigns with endorsement from the state and civic society. British multiculturalism used a shared legal citizenship to demand equal respect and treatment. Englishness was neglected entirely and the surprise might be that it has changed as much as it has. (In Scotland and Wales, by contrast, political and civic society focused on making Scottish and Welsh identities more inclusive rather than British identity).

³ In 2018 85% of white respondents felt 'strongly' English compared with 45% of BAME respondents. 84% of white residents were strongly British compared with 73% of BAME residents. 61% of white residents were 'proud' to be English, and 32% of BAME residents (Less than 10% of either group would actually be embarrassed to be English).

⁴ Polling by British Future and CEIP

A second challenge is that those who staff England's most influential institutions such as the civil service, academia, the media, NGOs and cultural organisations are significantly more likely to emphasise a British rather than an English identity⁵. Organisations that could be taking the lead in promoting an inclusive Englishness often shy away from doing so. At worst they may perpetuate the worst and most out-dated stereotypes of English identity.

Looking to the future

The lesson of Britishness (and Scottish and Welshness) is that national identities can be consciously refashioned as inclusive, but that this will require the commitment of every organisation and institution that engages with England and its people. This includes non-government and civic society groups, arts and cultural organisations, the media, political parties, sporting organisations, and the state at local and national levels.

I suggest seven principles to guide this work:

1. Acknowledge the English dimension to our work.

Many organisations that engage with England often avoid naming it, using 'the country' or 'Britain' or even the UK when talking only about England. (Nearly all political parties do this, for example). Some organisations describe themselves as 'UK' even when they have separate Welsh and Scottish branches. Making England invisible as a geographical, policy and organisational nation reinforces the idea that English identity is a cultural not a national identity.

2. Ensure that any visual representation of England and its people are fully representative of England's population

A 2018 survey⁶ found that many St George's Day events promoted by local authorities and even state-sponsored charities such as English heritage used overwhelmingly white images of activities. This not only reinforces the idea that Englishness is an ethnic communitarian identity but excludes the large number of non-white people who already identify strongly and proudly as English.

3. Sharing our stories in today's England

At the heart of any national identity are the stories we share about who we are, how we came to be here and what we value in common. Englishness must be open to all who are making their lives here. Our shared stories of England need to include the stories of those people whose families may have moved here in the relatively recent past and those (some of whom will have their own migrant heritage) who have lived

⁵ <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/ceip/publications/englands-elites-and-the-governance-of-england.page>

⁶ CEIP/Winchester University

in England much longer. It is easy to underestimate the power of actually taking the time to share our stories, whether at work, in local communities or in national organisations.

4. Avoid deliberately or inadvertently promoting or reinforcing inaccurate or out-dated representations of English identity

It is commonplace to find English identity openly associated in the media and social media with racism, xenophobia, far right politics, nationalist politics, little Englanders and the like. Cultural representations of English identity often promote similar conceptions. These come not just from fringe sources but mainstream politicians, prominent commentators and powerful cultural influencers. This unfair misrepresentation makes English identifiers reluctant to say so and, of course, makes Englishness unattractive to anyone who would find such values understandably threatening. Exploration of historic and current manifestations of Englishness is, of course, legitimate and important, but this should be done fairly and accurately.

5. Find opportunities to celebrate English identity

St George's Day is one opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate English identity (provided it is done inclusively). Southampton's St George's Day produced discussion material linked to the PHSE curriculum asking 'what modern dragons need slaying', worked with the local newspaper to run a St George's community award whose nominees came from all sections of the community, and offered small grants to encourage community organisations to run St George's Day events. Sporting events provide many other opportunities to ensure that the flag belongs to all of England. Organisations that serve England might look for an activity or event that particularly marks that relationship. Englishness should not be restricted to those born here but being born in England is overwhelmingly accepted as making someone English. This 'birth-right' of being born English may be woven into all celebratory activities.

6. Join the local with the national

Work to promote cohesive communities often focuses on local belonging and identity, understanding rightly that different communities may share a local allegiance even where national identities differ. But there are good opportunities to link the two. A distinct feature of Englishness is that it is usually also associated with a strong local identity. Being 'from here' can open the door to English identity to many. And the new British Future polling shows that BAME respondents are much more likely to agree that English identity is open to them in areas where different races get along well together and to disagree in areas where they do not. Promoting an inclusive English identity can be a positive part of promoting a cohesive local identity.

7. An inclusive Englishness benefits us all

For obvious reasons, the focus of inclusivity is on ensuring that people in England from an ethnic minority background feel that Englishness is fully open to them. But the British Future data also shows that a significant minority of white residents are not certain that the St George cross or St George's Day are fully open. Some may feel they represent a reactionary Englishness that they reject. By building an inclusive English identity we can ensure that Englishness, including its symbols and celebrations, are fully shared.

8. Do not be afraid of engaging with English identity!

Because the staffing and leadership of many NGOs, arts and cultural institutions, academia and the media, are much less likely to identify as English than the general population, these organisations often lack confidence in engaging with English identity. Many internalise all the worst misconceptions of Englishness and fear that to associate with it is to endorse those imagined values. This challenge needs to be recognised and tackled. As more organisations do so, and share good practice, the collective confidence of these crucial 'cultural influencers' will grow.

What next for Englishness?

The continued development of an inclusive English identity, open to all, is essential to averting future identity-based divisions. It is a shared task that cannot be left to one organisation or one area of activity. Every organisation that engages with England has a role to play and, while some will take to this more easily than others, our ability to do so will grow as we work together.



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