

England United: Pride not prejudice

A toolkit for those who want to
speak up for an inclusive England



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Future...

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About British Future:

British Future is an independent, non-partisan think tank engaging people's hopes and fears about integration and migration, identity and race, so that we share a confident and welcoming Britain, inclusive and fair to all.

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1. Introduction: Why we need to speak up for an inclusive England

How do we talk about England today and what could bring a changing England together?

Will national symbols and occasions be experienced as things that divide or unite us?

Are those who insist on rejecting the English identity of some of us going to narrow our sense of who we are as a nation?

Or could we voice a pride in England that is inclusive enough to invite everyone who calls this country home to join us and celebrate it?

This toolkit hopes to answer these questions and offer practical advice to those seeking to bring people together by celebrating pride in an inclusive England and Englishness that rejects prejudice.

The *England United: Pride Not Prejudice* project begins by publishing this toolkit because there is a lot of uncertainty about how to talk about England.

These are volatile times at home and abroad. The symbols of Englishness can look more like part of the problem of polarisation than something we can share. It is not surprising if people and institutions are wary of engaging in debates about identity that can feel so heated.

So we hope to build more confidence – among our civic institutions and ultimately the country as a whole – that there is a public appetite for an inclusive expression of English pride, open to all of us here in England.

There is often a sketchy understanding about how most of the public thinks about England and Englishness today.

Being British is the citizenship identity of a multi-national as well as multi-ethnic and multi-faith society. England's history stretches back ten centuries yet it is a nation without a state. So our leaders have talked much less about what it means to be English than about British identity. The boundaries between being British and English were usually more blurred than for the Scottish and Welsh, where the last three decades have seen devolved governments champion a civic national identity. It is less clear who has the responsibility for doing that in England.

Yet ideas about who can be English have changed over the last half-century. For the vast majority of English people, England is a nation that is wider than the majority ethnic group within it.

The breadth of the public consensus on this may surprise some people, given confused and polarised media and online debates. A minority may still insist that former British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, born and bred in England, is making a mistake when he identifies as English. Yet for most people, these questions were settled years ago, largely by the sporting symbolism of black English footballers and cricketers. Efforts in the 1980s and 1990s to promote an ethnically exclusive Englishness were overwhelmingly rejected.

Most ethnic minorities agree that they can be English too, albeit a little more tentatively. That comes in part from an historically stronger sense of British identity among ethnic minorities from Commonwealth backgrounds. But over the last fifty years, a long pattern in English history has continued. The children – and especially the grandchildren – of migrants often start to feel that they also have a birthright claim to Englishness too, even if this comes as a surprise to their parents and grandparents.

So our starting point is a grounded confidence in the appetite to bring people together and celebrate pride in an English identity we can share.

We are not promoting a one-size-fits-all idea of England. The broad appetite for a pride in England today will take many different forms across generations and geographies. The pluralism of England is part of what makes this a great country. This is a country of the city and countryside; of pride in our local accents and regional differences; where your breakfast bacon can come in a bap, a batch, a roll or a barm cake (or indeed without the bacon).

It is a country whose complex and contested history explains the plural, democratic society that we have become today. One with many sources of potential pride, in language and literature, music, arts and culture, gardens and landscapes, sports and traditions.

There is much to celebrate, and we should have the confidence to invite everyone here to join the party. Because pride can unite England today in a way that prejudice never could. We hope you will share your experiences of joining us on this journey.

2. Where does the public stand on English identity and its symbols?

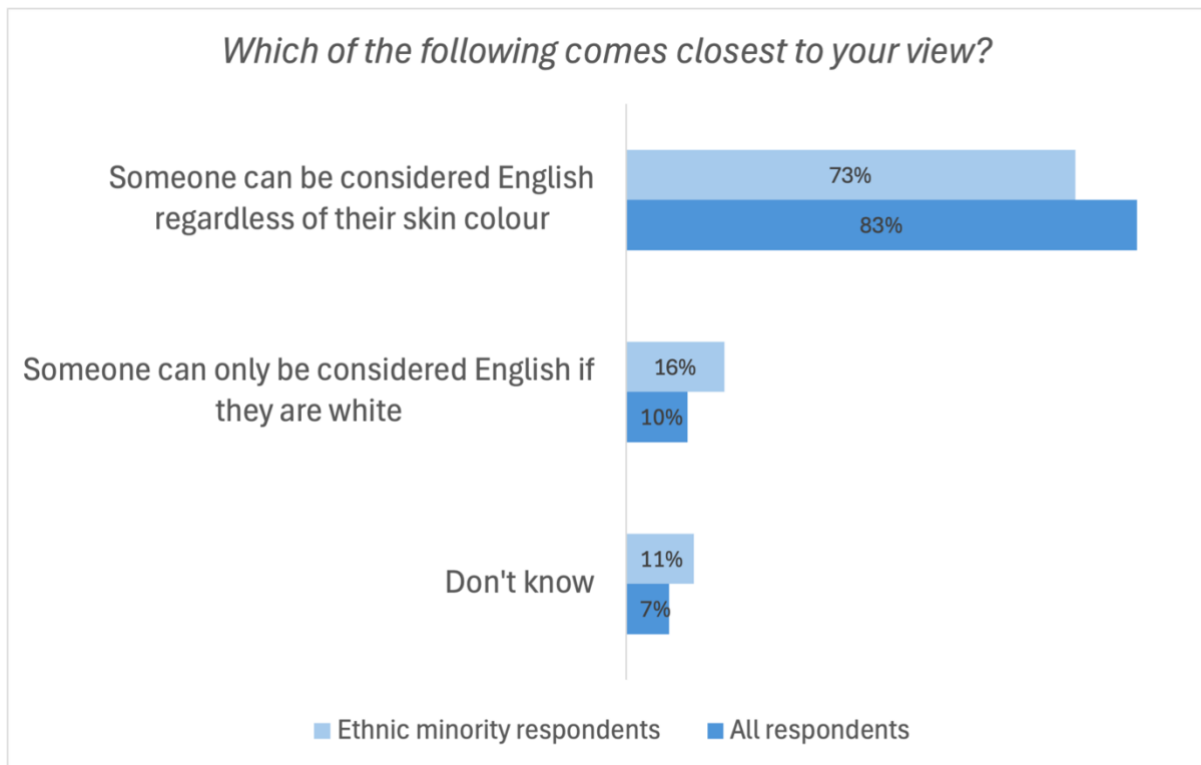
- The vast majority (83%) of people agree that Englishness is open to people of all ethnic backgrounds – though a 10% minority believe one has to be white to be English.
- Debates about the England flag have become contested and polarised, but context – including where and why a flag is flown – make a big difference to people’s perceptions.
- Only half the public currently feel a St George’s Day party is inclusive – but 7 in 10 would welcome efforts to make sure people from all backgrounds feel invited.
- Three-quarters of people in England want leaders and organisations to proudly celebrate an inclusive English identity that is opposed to prejudice. Those who do will have strong public backing.
- The England football team is seen as the most unifying symbol of England: 70% agree it belongs to people of all backgrounds.

Understanding what the public thinks about Englishness and its symbols, including the views of ethnic minorities, is important for organisations developing strategies for engaging with these issues. Attitudes data can also act as a useful counter to those voices on social media, often holding the strongest opinions, who claim to speak for the majority. To help us understand public attitudes to English identity and its symbols today, British Future commissioned Focaldata to survey 2,426 people in England from 6-17 February 2026, including a boosted sample of 686 people from an ethnic minority background. Data were weighted to be representative.

i) Englishness and ethnicity

One in ten of our survey respondents (10%) agreed with the statement that “Someone can only be considered English if they are white.” **Some 83% agreed “Someone can be considered English regardless of skin colour.”** This echoes the findings from YouGov’s [November 2025 survey](#), in which 13% of the public said you can only be considered English if you are white, compared to just 6% who said you had had to be white to be considered British.

Figure 2.1: Do people think you have to be white to be English?



There was little difference in responses by age, region, or politics. In fact the only factor that seemed to make a difference to responses was ethnicity – and not, perhaps, in the way one might expect. Ethnic minorities were significantly more likely to say that Englishness is exclusively for white people, with 16% agreeing with this statement, compared to 73% who felt it was open to people from all backgrounds. This correlates with census findings that a higher proportion of ethnic minorities identify as British rather than English; and also with the 2025 YouGov survey referenced earlier, in which 24% of ethnic minority respondents said you could only be considered English if you were white.

One important inference from this is that the 10% of the public who agree ‘Someone can only be considered English if they are white,’ almost certainly aren’t all racists who would never *want* Englishness to be open to people of all backgrounds. Rather, a proportion – many of them probably ethnic minorities – are observing how English identity appears to be racially exclusive today.

Yet we know racists exist and are also likely to have chosen the ‘whites only’ version of Englishness. So this question identifies overall sentiment but doesn’t elucidate why people answered how they did – which may vary considerably.

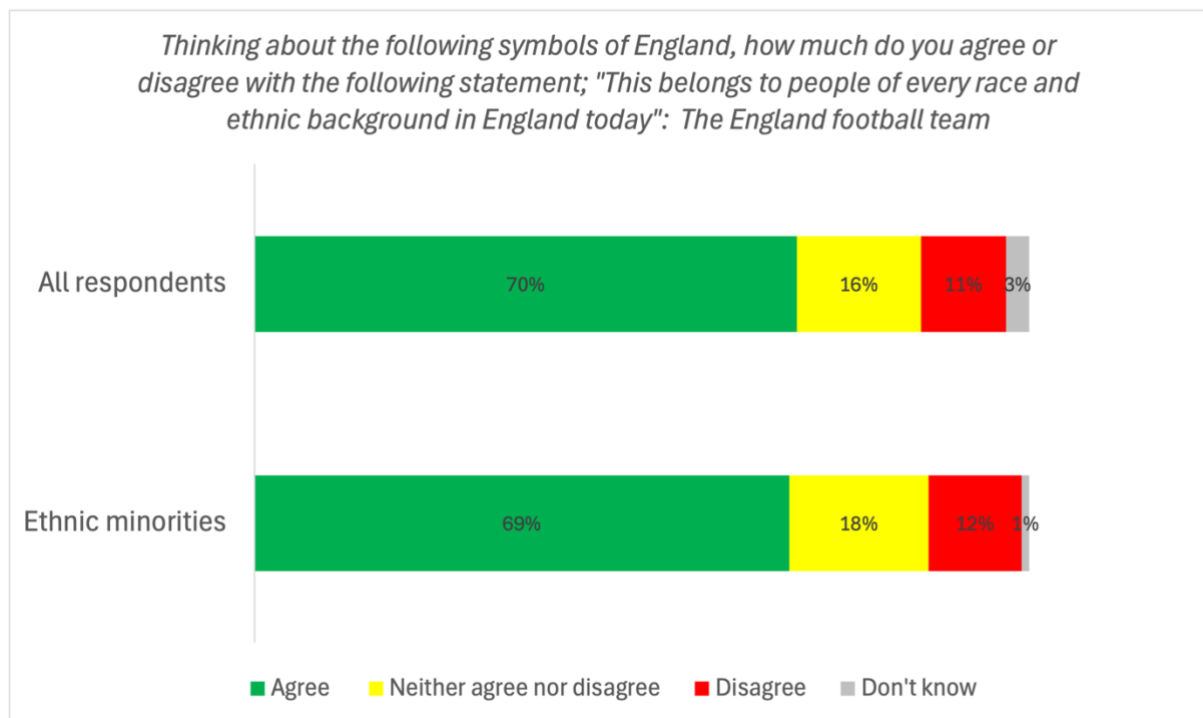
Do England's symbols belong to people of all backgrounds?

Our survey listed four prominent symbols of English identity – the England flag, the England football team, a St George's Day party and 'calling yourself English'. Respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement that "this belongs to people of every race and ethnic background in England today".

The England football team, which heads to the USA this summer to compete for the World Cup, is seen as the most unifying symbol of England, with 7 in 10 respondents (70%) agreeing that it belongs to people of all ethnic and faith backgrounds, while only 11% disagree.

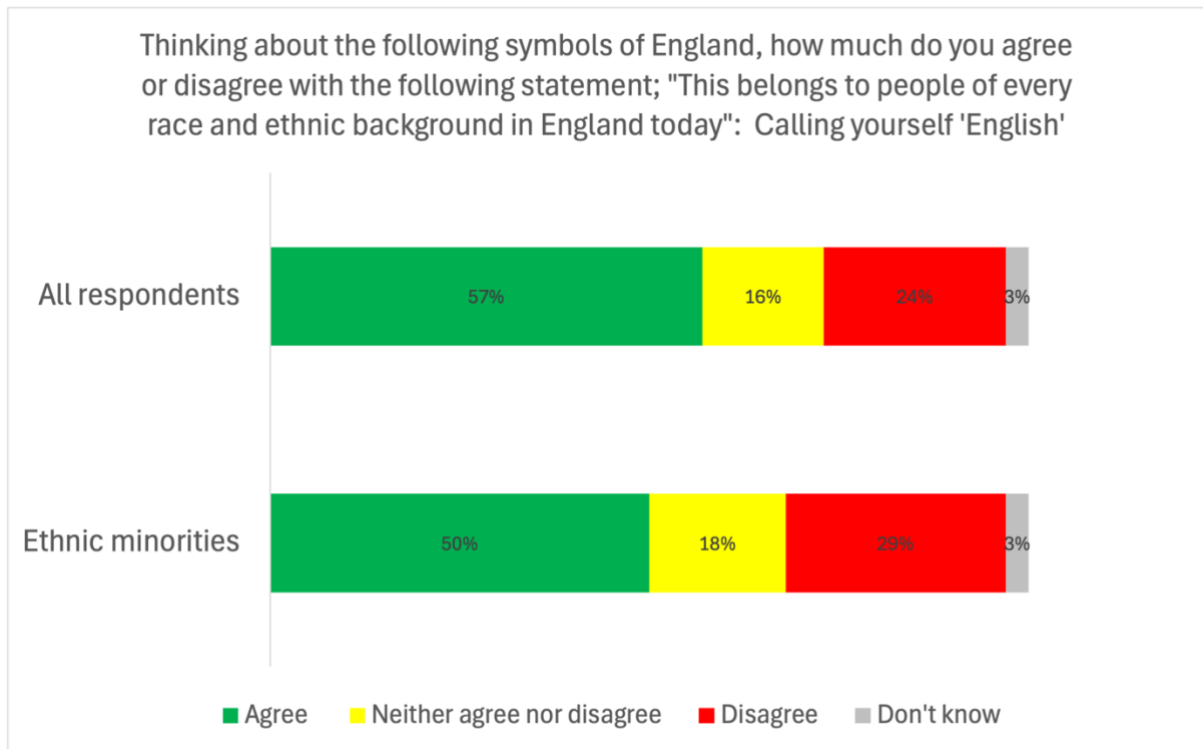
That feeling is shared by ethnic minority respondents too, with 69% saying the England team belongs to us all and just 12% in disagreement.

Figure 2.2: The England football team as a symbol of an inclusive England



A similar number, 57%, feel that 'calling yourself English' belongs to people of all ethnic backgrounds. Around a quarter (24%) disagree – though it is important to note that motivations could differ for answering in this way. Some may want Englishness to be exclusive on grounds of race and faith; while others may be observing that this feels like it is the case, even if they would rather it was not. That caveat is backed up by the 29% of ethnic minority respondents who feel that 'calling yourself English' is not open to them. Half of ethnic minorities in England, however (50%), feel that 'calling yourself English' is open to people of all backgrounds.

Figure 2.3: Does 'Calling yourself English' belong to people of all backgrounds?



The England flag is the symbol of English identity that has, in recent years, become more contested and polarising than any other. We explore how the public feels about flags in the next section.

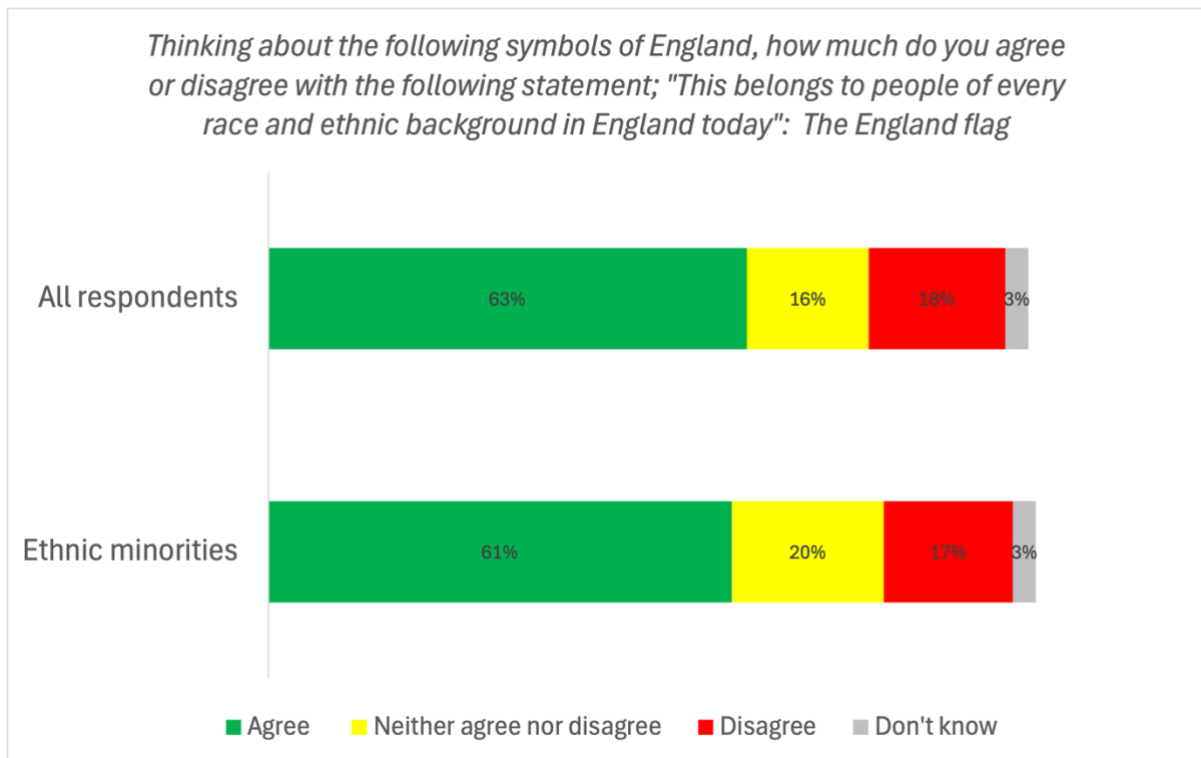


St George's Day party. Photo by Rachel Clarke

ii) Feelings on flags

The English flag has, in recent years, become the most contested of English symbols. Yet in our survey nearly two-thirds of the public in England (63%) feel it belongs to people of all ethnic and faith backgrounds in England today, compared to 18% who disagree. Ethnic minority respondents felt similarly, with 61% identifying the flag as a symbol that belongs to them too and 17% feeling it does not.

Figure 2.4: Do people feel that the England flag belongs to all of us?

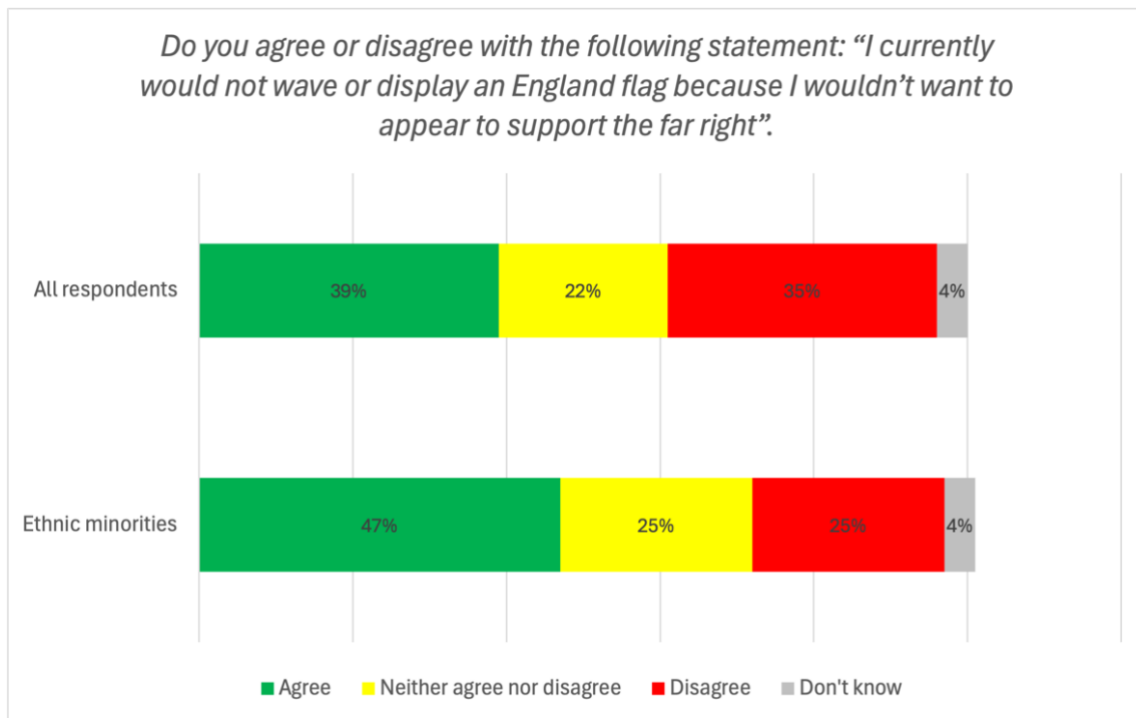


The debate about the England flag and its meaning has become polarised.

Four in ten people in England (39%) and almost half of ethnic minorities (47%) agree that “I currently would not wave or display an England flag because I wouldn’t want to appear to support the far right”. One in five (22%) strongly agree. At the same time, a similar proportion (35%) disagree with this statement – one in five of them (21%) strongly.

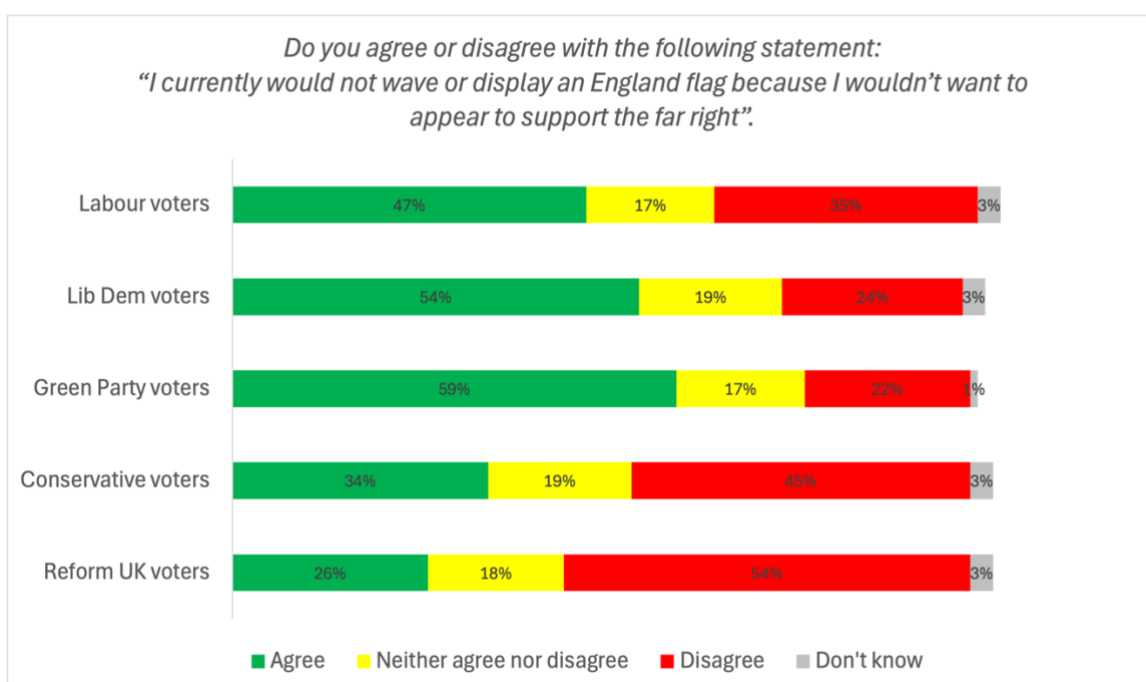
Context matters to how the flag is perceived. Previous [British Future research](#) found that views on the England flag shifted significantly depending on whether a major sporting tournament is taking place. A September 2025 [Opinium survey](#) of 500 ethnic minority respondents, conducted for *Good Morning Britain*, found that about a third saw the flags as primarily an expression of pride and patriotism (33%) and a third as primarily worrying far right extremism and racism (35%), with many other respondents saying their perception depended on the context and intent.

Figure 2.5: Anxieties about the England flag



Responses differ significantly by politics. Around half of 2024 Labour voters (47%), Lib Dems (54%) and 6 in 10 Green voters (59%) would not display the England flag for fear of appearing to support the far right. While 34% of Conservative 2024 voters feel the same way, a plurality (45%) disagrees; and more than half of Reform UK voters (54%) disagree with this statement, 40% of them strongly.

Figure 2.6: How the meaning of the England flag is polarised by politics



But that does not mean that people have given up on celebrating their English identity – indeed the majority of people in England express an appetite to display their pride in England in an inclusive way. **Six in ten people (62%) agree that “I would like to be able to fly an England flag without appearing to support the far right,”** while 15% disagree. More than half (54%) of ethnic minorities also agree, with 1 in 5 (20%) saying they disagree.

This matters much more to over-55s, who are 20 percentage points more likely to agree than our youngest respondents (69% of over-55s vs 49% of 18-24s). And it spans politics, too – with agreement from two-thirds (65%) of Labour voters and 72% of Conservatives; 65% of Reform UK voters and 61% of Greens; and 62% of those who vote Liberal Democrat in 2024.

Context matters when it comes to how flags are perceived – and in most contexts, a majority of people in England of all backgrounds view flag-flying as a healthy expression of English pride, rather than something more threatening. The exception will come as little surprise, given the polarised debate about recent incidences of England flags being put up in numbers and without permission on lamp-posts across the country.

Eight in ten people in England (81%) and three-quarters of ethnic minorities (74%) see the flying of England flags to support our football teams in major tournaments as “a healthy expression of English national pride”. Just 7% see them as a “worrying expression of English nationalism”, with people from an ethnic minority background significantly more likely to say so (13%).

The picture is not dissimilar when people are asked about England flags being flown at the Town Hall to mark St George’s Day, with 79% of the general public and 69% of ethnic minorities seeing this as a healthy expression of English pride.

And when people choose to fly England flags on their own house or car, even outside major sporting events, most people see little to be concerned about, with just 15% of the English public and 18% of ethnic minority respondents finding this worrying – compared to 72% and 69% respectively who don’t.

The outlier is when such flags are flown from lamp-posts along the street. Support falls to 59% of the general public, with a quarter (25%) seeing this as a worrying expression of English nationalism. Nearly 3 in 10 people from an ethnic minority background (28%) find these flags worrying, though a narrow majority (54%) still feel they are a healthy expression of national pride.

Figure 2.7: Perceptions of England flags in different contexts – all respondents

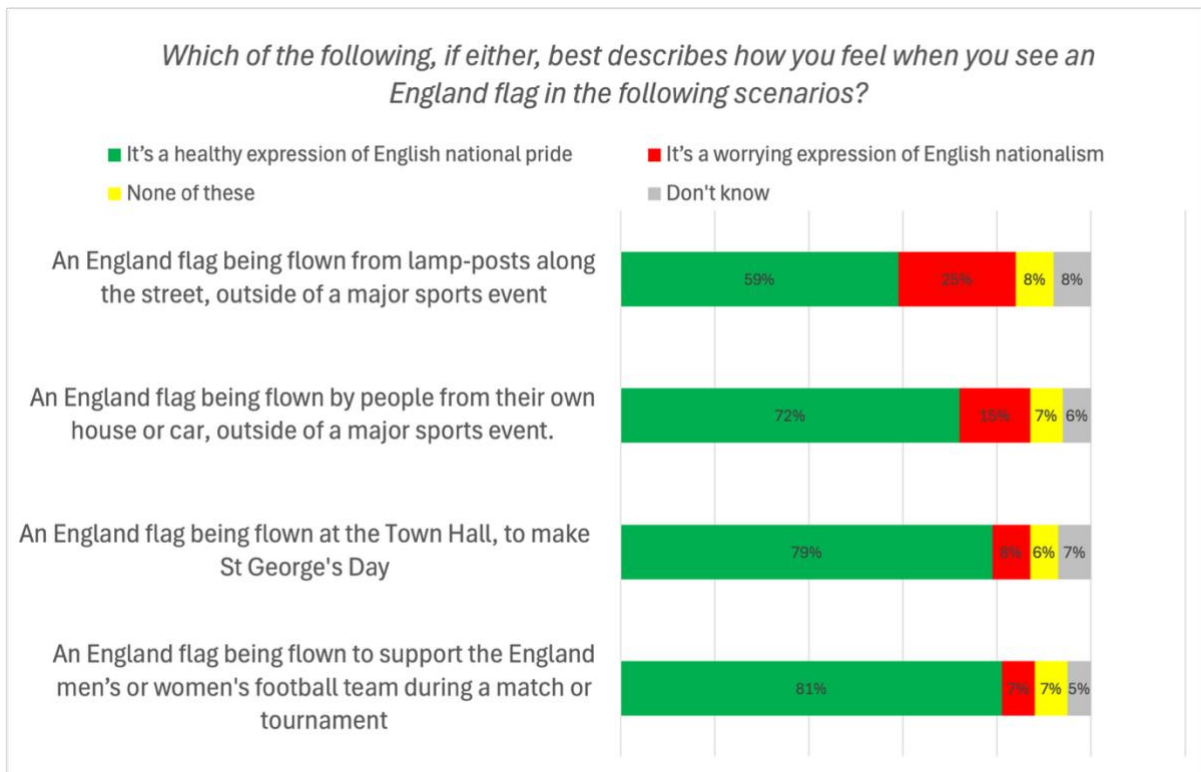


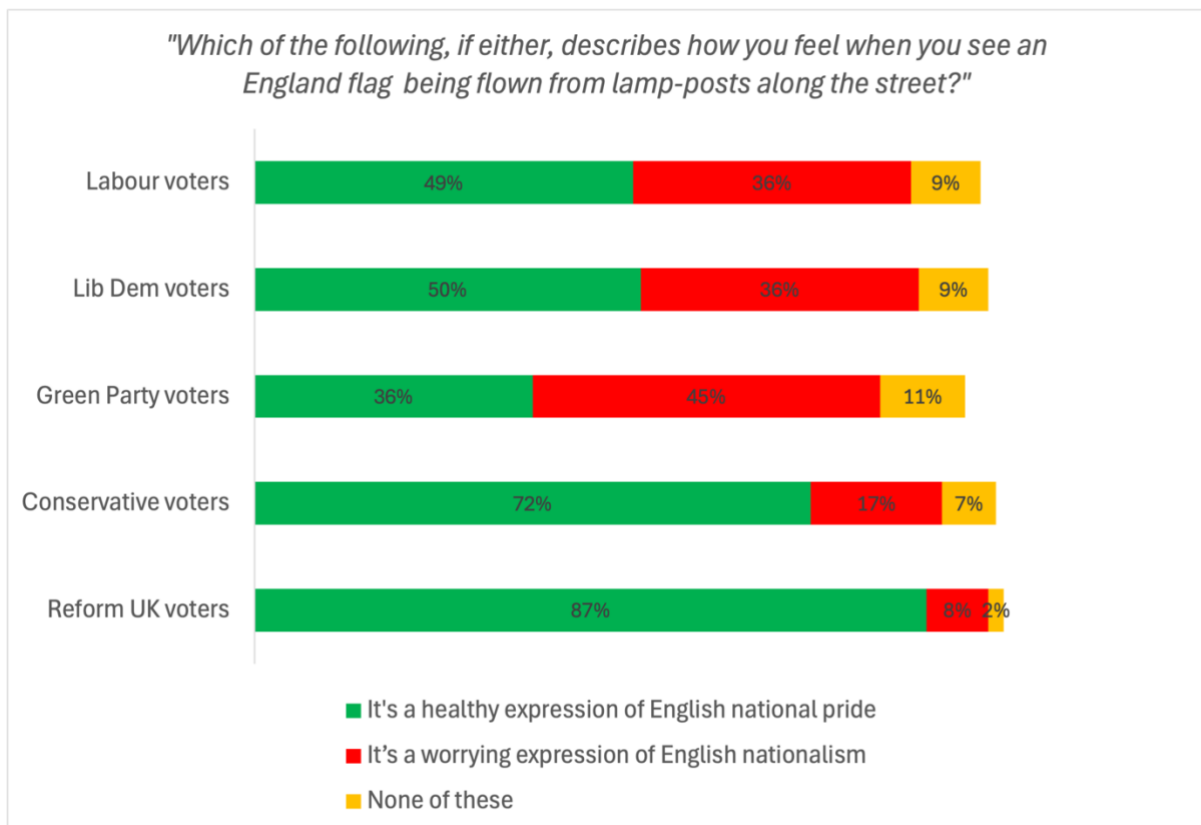
Figure 2.8: Perceptions of England flags in different contexts – ethnic minority respondents



Young people are most concerned by flags on lamp-posts, with around 4 in 10 (39%) of those aged 18-24 finding them worrying, while less than half (45%) are untroubled. That sets them at odds with older people in England, of whom two-thirds (66%) are fine with England flags in this context, while 25% see them as worrying.

And this use of the England flag divides by politics too. Labour 2024 voters are quite divided, with half (49%) considering them healthy expressions of pride while 36% see them as worrying. Lib Dems are very similar (50% healthy / 36% worrying). Green voters are the most concerned, with 45% seeing flags on lamp-posts as expressions of worrying nationalism, more than the 36% who view them as benign. But a large majority of Conservative voters (72%) are at ease with this use of England's flag, with just 17% finding it troubling; and 2024 Reform voters are strongly supportive, with 84% seeing England flags on lamp-posts as a healthy expression of pride and just 8% finding them worrying.

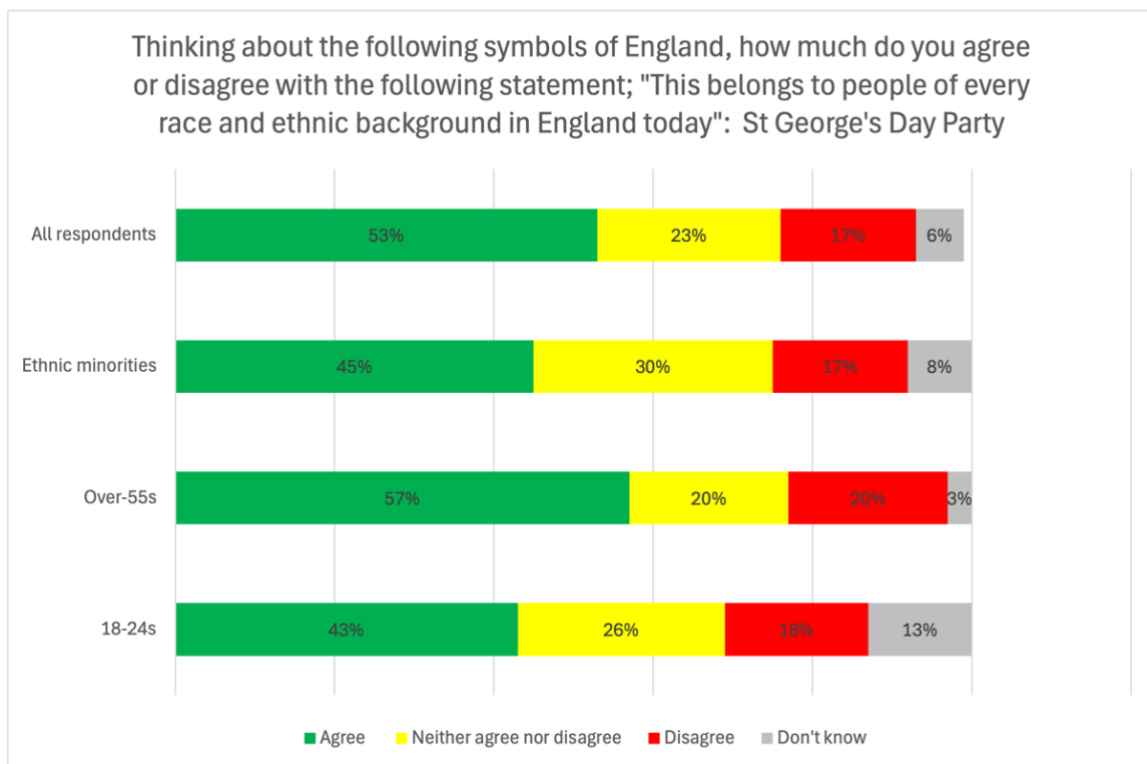
Figure 2.9: Feelings towards England flags on lamp-posts, by party



iii) Can St George bring England together?

Our survey finds that only around half the public in England (53%) feels that a party to celebrate St George's Day on 23 April belongs to people of all backgrounds. That falls to 44% of ethnic minority respondents. Older people are more inclined to see a St George's Day party as inclusive, with 57% of over-55s feeling that it belongs to people of all backgrounds. Yet only 43% of 18-24s agree with them, while 18% of our youngest respondents actively disagree that a St George's Day party is for all of us.

Figure 2.10: Do people think St George's Day belongs to people of all backgrounds in England?



More work is clearly needed to make St George's Day an inclusive celebration of Englishness that brings people together. We profile case studies of how this can work in practice later in the toolkit.

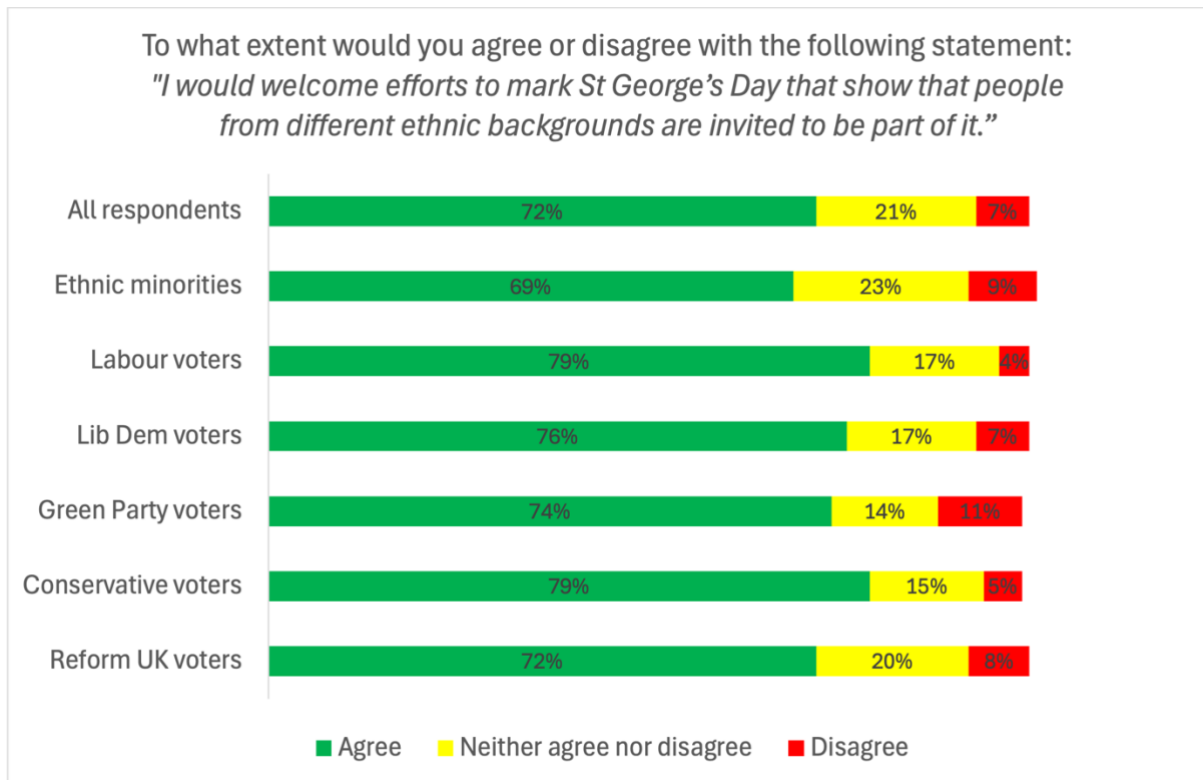
The good news is that there is a public appetite to do this. Some 72% of the public in England say they would "welcome efforts to mark St George's Day that show that people from different ethnic backgrounds are invited to be part of it." Just 7% disagree.

Some 7 in 10 people from an ethnic minority background (69%) would support efforts to promote more inclusive celebrations of St George's Day, with just 9% saying they

disagree; and an inclusive St George's Day event would have the support of 18-24s (63%) and over-55s (75%) alike.

The proposal also wins support across party politics, from 78% of 2024 Labour voters; 79% of Conservatives; 72% of Liberal Democrats; 74% of Greens and 72% of Reform UK voters.

Figure 2.11: Breadth of support for an inclusive celebration of St George's Day



Free hugs at St George's Day event. Photo by John Pannell.

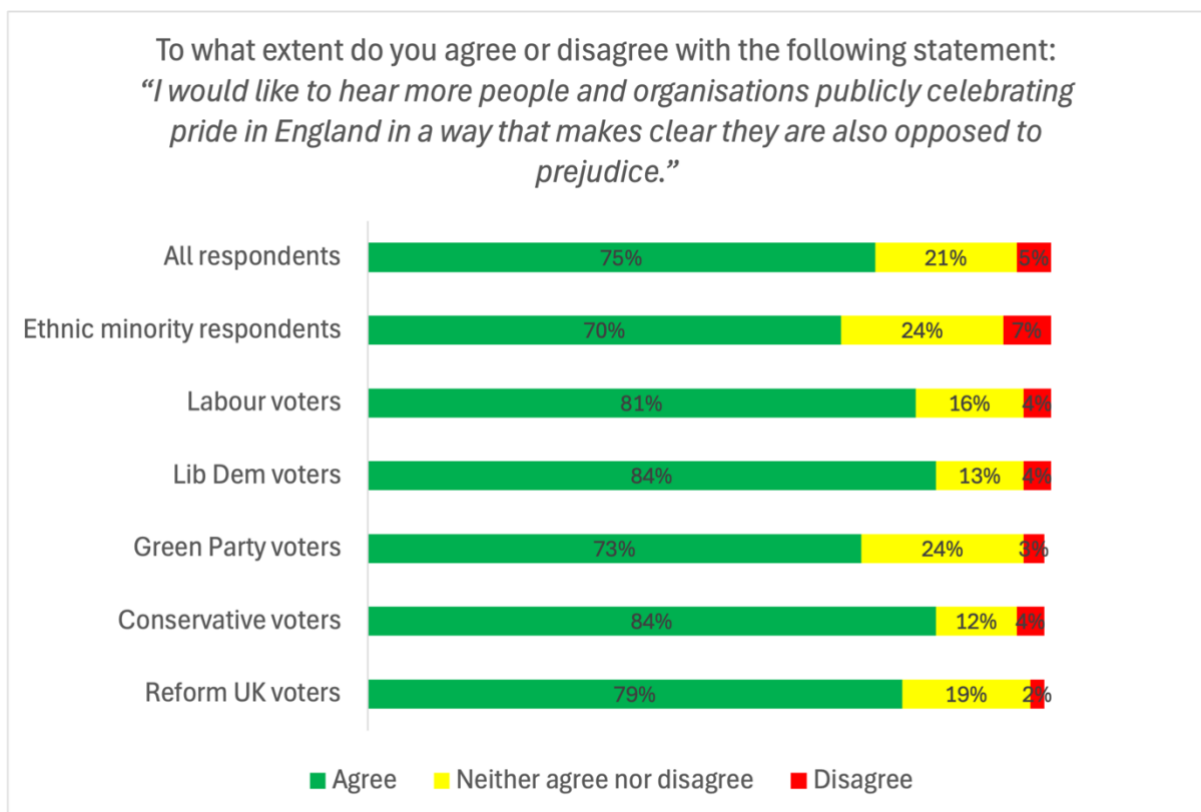
iv) Appetite for new efforts to project an inclusive English identity

There is a clear public appetite in England to celebrate an inclusive Englishness that opposes prejudice. The public wants organisations and individuals to step up and show leadership – and those that do will find broad support. **Three quarters of the public (75%) say they “would like to hear more people and organisations publicly celebrating pride in England in a way that makes clear they are also opposed to prejudice.”** Importantly, just 5% disagree.

Speaking up for an inclusive England wins support from 70% of ethnic minorities and from the young (63% of 18-24s) and older people in England too (80% of over-55s). It is popular across the geographies of England, from the North East (80%) and West Midlands (73%) to the South West (70%) and Greater London too (72%).

And it is a winning approach across politics, with approval from 85% of Conservatives, 81% of Labour voters, 84% of Lib Dems, 73% of Green Party voters and 79% of Reform UK voters.

Figure 2.12: The broad coalition who want voices to speak up for an inclusive England

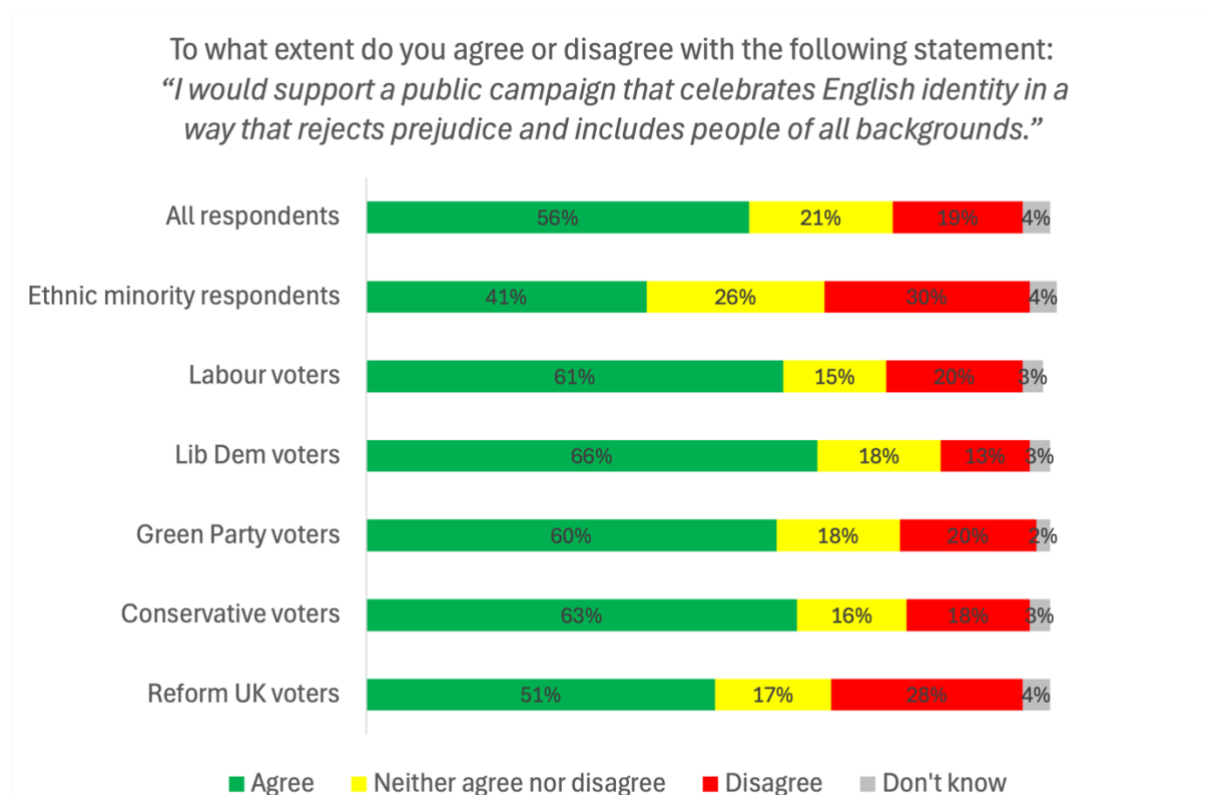


Support drops off somewhat when people are asked to get involved themselves – but a majority of the public (56%) agrees with the statement “I would support a public campaign that celebrates English identity in a way that rejects prejudice and includes people of all backgrounds.” Some 19% of people disagree, however.

People from an ethnic minority background are less supportive (41%) of a public campaign for inclusive Englishness, with 29% saying they disagree – perhaps reflecting perceptions among minorities that Englishness is a racialised identity, as discussed earlier. Support is also stronger among older people (61% of over-55s) than the young (46% of 18-24s).

A campaign for inclusive Englishness would secure broad support across politics, from 61% of 2024 Labour voters, two-thirds (66%) of Lib Dems, 60% of Greens and 63% of Conservatives. It tails off somewhat among 2024 Reform UK voters, though around half (51%) are supportive, compared to 28% who are not.

Figure 2.13: Support for a public campaign on inclusive Englishness



So there is public support for greater efforts to speak up for an inclusive England – with limited opposition. St George’s Day on 23 April could be one moment to focus such efforts; as discussed earlier, nearly three-quarters of the public in England say they would “welcome efforts to mark St George’s Day that show that people from different ethnic backgrounds are invited to be part of it,” while fewer than 1 in 10 disagree.

But in a time of polarised debates about identity, how should voices speak up for inclusive Englishness in a way that reaches the broadest audience? We discuss this in the next section, on communicating an England for all of us.

3. How to talk about inclusive Englishness:

Communications advice and tested messages

Getting your communications right is always important. That is truer still when engaging in debates about contested issues like race and national identity. But that challenge should inspire organisations and public voices to focus hard on effective communication – not duck the debate altogether. As we have seen from the findings so far, there is a broad coalition of support for an inclusive Englishness that rejects prejudice, which can be unlocked with the right approach. That should include adhering to the basic principles of effective comms – thinking hard about audiences and objectives, messages and messengers, channels and timing. But there are some specific points that apply to debates about race and identity too, which we hope will help as you devise your own comms activities to promote and advocate an English identity that is for all of us.

Top tips for communicating inclusive Englishness across divides

- 1. Think about audience.** The key target audience for inclusive Englishness is the broad majority of people who share a pride in England but reject racism. Many of this group may feel alienated by more liberal-facing campaigns that write-off English national pride as an expression of racism or xenophobia.

If you're trying to connect with this 'pride not prejudice' audience, it will need a different approach – in terms of messaging, messengers and tactics – than, for example, when seeking to mobilise a primarily liberal audience for a campaign against the far right.

- 2. Show not tell.** The best way to communicate that Englishness is inclusive is to show it in practice, not to tell people that it is the case. So you should pay attention to the optics of your activity and how it comes across in pictures and video. Sport can do this very well – when Maro Itoje talks of his pride in captaining England's rugby team, or similarly for English cricketers and our multi-ethnic men's football team.

A St George's Day Parade or party that brings people from all backgrounds together shows inclusive Englishness happening in people's communities. In our case study from Gurbinder Sandher in Dartford and Gravesham, for example, the St George's Parade is centred on the participation of local schools, which naturally includes a very diverse group of children – and when their parents come out to cheer them on, the event builds a diverse audience of local people celebrating St George's Day together.

- 3. Use inclusive language.** English identity is for *everyone* who feels pride in England. England's symbols represent everyone who feels pride in England – including those whose politics we don't agree with (provided they respect anti-racism and decency norms). So we need to use inclusive language and not set up new exclusions.

The most effective messages will also be short and simple, free from technical jargon and easily comprehensible to all. As part of this toolkit we tested a range of messages about inclusive Englishness to assess their appeal to different audiences: the findings are set out in part two of this chapter.

- 4. No loyalty tests.** Lots of people, particularly those from an ethnic minority background, feel uneasy about the England flag, as a result of divisive debates about Englishness. This has been heightened recently by the weaponisation of flags through the 'Raise the colours' initiative. So don't expect everyone to want to come onboard with an initiative based around flag-waving, or posting pictures of themselves doing so. There are lots of ways to express national pride and people need to choose what they are comfortable doing (see for example the case study of Southampton's place-based approach, grounding Englishness in a celebration of the people of an English city).

- 5. Consider working with 'unusual allies' to build a broad audience.** Think about trusted messengers who can communicate across audiences with different political views; with older and younger people; and with minority and majority groups. This might mean reaching outside your comfort zone of usual partners, to work with different organisations who still share the vision of an inclusive English identity that rejects prejudice, but appeal to a different audience to your own.

For example, when involving local councillors aim to bring in spokespeople from a range of political parties. Think also about which of your local community institutions might have broadest reach and resonance: football clubs, local celebrities, or others who can offer high-profile support.

- 6. Calling out racism is important – but only if someone is being racist.** There is nothing inherently racist about waving an England flag. Suggesting that everyone who wants to express pride in England has racist intentions will alienate all but the most liberal audiences. It will particularly be a turn-off for the key 'pride not prejudice' target audience.

7. **Think carefully about using ‘reclaiming the flag’ as a message.** It implies that the far-right has already succeeded in taking ownership of the England flag. While they may be trying to do so, they have not succeeded: that will be very evident when flags break out all over England for this summer’s World Cup.

8. **And do we really need another flag?** One tempting response to associations of the England flag with the far right is to come up with a new flag, or a doctored version of the existing flag, to represent anti-racist pride in England. But while we don’t need to reclaim our flag from the far right, we shouldn’t cede it to them but adopting a different symbol. The existing England flag *is* our flag – for all of us – not theirs alone.

9. **Fact-checking and myth-busting.** Countering mis- and disinformation (eg someone saying online “*The St George’s Day parade was banned because minorities objected*”) is important. But that is quite different to a ‘myth-busting’ approach, for example contesting the history of St George – this can start an argument, rather than a conversation.

Pointing out that “St George was actually Palestinian/Turkish” can sound rather condescending and be heard as ‘If you knew the real facts you wouldn’t be waving your silly flags’. The aim should be to find common ground rather than to win the argument. We celebrate St George’s Day on 23 April because he is the patron saint of England – and England is a diverse nation, so everyone should be invited to celebrate together.

10. **Get people talking.** Discussing our sense of identity is important and schools and museums can be good spaces for such dialogue and reflection. People will have different views about Englishness and how it is celebrated, but most will welcome opportunities for respectful dialogue. A new project called ‘*A very English chat*’ from Grow Social Capital offers resources to encourage discussion about Englishness: there is more detail in the case study in Chapter 4 of this toolkit, and at www.averyEnglishchat.org.uk.

Messages for an inclusive England

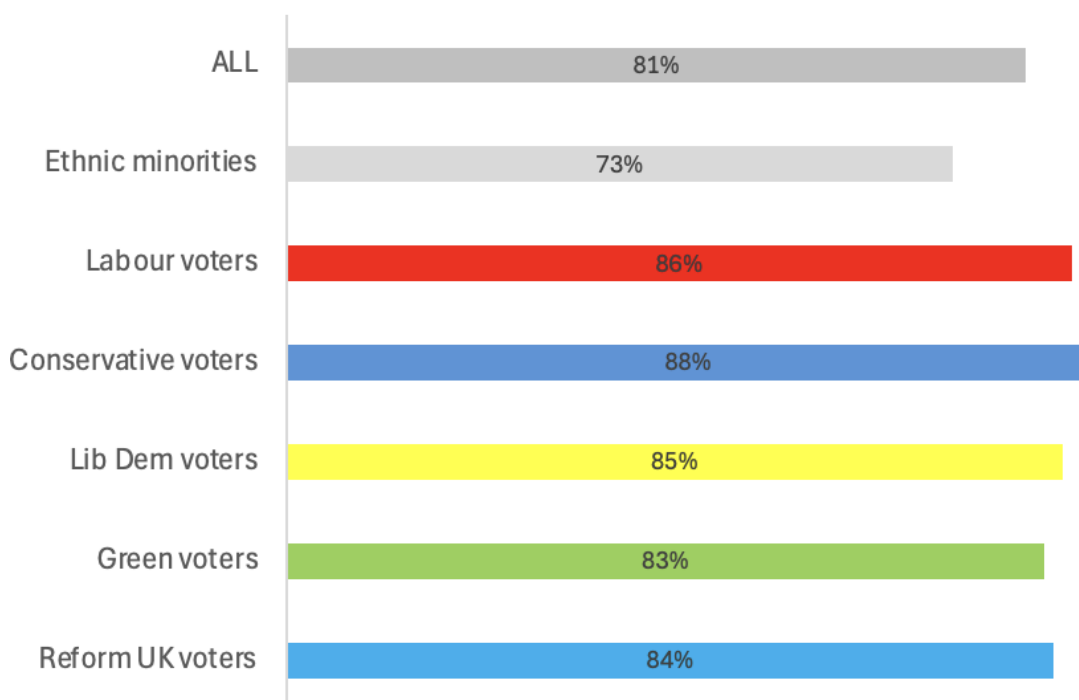
As part of the research for this project, we tested a series of messages about inclusive Englishness using a nationally representative Focaldata survey, asking people whether they agreed or disagreed with each message. Cross-referencing with demographic questions enables us to see how each message appeals to different audiences. All of the messages tested secured agreement from a majority of respondents, but with some notable differences in responses.

A. “I don’t like it when our English flag is linked to racism or used to intimidate minorities. That’s not what this country stands for.”

The most popular message tested was also the simplest: “I don’t like it”. Eight in ten people overall (81%) agreed with its combination of inclusive patriotism and anti-racism, 59% of them strongly, while only 6% said they disagree.

It connected with ethnic minority respondents, 73% of whom agreed with the message (9% disagreed) as well as with young people aged 18-24 (74% agree) and older people aged over 55 (88% agree). And as the graphic shows, it secures support across political divides too.

Figure 3.1: Public agreement with the message: “I don’t like it when our English flag is linked to racism or used to intimidate minorities. That’s not what this country stands for.”



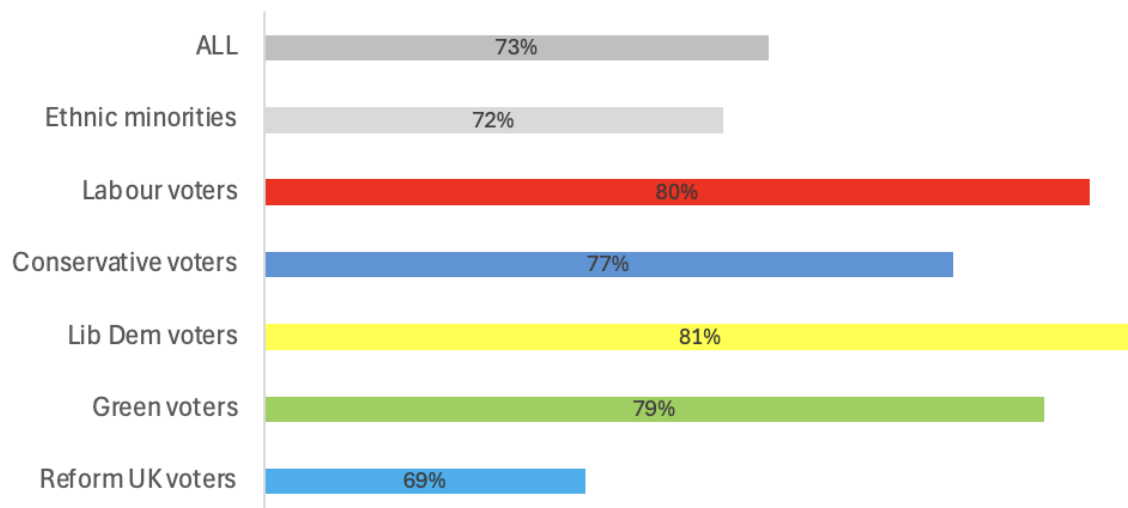
B. “England’s multi-ethnic football team represents the modern England that I am proud of.”

As discussed earlier, the England football team is the symbol of England that most people feel belongs to people of all backgrounds in England today. So it is little surprise that a message evoking the multi-ethnic Three Lions as a symbol of inclusive English pride secures broad public support. Nearly three-quarters of the public (73%) agree with this message, 45% of them strongly, while just 7% disagree. Ethnic minority scores are almost identical (72% agree, 8% disagree) showing the breadth of appeal.

Some have argued that using football to get a message across is gendered, but the data suggests otherwise, with agreement from 73% of men and 74% of women. The success of the Lionesses has put paid to the argument that football in England is only for the boys.

There is a slight variation in support by politics, with Reform UK voters 11 points less supportive of this message than Labour voters. But seven in ten Reform UK Voters (69%) still agree, compared to just 11% who say they disagree.

Figure 3.2: Public agreement with the message: “England’s multi-ethnic football team represents the modern England that I am proud of.”

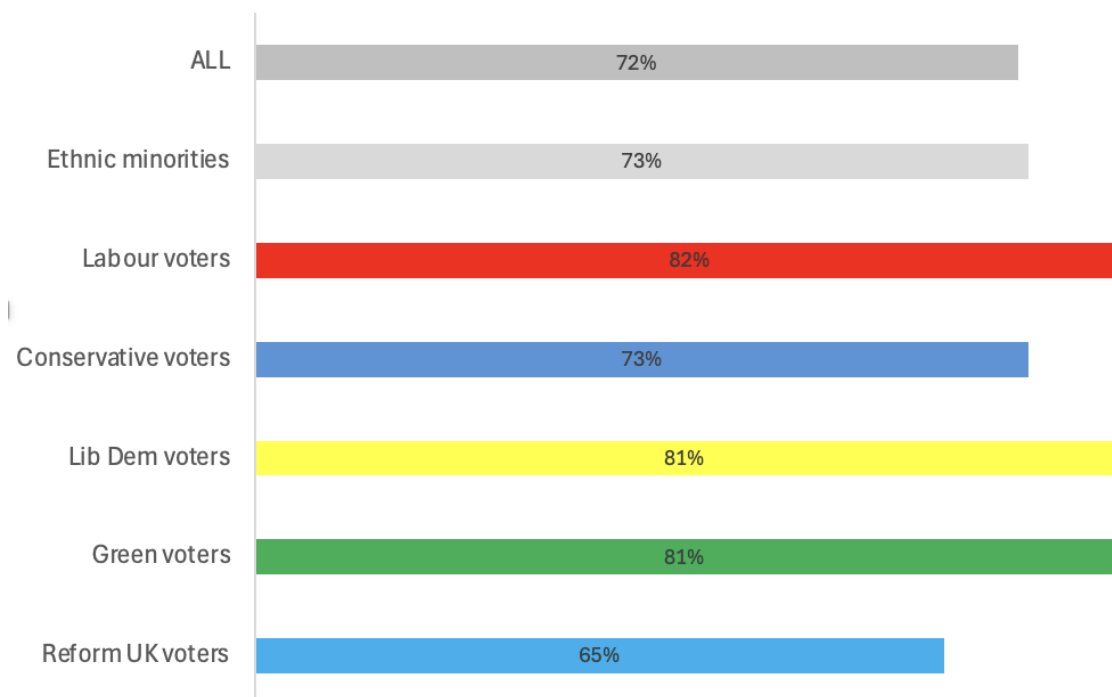


C. “Englishness should be open to everyone who calls this country home, whatever their skin colour, faith or heritage.”

Another positive message that secures strong support among 72% of the English public as a whole (with 11% saying they disagree) and 73% of ethnic minorities (10% disagree).

As the graphic below shows, it has slightly stronger appeal to more liberal audiences, with those who vote Labour, Lib Dem or Green in 2024 all 15 points more likely to agree than Reform UK voters. Yet it still secures agreement from 73% of Conservatives and two thirds (65%) of Reform UK voters, as well as 8 in 10 voters of more liberal parties.

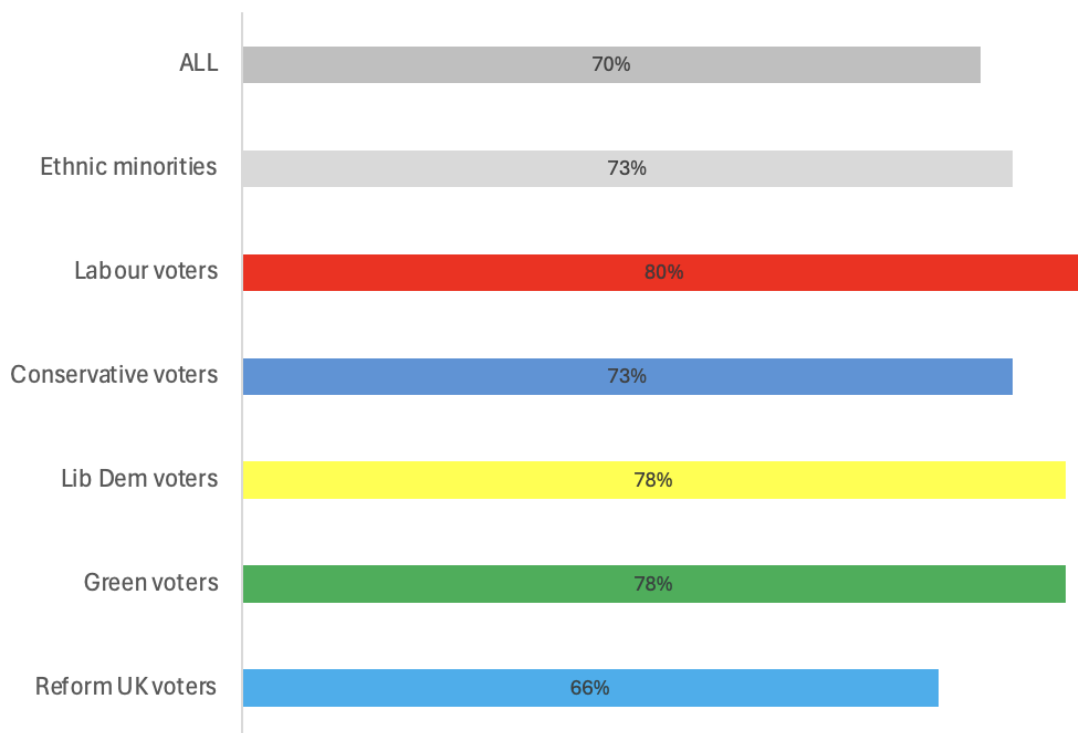
Figure 3.3: Public agreement with the message: “Englishness should be open to everyone who calls this country home, whatever their skin colour, faith or heritage.”



D. “Everyone in England should be able to call themselves English if they have made a home here and feel proud of our nation.”

Seven in ten people (70%) agree with this message, 40% of them strongly, while 12% disagree. Ethnic minority support is slightly higher, at 73%, with 10% disagreement. Like message C above, support is slightly higher among more liberal groups, based on their 2024 party vote, though strong majorities of voters for the Conservative Party (73%) and Reform UK (66%) agree with the message, along with those who voted Labour (80%), Lib Dem 78% or Green (78%).

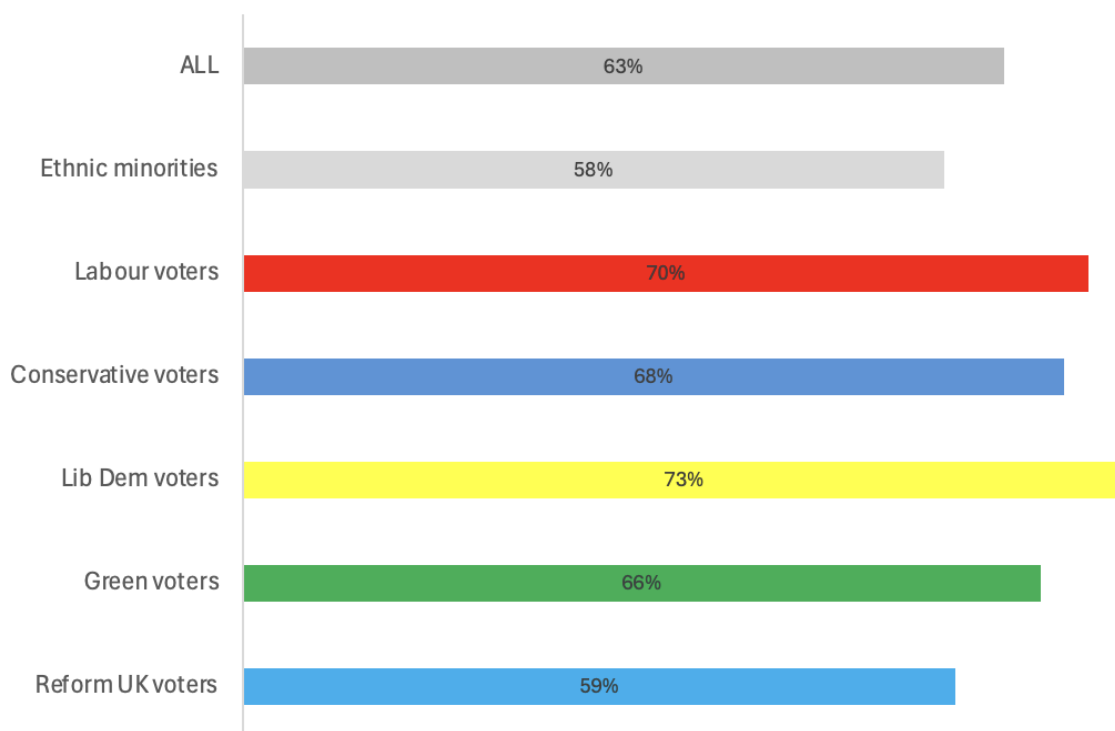
Figure 3.4: Public agreement with the message: “Everyone in England should be able to call themselves English if they have made a home here and feel proud of our nation.”



E. “The England flag should represent the country we are today: one where people from different ethnic backgrounds live together.”

Six in ten people (63%) agree with this message, with a similar level of agreement among most ethnic minority respondents (58%). But it is somewhat more polarising: 17% of the public, and 20% of ethnic minorities, actively disagree (10% of them strongly).

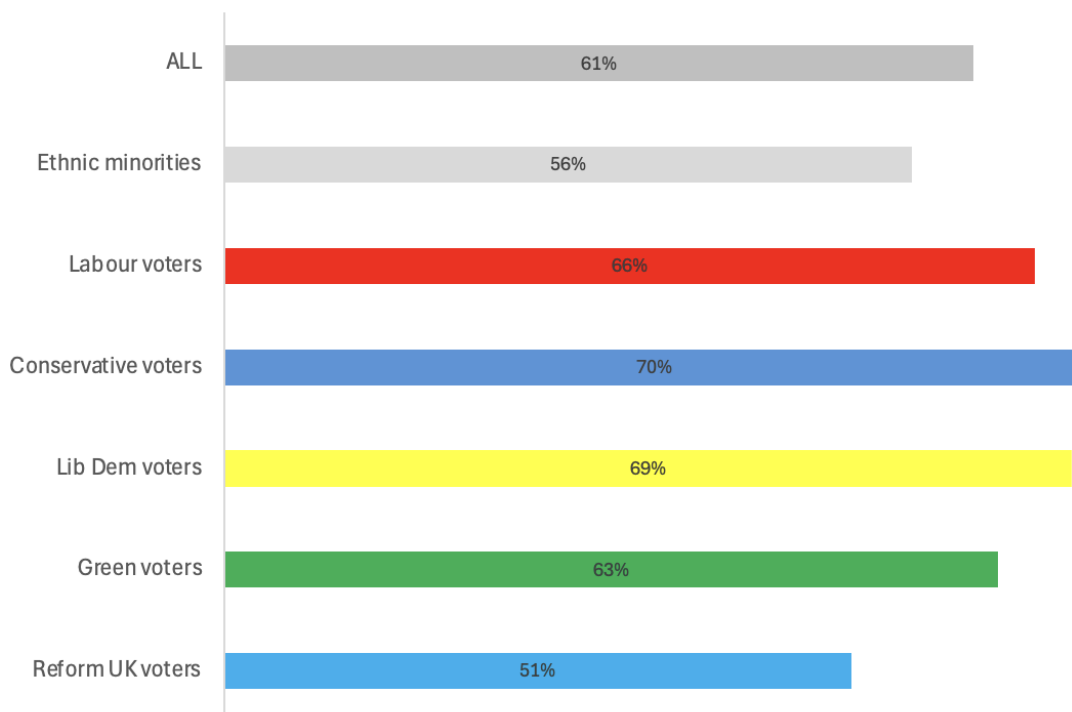
Figure 3.5: Public agreement with the message: “The England flag should represent the country we are today: one where people from different ethnic backgrounds live together.”



F. “This is my flag too. No one group should be able to claim it exclusively for themselves.”

The slightly more assertive tone of this message seems to turn off some people, and it scores less well with both majority audiences (61% agree) and ethnic minority audiences (56% agree) . It is worth noting, however, that a majority of both groups still agree with the message. Like message E above, it is slightly more polarising, with 16% of the public saying they disagree (10% strongly) and 21% of ethnic minorities in disagreement, 12% strongly).

Figure 3.6: Public agreement with the message: “This is my flag too. No one group should be able to claim it exclusively for themselves.”



Inclusive English identity is a contested issue. Some organisations will understandably be wary of engaging with the topic, particularly in divided times, when some actors are actively deploying symbols of English identity – such as flags – with the aim of sowing division. Yet that context makes it more important than ever that moderate and inclusive voices do not vacate the field and give them a clear run. Our findings suggest that we can engage this issue with some confidence. Most of the public are onside, with majorities agreeing with the messages that we tested. British Future would be happy to offer advice to organisations looking to step up.

4. Case studies: Putting inclusive Englishness into practice

i) Gravesham and Dartford's inclusive St George's Day parade

Gurvinder Sandher MBE DL, Cohesion Plus Kent

We started organising Saint George's day celebrations in 2006 as a way to reclaim the Saint George's flag as a symbol to represent all of us who take pride in England today, regardless of background, ethnicity or faith. Growing up in the 70s and 80s I saw the Saint George's flag taken advantage of by the far right and used to highlight our differences, but what we aim to do is celebrate the legacy of our patron saint as a symbol of our modern, diverse England.

Through the Saint George's Day events in Gravesham and Dartford, we strive to celebrate England in the context of today, a diverse country in which the symbol of the flag represents all of us, regardless of faith or ethnicity. It is important to us that celebrating Saint George's Day reminds us as a community of what unites us, rather than what divides us.

In the lead up to our events we work with local schools across both Gravesham and Dartford, where pupils participate in art workshops producing Saint-George-themed shields and banners carrying messages of friendship and unity. The schools have the opportunity to learn about the legacy of Saint George as a defender of faith, and the importance of coming together as a community on 23rd of April to celebrate our shared values in a diverse England. Since 2006 well over 20,000 young people have taken part in our parades and workshops.

This year we will have 22 schools taking part, with some 1,400 pupils participating in the school workshops and the large, vibrant parades. The involvement of the school students is at the heart of the event and one reason for its success in bringing people of all backgrounds together. Our local schools are very diverse, and lots of parents want to line the parade route to cheer on their children. Flags are handed out to all the spectators and so we have people from all backgrounds out on the streets of Dartford and Gravesham on 23 April, celebrating Saint George's Day together.

During our events you can expect to see a mobile dragon, brass bands, Morris dancers and an appearance from a Saint George character. As well as this, the celebrations will feature musical performances from the Indian Subcontinent, Africa and the Caribbean, all with an English twist as we celebrate our country of today.

The celebrations are majority funded by Arts Council England, with some support from Dartford Borough Council, local schools and Kent Equality Cohesion Council. Since its inception we have worked with Same Sky from Brighton on the celebrations, who go into local schools and deliver the workshops for us. We are grateful to provide

these events as a fun and educational opportunity to promote inclusion, shared identity and pride through Saint George's cultural significance.

Speaking about the event last year, I commented: *“These events are about more than just tradition – they’re about celebrating who we are today. Saint George’s Day gives us a platform to bring people of all backgrounds together, to champion unity and pride in our communities, and to showcase the vibrant, diverse England we live in. It’s a joy to see young people lead the way in sharing these positive messages.”*



St George's Day in Gravesham. Image by British Future.

ii) Inclusive St George's Day activities in Southampton

Professor John Denham

I have a long-standing interest in inclusive English identity and some of the events that we held on this theme in Southampton, though now some time ago, may contain helpful lessons for others planning activity to celebrate an English identity open to all of us.

They centred on an inclusive St George's Day festival, but the emphasis was always on telling the story of all the people of the city. Our core message focused on inclusive local pride. Over time we developed the tag line 'Southampton is a great English city built by all the people who have made their lives here'.

We set up the [Southampton St George Community Awards](#), working with the local newspaper, the council and Southampton Solent University. This celebrated local organisations and individuals, reflecting the city's diversity, who had made a real contribution to the city. It included awards for 'Biggest supporter of Southampton people,' 'Unsung hero', as well as awards for contribution to inclusion and for caring for the environment.

We also produced videos of individuals and community organisations which are collected together on the [Southampton St George You Tube Channel](#). Nearly 40 videos produced over three years included the [Spacagna Family](#) – an Italian origin family whose patriarch, a D-Day veteran, gave the British Legion vow on Remembrance Sunday and was hugely well known; [Del Singh](#), a local aid worker who was tragically murdered in Afghanistan; and the Diapers, a large local family which included the manager of an FA-Vase-winning local football team.

A community charity gave us funds to provide £50 grants to community organisations, funding everything from St George's Day football tournaments and inter-generational tea-parties to red and white flower bulb-planting. We also produced St George's Day educational materials – national PHSE curriculum compliant – that asked school students to discuss what 'modern dragons' needed slaying: such as homelessness, substance abuse and bullying.

The events were well attended and well received by local people, because they were all about celebrating local people. Initial assumptions that special efforts would be needed to involve minority communities were met with simple delight to be invited. Over the years we were able to feature the Sikh youth group helping to feed homeless people and also to highlight the connections between Southampton, the Spitfire, the Polish squadron who flew it and the local Polish community. By grounding Englishness in a celebration of the people of an English city, we avoided any exercise which asked people to 'discuss England and English identity', which they can find quite awkward and abstract. Celebrating St George became part of celebrating Southampton, which was something that people in the city could get behind.

John Denham is a former Communities Secretary and served as the MP for Southampton Itchen for 23 years. He is now a Professorial Research Fellow in the Department of Politics and International Relations and Director of the [Centre for English Identity and Politics](#) at the University of Southampton.

iii) 'A very English chat' - how to transform division and hatred into respectful conversations

Andy Green, *Grow Social Capital*

How can you turn a potentially divisive, polarising encounter around English identity into respectful conversations, even fun, exploring other people's differences and what you share in common?

The '*A very English chat*' campaign addresses this with a simple request: what are the five objects that define *your* story of England, Englishness, and being English, or not?

The conversation goes beyond bringing people together but knits them in a greater appreciation, empathy, and respect for their shared identities, while celebrating a national narrative with values of inclusivity, fairness and respect for law and democracy at its heart.

Objects could be a favourite book, event, film, food, music, people, places, things – one person suggested 'windbreaks' – and stories ranging from the profound to the everyday. These are the 1,001 things knitting us together, creating a shared sense of belonging and togetherness, of what we have in common around our national identity that's worth protecting.

We make the task easier with a 'Conversation Starter' guide featuring a cross-section of other people's responses to sharing their five objects telling their story of England. A freely shared Toolkit enables a deeper and wider exploration of other people's perspectives on their shared English identity. It even includes a creative exercise which imagines the nation's tribes represented by their preferred choice of biscuit!

'A very English chat' events are being held in the run-up to this year's St George's Day celebrations, where we'll be collecting ideas across the country to co-create a 'pocket museum' telling 'The story of England 2026 in 50 objects'.

Called a 'pocket museum' – because it can literally fit into your pocket – 'The story of England 2026 in 50 objects' will be produced in a range of creative media from decks of cards, posters for schools and public spaces, giant outdoor projector screenings, T-shirts, tea towels and more, and sold via the campaign's crowdfunder.

'A very English chat' provides safe, generous spaces for respectful conversations around English identity, enabling anyone to break out of the bubbles that define their worldview. It provides you with practical ways to turn difficult conversations around English identity into respectful ones. It helps build greater confidence in talking about English identity with respect and curiosity.

'A very English chat' is supported by the Jo Cox Foundation's More in Common Network, Absurd Intelligence, Community Organisers and Steps to Togetherness; as well as author/singer Billy Bragg, author/environmental campaigner Caroline Lucas,

environmental activist and reality TV star Daze Aghaji, and author and academic Kojo Koram.

The campaign is delivered by social enterprise Grow Social Capital CIC and is being funded through a crowdfunder.

More details at www.averyEnglishchat.org.uk



What's your story of England?

How you can have 'A very English chat',
a respectful conversation to overcome growing
hatred and division around our national identity

 MORE IN COMMON NETWORK
MODERN COCKNEY
INSPIRED BY JO COX

 Civil Society Together

 Steps to Togetherness
Scotland & England

 the VI

 Community Organisers

 GROW SOCIAL CAPITAL

5. Celebrating an inclusive English pride at the World Cup

- **Football and the World Cup gives you a chance to reach the widest possible audience – don't miss out.**
- **England's multi-ethnic team bridges divides as a shared symbol of the nation today.**
- **Plan your event carefully to bring a diverse group of fans together: you could consider hosting a communal screening of a match.**
- **Think about communications to ensure more people hear about and see what you did.**
- **Start strategising for an even bigger opportunity as England co-hosts the Euros in 2028.**

A big opportunity to reach a wide audience

Football's reach in England is quite unique, spanning divides by geography and class, age, politics, ethnicity and faith and, increasingly since the vast success of the Lionesses, by gender too. The peak TV viewing audience for England's quarter-final defeat by France in the 2022 World Cup was 21.3 million, approaching one-third of the population. The only event that was more widely-watched that year was the funeral of the Queen (26.5 million).

Sporting events are one of the few times that people in England celebrate their English identity, or indeed discuss it publicly. So the England football team has often 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 represented England on the pitch since then. Former England manager Gareth Southgate publicly recognised the symbolic power of the multi-ethnic team that he took to the World Cup semi-finals in Russia in 2018, for a nation that has struggled to debate and articulate English identity.

This summer's World Cup will raise the profile of football yet higher, with the Three Lions one of the favourites to win the tournament. And England's football team is the symbol of Englishness that feels most equally shared by people from all ethnic and faith backgrounds in the nation. So for those who want to champion an inclusive English identity, it makes sense to look at the World Cup, hosted in the USA, Canada and Mexico from 11 June to 19 July, as an opportunity for events and communications activity.

Planning your event

A World Cup event celebrating an inclusive England does not have to be complicated or particularly large-scale. Bringing a diverse group of people together to cheer on the team as it is screened on BBC or ITV is not particularly difficult, if you have the networks and relationships to assemble such an audience. It helps to involve partners from minority groups in building trust for a football event, particularly given the recent context of contested debates about English identity.

Local councils can organise communal screenings on big screens, but it is not their preserve alone: residents, community organisations, tenants and groups of neighbours can also organise an event that brings people together to watch a match.

Bear in mind that the US time zone means late starts for World Cup matches (kick-off for England's first three games are at 9 or 10pm) and this can make family watch-along events more challenging to organise.

Alcohol is an issue to consider, too, especially given the late timings. The main location in which most people watch football communally is in the pub, and for many people football-watching and alcohol go hand in hand. These are not welcoming spaces for those who do not drink alcohol, or would prefer not to be in settings where others are consuming it, for religious or cultural reasons. So if you are bringing people together to watch the match, you may want to consider a neutral, unlicensed space and some other enticements to attract people away from the pub or sofa, such as food or other entertainment.

You could consider talking to your local football club – whether it's Premier League or non-league – to see if they would be interested in getting involved. Most football league clubs will have some community engagement programmes, delivered in the bigger clubs through a charitable Community Trust. They may be able to help with a venue, contacts or even funding – but even if not, their support and brand can help open doors to supporters.

Many children will also be excited about the World Cup and working with schools during the World Cup is a great way to engage younger audiences. This could combine some learning activity – looking at the family backgrounds of England's players, or the nations that players for the local team will be representing – with craft activities decorating England flags.

Communications: Make sure people know what you did

Communicating your event is important too if you want to extend its reach beyond those who attend. Get the optics of your event right and the messaging needs to do much less work. Bringing together a group of adults or children from visibly different backgrounds to cheer on the England team tells the story of inclusive English pride all by itself. A mixed group presents a powerful image of social cohesion in action.

You will need some visual symbols of support, like flags and bunting, though many football fans will already have an England shirt they would want to wear to support the team. And you will, of course, need people's permission (or their parents', if working with children) to film or photograph them.

Simple messages about people from across the local community coming together to support the Three Lions can reinforce these images. Chapter 3 of this toolkit contains practical advice on communications and messaging.

Longer-term plans

Thinking longer-term, there is also strategic value in beginning to engage with football as a vehicle for inclusion now in 2026, because a far bigger opportunity awaits in two years' time. England, Scotland and Wales host the 2028 men's Euros – and the nation will go even more football-crazy than usual (especially with a decent team and home advantage). The 2028 tournament coincides, too, with the 80th anniversary of the Windrush arriving in the UK on 22 June, a moment that has come to symbolise Britain's long history of migration and diversity. And 2028 also marks the 50th anniversary of England's first Black footballer, Viv Anderson – providing a clear link between the tournament and discussions about race and inclusion. Start building the local relationships and track-record on football and inclusion now, and by 2028 you could be in a great position to host something more ambitious and impactful.



6. Resources and further reading

We hope these resources are useful for those seeking to find out more about how to celebrate an inclusive English identity that rejects prejudice. It is not an exhaustive list, and we apologise in advance for any inadvertent omissions.

Our aim is to signpost advocates for inclusive Englishness to others who are working in this field – and through the dissemination events linked to the toolkit, to offer a space for connection and collaboration, too.

British Future would also like to continue conversations about how to promote an inclusive English identity, and you will find our contact details at the end of this chapter – please do get in touch.

- **British Future reports:**

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

[*Shared Goals: The power of football to connect diverse communities*](#)

[*Crossing Divides: how arts and heritage can bring us together*](#)

Sunder Katwala's book ***How to be a patriot*** also includes extensive discussion of inclusive identity, including Englishness – as set out in this extract [*England, My England*](#).

- **Kent Equality Cohesion Council and Cohesion Plus:**

[*St George's Day Parades in Dartford and Gravesham*](#)

- **Grow Social Capital:**

[*A very English chat*](#)

More information here on [Grow Social Capital's campaigns and resources](#) – including 'The story of England in 50 objects' and the 'Modern Cockey Festival'.

- **The Belong Network**

Belong has produced two toolkits which look at bridging divides through sport and events:

[*The Power of Sport*](#)

[*The Power of Events*](#)

- **The Centre for English Identity and Politics, Southampton University:**

[Publications, recordings of lectures and seminars, and upcoming events.](#)

- **Hope not Hate:**

[‘A million acts of hope’](#) activity in May 2026

[How to run inclusive events: A community resilience guide](#)

- **Jo Cox Foundation:**

[Great Get Together](#) June community events

[Resource library](#)

- **Local Government Association:**

[Top tips for holding a public event in your community](#)

- **English Heritage:**

[England United – A flag by English Heritage](#)

- **Resources for schools**

All children in state schools aged 14-16 (Key Stage 4) have to be taught about “*diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding*” as part of the Citizenship National Curriculum. Learning about identity is also important in history. High quality resources are available from [the Linking Network](#) (Their Identity Pack) and [Teach for Tomorrow](#), among other sources.

Contact British Future

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LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/britishfuture>