



**ENGLISH
LABOUR
NETWORK**

For Labour, England, and St George

A guide for Labour activists



For Labour, England and St George

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“As Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, and a proud Englishman, I’m delighted to see the English Labour Network promoting a discussion about how Labour members can celebrate St George’s Day across the county.

“The Labour Party firmly believes in celebrating all Britain's Patron Saint days which is why we made a commitment to all the nations of the United Kingdom in our manifesto to making each occasion a public holiday, including St George's Day.

“For me personally St George's Day is an important day of celebration because it brings together all those different strands which make up our shared English identity.

“Moving forward I hope the English Labour Network and Labour members everywhere stand up for a progressive England, and what better way to do this than by every CLP holding its own St George's Day celebrations this April.”

Andrew Gwynne MP

Labour’s Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Introduction

Labour has promised to bring in four UK-wide patron saints day bank holidays when next in government (although the Scottish government would have to agree to any new holidays there). This is a popular policy that will boost the number and size of St George's Day events across England.

But we don't have to wait for a Labour government to start celebrating England's national day.

To win England, Labour needs to win more votes from people who have a strong sense of English identity. We need to make the link between building a better society in England and Labour's commitment to be 'for the many, not the few'.

We can strengthen a progressive, inclusive English identity. This will help marginalise the far-right groups who want to appeal to a racist and xenophobic Englishness.

Not all activists are familiar with, or instinctively comfortable with, English identity or the patriotism expressed by many voters. This briefing:

- explains why national identity is important and why the left has much to gain and nothing to lose by engaging with it.
- suggests issues for discussion in party meetings.
- makes practical suggestions on ways of engaging with English identity through the celebration of St George's Day, in ways that reflect Labour's principled progressive values.

John Denham

Director, English Labour Network

For the many not the few: why national identity should matter to the left

Building a majority for progressive change

Labour wants to be ‘for the many not the few’. That means we must help to create a ‘many’ with a strong sense of shared identity, common interests and a determination to work together to build a better society.

Voters have always looked for parties and candidates who will ‘stand up for people like me’. Left of centre parties across Europe are losing elections because old identities are changing. The working class identity that once generated loyal support for Labour was based on large industrial workplaces, high levels of trade union membership, and tightly knit communities. It is much weaker than it used to be. The working class is still just as large but no longer has the same deep collective sense of identity.

In an insecure and uncertain world people still want a sense of shared identity. They often turn to identities based on the place they live, the communities they share, and the nation they belong to. The sense of national identity is often most important to people who feel they are doing less well in a fast-changing world. They are people Labour must want to represent.

National identity is not the only source of shared identity, but it is important to many voters. Most voters also say they are proud of their national identities, whether English, British or both. It is also important that Labour is seen as a patriotic party. Our movement has been at its most powerful when we have combined our radical economics with a sense of national purpose.

Tackling the populist right

Sadly, and right across Europe, the populist right has been quick to tap into this politics of people, nation and place. But the right promotes an identity politics that is often xenophobic and racist.

When the left fails to engage with these identities it makes life easy for the right. It sometimes even makes things worse by labelling anyone who is proud of their nation or worried about rapid social change as racist.

By engaging positively with English identity, Labour can help to marginalise the populist and far right groups and the parties who want to promote division and hatred.

Reaching across a divided nation

England is a nation divided by wealth and income, between regions, cities, and towns, by age, race, faith and by values. Labour can’t just be for the people on one side of those

divisions. Most people – ‘the many’ – have a shared interest in a society and an economy that works for the common good, not just a few.

By talking about the future of our nation Labour can help bridge those divisions and express our common interests.

English, British and local identities

National identities in England

Most people who live in England say they are both English and British. Most identify strongly with where they live. Most are patriotic. But there are some differences between the two identities.

In the largest and most recent survey:

- 32% of the English population said they were ‘more English than British’
- 33% said they were ‘equally English and British’
- 24% said they were ‘more British than English’
- 11% said ‘other’ or ‘don’t now’

English is not a minority identity; it is shared by more people than Britishness

Those who are ‘more English than British’ tend to be:

- more strongly rooted in a local area, more patriotic (about both England and Britain) and least likely to identify as European.
- Older, unlikely to have gone to university, more working class
- more likely to live in non-university cities, towns and villages.
- feeling that economic and social change has gone against their interests for a long time.
- more likely to be white

The ‘more British than English’ tend to be:

- less patriotic (even about being British), less rooted in any part of England, more likely to identify as European and to have another, non-English national identity
- younger, university educated, and be more middle class
- living in the larger cities
- confident about social and economic change (even if it isn’t working for them just now)
- more likely to be BAME

On pride, patriotism and strength of identity the 'equally English and British' tend to be more like the 'more English' than the 'more British'.

National identities and politics

In recent years, the 'more English' have tended to vote to the right and the 'more British' to the left. The 'equally English and British' have been balanced between the two.

In the EU referendum, the 'more English' were more likely to vote Leave, the 'more British' to vote Remain.

In the last general election, Labour won amongst the 'more British' but lost amongst the other groups of English voters. Labour would be in power now if we had done better amongst English identifying voters.

English identifying voters are more likely to think there are distinct 'English issues' that are not well represented in parliament, they want English MPs to make laws for England, and they think England's deprived regions are not fairly funded.

Although English identifiers have recently tended to vote towards the right, on issues like NHS spending, redistribution and public ownership, English views are very similar to the rest of the population.

The seats we must defend or win at the next election, like Mansfield, are mainly in strongly English identifying areas. They more likely to cover towns and villages than big cities.

Key facts on Labour and national identity

Labour and the language of national identity

To be 'for the many', people who are patriotic, and proud of being English (and British), must believe Labour will stand up for people like them.

Most people who identify as English just don't want to be ignored. They want to know that Labour respects their identity and their views. We must not forget English identity or ignore people who feel English.

In the Labour Party in England, at all levels, we often ask 'what sort of country' we want to be, not 'what sort of England do we want?' We often talk only about Britain, as in our current campaign 'Rebuilding Britain'.

We rarely talk about England or the English, even though we use national language in other nations – we are happy to say ‘Rebuilding Scotland’, for example.

St George’s Day is one important opportunity to show that Labour is proud of England and English identity.

The English Labour Network is also campaigning for the publication of an English manifesto. We want spokespeople to name England when they are talking about policy – like childcare, schools, further and higher education, the NHS, social care and much of transport, agriculture and the environment - that apply only in England (because they are devolved to the other nations).

Nationalism, racism and the far right

Some Labour activists worry that celebrating St George’s Day and reflecting English identity in our campaigning may pander to or strengthen racist and far right extremists. This is wrong. It is actually an important way of countering the populist right.

English identity is not a far-right identity. After all, 80% of English residents say they are ‘strongly’ English. It only looks like a far-right identity if we let the far right be the only people who talk about England or use the national flag.

There is very little real ‘English nationalism’ to compare with, say, Scottish, Welsh or Catalan nationalism. Many people do identify ‘English interests’ that are distinct from UK wide issues, but calling everyone who cares about England ‘a nationalist’ is a mistake that pushes some towards right-wing populist groups and confuses our own activists.

But there are some difficult issues:

- English identifiers are more concerned about migration. Sometimes this is driven by racism and a dislike of foreigners, but often it is caused by very rapid change in communities that have been cohesive and stable for a long time. Labour must always challenge racism, but we should not make the mistake of labelling everyone who worries about the impact of migration as racist.
- Compared with a generation ago, English is much less likely to be seen as an ethnic identity by most people. But it is still contested. Most people don’t think you have to be white to be English, but a significant minority (including some in minority communities) see English as a white identity. Labour needs to engage in this battle to hasten the development of what England manager Gareth Southgate called a ‘modern, diverse English identity’.
- It is most likely that English identity will become as widely shared amongst ethnic minorities as British is today. But we must not be complacent. The populist right will fight against it. Far-right groups are trying to recruit amongst young white people. Labour must actively champion an inclusive Englishness.

Images and symbols

Support for symbols of England is widespread and shared across different communities. But there is not one symbol that everyone in England shares.

- Football: in 2016 74% of the general public, 74% of BAME, and 75% of Muslims saw the English football team as a symbol that belongs to every race and background
- St George's Flag: accepted by 57% general public, 57% BAME, 58% Muslim
- St George's Day parties: accepted by 59% general public, 54% BAME, 46% Muslim.

To reach English voters we need to use these symbols. But we also need to build support for them, by associating the symbol with positive and inclusive image and reducing worry about their use.

In 2017, London Mayor Sadiq Khan said he was 'proud to be a Londoner, proud to be English'. This was an important message to London's English identifiers. But it also reassured those who have a migrant heritage that they can be English too.

Celebrating St George's Day – key points to remember

The activities we organise depend on whether they are promoted by the Labour Party, a community organisation or a local authority. Party activities can be explicitly political, our involvement in events organised by others should be non-party. However, there are a number of principles that should apply to all events.

English is a national identity not an ethnic identity

Many minority communities celebrate dates or festivals including Chinese New Year, Divali, and Ramadan. St George's Day is different. **It is England's national day**; a day that everyone, from all communities can share. We should not promote St George's Day activities for just one part of the community.

It must be an inclusive day

Because some worry that English is seen as an ethnic identity, it is important to take active steps to ensure that all communities feel welcome to participate.

It's good to celebrate local identity at the same time as our national identity

Most people feel a strong identity with the place they live; and this is often shared across people with different national, ethnic or faith identities. By celebrating how a particular

place makes England and Britain better, we can draw in more people and strengthen our common identities.

It's a chance to draw on shared histories and bring people together

It's the people who have made England what it is today. St George's Day is a chance to remember the shared sacrifice of wars, the role of important local industries, local struggles against racism, for better housing, for the vote, and for equality.

It's not just about St George!

St George is a semi (at least) mythical figure who was adopted as England's patron saint by Edward III. The saint's day is April 23rd. April 23rd is also celebrated as the birthday of England's most famous playwright, William Shakespeare. UNESCO have designated April 23rd as World English Language Day.

Our history has left us speaking the world's shared language and with family links to every corner of the globe. April 23rd is a chance to celebrate every part of our culture and community in England

Labour and English identity – some golden rules

Engaging with English identity does not require massive changes in the way we campaign. Here are a few simple tips

Don't forget to call it England!

Too often, Labour doesn't say 'England' even talking about England. But policies on child care, school, further and higher education, the NHS, social care, and most of transport, environment and agriculture are 'England only'. We should talk about Labour's plans for the NHS in England, Labour's call for a National Education Service for England, or Labour's proposal for free university education for England.

Tell a story of your place, of England and of Britain

Develop a story to describe your local area that links the place, England, and, if possible, Britain. For example: 'the people of X town made goods sold around the world, making England and Britain strong. Labour will support the people of X town to make the country prosperous and strong again'.

Use well-known and diverse representatives and images

Campaigns. and communications that refer to England and the English should reflect the diversity of the local community. Use well known individuals alongside the St George flag, the union flag and well-known local images.

Campaign for Labour policy!

It is Labour policy to have four new bank holidays, including St George's Day. Campaign for it on street stalls, petitions and on-line campaigns.

Talk about England and Britain

We shouldn't just talk about England. Just don't forget to mention England!

Points for Discussion

CLP / branch meeting motion suggestion

One way of starting a conversation with other Labour members might be to put forward a motion at your local CLP or branch meeting. For instance:

"That this CLP/ branch supports Labour's 2017 manifesto commitment to mark St George's Day as a national holiday; welcomes the discussion document from the English Labour Network about Labour and English national identity; agrees to hold a discussion with Labour members about how we can celebrate St George's Day."

Members and identity

Labour members are often 'more British' than the general population. A good discussion starter in a Labour meeting is to ask members how many are:

- More English than British [National average 32%]
- Equally English and British [National average 33%]
- More British than English [National average 24%]
- Other or Don't Know [National average 11%]

While stressing that there is no 'right' identity, or suggestion that people should feel differently to the way they do, use the responses to underline that voters in general may see identity differently to those in the meeting.

Identity and politics

- If Labour ignores people who feel English, we are ignoring a very large of the population. What are the political risks of doing this?
- Why might English identifiers be voting in different ways to British identifiers?
- Thinking about the place you live, in which areas are people most likely to feel strongly English? Who do they vote for at local and national elections? What is the potential for gaining more votes?

Labour members and English identity

- Why might Labour members' feel less English than the wider population?
- If you see a St George's Cross on a private house, do you: a. think the householder is proud to be English; b. assume that the householder is a right wing racist or; c. feel you will have little in common with them? And why? Is your reaction justified?

Campaigning and communication

- Even if some people don't feel particularly patriotic, many voters do. What are the best ways of showing we understand their patriotism?
- There are right wing groups who want to push a racist view of Englishness. How can Labour best promote Englishness as an inclusive national identity? How can Labour's campaigning help to marginalise the far-right view of England?
- What is the strongest argument we can make to voters who value the contribution of migrants but still want to see the system under control?

Your part of England

- Thinking about your local area, what are the stories Labour can tell about its history, its people, and how they have helped build England?
- What opportunities are there to show the St George's flag more widely in your area, including local authority, religious, other public, businesses, sports clubs, and private buildings

Celebrating St George's Day

- How would you like to see St George's Day celebrated?!

The English Labour Network

Labour must win England. Despite Labour's welcome recovery in Scotland and strength in Wales, we cannot rely on success in these nations to deliver a Labour majority at the next election. We must continue to build support across England.

To win England, Labour policy and values must attract voters in every village, town and city across England and beyond our current areas of support.

The English Labour Network is campaigning for an **English Labour Manifesto** at the next election, to promote Labour's message to English voters and to give English Labour members the opportunity to shape policy for England.

To find out more about our work:

- englishlabournetwork.org.uk
- info@eln.org.uk
- [@englabnet](https://www.instagram.com/englabnet)
- [facebook.com/englishlabournetwork/](https://www.facebook.com/englishlabournetwork/)