



The Seven Pillars of Englishness

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The place of England within the UK is arguably the great unresolved question of the constitutional reform processes in the UK that were launched by the Labour government in the 1990s. Although the recent McKay Commission is one indication that England's place within the UK is now at least being given more serious attention, the issue remains unresolved. Indeed, the considerable delay in the government response to McKay is suggestive of the difficulties that may be encountered in achieving consensus behind any putative 'solution'.

In any attempt to 'solve' the English question, the views of the people must surely be a relevant factor: in any democratic system of government, governmental arrangements require some diffuse popular support. It is therefore relevant to ask what the views of people in England are. How do they feel about the way they are governed now? And do they have any clear preferences for what they want for the future?

This short paper is intended to summarise important recent research about public attitudes in England: principally ones relating to national identities; how England is governed within the UK; devolution; and the European Union.

Ideally, this paper should be seen as a primer for two much longer reports,¹ published by IPPR in the last 15 months, which contain the bulk of the evidence that this paper

¹ Richard Wyn Jones, Guy Lodge, Ailsa Henderson, Daniel Wincott, *The Dog that Finally Barked: England as an Emerging Political Community* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2012); Richard Wyn Jones, Guy Lodge, Charlie Jeffery, Glenn Gottfried, Roger Scully, Ailsa Henderson and Daniel Wincott, *England and its Two Unions: the Anatomy of a Nation and Its Discontents* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2013). The reports draw on two major surveys of representative samples of the adult

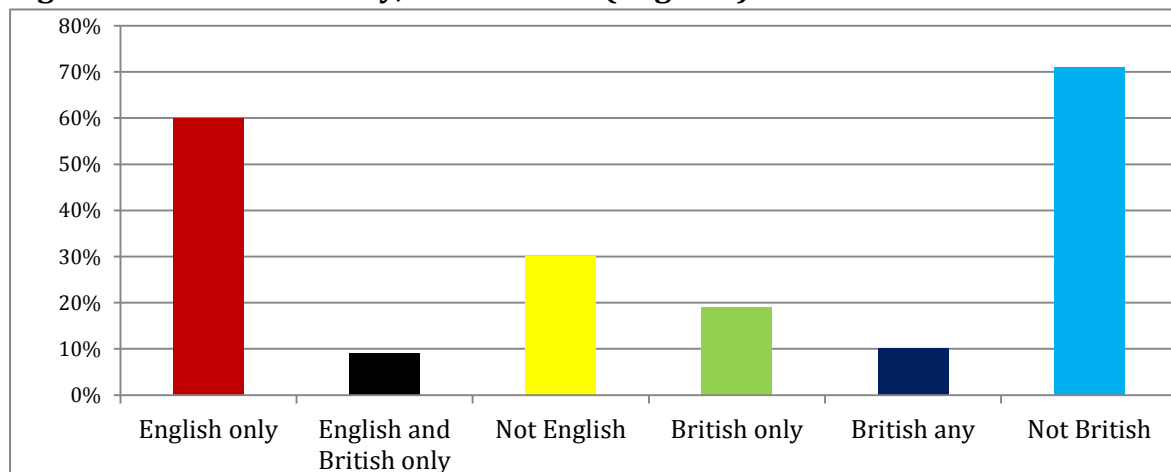
discusses, as well as much more detailed information. Here I summarise the most important findings discussed in those reports. I do so via seven statements which I have (slightly flippantly) labelled the Seven Pillars of Englishness.

1. Englishness is now the dominant national identity in England

Questions about national identity have been a staple of social attitudes research in many countries for many years. In both Scotland and Wales, these questions have proven fruitful: the national identity people affirm is a robust predictor of various other attitudes and behaviours, including attitudes to devolution and the constitution and voting preferences. For England, the suspicion has long been that most people make little distinction between Englishness and Britishness.

The IPPR reports offered a very different picture. Compared with previous studies, they showed much higher levels of English identity (across several ways of measuring the concept), with English identity clearly stronger among the people of England than British identity, and remaining so even after the high-profile given to symbols of Britishness in the 2012 'Jubilympics' celebrations. Although some authors have questioned the extent to which there has been change over time in national identities,² important support for the dominance of English identity has come from the largest social survey of them all, the Census. For the first time, in 2011 this carried a question about national identity. Figure 1 summarises the main findings:

Figure 1: National Identity, 2011 Census (England)



Clearly, and very much in line with the findings of the two IPPR reports, Englishness is the most widely-affirmed national identity. A further striking feature of both the Census findings and the IPPR reports was the relative uniformity of these findings, both geographically and socially. London was the only region of England where a majority of

population of England, known as the Future of England Surveys, conducted in 2011 and 2012. The surveys were conducted via the internet by YouGov, and funded by Edinburgh and Cardiff Universities. Further details of the surveys are given in the two reports. All tables and Figures in this paper draw on the 2012 survey, unless otherwise stated.

² John Curtice, Paula Devine and Rachel Ormston, 'Devolution: Identities and Constitutional Preferences Across the UK', in *British Social Attitudes 30* (<http://www.bsa-30.natcen.ac.uk/>).

Census respondents failed to affirm an exclusively English national identity. Somewhat relatedly (and discussed under point 6 below), the only major social distinction in national identity found in the survey research concerns Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) respondents, who were significantly less likely to affirm an English identity, and more likely to identify as British.

2. There is substantial unhappiness in England about how it is governed within the UK

The two surveys underpinning the IPPR reports carry multiple questions asking respondents about the governance of England within the UK. A common feature across the findings from all these questions is substantial unhappiness: many people in England are not happy with how England is currently dealt with in the governing structures of the UK.

A few examples will suffice to illustrate the point. Several survey questions offer respondents a multi-option ‘constitutional preference’ question, asking respondents to select their most favoured options from several possibilities. When asking “Thinking about how England should be governed, which one of the following statements comes closest to your view?”, one question garnered the following profile of responses:

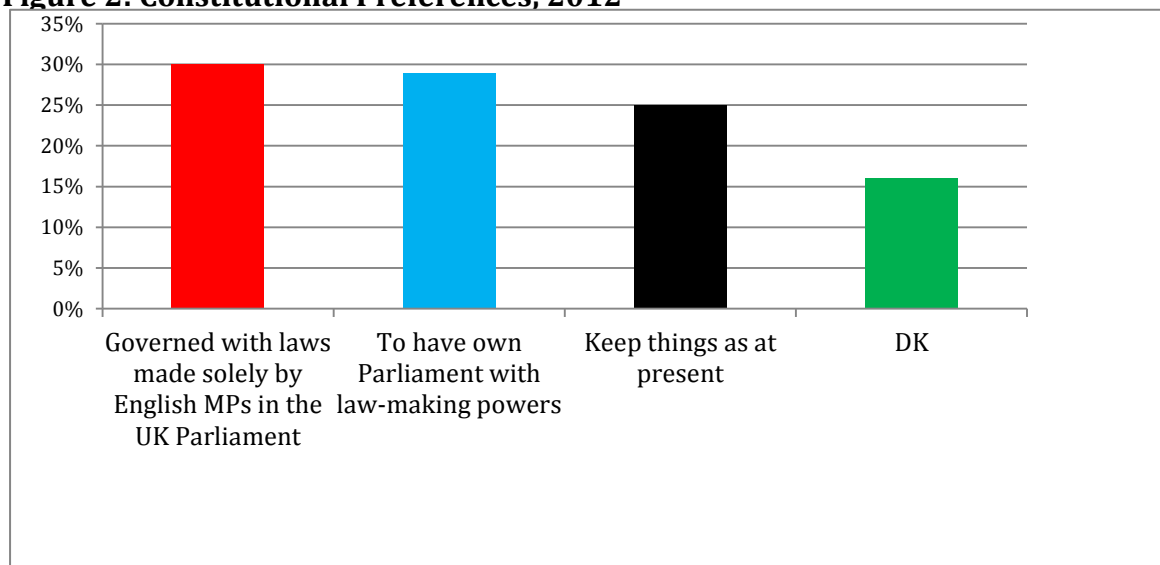
Table 1: Constitutional Preferences, 2012

England should be governed as it is now with laws made by all MPs in the UK parliament	21%
England should be governed with laws made solely by English MPs in the UK parliament	33%
England should have its own new English parliament with law-making powers	18%
England should be an independent state inside the EU	7%
England should be an independent state outside the EU	8%
Don't Know	12%

The high level of support for an ‘English dimension’ to constitutional arrangements (whether that be English votes for English laws at Westminster, or an English parliament) is not about support for greater localism –for government to be brought ‘closer to the people’. An alternative formulation, presented to other respondents in the 2012 survey, replaced the independence options with one for English regionalism (“Each region in England to have its own elected Assembly”). This produced very little support for regionalism (backed by only 8 percent of respondents). Nor was there substantial support for other forms of localism. What appears to be desired is recognition of England *as England*.

There are two further important points to be made here. The first can be illustrated by Figure 2, which shows responses to a question that narrowed down the constitutional options to the two most plausible English options (English votes for English Laws, and an English Parliament) and the status quo.

Figure 2: Constitutional Preferences, 2012



Two things are of note here. First, that while support for the constitutional status quo was higher here than in any other question formulation, it was still only at one quarter. Dissatisfaction with how England is governed is a robust finding; it is not dependent on any particular question wording. Second, there is no clear consensus around a particular constitutional option for England.

The second point concerns the salience of constitutional discontent. Constitutional politics may not be the dominant public concern in most people’s minds. But at least when compared to other constitutional issues – including several hardy perennials of political debate – the status of England does rank highly. When asked to indicate which of a list of issues should be a priority (with respondents able to pick up to three, hence percentages in the table summing to more than 100), the following responses were obtained:

Table 2: Salience of Constitutional Issues, 2012

The UK’s relationship with the European Union	59
<i>How England is governed now Scotland has a Parliament and Wales an Assembly</i>	42
A more proportional system for electing MPs at Westminster	29
Strengthening local government	27
Reforming the House of Lords	26
Scotland’s future relationship with the UK	25
The future of Northern Ireland	5
None of these	4
Don’t Know	11

3. There is substantial (and growing) unhappiness in England about Devolution

Research conducted in the early years of devolution generally showed people in England to be largely indifferent to devolution and its consequences. The more recent evidence shows attitudes changing. In particular, there is a broad perception that

Scotland, in particular, is being unfairly advantaged by current financial arrangements: an absolute majority (52 percent) of all respondents to the 2012 survey agreed that 'Scotland gets more than its fair share of public spending'.

There is also now considerable discontent with current constitutional arrangements. More than three in four respondents to the 2012 survey (78 percent) agreed that 'The Scottish Parliament should pay for services in Scotland from its own taxes'; and over four in five (81 percent) agreed with the statement that 'Scottish MPs should no longer be allowed to vote on English laws'. For devolution, as for the status of England, the clear position of the majority of people in England is that the status quo simply will not do.

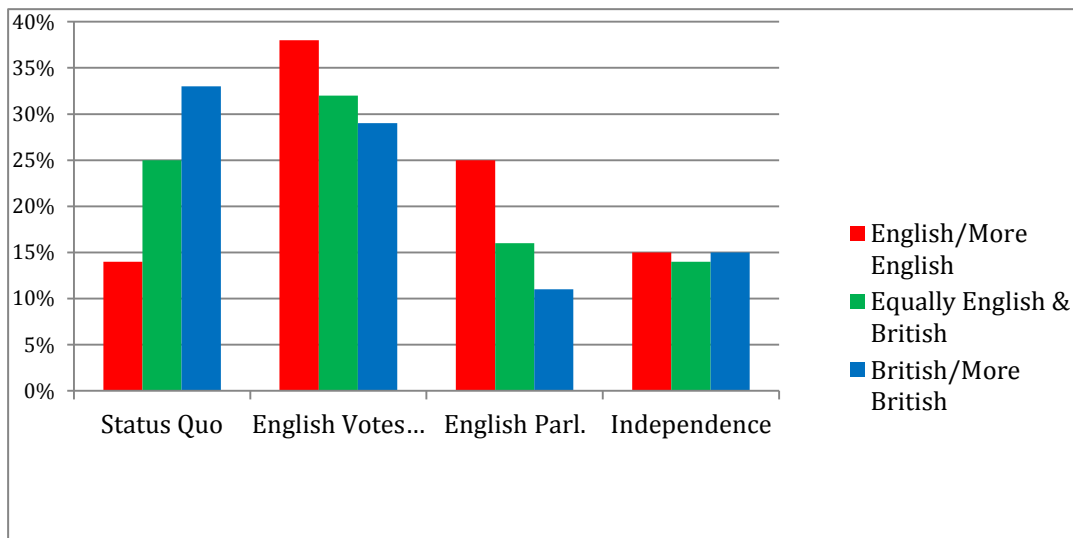
4. English Identity is closely linked to constitutional attitudes

One of the most intriguing findings presented in both the IPPR reports is the interconnection between findings 1-3. English identity is not only becoming more prominent; it is also becoming more politically relevant, and is increasingly closely related to constitutional attitudes.

Specifically, we find that English identity has a strong and robust relationship both with attitudes towards the status of England within the UK, and towards devolution. The first of these points is illustrated in Figure 3 below, which compares constitutional preferences for those giving different answers to the standard 'Moreno' national identity question. Among those who affirm a 'British, not English', or a 'More British than English' national identity, the constitutional status quo is the most preferred (plurality choice) option, ahead of English Votes for English Laws in Westminster; and English Parliament; or Independence for England. Among those stating their national identity to be 'English not British', or 'More English than British', by contrast, the status quo is only the *fourth* most preferred option – behind even English independence, a constitutional option that currently has more-or-less no major backers.

Very similar findings obtain for devolution. The more English a national identity someone affirms, the more likely they are to agree that Scotland gets more than its fair share of public spending; that the Scottish Parliament should pay for services in Scotland from its own taxes; and that Scottish MPs should no longer vote on English laws.

Figure 3: Constitutional Preferences by National Identity, 2012



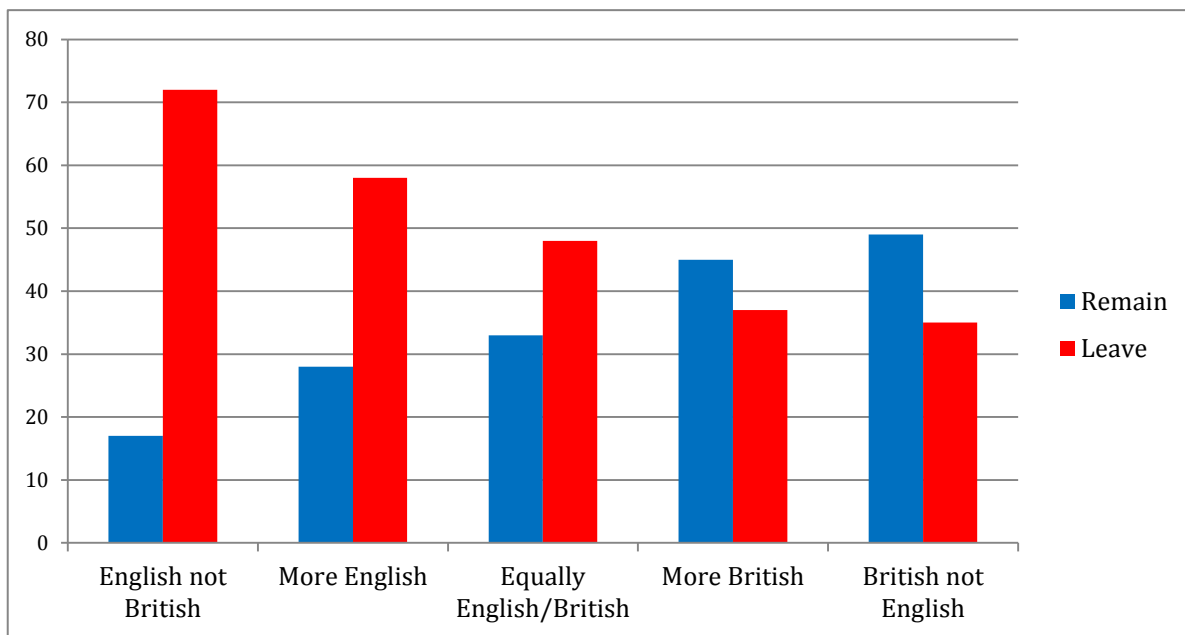
Englishness is also Connected to Attitudes to the EU

One of the most intriguing findings presented in the more recent IPPR reports is the extent to which there is also a significant and robust relationship between English national identity – and related attitudes, such as towards England’s place in the UK, and towards devolution – on the one hand and attitudes towards the EU on the other. Put simply, public views towards England two unions, the UK and EU, are much more closely connected than has been generally realised. The same people who are those most unhappy with the constitutional status quo in England are also those who are most discontented with the UK’s relationship with the EU.

While events of recent years have left little outright Euro-enthusiasm alive anywhere, the extent of hostility to the EU in England is striking. One question in the 2012 survey asked respondents which level of government they believed had most influence over how England is run: while a majority (55 percent) chose the UK government, a substantial minority (31 percent) nominated the EU. When a similar question was asked in fourteen different regions in 2009, the percentage choosing the EU option was never greater than 9 percent. These perceptions of importance are strongly correlated with hostility: overwhelmingly, these are people who think the EU is important and do not like it!

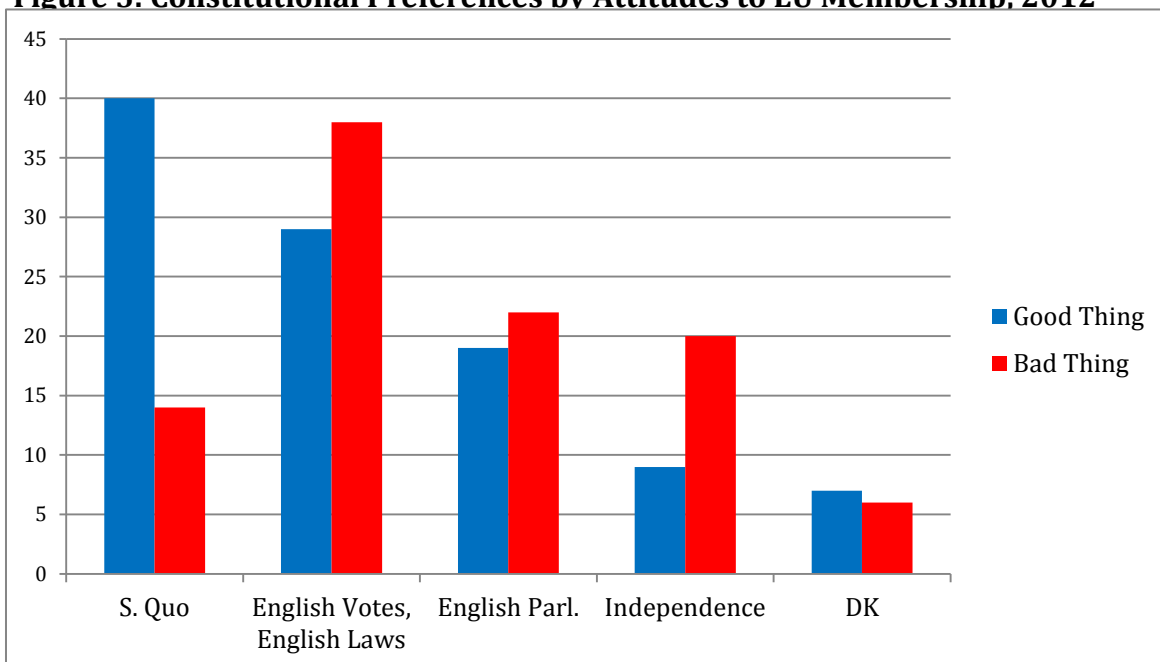
Perhaps surprisingly –not least given the Union Jack-waving tendencies of UKIP and many Euro-sceptic Tories – the 2012 survey found hostility to the EU to be overwhelmingly an *English* phenomenon, not a British one. On various measures, those affirming a more English identity were much more likely to evince antagonism to the EU, while the main supporters of the EU and the UK’s membership of it were located among those with a more British identity. For example, in a putative EU membership referendum those with a more or exclusively British identity would vote to remain inside the Union; those with an exclusively English identity oppose continued membership by about four to one.

Figure 4: EU Referendum Vote Intention by National Identity, 2012



We also find that attitudes to devolution, and England’s place within the UK, are related to attitudes to the EU. This leads to the clear conclusion that although such attitudes are often identified with the political right, Eurosceptics in England are not generally constitutionally conservative. It is hardly a surprise – indeed, almost true by definition – that they wish to see change in the UK’s relationship with the EU. What is striking is the extent to which they tend also to favour change within the UK. But this is illustrated by Figure 5. Among those regarding the UK’s EU membership as a Good Thing, their most-favoured constitutional option is the status quo; among those (rather more in number) who see EU membership as a Bad Thing, the status quo is only the fourth most popular option.

Figure 5: Constitutional Preferences by Attitudes to EU Membership, 2012



5. Ethnicity is Strongly Related to English Identity and Related Attitudes

One feature of attitudes in England which was investigated in some detail in the 2012 survey was whether attitudes towards the matters under investigation differed according to race. England now has a significant BME population. The 2012 survey therefore deliberately over-sampled among this population, in order to have sufficient non-white respondents to compare BME and white attitudes.

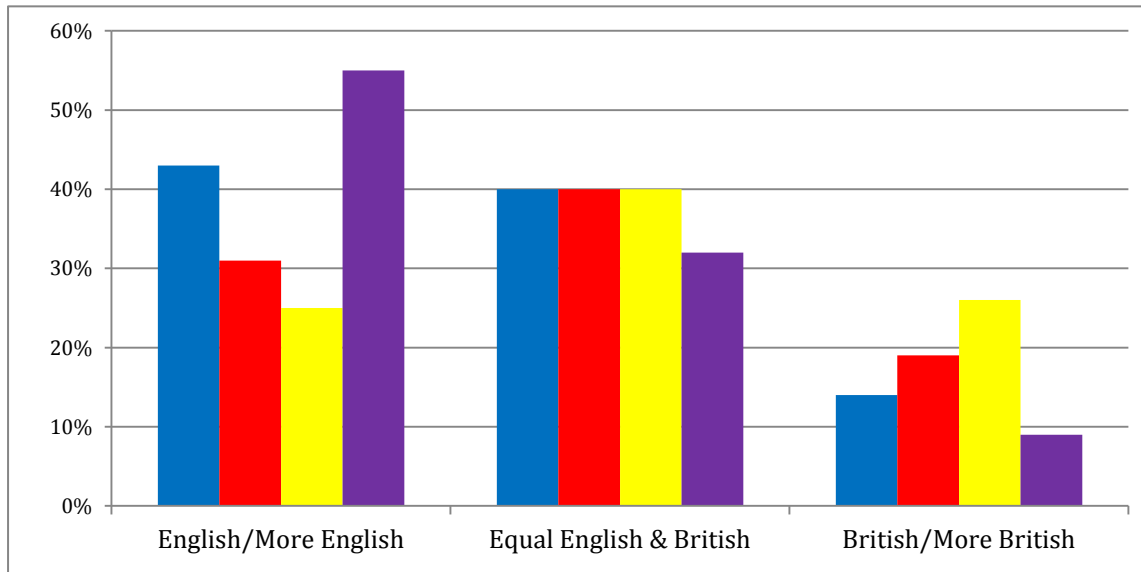
Perhaps surprisingly, given the diversity of the BME population (by geographic origin and religious background, among other factors) there were few major attitudinal differences between sub-groups within the BME sample. There were, however, some significant differences between the BME and white samples. In general:

- BME respondents were substantially more likely to affirm an exclusively or mainly British national identity than white respondents, and much less likely to affirm an exclusively or mainly English identity. In fact, BME respondents were approximately four times more likely than white ones to claim to be British, not English.
- BME respondents were substantially less likely than white ones to support 'English' constitutional options like English votes for English Laws or an English parliament. They were also much less likely to nominate addressing the status of England as an issue requiring urgent attention.
- BME respondents showed notably lower levels of hostility than white ones towards devolution, and towards the position of Scotland regarding public spending or constitutional arrangements.
- BME respondents were also less Euro-sceptic. Although hardly over-flowing with warmth towards the EU, they were – as with others affirming a more British national identity – much less likely to support the UK leaving the EU or to regard the UK's membership of the Union as a Bad Thing.

6. UKIP is the Party of England, Not Britain

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the close connection discussed above between English identity and attitudes to the EU, but in stark contrast with the party's own name, rhetoric and imagery, there is a close relationship between support for UKIP and English – rather than British – identity in England. As the figure below shows, the majority of UKIP supporters in England identify as exclusively or mainly English, and very few as exclusively or mainly British. (Also striking, particularly given the party's long Unionist history, is that a plurality of Conservative supporters identify as exclusively or mainly English). Similarly, if given the choice, a clear majority of UKIP supporters indicated that they prefer an English rather than British passport. Rather than prompting a resurgence of Britishness, UKIP's rise may be understood as feeding off the confluence of specifically *English* resentments outlined earlier in this paper.

Figure 6: National Identity by Party Support, 2012



Conclusion

The attitudes outlined in this paper suggest that, in England, we see a nation which is far from wholly at ease with its place in the world. A clear English identity appears to now be emerging as the dominant sense of nationality within England. But that rising Englishness is associated strongly with discontent: with how England is currently (not) recognised within the UK; with how devolution apparently favours the other nations of the UK; and with the relationship with England's 'other union', the EU.

Many potential questions are raised by these findings. Among them are:

- Will English identity continue strengthening, to become the wholly dominant sense of national identity within England?
- If so, will the other political attitudes currently associated with English identity also continue to strengthen?
- Englishness currently appears strongly associated with ideas of the political right. Can the left find a positive response to the rise of Englishness?