

Euroscepticism is English, not British

July 9 2013

There is a strong relationship between Euroscepticism in England and English (rather than British) national identity, a joint University report has uncovered.

The Future of England Survey (FoES) 2012 is a joint initiative between the University's Wales Governance Centre, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) the Academy of Government at Edinburgh University.

Led by the Wales Governance Centre's Professor Richard Wyn Jones and Roger Scully the FoES is the most comprehensive examination of how [public attitudes](#) within England are changing in respect of issues around [national identity](#), nationhood and governance

The report *England and its Two Unions: the anatomy of a nation and its discontents* published today (Monday 8th July) shows that while people living in England retain a dual sense of identity, they are increasingly choosing to prioritise their English over their British identity. The report is based on a poll of over 3,500 people living in England only.

While more than half of people living in England who say they are 'more English than British' say that the UK's membership of the EU is a 'bad thing', less than a third of people who feel 'more British than English' agree.

Euroscepticism is concentrated most heavily among those with a stronger sense of

English national identity - a group that represents a growing proportion of the population.

By contrast it is those with a stronger sense of British national identity - who make up the smallest part of the English population - who are most supportive of the EU.

Director of the University's Wales Governance Centre and co-author of the report, Professor Richard Wyn Jones, said: "Alienated from both Europe and the other nations of the UK, and especially Scotland, the English appear increasingly discontented with their lot.

"Yet the British political class seems largely unable to recognise that there's a problem let alone suggest relevant solutions. This report should stand as a stark warning. It's high time that England and Englishness receive due recognition from the political system.

"The rise of UKIP underlines the dangers of not taking England seriously. That party is already the de facto English National Party and the inter-relationship between Euro-scepticism and discontent with the way that England is governed creates the perfect opportunity for that party to further strengthen its appeal."

The report also shows a strong relationship between Euroscepticism in England and concerns about the perceived unfairness of devolution. Those that believe membership of the EU is a bad thing also strongly believe that 'Scotland gets more than its fair share of public spending', that 'Scottish MPs should no longer vote on English laws' and that the 'UK government cannot be trusted to work in England's interest'.

There is now a substantial strain of English opinion who wish to see UK withdrawal from the EU and who support giving England greater recognition in the UK's constitutional arrangements.

The report argues that the main political parties have not done enough to address the growing importance of the politics of English nationhood. It shows that the English now believe that UKIP is the party that is best placed to 'stand up for English interests' (and the number who believe this has doubled between 2011 and 2013).

Nick Pearce, IPPR Director, said: "English identity is on the rise and it is increasingly expressed in terms that are resentful of both the EU and the devolution settlement. Attitudes towards England's two [unions](#) are related and two sides of the same coin of English discontent.

"Our mainstream political parties need to embrace Englishness, take it seriously, and find new ways of giving it political expression. Labour and progressive politics need to recognise that Englishness is not something to be feared or abandoned to those on the margins of right wing politics. But the longer this debate is ignored, or worse, denied, the more likely we will see a backlash within England against the UK. "

Charlie Jeffery, Professor of Politics at Edinburgh University and co-author of the report said: "One of the most striking features of these findings is the sheer strength of feeling uncovered among the English. Among those with a strong sense of English identity, the feeling that England is getting a raw deal in the post-devolution UK is nigh on universal.

"There appears to be reluctance in some quarters to talk about England for fear of how it might play in Scotland in the run-up to 2014. But it is surely mistaken to allow the debate in Scotland to inhibit a discussion about England's place in a reformed union."

The report shows:

- 43 per cent of the English believe that Britain's membership of

the EU is a bad thing, compared to 28 per cent who say it is a good thing. 50 per cent say they would vote to leave the EU in a referendum, compared to 33 per cent who say they would opt to stay in. Euroscepticism is closely associated with Englishness: 72 per cent of those who say they are exclusively English and 58 per cent of those who say they are more English than British would vote to leave the EU respectively;

- Compared to the other nations of the UK, the English appear to be far more conscious of and hostile towards the role of EU institutions. When asked to select from the level of government (including the UK government) 'which you believe has the most influence over the way England is run', 31 per cent of the English say the EU. In contrast just 8 per cent of Scots and 8 per cent of Welsh respondents selected the EU;
- Euroscepticism is closely related to concerns about the perceived inequities of the devolution settlement: 91 per cent of those that think the EU is a bad thing believe that Scottish MPs should not be allowed to vote on English matters; 91 per cent of those that think the EU is a bad thing believe that Scots should pay for devolved services from Scottish taxes; 62 per cent of those that think the EU is a bad thing believe that Scotland gets more than its fair share of public spending; 71 per cent of those that think the EU is a bad thing say that the UK government can't be trusted to govern in the interests of England;
- The English believe they get a raw-deal from the devolved settlement, with 52 per cent of voters in England saying that Scotland gets 'more than its fair share of public spending' – the number agreeing with this has more than doubled since 2002. Meanwhile 40 per cent of voters in England say that England gets 'less than its fair share' of public money. Just under half (49 per cent) say that Scotland's economy benefits more than England's from being in the UK;
- While the English do not want Scotland to leave the union – 30

per cent say Scotland should become an independent country, compared to 49 per cent who say Scotland should stay put – they strongly support the view that the current devolved settlement should be reformed. 78 per cent say that Scotland should pay for devolved services out of Scottish taxes, with 49 per cent agreeing strongly. 81 per cent say Scottish MPs should be barred from voting on English laws, with 55 per cent agreeing strongly with that proposition;

- The report finds that having initially been content to continue to be governed by an unreformed set of UK institutions at Westminster, support for the status quo has now fallen to just 1 in 5 of the English electorate. And 62 per cent say that they do not trust the UK government to work in the best long-term interests of England. Voters in England appear to support introducing distinct governance arrangements for England but are currently divided between support for 'English voters on English laws' and an 'English Parliament' (combined support for these two options is 56 per cent);
- When asked 'which party best stands up for English interests', UKIP tops the list. Indeed in the last two years it has more than doubled its support as the party that best speaks for England (jumping from 9 per cent in 2011 to 21 per cent in April this year). At no point have either of the main parties topped this list: before UKIP's surge the most popular option was 'none of the parties' stand up for England;
- UKIP's supporters express the strongest sense of English identity (55 per cent of UKIP supporters prioritise their English over their British identity). And UKIP supporters are the most dissatisfied with the constitutional status quo in the United Kingdom. 49 per cent agree that England should become an independent country; while over 90 per cent (unsurprisingly) of want out of Europe too.

Provided by Cardiff University

Citation: Euroscepticism is English, not British (2013, July 9) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-07-euroscepticism-english-british.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.