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# THE LABOUR PARTY AND THE 'POLITICS OF ENGLISHNESS'

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Science by Research in Politics and International Studies

January 2017

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## **Abstract**

*This thesis examines how the Labour Party has engaged with the so called 'politics of Englishness'. It does so by considering the extent to which Englishness has been politicised and through discussion of the way in which the Labour Party has responded to it. An analytical framework based on politicisation and the importance of identity, governance and political conflict on it is used for this task. The thesis then considers the Labour Party's relationship with the 'politics of Englishness' through analysis of primary data gathered from semi-structured interviews with leading national and local Labour politicians in England. This analysis enables the thesis to conclude by detailing the current state of the Labour's relationship with the 'politics of Englishness' and allows it to consider how the party might engage with it in the future.*

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## Introduction

This study examines the emergence and development of the so called ‘politics of Englishness’ (Mycock and Hayton, 2014) and its resonance and impact on the Labour Party. The ‘politics of Englishness’ is associated with changes to English identity construction, governance and the resulting ‘recalibration of party politics’ amongst Westminster-based unionist parties in an attempt to engage with these issues (Mycock and Hayton, 2014, p. 251). The primary aim of this thesis is to consider the impact of the ‘politics of Englishness’ and to examine how and in what ways the Labour Party has engaged with it. This raises several key issues that the study addresses. Firstly, it considers the main drivers of the ‘politics of Englishness’ and examines the extent to which national identity in England has been politicised. It then considers how the ‘politics of Englishness’ has impacted upon the Labour Party and analyses the views of Labour politicians on its implications in terms of party organisation and policy-making.

The thesis addresses these issues by applying an analytical framework developed from the work of Hooghe and Marks (2009). The framework is based around the importance of politicisation and the impact of identity, governance and political conflict on it. Analysis of the party’s engagement with Englishness through the prism of these three key themes enables the study to discuss how the party has reacted to the ‘politics of Englishness’ and explore the implications of it. In its conclusion, the thesis considers how Labour might engage with the ‘politics of Englishness’ in the future.

Contextually, there are four key drivers of this study. Firstly, an increased affiliation to English national identity has been emerging since the early 1990s (Kenny, 2012, p. 156). This may have been driven by a number of factors including the end of empire and the impact of this upon the English’s sense of belonging (Wellings, 2011, p. 12). It may also have been influenced by a sense of ‘dislocation and anxiety’ associated with the rapid shift to post-industrialism in the 1980s (Kenny, 2015a, pp. 358-359). More recently, UK devolution and Euroscepticism can be seen to have contributed towards an increasingly politicised English national identity (Jeffery et al, 2014).

Some survey data suggests that forty per cent of the population in England now prioritise their English identity above all others, compared with just sixteen per cent who prioritise their British identity (Wyn Jones et al, 2012, p. 5). Furthermore, sixty per cent of those in England

believe that the English have become 'more aware of Englishness in recent years' (Wyn Jones et al, 2012, p. 5). Wyn Jones et al (2013, p. 32) argue that there is now strong evidence that 'England is emerging as a distinct political community'. Jeffery et al (2014, p. 3) suggest that it is one which possesses a 'distinctive politics that combines a politicisation of English national identity with an increasingly clear political prospectus'.

Secondly, some believe that issues concerning England's position as a distinct nation within the United Kingdom are becoming increasingly salient politically. Several recent political events are given as evidence of this. Kenny (2015b) argues that one of the most striking consequences of the 2015 General Election was the 'sudden shift of attention onto the spectre of a burgeoning English nationalism'. In particular, he points to the impact of the Conservatives' focus on the prospect of SNP involvement in a putative UK government and the Conservative Party's focus upon English votes for English laws (EVEL) as exemplifying the increased political importance being given to England as a nation.

The recent referendum decision to leave the European Union has also been seen by some to have, at least in part, been driven by an increasingly politicised sense of Englishness. In every region in England apart from London the majority voted in favour of Brexit (Wheeler and Hunt, 2016). Whilst it is true that there was also significant support for Brexit outside of England and that socio-economic grievances can be seen to have influenced many leave voters (Kenny, 2016a), English identity politics may also have played a part. Erlanger (2016) suggests that the vote was influenced by the idea that 'subordination to the bureaucrats of Brussels' has led to the erosion of 'English identity and values'. Foster (2016) argues that the referendum campaign and result can be seen to be driven by the 'rise of an aggressive, angry, ethnic Englishness'. Again, these arguments suggest that the 'politics of Englishness' is becoming increasingly significant.

Thirdly, there is a perception among some academics and commentators that the Labour Party has failed to engage with English identity politics for a significant number of years. Aughey (2010, p. 517) points out that the Labour governments between 1997 and 2010 took the view that a 'politicised Englishness could not and should not be accommodated'. Instead, Britishness became the focus of Labour ministers attempting to engage with identity politics. Wellings (2011, p. 192) argues that New Labour sought to re-package Britishness as something 'modern in the absence of any specifically English reforms to the British state'. Meanwhile, Lee (2011,

p. 169) suggests that under Gordon Brown's premiership 'England remained the nation and focal point for political identity whose name he dare not speak'.

In recent years, the issue of Labour's relationship with England and Englishness has been raised more frequently by some within the party. The emergence of the Blue Labour movement had some influence on the former leader, Ed Miliband. This was evident in his 2012 speech about England where he argued that if the party is 'committed to enabling a vibrant Scottish identity' within the framework of the UK, it must also 'do the same for England'. Miliband (2012) acknowledged that many within the party had 'been too reluctant to talk about England in recent years'. Latterly, some of the ideas of Blue Labour can also be seen to have influenced Miliband's 'One Nation Labour' rhetoric (Gaffney and Lahel, 2013; Atkins, 2015). Although ultimately, it became unclear which 'nation' Miliband was referring to. The importance of the party's historic English traditions has also received greater attention from some in recent years, in an attempt to form some kind of English Labour narrative (Denham, 2012; Cruddas, 2015). Furthermore, debate within the party concerning EVEL and English regional devolution can be seen as an attempt to engage with England and Englishness (Denham, 2012; Cruddas 2015; Umunna, 2015).

Fourthly, some within the party now believe that Labour's failure to properly engage with the 'politics of Englishness' has become electorally damaging in England (Byrne et al, 2015; Cruddas, 2015; Denham, 2015a). The party has not won a majority of English constituencies since 2005 (Byrne et al, 2015, p.2). John Denham (2010), the former Labour MP for Southampton Itchen and current professor of politics at the University of Winchester, argues that Labour has struggled in the south of England for longer still. Meanwhile, Dagenham and Rainham MP, Jon Cruddas (2015), suggests that there is now some evidence that Labour has been deserted by many of its traditional working class voters who 'value home, family and their country' and feel that their 'cultural identity is under threat'.

Following the 2015 general election, some within the party argue that Labour now needs to win 106 more English seats which will require its national vote share to increase from 30.4 per cent to 42 per cent in order to win a majority in England (Byrne et al, 2015, p.2). Liam Byrne, MP for Birmingham Hodge Hill, and a number of other Labour MPs argue that the party now has 'a mountain to climb' to reconnect with voters and win back power in England (Byrne et al, 2015, p. 2). However, in Batson's (2016, p. 12) view, the party's performance in the English



local elections in May 2016 was ‘in line with what one might expect a year in to a parliament where the opposition is not going to win the general election’.

Whether Labour’s electoral problems in England are largely down to its engagement or lack thereof with the ‘politics of Englishness’ is debatable and is an issue that is addressed in this study. While it is likely that there are a number of other factors at play when it comes to the issue of Labour’s electability in parts of England, it has not prevented several senior Labour politicians calling for the creation of an English Labour Party in the belief that it would increase the party’s appeal to the English electorate. Cruddas (2015) has argued that Labour is now ‘dangerously out of touch with the electorate’ and ‘stands on the brink of becoming irrelevant to the majority of working people in the country’. He claims that Labour has ‘lost its connection with the English people’, many of whom no longer know ‘what the Party stands for’. Tristram Hunt (in Watt, 2016), MP for Stoke-on-Trent Central, has also argued that many socially conservative voters ‘feel that Labour no longer represents them, or understands their lives’ and feel that Labour do not ‘value England’ and is not ‘on the side of the English’.

As support for Brexit in Wales shows, Euroscepticism is not an issue that effects England alone and it evidently runs deeper than the issues of English identity and the ‘politics of Englishness’ (Mycock and Gifford, 2015, pp. 51-73). However, the fact that the vote for Brexit was highest in the traditional Labour heartlands of the Midlands and the North of England (Wheeler and Hunt, 2016) does suggest that there is a unique sense of disconnect in these areas. Some within the party believe that addressing Englishness is vital in order to help tackle its decline in its historic heartlands and the decline of its traditional working class vote, particularly among ‘small c’ conservative voters concerned with issues such as immigration (Cruddas, 2015). For example, Barnsley Central MP Dan Jarvis (2015), suggests that it is in these areas that Labour is now facing stiff electoral competition from UKIP.

Cruddas (2015) argues that Labour is currently losing everywhere to everybody. However, the party’s recent performances in places such as Bristol, London and Manchester suggest that this is not entirely true. It appears to be the case that the party’s position as a marginal political force in Scotland for the foreseeable future has made its English dilemmas more pronounced and for some it has increased the importance of finding a solution to them. For many of those arguing that Labour should engage with the ‘politics of Englishness’ more seriously, it has now become clear that the changing power dynamics within the UK in terms of both national and

regional devolution mean that it is vital for Labour to address its perceived identity crisis and its internal structural relationships. It is in this context that a study examining the rise of the 'politics of Englishness' and the response of the Labour Party is highly topical and relevant.

The four key contextual drivers as detailed above have shaped the aims and objectives of the research. Crucially, the study aims to assess the nature and extent of the politicisation of Englishness and examine how the Labour Party has engaged with 'the politics of Englishness'. In doing this, it aims to discover how Labour members understand Englishness, its potential for good or bad fortune in future elections and its impact on the party structurally. In common with most social research, the motive for undertaking this study was to provide some research that fills an existing gap in the current literature (Bryman, 2012, p.5). The thesis seeks to contribute to the literature by providing a detailed examination of how the Labour Party is engaging with the ever evolving 'politics of Englishness'. While this has been touched on in some studies (Kenny, 2012; Mycock and Hayton, 2014; Mycock, 2016), there is, as yet, no individual study which has solely addressed this important issue and explored it in depth.

## **Methodology**

This section discusses the research methodology of the study and explains the rationale behind it. It details the primary research methods and the sampling method. It also discusses how the primary data has been analysed and the ethical considerations of the research. The methodological approach employed in this study combines research based on secondary analysis of the literature with analysis of primary qualitative data gathered from in-depth semi-structured interviews with Labour Party politicians.

The review of the literature was vital in order to establish what is already known about the 'politics of Englishness' and to assess the concepts and theories that may be applied to it and the potential controversies that surround the topic (Bryman, 2012, p.8). Theory is particularly important because 'it provides a backcloth and rationale for the research' (Bryman, 2012, p.20). Theoretical analysis based on Hooghe and Marks' (2009) theory on politicisation has resulted in the application of an analytical framework within which the research findings have been interpreted. The use of this analytical framework was vital to establish the 'crucial lines of conflict' within the debate around the Labour Party and the 'politics of Englishness' (David and Sutton, 2011, p. 66).

The analytical framework has been utilised to frame and evaluate the primary research interviews undertaken as part of this research project. The main aim of the interviews was to discover the key themes that emerged from participant's responses on the importance of Labour's historic, present and future engagement with the 'politics of Englishness'. The study took the approach of semi-structured interviews because it enabled the gathering of 'rich information' and allowed for 'follow-up on interesting points'; this has provided 'greater detail' to the research (Curtis and Curtis, 2011, p. 32). The semi-structured approach allowed for flexibility in responding to the direction of the interviewee, and has resulted in valuable 'detailed answers' to important questions (Bryman, 2012, p. 470). Ultimately, the choice of the qualitative approach was influenced by the desire for 'explanation' of participants' views (Bryman, 2012, p.401). These views were then interpreted within the established framework reflecting the interpretivist epistemology of this study (Bryman, 2012, p. 380).

The sampling method used was purposive sampling. This is a 'non-probability form of sampling' that aims to select participants in a strategic way so that those chosen are 'relevant to the research questions that are being posed' (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). Potential interview participants were identified based on their relevance and contribution to the current debate about the Labour Party's position and future in England and with the aim of contrasting the views of different sides of the debate. In total, twenty-six people were invited to take part in the study: Eighteen MPs, six councillors, one Lord and one academic and former MP. Of the twenty-six, eight were female. In total, eight people agreed to take part, nine of those invited to take part did not respond and the other nine said they could not take part. Of those who stated that they would not be able to take part in the study their reasoning was invariably down to time constraints.

The final sample was made up from the following research participants: Jon Cruddas, MP for Dagenham and Rainham; John Denham, Professor of Politics at Winchester University and Labour MP for Southampton Itchen between 1992 and 2015; Michael Dugher, MP for Barnsley East; Richard Leese, leader of Manchester City Council; James Lewis, deputy leader of Leeds City Council, David Sheard, leader of Kirklees Council; Barry Sheerman, MP for Huddersfield; and the leader of a sizeable city council in the North of England who wished to remain anonymous. All the research interviews were undertaken between February and May 2016. The sample provided a good mix of contrasting views from a strong range of participants.

However, the voices of several more MPs and greater gender and ethnicity diversity may have improved the sample, but these groups proved least likely to respond to the invitation to participate in the study.

The analysis of the data gathered from these interviews followed the general pattern of the majority of qualitative research. That is, once the general research question was established, the relevant interview participants selected and the relevant data gathered there was a period of interaction between the interpretation of the data and the conceptual and theoretical framework which resulted in the writing up of the research findings (Bryman, 2012, p. 384). As Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 1) point out, qualitative analysis is the 'process of examining and interpreting data in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge'. The analysis is the 'process of generating, developing and verifying concepts'. Essentially, it is 'the act of giving meaning to data' (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, pp. 57- 64).

Prior knowledge established in the theoretical review of the literature served to guide the analysis of the data (Schmitd, 2004, pp. 254-255). The key concepts established in the analytical framework meant that it was possible to group and organise the data in to relevant categories (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 51). The study therefore analysed the data in a thematic way whereby 'core themes' were extracted and broken down or 'coded' (Bryman, 2012, p. 13). 'Recurrences' and 'links' between the coded text were then identified (Bryman, 2012, p. 13). This analytical approach allowed for the data to be effectively 'interpreted' and linked with the research question, the literature and the theoretical ideas established within the analytical framework (Bryman, 2012, p. 13).

Overall, this methodological approach has enabled the study to draw on a wide range of views and ideas which have been considered and analysed alongside the study's own primary research findings. This allowed for a detailed analysis of the topic which has been enhanced with up to date and insightful qualitative data. The biggest challenge of the research process was ensuring that the interview sample was mixed and large enough to provide significant value to the research. Although greater representation of MPs and greater gender and ethnicity diversity in the sample may have improved it, it still provided an interesting cross section of views and opinions which have shed some valuable light on the key themes that exist within the party when it comes to the issue of Labour and the 'politics of Englishness'.

The research methodology raised a number of ethical considerations common to interviewing. They included the issues of receiving informed consent from participants, the availability of the right to privacy for participants and the protection of harm to participants both physically and emotionally (David and Sutton, 2004, p. 90). Participants were informed at the initial contact stage and again before their research interview took place of their right to withdraw at any time, their right to informed consent and their right to anonymity and confidentiality. All the participants were happy with this and all signed a consent form. In every area, great care was taken to ensure that this study complied with all the necessary ethical guidelines.

### **Thesis Structure**

The thesis is largely structured around examining the role of identity, governance and political conflict, the three core themes of the analytical framework, on the politicisation of Englishness generally and the Labour party's position more specifically. Before this however, Chapter 1 begins by reviewing the literature and contextualising the 'politics of Englishness' within the plurinational framework of the UK. It then goes on to detail the analytical framework more thoroughly. In Chapter 2, the analytical framework is applied to examine the politicisation of Englishness. The chapter considers whether English national identity is currently strong enough to require recognition in the form of some degree of explicitly English governance; a form of governance which may require more distinctively English political parties. Following this, it examines whether the political conflicts that are driving the 'politics of Englishness' are salient enough for significant politicisation and whether there exist any notable political entrepreneurs capable of this.

In Chapter 3, the study applies the same framework to its analysis of Labour's potential politicisation of Englishness. Within this, the potential impact that it could have on the party electorally, ideologically and in terms of unity are considered. In Chapter 4, the analytical framework is used to analyse the key themes that emerged from this study's primary research findings. It considers the participants' views on the party's current and future engagement with the 'politics of Englishness' and the party's position and role in England presently and going forwards. The chapter also examines the views of the political entrepreneurs within the party pushing for greater Labour engagement with Englishness and considers the primary research data concerning participant's views on the formation of an English Labour party. Finally, the study brings all of this analysis together in its conclusion.

## **Chapter 1: Literature Review**

This chapter begins by examining the academic literature concerning the impact of devolution on British unionist political parties and considers how this relates to the ‘politics of Englishness’. As the study of Englishness as a political phenomenon is a relatively recent academic field the chapter focuses on exploring a relatively small number of sources in detail. The chapter considers political parties’ relationship with nationalism and the realities of plurinational, multi-level governance. To start, it discusses what is meant by the concept of the nation, the ideology of nationalism and the relationship between the nation and the state. It then considers these concepts in the case of Britain and examines how the plurinational nature of the state shapes party political relationships. Following this, it looks at how devolution to Scotland and Wales in particular has impacted upon British unionist political parties. The chapter then goes on to introduce and discuss this study’s analytical framework.

### **Devolution and the Impact of Multi-Level Politics**

According to Smith (2010, p. 13) a nation can be defined as ‘a named human community residing in a perceived homeland, and having common myths and a shared history, a distinct public culture, and common laws and customs for all members’. The ideology of nationalism is a political principle, ‘which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent’ (Gellner, 2008, p. 1). According to Gellner, nationalism is a theory of ‘political legitimacy’ which requires that ‘ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones’ (2008, pp. 1-5). However, as McCrone (1998, p. 85) points out, the majority of states are ‘not culturally and ethnically homogenous’ and many nations are ‘stateless’. Indeed, true congruence between the nation and the state is rarely achieved. As a result, ‘statehood, and the associated rights and responsibilities of citizenship, are often fused with and underpinned by majoritarian rather than universalised forms of nationalism’ (Mycock, 2016, p. 389). This is often the case in plurinational states where several ‘substate nationalisms may exist’ either in ‘complement or conflict with the overarching state-based nationalism and citizenship’ (Mycock, 2016, p. 389).

Mycock (2016, p. 389) argues that in the case of the UK, it is the English nation which has ‘historically dominated the framing of both British citizenship and identity’. But, he claims that plurinationality within the Union has ‘ensured each constituent nation has remained – to differing extents – ‘stateless’ and therefore unable to claim an overarching state-driven British

nationalism entirely as its own'. He points out, minority nationalism is often associated with 'the preservation of national heterogeneity in response to the homogenising threats of the dominant nation and overarching plurinational state'. It is for this reason that Irish, Scottish and Welsh nationalism has been 'operationalised via mounting intra-state frictions, underpinned by grievances concerning nationally framed asymmetries and inequalities in state-wide political, socio-economic and cultural citizenship' (Mycock, 2016, pp. 389-390). In contrast to this, English majoritarian nationalism 'has proven comparatively passive', largely because the 'merging and conflation of English national and UK state forms of identity and citizenship have historically reduced the potential for intra-state friction' (Mycock, 2016, pp. 389-390).

However, as has been noted, there is mounting evidence that points to the emergence of a distinctly English political community. One explanation for this is that UK devolution, which resulted in the creation of the Scottish Parliament and Welsh and Northern Irish assemblies in 1999, has significantly altered the plurinational balance of the UK. As Swenden and McEwen (2014, p. 489) point out, while 'devolution arguably puts the United Kingdom beyond the range of 'regionalised states', it falls short of being a federalised or confederal system'. The asymmetric nature of UK devolution is characterised by the 'different levels of self-rule' that apply to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and by the fact that there is no 'England Office to separately administer government in England' which has 'remained without self-rule altogether' (Swenden and McEwen, 2014, p. 493). Swenden and McEwen (2014, p. 505) argue that this has reinforced the 'profoundly asymmetric' nature of the UK 'more so than even other regionalised states' because 'regionalism extends only to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, geographically on the periphery of the state', meanwhile 'the English 'core' is governed by a parliament that serves simultaneously England and the United Kingdom as a whole'.

Devolution has not only had an impact on sub-state national relations and nationalism within the UK but also on British party politics, both in the way that issues are politicised by parties and on party structure and organisation. According to Driver (2013, pp. 172-173), new political jurisdictions created as a result of devolution 'exposed a territorial dimension to British party politics that had for many years... remained dormant under the 'normal' two party unionist politics in Britain'. Historically, the 'familiar language' used to describe and analyse the behaviour of political parties was often 'single-level' as the emergence of political parties and

party systems largely coincided with the ‘formation of national states’ where ‘major boundary crossing societal conflicts were domesticated and consequently ‘frozen’ in national systems of party political competition’ (Deschouwer, 2003, p. 213). However, this is no longer the norm. Most political systems are now multi-layered, with central government ‘typically diffusing power via federal, quasi-federal or devolved multi-national frameworks which sometimes reflect strong local, regional or national cleavages’ (Mycock and Hayton, 2014, p. 254).

Political parties may compete in any number of these arenas. Following devolution, traditional unionist parties in the UK such as the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats compete at all levels excluding Northern Ireland. Mycock and Hayton (2014, pp. 254-255) suggest that the priorities of unionist parties are ‘defined by inter-party competition for representation at a multi-national state level but also reflect distinctive supra- and sub-state national and local electoral priorities and discourses’. They have thereby become multi-level parties defined by ‘a party organisation with multiple lines of accountability and a division of authority between relatively autonomous party sections below and above the national level’ (Moon and Bratberg, 2010, p. 54). This has resulted in significant challenges concerning party structure, intra-party relations and issue politicisation.

When it comes to party structure within multi-level parties, Mycock and Hayton (2014, p. 254) point out that ‘inter-party relations are underpinned by horizontal and vertical interactions which reflect the multi-levelled nature of governance’. As a result, they note that party structures and policy frameworks ‘are responsive to the commonalities and differences of party systems and their electorates within each level of government’. Fabre (2010, p. 344) suggests that the ‘empowerment of regional governments and assemblies has led to the development of regional political arenas where party competition may vary from state-wide patterns’.

For British parties, distinct political arenas now exist in both Scotland and Wales but not in England as a whole. While England may still be dominant within the union, post-devolution all parties have been forced to make ‘increasingly direct appeals around issues of national identity’ in the devolved national arenas (Barker, 2004, p. 209). It appears as though devolution has enhanced the ‘importance of the stateless nation/region identity at the expense of that of the state identity’ in the devolved nations (Bradbury and Andrew, 2010, p. 229). This has had ‘implications for the cohesive nature of policy frameworks and party identity as the diffusion



of centralised party authority has compromised their ability to maintain common multi-national policy platforms' (Mycock and Hayton, 2014, pp. 255-256).

Mycock and Hayton (2014, p. 266) suggest that 'as the ability of Westminster politicians to speak for the 'multi-nation' has diminished', some 'have sought to connect with debates about political and cultural Englishness' and tap into 'narratives of English grievance'. However, this has been limited. The multinational unionist parties still largely appear to operate on the supposed consensus that the English electorate 'consciously and uncritically' accept the 'conflation of English and UK governance as part of the price for dominating the union' (Mycock and Hayton, 2014, pp 266-267). But the shifting asymmetric nature of the UK post-devolution and the increasingly important issue of English governance, means that unionist parties must 'find answers' whilst also 'continuing to represent a multi-national state and electorate that is increasingly defined by asymmetry rather than commonality' (Mycock and Hayton, 2014, pp. 266-267).

To summarise, devolution can be seen to have radically altered party structure and organisation as parties have become multi-level in order to mirror the new political jurisdictions. It can be seen to have increased the importance of national identity within party politics in the devolved nations but not necessarily in England which, as a nation, remains without any degree of self-rule. To date, the main unionist parties appear to have failed to adapt to this either structurally or politically in the case of England (Mycock, 2016, p. 393). However, some would contest this. Wellings (2011, p. 192) suggests that unionist political parties have implicitly engaged with the English electorate through a 'perpetuation of English nationalist allegiance' to what might be termed 'Rump Britain'.

The review of the literature highlights that there are several key themes shaping academic debate on this issue. Firstly, there is an important link between identity and governance. Additionally, it appears that issues concerning identity and governance become increasingly important for political parties that compete in more than one political arena within multi-level political systems. These themes can be further analysed and tested in the case of the 'politics of Englishness' and the Labour Party by applying an analytical framework based around the three core themes of identity, governance and political conflict to analysis of the politicisation of Englishness and Labour's response to it. This analytical framework is detailed below.

## **Analytical Framework**

The section introduces and examines Hooghe and Marks' (2009) theory on politicisation and explains why the study has chosen to derive its analytical framework from it. The work of Hooghe and Marks' (2009) considers politicisation in the context of European integration but their arguments can be applied to the politicisation of Englishness. The study does so by considering three key arguments put forward by Hooghe and Marks concerning the importance of identity, governance and political conflict on politicisation. It also seeks to engage with Hooghe and Marks' (2009, p. 19) three main '(dis)incentives' for political parties when it comes to issue politicisation.

Hooghe and Marks (2009, p. 2) argue that identity is decisive for multi-level governance. This is because governance is essentially a means to 'achieve collective benefits by co-ordinating human activity'. Efficient government therefore should be multi-level. Governance can also act as an 'expression of community'. However, this can be a challenge when it comes to community identity because 'the functional need for human co-operation rarely coincides with the territorial scope of community' (Hooghe and Marks, 2009, p. 2). They also argue that the existence of 'political conflict' is vital to 'engage communal identities' (Hooghe and Marks, 2009, p. 2). This is because conflict can serve to focus attention on a particular identity and lead to the politicisation of it.

The existence of identity alone is not enough to create conflict. Two things must happen in order to activate political conflict. Firstly, the 'tension must be salient'. And, secondly, 'political entrepreneurs must mobilise the tension' (Hooghe and Marks, 2009, pp. 12- 13). This is because connections between national identity and cultural and economic issues and insecurities 'cannot be induced directly from experience, but have to be constructed' by framing particular issues to a political tension and cueing them by instilling a bias, often linking identity to economic or political interest (Hooghe and Marks, 2009, p. 13).

Following this, Hooghe and Marks (2009, p. 19) highlight three key '(dis)incentives' that must be considered by a political party when it looks at politicising an issue. The first is the 'party's position on the issue in relation to the other parties and the electorate'. If it appears that the politicisation of a particular issue will be popular with the electorate, it is likely to be 'induced' by a political party in order to 'inject it in to competition with other parties'. Secondly, a party must consider its ideological reputation. A party's strategic positioning is likely to be

‘constrained by reputational considerations and the ideological commitment of party activists’. The third issue a political party must consider when it is thinking of politicising an issue the extent to which the party is ‘united or divided’ on it. Leaders will seek to avoid disunity, not only because it would likely damage the party’s electoral prospects but also because it is the ‘most frequent cause of party death’ (Hooghe and Marks, 2009, p. 19).

This use of Hooghe and Marks’ theory is valuable to this study as it outlines a two-step approach which allows the work to examine whether ‘conflicts are becoming politically salient to the extent that they are consciously perceived by the groups involved and are organised into politics by some collective actors’ (Kriesi, 2009, p. 221). Firstly, the existence of the ‘structural tension’ of English identity and governance which may provide ‘political potential that can be exploited by political entrepreneurs’ can be examined via the framework. Secondly, the issue of ‘strategic competition among political parties’ when it comes to issue politicisation, in this case the politicisation of Englishness, can be considered (Kriesi, 2009, p. 221).

Hooghe and Marks’ theory clearly sets out the important criteria and ‘(dis)incentives’ for party politicisation (Green ~~February 2012~~ ~~for this~~ ~~reason that their~~ theory has been accused of focusing too much on ‘elite, party politicisation’ (Hurrelmann et al, 2015, p. 44). Hurrelmann et al (2015, p. 44) argue that ‘insufficient attention has been devoted to the questions of whether politicisation has reached the broader citizenry’. However, in this study, the main focus is on elite party politicisation of the ‘politics of Englishness’ within the Labour Party therefore, the application of Hooghe and Marks is appropriate. The study is also able to consider the extent to which Englishness is becoming politicised among English citizens through this framework. Its focus on the importance of identity, governance and political conflict is sufficient for this task despite Hurrelmann et al’s critique.

While Kriesi (2009, p. 224) supports much of Hooghe and Marks’ argument he suggests that further empirical research is required to confirm it. According to Kriesi (2009, p. 224), further research should ‘attempt to explain why national identity has become such a powerful identity once again and how it relates not only to other kinds of identity, but also to economic interests’. Again, while this is referring to the impact of national identity on politicisation at the European level, the potential impact of identity on politicisation at a national level can still be examined with this theory. This study seeks to do that.

Applying this analytical framework to the study of the ‘politics of Englishness’ and the response of the Labour Party enables the thesis to address several important research objectives. The study is able to consider what is driving growing affiliation to English identity and discover how this is impacting upon demands for alternative forms of English governance. It is able to determine whether English political conflict has been mobilised by any political parties and state whether Englishness can be seen to have been politicised. Following this, the application of the analytical framework to address the key research objectives concerning Labour’s engagement with Englishness allows the thesis addresses the issue of how competing visions within the party about identity politics are shaping the debate about the party’s position on England. It also enables it to evaluate the importance Labour members’ views on English governance and the importance of mobilising English political conflict as a tool for electoral success. Through addressing these key research objectives, the study is able to conclude by clearly stating how the ‘politics of Englishness’ has impacted upon the Labour Party.

## **Chapter 2: The Politicisation of Englishness**

This chapter examines the nature and extent of the politicisation of Englishness through the analytical framework developed from Hooghe and Marks (2009) theory on politicisation. Firstly, the ways in which English national identity is constructed and expressed are examined. The chapter considers whether the politicisation of Englishness is being driven by ethno-cultural resentments or by socio-economic and material grievances. It then examines how differing forms of identity within England are influencing the debate on the need for some form of English governance. The relationship between English national and regional identity is considered here. The chapter then assesses the importance of political conflict on the politicisation of Englishness. It looks at the extent to which Englishness is being politicised by political entrepreneurs and considers the way in which it has been done. Some of the potential problems arising from the politicisation of Englishness are also considered before the chapter concludes by detailing the current state of political Englishness.

### **Identity**

This section considers the extent to which a sense of community and identity politics exists in England. While it has been noted that there is a growing affiliation to English identity among a substantial percentage of the population of England (Wyn Jones et al, 2012, p. 5), this has not yet resulted in explicit politicisation of English issues. There are a number of reasons for this. When it comes to identity, the majority in England continue to see themselves as both English and British and are in favour of the continuation of the Union (Kenny, 2015c). But this continuing sense of Britishness, which is often the weaker of the two identities, may represent 'little more than an acknowledgement of citizenship rather than an expression of identity' (Curtice, 2011, p. 59). Erlanger (2016) argues that while English identity is often 'subsumed' in to British identity, it is not the same. Meanwhile, Kenny (2015c) suggests that there is a growing sense of English grievance based around a variety of issues. The motives and expression of these grievances can be viewed either in terms of the political expressions of an ethno-cultural Englishness or a socio-economic Englishness.

A sense of politicised ethno-cultural Englishness was arguably evident in the EU referendum campaign. Foster (2016) argues that the campaign was not fought on 'logical, sober, rational arguments' or on economic data but on an identity that can be viewed as a retreat 'into an ethnic

nationalism'. A nationalism that he suggests is characterised by 'a yearning for a collective belonging which is given meaning not by appealing to a distant, nostalgic imagination but by appealing to a rejection of the present'. Wellings (2011, p. 198) points out that although English Eurosceptics are often seeking to defend British sovereignty, cultural English nationalism which has been on the rise since the 1990s has 'reinforced the idea that England's 'golden age' lay in a historic and romanticised past rather than a Europeanised future'.

Erlanger (2016) argues that the English are 'considerably less willing than their fellow Britons in Scotland and Northern Ireland to see themselves as a subset of Europe'. He claims that this is because in England there is a clear sense of 'nativism and more Little England nationalism', which, he warns, can often 'veer into xenophobia'. While Erlanger presents no evidence to substantiate his argument, some survey data does show that England is the most Eurosceptic nation of the UK (Ormston, 2015). Tied in with this is the English attitude to immigration which was an important part of the debate in some areas. Jeffery et al (2014, p. 19) argue that while concerns about immigration are not unique to England 'it does appear to have a specifically English dimension in terms of national identity'. This may be because levels of immigration are much higher in England compared to the other nations of the UK.

However, it is perhaps too simplistic to use the xenophobic, little Englander stereotype and to create a narrative that charges the population of England with hostility to 'the other' (Wyn Jones et al, 2013, p. 23). Wyn Jones et al (2013, p. 23) suggest that the increasingly politicised nature of English national identity can be best viewed as a reaction to the perceived unfairness that many in England feel is inflicted upon them as a result of England's position within both the UK and the EU. Essentially, 'many people in England increasingly perceive both of their unions as detrimental to their material interests'.

When it comes to England's position within the UK it appears to be the case that devolution has resulted in a 'heightened sensitivity' among a large number of the English to the 'asymmetric and inequitable' aspects of the constitutional structures of the state (Kenny, 2015a, p. 358). Aughey (2010, p. 507) argues that English political and cultural anxieties 'are bound up with the new complexity of British governance' post-devolution and with the uncertainty of England's place within this relatively new arrangement. He suggests that this can, in part, 'be traced to the fact that the English have discovered the rest of the United Kingdom, not as peripheral appendages to England, but as national entities with clear institutional presence'.

However, as well as simply highlighting national differences within the UK, devolution has also led to a sense of resentment both politically and economically from some in England who believe that the degree of devolved power enjoyed in the other nations of the UK is unfair on the English.

Seth-Smith (2013) claims that there is now a strong belief that England is getting a 'raw' deal from its position within the union; 'that English taxpayers are funding decadent spending north and west of the boarder' and that 'England is ceding its sovereignty, if not its identity'. The Future of England studies show that there is a growing tendency in England to believe that Scotland gets more than its 'fair share' of public spending with the number of people who believe this more than doubling in the last ten years (Wyn Jones et al, 2012, p.11). Indeed, it is the case that not only Scotland, but also Northern Ireland and Wales, receive a significantly greater amount of public spending per head than England (Keep, 2016, p. 5). Although public spending in Scotland has been higher per head than in England for several decades and the issue 'pre-dates devolution', English resentment over the issue can be seen to have 'intensified' because of the 'policies pursued by the Scottish Government since devolution' (Ormston, 2012, p. 6). Curtice (2011, pp. 62-63) also notes that it appears to be the case that English resentment over Scottish financial arrangement has grown steadily since devolution.

Kenny (2015c) argues there is also a 'growing sense of irritation' regarding England's position within the current constitutional settlement. He notes that 'worries and anger about inequality, the lack of accountability of economic elites, and the deepening regional imbalances within the country' are being connected with a 'gathering sense that the British state has been neglectful of, or indifferent to, the peoples of the English heartland'. Foster (2016) claims that this sense of neglect and indifference emerged politically with the significant support for Brexit in England, particularly in the country's 'post-industrial provinces' which have spent 'forty years as backwaters'.

Rather than viewing this as an ethno-cultural, xenophobic expression of Englishness, Kenny (2016a) suggests that it could be seen as the English finally expressing their anxiety and anger at the social and economic change that many perceive as being detrimental to their material wellbeing. Foster (2016) suggests that it could be viewed as a rejection of 'economic decline', the 'Westminster consensus' and the 'Brussels establishment'. The fact that there was

significant support for Brexit outside of England though suggests that a sense of socio-economic and political abandonment is an issue that is felt across the UK, not just in England.

Despite this, Kenny (2016a) suggests that the Leave campaign's slogan to 'take back control' was, at least in part, intended to connect with the 'frustrated, but increasingly palpable, sense of political disenchantment' and with an 'incipient ethos of self-government among many of the English'. Although, as it was a UK-wide campaign, the extent to which this was the case is debateable. When it comes to England's political position more generally, Kenny (2015a, p. 358) argues that ultimately the English feel they are being 'denied any meaningful sense of popular sovereignty'. Wellings (2011, p. 11) agrees that 'the conception of sovereignty' lies at the heart of English grievances. This comes back to the issue of how identity relates to governance.

## **Governance**

In addition to the issues of UK devolution and EU membership, there are several other issues related to English governance that can be seen to have had an impact upon the politicisation of Englishness. It has already been noted that while different levels of political autonomy are enjoyed in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, England remains without self-rule. Thus, its position within the Union, reinforces the asymmetric nature of it (Swenden and McEwen, 2014, p. 493). Because the Westminster parliament serves both England and the UK as a whole it is now the case that the UK government is, to 'all intents and purposes', the English government for most important public policy areas, such as health and education (Wyn Jones et al, 2012, p. 6). Unsurprisingly, this has resulted in the Anglicisation of Westminster politics as unionist parties are 'reactively adapting to the *de facto* status of post-devolution Westminster as England's parliament' (Mycock and Hayton, 2014, p. 266).

According to Wyn Jones et al (2012, p.6), it has therefore been an 'unintended consequence of devolution' that an 'English polity has (re)emerged as an incubus at the heart of the UK state'. However, Kenny (2012, p. 158) argues that the Anglicisation of British politics has not, in the main, resulted in a 'highly political nationalism demanding the creation of English only institutions' but instead has merely 'led to a more Anglocentric way of thinking and talking about politics'. Mycock (2010) points out that the previous Coalition government often talked to Britain when it was referring to England. Kenny (2012, p. 153) argues that while there is an



‘ingrained assumption’ among the main British political parties that ‘England is coterminous with British institutions and affiliations’, this may be ‘at odds with wider patterns of national self-awareness among the English people’.

This is because for some in England, English identity is not just a reaction against ‘others’ but is also part of a search for an ‘institutional recognition of England that can express their concerns better than the current political system’, which sees the representation of England submerged within the wider UK institutions in Westminster and Whitehall (Jeffrey et al, 2014, p. 3). It appears that in recent years the increasingly Anglicised nature of Westminster has not been enough for some in England who wish to see a greater ‘English dimension’ to the country’s politics (Wyn Jones et al, 2012, p. 4). This is often sought in the form of ‘distinct governance arrangements for England as a whole’ which range from support for some form of EVEL to support for an English parliament (Wyn Jones et al, 2012, pp. 4-5).

The passing of the EVEL bill in 2015 (BBC, 2015) further highlights the increasingly Anglicised nature of Westminster politics and suggests that the position of England is becoming increasingly important constitutionally. Glover and Kenny (2015) argue that EVEL marks a ‘significant moment in our constitutional history’ because it reflects the ‘acceptance of the need to institutionalise a collective English interest in the legislature’, and highlights the ‘conviction that there is a growing and legitimate sense of grievance concerning England’s position within the UK’. However, they argue that ‘there is good reason to think that EVEL is unlikely to represent a sufficient answer to the English question’. They suggest that it is likely that EVEL will turn out to be the beginning, rather than the end, of a ‘much longer process of finding viable answers to the English Question’.

This all ties in with arguments that suggest English identity is becoming increasingly politicised. Wyn Jones et al (2012, p. 5) claim that it now appears to be the case that ‘the more strongly English a person feels the more likely they are to believe that the current structure of the post-devolution UK is unfair and the more likely they are to support the development of an English dimension to the governance of England’. They argue that England can therefore be seen to be ‘re-emerging as a political community’ following centuries of being ‘subsumed within the wider state’ (Wyn Jones et al 2012, p. 33). They also suggest that the rise of Englishness should be viewed as a ‘political project’ that enjoys ‘significant levels of popular support in a country that appears to be increasingly conscious of a distinct national identity that

is not simply reducible to Britain and Britishness'. While some would contest that the current constitutional structure of the UK does submerge the English (Bogdanor, 2015, p. 24), it does not appear to be seen this way by many in England. Kenny (2012, p. 154) suggest there are clear signs that a more 'delineated' relationship between England and the UK is 'becoming increasingly attractive'. Jeffery et al (2014, p. 3) argue that England can now be seen to have a 'distinctive politics that combines a politicisation of English national identity with an increasingly clear political prospectus'.

In contrast to this, some dispute the idea that we are witnessing the emergence of a widespread politicisation of Englishness. Richard English (2011, pp. 1-6) argues that what has emerged so far is a resurgent English identity, rather than a clear English nationalism. He points out that nationalism involves 'the politics of struggle and power' and claims that there 'simply is not the kind of significant, organised political struggle by English nationalists that the UK has seen in Ireland, in Scotland or in Wales'. According to English (2011, pp. 6-7), that many who 'might enthuse over English distinctiveness' gladly engage with political parties named United Kingdom Independence Party and British National Party 'aptly illustrates the situation'.

However, Wellings (2011, pp. 41-42) argues that 'English nationalism does not always go by the name of England'. Instead, he suggests that it 'defines itself in close relation to Britain's political institutions, which it equates with the continued existence of England's national character'. Wellings (2011, p. 11) also points out that political Englishness can be seen to be distinct due to the way that it merges with other categories of belonging. One of those other categories of belonging that is important to many in England is their local or regional identity (Cox and Jeffrey, 2014). This is a key issue and one that has complicated the politicisation of Englishness and the advocacy of some form of English political recognition.

As Hooghe and Marks (2009, p. 2) point out, communities often demand self-rule but the preference for self-rule is often 'inconsistent with the functional demand for regional authority'. While this may not be overly problematic if there was an overwhelming demand for England-wide governance, the fact that numerous intra-England regional and local demands for increased self-rule exist both in connection with and in competition with England-wide demands complicates the issue.

The existence of the so-called ‘north-south rivalry’ within England (Kenny, 2012, p. 158) and the ‘rising tide of resentment’ in many parts of England ‘towards the position of London and the South-East’ (Kenny, 2015c) may impact on public opinion on the issue of English governance. Wyn Jones et al (2012, p. 15) suggest that in the Midlands and the North of England almost ninety per cent of people feel that the south east in general, and London in particular are the ‘main beneficiaries’ of government favouritism. In terms of public spending per head in England, it is indeed the case that London receives the greatest level of funding; however, this is followed by the North East and the North West respectively. Meanwhile, the South East receives least amount of public funding per head in England (Keep, 2016, p. 5). Despite this, perceptions of government favouritism and regional bias persist (Wyn Jones et al, 2012, p. 13) and continue to pose challenges for the politicisation of Englishness. That this is still the case suggests that perhaps some form of local or regional devolution within England could potentially be a better approach to finding a solution to the issue of English governance.

But, when it comes to English regional devolution, there currently appears to be a ‘lack of a strategic and coherent vision’, according to Giovannini and Mycock (2015). Thus, they argue that it is likely to increase competition between English regions and localities. They point out that while EVEL is supposed to answer the West Lothian Question, the government’s English regional devolution policy is ‘recreating the same question in a new form’. They use the example of the devolution of ‘some or all provision of health, social care, employment and training, and transport’ to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and argue that while MPs in Greater Manchester ‘will no longer be directly responsible, accountable or able to influence formulation and delivery for these areas in Westminster’ they will still be able to ‘continue to vote on some or all of these policy areas in other English MPs constituencies where responsibility has not yet been devolved’. If the regional devolution agenda is to continue in England as appears to be the case (Clifford and Morphet, 2015, p. 58), issues such as this must be addressed in order not to exacerbate English regional tensions.

Future of England data suggests that attachment to the local area is stronger than attachments to England, Britain and Europe respectively across all regions of England (Cox and Jeffery, 2014, p. 5). Additionally, some data shows that a majority of people believe that they have greater political influence locally and have more trust in their elected representatives at the local level (Cox and Jeffery, 2014, pp. 6-9). However, Cox and Jeffery (2014, p. 9) warn that it would be ‘unwise to assume that these indicators necessarily imply a desire or mandate for a

greater role to be given to local political institutions or other means of local democratic governance'. Indeed, it appears that regionalism may not necessarily be an alternative answer to the English question that enjoys significant popular support (Wyn Jones et al, 2012, p. 17).

Analysing the data from the 2014 Future of England survey and the 2014 Smith survey, Henderson et al (2015, p. 268) argue that EVEL or an English parliament are more popular English institutional alternatives than greater devolution of power to local authorities or the English regions. They suggest that the data demonstrates that there is a 'preference for a national form of government in England within the UK'. However, this may be because the local or regional alternatives offered to participants in those surveys were less precisely defined than the options offered when it came to an English Parliament or EVEL. Overall, it appears as though an individual's idea of the suitable level of governance is complex and does not necessarily correspond with the strength of their various political identities.

To summarise this section, it can be seen that there is a growing sense of English national identity but many still acknowledge Britishness. There is some evidence that English national identity is being driven by an ethno-cultural sense of Englishness. This was evident in some of the opinions expressed during the EU referendum campaign especially when it came to the subject of immigration. Despite this, it is fair to suggest that English identity politics is largely driven by socio-economic grievances often associated with England's place within the UK and the EU. There is a sense that England loses out both financially and politically, does not have a voice and is being denied any meaningful sovereignty. The Anglicisation of Westminster politics post-devolution and the passing on the EVEL bill has not satisfied the desire among many for greater political recognition of England. However, the issue of English governance is complicated by the strong regional identities and resentments that exist in England. It appears that some form of English regional recognition may be just as important as some form of England-wide recognition when it comes to finding a solution to the issue of English governance.

### **Political Conflict**

This section examines the extent to which English political conflict is being mobilised by political entrepreneurs and political parties. It looks at whether anyone has truly played the English card yet and considers whether there have been any signs of a rejection of the British

multinational framework from politicians in England. Following this, some of the potential issues surrounding the politicisation of Englishness are also considered. It has already been identified that devolution and Euroscepticism are the two main sources of political conflict vital to contemporary political Englishness. While these issues have become increasingly salient for many in England and have, to differing degrees, been mobilised by political entrepreneurs, they have rarely been done in the name of England and Englishness alone.

Despite this, there are several different forms of politically constructed Englishness that currently exist. Perhaps the most commonly held example is the form associated with the conservative right and with Euroscepticism which can be seen to promote an insular type of Englishness. However, this is only one manifestation of political Englishness. Kenny (2012, p. 157) has identified several other strands of political Englishness. He claims that there is 'harder edged' English nationalism, a moderate, conservative Englishness, and a strand of Englishness that is 'associated with various attempts to promote a modern, liberal version of a multicultural England'; although he acknowledges that this last strand is currently the most 'incoherent of these English blocs'.

When it comes to English political interest groups, their influence on the politicisation of Englishness is varied. Interest groups such as Campaign for an English Parliament whose strategy is to assemble a 'powerful coalition of expert and public opinion possible in order to secure an English Parliament and Executive' (Campaign for an English Parliament, 2013, p. 1), may have played a part in bringing the issue of English governance into wider political debate. Their aim also clearly acknowledges the political conflict surrounding England position in post-devolution UK.

However, when it comes to other interest groups that seek to politicise England and Englishness it is often the case that they are making a political point about separate issues. For example, despite the name, the English Defence League (EDL) place themselves 'in vocal opposition to 'radical Islam' and 'Islamic extremism'' rather than acting as a specifically English political interests group (Garland and Tredwell, 2012, p.2). While the message of groups such as the EDL may resonate with some, it cannot be claimed that they have politicised salient political conflicts around Englishness and English governance.

Hooghe and Marks (2009, p. 18) claim that the vital factor as to whether an issue enters mass politics is not its 'intrinsic importance', but instead whether a political party chooses to take it up. The role of political parties is therefore crucial in determining whether an issue enters mass politics or remains in the interest group arena. The arena and the way in which a political party chooses to politicise an issue shapes whether it seeks to do so by focusing on salient political conflict in terms of identity or in terms of distribution (Hooghe and Marks, 2009, pp. 8-9). There is evidence that political parties in England have taken both approaches. However, it is currently the case that although the English card can be seen to have been played to a degree on certain issues, it is often still done so in an Anglo-British way and there is little evidence of a rejection of the British multi-national framework. It appears that politicians and political parties are yet to 'fully recognised the potential opportunities that could arise from positioning themselves as advocates of an English territorial interest' (Jeffrey et al, 2014, p. 33).

The exception to this is the English Democrats who are arguably the only distinctly English national party of any real significance. Copus (2009, p. 377) claims that they pursue an 'avowedly civic-nationalist' agenda which views Englishness in the 'broadest' of ways. However, this can be contested. Mycock and Hayton (2014, p. 266) point out, the fact that the English Democrats state that the 'public culture of England should be that of the indigenous English' suggests that their version of Englishness 'is implicitly ethnicised and hierarchical'. Despite this, in addition to its focus on identity, the party can be seen to have politicised Englishness in terms of constitutional and socio-economic issues. It highlights the lack of English devolution, the 'unfairness' of the Union and the use of 'English resources' to support the other nations of the UK (Copus, 2009, p. 377).

Copus (2009, p. 377) argues that the party 'articulates a clear and distinctive Englishness that stands apart from Britishness' by 'disentangling in cultural, traditional and historic terms England as a nation, from Britain as a state'. In 2014, the party changed its stance from supporting an English parliament within the UK to being in full support of English independence (BBC, 2014). It is highly likely that this policy change was driven by a desire to mobilise political support around the conflict of English constitutional recognition. However, the party does not yet appear to have captured the public attention with this issue.

In contrast to the English Democrats, unionist political parties have largely shied away from the politicisation of Englishness and issues surrounding English governance (Mycock and

Hayton, 2014, p. 267). Copus (2009, p. 364) argues that unionist parties have made no attempts to accommodate English nationalism and points out that some members from these parties have previously ‘spoken out vociferously and often insultingly against English nationalism, in ways they have not about Scottish and Welsh nationalism’. He argues that the main unionist parties ‘have created a political environment that gives little concern to England as a political and national construct’. However, this view is not entirely correct. While Englishness may not have been politicised by the main unionist parties, as the ability of Westminster politicians to ‘speak for the ‘multi-nation’ has diminished’, some have sought to connect with debates about political and cultural Englishness and can be seen to have occasionally tapped into ‘narratives of English grievance’ (Mycock and Hayton, 2014, p. 266).

Despite this, there is no clear consensus within or between the main unionist parties about how to address the ‘politics of Englishness’ (Mycock and Hayton, 2014, p. 266). It has been argued that the Conservative ‘route to power is in England, and lies in creating a distinct English polity’ (Heffer in Aughey, 2010, pp. 517-518). But despite the Conservative government’s passing of the EVEL bill they cannot be said to have significantly politicised Englishness and they have not rejected the British multi-national framework. The Liberal Democrats acknowledge England in the party’s federal structure but they have been ‘reluctant to engage debates about English governance and identity beyond the promotion of regional devolution in England’ (Mycock and Hayton, 2014, p. 263). Within the Labour party, as this study details, opinion has been and still is divided on the party’s relationship with England and its approach to English governance.

Of all the unionist parties, UKIP is the one most commonly associated with the politicisation of Englishness. Kenny (2015d, p. 159) suggests that the rise of UKIP has been interpreted by many as indicating that ‘populist nationalism’ is now a ‘major force’, and that Englishness itself is now ‘becoming politicised’. This is evident in Seth-Smith’s (2013) argument which holds that while ‘English identity has never belonged to the right’, UKIP’s rhetoric, particularly since 2011, has led to it becoming increasingly identifiable with English grievances. Meanwhile, Wyn Jones et al (2013, p. 36) claim that it is those who feel ‘most English and most discontented with the territorial status quo’ that are ‘flocking to the UKIP banner in increasing numbers’. They argue that UKIP ‘might better be described as England’s nationalist party’ rather than the UK’s independence party’.

However, Kenny (2015d, p. 159) points out that there is ‘an important conceptual distinction that needs to be made’ between a ‘strong’ idea of politicisation, which implies a ‘uni-directional causal relationship between the adoption of a particular form of national identity and an inclination towards a particular part(s) of the political spectrum’, on the one hand, and a ‘weaker’ conception ‘which identifies new inter-relationships between political traditions and affiliations and forms of nationhood, allocating causal influence to both sides of this relation’. He argues that ‘too much of the debate on Englishness takes the first model as a ‘given’, and has thus ‘neglected the different political versions of Englishness which have emerged in recent years’.

It is not the case that UKIP is an English nationalist party mobilising English only political conflict. Those who regard English nationalism as encompassing more than explicitly English issues may regard it as being so but, as its name suggests, UKIP supports the maintenance of the Union; it is a unionist party. Although, unlike other parties, UKIP’s unionism can be viewed as an ‘expression of Anglo-Britishness’ (Hayton, 2016, pp. 400-401). While UKIP have mobilised the conflict of Euroscepticism, this is perhaps best viewed considering the party’s Anglo-British views on sovereignty rather than being associated with an attempted politicisation of Englishness. Hayton (2016, p. 408) argues that UKIP should be regarded as a ‘predominantly English party articulating a language of Britishness, but in a narrowly Anglo-centric way’.

While it appears to be the case that issues associated with England’s position as a nation are becoming increasingly salient politically, a mainstream political movement has not formed around the ‘politics of Englishness’ and it has not been greatly embraced by any major political party. That there are several, competing varieties of political Englishness suggest that political parties across the spectrum could embrace it more strongly. However, while events elsewhere in the UK coupled with the increasingly anglicised nature of Westminster and the increasing demands for some form of English political recognition have brought ideas associated with the ‘politics of Englishness’ into the mainstream, there is still some way to go before it can be considered a significant political movement. There appears to be two main barriers preventing this. Firstly, it appears as though several issues relating to the ‘politics of Englishness’ are often still bound up with ideas of Britishness. Secondly, it has been hindered by the fact that regionalism is a significant issue in England. Political parties, and unionist parties in particular,



should consider these issues and others carefully before mobilising English political conflict to ensure that it does not actually have negative consequences for them.

When it comes to the issue of English governance and intra-English devolution it appears that some who favour an English Parliament are unsympathetic with the idea of dividing England into regions, as they believe that ‘such a division would fragment the voice of England just at a time when that voice needs to be heard loud and clear’ (Bogdanor, 2010, pp. 159-160). This is an argument that has been espoused by a number of Conservative politicians for some time. John Redwood (in Aughey, 2010, p. 518), Conservative MP for Wokingham, has argued that English regional governance based on ‘balkanising’ the country into ‘a set of artificial euro-regions’ does not provide an acceptable level of national recognition for England. In contrast to this, supporters of English regional government may be unenthused by the idea of an English Parliament. Largely because such a parliament would be legislating for around fifty million people, and would therefore do ‘nothing to solve the problems of over centralisation and overloaded government which, in their view, currently bedevil Westminster’ (Bogdanor, 2010, pp. 159-160).

The answer to the problem of English governance may in fact lay in a combination of the two. Cox and Jeffery (2014, p. 11) argue that despite many commentators talking about an English parliament or a procedural solution for English matters within the Westminster parliament as the most obvious ways of ‘addressing the English question’, there appears to exist a ‘clear desire on the part of the public for more powerful sub-national institutions’. They point out that English national governance or English regional governance ‘need not be seen as either/or choices’. Instead, they suggest that ‘some form of new England-wide governance could be combined with strengthened English sub-national institutions’. The existence of multi layered identity and political attachment in England is something that those who seek to politicise Englishness must consider.

The relationship between identity and Englishness among black and minority ethnic (BME) residents in England is another factor that may need to be considered before Englishness is explicitly politicised. Some data suggests that only just over one in ten BME people express an exclusively or mainly English identity, with twenty-seven per cent declaring themselves not English but British (Wyn Jones et al, 2013, p. 25). BME people in England are also ‘notably less likely than white respondents’ to support St George’s Day as a public holiday and are ‘very

substantially less likely to indicate that they would favour an English designation on their passport' (Wyn Jones et al, 2013, p. 25). There appears to be a tendency among England's BME population to 'align itself to the broader, and perhaps rather looser, notion of Britishness rather than to Englishness more narrowly' (Wyn Jones et al, 2013, p. 25).

Wyn Jones et al (2013, p. 26) suggest that this is because the BME population continues to 'associate Englishness with a hostility towards immigration' and political expressions of Englishness with xenophobic or racist politics. Kenny (2016a) argues that 'building inclusive, modern forms of nationhood, that span both majority and minority communities, still represents one of the best available buttresses against the kinds of aggressive nationalism and populism that have become so powerful'. However, it appears that there is still much work to be done to convince people of this, particularly those from BME communities.

To summarise this section, it can be seen that political and economic resentments associated with UK devolution and the England's position within the EU are the main sources of English political conflict but to date, they have not been mobilised to their full potential by political entrepreneurs in the form of a distinct English identity politics. The role of interest groups has been relatively limited. Meanwhile, political parties, particularly unionist ones, have acknowledged Englishness but largely shied away from politicising it. The English Democrats are the only notable party to explicitly mobilise political conflict around the issue of English governance but their success has been limited to date. While some have suggested that UKIP may largely be an English nationalist party its ideology and policy is best viewed in terms of Anglo-Britishness not Englishness. There are several challenges that political parties face if they do seek to mobilise English political conflict. The issue of English national demands for recognition and governance versus the English regional agenda is one. Another is the issue of inclusiveness and the 'politics of Englishness'. This is particularly important for England's BME population.

## **Conclusions**

Presently, it appears as though there are two key differences in the way in which English majoritarian nationalism is 'politicising England as a national community' in comparison to the other constituent nations of the UK (Mycock, 2016, p. 397). Firstly, as Mycock (2016, p. 397) points out, although the political debate surrounding identity and governance in England

has intensified recently it has not yet 'encouraged a more vociferous English party political nationalism'. Secondly, it is becoming increasingly clear that 'established and emergent intranational, local and regional polities and identities seem to be fracturing the cohesion of the two main Union-wide political parties in their engagement with the fledgling party politics of England'.

Thus, it seems that while there may be a desire for greater party politicisation of Englishness and the creation of some significant form of English governance it is still extremely challenging ground for unionist parties. Not only must they negotiate the electorates differing relationships with identity and governance but they must also consider the wider implications of the politicisation of Englishness. While there may be a significant reward for the party that takes this on, it currently seems that the majority view is that the politicisation of Englishness is not yet worth the associated challenges and political risks. The following chapter will consider this specifically in the case of the Labour Party.

### **Chapter 3: The Rise of English Labour?**

This chapter examines how the so called ‘politics of Englishness’ has effected the Labour party and considers how the party has engaged with it in recent years. Its analysis draws on the views of party insiders, academics and political commentators. Again, the analytical framework based on politicisation and the role of identity, governance and political conflict is applied. Within this framework, Hooghe and Marks’ three main ‘(dis)incentives’ for party politicisation, namely electoral, ideological and unity ‘(dis)incentives’, are considered in the context of the challenges that the Labour Party faces when it comes to its potential politicisation of the ‘politics of Englishness’.

#### **Identity**

Eaton (2016) argues that most of the reasons for Labour's 2015 general election defeat have been ‘well-rehearsed’. They include arguments that Ed Miliband was not viewed as ‘an alternative prime minister’, the existence of the perception that ‘the party was not ‘trusted to manage the economy’ and that Labour ‘was at odds with voters on welfare and immigration’. However, according to Eaton, ‘there is another failing that has received far less scrutiny’, namely ‘the belief that the party was anti-English’. This is a view that is also held by others associated with or within the party.

Cruddas (2015) claims that ‘Labour is now as toxic in the South as the Tories are in the North’. He argues that forty-five per cent of over sixties say they will never vote Labour and suggests that ‘Labour is more toxic amongst socially conservative voters than either UKIP or the Conservatives’. Cruddas claims that since 2005 voters who are socially conservative, who value their ‘home, family and their country’, who feel their ‘cultural identity is under threat’ and who seek a ‘sense of belonging and national renewal’ are the most likely to have deserted Labour. According to Cruddas, ‘their desertion represents the collapse of Labour’s traditional working class base’. Some have put this down, at least in part, to Labour’s perceived failure to connect with the increased political salience of English identity (Denham, 2016a; Cruddas, 2015).

While there is some merit in the arguments that Labour has failed to connect with its traditional working class support base, this may not be solely down to a failure to engage with the ‘politics

of Englishness'. There is a lack of evidence to support this argument either way. Instead, some have suggested that it may be partly down to a lack of understanding of the increasing importance of identity politics not just in England and the UK but across Europe more generally. Denham (2012) argues that 'national identities usually strengthen when people feel hard done by'. He suggests that in England, increased affiliation with English identity 'reflects a growing sense that English people lack a real voice on the things that matter to them' and 'they feel they are losing out and being treated less fairly than others'. Therefore, in Denham's view, it is 'no surprise that strongest expressions of Englishness are in those working-class communities where profound economic change has been compounded by the impact of large-scale migration'. For Denham, expressions of English identity are partially a 'reaction to a real sense of powerlessness, insecurity and unfair treatment in a rapidly changing world'.

Denham (2016b) argues that the decline of 'mass working-class politics' has resulted in many people finding an 'alternative politics of identity in nationalism and populism'. He claims that 'the role that class once played in defining 'people like me' is being replaced by a more communitarian sense of belonging' (Denham, 2015a). Rutherford (2016a) argues that while there is no single cause to explain the increase in identity politics, 'the globalisation of capitalism that began in the late 1970s' and resulted in the 'destruction of our common life' and the disappearance of 'industrial class identities and forms of solidarity, along with the work that formed them' is one. Further to this, Rutherford argues that 'the commercialisation and standardisation of culture' since the 1970s has 'deracinated local places and identities' while 'unprecedented high levels of immigration have created division, anger and cultural anxiety'.

This shift away from traditional class based politics to identity politics is not unique to England and the UK. According to Denham (2016b), almost every country in Europe 'has experienced a marked impact from identity based and often nationalist political forces'. He cites the populist anti-migrant and anti EU parties in Scandinavia and Germany as examples of this. As well as leftist parties, such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain which he views as having 'challenged the established social democrats with distinctly nationalist narratives'. Denham points out that 'in most countries it is the established social democratic parties' like Labour that have suffered the most damage, rather than parties from the centre right. He acknowledges the changing politics of England 'have some distinctively English features', but suggests that it may be 'part of a much wider phenomenon'. Jarvis (2015, p. 5) also highlights this issue arguing that 'winds of political discontent are blowing across the Continent and fuelling

support for populist parties all over Europe'. He believes that this trend has been driven by 'sustained pressure on living standards, rapid global change and declining trust in mainstream political leaders are coinciding with falling election turnout and the loosening of traditional party loyalties'.

While there is no doubting the wider phenomenon of the growth of identity politics, Labour's working class decline may still, to a significant degree, be of its own making. Rutherford (2016b) argues that Labour 'has lost a language of patriotism and does not appear to value protecting people's ways of life and the local places they belong. He argues that 'Labour is becoming an exclusive cultural brand of socially liberal, progressive-minded people'. According to Rutherford, it is this 'growing class and cultural exclusiveness' that is 'estranging Labour from large parts of the voter population in England and Wales, who are either pragmatists in their voting habits or who have a small conservative dispensation and who value most their family, their community and their country'. However, the fact that Rutherford also mentions Wales, suggests that the party is struggling to come to terms with the politics of identity across Britain, not just in England.

In Rutherford's (2016b) view, the party's strength in London, metropolitan cities and university towns 'only highlights the growing gulf between Labour and the rest of the country'. This gulf in identity between elements of the party elite and much of the wider electorate is noticeable in its internal debates about its ideological reputation of the party when it comes to its relationship with the 'politics of Englishness'. The idea that Labour should politicise Englishness is problematic for some feel uncomfortable with or hostile to overt displays of English nationalism. Kingsnorth (2015) argues that the English left 'exhibits a strange national self loathing' that is not 'mirrored in any comparable European country'.

Evidence of this can be seen in the views of the then senior Labour Minister Jack Straw (in BBC, 2000) who claimed that the English have used their 'propensity to violence to subjugate Ireland, Wales and Scotland' and suggested that English nationalism is 'potentially very aggressive, very violent'. It is also evident when Jones (2012) argues that 'there is no coherent or cohesive' Englishness. He regards it as a 'catch-all term for all those who live in England's borders, who have a range of identities, interests and histories'. Jones stresses the importance of socio-economic identity over national identity. Kenny (2016b) claims that many on the political left tend to see Englishness 'either as an irretrievably insular kind of nationalism, or

as something that is essentially indefinable and therefore meaningless'. Evidence of this can be seen when Jones (2012) argues that 'much of the left has traditionally been wary of nationalism precisely because of a belief that working people share common interests; nations just divide them up'.

Kenny (2016b) draws attention to 'the preference of many on the left is to assert northern regionalism, or London metropolitanism, as morally superior alternatives to Tory Englishness'. However, he argues that 'such an approach locks the party into particular cultural idioms, and reinforces the perception that it speaks only to certain parts of England'. Kenny warns that in holding 'to these twin beliefs' about Englishness puts Labour 'increasingly at odds with a growing proportion of the English electorate'. Harris (2016) points out that there is discomfort with overt expressions of nationhood across all wings of the Labour Party, not just the left. He suggests that so called 'Blairites' are so 'enraptured by globalisation' that they regard 'vocal expressions of patriotism as a retrogressive block on progress'. Meanwhile, Corbyn and his followers on the left wing of the party hold to a 'rose-tinted internationalism that regards such things as a facade for bigotry'.

For Hunt (2016) it is an 'unfortunate truth is that in recent years, the Labour party has not been nearly explicit enough about its love of the country'. He suggests that Labour must 'redouble' its 'cultural affiliation with English identity' and 'be much clearer' about its 'love and affection for the signs and symbols of modern England'. However, Hunt points out that many within the party are uncomfortable about 'overt displays of patriotism'. Denham (2015a) has argued that voters sensed the party's 'reluctance to speak for England' during the 2015 election campaign. Meanwhile, Byrne et al (2015, p.3) also point out that the party seems 'uncomfortable' talking about its English identity. They argue that Labour must 'embrace not dodge the politics of English identity' in order to 'reclaim Englishness'.

Byrne et al (2015, p. 9) suggest that Labour 'must find new ways to accommodate a positive English nationalism and pride without the divisive language and posturing of the Tories, or indeed the hatred and bigotry of far right extremists'. They argue that it must 'find a way to express an Englishness which is inclusive of all'. However, as Mycock and Hayton (2014, p. 261) point out, while proponents of Labour embracing the 'politics of Englishness' more strongly may have 'stressed the cosmopolitan and civic potential of contemporary Englishness

and its potential to counter far-right extremism', they appear to be 'less sure of boundaries between inclusive civic and exclusive ethnic nationalism and its political repercussions'.

Another important theme that can be seen to run throughout the Labour Party's history, ideology and its recent consideration of its relationship with England is the idea of Labour's English traditions. Cruddas (2015) has argued that 'Labour's English traditions' go back to a 'unique brand of socialism that owed a profound debt to romanticism'. He claims that they are connected to 'the traditions of English liberty' and 'self-determination', and possess an inherent 'conservative instinct'. However, Cruddas points out that these ideas and traditions are 'barely visible on the left today'. Denham (2012) has argued that Labour should draw on its 'radical traditions' but must 'blend them with the histories of everyone who wants to feel English, and who recognises that a common identity is best developed through shared experience'.

Several academics have also acknowledged Labour's English Traditions. Wyn Jones (2013) has written that when progressives, including those within the Labour Party, 'do finally engage seriously with the new politics of Englishness, they will find that they have formidable intellectual resources on which to draw'. He points to history of the Levellers, the works of Orwell and the Quaker tradition of philanthropy and suggests that 'radicals can gain sustenance and inspiration from a hugely impressive tradition of English social radicalism'. He goes on to argue that 'viewed from this angle it seems downright bizarre that the left has been so willing to cede to its political opponents the terrain of Englishness when for once it, rather than the right, has all the best tunes'. Sandbrook (2011) has also acknowledged Labour's English Traditions. He points out that 'nostalgia has long been a central part of the left-wing political tradition' and can be seen in a celebration of 'a distinctly English radical tradition dating back to the peasant's revolt'. Though he does point out that during the New Labour years history and values that 'harked back to the party's past' were rarely spoken of.

In his analysis of Labour's English traditions Sandbrook (2011) agrees with some within the party such as Cruddas and Lord Glasman who have highlighted the conservative elements of the historic Labour movement. Sandbrook argues that 'Conservatives and conservatism played such an important role in the party's origin'. Marquand (in Sandbrook, 2011) agrees that early socialists 'drew on a long line of working class Toryism'. Sandbrook may be correct when he argues that if Labour wants to 'reconnect with its heritage and win again in England, it needs to rediscover its forgotten conservatism'. However, he is right to warn that 'sentimental



evocations of a romanticised, radical tradition, or fond reminiscences of the Tolpuddle Martyrs and the miners' strike, will not be enough'.

Kenny (2016b) agrees that while Labour's English traditions are 'undoubtedly important' it is 'not sufficient to produce the kinds of narrative and idiom that Labour politicians will need to employ' in order to win in England. He suggests that the party must develop 'resonant stories of the English as a nation with a strong sense of tradition, one which has long viewed itself as among the most dynamic and outward-looking peoples in the world'. Riddell (2016) argues that while Labour's English traditions are 'rich', it has been the Conservative Party that has 'proved more adept at implanting the idea that England was a Tory country' in the twenty-first century. This suggests that Labour must do more to turn its English traditions into identifiable and meaningful visions of Englishness. However, they should be wary that this could be viewed as further evidence of 'the Anglicisation of key parts of the British Labour party's history, ideals and values' which would raise serious questions about the 'multi-national origins and past achievements' of the party (Mycock and Hayton, 2014, p. 262).

From this analysis, it appears to be the case that Labour is facing several identity crises. Firstly, it is facing challenges shared by many social democratic parties across Europe who have failed to come to terms with the increased salience of identity politics. Although this may be a broader and more widespread issue that applies to more than just the 'politics of Englishness'; it appears that some within the party believe that Labour has been and still is perceived by voters to have failed to appreciate the importance of identity politics in England. In contrast to this, others have little time for this view. This could be problematic for the party in terms of its identity, electability and unity.

Secondly, Labour faces an identity crisis within itself. While there are some notable proponents within the party championing a greater embrace of English identity politics these are in the minority. Many on the left of the party and some on the right are not supportive of greater expressions of English identity, particularly those in the North of England. This division of opinion when it comes to the Labour's identity in England is symbolic of the ideological challenges that currently exist within the party. Furthermore, this division would again likely be a threat to party unity in the event of the Labour party leadership attempting to politicise Englishness.

## Governance

This section examines the Labour Party's position on English governance and on its own internal governance and party structure. It considers the competing visions within the party on both of these issues and examines the potential implications of them on party unity. When it comes to Labour's political position, regional devolution remains the party's most 'popular response to the question of English governance' (Mycock and Hayton, 2014, p. 262). However, historically the party does not have a great track record on this. Tomaney (1999, pp. 75-76) points out that New Labour's plans for devolution in England were always 'modest'. He suggests that Labour 'has traditionally had a centralising instinct which is deeply embedded in its political culture' and argues that this 'may perhaps have found new life under the highly centralised approach of New Labour'.

Lodge and Mitchell (2006, p. 107-109) claim that despite much talk about regionalism and the 'north-south divide' in opposition, on coming to power in 1997, 'the regional agenda quickly fell down the list of Labour's priorities'. They suggest that 'there was no urgency within government to move forward with elected regional government, especially compared to the energy invested in establishing devolution for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and London'. Like Tomaney, they argue that the centralising, target driven approach of New Labour had implications for the regional agenda'. With the failure of the referendum to devolve more power locally in the North East of England, Lodge and Mitchell suggest New Labour's 'main regional achievement' was the establishment of the new defunct regional development agencies in 1999.

Under the leadership of Ed Miliband, the party made no calls for English political recognition beyond 'ill-defined plans for greater localism in England' (Mycock and Hayton, 2014, p. 261). Miliband (2012) claimed that 'England does not expect constitutional symmetry' and argued that politicians 'should get on with devolving power away from Westminster to English local authorities and the people, without the need for mayoral referendums or such-like'. Cruddas (in Boffey, 2015) has argued that, historically, Labour has been 'too timid to act' when it comes to devolving power in England. He claims that Labour's indecisiveness about a 'New Deal for England' allowed the then Conservative Chancellor, George Osborne to grab it and claim it as 'his own northern powerhouse'. Chucka Umunna (2015), MP for Streatham, has also argued that 'despite the strides forward we made in the last parliament in this policy area, the fact

remains that the chancellor has made a big bid for a cause on which Labour should be leading: the decentralisation of this country’.

Under the current party leadership, the issue of England and English political recognition does not seem to be a matter of great importance either in terms of UK constitutional recognition or recognition within the party. When more autonomy was granted to the Scottish Labour party in 2015 Jeremy Corbyn (in Labour List, 2015) stated that he did not want a ‘Scottish-only solution’ and talked of wanting to ‘kick start reform across the UK Labour Party’ in Wales and ‘the English regions’. Clearly, this is not an endorsement for an England-wide solution for the party. There is also little evidence to suggest that there has been any significant English regional devolution within the party under his leadership so far.

Riddell (2016) claims that the Labour left, to which Corbyn belongs, ‘has traditionally favoured a centralised system and tight controls’. She argues that because of this, Corbyn has shown only ‘limited enthusiasm for giving power to the regions’ and he has not ‘responded very positively to pressure from Cruddas, John Denham and others for the foundation of an English Labour party’. Although, in the 2015 Labour Leadership contest, Corbyn did not rule out greater English devolution or greater regional devolution within the party (Mycock, 2016, p. 396-397). However, he has done little to push either of these two agendas since then. Despite this, the current lack of appetite for change within the Labour leadership may not necessarily be ideologically driven given Corbyn’s previous words on devolution. It may in fact be down to the vast challenges associated with the recognition of Englishness within the multiparty framework of Labour as a unionist party.

As has been noted, the ‘core’ of British political parties has traditionally ‘reflected the dominance of England within the Union and British politics’ and highlighted the ‘primacy of English concerns’ both electorally and in terms of governance (Mycock and Hayton, 2014, p. 255). However, as Fabre (2010, p. 345) points out, post-devolution, the multi-level nature of UK politics has created ‘structures of opportunity for political parties to compete at different levels and to choose which is their ‘core level’’. She suggests that this is often at a party’s ‘level of reference for electoral competition’. Determining this ‘level of reference’ is a challenge for multinational parties competing in multi-level systems. As Fabre argues, ‘when state-wide parties compete in a federal or devolved state, the challenge of maintaining a coherent organisation is higher than in a centralised system’. She argues that the issue of the party’s

vertical organisation is a 'potential conundrum for state-wide parties', as they seek to 'find a balance between party cohesion and regional demands for autonomy'. It appears that Labour has found this balance to a certain extent in Scotland and in Wales but not yet in England.

It is currently the case in the Labour Party that while there has been 'the creation of sub-Westminster national party organisations in Wales and Scotland', there has been 'no attempt to create a distinctive English national party framework' (Mycock and Hayton, 2014, p. 255). Scottish and Welsh Labour have their own executives while in England the party is divided into regional boards (Unite, 2015). For some, this structure is electorally sensible because, as Laffin and Shaw (2007, p. 56) point out, the devolved parties in Scotland and Wales are 'working within regional political systems' which pose electoral challenges distinct from those at the UK level. This is not the case in England. This degree of autonomy enjoyed in the devolved branches of the party has resulted in 'separate policymaking processes for manifesto formulation in Scotland and Wales' as well as their 'separate verification of parliamentary candidates' (Moon and Bratberg, 2010, p. 56). In policy areas including health, education and welfare, Labour must now 'accommodate particular sub-state national demands' (Mycock and Hayton, 2014, p. 256).

This could potentially pose serious challenges in terms of party unity and the ability to espouse a UK wide policy agenda that appeals to different political cleavages in all the nations of the Union. Between 1999 and 2007 when Labour held power in Westminster as well as running the devolved governments in Scotland and Wales there were few significant disputes as the party 'broadly shared policy and political agendas' in all areas, thus 'minimising the likelihood of conflict emerging' (Swenden and McEwen, 2014, p. 498). However, there were some notable policy differences which have caused degrees of conflict within the party. Driver (2009, p. 186) argues that post-devolution, 'there has been a political parting of ways, giving rise to institutionalised ideological polarisation within parties'. For example, in Wales and Scotland, the Labour administrations 'staked out distinct policies on schooling, housing, the funding of higher education, the NHS and personal care of the elderly to the left of the national party in government in London' (Driver, 2009, p. 186).

Driver (2009, pp. 186-187) argues that these policy differences between national and devolved parties often 'come to the fore at general election time when campaign strategies have to be agreed and coordinated'. However, he notes that there appears to be 'no hard and fast division

between national issues and devolved policy questions'. As a result, he argues that even if it were possible to draw clear lines between elections at different levels, it is the case that 'multi-level governance has brought real challenges of coordination for political parties operating across the UK'. The addition of another devolved party beneath the UK party in the form of an English Labour Party would complicate the situation more.

It is evident that asymmetric devolution has had an impact on the way that issues relating to England as a distinct nation are politicised. It has also had an impact upon the way in which multi-national political parties are structured and their decisions to politicise issues based on different national interests. As Fabre (2010, p. 344) points out, the 'empowerment of regional governments and assemblies has led to the development of regional political arenas where party competition may vary from state-wide patterns'. The greater levels of political autonomy enjoyed by Scottish and Welsh Labour make it easier to politicise issues relevant to their respective nations and political circumstances. Meanwhile, the party in England can currently only do this at a local or UK-wide level, not at an English national level. Mycock and Hayton (2014, p. 256) argue that these structural changes post-devolution have had 'implications for the cohesive nature of policy frameworks and party identity' and have compromised the 'ability to maintain common multi-national policy platforms'.

Fabre (2010, p. 360) warns that a 'lack of territorial integration in central party decision-making organs' within multi-level political parties has the potential to turn into a long-term problem for the parties if their electoral results are not 'homogeneous throughout the country'. This is currently an issue that the Labour party faces. Another challenge which appears more prominent within multi-level political parties is the containment of 'non-formal, intra-party tendencies' based on ideological differences (Moon and Bratberg, 2010, p. 55). Again, there is some evidence of this in the Labour Party at present. Groups including Labour first, Labour for the common good, Progress, Compass, Momentum and Labour together exist often in competition or contradiction to one another (Chakelian, 2015). All of this suggests that Labour faces a significant challenge to continue to operate under its current party structure. This may therefore necessitate some form of internal devolution of power within the party in England if it is to be able to effectively appeal to English grievances distinct from those in Scotland, Wales and the UK-wide level.

However, while arguments can be made that greater internal devolution in England or even the creation of an English Labour Party, operating with a clear and distinct English agenda, could be an option to improve the voice of England within the party, it may serve to divide the party further. The potential dominance of the English wing over its Scottish and Welsh counterparts would likely increase ‘accusations of enduring Anglo-British synonymity’ (Mycock and Hayton, 2014, p. 267). It would also pose significant challenges in terms of policy. It would be extremely difficult for Labour to position itself as defending the national interests in each of the constituent nations of Britain whilst simultaneously maintaining its support for the union and a shared sense of British identity. The fact that there are no English wide elections is another a stumbling block when it comes to arguments in favour of English Labour. If Labour was to devolve power internally in England while devolution of English governance was not mirrored constitutionally, it may result in the creation of more problems rather than solutions or electoral benefits.

### **Political Conflict**

It is evident that Labour currently faces substantial electoral challenges in England. In response to this, several academics, commentators and Labour party politicians have suggested that greater engagement with the ‘politics of Englishness’ will be beneficial to the party’s electoral prospects. Others have gone even further and called for the creation of an English Labour Party. These proponents may be viewed as the political entrepreneurs attempting to drive Labour’s politicisation of Englishness. This section assesses the competing argument’s concerning Labour’s potential politicisation of English political conflict and the potential electoral impact of this on the party.

Kenny (2016b) believes that it is crucial for Labour to engage with and reconnect with England. He argues that the loss of Labour’s ‘Scottish heartland for the foreseeable future’, the party’s slight decline in Wales and the effect that changes to constituency boundaries will have, means that ‘Labour’s performance in different parts of England will determine its prospects of regaining power at the UK level’. Following the Scottish, Welsh and English local elections in May 2016, Denham (2016a) argues that ‘unless Labour embraces England it faces exclusion from any national power, outside Wales, until 2025 at the earliest, and maybe for much longer’. He argues that this requires the creation of an English Labour Party with an English Manifesto detailing policies for the English NHS, English schools and English universities (Denham,

2015b). Denham believes that the creation of English Labour ‘would be a re-statement as powerful as New Labour was in its time’.

Rutherford (2016a) agrees that Labour needs to take decisive and potentially radical measures when it comes to its structure, organisation and policy in England. He argues that as ‘the party’s future will be decided in England’ it requires a ‘specifically English strategy to identify the politics and policies it will need to win a majority of English seats’. Rutherford therefore believes that Labour must ‘reform itself into a federal UK Labour Party with an English Labour Party, and with Scottish and Welsh Labour granted more autonomy to respond to their own national politics’. Meanwhile, Jamie Reed (2016, p. 45), MP for Copeland, argues that for the sake of the Union and the party, Labour ‘must not delay in creating a discrete English Labour identity, committed to the nation-building that England’s regions demand’. He warns that ‘without embracing England, Labour risks becoming a party without a country’.

If Labour was to embrace the ‘politics of Englishness’ more seriously proponents suggest that it is likely that it would induce greater electoral competition with UKIP. UKIP’s threat to Labour in England was noted by some observers back in 2013, two years prior to the last general election. Seth-Smith (2013) argued the ‘rise in Englishness needs to be acknowledged by the parliamentary left’ because if they fail to do so ‘UKIP’s nostalgic vision of an England of ‘blood and bitter’ is likely to hold sway’. Meanwhile, Wyn Jones et al (2013, p. 38) suggested that Labour needed to ‘find a distinct, progressive platform from which to secure and develop its strength in England – or risk leaving ‘Englishness’ to become ever more closely associated with the political right’.

Despite this, UKIP’s threat to Labour was not taken seriously by many within the party at the time. Michael Dugher (in Chakelian, 2015), points out that ‘there was a naive assumption’ within the Labour back in 2013 that ‘because UKIP was bad for the Tories’, it must be ‘good for us’. Following Labour’s electoral performance in 2015, the challenge posed by UKIP has become an increasingly important issue within the party. Byrne et al (2015, p.8) argue that ‘the bottom line is that Labour is not seen in England as a patriotic party’. They claim that this has been highlighted by the number of traditional voters that the party have lost to UKIP. In Cruddas’ (2015) view, it is Labour’s ‘failure’ to talk about ‘culture and identity’ rather than ‘instrumentalised economics’ that has ‘allowed UKIP to speak for those who feel dispossessed and left behind’. He argues that Labour must ‘stop patronising socially conservative

UKIP voters and recognise the ways in which UKIP appeals to former Labour voters' (Cruddas et al, 2016, p. 9).

Rutherford (2016b) points out that evidence suggests that UKIP are the main beneficiaries of Labour's working class decline. Jarvis (2015, p. 2) highlights three broad trends that demonstrate how UKIP damaged Labour's prospects in England and Wales at the 2015 general election. Firstly, he points out that UKIP challenged Labour in the party's 'traditional heartlands'. Indeed, sixty-three of the one-hundred seats 'where UKIP made their greatest inroads were Labour constituencies, helping them achieve forty-four second places in communities that elected Labour MPs'. Secondly, Jarvis argues that UKIP 'blocked' Labour in many of the key marginal seats. He points out that there was a UKIP swing of ten per cent or greater in more than a third of the 106 key marginals Labour was targeting in order to form a government'. Thirdly, Jarvis claims that Labour is in danger of 'southern retreat'. With UKIP entrenching the party's 'southern discomfort' by eroding its foothold in seats that it used to hold and would need to regain to win a majority.

Jarvis (2015, p. 2) argues that 'UKIP is effectively serving as a barometer for Labour's shortcomings'. He claims that many voters no longer trust Labour and do not think that the party is 'on their side', particularly 'on issues such as welfare and immigration'. However, Jarvis' report does not focus on England alone. This suggests that there is more to UKIP's challenge to Labour than issues associated with the 'politics of Englishness'. Despite this, many commentators agree that UKIP have benefited from Labour's failure to come to terms with the political mood of England. Riddell (2016) believes that this is because 'Labour had done little or nothing to harness and shape English identity'. For Rutherford (2016a), the 'challenge of UKIPs blue-collar English nationalism' means that 'safe Labour seats can no longer be taken for granted'. It may prove to be the case that if Labour wishes to remain competitive in these areas it must address its relationship with England and Englishness, although whether an English Labour party would be the answer is debateable.

There are two main theoretical approaches when it comes to the study of electoral choice. One approach stresses the importance of party positioning and ideology and is often known as the spatial approach (Sanders et al, 2011, p. 287). The alternative approach is known as valence theory and focuses more on specific issues and public perceptions (Sanders et al, 2011, p. 289). An examination of these approaches and the influence of them on Labour politicians'



perceptions on the key political conflicts important to the party, sheds some light on the divisions within Labour between those supporting greater engagement with the ‘politics of Englishness’ and those disinterested in or hostile to the idea.

The spatial approach focuses on ‘the issue or ideological proximities between parties and voters’ and assumes that ‘political actors are distributed in a shared, possibly multidimensional, ideological-issue space in which parties manoeuvre in search of public support’ (Sanders et al, 2011, p. 287). The key idea in this approach is that the ‘primary determinants of party choice are the relative positions of voters and parties in the relevant ideological or issue space’ (Sanders et al, 2011, p. 288). In contrast to this, valence theory suggests that voters are primarily concerned by a party or candidate’s ‘perceived ability to handle the most serious problems that face the country’ (Sanders et al, 2011, p. 289). The term valence has now come to encompass a range of issues that are deemed important to the public at election times. These include the popularity of a party’s leader, a candidate or party’s perceived ‘trustworthiness and honesty’ and its economic performance or reputation (Green, 2007, p. 629).

In addition to these points, national and personal security and the delivery of public services, such as health care and education are also ‘perennially important valence issues’ (Sanders et al, 2011, pp. 289-290). Sanders et al (2011, p. 289) claim that in valence theory, voters make a ‘comparative assessments of parties’ managerial capabilities and their potential performance’. As Johnston and Pattie (2011, p. 284) argue, the electorate are increasingly likely to ‘support governments and leaders that are seen to be delivering on the relevant public policies, but opt for the opposition when governments and leaders are seen to be failing’. In other words, voters will ‘reward perceived success but punish failure’.

It appears to be the case that, in Britain and elsewhere, ‘valence models outperform spatial rivals in analyses of party choice’ (Sanders et al, 2011, p. 287). However, that does not mean that spatial perceptions are irrelevant. Sanders et al (2011, p. 288) argue that spatial calculations can have ‘significant indirect effects on party support through their impact on valence judgements’. Another issue that may affect valence judgements is the local dimension of electoral politics. As Johnston and Pattie (2011, p. 285) point out, economic circumstances can differ substantially in different parts of the country. Therefore, ‘voters’ evaluations of government economic competence may in part reflect their ‘experience of their local economy’. However, wider valence issues are likely to still be important.

When it comes to the Labour Party, it appears that since its landslide victory in 1997, the party has lost a substantial number of voters for both spatial and valence reasons. It appears that Labour has lost support among some of its 'core' working class voters who believe that ideologically the party has been 'too close to business' or has ignored 'the needs of ordinary hard-working families' (Johnston and Pattie, 2011, pp. 283-284). Further to this, it seems that Labour has also lost support from the 'aspiring middle classes who had been attracted to vote for it by Tony Blair in 1997 but were increasingly disillusioned with the party's performance' (Johnston and Pattie, 2011, pp. 283-284). The fact that Labour now has very few seats in the south of England aside from in London is put forward as 'a clear indicator of the extent of this decline in middle-class support' which is largely down to valence judgements (Johnston and Pattie, 2011, pp. 283-284).

Naturally, it is the case that proponents of Labour embracing the 'politics of Englishness' argue that fighting on English issues will improve the party's electoral prospects. They believe that among voters for whom Englishness is becoming an increasing salient issue there is an emerging political space in which Labour can engage. In contrast to this, opponents of Labour significantly embracing the 'politics of Englishness' stress the importance of valence issues on the party's electoral prospects. This was evident in this study's primary findings. Not only does this difference of opinion pose a threat to party unity when it comes to the manner in which it competes in elections, but it also provides a significant impediment to Labour politicising Englishness when many within the party regard it as electorally unimportant.

## **Conclusions**

To summarise this chapter, it is evident that Labour is facing an identity crisis when it comes to the party's relationship with England. When it comes to the issue of English governance the party still favours regional devolution rather than England wide devolution. However, historically the party does not have a great track record on this and has had little of substance to say on the issue recently. Because of this, there is a fear among some in the party that it is losing ground to the Conservatives and their 'Northern Powerhouse' agenda. On the issue of political conflict, it is clear the party faces substantial electoral challenges in England yet there is little consensus on how to resolve these issues.

In the context of these challenges, further questions concerning the views of Labour Politicians on the party's relationship with identity politics, the historic legacy and future direction of Labour policy on devolution and English governance and the electoral importance of the 'politics of Englishness' for the party remain. This study has sought to contribute to the debate on the issue of Labour's relationship with the 'politics of Englishness' by putting vital questions on these issues to Labour politicians in its primary research interviews. The following chapter analyses the research findings of these interviews.

## **Chapter 4: Labour in England: The Research Findings**

This study's primary research was undertaken by drawing on the methodology outlined in the introductory chapter. The data was gathered during semi-structured interviews with the following research participants: Jon Cruddas, MP for Dagenham and Rainham; John Denham, Professor of Politics at Winchester University and Labour MP for Southampton Itchen between 1992 and 2015; Michael Dugher, MP for Barnsley East; Richard Leese, leader of Manchester City Council; James Lewis, deputy leader of Leeds City Council, David Sheard, leader of Kirklees Council; Barry Sheerman, MP for Huddersfield; and the leader of a sizeable city council in the North of England who wished to remain anonymous.

This chapter analyses the data gathered in these research interviews. It does so within the established analytical framework. The chapter focuses its analysis on participant's views about Labour's current state and position in England and its options for the future. This analysis allows for the key themes that emerged from the research findings concerning Labour's relationship with the 'politics of Englishness' to be clearly highlighted and discussed. This approach enables the chapter to summarise by considering how the contrasting views of the research participants relate to internal party debate concerning the role identity, governance and political conflict on the Labour Party's engagement with the 'politics of Englishness'.

### **Identity**

One factor that came up on several occasions as playing a role in Labour's electoral problems in England was the issue of the increasing importance of identity politics. Talking specifically about Labour's shortcomings in England, Cruddas argued that the party 'did not speak to some of those forces that have been opened up around the question of identity and Englishness'. That tactically the party focussed more on arguments around the 'cost of living' rather than looking at the questions of 'nationality, devolution and nationhood' was a major shortcoming according to Cruddas. However, this view was not a commonly held one among the majority of participants in this study. While some recognised that a distinct 'politics of Englishness' may be emerging, it was not a majority view that greater engagement with Englishness would have helped Labour in 2015 or would significantly improve its future electoral prospects.

Denham and Cruddas were clear that some form of identity politics is emerging in England. Referring to the 2015 general election, Denham suggested that the ‘so called SNP threat’ resonated with many voters and resulted in people being ‘prepared to vote Conservative to stop any chance of Labour winning’. He claimed that this highlighted ‘the wider emergence of the sense that in elections there are issues where the English interest and the British interest are not necessarily the same thing’. Although Denham was clear that this does not represent the emergence of an English nationalism, he claims it represents the emergence of a form of political ‘English sensibility and English awareness’. Cruddas referred to data from the Future of England studies to point out how affiliations to English identity are becoming increasingly politically salient. He also argued that it can be seen ‘in terms of the changing texture’ of the ‘public conversations’ surrounding political issues relating to England’s position as a nation.

The fact that Cruddas and Denham, two of the key political entrepreneurs behind the idea English Labour, feel this way is hardly surprising, but several other participants also acknowledge growing affiliation to English identity. Leese suggested that there does now appear to be ‘a stronger notion of Englishness’ in many parts of the country. He referred to the increased visibility of crosses of St George particularly around sport and within ‘indigenous white working class areas’ of the country. Dugher also pointed out that there seems to be an increasingly visible rise in English identity. He referred to the growing notability of St Georges flags within his South Yorkshire constituency. However, despite this, a number of other participants were reluctant to recognise the emergence of a growing sense of English identity and certainly did not believe that we are currently witnessing the emergence of a distinct ‘politics of Englishness’.

David Sheard claimed that the idea of increased identification with Englishness was false as, in his opinion, ‘the people of England see themselves as British’. For Sheard, increased displays of English national identity represent racism becoming ‘more acceptable’. Sheerman believed that there is currently insufficient evidence available for him to ‘have a judgement’ on the growing importance of Englishness. Although, he did point out that for him, the ‘notion of Englishness’ is ‘very illusive’. Lewis also stated that he did not believe that there has been a rise in English identity recently. Politically, he pointed out that ‘there has not been a shift towards parties with the name England within their title’. While Lewis referred to the rise of UKIP he thought that this was down to ‘a number of factors’ and not driven by the ‘politics of Englishness’. The contrasting views of the participants highlight the clear differences of

opinion within the party not just about the political salience of English identity politics, but also about whether a ‘politics of Englishness’ even exists.

Electoral, Dugher took the view that ‘just talking about English issues’ is not enough to win an election. Instead, he argued that the party must talk about ‘trust on the economy’, demonstrate that it is ‘in touch on immigration’, is ‘in the right place on welfare’, and show that it has ‘strong leadership’. As Dugher rightly noted, ‘these were issues for Labour that transcended the English boarder’. While Dugher acknowledged that ‘there were particular problems in England’ associated with an emerging identity politics, his opinion was that the politics of identity is largely related to economics. He argued that ‘often the demand for some kind of recognition in terms of the politics of identity is born out of economic grievances when people feel that the economy does not work for people like them and does not work for their community’. If this is the case, it stands to reason that addressing these wider socio-economic issues rather than focusing on fostering a shared sense of English identity would be more beneficial to Labour’s electoral prospects in communities such as those described by Dugher.

Denham agreed that other issues are currently much more politically salient than the issue of English identity alone. He claimed that concerns around migration, welfare and the economy were ‘more important’. However, crucially for Denham, these issues tie in with concerns that voters, particularly English voters, have about whose ‘side’ Labour are on and who the party ‘represents’. A connection can be made between this view and Lewis’ argument that Labour struggled to connect with people in areas with a ‘high white population’, ‘low unemployment rate’ and low levels of ‘benefit claimants’. This suggests that Labour must do more in policy terms to reach out to so-called middle England. However, if this is the case, it is debatable whether an increased focus on English issues alone would be enough. Indeed, a greater focus on valence issue may be more beneficial.

This division of opinion about the existence and political importance of English identity was also reflected in participants’ views about the ideological importance of English identity politics to the party. The data reflects the literature in terms of opinions being divided on what Englishness represents and how Labour can relate to narratives around English national identity. The views of Sheard highlight the existence of strong ideologically grounded opposition to national identity politics in general and the ‘politics of Englishness’ more specifically from some elements of the Labour Party.

Sheard stated that he is 'not a nationalist' and does not believe in the concept of 'national boundaries'. For him, there is no such thing as 'an English identity'; people are trying to 'invent' something for Englishness but 'there isn't anything'. He argued that 'Englishness is just an excuse for racism' and has nothing do with a 'sense of identity' but is merely 'xenophobia'. Sheard argued that instead of giving credence to this politics of 'racism' and 'xenophobia', Labour should use social class as its ideological foundation. He claimed that people are much more likely to identify by class than national identity therefore Labour should be seeking to 'reintroduce the class war' and bring back 'the politics of envy'. This distinct ideological position is likely not to be unique to Sheard and it highlights the tensions around the ideological importance of national identity versus class identity within the party.

Another ideological issue that emerged from the research data was that the 'politics of Englishness' is an inherently Conservative agenda and as a result, should not be embraced by Labour. Sheerman was one who took this view, arguing that English identity politics is 'such Conservative property' that Labour ought not to 'go there'. In his view, 'the English narrative has really been a Conservative Party narrative' which has become increasingly prevalent in recent years due to the 'UKIPisation' of certain parts of the Conservative Party. Sheerman did acknowledge that Labour was losing some of its 'traditional' working class vote to UKIP which he attributed to a 'resurgence' of working class conservatism. But despite this, he was largely hostile to the idea of Labour engaging more directly with the 'politics of Englishness'. Again, this was driven by the view that English identity politics is the property of the political right.

Cruddas, also acknowledged this issue. He suggested that there are 'two big blockages' preventing the left from 'really getting into this political space'. Firstly, Cruddas argued that among many on the left 'nationhood or English nationalism or patriotism more specifically, is seen as the preserve of the right'. Secondly, he claimed that the 'notion of patriotism' is almost seen as 'pathological' by many on the left, and there is a view that it is 'irrational' and often 'racially absolute'. These ideological challenges highlighted by Cruddas are evidently reflected in the views of David Sheard who was ideologically opposed to ideas around nationalism and identity, and in the views of Barry Sheerman who was uneasy engaging with what he regards as an issue which traditionally he views as being the preserve of the right.

Cruddas appears to be correct when he states that the majority view within the Labour party is 'let's not go there' when it comes to the issue of English identity politics. Discussing the current party leadership, Cruddas argued that 'Jeremy Corbyn's liberationist politics are not aligned to this sort of stuff, even though he would reference in his own history the Levellers, Chartism he would not locate that within an English politics'. This is because 'the categories of nationhood' are not one's which the Labour left 'operate within', in Cruddas' view. This does appear to be reflected in Corbyn's current engagement with the 'politics of Englishness' to date.

According to Cruddas, whether one is prepared for the party to engage with the politics of nationhood and identity depends on their view of what the purpose of the political left is. If an individual believes that the left is largely concerned with the 'distributional justice of giving money away' and about 'rights' then it limits the need for national categories. But if a person thinks the role of the left also involves fostering a sense of 'common good' then the issue of national categories becomes 'more appropriate'. While there is some merit in this view, those ideologically opposed to support for English nationalism and patriotism would likely argue that a sense of common good can be formed around other categories of belonging such as class and local identity.

One of the potential reasons for this is that English identity has not emerged in the same way as other forms of belonging or even other forms of national identity. Denham argued that English national identity has taken a 'different route to national identities where people can have a story of an oppressor, of the other, as you can in countries that have historically been invaded or dominated'. Despite this, Denham argued that it 'does not mean that a sense of feeling English and wanting to know the English are properly well represented and looked after is not a significant factor' in contemporary British politics.

The fact that some within Labour and on the political left feel they cannot frame English identity politics as a politics defending the oppressed and underrepresented may be a significant factor in its failure to engage with it in any substantial way. However, if English identity becomes increasingly politically salient and increasingly electorally damaging to the party, this may change. But, as Denham points out, evidence of a rising level of 'English identity or sensibility' has been 'gathering for ten or twenty' years and yet, in that time, 'the Labour Party has largely not wanted to engage with it'. It does appear that the failure of Labour to engage with the 'politics of Englishness' is partly based in the ideological challenges it faces



due to many within the party being adverse or openly hostile to national identity politics and specifically English identity politics, for one reason or another.

## **Governance**

While there were conflicting views among the participants about the ideological importance of English identity politics for Labour, there was one issue on which there was much agreement. In fact, there was a universal consensus among the participants that Labour made mistakes with its devolution agenda when it was in government between 1997 and 2010. This section analyses participant's views about Labour's mistakes on devolution and considers their proposed remedies to improve devolution in England. These include a number of calls for greater English regional devolution as opposed to English wide devolution. Following this, participant's views about devolution within the party will be analysed. Again, the majority can be seen to favour some form of English regional devolution while others called for the formation of an English Labour Party.

When it comes to the mistakes of Labour's devolution agenda, the majority of participants highlighted the failure to provide any significant devolution to the English regions. Sheard argued that the party devolved too much power to Scotland and Wales when some English regions which are larger received no further powers. He also suggested that the party 'picked the wrong boundaries' by offering regional devolution to the North East of England. Instead, according to Sheard, they should have attempted it somewhere with more of an 'identity' such as Yorkshire. Lewis pointed out that aside from the creation of the office of Mayor of London, there was 'a lack of thinking about how the rest of England was governed' and there was 'quite a limited attempt to' understand the implications of this.

Richard Leese also argued this point. He claimed that 'the long-term failure to answer the English question has created problems within the Labour party' and 'within the country'. He claimed that once Scotland and Wales and London 'were given their differing levels of autonomy' then people such as himself were asking the questions 'what about us? what about the rest of the country?' Leese added that the 'failure' to answer these questions has 'caused real issues' for the party, particularly at the national level. Evidently, there appears to be strong feelings among local leaders, that English regions and cities were largely ignored during Labour's devolution process.

This view was not just confined to local politicians though. Dugher argued that while the Scottish and Welsh appeared to have a ‘big say’ about ‘real reform’, the reform agenda for England was ‘pretty patchwork, pretty unconvincing and never really took off’. In his view, this was largely because ‘there was no consensus not just inside the Labour government but there was no consensus among the general public as to what the kind of set up should be’. Thus, ‘almost by default, the status quo became emboldened’ and, in the end, English devolution ‘all became unfortunately a bit too difficult and got rather parked’. This, in Dugher’s view ‘became a problem’. Dugher suggested that this has certainly played a part in the rise of identity politics in England. Cruddas also took the view that Labour’s devolution agenda did not have ‘sufficient English elements within it’.

For Denham, Labour made two ‘major mistakes’. Firstly, people in England were hostile to another layer of politicians as the proposed changes were not ‘organic’. Secondly, the powers that were to be offered to the English regions ‘were not worth having and certainly were not worth the expense’. Denham argued that the UK Labour government took the decision ‘not to allow English regions to have significant powers’. Partly because it was blocked by a number of Scottish and Welsh ministers but also because ‘there were plenty of centralising English ministers who didn’t want to give any power away’.

While there was agreement that Labour made mistakes on English devolution, there were several different ideas put forward about how the current situation might be improved. A clear majority of participants supported some form of greater regional devolution within England with few supporting devolution to England as a whole. Leese argued that a commitment to set the ‘English sub-regions free’ should be at the ‘heart’ of what Labour is about. This was a commonly held view especially, but not exclusively, among local representatives.

The dominant theme that emerged from the responses supporting greater regional devolution was that it should be based around economic areas like city-regions. Leese’s position was that ‘there ought to be a sub-regional map of England based on functional economic areas’ not ‘based on national identity’ like in Scotland and Wales. He suggested that there must be ‘similar arrangements’ to those in London and now Greater Manchester ‘for the rest of the country, based on economic boundaries’. The participant who wished to remain anonymous argued that

the city region model with local councils cooperating services is certainly the best way to improve and grow regional economies.

Lewis also claimed that devolution to city regions would be beneficial. Using his own city of Leeds as an example, he highlighted how it made sense to devolve power to a clear 'functioning economic area' based around 'a commuter work area'. He argued that this will result in 'benefits from the collaboration of all local authorities in those areas dealing with issues that cross local authority boundaries'. However, Lewis did point out a key issue with the city region model concerning what happens to those areas that are not 'inside the city regions'. He argued that in order to address this issue 'a comprehensive devolution settlement' was required to 'answer to the question of what do you do with everywhere'. In Lewis' view 'some things are best done at a national level, some things at a sub-regional and some things at a local level' and the challenge therefore is to determine 'the best level to do everything at'.

Similarly to Lewis, Dugher suggested that when it comes to devolution people are not generally 'hung up on structures'. Instead, they are more concerned with the 'outcomes delivered'. Therefore, Dugher believed that the idea that big cities can 'get hold of their own infrastructure decisions' and can 'influence their own regional economies and its priorities around investment or housing or transport' is powerful. However, he also suggested that a one size fits all approach is undesirable and that Labour could look to do 'different things in different parts of the country'. Essentially in his view the English regional devolution agenda is vital to address the fact that 'communities in parts of the country are crying out for more powers and more control over their own affairs and for the ability to make the changes that they would like to see in their communities and across their towns, cities and regions'.

In Dugher's view, there is little substance to the Conservatives 'Northern Powerhouse' agenda. Therefore, Labour must 'play a bigger role on the whole devolution agenda to show that we are the party that we are the party that is committed to genuine devolution of powers out to English regions'. Not only would this give local communities more control over the decisions that affect them, but it would also provide Labour with greater political power because many of the new city region mayors are likely to be Labour. Therefore, as Dugher pointed out, English regional devolution provides 'an opportunity' for Labour to show that it can 'own this agenda', that it can 'make it work' and that it can potentially 'go further'.

Arguably there would be benefits for the party if it were to embrace greater regional devolution but for some this is not enough. Denham argued that in addition to regional devolution there must also be some form of 'governance at an English level' because the idea of 'UK Labour telling English cities what they can have is no good'. In Denham's view, even if the aim 'was the highest level of devolution somebody still has to decide something at the English level'. This is because currently reform is based around 'administrative devolution through a very loose legal framework'. Denham argued that this is clearly 'quite different from saying we are going to have different schools' legislation in Lancashire to Hampshire or something like that'.

Because of this, Denham argued that 'the framework of law for schools, higher education, health and social care is going to be determined at a national level' therefore it is essential 'to get the governance of England right as well as the devolution'. Cruddas also took the view that at the same time as 'driving forward' an English 'civic nationalism' there must also be an empowerment of 'local authorities and local government' to develop a more 'coherent architecture' between the 'different layers of government: 'UK, national, regional, and local'.

When it came to the issue of an English Parliament, Sheerman stated that he has always been 'against' it as he views it as a threat to the UK which he wishes 'to keep us together as a United Kingdom'. Sheard was against the idea because he argued that it is a 'waste of time' and is not an issue that people are concerned about. He claimed that the last thing people want is 'another layer of politicians'. Dugher was also 'sceptical of the view that we need more politicians'. For Lewis, an English Parliament would not reconcile the 'tensions that exist in England' as it 'would still end up containing the tensions between North and South'. Further to this, it would not address issue around the 'distribution of resources' in England which Lewis argues are currently 'bias towards London and the South East'. Leese similarly argued that 'an English parliament would be just as remote and out of touch as what we've got at the moment' with 'too many things being run by Whitehall'.

The participant who wished to remain anonymous was unsure whether an English Parliament was necessary. They argued that a comprehensive review lasting four or five years involving academics, young people and local government was required in order to really consider how we are governed. Cruddas stated that he is 'quite interested in an English parliament' but did point out that it may have some 'consequences in terms of parliamentary democracy'. As a result, he concluded that at present it is a 'bit too soon' but he did not 'rule it out' for the future.

Denham argued that the creation of an English Parliament is becoming the inevitable option. He was unsure whether it would be in the form of ‘a reworking of the Westminster system’ or whether it would require ‘an entirely separate body’. However, Denham did point out that it is likely that ‘there will be public resistance to anything that looks like another set of people at public expense’. Despite this, he claimed that somehow, we must ‘separate the decision-making structures into matters which are more clearly federal and those which are English’.

With this evident lack of majority support for any form of England wide devolution of powers of governance it is hardly surprising that there was little appetite among the interviewees for Labour to significantly politicise Englishness within its own party structure. Instead many expressed their desire to see greater regional devolution within the party. Talking about his own experiences, Leese claimed that the party in his city ‘would very much brand ourselves as Manchester Labour’ because the idea of ‘being of the city’ is of much greater importance to them in terms of identity politics. At present, he suggested that regional Labour politicians are generally ‘enormously resentful of the remote and out of touch NEC and national party administration’ who, in his view, are ‘just as out of touch as Westminster and Whitehall’. Ultimately for Leese it came down to the issue of policy and its effect on people’s lives. He stated that ‘there is a pretty strong argument that once you go beyond defence, foreign policy and macroeconomic policy that you do not have to do a great deal at a nation level at all’.

Leese therefore took the view that future party devolution in England should provide ‘a large amount of autonomy at a regional level and a far chunk of decision making being taken differently in different parts of the country’. This should not lead to the creation of lots of separate devolved regional party’s but be ‘one Labour party which has an overall vision and message’ but where there also exists ‘room for variations to meet different local circumstances’. In Leese’s view this would allow the party to ‘concentrate on what is important to the people that it is supposed to represent’ because these things are ‘are nearly always local’. Dugher also stated that he would ‘like to see a kind of English regional Labour party have a louder voice and a stronger say in how we respond to issues in our own region’. However, he too took the view that this should take place ‘within the overall structure... of a British Labour party’. Evidently, most participants appeared to support constitutional devolution and internal party devolution on a regional or local level, if at all.

In contrast to this support for a greater local or regional dimension to party organisation and governance, Cruddas and Denham put forward the case for England-wide devolution and the creation of an English Labour Party. Cruddas argued that if Labour is to recognise that it is 'moving towards a more federalised model' then it must recognise it in the party rulebook and have an English Labour party alongside the Scottish and Welsh parties. Cruddas argued that not to do so 'is a really sad reflection of the failure to have an agile response in this space'. Cruddas explained his position by stating that for him an English Labour party would not be 'racially absolute' or about 'acknowledging empire or something like that' but would be about recognising an English 'sense of space and democracy' in the context of a 'rapidly changing world' and 'globalisation'. This would mean that an English Labour Party of the type the Cruddas describes would be seeking to exploit the progressive strand of political Englishness which at present is the least developed form of the 'politics of Englishness'.

Both Denham and Cruddas expressed the view that for too long the party has been influenced by politicians from Scotland and Wales. Denham argued that Labour as a party has been 'heavily influenced by Scottish and Welsh MPs' both 'culturally and politically'. He suggested that these members 'have tended to be resistant to the idea of acknowledging an English dimension in politics because they feel that damages their own interests'. Meanwhile, Cruddas claimed 'that for too long the Scottish and Welsh Labour parties had disproportional significance because the Labour party was seen too much as a Celtic fringe phenomena' whereas, the reality in Cruddas' view is that 'the history of the Labour party is that it only wins when it wins in England'. Denham also stated that there is 'pessimistic view' among many within the party that Labour is unlikely to win in England; therefore, they must 'rely on Scottish and Welsh votes'. But, as he pointed out, this argument has been somewhat weakened by the rise of the SNP. While there may be some truth to these arguments, there is a potential danger of creating significant national divisions within the party if they are offered as one of the key rationales for the creation of English Labour.

When it came to the political realities of English Labour, Denham and Cruddas put forward some ideas on how the party might operate. Denham suggested that 'just as Scottish Labour and Welsh Labour' have their own conference, executives and decision making structures, 'English Labour would have the same'. This would then be 'brought together' under a 'new UK Labour body'. It would therefore be a completely federal party. Cruddas took a similar view suggesting there could be 'an English Labour party with an English leadership' in addition

to a UK Labour party acting as the ‘overarching house’ in which ‘a programme is brokered between the three constituent parts and Northern Ireland’. This federal approach would have significant implication on party leadership and policy. Cruddas argued that each constituent party should have ultimate say over candidate selection within its jurisdiction as well as ‘its own policy platform’. He suggested that in order to uphold unity, policy could be worked out in the national policy forum with ‘the final meeting of the national policy forum becoming the reckoning for all those regional and national sites to broker a programme for the national UK elections’.

On the issue of how English Labour might work in parliament the proponents were less sure but offered some tentative suggestions. Both showed little interest in the need for an English parliament at present so discussed the issue in the context of the current UK parliament in Westminster. Denham suggested that the party would ‘probably need an English Labour leader in the House of Commons’ but was unsure as to whether a separate leader would be required for the Labour party as a whole and for England. He concluded that it may be best for ‘the English MPs at Westminster or in parliament to have its own leader’ as a first step. Beyond this, if a ‘separate executive’ began to evolve ‘a separate English leadership’ may then be required.

While Denham claimed that this ‘step by step... British way of evolving the constitution’ may be best there does appear to be a danger that it would foster a greater sense of uncertainty and division. Cruddas was even less sure on the practical details, claiming that at the moment ‘he does not ‘think they are that important compared to the key priority which is to change the character of the Labour party, to acknowledge a core English component’. Until that is achieved, looking at the detail is simply ‘heading for the weeds’ in Cruddas’ view. Because, as he claimed, the party is ‘nowhere near’ a clear consensus around the ‘politics of Englishness’ and English Labour at present.

This opinion expressed by Cruddas was confirmed by some of the other participant’s hostility to the idea of English Labour. Sheard was simply ‘not interested in it’ believing there should be no devolved parties under UK Labour. Similarly, Sheerman could not bring himself to entertain the idea of English Labour because his heart is still ‘in building a UK wide party’. Dugher expressed similar sentiments arguing that he could not support English Labour as ‘we are still a United Kingdom’. Dugher argued that while ‘the English are rightly proud of our

Englishness and our English identity... most English people' are also 'very proud of Great Britain and are strong supporters of the Union'. Meanwhile, the participant who wished to remain anonymous also expressed a desire to be just one UK Labour party as opposed to a federal one.

Lewis' hostility to English Labour stemmed from his belief that little could be achieved at the English level that could not be achieved at either 'a regional, sub-regional or UK level'. He therefore took the view that there was just no need for 'another level' of devolution. Leese's main issue with the idea was that 'in a federated model, an English Labour party would be so large in comparison to the other two that it would be completely unbalanced'. He also pointed out that the party structure 'needs to reflect the levels at which it is fighting elections' and as it is 'not fighting English elections... the party structure ought to reflect that'.

This view is in stark contrast to that of Denham and can be seen to reflect the division among Labour in England between those who favour greater national recognition and those who favour greater English regional recognition. On this evidence, it does not appear to be the case that the idea of an English Labour Party is one that enjoys widespread support among the majority of Labour representatives. Instead, some form of local or regional devolution both constitutionally and within the party was the preference for the majority of participants.

### **Political Conflict**

A wide variety of reasons were put forward to explain Labour's poor electoral showing in the 2015 General Election. These included issues around party policy or the public perception of Labour policy, particularly on the economy, problems stemming from Ed Miliband's leadership abilities, failure to effectively compete with opposition parties and failure to recognise the increasing importance of identity politics. Evidently, there is no clear consensus within the party on the reasons for Labour's electoral shortcomings and thus, there may be no definitive solutions for electoral success.

As has been noted in the previous chapter, there was a noticeable difference between those who support a greater embrace of the 'politics of Englishness' and those who support the status quo or an alternative approach when it comes to their explanations for Labour's electoral failings. While proponents of a greater embrace of Englishness still note the importance of valence



issues they also highlight the potential benefits of moving into the currently uncongested space of political Englishness. In contrast, those less concerned with the ‘politics of Englishness’ primarily referred to valence issues such as public perceptions of economic trustworthiness and poor leadership as being responsible for the party’s shortcomings.

When it comes to the impact of economic policy and the public perception of it on Labour’s 2015 performance Sheard argued that the party had not recovered from being tarred with being responsible for the ‘bankers crash’ and the economic impact of this. He suggested that Labour should have done more to ‘challenge’ these accusations. Similarly, Dugher argued that ‘fundamentally, it was a lack of trust, on the economy’ that was responsible for Labour’s shortcomings. He too argued that this was a ‘problem’ that has been associated with the party ‘since the global financial crisis’. The anonymous participant suggested that ultimately elections are won on the economy and the public simply did not trust Labour as much as the Conservatives when it came to the management of it. Leese also argued that the party’s failure to establish its economic ‘credibility’ was a significant factor in the 2015 general election results.

In addition to issues around economic policy or perceived competence, failures by the party in other key policy areas were cited as explanations for the 2015 defeat. Denham argued that Labour were not trusted as a party of government on a ‘number of key issues’ such as welfare and immigration as well as on the economy. Dugher also pointed to issues around welfare and immigration as well as highlighting the impact of the arguments that if elected, a Labour government would be ‘ beholden to the SNP’. He suggested that this idea served to ‘reinforced pre-existing negatives that people held about Labour’.

More generally, Denham claimed that ‘many voters felt that the Labour party did not represent them or their interests’. Similarly, Leese argued that Labour ‘failed to develop a narrative’ that reached its traditional voters as well as voters that the party were attempting to win around that ‘gave them confidence that they were going to benefit from a Labour government’. From these arguments, it can be seen that there is a strong belief within the party that Labour did not get its strategy right in terms of policy, or at least did not clarify arguably falsely held views associated with it. The issue of the economy was evidently seen as an important factor in the party’s electoral performance but there is a clear sense that Labour failed in other policy areas as well as in its articulation of them.

Problems associated with Ed Miliband's leadership skills was another issue that was suggested by some as an explanation for Labour's poor results in 2015. Barry Sheerman claimed that Miliband 'never captured the imagination of the British public' as he was not 'adept at leadership'. Dugher also raised the point that there were 'question marks' over the party's leadership and suggested that there was a feeling among some that resulted in the view that Labour was just 'not strong enough to do the job'. While there may be some truth in these arguments, nobody suggested that this was the main source of Labour's electoral failure.

In addition to the issues raised around policy and leadership, some also felt that Labour failed to recognise the changing nature of party politics in 2015 and did not effectively compete with electoral competition from across the political spectrum. Lewis highlighted how a shift in the 'dynamics between the different parties' may have adversely affected Labour. He pointed out that 'the reduction in the Lib Dem vote did not have a universal pattern to it', thus 'not all 2010 Lib Dem votes became a 2015 Labour vote'. He also pointed out that Labour was challenged from both directions from both UKIP and the Greens. Sheard also highlighted the impact of the rise of UKIP on Labour's performance. He suggested that they played on a 'fear factor' in areas with high levels of immigration and as a result, former Labour voters turned to them as a 'protest' vote. Cruddas argued that across the whole of the UK Labour simply 'lost everywhere to all different parties'. Recognising why this was the case is vital for Labour if they wish to be a party of government once again.

The majority of participants did not believe that the politicisation of Englishness and the creation of an English Labour Party would provide the answer to the party's electoral problems. Only two out of eight of those interviewed argued that English Labour could potentially be electorally beneficial. Denham argued that the creation of English Labour within the UK Labour party framework is required for electoral and organisational reasons for the party to 'focus on winning a majority in England'. He also suggested that in terms of identity, English Labour would allow the party to connect with voters 'whom recognition of the importance of England is important to'. Although Denham did acknowledge that Labour Party members tend to 'have a much higher level of British identity than the English population as a whole and a much lower level of English identity'. A greater engagement with the 'politics of Englishness' therefore may not be too appealing to much of the party membership. But, if Denham is correct, it may be vital in order to win back lost Labour voters and potential new voters.

While Cruddas also supports the creation of English Labour he was not quite as sure as Denham that it would necessarily be a cure for the party's electoral woes. Although he argued that the 'next election will be won or lost in England' and that Labour can 'either hideaway' from this or 'run towards it' he added that it is not to say that Labour will be successful if they 'run towards it' but, in his view, the party has little option but to do so. Evidently, this does not appear to be an entirely convincing argument for the electoral benefits of English Labour. Despite being a proponent of English Labour, Cruddas appeared to grasp that the extent to which Labour embrace English identity politics could be a fine balancing act.

Denham's reasoning for supporting the creation of English Labour was both political and cultural. Culturally he suggested that it would be beneficial 'because there is a set of voters for whom recognition of the importance of England is important to them'. Politically he argued that English Labour is 'necessary organisationally' because it is in England where the party 'need to win elections'. He also suggested that it would be 'important democratically' because it would align the 'policy processes with the elections and structures of government'. These final two points raised by Denham are clearly at odds with the political realities and the views of many regional politicians, because at present there are no English wide elections or political institutions.

Overall, when it came to the issue of whether an increased focus on England and English issues could have improved the party's performance in 2015 and would improve its future electoral performances there was a split of opinion. It was the majority view that in 2015 there were far more important issues adversely effecting Labour than the 'politics of Englishness'. For most, a greater focus on England would have made little difference to the election results. It was also the majority view that the party currently faces much more substantial policy challenges that deserve far greater attention than the issue of English identity politics. As a result, the resolution of these issues is a more pressing requirement for the majority of participants than some form of politicisation of Englishness. However, English Labour proponents believe that many of these issues are connected and English Labour would therefore go a substantial way towards improving the party's future electoral prospects in England.

## **Conclusions**

From the analysis of the interview data several key findings concerning Labour's current state and potential future in England can be summarised. When it comes to the ideological challenges of English identity politics and the issue of Labour's potential politicisation of Englishness, the participants were divided between those who had no time for any form of English national identity politics and those who espouse the importance of Labour's position in England and its English traditions. This division is perhaps indicative of the wider ideological challenges facing the party at present. There was also a third school of thought expressed by some participants connected to the rejection of identity politics but slightly different in tone. It held that Labour should be reluctant to engage with the 'politics of Englishness' because it is Conservative property. This position risks alienating many voters for whom Englishness is becoming increasingly important politically. Overall, based on the responses of the interview participants, it appears that Labour politicians are largely not yet prepared to vociferously embrace the 'politics of Englishness' in any form.

This was clear from the majority of participants' responses concerning devolution to or within England. While there was a consensus that Labour made mistakes with its devolution agenda in 1997 there was little support among participants to rectify this by offering some form of England wide devolution. Instead, a clear majority supported greater regional devolution. Even proponents of English Labour acknowledged that it must include a significant local element. In terms of internal devolution within the party, a regional approach was again the clear favourite with only two participants' supporting the creation of English Labour. This suggests that if some national figures within the party continue to push the politicisation of Englishness agenda, it could potentially threaten party unity as there appears to be a lack of support for it at the local level.

A variety of reasons were given as explanations for Labour's poor recent electoral performances. Several participants did mention the perceived growth of importance of English identity politics and the need to speak specifically to the English electorate. However, in the main, it was valence issues such as a lack of public trust on the economy and poor leadership that were seen as costing the party electorally. For the majority addressing such issues is the priority. Even proponents of English Labour did not suggest that greater engagement with the 'politics of Englishness and the creation of English Labour will necessarily provide a cure to all the party's electoral woes. Although, they did believe that it could offer a better platform to

attempt to engage directly with distinct issues concerning England which could in turn improve the party's electoral prospects. This however, was a minority view. If the findings of the data reflect wider opinion within the party in England then it appears as though Labour's politicisation of Englishness, certainly to the extent of an English Labour party, will be off the agenda for the foreseeable future. At present, we are not witnessing the rise of English Labour.

## Conclusion

This thesis has examined the ‘politics of Englishness’ and its impact upon the Labour party. The study framed its analysis by reviewing the academic literature and highlighting that UK devolution has resulted in the creation of multi-level political parties in order to mirror the new political jurisdictions created in Scotland and Wales. This development has increased the importance of national identity in party politics in the devolved nations however, such changes have not yet occurred to a significant degree in England. As a result, all of the main unionist parties have failed to fully recognise England’s distinct position as a nation either politically or structurally to date. To examine why this is the case generally and when it comes to the Labour Party specifically, the thesis introduced an analytical framework. The framework was derived from Hooghe and Marks’ (2009) theory of politicisation and was based around the importance of identity, governance and political conflict on politicisation.

The study then went on to apply the analytical framework to the analysis of the ‘politics of Englishness’ to determine what is driving growing affiliation to English identity, to discover how this is impacting upon demands for alternative forms of English governance and to determine whether English political conflict has been mobilised by any political parties. The study has shown that while there may be a growing affiliation to English national identity many still acknowledge their British identity as well. There are arguments that English identity politics is being driven by an ethno-cultural sense of Englishness which arguably became more visible during the EU referendum campaign. However, it is unfair to suggest that Englishness is merely an expression of xenophobic hostility to others. English identity politics is largely being driven by socio-economic grievances mainly associated with England’s position within both the UK and the EU. There is a clear sense that England loses out both financially and politically, does not have a voice and is being denied any meaningful form of sovereignty.

When it comes to the impact of this increased affiliation with English identity on demands for an alternative form of English governance it is the case that, despite the Anglicisation of Westminster politics post-devolution and the passing of EVEL, the desire among many for greater political recognition of England has not yet been satisfied. However, the issue of English governance is complicated by significant affiliation to regional or local identities and by strong regional or local attachments in England. Thus, it appears that some form of English regional recognition may be just as important as some form of England-wide recognition when

it comes to finding a solution to the issue of English governance. Taking Hooghe and Marks' (2009, p. 2) argument that identity is decisive for multi-level governance, it is evident that the existence of competing identities in England is a significant impediment to large-scale support for constitutional change recognising England as a distinct political unit.

The study has shown that political and economic resentments associated with UK devolution and the EU are the main sources of English political conflict. Hooghe and Marks (2009, pp. 12- 13) argue that two things are required for the mobilisation and politicisation of political conflict. Firstly, the 'tension must be salient' and, secondly, 'political entrepreneurs must mobilise the tension'. However, these political conflicts have not yet been mobilised to their full potential by political entrepreneurs in the form of a distinct English identity politics.

Political parties, particularly unionist ones, have acknowledged Englishness but largely shied away from politicising it and continue to frame debates in terms of Anglo-Britishness. Even the politics of UKIP, who some have suggested is largely an English nationalist party, is best viewed in terms of Anglo-Britishness. The English Democrats are the only significant party to mobilise political conflict around the issue of English governance but their influence and success has been extremely limited. There are several potential reasons why no major party has explicitly mobilised English political conflict. Firstly, they may not regard English political tensions as being salient enough for politicisation. Additionally, their decision is complicated by the issue of English national demands for recognition and governance versus the English regional agenda. Another challenge is the issue of inclusiveness and English identity politics, particularly when it comes to England's BME population. Englishness is still not seen as a wholly civic national identity.

It is evident that while there may be a desire for increased party politicisation of Englishness and the creation of some significant form of English political recognition and governance there are significant challenges for unionist parties. Not only must they understand the electorate's differing relationships with identity and governance but they must also consider the wider implications of the politicisation of Englishness. While they could potentially be a significant reward for the party that takes this on, it appears that currently, the majority view within the main unionist parties is that the party politicisation of Englishness is not yet worth the associated challenges and political risks when it is still so difficult to determine the potential

political and electoral benefits of doing so. The ‘politics of Englishness’ has therefore not been fully politicised to date.

It was in this context that the established analytical framework set out to analyse the Labour Party’s Engagement with the ‘politics of Englishness’. The study has examined how competing visions within the party concerning identity politics are shaping the debate about the party’s position on England. It has also examined the views within the Labour Party when it comes to devolution and English governance and the importance of politicising English identity and political conflict as a tool for electoral success. Through addressing these key research objectives, the study has been able to detail the key themes within the debate around how the Labour Party is engaging with the ‘politics of Englishness’ in terms of identity, governance and political conflict.

On the issue of identity, analysis shows that Labour is currently facing an identity crisis when it comes to its relationship with England. This is noticeable in both the internal and external debates concerning its relationship with England and English national identity. It is also noticeable when it comes to the party’s position on the issue of English governance. Although Labour still favours regional devolution, the party leadership has done little to progress this agenda and as a result, there is a fear among some in the party that it is losing ground to the Conservatives on their ‘Northern Powerhouse’ agenda.

Further to this, when it comes to political conflict, it is evident that Labour is facing a clear threat from the electoral challenge posed to it by UKIP in its traditional heartlands. While this threat is not confined to England, some still suggest that it may partly be driven by the failure of many within the party to recognise the importance of English identity politics in some of these areas. While some political entrepreneurs within the Labour Party have been pushing the Englishness agenda it has had little impact on the party in terms of policy and moving it towards embracing the ‘politics of Englishness’. Historically, Labour has been reluctant to engage with it and it appears that this will continue to be the case unless there is a radical shift in thought for the majority within the party.

In order to build on these findings, the study sought to contribute to the debate on the issue of Labour’s relationship with the ‘politics of Englishness’ by undertaking primary interviews with Labour Party politicians. The main aim of the interviews was to discover the key themes that



emerged from participant's responses regarding the importance of Labour's historic, present and future engagement with the 'politics of Englishness'. Again, the research findings were analysed within the established analytical framework.

Data from this study's primary findings confirmed the existence of an identity crisis within the party when it comes to its relationship with Englishness. The participants were clearly divided between those who had no time for any form of English national identity politics and those who espouse the importance of Labour's English traditions. In terms of governance, there was little appetite among the majority of participants for the creation of an English Labour Party. If the findings of the data reflect the opinion within the party at large in England it appears as though Labour's politicisation of Englishness, certainly to the extent of an English Labour party, will be off the agenda for the foreseeable future. On the issue of English political conflict, it is apparent that a majority believe that the 'politics of Englishness' is of little concern to Labour electorally when compared with other issues.

Perhaps the most interesting finding from the data was that the majority of participants favoured some form of local or regional devolution of powers as opposed to any form of England-wide devolution. Both in terms of governance of the country and when it comes to internal Labour Party structure. While this may have been influenced by the fact that most participants were local representatives or Northern English MPs it is still significant. If going forward the majority within the Labour Party wish to focus more on local or regional issues rather than the 'politics of Englishness' it could lead to many having to question which identity is most important to them and whether that is the same at all levels of governance. This issue of the relationship between local, regional and English national identity, governance and the political conflict surrounding it may therefore be an interesting area for future research.

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Interview with Councillor David Sheard, 23 February 2016, Huddersfield.

Interview with Jon Cruddas MP, 8 March 2016, London.

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Interview with Councillor James Lewis, 22 March 2016, Leeds.

Interview with Professor John Denham, 13 April 2016, Huddersfield.

Interview with anonymous northern English council leader, 12 May 2016, anonymous location.

Interview with Michael Dugher MP, 13 May 2016, Telephone.

Interview with Barry Sheerman MP, 27 May 2016, Huddersfield.

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