

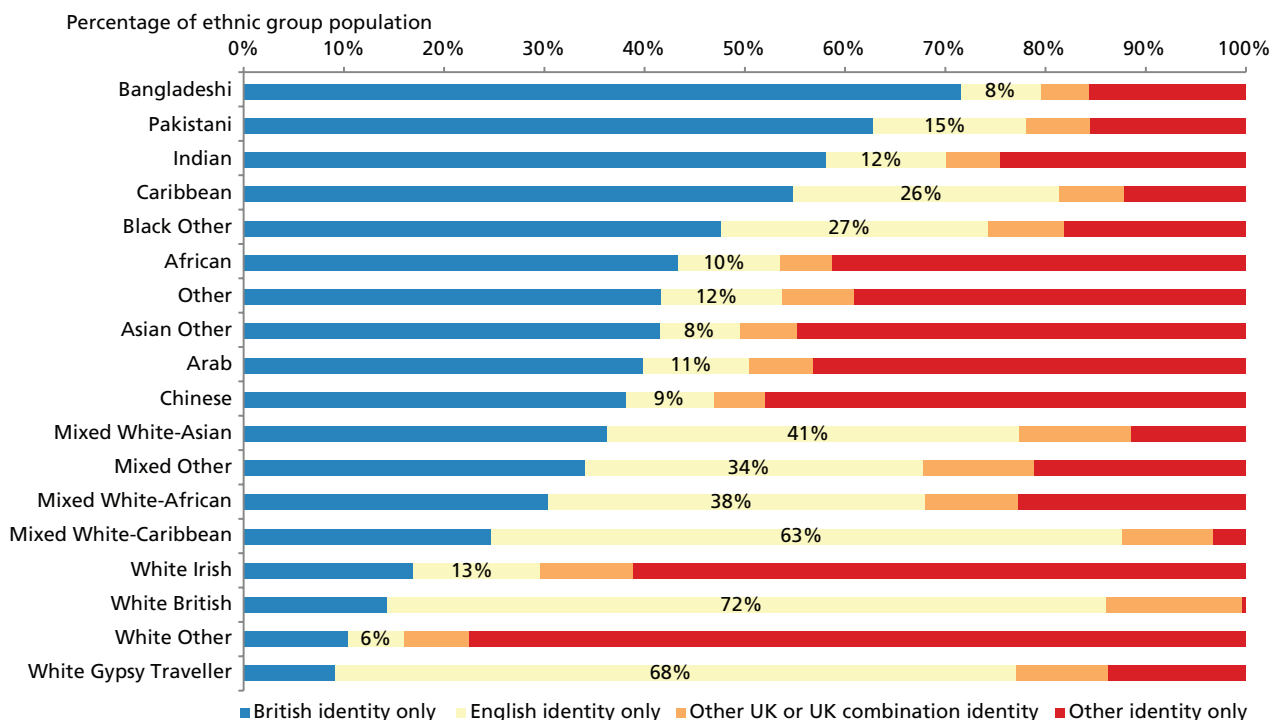
# Who feels British?

## The relationship between ethnicity, religion and national identity in England

### Summary

- The 2011 Census national identity question allows people to report multiple identities from English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British and Other. However, nine in ten people only report a single national identity.
- In England, ethnic minority groups are more likely to describe themselves as exclusively British compared with the White British population (38% compared to 14%).
- Bangladeshi (72%), Pakistani (63%) and Indian (58%) ethnic groups are the most likely to report only a British national identity.
- White British (72%) and Mixed (47%) ethnic groups are more likely to see themselves as English rather than British.
- In England, Muslims are more likely than Christians to report British national identity only (57% as compared to 15%).
- Muslims are less likely to report Other national identity only than Buddhists or Hindus (24% compared to 42% and 32%).
- Christians and Jews are more likely to report English only national identity than any other religious group (65% and 54% respectively).
- Age is related to national identity in England:
  - People aged 60 and above are more likely to report only English national identity than those aged 30-59 (70% as compared to 56%).
  - People in their 30s, 40s and 50s are more likely to report British identity than those over 60 (21% as compared to 15%).
  - Those who report Other national identity only are disproportionately young adults (20-34), reflecting the typical age of recent international migrants.

**Figure 1.** National identity by ethnic group in England, 2011



Note: Percent label shown for 'English identity only' to aid comparison across ethnic groups.

[Click here for data in Excel](#)

## The British dream

The Coalition government's plans to promote mainstream British values<sup>ii</sup> appear to be at odds with the sense of national identity in England. Three-fifths of the population do not identify with a British national identity, and only see themselves as English. This begs the question, what is the purpose of placing so much emphasis on encouraging ethnic minorities and new migrants to the UK to accept 'British' life and 'British' values? Increasing aspirations of Britishness amongst ethnic minorities might only have led to the creation of new minority forms of identity. It is often assumed that, for the English, Englishness is synonymous with Britishness and that the values of these identities are the same. When given an option of reporting British and English dual national identity, less than a tenth of the population in England choose this.

## Ethnicity and national identity

UK surveys have shown for some time that ethnic minorities identify more closely with Britishness than their White counterparts<sup>iii</sup>. The 2011 Census supports these findings. Figure 1 shows that the percentage of the White British population (14%) who only report a British national identity is lower than any other ethnic group, except White Gypsy or Irish Traveller and White Other. In contrast, more than 70% of people who report Bangladeshi ethnicity describe their national identity as British only. Even when combining those that feel both English and British, fewer White British people suggest they identify with Britishness than any non-White ethnic minority group.

The ethnic groups that are most likely to report Other national identity only are White Other (78%) and White Irish (61%). The majority of the Other White population was born in continental Europe (two-fifths in EU Accession states and another fifth in other EU states). The recent arrival of many of these people, and the fact that they have secure rights to live and work in the UK without having to become British citizens, may explain their greater tendency to describe themselves as foreign in terms of their national identity. People identifying with the White Irish ethnic group are most likely to describe themselves as Irish rather than any other national identity, including British.

The development of national identity takes time for immigrant groups and their descendants. Research has clearly shown that recent immigrants are less likely to report British national identity<sup>v</sup>. The more established ethnic minority groups in England and Wales, those who have a longer history in Britain and therefore are more likely to have been born in the country, are much more likely to describe themselves as British. More than half of the Bangladeshi (72%), Pakistani (63%), Indian (58%) and Caribbean (55%) ethnic groups identify with only British national identity. Chinese (48%), Asian Other (45%), Arab (43%) and African (41%) are most likely to identify with Other identity only, reflecting the recent arrival of many

people in these groups. Nonetheless, more than half the population in each of these groups describe themselves as English, British or other UK identity.

The Mixed ethnic groups report English rather than British national identity less than the White British, but more than all other ethnic minority groups. Three-fifths of the Mixed White-Caribbean and two-fifths of the Mixed White-Asian groups describe themselves as English only. This suggests that Englishness is predominantly a White identity, which some Mixed people might feel they have access to. More than a quarter of the Caribbean and Black Other ethnic groups also report only an English national identity suggesting that some people in the ethnic minority groups that are most likely to have Mixed offspring are able to feel an English national identity too.

## Measuring national identity

A question on national identity was included for the first time in the 2011 Census. The question asks 'How would you describe your national identity?' and persons are encouraged to tick all that apply from English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British and Other. Those ticking 'Other' are asked to write in their national identity. National identity is an exception to other questions in the census because you are asked to describe rather than objectively state your status. The question precedes questions on ethnic group, language, religion and passports held.

The option of reporting more than one national identity makes it difficult to aggregate the responses to neat and meaningful categories. We have created four exclusive categories based on the census outputs for people living in England:

- English identity only
- British identity only
- Other UK or UK combination identity: Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or a combination of more than one identity involving at least one UK country. For example, Scottish and British; English and British; Moroccan and English; and Irish and British.
- Other identity only: foreign identity only, including Irish.

## Religion and national identity

Despite survey evidence indicating the opposite, it has been suggested by leading policy makers that certain minority groups, especially Muslims, have difficulty feeling British<sup>v</sup>. It is often assumed that maintaining other identities is incompatible with being British. Figure 2 shows that Sikhs (62%), Muslims (57%) and Hindus (54%) are all more likely to report British only national identity than all other religious groups. Christians (15%) are least likely to describe themselves only as British. Christians (65%) and Jews (54%) are much more likely to identify with only an English

national identity. The groups most likely to report Other national identity only are Buddhists (42%), Hindus (32%), Muslims (24%) and Sikhs (17%).

## Age and national identity

The census has not previously asked a question on national identity and therefore it is not possible to compare trends over time. It is, however, possible to show how national identity varies by age. Figure 3a shows that English only national identity is strongest in the oldest ages (over 60). More than 70% of those aged 60 and above describe themselves as English only. This is compared with less than 60% for those aged 20-59. The middle age population (30-59) is over-represented amongst people identifying with British only identity (see Figure 3b). One in five people aged 30-59 describe their national identity as British only compared with fewer than one in seven aged 60 and over.

The most striking age difference in the four categories of national identity is the disproportionate percentage of those identifying with Other national identity only who are young adult ages (see Figure 3d). Those with Other national identity are likely to be recent, and possible short-term,

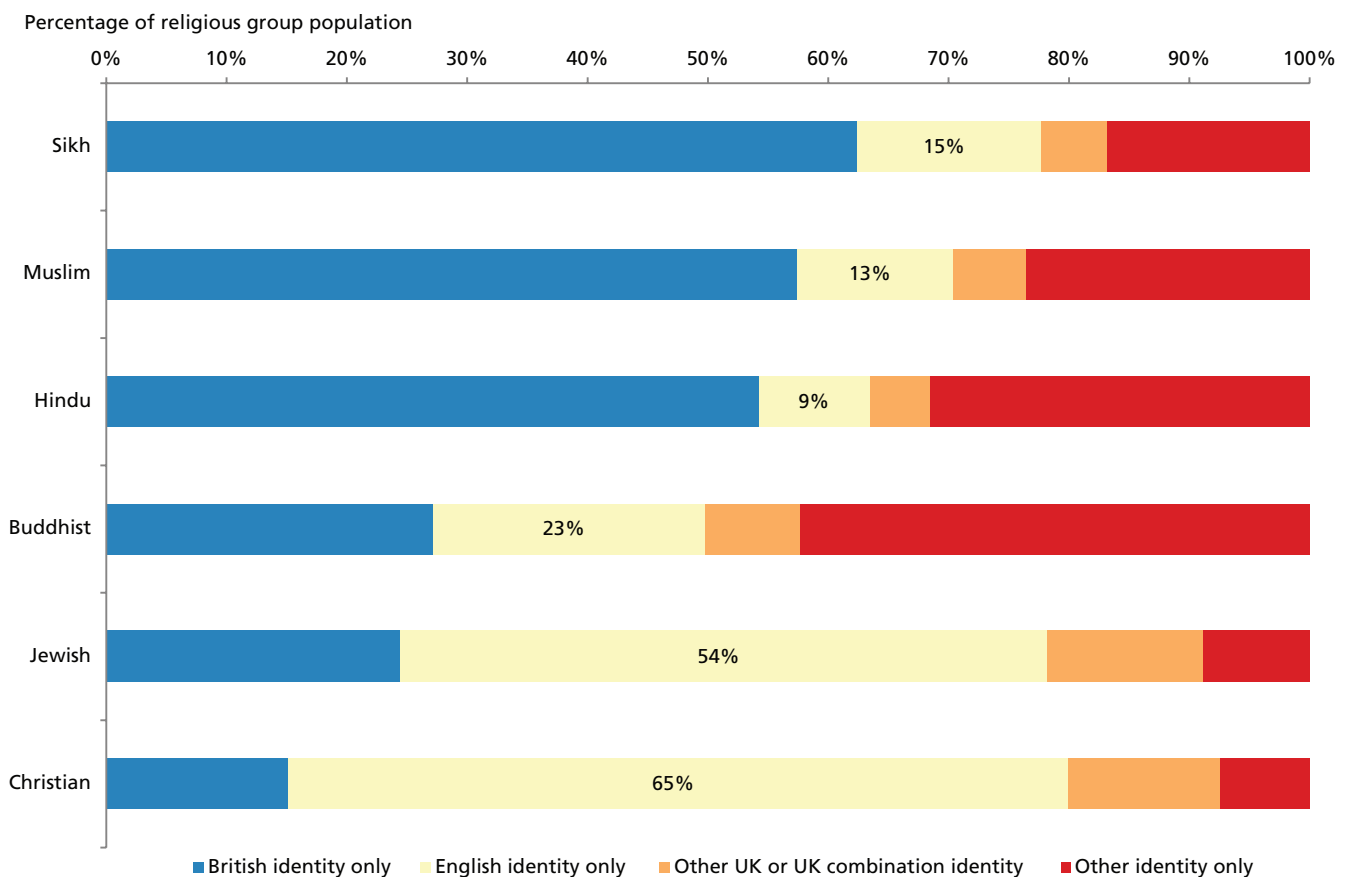
immigrants: this simply reflects a typical age distribution of migrants. A fifth of the Other national identity only population are aged 20-34 compared with less than a tenth of the population in the other three national identity categories.

## Other measures of immigrant history

There is a strong relationship between Other national identity only, and other indicators of immigrant history. In local authority districts with a high proportion of people describing their national identity as Other only, there is also a high proportion of people born abroad, arrived in the UK between 2007 and 2011, with a not White British ethnicity, and with poor English language proficiency.

The relationship is weakest between national identity and English proficiency. This means that English tuition needs are not necessarily greatest in areas of recent immigration. For example, Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster have the highest proportion of people with a foreign national identity (38% and 37% respectively); however, in both districts fewer than 5% of the population cannot speak English well.

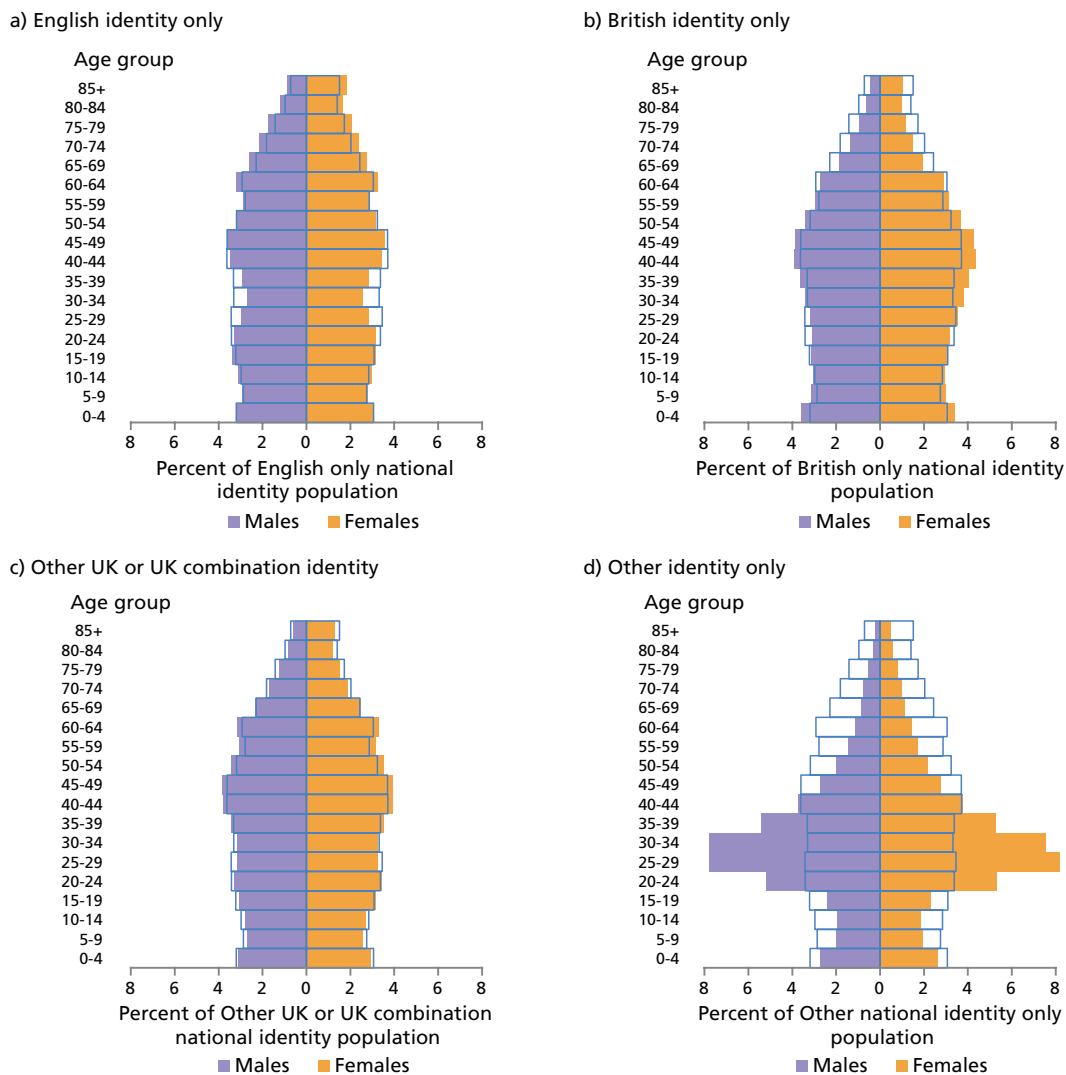
**Figure 2.** National identity by religious group in England, 2011



Note: Percent label shown for 'English identity only' to aid comparison across religious groups.

[Click here for data in Excel](#)

**Figure 3.** National identity categories population age structure in England, 2011



Note: Blue outline represents the age-sex structure of the total population in England. Bars that exceed the outline represent ages that are over-represented amongst people identifying with the national identity; bars inside the outline represent ages that are under-represented amongst people identifying with the national identity.

[Click here for data in Excel](#)

<sup>i</sup> People who ticked the ethnic group category White English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British.

<sup>ii</sup> CLG (2012) Creating the conditions for integration. Department for Communities and Local Government, London. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creating-the-conditions-for-a-more-integrated-society>.

<sup>iii</sup> Nandi, A. & Platt, L., 2012. How diverse in the UK. In S. McFall, ed. *Understanding Society: Findings 2012*. Colchester: Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex, pp. 13–14.

<sup>iv</sup> Manning, A. & Roy, S., 2010. Culture clash or culture club? National identity in Britain. *The Economic Journal*, 120(2), pp.F72–F100.

<sup>v</sup> Uberoi, V. & Modood, T. (2010) 'Who Doesn't Feel British? Divisions Over Muslims', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 63(2).

Source: the 2011 Census (Crown Copyright). [Click here for links to the 2011 Census data](#)

This briefing is one in a series, *The Dynamics of Diversity: Evidence from the 2011 Census*.

Author: Stephen Jivraj

**Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE)**

The University of Manchester  
Oxford Road, Manchester  
M13 9PL, UK

email: [censusbriefings@ethnicity.ac.uk](mailto:censusbriefings@ethnicity.ac.uk)

[www.ethnicity.ac.uk](http://www.ethnicity.ac.uk)

