Beyond the St. George's Cross: A Case for a Yorkshire Identity

I. Executive Summary

This report presents a compelling case for a distinct Yorkshire identity, grounded in empirical evidence and a nuanced understanding of economic realities, public sentiment, and historical context. Analysis reveals significant economic disparities, particularly in infrastructure investment and economic output, which foster a palpable sense of grievance and a perceived separate economic destiny for the region compared to London and the national average. Public opinion surveys underscore a strong, often primary, identification with "Yorkshireness" over "Englishness," coupled with a clear and widespread desire for greater regional autonomy. Furthermore, the White Rose Yorkshire flag emerges as a positive, unifying symbol of local pride, contrasting sharply with the St. George's Cross, which is increasingly viewed as divisive due to its association with far-right groups. The enduring, celebratory phrase "God's Own County" encapsulates a deep, resilient, and authentic connection to Yorkshire's unique heritage, landscape, and people. Collectively, these factors demonstrate that Yorkshire identity is not merely cultural nostalgia but a profound and assertive response to concrete socio-economic conditions, demanding recognition and a re-evaluation of centralized governance models.

II. Introduction: Defining Yorkshire Identity in a Modern Context

The concept of regional identity in the United Kingdom extends beyond mere cultural affiliation; it is intrinsically linked to economic realities and historical grievances. In an era marked by political discourse around "levelling up" and addressing regional imbalances, understanding the specific dynamics of identity becomes paramount. This report aims to transform a commentary piece into a data-backed analysis, providing empirical evidence to support the claims and narrative of a distinct Yorkshire identity.

The premise established here is that a regional identity is not merely cultural but deeply intertwined with economic realities and historical grievances. This framing is crucial for demonstrating that the assertion of a "Yorkshire identity" is rooted in tangible disparities and lived experiences, rather than abstract sentiment. The report will delve into quantitative data and qualitative observations to illustrate how the economic landscape and public perception converge to define a unique sense of self within this prominent English region.

III. Economic Disparity: The Material Basis of Regional Identity

III.A. Infrastructure Investment: A Tale of Unequal Distribution

The allocation of public spending and infrastructure investment across England reveals

significant regional imbalances, contributing to a sense of economic marginalization in areas like Yorkshire. In 2023–24, London recorded the highest per-person identifiable spending at £14,858, approximately 17% higher than the England-wide average of £12,653. While the North East (£13,631) and North West (£13,337) followed, this overall similarity in per-person spending masks crucial differences in specific spending categories. When public spending is considered as a share of regional Gross Domestic Product (GDP), London exhibits the lowest at 22.1%, whereas the North East stands at 47.7%, more than double London's level. This indicates that London's higher GDP per person significantly offsets its higher public spending, while the North East's economy appears more reliant on public expenditure relative to its output.

A closer examination of targeted investment in growth-enabling sectors further illuminates this disparity. Per-person spending on transport (£1,315 vs. £543), housing and community amenities (£575 vs. £262), and business and economic development (£511 vs. £263) is substantially higher in London compared to the North East. These categories constitute a larger share of public spending in London (16%) than in the North East (8%), suggesting a disproportionate allocation of capital and growth-oriented investment towards the capital.

The transport investment divide, often characterized as a series of "broken promises," provides a stark illustration of this unequal distribution. Over the decade leading up to 2022/23, London received £1,183 per person in transport investment, while the North received a mere £486 per person. Specifically, Yorkshire and Humber received £441 per person. This substantial difference implies that had the North received equivalent per-person spending, it would have gained an additional £140 billion, sufficient to construct seven Elizabeth Lines. This analysis from IPPR North explicitly highlights a "decade of broken promises" and a pervasive "transport investment divide".

The High Speed 2 (HS2) project serves as a potent symbol of perceived Northern neglect. Initially envisioned for completion by 2033, the project has been progressively curtailed, with only the London to Handsacre and Birmingham section remaining. Crucially for Yorkshire, the Phase 2b Eastern Leg (West Midlands to Leeds), vital for enhancing regional connectivity, was cancelled, with safeguarding removed in July 2025. Similarly, safeguarding for most of Phase 2a (West Midlands to Crewe) was removed in January 2024. HS2 trains are now intended to reach Northern cities via existing West Coast Main Line connections north of Birmingham. The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee reported in January 2024 that, following the cancellation of Phase 2, HS2 now offers "very poor value for money to the taxpayer".

The consistent pattern of lower investment in growth-enabling infrastructure in the North, particularly when contrasted with the capital, is not merely a statistical observation but a tangible policy outcome. The dramatic scaling back of HS2, especially the Eastern Leg intended to serve Yorkshire, despite initial commitments, reinforces a narrative that national infrastructure projects disproportionately benefit the South or are curtailed when they are meant to benefit the North. This perceived centralization of investment fosters a strong sense of grievance. When a region consistently experiences lower per-capita investment in areas critical for future economic growth, it cultivates a profound perception of neglect and central government bias. This perception translates into slower economic development, fewer opportunities, and a widening gap in living standards. This directly fuels regional resentment and strengthens the argument for a distinct identity that feels underserved by the national center. It also suggests that the "levelling up" agenda, if it existed, has lacked substance, as indicated by broader discussions on regional inequality. The material reality of underinvestment thus becomes a powerful driver for a distinct regional identity, as residents perceive their collective fate as separate from the national trajectory.

While London's higher per-person spending is partly attributable to higher costs and its elevated

GDP, the fact that the North East's public spending is double London's as a share of regional GDP reveals a fundamental economic imbalance. This indicates that the North requires a larger proportion of its economic output to be public spending, potentially due to lower private sector wealth generation or higher social needs. This situation is then compounded by lower investment spending per capita in transformative, growth-enabling categories. This analysis points to a critical policy distinction: London receives higher capital spending, particularly on transport, housing, and business/economic development , which are typically drivers of future growth and productivity. In contrast, while the North might receive high social protection spending as a percentage of GDP , it receives significantly less per capita in these transformative categories. This suggests a central government policy focus that prioritizes sustaining existing conditions in the North, for example, through benefits, rather than investing in long-term economic transformation. The "transport chasm" is a direct manifestation of this approach. This sustained underinvestment in productive infrastructure can lead to a widening economic gap, which in turn reinforces a sense of separate economic destiny and identity in regions like Yorkshire, distinct from the perceived economic engine of London and the South East. It highlights a structural impediment to regional prosperity that fosters a desire for greater regional control over investment priorities.

Table 1: Per Capita Public Spending and Infrastructure Investment: London vs. Yorkshire & North of England (2012/13-2023/24)

Category	London (Per Person)	North East (Per Person)	North West (Per Person)	Yorkshire & Humber (Per Person)	England Average (Per Person)	UK Average (Per Person)
Identifiable Public Spending (2023-24)	£14,858	£13,631	£13,337	N/A	£12,653	N/A
Transport Spending	£1,315	£543	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Housing & Community Amenities	£575	£262	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Business & Economic Development	£511	£263	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Transport Investment (Decade to 2022-23)	£1,183	£430	£540	£441	£592	£603
HS2 Project Status (Key Changes)	London-Birmingham section remains	Phase 2a cancelled (Jan 2024)	Phase 2b Eastern Leg cancelled (July 2025)	Phase 2b Eastern Leg cancelled (July 2025)	N/A	N/A

III.B. Economic Performance: GVA Trends and Regional Divergence

Analysis of Gross Value Added (GVA) per head and growth trends further substantiates the economic disparities between Yorkshire and other regions, particularly London. In 2022, London recorded the highest GDP per head at £63,407, significantly surpassing the UK average of

£36,844. In stark contrast, the North East registered the lowest GDP per head at £26,747. While specific GVA per head for Yorkshire and the Humber at the ITL1 level for 2022 is not explicitly detailed in the provided information, its geographical position within the broader North of England suggests alignment with these lower figures, placing it considerably below London's economic output.

Examining regional GVA growth trends over time reveals a slower pace of economic expansion in Yorkshire compared to the national average. Over the decade from 2008 to 2018, Leeds experienced a GVA growth of 28%, which was consistent with West Yorkshire's growth but noticeably lower than the overall UK growth of 33%. Yorkshire and the Humber's GVA growth for the same period stood at 26%. This indicates that the region has been expanding economically at a slower rate than the country as a whole.

Productivity measures, such as GVA per filled job, also highlight a persistent gap. In 2017, Leeds' GVA per filled job was estimated at £49,500, marking a 12% increase from 2012. While this figure is higher than the broader Yorkshire & Humber region, it was "significantly less than London," underscoring a persistent productivity gap between major Northern economic hubs and the capital. The sectoral composition of Yorkshire's economy also offers insights into its structure. In 2018, finance and business services accounted for 37% of GVA in Leeds. While a significant sector, this percentage was lower than in other major cities such as Edinburgh, Manchester, and Bristol. Leeds also registered the lowest level for public services GVA compared to these cities. This particular sectoral mix may contribute to its overall GVA performance relative to other regions.

The GVA per head data clearly demonstrates a massive and persistent gap between London and Northern regions. Even within Yorkshire, Leeds, a major economic hub, performs significantly worse than London in GVA per filled job. The growth rates for Yorkshire and the Humber (26% over a decade) are also lower than the UK average (33%). This is not just a snapshot; it represents a consistent trend over at least a decade that indicates a structural productivity gap. Lower GVA per head and slower growth in Yorkshire suggest either lower output per worker, a less productive economic structure, or a lack of high-value industries compared to London. This sustained underperformance, despite regional growth efforts, implies that current economic policies or investment patterns are failing to close the gap. This economic reality forms a strong foundation for a distinct regional identity, as residents experience a different economic landscape and opportunities compared to the national average or the capital. The "imbalanced UK economy" is explicitly mentioned , and this GVA data quantifies that imbalance. The implication is that without fundamental shifts in investment and policy, this gap will persist, further entrenching a sense of separate economic destiny for Yorkshire.

The data on GVA per head and GVA growth consistently shows a significant economic disparity and divergence, with London dominating. This directly contradicts the stated aim of recent government policies like "levelling up" the country. The cancellation of HS2's northern legs , which were intended to improve connectivity and stimulate regional growth, further undermines efforts to address this economic imbalance. The continued economic divergence, despite political rhetoric, suggests that the "levelling up" agenda has either been insufficient, poorly executed, or fundamentally misaligned with the realities of regional economies. The observation that "regional inequality and centralization are holding back growth" is directly supported by the GVA data. This failure to "level up" creates a fertile ground for regional identities to solidify, as people feel their region's economic potential is being constrained by central policies or a lack of targeted investment. This fosters a sense of distinct economic fate and a need for greater regional autonomy, as the national approach is perceived as failing to deliver equitable prosperity.

Table 2: Gross Value Added (GVA) Per Head and Growth: Yorkshire & Humber, London, and UK (1998-2022)

Indicator	Yorkshire & Humber	West Yorkshire	Leeds City Region	Leeds	London	UK
GDP per Head (2022)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	£63,407	£36,844
GVA (£bn)						
2008	£98.5	£43.2	£57.6	£20.5	N/A	£1438
2013	£104.7	£46.6	£62.1	£21.7	N/A	£1591
2018	£123.6	£55.4	£73.6	£26.2	N/A	£1909
GVA Growth (%)						
2008-2018	26%	28%	28%	28%	N/A	33%
2013-2018	18%	19%	19%	21%	N/A	20%
GVA per Filled Job (£'000)	N/A	N/A	N/A	£49.5 (2017)	Significantly higher than Leeds (2017)	£54.3 (2017)

III.C. Social and Regional Inequality: The Human Cost of Centralisation

Economic disparities translate directly into social inequalities, impacting the daily lives of residents in Yorkshire. Wage disparities are a notable concern; in 2024, Yorkshire's average salary of £39.7k was £6.1k lower than the UK average of £45.8k. This gap persists across genders, with both male and female average salaries in Yorkshire significantly lower than their UK counterparts (£43.0k vs. £50.2k for males; £35.2k vs. £39.9k for females). Similar disparities are observed in median salaries. For West Yorkshire specifically, the average weekly wage in 2022 was £547, nearly £83 lower than the English average of £630.20.

Regarding employment and economic inactivity, Yorkshire's unemployment rate in 2024 stood at 3%, notably lower than the UK average of 3.7%. West Yorkshire's unemployment rate (3.6%) was also just below the English average (3.7%). However, this apparent positive masks a higher economic inactivity rate in West Yorkshire (23.9%) compared to the rest of England (21.4%), indicating a larger proportion of the working-age population not participating in the labor force. This suggests that while more people in Yorkshire might be employed, they are often in lower-wage, less secure jobs, or there is a larger proportion of the working-age population not actively seeking work due to a lack of suitable opportunities. This points to a "low wage economy" and a potentially less productive job market, creating a cycle where economic activity does not translate into higher living standards or wealth accumulation. This disparity in earning potential, despite employment rates, contributes to a sense of economic marginalization and reinforces a distinct regional identity based on different economic realities than the wealthier South. It highlights that "employment" alone is an insufficient measure of regional economic health.

Job quality further complicates the picture. In West Yorkshire, 19.2% of workers are in severely insecure work, slightly below the national average (19.8%). However, Black and ethnic minority workers in West Yorkshire are 1.7 times more likely to experience severely insecure work than white workers, a rate higher than the English average (1.3 times), highlighting internal inequalities within the region. Housing affordability offers a contrasting point, with Yorkshire's

median property price to median earnings ratio at 5.8 in 2024, lower than the England and Wales ratio of 7.54. This indicates that properties are relatively more affordable in Yorkshire compared to the broader national average.

Public sector funding cuts and the "Fair Funding Review" have also contributed to regional inequality. Local government finance overall is described as being in a "perilous state," with funding failing to keep pace with population growth, service demand, or rising costs. Core Spending Power per person declined between 2015-16 and 2023-24, leading to significant reductions in discretionary services like street cleaning, while statutory services such as social care face increasing pressure. A total of 42 local authorities have required over £5 billion in exceptional financial support since 2020-21, indicating systemic financial pressures across the country. The proposed "Fair Funding Review" reforms are complex: while Yorkshire & the Humber is projected to see a significant cash-terms increase in funding (+19%) over the next three years (outside London, which is projected to see the smallest increase at +8%), specific areas within Yorkshire face cuts. North Yorkshire, for instance, warns it will be £27 million a year worse off due to the Fair Funding Review, in addition to a previous £14 million loss from the Rural Services Delivery Grant. This is perceived as a "ruthless way to shift monies from rural areas into urban areas," despite North Yorkshire being a "low wage economy". The introduction of 100% council tax equalization is also a concern, as it transfers funding from areas with higher council tax bases (like North Yorkshire) to those with lower ones. This highlights a crucial nuance: aggregate regional figures can mask significant intra-regional disparities and the impact of specific funding mechanisms. While the region of Yorkshire & Humber might see an overall increase, specific areas within it, particularly rural ones like North Yorkshire, can experience substantial cuts due to changes like council tax equalization. This suggests that central government funding models, even when attempting "fairness" or "levelling up," may not adequately account for the diverse needs and economic structures within large regions. This internal contradiction further complicates the relationship between central policy and regional welfare, potentially fueling local-level grievances and strengthening sub-regional identities, such as a North Yorkshire identity distinct from a broader Yorkshire identity. It also points to a perceived "war on rural England" , demonstrating how policy impacts are felt differently at different scales, contributing to a fragmented sense of identity within the broader region.

Table 3: Key Socio-Economic Indicators: Yorkshire vs. UK/England Average (2022-2024)

Indicator	Yorkshire / West Yorkshire	UK / England Average
Average Salary (2024)	£39.7k	£45.8k
Female Average Salary (2024)	£35.2k	£39.9k
Male Average Salary (2024)	£43.0k	£50.2k
Median Salary (2024)	£34.4k	£37.4k
Average Weekly Wage (West Yorkshire, 2022)	£547	£630.20 (England)
Unemployment Rate (2024)	3%	3.7%
West Yorkshire Unemployment Rate (2022)	3.6%	3.7% (England)
Economic Inactivity (West Yorkshire, 2022)	23.9%	21.4% (England)
House Price to Earnings Ratio (2024)	5.8	7.54 (England & Wales)
Public Sector Funding Impact (Fair Funding Review)	+19% increase (Yorkshire & Humber, cash-terms over 3	London: +8% increase

Indicator	Yorkshire / West Yorkshire	UK / England Average
	years)	
North Yorkshire Specific Impact	-£27m annual loss	N/A

IV. Cultural Identity and Public Opinion: The Heart of "Yorkshireness"

IV.A. Regional vs. National Identity: The Strength of Local Bonds

Public sentiment regarding identity in Yorkshire demonstrates a strong connection to the region, often on par with or even surpassing national identification. Survey data indicates that approximately a third of residents in Yorkshire and the Humber (34%) describe their bond with their region as "very strong." This level of attachment is comparable to the North West (35%) but is less pronounced than in the North East (48%), where regional attachment is particularly strong. It is worth noting that Londoners also exhibit a strong attachment to the capital (38%), indicating that robust regional identities are not exclusive to the North.

When comparing regional versus national affinity, attachment to the region (34%) in Yorkshire and the Humber is roughly equally strong as attachment to England (35%). This contrasts with the North East, where regional attachment (48%) is significantly stronger than to England (32%). A nuanced aspect of identity within Yorkshire is the attachment to one's specific county. Interestingly, people in Yorkshire and the Humber report being more attached to their specific county (37%) than to the broader Yorkshire region (34%). This highlights the importance of sub-regional identities within the county itself.

A significant survey conducted by The Yorkshire Society, involving over 4,500 respondents, found that 53.6% of individuals consider themselves "more Yorkshire than English." This proportion expands to a vast majority (84.3%) when including those who feel "as equally Yorkshire as English". This suggests a strong primary or equivalent identification with Yorkshire over England. This is not merely regional pride; it represents a profound political inclination towards greater autonomy and self-governance, indicating a desire to control their own destiny rather than relying on central government. This deep-seated regional loyalty, coupled with a clear aspiration for self-determination, forms a powerful argument for a distinct Yorkshire identity that transcends mere cultural affinity. It suggests that for many, "Yorkshireness" is not just a cultural descriptor but a political stance, advocating for a different model of governance that prioritizes regional needs and aspirations.

This sentiment translates into clear political aspirations for self-governance. Almost three-quarters (73.4%) of respondents in The Yorkshire Society survey agreed that Yorkshire should have more decision-making powers, mirroring the autonomy granted to Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and London. Furthermore, there was overwhelming support (56.3% 'Yes' vs. 23% 'No') for establishing a Yorkshire parliament in a hypothetical referendum. The Ipsos survey indicates that while the public generally prioritizes improving the UK economy as a whole (55%), Members of Parliament (MPs) are more divided, with a preference for regional development (49%). This contrasts sharply with the strong public demand in Yorkshire for more decision-making powers. This strong local demand for autonomy, particularly in a context of economic disparity, suggests a direct connection. The public's desire for regional development and self-governance, particularly in Yorkshire, can be seen as a direct response to the perceived failures of centralized governance to address regional economic disparities and lack of investment. When people feel their region is neglected or misunderstood by distant

policymakers, their regional identity strengthens as a mechanism for collective agency and self-advocacy. The call for a "Yorkshire parliament" is not just cultural but a political aspiration born from a sense of disempowerment and a belief that local solutions are better suited to local problems. This suggests a causal link where economic and policy neglect fuels a stronger, more politically active regional identity, seeking to assert its distinctiveness and control its own future. The "levelling up" agenda's perceived lack of substance likely exacerbates this sentiment. Academic perspectives reinforce these findings, suggesting that Yorkshire typifies 'northern-ness' and emphasizes a unique type of 'Englishness'. People are immensely proud of their county and culture, and it has been suggested they identify more strongly with their county than their country. This regional pride is a common feature across many distinct areas within the UK.

Table 4: Strength of Regional vs. National Identity in North England & Yorkshire (2021-2025)

Region / Identity	Very Strong Regional Attachment (%)	Very Strong English Attachment (%)	More Yorkshire than English (%)	Equally Yorkshire as English (%)	Support for More Decision-Making Powers for Yorkshire (%)	Support for Yorkshire Parliament (Yes %)
North East	48	32	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
North West	35	32	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Yorkshire & the Humber	34	35	53.6	84.3 (combined with "more Yorkshire")	73.4	56.3
London	38	29	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

IV.B. Perception of Symbols: St. George's Cross vs. Yorkshire Flag

The public perception of national and regional symbols plays a crucial role in shaping identity. The St. George's Cross, the flag of England, elicits a mixed response. While most Britons (57%) and English adults (61%) hold a favorable opinion of those displaying the flag, a significant minority—a quarter (27% of Britons, 24% of English adults)—express an unfavorable opinion. These figures have remained consistent since 2018.

Attitudes towards the England flag are highly political and vary by age. Among 2019 Labour voters in Britain (and England), 44% have a negative view of those who fly the England flag, a figure significantly higher than the 10% among 2019 Conservative voters. Labour voters are notably twice as likely to have an unfavorable view of the England flag compared to the Scottish or Welsh flags. Alarmingly, one in eight Labour voters even believe the St. George's Cross is "racist, divisive and should not be displayed". Unfavorable views are more prevalent among younger age groups: 37% for 18-24 year olds (33% in England), decreasing with age to 17% for those 65 and older (14% in England). Conversely, favorable views increase with age. The data clearly shows the St. George's Cross is a polarizing symbol. While a majority hold favorable views, a significant minority, particularly Labour voters and younger demographics, view it unfavorably. This is explicitly linked to its "hijack" by far-right groups, who used it as a "symbol of hatred against minorities". A national symbol that evokes such strong negative reactions among significant segments of the population, especially younger generations and those with different political leanings, cannot effectively serve as a truly unifying emblem for a diverse nation. Its

historical co-option by far-right extremism has tainted its perception, making it a symbol of exclusion and contention for some rather than shared national identity. This inherent divisiveness undermines its ability to represent a cohesive "English" identity and creates a vacuum that regional symbols, like the Yorkshire flag, can fill as a less contentious and more genuinely unifying emblem for local pride. The ongoing debate surrounding its use and meaning highlights a deeper fracture within the concept of English national identity itself.

Regional differences in perception are also evident. Scots tend to view those flying the England flag negatively (50% unfavorable), while opinions in Wales are more divided (41% unfavorable vs. 42% favorable). In contrast, English people generally hold a favorable view of Scottish or Welsh flags (60%). The St. George's Cross has indeed been "hijacked by far right groups like the EDL and used as a symbol of hatred against minorities." This co-option led to a period where flying the flag was "assumed to be a supporter of these opinions." The English Defence League (EDL) is characterized by anti-Islamism and English nationalism, with a support base primarily of young, working-class white British men. While some suggest its perception is "getting better" , the survey data indicates persistent negative associations.

In stark contrast, the public perception of the Yorkshire flag is overwhelmingly positive. A clear majority (56.8%) of respondents in The Yorkshire Society survey believe that the White Rose Yorkshire flag best symbolizes Yorkshire, significantly more than other regional symbols like Yorkshire Pudding (18.7%). While no direct survey data explicitly states "positive, local pride" for the Yorkshire flag, the strong preference for it as the region's primary symbol and the general "immense pride" Yorkshire people have in their county and culture strongly imply a positive and unifying association with local pride. In contrast to the divisive nature of the St. George's Cross, the White Rose Yorkshire flag is overwhelmingly chosen as the best symbol of Yorkshire by a clear majority. This strong preference, coupled with the general "immense pride" Yorkshire people have in their county and culture, suggests a clear, positive, and largely uncontested association with local pride. There is no evidence in the provided information of the Yorkshire flag being co-opted by extremist groups or generating significant negative sentiment. The Yorkshire flag offers a clear and compelling alternative to the problematic St. George's Cross. It is a symbol that appears to unite across different demographics within the region, fostering a sense of shared heritage and identity without the baggage of political or extremist associations that plague the national flag. This makes it a powerful emblem for asserting a distinct Yorkshire identity, one that is rooted in positive local sentiment and a shared sense of place rather than nationalistic contention. The contrast highlights the potential for regional symbols to provide a more inclusive, authentic, and less fraught representation of identity for their inhabitants, especially when the national symbol is perceived as divisive.

Table 5: Public Perception of National and Regional Symbols (2024)

Flag / Group	Favorable (%)	Unfavorable (%)
St. George's Cross (England Flag)		
All Britons	57	27
English Adults	61	24
2019 Conservative Voters (English)	84	9
2019 Labour Voters (English)	38	44
18-24 Year Olds (English)	44	33
25-49 Year Olds (English)	52	28
50-64 Year Olds (English)	68	22

Flag / Group	Favorable (%)	Unfavorable (%)
65+ Year Olds (English)	76	14
Labour voters believing it's 'racist/divisive'	N/A	1 in 8
White Rose Yorkshire Flag		
Best Symbol for Yorkshire	56.8	N/A

V. Historical and Cultural Context of Symbols: Roots of Identity

V.A. The St. George's Cross: From Crusades to Contemporary Controversies

The St. George's Cross, a red cross on a white background, has a long and complex history, evolving significantly over centuries. Its origins can be traced back to the 10th century, where it served as the ensign of the Republic of Genoa and was later adopted by the Swabian League. The design itself is a simplification of the cross of Saint Ambrose, adopted by the Commune of Milan in 1045.

The symbol gained prominence during the medieval period, particularly through its association with the Crusades and, subsequently, with England. Saint George became widely venerated as a warrior saint during the Third Crusade, with legends attributing miraculous assistance to him. The red cross was specifically linked to the Knights Templar from the Second Crusade (1145). In 1188, red and white crosses were chosen to identify French and English troops, respectively, during the "Kings' Crusade." The plain red-on-white cross became a recognizable crusader symbol around 1190. The red cross was introduced to England by the late 13th century, initially worn by English soldiers as an identification from the 1270s. Saint George officially became the "patron saint of England" in 1348 with the Order of the Garter, a status solidified in 1552 when other saint's banners were abolished. A popular, though unsubstantiated, tradition suggests that Richard the Lionheart adopted the flag from Genoa in 1190.

The St. George's Cross was later integrated into the Union Flag in 1606, combined with St. Andrew's Cross following the union of England and Scotland. It remained the flag of England for other purposes until the Acts of Union in 1707, when the Union Flag became official for all purposes in the new Kingdom of Great Britain. In modern times, the flag has experienced a resurgence in popularity since the late 20th century, partly fueled by football-inspired nationalism and in response to devolution movements in Scotland and Wales.

However, this resurgence has been accompanied by a controversial adoption by far-right groups, which has significantly impacted its public perception. The St. George's Cross has been "hijacked by far right groups like the EDL and used as a symbol of hatred against minorities." This co-option led to a period where flying the flag was "assumed to be a supporter of these opinions." The English Defence League (EDL), for instance, is characterized by anti-Islamism and English nationalism, with a support base primarily of young, working-class white British men. While some suggest its perception is "getting better" and that "normal people" are using it "as a normal flag again" , its association with such groups has profoundly affected its public perception.

The St. George's Cross originated as a practical naval ensign and a crusader symbol, later adopted as England's national flag, representing a historical lineage. However, its meaning has not remained static. Its "hijacking" by far-right groups represents a significant shift, imbuing it

with new, negative connotations that were not part of its original historical usage. This demonstrates how national symbols are not fixed entities but acquire new meanings over time, often reflecting contemporary social and political tensions. The co-option by far-right groups has fundamentally altered its public perception, particularly among certain demographics, as discussed in Section IV.B. This historical trajectory, from a symbol of military protection and nascent national identity to one perceived as divisive and hateful by a significant portion of the population, underscores the fragility of national unity when symbols are co-opted for exclusionary purposes. For Yorkshire, this historical baggage makes the St. George's Cross less appealing as a universally unifying emblem, further strengthening the case for a distinct regional identity that can rally around its own, less controversial symbols. It highlights the challenge of maintaining a cohesive national identity when its primary symbol is contested.

Despite the negative associations and the explicit "hijacking" by far-right groups, some sources suggest the St. George's Cross is "getting better" and "normal people" are using it "as a normal flag again". However, YouGov data from 2024 still shows significant unfavorable views, especially among Labour voters and younger people. This creates a tension between the desire to reclaim the symbol and its persistent negative perception. This presents a profound challenge for national identity: can a symbol, once tainted by association with extremism, truly be "reclaimed" by the mainstream and shed its negative connotations? The data suggests that while efforts might be underway, the negative perception persists significantly within key demographics, indicating a deep-seated and perhaps generational divide in its interpretation. This ongoing struggle for the St. George's Cross to be a universally accepted symbol of English identity further opens the door for regional identities to flourish, as they offer an alternative, untarnished focal point for collective pride and belonging. This raises the critical question of whether a national identity can effectively thrive when its primary symbol is deeply divisive and fails to resonate positively with all its constituent parts.

V.B. "God's Own County": Unveiling the Spirit of Yorkshire

In contrast to the complex and often contentious history of the St. George's Cross, the phrase "God's Own County" offers a glimpse into an organic and deeply cherished aspect of Yorkshire identity. This colloquial expression, sometimes rendered as "God's Own Country," is widely used by inhabitants of Yorkshire to refer to their countryside, reflecting a profound affection for the region.

The connotations of this phrase are largely secular, humorous, or celebratory, rather than genuinely religious. It encapsulates a profound sense of pride and belonging among Yorkshire residents, often employed to boast about the county's unique qualities. This contrasts with identities that are historically adopted or later burdened by external political or social manipulation. "God's Own County" represents an authentic, positive, and unifying aspect of Yorkshire identity, reflecting a genuine, unadulterated connection to the land and its heritage. This organic nature makes it a powerful and resilient component of "Yorkshireness," providing a stable foundation for a distinct regional identity that is less susceptible to external political or social manipulation, unlike the St. George's Cross. It speaks to a self-defined identity rather than one defined by national narratives.

The reasons for this deep-seated Yorkshire pride are numerous and multifaceted. Yorkshire holds the distinction of being the largest county in Britain, boasting immense diversity in its scenery, from the rugged Pennines and wild moorland to limestone scars, sprawling dales, and picturesque coastal areas. It is home to two of Britain's finest National Parks, the North York Moors and the Yorkshire Dales, and possesses more castles, ruined abbeys, and stately homes

than any other county. Its rich history, encompassing Roman, Anglo-Saxon, and Viking influences (which led to the division into "Ridings"), and its past as a global center of industry—including wool, steel, and coal—all contribute to its unique character. The Yorkshire Society survey further confirms that "people" (44.9%) and "landscape" (34.1%) are considered the main elements contributing to Yorkshire's unique identity, with strong appreciation for its variety and diversity. Academically, Yorkshire is seen to typify 'northern-ness' and emphasizes a unique type of 'Englishness'.

Despite the significant industrial decline since the 1970s that profoundly impacted Yorkshire's traditional economic base, the pride in Yorkshire's landscape, people, and history remains remarkably strong, as evidenced by the enduring phrase "God's Own County" and the survey results on identity. This suggests that a deep-seated, place-based identity, rooted in shared history, culture, and geography, can endure and even strengthen in the face of profound economic challenges and shifts. When traditional industries decline and economic uncertainty looms, cultural and geographical markers become even more important in defining a community's sense of self and providing a source of stability and pride. The phrase "God's Own County" encapsulates this enduring affection, acting as a shorthand for the unique qualities that residents cherish, transcending economic hardship. This resilience of identity, rooted in both tangible (landscape, history) and intangible (spirit, humour) aspects of the region, provides a powerful counter-narrative to purely economic definitions of regional success and underscores the enduring nature of "Yorkshireness" as a distinct and deeply felt identity.

VI. Conclusion: Towards a Defined Yorkshire Identity

The evidence presented in this report substantiates a compelling case for a distinct and robust Yorkshire identity, one that is deeply rooted in both tangible socio-economic realities and intangible cultural pride. The analysis of economic disparities reveals an undeniable material basis for a sense of grievance and a perceived separate economic destiny for Yorkshire. Consistent patterns of lower per-capita infrastructure investment, particularly in growth-enabling sectors like transport, coupled with slower GVA growth and a persistent productivity gap compared to London and the national average, underscore a structural disadvantage. The dramatic scaling back of major projects like HS2's northern legs serves as a potent symbol of central government policies that are perceived as failing to adequately support regional development. This economic divergence, despite political rhetoric around "levelling up," suggests that current approaches are insufficient to bridge the gap, fostering a desire for greater regional control over investment priorities.

Public opinion surveys further reinforce the strength of this regional identity. A significant proportion of residents identify more strongly with "Yorkshireness" than "Englishness," or at least equally so. This strong self-identification is not merely a cultural preference but translates into a clear and widespread political aspiration for greater regional autonomy, including overwhelming support for a hypothetical Yorkshire parliament. This indicates a profound desire for self-determination, driven by a belief that local solutions are better suited to address regional challenges and that centralized governance has historically underserved the area.

Symbolically, the White Rose Yorkshire flag stands as a unifying emblem of local pride, free from the divisive connotations that have come to plague the St. George's Cross. The national flag, tainted by its association with far-right groups and viewed unfavorably by significant segments of the population, particularly younger generations and those with different political leanings, struggles to serve as a cohesive national symbol. In contrast, the Yorkshire flag offers

an uncontested focal point for collective identity, reflecting an authentic and positive connection to the region.

Finally, the enduring colloquial phrase "God's Own County" encapsulates a deep, resilient, and organic connection to Yorkshire's unique heritage, diverse landscape, and distinctive character. This organic identity, born from shared experiences and a profound sense of place, demonstrates remarkable resilience even in the face of significant economic shifts and industrial decline. It provides a stable foundation for "Yorkshireness" that transcends purely economic definitions of regional success.

In synthesizing these findings, it becomes clear that the "case for a Yorkshire identity" is far more than cultural nostalgia or a quaint regional quirk. It is a profound and increasingly assertive response to concrete economic realities, a desire for greater self-determination, and a rejection of national symbols that fail to represent the diverse experiences and values within England. This identity is distinct, deeply rooted, and increasingly asserting itself in the national discourse as a legitimate and powerful force. Beyond the St. George's Cross lies a vibrant, distinct Yorkshire identity, forged by unique economic challenges, deep cultural pride, and a growing aspiration for greater regional agency and self-governance. This identity demands recognition and a re-evaluation of centralized governance models that have historically underserved the region.

Works cited

1. Exploring regional differences in public spending across England ..., https://ifs.org.uk/articles/exploring-regional-differences-public-spending-across-england 2. If the North had seen the same transport investment as London ..., https://www.ippr.org/media-office/ippr-north-and-ippr-reveal-if-the-north-had-seen-the-same-transport-investment-as-london-under-the-previous-government-it-would-have-received-140bn-more 3. High Speed 2 - Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_Speed_2 4. Project rescoping: Phase Two cancellation - HS2, https://www.hs2.org.uk/in-your-area/assistance-for-property-owners/project-rescoping-phase-two-cancellation/ 5. The Identities of Northern England - University of Southampton, https://www.southampton.ac.uk/ceip/lectures-and-talks/transcripts/identitiesofnorthernengland.page 6. Regional economic activity by gross domestic product, UK - Office ..., https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/bulletins/regionaleconomicactivitybygrossdomesticproductuk/1998to2022 7. Gross Value Added and Productivity | Leeds Observatory, https://observatory.leeds.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/1-GVA-and-productivity.pdf 8. Wales lags behind English regions on new economic competitiveness index - Business Live, https://www.business-live.co.uk/economic-development/wales-lags-behind-english-regions-32203526 9. Yorkshire Average salary and unemployment rates in graphs and ..., https://www.plumplot.co.uk/Yorkshire-salary-and-unemployment.html 10. West Yorkshire | Lancaster University, https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/media/lancaster-university/content-assets/documents/lums/work-foundation/reports/WF_Factsheet_WestYorkshire.pdf 11. North Yorkshire Faces Significant Funding Cuts Amid Government Review, Leaders Warn, https://www.thisisthecoast.co.uk/news/local-news/north-yorkshire-faces-significant-funding-cuts-amid-government-review-leaders-warn/ 12. Local Government Financial Sustainability - Parliament UK, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmselect/cmpubacc/647/report.html 13. Fair

Funding Review 2.0: the impacts on council funding across England, https://ifs.org.uk/publications/fair-funding-review-20-impacts-council-funding-across-england 14. How strong are regional identities in Britain? | YouGov, https://yougov.co.uk/society/articles/52269-how-strong-are-regional-identities-in-britain 15. Residents consider themselves more Yorkshire than English, new ..., https://www.thescarboroughnews.co.uk/news/people/residents-consider-themselves-more-yorkshire-than-english-new-survey-reveals-3331020 16. New Ipsos survey shows divides between MPs and the public on priorities for economic growth, https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/new-ipsos-survey-shows-divides-between-mps-and-public-priorities-economic-growth 17. Northern/Yorkshire Identity - Leeds Beckett Repository, https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/2315/1/Fletcher%20-%20Aye%20but%20it%20were%20wasted%20on%20thee3%28Harvard%295.doc 18. Quarter of adults in England have negative view of those flying St ..., https://yougov.co.uk/society/articles/49223-quarter-of-adults-in-england-have-negative-view-of-those-flying-st-georges-cross 19. 1 in 8 Labour voters say St George's Cross is 'racist' | LBC callers debate - YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LD93QAM2wi4 20. What is the reason behind the British adopting St. George's flag, even though he is not English or British? - Quora, https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-reason-behind-the-British-adopting-St-Georges-flag-even-though-he-is-not-English-or-British 21. English Defence League - Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Defence_League 22. Saint George's Cross - Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_George%27s_Cross 23. Yorkshire – God's Own County - STOCKDALE/STOCKDILL One-Name Study, https://roystockdill.wordpress.com/yorkshire-gods-own-county/ 24. Yorkshire - Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yorkshire