



Flying the flag

Suddenly, Union Jacks and the flag of St George are everywhere.

Joan Garrod asks, why?

In August and September 2025, in English cities, towns and villages, on houses, roundabouts and lamp posts, thousands of flags were hoisted. These were the union flag, commonly known as the Union Jack, and the flag of St George, a red cross on a white background.

This situation is unusual, in that in England, such flags are normally in evidence only on special occasions, such as royal celebrations (jubilees, coronations and weddings), major sporting

events and military commemorations such as Remembrance Sunday, VE and VJ Day. Some buildings display it, but only on St George's Day, 23 April.

Why are these flags flying now?

Some flags were in evidence during the period of the Lionesses competing in the football Euros in June 2025, but the current outbreak started in August 2025, in a suburb of Birmingham in the

West Midlands. This followed the reporting of a story of a 12-year-old schoolgirl who was allegedly prevented from giving a speech on 'What it means to be British' at a cultural event at her school, while wearing a dress based on the union flag. A group of local men identifying themselves as 'proud Englishmen' started erecting flags in the area, and this was picked up by social media and rapidly spread to other parts of the country.

Local councils reacted differently, with some accepting the flags, and others attempting to remove them, especially from lamp posts, on the grounds of safety for motorists and pedestrians. The policy of removal in turn led to some people expressing outrage, and there was a further increase in the number of flags. A campaign was launched under the name of 'Raise the Colours' to promote the flying of flags and painting the cross of St George on buildings and roundabouts – legally designated as acts of vandalism.

When interviewed, those involved say that their actions are an act of patriotism, showing pride in British or English heritage, and claim that the practice has nothing to do with racism or anti-immigration sentiments. However, there is evidence that some members of far-right groups are involved, and the practice coincides with various protests outside hotels housing asylum seekers and the growing disquiet about the number of people crossing the English Channel in small boats. A rally in London organised by the far-right activist Tommy Robinson under the name of 'Unite the Kingdom' attracted some 150,000 people, many of them waving union or St George's flags.

Patriotism or prejudice?

These highly visible displays of nationalism have led to growing concern among anti-racist groups such as Stop the Hate and Stand Up to Racism, but also among migrant and ethnic minority communities. Flags are powerful symbols of culture and identity, a way of displaying belonging and the ideas in which we believe. It is easy to see why



To what extent do you consider a flag (any flag) a symbol of your identity?

those from different cultures and ethnic groups might feel threatened and intimidated by what is going on, and see themselves as being identified as 'the other'. This is all happening at a time when the Reform Party, with its message of nationalism and anti-immigration, is consistently performing well in the polls, and social media once more is showing its power in spreading a particular message.

Questions and activities

As a class or in small groups, discuss the following:

- Why might some native British people feel 'left behind' and under-valued in today's society?
- Why might some groups feel intimidated and threatened by the current displays of nationalism?
- To what extent do you consider that a flag (any flag) is a symbol of your identity?

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