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**A REPORT BY BRITISH
FUTURE FOR THE SPIRIT
OF 2012 EVENTS INQUIRY**

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REPORT

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SEIZING THE MOMENT:

**WHY EVENTS MATTER FOR
SOCIAL CONNECTION AND
SHARED IDENTITY**



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About British Future:

British Future is an independent, non-partisan think tank engaging people's hopes and fears about integration and migration, identity and race, so that we share a confident and welcoming Britain, inclusive and fair to all.

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CONTENTS

Executive summary	3
Section 1: Why events matter	10
Section 2: Beyond reach: Realising the untapped potential of events	13
Section 3: From 'them and us' to the 'new us': How major events can help to take diversity out of the box	24
Section 4: Shaping the 'new us': understanding the power and limits of sport	28
Section 5: Windrush 75: from rising recognition to shared national story	37
Section 6: What can go wrong? How major events can fail to realise their potential	40
Section 7: Recommendations: maximizing the bridging power of events	46
Section 8: From theory to practice: Five opportunities	52
Endnotes	57
About this report and the authors	58

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why events matter

Moments like the Queen's Platinum Jubilee offer a rare and important point of commonality between individuals. New Focaldata research for this report finds that 43% of UK adults report that they attended an event to mark the Jubilee. That scale of participation – some 23 million people – gives major events the potential to reach people across UK society.

Events bring people together, helping to promote integration through social contact, most importantly 'bridging contact' between people from different backgrounds, which can help break down stereotypes and prejudice. Events also offer an opportunity to reshape public narratives, helping to project an inclusive sense of national identity and tell a story of an inclusive 'new us'.

In challenging economic times, events will have to work harder to demonstrate that they have public value beyond that of entertainment. This report urges that greater efforts are invested in strategic planning of events to maximise their social impact. This should be backed up with evaluation of events' social value in bridging divides, with research insights shared across the planning cycles of major events across different disciplines including sporting, cultural, royal and commemorative events.

Beyond reach: Realising the untapped potential of events

Organisers need to understand the audiences that their events can reach in order to maximise their power to bridge divides. Encouragingly, only a very small segment of the population feels that there are no events for 'people like me' – showing the breadth of reach that events can have.

Those planning events should consider and address the barriers that can limit their bridging potential – from participation costs to location. Our research found strong public support for prioritising events that appealed to people of all ages, to help bring families together.

There is a strong case for prioritising the opportunities to promote social connection through events, to fully realise their potential as moments that bring communities together across divides. Practical steps to help do this include:

- Allowing sufficient development time to map audiences and address barriers to participation.
- Building key partnerships and community engagement.
- Trialling different approaches.
- Measuring and evaluating participation.
- An ongoing commitment to reflection and learning.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From 'them and us' to the 'new us': How major events can help to take diversity out of the box

To engage those who have less contact with people from different backgrounds to their own, events will need to be better at reaching across majority and minority groups and geographic and generational divides. They will also need to avoid segmenting ethnic and faith diversity into parallel stories and activity, but rather focus on including diversity as part of a broader, 'all of us' narrative.

National traditions have particular bridging value. Fostering an inclusive national identity in practice as well as in theory works best when we engage with the national moments that bring us together. Images of minority participation in national events are powerful symbols of inclusion, countering stereotypes and casual prejudices.

Cultural activity, however, has tended to pursue a 'deficit model' approach to diversity, noting a lack of visible ethnic diversity and addressing it by trying to tell more stories about 'diverse communities'. This approach still effectively treats ethnic minorities as separate and different, albeit as something positive. An approach that encompassed diversity across generations, geographies, social class and ethnicity could better tell a more inclusive story of a 'new us'.

Shaping the 'new us': understanding the power and limits of sport

Major sporting events have particular power in shaping identity and belonging. They have mass public reach and can dominate public and media debate while they are taking place. They offer an articulation of national identity with which the public can easily engage, and can thus embody and communicate a story of a shared and inclusive identity.

The Olympics and Team GB undoubtedly conveyed an aspirational sense of inclusion and belonging in 2012 with enormously broad public appeal. Yet beyond athletics, boxing and some emerging sports, most Olympic sports continue to struggle with inclusion and ethnic diversity. Some in the sporting world are pressing for greater efforts to broaden participation.

There are other challenges for sport to achieve its potential to help shape a shared identity and bridge divides. The recent successes of England's multi-ethnic football teams have opened conversations about Englishness and helped to shape a more inclusive English identity. Yet these efforts were set back by the appalling racial abuse faced by black England footballers after the Euro 2020 final. English cricket has made great strides on inclusion in gender and disability, but has struggled particularly to realise its potential to bridge ethnic divides. Cricket's racism crisis of 2021 has driven a renewed commitment to realising cricket's potential.

We cannot rely on sport alone, but we can do more to maximise its contribution to inclusive identity and social connection. An intentional, long-term strategy is needed to link up everyday work on inclusion and social connection with those showcase sporting moments of most reach, on both the national and international stage, to help underpin sustained movements for change.

Windrush 75: from rising recognition to shared national story

Britain has an opportunity in 2023, as it marks the 75th anniversary of the arrival of the Windrush in 1948, carrying new migrants from the Caribbean, to communicate an inclusive history of modern Britain and the part that migration has played in how we became the society we share today.

A broad civic and cross-partisan coalition is now urging government and all institutions to mark Windrush 75 as a major national moment. While the anniversary offers an opportunity to highlight and address ongoing injustices, there is a preference not to see the story of four generations of contribution and change in British society told only through the narrower lens of the Windrush scandal.

Windrush 75 is an opportunity to bridge polarised debates about how we commemorate our history – moving beyond debates about which statues to take down to examine how we could mark our shared history together. Yet with research for this report finding the public divided over whether it would be a unifying or divisive moment, understanding the attitudes of different sections of the public will be an important foundation.

What can go wrong? How major events can fail to realise their potential

Events do not always succeed in bridging divides and there are useful lessons from reflecting on those that have failed to capitalise on the opportunities to do so.

While Danny Boyle's Olympic opening ceremony told a story about modern Britain that was rooted in our shared history, the Millennium Dome, in its unremitting focus on the future, lacked such a fundamental underpinning.

In the current economic circumstances there is likely to be increased public scepticism about whether major events deliver value for the public money invested. Research for this report finds that 50% of the public agrees that 'big events like the Jubilee and the Commonwealth Games are a distraction from the real issues facing the country.' Organisers will need to ensure that evaluations are able to demonstrate the value that events can bring, not only for infrastructure and local/national economies but also for society.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**Recommendations****1****Make connections across events and apply bridging lessons to key opportunities**

Build new frameworks for evaluation that are more consistent across relevant major events. Institutionalise reflective learning, to link local and national efforts more strongly. DCMS should explore how best to encourage and support a new cross-sectoral community of practice to sustain links, networks and evidence, especially linking up place-based expertise with major national occasions.

2**Help major events contribute to 'levelling up' participation and pride in place**

Make increased participation in the quarter of wards with least social capital a sustained goal, that all major events are encouraged to adopt and to measure.

3**Sustaining the power of sport – linking the national and the local**

Sport has some of the greatest untapped potential to contribute to bridging and social connection at scale. This will require a long-term strategy to link up grassroots efforts with showcase moments on the national and international stage, and to use key staging posts, such as Euro 2028 and the Olympics, as focal points for change.

4**Integrating diversity: How to move away from a segmented approach to ethnic minority 'outreach' and inclusion**

Institutions need to develop more confidence in how they talk and act on issues of race and ethnic diversity. The public narratives of events need to project a 'this is for everyone' invitation and depict inclusive participation across all dimensions of difference. Inclusion should be integrated into broader strategies to bridge generational, social class and geographic divides, with intergenerational contact an explicit objective for bridging divides through events.

5**Make the most of opportunities presented by hosting events and major anniversaries – and plan long-term to maximise impact**

There is a clear pattern that the hosting of major events has particular opportunities for impact; and that major anniversaries offer significant opportunities to ratify and catalyse progress. Planning cycles should be extended in order to make the most of the bridging opportunities presented by such major events.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From theory to practice: Five opportunities



Photo by Alina Vozna / CC BY-SA 4.0

1. THE WELCOMERS' EUROVISION, 2023

A jointly-hosted UK-Ukraine Eurovision Song Contest in 2023 offers an opportunity to bring together Ukrainians in Britain and their British hosts in the Homes for Ukraine scheme, to recognise and celebrate this partnership between the welcomers and the welcomed.



Photo by the wub / CC BY-SA 4.0

2. WINDRUSH 75 – AN OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE DIVERSITY OUT OF THE BOX

A pluralist celebration of the 75th anniversary of the arrival of the Windrush, as a major national event for Britain, would reflect the importance of Windrush to the history of Black Caribbean citizens and the wider black community in Britain. But it should also be marked as an essential chapter in our shared national history. This could help to counter a fear of ever-increasing polarisation around the history of race and Empire, and increase confidence that we can deepen constructive conversations about our past, present and future.

3. EURO 2028 – A SHOWCASE FOR SUSTAINED EFFORTS IN FOOTBALL

There is strong prospect that the UK and Ireland's five-way hosting bid for the men's Euro 2028 football tournament will be successful. This could become one of the most important showcases in a generation for the power and potential of sport to help bridge divides and promote social contact between people from different backgrounds.



Photo by Peter Glaiser / Unsplash



Photo by David Clode / Unsplash

4. THE SECOND WORLD WAR CENTENARIES OF 2039-45 – CAPTURING LIVING HISTORY TODAY

The centenary of the Second World War will surely be marked in a major way following the success of the First World War centenary activities. Work should begin now to capture the testimony of veterans and others who lived through the war, while it is still possible. This is an important opportunity for intergenerational contact. The Second World War centenary also presents an opportunity for public engagement in the shared history of multi-ethnic contribution to the forces who served in the conflict, many of whose descendants are living in the UK today.

5. THE NEXT CORONATION

The two most momentous public events of the decade to come will be shaped by the monarchy – once in mourning and later in how a future coronation is celebrated.

Civil society and other actors should begin to quietly plan for the Coronation to make it a moment of contact between people from different backgrounds across the UK, helping to foster a shared and inclusive sense of identity.

The Coronation also offers an opportunity to examine how our multi-ethnic, multi-faith society has changed over 70 years of the Queen's reign, drawing on existing efforts to use our common history to connect people from different backgrounds and casting forward to the future that we share.



Photo by KGBA Ltd / Alamy

SECTION 1

WHY EVENTS MATTER

Events matter because they are something that we share, at a time when our lives are increasingly atomised. Forty years ago, someone heading to their workplace on Monday morning would likely have spent the weekend watching the same TV shows (on the UK's three channels) as their colleagues, shopping on the same high street and perhaps socialising in the same pubs, community centres and sports venues. Today, streaming services, online shopping and the hollowing-out of community infrastructure make for a very different picture; not to mention that half of their colleagues may be working from home.

So moments like the Queen's Platinum Jubilee offer a rare and important point of commonality between individuals. New Focaldata research for this report finds that 43% of UK adults report that they attended an event to mark the Jubilee. That scale of participation – some 23 million people – gives major events the potential to reach people across UK society.

If such events are genuinely inclusive, they further offer the chance for social contact between people from different backgrounds, providing common ground between young and old and across divides by politics, ethnicity and faith. This is important for integration and community cohesion, with a long history of research demonstrating that social contact helps to bridge divides between in-groups and out-groups, by dispelling mistrust and increasing empathy.¹

Not all social contact is the same, however: 'bonding' connections, with people who we see as similar to ourselves, can help strengthen a sense of identity but also run the risk of furthering 'us and them' divides. What can alleviate that is 'bridging' connection – where we meet and mix with people from an 'out group', perceived as different to ourselves. Provided the experience is a positive one, 'bridging' social contact can help break down stereotypes and prejudice, reducing the sense of 'us and them'. Instead it can help people develop greater trust and empathy with those from different backgrounds and shape a more inclusive and shared identity.

Because of their scale and reach, major events offer an opportunity for such bridging contact. Research for this report finds that 6 in 10 people (62%) feel that Jubilee events and major sports tournaments bring people from different backgrounds together. A similar proportion (63%) say that neighbourhood and local authority events have the same effect, with 60% feeling that music events can do the same. A majority of people (54%) also feel that our annual tradition of Remembrance each November brings people from different backgrounds together.

43%

of UK adults report that they attended an event to mark the Jubilee.

6 in 10

people (62%) feel that Jubilee events and major sports tournaments bring people from different backgrounds together.

In addition to the practical opportunity for people to physically meet and mix, major events such as the Jubilee, major sports tournaments and commemorative events like Remembrance carry an additional weight and resonance as an opportunity to re-shape public narratives. These moments are a rare opportunity for us – the public as well as politics and the media – to reflect on national identity and who we are as a nation and as a society. Much debate about race and identity in England in the last 40 years, for example, has centred on the England football team: not least last year during the Euro 2020 tournament, with debates over 'taking the knee', celebration of the successes of England's multi-ethnic team and then, appallingly, racist abuse of black players after the team's defeat in the final.

The optics of events are important too. Moments like Remembrance, royal and sporting events and national days have a powerful emotional resonance, especially among older and more traditional members of the public. They can be some of the few times that the public engages with national identity and its symbols such as flags, songs and collective memories. And so, when done well, such events can help to shape a more inclusive national identity that bonds people together.

The inclusion of ethnic and faith minorities in imagery from these moments tells a story of an inclusive society, a 'new us' transcending 'them and us' divides.

That cuts both ways: when the establishment and majority community participates in events that are important to ethnic and faith minorities – Eid, Diwali and Windrush Day, for example – it projects a message of respect and inclusion. Iftar events marking the breaking of the Ramadan fast at the Ministry of Defence and Blackburn Rovers football ground are strong practical examples.

We should resist, however, the temptation to pursue diversity and inclusion as parallel projects to the main event. Segmenting diversity into its own box, even when presented as something positive, is still a 'them and us' approach that can reinforce the notion that people from an ethnic or faith minority background are separate and different. Inclusion should, rather, seek to incorporate diversity into the whole, as part of an 'all of us' narrative.

Research suggests that narratives and optics have an important practical, as well as symbolic, value. The positive effect of social contact is not reliant on people physically meeting and mixing in person: that is just one way in which social contact helps break down barriers. It can also be achieved through indirect social contact, such as by having friends who have friends from an out-group.

Moments like Remembrance, royal and sporting events and national days have a powerful emotional resonance, especially among older and more traditional members of the public.

And researchers also found that 'contextual contact' can have a similar effect – so simply knowing that other people have mixed friendship groups can help bridge divides too. In this context, images on the television or social media of multi-ethnic, multi-faith participation in resonant national events can be more than symbolic: they can actually help to shift attitudes and undermine prejudices.

WHY EVENTS MATTER

Most of the public appreciate the value of major events – that they are more than just ‘bread and circuses’ and have societal value too. Recent research for the British Future report ‘Jubilee Britain’ found that three-quarters of the public (77%) feel that the Jubilee was ‘important for Britain’, with majorities feeling the same about the Commonwealth Games (64%), the football World Cup (58%) and the Women’s Euros football tournament (53%) which England hosted this year. Most people (51%) also agreed that the Jubilee ‘will help to bridge divides and bring people together’.

But the resonance of major events is not guaranteed and public support for hosting them will fluctuate according to the national context. That is true at the current time, with mounting pressures on household and national budgets. Research for this report finds that half of the public feels that “Big events like the Jubilee and the Commonwealth Games are a distraction from the real issues facing the country”.

To address this, event organisers will need to demonstrate the value that major events have, over and above that of entertainment. Measuring and evaluating the social impact and legacy of events is important, both as a response to this critique but also to inform the design and projection of future activity. Insufficient attention is paid to capturing data and lessons from one major event and sharing it with others to inform the design of subsequent events. Learnings from the Jubilee, for example, should inform the design of activities to mark a future Coronation; but all ‘showcase’ events will have a more enduring and meaningful legacy when backed up by a strategy that connects them with a theory of change and ongoing work to carry this forward.

51%

also agreed that the Jubilee ‘will help to bridge divides and bring people together’.

Much of the value of major events is their scale, breadth and penetration. That is particularly true of major sporting events, the value of which for social connection and integration has been somewhat undervalued. For the English in particular, football tournaments are some of the few times when the public engages and celebrates national identity. Recent efforts to make that more inclusive have met with considerable success – as well as some high-profile setbacks resulting from the racist actions of a toxic minority. Yet that should prompt anti-prejudice actors not to step back but rather to make greater efforts still, given sport’s ‘Heineken effect’ of engaging groups that can otherwise be hard to reach. As we examine later in this report, the reach and resonance of events are amplified when a town, city or nation is the host of something with a broader appeal: from Cities of Culture telling a story of place to the rest of the UK, to World Cups and Olympic and Commonwealth Games telling our national story to the world.

This does not mean, however, that events are meaningful to everybody. Evaluation is important to ensure that major events and indeed smaller local authority and neighbourhood activities do not only serve those, predominantly wealthier, neighbourhoods and individuals with the existing social capital to engage with and benefit from them. Establishing who is missing out, why that is the case and what can be done to address this, should form part of any post-event evaluation.

Major events do bring value in and of themselves. But in order to maximise their social value in bridging divides and helping to build a shared sense of identity, their design needs to be intentional: mindful of those neighbourhoods and groups that are less likely to organically take part. Getting this right requires evaluation and consideration of where previous events have succeeded and failed; and is one of the objectives of this report.

SECTION 2

BEYOND REACH: REALISING THE UNTAPPED POTENTIAL OF EVENTS

Major events often provide organic opportunities for social contact, enabling people across communities to come together, meet and mix. Without proactive planning, however, there is also a risk that the benefits for integration will be fleeting – and that the collective memory of these moments, and the newfound connections forged in these spaces, will fade away over time.

This means that organisers will need to be intentional about how they use events, if they want to maximise their potential for crossing divides and bringing people together in ways that successfully cultivate stronger bonds of trust, empathy and neighbourliness. Many events may already be successful in strengthening ‘bonding’ connections – the forms of social contact between people from the same social groups. Yet breaking down ‘us and them’ divides will require conscious efforts to facilitate the ‘bridging’ contact that spans in-groups and out-groups, and which helps develop shared identities and stronger respect for peoples’ differences.

UK-wide research from British Future in 2019 has previously found that, among events practitioners, there is a broad interest to understand how major events can successfully institutionalise their ability to bring people together in divided times.² The challenge now is to build on this appetite: firstly to ensure that events reach wide audiences, so that everyone feels invited to participate; and secondly, to trial and scale the activities that can nurture deeper, more sustained relationships across communities.

54%

18-24 years felt music events such as Glastonbury were for people like them, compared with 18% of over 65s.

BEYOND REACH

Mapping opportunities for bridging

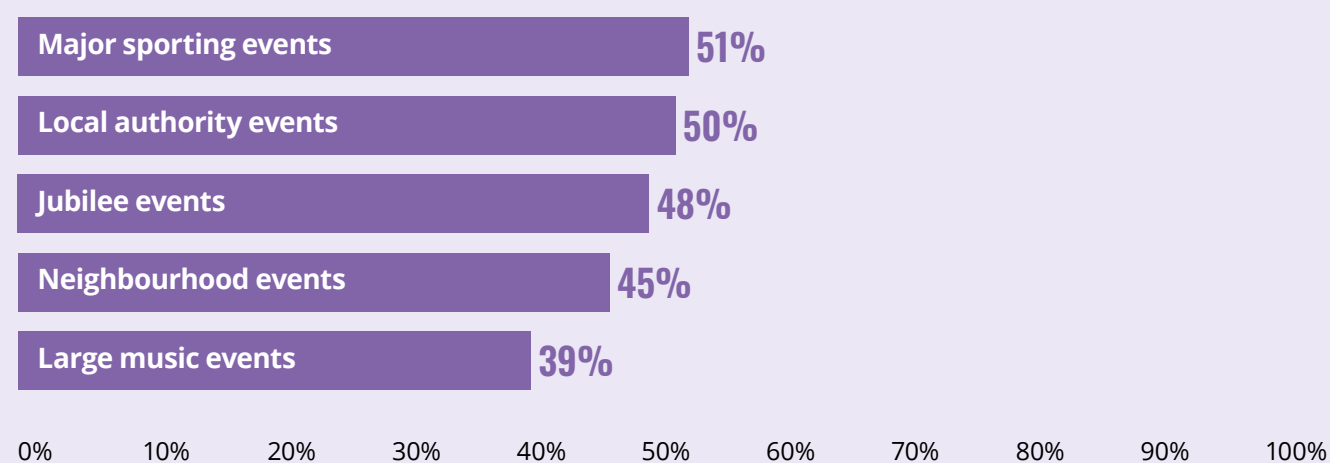
Events practitioners will need to have a detailed understanding of their audiences, to map the specific opportunities for crossing divides and to identify the types of social divide that their event is well placed to address. Different events will have stronger organic reach across different communities and demographic groups, leading some to be particularly successful in bridging certain ethnic, faith or social divides, or those between different generations.

Focldata polling for this report explored some of the key categories of major events, to ask Britons from all walks of life whether these were 'for people like them'. As shown in Figure 2.1, major sporting tournaments came out on top – with 51% agreeing these events were appealing. This was closely followed by events hosted by one's local authority, such as a food festival (50%), then events to mark the Platinum jubilee (48%) and neighbourhood events such as street parties (45%). Large music events had slightly narrower reach (39%), particularly reflecting age differences: 54% of 18-24 years felt music events such as Glastonbury were for people like them, compared with 18% of over 65s.

Similarly, respondents from socioeconomic grades DE were less likely to feel that music events such as Glastonbury appealed to 'people like me' (34%) than those from groups AB (43%).

This research suggests that there was some kind of event for everyone and that very few people felt alienated from all of the types of major event. Across the five categories, only 4% of respondents felt that none of the options listed appealed to them (both in the nationally representative and boosted ethnic minority surveys). But each event will also have a certain audience skew, which organisers will need to be conscious of when seeking to identify where and how their events can most successfully build new social connections.

Figure 2.1 Are particular events for 'people like me'? – all UK adults



Source: Focldata poll of 2,018 UK adults, 6-7 June 2022.

Case study: The power of sport

The role of spectator sport is often underplayed in its potential here to engage very broad audiences. Events such as the Commonwealth Games, the FA Cup final and Wimbledon appear to have a 'Heineken effect' of reaching all parts of society in the UK, with wide appeal across ethnic groups, generations and socioeconomic groups. In an increasingly individualistic and fragmented age, few other events can match this ability to excite such broad sections of the public and unite them around a common interest.

That is not to deny the challenges for those using sport to cross divides. There is a tendency for sport to appeal more greatly to men (60%), although more than four in ten women (42%) agree that major tournaments are 'for people like me'. Watching televised major sporting events together, particularly football, often takes place in pubs – which may not be welcoming places to those who do not drink alcohol. Organisers will need to consider how events themed around sport can be genuinely inclusive places, where all can feel welcome.

Similarly, the racist online abuse levelled at England football players after the Euro 2021 serves as a stark reminder that hateful voices can disrupt and sour these bridging moments of inclusive pride, particularly in an online age where platforms too often increase the visibility of a toxic fringe.

But, when successful, there is enormous potential for sport to unite communities across divides, often around a shared 'more in common' identity as supporters of a team, an athlete or indeed a country.

Organisers will need to consider how events themed around sport can be genuinely inclusive places, where all can feel welcome.

Focldata research found that 62% of respondents agree that major sports tournaments are good at bringing people together who are from different backgrounds, while just 12% disagreed. Agreement was also equally broad among white and ethnic minority respondents.

We explore the potential of sport to bridge divides in more detail in the following chapter.

62%

of respondents agree that major sports tournaments are good at bringing people together who are from different backgrounds



PA Images / Alamy

BEYOND REACH

Case study: Jubilee spirit

The breadth of participation in the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee events – with more than 4 in 10 UK adults, across majority and minority ethnic minority groups, reporting haven taken part – highlights the extent to which royal occasions can offer another major opportunity for crossing divides.

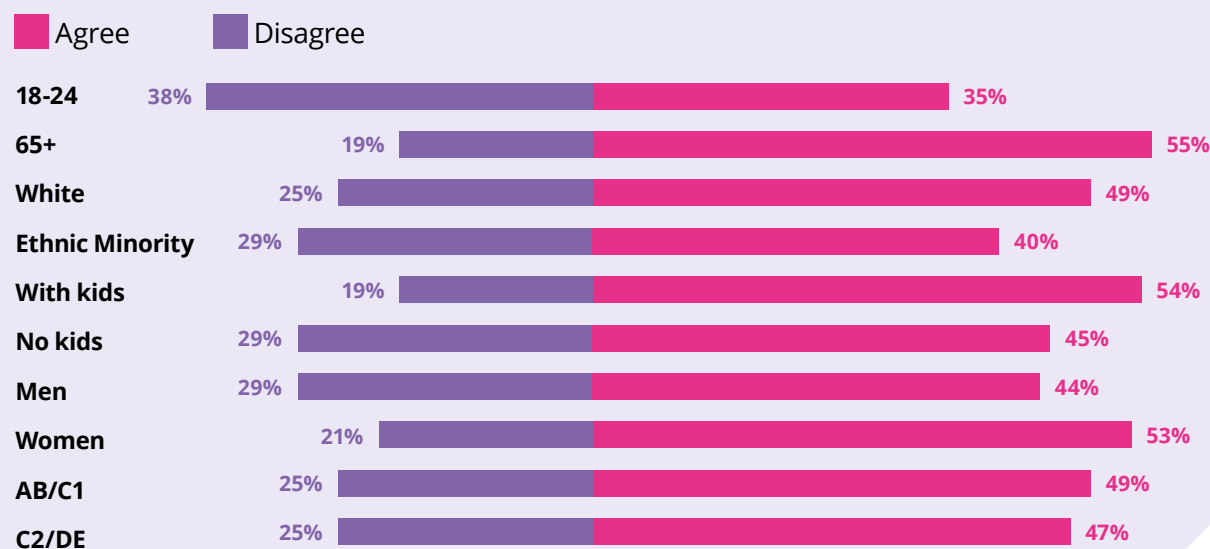
Polling from Focaldata finds that there is broad legitimacy for using these moments to cross divides, ensuring everybody is invited and that they act as a moment of social contact across our society. Some 62% agreed that events to mark the Platinum Jubilee were good at bringing together people from different backgrounds, while only one in seven disagreed.

There are strengths and weaknesses to using royal events for bridging different specific divides. Currently, older demographics are notably more likely to feel that these occasions are ‘for people like me’, with 55% of respondents over 65 feeling that the jubilee appealed to them. By comparison young people are more split, with 35% agreeing that the jubilee events were for people like them, and 38% disagreeing.

This would suggest that other major events may be better placed for building new cross-generational connections. While five in ten white Britons felt the celebrations appealed to their interests, this was also slightly lower – four in ten – among ethnic minority respondents.

Nevertheless, the survey also suggests that the Jubilee had particularly strong appeal among respondents with children, potentially reflecting the fact that the event was marked with a bank holiday. Most adults with a child under the age of eighteen (54%) agreed that the Jubilee events appealed to them, compared with 45% who did not have children. Where children can often be confident forming friendships across ethnic, faith and class divides, this can in turn lead to greater social contact between parents and caregivers. Research also shows that indirect social contact (having friends who have friends from the out-group); or contextual contact (knowing that other people have mixed friendship groups) – including among one’s children – can have a positive impact on levels of trust and empathy between in-groups and out-groups.³

Figure 2.2 Who thinks that Jubilee events are for ‘people like me’?



Source: Focaldata poll of 2,018 UK adults, 6-7 June 2022

Case study: Coming together locally

Local moments, as well as national occasions, can provide important opportunities for bringing together residents of a community to meet and connect.

This can be at a neighbourhood or street level, for example through street parties for occasions such as The Big Lunch, which encourage social contact between neighbours. Local authorities can also play an important role in facilitating events on a larger scale, from food festivals to celebrations of local culture. Indeed, where these are rooted in local identity, such events can be important moments for building place-based pride among residents from different backgrounds, improving perceptions of belonging and shared identity.

The specific themes and content of a given local event will naturally have a bearing on its reach and appeal to different groups. However, Focaldata polling for British Future found that – when asked about these events more generally – there was broad agreement that respondents felt these moments were ‘for people like them’, equivalent to events held on a national scale. Some 63% also agreed that local events, both at neighbourhood level and at village, town or city level, were good at bringing people together who were from different backgrounds.

In contrast to sporting tournaments, women are more likely to agree that both local and hyper-local events are appealing to them (53% and 50% respectively), compared with men (46% and 41%). This could in part reflect that these events are often held in public places, rather than pubs or sports stadiums, which can sometimes carry reputations as more gendered spaces. The hosting of these events in public spaces may also account for the popularity of local events among people with children. Most respondents with children under eighteen (61%) felt that local authority events were for them, compared to 44% of people without children; while for neighbourhood and street events this was 56%/41%.

People with a disability or long-term health condition were somewhat less likely to agree (42%) that local authority events were ‘for people like me’ compared with those without a disability or long-term health condition (53%); although views around neighbourhood and street level events were more similar (44% vs 47%). Likewise, respondents in socioeconomic grades C2 and DE (46%) felt that local events at a village, town and city level had less appeal than those in classes AB and C1 (52%). Local authorities must be mindful of ensuring that events carry out thorough assessments on accessibility and that low-income groups do not feel ‘priced out’ of attending, if they are to ensure these moments are welcoming and inclusive for all.

Local authorities can also play an important role in facilitating events on a larger scale, from food festivals to celebrations of local culture.

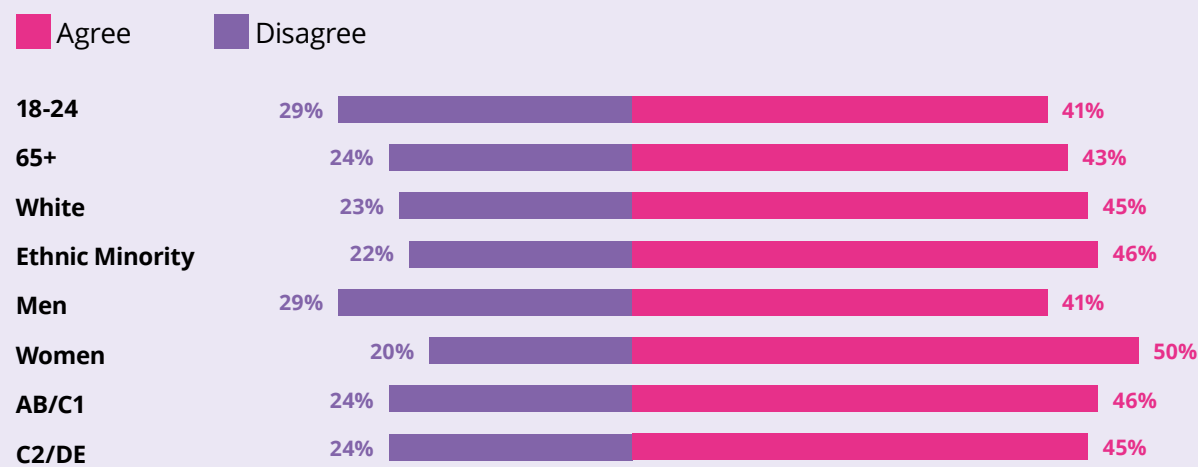
However, the polling indicates that these events have broad reach across the ages, and similarly across white and ethnic minority Britons. This cross-generational and cross-ethnic appeal can be particularly important for forging bridging connections in otherwise disconnected communities, particularly where there is high population churn of younger renters from different backgrounds moving in and out of neighbourhoods, often without laying sustained roots in a community. Such events can offer a useful starting point for neighbours or local residents to break the ice, forge new friendships and to strengthen mutual perceptions of neighbourliness and pride in place.

BEYOND REACH

Where areas are spatially segregated between people from different ethnic, faith and social backgrounds, or between people of different ages, local events – when consciously planned to enable mixing – can also offer important moments for breaking down perceptions about ‘the other side’ of a community.

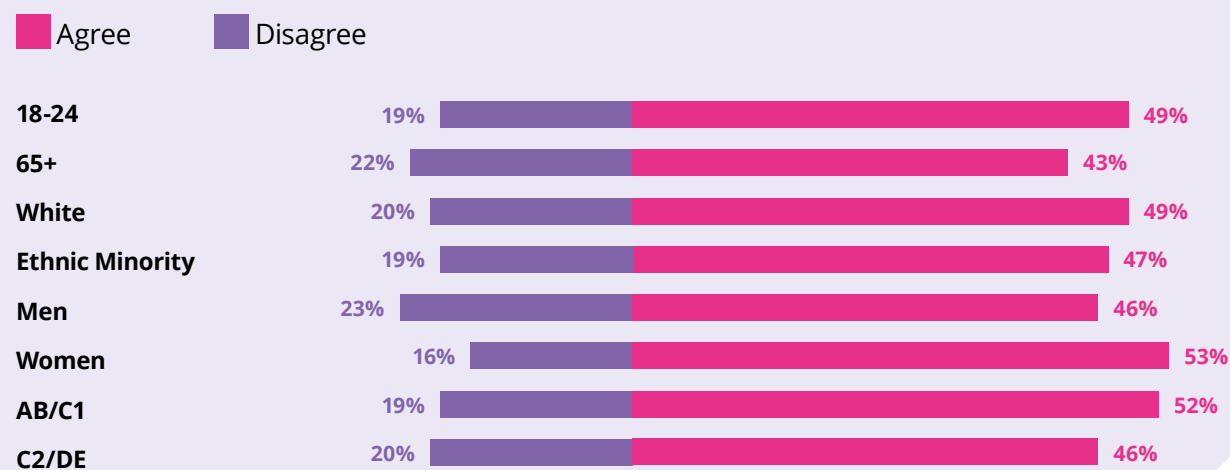
These occasions can provide literal common ground for residents to gather in one space, helping redefine perceptions of ‘place’ and defuse community tensions.

Figure 2.4 Who thinks that Local events in their street or neighbourhood (for example a street part of fête) are for ‘people like me’?



Source: Focaldata poll of 2,018 UK adults, 6-7 June 2022

Figure 2.5: Who thinks that Local authority events in their village, town or city (for example a food festival) are for ‘people like me’?



Source: Focaldata poll of 2,018 UK adults, 6-7 June 2022

Removing the barriers to bridging

When mapping the opportunities for events to bring people together across divides, it is equally important that practitioners consider the potential barriers that can weaken social contact between groups or prevent people coming to an event at all.

Conversations about British identity can be heard differently across the different nations in the UK and among different segments of the population. National symbols work best when they transcend our social tribes and that gets harder when they are deployed in contested political arguments, as they have been over the last decade.

National symbols work best when they transcend our social tribes and that gets harder when they are deployed in contested political arguments, as they have been over the last decade.

There is evidence in this research, as in British Future's *Jubilee Britain* report, of a significant segment of socially liberal opinion becoming more sceptical about national symbols, and of more division about both the Union Jack and the Saltire in Scotland. However, retreating from them would give us less bridging capital that can reach across social divides. The use of national symbols needs to be nuanced and strongly inclusive – being clear that they belong to a nation and a society that we all share – though whether events unite or divide is also dependent on the tone that national political figures set too.

On a more practical level, there may be broad interest among different groups in participating in an event, but even small hurdles can make the difference between people turning up or choosing to do something else. So as well as the big picture, events organisers need to look at the details too.

The choice of space and location for an event can have a crucial bearing on whether it is perceived as genuinely inclusive by different groups. Hosting an event for national sports tournaments in a pub or bar, for example, can exclude faith minorities or groups who do not drink, but who may otherwise be interested in attending. Similarly, certain locations may also hold a reputation for being strongly associated with people of a particular gender, age or social background, leading others to feel unwelcome.

The price of attendance, activities involved and the level of investment in community engagement can also affect whether groups feel genuinely welcomed and at ease to forge meaningful new connections.

It is important, too, for organisers to consider how their events can engage participants in building ‘real time’ relationships that extend beyond the occasion itself. The types of bridging contact that are best at building mutual trust and reducing prejudice are those which are sustained, rather than fleeting, and lead to deeper friendships being formed.⁴ Events that involve active participation, rather than a more passive ‘watching experience’, are typically better-suited to encouraging communication between strangers that can help to initiate these new connections.

High ticketing and other associated costs for major music and other cultural events may be a factor limiting the potential for such moments to bring people together across social class divides. It may also restrict the diversity of performers too. The actor Brian Cox has recently spoken out about the exceedingly high cost of accommodation in Edinburgh during the Festival, saying that it could restrict the breadth of performers who felt able to take part.⁵ More than 1,000 performers also signed an open letter urging the Fringe to address this and other concerns.

BEYOND REACH

Untapping the connection potential: practical steps

Research for this report tested a series of proposals to expand the extent to which events can bring people together and bridge divides. Respondents were asked to rank their three top priorities from the in Figure 2.6 below.

By some distance, the most popular option was to prioritise **events that appealed to people of all ages, to help bring families together**, with over half of respondents (57%) ranking this among their top three options. This was ranked highly among both men (55%) and women (58%), and among white (58%) and ethnic minority (52%) respondents. Events that attract parents, grandparents and children can be important moments for social mixing between different age groups, helping to bridge identity polarisation across generations.

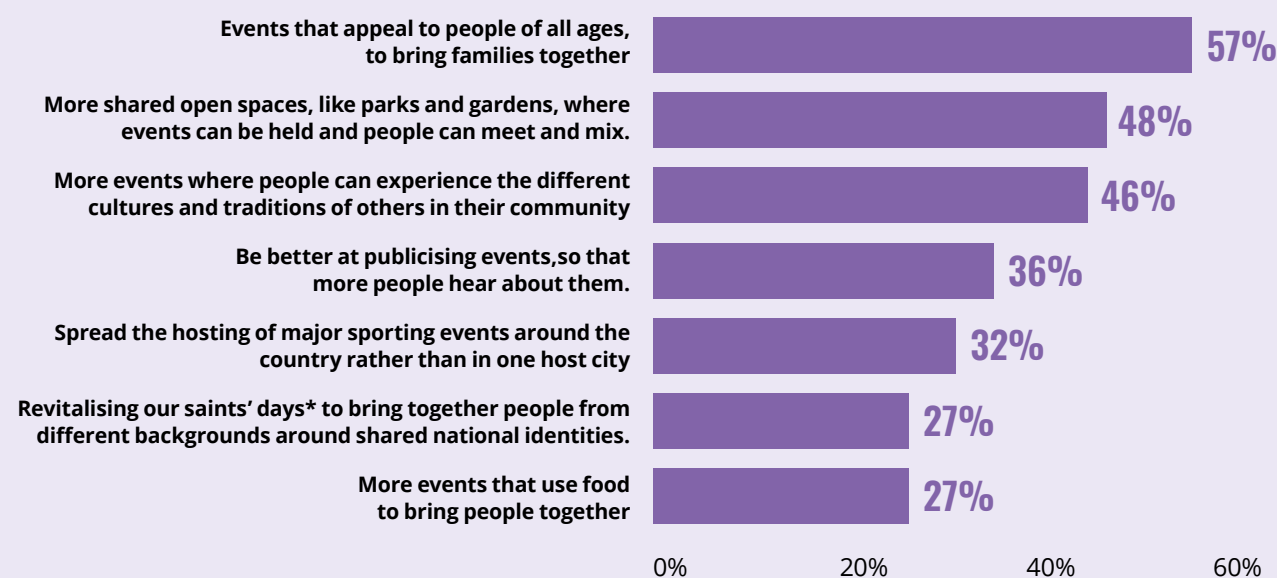
Activities for children can also form important ‘ice breakers’ between fellow parents and caregivers to initiate conversation, find common ground and forge more long-lasting relationships that endure beyond the experience of an event itself.

The need for more shared open spaces, such as parks and gardens, where events can be held and people can meet and mix, was also seen as a top-three priority by 48% of respondents.

Women, in particular, listed this in their top three priorities (53%, compared to 43% of men). Events in public spaces that are open, free and sociologically associated with shared ownership provide an effective ‘leveller’ for people from different backgrounds – offering a neutral space where groups can feel welcome to participate.⁶

Figure 2.6 What would help events bring people together?

If we wanted events to bring people together more, which of the following do you think would make a difference? [Ranked top three]



*e.g. St George's Day, St Andrew's Day, St David's Day, St Patrick's Day

Source: Focaldata poll of 2,018 UK adults, 6-7 June 2022.

More events that provide insights and experiences of different cultures and traditions was the third most popular choice, with this option ranked by 46% in their top three priorities. This was the clearest priority among respondents from an ethnic minority background, 57% of whom listed it in their top three. It was also more popular among those educated to degree level or above; and among people with more liberal politics (Remain voters and Labour/Liberal Democrat supporters).

Interestingly the option was also equally popular among those who 'rarely' have opportunities to meet others from different backgrounds (46%) as it was among those who already have regular social contact with people outside their in-group (48%).

Some 36% felt that organisers should be better at publicising events, so that more people hear about them. Events promotion can be hard to get right in ways that enable these occasions to resonate with new audiences. However, strategic local and national-local partnerships can be crucial to broadening participation. Collaborating with stakeholders that have strong relationships within local populations can help events to reach into different parts of a community, beyond the groups who may already be socially connected and highly engaged in similar activities. Schools, faith organisations and community groups will often be best placed to raise awareness of events and an understanding that these occasions are open and welcome to all.

One in three respondents (32%) felt that the hosting of major sports tournaments should be spread around the country, rather than in one host city, to increase opportunities for people in different regions to come together. Those in Scotland (41%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (38%) viewed the hosting of major sports events as a higher priority issue than respondents in London (30%), suggesting the need to ensure that major sports events do not remain overly concentrated in the South-East. Models such as that of the 2026 Football World Cup, spread across three countries (Canada, Mexico and the USA) in 16 cities, exemplify how a 'hub and spokes' model for major tournaments can help to reach and engage wider audiences, scaling up the opportunities for people to come together around a shared love of the game.

This option was placed in the top three among a higher proportion of respondents from socioeconomic group AB (38%) than those from C2 (27%) and DE (29%). It is important that the pricing of major spectator sports events do not 'price out' people who are less well-off. Organisers can incorporate initiatives to make events more accessible to those on lower incomes.

Around a quarter of respondents (27%) felt that practitioners should **revitalise our saints' days to bring together people from different backgrounds around shared national identities.** This ranked lower among ethnic minority respondents (21%) than white respondents (27%), suggesting that more concerted action may be required by organisers to make St George's Day, and other national saints' days, an annual occasion to which everyone feels invited. A similar proportion (27%) then prioritised holding more events using food to bring people together.

32%

felt that the hosting of major sports tournaments should be spread around the country, rather than in one host city

BEYOND REACH

There is a strong case for prioritising the opportunities to promote social connection through events, to fully realise their potential as moments that bring communities together across divides. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to achieving this objective, and practitioners will need to give consideration to the unique opportunities and challenges of a given event, adapting each approach to suit the profile of their community.

Nevertheless, organisers can begin to set the foundations for promoting social contact through mainstreaming a connection lens into the planning, delivery and legacy stages of an event. Practitioners can begin by strengthening their capacity for bridging – through building the relations to reach different groups in a community, and through developing new reflective practice around 'what works' and 'what to avoid'.

The grid below outlines five steps around how to embed this within their timeline:

1 Development time

Practitioners should allow sufficient time to identify their audiences and consider steps for ensuring that all feel welcomed to join in and participate at an event. This may require gradual trust and relationship building with local partners to reach different parts of a community who may previously have been less likely to engage in similar events.

2 Partnerships and community engagement

Strategic partnerships are essential in order to design events that engage beyond audiences who already have regular inter-group social contact and are highly engaged in their community. Organisers of both local and national events should identify the partnerships that can help to spread awareness of events among out-groups, emphasising that everyone is welcome to attend. Partnerships with schools, faith networks and community-based organisations such as the Scouts and Girlguiding, are all potential routes for extending the local reach of events among groups previously less likely to feel engaged.

3 Trialling different approaches

Not all attempts to embed social connection into events will work straight away. Practitioners should be prepared to trial and adapt new approaches to establish a confident understanding of what does and does not work.

4 Measure and evaluate audience participation

Where organisers have capacity, systematic research and evaluation should be built into events – to map the size and breadth of audience engagement, and to collate feedback on how events could be made more inclusive and engaging in future.

Measurement exercises should be carried out during the event itself. Moreover, surveys carried out in the weeks after an event can also indicate whether it has helped establish the deeper social connections required to increase trust between groups and reduce prejudice.

5 Commitment to ongoing learning

A commitment to reflection and learning is crucial to establishing good practice among practitioners and partner organisations. Steps three and four should inform an ongoing review of good practice, which can enable events to hone their approach to social connection year on year.

The power of events for bringing communities together in an increasingly fragmented society can often be underplayed in comparison to other legacy questions of major events, such as their impact on local infrastructure or public levels of physical activity.

The role of an event in bridging divides should be recognised as an important feature of its longer-term legacy. The power of events for bringing communities together in an increasingly fragmented society can often be underplayed in comparison to other legacy questions of major events, such as their impact on local infrastructure or public levels of physical activity. Yet while the benefits of social connection are less tangible, connecting communities can have an enduring impact on participants. Reaching new audiences across social divides should not be seen as something that events only aspire to do on special occasions. Rather, this should be celebrated as an important achievement of major events, to be built upon and institutionalised within organisers' core objectives year-on-year.

In the chapters 3 and 4 we examine some of the specific strengths of events for bridging divides, when they are done well. Events can help to bring diversity organically into the mainstream, rather than leaving it siloed in parallel activities, helping to project a 'new us' narrative of shared identity. And they can do this at scale, reaching and communicating to new audiences – particularly through sport – that are much harder for other activities to engage.

SECTION 3

FROM 'THEM AND US' TO THE 'NEW US':

HOW MAJOR EVENTS CAN HELP TO TAKE DIVERSITY OUT OF THE BOX

Do we still need national stories today? And, if they are still considered desirable, are they still possible given the pluralism and fragmentation of our society?

The core challenge, for efforts to extend social contact so that events promote bridging as well as bonding, is that the offer of greater contact with those who we do not see as 'people like us' is often more attractive to those who already have some contact with out-groups, while others are more difficult to engage. In Britain in 2022, this challenge has a clear geographic and generational pattern too. The challenge for major events is to reflect and include Britain's growing diversity, without segmenting it into a parallel sphere of separate engagement. So how can efforts to increase social contact get better at reaching across majority and minority groups, and geographic and generational divides?

Efforts at ethnic minority inclusion have most often been targeted at areas of high diversity, with the role of schools seen as particularly important in shaping the next generation. This is necessary but it is not sufficient. It would target our efforts on the areas and cohorts who already have the most ongoing, organic everyday contact. Doing so may have a role in entrenching, reinforcing and ratifying the shifts that have already been made in attitudes and experiences of contact across generations. But it will be less effective at extending and broadening its impact.

We need to think much more about what happens beyond the school-gate, given how there has been a rapid inter-generational shift in attitudes, with closer social relationships between younger people from different ethnic backgrounds than in older age groups.

Greater confidence about local, rather than national, race relations is a strong feature of British attitudes towards race relations today. This is a pattern across all nations and regions of the UK, shared across ethnic majority and minority groups. It is vital to have sustained, positive relationships across faith and ethnic groups in major cities. The everyday experience of living together provides resilience against attempts to use national or international events to foster tensions. Many studies show that casual anti-Muslim prejudice has broader reach than other forms of prejudice but is less prevalent in areas where non-Muslims have everyday contact with their Muslim neighbours.

Geography has a significant impact on levels of social contact with Black British people, who number just two million people, or 3% of the general population, around half of whom live in London. So Black Britons make up one in six of the London population, and one in fifty of the population across many nations and regions. There will obviously be a significant difference between the big cities and other areas in the frequency, familiarity and depth of social contact.

Neighbourliness matters in promoting bridging contact but it will not be enough to address the risks of a 'them and us' culture if we do not foster a shared identity that reaches beyond our diverse cities. We need to extend this across geographies and generations to those much less likely to have personal contact with those from groups that they perceive as most distant from themselves, or even as a perceived threat to their own sense of identity.

Why national traditions have particular bridging value

Fostering an inclusive national identity in practice as well as in theory works best when we engage with the national moments that bring us together. In seeking to turn this from theory to practice, there is a particular macro-symbolic value and reach in those events, such as the annual Remembrance commemorations and major Royal occasions, that represent national traditions. Efforts to engage such moments should also include work to establish and engage with those occasions which are especially meaningful to significant minority communities.

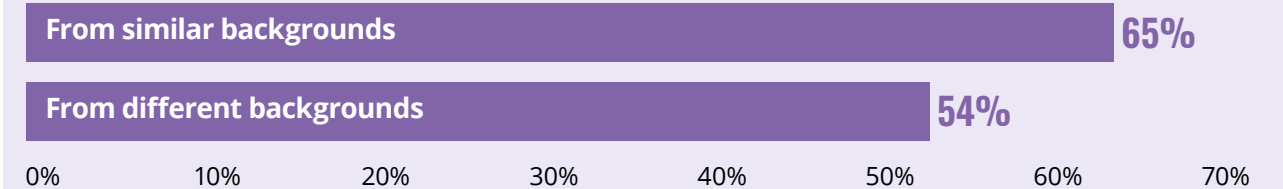
Images of minority participation in national events can play a powerful and perhaps underestimated role. They represent powerful symbols of inclusion, countering stereotypes and casual prejudices, especially among those least likely to have personal contact across social class, ethnic or faith lines.

This is partly due to the high profile of these events – which have a reach as broad as the biggest sporting events – and partly due to their macro-symbolic significance. Remembrance has provided a strong example of this, with a significant growth in awareness and understanding, across both majority and minority groups, of the shared sacrifice of Commonwealth soldiers. This was particularly enhanced during the First World War centenary commemorations and thereafter, creating new foundations to explore the meaning of Remembrance in today's Britain.

More work is needed, however, to make Remembrance events feel fully inclusive. In our research for this report, while most people (54%) do feel that commemorative events such as Remembrance Sunday are good at bringing people together who are from different backgrounds, more people (65%) feel that they are good at bringing people together from similar backgrounds – suggesting that contact may currently be more of the 'bonding' than 'bridging' variety.

This differentiation was more pronounced among ethnic minority respondents, of whom 58% felt that Remembrance and other commemorative events successfully brought together people from similar backgrounds, while only 40% felt they brought people from different backgrounds together.

Commemorative events such as Remembrance Sunday are good at bringing people together



FROM 'THEM AND US' TO THE 'NEW US'

Yet anniversaries do have the power to catalyse. They offer an opportunity to communicate publicly at scale about inclusive history and reinterpretation projects. They broaden social engagement and proactively challenge the perception, generated by flashpoint media controversies, that work on inclusive history invariably involves sharp polarisation. The major Royal occasions of the next decade may also offer even bigger opportunities to apply these bridging insights at scale.

Don't underestimate the importance of mediated contact

It is national broadcasting that does most to extend the sense of being part of something together. While tens or hundreds of thousands of people might come together at mass participation events, millions – even tens of millions – can share in an experience via TV, through a mixture of direct participation and mediated engagement with a major event.

This can help to ensure that major occasions promote bridging as well as bonding. We may often take part in neighbourhood and community events with 'people like us' and those we already know. Broadcasters also show us how we can be invited to share moments and experiences with fellow citizens who are different and maybe distant from us. This can have a particularly important effect in social relationships with those we perceive as 'out groups' across class, ethnic or faith lines, such as by reducing casual prejudice against Muslims. Yet national broadcasters, particularly the BBC, face challenges from increased identity polarisation – particularly in the media, politics and social media. If they become ammunition in the so-called culture wars, or a subject of sustained political polarisation, it will become more difficult to be perceived as a national forum by those with different views of major political and social questions.

Taking diversity out of the box

Britain is a society of growing ethnic diversity: from one-twentieth of the population in the early 1990s, today in the 2020s one in six of us is from a range of ethnic minority groups. Just as significantly, this diversity is itself increasingly diverse, across several key dimensions.

So the story of ethnic and faith diversity in Britain has never been more complex, either in socio-economic or identity terms. There is increasing understanding of the need to disaggregate beyond an all-encompassing "BAME" lens, with a broad civic consensus behind the decision to move away from this label. Yet this often generates the tendency to generalise instead about specific groups – such as Indian, Chinese, Pakistani, Black Caribbean and Black African groups. There has, generally, been an increasing focus and understanding, especially since the 2016 EU referendum, on the importance of age, geographic and educational status in structuring social and political attitudes. Despite that, strikingly little attention has been paid to the parallel dynamics of shifting experience by generation, gender and geography within minority groups. The inter-generational shift in life experiences, attitudes and expectations is often greater within minority than majority groups, since half of the ethnic minority population migrated to the UK, while the other half are their British-born children and grandchildren.

A 'community of communities' multiculturalism will be too static in the Britain of the 2020s. It may maintain some value in recognising the contribution of major faith communities, groups that have persisted over time, while encouraging interaction across those of many faiths and none. However, historically, a focus on engaging with minority groups through faith institutions paid too little attention to ensuring a fair share of voice across genders and generations, with older men tending to dominate. A primarily group-based model is likely to increasingly struggle, in both principle and practice, as a way to engage with the pluralism of ethnic diversity today.

There are more than two dozen groups reflecting a range of different ethnic, faith and national heritages, with a pluralism of views within each of them; and those of mixed ethnic heritage have become more numerous than any specific minority group. Major events in particular need to reflect Britain's growing diversity while making effective offers to include people in the moments and experiences that we can share.

If the way in which Britain thinks and talks about diversity is shifting, there are challenges for how thought and practice in the cultural sector can keep up. Taking diversity seriously has become an increasingly important theme in cultural practice, heritage and the arts over the last quarter of a century. This now-familiar formula is to combine an articulation of the essential value of diversity for culture, while regrettably acknowledging its absence in the proportions that would be hoped for, and so reaffirming a commitment to greater engagement with 'diverse communities' so that all of the voices can be platformed and all of the stories told.

From a bridging perspective, the 'creative case for diversity' may have led to marked progress in the 1990s but it is no longer fit-for-purpose a generation or two later. There is evident fatigue among ethnic minority practitioners if such 'diversity talk' does not lead to action. And the 'deficit model' brings risks as well as gains. There has certainly been a strong appetite for missing and untold stories to get a hearing – but cultural policymakers can find themselves responding to a 'them and us' challenge with a 'they are good for us' story about the benefits of diversity, celebrating new, authentically diverse stories that only the voices of 'diverse communities' can bring to the table. Yet 'they are good for us' is still a 'them and us' case. If crossing divides is to have greater priority, we would need to dig deeper and challenge us all to tell stories of the 'new us'.

The approach to diversity risks becoming a parallel project. Ethnic diversity and class outreach risk running mainly on parallel tracks and falling into the trap of a 'competing grievances' frame: prioritising either minority inclusion or the white working-class. This is despite the largest proportion of ethnic minority Britons being in social grades C2DE.

So the creative case for inclusion might be different to the creative case for diversity. It would cease the othering practice of talking about 'diversity' as a synonym for the presence of visible minorities, carrying as that does the implicit message that 'you are different to us'. Instead, it would take diversity seriously in all of its forms: seeking to bring ethnicity, age and class together. It would ask less what 'ethnic communities' want, as if they are monolithic groups, and instead integrate insights into how differences by generation, education, class, gender and place exist within and across minority as well as majority groups.

Major events can catalyse this shift – if a message that everybody is invited is combined with proactive efforts to bridge divides. Yet there are also missing foundations to create the conditions for more confident engagement with the growing diversity of Britain.

Engagement with ethnic minorities too often remains a peripheral bolt-on rather than a mainstream theme in public engagement and audience insight activities. There is a foundational gap in the quality and depth of understanding of the pluralism of minority attitudes, which remain invisible in many published studies of public attitudes, or are covered in aggregate categories. Major events offer one opportunity to address this foundational gap, and to institutionalise appropriate good practice, to ensure that strategies to engage across majority or minority groups are informed by evidence rather than anecdote. Ensuring proper weighting to provide rigorous and reportable findings should become a standard practice in the 2020s.

It probably won't be possible to move on from a 'deficit' approach to missing diversity while progress in the cultural workforce is so gradual. Greater diversity in the boardroom and in governance and leadership, as much as on the stage and screen, may be one key to taking diversity out of its current pigeon-hole. Securing this could help advance a move away from 'they are good for us' approaches to diversity, in which the imagined voice and self-identity of the institution remains primarily one of white 'allyship' rather than common ground for Britons of all colours and creeds.

SECTION 4

SHAPING THE 'NEW US':

UNDERSTANDING THE POWER AND LIMITS OF SPORT

Sporting events have particular power in shaping identity and belonging for several reasons.

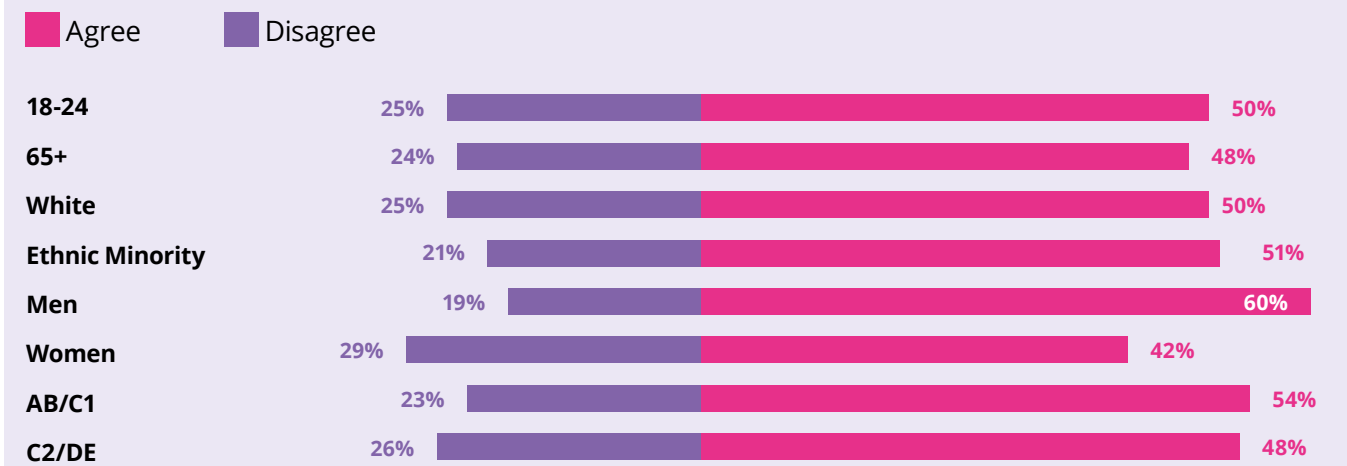
Firstly, sport may be often one of the first ways many of us encounter national identity. As children of primary school age, hearing about the build-up to the Olympics or seeing a big international football, cricket or rugby match on television may be our introduction to national flags, anthems or team colours. By the time we are teenagers or young adults, with our own perspective of what identity means to us, our experiences and memories of major events may have influenced our early ideas about identity and belonging, positively or negatively.

Secondly, reach: the highest-profile live sporting events in the 2020s maintain a public reach still as broad as that of half a century ago, while the reach of other broadcast events with similarly large audiences, like soap operas or the most anticipated TV programmes on Christmas Day, has now fragmented. In our research for this report, half of UK adults say that major sporting events are for 'people like me'. So sporting events persistently provide major focal points in the national conversation.

Thirdly, sport has a particular power to provide an idealised **vision of who we want to be** – as the idea of a national 'team' of which we can all be part takes literal as well as metaphorical form. Sport has therefore been a site of contested arguments about different forms of identity, both exclusive and inclusive. This has been especially important when big tournaments are hosted in the UK: the comparative scarcity of these events, the sense that hosting means that the country or city has to tell its story to its guests and the wider world, and the chance to link narratives of who we are to real-world contact, makes these especially potent moments for identity, belonging and new forms of contact.

By the time we are teenagers or young adults, with our own perspective of what identity means to us, our experiences and memories of major events may have influenced our early ideas about identity and belonging, positively or negatively.

Figure 4.1 Who thinks that major sporting events are for 'people like me'?



Source: Focaldata poll of 2,018 UK adults, 6-7 June 2022

How sport has helped to shape a 'new us'

Sport in the UK can make a strong claim to have made a distinctive, more powerful contribution towards the creation of more inclusive identities, that are civic rather than ethnic, than any other sphere of public and cultural life.

That claim would have been very surprising and counter-intuitive a generation or two ago. Football in particular was strongly associated with some of the most exclusive, toxic and xenophobic forms of national identity, though the nature of the challenges of hooliganism, racism and sectarianism varied across different UK nations in the '70s, '80s and 1990s. So it is striking that it is football, along with the Olympic Games, which provides the most confident sphere of shared and inclusive national identities.

Sport has done this across the complex patchwork of national sporting identities in the UK. Great Britain competes in the Olympics and Paralympic Games, but is only occasionally the focus of sporting allegiance between those quadrennial showcases. It is England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland who compete in the Commonwealth Games, and as the representative national football teams.

The Rugby Union six nations includes an all-Ireland team. Many ethnic minorities in Britain support cricket teams that reflect their Commonwealth roots, alongside home nations in the Olympics and football World Cup. Brexit will not end British participation in the European team for the Ryder Cup.

National sporting teams – Team GB for the Union Jack, and the English, Scottish and Welsh football teams – currently rank as the primary public association with the national flags. This can provide a valuable counter-pressure in polarised times, as one potential antidote to efforts to narrow national symbols into reflecting allegiance to specific political projects, whether in mainstream politics or those out on the extreme fringes. The 2020s challenge for sport is how to use this positive and inclusive vision as a foundation for the bridging social contact that can do more to realise it.

SHAPING THE 'NEW US'

Olympic sport: a positive vision of inclusion – and the challenges of realising it

Olympic sport is unusual. The scarcity of the four-year cycle brings bursts of enormous public attention, while London's hosting the Olympics and Paralympics for the first time in 64 years meant this was seen as a once in a lifetime experience for both athletes and fans. The London Olympics and Paralympics have, a decade on, been the subject of many further detailed reviews and retrospectives. They capture a nuanced story of the mixed legacy of 2012: a sustained sense of pride in what it meant for the country; a tangible local legacy in East London; a positive model of volunteer engagement, which has informed strategies in later events; yet disappointment on the goals for sporting participation. Hosting the Paralympics in London 2012 was undoubtedly a transformative occasion for disabled sport and a significant focal point for the broader public conversation about inclusion. Yet how far they help build pressure for broader social change depends on what can be sustained after the torch goes out. The overall experience has shifted understandings of how to think about the legacy of major events.

The Olympics and Team GB undoubtedly conveyed an aspirational sense of inclusion and belonging in 2012 with enormously broad public appeal. The Olympic team, particularly in athletics, had been a pioneer of ethnic inclusion ahead of most other sports, reflected in the medal winning athletes of the 1984 and 1992 games a generation earlier.

Yet beyond athletics and boxing, and some emerging sports like BMX cycling and skateboarding, most Olympic sports continue to struggle with inclusion and ethnic diversity. British Asians, in particular, were present in large numbers in the London 2012 crowds, but continue to be absent from major sports, with no further progress made between London 2012 and the Tokyo Games this summer. There was just one British Asian Team GB member among the 399 who went to Japan. An open letter from Chris Grant, the Sport England board member, put a powerful case that most sports are missing out on the full potential of the nation, and called for a stronger sense of shared mission, underpinned by networks of learning and practice across sports, to inform effective strategies within them⁷.

The Olympic team, particularly in athletics, had been a pioneer of ethnic inclusion ahead of most other sports, reflected in the medal winning athletes of the 1984 and 1992 games a generation earlier.

A new fan culture: intentional inclusion in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland's post-conflict society offers important insights into a successful constructive and sustained use of sport to reshape sporting identity.⁸

Northern Ireland's underdog qualification for the 1982 and 1986 World Cup finals was heralded as giving the province, at the height of the Troubles, at least one civic institution to draw equally from the Catholic and Protestant communities – on the field at least. In a society split by contested claims about sovereignty and national identity, the two communities divided too over their primary sporting allegiances. However, significant sections of the population did not see this as a zero-sum question, with many in both communities also willing to offer some level of support to the other Irish team – whether Northern Ireland or the Republic – if they were not in direct competition.

With the team in decline, the 1990s saw a deterioration in community relations in sport. There was a rising perception of a sectarian atmosphere, in the colours worn, the songs sung and the graffiti around the ground. Attendances had fallen, with the atmosphere unattractive to families. Early in this century, the national team captain, Neil Lennon, a Catholic, retired from international football after his decision to sign for Celtic led to persistent booing in a home game in Belfast, then a death threat.

The strength of Football for All was that its focus was less on what it was determined to remove but on the creation of the positive fan culture.

This pitched the Northern Irish game into a crisis over sectarianism – but also led to a stepping up of the 'Football for All' campaign⁹.

A generation on, the campaign has successfully shifted the stadium culture. The weakness of many anti-prejudice campaigns, particularly official UEFA-led efforts, is that they can be calls to inaction, lecturing supporters on what not to do. The strength of Football for All was that its focus was less on what it was determined to remove but on the creation of the positive fan culture: that of the "Green and White Army", promoting new songs, colours and symbols with the intention of inviting everyone to get behind the team.

The strong focus on self-deprecating humour in new chants and songs (such as "We're Not Brazil, We're Northern Ireland") and making the fan culture more enjoyable made it difficult to present it as an earnest kill-joy effort in taking things away, though the campaign also empowered supporters to directly challenge the use of sectarian symbols and chants. Another particular strength of the Football for All campaign was the strong link between cultural change at the club and national level, through the network of supporters clubs co-owning and shaping the campaign.

SHAPING THE 'NEW US'

When Northern Ireland qualified, in 2016, for its first major tournament for three decades, the fan culture of the travelling support was the product of a decade and a half of sustained effort at inclusion¹⁰. The Irish Football Association's support for the campaign with conscious efforts at bridging included locating fan zones in the Titanic quarter, a post-conflict 'shared space'. Challenges remain. The shouting of 'No Surrender' by some supporters during the national anthem consciously challenges the ethos of the Football for All campaign.

Yet research has shown conclusively that the Green and White Army campaign dominates the stadium culture. A more welcoming atmosphere may not in itself produce extensive cross-community attendance at games, but a 2015 Ulster University study found that 84% of respondents felt there had been progress in community relations in Northern Irish sport in the previous decade.¹¹ How this campaign has linked efforts by the governing body and supporters associations with civic society and academic expertise offers a useful model for national and local efforts seeking to maximise sport's efforts to bridge divides.

84%

of respondents felt there had been progress in community relations in Northern Irish sport in the previous decade.



Photo by Sportimage / Alamy

How 'football Englishness' has modelled a new inclusive English identity

Sport was almost certainly the dominant contributor to the civic reshaping of English identity over the last thirty years – not least due to the lack of civic engagement with English identity, bar the Established Church, outside of the national football, rugby and cricket teams. Scottish and Welsh identity have more institutional interlocutors, with devolved political institutions and greater recognition in cultural and civic institutions.

The idea of who could be English has shifted decisively across generations. The pioneering black footballers of the 1970s and 1980s faced and overcame overt racism. Yet winning the argument about who was English on the pitch – largely an argument which had been won by the time Paul Ince became England's first black captain in 1993 – did not in itself shift the broader culture of the game.

Hosting the biggest major sporting event in England for several decades – Euro '96 – contributed to a significant shift in the culture and spirit around English football.

Hosting the biggest major sporting event in England for several decades – Euro '96 – contributed to a significant shift in the culture and spirit around English football. St George's flags were waved around Wembley stadium, a contrast to the Union Jacks which had been a dominant presence around Wembley for the World Cup final thirty summers earlier.

The "Three Lions" song created a very unusual thing – a non-aggressive, non-triumphalist patriotism. Yet if Euro '96 made the atmosphere more inclusive, that was not necessarily reflected in a broader participation in the stands, which has been the focus of campaigns today, such as *England Together*¹² and the *Three Hijabis* campaign.¹³ There is strong evidence of gradual progress, ultimately somewhat reinforced by the polarising argument about racism and anti-racism, and the players 'taking a knee', ahead of the Euro 2021 football tournament, whose aftermath demonstrated that eradicating racism from sport and society remains work in progress.

White English and ethnic minority citizens express strong confidence about the national football team representing the principle of England belonging to everybody in England today – but there is more uncertainty about whether it extends to the flag and St George's Day. 'Football Englishness' is not enough without a broader civic effort. Too few civic institutions in England can confidently navigate when and how to talk about England. So the story of football shows how different spheres of inclusion, such as diversity on the pitch and creating an inclusive atmosphere, each need distinct work – within the stadium, but beyond it too¹⁴.

SHAPING THE 'NEW US'

English cricket's struggle to become a social contact sport

English cricket had – but missed – the biggest opportunity for integration in English sport of the post-war decades. In an age when its attempt to claim co-equal status with football as the national game was slipping, it had first mover advantage with many of the first generation of Commonwealth migrants to Britain. That passion for the game was combined with a sense that English cricket – both for club and country – was a cold and unwelcoming place, where ethnic minorities remained outsiders.

Asian players were in their own leagues, frustrated at being off the radar of county scouts, while senior figures in the county game wondered aloud if any of them would really be good enough anyway.

It did not help that cricket was proposed as a metaphor for “them and us” exclusion by Norman Tebbit’s cricket test in 1990. “Which side do they cheer for? It’s an interesting test. Are you still harking back to where you came from or where you are?” The senior Conservative Cabinet minister’s idea that Commonwealth migrants would cheer for England if they really wanted to fit in here was proposed in the full knowledge that most people from India, Pakistan or the West Indies did not see it that way.

So cricket fans had always felt that the Tebbit Test wasn’t quite cricket. British Future’s research in 2012 found that the general public rejected it, by a wide margin of four to one, as a relevant or fair test of identity or integration.¹⁵

Around half of British Asians in this country support India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka or Bangladesh at cricket, while a fifth of Asians report that their primary cricketing allegiance lies with England. A third have no interest in cricket. The 2019 World Cup final reflected that liberal consensus in cricket – cheer for who you want to – yet also suggested the gradual growth in ‘both and’ cricketing identities.

The World Cup final crowds in Lords and Trafalgar Square contained many British Asians who, having secured tickets in the hope that India would make the final, now joined in celebrating England’s success. One influence is that young Asian cricket fans, born in this country, see people like them – Adil Rashid from Bradford or Birmingham-born Moeen Ali – playing for England, when British-born Asians are much less likely to feature in future India or Pakistan national teams.

If the 2019 World Cup captured a positive vision of inclusion, the Yorkshire racism scandal showed how much work is needed to live up to it. Yet this had been half a century in the making. Rather than cricket forging the strongest link between Commonwealth migrants and Yorkshire pride, that instead soured into a sporting sphere of parallel lives. Asian players were in their own leagues, frustrated at being off the radar of county scouts, while senior figures in the county game wondered aloud if any of them would really be good enough anyway. It took Pakistan captain Imran Khan’s comments at the 1999 World Cup, about Yorkshire having yet to field a single Asian player (something which changed in 2004), to sting the county into more visible outreach activity.

Understanding what sport can't achieve (on its own)

If sport’s emotional power comes from its unscripted drama, it may be risky to invest too much in its uncertain outcomes. If we celebrate sporting success for bringing a nation together, projecting inclusion as it does so, then what happens in defeat? “When we win, I am German. When we lose, I am an immigrant,” footballer Mesut Özil has said: one of many international sports stars of migrant and minority heritage who have warned that inclusion is too shallow and contingent if it depends on scoring a goal or winning a match or medal.

So we may need to be clear about both the power and limits of sport. Sport has particular potential to bridge ‘them and us’ identity divides by offering a ‘new us’ identity that we can share. It captures, catalyses and perhaps especially ratifies significant shifts in identity; shifts in who we think we are and who we want to be. That is especially the case on the rare moments when one of our teams is particularly successful, or when the world is invited to our city or country for the Olympics, Commonwealth Games or one of the other big tournaments in a major sport. Emulating the ‘hosting’ model outside sport – as with the City of Culture competition – has proved an important way to create more focal points of this kind outside sport too.

The most heightened sporting moments are, by their nature, ephemeral. We may need a clearer understanding of the potential of sport and its limits too. Sporting events can demonstrate the breadth of public appetite for an inclusive story of who we are. If we find the vision attractive, we need to work out how to do the spadework to bring it closer to reality, and to do so within sport and beyond it too.

Too many of cricket’s activities at inclusion replicated and risked reinforcing in a sporting sphere a phenomenon of “parallel lives”, rather than using sport’s power to make meaningful contact across divides. The focus on increasing participation rates – including across minority groups – continued to generate segmented and siloed approaches to ‘inclusion’ with too little priority to the types of meaningful contact that can shift and challenge prejudices. This proved a barrier to opportunity too. British Asians still make up a third of grassroots cricketers, yet closer to one in twenty players in the professional game. Cricket’s retreat from state schools and the big cities has taken it backwards with Black Britain over thirty years.

English cricket has made great strides on inclusion in gender and disability, but has struggled particularly to realise its potential to bridge ethnic divides. Cricket’s racism crisis of 2021 has driven a renewed commitment to realising cricket’s potential. The first Iftar in the Long Room at Lords in Spring 2022, with Azeem Rafiq present, was a symbolically powerful occasion, conveying a spirit of reconciliation and a shared commitment to inclusion. Delivering that will take a sustained effort – but such a shared ambition can be an important foundation. The next challenge is for those governing the game to mobilise the decent majority of members and spectators to become active participants in helping the sport they love to make the changes it needs. The shared vision should be for cricket to become a ‘social contact sport’ both on and off the pitch. For example, a ‘Yorkshire Welcomes’ campaign, and similar efforts in other counties, could invite members to reach out across class, generational and ethnic lines to invite friends, neighbours and colleagues to the ground, rather than leaving it only to the club itself to engage schools and community groups.

SHAPING THE 'NEW US'

Scotland offers a useful model of learning not to rely too much on sport. The late 1970s were a nadir of modern Scottish identity. The 1978 World Cup was a moment of hubris, with the manager declaring the team would win the World Cup, before returning home early. After the failed devolution referendum, Scottish public voices talked about the shortcomings of being a nation of "90 minute patriots". Yet Scotland has developed a healthier relationship with sport in recent decades. The Tartan Army developed what David Goldblatt calls "a carnivalesque caricature of Scottish identity," in which the 'craic' mattered as much as the result. It has enjoyed the success of great sporting champions in cycling, tennis and curling. It is important that the national rugby and football teams are institutions supported across its political divides, given the post-referendum polarisation of Scottish politics. But it matters that Scotland has an increasing number of sources of institutional, civic and cultural confidence so that its sporting teams can take to the field with much less of the burden of carrying the whole national psyche.

Those seeking to shape an inclusive English identity could learn from the Scottish experience, by ensuring that an inclusive Englishness is not something that football has to achieve on its own.

Those seeking to shape an inclusive English identity could learn from the Scottish experience, by ensuring that an inclusive Englishness is not something that football has to achieve on its own. So it is England that now seems to have remained a '90-minute nation', largely unrecognised outside its football, cricket and rugby teams. There has been a dramatic, underestimated shift towards Englishness being understood to cross ethnic lines. The case of Northern Ireland's new fan culture shows how the benefits of providing a positive fan culture may need parallel work in other spheres.

Though we cannot rely on sport alone, it can do more to maximise its own contribution to inclusive identity and social connection – especially when it can use opportunities to host major events strategically. An intentional, long-term strategy to link up its everyday commitments on inclusion and social connection, week in and week out, with those showcase moments of most reach on both the national and international stage, offers new opportunities to use these moments to underpin sustained movements for change. That is especially the case where these can be linked to local efforts, using club identity to provide examples of how a "new us" sense of a proud and welcoming identity works at the local level.¹⁶ That can be underpinned by efforts to ensure that efforts to increase participation involve meaningful contact to bridge divides too.

There are plenty of opportunities to harness the ongoing power of sport. Hosting the Euro 2022 women's football tournament offers a focal point to take a sustained strategy to boost the profile and status of women's sport to another level. Birmingham this summer gets the opportunity to tell its story to the world as it hosts the Commonwealth Games. And further in the distance, the Euro 2028 international football tournament offers a particularly distinct opportunity, given the geographical range of its potential host cities – but the story to be told about the potential of football, and other sports too, to connect across the nations and regions remains to be written in the years before the whistle blows.

SECTION 5

WINDRUSH 75: FROM RISING RECOGNITION TO SHARED NATIONAL STORY

No account of the history of migration to Britain could be complete today without including the Windrush. The new Windrush National Memorial, unveiled at Waterloo Station in June, marks a new phase of recognition of the place held by the Windrush in our national history. Unveiled on the 74th anniversary of the ship docking in Britain, it offers a foundation for an ambitious vision of how the 75th anniversary can deepen our understanding of the past, present and future of multi-ethnic Britain.

The Windrush's arrival in Tilbury in June 1948 coincided with the passage of the British Nationality Act through Parliament. The Evening Standard sent a plane to greet the Windrush: its "Welcome Home" headline emphasised just how many of these new arrivals were RAF servicemen returning to Britain.

Less was heard about the Windrush for most of the four decades after its arrival. Its twentieth anniversary fell weeks after Enoch Powell's infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech proposing mass repatriation of as many Commonwealth migrants as possible. It was 39 years after the ship's arrival that the first post-war Black and Asian MPs were elected to Parliament in 1987, exemplifying how little sustained voice the Black British had in British politics, though the 1991 census – the first to officially record ethnicity – reported a Black British population of nine hundred thousand people, among three million ethnic minority respondents.

It was the conscious and successful use of the 50th anniversary that brought the history of the Windrush to much broader public attention. A major four-part BBC One TV series, with an accompanying book by Mike and Trevor Phillips, gave prime-time coverage to this story. 1998 was also the year that 'Windrush Square' was inaugurated in Brixton, in response to the successful efforts of the Windrush Foundation, co-founded in 1996 by Sam King and Arthur Torrington, to secure public recognition of the Windrush Generation and their legacy.

That 50th anniversary breakthrough became a foundation, in the early years of this century, for important cultural representations of the Windrush. Andrea Levy's seminal novel *Small Island* in 2004, later adapted for stage and television, powerfully captured how the Windrush passengers arrived with a belief that their Britishness was non-negotiable before discovering how much patchier the idea of Britain was in the Mother Country itself. A papier maché Windrush, made up of newspaper headlines, formed part of Danny Boyle's iconic opening ceremony to the London 2012 Olympics that charted our national story. Sam King MBE was again among those who led a broad civic, inter-faith and inter-ethnic coalition that marked the 65th anniversary in 2013 by pledging to mark Windrush Day each year as "an inclusive celebration of the Britain that we are proud to call home".

WINDRUSH 75

Yet the official governmental recognition of National Windrush Day, five years later in 2018, came about in response to the Windrush scandal. That stark injustice arose from the failure of governments to properly document the status of pre-1973 arrivals to Britain – after the 1971 Immigration Act had ended Commonwealth free movement – before failing to recognise their claims, four decades later, once they became caught-up in efforts to create a more hostile environment for those without legal status. Wendy Williams' Windrush Lessons Learned Review set out how the lack of knowledge of the history of Commonwealth migration, race and Empire among decision-makers and officials was one central cause of the injustices done to those whose status was not understood. While over 8,000 people affected have had their status confirmed, the slow progress of the compensation scheme has struggled to secure the confidence of victims.

This requires an invitation for everybody to participate if Black history is to be fully recognised as British history.

So the National Windrush Memorial arises directly from the government's apology for the scandal, as well as reflecting the growing call for recognition over the decades. A broad civic and cross-partisan coalition of over 120 civic voices came together to mark the unveiling of the monument with a call to action for all sectors of British society to play their part in making the 75th anniversary an important national moment.

What could the 75th anniversary be for?

There are many meanings of Windrush, so the Windrush 75 anniversary will be inherently pluralist. It is a foundational story about the Black Caribbean experience, of the Black British story; the symbolic origins story of post-war migration from the Commonwealth and beyond; and now an opportunity for this to be fully written into the national story as the history of modern Britain.

During initial convening by the Windrush 75 network over the last year, several areas of common ground have emerged about the potential value and impact of the 75th anniversary.

The importance of elevating this as a national moment has been a shared theme. This requires an invitation for everybody to participate if Black history is to be fully recognised as British history. The 75th anniversary should offer useful opportunities for symbolic recognition – on coins and stamps, and in shifting the argument from how many statues to take down to which ones we could put up. It is an opportunity for national institutions, from the NHS to major sporting bodies, to tell the story of the contribution of the Windrush and the migration that followed to shaping who we are today. The sustained legacy of Windrush 75 beyond 2023 may depend on whether the year can be a foundation for educational resources that give schools the tools they need to fully engage with the place of race, Empire and immigration in the making of modern Britain.

The particular educational value of Windrush is that it can illuminate both the contrasts and the common strands in the British and American histories of race. This origins story for the Black British presence is one of voluntary economic migration – of those who saw an advertisement for a £28 fare, six months wages in Jamaica, to come to Britain. The Windrush generation arrived with full and equal rights in law, as British citizens, yet struggled to get that status recognised in society. It is also an experience located within a four-century history of the transatlantic slave trade and its abolition, the contribution of Empire to Britain's industrial revolution, and the role of decolonisation and Commonwealth migration in the making of modern Britain.

75th anniversaries are an important moment in the human life-span: a bridge towards a centenary when there will be little or no living memory of 1948 itself, and rather less of the generation as a whole.

There is a particularly strong civic appetite to see the 75th anniversary focus on inter-generational reach. 75th anniversaries are an important moment in the human life-span: a bridge towards a centenary when there will be little or no living memory of 1948 itself, and rather less of the generation as a whole. There is also a broad desire to address the ongoing injustices, but not to see the story of four generations of contribution and change in British society now told through the narrower lens of the Windrush scandal.

2/3

of the public favour children being taught about the Empire Windrush in schools, with just 9% disagreeing

Activity to mark Windrush Day has been growing across nations and regions – in Birmingham and Leeds, Bristol and Liverpool, Luton and Cardiff – offering important opportunities to extend the geographic reach of commemorative activities. The anniversary offers the social connection sector an opportunity to deepen its engagement with ethnic minority Britain.

Initial attitudes research for the Windrush 75 Network has demonstrated a broad public appetite and understanding for the call to mark the 75th anniversary. Two-thirds of the public favour children being taught about the Empire Windrush in schools, with just 9% disagreeing. A majority of ethnic minority respondents wanted to see the 75th anniversary marked in a significant way, supported by a white British plurality of 46% to 15%.

Yet research for this report found that white British participants were equally likely to think this could prove unifying (42%) or divisive (40%), largely reflecting the polarised arguments about statues after the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020. The unusually broad cross-party and civic coalition of support for the Windrush 75 anniversary suggests such anxieties may be overstated. But research to understand the range of starting points of different sections of the public – across the generations and different minority and majority groups – will be an important foundation for efforts to take the story of Windrush to the broadest possible public audience.

SECTION 6

WHAT CAN GO WRONG?

HOW MAJOR EVENTS CAN FAIL TO REALISE THEIR POTENTIAL

Not all major events work. That may sometimes be a matter of alchemy and luck. The reasons may sometimes only become clear with hindsight. But there are also useful lessons from reflecting on those major events that have failed to capitalise on the opportunities highlighted in this report.

The Millennium Dome was a public and artistic failure in terms of its intended contribution to providing a national narrative for this new century (though it did catalyse a tangible local impact in North Greenwich). It had a once-in-a-thousand years moment, promising to tell a new story about this country to the world, but failed to find much of a voice. There were many problems – the dominance of the £750 million cost, which the public were always sceptical about; having to deal with direct political control and significant direct sponsor influence over the content. Those problematic aspects of the Millennium Dome have offered important lessons, adopted in the governance structures of major cultural projects and programmes since. This new research shows that the challenge remains of explaining why major events are an effective use of public resources.

The Dome was part of a conscious act of national ‘rebranding’. This meant that it was in many ways envisaged as a story that Britain (or its government) wanted to project to the wider world, about a young and modern Britain, perhaps more than a message to Britain itself. But an effort to consciously change the story that Britain tells to the world probably requires more of a sense of conversation at home about what is in it and why.

It’s useful to consider why Danny Boyle’s opening ceremony for the 2012 London Olympics was largely perceived to be a critical and public success, where the Dome was not. There were doubts about the 2012 Olympics until it began. Yet Boyle’s story was more contentful than that proposed by the Dome, not least because it was less binary. The extent of the Dome’s focus of modernity – “the future, not the past” – left it unmoored. In a bid to be inclusive of some of those previously excluded, it tried to be everything for everyone and ended up being for no-one. Danny Boyle did much more to try to bridge than the Dome had attempted.

Twenty-seven million of us that night watched a compelling story about our past and present, in which modern Britain was shown to arise as a product of our long history – of the industrial revolution, war and Empire, cultural and technological change – rather than being a modernising rupture from it.

This emphasises too the value for efforts to lead a national conversation about “who we are” to combine participation and voluntary engagement with mass public projection through broadcast media.

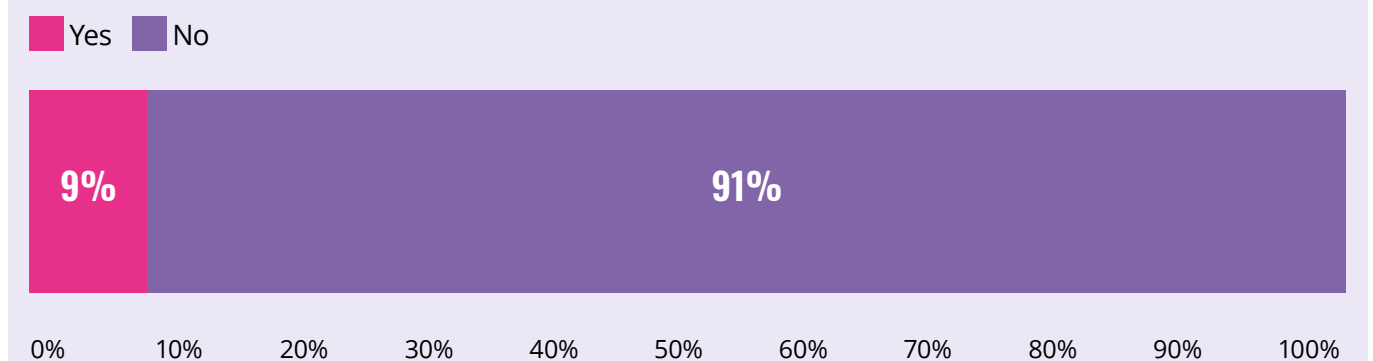
The **Unboxed Festival** – previously the Festival of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and colloquially (and unhelpfully) the so-called ‘Festival of Brexit’ – is still underway. It is too early to offer a rounded verdict, particularly of audience reaction from those who did take part. But what does seem clear is that it has fallen short of one expectation of a shared event – public awareness. British Future’s recent research for the *Jubilee Britain* report found that just nine per cent of the public had heard of it.

The aims of Unboxed are that the festival should bring people together, celebrate UK creativity and span both the traditional arts and technology. The programming may achieve the latter two – but the lack of public reach may limit its ability to bring people together and bridge divides at scale. A televised flagship moment early in the festival, with national reach, could have made an important difference.

Major sporting events have a clear advantage in this respect, while the programming of major royal events like the Jubilee blends offers of public and mediated participation. 14-18 NOW faced a difficult challenge of marking a centenary (of the First World War) across an extended four-year period. A mass participation invitation, the *Lights Out* extinguishing of candles on the evening of 4th August 2014, proved an effective way to put the broader programme on the public radar, while the arc of activities around major focal points helped to mitigate the risk of centenary fatigue. It was doubtless an advantage to be able to pitch this as a way to mark a significant anniversary, but it took creativity to do it well and in a way that continued to engage the public over a four-year period.

However, the attempt at a 2020s national festival was not in itself an unrealistic ambition. It would have had a much greater opportunity to combine broad participation with a leading role in the national conversation had it been scheduled as part of one of the great national occasions of this year, rather than running on a distinct and parallel track to the Jubilee. Reflections on the lessons of the successes and challenges of Unboxed may still, therefore, be of relevance to considering the type of cultural activity that might showcase British culture in all of its forms during the year of the next Coronation.

Figure 5. Before today, have you heard of the “Unboxed” festival of creativity that is scheduled to take place around the UK in 2022, or not?



Source: Focaldata survey of 2,006 GB adults, 28 February – 7 March 2022.

WHAT CAN GO WRONG?

This is not an argument in principle against the invention of new moments and events. After all, we would have few national traditions if nobody ever tried to invent one. Remembrance, for example, was a conscious creation. It had to navigate significant tensions between the expectations and intuitions of how to mark the armistice anniversary, between those who had been bereaved and veterans who survived, to meet the needs of the post-war generation. It has evolved, over the generations, to meet the shifting needs of British society. The Festival of Britain was a successful event in its own time, albeit one where a major government-commissioned project faced rather less competition for attention and airtime.

More recently, the development of place-based festivals through the City of Culture programme – a new, national model – have in different ways contributed significantly to pride of place, and to public engagement, in Hull, Derry/Londonderry and in Coventry. There was already a scale of appetite and expectation in the announcement of Bradford's City of Culture selection that augurs well for its reach and presence across the city and more broadly. Efforts to create new moments can also repurpose pegs that already have a public resonance. The birthday of the NHS – the most cherished of British institutions – was chosen by the Together Coalition as the occasion for its first national Thank You Day during Covid-19, generating impressive public reach for a new initiative. Thank You Day this year joined in with the Jubilee effort.

So there should be no prohibition on the invention of new traditions – but the challenge of establishing broad reach with them sets a high bar. So, on balance, there is a strong argument for giving priority to extending and sometimes reinventing the traditions we already have when seeking to extend broad public reach with the intentional ambition to cross divides.

50%

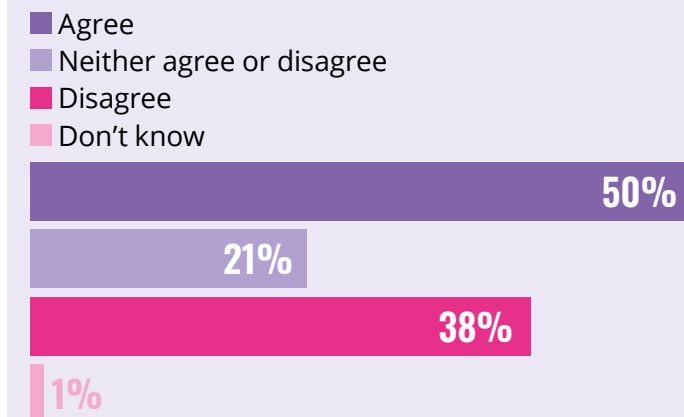
agreed with a statement that 'big events like the Jubilee and the Commonwealth Games are a distraction from the real issues facing the country.'

The broader socio-political context in which an event takes place can also affect how people perceive and engage with these occasions, sometimes increasing the potential for challenge or scepticism from different parts of a community. The Focldata survey for this report, for instance – undertaken the day after the Jubilee, and within a period of rising costs of living – found that 50% agreed with a statement that 'big events like the Jubilee and the Commonwealth Games are a distraction from the real issues facing the country.' This was felt most strongly by younger respondents aged 18-24 (61%) compared with 39% of over-65s. This represented a marked shift in attitudes from when British Future posed a similar question in 2012 and 2019¹⁷, though the different phrasing of the 2022 question means the results are not directly comparable. Event organisers will need to be attuned to how circumstances, such as a challenging economic climate, can impact appetite for events – and have a compelling account of the value that the event brings.

It is also worth noting that people from socioeconomic group DE were less likely to have attended a Jubilee event than those from the AB group. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of people from the DE group did not attend a Jubilee event, significantly more than the 48% of ABs who sat out the Jubilee. This does not appear to be based on appetite to attend, with people in both groups equally likely to say that Jubilee events are for 'people like me'. So other factors – perhaps needing to work on the Bank Holiday, or a lack of accessible events in their local area – may have been a factor.

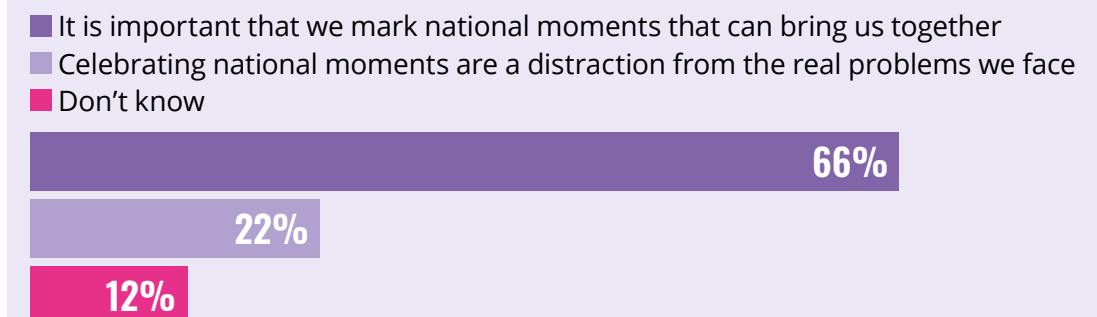
Focldata survey, 2022 of 2018 UK adults:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? "Big events like the Jubilee and the Commonwealth Games are a distraction from the real issues facing the country."



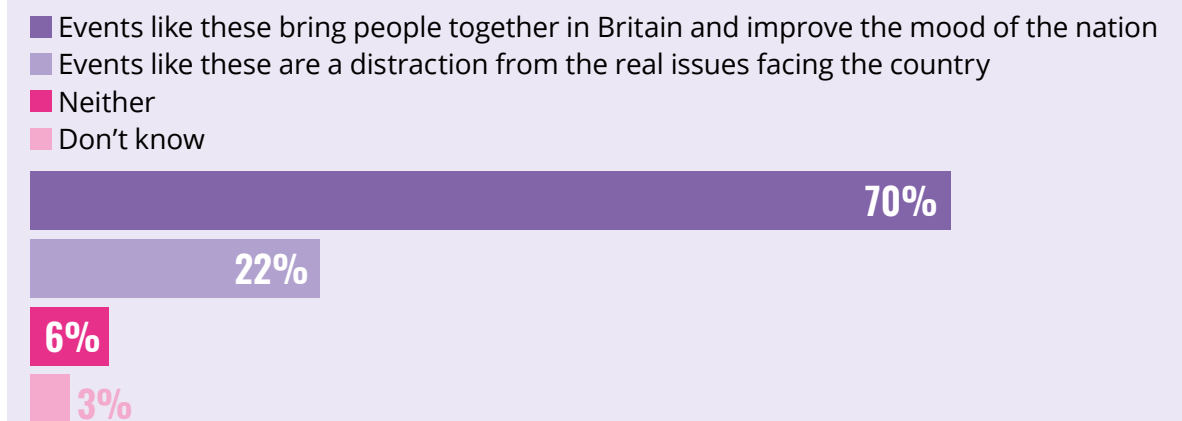
ICM survey, 2019 of 2260 GB adults:

Which of the following comes closest to your view? At a time when the UK can feel divided...



Ipsos Mori survey, 2012 of 1,015 GB adults:

This year, Britain has held the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and hosted the 2012 Olympic Games. Thinking about these events, which of the two statements below best reflects your opinion?



WHAT CAN GO WRONG?

Could the 'culture wars' be a risk for major events?

There is increasing concern regarding polarisation about culture and identity in Britain. One of the lessons of the last decade has been that Britain is a more anxious, fragmented and divided society than most of us would want, though it is also somewhat less so than our media (and particularly social media) debates would have us believe.

In comparative terms, the UK is a society with middling levels of conflict about identity and culture, with lower levels of social conflict and 'affective polarisation' – feeling cold or hostile to those with differing views – than in the United States.

Research from King's College London Policy Institute shows that an exponential growth in media discourse about "culture wars" has led to gradually higher public awareness and concern about this. Some 54% of people say they feel that the UK is divided by 'culture wars' in 2022, compared to 46% in 2021. Public recognition of some of the main terms in media and political arguments about clashes of culture and identity has grown faster. Around half (49%) of the public had not heard of 'cancel culture' in 2021 but this fell to 27% this year. The number of people who had not heard anything about debates over what it means to be 'woke' fell from a third to a sixth of the population.

54%

of people say they feel that the UK is divided by 'culture wars' in 2022, compared to 46% in 2021.

Engagement in these culture and identity debates, from whatever position, remains significantly skewed towards those with higher levels of political engagement and high levels of participation in online discussion. A significant amount of the growing discourse about 'culture wars' is often an expression of anxiety about this challenge, rather than an endorsement of such cultural conflicts. Yet this can contribute itself to perceptions of increasing division. If perceptions are that social norms of how we disagree with each other have shifted, this can influence our attitudes and behaviour.

Major events have significant potential to provide something of an antidote. When they go well, major events can help to demonstrate that significant disagreements over major political issues, including Brexit, Scottish independence or how we approach issues of identity, equalities and social change, do not prevent those with different views finding things that we share. Yet this could become more difficult if they become potential lightning rods for cultural conflict, about whose values and views they should reflect.

The Euro 2020 football championships demonstrated some of these dynamics. The argument about taking the knee – and then about a minority of fans booing the players when they did so – was the dominant theme of the tournament build-up. The profile of the issue was reduced once the tournament began. Opinion remained divided over the value of the symbolic act; though those who booed the players, or the handful of politicians and commentators who declared that they would boycott the team over the anti-racism gesture, simply isolated themselves. Public opinion gradually became more divided over the issue, while becoming more supportive of the player's choice by a 56% to 32% margin,¹⁸ a perception reinforced by the online racism received by footballers after the tournament ended.

The spirit of all major events should be one of celebration rather than conscription. One advantage of technological change is that it is much easier for those who aren't interested to do something else instead. In 2022, social, political or identity conflict over the Jubilee was rather quiet. Those in favour of a UK Republic can legitimately use such moments to make their case, but chose to do so in a respectful way during a Platinum Jubilee.

The commemoration of the centenary of the First World War took place across five of the most volatile years in public life of this century, coinciding with several political events of a magnitude rarely seen more than once in a generation.

The commemoration of the centenary of the First World War took place across five of the most volatile years in public life of this century, coinciding with several political events of a magnitude rarely seen more than once in a generation. The commemorations began at Glasgow Cathedral in August 2014, just weeks before Scots voted not to dissolve the United Kingdom. In July 2016, David Cameron oversaw the commemorations of the Somme as one of his final duties as Prime Minister, just a week after the public vote to leave the European Union had triggered his resignation. The November 2018 commemorations of the centenary took place during a long period of deadlock in British politics.

Yet the centenary largely navigated this context successfully. It did not do so by ducking difficult issues or challenges. The cultural programme, for example, saw *We're Here Because We're Here* put actors playing troops in British uniforms on the streets of Northern Ireland, in common with its approach elsewhere, in a way that was understood to be part of a cultural commemoration rather than any kind of political provocation. There was some nervousness in Whitehall about the decision to symbolise reconciliation by inviting the President of Germany to lay a wreath at the Cenotaph, yet this generated no public or media controversy whatsoever.

It helped that there was much greater civic and cultural participation in the centenary activities in the UK, thanks to the scale of the cultural programme. In an era in which there is dissatisfaction with political polarisation, there is also a broad public appetite for trying not to turn those events that can transcend our divides into yet more ammunition for political arguments.

So those organising major events need to be vigilant, but not alarmist, about cultural challenge. Avoidance of difficult issues can be less effective than constructive engagement with them. Social and political challenge to major events is a legitimate part of free expression: people can have different views about whether we should have a monarchy or the value of public spending on major sporting events. Issues of transparency or bad governance in global sporting bodies have a higher profile during showcase moments.

There may be value in doing more to prepare. That could include emulating the approach to the Decade of Centenaries taken across the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, in proactively identifying the risks of future events, being open about the challenges and articulating principles for engagement that can secure consent from those with different substantive views of the events being commemorated.

SECTION 7

RECOMMENDATIONS:

MAXIMISING THE BRIDGING POWER AND POTENTIAL OF EVENTS – FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

The portfolio of major events will present a host of opportunities to bring people together, shape a positive, inclusive and shared identity and to help people live better together in communities across the UK. But there will also be increasing demands, given competing pressures on public finances and economic anxiety, to demonstrate impact and value when major events draw on public resource and capacity.

Some major events will succeed in their aims and exceed high expectations, while others may occasionally disappoint. The central theme of this report is how far a more strategic and intentional approach can maximise the bridging opportunities of events.

The complex nature of each major event means that their success, in increasing social contact and bridging, depends on the work behind the scenes that the public never sees.

How can that be realised in practice? Who needs to act and how? The complex nature of each major event means that their success, in increasing social contact and bridging, depends on the work behind the scenes that the public never sees. It also depends on strong partnerships: between national policy-makers, cultural practitioners, civic groups, major trusts and foundations, and national and local institutions across the major spheres of society.

Given that these different organisations and institutions will not all have the same roles, responsibilities and objectives, working together will inevitably present some challenges and tensions too.

Here we suggest how to do more to join the dots – before looking in Chapter 8 at some specific examples of major events where the theory could be put into practice.

1.

Foundations and facilitators: how to make connections across events and apply bridging lessons to key opportunities

National policy-makers have a crucial role to play in making major events succeed. They have an important say in the choice of occasions that secure most attention, and often provide a significant amount of public resource to enable civic action at a national and local level – such as by establishing the City of Culture programme. The success of major events also depends on devising effective arms-length governance processes that do not seek to micro-manage the content of, for example, the cultural activities being devised. A broadly effective model to do this has evolved over the last two decades, not least from reflective learning on the Dome experience. Where policy-makers can add most value is by getting the foundations right: being clear about objectives and responsibilities and encouraging transparency about progress in achieving and respecting them.

Align an evidence base: build new frameworks for evaluation that are more consistent across relevant major events.

Post-event evaluations currently place a somewhat excessive priority on estimating headline 'reach' numbers. If that is thought to be the primary focus for policy-makers and public audiences, it will inevitably incentivise an instrumental approach to boost the headline number. This can sometimes lead to organisers finding creative ways to capture or estimate 'fleeting' contact from passers-by, which may be prioritised over intentional engagement or more meaningful forms of participation. While some focus on these headline reach numbers is inevitable, this form of 'competition' in reach statistics presents more of a barrier than a contributor to reflective learning, particularly as this creates a form of inflationary pressure on future event producers to follow suit, and some disincentive to focus on more meaningful, but harder measure, engagement.

A clearer and more rigorous framework for calculating reach may have some value, but the more important factor may be in identifying factors of importance other than reach. This could be achieved through a public conversation about what else is of foundational importance – and developing clear frameworks for ongoing evaluation. Given the importance of 'bridging' connections for integration, we recommend paying particular attention to devising useful frameworks for bridging, particularly strategies and indicators that can capture and inform efforts to create meaningful contact across perceived differences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Institutionalise reflective learning, to link local and national efforts more strongly.

The transfer of lessons across events is significant, but has largely been ad hoc. Evaluations are conducted but these are often retrospective, albeit with a forward-looking element. Individuals and institutions involved in one major project will leave and take those insights and experiences with them. When new projects begin they can then sometimes start from scratch, consulting widely. There has been increased awareness of the value of capturing and integrating these lessons in a systemic way, in the decade since 2012. This current inquiry is an example of creating one vehicle to explore that challenge. This creates an opportunity to consider how to develop and institutionalise communities of reflective practice.

DCMS should explore how best to encourage and support a new cross-sectoral community of practice to sustain links, networks and evidence, especially linking up place-based expertise with major national occasions.

A distinct opportunity of the 2020s is to find the most effective way to draw on the experiences and insights of major place-based events of this decade – the Birmingham Commonwealth Games, the City of Culture programme in Coventry and soon in Bradford – sustaining networks so that a bigger part of their intentional legacy becomes how they can contribute to the impact and reach of the biggest national occasions of the 2020s and 2030s, such as the Euro 2028 football tournament and, especially, the next Coronation.

2.

How major events contribute to ‘levelling up’ participation and pride in place.

‘Levelling up’ is one of the central missions of this government, indicated by the reframing of the identity and mission of the government department which leads on Communities into the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Beyond the political debates about the language and framing, and how to measure delivery, this reflects a broadening of the cross-party, civic and public consensus on the importance of narrowing place-based inequalities. There is also a broad consensus on the links between socio-economic challenges and issues of identity, culture and belonging, reflected in the role of ‘pride in place’ as one key sphere of levelling up, alongside socio-economic indicators.

The levelling up challenge for social connection is that it will tend to happen most in the places that already have it, and be harder to achieve in the places that do not. Levelling up social connection therefore requires sustained and intentional strategies for how policy and practice can challenge that dynamic and narrow those gaps. Major events have a particularly important role to play in contributing to efforts to achieve this – offering potential to widen the sphere of participation if they can play a part in sustained strategies.

Making increased participation in the quarter of wards with least social capital a sustained goal, that all major events are encouraged to adopt and to measure.

Some places have broader and deeper networks and relationships between local individuals and institutions than others. A clear framework to target activity promoting social connection at those places that most need it can increase transparency and give this objective status as a key test of success. It will also help to highlight the nature of this challenge – and mainstream efforts to learn and to transfer what is and is not proving effective in addressing it. Indicators can increase accountability and transparency, and incentivise efforts to prioritise this objective. It will need to be a foundation for effective partnerships between national and city-region government, trusts and foundations to invest in social connection capital and connectors in a sustained way.

Efforts will need to engage a range of different actors, with funding to ensure a broader spread of grants, including addressing the challenges of civic capacity from those areas and communities currently least likely to apply. It should tap into the mission shared by major charities to broaden volunteering, building from the insights of major events and the Covid pandemic; and the aims of sporting and cultural bodies to reach across geographic, social and ethnic divides. No one-size-fits-all model will be appropriate, but a range of efforts can be strengthened by seeking synergies and connections at national, regional and local levels between those who share this goal.

3.

Sustaining the power of sport – linking the national and the local

Despite its public profile, sport has arguably been somewhat undervalued, compared to other spheres of arts, culture and heritage, in the potential contribution that it can make to social connection.

With increasing commitment to social action from governing bodies and sporting clubs, there are opportunities to make links between practitioners about how theories of change and practical insights in social connection can best inform opportunities to apply them at scale. This may be particularly important in seeking to ensure that the increased commitment to ethnic minority inclusion is linked up, rather than becoming a separate sphere of outreach.

Different sports now face distinct challenges. Cricket has responded to an existential crisis around race with a deeper commitment to change – and knows it will face intense scrutiny. Many major sports need stronger efforts to act on their own strategies if they do not want a crisis about exclusion to become the primary driver for change. While the challenges are distinct, there are opportunities for national institutions across sport to offer more support to individual governing bodies, to cut out some replication of effort around strategic foundations of inclusion. Sport will contribute most to bridging if there is an intentional long-term strategy to link up the everyday commitment with showcase moments on the national and international stage, and to use key staging posts, such as Euro 2028 and the quadrennial Olympic cycle, as focal points for change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4.

Integrating diversity: How to move away from a segmented approach to ethnic minority 'outreach' and inclusion

All institutions are going to need to develop more confidence in how they talk and act on issues of race and ethnic diversity. As race increases in salience this is generating stronger commitments to inclusion. There are challenges, however, at a time of increasing political polarisation, to ensure that contested debates about how the language on race is shifting across generations do not impede practical action for inclusion and race equality. Major events have important opportunities to demonstrate inclusion in practice, at scale.

Effective narratives: Public narratives will need to effectively project a 'this is for everyone' invitation, combining this with a 'show not tell' proof that depicts inclusive participation across all dimensions of difference. Delivering this may require specific strategies to bridge across ethnicity and social class, geography and generations. Grounding narratives in audience research will help to maximise their resonance across different groups.

Integrating inclusion: The key to successful bridging strategies is to do more to integrate strategies for equality and inclusion across different strands. Rather than using 'diversity' as a synonym for ethnic minority presence, with efforts to reach out to specific under-represented groups and communities, the

social demographics of 2020s Britain will make it increasingly important to make this integral to broader strategies to bridge generational, social class and geographic divides. Those leading major events should adopt specific commitments that some of their work builds common ground across ethnic, faith, class and other social divides.

Making intergenerational contact an explicit objective and practice for bridging divides through events is an important way that major events can address the interaction of ethnicity, education and place in our current social perceptions of each other. This should become a norm for funders and practitioners in sports, heritage and arts and culture, by being explicitly adopted by contributors to major events such as National Portfolio Organisations and community trusts.

Timetabled commitments to increase ethnic, gender and social class diversity in governance and leadership should become sector-wide norms, at least emulating or surpassing the voluntary commitments now driving significant progress among most FTSE 100/250 firms following the Parker-Tyler review process¹⁹.

Missing foundations for ethnic inclusion: There are significant missing foundations to devise such a strategy and to put it into practice. The UK is certainly among the pioneers when it comes to ethnic minority data, but this is not emulated when it comes to researching and analysing ethnic minority attitudes in participation and audience insight research.

5.

Make the most of opportunities presented by hosting events and major anniversaries – and plan long-term to maximise impact.

While there is no precise formula as to which major events meet or exceed expectations, and which may struggle to do so, there is a clear pattern that the **hosting** of major events has particular opportunities for impact; and that **major anniversaries** offer significant opportunities to ratify and catalyse progress. This insight has been successfully extended beyond major sporting events in the City of Culture programme.

Why hosting matters so much may have many explanations. The sense of a special and scarce occasion may generate a widely felt sense of ownership in the potential pride (or anxiety) about whether things will go well. Hosting international guests requires us to decide, at home, what it is that we want to say about who we are and where we are going. When we are hosts, there are extended opportunities to combine the reach of mediated participation in national events with personal contact – participating as competitors, volunteers and audiences.

Extending the planning cycle for the biggest events will increase opportunities to move from moments to movements and sustained relationships.

The 2014-18 First World War centenary clearly benefitted from the chance to act on insights from 2014 in its activities for 2016 and 2018, and for these to provide foundations that could be extended in ongoing activities around Remembrance.

There are specific challenges in doing this for the public event with most reach and impact – the Coronation of the next Monarch. It is especially important to find appropriate ways to do this, including by linking up insights across major events, particularly between national and place-based moments.

Hosting international guests requires us to decide, at home, what it is that we want to say about who we are and where we are going.

SECTION 8

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: FIVE OPPORTUNITIES

1.

The Welcomers' Eurovision, 2023

The Eurovision song contest of 2022 had a peak audience of 10.6 million in the UK, the second biggest national television audience of the year so far, behind the Jubilee pop concert at Buckingham Palace. Indeed, the UK viewing figures were the highest across Europe. While the cosmopolitan spirit of Eurovision does not take winning or losing too seriously, Sam Ryder's second place in 2022 has usefully countered public scepticism about the UK's prospects in the contest in the post-Brexit era.

As runners-up, and with 2022 winners Ukraine unable to host the contest, the UK is now being invited by to host the Eurovision song contest for the first time since 1998. If we have a clear idea about how events matter to bridging, this can also be applied to unexpected opportunities too. Hosting Eurovision makes a useful contribution to the UK's major events portfolio – since it is a pop culture event which will have a distinct reach compared to major Royal and sporting events (as well as some overlapping audiences too).

In these circumstances, there will be an expectation that the BBC should propose a UK-Ukraine partnership seeking to co-produce a UK-hosted event with significant Ukrainian ownership and input. One of the most powerful ways to

send an inclusive and welcoming message about the meaning of the contest would be to ensure that Ukrainians in Britain and their British hosts in the Homes for Ukraine scheme are given priority in the allocation of several thousand tickets for the event. That should be accompanied by other ways to recognise and celebrate this partnership between the welcomers and the welcomed in activities, events and public communications around the song contest.

For civic society, championing public support for welcoming those fleeing conflict during Eurovision could become an important way to extend the invitation to more people to get involved in welcoming, across a wider range of groups.

Hosting the 2023 Eurovision song contest offers towns and cities across the nations and regions an opportunity to recognise the ongoing contributions of Europeans in British society. Both UK-Ukraine and broader 'welcoming' themes could be replicated in Eurovision 'fan zone' events – such as screenings of the contest and the build-up to it, as well as other related activities. This is a useful opportunity to show that valuing Britain's social connections with Europe can be something that many of those who took different positions in the EU referendum can get behind. It is an opportunity to ensure that Britain's ongoing social, cultural, educational and personal links in Europe do not become framed primarily by the political arguments of seven years earlier, before those aged 18-24 were even adults.

2.

Windrush 75 – an opportunity to take diversity out of the box

For those seeking to bridge ethnic divides, a key message of this report is that integrating diversity in the events that we all share – the rituals of Royalty and Remembrance; and major cultural and sporting events – has more potential for bridging. Yet it should now be possible in this decade to take the narrative that has most resonance for many first, second and third generation Britons, whose parents and grandparents came to Britain as migrants, and show how this too can be recognised as a national moment which tells the story of who we, the British, are today.

We have seen how the 50th anniversary of the Windrush successfully laid many foundations for the deeper engagement with the history of race and migration in the first two decades, though it was also the Windrush scandal that belatedly cemented understanding of why this is of more than symbolic importance. There is now a vital opportunity for the 75th anniversary to emulate this for the needs of our times, perhaps above all to counter a fear of ever-increasing polarisation around the history of race and Empire, and to increase confidence that we can deepen constructive conversations about our past, present and future in which all of the stories can be told.

A pluralist vision of Windrush would recognise and respect that it has a range of powerful meanings for different groups.

The meaning of Windrush is a founding memory for British Caribbean communities and a key moment in the broader Black British and Commonwealth experiences of migration and integration. At the same time it is also an essential chapter in our shared national history, if we are to understand together the changing nature of who we became over these 75 years and how that is rooted in a much longer history of four centuries of Empire and decolonisation. Rather than seeing these accounts of the meaning of Windrush as in competition, the anniversary can explore what their connections mean for understanding our past, present and future.

The meaning of Windrush is a founding memory for British Caribbean communities and a key moment in the broader Black British and Commonwealth experiences of migration and integration.

Understanding the starting points of audiences' knowledge and attitudes will be a key foundation for efforts to ensure the invitation to participate reaches across the generations, and across all minority and majority groups. How far the vision for connection is realised in 2023 will now depend on the extent to which the mainstream institutions of British society – not just national and local elected representatives, but the leaders of the NHS, the armed forces and our major sports, arts and culture – now respond to the civic call to action, so that the 75th anniversary opens up new understanding of our history and creates new connections for the future too.

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

3.

Euro 2028 – a showcase for sustained efforts in football

The Euro 2022 women's football tournament will be the highest profile staging post in the sustained campaign to increase the profile of women's sport. There is now a very strong prospect that the UK and Ireland's five-way hosting bid for the men's Euro 2028 football tournament will succeed. The decision will be announced in September 2023, giving almost five years to prepare for the tournament itself. Euro 2028 will have more reach across nations and regions than any previous major sporting event hosted in Britain and Ireland: London, Cardiff, Glasgow, Belfast, Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle, Leeds and Leicester are among the probable venues, as well as Dublin in the Republic of Ireland.

This could become one of the most important showcases in a generation for the power and potential of sport to help bridge divides and promote social contact between people from different backgrounds. So there is now a unique opportunity for governing bodies, football clubs and community trusts, supporters and grassroots volunteers to co-produce football's vision of inclusion and connection for 2028 – so that the tournament can become a catalyst and focal point for this next phase of social connection.

When the hosting decision is made, convening within each of the host nations could focus on the question of how to maximise the opportunity of a unique tournament. In each of the nations of the UK, football has a strong story to tell about the potential to break down "them and us" divides and to extend the invitation to celebrate the "new us" identity that we all share. With five years to go, the key question may be how to link these efforts between club and country: what can we aim to achieve over the seasons to come across our towns and cities to create the next story about football's contribution to shared identity and belonging, that can be celebrated when the home nations come together to welcome players and fans from across Europe in 2028?

4.

The Second World War centenaries of 2039-45 – capturing living history today

The centenary of the Second World War in 2039-45 may currently seem to lie in the distant future and few institutions will have the capacity to start planning 17 years in advance. Yet there are two strands of activity that would be useful to engage in at the current time, which would lay the foundations for successful commemorations in the future.

The commemorative programme for the centenary of the First World War in 2014-18 was a significant success, with arts and culture playing an important role in extending the reach and resonance of the centenary with Britons from all backgrounds. That would seem to make a major commemorative programme across 2039-45 very likely to get political, institutional and public support.

The scope and scale of civic, local and public participation in the First World War centenary, largely due to the ambition of the cultural programme alongside other local heritage projects, sets a benchmark for public engagement through culture and heritage which the Second World War centenary should match. The Government should make sure there is a systematic effort to capture the useful lessons from the 2014-18 centenary, including the 14-18 NOW cultural programme, to inform plans for 2039-45.

Efforts should also be initiated now to capture the testimonies of tens of thousands of Second World War veterans, now in their nineties, and some of the million people in their eighties with some memory of the war years as children. Across the 2020s and 2030s direct experience of this conflict too will pass from living memory into the realm of history and identity. There are important opportunities, too, for intergenerational contact in the collection of oral histories.

The Second World War centenary also presents an opportunity for public engagement in the shared history of multi-ethnic contribution to the forces who served in the conflict, many of whose descendants are living in the UK today. Around half of the men who arrived on the Windrush, for example, were Caribbean RAF servicemen returning to Britain after having been stationed here in the war. There is a significant opportunity to rethink curriculum choices and textbooks well ahead of the next centenary, rather than in response to it; and for the collection of oral histories of commonwealth servicemen and women to function as a means of bridging ethnic and faith divides.

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

5.

The next Coronation

The two most momentous public events of the decade to come will be shaped by the monarchy – once in mourning and later in how a future coronation is celebrated. Both events are likely to be framed as an opportunity to look back at more than 70 years of British history – at how our society has changed over the course of this second Elizabethan era and who we are today. It is hard to overstate the magnitude of such events to our public, media and political discourse: the public's experience and memory of how we mark them could shape our society's understanding of itself for many years to come.

The funeral of a Monarch is a delicate subject and will be marked by the well-rehearsed plans of the Government and other key institutions, as well as the public's own displays of mourning. It would, however, be appropriate for civil society and other actors to begin to quietly plan for the Coronation that follows. Bringing people together and ensuring everybody is invited to participate in these major national events – in the way that they choose to – and striving to make them a moment of contact across our society, would have broad legitimacy. That should be a goal in which many people, enthusiastic or more agnostic about the institution of Monarchy, could see value.

The Monarchy itself may also want to reflect on the broadly positive response to Prince William's participation in the June unveiling of the national Windrush monument, which he used as a moment to acknowledge the contribution of the Windrush generation, and those who followed, to British society.

Those planning Coronation events should draw on the lessons of what worked well and less well from the Platinum Jubilee, and indeed from other major national events too. It should look beyond the Mall and Westminster Abbey to consider how Coronation events can engage people of all backgrounds across the UK, building on the legacies from the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham and City of Culture programmes in Coventry and Bradford.

The Monarchy itself may also want to reflect on the broadly positive response to Prince William's participation in the June unveiling of the national Windrush monument, which he used as a moment to acknowledge the contribution of the Windrush generation, and those who followed, to British society. The Coronation should seize a similar opportunity to examine how our multi-ethnic, multi-faith society has changed over 70 years of the Queen's reign, drawing on existing efforts to use our common history to connect people from different backgrounds and casting forward to the future that we share.

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ABOUT THIS REPORT AND THE AUTHORS

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British Future is an independent, non-partisan think tank engaging people's hopes and fears about integration and migration, identity and race, so that we share a confident and welcoming Britain, inclusive and fair to all.

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