

# If England players must sing the national anthem at the football World Cup, it should not be ‘God Save the Queen’

By Democratic Audit

With the football World Cup approaching, England manager Roy Hodgson is insisting that his players [sing the national anthem](#) before each game. We asked a number of democracy experts to share their views on Hodgson’s rule. In the first of a [series of posts](#) on this issue, we find a broad consensus that while singing the anthem may be a positive sign of patriotic feeling, ‘God Save the Queen’ is inappropriate for various reasons, including its religious and monarchist sentiment, and because it is a UK anthem rather than England’s alone.



Roy Hodgson wants all of his players to sing the national anthem before games. Credit: [Alexandra Savicheva](#), CC BY-NC 2.0

**David McCrone, Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Edinburgh**

[God Save the Queen/King](#) is a dirge, invented by Thomas Arne at the time of the Jacobite Rising in 1745 (hence the line ‘Rebellious Scots to Crush’ in the second stanza, no longer sung). It is quite unworthy of being the English national anthem, alongside something as good as Blake’s [Jerusalem](#). This has the merit of not only being a good tune, but lacking in vainglorious triumphalism like [Land of Hope and Glory](#).



Mind you, we Scots have to make do with some awful stuff, including [Flower of Scotland](#), and [Scotland the Brave](#). The only peoples of these islands who have anything like the proper thing are the Welsh with [Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau](#) (Land of my Fathers). So it’s about time that England recovered a great tune with proper words, and radical sentiments. ‘Til we have built Jerusalem on England’s Green and Pleasant Land’: unbeatable.

**Graham Smith, Chief Executive Officer, [Republic](#)**

*Hodgson makes the common enough mistake of associating patriotism with the monarchy. Yes, he's asking players to sing the 'national' anthem, but the dirge in question is not an anthem to the nation but a song about the monarchy. Patriotism is not a loyalty to state institutions but a loyalty to the nation – and it has to be a very personal thing, not something pre-determined by a football coach. A love of one's country is clearly going to be felt in different ways by different people in this multi-cultural age.*



*Clearly any atheist or republican – and there are millions of both in this country – would think twice before singing God Save the Queen. A national anthem should be about the nation, a celebration of the people and our achievements – yet God Save the Queen barely mentions the country at all. Instead we are beseeched to call upon God (not sure which one) to save an 88 year old monarch. It is a song born from 18th century politics that has no place in a modern society.*

*It is also an anthem for the whole union, not just England. As part of that union debates breaking away perhaps England should think more about its own unique identity and how that can be celebrated in a more meaningful way through our 'national' sports teams.*

**Sunder Katwala, Director of [British Future](#)**

*England will be the only one of 32 nations to play in the World Cup without a state to its name. Union Jacks fluttered around the Wembley stands when Bobby Moore lifted the Jules Rimet trophy in 1966. Since football came home for Euro '96, and the flag of St George came out, the English have increasingly appreciated that being British and English are not the same thing; something that the Scots and the Welsh always knew.*



*So God Save the Queen remains the right anthem for Team GB, the brand under which the UK compete at the Olympics (despite Northern Irish sensitivities). We will keep our constitutional monarchy for as long as the broad social consensus in favour of it remains strong. But it helps neither Union nor Crown for one British nation to appropriate the civic anthem of our multinational state. An English anthem for our young, modern English team is overdue. It probably can't be [Football's Coming Home](#). So Jerusalem would fit the bill perfectly.*

**Michael Kenny, Professor of Politics at Queen Mary University of London and author of [The Politics of English Nationhood](#)**

*The idea that footballers have to prove their patriotic fervour by singing along to a tune which emerged, in true British style, as 'the national anthem' because the political establishment decreed that it was a hallowed custom rather than an invented tradition, is a familiar part of the media hoopla that we have come to associate with any England World Cup campaign.*



*But this tiredness of clichés could be turned on its head and transformed into a game-changing cultural moment if Roy Hodgson were to call instead for an English anthem to be*

sung by his team. Why not advocate that the young men, and women, who represent England at international sporting events get the chance to sing a resonant number that celebrates the iconic power of a sense of collective inheritance, and holds out the prospect of a radically re-made and reborn England. In an era of seismic change and accompanying uncertainties, and when a team that hails from a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds suddenly becomes the focus for a nation's excessive hopes and secret fears, surely we need William Blake's Jerusalem not a clapped-out, energy-sapping dirge?

Those who think that an English anthem might play into the hands of nationalist enemies of the UK are seriously out of kilter with the national mood. [Polling suggests](#) that such a move would win the support of most English people, and would find favour with non-English peoples in the UK who have long been fed up with the English penchant for mixing up Anglo and British identities. More importantly still, as evidence grows that more English people are [increasingly responsive to an English sense of peoplehood](#), and as this emergent sense of national sovereignty is currently being addressed in political terms only by UKIP, there is a growing need to provide new forms of meaningful recognition for English pride and identity within a reconstituted United Kingdom – one reason perhaps why some politicians, [including the Prime Minister](#), have begun to support calls for an English anthem.

Democratic, lyrical and a thumpingly good tune; the echoes of Jerusalem might even make the penalties more bearable...

**Norman Bonney, Emeritus Professor at Edinburgh Napier University and Honorary President of Edinburgh Secular Society**

It is increasingly unjustifiable to expect team members to actively engage in singing the national anthem at international sporting events because of its invocation of a supernatural being. Social survey [evidence](#) now suggests that 19 per cent of the population say 'there definitely is not a God or some higher power' and 16 per cent say 'there probably is not a God or some higher power'. Such figures are even higher among younger people who are generally more disengaged from religious faith. To impose participation in singing or even listening to the anthem is unworthy of a diverse liberal society.

The UK, and England, clearly need new national songs that reflect contemporary values. Nor is it justifiable for England, alone, to appropriate the UK anthem. The monarchy website claims that only the first verse is used on official occasions – luckily this excludes the 1745 additional verse about 'crushing the rebellious Scots'.



**Andy Mycock, Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Huddersfield**

Roy Hodgson's request that those taking the field to represent England in the forthcoming World Cup matches must sing the 'national' anthem raises a rather awkward question – which nation's anthem? Together with others, I have long argued that there is an urgent need for those representing England to sing an English national anthem other than God Save the Queen.



The current arrangements merely confirm an enduring Anglo-British myopia that, although slowly unravelling, still offends those from outside of England across the rest of the UK

*and politicises the British national anthem. This oversight needs to be addressed as the World Cup will in many other ways offer further evidence of a growing popular ascription to an English nationalism that has much to laud.*

*In my life time I have witnessed the popular embrace and normalisation of English patriotism during sporting occasions such as the World Cup, with the Cross of St George now flown with pride from many houses, cars, and pubs. Indeed it has become such a banal feature of public life in England that it now barely raises comment. Why not supplement this outpouring of sporting pride (and fatalism) with an English national anthem – Jerusalem being the most popular choice – that players and football patriots alike can bellow with pride?*

**Colin Copus, Professor of Local Politics, De Montfort University**

*Roy Hodgson is absolutely right to insist the England team sing a national anthem and with gusto. The sight of more demonstrative nations not only belting out their anthem, but covering their hearts with their right hands and even standing to attention, is testament to their commitment to their country's footballing cause. Contrast that to the mumbling and embarrassed downward glances and shuffling of feet that often accompanies the England team's rendition and we can see the winners already.*



*But, the real problem for the England team is that they sing the wrong anthem: the British anthem. When was the last time a Scottish or Welsh team sang with gusto the British anthem and yet the England team and nation is refused the right to hear its own national anthem at exclusively English occasions. Personally I prefer a re-written version of [There'll Always be an England](#), removing the references to Empire and the colour blue (no blue in the English flag), but by popular accord Jerusalem should be sang by the English team: loudly and proudly. Even re-inserting into the British anthem the bit about 'rebellious Scots to crush' won't do, because, well they're not there are they. Nope, Jerusalem it must be and not just at the World Cup, but every time an English team plays anywhere and anything.*

**We have published follow-ups to this post with more expert views on the national anthem, considering its place in today's multi-cultural society and the approach of the media. [Click here to read more.](#)**

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*Note: This post represents the views of the author and does not give the position of Democratic Audit or LSE. Please read our [comments policy](#) before responding.*