

04 FEB 2015

ENGLISH DEMOCRATS

PRO PATRIA ANGLORUM

QUIRES GREEN
WILLINGALE
ONGAR
ESSEX
CM5 0QP

Tel: 01277 896000

Fax: 01277 896050

www.englishdemocrats.org

Our Ref: RT/37

Your Ref:

Date: 03/02/15

Ofcom
Riverside House
2a Southwark Bridge Road
London SE1 9HA

Dear Sir

Re: Leaders televised debates in the General Election

We note that there has been much discussion recently about the position of UKIP and the Greens, Plaid Cymru, the SNP and the DUP. We do however take issue with the currently publicised position, which seems, with the greatest of respect to all concerned, to be discriminatory about the interests of England and the English Nation.

David Cameron has said all the Nation of the UK should be represented. That should include England!

In all the discussions about what format the party leaders' debates in the forthcoming general election should take, one factor that has consistently been ignored is the England-specific framing of the discussion.

By this, we mean not just that the possibility of an England-specific debate – focusing on the type of 'English matters' on which many have recently advocated that only English MPs should have the right to vote – has simply not been considered; whereas separate Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish debates *have* been offered. Also the whole frame of reference for defining what constitutes 'major UK parties' is effectively English – or at least Anglo-British – has failed to be properly acknowledged. It should not be overlooked that 85% that 85% of electors are in England.

Take the recent statement by the Green Party's Australian-born leader Natalie Bennett claiming that the Green Party (of England and Wales) was one of the five major

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parties “in Britain”. Actually, no, it’s one of the five largest parties *in England*. If you really mean ‘Britain’, or the UK, then you’d probably have to rank the Greens as sixth, with the SNP clearly in third place, both in terms of party membership and likely parliamentary representation after the general election.

Then there are meaningless semantic arguments about what constitutes a ‘national’ party: whether it means standing candidates in every single seat in Great Britain; (as opposed to the whole UK), seat – leaving aside the fact that the Greens, Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats all have separate ‘Scottish’ parties, so that, technically, UKIP is the only major UK-wide party that qualifies. Unless, of course, by ‘national’ you mean every *English* seat. Because that is what, in this debate about the debates, ‘national’ actually does mean: it’s whether parties are standing everywhere in England that counts, and hence whether their leaders’ performance in the debates are of relevance and interest to an English TV audience. This is not being properly acknowledged.

This is not being properly acknowledged. Politicians and Media should admit that, in this supposedly UK election, involving UK-wide issues, there are really multiple elections: those in the devolved nations, where the issues properly concern only policy areas reserved to the UK government, and where nation-specific parties need to make their respective pitches about how they intend to look after the interests of the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish people within the London parliament; and then, in contrast, there is the election in England, where both reserved matters of great importance such as the economy, the EU, security and immigration are at stake, along with England-only matters such as the NHS, education, social care and cuts to local government – among many others.

It seems to us that instead, politicians and the media are seeking to maintain the pretence that there is a single UK electorate, and single set of policy issues of equivalent importance and relevance to that ‘national’ audience: the NHS alongside the economy; education alongside immigration; social care and housing alongside welfare. There *is* of course a single national audience affected by the parties’ positions in all of these areas – but it’s the English audience, not the British one. And the ‘English’ parties certainly shouldn’t make a pitch to viewers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on the (English) NHS, social care, education system, transport and local government, as if they were of equal relevance to viewers in those countries as those parties’ policies on the economy, defence and immigration. In fact, to do so is tantamount to fraud, as those parties wouldn’t be able to do anything in devolved policy areas if people in those countries voted them into power in Westminster.

We respectfully suggest that the only way to be fair and proportionate about this is to split the debates into “Reserved” and “Devolved” matters; to have separate debates in all four of the UK’s nations on the latter; and have one or more debate on “Reserved”

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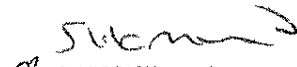
policy areas involving, in some way, all the major parties of each nation. Then, by all means, the Green Party of *England and Wales* should be included, at least in the separate English and Welsh debates; and the Scottish Greens should be included in the Scottish debate.

We suggest debates as follows:

- A first debate, aired UK-wide, featuring just David Cameron and Ed Miliband: as the PMs in waiting. This would deal only with "Reserved" matters, given its UK-wide transmission
- A second debate, aired UK-wide, featuring the leaders of all the parties that could end up as coalition partners to the Conservatives or Labour, or as holding the balance of power, i.e. the SNP, the Liberal Democrats, UKIP, the Greens, Plaid Cymru and the DUP. This debate should also be on "Reserved" matters only and should exclude the Conservatives and Labour in order to counterbalance the potential bias from limiting the first debate to them. Although only UKIP and the Greens are English parties, it would be relevant to English voters to have the leaders of the main nation-specific parties of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland appearing on the platform, as these parties may form part of UK governments legislating for England. The debates would therefore give voters in England a chance to find out whether these parties would ally themselves with Labour or the Conservatives in the event of a hung parliament; and what their stance on matters such as English votes for English laws, constitutional reform for England, and other issues of concern to English people such as immigration and EU membership would be. That might make a real difference to English voting intentions
- Four further nation-specific debates should also then happen, including UKIP, the English Democrats and the Greens in England, and the single nation-specific parties in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In England, the debate should reasonably deal with both England-specific (also "Devolved") and "Reserved" matters, but with a greater emphasis on English issues, as Reserved issues would have formed the focus of the previous two debates.

Please acknowledge receipt of this letter.

Yours faithfully


R C W Tilbrook
Chairman

Second submission sent by English Democrats on 5 February 2015

So far as England is concerned I would dispute that it is right to use statistics that are for the whole of Great Britain whereas for Scotland and Wales you use information specific to those nations. The approach that you have adopted is discriminatory against English Nationalists. This approach should be amended for future such exercises.

As compared with Plaid Cymru we have got a higher number of votes in EU elections than they have, albeit not as high percentages. I do not submit that we should be designated as a Major Party on this occasion. I do however think that the Greens should be.