

Who Are The Grouzers And Shiners?

By Ben Page and Nicholas Gilby, MORI Social Research Institute.

Who are the most miserable, grouching people in England? MORI has just completed a new analysis of a wide range of surveys on behalf of the BBC's PM Programme, looking at how perspectives vary across England. Again and again we have found that one region of the country seems markedly more positive about life and public services. We have christened them the "Shiners".

Looking at a wide variety of data tracking public satisfaction with a range of private and public sector institutions, the public in some regions have a much more positive outlook on things than others, for reasons which cannot simply be explained by factors such as political views or localised problems with some services.

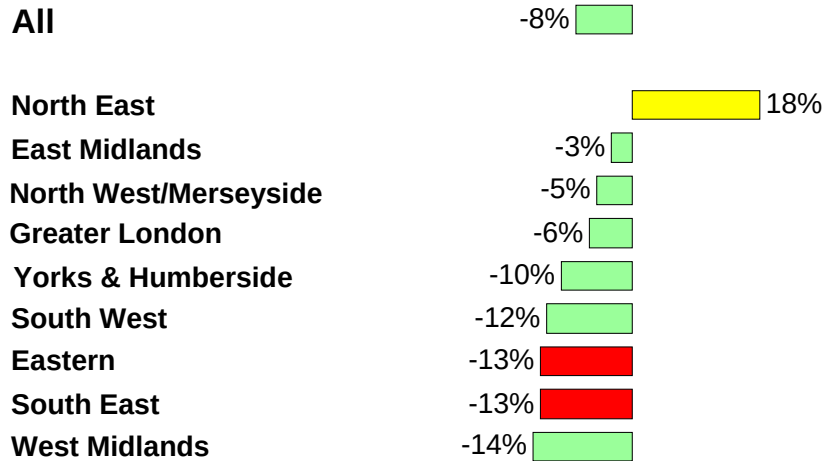
It is in the northernmost regions of Great Britain where the sunniest outlooks on life are to be found. The North-east is easily the most optimistic region, consistently being more positive than most others on the economy, and most public services. Their cheerfulness is largely mirrored in Scotland north of the border. Despite losing population and jobs to the South over the last few decades, it is these regions which are most positive. On the face of it, higher wages and household incomes in the South East do not seem to count for much, highlighting again the fact that money doesn't buy you optimism.

And as a general rule, the miserable people live in the higher waged but over-heating south east – but *not in London*.. They are among the regions most dissatisfied with the Government, and pessimistic about the economy, public services overall, the NHS, education, public transport, policing and the environment. Following hard on their heels is the other region within commuting distance of London – the East of England. No other regions are as consistently pessimistic about the future of public services, but also many other services – despite their apparent greater affluence.

For example, looking at the health service, people in the North East are far more likely to anticipate it getting better over the next few years than is typical for the country as a whole (where more think it will deteriorate rather than improve). Among the most pessimistic about the NHS are those in the South-East and East Anglia.

Expectations of NHS by Region

% thinking it will get better



Base: 3,873 adults aged 18+ 2003: MORI Delivery Index Aggregate Data

Source: MORI

A similar pattern appears when we look at education – people in the North East and Scotland are most optimistic – those in the South East and the Fens most pessimistic.

Expectations of Education by Region

% thinking it will get better



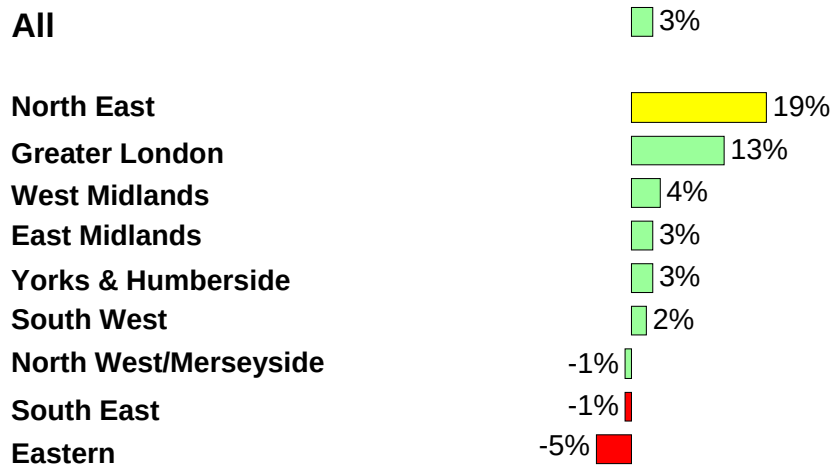
Base: 3,873 adults aged 18+ 2003: MORI Delivery Index Aggregate Data

Source: MORI

And so with policing...

Expectations of Policing by Region

% thinking it will get better



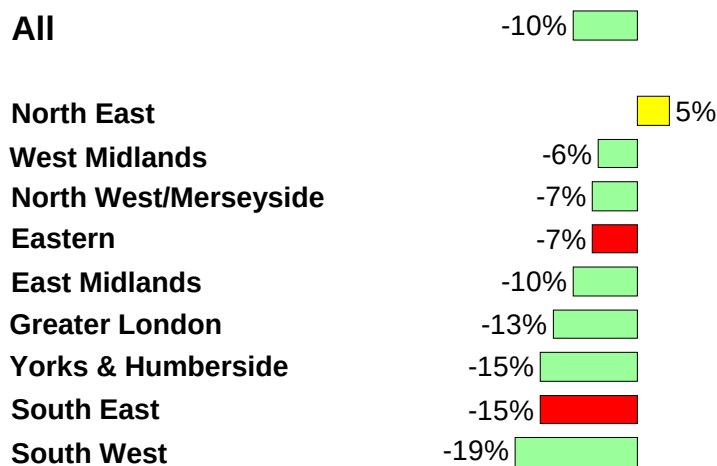
Base: 3,873 adults aged 18+ 2003: MORI Delivery Index Aggregate Data

Source: MORI

With the quality of the environment where, this time, people in East Anglia are a little bit more optimistic than on other issues.

Expectations of Quality of Environment by Region

% thinking it will get better

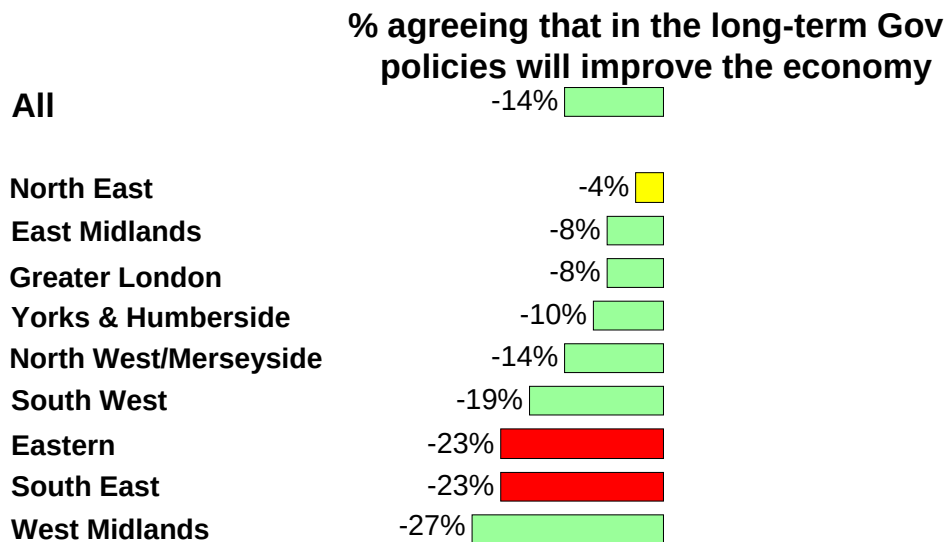


Base: 3,873 adults aged 18+ 2003: MORI Delivery Index Aggregate Data

Source: MORI

When we look at prospects for the economy, the same pattern is evident. Despite the North East having one of the lowest GDP of any region in Great Britain, its residents are optimistic about policies for the economy, in contrast to the affluent South East.

Expectations of Economy by Region

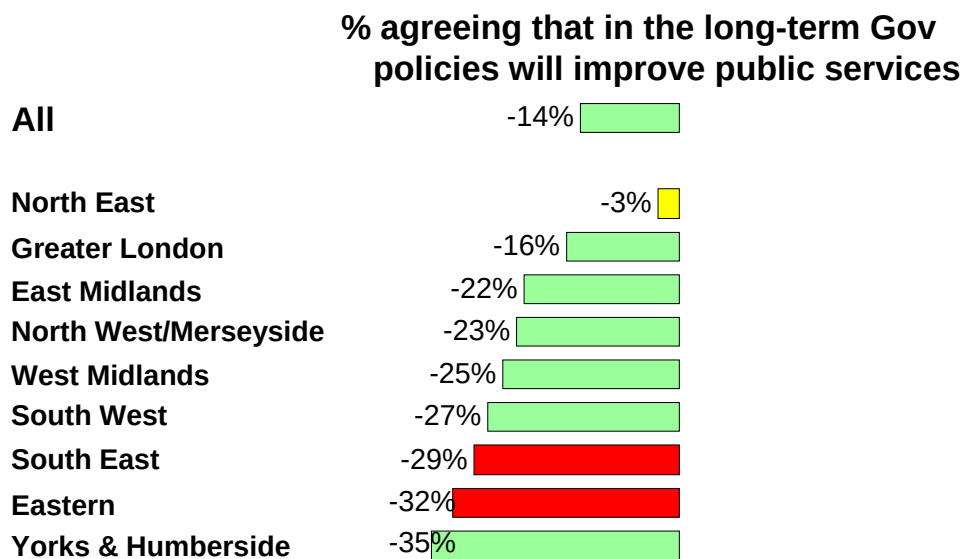


Base: 3,873 adults aged 18+ 2003: MORI Delivery Index Aggregate Data

Source: MORI

A similar picture prevails with public services...

Expectations of Public Services by Region



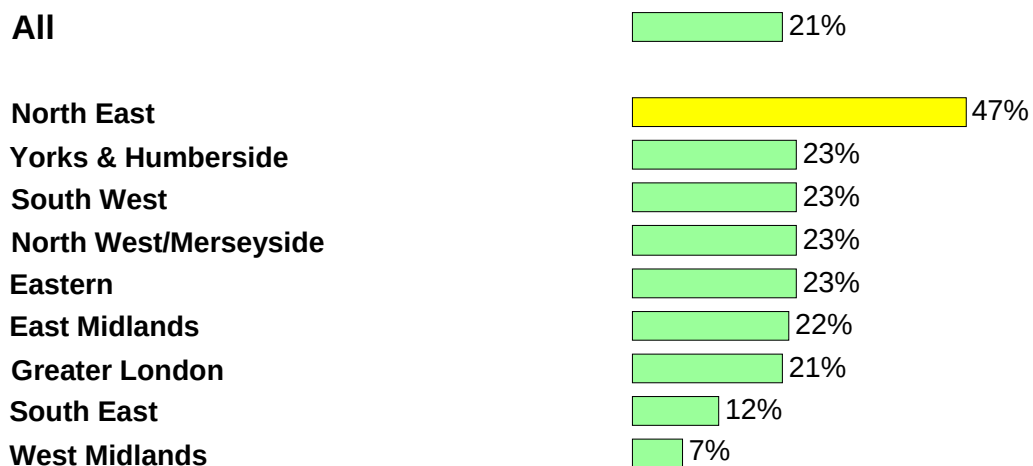
Base: 3,873 adults aged 18+ 2003: MORI Delivery Index Aggregate Data

Source: MORI

Could this however, be to do with the fact that the North East is a Labour “heartland” and therefore more likely to be positive about the issues upon which New Labour has staked its reputation in the second term? Not really. When we look at the views of Labour voters and those who don’t vote Labour, we find that even non-Labour voting North-Easterners are more optimistic than their non-Labour voting brethren in other regions.

Expectations of NHS by Region

% thinking it will get better

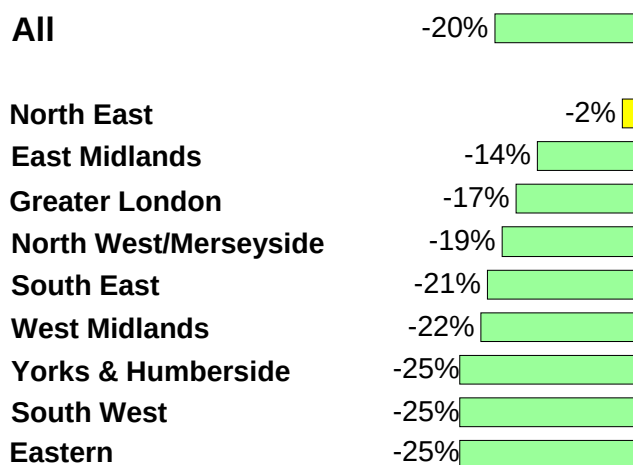


Base: 1,162 Labour voters aged 18+ 2003: MORI Delivery Index Aggregate Data

Source: MORI

Expectations of NHS by Region

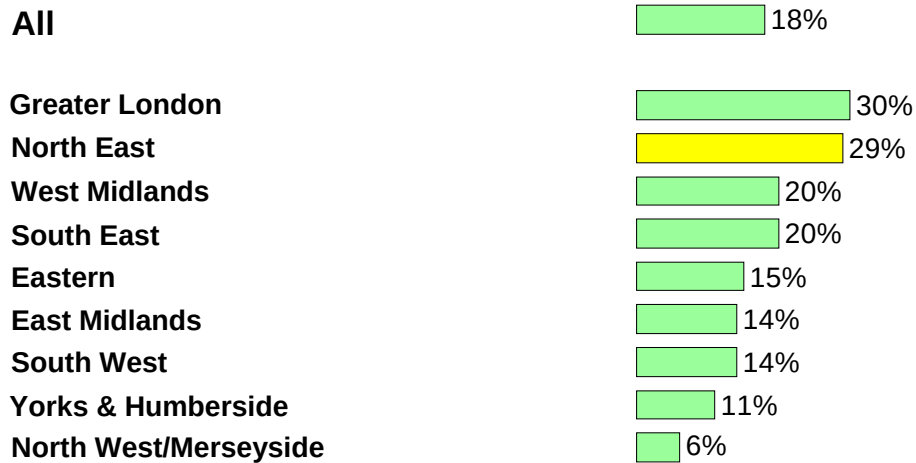
% thinking it will get better



Base: 2,712 Non- Labour voters aged 18+ 2003: MORI Delivery Index Aggregate Data Source: MORI

Expectations of Policing by Region

% thinking it will get better

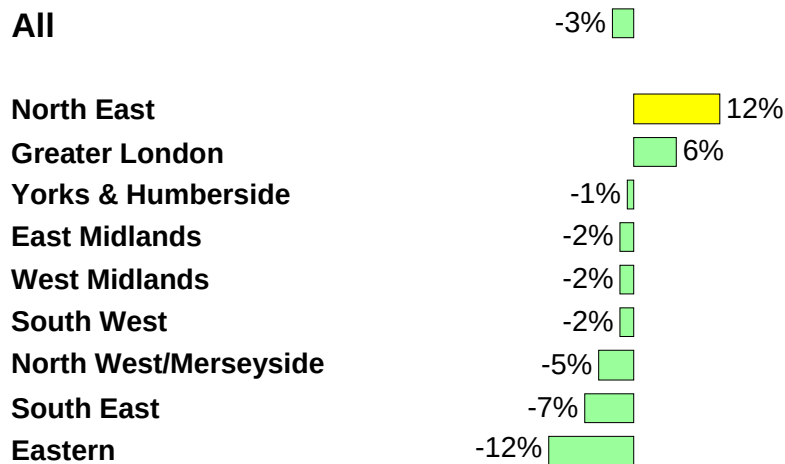


Base: 1,162 Labour voters aged 18+ 2003: MORI Delivery Index Aggregate Data

Source: MORI

Expectations of Policing by Region

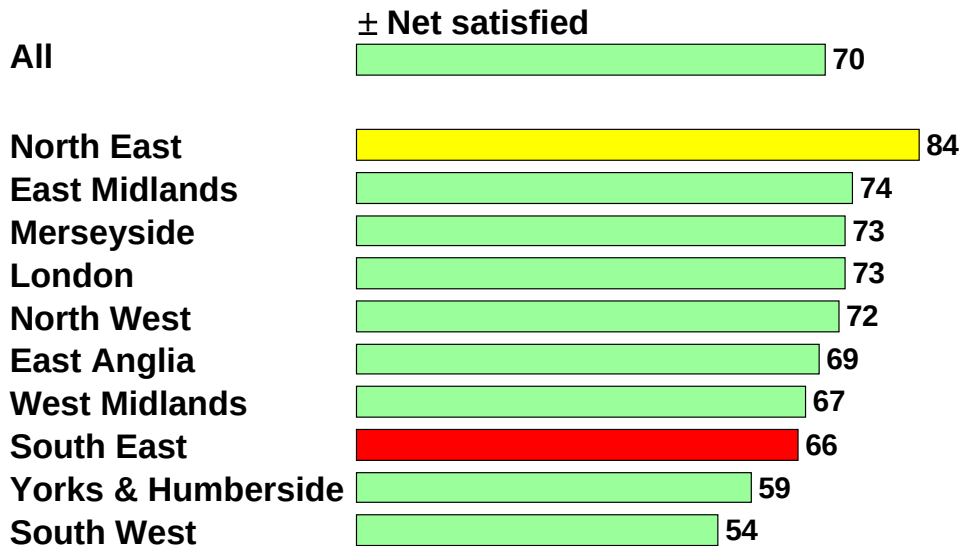
% thinking it will get better



Base: 2,712 Non- Labour voters aged 18+ 2003: MORI Delivery Index Aggregate Data Source: MORI

Is it just to do with attitudes to public services? No – people in the North East and Scotland are generally more satisfied with everything from their water company, their bank to their local Council. People in the South East and East Anglia tend to be more fed up than most with their water supplier:

Water Industry - Satisfaction with local water services

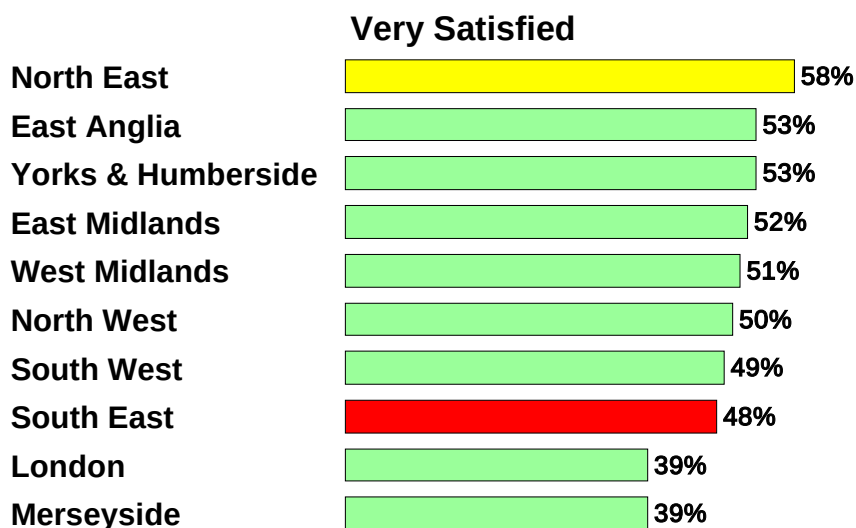


Base: 8,056 adults aged 18 plus

Source: MORI

The same with banks – the further north you go, the happier people are with them. In MORI's surveys of how the public regard their banks, the North East is consistently among the most positive regions.

Satisfaction with Banks - Financial Omnibus

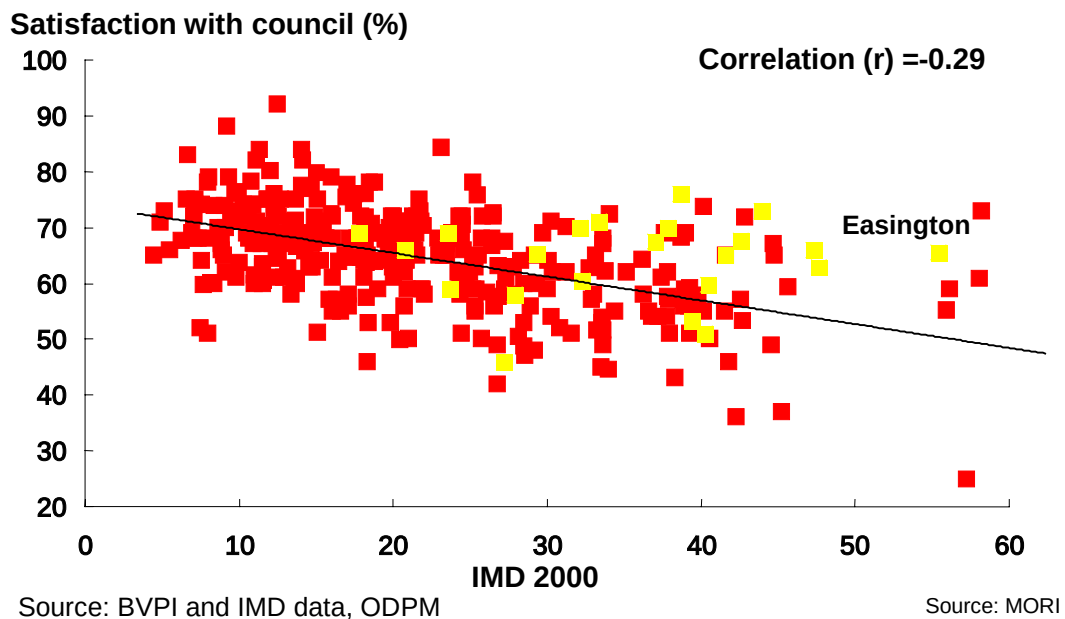


Base: 5000 interviews, 2002

Source: MORI

When we look at local government, authorities in the North East consistently get higher satisfaction ratings than is normal given the level of deprivation in the region: the chart below shows results from the government's BVPI surveys that all councils are obliged to collect. Generally councils serving more deprived communities do less well than those serving more affluent areas – the wealthiest places in England (on the left of the chart), tend to be more positive. But authorities in North East England (in yellow) stand out as doing rather better than we'd expect, given their greater deprivation levels.

BVPI Surveys and Deprivation



Why then, is the North East happier than other regions in general?. Is there something in the air or are institutions just better run in that part of the world? Certainly in the recent Comprehensive Performance Assessments that were undertaken by the Audit Commission, authorities in the North East consistently outperformed the rest of the country.

One hypothesis is simply that much of the difference may be about better social bonds within the region, and a less diverse population. The North East is highly homogenous, relative to many other regions. MORI's research into perceptions of quality of life and levels of trust¹, highlights that areas that are relatively homogenous, with lower turnover of population, tend to be more positive about their area and local services. Perhaps it is these factors, combined with a strong local culture and distinctiveness, may be part of the answer.

Another factor may well be that the South East is simply a victim of its own economic success – despite higher incomes, an analysis by Barclays of ONS data shows that of all UK regions, because of the cost of housing, transport and other essential services, actual **disposable** income is lowest in the South East and highest in the North East. Moreover, when one looks at government spending, the South East has received 10-11% less the average², whereas in the

¹ Life Satisfaction, MORI, 2004 –Bobby Duffy

² Spending Review 2004, SEEDA, Appendix 3

North East expenditure per capita rose from 11% to 15.6 % over the national average in 1998-2002. In 2003 the South East and East of England – two of the more negative regions in terms of public perceptions – had the lowest levels of public expenditure in England. The North East has the highest. The basis for this is understandable – there is more ill health, absolute poverty and so on, in the North East, so on many measures the population is more needy. But it may also be the case that living in the overheating South East, despite its paper wealth in assets and wages, is also very demanding for many people. What will be interesting is how these trends in terms of both public opinion and expenditure continue, as regional government develops, in future.