

Marriage Foundation

“Marriage-rich” Cabinet need to back marriage

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- With UK family breakdown at the highest level in the developed world, it is vital that Cabinet look beyond Brexit to include serious pro-marriage social policies in their manifesto.
- In their private lives, Cabinet members show near universal support for marriage, with 89% of 27 ministers married and only one minister who has never married.
- In their constituencies, there is also solid support for marriage, with 88% of Cabinet constituencies above the UK average, and half in the top quintile.
- Cabinet members are thus exposed to well above average levels of family stability. Only four have divorced and 81% of their constituencies have below average levels of lone parenthood.
- With such overwhelming personal support for marriage, and representing constituencies that have double the rate of marriage and half the rate of lone parenthood of the least stable constituencies, it is long overdue that private backing for marriage turns into public policy.

The 27 members of the current Cabinet are hugely supportive of marriage in their private lives. 89% are married. Only one Cabinet member has never married.

The 26 Cabinet constituencies – excluding Baroness Evans – are also supportive of marriage. The average level of married families in these constituencies of 65% contrasts with the 58% UK national average and 33% in the inner city constituencies with the lowest levels of marriage.

Cabinet constituencies also have correspondingly low levels of lone parenthood. The average of 21% is below the national average of 27% and well under half the levels of over 50% in the least stable inner city constituencies.

The case for a serious pro-marriage policy is robust and long overdue.

Since the 1980s, family breakdown has been driven not by divorce but by a trend away from marriage and commitment.

This paper summarises the case for marriage, details the spread of family structure among Cabinet constituencies, and offers some zero or low cost pro-marriage policy proposals for the forthcoming manifesto.

Marriage ratios of families in Cabinet constituencies

Name	Status	As %	Ranking	Percentile
UK		58%		
Cabinet		65%		
Hunt	M	74%	5	1%
May	M	73%	16	2%
Grayling	M	73%	17	3%
Wright	M	72%	25	4%
Gauke	M	70%	40	6%
Hammond	M	70%	42	6%
Leadsom	M	69%	53	8%
Fallon	M	69%	59	9%
Davis	M	69%	62	10%
Fox	M	68%	66	10%
Clark	M	67%	80	12%
Javid	M	67%	81	12%
McLoughlin	M	67%	83	13%
Lidington	M	65%	133	20%
Patel	M	65%	146	22%
Williamson	M	64%	149	23%
Brokenshire	M	64%	163	25%
Greening	S	63%	189	29%
Mundell	D	62%	198	30%
Bradley	M	61%	231	36%
Truss	M	61%	241	37%
Johnson	M (2nd)	60%	250	38%
Green	M	59%	282	43%
Cairns	M	54%	421	65%
Gummer	M	52%	474	73%
Rudd	D	47%	576	89%
Evans	M	n/a	House of Lords	

THE CASE FOR MARRIAGE

The UK has the highest level of family instability in the developed world, across education groups.

By the time a child reaches their 12th birthday, 62% of children born to unmarried cohabiting parents and 32% of children born to married parents will have experienced more than one transition by their parents, whether into or out of a relationship (*DeRose et al 2017*).

Altogether nearly half of all today's teenagers aged 13 to 15 are not living with both natural parents (*Benson 2013a*).

This has serious and well-known consequences for children's outcomes, whether due to lack of parental resources, father absence, or instability (*Amato 2005; Brown 2004; Lee & McLanahan 2015; McLanahan et al 2013; Panico et al 2010*), especially following low conflict splits (*Booth & Amato 2001*).

Family breakdown costs the taxpayer £48 billion per year (*Ashcroft 2016*). For example 60% of lone parents receive housing benefit compared to 10% of couple parents (*DWP 2015; ONS 2015*).

Unmarried cohabitation is the main driver of family breakdown: the 21% of couple parents who are not married account for 51% of all family breakdown involving children (*Benson 2017*).

Much, or even most, family breakdown is far from inevitable. Two of three parents who split up reported they were at least somewhat happy and not arguing excessively in the previous year (*Benson & James 2015a; James 2015*).

Nobody has to marry, yet the rich overwhelmingly do so. Only 24% of the poorest parents with young children are married compared to 87% of the richest (*Benson & McKay 2015*). This "marriage gap" runs throughout Europe, including Scandinavia (*Benson & James 2015b*).

The evidence is overwhelming that couples who marry tend to stay together. Only a minority of unmarried cohabiters do so. This holds true independent of age and education.

Whereas 69% of couple parents who remain unmarried split up before their child is 16, only 24% of couple parents who are married before having children split up. This is the real divorce rate (*Benson 2015*).

The explanation that rising family breakdown since the 1980s is almost entirely due to the trend away from marriage is therefore a strong one. Those who argue that it is the 'quality of the relationship that matters, not the status' (*Daily Mail 2017; Relate 2017*) have yet to explain why family stability has worsened so markedly when background factors linked to relationship quality – such as age and education – should have caused it to improve.

Stability is high when couples 'decide' rather than 'slide' through relationship transitions, and low where the 'inertia' of living together without a clear plan for the future traps fragile relationships on into parenthood (*Stanley et al 2006; Knopp et al 2015*).

Encouraging higher marriage rates would undoubtedly lead to higher stability, simply because more couples would establish clarity and intent about their plans for the future.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY STABILITY ACROSS THE UK

The following two tables illustrate the huge range of family structures within UK constituencies.

While three quarters of families are married in leafy suburbs and rural areas, such as Wimbledon and North East Hampshire, barely one third of families are married in the inner city areas of Glasgow, Nottingham, Liverpool, Belfast, and London.

Parliamentary Constituency	% of all families	Married Ranking	Lone parent Ranking
UK	58%		
Cabinet	65%		
Top Ten Married Family Constituencies			
Wimbledon	76%	1	8
North East Hants	75%	2	1
Chesham & Amersham	75%	3	3
Wokingham	75%	4	10
South West Surrey	74%	5	7
Esher and Walton	74%	6	13
Mid Ulster	74%	7	108
Henley	74%	8	6
Woking	74%	9	14
Buckingham	73%	10	12
Bottom Ten Married Family Constituencies			
Birkenhead	39%	641	634
Liverpool, Riverside	39%	642	641
Vauxhall	38%	643	648
Hackney South & Shoreditch	38%	644	647
Manchester Central	38%	645	642
Belfast West	36%	646	650
Glasgow East	36%	647	645
Liverpool, Walton	35%	648	646
Nottingham North	35%	649	637
Glasgow North East	33%	650	649

The divide is even more stark when looking at the prevalence of lone parent families.

Whereas the bottom ten constituencies – in leafy suburbs and rural areas – all have fewer than 15% lone parent families, around half of all families in the top ten constituencies – in inner city areas – are lone parent families.

Belfast West (57%) has more than four times the proportion of lone parent families compared to North East Hampshire (13%)

Parliamentary Constituency	% of all families	Lone Parent Ranking	Married Ranking
	27%		
	21%		
Bottom Ten Lone Parent Family Constituencies			
North East Hants	13%	1	2
South Cambs	14%	2	19
Chesham & Amersham	14%	3	3
South East Cambs	14%	4	30
West Aberdeen & Kincardine	15%	5	26
Henley	15%	6	8
South West Surrey	15%	7	5
Wimbledon	15%	8	1
Gordon	15%	9	39
Wokingham	15%	10	4
Top Ten Lone Parent Family Constituencies			
Liverpool, Riverside	48%	641	642
Manchester Central	48%	642	645
Belfast North	49%	643	622
Islington South & Finsbury	49%	644	635
Glasgow East	49%	645	647
Liverpool, Walton	50%	646	648
Hackney South & Shoreditch	50%	647	644
Vauxhall	51%	648	643
Glasgow North East	53%	649	650
Belfast West	57%	650	646

Unsurprisingly the above tables illustrate the almost perfect inverse correlation of $r=.91$ between marriage and lone parenthood.

The inverse correlation between marriage and cohabitation is also strong at $r=-.51$. The correlation is direct, though much less so, between cohabitation and lone parenthood at $r=.11$.

CABINET PERSONAL SUPPORT FOR MARRIAGE

Almost all Cabinet members are supportive of marriage in their personal lives.

- Of the 27 Cabinet members, 23 (89%) are married.
- Only one – *Justine Greening* – has never married.
- Two are divorced – *David Mundell* and *Amber Rudd*.
- One is divorced and remarried – *Boris Johnson*.

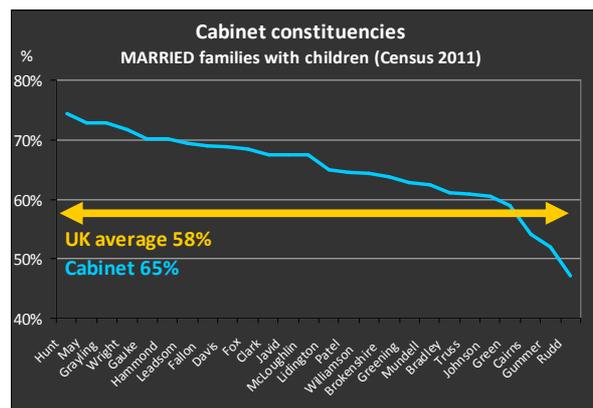
CABINET CONSTITUENCY SUPPORT FOR MARRIAGE

In their constituencies, Cabinet members disproportionately represent leafy and rural areas where marriage is the norm and lone parenthood is less common, rather than the inner city areas where the reverse is true.

Almost all Cabinet members (excluding Baroness Evans) represent constituencies that have above average rates of marriage and below average rates of lone parenthood. Cabinet constituencies have slightly below average rates of unmarried cohabitation.

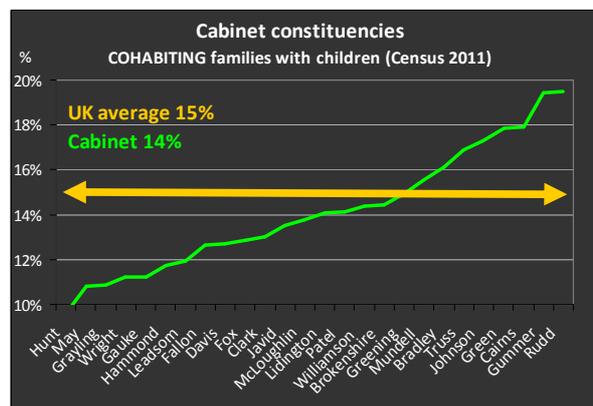
On average, 65% of Cabinet constituent families with dependent children are married compared to 58% for the UK as a whole:

- 10 (38%) are in the top decile
- 14 (54%) are in the top quintile
- 23 (88%) are in the top half



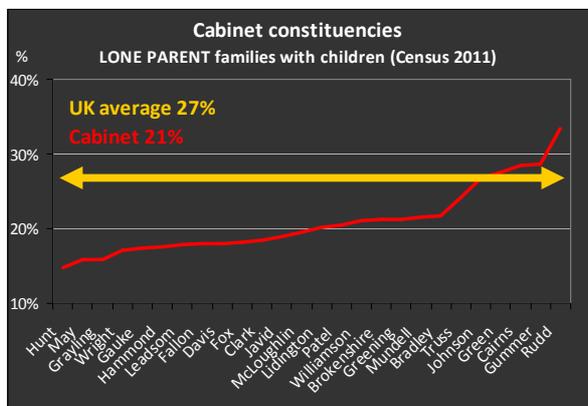
On average, 14% of Cabinet constituent families with dependent children are cohabiting compared to 15% for the UK as a whole:

- 1 (4%) is in the top decile
- 9 (35%) are in the top quintile
- 19 (73%) are in the top half



On average, 21% of Cabinet constituent families with dependent children are lone parents compared to 27% for the UK as a whole:

- 12 (46%) are in the bottom decile
- 16 (62%) are in the bottom quintile
- 21 (81%) are in the bottom half



WHY SO SILENT ON MARRIAGE?

With such a strong personal vote of confidence in marriage, and solid support for marriage from their constituents, the surprise is why there is so little public talk about marriage in public policy.

The need for greater stability in family life has never been greater.

As stated earlier, Britain leads the developed world in family breakdown. Half of our teenagers are no longer living with both parents. Our taxpayers are paying at least £48 billion per year picking up the pieces.

Here are some simple policy proposals that would send a big message that Cabinet members are as serious about encouraging marriage for others as they do for themselves.

PRO-MARRIAGE POLICY PROPOSALS (ZERO/LOW COST)

Policy signal #1

- Cabinet Ministers can and should lead by example, signalling fearlessly and unequivocally that the commitment of marriage matters.
- As this paper reveals, the Cabinet is overwhelmingly supportive of marriage at a personal level, as are their constituents.
- 89% of the Cabinet are married, 88% represent constituencies with above average marriage rates, and 81% represent constituents with below average family breakdown.

Policy signal #2

- Government forms should clearly distinguish legal marital status and stop using the term 'living together as if married' which conflates the real difference in outcomes.

Fiscal reform

- Current welfare policy pays parents £7,000 or more in tax credits to live apart, or pretend to do so (*Benson 2013b*).
- This is the perverse 'couple penalty' that actively discourages formal commitment. Our preliminary investigations suggest that Universal Credit will make this worse.
- In contrast the £220 transferable allowance for couples who are married is poorly targeted and wasteful. It should be redirected as '000s in child benefit for married mothers with a first child under three to offset the 'couple penalty' and actively encourage personal commitment before having a child.

Legal reform

- Recent legal cases have shown laws on divorce and cohabitation to be in need of wholesale overhaul. The overriding principle should be to affirm and reward formal commitment, even by introducing the option of formal status for committed cohabiting couples.
- Sir Paul Coleridge, former high court judge and chair of Marriage Foundation, has draft proposals for this to be developed further following the election.

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