



Marriage Foundation

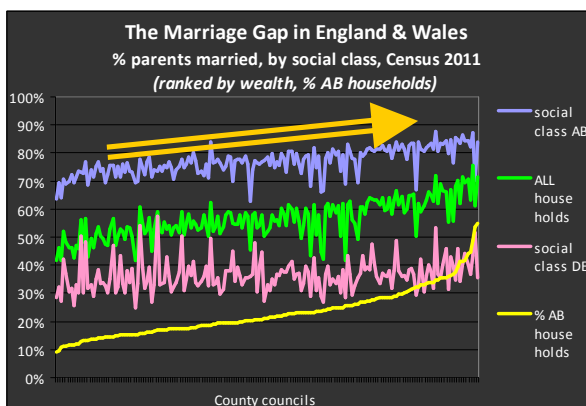
Keeping up with the neighbours The influence of local wealth and faith on marriage

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- Previous research from Marriage Foundation has highlighted the ‘marriage gap’ between parents who are better-off, most of whom who marry, and worse-off, most of whom don’t.
- This new analysis of Census 2011 data shows that the ‘marriage gap’ exists in every one of 174 county councils in England & Wales.
- Whereas 79% of all parents in social class AB – managers & professionals – are married, only 37% of parents in social class DE – manual workers and non-workers – are married.
- However there is also a clear influence of local area characteristics on marriage rates.
- In richer areas, everyone is more likely to be married, regardless of whether they are better or worse off. This is true across all social classes.
- The most extreme contrast in marriage rates is between Harrow, where 88% of AB parents are married, and Liverpool, where only 25% of DE parents are married.
- In more religious areas, those in the lower social groups are more likely to be married. However this varies by religion. In areas where there is a higher proportion of Muslims, more of the C2s – skilled workers – and DEs are married. In areas where there is a higher proportion of Christians, more of the C1s – supervisors and junior managers – are married. There is no overall link between marriage rates and religion, nor with those in social group AB.

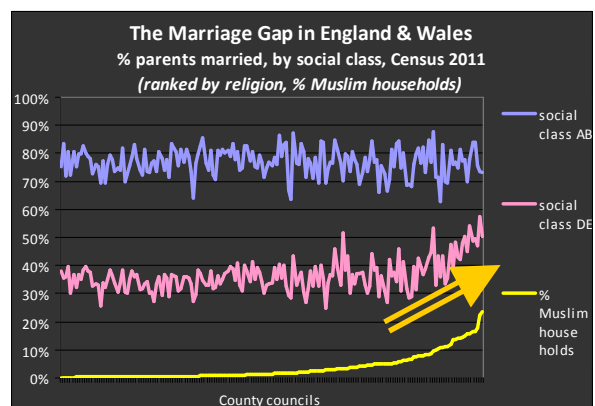
The chart below illustrates the ‘marriage gap’ between AB (purple) and DE (pink) parents in every council in England and Wales.

It also shows how rising wealth (yellow) correlates with higher marriage rates across all social classes (green).



The next chart also illustrates the ‘marriage gap’ across every council in England and Wales.

But it also shows the strong correlation between marriage rates for DE parents (pink) and the prevalence of Muslim households (yellow) in the council area.



INTRODUCTION

Social conformity plays an important role in how we make our big and small decisions.

Solomon Asch famously demonstrated in 1951 how individuals can be influenced by others to make a choice that they know to be wrong, but made it anyway (*Asch, 1951*).

Of course people more often make healthy choices because of the influence of social conformity. We are routinely influenced by family, friends, celebrities and other role models.

Marriage is no exception.

In previous studies, Marriage Foundation has demonstrated that marriage rates are higher among the better educated and better off (*Benson & McKay, 2015*) and also among those more religious (*Benson & McKay 2016*).

I have argued that the best explanation for falling divorce rates is because of the reduced social and family pressure for couples to marry. 'When are you going to do the decent thing?' is asked less often of men. The huge reduction in divorces filed by women in the early years of marriage strongly suggests that those men who do marry are more serious about it (*Benson 2012*).

I have also argued that the abnormal 5% rise in marriage rates in 2012 was most likely due to the influence of the royal wedding in the previous year. After compressing this unexpected increase into the first half of 2012 (*Benson 2014*), it subsequently unravelled in the following year.

THE PRESENT STUDY

This new study uses data from Census 2011 to look at how marriage rates vary from area to area and across social groups.

Marriage Foundation research has already established the existence of a marriage gap between the better-off and the worse-off in the UK and throughout Europe (*Benson & James 2015, Benson & McKay 2015*).

In the UK, among parents with children under five, we found that 87% of those in the highest income quintile – earning more than £45,000 – were married.

In sharp contrast only 24% of those in the lowest income quintile – earning below £14,000 – were married.

The aim of this study is to explore how the size of this marriage gap varies from area to area, depending on the wealth of the area and the religious make-up of the area.

Census data do not allow us to look at marriage/wedding rates per se, i.e. the proportion of unmarried adults who get married in any given year.

However they do allow a proxy for marriage/wedding rates by looking at the proportion of parents with dependent children who are married across five social groups.

The five social groups are as follows:

- AB: Higher and intermediate managerial, administrative, and professional occupations.
- C1: Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative, and professional occupations.
- C2: Skilled manual occupations.
- DE: Semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, unemployed and lowest grade occupations.

RESULTS

Of the 174 councils in England & Wales, I excluded 'City of London' and 'Scilly Isles' on the grounds of low population. Whereas the average council has 35,000 families with dependent children, these two only have a few hundred.

Of the remaining 172, councils were then ranked for wealth on the proportion of AB families in the area.

Councils were also ranked for religiosity on the proportion of Muslim families in each area.

Table 1 – at the end of this report – shows a list of the top and bottom twenty council areas in terms of proportion of AB families with dependent children who are married (percentages and rankings are highlighted in yellow).

Across all top twenty councils, over 83% of AB parents are married, slightly above the average of 79% across England & Wales.

- **Harrow** has the highest proportion of married AB parents at 88%.

- **Wokingham** has the highest overall proportion of married parents at 76%.

In the bottom twenty councils, fewer than 71% of AB parents are married.

- **Hackney** has the lowest proportion of married AB parents at 63%.
- **Blackpool** has the lowest overall proportion of married parents at 42%.

Table 2 – also at the end of this report – shows a list of the top and bottom twenty council areas in terms of proportion of DE families with dependent children who are married (percentages and rankings are highlighted in yellow).

Across the top twenty councils, the proportion of DE parents who are married ranges from 57% down to 43%, above the average of 37% across England & Wales.

- **Tower Hamlets** has the highest proportion of married DE parents at 57%.

Across the bottom twenty councils, the proportion of DE parents who are married ranges from 30% down to 25%.

- **Liverpool** has the lowest proportion of married DE parents at 25%.

Comparing the proportion of AB and DE married parents shows the ‘marriage gap’, present in every council, and averaging 42% across England & Wales

- **Solihull** has the highest marriage gap at 51%, with 84% of AB parents married compared to 35% of DE parents.

- **Tower Hamlets** has the lowest marriage gap at 16%, with 74% of AB parents married compared to 57% of DE parents.

These results already give clues that both wealth and religiosity of the local area influence marriage rates for both ABs and DEs.

Table 3 – on this page – shows the inter-correlations between marriage rates across social class and both wealth and religion.

The first box shows that there is a statistically significant link between wealth – the prevalence of AB families – and marriage rates across all social classes, with the strength of the correlation even stronger for ABs than for DEs.

This correlation is either not as clear or not nearly as strong when there are more C1 or C2 families in each local area.

The relationship is however reversed when there are more DE families in the area, when all bar the DE families themselves are less likely to be married.

The second box shows the link between the religiosity in each council area with marriage rates.

Since the proportion who are Christian in any area is directly affected by the proportion who are Muslim, it is more relevant to look at the relationship between marriage rates and Muslim prevalence.

In some rural areas, the proportion of Muslim families rounds down to zero percent. In **Newham**, 23 per cent of families are Muslim.

Here, by far the biggest influence is on DE families.

TABLE 3
Correlation of marriage rates with local characteristics by England & Wales council, source Census 2011

	% Prevalence of			
	AB	C1	C2	DE
All	0.75	0.09	-0.15	-0.80
AB	0.65	0.14	-0.15	-0.70
C1	0.47	0.09	0.22	-0.68
C2	0.30	0.05	0.16	-0.46
DE	0.27	-0.27	-0.18	-0.12

	Religious	Christian	Muslim
	All	0.12	-0.06
AB	0.20	0.05	-0.05
C1	0.11	0.25	-0.27
C2	0.35	0.02	0.08
DE	0.31	-0.41	0.60

Pearson correlations: n=173 (df=171)

r > .15 p < .05
r > .20 p < .01
r > .25 p < .001

The two **tables 1 and 2** – at the end of the paper – illustrate these correlations well.

Table 1 illustrates the link between ABs and wealth:

- Eight of the *top ten richest* council areas – **Wokingham, Surrey, West Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Kingston-upon-Thames, Windsor & Maidenhead, Richmond upon Thames, and Wandsworth** – also feature in the

list of top twenty councils with the *highest proportion of ABs* who are married.

- Seven of the *top ten poorest* council areas – **Sandwell, Merthyr Tydfil, Knowsley, Blaenau Gwent, Stoke-on-Trent, Blackpool, and Kingston-upon-Hull** – also feature in the list of bottom twenty councils with the *lowest proportion of ABs* who are married.

Table 2 illustrates the link between DEs and religion, and to a lesser extent wealth:

- Nine of the top ten council areas with the *highest Muslim population* – **Tower Hamlets, Luton, Newham, Bradford, Slough, Redbridge, Brent, Blackburn with Darwen, and Waltham Forest** – also feature in the list of top twenty councils with the *highest proportion of DEs* who are married.
- Three of the *top ten richest* council areas – **Buckinghamshire, Kingston-upon-Thames, and Wokingham** – also feature in the list of top twenty councils with the *highest proportion of ABs* who are married.

DISCUSSION

Although individual circumstance plays a significant role in deciding who marries and who doesn't, so does local area circumstance.

This brief analysis is the first UK study to look at how the wealth and religious context of a local area influences the private decision to marry.

Comparing families in the professional managerial 'AB' class with families in the less skilled 'DE' class reveals a universal gap in marriage rates across England and Wales.

However the size of that gap varies tremendously from area to area, ranging from 51% in **Solihull** and **West Berkshire** to 16% in **Tower Hamlets**.

Thinking about these particular council areas already gives a clue as to why these disparities exist.

In areas where there is a significant Muslim population – such as **Newham, Tower Hamlets, Blackburn with Darwen, Slough** and **Redbridge** – there is a strong correlation with marriage rates among DE families.

However the biggest overall influence on the marriage gap is wealth.

In the richest council areas, nearly nine out of ten AB families are married compared to just over six out of ten in the poorest council areas.

Our analysis reveals that in wealthy areas, everyone is more likely to get married, right across the social spectrum.

In terms of the direction of this effect, it seems implausible that more people marry and then move to a richer area. It seems more likely that the influence of the area encourages more people to marry.

People are keeping up with the neighbours.

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Acknowledgment

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TABLES

TABLE 1 - ABs

Census 2011	Families w dependent children, % married, by social class						RANKINGS				WEALTH		RELIGION	
	MARRIED PARENTS						Marriage							
	All	AB	C1	C2	DE	Gap	All	ABs	DEs	Gap	% ABs		% Muslim	
England and Wales	58%	79%	56%	62%	37%	42%					24%		5%	
High	76%	88%	70%	75%	57%	51%					55%		23%	
Low	42%	63%	32%	47%	25%	16%					9%		0%	
TOP 20 COUNCILS BY MOST MARRIED ABs														
1 Harrow	72%	88%	65%	75%	53%	35%	2	1	3	155	35%	17	9%	21
2 Wokingham	76%	87%	69%	70%	43%	44%	1	2	20	40	49%	2	2%	77
3 Surrey	72%	86%	67%	67%	40%	46%	3	3	29	19	41%	6	2%	83
4 West Berkshire	68%	86%	64%	67%	35%	51%	9	4	102	2	38%	9	1%	114
5 Buckinghamshire	70%	85%	65%	67%	46%	39%	6	5	13	123	39%	8	3%	60
6 Barnet	67%	85%	60%	69%	43%	42%	10	6	21	76	37%	11	8%	23
7 Kingston upon Thames	69%	84%	63%	66%	44%	40%	7	7	16	102	42%	5	5%	46
8 Merton	66%	84%	57%	66%	46%	38%	14	8	12	129	36%	13	6%	35
9 Windsor and Maidenhead	70%	84%	66%	65%	40%	44%	5	9	32	41	44%	4	3%	66
10 Slough	62%	84%	57%	69%	49%	35%	32	10	6	154	19%	109	17%	4
11 Solihull	62%	84%	57%	63%	33%	51%	35	11	134	1	32%	24	2%	80
12 Richmond upon Thames	71%	84%	61%	62%	35%	49%	4	12	93	8	55%	1	3%	65
13 Redbridge	66%	84%	61%	72%	49%	35%	12	13	7	152	29%	33	17%	5
14 Hampshire	65%	84%	63%	65%	37%	47%	15	14	75	13	32%	26	0%	127
15 Wandsworth	62%	84%	52%	57%	34%	49%	37	15	105	6	41%	7	6%	36
16 Rutland	69%	83%	70%	68%	35%	48%	8	16	95	10	35%	15	0%	171
17 Bracknell Forest	65%	83%	60%	64%	39%	45%	17	17	45	31	31%	27	1%	102
18 Hertfordshire	65%	83%	60%	64%	38%	46%	16	18	61	18	34%	19	2%	74
19 Wiltshire	65%	83%	64%	65%	36%	47%	19	19	86	12	30%	31	0%	142
20 Oxfordshire	67%	83%	62%	67%	40%	43%	11	20	31	61	35%	14	2%	81
BOTTOM 20 COUNCILS BY FEWEST MARRIED ABs														
153 Sandwell	52%	71%	49%	62%	42%	29%	129	153	25	165	11%	169	5%	39
154 Gwynedd	53%	71%	54%	61%	32%	38%	116	154	136	132	17%	124	1%	109
155 Merthyr Tydfil	46%	70%	50%	56%	31%	39%	159	155	149	119	12%	167	0%	146
156 Manchester	45%	70%	43%	53%	34%	36%	162	156	115	147	15%	139	11%	16
157 Waltham Forest	55%	70%	50%	66%	45%	24%	94	157	14	169	20%	100	16%	7
158 Tameside	48%	70%	47%	56%	33%	37%	152	158	133	141	14%	152	2%	67
159 Liverpool	42%	70%	43%	54%	25%	45%	169	159	172	29	15%	140	3%	64
160 Knowsley	43%	69%	44%	56%	25%	44%	167	160	171	42	12%	165	0%	156
161 Blaenau Gwent	46%	69%	49%	59%	32%	37%	158	161	137	139	9%	171	0%	154
162 Haringey	49%	69%	43%	57%	36%	34%	149	162	89	157	26%	49	11%	15
163 Stoke-on-Trent	48%	69%	48%	57%	37%	32%	150	163	64	161	11%	168	4%	51
164 Islington	42%	69%	32%	47%	28%	41%	170	164	166	101	25%	54	7%	31
165 Nottingham	43%	68%	43%	51%	32%	37%	166	165	142	144	13%	159	6%	32
166 Southwark	43%	68%	36%	49%	29%	39%	165	166	162	124	23%	68	7%	30
167 Brighton and Hove	50%	67%	45%	54%	29%	38%	142	167	161	135	32%	25	2%	79
168 Lambeth	42%	67%	34%	50%	27%	40%	168	168	169	111	24%	63	5%	40
169 Lewisham	45%	66%	38%	53%	29%	37%	164	169	163	137	24%	64	5%	43
170 Blackpool	42%	64%	44%	52%	27%	37%	172	170	168	142	11%	170	1%	118
171 Kingston upon Hull, City of	42%	64%	45%	53%	29%	35%	171	171	165	153	9%	172	2%	78
172 Hackney	45%	63%	40%	56%	36%	27%	161	172	82	168	20%	93	11%	18

TABLE 2 - DES

Census 2011	Families w dependent children, % married, by social class						RANKINGS				WEALTH		RELIGION	
	MARRIED PARENTS						Marriage							
	All	AB	C1	C2	DE	Gap	All	ABs	DEs	Gap	% ABs		% Muslim	
England and Wales	58%	79%	56%	62%	37%	42%					24%		5%	
High	76%	88%	70%	75%	57%	51%					55%		23%	
Low	42%	63%	32%	47%	25%	16%					9%		0%	

TOP 20 COUNCILS BY MOST MARRIED DES

1 Tower Hamlets	59%	74%	49%	65%	57%	16%	59	130	1	172	17%	131	22%	2
2 Luton	61%	78%	55%	67%	54%	24%	49	76	2	170	16%	138	16%	6
3 Harrow	72%	88%	65%	75%	53%	35%	2	1	3	155	35%	17	9%	21
4 Newham	56%	73%	49%	69%	51%	22%	84	137	4	171	13%	162	23%	1
5 Bradford	59%	77%	56%	62%	50%	27%	57	79	5	167	17%	121	15%	8
6 Slough	62%	84%	57%	69%	49%	35%	32	10	6	154	19%	109	17%	4
7 Redbridge	66%	84%	61%	72%	49%	35%	12	13	7	152	29%	33	17%	5
8 Leicester	57%	77%	56%	62%	48%	29%	83	89	8	164	13%	160	14%	12
9 Brent	59%	77%	51%	69%	48%	29%	63	84	9	162	21%	91	15%	9
10 Ealing	64%	81%	57%	73%	48%	33%	23	39	10	158	28%	43	12%	14
11 Blackburn with Darwen	57%	76%	56%	61%	47%	29%	82	107	11	163	15%	149	18%	3
12 Merton	66%	84%	57%	66%	46%	38%	14	8	12	129	36%	13	6%	35
13 Buckinghamshire	70%	85%	65%	67%	46%	39%	6	5	13	123	39%	8	3%	60
14 Waltham Forest	55%	70%	50%	66%	45%	24%	94	157	14	169	20%	100	16%	7
15 Kirklees	58%	77%	56%	62%	45%	32%	73	85	15	159	21%	88	9%	22
16 Kingston upon Thames	69%	84%	63%	66%	44%	40%	7	7	16	102	42%	5	5%	46
17 Hounslow	62%	83%	56%	68%	43%	40%	38	21	17	112	25%	53	11%	17
18 Oldham	53%	71%	51%	58%	43%	28%	122	150	18	166	15%	146	10%	19
19 Bedford	61%	79%	56%	65%	43%	36%	48	63	19	151	27%	47	3%	56
20 Wokingham	76%	87%	69%	70%	43%	44%	1	2	20	40	49%	2	2%	77

BOTTOM 20 COUNCILS BY FEWEST MARRIED DES

153 Bristol, City of	50%	73%	47%	57%	30%	43%	141	134	153	55	25%	56	4%	55
154 Redcar and Cleveland	48%	73%	51%	58%	30%	42%	151	140	154	71	13%	161	0%	145
155 Halton	47%	72%	48%	57%	30%	42%	154	143	155	72	14%	151	0%	168
156 Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	49%	73%	51%	59%	30%	43%	148	139	156	63	15%	144	0%	136
157 Middlesbrough	46%	74%	50%	59%	30%	43%	160	132	157	51	12%	163	5%	48
158 South Tyneside	47%	72%	48%	57%	30%	41%	153	148	158	81	15%	148	1%	89
159 Darlington	51%	76%	51%	58%	30%	47%	133	95	159	14	19%	105	1%	117
160 The Vale of Glamorgan	56%	78%	56%	58%	29%	49%	85	71	160	7	26%	51	0%	131
161 Brighton and Hove	50%	67%	45%	54%	29%	38%	142	167	161	135	32%	25	2%	79
162 Southwark	43%	68%	36%	49%	29%	39%	165	166	162	124	23%	68	7%	30
163 Lewisham	45%	66%	38%	53%	29%	37%	164	169	163	137	24%	64	5%	43
164 Hartlepool	46%	72%	48%	57%	29%	43%	156	147	164	66	14%	157	0%	128
165 Kingston upon Hull, City of	42%	64%	45%	53%	29%	35%	171	171	165	153	9%	172	2%	78
166 Islington	42%	69%	32%	47%	28%	41%	170	164	166	101	25%	54	7%	31
167 Wirral	51%	77%	51%	57%	27%	50%	138	83	167	4	21%	87	0%	134
168 Blackpool	42%	64%	44%	52%	27%	37%	172	170	168	142	11%	170	1%	118
169 Lambeth	42%	67%	34%	50%	27%	40%	168	168	169	111	24%	63	5%	40
170 Salford	45%	72%	45%	53%	27%	45%	163	149	170	33	16%	133	2%	72
171 Knowsley	43%	69%	44%	56%	25%	44%	167	160	171	42	12%	165	0%	156
172 Liverpool	42%	70%	43%	54%	25%	45%	169	159	172	29	15%	140	3%	64