

## So you think you know about Britain?

As the country gears up for the 2011 Census, writer and professor of human geography **Danny Dorling** reveals some fascinating truths about the state of our society

YOU MAY THINK you know quite a lot about this country, but you might not appreciate how unusual Britain is compared with other affluent nations. The fact is, people here have a wider variety of lifestyles than in any other country in Western Europe.

The main reason for this is the wealth gap. In the age group 55-64 in England, people in the middle of the richest fifth of the population are 23 times wealthier than those in the middle of the poorest fifth. In London, a similar comparison reveals that the richest are 273 times wealthier than the poorest.

People with such enormous differences in their resources tend not to mix much. As a result, our neighbourhoods have become far more segregated according to income and wealth than they were 30 or 40 years ago. And it is this increase in social segregation that is behind many current social trends.

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### NINE TRENDS THAT MAY SURPRISE YOU:

**1. The social segregation of Britain** has led to town and country becoming much more divided in terms of which groups of people live in each area. However, beware of the stereotypes. For instance, gun-crime is actually more common in the countryside than the city, simply because there are more (usually legally held) guns in rural areas. And stepchildren are more often found in affluent country areas, possibly because when two wealthier single-parent families come together, they can pool the resources of two homes in the city and so afford that rural idyll.

**2. Britain has a higher divorce and remarriage rate** than most of the rest of Europe – and some peculiar geographical patterns can be identified. The more times a person divorces, the nearer he or she will tend to move to the sea. Rates of divorce are highest in Blackpool,



while those who marry again are concentrated along the south coast.

**3. Muslims are far more likely to marry non-Muslims** in Britain than Christians are to marry non-Christians. This is mainly because there are far more non-Muslims to marry. Among the young, and despite huge social polarisation, mixing between religious and ethnic minorities and the majority is greater in London than anywhere else in the world.

**4. The North/South divide** in Britain has existed for centuries, but it has widened in recent decades as social inequalities have grown. Britain now has the greatest inequalities in health between its regions of anywhere in Europe.

**5. One in three families** in Britain today contains a member suffering from depression, severe anxiety or another form of mental illness. Many teenagers now suffer greater anxiety than their parents did at their age.

**6. The greatest threat to life** in Britain of all those aged under 30 is the car. Young adults are most likely to die as drivers or passengers, while children over the age of nine are most likely to be killed as pedestrians.

**7. In economically good times** there are many low-paying jobs that encourage immigration, raising

concerns over what the optimum population might be. During all recent recessions Britain has seen more people leaving the country than entering it – but the latest figures buck that trend. In February, the Office for National Statistics reported that during 2010, net immigration rose by 36%, with an estimated 572,000 people entering the country on a long-term basis, while 346,000 emigrated.

**8. Although inhabitants of London have been becoming younger** and younger, the population of Britain as a whole is ageing. The latter should be a cause for celebration. It's surely preferable to high rates of premature mortality or seeing more affluent elderly people retiring abroad.

**9. The last time we were as unequal** in income and wealth as we are now was in 1920. Following the 1929 crash, the country – first in fits and starts, but then more steadily – became more equal. In 1920, the richest 1% received 18% of all national income, but by 1980 that had fallen to just 6% (and only 4% after tax). Today, the richest are once again receiving 18% and the figure may be even higher than that.

So You Think You Know About Britain?  
by Danny Dorling (Constable, £8.99).  
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Bookshop on page 185 ■

## So you think you know about the Census?

**Mitchell Symons** on questions of Jedi Knights and national identity

### Findings from the 2001 Census

- The 2001 Census was the first in which the government asked about religion on the main Census form, and 390,000 people entered the words "Jedi Knight" (from *Star Wars*), so "Jedi" was the fourth-largest reported religion (more than Sikhs, Buddhists or Jews).
- 1% of households in London did not have their own toilet or bath.
- 29% of households owned two or more cars, compared with 24% a decade before.
- In England, 79.9% of households were houses or bungalows and 19.7% flats, maisonettes or apartments, while in Wales 88.2% were houses or bungalows and 11.4% flats, maisonettes etc.
- The average number of rooms per household was 5.34.
- 12% of households were on the first floor or above.

### New questions in the 2011 Census:

- How many bedrooms are there in your home?
- If you have any overnight visitors, can you provide their name, sex, date of birth and address?
- How well can you speak English? Answer: "Very well, well, not well or not at all".
- What kind of central heating do you have in your home?
- Do you have a second home?
- How do you define your national identity? Options are English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British or "other". For the first time, there will be space to add the separate categories of "Gypsy or Irish Traveller" and "Arab".
- Are you in a same-sex civil partnership?
- If you are an overseas national, when did you enter this country and how long do you intend to stay?

