4: Housing

Housing issues affect almost the entire population of Britain, as 98% of people live in households. Censuses are the principal source of information on the quantity and distribution of the nation's housing and on how the population is housed. There is, however, little good geographical information available on the quality, costs and availability of housing. In England, the quality of housing is monitored officially by a periodic survey (DoE 1993) which is too small to be relied upon even to produce accurate national statistics. The local costs of owner-occupied housing can be estimated from information provided by building societies and these data are used in this chapter. Housing availability is inferred from census estimates of the number of vacant dwellings and the number of households who appear to be unsatisfactorily housed.

Several new objects of analysis are used in this chapter, and are defined here. A group of people constitute a *household* when they live at the same address and share at least one meal a day or use a common living room. Many households thus consist of only one person. It is thus also possible for more than one household to live in the same dwelling. A *dwelling* is accommodation designed for one household. For each dwelling a count of the number of rooms it contained was made in the census. The count of *rooms* did not include bathrooms, toilets and kitchens less than two metres wide.

The physical stock of housing changes slowly as property is built to last and entails a long pay-back period due to its cost, so a twenty year perspective is used in many of the maps of change shown here. This is also done because dramatic changes in the provision of housing occurred in the 1970s. Although it takes a long time to change the supply of housing, the way in which housing is used can alter relatively quickly. For instance, the proportion of dwellings which are vacant and the proportion of households which are poorly housed can fluctuate year by year. This balance is influenced by changes in how property is held (tenure) and by changes in the market price of private housing and by rents. The propensity of different kinds of households to form in different places over time, the availability of the kind of housing they need, and their ability to afford it, also require consideration in understanding how people are housed.

This chapter begins by mapping the distribution of different types of dwellings across Britain, distinguishing between detached, semi-detached and terraced houses and between different types of flats. The spatial distribution and change in different kinds of household is then shown through a most basic statistic — average household size. Bringing these two factors together, the geography of the balance of dwellings to households is then shown. This balance is a measure of the excess of dwellings over households in each place and it can provide a rough indication of where housing demand is strongest and how that pattern is changing.

A second slightly more sophisticated measure of the pressure on housing is of overcrowding, indicated by the number of people per room exceeding some threshold. This measure has been used since housing statistics were first recorded. At the start of this century an average occupancy rate of more than four people per room was seen as unacceptable (Rowntree 1902). Now a rate of more than one person per room is judged to be too crowded (Audit Commission 1992).

Density of occupation is one measure of housing suitability; privacy and permanence are others. If the members of a household have to share parts of their accommodation with other households, for instance having to use a common stairway to visit the kitchen, that accommodation is described as *not self-contained*. Here, households living in "not self-contained" and temporary accommodation are combined to provides an indication of where there appears to be an overall shortage of suitable housing.

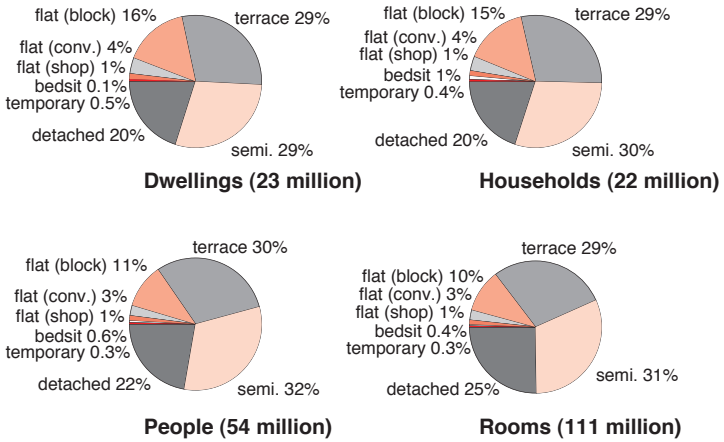
The map showing the distribution of vacant dwellings also demonstrates where part of the means to overcome housing shortages exists. A note of warning is included here as some of the dwellings which were thought to be vacant at the census were occupied by households who avoided being enumerated. Despite this, the pattern shown is intriguing and suggests that where there appears to be the greatest shortage of housing there is also often the highest proportion of vacant dwellings.

The most important factor in understanding the irony of there being most empty housing where there is most need for housing is tenure — the way in which housing in each area is owned. Each of the major forms of tenure is mapped separately along with the geography of its growth or decline over the last two decades. The ward level detail of the effect of 1980s "right-to-buy" legislation is reflected by the decline of council tenure and the increase in owner occupation. Changes in the proportions of households living in housing association or private rented accommodation are also shown.

The large owner occupier group is then split into those who owned outright and those who were still buying their houses with a mortgage. Then, the changing geography of house prices is shown at the district level for each year during the 1980s because these changes, to a large degree, determined local affordability. The geographical dimension of the housing market slump of the late 1980s is next explored through mapping the distribution of unsecured mortgage debt, where a household owes a mortgage lender more money than it could realise if it sold its home — this is known as having *negative equity*. Finally, issues of arrears and home possessions are addressed and the changing geography of homelessness is shown.

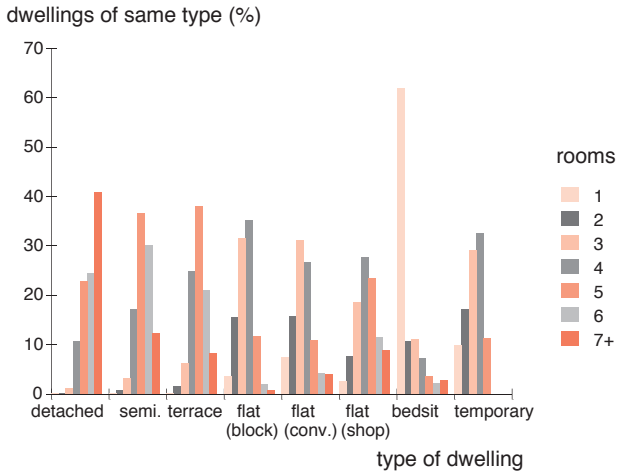
Despite all the improvements in housing provision over the last twenty years, housing problems look more complex than ever in the 1990s. Traditional problems of overcrowding, privacy, quality, affordability and under-use remain and new problems such as mass debt, mortgage and rent arrears and eviction have emerged.

4.1: Housing by Type, Households, People and Rooms in Britain 1991



Note: bedsits are defined here as flats where the hall, landing or stairways are shared; figures in brackets are the totals from the 1991 census (rounded to the nearest million).

4.2: Household Space (Rooms) by Dwelling Type in Britain 1991



Housing Type

The type of housing people live in is often a good guide to their general level of affluence due to the differentials in the costs of different types of dwelling. The most expensive dwellings are detached houses which, as Figure 4.1 illustrates, constituted one fifth of all dwellings and contained one fifth of all households, which included 22% of all residents who between them had access to one quarter of all the rooms in Britain in 1991. The (arithmetical) average price of detached houses in the United Kingdom was £111 000 at the time of the 1991 census. Semi-detached houses cost on average half this amount, while terraced houses were £10 000 cheaper than semi-detached (Halifax 1991); these types also each accommodate a higher proportion of people in fewer rooms.

Flats are not as simple to categorise as houses. A *flat* is a dwelling where all the rooms are on one floor and where the building in which the dwelling is contained consists of more than one floor. Most flats are purpose-built residential buildings, called "flat (*blocks*)" here. If the flat is in a commercial building, above a shop for example, it is categorised as "flat (*shop*)". If a flat is in a building which has been converted to flats it is labelled as "flat (*conv.*)", unless it is not self-contained (i.e. to move between rooms a passageway open to other households has to be used), in which case it is labelled here as a *bedsit*. Finally, dwellings can be classified as *temporary*, mobile homes for instance.

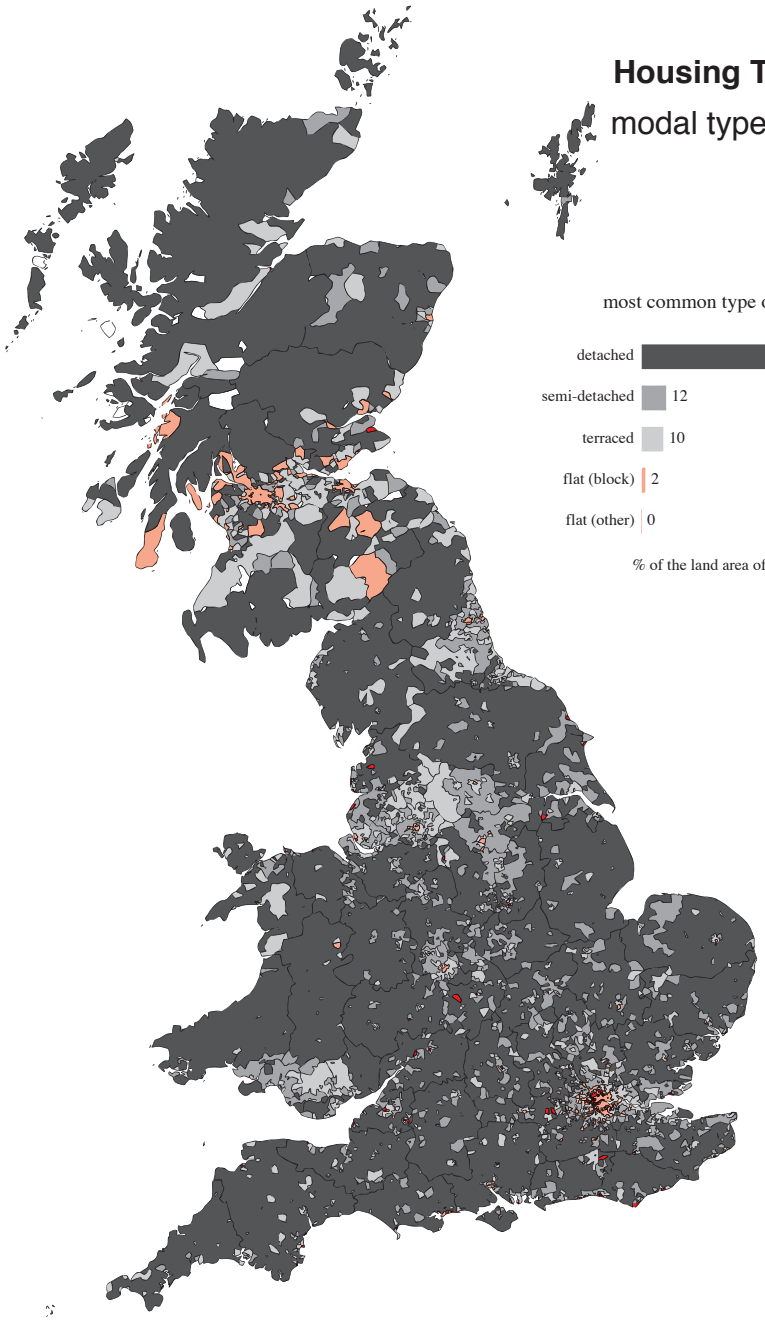
This eight-fold classification of dwelling types is used in Figure 4.2, which shows how many rooms each type of dwelling typically contains. Most detached houses have six or more rooms, whereas most bedsits consist of only one room. Semi-detached houses and terraced houses typically have five rooms — three bedrooms, a sitting room and a kitchen. Purpose-built flats and temporary accommodation usually contain four rooms, while flats in buildings which have been converted typically have three rooms. The figure also shows the degree of variation about these national averages.

The land area map and population cartogram opposite both show the same distribution: which type of dwelling is most common in each ward. All the types of flat other than those in purpose-built residential blocks are grouped. The land area map illustrates another important difference between the dwelling types — detached houses predominate in rural wards and so they dominate this image. The cartogram shows how most people live in wards where the predominant dwelling is either a semi-detached or a terraced house. Flats are only dominant in large numbers in London, Tyneside and Scotland. Flats in commercial or converted buildings and bedsits are only typical on the western side of London and along parts of the south coast.

The average price of a flat at the time of the census was £50 500. This was almost £1500 more than the average price of a terraced house. The reason for this is that so many flats are in London where prices are generally high. In any individual area flats are generally the cheapest form of accommodation.

Housing Type 1991

modal type of ward dwelling



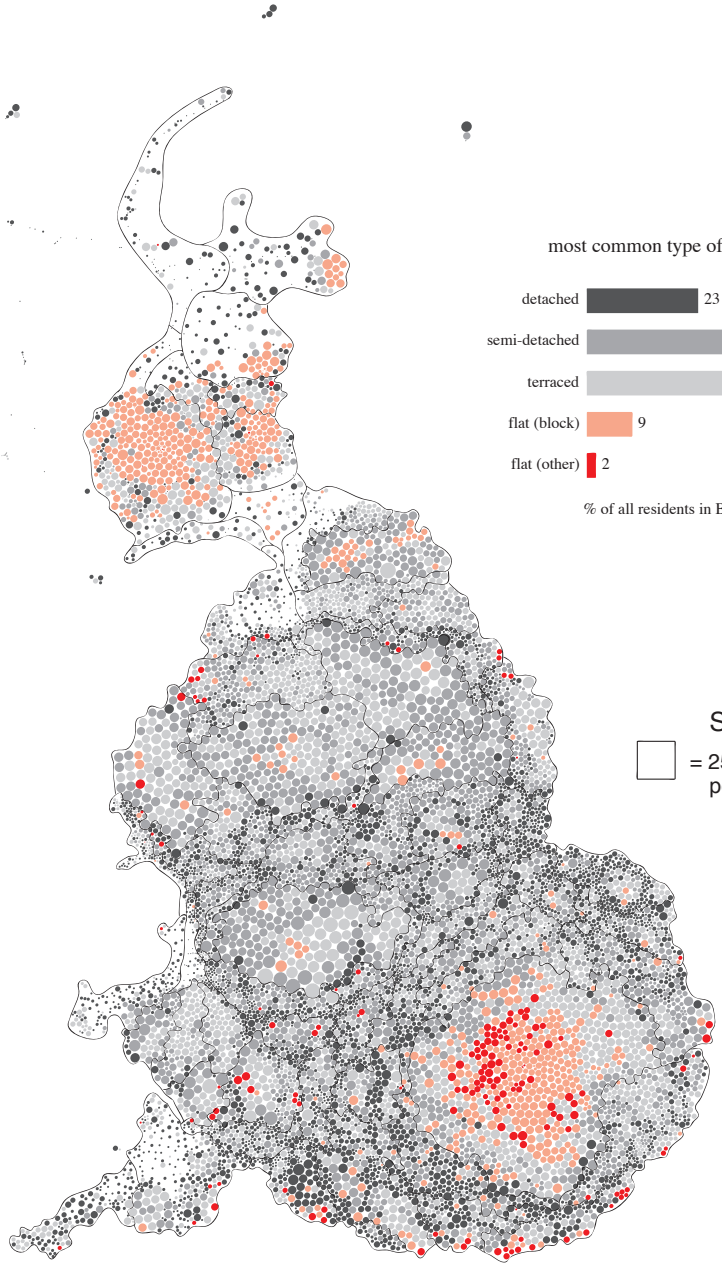
most common type of dwelling

detached	76
semi-detached	12
terraced	10
flat (block)	2
flat (other)	0

% of the land area of Britain

Scale

= 1000 km²



most common type of dwelling

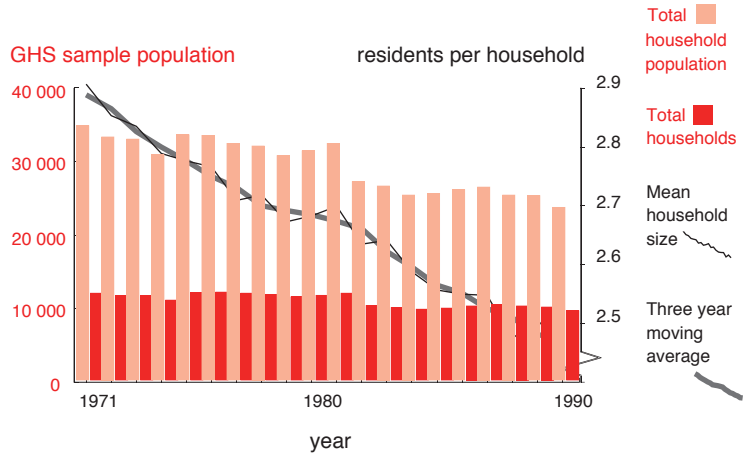
detached	23
semi-detached	34
terraced	32
flat (block)	9
flat (other)	2

% of all residents in Britain

Scale

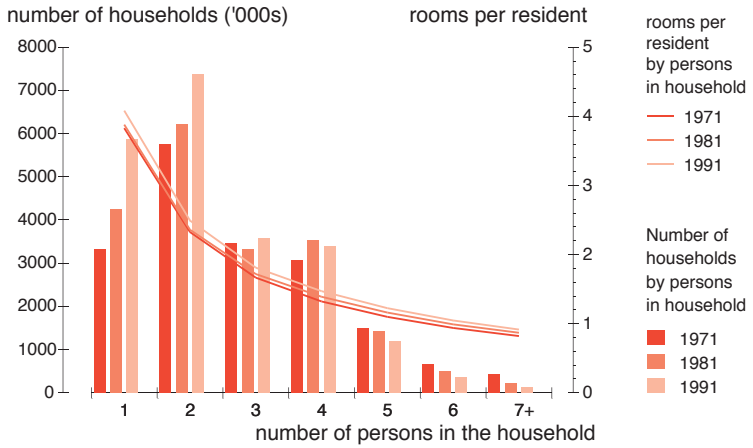
= 250 000 people

4.3: Average Household Size in Britain 1971–1990



Source: General Household Survey estimates (OPCS 1973, 1975, 1986, 1989, 1991)

4.4: Households and Rooms by Household Size in Britain 1971, 1981, 1991



Household Size

The type of dwelling that is most suitable for a particular household depends primarily on the size of that household. Changes in average household size are also the most important influence on the changing need for housing. Between 1971 and 1991 the number of residents enumerated by the census increased by only 3%. The number of households these residents lived in rose by 18% over the same period. This is because the average size of a household fell from 2.9 to 2.5 people over this period.

Figure 4.3 shows the annual changes in average household size over the twenty years to 1990. Household size can be seen to have been falling quickly in the years between censuses, which has led to estimates of need based on past censuses often underestimating the changing demand for housing. However, the General Household Survey sample which is used to estimate this statistic is small, as the figure shows, and so for individual years it is difficult to estimate average household size and hence difficult to estimate the change in aggregate housing demand accurately.

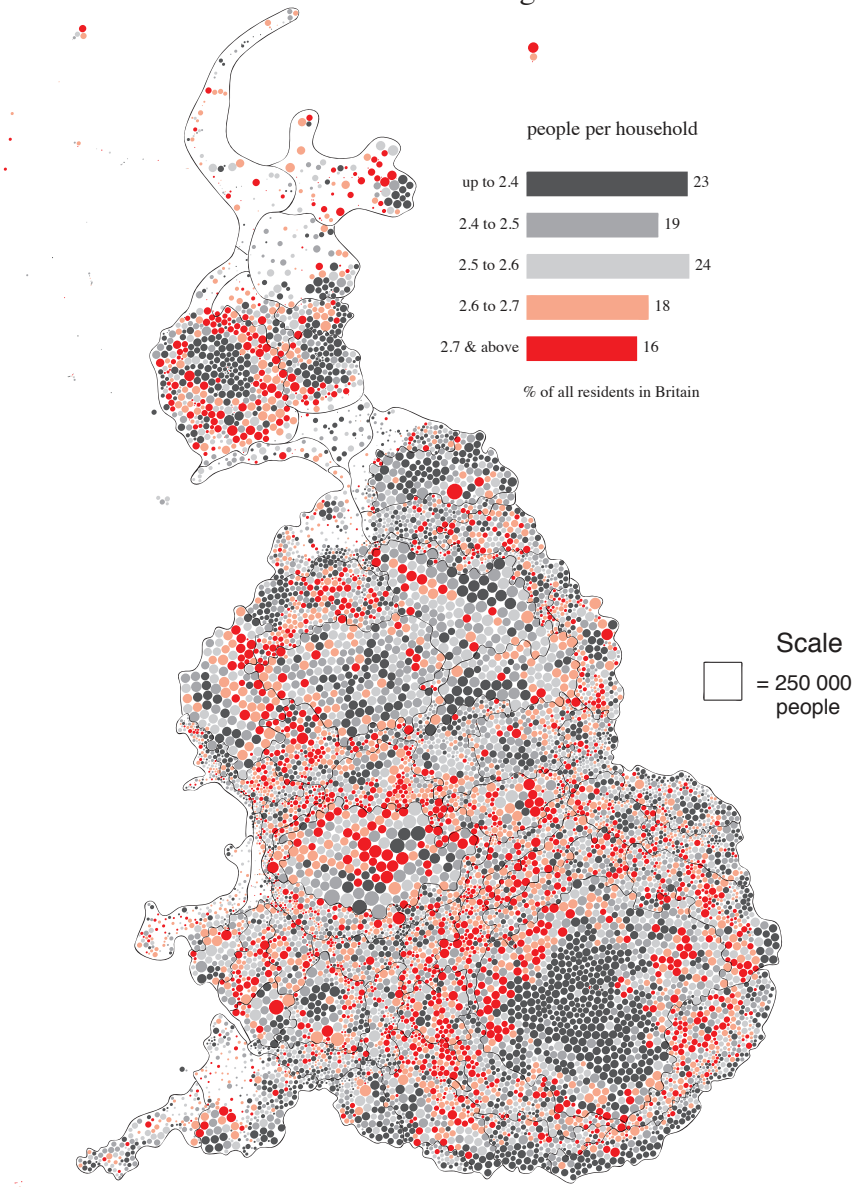
The first map opposite shows the average household size recorded in each ward in Britain in 1991. Large cities contain many single person households and so these areas typically have the lowest average household sizes. The coast, where many older people live on their own, also tended to have smaller households. Suburban and rural areas tended to have larger households. These are the areas with most married couples and most teenage children (see pages 31 and 37). There are always exceptions, which is the reason for depicting the distribution in this detail. For instance, central Birmingham has some of the largest households in Britain.

The geography of the changes in this distribution since 1971 has been very variable across Britain. Average household size has fallen almost everywhere, but most dramatically in Scotland, the North East, Liverpool and the Home Counties, and least in London, the south coast, Manchester, Lancashire, Leeds and in central Birmingham. Where the population has risen fastest and average household size has fallen the most, the demand for new housing will have been greatest.

Figure 4.4 shows how the number of households of different sizes has changed between the censuses. The number of single person households has almost doubled since 1971 and two person households have also increased in number significantly. Three person households fell in number in the 1970s but increased again in the 1980s. The converse was true for four person households. All larger households have fallen in number. The largest (seven or more people) households have become three times less common than they were in 1971. The figure also shows how the average number of rooms available to each person in each size of household has increased over time. The typical one person household now occupies a dwelling with just over four rooms. This improvement has been less for the larger households.

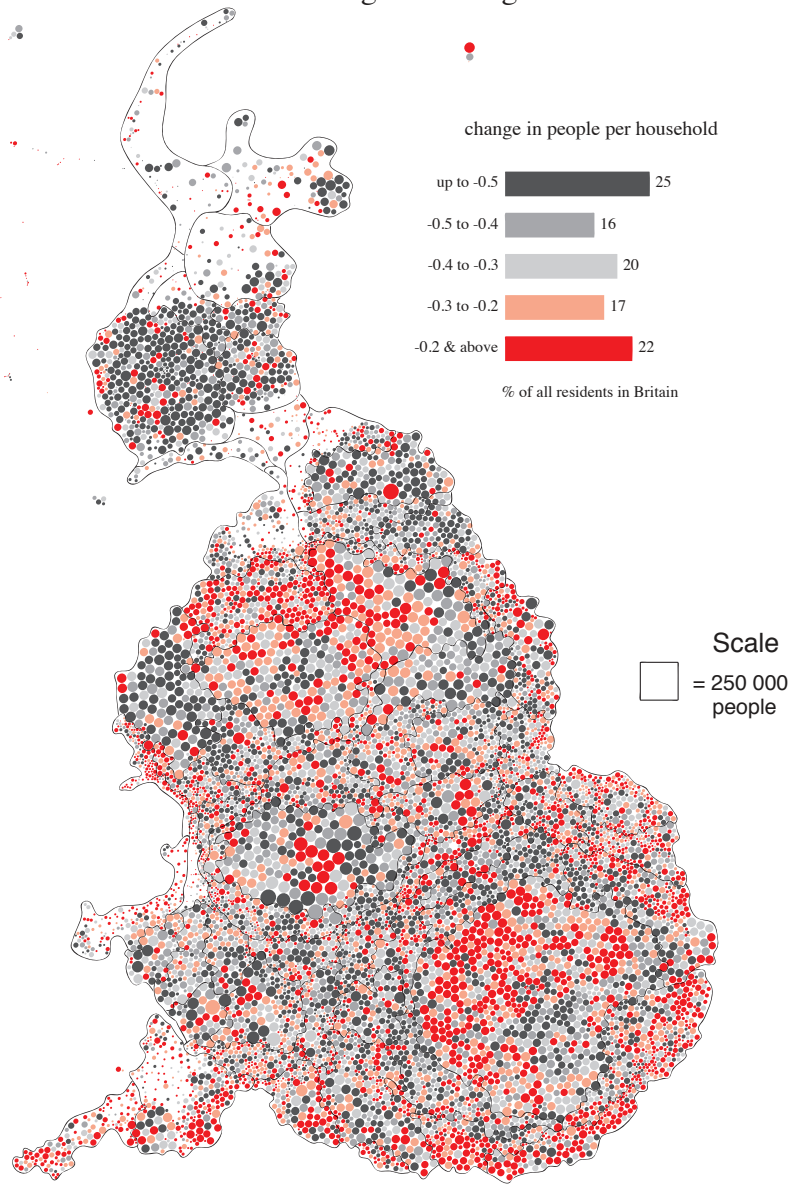
Household Size 1991

average for ward households

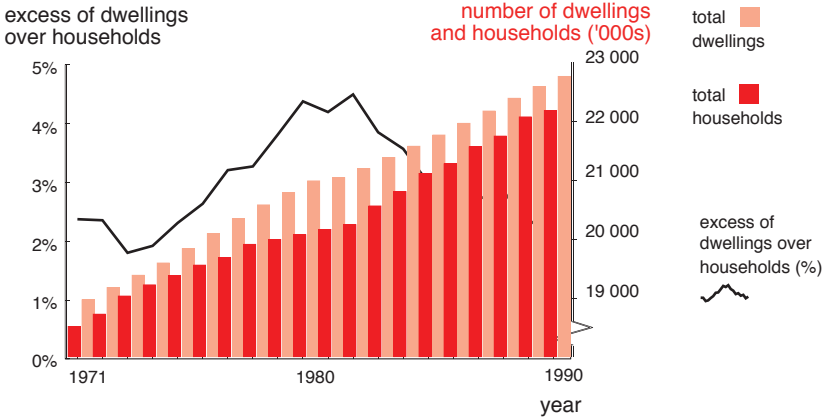


Household Size 1971–1991

change in average for ward households



4.5: Balance of Dwellings over Households in Britain 1971–1991



Source: General Household Survey estimates (OPCS 1973, 1975, 1986, 1989, 1991) and Housing and Construction Statistics (DoE 1982, 1990, 1991).

4.6: Estimates of Dwellings, Households and the Housing Balance in England 1991, 1992

Estimates for England	Raw Census 1991	DoE figures 1991	Updated 1992	Notes
Dwellings ('000s)	19 671	19 700	19 860	1
Households ('000s)	18 766	19 111	19 338	4
Private Household Population ('000s)	46 337	48 100	48 269	2
Excess Dwellings ('000s)	1092	639	572	5
Average Household Size	2.47	2.52	2.50	3
Excess of Dwellings over Households	5.55%	3.24%	2.88%	6

Source: 1991 Census Small Area Statistics, DoE (1993) and see notes below:

Notes:

1. JRF Housing finance review 1993 p.51, from Housing and Construction Statistics (DoE).
2. Mid-1992 population estimates for England and Wales OPCS monitor PP1 93/3, resident population multiplied by same ratio as DoE used to remove institutional population in 1991.
3. Average household size assumed to have changed by the same amount as the General Household Survey three year moving average has from 1989–1991 to 1990–1992 (-0.8%) (the 1992 General Household average size was 2.45, dramatically below the figure used here).
4. The result of dividing private household population estimate (2) by average household size (3).
5. The results of subtracting households from dwellings assuming the same proportion of households are sharing as the DoE estimated there to be sharing a dwelling in 1991.
6. Just before this atlas was printed revised official statistics were released which added roughly 100 000 more households to the 1991 England figure, reducing the 1992 "excess" to under 2.5%, half the census figure (DoE, 1995, Projections of Households in England to 2016, London: HMSO).

Housing Demand

Demand for housing is shown here in the most simple way possible — through the relationship between numbers of dwellings and households. As a dwelling is accommodation designed for one household, an idealised view of housing is that each household should live in one dwelling, and thus the proportion of dwellings which remain unassigned provides an indication of the demand for housing in an area. Because dwellings are empty when households move between them, and because many are unfit to live in, or in the wrong place, or are second homes, there is usually an excess of dwellings to households. However, as Figure 4.5 shows, the excess has fluctuated greatly over time, with the lowest excess and therefore the greatest crude demand for housing in recent years being in 1973 and 1989.

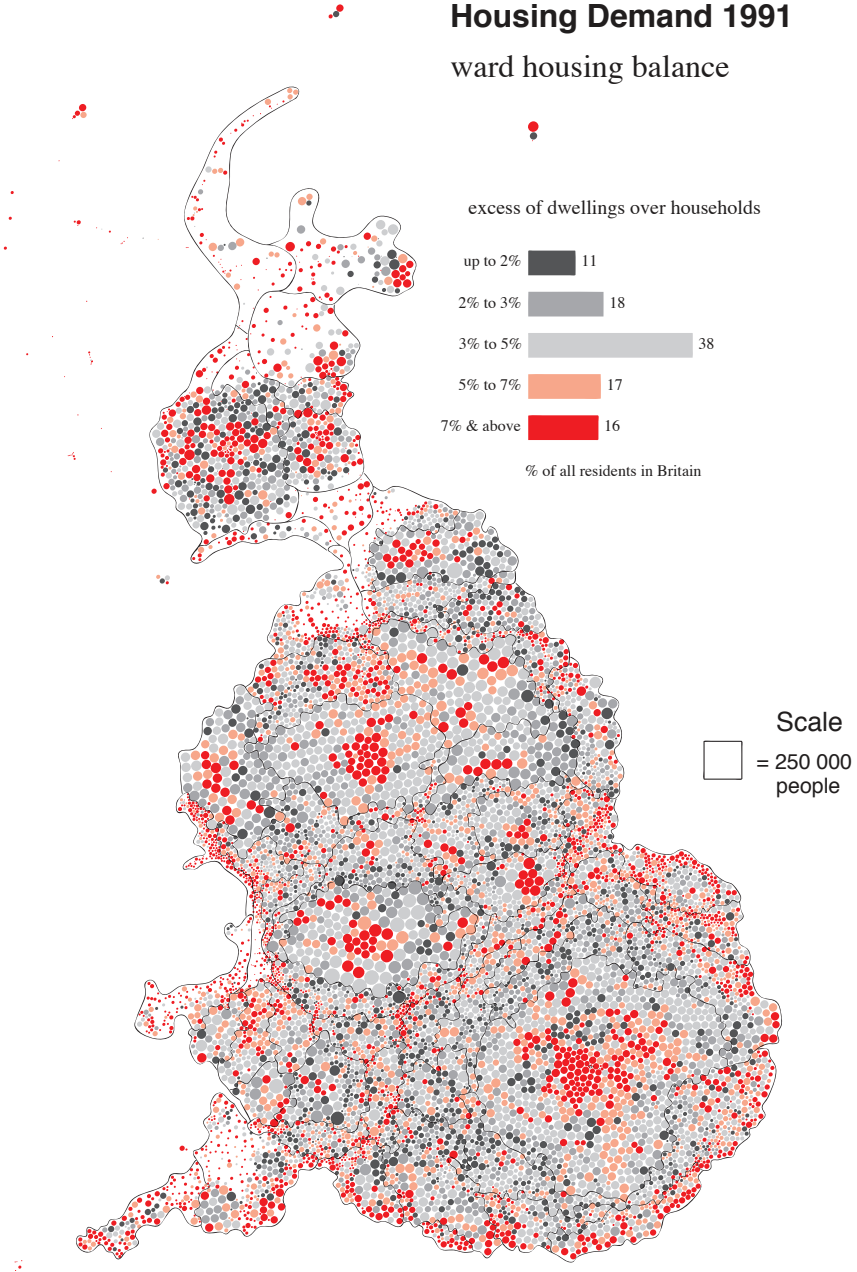
The excess of dwellings over households has also varied greatly over space as the map opposite illustrates. Excesses of one in ten more dwellings than households are not unusual in central city areas, while less than one in fifty excess dwellings can be found in 11% of wards (by population). In three quarters of the wards the excess has increased since 1971. In one fifth of the country this amounts to one "surplus" dwelling for every twenty existing dwellings. This fifth includes almost all of London and most of Bristol, the West Midlands, Liverpool, Manchester and many other urban areas. Crude housing demand in the more affluent areas, the areas which are dominated by detached houses (page 103) and increasing employment (page 69) has risen since 1971.

A note of caution is required at this point. Just as the 1991 census failed to enumerate many people (see Figure 1.13), it also missed many households. At the time of writing there is little agreement as to how many households were missed, with different parts of government publishing different figures (Simpson and Dorling 1994). Figure 4.6 shows just how big those data discrepancies are and how serious they are for estimating even crude housing demand. Compared with Department of the Environment estimates for 1991, the census statistics omit 1.76 million residents of private households and 345 000 households in England alone. The result of this is that when the "surplus" of dwellings over households is compared, the census figure is 70% higher!

The census figures must therefore be viewed with some scepticism. Unfortunately, at the local level they are the only statistics which can be used. Thus when reading the map opposite, it must not be assumed that more than 7% of the dwellings in central Manchester are surplus to requirements. All that can be said is that the census enumerators found 7% more dwellings than households, but that it is easier to count dwellings than households. Nevertheless comparisons across the map can be made, and where the level of imputation was low (page 11) and the excess of dwellings was high, for instance in north Wales, it is quite likely that a large proportion of buildings were empty in 1991.

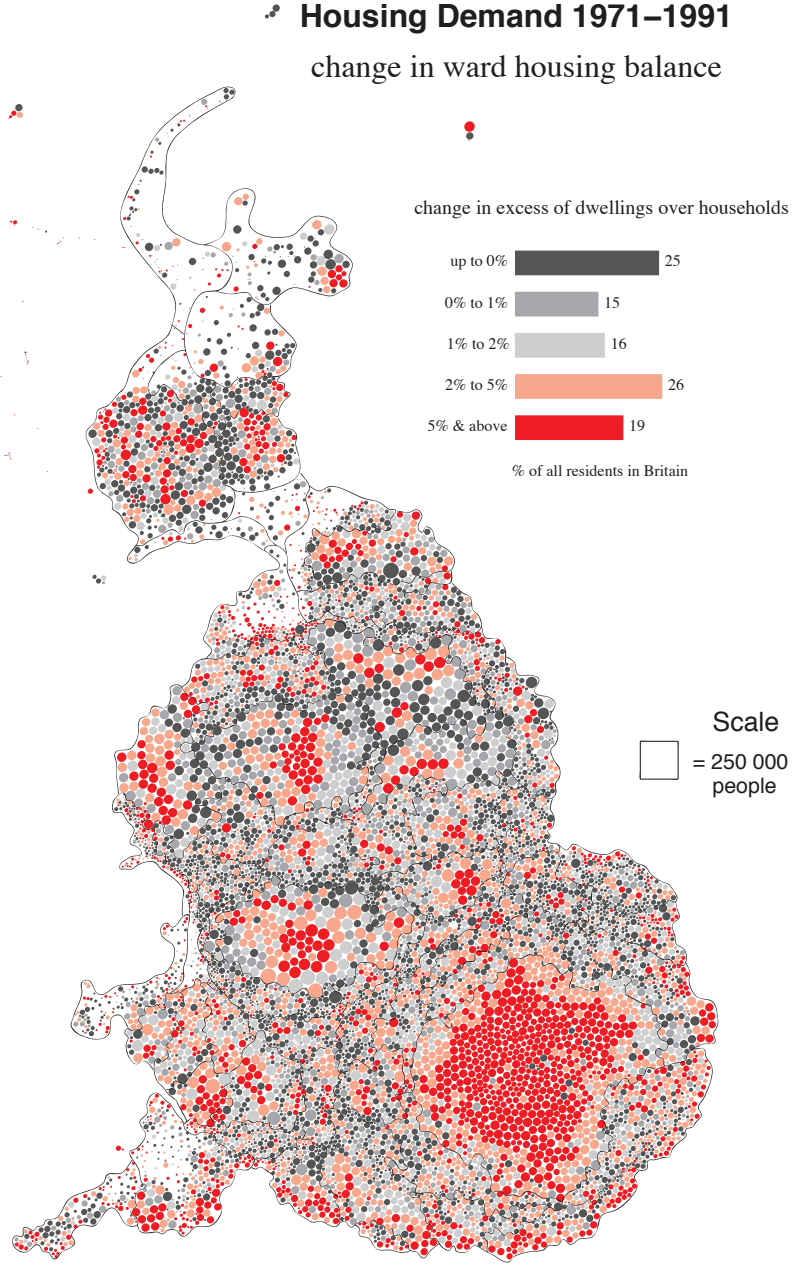
Housing Demand 1991

ward housing balance

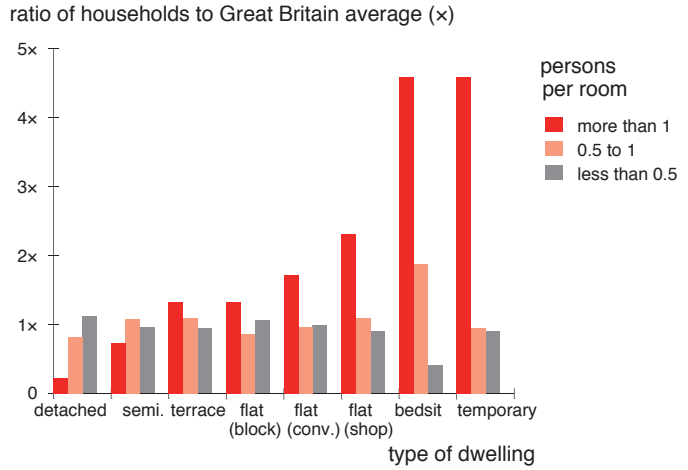


Housing Demand 1971–1991

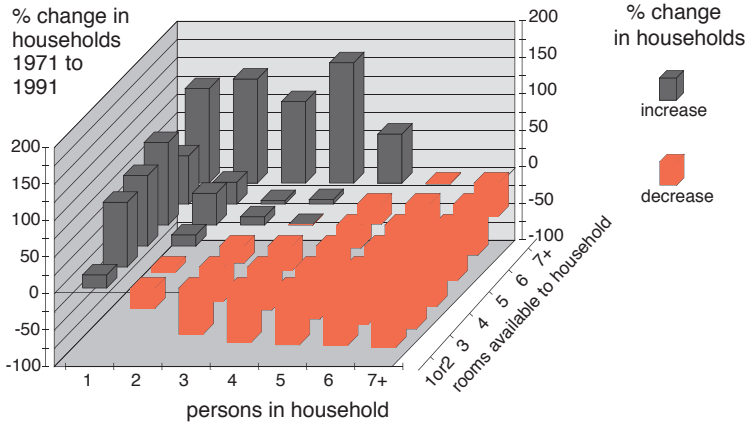
change in ward housing balance



4.7: Persons per Room by Dwelling Type in Britain 1991



4.8: Persons and Rooms per Household in Britain 1971–1991



Overcrowding

There are better ways of trying to assess where there is greater housing demand than dividing the total number of dwellings by households. These better measures include comparing how densely dwellings are occupied. Measures of overcrowding have been derived from the British census since 1901, when rooms were first counted (Dale and Marsh 1993). Living at densities of more than one person per room is the definition of overcrowding used here. A household consisting of two adults and three children living in a two bedroom house with an average sized kitchen and one living room would be considered overcrowded. On the other hand the same dwelling occupied by only one person, thus at a density of less than 0.5 people per room, could be considered under-occupancy. Nationally, 64% of dwellings are under-occupied by this measure, while only 2% are overcrowded.

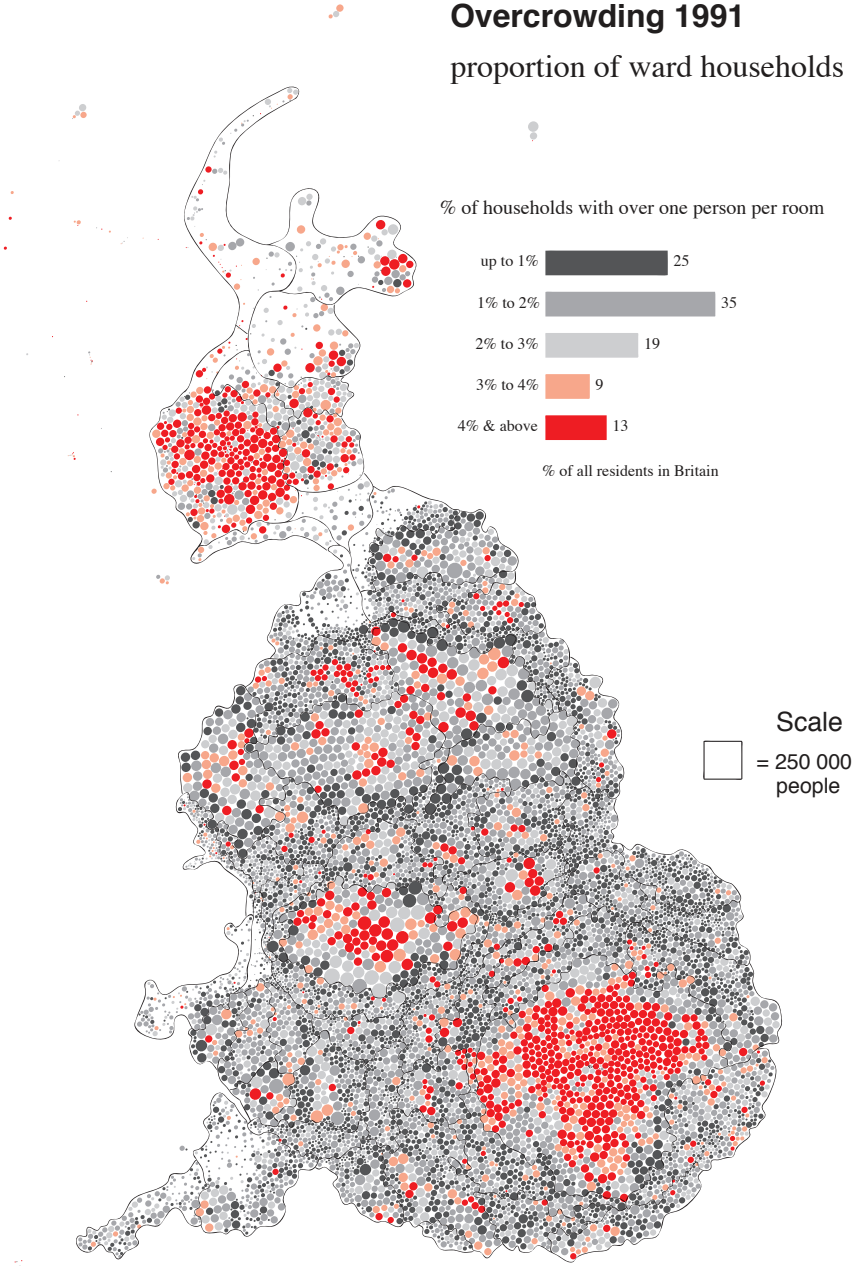
Figure 4.7 shows the difference between the proportion of households which live at these densities for each type of dwelling as compared to the overall proportions. Households living in bedsits or in temporary accommodation are more than four times more likely to be overcrowded than is usual. Households living in detached houses are almost five times less likely to be overcrowded, and 12% more likely to be under-occupying, when compared to the typical household in Britain.

The map opposite, of overcrowding in 1991, shows stark differences in the proportion of households living in dwellings with more than one person per room. More than 4% of households are typically overcrowded in London and in Scottish wards. In wards comprising 60% of the population, less than 2% of households are overcrowded. This geographical pattern exists despite the large falls that have taken place in overcrowding since 1971. These falls have been strongest in Scotland, the North East and London as the second map shows. These changes are due to both falling average household sizes and increasing numbers of rooms in dwellings (through the addition of extensions and the building of larger property). Slum clearance has also been a factor. It is noteworthy that densities of occupation have not fallen much in Outer London.

Studying the simple ratio of persons to rooms simplifies the changes which have taken place in the way in which people occupy their homes and in how those homes are changing. Figure 4.8 shows the changes for each combination of household size and dwelling size from 1971 to 1991. What is most striking about this graphic is that all the combinations which have seen large increases are on the back margins of the matrix. This shows that the two major changes to have occurred have been the huge increases in the number of single person households and in the number of households who live in dwellings with seven or more rooms. In fact, over one million households in Britain in 1991 (4.6% of all households) consisted of a single person living in a dwelling with six or more rooms to him or herself.

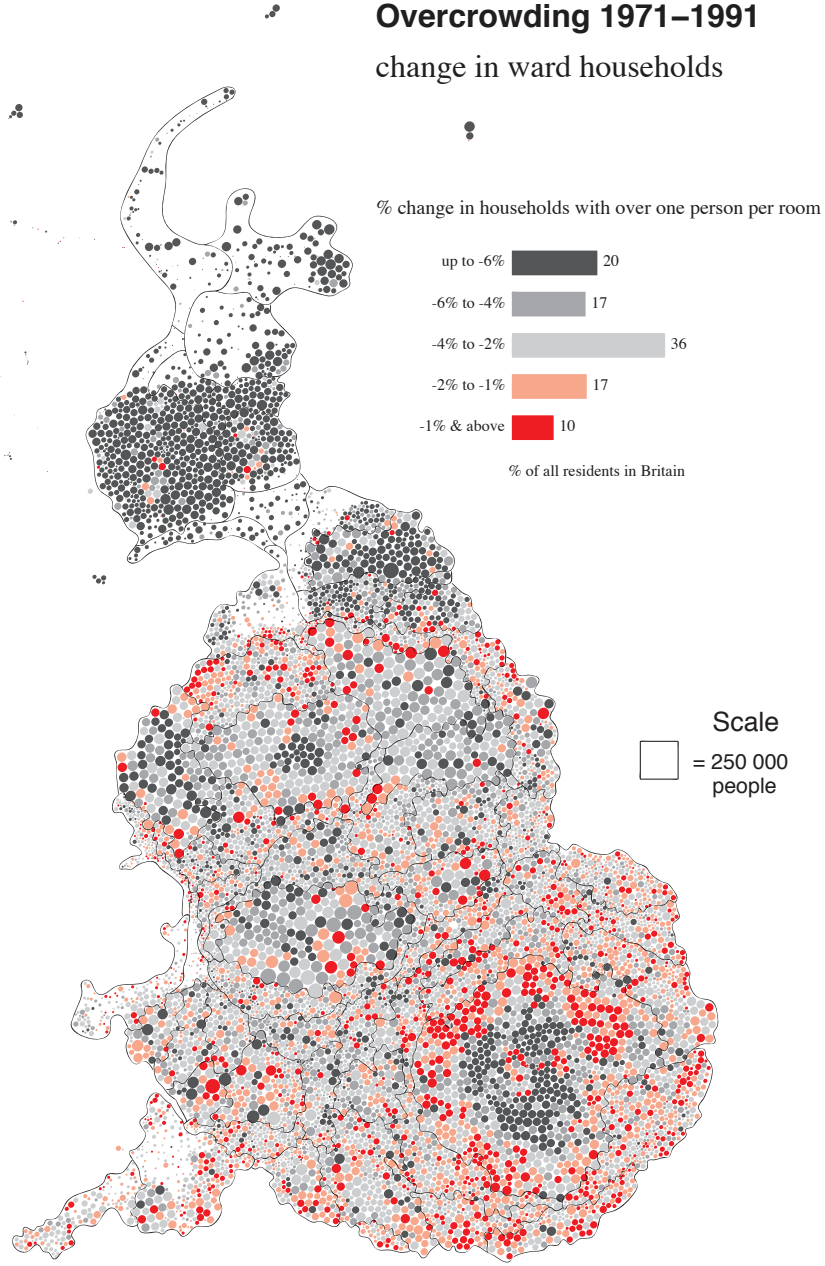
Overcrowding 1991

proportion of ward households



Overcrowding 1971–1991

change in ward households



4.9: Indicators of Housing Shortage in Britain 1991, 1981–1991

Shortage of:	*Privacy*		*Permanence*		*Preference*	
Type of household, people or family:	**Having to share parts of their home with other households:**		**Households living in non-permanent accommodation:**		**People living in a household with two or more families:**	
	1991 total	1991% (1981%)	1991 total	1991% (1981%)	1991 total	1991% (1981%)
All households (in the census)	220 000	1.0% (1.3%)	94 000	0.43% (0.41%)	199 000	0.93% (0.87%)
All residents in households	312 000	0.6% (0.7%)	180 000	0.333% (0.326%)	1 081 000	2.0% (1.9%)
Children aged under 16	29 000	0.26% (0.36%)	25 000	0.23% (0.26%)	285 000*	2.4% (2.2%)
Lone parent households	8100	0.88% (0.92%)	2700	0.3% (0.4%)	148 000	7.2% (6.6%)
Households with children	20 000	0.3% (0.4%)	14 000	0.2% (0.3%)		
Pensioner only households	31 000	0.6%(1.3%)	28 000	0.5% (0.4%)		
Families**	403 000	2.6% (2.4%)			*(figures shown in red when rising)*	

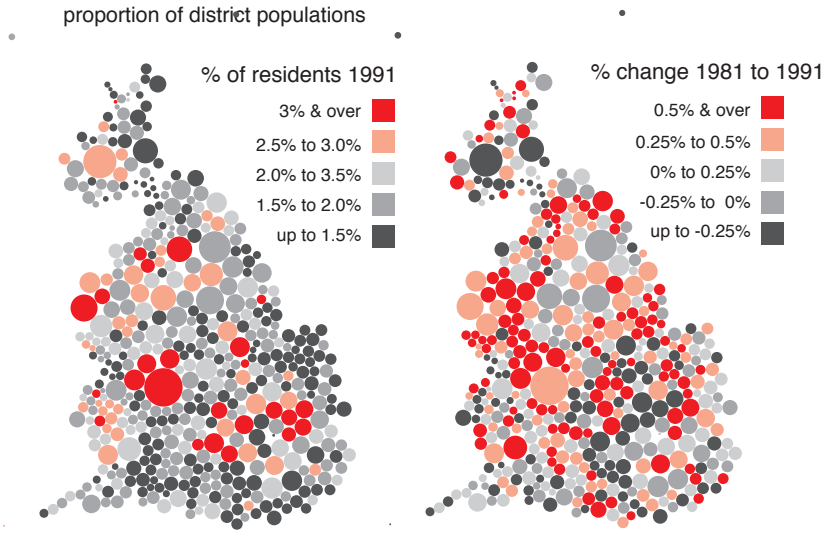
* estimates of children in two plus family households include those aged 16 to 18 years old who are still at school (for comparability).
** the number of families living in households which contain two or more families and hence share parts of the home with another family.

Source: 1991 and 1981 Census Small Area Statistics

Note:

A family is a group of people within a household who are related and span two generations. If a woman lives with her parents and her child, altogether they form a two family household. In 1991 cohabiting couples were identified as families whereas in 1981 they were not. This change of definition should reduce the number of two or more family households. Despite this change in definition, the number of separate families sharing the use of a living room in their dwelling with another family, or having at least one group meal a day, has increased over the decade.

4.10: Residents in Two or More Family Households in Britain 1991, 1981–1991



Housing Shortage

Given the recent improvement in overcrowding and the general excess of dwellings over households, it may appear contradictory to talk of a housing shortage. Indeed, the situation in 1991 was vastly different from that in 1971, when 653 000 households shared a dwelling and 3.2 million households did not have exclusive access to amenities such as an inside toilet, a bath or hot water. However, there are many households who still do not have the privacy of exclusive use of their own home, or are housed in accommodation which was designed to be temporary. There are also many families who share a home with another family. Many of these families may prefer to live separately but cannot. This is one form of homelessness. More acute measures of housing shortage are discussed at the end of this chapter (see page 130).

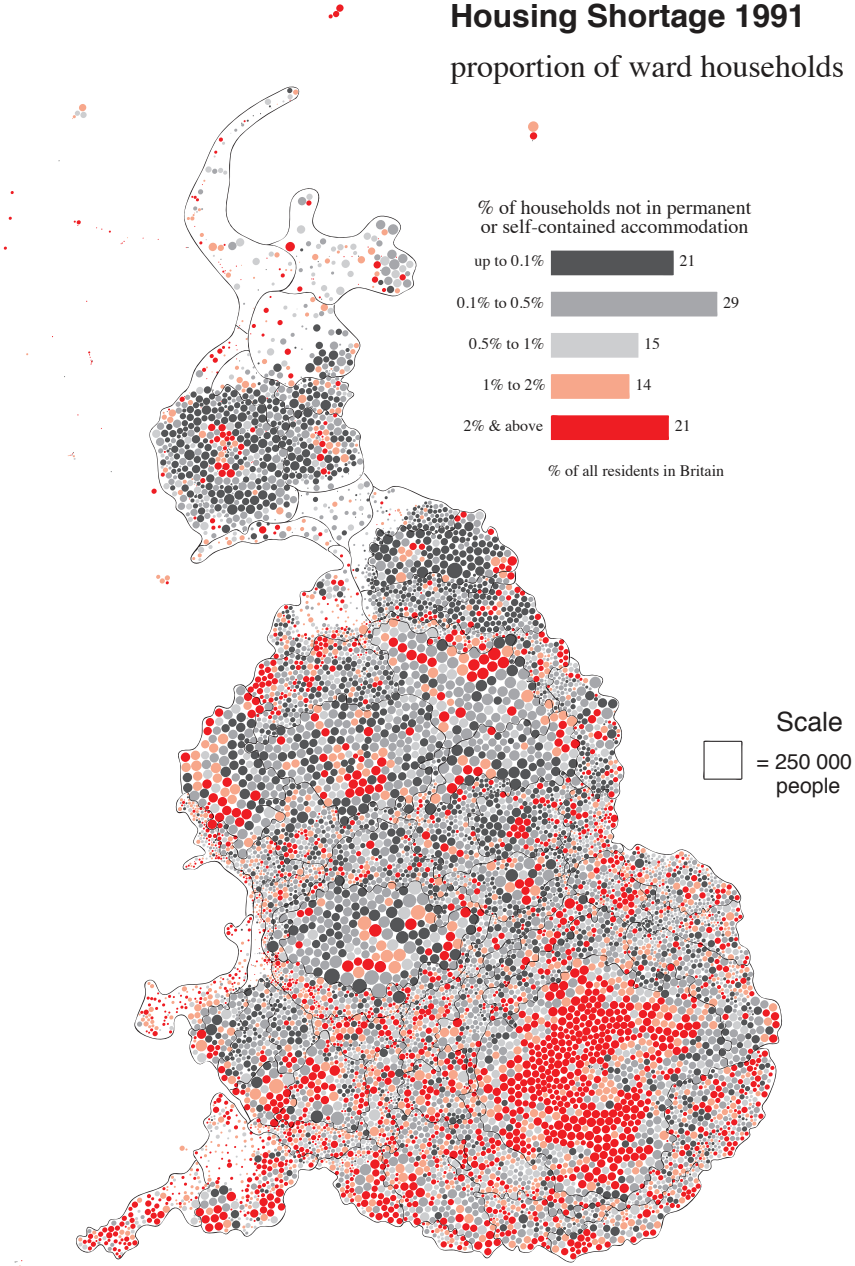
Figure 4.9 presents estimates of the shortages of privacy, permanence or preference and shows how these statistics have changed over the 1980s. Caution is again needed in interpreting these figures as many of the households missing from the 1991 census statistics may be living in dwellings which would be classified as having two families or to be lacking privacy, had they been recorded. The number of lone parent households may also be inflated through one parent being omitted from the enumeration. However, an increase to over a million can be seen in the number of people living in households containing two or more families. In general, fewer people are having to live in households where they share parts of their homes with other households (although 29 000 children still live in this situation). There has been a fall in the use of non-permanent accommodation among all groups other than pensioners.

The maps opposite show the proportion of households who lack privacy or permanence and how this has changed geographically during the 1980s. London has experienced the most significant improvement but, by this measure, it is still the area of Britain with the most acute housing shortage. The situation can be seen from the map to have deteriorated most quickly in towns such as Leeds, Bristol, Coventry, Lancaster and Liverpool. These maps are, however, difficult to interpret because some households may like temporary accommodation, just as some families might want to live in households with other families. However, it is unlikely that most are happy with this (Niner 1989).

Figure 4.10 shows that the highest proportions of families sharing accommodation are found in London boroughs such as Brent, Ealing, Newham and Tower Hamlets, and in districts like Slough, Leicester, Wolverhampton, Knowsley and Birmingham; these are the same sorts of areas as those which contain the highest proportion of households in temporary accommodation or sharing dwellings. The geography of the changes in this statistic are also similar to those shown opposite. This exercise suggests that all these measures do provide complementary indications of the areas where there may be the greater shortages of housing.

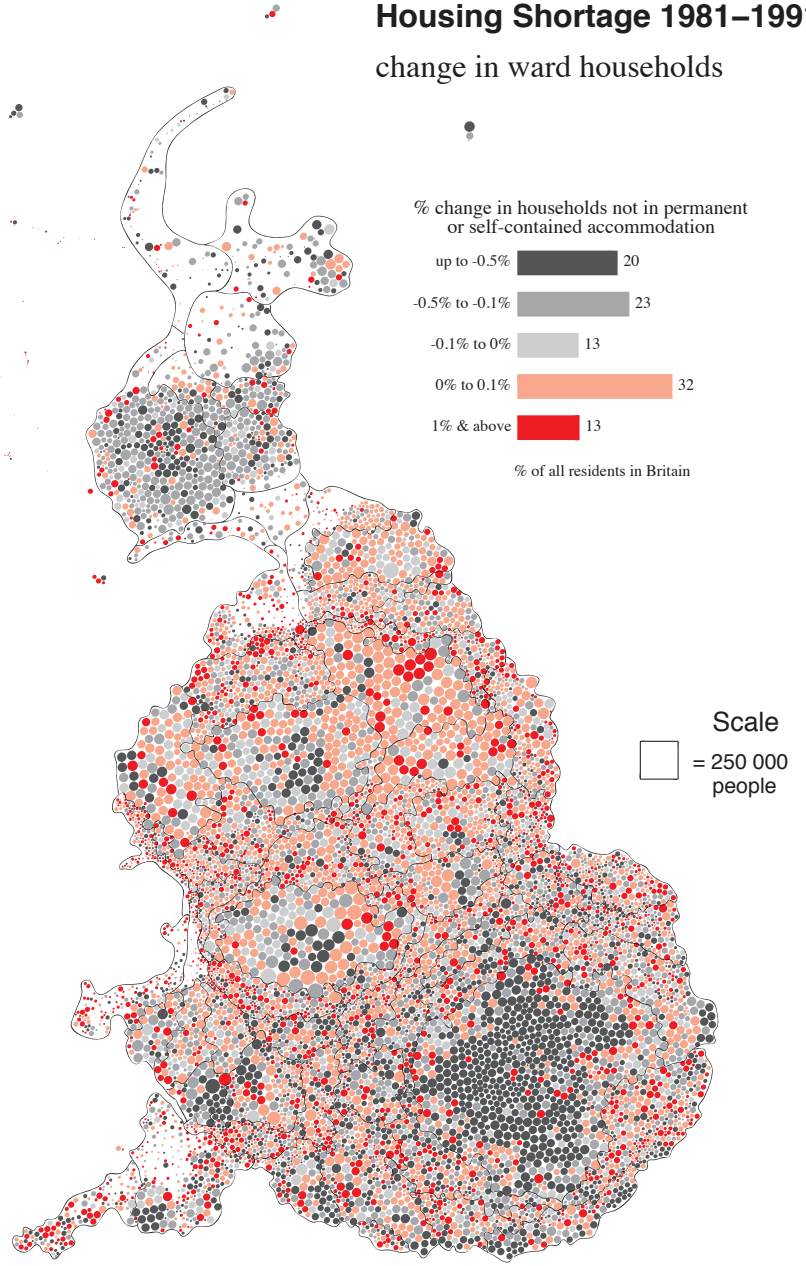
Housing Shortage 1991

proportion of ward households

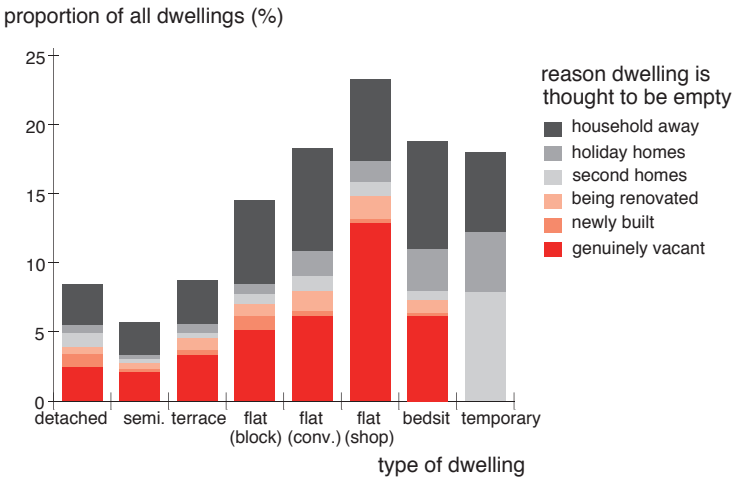


Housing Shortage 1981–1991

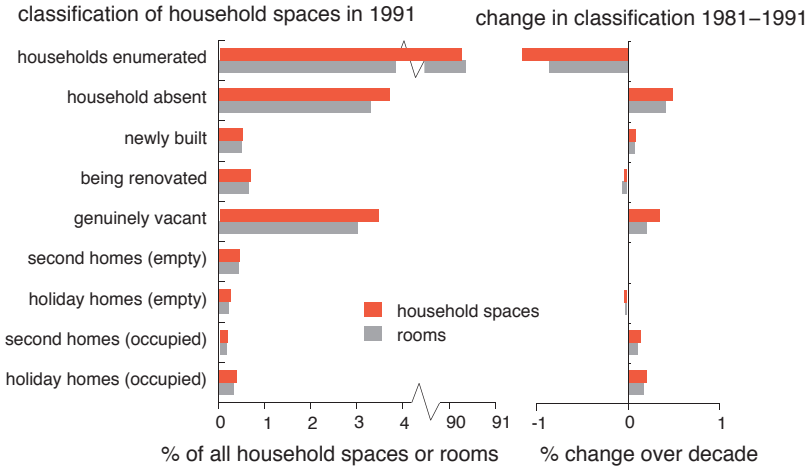
change in ward households



4.11: Empty Dwellings by Reason to be Vacant and Type in Britain 1991



4.12: Empty Household Spaces and Rooms by Reason in Britain 1981, 1991



Vacant Housing

The housing shortage in Britain is not a shortage of buildings but a shortage of access to suitable, affordable accommodation where households need it. The numbers of vacant dwellings in Britain and their location strongly imply this. The first map opposite shows the locations of the one million dwellings which the census enumerators thought were vacant in 1991. These are generally concentrated in the same areas as have the most obvious housing shortages. Despite the more probable number of vacant dwellings being closer to half this number (see Figure 4.6), the basic pattern to the geographical distribution shown here may well hold true.

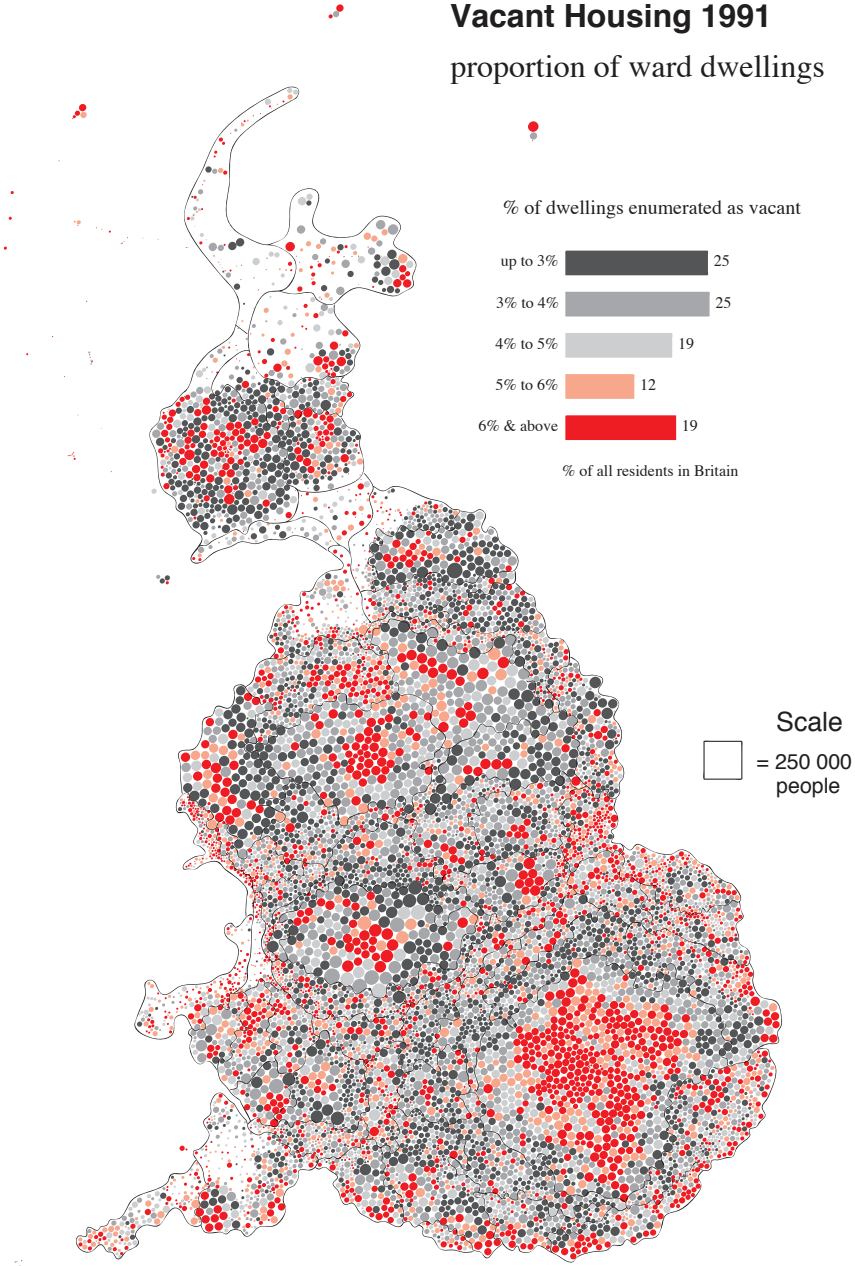
Although dwellings were not enumerated by the 1981 census, which is one reason why many of the maps here show change since 1971, it is possible to deduce the numbers of vacant dwellings from the estimates of the numbers of rooms found in vacant *household spaces* (which were defined as the accommodation available for a household, and therefore can include subdivisions of dwellings). The map of change in vacant housing is, in fact, a map of the changing proportions of rooms in a ward which were vacant between 1981 and 1991. Inner London, Birmingham, Liverpool and Glasgow can all be seen to have fewer vacant rooms, while the numbers have increased in the suburban parts of cities and along the south coast.

Most vacant dwellings are unlikely to be suitable for the kinds of households most needing housing, or the dwellings may not actually be available to buy or rent. Figure 4.11 shows how it is flats, particularly those above shops, which are most likely to be genuinely vacant when they are found to be empty. Semi-detached houses, which are often most suitable for households needing housing, are least likely to be vacant. Temporary accommodation, by definition, cannot be vacant — or every empty caravan in Britain could be classified as a potential empty home!

Figure 4.12 shows how the numbers of household spaces and rooms in Britain have altered since 1981, according to their form of occupancy. Again, this figure should be read with caution as many of the homes found to be vacant in 1991 may have been housing some of the one million residents unaccounted for by the census. Over 1% fewer household spaces were found to contain households on census night 1991 than in 1981. Just over half of these empty homes were thought to contain households who were away on census night, the other half were estimated to be actual vacant accommodation. The number of household spaces which were second or holiday homes is also recorded as having risen. The changes in the proportions of rooms falling into each of these classifications have been lower, suggesting that it is most likely to be flats which are becoming vacant in larger numbers. However, if a flat is above the ground floor, and the neighbours do not know who lives there, establishing that the address is vacant (when nobody answers the door) can involve little more than an educated guess.

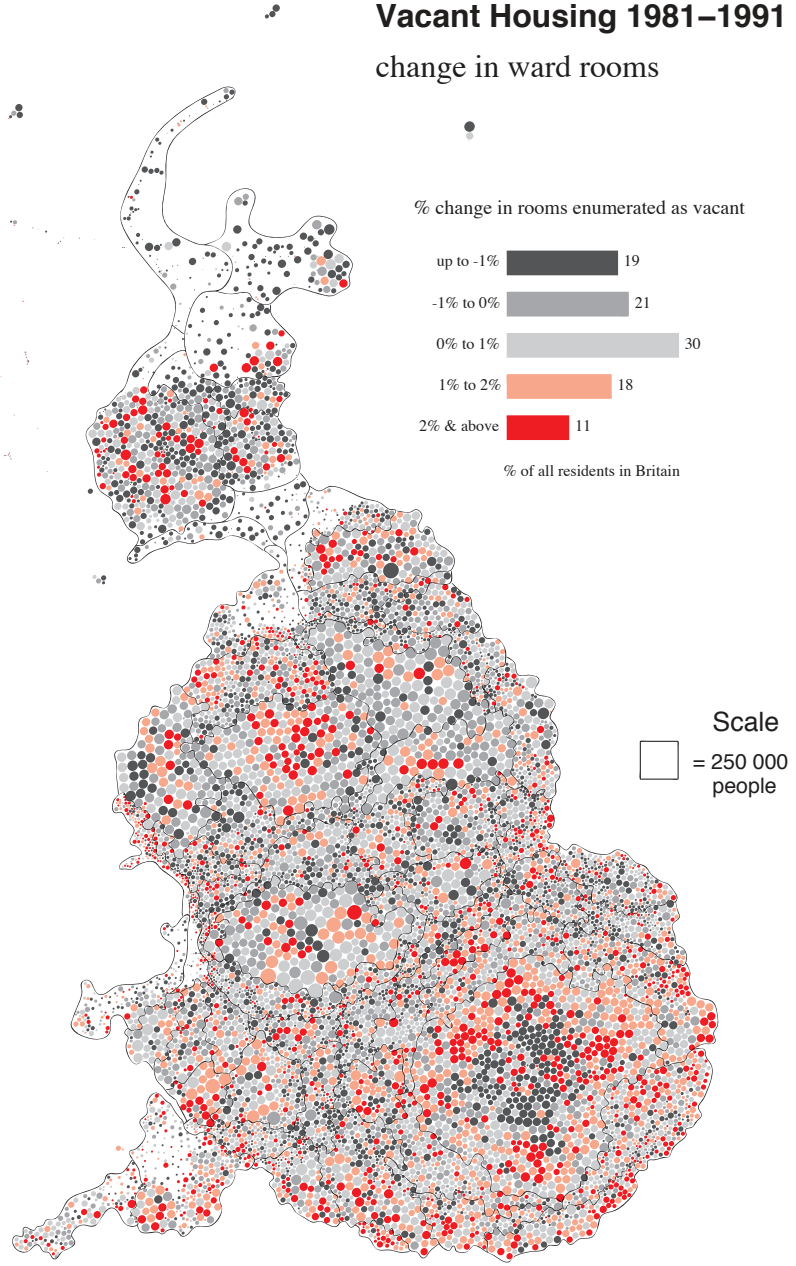
Vacant Housing 1991

proportion of ward dwellings

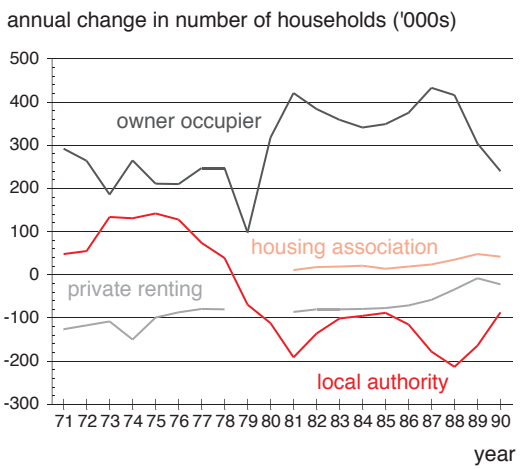


Vacant Housing 1981–1991

change in ward rooms



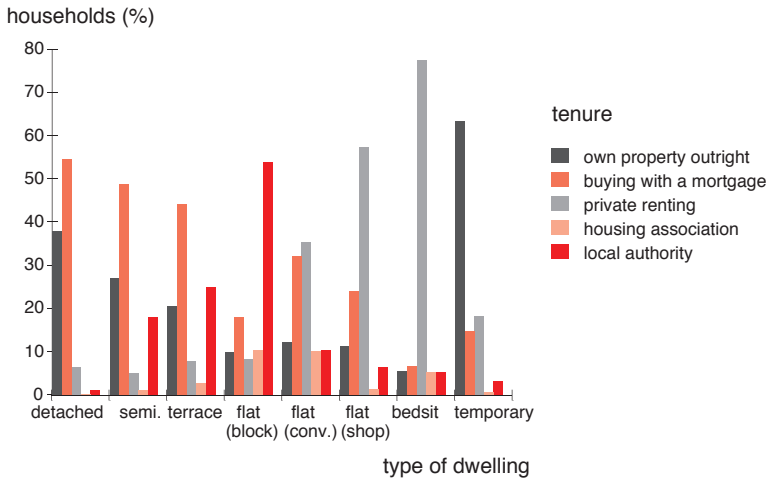
4.13: Change in Tenure of Households in Britain 1971–1991



Source: Newton (1991)

Note: private renting comparisons between 1979 and 1981 are unreliable

4.14: Dwelling Type by Tenure in Britain 1991



Housing Tenure

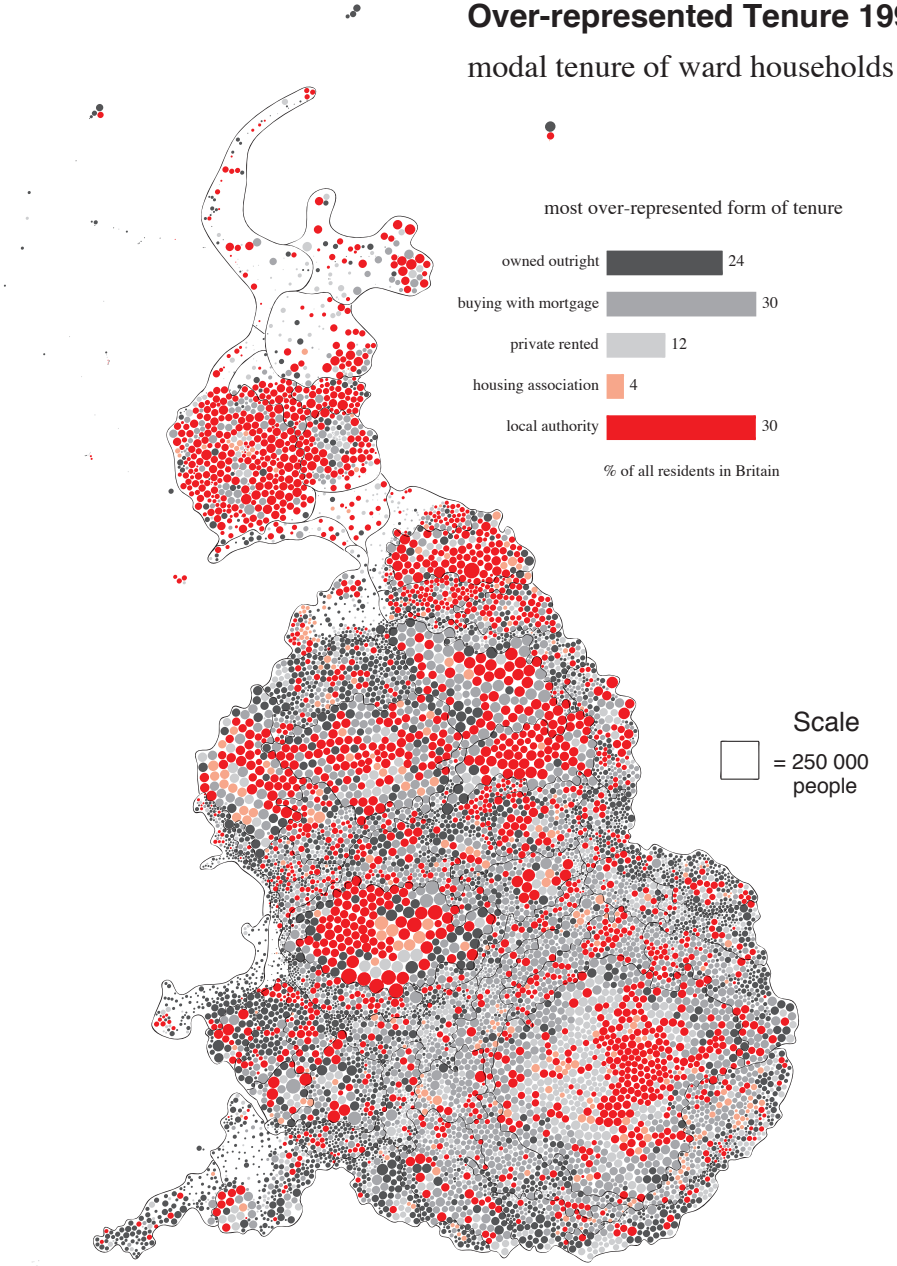
The nature of the *tenure*, the form of title under which property is occupied or held, may be one of the reasons why so many homes are vacant. Most vacant accommodation is not available for rent (JRF 1991). Unfortunately, the census could not collect information on the ownership of vacant property because, by definition, there was nobody there to ask. Of all households in occupied dwellings in Britain in 1991, 66% owned their home or were buying it, 12% rented privately or with a housing association and 21% rented from a local authority (including New Towns or Scottish Homes). Figure 4.13 shows graphically the changes which have taken place year by year in the absolute numbers of households in each form of tenure. Most striking has been the rise in owner occupation, which in the peak years of 1981 and 1987 increased by almost half a million households annually. These rises were mirrored by falls in the number of households renting from local authorities as a result of "tenure transfer", notably following the extension of right to buy legislation during the 1980s. The next largest form of tenure, private renting, can be seen to have been slowly recovering over the twenty year period to reach a point, in 1989, where, for one year, it was no longer reducing in size. The number of households in housing association tenure has been steadily rising since that category was distinguished in official statistics in 1981. However, it is important to remember that this tenure only houses 2.45% of the population (see page 122).

The maps opposite show which tenure of household in each ward is furthest above the national average proportion for that tenure, and which is furthest below that proportion. Households in local authority tenure — council housing — are most distinctly concentrated, being above average in many wards in almost all metropolitan counties, Durham, Cleveland and across Scotland. Houses are being bought in high proportions in the Home Counties and in much of the remainder of the metropolitan counties. They are usually owned outright in many parts of Wales, in Lancashire, Cumbria and along the coast. Only in London is a large area dominated by private renting, while housing association tenure stands out above the others only in a few wards, most notably in Merseyside and the West Midlands. The map showing the tenure most under-represented in each ward largely mirrors this picture and so is dominated by the distinct lack of local authority housing in wards in which almost half the population of Britain live.

Type of dwelling is a good indicator of its tenure. Figure 4.14 shows that 92% of detached houses are occupied by their owners, while the majority of flats in blocks are owned by local authorities and over three quarters of bedsits are privately rented. Tenure reflects the financial resources of people in an area — whether they can afford to rent privately, or tend to hold property worth many thousands of pounds. Increasingly tenure also reflects the quality of housing in an area, as much of the better local authority stock was transferred to owner occupation through right to buy legislation.

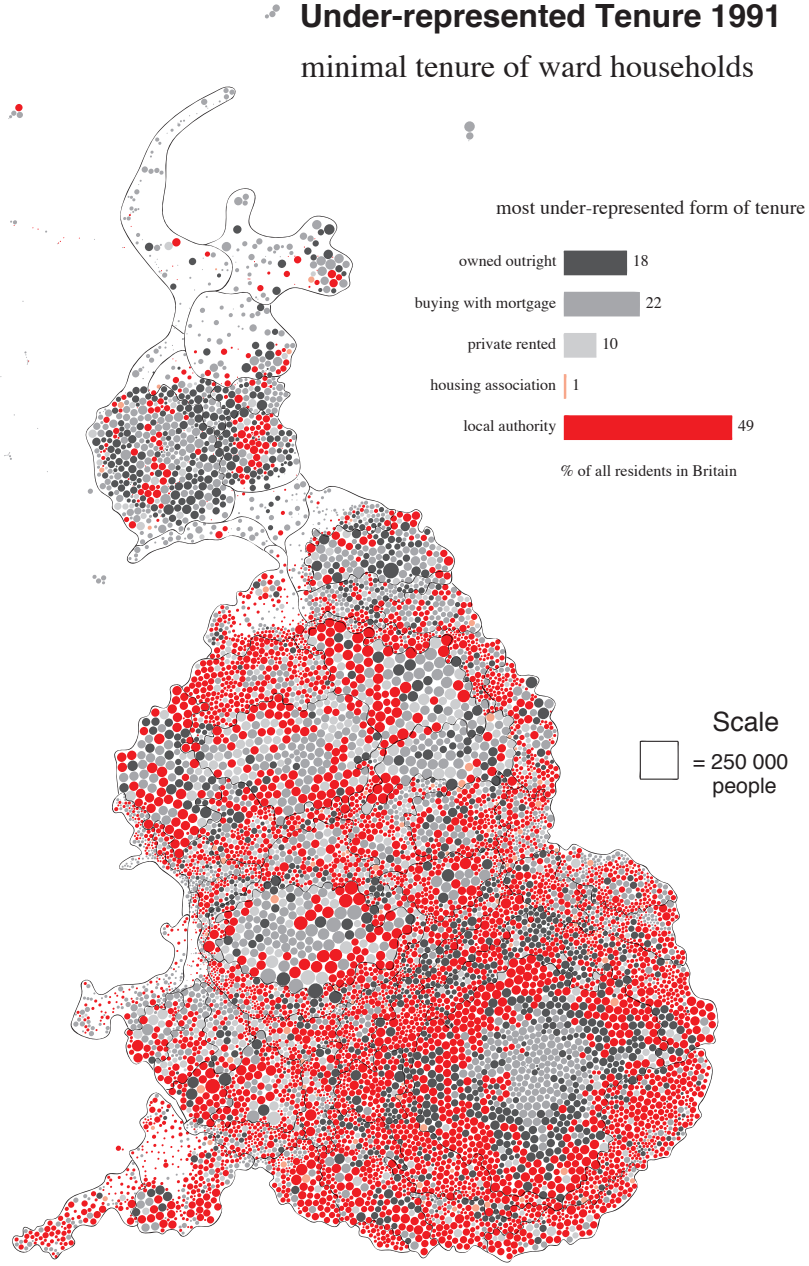
Over-represented Tenure 1991

modal tenure of ward households

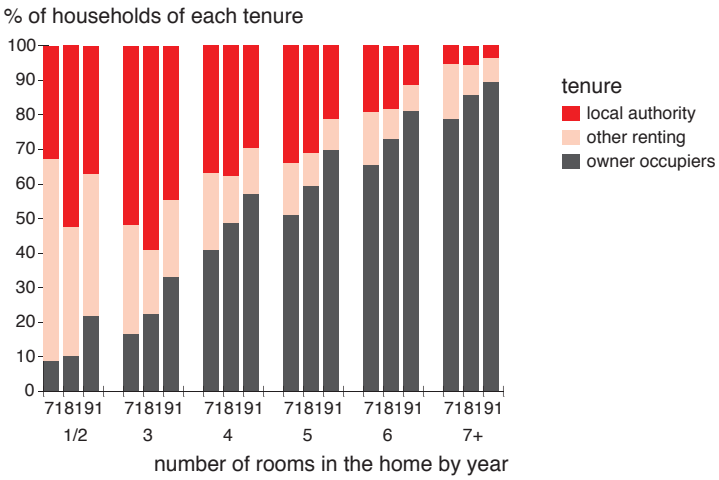


Under-represented Tenure 1991

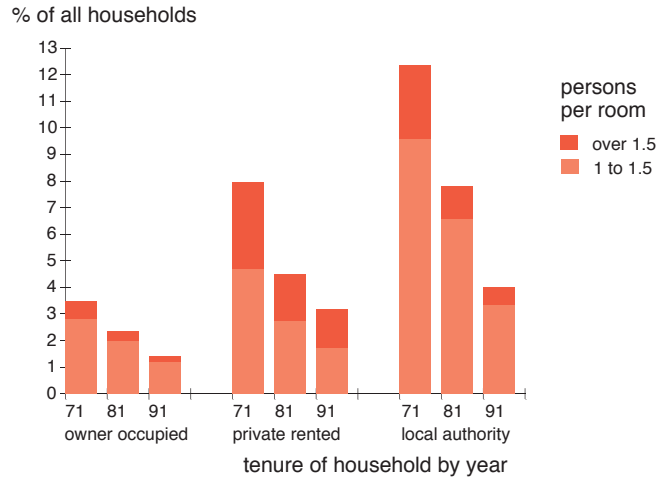
minimal tenure of ward households



4.15: Size of Home by Tenure in Britain 1971, 1981, 1991



4.16: Overcrowded Households by Tenure in Britain 1971, 1981, 1991



Owner Occupiers

Owner occupation is a deceptive term as most housing in this tenure is, in fact, owned by the bank or building society with whom the *home-buyer* has a mortgage. On page 124 the geographical differences between home owners who own their homes outright, and those who are buying them, are explored. Here, however, both groups are treated as a single tenure, not least because this is how they were treated in the past, from which comparisons are drawn. As the first map opposite shows, owner occupation is now the dominant tenure in Britain, with half the population living in wards in which over 70% of households "owned" their home in 1991. Only in the centres of the seven metropolitan counties and in Scotland are groups of wards to be found where less than half the households own or are buying the homes that they occupy.

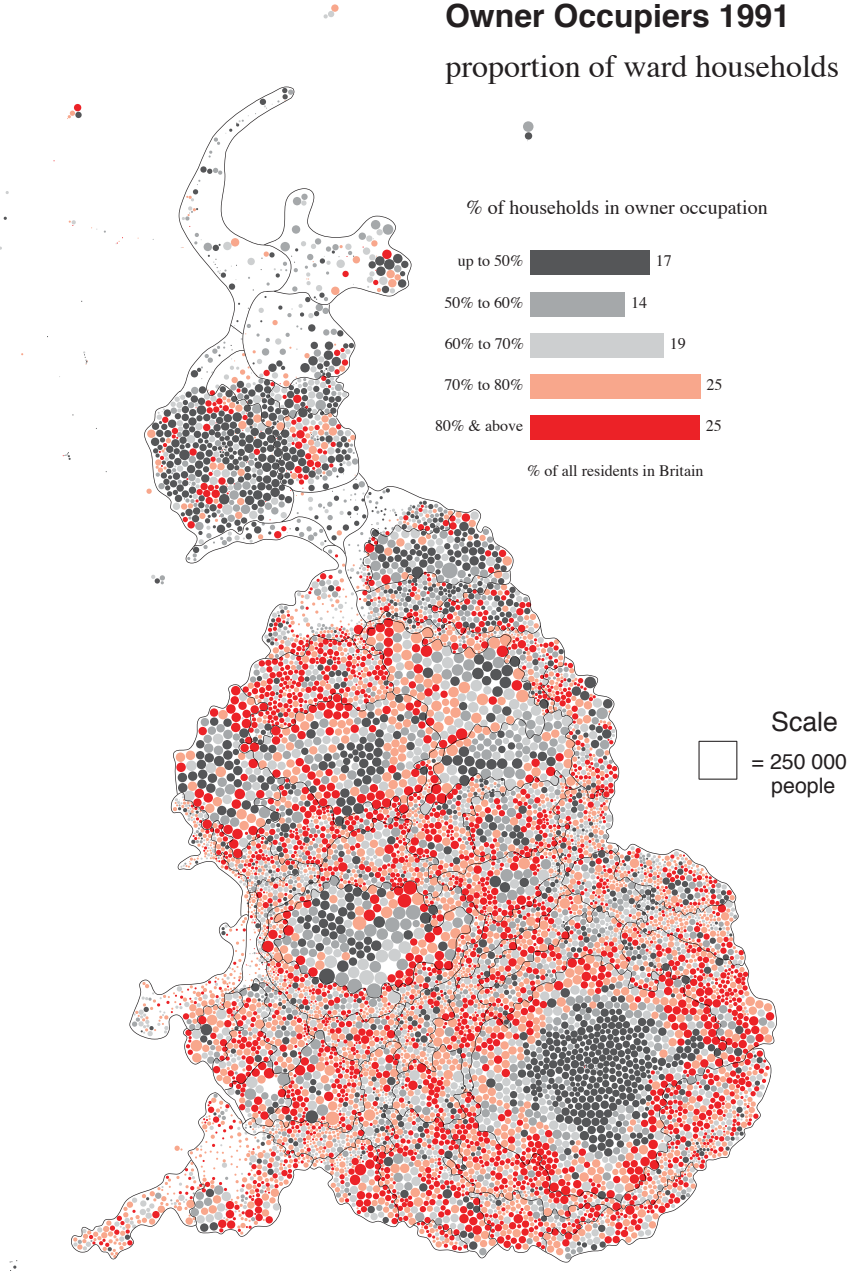
In 1971 less than half of all households were owner occupiers. During the 1970s an further 7.5 households in every hundred joined this tenure, which rose by an additional 10.7% in the 1980s. The second map opposite shows those areas which exceeded growth rates of 10% in both decades. Areas of West London, South Yorkshire and parts of towns such as Plymouth feature prominently. The areas with the lowest growth rates tended to have either quite high or quite low levels of owner occupation in 1971, and not to have changed greatly. The revealing contrasts are between those areas which exceeded this growth rate only in the 1970s, and those which exceeded it only in the 1980s.

It is important to remember that just as the proportions of households changed over time, the nature of dwellings in each type of tenure altered over the decades. Figure 4.15 illustrates how a larger proportion of all sizes of home became owner occupied. Even the smallest two and three room homes were transferred in significant numbers from local authority tenure, reversing the trend of the 1970s (when many of these homes, which were probably flats, had been built). After one or two room homes, the largest proportional increase in owner occupation was in large houses of seven or more rooms. These increased in number by 60% in the 1970s, and by 47% in the 1980s. Most of this increase was due to the building of new larger homes for sale.

Figure 4.16 shows how the building of larger homes in recent years, and the reduction of average household size, has led to a decline in overcrowding in each tenure group. In 1971, one household out of every eight in local authority tenure was overcrowded. By 1991 this had fallen to only one in every twenty five. This is still higher, however, than was the case for owner occupied housing in 1971. Now, only one owner occupied household in every seventy is overcrowded and one in over four hundred is living at a density of over 1.5 people per room. Densities as high as this are usually only found in private rented accommodation, as the figure shows. Overcrowding has fallen most significantly for households in owner occupation because these households have bought the largest available dwellings while having themselves fallen in size most quickly.

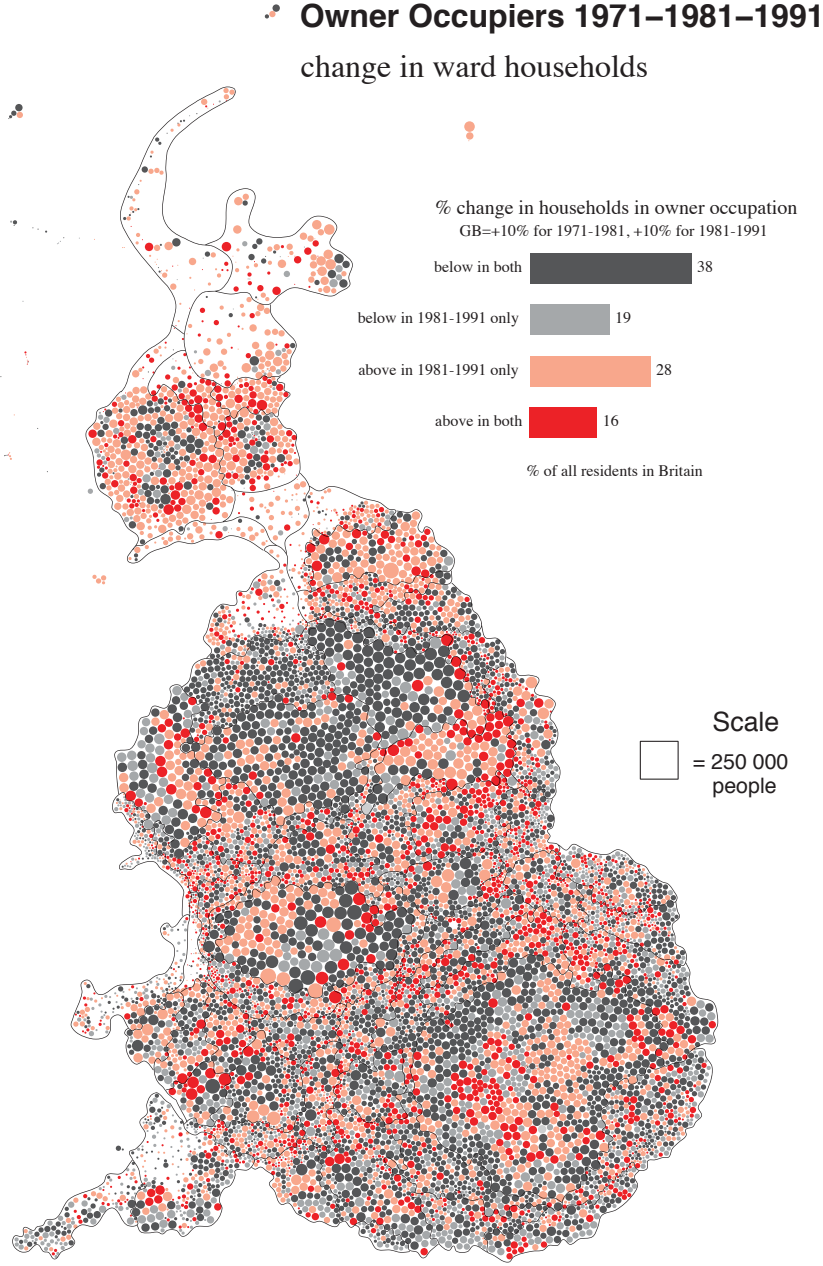
Owner Occupiers 1991

proportion of ward households

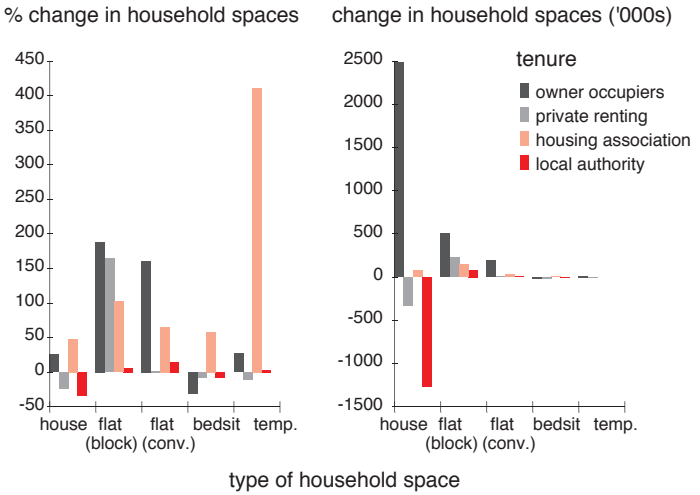


Owner Occupiers 1971–1981–1991

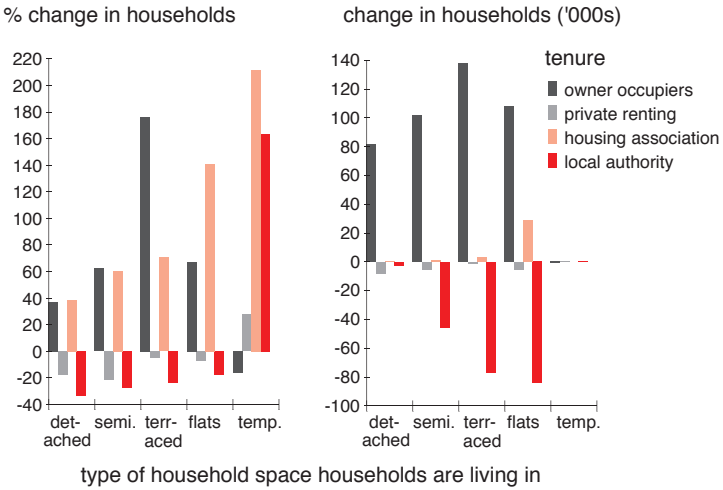
change in ward households



4.17: Tenure by Type of Home in England and Wales 1981–1991



4.18: Tenure by Type of Home in Scotland 1981–1991



Council Housing

One third of households in Britain rent and most of these rent from their local authority or council. The map of council housing is distinctive and can be seen to be reflected in many of the other distributions shown here. Because households renting from Scottish Homes are included in this tenure almost the whole of Scotland appears to be made up of wards where over 30% of the households rent from a "local authority".

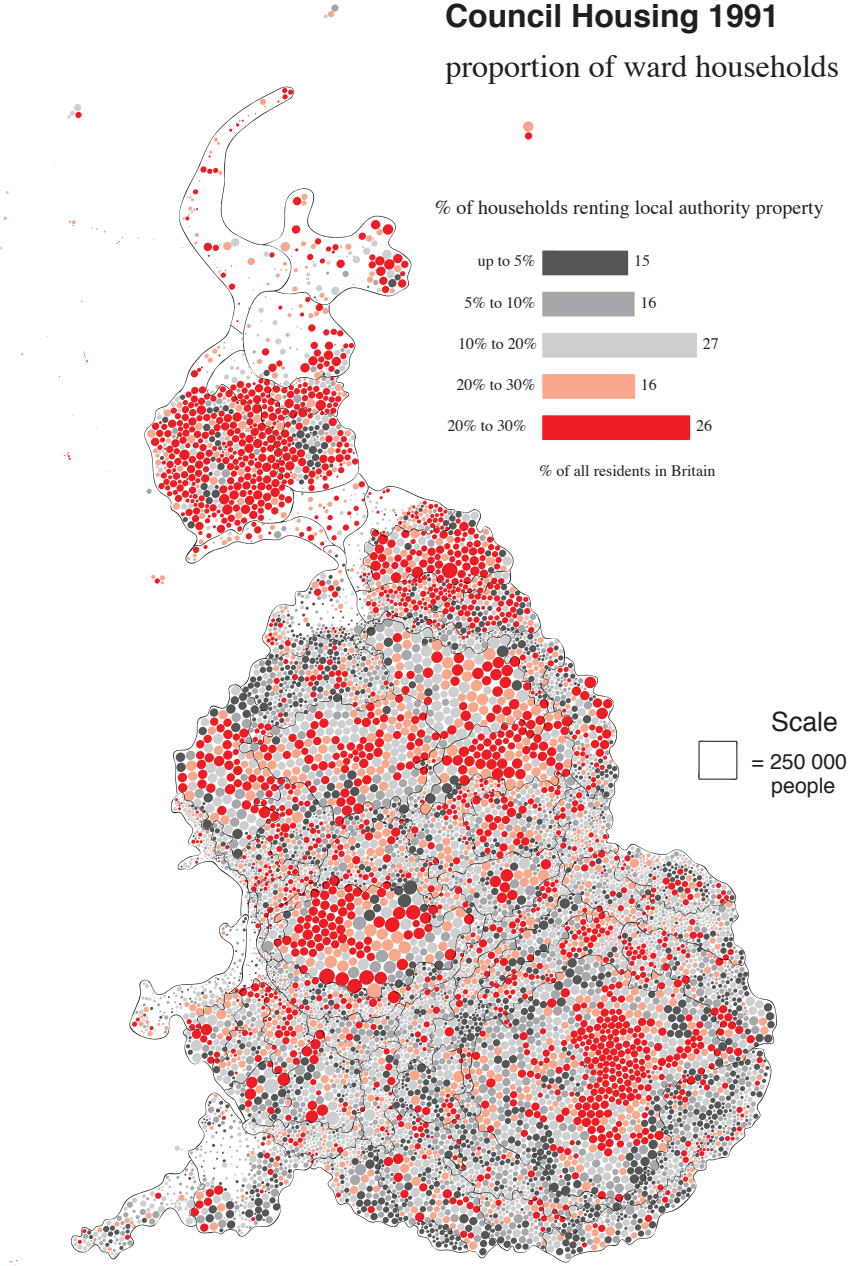
The proportion of households living in council accommodation fell from 31% in both 1971 and 1981, to 22% in 1991. The second map shown opposite is shaded to highlight which areas have seen sustained falls, and in which decades the relatively larger falls occurred. Most of London and the centres of other cities, such as Glasgow and Edinburgh, can be seen to have had above average falls in both decades. Falls have been low in most of Scotland and some English districts such as St Helens and South Tyneside. Central London, South Yorkshire and Wolverhampton saw above average falls in the number of households in this tenure during the 1970s. It tended to be the more suburban or rural wards which saw the greatest falls in this tenure during the 1980s.

This pattern is reflected in the type of accommodation which was being transferred from council housing to owner occupation and the type which was not being built as council housing during the 1980s. For England and Wales census figures in 1981 distinguished different types of flats but not houses (and then presented only numbers of household spaces). Nevertheless, using this information, Figure 4.17 shows that the largest relative and absolute falls in tenure were for houses which used to be owned by the local authority, of which there were 1.27 million less by 1991 compared with a rise of 2.49 million in the number of owner occupied houses. The number of household spaces in flats owned by local authorities actually increased by 92 000 over this period, but this figure should be compared with a rise of 693 000 in the number of household spaces enumerated as flats which were owner occupied. Private renting and housing association renting also saw large relative rises amongst flats. The biggest relative rise can be seen to have been in the amount of temporary accommodation held by housing associations which rose by 411%; however, this was an absolute increase from 81 to just 414 household spaces for the whole of Britain in tenure of this type.

The picture for Scotland given in Figure 4.18 is very similar. In Scotland different types of houses were differentiated in 1981 and so it is possible to compare their rates of transfer. In relative terms, local authorities lost detached houses most, but they had very few to lose in absolute terms. Local authority terraced houses and flats have been depleted in greatest numbers. By both measures, terraced housing has seen the greatest increases in owner occupation. Housing association tenure has increased most in flats, while private renting has fallen for every category of housing except for temporary accommodation, in contrast to the rise in privately rented flats in England and Wales.

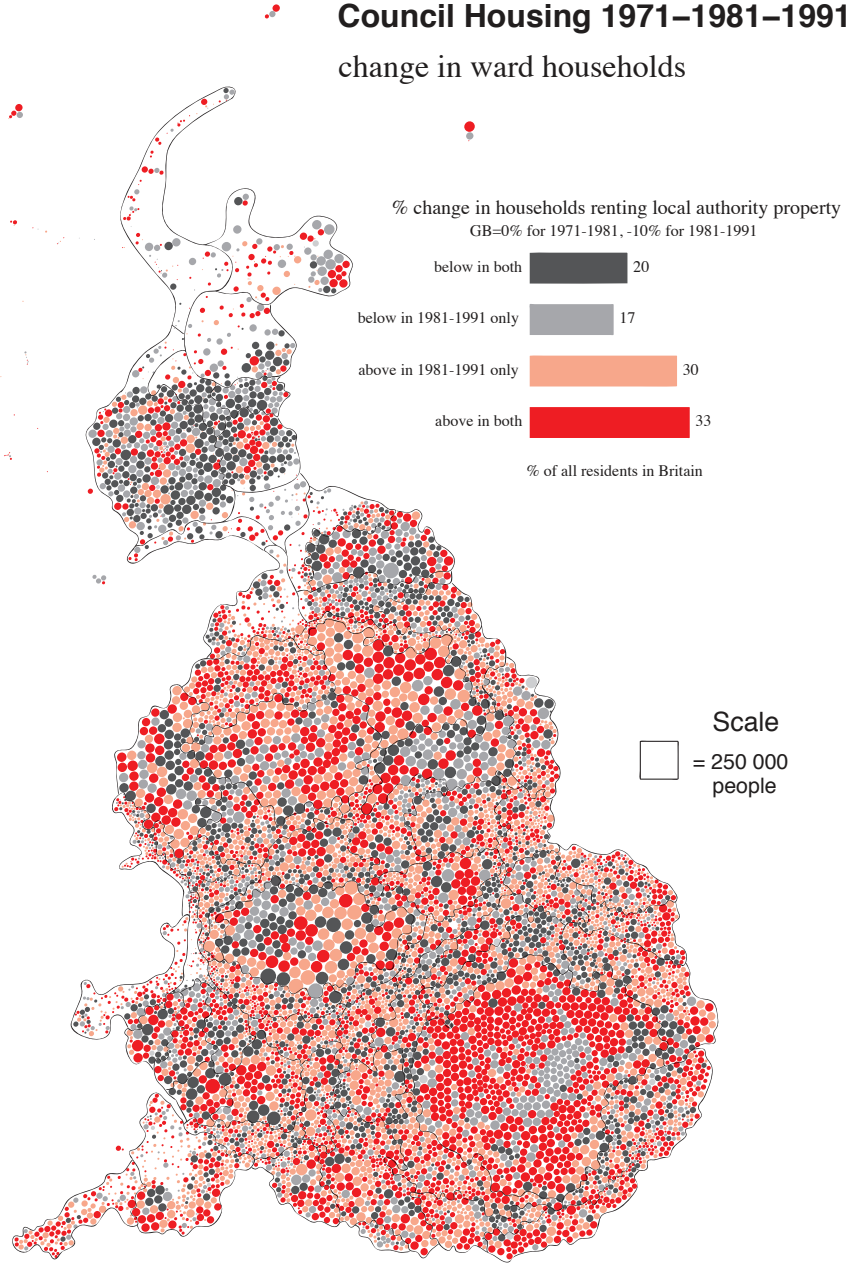
Council Housing 1991

proportion of ward households

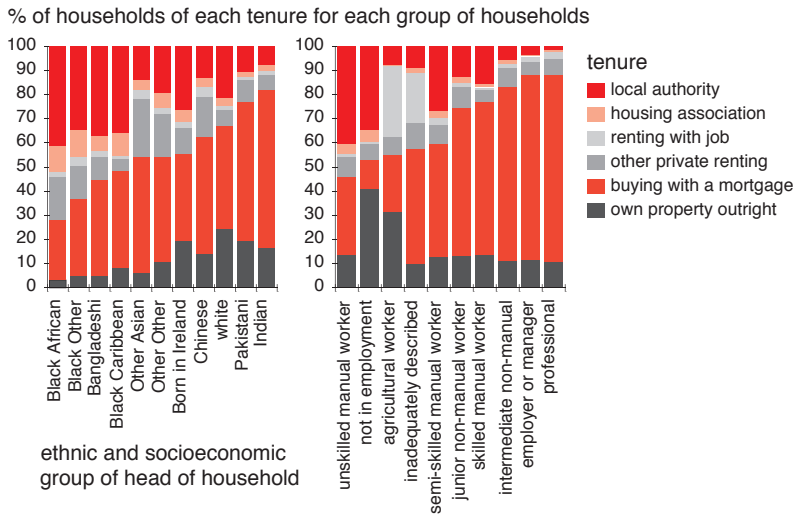


Council Housing 1971–1981–1991

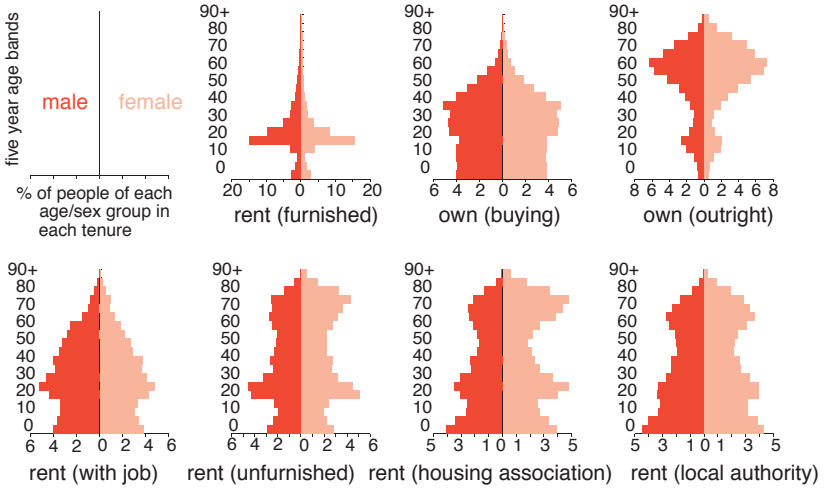
change in ward households



4.19: Ethnic and Socioeconmic Group by Tenure in Britain 1991



4.20: Age and Sex of Residents by Tenure in Britain 1991



Private Renting

After those households who own or are buying their home and those who are renting from a local authority, the next largest group are people who are renting from private landlords. In 1971 this group, which then included housing associations, constituted 19% of all households. By 1981 this proportion had fallen to 13% and when (for statistical reasons) just under half a million housing association tenancies were excluded it fell to 11%. By 1991 only 7% of all households were renting privately. However, in recent years the proportion of households renting privately may have stabilised, although very up to date tenure figures are particularly unreliable (given the number of households missed by the last census for whom tenure is not known, see Figure 4.6).

The geographical distribution of these households can be seen to cluster in just a few locations on the first map opposite, notably London, around the coast and in Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester and other towns with large numbers of students. In Scotland the divide between those areas where more than one in eight households rent privately and those where less than one in thirty do is very clear.

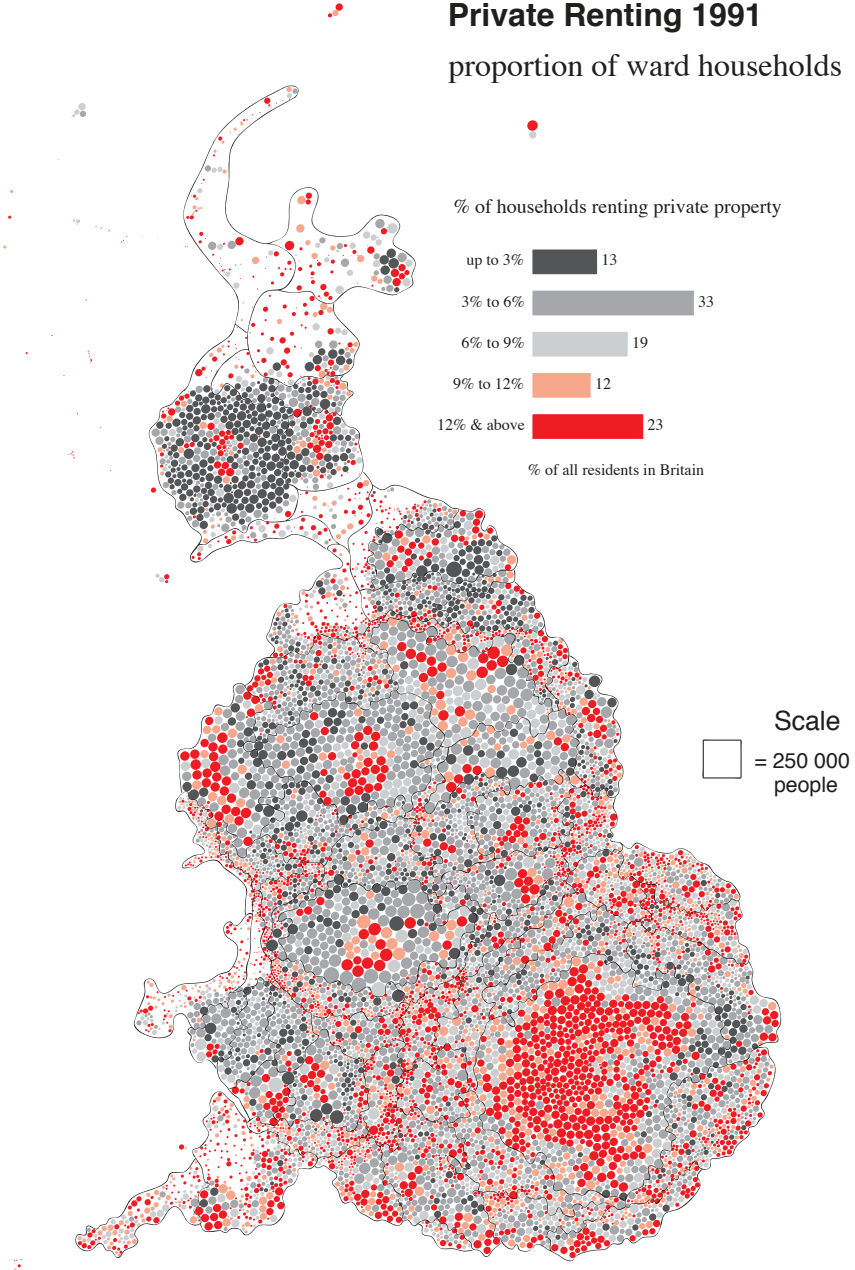
The pattern of change over the last ten years, the longest period for which comparisons of private renting excluding housing associations can be made, is less clear. London, Liverpool, Leeds and distinct parts of Scotland — which tend to have the highest levels of private renting — have seen some of the strongest falls. Growth in private renting can be seen in the suburbs. Part of this growth may be due to home owners renting out property which they could not sell in 1991. This question is addressed again later.

For particular ethnic and socioeconomic groups, private renting is more important than for the population as a whole. Figure 4.19 shows the share of tenure among the census classifications of these groups, ordered by the proportion living in owner occupation. In this diagram private renting is subdivided into households whose home comes with their job or business and all other forms of private renting. Households headed by agricultural workers were most likely to rent privately in 1991 (37%). Those households least likely to rent privately were headed by skilled manual workers (6%). Only households headed by members of Black Caribbean and Indian ethnic groups are less likely than whites to rent privately. Between a fifth and a third of all households in mixed groups, or of Chinese ethnic origin, rented privately in 1991.

One of the reasons for the imbalances between the tenures which different ethnic groups hold, apart from their differing geographical and social positions, is their different age structures (see Figure 2.20). Figure 4.20 shows the age and sex profiles for each different type of tenure. In this figure private renting is divided into three groups, so that the distinct profile of people renting furnished accommodation is shown. People renting privately tend to be younger than the population as a whole, while people in households which own their home outright are, on average, 56 years old.

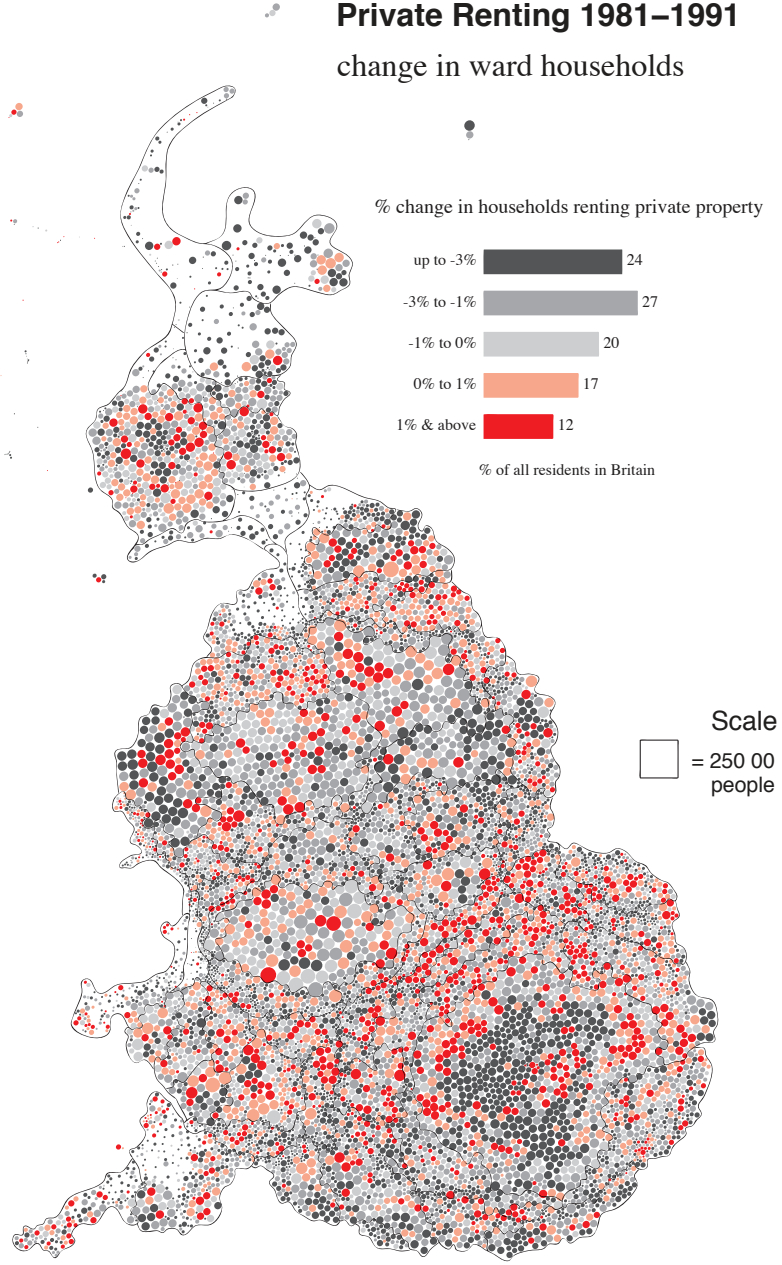
Private Renting 1991

proportion of ward households

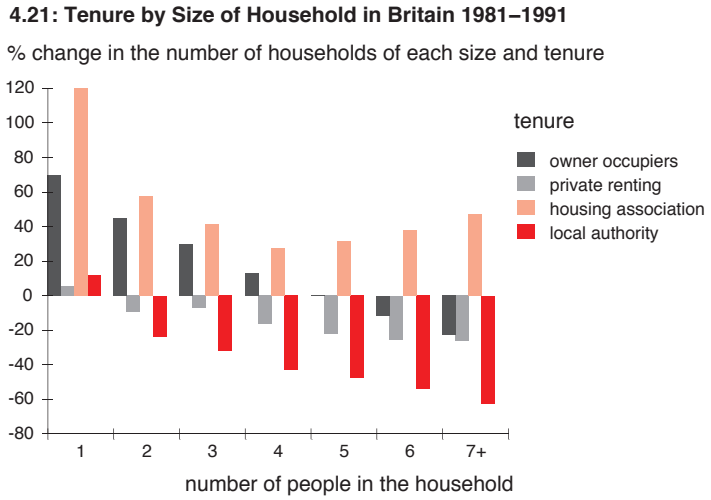


Private Renting 1981–1991

change in ward households



4.21: Tenure by Size of Household in Britain 1981–1991



4.22: Some Characteristics of People and Households by Tenure in Britain 1991, 1981–1991

Category:	Distribution *down* list of characteristics		Distribution of people or households included in each category *across* tenures							
			owner occupiers		private renting		housing association		local authority	
	1991	change	1991	change	1991	change	1991	change	1991	change
All census household residents:	53.86 million	(2%)	70%	(11%)	8%	(-1%)	2%	(1%)	20%	(-11%)
aged under 5 years	7%	(1%)	63%	(4%)	8%	(0%)	3%	(1%)	27%	(-5%)
aged 5 to 15	14%	(-3%)	69%	(10%)	6%	(-1%)	2%	(1%)	23%	(-10%)
aged 16 to pensionable age	61%	(1%)	73%	(13%)	9%	(-1%)	2%	(0%)	17%	(-13%)
pensionable age to 74	12%	(-0%)	65%	(13%)	6%	(-5%)	3%	(1%)	26%	(-9%)
aged 75 or more	6%	(1%)	58%	(6%)	9%	(-4%)	6%	(3%)	28%	(-5%)
All types of household:	21.89 million	(13%)	66%	(10%)	9%	(-2%)	3%	(1%)	21%	(-10%)
one pensioner living alone	15%	(1%)	49%	(7%)	9%	(-5%)	7%	(3%)	35%	(-5%)
one adult (not pensioner) alone	12%	(4%)	55%	(12%)	19%	(-6%)	5%	(1%)	21%	(-8%)
two or more adults living together	43%	(-1%)	74%	(15%)	8%	(-2%)	2%	(0%)	16%	(-13%)
one adult living with child(ren)	4%	(2%)	31%	(2%)	9%	(2%)	7%	(2%)	53%	(-6%)
Two or more adults with child(ren)	26%	(-6%)	75%	(13%)	6%	(-1%)	2%	(0%)	17%	(-12%)
Households by number of families:										
members of household not related	30%	(3%)	52%	(9%)	13%	()	6%	()	28%	(-6%)
household contains one family	69%	(-3%)	73%	(13%)	4%	()	2%	()	19%	(-12%)
household contains two+ families	1%	(0%)	68%	(11%)	3%	()	2%	()	25%	(-10%)
Households by head's occupation:										
employer or manager	20%	(4%)	88%	(7%)	8%	()	1%	()	3%	(-5%)
professional worker	7%	(2%)	88%	(2%)	10%	()	1%	()	2%	(-2%)
intermediate non-manual worker	12%	(3%)	83%	(8%)	10%	()	2%	()	6%	(-6%)
junior non-manual worker	12%	(-0%)	74%	(10%)	11%	()	2%	()	13%	(-8%)
skilled manual worker	28%	(-3%)	77%	(22%)	6%	()	2%	()	15%	(-20%)
semi-skilled manual worker	13%	(-3%)	60%	(19%)	11%	()	3%	()	27%	(-19%)
unskilled manual worker	4%	(-1%)	46%	(17%)	10%	()	4%	()	40%	(-18%)
agricultural worker	2%	(-1%)	55%	(7%)	37%	()	1%	()	8%	(-5%)
inadequately described	2%	(-1%)	57%	(22%)	32%	()	2%	()	9%	(-26%)

Figures in red show proportions or changes which are above the national average rate

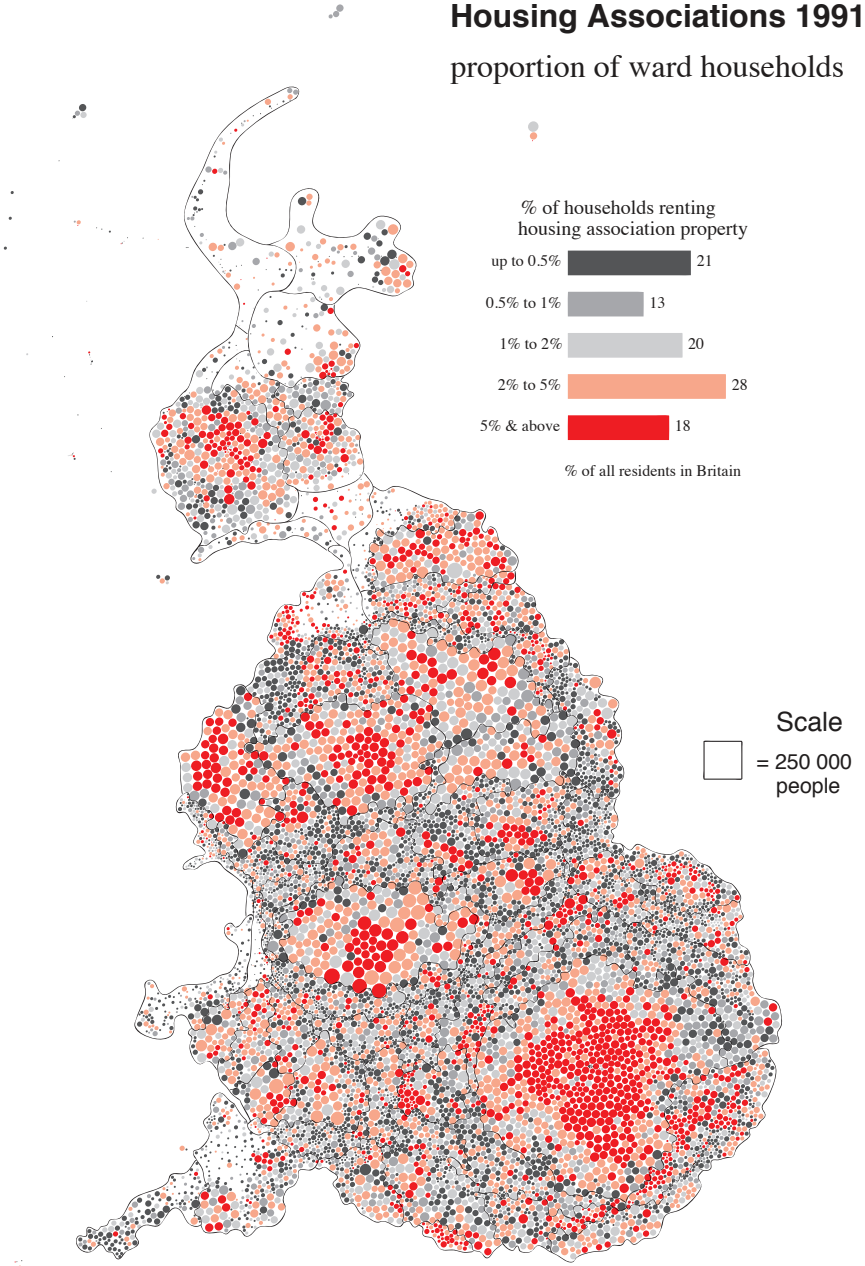
Housing Associations

The smallest tenure group identified in this analysis is made up of households who rent from housing associations. This group is identified separately because housing associations are unique institutions, being neither in the public sector nor profit-making, and because this group is growing in size. Figure 4.21 shows how housing associations are also unique in that they are renting to increasing numbers of households of all sizes. While only 3.13% of households and only 2.45% of people live in this tenure, they are not a typical group of people. They are disproportionately female and older, as Figure 4.20 showed. Households headed by someone belonging to one of the three black ethnic groups were three or four times more likely to be renting from a housing association than was the population in general (while Indian or Pakistani headed households were 25% less likely to be in this tenure, see Figure 4.19). In fact, housing association property is more often found in the places where these groups of people are more likely to be found. This is shown on the first map opposite which highlights a very similar set of places to those with high proportions of people in local authority tenure, except that housing association properties can also be found in significant numbers in the Home Counties. This is partly due to the complete transfer of local authority stock in some districts. The map showing increases in the number of households in this tenure is also similar to the map showing the number of households in the tenure, indicating that much of the present pattern was created during the 1980s and that associations tended to expand most where they were already present in a ward.

Traditionally, some housing associations have tried to cater for types of households which would otherwise find securing a home difficult. Figure 4.22 illustrates this showing that, for instance, 6% of very old people live in this tenure, as opposed to 2% of the population in general, and that this number has doubled over the last ten years as more and more housing association property is taken up by elderly people. Similarly, this tenure accommodated more single adults with children, more households within which people were not related, more unskilled workers and more children under five than would be expected from an even distribution. Many other facts for different tenures and groups of households and people can be extracted from this table. For example, households made up of one adult with one or more children (4% of all households) are the only group that is more likely to be living in private rented accommodation than it was ten years ago. The highest rates of increase in owner occupation have been for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers and those whose occupations were "inadequately described". These groups also saw the greatest rates of decrease in their proportions in local authority tenure. Changes in households' socioeconomic and family compositions for housing association and private rented tenures could not be distinguished in the 1981 statistics.

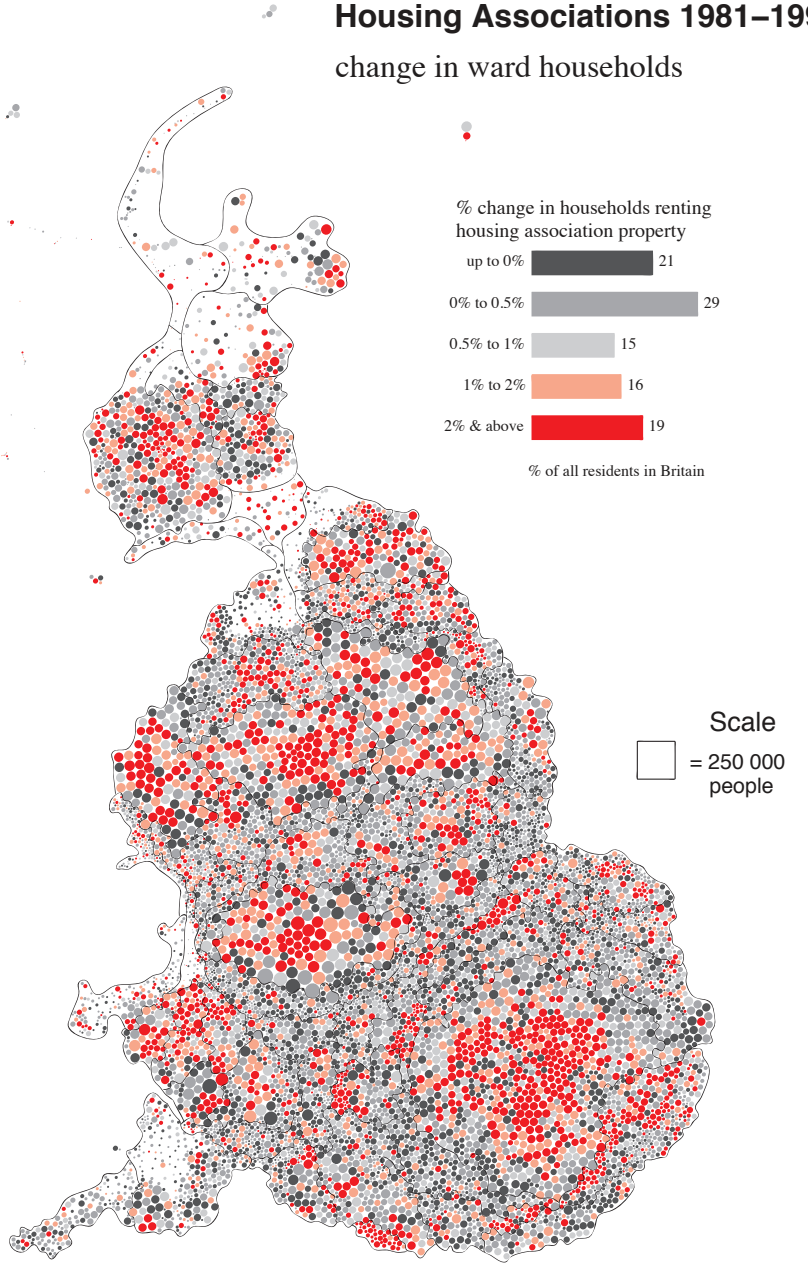
Housing Associations 1991

proportion of ward households

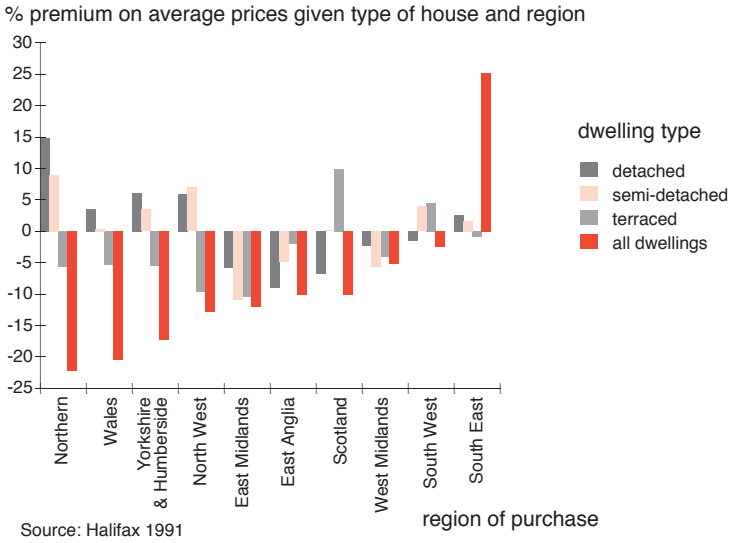


Housing Associations 1981–1991

change in ward households

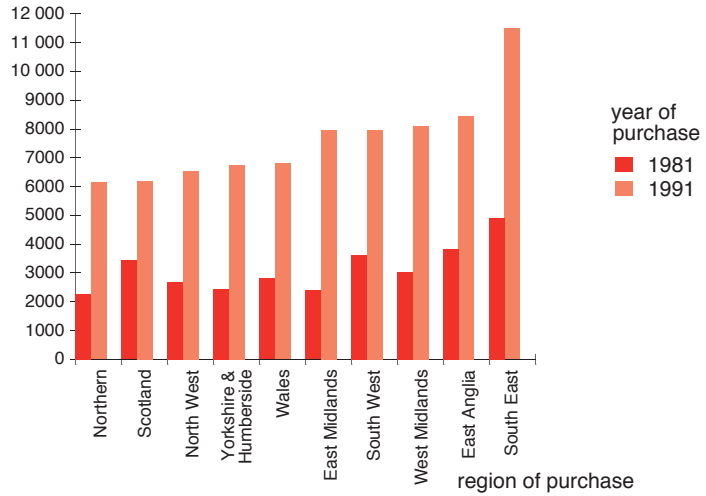


4.23: House Prices by Type of House and Region in Britain 1991



Source: Halifax 1991

4.24: First-time Buyer Deposits by Region in Britain 1981, 1991



Source: unadjusted unpublished Building Society Mortgage Records

House Buying

The increase in owner occupation means that more households now have a mortgage than ever before in Britain. Figure 4.22 showed how most of this increased borrowing could be attributed to households made up of at least two adults or single working age adults without children. Manual workers also made up a significant component of the additional buyers of the 1980s. The first map opposite shows where the highest proportions of owner occupiers were buying their properties in 1991. Buyers are in the majority in almost every ward. In wards containing over half the population at least two thirds of owner occupied property is actually owned by the mortgage lender.

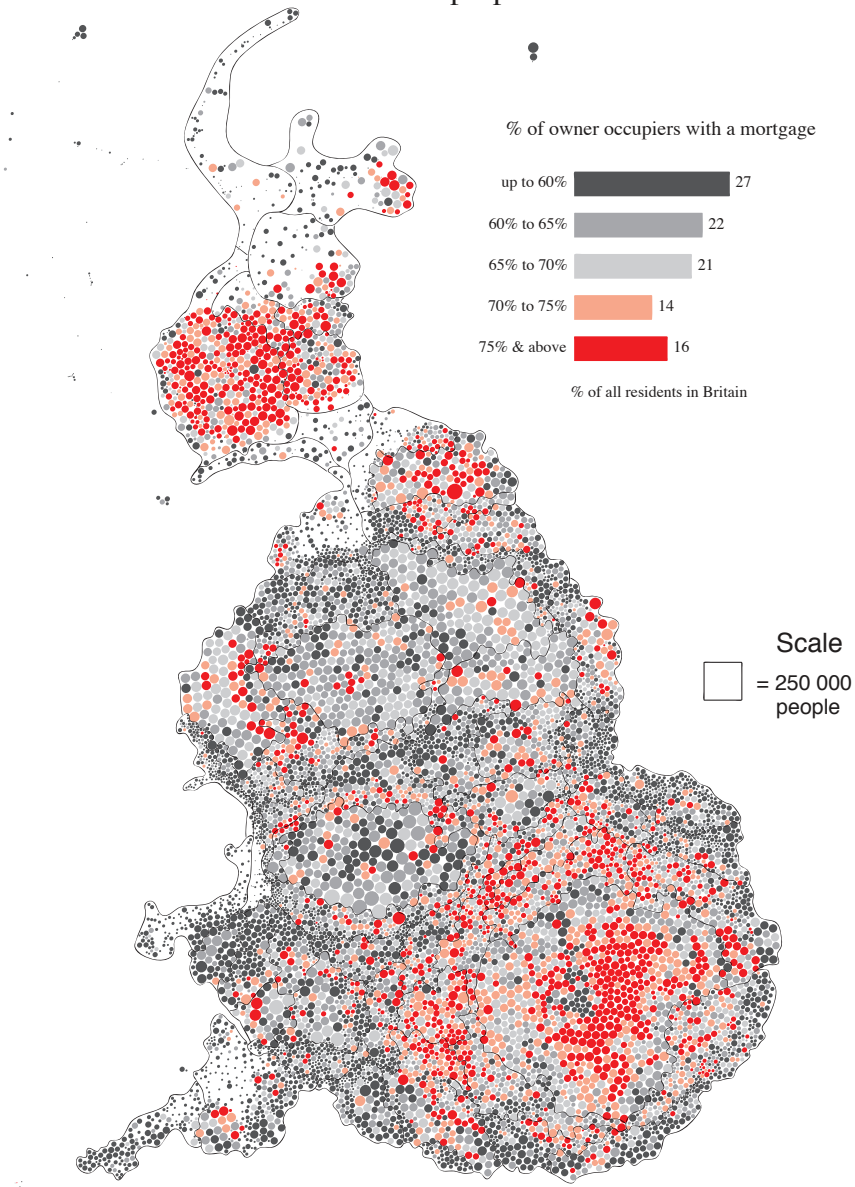
The second map opposite shows the average prices which buyers were paying to own property in each ward by 1991. These prices are estimated by using sale records from a building society and calculating a weighted average price for all the "market sales" in the ward over ten years. The weights applied allow for national inflation so that the prices shown here relate to the prices for which property was selling in 1991. This method produces robust estimates based on large samples, but the estimates will not be very sensitive to local price changes in the years immediately prior to 1991.

Figure 4.23 shows the premium that buyers can expect to pay for wishing to live in particular types of housing or in particular regions. In 1991 property prices in the South East were 25% above the national average. Within the South East, detached houses attracted a further premium of 3%. Semi-detached houses attracted a premium in all regions other than the midlands and East Anglia. Terraced houses attracted premiums only in Scotland and the South West. The map of average prices reflects the property in greatest demand as well as the areas in which people are prepared to pay the most to live.

Figure 4.24 shows the average deposits first-time buyers needing a mortgage were raising in each region in 1981 and 1991, calculated from the same source as the local property prices. *First-time buyers* are all purchasers who were not recorded as selling or owning an owner-occupied property at the time that they applied for their mortgage. The very different levels broadly reflect the differences in average property prices between regions and how these have changed. Within this pattern, however, there are differences. First-time buyers in East Anglia and the East and West Midlands were putting down average deposits of over 13% of the purchase price of their property in 1991. In contrast, buyers in the South West and North West were putting down average deposits of less than 11% of their purchase price. The biggest relative rises in deposits have not been in the regions which have experienced the largest increases in property prices over the period but in the East Midlands, Yorkshire & Humberside and the Northern Region. The largest absolute increase has been in the South East, however, where the average first-time buyer put down £11 500 towards the purchase of his or her new home in 1991.

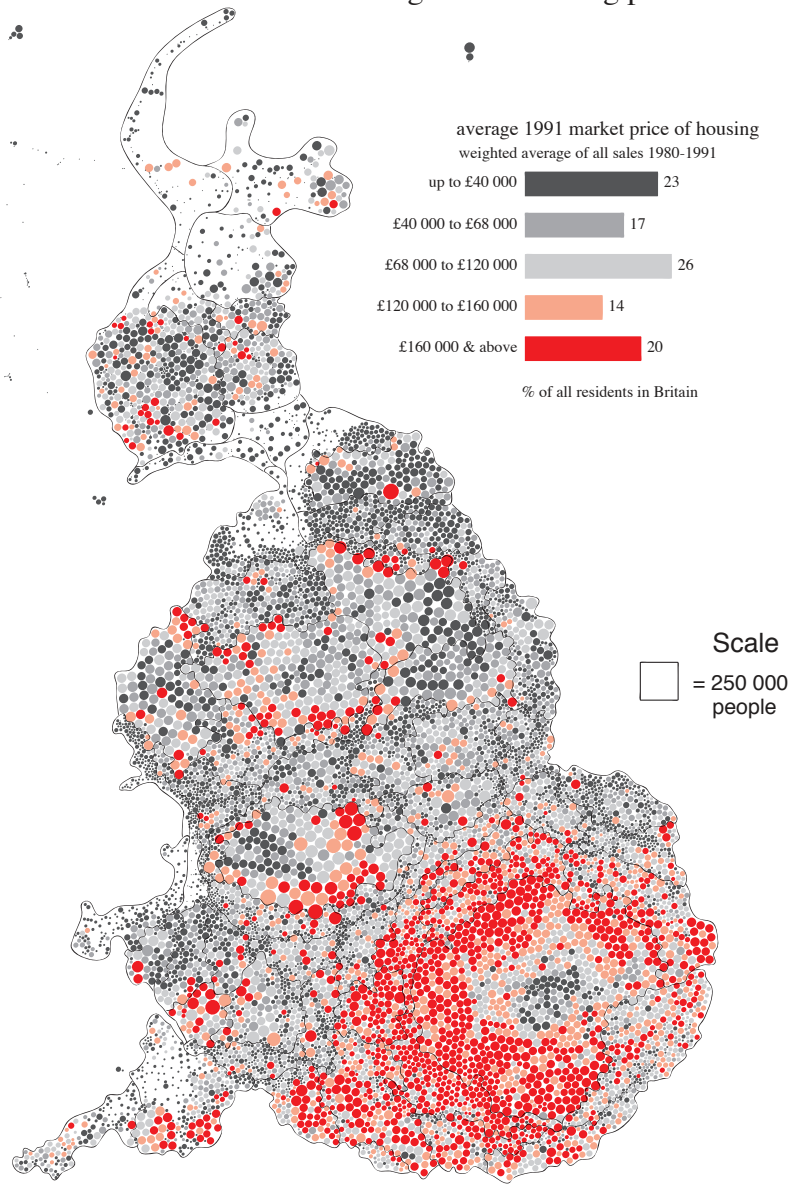
House Buying 1991

proportion of ward households

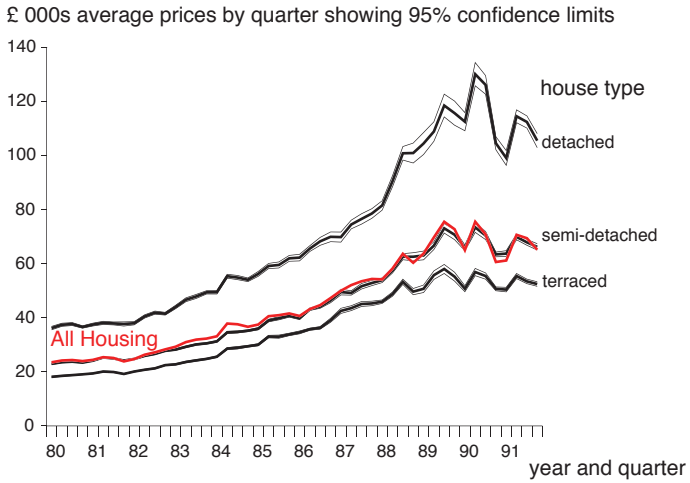


House Prices by 1991

average ward housing price

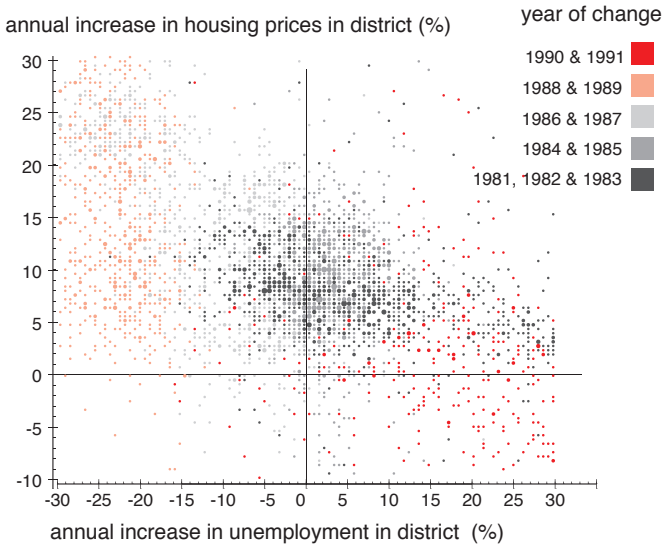


4.25: House Prices by Type of House in Britain 1980–1991



Source: unadjusted unpublished Building Society Mortgage Records

4.26: Unemployment and House Prices in Britain 1981–1991 Shaded by Years



House Prices

The changes in house prices over time are of importance not only to home owners and potential home owners, but also to the economy in general as they affect how wealthy people feel themselves to be and thus how much they spend on things other than housing. Figure 4.25 shows the average price for different types of housing for each quarter in each year since 1980, along with confidence limits on these prices. Prices rose steadily in the early 1980s and then accelerated between 1988 and 1989 before collapsing in a series of erratic false recoveries which disguise the general downward movement since 1990. When the market collapsed, the number of sales diminished greatly, and so the confidence with which prices could be estimated also fell.

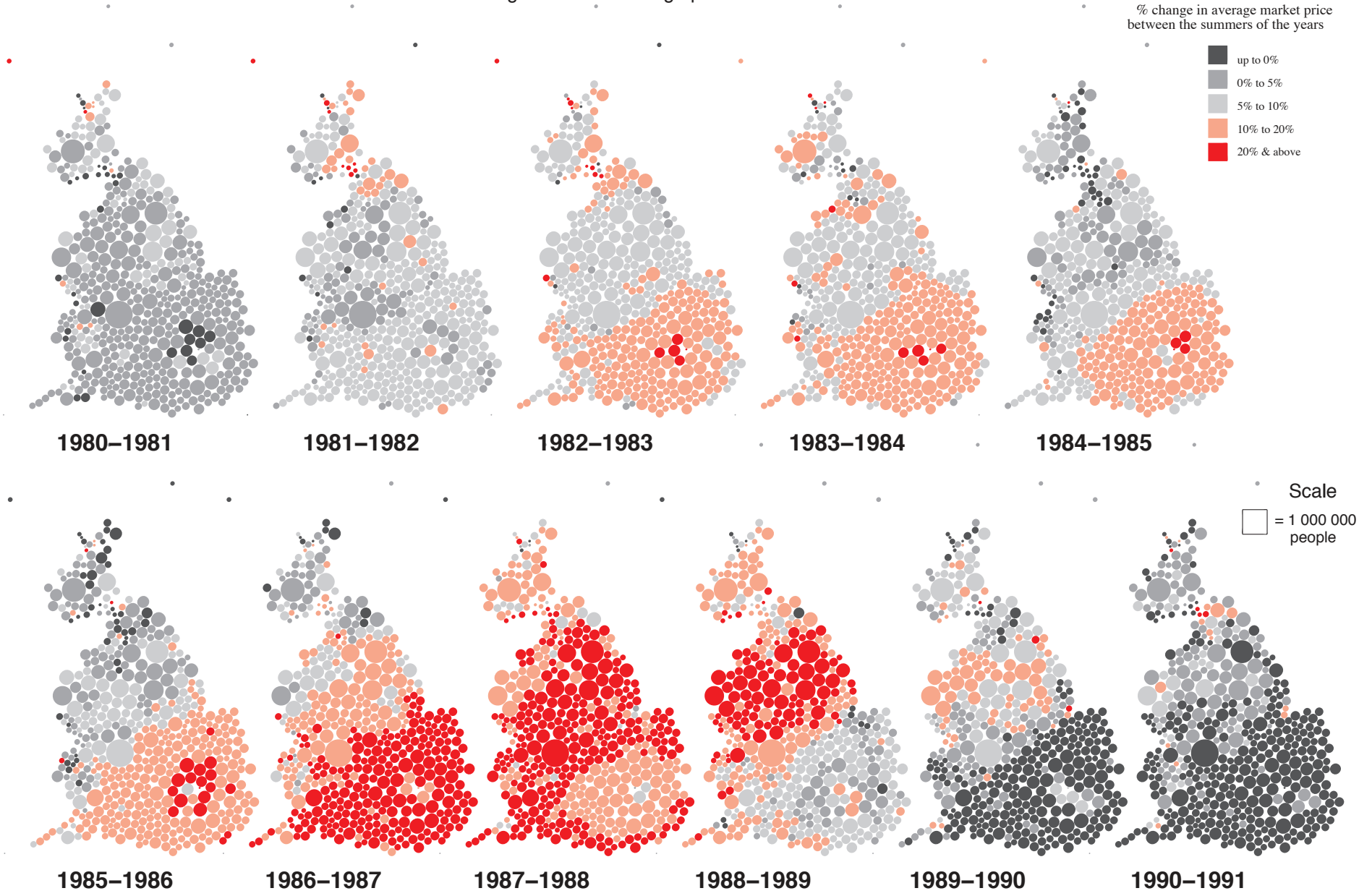
To estimate the changing price of housing in an area, weighted averages of all market sales at specific periods need to be taken to allow for changes in the mix of dwellings being sold at any particular time. If this is not done then the sale of a large number of flats in an area one year, followed by the sale of many detached houses the next year, will appear as a price rise — even when prices are falling. The maps opposite show the changes at district level between mix-adjusted annual average property prices. These prices are referred to as *housing prices*, and relate to a hypothetical average dwelling.

The eleven maps show the geography of how the housing market moved from slump to boom and then bust. In some central London boroughs (and in a few other districts) prices were actually falling slightly at the start of the 1980s. After 1982 rapid inflation began to occur which was particularly strong in districts in the south east of England, but even during this period prices were not rising in some remote rural districts in the north and in Wales. Between 1985 and 1986 inflation in central London boroughs exceeded 20%. The following year this rate spread throughout southern England and then across all England. By 1989, however, the ripple had passed out of the South East and in the following year price falls there were widespread. By the summer of 1991 the price falls had spread across the whole country.

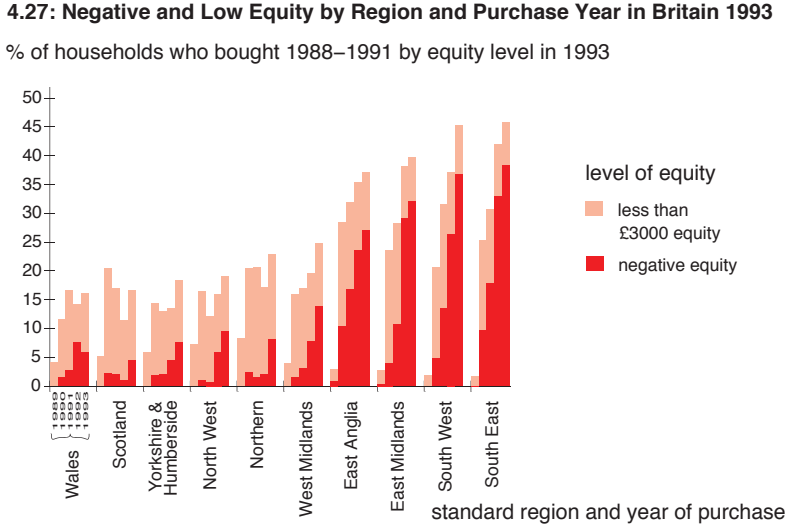
An impression of the relationship between the housing market and the wider economy (in the form of the labour market) is given in Figure 4.26. Here the correlation between the annual changes in the rate of unemployment in each district (taken from page 97) and the annual change in housing prices is presented visually. Each dot shows the rates of change of both statistics for a district in a given year, the colour of the dots indicates the year. The correlation is negative: rising unemployment implies falling house prices and vice versa. In the period up to 1987 the relationship is not particularly strong, but it has strengthened since, with the boom of 1988–1989 and the bust of 1990–1991 involving particularly rapid changes in the levels of both housing prices and unemployment. The advantage of the graphic, however, is in showing the extent to which this statement generalises a much more complex situation.

House Prices 1980–1991

change in district average prices

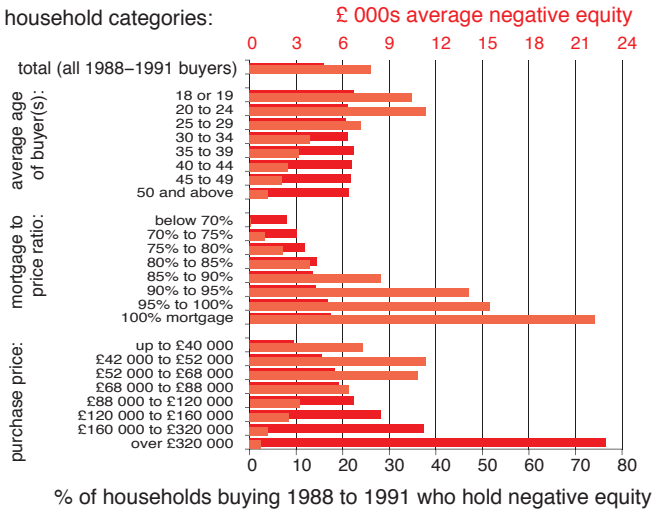


4.27: Negative and Low Equity by Region and Purchase Year in Britain 1993



Source: unadjusted unpublished Building Society Mortgage Records

4.28: Households Holding Negative Equity in Britain 1993



Source: unadjusted unpublished Building Society Mortgage Records

Negative Equity

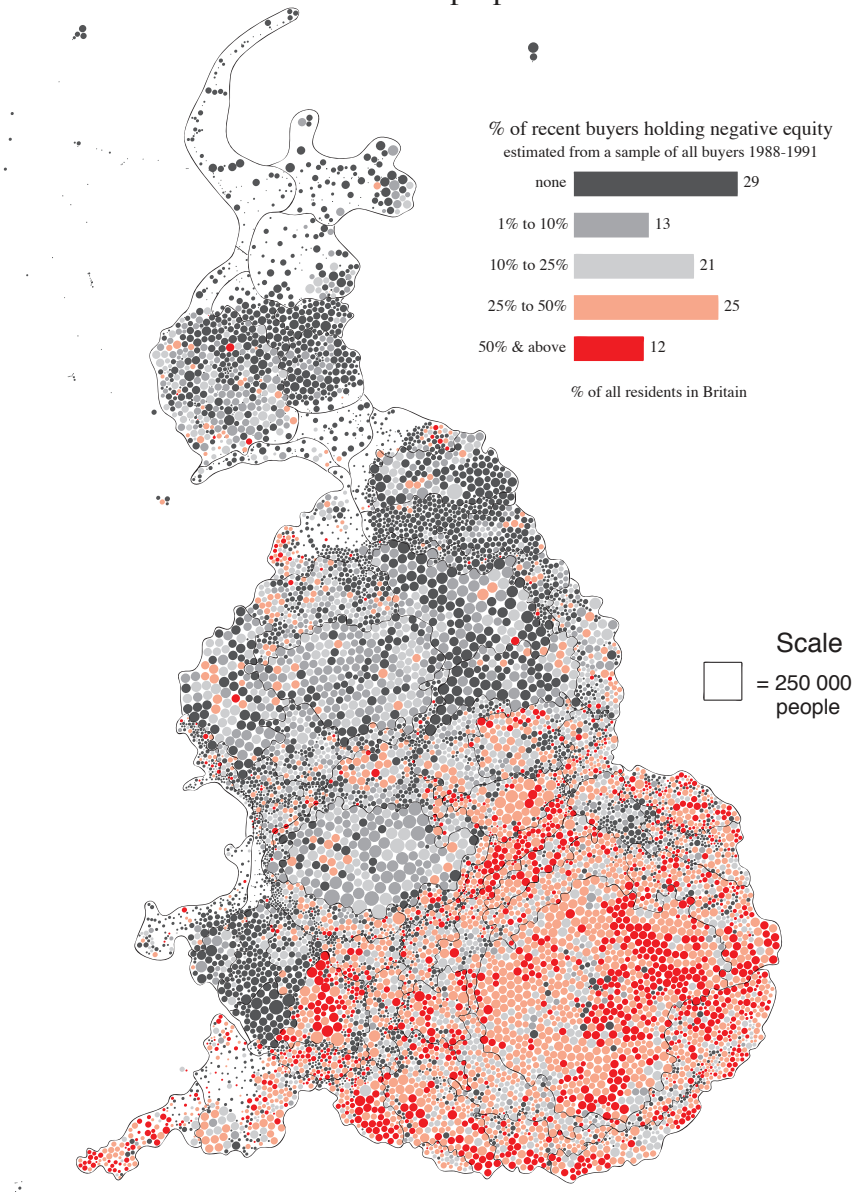
Falling house prices at the end of the 1980s resulted in the widespread emergence of a housing problem which had rarely been experienced before in Britain — households holding negative equity. When the market price of a property is less than the mortgage secured upon that property the difference is the amount of *negative equity* held by the household living there. This is additional money which that household is liable for if it sells its home, and having to find this money prevented many households from being able to move home in the early 1990s. The emergence of negative equity also tended to reduce spending and confidence in the local economies where it struck most deeply.

For the figures presented here, the building society records which were used to estimate local housing prices and first-time buyers' deposits have been employed to calculate the proportion of households who bought their home between 1988 and 1991 and who held negative equity in 1993. This group of buyers is concentrated on because they hold almost all negative equity and because their exposure to this problem can be estimated with confidence. Price changes monitored by the Halifax Building Society are also used in these calculations. Figure 4.27 shows how the levels of negative equity and low equity rose across the country at the regional level between 1988 and 1993. Having low levels of equity can also deter households from moving home, particularly when the move would be to a more expensive property for which they would need to raise a larger mortgage than they currently hold.

The maps opposite show how in 1993 a line divided Britain in half between those recent buyers who were likely to hold negative equity (living in the south) and those who were unlikely to have mortgages worth more than their property (who were living in the north or in Wales). The first map shows the proportion of recent buyers holding negative equity, the second map shows, for each ward, the average amounts of negative equity recent buyers held. Nationally, these figures were 26% and £4800, respectively. Local discrepancies in the national pattern are found both sides of the dividing line because exposure to negative equity is a function of both local house price changes and the average size of deposits in each area. The proportion of the purchase price which home owners tend to borrow fluctuates greatly between local areas as people living in less affluent wards tend to need to borrow larger amounts of money and hence are more likely to suffer from even slight falls in local housing prices. Young buyers and buyers of the cheaper kinds of property are also more likely to have taken out relatively larger mortgages and so their chances of holding negative equity are higher, as Figure 4.28 illustrates. However, they are unlikely to have been allowed to take out particularly large mortgages in absolute terms and so the average amounts of negative equity they hold will be lower. This figure also shows the closeness of the relationship between the size of deposit and the chance of a buyer holding negative equity.

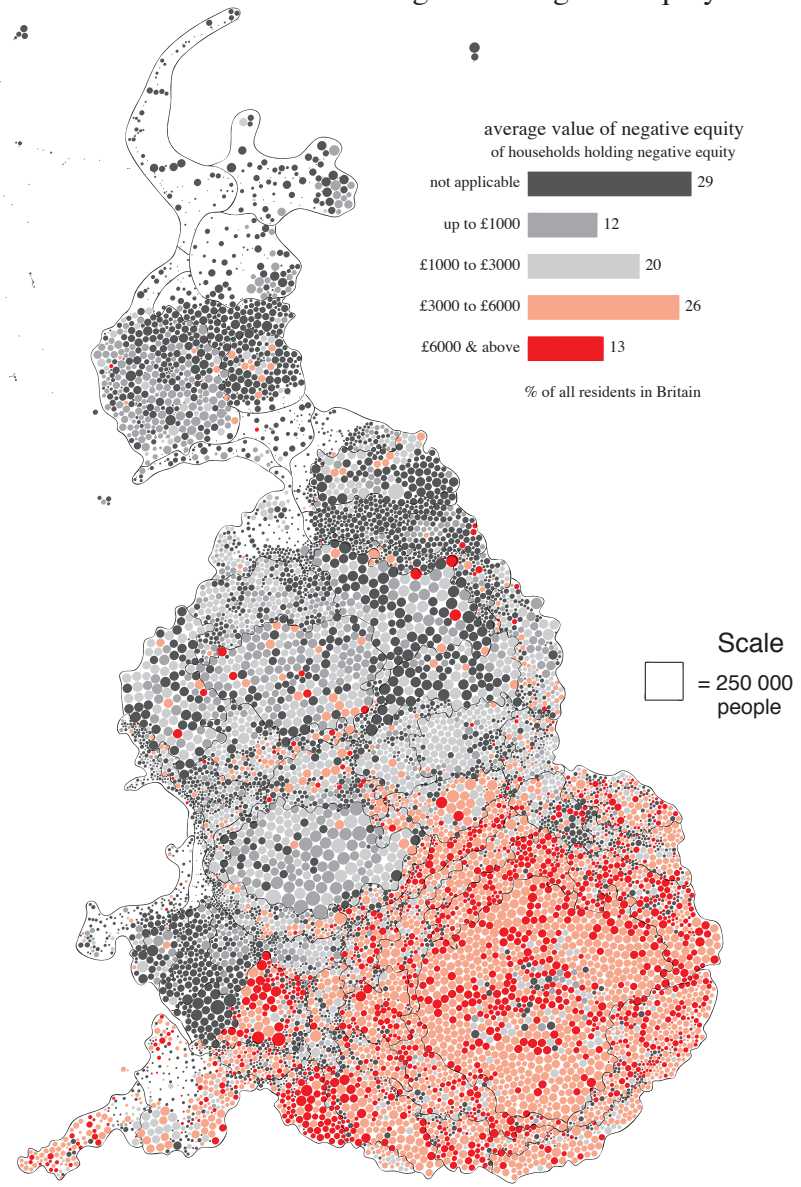
Negative Equity 1993

proportion of ward households

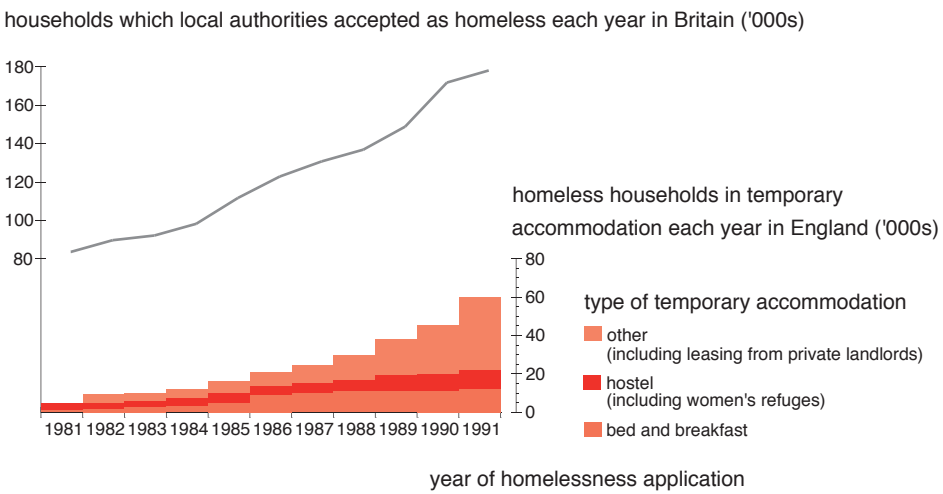


Unsecured Debt 1993

average ward negative equity

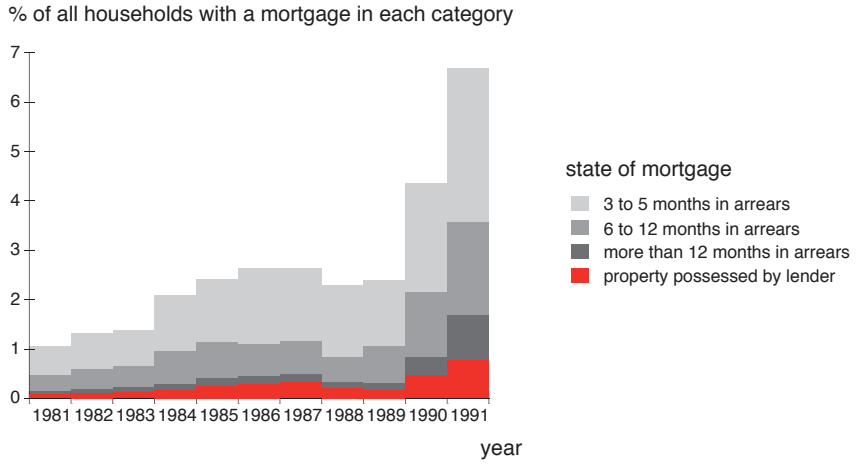


4.29: Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation in Britain and England 1981–1991



Source: Wilcox (1993) tables 70 and 71

4.30: Mortgage Possessions and Arrears in Britain 1981–1991



Source: Ford (1993) table 1, 3–5 month arrears figures are imputed before 1985

Homelessness

Homelessness means different things to different people. Reliable figures are available only for the numbers of households who applied to local authorities to be housed under the homelessness legislation. Thus those households which applied and were accepted by local authorities as homeless are reported here. This definition excludes homeless single people and other groups who did not qualify and about whom very little is known.

The first map opposite is shaded according to the proportion of households who were accepted as homeless by each local authority in 1991. In total 178 000 households were accepted; this number represents 0.8% of all households. In Scotland 7600 households assessed as potentially homeless are also included. The highest proportion of households who applied and were accepted as homeless in 1991 was 4.5% in Manchester. The map also shows the actual number of households accepted in each district in 1991. The highest figure is 7812 in Birmingham (which is also the most populous district).

The second map opposite shows how the pattern of homelessness has changed over the last decade. The districts are shaded according to the percentage point change in the proportion of households accepted to be homeless by local authorities. In districts containing a fifth of the population the incidence of homelessness has fallen, but in most districts it has risen. The sharpest rise over the decade was of 3.9% additional households being accepted as homeless in Manchester, followed by 2.6% in Dumbarton and 2.3% in Southwark. In relative terms these rises are much more dramatic, being 802%, 215% and 400% for these three areas, respectively. These figures are shown in each district. The national average rise in the numbers of households homeless was 115% over the decade.

Figure 4.29 shows how the numbers of households accepted as homeless rose over the 1980s. The figure also shows how some of those households were dealt with after the local authorities had accepted them. An accelerating number were placed in temporary accommodation, and a rapidly growing number of these households were placed in private rented accommodation which had been leased on their behalf.

Most households became homeless because relatives or friends were no longer willing to accommodate them. However, by the end of the period an increasing proportion of households was becoming homeless due to mortgage arrears (12% of all households accepted in 1991). Figure 4.30 shows how the proportions of households in arrears with their mortgage rose to unprecedented levels by 1991. In that year the homes of 75 500 households were possessed by mortgage lenders because of arrears in repayment. Having negative equity made it difficult for some borrowers in arrears to sell (page 128).

Finally, given that the last census missed over a million people who were thought to be resident in dwellings in 1991, the official counts made of the numbers of people “sleeping rough” are likely to be gross underestimates. Nevertheless, for the record, 2395 men and 457 women were recorded as living on the streets of Britain in 1991.

Homeless 1991

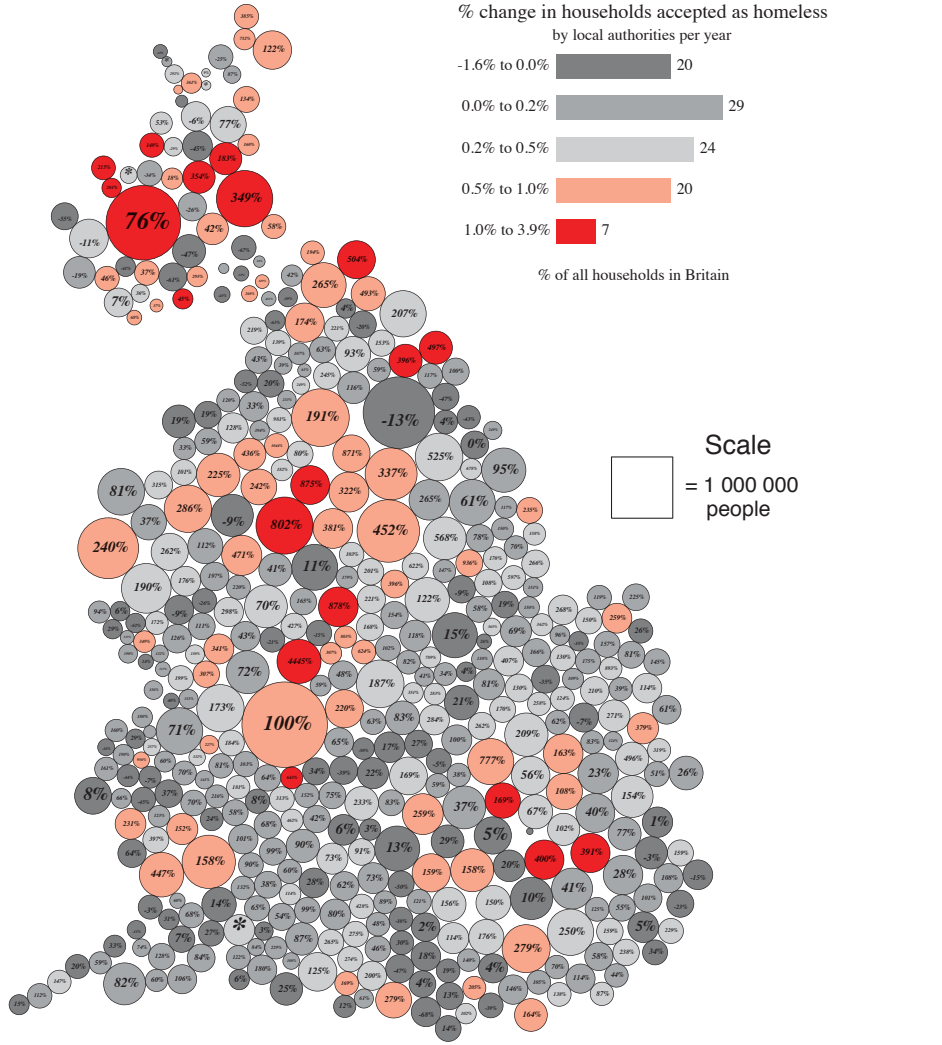
proportion of district households

Figures in each district are of the numbers of households accepted to be homeless there during 1991 by the local authority

Homeless 1981–1991

change in district households

Figures are of the relative change in the numbers of households accepted to be homeless between 1981 and 1991 within each district local authority



Conclusion: Housing and Wealth

The Housing Census

The decennial census, upon which so much of our knowledge of society is based, is a census of housing as well as of population. It provides the basic counts of how households are housed and how many dwellings are standing in each area. Only the census gives a national picture of the distribution of dwelling types, sizes, occupancy and ownership, and these measures reflect other aspects of housing which it does not count, such as price and quality. This chapter has shown how all these characteristics of housing provision are related to one another, as well as to some of the living conditions of their inhabitants. For instance, people living in non-permanent accommodation are twenty times more likely to be overcrowded than residents of detached houses (Figure 4.7). The largest differences, however, are not to be found between households living in different types of housing, but in different tenures. The maps of tenure distribution (pages 114–123) reflect both the economic and demographic geography of Britain shown previously (see Figures 4.19 and 4.20) and other social and political patterns which are drawn in later chapters. The geography of the transfer to private ownership of a quarter of the 1979 stock of local authority housing has sharpened the divides between people with different forms of tenure. The transfer to home ownership has been most prevalent amongst households with families of two adults of working age, where the main breadwinner was most likely to be a skilled manual worker; while the only group more likely to be living in private rented accommodation by 1991 were lone parent families (Figure 4.22). Particularly telling is the fact that in almost every district in Britain the level of car ownership amongst households in local authority tenure has fallen over the 1980s (Figure 6.27). The census also allows some aspects of housing quality to be compared with the composition of families living in each dwelling. Households where all adults are ill and at least one is aged 85 or over are least likely to have central heating; as are children living in the north and west of Britain (Figures 5.7 and 5.8). Housing amenities and quality are considered in more detail in the following chapter on health.

Social Housing

The census asks questions about housing because government has a traditional commitment to provide a decent home for every family (Audit Commission 1992). In crude terms the requirement for new social housing is as high now as it was twenty years ago (Figure 4.5). Measures such as rates of overcrowding, lack of privacy and the requirement for temporary accommodation show that this need is still strongest in large cities (pages 108–111), but these are also the places where the largest numbers of homes are empty and which already have the largest rented sectors. However, as the census missed over a million people, estimates of vacant housing cannot be reliable, particularly as most people were missing where more homes were thought to be empty (page 217). The census also fails to record information such as household income and property rent, so a clear picture of where rented housing is affordable is very difficult to draw. Alternative detailed information is available on the home ownership market which is discussed below. What the census did suggest is that the property least likely to be vacant was that defined as semi-detached houses (suitable for most families), whereas small flats and bedsits were most likely to be vacant (Figure 4.11). The tenure of vacant property can only be implied from the census, but independent estimates have shown that local authority housing is most unlikely to be vacant (Newton, 1991: 52). The imbalance of the supply of housing of different tenures to the need for housing in each area appears to underlie housing shortages. The strongest evidence for this argument is provided by official homelessness figures which show where households accepted as homeless are most likely to live and how that pattern has changed over the last decade (page 131). Again the same city centres are highlighted as those areas that showed all the other indications of housing shortage and supply imbalance. New social housing has to be built in the right places, to be rented at the right prices, and must be of the right quality, if the additional need which has developed over the last decade is to be met.

Housing Market

The converse problem to the lack of affordable rented accommodation in Britain is the over-supply and under-use of expensive privately owned property, which over 40% of all households were buying in Britain in 1991, while less than a quarter of all households owned their home outright. The price paid (and hence the mortgage borrowed) by different buyers varies more by the area they live in than by the type of property they buy (Figure 4.23). House buying is currently most prevalent in central London, the outer South East and in Scotland (page 125), but each of these groups are paying very different prices for their homes and have had very different experiences of the housing market in recent years. The collapse of property prices in 1989 was as clearly differentiated geographically as was the rise in the early 1980s (page 127). Price falls have yet to affect Scotland significantly and so the increase in house buying there, which resulted from the introduction of the right-to-buy council housing, has not been reflected in increased housing debt in that country. However, owner occupation levels are still below 50% in most of Scotland. The same is true of Inner London, but there prices have fallen severely so that the greatest numbers of people now living in homes worth less than their mortgage are to be found in the south and east of that city. The map of negative equity shows how a clear divide cut across the country by 1993, separating the south — where unsecured debt is most commonly held — from Wales and the north, where households

have been able to borrow less and where these lower prices have held up more strongly (page 129). However, households in peripheral regions have the lowest levels of positive equity, so even small falls in prices in these regions could put large numbers of households into this form of housing debt (Figure 4.27). A more serious form of debt occurs when households fall into arrears with the monthly payments on their mortgage. Mortgage arrears and property possession rose to unprecedented levels by 1991 (Figure 4.30) following a period of high interest rates, rising unemployment and the collapse of the housing market, which together made it very difficult for mortgaged households in difficulties to cut their losses and sell.

It is important to remember that this situation is only economically tolerable because 60% of all households in Britain still have positive equity in their homes and only 34% rent. At the end of 1993 only 6% of all households had negative equity (this proportion fell in early 1994 but then rose again, so that 1.3 million households were still holding negative equity by the start of 1995: Dorling and Cornford 1995). Thus most people who bought homes between 1987 and 1991 still have tens of thousands of pounds worth of positive equity held in them, despite the market slump (see Figure 6.28). Our current system of allocating and financing housing is accepted politically because a majority of households still fare well from the process and a minority have made a profit from it (page 199). Two fifths of households live in increasingly expensive rented accommodation or now owe more to a mortgage lender than they could raise if they could sell their home, while the wealthy "invest" their savings in old bricks and mortar rather than in enterprises which create jobs and goods. This division underlies the geographical distribution of wealth in Britain.

Mapping Wealth: Colour Print E

If life assurance and pension funds are excluded from the equation, then half of all personal wealth in Britain is held in housing (Figure 6.30). This can be mapped. To estimate this wealth in each ward, the average price of housing (page 125) is multiplied by the number of households who own their homes outright and then the average positive equity of home buyers (page 199) is multiplied by the number of buyers who do not have negative equity (page 129). From these two figures an estimate of total positive equity is made, from which the total value of negative equity in each ward can be subtracted. When this total net housing equity is divided by the total number of households living in each ward an estimate of local housing wealth is produced, and hence an indication of total wealth in each small area. The resulting map, combining census and building society data, is shown in Colour Print E which divides the wards of Britain into thirteen groups at intervals of thousands or tens of thousands of pounds. This is only an estimate of housing wealth because it under-values both the positive equity of all buyers (see page 198) and the extent to which households may have borrowed additional money secured on the value of their property. These two effects work in opposite directions and so there is no reason to presume that this map of wealth is biased in any particular direction. The map key illustrates just how divided Britain is in terms of wealth. The richest 8% of the population live in wards where the average housing wealth is at least £75 000 per household, while the poorest 8% of people live in areas with negligible housing wealth, averaging less than £5000.

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