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New 'Bankrupt Britain' atlas shows austerity hitting the poor rather than the rich

Using an extensive range of data, Professor Daniel Dorling and Dr Bethan Thomas of the University of Sheffield have created a unique atlas which is an authoritative record of the changing social geography of Britain. Due to the effects of government cuts on data collection and dissemination, much of this information will not be collected in future, making this truly one of a kind.

Bankrupt Britain: An atlas of social change, published by The Policy Press on 23rd May 2011, shows for the first time how economic and social fortunes have been affected in different areas in the wake of the 2007 banking crisis, 2008 economic crash, 2009 credit crunch and 2010 cuts. It reveals the extent of Britain's bankruptcy in financial, residential, political, moral, emotional and environmental aspects of life across Britain and highlights the way this has impacted more on the poor and vulnerable in society with the rich continuing to fare better. The atlas also highlights that views on the extent to which Britain is morally and/or economically bankrupt vary geographically: for example Londoners are three times more inclined than the residents of the industrial Midlands to believe that 'the economy is on the mend'.

Co-author of the atlas, Professor Daniel Dorling, said: "The atlas demonstrates that, in too many ways, social trends across the country continue in the wrong direction. In the wealthiest parts of London and the South East, people continue to be extremely well paid, are becoming wealthier more rapidly, and still often have a lifestyle of hyper-consumption. In much of the rest of the country, and especially for poorer groups, austerity has set in and living standards have fallen over the last five years."

Here are some of the striking ways the atlas illustrates the different effects of the recession across the country:

Financial bankruptcy

- The atlas examines three types of financial bankruptcy: insolvency requests, individual voluntary arrangements (IVAs) and debt relief orders (DROs) and finds that the decreases in requests for these are concentrated in London and the South East. The highest rate of insolvencies in 2009 at 56.4 per 10,000 adults was in Mansfield in Derbyshire. The greatest fall was in the City of London, where there were only 17 cases of insolvency in 2008. Similarly, in 2009, IVAs were most commonly drawn up in Easington in County Durham (23.3 drafted per 10,000 adults), whereas the lowest rates were in London (3.1 per 10,000 in Kensington & Chelsea). Likewise, the greatest number of DRO requests, for those too poor for IVAs to be imposed, were in Berwick on the Scottish border (14.1 cases per year per 10,000 adults), whereas none at all were issued in the City of London.
- One of the key measures of financial bankruptcy is the number of children living in poverty in the UK, which is known to have among the highest rates in Western Europe. The highest rates in 2007 were in Tower Hamlets in London (more than 60%), followed by some areas in Scotland, such as Glasgow City, North & East Ayrshire and Inverclyde. In contrast, only between 1 in 13 and 1 in 22 children live in poverty in areas such as West Oxfordshire, Wokingham and the Ribble Valley. Furthermore, the greatest decreases in poverty levels have been in areas which were already the wealthiest, such as North Devon (-0.4%) and Tunbridge Wells (-0.5%).
- Income inequalities in the UK are among the widest in the Western world. In 2009, mean weekly earnings exceeded £1000 in wealthy areas like Kensington & Chelsea and Elmbridge, but they were only between £392 and £426 in Boston, Blackpool and Blaenau Gwent: in real terms, people in Kensington & Chelsea were on average earning 3.3 times more than those in Blackpool.

- The public sector spending cuts imposed on local authorities were initially most strongly focused on poorer areas, especially the North of England. As more cuts have been announced, the concentration of those people and places with less has become more apparent. For example, in 2010/11, affluent areas such as Chiltern in Buckinghamshire and the City of London experienced cuts of around 0.1% while, whereas cuts in Northern cities such as Sheffield and Bradford were around 1-2%. Cuts in subsequent years will be even more polarised.

Residential bankruptcy

- Despite the financial crash of 2008, the housing wealth of the richest continues to grow at increasing rates and in no other large European country is housing as badly distributed as in Britain. At the height of the boom in 2007, average prices exceeded £500,000 in nine areas, such as Richmond Park and Chelsea & Fulham. In contrast, in 79 areas average prices were less than £130,000. By 2008, there were 95 constituencies where average prices were £130,000, but most wealthy areas did not see any falls.
- While across much of Britain house prices have been falling, in the wealthiest parts of London, such as Kensington & Chelsea and just to the West of the capital, in places like Amersham, they have been rising from between 10.1% and 22.8% a year as those with the most appear cushioned from the financial crises
- Repossession rates in 2008 were the highest in East London, Northern England and South Wales, where people have the least money behind them, and lowest in the South West where the highest number of people own their homes outright.

Political bankruptcy

- The 2010 general election had one of the lowest rates of legitimacy (the proportion of people in each constituency who voted for the winning candidate) in recent times. Nowhere does any MP elected in 2010 have the support of even half their constituents. Despite this, the recent Referendum to change the voting system to a fairer system has just been rejected, which raises further questions about the disenfranchisement of voters.
- In the 2010 election, the Conservative vote was the most geographically uneven since 1918 – 16.4% of their voters would have to move constituencies to ensure an even Tory vote, up from 15.7 in 2005. David Cameron only failed to secure a majority because support for his party was lacklustre in the marginal seats. Voters in cities and in the North were the most disappointed with the outcome, where more majorities did not get what they voted for, showing a growing segregation between those living in Tory strongholds and others.

Moral bankruptcy

- One of the key aspects of morality is the abuse of children and the Government provides child protection plans to improve the future safety of those children identified as at risk of abuse. In 2008-9 in 158 of the areas studied, the rate of protection plans rose with the greatest rises occurring in Northern towns, such as Middlesbrough and Newcastle upon Tyne, and Inner London boroughs. In the poorest 60% of areas in Britain, children are subject to these plans in direct proportion to their likelihood of living in poverty; therefore the existence of such high rates of poverty and inequality in the UK is at least in some part to blame for the high rates of child abuse.

- UK child well-being rates are around the lowest in the affluent world. One example of this is the high rates of reported bullying in some areas in 2010, such as Darlington and Lincolnshire, whereas lower rates are reported in London, perhaps reflecting different tolerance levels of bullying in different areas or the progressive civil movements in London.

Emotional bankruptcy

- Emotional bankruptcy is when the mental health and well-being of adults and children deteriorates rapidly. For children, their emotional health worsened between 2008 and 2009 in all areas, perhaps reflecting their awareness of adult concerns. The largest falls in children's emotional well-being were in Poole (14.3%) and Hackney (13.8%) and the smallest increases were in Shropshire (1.3%) and Gloucestershire (1.2%).
- For adults, a sign of unhappiness is an increase in the number of anti-depressants taken. The highest numbers of antidepressants prescribed in the UK are in Wales (Bridgend, Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent), while numbers are lowest in London (Ealing and Southwark, for example) and Birmingham. The greatest increases between 2008/9 and 2009/10 occurred in Northern areas, such as Blackpool, Sunderland and North Tyneside, but nowhere in England were any falls recorded.

Environmental bankruptcy

- Environmental harm occurs when people are affected by their environments in the medium or longer term and the actions of one group adversely affect another. Cars are the most immediate everyday threat to life. Children in Northern towns, such as Congleton, Preston and Durham suffer some of the highest rates of accidents, while those in Surrey Heath, Mendip and Kingston-upon-Thames were among the lowest.
- Another measure of environmental bankruptcy is the amount of rubbish we generate. This has increased six-fold in a generation, with the greatest increases between 2007/8 and 2009/10 occurring in Lichfield, whereas Tower Hamlets saw the greatest fall in rubbish generated. Furthermore, the greatest increases in recycling rates between 2007/8 and 2008/9 have occurred in the Cotswolds (17.5%) and Warwick (21.3%) but the greatest falls are in South Somerset (-4.8%) and Ceredigion (-3.6%).

Other findings from the atlas include:

- Nowhere did more than 37% of the adult population engage in regular volunteering in 2008, with rates in some areas as low as 14% in areas such as Sunderland and South Tyneside— not a promising start for the 'Big Society'. National rates have been falling since then, despite political rhetoric encouraging it.
- In 2009, in over 100 local authorities in England, such as South Shropshire, there were more households on the housing waiting list than there was council housing stock, demonstrating the acute housing shortages in some areas, and that in some cases people would have to wait up to 500 years to get to the top of the list!
- If the proposed 25% cut in public sector employment comes to pass, and there is little compensatory private sector job creation, we could be looking at unemployment rates of as high as 25% in some areas.

The atlas includes the best and worst tables for the topics mapped and provides a myriad of illuminating insights into the changing social geography of Britain in recent years.

Co-author of the atlas, Dr Bethan Thomas, said: "Despite many people's fears of a bankrupt – or broken – Britain, this remains one of the richest countries on earth, but the rich have not taken their fair share of austerity."

Ends

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. *Bankrupt Britain: An atlas of social change* by Daniel Dorling and Bethan Thomas is published by The Policy Press on 23 May 2011 price £29.99 (ISBN 978184742 747 2) It is available to buy from <http://www.policypress.co.uk/display.asp?K=9781847427472> at 20% discount, or from Marston Book Services, P.O. Box 269, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4YN. Tel: 01235 465500 plus £2.75 postage and packing.

Dr Bethan Thomas is a Research Fellow at the Department of Geography, University of Sheffield and co-author of *Identity in Britain: A cradle-to-grave atlas* also published by The Policy Press. She is currently working on homeless mortality in Britain.

Professor Daniel Dorling is Professor of Human Geography at the University of Sheffield. He has published several atlases and books on the population of Britain, including *Injustice: Why social inequalities persist, So you think you know about Britain* and *The Grim Reaper's road map*. Follow news about Danny Dorling on Twitter: @dannydorling.

2. The report examines six themes, illustrated with over 90 full colour maps. A large number of data sources were employed to describe the various aspects of these six themes.

The themes are:

Financially bankrupt
Residentially bankrupt
Politically bankrupt
Morally bankrupt
Emotionally bankrupt
Environmentally bankrupt

3. An online appendix with locational maps of the parliamentary constituencies and local authorities used throughout the atlas, together with the data mapped in the atlas, can be found at <http://www.policypress.co.uk/display.asp?K=9781847427472> and the authors' website at the University of Sheffield is at <http://sasi.group.shef.ac.uk/bankruptbritain/>

Additionally, where there have been later releases of data, updated data and maps are also available from the accompanying websites.

4. For further information, please contact:

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5. The Policy Press is a leading social science publisher based at the University of Bristol and is committed to publishing books that make a difference. Follow The Policy Press on Twitter (@policypress) and Facebook.