

# Second Thoughts on the Family

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Anastasia de Waal

**T**he family is a central battleground of British politics. The Conservative Party believes that the two-parent family needs to be promoted by financial incentives to marry, while Labour has taken up a 'neutral' position in which family structure doesn't matter. *Second Thoughts on the Family* argues that both positions are out of touch.

- Marriage does not need to be 'incentivised': despite declining marriage rates and a high number of divorces, marriage is arguably more popular today than ever before.
- Family structure in the UK *should* matter to Labour because of a hugely significant trend underlying it. Family 'diversity' today is disproportionately experienced by the poor.

The premise of both New Labour and Conservative policy is that people not living in married two-parent families are *choosing* not to. This signifies positive diversity to Labour and a decline in family values to the Conservatives. Both miss a critical reality: that high marriage rates are characteristic of the middle and upper classes, whereas family instability is concentrated amongst those on low incomes. The true divide on the family is about poverty not politics.

New research evidence collected for this book shows that most people want the same things, regardless of their politics, class or sexuality. Committed couple-parenting is seen to be the ideal. Therefore, in a liberal, secular society, marriage is a majority aspiration because it is seen to signify commitment. Focusing on the New Labour government, *Second Thoughts on the Family* demonstrates the way in which Labour's nominally inclusive position is actually harming those it seeks to support.

Drawing on a specially commissioned opinion poll and 27 interviews with opinion-formers, *Second Thoughts on the Family* presents a new way of thinking about family policy that transcends all divides.

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