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Wales Institute of Social and  
Economic Research and Data



# The Importance of Family, History and Place for Trade Union Membership

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# Motivation

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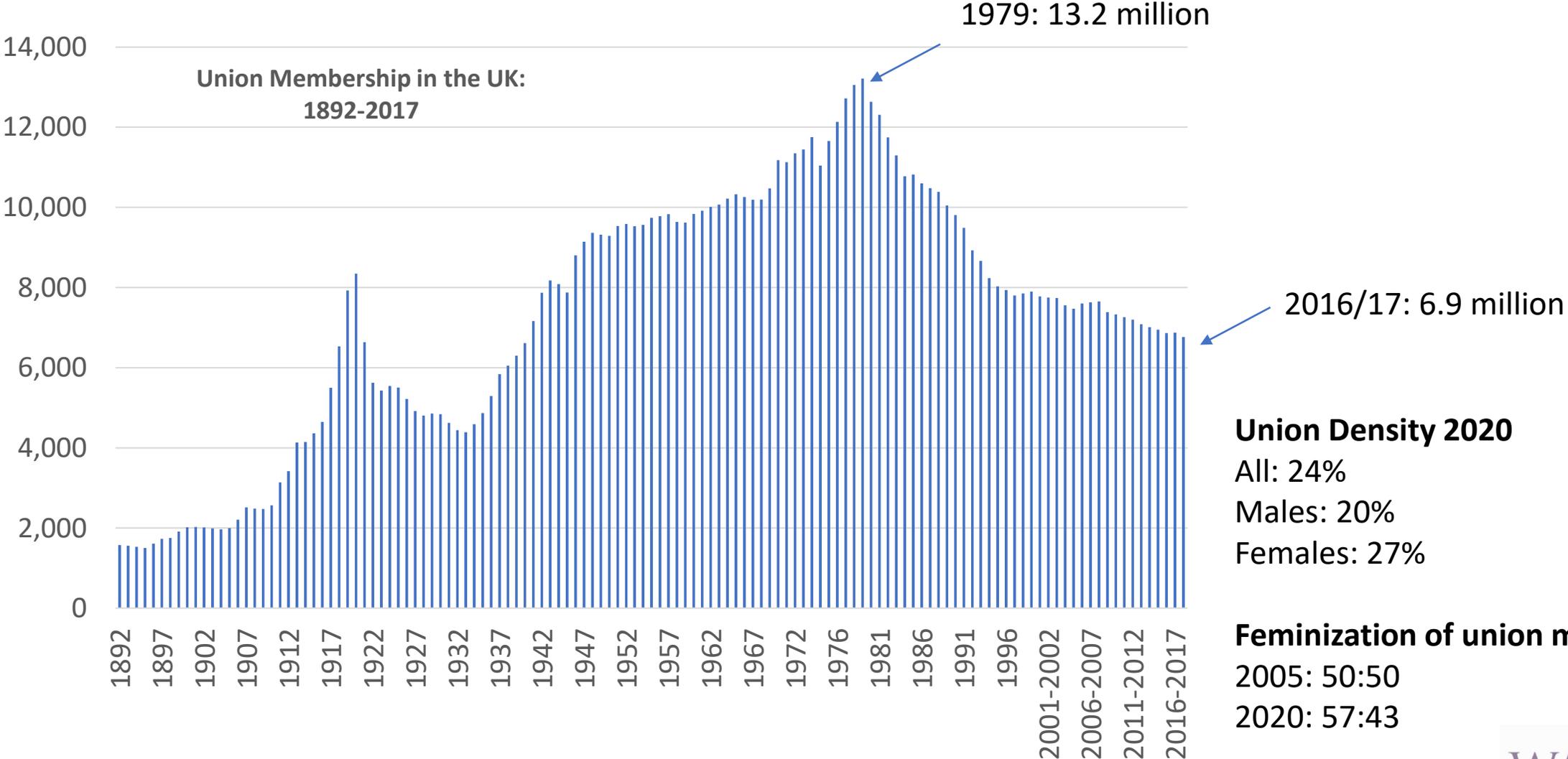
- Union membership is associated with higher earnings and a variety of other benefits for employees. Evidence of negative effects of unions on the performance of businesses appears to have vanished ([Bryson and Forth, 2017](#))
- To the contrary, recent research demonstrates that unions support employee-driven innovation ([Felstead, 2020](#)) and product and process innovation ([Bryson and Dale-Olsen, 2020](#))
- PrOPEL resources emphasise role of unions in:
  - contributing to [action teams](#) to facilitate change;
  - addressing [under-employment](#);
  - supporting access to [Flexible Working Arrangements](#);
  - supporting [job quality](#), [conflict management](#) and achieving [mutual gains](#)

# Policy Context

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- Union membership is regarded both as a route to and a key indicator of fair work and has been held up as an important instrument to achieving stronger, more inclusive economies.
- Prominent in the [Scottish Fair Work Framework](#).
- Recommendations of [Wales Fair Work Commission](#):
  - A trade union is recognised for collective bargaining or exceptionally, if not possible, other arrangements are in place for effective representation of employees' collective views and participation.
  - We recommend Welsh Government take all measures possible within its sphere of competence to support and promote trade unions and collective bargaining.
  - Trade union recognition for collective bargaining is included as a national indicator.
- Building on a “strong tradition of union membership in Wales”.
- Are there limits to this? Why do people join unions?

# Union Membership in the UK: 1892-2017



# The Importance of Place

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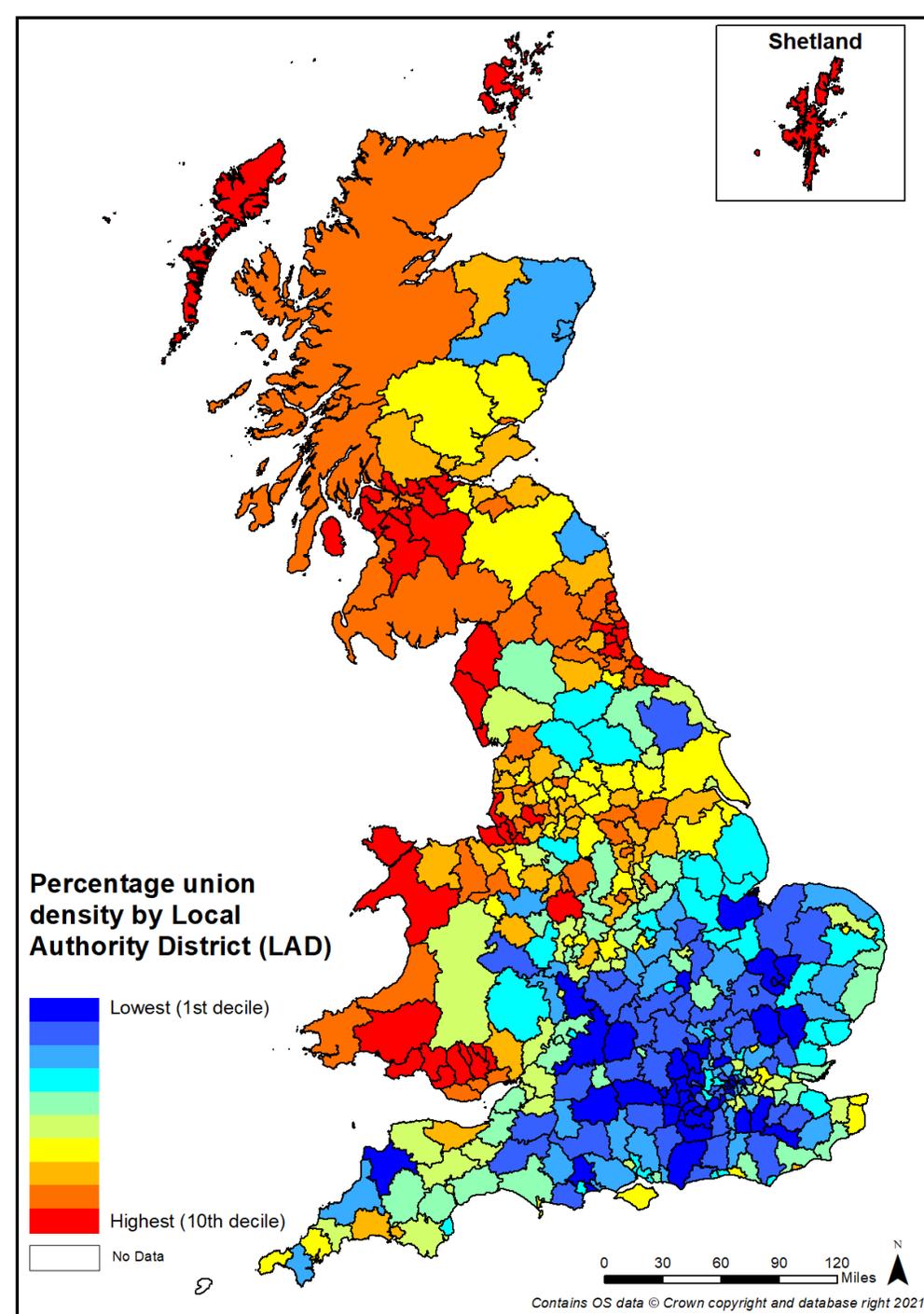
- Within areas where there is an historical legacy of trade unionism, the propensity of workers to join trade unions appears to be greater due to the favourable attitudes that exist (Diamond and Freeman, 2002).
- [Holmes \(2006\)](#) demonstrates that higher unionisation rates in care homes and grocery stores in West Virginia and Pennsylvania are linked to the unionisation of the old coal and steel sectors in those areas. Trends are path dependent.
- Martin et al (1996) emphasise the importance of “regional and **local variations** in the inherited and socialised traditions, customs and cultures” in understanding union membership
- “Variation in such phenomena is more appropriately examined at a **sub-regional** level of analysis” ([Beaumont and Harris, 1988](#)).

# UnionMaps@WISERD

[www.wiserd.ac.uk/unionmaps](http://www.wiserd.ac.uk/unionmaps)

Measures of union membership produced for Unitary Authorities and Local Authority Districts of Great Britain (approx. 400) including:

- Union density
  - Union presence
  - Union coverage
- Labour Force Survey
- Collective pay agreements
- Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings



# Britain's Most Unionised Places

	Union Density		Union Presence		Union Coverage	
	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank
<b>Copeland</b>	54.0	1	72.8	1	51.0	1
<b>Eilean Siar</b>	46.7	2	72.3	2	43.3	7
<b>Barrow-in-Furness</b>	44.8	3	67.7	6	45.5	3
<b>Neath Port Talbot</b>	43.6	4	68.1	4	44.3	5
<b>Merthyr Tydfil</b>	42.6	5	66.3	9	42.4	10
<b>West Dunbartonshire</b>	42.4	6	61.5	44	45.0	4
<b>Rhondda Cynon Taff</b>	41.6	7	66.6	8	41.6	14
<b>Durham</b>	40.3	8	69.1	3	43.0	9
<b>Bridgend</b>	39.6	9	65.0	10	42.4	10
<b>Allerdale</b>	39.3	10	63.5	15	38.9	39

# The Importance of Family

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- ‘Experience good’ model of union membership
  - Benefits of union membership are uncertain.
  - Can only be appreciated through direct experience or trusted recommendations from family, friends or colleagues
  - Important for labour market entrants.
- Lessons from political science regarding socialization:
  - Parents are especially influential role models
  - The impressionable years - <25 yrs old
  - Gender matters
  - Transmission of political values is more likely to occur where parents are more highly politicised and share the same values
- Limited evidence regarding inter-generational transmission in union membership.
- [Blanden and Machin \(2003\)](#) - young people with unionised fathers are more likely to join – more so if fathers are ‘active’ in unions
- Role of mothers, gender and geographical variance not considered.

# Data and Methods

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- British Household Panel Survey Waves 1-18 (1991-2008)
  - Includes questions on personal and employment related characteristics, political affiliation and trade union membership.
- Identify young people (age<26) living at home with their parent(s) for at least one wave. Able to follow the careers of these young people – even after they have left home.
- Run logistic regressions to model the probability of union membership among our sample of young workers.
- Include controls commonly used for analysis of union membership to estimate effect of parental membership.
  - $MEM_{it} = \alpha + PC_{it}\beta + JOBI_t\gamma + VOTE_{it}\lambda + PMEM_{it}\pi + \varepsilon_{it}$

# Results Part 1 - Gender

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	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<b>1. Parental Membership Status</b>			
(Reference Category: Children of non-unionised parents)			
Parent(s) Members	1.427***		
<b>2. Composition of Parental Membership</b>			
(Reference Categories: Children of non-unionised parents)			
Both Parents Members		1.866***	
One Parent Member		1.292**	
<b>3. Composition of Parental Membership and Gender</b>			
(Reference Categories: Daughters/sons of non-unionised parents)			
Both Parents Members: Daughter			2.296***
One Parent Member: Daughter			1.354*
Both Parents Members: Son			1.526**
One Parent Member: Son			1.233
R-sqd	0.258	0.260	0.260
		18,982	

# Results Part 2 - Place

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	Model 5	Model 6
<b>5. Parental Membership Status and Area</b>		
(Ref. Categories: Children of non-union parent(s) born in area)		
Low Density Areas: Parent(s) Member(s)	1.153	
High Density Areas: Parent(s) Member(s)	1.675***	
<b>6. Composition of Parental Membership and Area</b>		
(Ref. Categories: Children of non-union parent(s) born in area)		
<b><i>Low Density Areas</i></b>		
Both Parents Members		1.431
One Parent Member		1.074
<b><i>High Density Areas</i></b>		
Both Parents Members		2.211***
One Parent Member		1.498***
R-squared	0.258	0.260
Observations	18,982	

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# The Persistence of Unions in Coalmining Areas

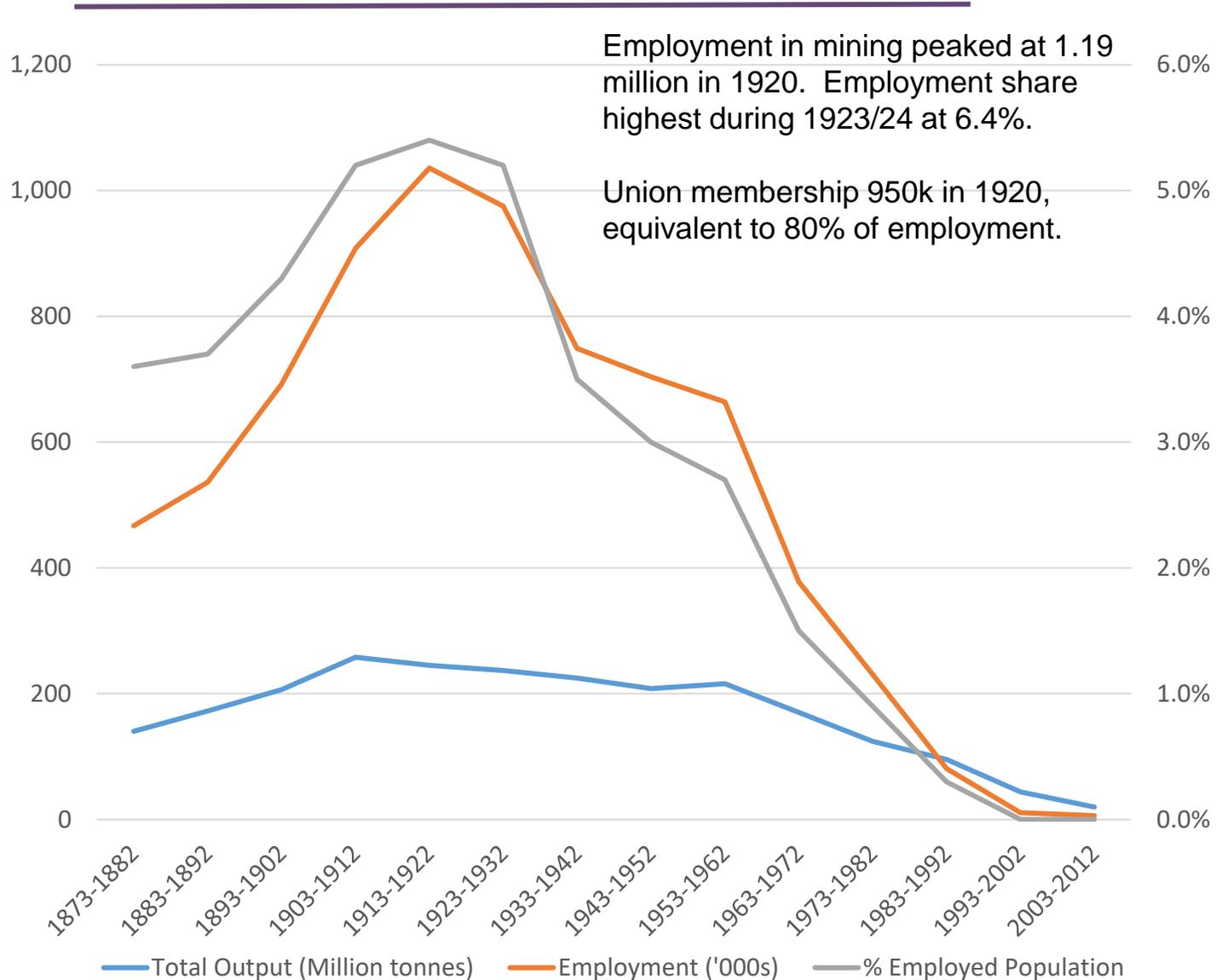
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- Within the UK, colliery villages and towns located in areas once dominated by coalmining are regarded as among the strongest and most durable bases for the trade union movement.
- Their direct effect on levels of union membership has not previously been assessed.
- By using definitions of coalfield areas based on census data, we explore how proximity to these areas is associated with present day levels of union membership.
- What was so special about mining?



Tomorrow, Durham's narrow streets will be thronged with thousands of people, young and old, from the county's pit villages. ...Don't ever say "former" pit villages, even if the last mine closed in 1993. The colliery banners processing for hours through the city will tell us otherwise. It remains a politically and emotionally charged day for the working people of Durham. Nostalgia? Not when you see the bonds of connection and common purpose that such communities in the North East feel (Guardian, 12 July, 2013).

# Coalmining in the UK

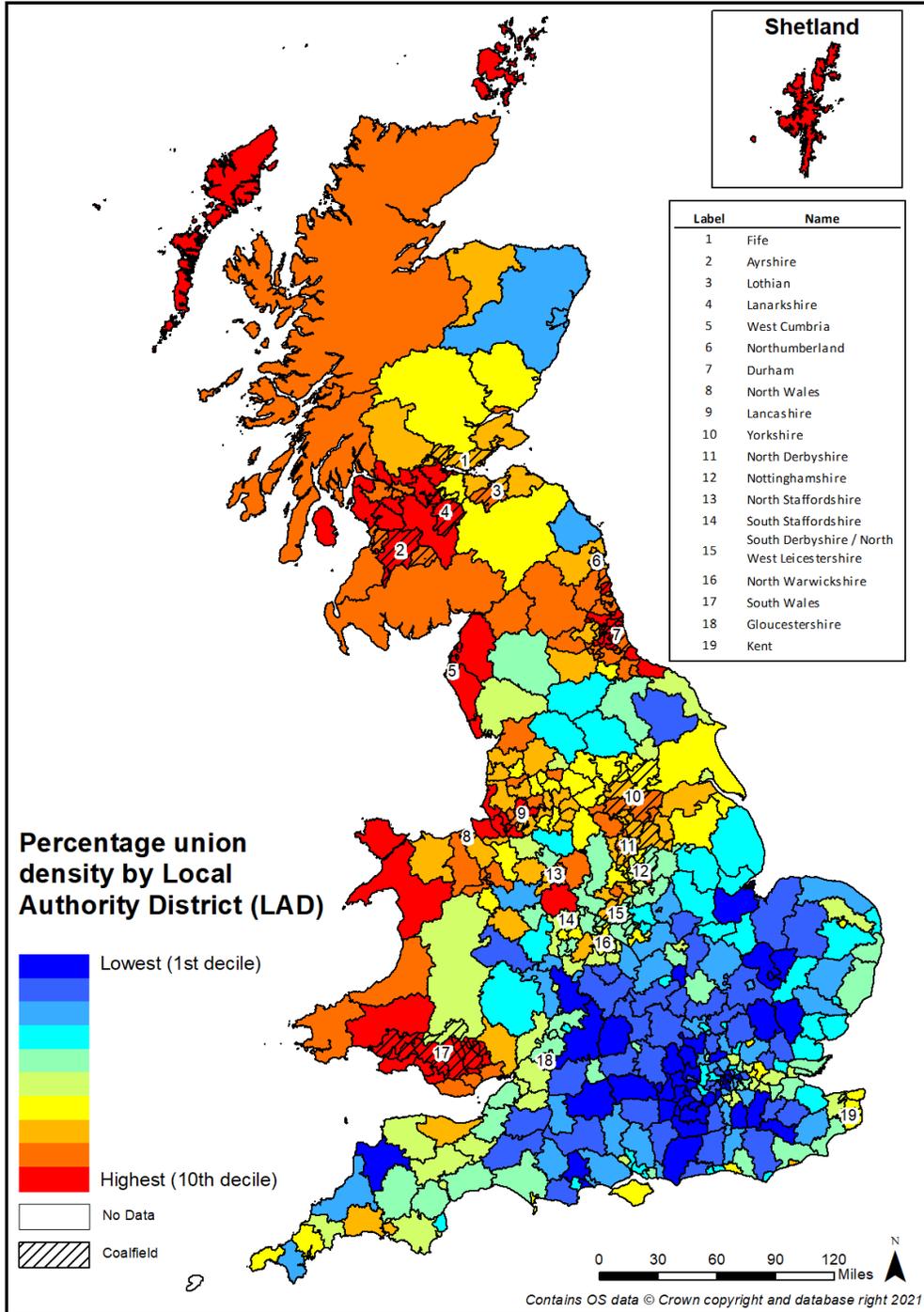


% Working Males (12 yrs+) Employed in Mining (1921 Census)	
<b>Industrial Areas of South Wales</b>	<b>35%</b>
Nantyglo/Blaina	77%
Rhondda	74%
Mynyddislwyn	74%
Abertillery	73%
<b>Durham</b>	<b>29%</b>
Easington	75%
<b>Derbyshire</b>	<b>24%</b>
Bolsover	70%
<b>Nottinghamshire</b>	<b>21%</b>
Huthwaite	70%

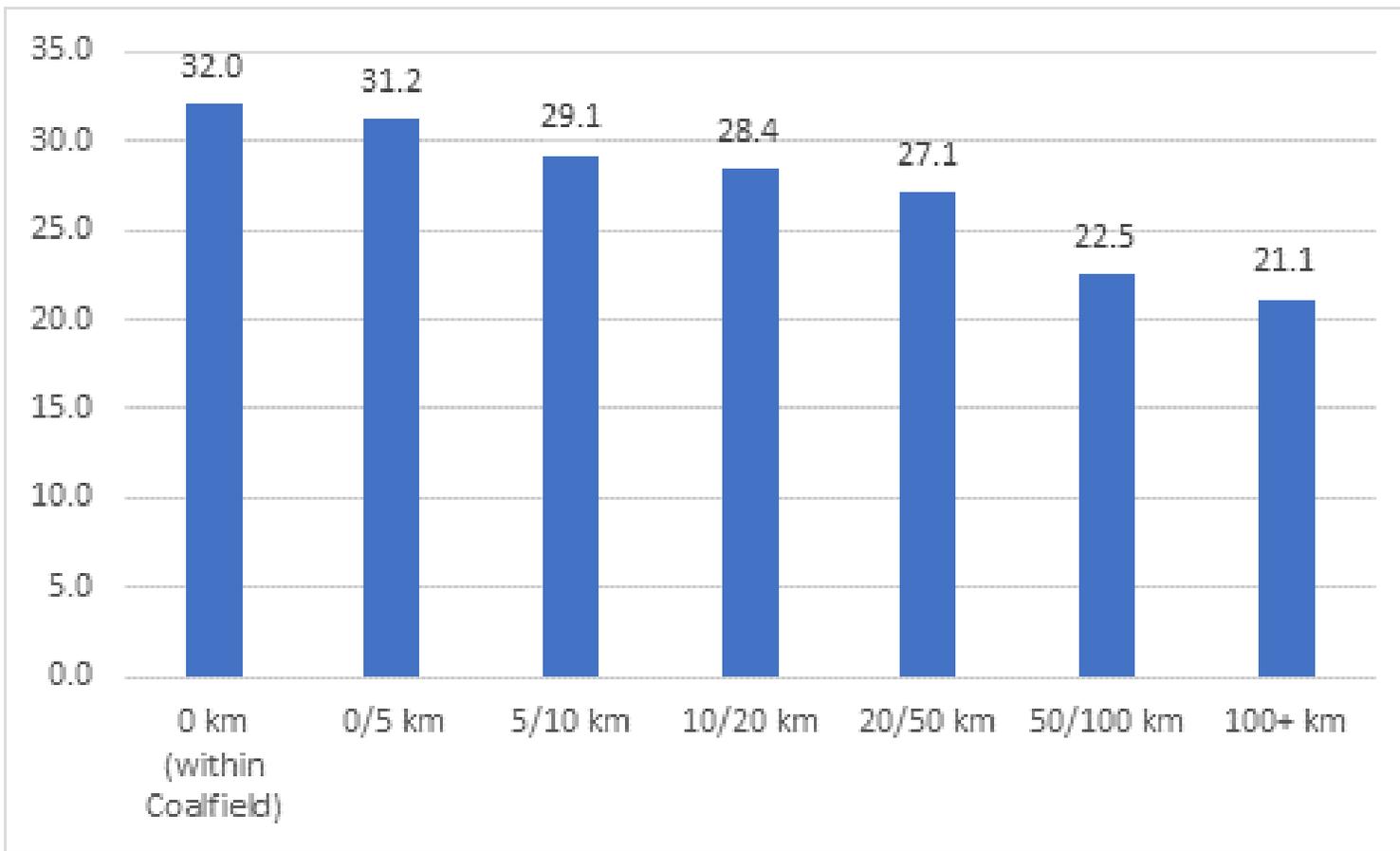
# Identifying the 'Coalfield Effect'

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- Information on union membership from UK Labour Force Survey 2000-2017.
- Coalfield definition developed by [Beatty and Fothergill \(1995\)](#). Based upon ward level Census data for 1981, '10% or more of male *residents* in employment working in the coal' - with some flexibility.
- Coalfield data held in form of LSOA/Data Zone lookup tables. Can merge onto Secure Access versions of LFS from 2005 onwards.
- Distance to nearest coalfield (road network travel distances in km) have been derived from the centroids of all LSOAs/Data Zones within Great Britain using the OS MasterMap Highways network.
- Explore how rates of union membership vary with respect to distance from coalfield. Estimate logistic regression to model the 'coalfield effect' after controlling for other personal and workplace characteristics.



## Union Density (%) and Distance from Coalfields

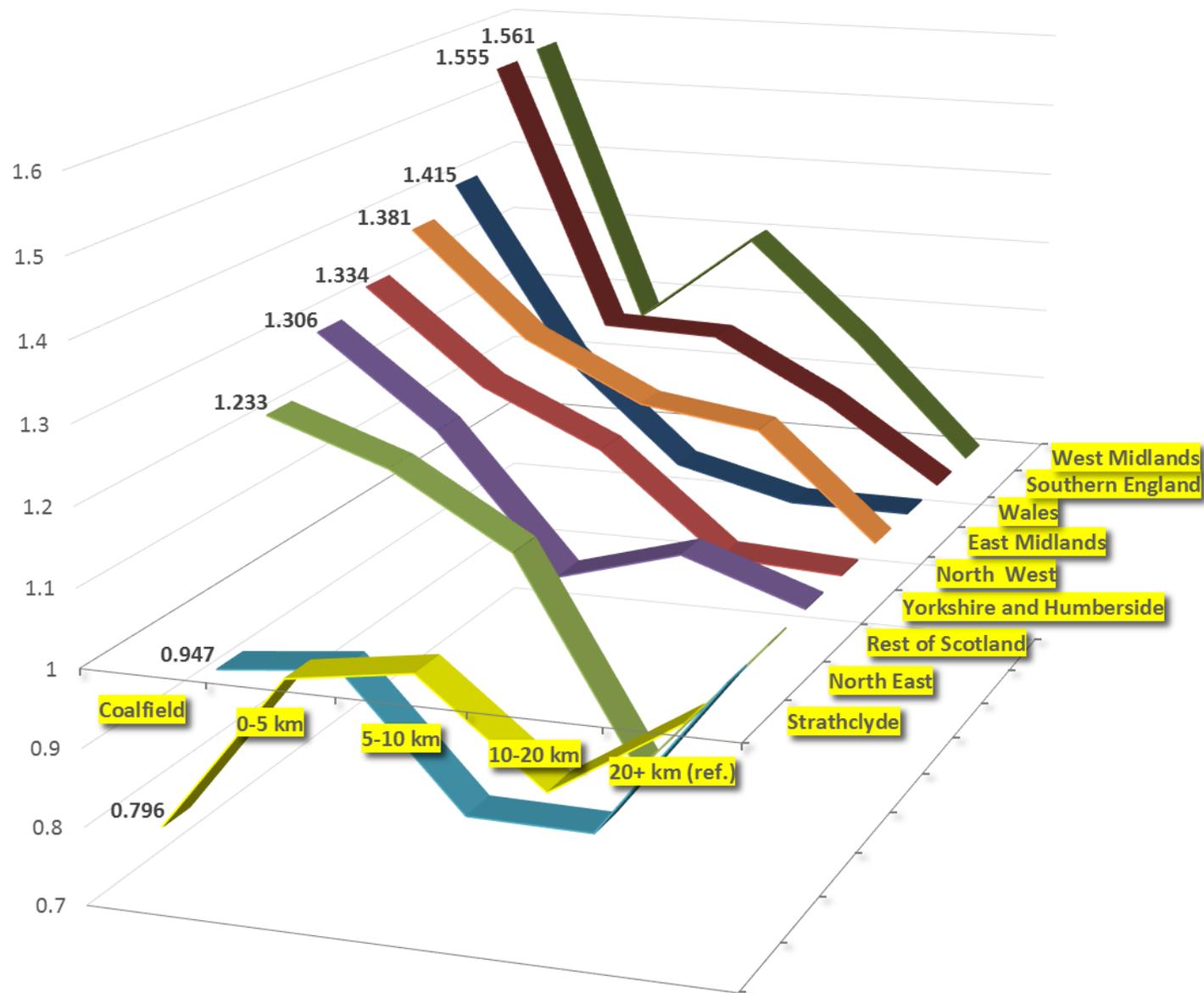


# Multivariate Estimates of the Coalfield Effect

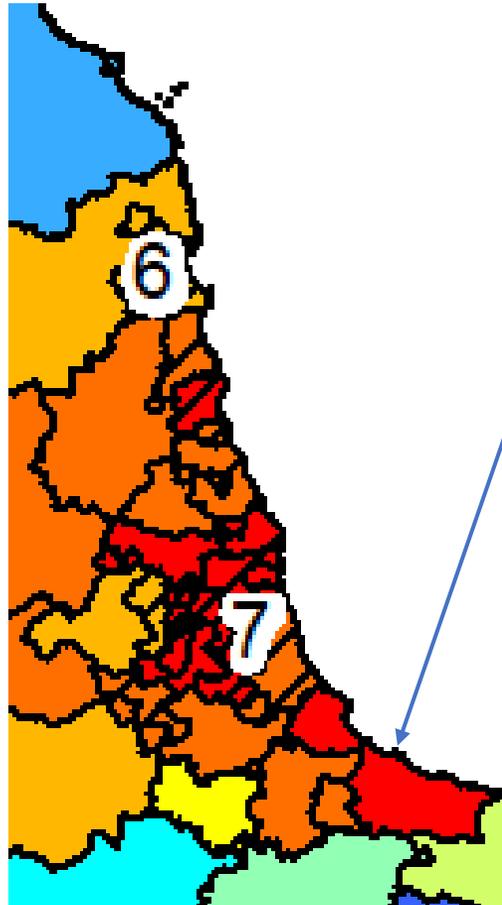
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	All Employees	Where Unions Present
<b>All Sectors</b>		
<i>Model 1</i>		
Mining Areas	ref. (=1)	ref. (=1)
Non-Mining Areas	0.807***	0.835***
R-squared	0.28	0.13
Sample	455,925	209,055
 <i>Model 2</i>		
Mining Areas	ref.	ref.
0/5 km	0.891***	0.900***
5/10 km	0.843***	0.862***
10/20 km	0.785***	0.819***
20/50 km	0.780***	0.796***
50/100 km	0.726***	0.794***
100+ km	0.680***	0.750***
R-squared	0.28	0.13
Sample	455,917	209,052

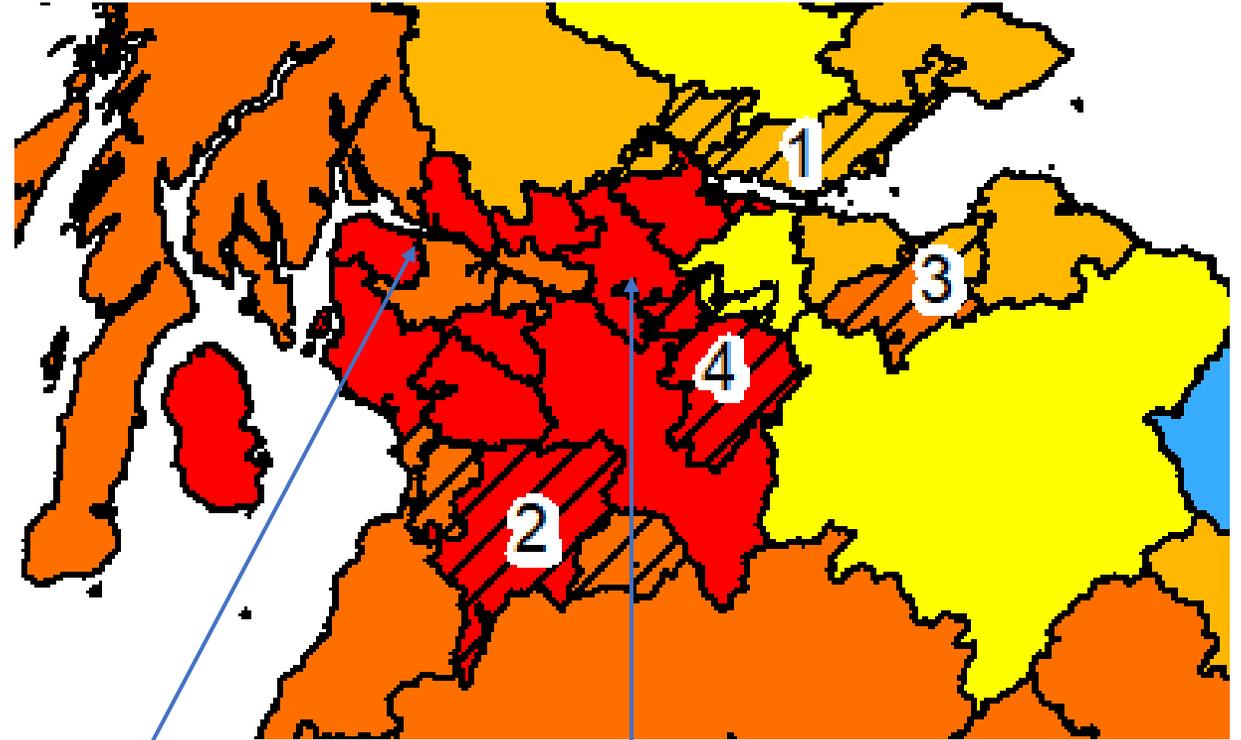
# Within Region Estimates of the Coalfield Effect



# Not Always Easy to Observe the Coalfield Effect



Redcar  
Steelworks  
South Teesside



'Red Clydeside'  
Ship Yards

Ravenscraig  
Steelworks;  
Ex-mining areas

# Conclusions

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- Results shine new light on path dependence of union membership: importance of both family, gender and place.
- Understanding spatial variance in trade union membership requires a detailed geographical analysis at the sub-regional level.
- Opportunities for renewal depend upon ‘path dependent assets’ including values ([Levesque and Murray, 2010](#)).
- Strength of intergenerational transmission in high density areas suggests that children of non-members do not get ‘converted’.
- What might be the ‘coalfields’ of the future, capable of acting as incubators for future generations of trade union members?

# Conclusions

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## **Unions and government can't recreate mining communities but....**

- Unions can leverage the power of union experience
  - Selling the union idea
- Government can use levers to switch the default in workplaces to 'union'
  - Public sector procurement
  - Sectoral bargaining with achievable union trigger points (cf New Zealand)
    - <https://onlabor.org/sectoral-bargaining-is-coming-to-new-zealand/>
    - May have positive spillovers via experience of unionization

# References

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- [www.wiserd.ac.uk/unionmaps](http://www.wiserd.ac.uk/unionmaps)
- Bryson, A. and Davies, R. (2019), Family, Place and the Intergenerational Transmission of Union Membership. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 57: 624-650. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjir.12435>
- Beynon, H, Blakely, H, Bryson, A, Davies, R. The persistence of union membership within the coalfields of Britain. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*. 2021; 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjir.12588>



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