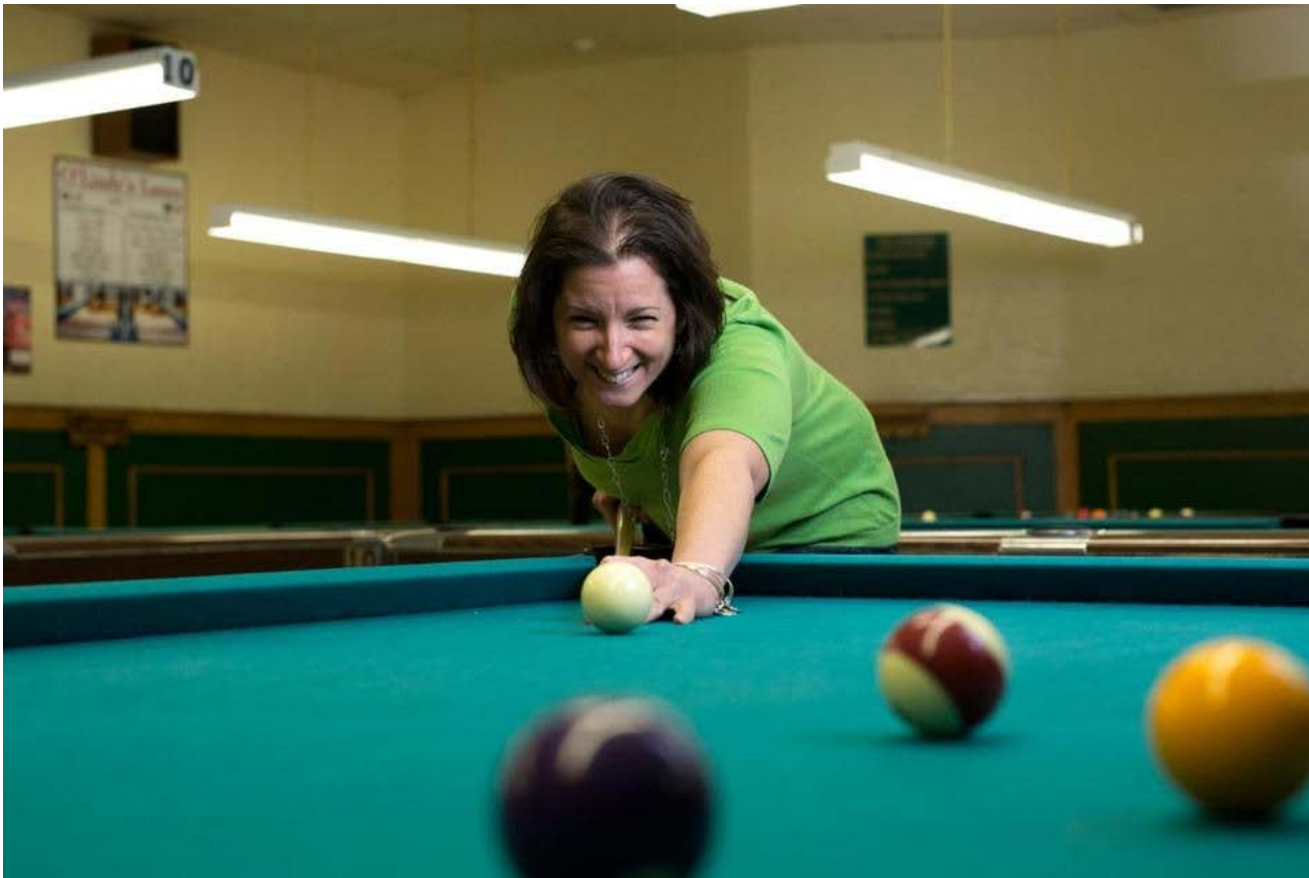




Where do all the single people live?

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JUSTIN SAGLIO FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Angela Nuss at Olindy's, a Quincy spot where the Braintree resident recently hosted a billiards parties for singles.

By Emily Sweeney

GLOBE STAFF FEBRUARY 11, 2016

Massachusetts residents who've never married

A town-by-town look at the percent of the population over age 15 that's never been married.

19% OR FEWER 20% TO 29% 30% TO 39% 40% TO 49 50% TO 59% 60% OR MORE

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau's 5-year American Community Survey (2010-2014)

MATT ROCHELEAU/GLOBE STAFF

Where do single folks live in Massachusetts?

You won't find many in wealthy suburbs, where three-car garages and one-acre zoning are de rigueur. Not surprisingly, the highest percentages of people who've never been married can be found in college towns and urban areas.

Number one is Amherst, where a whopping 74 percent of the population aged 15 and over has never gotten hitched, according to data from the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey from 2010 to 2014. Other college towns included Cambridge (57 percent), Wenham, which is home to Gordon College (48 percent), and Waltham, where Brandeis and Bentley are located (47 percent).

Communities with the lowest share of never-married residents included many affluent suburbs, such as Lincoln (17 percent) and Carlisle (18 percent), according to an analysis by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. At least 70 percent of residents aged 15 and over in Sudbury and Sherborn were married.

Singles in the Bay State also seemed to prefer urban areas. Communities with the highest share of never-married residents included Boston (57 percent), Somerville (56 percent), Chelsea (48 percent), Brookline (42 percent), and Brockton (40 percent).



Single in the suburbs: the more, the merrier

While many eligible bachelors and bachelorettes rely on online dating services, some prefer to meet new people in group settings, doing activities they enjoy.

'Friends'-style living on the rise among 30-somethings

One curious outlier is Shirley, a small, rural town located 50 miles northwest of Boston, not far from the New Hampshire border.

Compared with other neighboring towns, Shirley has a higher percentage of people who have never married: approximately 41 percent, and the majority of them are male. Why would half of Shirley's male residents (ages 15 years and older) have never married? That is likely due to the prison population that resides within the town's borders.

According to the [town's website](#), Shirley's 2010 Census population was 7,211 because it included the inhabitants of two correctional facilities: MCI-Shirley, a medium/minimum security prison with over 1,400 inmates, and the maximum security Souza-Baranowski Correctional Center, which housed over 1,200 inmates at the time.

Families live in the 'burbs, and young single people live in the cities. It all seems to make sense, right?

Actually, that could be changing, because a demographic shift is underway.

Len Albright, an assistant professor of sociology and public policy at Northeastern University, said the phenomenon is what academics are calling "The Great Inversion," a phrase that comes from the title of Alan Ehrenhalt's 2012 book about the evolution of American cities and suburbs.

Albright said that from the 1940s through the 1960s, there was a mass exodus out of cities as more people moved into the suburbs.

"Now we're seeing a reverse shift," said Albright.

Big employers that were once located in suburban office parks are coming back to the cities, and people are moving back to cities, too. "Increasingly jobs are being relocated back to urban areas," said Albright.

Albright noted General Electric's decision to move its headquarters from a suburban office park to Boston as an example.

"They want to be where the human capital is," said Albright. "Single people, they want to be where the jobs are."

Most suburban neighborhoods that housed the Baby Boom generation were designed for families raising children. Albright said the zoning regulations in many suburban communities did not



allow for multifamily housing, and, as a result, "You have all of these big single family houses in the suburbs."

Albright said millennials want to live in dense environments, walk to work, and many are not interested in owning their own homes (or they lack the financial means to).

As people wait longer to get married and have children, it remains to be seen whether today's single people will choose to stay in urban areas to raise their families. Albright is awaiting the 2020 Census to find out: "Are they going to stick around?"

Matt Rocheleau of the Globe staff and Globe correspondent Brenda J. Buote contributed to this report. Emily Sweeney can be reached at esweeney@globe.com. Follow her on Twitter [@emilysweeney](https://twitter.com/emilysweeney).

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