



IS THE LEFT RIGHT?

The creeping embourgeoisement of social democracy through homeownership

Sinisa Hadziabdic and Sebastian Kohl, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, Cologne, Germany

Political engagement in Britain: Taking back control? Understanding Society Insights 2024 policy conference, Broadway House, London, UK, 14.2.2024



OUTLINE

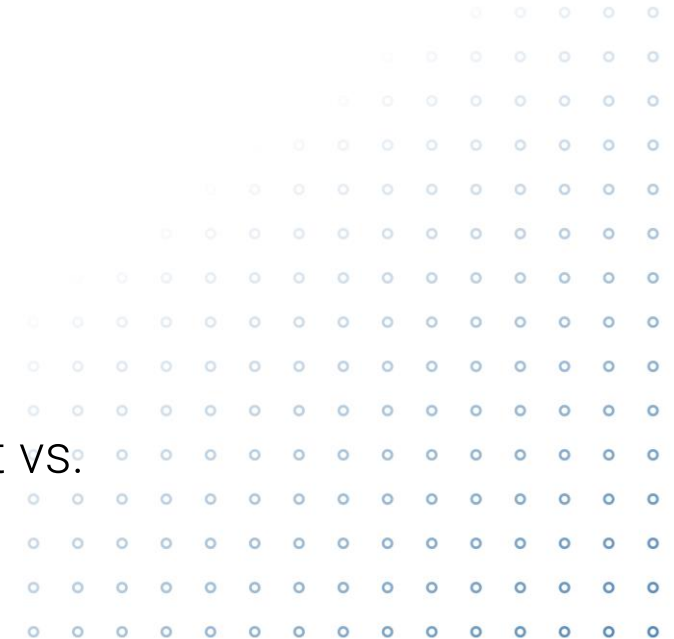
- Research Question(s)
- Theoretical Framework
- Empirical Strategy
- Empirical Findings
- Discussion
- Concluding Remarks





RESEARCH QUESTION(S)

- To what extent and how does becoming a homeowner change individual political attitudes?
- Homeownership:
 - Private home: largest asset and debt item
 - Social and professional integration
 - Decade-long transition
 - Wide policy options and changes in recent decades
- Existing literature: mainly cross-sectional studies:
 - Only observable controls: selection effects or causality?
 - Homeownership as discrete, immediate “game-changing” event vs. long-term gradual process?





THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- The political effects of homeownership in the existing literature:
 - Political involvement: “better citizens”
 - Conservative voting: community attachment vs. attachment to house value
 - Anti-redistribution preferences
- Exclusion from homeownership:
 - Political apathy or protest behavior
 - Populist voting





EMPIRICAL STRATEGY (1)

- Three countries:
 - United Kingdom: 1991-2017, BHPS-UKHLS
 - Germany: 1984-2018, SOEP
 - Switzerland: 1999-2018, SHP
- Most dissimilar cases research design:
 - Homeownership rate: UK 70-79% between 1991-2017 (high)
 - Mortgage debt: UK residential loans / income 101% in 2019 (high)
 - House price trajectory: UK constant increase
 - Partisan configuration: UK New Labor and UKIP





EMPIRICAL STRATEGY (2)

- Dependent variables:
 - Interest in politics
 - Having no vs. having a preferred party
 - Anything else vs. Labour Party
 - Anything else vs. Conservative Party
 - Anything else vs. UKIP
- Independent variable:
 - Transition from nonhomeowner to homeowner
 - Leads & lags analysis: focus on attitudinal trajectory throughout homeownership as a process rather than a discrete event
- Fixed effects with standard control variables



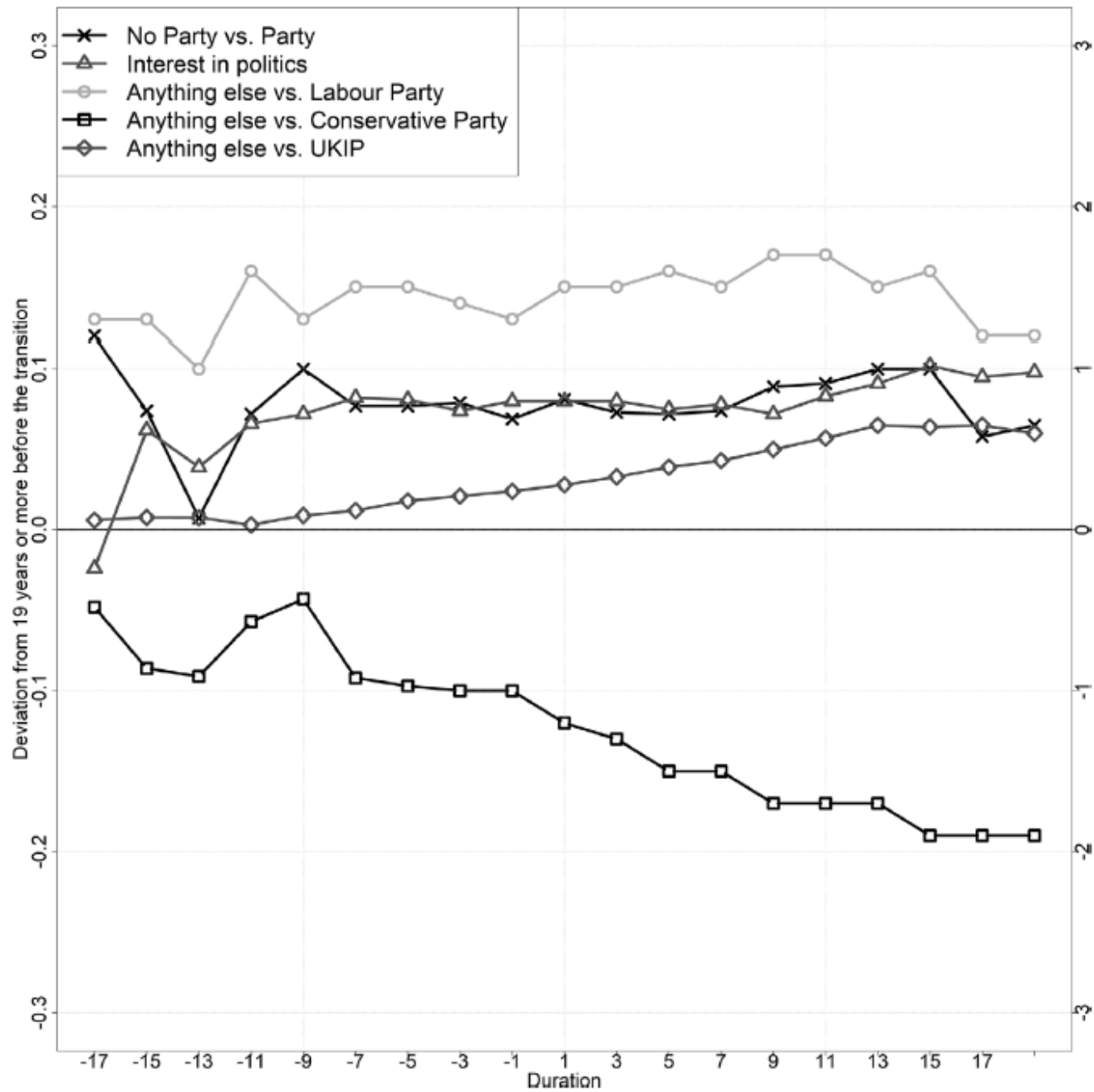


Figure 3. Dynamic effects of homeownership on political preferences in the United Kingdom.



DISCUSSION

- (Self-)selection of conservative individuals
- No short-term shock -> slow-moving causal effects:
 - Towards New Left (20%) (main subset)
 - Away from Conservative Parties (20%) (main subset)
 - Towards right-wing populist parties (6.5%) (limited subset)
- Homeownership contributes to the gradual embourgeoisement of the (new) left rather than conservatism:
 - Homeownership as part of general life trajectory: anticipation and socialization
 - Rise of New Left: New Labour
 - Material rationalization of highly educated individuals: culturally left-wing oriented, but with conservative economic interests





CONCLUDING REMARKS

- Homeownership: a gradual process, embedded in the biographical trajectory of homeowners
- Conservative homeowners: selection effect vs. gradual embourgeoisement: causality
- New social classes and new partisan equilibria: New Labour as key example of New Left
- The need for quantitative longitudinal data:
 - Control for (self-)selection
 - Adopting a long-term dynamic perspective: only possible through quantitative longitudinal data vs. qualitative or quantitative cross-sectional data

