

Housing and Party Politics in Germany and its Länder: The New Social Question?

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Abstract (100 words)

Amid a persisting affordability crisis, German parties increasingly frame housing as the “new social question of our time.” But to what extent do parties at the national and regional levels also agree on solutions given Germany’s stark regional housing differences and regionalized housing policymaking? Using a novel dataset on party positions toward housing, analyzing 361 party manifestos from national and Länder elections between 2000 and 2020, we find that housing has become an increasingly salient electoral issue over time. We also show that left-leaning parties prefer renter-oriented policies, while right-leaning parties favor homeowner-oriented policies. Finally, housing salience varies significantly between eastern and western Länder.

Introduction

Housing has become a hot-button issue in German politics, drawing increased media salience and public attention (see Appendix A1). While German political parties had rarely made housing a central electoral issue in recent decades, it is a top priority for all German parties today. Given the skyrocketing housing costs of the past 15 years, including both rents and house prices, politicians across the political spectrum have expressed concern about a lack of affordable housing in the country. In a social media post, former Chancellor Olaf Scholz (Social Democratic Party, SPD) called housing the “decisive social question” of our day.¹ The Greens’ party leader at the time, Annalena Baerbock, similarly noted that “housing is the social question of our time.”² Importantly, the sentiment is shared not only among parties on the left.³ Former center-right housing minister Horst Seehofer (Christian Socialist Union, CSU) equally stated that “housing ... is the social question of our time.”⁴ Even some Free Democrats (Free Democratic Party, FDP)—a party not particularly known for its generous stance on social welfare—called today’s high housing costs one of the “big social questions of our time.”⁵ Such language draws a parallel to the “old social question” of the late 19th century, when rapid urbanization led people to flock to industrializing cities, often forcing them into overcrowded, costly, and unsanitary apartments with minimal renter protections.⁶ In short, there seems to be an apparent cross-party consensus that actions are required to solve Germany’s housing affordability crisis.

Recognizing housing affordability as a major issue is one thing; reaching a consensus on solutions is another. Our article investigates the degree to which political parties agree on a set of housing policies in response to Germany’s new housing question. The universe of housing policy tools is complex, ranging from subsidizing the cost of building private owner-occupied or rental

homes, strengthening rent controls and renter subsidies, making land available for home building, supporting energy-efficient and climate-friendly homes, converting non-residential structures into residential ones, supporting social housing programs and limited-profit housing associations (*Wohngemeinnützigkeit*), and even expropriating commercial landlords, to name just a few. The beneficiaries (or losers) of such programs are similarly varied, including potential homebuyers and homeowners, rental investors, social or private renters, and various parts of the housing industry. Another layer of complexity is that many German housing programs are decided at the *Länder*-level. For example, the 2006 federalism reform transferred responsibility for social housing programs from the federal government to the *Länder*. We aim to closely examine this layer of Germany's complex federalist housing system by analyzing German party politics regarding housing not only at the national but also at the sub-national level of the German *Länder*.⁷

How do German parties compete over housing policy at the national and regional level? And how have parties' housing policy positions changed ever since housing costs have gone through the roof in recent years? To answer these questions, we present descriptive findings from a novel dataset on German party positions toward housing. The dataset is based on party manifestos of all national and *Länder* elections between 2000 and 2020 and comprises 361 party programs and the manual coding of their housing-related content. Our dataset allows us to show how the salience of housing as a political issue has changed over time, and which housing policies different parties promote in different regions.

Our findings indicate that housing has become significantly more salient as an electoral issue among political parties during the 2010s when compared to the 2000s. The top housing priorities identified by political parties were supporting social housing, addressing a lack of housing, stimulating home building, modernizing and renovating homes, subsidizing

homeownership, and strengthening rent control – all of which have increased in salience during the 2010s. In terms of party politics, German parties on the left tend to favor renter-oriented policies (SPD, The Left Party, and, to a lesser extent, the Greens), while parties on the right tend to favor owner-oriented policies (the Christian Democratic Union, CDU – as well as its Bavarian sister party, CSU – the FDP, and the Alternative for Germany, AfD). Except for the AfD, all other major parties have expressed support for new homebuilding and modernizing or renovating older homes. Finally, in regional terms, we find that parties mentioned housing policies the least in eastern states, while parties in the three city-states—as well as in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg—showed the strongest support for housing policies (especially renter-oriented policies).

This article contributes to debates on German politics in several ways. Thus far, little research has explored how German parties compete over housing at the regional level, as most studies have analyzed German housing policy from a national perspective⁸ or have relied on local urban case studies.⁹ Second, even though Germany’s “nation of renters”—with one of the lowest homeownership rates among rich democracies—makes it a “most likely” case for strong renter support across all political parties, we find that it is mainly parties on the left that tend to privilege renter-oriented policies. In contrast, parties on the right tend to emphasize homeowner-oriented policies.

Disaggregating Germany’s “nation of renters”

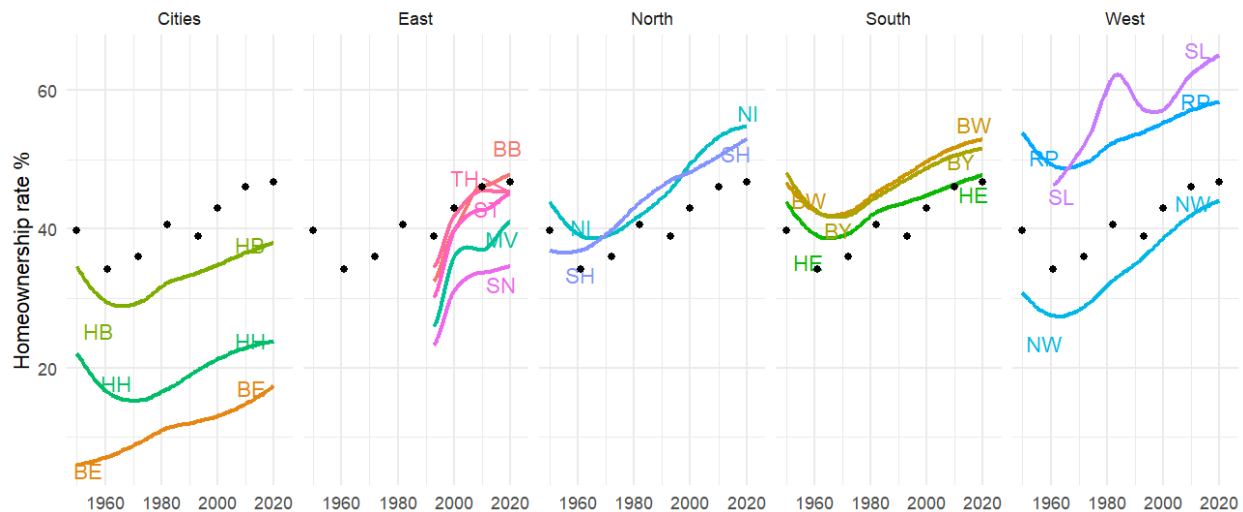
Germany is widely known as a quintessential “nation of renters,” with a homeownership rate, defined as the percentage of households living in owner-occupied homes, of only 42% according to the latest Census of 2022.¹⁰ Among rich democracies, only Switzerland has a lower national

homeownership rate.¹¹ However, these national averages conceal important subnational variation. As Figure 1 shows, homeownership rates within Germany range from 60% in Saarland to only 16% in Berlin (the black dotted line is the national average). Ownership rates are especially low in urban areas, particularly the city-states of Hamburg and Berlin, where only 20% of households or less live in their own home. Because of Bremen's distinctly liberal historical mortgage regime and widely accessible single-family houses, its homeownership rate of 32% has always been higher than that of Hamburg and Berlin,¹² but is still relatively low by international city standards (e.g., the Canadian city of Toronto, for example, has a homeownership rate of over 65%). Some more sparsely populated German states without major cities—such as Rhineland-Palatinate, Schleswig-Holstein, and Lower Saxony—exhibit homeownership rates of around or above 50%. Finally, the eastern Länder have lower homeownership rates than their western counterparts, with the notable exception of Brandenburg, where the homeownership rate of 45% is above the national average of 42%.

The differences in regional homeownership rates are, to a large degree, irrespective of party dominance, and they are relatively path dependent. First, Lower Saxony, which was governed by the SPD for much of the postwar period,¹³ has a higher homeownership rate of 49% compared to Bavaria's 46%, despite Bavaria being a stronghold of the conservative CSU. Second, despite some changes over time, these regional homeownership patterns are surprisingly “sticky.” Then and now, Berlin has been recognized as the world's largest rental tenement city, a reputation it has maintained since the 1920s.¹⁴ Today, homeownership rates in all German states surpass their 1950 levels—particularly when adjusted for the urban housing shortages at that time—but they have followed distinct trajectories.¹⁵ The eastern Länder experienced a “fall-and-rise” pattern, due to the GDR's emphasis on collective rather than individual property ownership, while the western

Länder have seen a more consistent upward trend over time (following a decline in homeownership in the 1950s caused by war-related damages; see fn. 15).

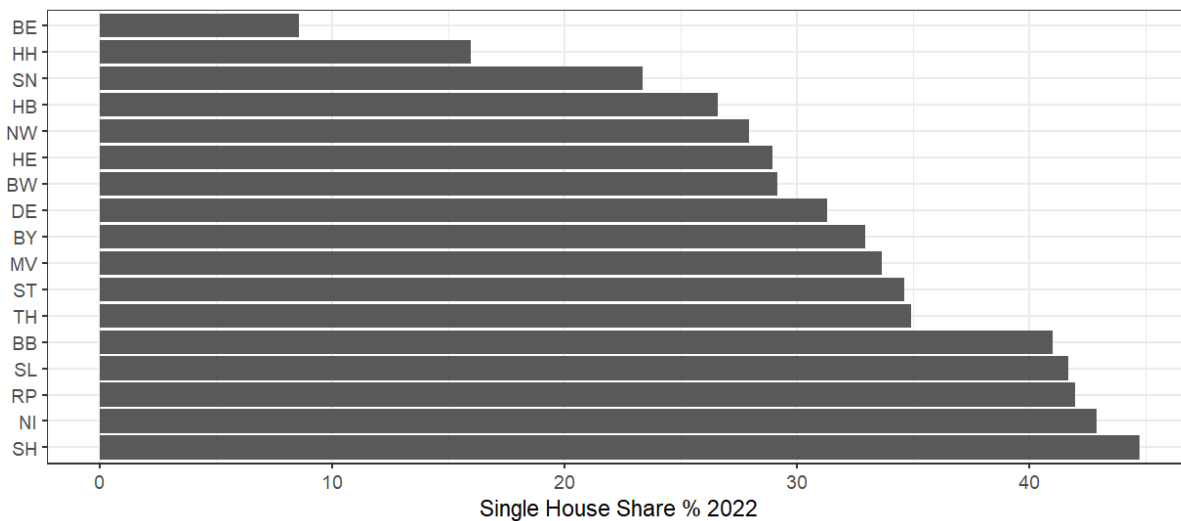
Figure 1: Homeownership rates of the German Länder, 1950-2020.



Notes: Housing counts and census benchmark years interpolated using loess functions. *Sources:* Sensch, Jürgen, *Bautätigkeit und Wohnungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1950-2005*, GESIS Datenkompilation, ZA8398 (Köln: GESIS, 2010); Zensus 2011 and Zensus 2022. BB=Brandenburg; BE=Berlin; BW=Baden-Württemberg; BY=Bavaria (Bayern); HB=Bremen; HE=Hesse (Hessen); HH=Hamburg; MV=Mecklenburg-Vorpommern; NI=Lower Saxony (Niedersachsen); NW=North Rhine-Westphalia (Nordrhein-Westfalen); RP=Rhineland-Palatinate (Rheinland-Pfalz); SH=Schleswig-Holstein; SL=Saarland; SN=Saxony (Sachsen); ST=Saxony-Anhalt (Sachsen-Anhalt); TH=Thuringia (Thüringen).

These differences in housing tenure are partly related to Germany's urban-rural divide and the different urban forms across the *Länder*. More urbanized regions and those with traditions of multi-family building generally have lower shares of single-family houses (as a share of all housing units), ranging from below 10% in Berlin to almost 45% in Schleswig Holstein or Lower Saxony (cf. [Figure 2](#)). With few single-family houses rented out, the gap between the share of single-family houses and the homeownership rate in 2022 highlights the slow but gradual growth of condominium ownership in German cities.

Figure 2: Share of single-family houses among all housing units in 2022.



Source: Zensus 2022, “Gebäude und Wohnungen,” accessed February 2, 2025, https://www.zensus2022.de/DE/Aktuelles/Gebaeude_Wohnungen_VOE.html

German post-WWII public policy has consistently privileged affordable rental housing over homeownership—although both were strong priorities—with the Länder playing a key role in the implementation of housing policy.¹⁶ To tackle the severe WWII-related housing shortages, there was a broad political consensus that supporting the construction of all kinds of homes—whether rental and owner-occupied homes—was necessary to overcome the shortage of at least 4.6 million homes. At the national level, parties on the left preferred building affordable rental housing, while parties on the right prioritized homeownership as solutions for the housing crisis. To support these efforts, national policymakers offered generous tax and social housing programs to encourage the construction of both rental and owner-occupied homes. At the regional level, the Länder played a key role in distributing social housing program funding. Much to the dismay of national Christian Democrats—above all, the Adenauer government—they distributed the vast majority of social housing funding to the rental sector.¹⁷ The Länder did so because i) constructing multi-family homes was simply more cost-effective, especially in industrial areas where land was scarce and expensive, ii) affordable rental homes were required for workers in industrial areas to

overcome labor shortages, limit commutes, and keep wages low, and iii) banks and non-profit housing associations already had established standardized practices for building multi-family homes as opposed to constructing owner-occupied homes on a mass level.¹⁸ The result was that, between 1952 and 1973, the country built a total of 12.5 million homes, including 5.7 million homes built with social housing funding. Of these 5.7 million social housing units, only 1.6 million were owner-occupied homes, while 4.1 million units were rental homes.¹⁹ It is partly for this reason that Germany was rebuilt as a nation of renters.

By the mid-1970s, Germany had largely resolved its acute housing shortages, leading to a general decline in housing construction and rental housing programs. Policymakers shifted their focus to supporting homeownership as a means of promoting private wealth, conservative family values, and old-age security. Despite the shift, Germany constructed a total of 1.6 million social housing units between 1974 and 1990, roughly half of which were rental units and the other half owner-occupied.

Housing cost and house price developments in Germany and its Länder

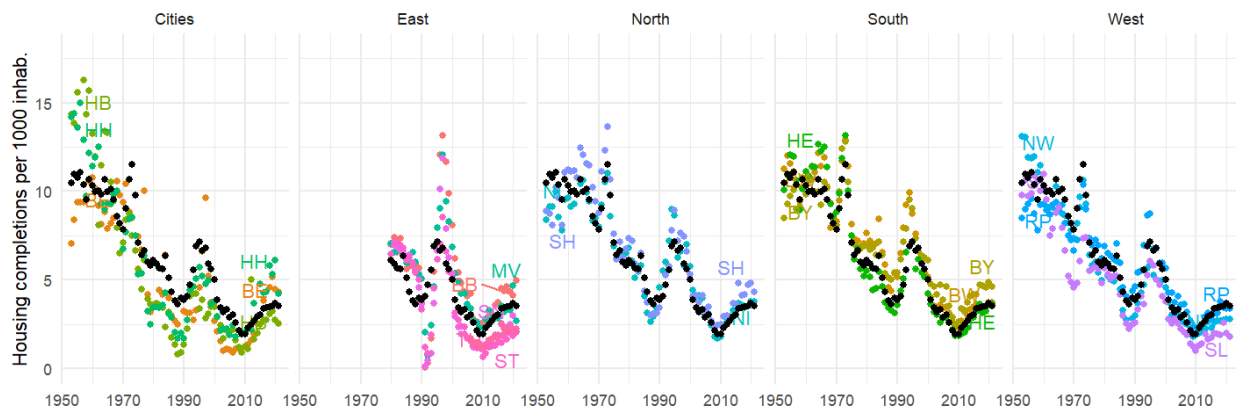
In the twenty-first century, Germany experienced two distinct housing periods: one of house-price decline in the 2000s (14% *decline* in real terms) and another of house-price inflation from 2010 to 2020 (nearly a 50% *increase*).²⁰ Germany had been an outlier among rich democracies, as it was the only major rich economy where real house prices decreased between 1970 and 2005. Real house prices in virtually all other rich economies had been rising—although to varying degrees—due to a combination of low interest rates, mortgage liberalizations, subsidies for homeownership, strict land-use regulations, demographic developments, and economic growth.

A major reason for the decline in German real house prices was the post-unification construction boom and bust of the 1990s and 2000s, and it took the country's housing market until the late 2010s to recover. To stimulate housing construction in both eastern and western Germany after reunification, the Kohl government implemented massive housing stimulus packages, resulting in an overproduction of housing. In the east, over one million homes were left vacant (i.e., the vacancy rate for some eastern cities was up to 20%), and many were demolished with public funds (*Stadtumbau Ost*). As the country's construction industry faced a deep and prolonged crisis in the late 1990s and 2000s—during a period when the German economy itself was reeling²¹—renters and buyers benefited from a period of relatively affordable housing prices.

While these trends affected all Länder, [Figure 3](#) shows that the 1990s building boom and bust was particularly severe in the eastern Länder, where policymakers had aimed to address decades of housing underinvestment during the GDR era. In the 1990s, the eastern Länder far exceeded the national average of housing completions per one thousand inhabitants (black dotted line), while the following construction bust then led eastern states to underperform housing completions in the 2000s. The city-states (West Berlin prior to 1990) transitioned from being above-average builders during the post-war reconstruction period to below-average builders starting in the 1970s. Moreover, a considerable part of both post-war and post-unification housing construction consisted of government-subsidized social housing, predominantly rental but also owner-occupied homes. While social housing permits (per 1,000 residents) have generally followed the larger housing construction cycle, [Figure 4](#) shows that social housing was far more prevalent in the city-states, the East, and North Rhine-Westphalia when compared to the national average (black dotted line). As the figure shows, social housing construction declined sharply over time, with the short-lived exception of the post-unification years, after which it dropped to

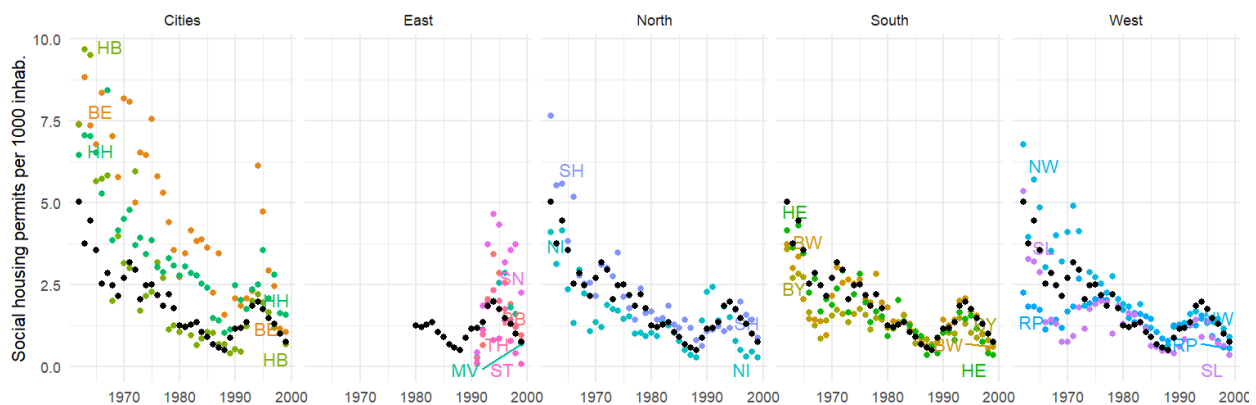
marginal levels in the 2000s. The result is that the country's social housing stock more than halved from 2.3 million units in 2000 to 1.1 million in 2020.

Figure 3: Housing completions per 1,000 residents across the German Länder in national comparison, 1950-2020.



Sources: Sensch, Jürgen, *Bautätigkeit und Wohnungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1950-2005*; Statistisches Bundesamt, *Bevölkerungsstruktur und Wirtschaftskraft der Bundesländer, 1971-1992* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer and Metzler-Poeschel, 1972-1993), *Statistisches Bundesamt Wiesbaden, Bautätigkeit und Wohnungen, 2005-2021*, Fachserie 5/1 (Wiesbaden: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2005-2021).

Figure 4: Social housing permits per 1,000 residents across the German Länder in national comparison, 1960-2000.



Source: Jürgen Sensch, *Sozialer Wohnungsbau in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1950-1999*, GESIS Datenkompilation, ZA8401, Datenfile V (Köln: GESIS, 2010).

As the German economy recovered in the late 2000s, so did the country's housing market, entering a period of sustained house-price inflation. During the 2010s, as noted above, German real house prices increased by around 50% compared to a 14% *decrease* in the 2000s. The reasons for the country's housing boom are found in demand and supply-side factors. On the demand-side, the European Central Bank's accommodative post-2008 monetary policy led investors and consumers to search for high returns in a depressed property market.²² More generally, the country rebounded from the Great Recession of 2008-2009 relatively quickly, resulting in strong employment and wage growth fueling housing demand. Finally, stronger-than-expected population growth through migration—intra-European migration during the euro crisis and then the influx of refugees from the Middle East—resulted in strong housing demand in German cities.

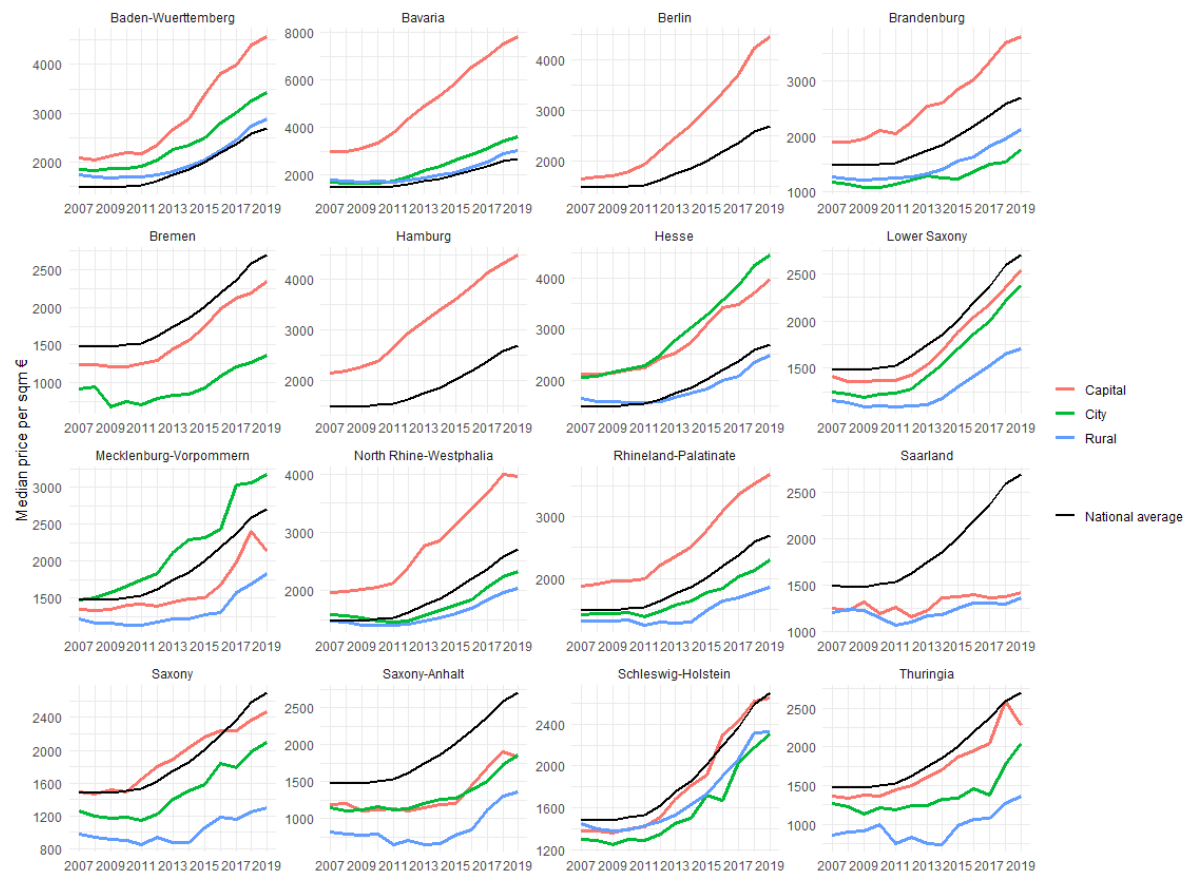
On the supply side, as mentioned, the construction industry, severely downsized due to the earlier construction slump, had difficulty in ramping up capacity and could not keep up with skyrocketing demand. Meanwhile, the federalism reform of 2006 eliminated *federal* social housing programs and delegated authority for social housing to the *Länder*, effectively relinquishing the federal government's ability to shape social housing policy. As [Figure 3](#) shows, during the 2010s, a new housing construction cycle started to gain momentum; however, its peak remains far below levels seen during the post-war or post-reunification booms. The simple conclusion is that Germany has not built enough homes in recent years.

In virtually all *Länder*, nominal house prices and rents have reached very high levels during the 2010s, as shown in [Figure 5](#), which presents median house and rental prices in euros per square meter (averaged across houses and apartments) based on data from *Immoscout24*. The median listing prices for buying a home (upper panel a) and for renting a home (lower panel b) have surged to particularly high levels in the southern *Länder* and the city-states of Hamburg and Berlin, far

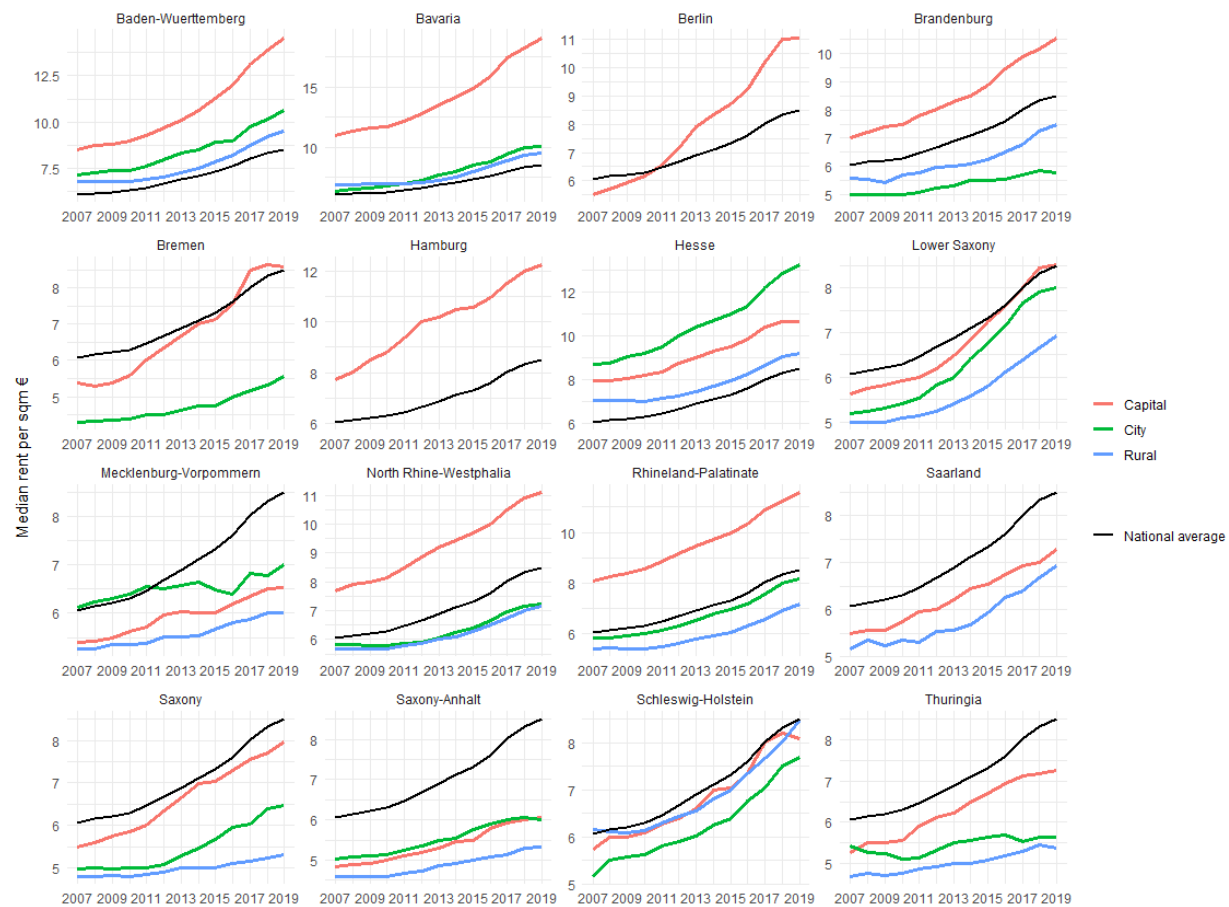
exceeding the national averages of 2,500EUR per square meter for purchasing a home and 9EUR per square meter for rent in 2019 (see black lines for national averages in both panels). While the eastern *Länder* also experienced dramatic increases in house and rental prices during the 2010s, housing costs there remained below the national averages – with the notable exception of Potsdam in Brandenburg, largely due to its proximity to Berlin. [Figure 5](#) also shows that over-time increases in house and rental prices have been particularly pronounced in the capitals of the *Länder*, where price growth has been significantly higher than in other cities and rural areas (notable exceptions include Hesse, where Frankfurt—the state’s largest city but not its capital—has seen the steepest increases, and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, where coastal cities have experienced greater price than the state capital). The figure thus illustrates that nearly all *Länder* capitals are particularly exposed to housing affordability challenges, making housing a particularly salient and potentially politicized issue there.

Figure 5: Development of house and rental prices in Germany, 2007-2019.

(a) Median house prices per square meter by Land



(b) Median rental prices per square meter by Land



Source: Boelmann, Barbara, Budde, Rüdiger, Klick, Larissa, Schaffner, Sandra, RWI, Scout24 AG c/o Immobilien Scout GmbH. 2019. “RWI-GEO-RED: RWI Real Estate Data (Scientific Use File),” *RWI – Leibniz Institute for Economic Research*. Datasets include “houses for sale, v. 1” (doi.org/10.7807/immo:red:hk:suf:v1), “houses for rent, v. 1” (doi.org/10.7807/immo:red:hm:suf:v1), “apartments for rent, v. 1” (doi.org/10.7807/immo:red:wm:suf:v1), and “apartments for sale, v. 1” (doi.org/10.7807/immo:red:wk:suf:v1).

German party programs and housing: Empirical approach

To shed light on national and regional party positions toward housing in the twenty-first century, we created a novel dataset based on 361 party manifestos of the CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, Greens, Left Party, and AfD for regional and federal elections held between 2000 and 2020. Using a list of 87 keywords (see Appendix A2), developed from screening a random selection of 60 manifestos (i.e., 15% of all manifestos), we filtered 20,067 housing-relevant sentences. As manual coding is

extensive, we drew a random selection of every second sentence. Of this subset, 5,291 sentences emerged as relevant and were coded with respect to 26 categories that were first formulated deductively and refined based on coding one fifteenth of all sentences (for the codebook, see Appendix A3). Statements could be coded into multiple categories when applicable—for example, a statement might reference both a general lack of housing and a specific response to this issue, such as building more homes.

Our dataset allows us to calculate saliency scores for parties' overall emphasis on housing policy and for individual housing categories. To this end, we divide the number of relevant housing statements by the total number of sentences of the respective electoral manifesto. As the manifestos differ in length—which we measure as the total number of sentences—the relative scores provide a more meaningful interpretation.

Descriptive findings

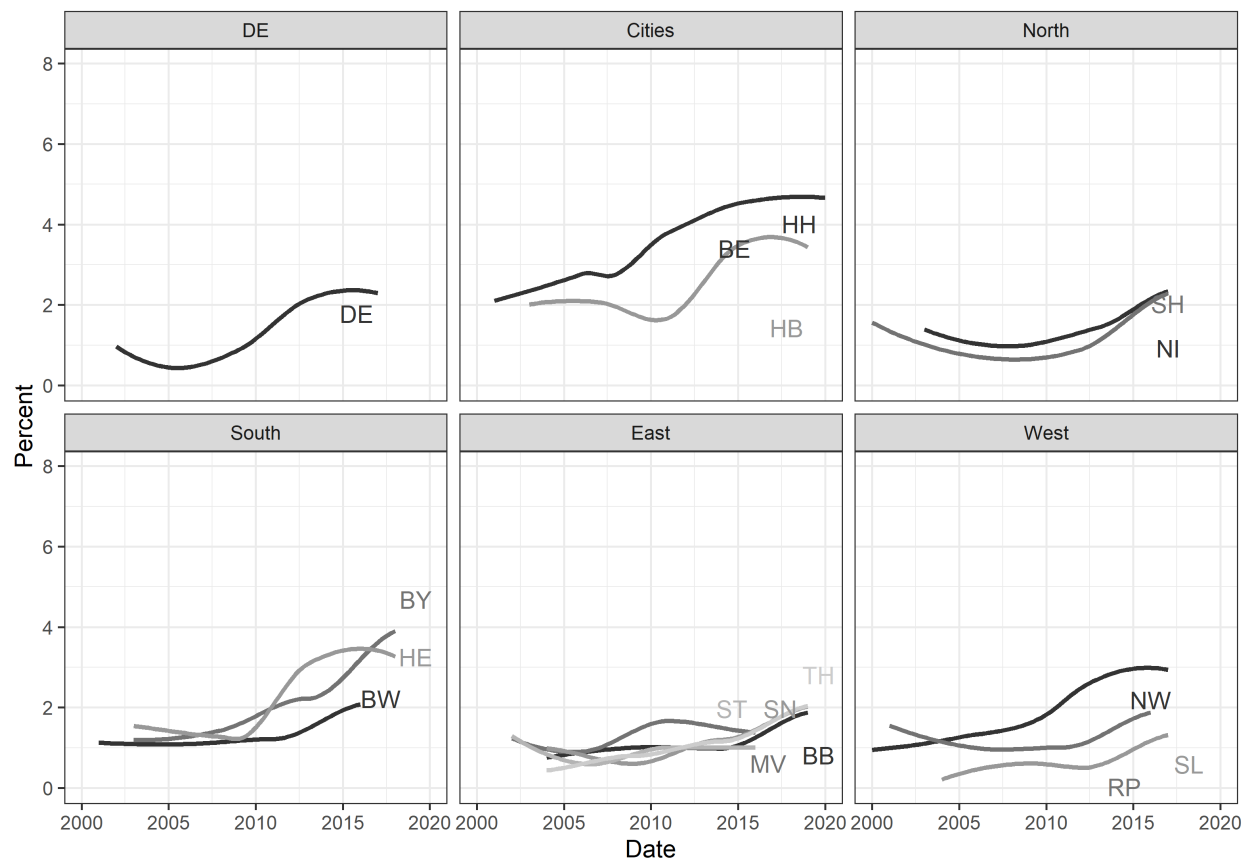
In this section, we present key descriptive findings on the role of housing in German party politics. For the period between 2000 and 2020, we analyze (1) the overall salience of housing as an electoral issue at both the national and regional levels, (2) the most prominent housing policies featured in parties' electoral manifestos, and (3) how housing priorities have varied over time, across regions, and between parties.

Housing policy salience

Focusing first on the overall salience of housing policy in German regional party manifestos, we observe a clear upward trend between 2000 and 2020. The average salience of housing per manifesto almost doubled from 1.3% to 2.3% of all sentences in a manifesto referencing housing.

Yet, there is also considerable variation in the trajectories over those twenty years. While the overall salience of housing was relatively similar across all regions around 2000, some *Länder* remained at this initial level, whereas others experienced a sharp increase. As shown in [Figure 6](#), housing salience remained somewhat constant over time in the eastern regions.

Figure 6: Overall housing policy salience over time and by region, 2000-2020.



Notes: Average percentage of sentences in electoral manifestos referring to housing by Land, nested in geographic regions. Loess curves. *Source:* Own data.

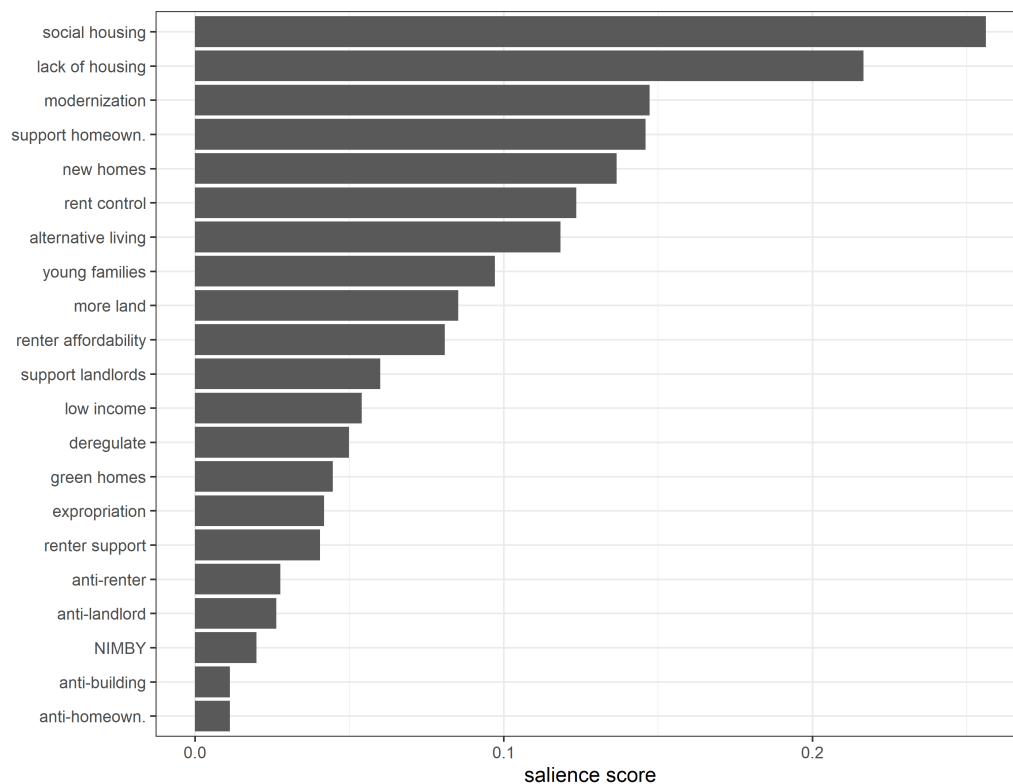
The strongest housing salience increases occurred in the city-states, as well as in Bavaria, Hesse, North Rhine-Westphalia, and Baden-Württemberg. These states are home to major cities like Munich, Frankfurt, and Stuttgart, where house prices have risen sharply. As the figure shows,

the ways in which national and regional parties feature housing in their electoral manifestos is far from uniform in the country; rather, we can observe considerable regional heterogeneity.

Which housing policies do German parties propose?

[Figure 7](#) disaggregates the overall salience score into individual housing policy categories. In the figure, the categories are ordered by their respective salience across all parties over the entire examined period, highlighting the following top six housing priorities: promoting social housing programs, addressing a lack of housing, proposing the modernization of homes (i.e., making homes more energy efficient or environmentally friendly), supporting new home construction, supporting homeownership subsidies, and proposing stronger rent controls. The figure thus shows that two renter-oriented policies—promoting social housing and rent control—and addressing a lack of housing are among the three most important categories. Subsidizing homeownership only ranks fourth, and it is the only prominent policy instrument primarily targeted at (prospective) owners.

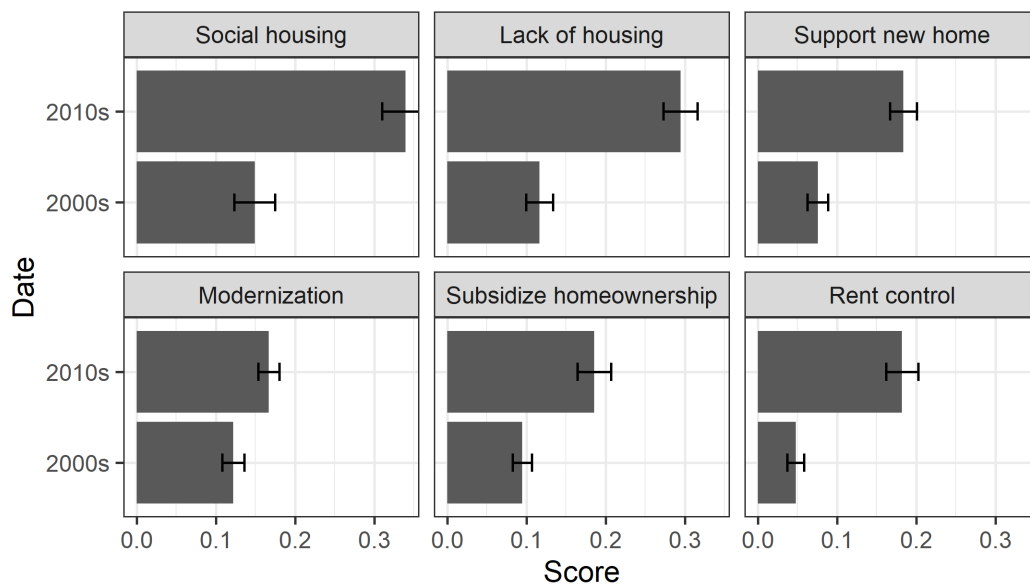
Figure 7: Salience by individual housing policy categories.



Notes: Average percentage of sentences in electoral manifestos referring to the categories. Loess curves. *Source:* Own data.

We will now have a closer look at the six most salient housing categories by comparing them across various dimensions. In terms of temporal changes, we can observe that the salience of all six housing policy categories increased significantly when comparing the 2000s to the 2010s. However, as Figure 8 shows, especially policies addressing renters' interests exhibit strong increases, with rent control standing out.

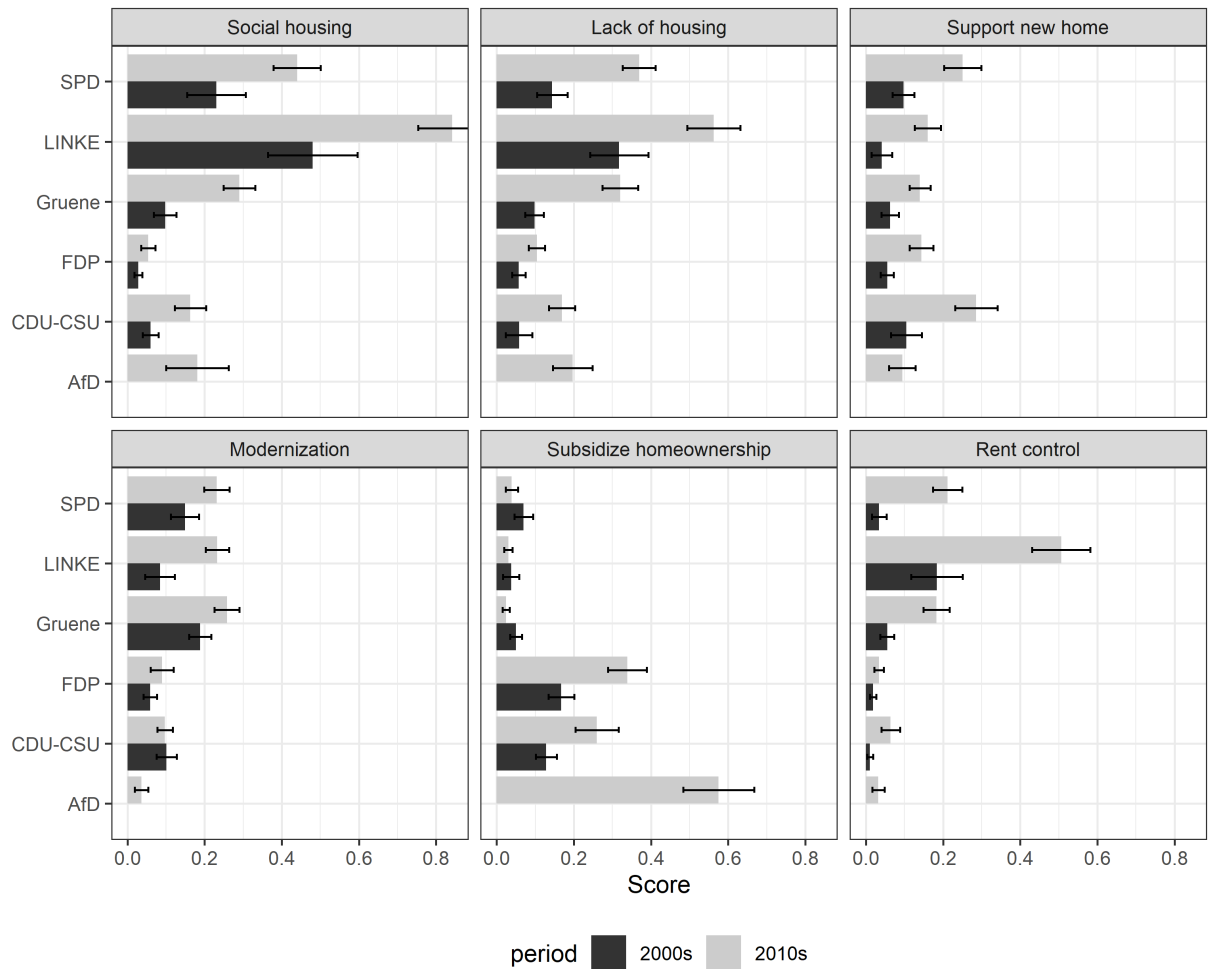
Figure 8: Salience of selected housing policy categories, 2000s and 2010s.



Notes: Average percentage of sentences in electoral manifestos referring to the categories by period. Loess curves.
Source: Own data.

In terms of German political parties' housing policy positions, [Figure 9](#) illustrates the salience of the six selected housing policy categories across political parties, comparing their prominence in the 2000s with the 2010s. In line with the ideological core of left-wing parties—the SPD, The Left Party, and the Greens—they place greater emphasis on strengthening social housing, addressing a lack of housing, and supporting rent controls compared to their right-leaning counterparts. It is also striking that the salience of these categories is significantly higher for The Left Party compared to the other parties. Support for the modernization of homes exhibits much less variation overall, though it remains notably higher among left-wing parties. Support for building new homes reveals minimal differences among parties, indicating at least moderate cross-party support on this position. However, significant differences among parties can be found in their support for homeownership. Market-liberal parties, and especially the AfD, are the most supportive of subsidizing homeownership, while left-leaning parties show much lower support.

Figure 9: Salience of selected policy categories by parties, 2000s and 2010s.



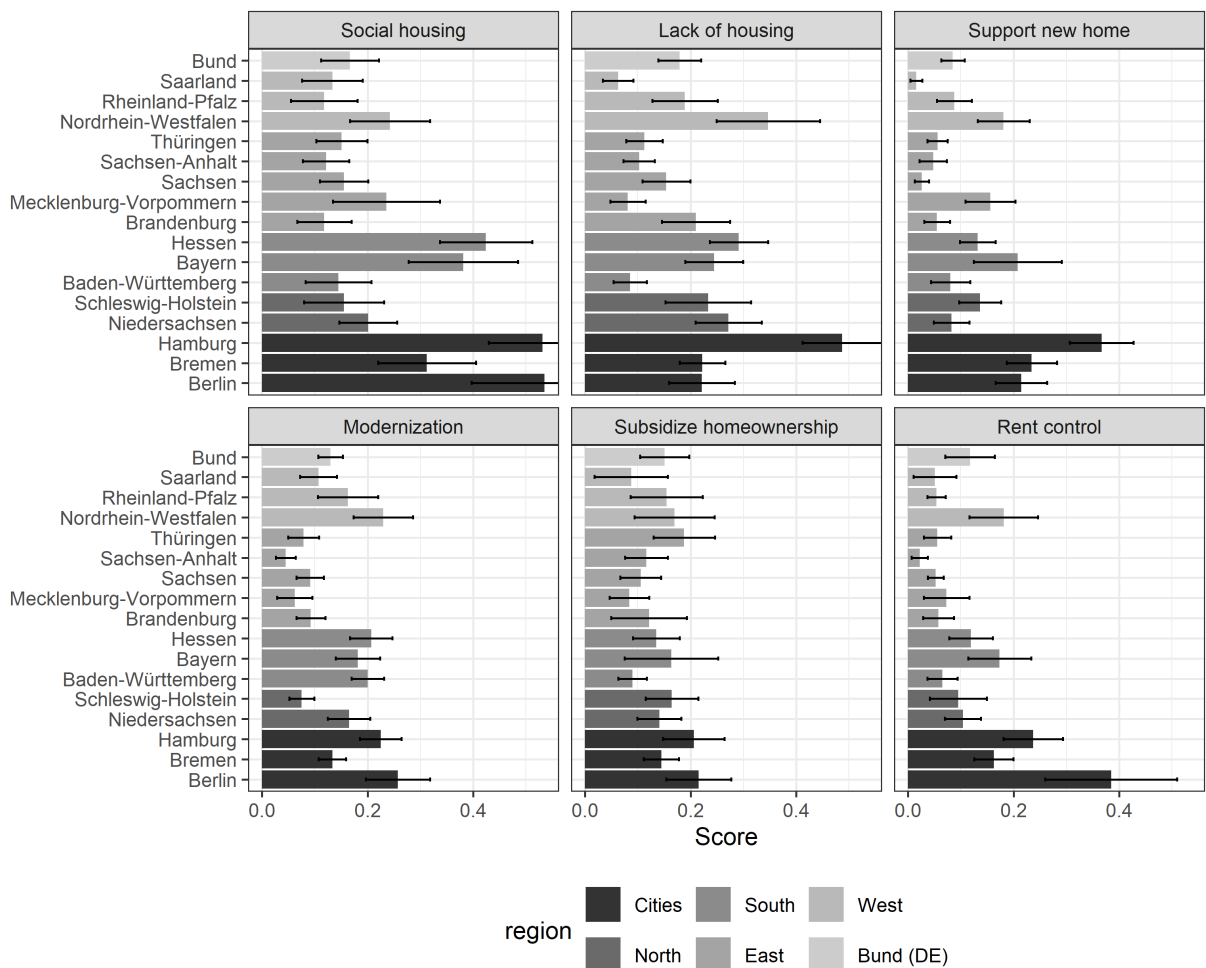
Notes: Average percentage of sentences in electoral manifestos referring to the categories by party and period. Loess curves. SPD = Social Democratic Party; LINKE = Left Party; Gruene = Green Party; FDP = Free Democratic Party; CDU-CSU = Christian Democratic Union/Christian Socialist Union, AfD = Alternative for Germany. *Source:* Own data.

The salience scores thus reveal a notable political polarization, with left-leaning parties placing greater emphasis on pro-renter policies, while right-leaning parties tend to privilege pro-homeownership policies. Figure 9 further indicates that these differences between left- and right-leaning parties have widened over time. Indeed, the rising salience of renter-oriented policies—that is, social housing and rent control—can be attributed to left-wing parties, whereas right-wing parties have been the driving force behind the increase in support for homeownership.

How do housing policy saliences differ geographically?

Finally, housing policy saliences vary significantly across regions and among the *Länder*. Figure 10 presents the average salience scores of the six housing categories at the federal and regional levels over the entire examined period. Interestingly, the salience of the six selected categories is lower in federal manifestos than in most *Länder* party manifestos. This difference is particularly pronounced for renter-oriented policies, which, along with the category of addressing a lack of housing, exhibit the greatest geographic variation. The city-states stand out with the highest average salience for social housing, rent control, and new homebuilding. Several larger regions with metropolitan areas—North Rhine-Westphalia, Bavaria, and Hesse—also show comparatively high salience scores for social housing, rent control, and addressing a lack of housing. In contrast, the eastern states (and the Saarland) exhibit the lowest salience for renter-oriented policies—i.e., rent control and social housing—and addressing a lack of housing, likely because housing unaffordability there has been less severe than in western regions. Similarly, eastern *Länder* exhibit relatively low salience scores for the modernization of homes, likely because much of the eastern housing stock was modernized during the post-unification years in the 1990s. Finally, there is relatively little variation across the *Länder* when it comes to homeownership support.

Figure 10: Salience of selected policy categories by region and federal level (2000-2020)



Notes: Average percentage of sentences in electoral manifestos referring to the categories by *Land* and region. Loess curves. *Source:* Own data.

Conclusion

In light of Germany’s persistent housing affordability crisis, politicians across the political spectrum have declared housing the “new social question.” Indeed, our findings show that policymakers have given housing much more electoral prominence during the 2010s compared to the 2000s. When pooling our data, the following housing priorities emerged as some of the most prominent in the German party landscape: social housing, addressing the lack of housing,

homebuilding, the modernization of homes, homeownership support, and rent control – all of which increased in salience during the 2010s.

However, there is considerable polarization in parties' preferred housing policy responses. While left-leaning parties tend to favor renter-oriented policies, right-leaning parties prioritize homeowner-oriented policies. In contrast, parties show greater uniformity on supporting new homebuilding and the modernization or renovation of older homes. Finally, there is also important regional variation. Housing is the least salient in eastern Germany, likely because it has remained comparatively more affordable than in many western regions and in the city-states, where housing salience is highest, particularly for renter-oriented policies. The salience of renter-oriented policies is also higher on average in the German regions than it is at the federal level.

As little scholarly research has focused on party politics in the housing arena, our dataset and findings offer systematic evidence on how German parties differ in their housing policy positions across regional and national elections. Recent news stories have especially focused on Berlin's intense housing policy debates on landlord expropriation and rent freezes, yet these debates are not representative for the rest of the country.²³ As our data shows, there is much regional variation in terms of housing salience, affordability, homeownership, and party positions, and the overall salience of landlord expropriation as a housing policy tool is relatively low. Even rent control is only the sixth-most salient housing policy issue in our dataset.

Finally, there are important limitations of our study, as party programs only reveal stated party preferences but not necessarily policy actions. While our dataset allows us to systematically map party positions across time and space, we cannot show policy outcomes. Future research might fruitfully investigate housing policy outcomes at the regional level to complement the literature on national housing policymaking in Germany and beyond.²⁴

¹ Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz (@Bundeskanzler), "Wohnen ist die entscheidende soziale Frage. Unser Ziel: Jährlich 400.000 klimafreundliche und bezahlbare Wohnungen bauen. In München konnte ich mit Mieterinnen," X, Oct 22, 2022, 12:00PM, <https://x.com/Bundeskanzler/status/1583850795014885377>.

² Annalena Baerbock, "Interview zur Bundestagswahl 2021," interview by Lars Eichert, Haus & Grund, <https://hausundgrund-brandenburg.de/interview-mit-annalena-baerbock>.

³ Caren Lay, *Wohnopoly: Wie die Immobilienspekulation das Land spaltet und was wir dagegen tun können* (Frankfurt: Westend Verlag, 2022).

⁴ Horst Seehofer, "Rede des Bundesministers des Innern, für Bau und Heimat, Horst Seehofer, zum Baulandmobilisierungsgesetz," Deutscher Bundestag, 28 January 2021, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/newsletter-und-abos/bulletin/rede-des-bundesministers-des-innern-fuer-bau-und-heimat-horst-seehofer--1846642>.

⁵ Daniel Föst, quoted in: Bayerischer Rundfunk, "Wohnkosten sind große soziale Frage unserer Zeit," *Kontrovers*, Video, 5:24, uploaded 7 February 2024, [https://www.ardmediathek.de/video/kontrovers/wohnen-sind-grosse-soziale-frage-unserer-](https://www.ardmediathek.de/video/kontrovers/wohnen-sind-grosse-soziale-frage-unserer-zeit/br/Y3JpZDovL2JyLmRIL3ZpZGVvLzcyYTY4NDcyLTg1YzQtdmM2ZS05ZDAwLTY1M2U1Y2IzNGIyMQ)

[zeit/br/Y3JpZDovL2JyLmRIL3ZpZGVvLzcyYTY4NDcyLTg1YzQtdmM2ZS05ZDAwLTY1M2U1Y2IzNGIyMQ](https://www.ardmediathek.de/video/kontrovers/wohnen-sind-grosse-soziale-frage-unserer-zeit/br/Y3JpZDovL2JyLmRIL3ZpZGVvLzcyYTY4NDcyLTg1YzQtdmM2ZS05ZDAwLTY1M2U1Y2IzNGIyMQ)
⁶ Friedrich Engels, "Zur Wohnungsfrage," in *Marx/Engels Werke* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1872/3), 213-287; Michael Harloe, *The People's Home? Social Rented Housing in Europe and America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Karl Christian Führer, *Mieter, Hausbesitzer, Staat und Wohnungsmarkt: Wohnungsmangel und Wohnungszwangswirtschaft in Deutschland 1914-1960* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1995).

⁷ We refer to the 16 *Bundesländer* having emerged after 1990 but also show some pre-1990 data for West Berlin and the 9 West German *Länder*.

⁸ Führer, *Mieter, Hausbesitzer, Staat und Wohnungsmarkt*; Karl Christian Führer, *Die Stadt, das Geld und der Markt* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016); Sebastian Kohl, *Homeownership, Renting and Society: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2017); Alexander Reisenbichler, "Entrenchment or retrenchment: the political economy of mortgage debt subsidies in the United States and Germany," *Comparative politics* 54, no. 4 (2022): 717-740, <https://doi.org/10.5129/001041522X16314500561319>; Alexander Reisenbichler, *Through the Roof: Housing, Capitalism, and the State in America and Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2025); Gertjan Wijburg and Manuel B. Aalbers, "The alternative financialization of the German housing market," *Housing studies* 32, no. 7 (2017): 968-989, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2017.1291917>.

⁹ Kenton Card, "From the streets to the statehouse: how tenant movements affect housing policy in Los Angeles and Berlin," *Housing Studies* 39, no. 6 (2024): 1395-1421, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2022.2124236>.

¹⁰ Statistisches Bundesamt, "Eigentumsquote," 19 February 2024 <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Wohnen/Tabellen/tabelle-eigentumsquote.html>

¹¹ Kohl, *Homeownership, Renting and Society*.

¹² Günter Albrecht, "Das Bremer Haus: Ein Sonderfall in der deutschen Baugeschichte um 1850," in *Massenwohnung und Eigenheim. Wohnungsbau und Wohnen in der Großstadt seit dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, eds. Axel Schildt and Arnold Sywottek (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 1988), 233-251.

¹³ Holger Lüning, *Das Eigenheim-Land: Der öffentlich geförderte Soziale Wohnungsbau in Niedersachsen während der 1950er Jahre* (Hannover: Hahn, 2005).

¹⁴ Werner Hegemann, *Das steinerne Berlin: Geschichte der größten Mietkasernenstadt der Welt* (Berlin: Kiepenheuer, 1930).

¹⁵ The Census of 1950 showed that 22% of West German households were doubling up in a single unit, which artificially inflated the homeownership rate estimated in 1950. Since the rate is calculated at the unit level, the 1950 figure is particularly overestimated in areas with serious housing shortages. At that time, household surveys reported ownership rates about 10 percentage points lower. As more housing was built in the 1950s, more households moved into rental apartments, which adjusted the homeownership downward. After the 1950s, the homeownership rate increased again, partly owing to growing prosperity, income, and household wealth in the country (Kohl, *Homeownership, Renting and Society*).

¹⁶ Kohl, *Homeownership, Renting and Society*; Reisenbichler, *Through the Roof*.

¹⁷ Again, there was considerable variation among the *Länder*: only Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate, and Saarland used their social housing funds to subsidize owner-occupied units to an equal or greater degree than rental units between 1957 and 1988 (Reisenbichler, *Through the Roof*).

¹⁸ Kohl, *Homeownership, Renting and Society*; Reisenbichler, *Through the Roof*.

¹⁹ Reisenbichler, *Through the Roof*.

²⁰ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Data Explorer, Analytical House price indicators," <https://data-explorer.oecd.org/>.

²¹ Alexander Reisenbichler and Kimberly J. Morgan, "From 'Sick Man' to 'Miracle:' Explaining the Robustness of the German Labor Market During and After the Financial Crisis 2008-09," *Politics & Society* 40, no. 4 (2012): 549-579, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329212461616>.

²² Alexander Reisenbichler, "The politics of quantitative easing and housing stimulus by the Federal Reserve and European Central Bank, 2008-2018," *West European Politics* 43, no. 2 (2020): 464-484, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2019.1612160>.

²³ Gillian Tett, "What investors should learn from a Berlin housing saga," *Financial Times*, 13 June 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/90fb4880-d444-480e-ac63-f409f7bbd5c7>.

²⁴ Kohl, *Homeownership, Renting and Society*; Reisenbichler, *Through the Roof*.