

The Political Preferences of Prospective Homeowners: Evidence from Canada

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Abstract

The political and social preferences of homeowners command significant attention from political scientists. Homeownership appears to make individuals more politically right-wing in their preferences over redistribution and increases their political activism. Comparatively little is known about renters. While often treated as a single group, our main argument is that renters are heterogeneous in their political preferences and behaviour. Our contribution is to differentiate between renters that would like to own, a group we call *prospective homeowners*, and those that would prefer to rent, or *satisfied renters*. We use a first-of-its-kind, nationally representative survey of Canadian renters to show that prospective homeowners are more right-wing than satisfied renters but are not more likely to vote for right-wing parties. Our findings suggest that many of the effects ascribed to homeownership may in fact predate the purchase of a house.

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1 Introduction

Are renters truly more politically left-wing than homeowners? A central argument in the literature on economic voting is that asset ownership makes individuals more right-wing, which is reflected in their political behaviour. A particularly salient asset appears to be the home, with homeownership being associated with both more right-wing views (Cabral and Hoxby 2012; Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2011) and support for right-leaning parties (Verberg 2000; Fischel 2005). While the political preferences of homeowners command significant attention, *renters* typically enter the picture merely as a foil. This is an important oversight in light of recent work suggesting that this central argument is flawed and not borne out in the data. Rather, both homeowners and renters hold complex, sometimes counterintuitive, views on housing markets and policy (Elmendorf et al. 2024, 2025). Fleshing out the views of renters, across developed markets, therefore can help us better understand whether the conventional asset-ownership theory of political behaviour holds, or whether housing tenure effects are more nuanced than previously assumed.

Omitting renters is a surprising gap in the political economy of developed countries for two reasons. One, rental markets are increasingly important across industrialized economies and the site of intense politics. In Canada, for example, about a third of Canadian families rent rather than own (Statistics Canada 2022), and the rise of rental prices in big cities has been one of the major economic (and therefore political stories) of the past decade, squeezing a sizable share of the population. Two, homeownership does not fall from the sky. For most renters, it entails significant, sustained financial effort and planning. A full accounting of the effects of homeownership on political behaviour must consider how the path towards ownership might

challenge the conceptual distinction between homeowners and renters. We examine this issue in Canada.

Our main argument is that renters are heterogeneous in their political behaviour. We differentiate between renters that, at any given moment, would like to own, a group we call *prospective homeowners*, and those that would prefer to rent, or *satisfied renters*. The standard patrimonial (economic) voting story is that homeowners are more right-wing than renters by virtue of being tied geographically and financially to their home – typically one of their largest financial assets. We think of prospective homeowners similarly. Prospective homeowners must save a significant amount of wealth and dedicate a substantial amount of time to realize their purchase. While they may not own a home just yet, their intention to buy and related saving behaviour make them holders of significant assets. As they prepare for a purchase, other social and behavioural factors kick in, pushing the ideological preferences of prospective homeowners away from those of satisfied renters and closer to those of actual homeowners. For example, prospective homeowners should demonstrate an aversion to increases in property tax rates because they anticipate these issues will affect them in short order. Along the same vein, the substantial financial and emotional effort of saving might make them less supportive of taxing the wealthy – viewing homeowners as more deserving. While we do not expect alignment on all issues between prospective homeowners and actual homeowners, our hypothesis is that prospective homeowners should tend to be more right-wing with regard to government intervention than satisfied renters.

Our goal is mainly theory building, not causal hypothesis testing. Though framed as a causal story about subtle shifts in political thinking, we rely on observational survey data to establish the empirical plausibility of our theories and hope that future work can fill in the gaps.

To begin, we show that there are persistent differences in the political behaviour of homeowners and renters using the Canadian Election Survey's 2019 wave. In line with the extant literature, homeowners are more right-wing than renters. Next, we deploy a first-of-its-kind survey of Canadian renters to probe into ideological heterogeneity among renters. Using simple statistical modelling techniques, we show that prospective homeowners are more right-wing than satisfied renters. However, these preferences do not translate into increased support for right-wing parties.

This study adds to the theoretical debates about the effects of homeownership on social and political beliefs. We join a limited body of work in political science theorizing about the political preferences of renters. Rather than consider how local market conditions change renters' political behaviour (Hankinson 2018), our focus is on how the home buying process generates differences in political behaviour among renters. Drawing on insights from patrimonial economic voting and political psychology (Case and Shiller 1988; Reid 2014; Salzman and Zwinkels 2017), we make the case that the relationship between homeownership and right-wing ideology and vote-choice predates, to some extent, the actual purchase of a home.

2 Homeowners as Politically Active Right-wing Citizens

Classical work in political economy going all the way back to Engels (1935) has long argued that property ownership shapes political behaviour and preferences in predictable ways. In more contemporary work, the logic is simple. Buying a home entails making a significant financial commitment that is anchored to a relatively illiquid asset. As such, most single homeowners are "stuck" financially (to their home) and geographically (to their neighborhood, city, state). These factors sharpen the trade-offs related to political participation. Because homeowners cannot (easily) vote with their feet, they must directly engage in the political

process should they want to pursue change. A main prediction, therefore, is that homeowners are more politically active than renters.

Existing work from housing scholars has mostly confirmed this.¹ Earlier work demonstrates that homeowners are more likely than renters to participate in local associations and political groups (Cox 1982; DiPasquale and Glaeser 1999). Homeowners are also more likely to be engaged in local politics and vote in national elections (Kingston et al. 1984; Rossi and Weber 1996; Herbert and Belsky 2008; McCabe 2016). Various studies from political scientists reach similar conclusions: homeownership leads to higher levels of political participation (Fischel 2005; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Verba et al. 1993). Recent studies using quasi-experimental designs in the US context provide evidence of a causal relationship between homeownership and participation in local elections, especially when questions about zoning laws are on the ballot (Hall and Yoder 2021; Yoder 2020).

Aside from limiting mobility, buying a house can shape political behaviour through its impacts on wealth. In the United States, buying a house remains one of the most important ways through which parents save money, invest it, and pass it on to their children (McCabe 2016; Di 2005; Turner and Luea 2009). Viewed as a wealth building endeavor, homeownership generates new predictions. The literature on patrimonial voting, for example, reasons that homeowners should be more right-wing than those that rent because more left policies, like expanding housing supply, can lower housing prices. Similarly, homeowners should be averse to policies that raise the costs of managing their investment, such as raising property taxes.

Generally, these differences between renters' and homeowner' political and policy preferences are well-documented in the empirical evidence. Scholars have shown that

¹ For an exception, see Engelhardt et al. (2010).

homeowners generally oppose increases in property taxes (Cabral and Hoxby 2012), which has indirect effects on voting through ideology and party identification (Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2011). In contrast, Brunner et al. (2015), for instance, show that renters are approximately 10 to 18 percentage points more likely than homeowners to favour a property tax increase over a sales tax increase to fund public services. As a result, local jurisdictions with higher shares of renters appear to spend more on local services, a phenomenon called the “renter effect” (Oates 2005). Scholars of public policy and urban studies have also confirmed that homeowners and renters express different attitudes on a variety of related issues (Oliver 2001), with renters significantly more pro-redistribution than homeowners (André and Dewilde 2016). Work on Canada supports this view. McGregor and Spicer (2016) argue that renters are less likely to vote in municipal elections and that they diverge sharply with homeowners on policies related to property. This may explain why homeowners are sometimes more likely than renters to support right-leaning political parties (Studlar et al. 1990; Verberg 2000; Fischel 2005), though this is not true across all contexts and might depend on the relative policy position of parties on housing policy (Hellwig and McAllister 2019).

At the same time, recent work challenges the notion that voters fully understand housing markets or policy. Elmendorf et al. (2025) find that large swaths of both renters and homeowners believe that a significant increase in housing supply would either not affect or would increase local housing prices. This suggests that the political motivations of homeowners are more complex than the traditional “homevoter hypothesis” would allow. Further, voters of all types show a strong preference for non-market interventions when presented with policy options to improve housing market affordability. Elmendorf et al. (2024) find broad public support for policies like rent control, demand-side subsidies, and restrictions on corporate investors, while

policies to increase the supply of market-rate housing are seen as less effective. Taken together, this new body of work suggests that the traditional homeowner-renter divide is blurry and that voters' policy preferences may be shaped more by heuristics and blame attribution than by sophisticated economic reasoning. This suggests a potential wedge between an individual's general ideological self-placement and their partisan choice, as specific policy beliefs may not align neatly with party platforms. This is consistent with cross-national work which suggests that as the "supply" or range of party's policy positions becomes more diverse or polarized, homeownership is more strongly associated with right-wing party support (Hellwig and McAllister 2019).

Market conditions, including changes in home value, can further complicate the relationship between homeownership and policy or political preferences. Looking at Sweden, Persson and Martinsson (2018) show that what matters is not homeownership per se but the changing *value* of the home. These findings are in line with scholarship in political psychology, which has noted that large changes in economic circumstance can alter preferences for redistribution (Peterson 2016; Doherty et al. 2006). Rising housing prices tend to improve homeowner's satisfaction with incumbents (Han and Shin 2021; Larsen et al. 2019), and increase homeowner's opposition to redistributive measures (Ansell 2014). Similarly, risky housing markets and significant drops in home prices seem to generate substantial backlash against the political system among homeowners. Studying this issue in Quebec, Foucault (2018) demonstrates that high-risk homeownership increases the probability of voting for a right-wing party. In contrast to earlier findings, André et al. (2018) show that in The Netherlands homeowners become more pro-welfare when their house value declines. This is nonetheless consistent with the notion that homeowners view their home as insurance against economic

shocks. Finally, an emerging literature links falling housing prices to the rise of far-right parties. Adler and Ansell (2020) have argued that low housing prices increase likelihood of supporting populist causes or parties. In sum, while scholars continue to conclude that homeownership makes individuals more likely to participate in politics, new work points to the fact that their politics seem more contextual than initially thought.

While much of the literature on homeownership politics focuses on the local level, our focus on federal partisanship and ideology is particularly relevant in the Canadian context. Housing policy in Canada is a multi-level affair. While provincial and local governments hold significant regulatory and planning authority (Farhan 2024; Ontario Housing Affordability Task Force 2022), the federal government plays a crucial role through tax incentives, mortgage insurance underwriting, and direct spending (Hulchanski 2006). The issue's national salience has grown substantially. In 2017, the federal government launched a ten-year, \$40 billion National Housing Strategy, and housing affordability has since become a top-tier priority for all major federal parties. In the most recent federal election, all major parties had detailed housing policy plans.²

3 The Preferences of Satisfied Renters and Prospective Homeowners

While the differences in political behaviour and preferences between renters and homeowners are well documented, we know much less about variation in the political behaviour and preferences of renters. While the literature may not explicitly assume renters are homogeneous, it has largely overlooked potential sources of heterogeneity within this group. If homeowners differ along some key dimensions on the degree of their political ideology and vote

² See for example, the CBC's summary of plans (CBC News 2025).

choice, it stands to reason that renters should too. In particular, the possibility that renters differ systematically in their ideology and partisanship remains underexplored.

Our contention is that renters differ with regard to their preference over homeownership. While prospective homeowners would like to own a home in the future, satisfied renters are perfectly content renting. As we show in the next section, these individuals are not only a non-negligible share of renters but sorting into satisfied “rentership” cannot be explained solely by socioeconomic characteristics or market conditions. Thus, this distinction is rooted not in the ability to enter the real estate market, but by true preferences over the possible returns (or burdens) of owning a home versus renting *at any given moment*. We are not distinguishing between people who will never want to own a home and those that always do, but rather conceptualize preferences over homeownership as fluid. In other words, we believe that many individuals that would prefer to rent right now will eventually become prospective homeowners. It is this potential transformation that is of theoretical interest to us—does wanting to enter the housing market flip a switch that partly shapes how individuals think about politics? Our tentative answer is yes. Becoming a prospective homeowner has social, behavioural, and financial implications that affect an individual’s political preferences and behaviour. We consider these in turn. (Of course, we recognize that the relationship between housing preference and ideology may be endogenous, as pre-existing political views could also influence the desire to own a home. We return to this challenge in our research design, but our primary goal here is to establish the theoretical grounds for distinguishing among renters.)

Studies across the developed world find that homeownership is associated with life satisfaction. In the United States, for example, homeownership is tightly linked to social aspirations and the American dream (Rohe and Stegman 1994). Likewise, it increases their sense

of security (Zavisca and Gerber 2016). In settings where renter protections are limited—like Canada—renters may find long-term stability and security in buying a home. But these benefits accrue only to homeowners. Prospective homeowners, on the other hand, are more likely to feel less satisfied and secure with regard to their renting situation. In contexts where home buying initiatives are robust, this might yield more sociotropic individuals. But in places where home prices are high and government support is limited, the opposite is likely to be true: individuals may find themselves more concerned with their own well-being, less likely to trust the government to provide support to buy a home, and generally more right-wing than satisfied renters.

On a cognitive level, becoming a prospective homeowner might shape political behaviour through two mechanisms. One, once renters commit to becoming homeowners they may find it difficult to back out. The path to homeownership begins with shifting consumer behaviour as renters increase their savings to make a down payment. As their savings increase, however, the stakes get higher as commitment bias kicks in. The more they save, the less likely they will deviate from actually buying a house, regardless of whether or not the current costs outweigh the benefits.³ This mechanism might operate through social channels as well. The more you advertise to friends and family that you are on the market for a house, the more likely you are to remain committed to buying a house. We would expect that in such cases prospective homeowners will share deep preferences with actual homeowners on issues like property taxes.

Two, prospective homeownership requires exercising a large amount of self-restraint in terms of saving because most people tend to value immediate returns to delayed ones, i.e. present bias (O'Donoghue and Rabin 1999; Goda et al. 2020). In high-cost housing markets, this bias

³ While renters save, too, their money is not constrained by a direct future purchase.

may be particularly acute since the opportunity cost of saving is higher than in lower-cost markets. People engaging in something difficult may value the efforts of those that came before them more highly. As such, they may be more likely to support policies that benefit the wealthy, thinking of them as more deserving. Together these biases tend to suggest that prospective homeowners, as they start down the path of saving for a down payment, will be more likely to identify with homeowners, shifting their views towards more right-wing positions.

As to the financial implications of prospective homeownership, we borrow from the literature on patrimonial voting. At its core, the patrimonial voting story is one of wealth accumulation. Property ownership shapes ideology and voting behaviour because homeowners have a significant amount of wealth invested into houses. As holders of significant wealth, homeowners may find themselves less reliant on social services, less supportive of property tax and redistribution more specifically, and more likely to engage in activities that raise housing or sustain housing prices (NIMBY activities, for instance). A similar process should be at work with regard to prospective homeowners. To be able to buy a house, these prospective homeowners must engage in the same type of wealth accumulation that we presume makes homeowners more politically active and right-wing. Specifically, to buy a house, homeowners must save (or otherwise acquire) a substantial amount of capital.⁴

This is surely the case in Canada. According to the National Bank of Canada (2021), the average home price across Canada is roughly \$650,000. Assuming, a minimum down payment of

⁴ We are not dismissing the recent work discussed above that challenges the patrimonial voting story, but instead we are focused on articulating a theoretical rationale for political differences among renters based on their desire to own. We leave to others the question of differences in specific housing policy preferences among renters.

10%, the average prospective homeowner will have to save about \$65,000 to be eligible to buy a house- a considerable amount to hold in cash. From a political psychology perspective, this substantial wealth accumulation should lead to distinguishable political effects; namely as wealth increases, we should note changes in ideological self-placement and partisanship (Peterson 2016; Doherty et al. 2006.) It follows that these prospective homeowners should be concerned with protecting their growing investment with implications for their support for taxation and redistribution.

Of course, prospective homeowners are not homeowners. This potentially closes off some pathways to changes in political preferences. To give an example, whereas homeowners are physically grounded by their investment, prospective homeowners are not and could potentially pick up and leave one housing market (and political unit) for the next with relative ease. We believe, however, that a nontrivial share of prospective homeowners may have strong attachment to their communities due to work or family commitments. These strong social attachments should increase their political activism to ensure, for instance, that their future property values do not plummet. In short, social and political investments may limit how mobile prospective homeowners truly are. Other differences will remain, of course. Our point is that to the degree to which wealth considerations shape political participation and political attitudes, they should push in the same direction for homeowners and prospective homeowners, and that this distinguishes the latter from satisfied renters.

We also note that this process is compatible with the “folk economics” framework (Elmendorf et al. 2025). While the financial discipline and future-oriented mindset required to save for a home may shift an individual’s general ideological disposition on matters of wealth and redistribution, their specific beliefs about *housing policy* may still be shaped by the same

intuitive heuristics that affect the general public. An individual can begin to see themselves as a future asset-holder deserving of tax breaks while still believing that rent control is the most effective way to ensure affordability, or that developers are to blame for high prices. This suggests that a shift in ideology *may not* neatly map onto a shift in partisan allegiance.

Furthermore, the link between a changing ideology and federal vote choice is not straightforward. On the one hand, comparative research suggests that asset ownership is more strongly associated with right-wing party support when the range of party policy positions are more polarized (Hellwig and McAllister 2019). In Canada, research suggests that voters' partisanship has become more strongly associated with redistributive policy positions in recent decades (Kevins and Soroka 2018), and that parties have also become increasingly polarized in their policy positions during the same period (Johnston 2023). Together, this would suggest that as Canadian prospective homeowners become more ideologically right-wing, they would be more likely to support right-wing parties. On the other hand, a voter's final ballot choice is the result of a complex calculation weighing a host of policy issues, candidate evaluations, long-standing partisan loyalties, and even strategic voting (Gidengil 2022; Rivard and Lockhart 2022); housing is but one factor among many.⁵In a federal system like Canada's, this link is weakened further, as voters may not attribute responsibility for housing policy solely to the federal government (see e.g., Cutler 2008; Mosannef et al. 2025). Blame or credit can be assigned to provincial or municipal actors, complicating the connection between an individual's housing concerns and their federal partisan choice.

⁵ Much of this literature also indicates that the politics of vote choice may be fundamentally different in Quebec.

We derive two hypotheses from this argument. First, because we think of prospective homeowners and homeowners as analytically equivalent with respect to wealth accumulation:

H_1 : Renters that express a preference for homeownership should be more right-wing than those that express a preference for renting.

While some suggest that the effect of homeownership extends to party preferences (André et al. 2018), we note that renters and homeowners are different in their preferences over housing prices. As prices increase, prospective homeowners will be increasingly priced out of the market. Thus, while renters who are prospective homeowners may be more right-wing on average along some dimensions, they are not necessarily fully right-wing and might be supportive of certain policies that are more in line with redistribution. For example, as they still need to enter the market, they may be more likely to support policies like rent control or housing subsidy programs that are broadly popular among the public (Elmendorf et al. 2024).

While a shift toward a more right-wing ideology seems plausible (H_1), we do not expect this to translate directly into increased support for right-wing parties. The link between a general ideological shift and a specific vote choice is attenuated by several factors. As noted, voters' final ballot decisions are multi-determined, influenced by a range of issues beyond housing, and in a federal system, voters may not attribute housing policy responsibility to the national government. Moreover, the "folk economic" beliefs individuals hold about housing (Elmendorf et al. 2025, 2024) may lead a prospective homeowner to adopt a more right-wing worldview on wealth and taxation while simultaneously supporting non-market housing interventions not typically associated with right-wing parties. Therefore:

H_2 : Renters that express a preference for homeownership should not be more likely to vote for right-wing parties.

4 Context: Renters in Canada

Before turning to our empirical analysis, we provide context on the political behaviour and attitudes of Canadian renters using data from the 2019 Canadian Election Study (CES) (Stephenson et al. 2020). Our task is to show that Canadian homeowners and renters conform broadly to the existing literature's expectations.

We begin by examining whether renters are more left-wing than homeowners using the 2019 CES data. We identify respondents that say they (or a member of their household) own a residence and code them as homeowners. After excluding non-responses, we code the remaining respondents as renters. We then identify political views. To do so we use self-reported data from CES documenting respondent's placement on a left to right scale, ranging from 0 to 10, where higher values indicate closer alignment with right-wing views. Figure 1 shows the distribution of responses for renters and homeowners ($n = 14,067$). We note the mean of each distribution with a vertical line. The mean shows that renters (mean = 4.8) are more left-wing than homeowners (mean = 5.2), and that such a difference is statistically significant at conventional levels ($p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$). Moreover, the distributions themselves are statistically distinguishable from each other ($p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$). At the same time, Figure 1 shows that there is substantial heterogeneity across groups. A great deal of homeowners *and* renters identify as having fairly right-wing views. In other words, while homeowners may be, on average, more right-wing than renters, quite a few renters are *more* right-wing than some homeowners.

[Figure 1 about here]

Next, we examine differences in political behaviour between homeowners and renters. About 22.31% (1,681) of homeowners reported attending at least one political meeting within

the last 12 months, compared to 20.13% (490) of renters.⁶ We also explore differences in voting by identifying respondents that say they have voted (in an advance poll) or are certain to vote in the pre-election survey, who we code as *certain voters*. After removing those who say they are ineligible to vote or prefer not to respond to the question, all remaining responses are coded *uncertain voters*. Canadian renters and homeowners behave in accordance with what the literature has described in other settings: homeowners are more likely to be *certain voters*, or 83.76% (20,058) compared to *certain voters* among renters at 70.98% (7,467).⁷

[Figure 2 about here]

Finally, we assess whether renters are more likely to vote for more right-wing parties. Figure 2 shows vote choice among six national Canadian parties for the entire electorate grouped by homeownership. Substantial differences are apparent. Homeowners are more likely to vote for the CPC than renters, while renters are more likely to vote for the NDP (and to some extent the GPC). Note that the share of renters voting for the CPC is not trivial; 24.2% of renters vote for the CPC. If we add voters for the PPC, 26.7% of renters vote for right-wing parties.

To summarize, in line with the existing literature, Canadian renters appear to be on average more left-wing than homeowners and less politically engaged. They are also less likely to vote for the CPC than homeowners. But these averages obscure quite a bit of variation in political views and engagement *among* renters. Many renters have right-wing views, are fairly

⁶ The weighted percentages are 21.7% of homeowners and 20.3% of renters. The Chi-square for unweighted sample, $p = 0.03$ and for weighted, $p = 0.23$.

⁷ The weighted percentages are 82.3% of homeowners and 68.3% of renters. The Chi-square for unweighted sample, $p = 0.00$ and for weighted, $p = 0.00$.

active across political activities, and vote for right-wing parties. Our argument about prospective homeowners can explain this heterogeneity.

5 Research Design

To assess the relationship between prospective homeownership and political beliefs and behaviour, we collect a national survey of Canadian renters. Our focus is on establishing the plausibility of our argument. Studying prospective homeownership is difficult because people are not sorted randomly into preferences for homeownership. Rather, these preferences are built on contextual circumstances, including resources available to individuals as well as their pre-existing levels of political behaviour (Manturuk et al. 2017). Prospective homeownership may very well be endogenous to ideology and vote choice. Thus, we can make no causal claims. Still existing work provides some guidance on how to proceed. We know, for example, that ownership itself is determined in part by resource accumulation, which is in turn dictated by income. Similarly, age and family composition are key determinants the choice to buy a home. Our strategy, therefore, revolves around modeling this relationship by adjusting for a host of plausible confounders. We leave to future work the task of untangling the causal relationship.

[Table 1 about here]

5.1 Data

Our sample consists of 1,845 self-identified renters who responded to our housing survey administered by Vox Pop Labs during the last week of January and first week of February 2020 (before the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Canada). Participants were aged 19 or older and Canadian residents. All participants were drawn from the Vox Pop Labs online respondent panel,

which contains approximately 650,000 panelists in Canada.⁸ The dataset used for the analysis consists of two components that were linked, 1) 37 questions about experiences and preferences regarding housing collected in January 2020, and 2) socio-demographic questions and political preferences from the respondents' initial participation in the Vox Pop Labs election survey conducted previously. We also use the respondent's forward sorting area (FSA) to code respondents who live in one of the four largest cities (Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver) or elsewhere. Table 1 includes descriptive statistics for our sample.⁹ The sample allows us to generalize about Canadian renters willing to speak on their political opinions and behaviours.

5.2 Dependent Variables

We have two dependent variables. The first is *ideological orientation*. We measure this concept by asking respondents to place themselves on an 11-point left (0) to right (10) scale. The resulting measure has a mean of 3.16 and a standard deviation of 1.99. This implies that most of the sample is fairly left-wing in orientation. The distribution of answers among respondents can be seen in Figure 3.

[Figure 3 about here]

⁸ No remunerative incentives were offered to participants. Potential participants were invited by email and on the Vox Pop Labs survey panel dashboard to participate in a survey study about housing. Vox Pop is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting civic engagement and informed dialogue through scientifically rigorous survey-based applications. Approved by McMaster REB, approval #2360.

⁹ After listwise deletion, we analyze a sample of 1,573 and 1,533 respondents over the age of 20 years old.

Second, we measure right-wing vote choice. To do so, we ask respondents whether they voted and exclude those that did not or those that spoiled their ballot. We code those that voted for the CPC or PPC as *right-wing voters*, given that these parties are generally considered to align with traditional, right-wing values. All other respondents casting valid ballots are the reference category. Roughly 7.63% of our sample are right-wing voters.¹⁰ The unweighted percentage of renters in our renter survey who reported voting for either the CPC or PPC is much lower than what renters reported in the 2019 CES. For this reason, in the statistical analyses that follow, we present weighted results in the main text.

5.3 Independent Variable

Our primary independent variable of interest is prospective homeownership. We conceptualize prospective homeowners as renters who are oriented towards future ownership, in contrast to those content with renting. We operationalize this concept by asking respondents:

“Right now, would you prefer to own your home rather than rent?”

Respondents that say they would prefer to own are coded as *prospective homeowners*, whereas those that prefer to rent are coded as *satisfied renters*.

We acknowledge that this question measures a preference or aspiration for ownership, rather than a concrete, active plan to purchase a home. However, we argue this is a valid and conceptually appropriate measure for our argument, which posits that the political effects of homeownership begin with the psychological and social reorientation that precedes active

¹⁰ In the Supplementary Materials, we repeat our analyses for CPC voters, who are 6.26% of the estimation sample.

financial planning.¹¹ Our goal is to capture the crucial segment of renters whose outlooks are shaped by the aspiration of future ownership, even if they are currently constrained by material circumstances.

5.4 Estimation Strategy

We estimate a series of simple statistical models on our observational data to assess the plausibility of our arguments. First, we estimate the relationship between prospective homeownership (PH) and ideological self-placement. The estimating equation is:

$$y_i = \gamma PH + X_i\beta + u_i \quad (1)$$

¹¹ Our thinking relies on three arguments. First, our measure effectively identifies the population from which future buyers will emerge. A preference to own is a necessary precondition for a plan to purchase. External data confirms a significant overlap. For instance, real estate market analyses consistently show that the vast majority of renters who intend to buy also prefer ownership. See Royal LePage (2024). Second, the 58.3% of our sample who prefer to own aligns with historical data from agencies like the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), which show a similar proportion of young renters eventually transitioning to ownership. This suggests our measure captures a group with a realistic potential to become homeowners. Third, our own survey data indicate respondents interpret this preference pragmatically. The top reasons cited for not yet purchasing are financial barriers like insufficient savings and local affordability (see Supplementary Materials, Table S7), not a lack of desire. This suggests that for most respondents, the preference for ownership is not an abstract ideal but a tangible goal constrained by material factors. Taken together, our operationalization identifies a group based not on an ideological attachment to property, but on a concrete aspiration whose political effects we aim to uncover.

where y_i is ideological self-placement, PH is an indicator for whether the respondent would prefer to own a home rather than to rent, \mathbf{X}_i is a vector of adjustment variables, and u_i is an error term. We estimate this as a linear equation with raking weights¹² and with fixed effects for province or region.¹³

Next, we estimate the relationship between prospective homeownership (PH) and vote choice in the last election (2019). The estimating equation is:

$$y_i = \gamma PH + \mathbf{X}_i\beta + u_i \quad (2)$$

where y_i is voting for either the CPC or PPC in fall 2019 for respondent i , PH is an indicator for whether the respondent would prefer to own a home rather than to rent, \mathbf{X}_i is a vector of adjustment variables, and u_i is an error term. Because the dependent variable is binary, we estimate this equation via logit with fixed effects for province or region.

¹² Raking weights were constructed using population marginals for renters from the population adjusted 2016 Canadian Census Statistics Canada (2023) (province or region, binary gender, age, education) and the 2019 CES (for renters' vote choice). Weights are trimmed to exclude the 7.5% most extreme weights, which are approximately two to three times the mean weight. We also estimate the models of political ideology using ordered logistic regression, and these results are in Table S4.

¹³ Provincial region is coded into five categories: British Columbia, Quebec, the Prairies, Ontario, and the Eastern provinces. Northern Territories were excluded due to too few respondents.

6 Results

6.1 Ideological Self-Placement

Our analysis finds support for H_1 . Table 2 examines the association between self-placement on an ideological scale and prospective homeownership across three models. Model 1 adjusts for age, education, gender, and region, whereas Model 2 further adjusts for income. Model 3 includes vote choice in the 2019 election. We think this variable might introduce post-treatment bias since becoming a prospective homeowner makes individuals both more right-wing and possibly more likely to vote for a right-wing party (in our hypothesized causal ordering.) If true, the inclusion of vote choice would absorb some of the effect of prospective homeownership on ideology, attenuating the coefficient's magnitude. For these reasons, we de-emphasize Model 3.¹⁴

[Table 2 about here]

Across all models, the relationship between ideology and prospective homeownership is positive and statistically significant at the $p < 0.01$ level. Since higher values on the self-placement scale indicate more right-wing views, the models suggest that prospective homeowners are more right-wing than satisfied renters. This relationship is fairly consistent

¹⁴ We do not believe the statistical significance of the estimates suffer from high collinearity, except perhaps between ideology and vote choice. See Table S2 for a correlation matrix and Table S3 for variance inflation factors for the models in Table 2.

across model specifications though, as expected, the magnitude of the effect is diminished in the model adjusting for vote choice.¹⁵

[Figure 4 about here]

How large are these effects in substantive terms? Figure 4 plots the predicted effects of prospective homeownership on ideology for both satisfied renters and prospective homeowners. Predictions are adjusted for age, education, province, income, and sex.¹⁶ While both groups are fairly left-wing, with scores well under mid-point of 5 on the 0-10 scale, we expect that prospective homeowners will be notably more right-wing than satisfied renters. We estimate the typical satisfied renter would take on a value of approximate 3.41 on the ideological scale, versus 3.88 for prospective homeowners, nearly half a point on the ideology scale, a non-negligible increase.

6.2 Vote Choice

Table 3 examines the association between voting for right-wing parties (the PPC and CPC) and prospective homeownership across three models.¹⁷ Model 1 adjusts for age, education,

¹⁵ See the Supplementary Materials, Table S8 for unweighted regression results, which are similar.

¹⁶ Other covariates are set at their means or modal category: under 30 years old, 1.65 mean education, British Columbia, no kids, not in Vancouver, a man, and mean income of 6.54.

¹⁷ In the Supplementary Materials, Table S9 presents results for CPC voters, and Table S10 presents results for right-wing parties using estimation methods appropriate for rare events (Heinze and Schemper 2002). We also include in SM Table S6 results for regressing self-reported voting on prospective homeownership, using penalized rare-events logistic regression estimates.

sex, region, and location, whereas Model 2 further adjusts for income. Model 3 includes left-to-right self-placement. Across all models, the relationship between voting for right-wing parties and prospective homeownership is positive but not statistically significant at conventional levels. This finding is consistent with our theoretical expectation that a general shift in ideology does not necessarily translate into a change in vote choice. Our argument there was that this would be attributed to the multiple determinants of voting, of which housing policy is but one possibly small component.¹⁸ Figure 5 presents these results in terms of predicted probabilities adjusting again for age, education, region, city size, income, and sex. Whereas we would expect satisfied renters to vote for right-wing parties with a 0.23 probability, we expect prospective homeowners to do so with a 0.27-0.28 probability. The magnitude of the difference is not statistically significant, likely due to significant variation within both groups. While prospective homeowners might be more right-wing, this does not directly translate into support for right-wing parties.

[Table 3 about here]

Together, the preceding results provide evidence consistent with both of our hypotheses. Prospective homeownership is associated with a more right-wing ideological self-placement among renters, but this does not translate into a significantly higher probability of voting for right-wing parties. The direction and significance of the control variables are broadly consistent with what is known about political ideology and vote choice in Canada.

[Figure 5 about here]

¹⁸ In the Supplemental Materials, Table S5, we regress LPC vote on prospective homeownership and find no significant relationship.

6.3 Additional Robustness Checks

In addition to the alternative measures and estimation methods noted above, we assess the possibility that specific housing markets are driving the results. We collect data on average income by FSA and merge it to our data. First, our results do not change when adjusting for these characteristics.¹⁹ Second, we also interact average FSA income with prospective homeownership and find no heterogeneous effects by FSA income levels.²⁰ Third, we assess whether respondents in certain high-priced cities are responsible for the overall effects. To do so, we rely on PadMapper’s Canadian Rent Report which identifies the top 10 most expensive cities in Canada to rent a one-bedroom apartment using their own data. We use these data to operationalize high rent markets in different ways (Top 2, 3, 4, 5, and 10 most expensive cities) and interact such a term with PH.²¹ We find no evidence that the effect of PH on ideological self-placement or vote choice depends on high rent markets, and that our results remain the same when adjusting for these terms.

7 Implications

The political science literature on housing has largely ignored potential heterogeneity in the political preferences and behaviour of renters. This paper addresses this gap by considering how the path to becoming a homeowner—what we call *prospective homeownership*—shapes the politics of renters. Our main argument is that renters are heterogeneous in their political preferences and behaviour. First, we make an analytic distinction between prospective

¹⁹ See Supplementary Materials, Table S11.

²⁰ See Supplementary Materials, Table S12.

²¹ See Supplementary Materials, Tables S13 and S14.

homeowners and satisfied renters. We argue that prospective homeowners share political preferences, and therefore ideological self-placement, with actual homeowners and that their preferences distinguish them from satisfied renters. Using a unique survey of Canadian renters, our evidence supports this argument.

Our findings have important implications for the literature on housing. Our argument is built around the notion that homeownership, and specifically the path to homeownership, is a continuous process shaping social and political identity, not a binary treatment that cleanly distinguishes those with a house and those without. More specifically, we demonstrate that the literature overstates political differences between prospective and current homeowners. Our key finding that the path to homeownership is associated with a more right-wing ideology but not with right-wing vote choice highlights that political identity is not monolithic. This aligns with a context where recent research reveals that the political beliefs of both groups are far more complex and internally contradictory than previously assumed (Elmendorf et al. 2025, 2024) and vote choice may be shaped by party policy positions on housing or other assets (Hellwig and McAllister 2019).

This paper also makes an important empirical contribution. Much of the literature on housing in North America focuses on the United States. While some authors do explore these issues in Canada, they do not typically rely on national survey data to support their claims.²² We hope our data and findings can help inform current and future debates about these issues in Canada, and through them, influence the larger comparative literature on housing. Other scholars can use our approach to test the degree to which our claims travel to other countries.

²² For example, McGregor and Spicer (2016) use administrative data.

Our findings also raise a compelling puzzle when viewed through the lens of recent American scholarship. The “folk economics” literature suggests that US voters are highly skeptical that building more homes will improve affordability (Elmendorf et al. 2025). Yet, in the contemporary Canadian political landscape, federal parties across the ideological spectrum have converged on a message emphasizing the need to “build more homes.” We suggest that the political appeal of increased construction may resonate with parties because they believe it signals to voters that they are serious about government action to make housing available. In a political environment where voters tend to blame actors like developers for high prices (Elmendorf et al. 2025), a pledge to build might resonate with voters regardless of their specific beliefs about market effects. This would explain why parties emphasize the tangible act of building without making the politically risky and potentially less credible promise of explicitly lowering prices.

We leave various questions unsettled. Does the effect of homeownership on political behaviour wane over time? Does it peak as families grow older and become more likely to retire, or when they become more numerous and outgrow the home? What do we make of homeowners refinancing their homes, or on the market to sell or buy a house? Our work pushes the comparative housing literature forward by suggesting that answers to these questions are likely to depend on what analytical groups are uncovered. When it comes to housing, our paper shows that heterogeneous effects do exist, that they deserve theorizing, and that future work should continue to untangle this relationship further.

Endnotes

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