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To cite this article: Michael Manville (2021): Liberals and Housing: A Study in Ambivalence, Housing Policy Debate, DOI: [10.1080/10511482.2021.1931933](https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2021.1931933)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2021.1931933>



Published online: 12 Aug 2021.



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Liberals and Housing: A Study in Ambivalence

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ABSTRACT

Do political liberals support or oppose zoning changes that allow more market-rate development? I use survey data from California and show that liberals are ambivalent. The ambivalence is explained in part by homeownership, which is associated with opposition to new housing of all kinds, even as it has little influence on attitudes about other policies. Even controlling for ownership, however, I find that self-identified liberals remain ambivalent about new development, never supporting it as much as they support more stereotypically liberal policies, and opposing it outright when reminded that enabling new housing might require less regulation, particularly environmental regulation. In contrast, liberals strongly and consistently support spending on subsidized affordable housing. The results together suggest that in supply-constrained cities with liberal electorates, the political calculus is unfavorable to new housing. Ownership injects some conservatism into development politics; liberal ideology could provide a counterweight to that conservatism, but that counterweight might be blunted if development also requires deregulation.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 18 December 2020
Accepted 15 May 2021

KEYWORDS

zoning; deregulation;
liberalism; public opinion;
homeownership

Is upzoning a liberal or conservative policy? Suppose a supply-constrained city changes its land-use rules to allow more development. The city might allow more height or density, ease its use restrictions, or streamline its permit process. The results of these actions could vary, and so too could interpretations of them. Depending on one's frame of reference, a city that loosens its zoning could be seen as encouraging entrepreneurship, letting its neighborhoods physically and visibly change, embracing deregulation, devaluing its existing property stock, increasing its land value, and/or increasing affordability and opportunity—if increasing the housing supply opens the city to more people and lowers overall prices. Some of these interpretations are stereotypically liberal (embracing change, enhancing affordability), and some stereotypically conservative (deregulating markets, encouraging entrepreneurship). The ideological contours of such prosupply policies are thus ambiguous.¹

This article examines those contours, with a particular focus on how political liberals view zoning and development. I emphasize liberals because America's crisis of housing affordability is concentrated in metropolitan areas with liberal governments and electorates. Cities in these areas often take strongly progressive positions on issues like gun control, labor, immigration, and the environment (Barber, 2013), but also tend to stringently regulate their land (Kahn, 2011).² Observers have tied these strict land-use regulations to the high housing prices, but efforts to change the regulations and allow more housing have created heated disagreement among liberals themselves. Although some liberals see zoning changes as essential to a progressive city, others see them as antithetical.

California, home to the nation's most expensive housing markets and some of its most liberal cities, epitomizes this situation, but similar dynamics appear to be at work in many expensive coastal areas (Capps, 2019; Dillon, 2018; Klein, 2021; McCordle 2018; Rainey, 2018; Sheyner, 2020). Journalists have noted this housing-based internal dissent among liberals, but academics have thus far given it little scrutiny. My aim is to help fill this gap: to determine whether political liberals are in fact suspicious of development, and if so, to shed some light on why.

I start from the premise that political attitudes are driven by some combination of abstract values and material self-interest (Chong, Citrin, & Conley, 2001). Based on this premise, I consider two potential reasons for liberal concern about development. The first, based on material self-interest, is homeownership. Homeowners, although they may not see themselves as such, are capitalists: in the market for housing services, they control the means of production.³ Residential structures are America's largest single source of physical capital, and the returns to this capital, in the form of implied payments to homeowners, account for 12% of the U.S. gross domestic product (Vollraith, 2020).⁴ No capitalist likes competition, so the typical homeowner should, all else being equal, be suspicious of new housing. Liberal homeowners might therefore find themselves cross-pressured, holding abstract ideals about affordability and opportunity that sit in tension with their material interests. Homeownership could make liberals act conservatively in development-related local affairs (Marble & Nall, *forthcoming*).

Ownership can only cross-pressure liberals, however, if liberals own homes and believe new market-rate development is consistent with their ideology. If either of these conditions is not satisfied, then homeownership cannot fully explain liberal opposition, and liberal opposition would imply that at least some liberals believe new development is inconsistent with their beliefs—that it is illiberal. This ideological antipathy is the second reason I consider for liberal opposition.

Among liberals, such ideological antipathy to new development might arise because new development, at least in supply-constrained places, would require deregulation, and deregulation is more a conservative than a liberal virtue. Concern about deregulation might occur through some combination of two channels. First, liberals might not believe deregulation promotes liberal ends: they might see it less as a path to affordability and more as a giveaway to developers. Second, even if liberals conceded that deregulation could achieve liberal ends (e.g., make housing more affordable), they might balk at achieving those ends through what appear to be conservative means. In either case, liberals would shy away from zoning reform and prefer policies that involve ends and means consistent with their ideology, such as direct subsidies for affordable housing.

All this reasoning suggests three hypotheses. First, homeownership, all else being equal, should be associated with less support for housing development of any kind. Second, liberal attitudes toward new housing should be sensitive to issue framing. If liberals who think about building new housing think first about affordability, and only later or not at all about deregulation, they might cognitively log market-rate development as liberal. But if they think of deregulation and profit first and affordability later (which is, after all, the real-world order of the process) they might see development as conservative, or at least less liberal. The salience of deregulation should thus help determine liberal attitudes toward market-rate development.

Third, liberals should *not* be ambivalent about supporting subsidized affordable housing. Market-rate development, because of its profits or the deregulation it entails, might fit uncomfortably into conventional ideas of liberalism. But affordable housing programs align more easily with those conventional ideas. With affordable housing the government taxes and spends, and the spending directly benefits vulnerable groups. Affordable housing's appropriate ideological bin should thus be more obvious.

My regression results lend support to all of these hypotheses. I find that homeownership is associated with opposition to new housing of all kinds, even controlling for ideology. Liberalism, meanwhile, is strongly associated with support for subsidized housing, at magnitudes similar to liberal support for stereotypically liberal policies, like immigrant rights or expanded health care. Attitudes toward market-rate development, however, are different. In some specifications, where deregulation is less salient, liberalism is associated with modest

support for market-rate housing, but that support is lower than support for subsidized housing, and lower than support for conventionally liberal positions—suggesting that although affordable housing development may be a core liberal position, market-rate development is not. In other specifications, moreover, when the survey language explicitly mentions deregulation, liberalism’s association with market-rate housing flips, and becomes opposition. All of these findings about ideology hold not just controlling for tenure but also within tenure: liberal homeowners are more likely than other homeowners to support building more housing, but less likely than other homeowners to do so when deregulation is salient.

Broadly, these results reinforce both common theories of political belief formation (Zaller, 1992), and established findings about liberal ambivalence (Feldman & Zaller, 1992). The policy implications of these results, however, are less clear, because the implications of any belief hinge crucially on whether that belief is accurate. If more market-rate development does not advance affordability, then liberal ambivalence toward it might entail few social costs, and could even be beneficial.

If, on the other hand, new market-rate housing is an important component of affordability, then my results augur poorly for high-demand cities with liberal governments and large liberal constituencies. Many Americans strive for homeownership: indeed, one common concern about expensive metropolitan areas is the difficulty of buying homes in them. But if ownership is associated, all else equal, with people being less willing to allow new homes around them, then homeownership becomes not just a goal of affordability policy but also an obstacle to it. That obstacle need not be insurmountable: a liberal political culture could, in principle, push back against homeowner-associated conservatism. But if liberals are themselves lukewarm toward development, the counterweight they offer might be weak, and housing scarcity and its attendant problems could persist.

1. Liberal Ambivalence Toward Market-Rate Development

In at least some ways, changing zoning to allow more development is consistent with abstract principles associated with liberalism. Compared with conservatives, liberals tend to be more concerned about inequality, unaffordability, and racial segregation,⁵ and by now considerable evidence suggests that strict zoning contributes to all of these problems. Sociologist Orlando Patterson asked in 2020 to explain the continued oppression of Black Americans, quickly named restrictive zoning as a culprit. “One of the reasons why people have been crowded in ghettos,” he told a reporter, “is the fact that housing is so expensive in the suburbs, and one reason for that is bylaws that restrict the building of multi-occupancy housing” (quoted in Mineo, 2020). High housing prices disproportionately burden lower income people, exacerbate racial and economic segregation, and impede intergenerational economic mobility (Chetty and Hendren, 2018; Glaeser, 2020; Glaeser & Gyourko, 2018; Kahn et al., 2010; Kok, Monkkonen, & Quigley, 2014; Lens & Monkkonen, 2016; Rothwell & Massey, 2009, 2010; Rosenthal, 2014; Saiz, 2010).

Stacked against these considerations, however, are the two factors mentioned above: homeownership and ideological antipathy. I consider these in turn.

1.1. Homeownership and Intrinsic Conservatism

Housing in the United States is both a store of wealth and a source of shelter. These roles do not rest easily with each other. For individual owners, housing wealth grows when housing is scarce. But when housing is scarce, shelter is insecure. If liberal homeowners believe that providing more housing can make housing less expensive, they may confront a tension between their abstract interest in affordability and their material interest in the value of their house.

Such cross-pressure could be both widespread and acute. More than 60% of American households own homes, and for most of these households, the home is their largest source of wealth (Fischel, 2002; Glaeser, 2011). But housing is not a particularly good way to store wealth: Compared with other financial assets, housing involves both more risk and fewer ways to mitigate it.

The value of a home, like the value of any asset, depends on other people's judgment. Housing appreciates when more people who do not own it decide they want to. Housing differs from other assets, however, in that this subjective valuation is determined less by the characteristics of the home itself, and more by the real or perceived quality of the various collective goods people get when they buy it (Fischel, 2002; Tiebout, 1956). People who purchase housing buy not just a dwelling unit but also, in the same transaction, access to jobs, membership in a neighborhood and school district, voice and representation in a set of political institutions, and exposure to a given rate of crime or pollution (Sheppard, 1999). It is these locational attributes, not the unit itself, that largely determine the home's value, which means homeowners themselves have little control over what their asset is worth. Homeowners can remodel their kitchens, but good kitchens are no match for bad school districts or shrinking economies. Thus large and elegant homes sell for modest amounts in declining regions, whereas structures suitable only for demolition sell for millions in Silicon Valley (e.g., Dill, 2017).

In part because of these external factors, and in part because homes are large purchases that require credit (which can be more or less available for reasons unrelated to home quality), housing values are volatile. By one estimate, the value of any given house can vary up to 15% each year—a remarkable level of instability for an investment where the typical buyer borrows 80% of the purchase price (Unison, 2019).

To be sure, volatility and vulnerability to outside taste do not, by themselves, make housing unique. Stocks are also volatile, and the fate of every asset hinges on the preferences of the marginal investor.⁶ People who invest in Coca-Cola cannot make the public *like* Coca-Cola, and cannot, unless they buy inordinate volumes of it, steer Coca-Cola's corporate direction. But investors who buy Coke can protect themselves from changing taste and bad management by diversifying. They can buy stock in Pepsi as well, and in something entirely unrelated, like software or oil. From there they can make incremental adjustments to their diverse portfolios—cheaply and easily trading some soda for software, or vice versa—as events unfold.

Housing offers none of this flexibility, and as such offers less protection against risk. Housing is immobile, illiquid, and largely indivisible. It is difficult to buy half a house in one place and half in another, to move a house to a better market if local conditions sour, or to sell off small parts of a house if the owner needs cash (Fischel, 2002). These constraints arise not just because housing, unlike many other assets, has a tangible physical form, but also because housing is neither solely nor primarily a store of value. People buy housing mostly to live in it, and because preferences about living environments vary, the housing stock varies as well. Almost no two housing units are completely alike. Any two shares of Coke, in contrast, are identical. Because transactions are easier when goods are smaller and more homogeneous, housing is—compared with other forms of wealth—cumbersome to buy and sell. Where stocks and bonds can be traded with the press of a button, a typical home purchase takes months, with high costs in the form of searching, negotiating, and transacting.⁷

Housing is, in sum, a uniquely large and uniquely vulnerable store of wealth. And because it offers investors little recourse if its value changes, the best protection is preventing change itself. One way to do so is via land-use regulations that keep the neighborhood, and perhaps the whole city, the way it is.

If the logic above is valid, homeownership should, at least on the margin, breed suspicion of change. Because suspicion of change is a bedrock element of conservatism, it follows that homeownership will inject conservatism into local government, at least in matters related to development.

This idea, that homeownership bends local politics to the right, is not new. Banfield and Wilson (1963) advanced it in their pioneering book on urban affairs. Proponents of land value taxation have long argued that widespread homeownership created a local capitalist class that resisted steep taxes on land (e.g., Samuels, 2003). It is Fischel (2002), however, who offers the most detailed treatment of tenure-based conservatism, with his “homevoter hypothesis” (also see related work by Fennell [2006, 2010]). The homevoter hypothesis predicts that homeowners, regardless of their other political views, will be conservative in local matters, especially those related to zoning and development, because they will behave like the risk-averse owners of a vulnerable and volatile capital asset. They will prefer more regulation to less (assuming the regulations restrict development), and less new housing to more.⁸

In a strong form, the homevoter hypothesis can seem unrealistic. Not every homeowner, after all, opposes all new development, and those homeowners who do are not always motivated by explicitly financial concerns. Many homeowners may not even see their housing primarily as an investment: they purchased it to live in, so it looks more to them like a consumption good.

Accounting for these objections, however, does little to weaken the basic argument. The hypothesis need not predict that all owners oppose development, nor that they do so explicitly for financial gain. A more realistic prediction is that owners will be more likely than renters to oppose development, and will be aware, if only implicitly, that this opposition carries little risk of financial harm. Similarly, while many homeowners may not view their houses exclusively as investments, they also may not see them purely as consumption goods. Even homeowners who do not try to make their home values rise are often unhappy if those values fall. This unhappiness alone makes housing different from other consumption goods, whose values almost inevitably fall without comment or concern from their owners. Few people buy cars or computers, for example, and expect to sell them years later at no loss (Glaeser, 2011).

Empirical work on the relationship between tenure and political attitudes generally supports the homevoter hypothesis. Hall and Yoder (forthcoming) and Yoder (forthcoming) show that homeowners are more likely than renters to participate in local politics, much more likely to participate when zoning and development are at issue, and more likely to oppose new development in those cases. Ansell (2014) shows that rising property values reduce homeowner support for the welfare state, and especially support for retirement programs—suggesting that people treat their housing as wealth they can draw down as they age. Wassmer and Wahid (2018) suggest that homeowner anxiety about property values helps explain opposition to affordable housing. Finally, Marble and Nall (forthcoming), use a survey experiment to show that homeownership can make liberals behave conservatively in local matters, and oppose more housing.

1.2. Means, Ends, and Liberal Ambivalence

Homevoting could explain why liberal homeowners oppose new development. It would not explain why liberal opposition persists even after homeownership is controlled for. Such a finding would suggest not cross-pressure but ideological distaste: a belief by liberals that market-rate development is inconsistent with their values.

Why might this belief arise? Market-rate development is, at least superficially, strange medicine for a housing crisis, in that it carries all the outward hallmarks of the disease it purports to cure. The housing it produces is often expensive, and the developers who build it are not in fact trying to cure anything. They are profit-seeking entrepreneurs, not altruistic activists. And because the new housing is expensive, the people who move in tend to be well off. None of these attributes make market-rate development seem like a path to affordability.

In addition, market-rate housing is (obviously) a product of the market, and liberals are often less trusting of market outcomes. Liberals might be particularly suspicious of deregulated markets, because deregulation is an ideologically charged concept stereotypically associated with conservatism. Indeed, some evidence even suggests that attitudes about regulation predict ideology more

reliably than attitudes about redistribution do. Responses to the General Social Survey (GSS) from 2014 to 2018, for example, show that 79% of liberals support increased efforts to help the poor, compared with only 58% of conservatives. This gap is large, but notably smaller than the liberal-conservative gap when asked if government should regulate business less: 70% of conservatives say yes, compared with only 37% of liberals.⁹ Precisely because opinions about regulation are such reliable guides to broader ideological identity, for decades Pew Research has used questions about government regulation of business to build its ideological consistency scales.¹⁰

In sum, using market-rate development to alleviate a housing crisis involves rolling back regulations to let profit-minded entrepreneurs build expensive housing for affluent people. We should not be surprised if many people, especially liberals, look at this approach askance. Indeed, many people appear to believe, based at least in part on the logic above, that building more housing can make housing more expensive, and help gentrify neighborhoods (e.g., Angotti & Morse, 2016; Rodrigues-Pose & Storper, 2019).

Perception, however, is not reality. The fact that market-rate development does not appear to advance affordability doesn't mean that it *doesn't* advance affordability. The case above, against market-rate development, is based on its process. One can build a different case entirely by emphasizing its outcomes. That argument might go as follows: As long as lower-income renters bear the burden of a housing crisis, as long as that crisis is fueled by housing scarcity, and as long as affluent people want to be in growing regions for reasons *other* than the mere availability of new housing, then even expensive new housing will, counterintuitively or not, help low-income people. New housing will siphon demand away from the existing stock, slowing the rate at which its price appreciates (Asquith, Mast, & Reed, 2019; Been, Ellen, & O'Regan, 2019; Philips, Manville, & Lens, 2021).¹¹

This case for zoning deregulation rests, in essence, on the idea that a city with a growing economy can create expensive housing in two ways. One way is to allow new housing, which by sheer virtue of its newness will often be more expensive than similar housing that already exists.¹² The second way, somewhat paradoxically, is to block new housing, because without new housing to absorb demand, the price of existing housing will rise. Put less elegantly, if affluent in-migrants arrive in a city, housing policy can divert them into gleaming new buildings, or unleash them onto older buildings that currently house lower-income people.

Obviously not everyone accepts this logic (Angotti & Morse, 2016; Rodrigues-Pose & Storper, 2019). But its validity, for the moment, is irrelevant. What matters is that *even if it is true*, it is highly counterintuitive. On its own terms, the case for more market-rate development suggests it will reduce prices in a way that obscures its own result. The process of market-rate development (a construction site, then a new, probably bigger and taller building with high rents, and then affluent people moving in) is both obvious to observers and not obviously progressive. The outcome of the development (a change in the value or price of *existing* housing) may well be progressive, but it occurs later, and away from the site of physical change.¹³ A visible means thus precedes—and, in many ways, does not align with—a less visible end. The deregulation and profit are more salient than the affordability and redistribution.

The reasoning above forms the basis for my empirical tests. Before proceeding, however, I should address a reasonable potential objection: Liberals may, on average, be suspicious of deregulation, but certainly in some policy arenas, liberals approve of it.¹⁴ For example, liberals often favor criminal justice and immigration reforms that involve removing or reducing regulations. What makes zoning different?

This question becomes all the more salient when one considers that liberals are generally favorable toward antitrust (e.g., New York Times, 2019; Yglesias, 2019), which has strong parallels with zoning reform. Both policies are designed to inject competition back into constrained markets—to prevent the “escape from equilibrium” (Levenstein, 2012) that occurs when supply is constrained and prices rise. Neither policy, moreover, restores competition by having the government start or subsidize new businesses. The government instead removes impediments to new private

entrants, thus converting profit-driven actors into vehicles of progressivity. Antitrust's immediate beneficiary is the new market entrant, just as zoning reform's immediate beneficiary is the developer. Consumers benefit indirectly, from the enhanced competition (Wu, 2018).

Zoning deregulation does differ from antitrust in some ways. One is the implied size of the state. With antitrust the state asserts itself, by making and enforcing a rule. With zoning reform the state retreats, rolling back rules it has made. But this difference is largely cosmetic, and should matter only if liberals think progressive policy requires an expanded state. There is little reason to believe this is so. Immigration and criminal justice reform, again, often involve state retreat.

Political scientists generally agree that most people make judgments by relying on cues from ideological elites—people they implicitly or explicitly recognize as arbiters of their ideological boundaries. These elites can be public officials, activists, academics, or media figures. What unites them is a role that Zaller (1992) calls mediated interpretation—selecting and framing the facts about a given policy, and thus providing cues for thinking about it. Much public opinion is formed only after elites select the facts and interpretations the public is exposed to (Friedman 2015; Lippman, 1922; Zaller, 1992). Put simply, liberals decide whether a policy is liberal by looking to liberal leaders.

If mediated interpretation helps form political beliefs, liberal ambivalence about market-rate development suggests that liberal elites might themselves be ambivalent or divided about it. There is reason to think this is so (Capps, 2019; Dillon, 2018; Klein, 2021; Rainey, 2018; Sheyner, 2020), and it may be so for two reasons. The first is that liberal elites, like most elites, probably own homes, which means that liberal elites will have a material interest in housing capital that they lack in other forms of capital. Yoder (2020) shows that across California, elected officials, regardless of ideology, consistently hold substantially more housing wealth than their constituents. To give some specific examples, over half of Seattle residents are renters, but every member of its left-leaning city council, including an avowed socialist, owns a home (Felt, 2014). Similarly, almost two thirds of Los Angeles households are renters, but all city council members (all but one of whom are Democrats) are homeowners, and more than half are landlords. The local political class is a propertied class.

The second explanation might involve the postwar trajectory of urban liberalism. Liberal elites were not always suspicious of development. Postwar urban liberalism was initially defined by a modernist optimism about improving cities through physical change (e.g., Auletta, 1979; Cohen, 2019; Dyja, 2013; Highsmith, 2015; Zipp, 2012). In a few tumultuous decades, however, the excesses of urban renewal soured this optimism, and converted it to a deep suspicion of building and its role in social problems (Metcalf, 2015; Osman, 2011). What emerged from this suspicion was a worldview—held by liberals who otherwise leaned libertarian, like Jane Jacobs (1961), and those who leaned Marxist, like Logan and Molotch (1987)—that saw *blocking* development, or neighborhood protection, as a liberal priority. Domhoff (n.d.), for example, describes the origins of liberal San Francisco as “a determined band of progressive activists and neighborhoods...[trying to] put real limits on the growth coalition.” Across the country, liberal elites championed policies and regulations—environmental laws, preservation statutes, and so on—that protected communities and made development difficult (Manville & Osman, 2017; Rome, 2001). Many of these policies are considered liberal triumphs.

Seen in this context, efforts to reform zoning represent not just deregulation, but deregulation that targets a form of wealth liberal elites are likely to hold, and targets some policies considered hard-won liberal victories. Liberal elites might thus be suspicious of zoning reform, and their ambivalence could percolate down to liberals in general. I return to this point in the conclusion.

2. Data and Empirical Approach

The discussion above suggests three hypotheses. First, homeownership should be associated with less support for new housing, be it subsidized or unsubsidized, and regardless of the homeowner's ideological identity. Second, even controlling for homeownership, liberalism should be associated with less support for market-rate development, but more support for subsidized development. Put

differently, subsidized development, because it conforms more to stereotypical ideas of liberalism, should sit more comfortably within the broader constellation of policies people consider liberal, whereas market-rate development should lie outside it. Third, liberal opposition to new development should be stronger when deregulation is more salient.

I test these hypotheses using survey data from the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), a research organization that regularly asks a representative sample of Californians about a wide variety of topics. Using representative, person-level data lets me build constructively on previous work. Kahn (2011), for example, studied a panel of cities and correlated place-level proxies for liberalism (a city's Democratic presidential vote share and its purchases of hybrid vehicles) with issuance of building permits. He found that liberal cities allowed less housing, but his use of city-level data opens the door to ecological error. The fact that liberal places are associated with less development cannot tell us that liberal people oppose development (e.g., Gelman, 2009). Marble and Nall (forthcoming), in their study of homeownership and liberalism, use representative person-level data, but their analysis is built primarily on a survey experiment. My use of representative data for a whole state can complement these earlier articles.

I draw on two PPIC statewide surveys from 2017, one conducted in May and the other in September (Baldassare, Bonner, Kordus, & Lopes, 2017a, 2017b).¹⁵ Each survey asked one question about mitigating high housing prices by allowing more housing generally, and one question about doing so with more subsidized affordable housing. Because the vast majority of housing, both new and existing, is market rate, I consider the questions that ask about housing generally to be eliciting attitudes primarily about market-rate housing.

Each survey also asks respondents about their political ideology, their homeownership, and their opinions on a host of other policy topics. These other topics, which include gun control, immigration, health care, and progressive redistribution, fall more cleanly into conventional ideological categories. The surveys thus offer a way to test the relationship between political ideology, tenure, and attitudes about development, and to compare those estimated relationships between ideology and development with relationships between ideology and other policy issues.

The market-rate housing question posed in May read as follows:

Do you favor or oppose changing California's environmental regulations and permitting process to make housing more affordable in your part of California? [61% support, 39% do not support.]

The September market-rate housing question, in contrast, read:

Do you favor or oppose building more housing in your city or community to meet the current need in in your part of California? [64% support, 34% do not support, 2% volunteer that California already has adequate housing to meet need.]

The two questions are similar, and yield similar overall responses, but also differ in ways worth discussing. The May question specifically uses term "affordable" to describe the housing goal, as opposed to just "meet the current need." The September question, for its part, drives home the "backyard" nature of new development, by emphasizing that new housing would be built "in your city or community" rather than just "in your part of California."

For our purposes, the most important difference is that the May question specifically mentions deregulation, and particularly environmental deregulation. It thus explicitly ties housing development to two ideologically charged concepts: deregulation and environmental protection. One could, as a result, criticize this survey question for being double- or even triple-barreled. By invoking not just housing but also deregulation, and particularly environmental deregulation, the question elicits attitudes about multiple topics, and is therefore harder to interpret. On the other hand, the question is realistic: meaningfully increasing the housing supply in expensive areas often will mean reducing regulations, including some regulations that at least nominally protect the environment, like open-space mandates. Moreover, even if this question is hard to interpret on its own, we can usefully

compare it with the September question, which asks about more housing without mentioning deregulation. Together, these two questions let us test the idea that liberals will be more averse to market-rate development when deregulation is more salient.

The two questions about subsidized affordable housing, meanwhile, also differed in their wording. The differences here are substantial, and correspond to larger differences in response. The May question read as follows:

If the state ballot had a bond measure to pay for affordable housing projects, would you vote yes or no? [70% yes, 24% no, 6% don't know.]

The September question read:

The California Legislature is considering legislation to impose a \$75 fee on real estate documents such as deeds and notices, with a cap of \$225 per transaction. It's expected to generate between \$200 million and \$300 million annually for affordable housing projects. Do you favor or oppose this proposal? [46% favor, 47% oppose, 7% don't know.]

Unlike both market-rate questions, neither affordable question implies that subsidized housing will be built near the respondent. The survey asks only about respondents' willingness to pay for affordable housing, not the willingness to accept it. Further, May's question differs from September's in both the method of paying for the affordable housing (a bond rather than a transfer fee), and the level of detail. A transfer fee is borne explicitly by people who buy or sell housing, which means many survey respondents could imagine themselves paying it. The question also provides a detailed estimate of both the fee's payment burden and the total revenue it would raise.

The bond question, in contrast, is in every way more abstract. Bonds are paid for by all taxpayers, and their burden often falls on future taxpayers. The bond question also offers no detail: respondents do not learn the size of the typical taxpayer's payment, or the total amount of money the bond would raise. More than two thirds of respondents favor this proposal, whereas the September question, with its specific tax on real estate, fails to muster majority support.

I combine these questions into the following empirical approach. For each survey, I estimate regressions where the dependent variable is support for either market-rate or affordable development, and the independent variables of interest are homeownership and liberalism—where a respondent is coded liberal if they identify as “very” or “somewhat” liberal. These regressions will test the hypotheses that liberal support for market-rate housing will be smaller than support for affordable housing, that liberal support for market-rate housing will be lower when deregulation is more salient, and that homeownership will be associated with opposition to new housing of all kinds.

I then estimate additional regressions, which are identical to the first four except that the dependent variable in each is support for a broader national policy position that most people consider liberal, like stricter gun control or stronger immigrant protections. These additional regressions serve two purposes. First, they control for the possibility that conservatives self-select into homeownership. The homevoter hypothesis suggests that homeownership will bend people to the right in local affairs. But if homeownership is associated with conservatism across all positions, then conservative people (whether they self-identify as such or not) may just be more likely to own homes. The additional regressions can thus function as placebos: if the homevoter hypothesis is correct, then ownership should, all else being equal, be statistically associated with less support for housing, but not associated with opinions about other policies. For example, ownership would predict opposition to new affordable or market-rate housing, but not to gun control.

These additional regressions also let me gauge the extent of liberal ambivalence toward market-rate development. Liberals might support affordable housing more than market-rate housing, but that by itself would not indicate liberal ambivalence about market-rate housing. Liberals might just hold extraordinary support for affordable housing. By comparing the associations between liberalism and development with the associations between liberalism and policies that are stereotypically liberal, we can see where market-rate and affordable housing sit within the broader spectrum of liberal opinion.

3. Results

Tables 1 and 2 show, for each survey (May and September) responses for each policy question, broken down by ideology and tenure. We can look first at the May survey (Table 1). Examining responses by tenure shows that renters are much more supportive than owners of both market-rate and subsidized housing. Renters are 20 percentage points more likely than owners to support more market-rate housing, and more than 30 percentage points more likely to support an affordable housing bond. Renters are also consistently more liberal than owners: by margins of varying sizes, they are more favorable toward expanded gun control, health care, immigrant rights, and so on.

Table 1. Public opinion on housing and select social issues, California residents, May 2017.

Percentage that:	Liberal	Conservative	Owner	Renter
Supports deregulating to build more	52	69	50	70
Supports state affordable housing bond	85	57	52	84
Supports greater rich–poor redistribution	77	48	50	69
Supports California sanctuary policy	61	36	45	51
Supports stricter gun control	73	48	44	66
Supports Obamacare	66	30	48	49
Supports guaranteed health coverage	62	23	39	45
Share liberal		35		
Share owner		44		
Share liberals who own homes		41		
Share owners who are liberal		33		

Note. Numbers in the table are percentages; survey $N = 1,683$. The deregulation/building question reads: “Do you favor or oppose changing California’s environmental regulations and local permitting process as a way to make housing more affordable in your part of California?” The affordable bond question reads: “If the state ballot had a bond measure to pay for affordable housing projects, would you vote yes or no?” Source: Baldassare et al., 2017a.

Turning to ideology, we see that, as expected, liberals are much more likely to support a bond for subsidized housing (85% vs. 57%), and much less likely to support deregulating zoning to build more housing (52% vs. 69%). Liberals are essentially split over this question: the narrow majority supporting it pales next to much stronger liberal support for conventionally liberal policies. More than 60% of liberals support strong immigration protections and expanded health care, more than 70% support stricter gun control, and 77% support rich-to-poor redistribution more broadly. Liberal support for market-rate development, in fact, lies closest not to liberal support for any other position, but to *conservative* support for progressive redistribution or gun control (48%).

The bottom rows of Table 1 show that both liberals and homeowners are large groups, although neither is a majority, and that substantial overlap exists between them. Thirty-five percent of respondents identify ideologically as liberal (most respondents identify as moderate, or “middle of the road”) whereas 44% of respondents own homes. About 33% of homeowners are liberals, and about 41% of liberals are homeowners. Thus a substantial albeit minority share of liberals could be cross-pressured by homeownership when considering local issues. Moreover, in California’s coastal counties, where housing is most expensive, these figures are higher: 38% of owners are liberal, and 50% of liberals are homeowners (these figures are not shown in the table).

Table 2 shows responses to the September questions. Compared with Table 1, the absolute levels of support are very different, consistent with the different shares of overall favorable responses between May and September. The variance in support, in contrast, more closely resembles Table 1. Homeowners remain much less supportive than renters of new housing, and remain modestly more conservative overall. Liberals remain more open to new housing, and especially affordable housing, than conservatives.

Table 2. Public opinion on housing and select social issues, California residents, September 2017.

Percentage that:	Liberal	Conservative	Owner	Renter
Supports more housing nearby	70	62	52	73
Supports fee for affordable housing	64	30	39	52
Thinks immigrants are good for California	91	64	71	81
Supports Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)	91	67	75	82
Opposes border wall	89	57	68	78
Supports Obamacare	80	39	34	62
Supports single-payer health care	65	43	44	48
Share liberal		33		
Share owner		49		
Share liberals who own homes		44		
Share owners who are liberal		30		

Note. Numbers in the table are percentages; survey $N = 1,715$. The more housing question reads: “Do you favor or oppose building more housing in your city or community to meet the current need in your part of California?” The affordable fee question reads: “The California Legislature is considering legislation to impose a \$75 fee on real estate documents, such as deeds and notices, with a cap of \$225 per transaction. It’s expected to generate between \$200 million and \$300 million annually for affordable housing projects. Do you favor or oppose this proposal?” Source: Baldassare et al., 2017b.

In those places where Table 2’s variance differs from Table 1’s, question wording appears to play a role. Across all groups, support for affordable housing (where the question now explicitly mentions a transaction fee) plummets. Support for market-rate housing, meanwhile, which in this question is not framed as involving deregulation, spikes dramatically among liberals, and falls slightly among conservatives, suggesting that deregulation might trigger more opposition in liberals than it does support in conservatives. Fully 70% of liberals support more market-rate housing in this survey, which is actually higher than the proportion supporting a transfer fee for subsidized housing. Note, however, that support for market-rate housing remains well below support for nonlocal liberal positions, such as Obamacare (80%), or various forms of immigrant protection (around 90%). Only support for single-payer health care is lower.¹⁶

Tables 3 and 4 present a series of logit regressions. As discussed, the dependent variable in each regression is coded 1 if the respondent supports the policy in question (e.g., building housing, maintaining Obamacare), and 0 otherwise. The two independent variables of interest are liberalism and homeownership. Homeownership is coded 1 if the respondent owns the unit they occupy and 0 otherwise, and liberalism is coded 1 if the respondent identifies as liberal and 0 otherwise (meaning that both moderates and conservatives are included in the zero category).

Each regression also includes an array of controls. The precise controls differ across the two surveys, because they did not ask about the same economic or demographic attributes. Nevertheless, each regression has some form of control for income, age, race, sex, and nativity. Both sets of regressions also have a binary variable indicating whether the respondent lives in a coastal county, where housing prices are highest.

Table 3 presents results for the May survey. Because logit output can be hard to interpret, the bottom rows of the table clarify the results in two ways. First, I present the percentage change in the odds of support associated with being a liberal rather than a nonliberal, and an owner rather than a renter. Second, I present the predicted probability of support for each group. I build the prediction by estimating the marginal effects of liberalism and ownership, holding constant the respondent’s other attributes (specifically, I assume that the respondent is college-educated, middle-income, native-born, White, and coastal-dwelling). These probabilities are best interpreted by comparing them: for example, an owner is 10 percentage points less likely to support deregulating to allow new development than an otherwise identical person who is a renter.

Table 3. Liberalism, homeownership, and policy preferences, May 2017: Logit regressions.

	Relax regulations to build more	Affordable housing bond	More redistribution	Support California sanctuary	Guaranteed health care	More gun control
Liberal	– 0.6167*** (0.1786)	1.4029*** (0.2185)	1.1395*** (0.1964)	0.8144*** (0.1627)	1.2221*** (0.1654)	0.9178*** (0.1827)
Homeowner	– 0.4865* (0.2019)	– 0.5990** (0.2154)	– 0.3195 (0.1965)	0.0544 (0.1811)	– 0.1975 (0.1886)	– 0.3112 (0.2064)
White	– 0.4767** (0.1706)	– 0.5507** (0.1996)	– 0.2597 (0.1755)	– 0.1510 (0.1615)	0.1487 (0.1695)	– 0.5761*** (0.1699)
BA or higher	– 0.5806*** (0.1745)	0.0780 (0.1960)	0.1151 (0.1846)	0.3548* (0.1689)	0.4999** (0.1803)	0.2334 (0.1822)
Household income >\$100,000	– 0.0643 (0.2072)	– 0.8173** (0.2592)	– 0.5353* (0.2313)	– 0.4845* (0.2109)	– 0.2438 (0.2006)	0.2672 (0.2163)
Household income <\$20,000	– 0.2193 (0.2327)	0.5401 (0.2782)	0.2789 (0.2238)	0.0842 (0.2060)	– 0.2722 (0.2286)	0.2496 (0.2185)
Foreign born	0.8967*** (0.2100)	0.8432*** (0.2559)	0.4597* (0.1995)	0.3248 (0.1787)	– 0.1736 (0.1951)	1.3202*** (0.2132)
Age 65 or older	– 0.2908 (0.2111)	0.0776 (0.2262)	– 0.1499 (0.2185)	– 0.2794 (0.1896)	– 0.6489** (0.1989)	0.2379 (0.2050)
Children at home	0.2877 (0.1840)	0.3455 (0.1870)	0.4174* (0.1823)	– 0.0465 (0.1639)	– 0.1146 (0.1787)	0.2778 (0.1731)
Live 10+ years at home	– 0.1643 (0.1860)	– 0.4847** (0.1849)	– 0.2129 (0.1776)	– 0.0391 (0.1678)	– 0.0114 (0.1766)	0.0813 (0.1739)
Male	0.3223 (0.1654)	– 0.4546* (0.1844)	– 0.4473** (0.1718)	0.0349 (0.1508)	0.1145 (0.1574)	– 1.0412*** (0.1585)
Employed	– 0.1701 (0.1783)	– 0.2302 (0.2236)	– 0.3906* (0.1945)	– 0.0066 (0.1701)	– 0.5120** (0.1834)	– 0.1489 (0.1795)
Coastal county	– 0.1156 (0.1828)	– 0.1515 (0.1787)	0.0234 (0.1668)	– 0.2724 (0.1620)	0.1526 (0.1742)	0.6624*** (0.1604)
Constant	1.2390*** (0.2940)	1.4692*** (0.2916)	0.5972* (0.2575)	– 0.1254 (0.2530)	– 0.4971 (0.2870)	0.0693 (0.2570)
<i>N</i>	1,423	1,431	1,422	1,423	1,428	1,431
Pseudo <i>R</i> ²	0.118	0.204	0.119	0.118	0.094	0.190
Log likelihood	– 821.7333	– 674.1187	– 826.8735	– 821.7333	– 876.1081	– 764.4300
Percentage change in odds (%)						
Liberal vs. other	– 46***	307***	212***	126***	239***	150***
Owner vs. renter	– 38*	– 45**	– 27	3	– 17.9	– 27
Probability of support (%)						
Liberal–other	29–43	85–58	79–55	65–45	67–37	76–55
Owner–renter	29–39	85–91	79–84	65–64	67–71	76–81

Note. Standard errors are given in parentheses. The build more housing question reads: “Do you favor or oppose changing California’s environmental regulations and local permitting process as a way to make housing more affordable in your part of California?” The affordable housing question reads: “The California Legislature is considering legislation to impose a \$75 fee on real estate documents such as deeds and notices, with a cap of \$225 per transaction. It’s expected to generate between \$200 million and \$300 million annually for affordable housing projects. Do you favor or oppose this proposal?” Support probabilities are estimated marginal effects based on a native-born White female employed middle-class person living in a coastal county. The owner vs. renter prediction assumes this person is liberal, and liberal/other prediction assumes person is an owner. Probabilities do not include asterisks but have the same significance levels as odds changes.

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

The results show first that liberalism is associated with with powerful support for subsidized affordable housing, but opposition to deregulation to allow more market-rate housing. Controlling for other factors in the models—including homeownership—the odds of liberals supporting a statewide affordable housing bond are 306% higher than they are for nonliberals. The odds that liberals will support deregulation to build more housing in their area, in contrast, are 46% lower than the odds for nonliberals.

Could this opposition reflect other aspects of question wording? Possibly. Recall, however, that the May question uses the word “affordable”, which might be appealing to liberals. It also refers to new housing “in your part of California” rather “in your city or community”; this broader phrasing might dampen NIMBY (Not-In-My-Backyard)-style hostility. The ancillary wording in this question, therefore, is actually rather favorable to housing, which suggests that the negative coefficient attached to liberalism might underestimate the antipathy liberals associate with zoning deregulation.

Liberals are also more likely than nonliberals—often 2–3 times more likely—to support immigrant protections, guaranteed health care, stricter gun control, and progressive redistribution. Thus affordable housing appears to sit comfortably in the constellation of stereotypically liberal policies, whereas deregulation to promote market-rate housing does not.

The regression results are also consistent with the idea that homeownership is associated with locally specific conservatism. Controlling for ideology and other factors, the odds of a homeowner supporting new market-rate development are 39% lower than the odds a renter will, and the odds of homeowners supporting new funding for affordable housing are 45% lower. However, where liberalism is strongly associated not just with housing policy, but also with national policy issues, the associations between homeownership and national policy are small and statistically insignificant, suggesting that tenure does matter primarily for local affairs.

Table 4 shows regression results from the September survey. The coefficients on housing tenure tell basically the same story that they did in May. The odds that a homeowner will support more market-rate housing are 45% lower, and the odds of supporting affordable housing funding are 27% lower (although latter coefficient is statistically significant at only the 10% level). On national policy questions, we once again see no statistically or substantially significant differences between owners and renters. Owners and renters diverge notably on local housing policy, but owner–renter differences in national policy, in both odds and probabilities, are strikingly small.

Table 4. Liberalism, homeownership, and policy preferences, September 2017: Logit regressions.

	Build more housing	Transfer fee	Support Obamacare	Support single payer	Support DACA	Oppose border wall
Liberal	0.4974** (0.1648)	1.1511*** (0.1552)	1.4406*** (0.1783)	1.0502*** (0.1794)	1.3102*** (0.2225)	1.6733*** (0.2189)
Homeowner	– 0.5921*** (0.1633)	– 0.3103 (0.1632)	– 0.1060 (0.1637)	– 0.2145 (0.1851)	– 0.2125 (0.1965)	– 0.1710 (0.1746)
White	– 0.2722 (0.1577)	– 0.3103* (0.1541)	– 0.1926 (0.1619)	0.1566 (0.1830)	– 0.2244 (0.1858)	– 0.3069 (0.1777)
Household income <\$20,000	0.0786 (0.2002)	– 0.3331 (0.2034)	0.0679 (0.2050)	0.2023 (0.2191)	0.0690 (0.2432)	0.3370 (0.2333)
Household income >\$100,000	– 0.3649* (0.1779)	– 0.1444 (0.1725)	– 0.3174 (0.1752)	– 0.2222 (0.2162)	– 0.2570 (0.2116)	– 0.3500 (0.1853)
Foreign born	0.5665** (0.1905)	0.4251* (0.1772)	0.2547 (0.1810)	0.4620* (0.2042)	0.3593 (0.2203)	0.8892*** (0.2239)
Male	0.1231 (0.1503)	0.3110* (0.1450)	– 0.0800 (0.1509)	– 0.0942 (0.1712)	– 0.2992 (0.1771)	– 0.2512 (0.1643)
Age 65 or older	0.3477* (0.1760)	– 0.0058 (0.1686)	– 0.0027 (0.1650)	0.1270 (0.2013)	– 0.1294 (0.1874)	– 0.2887 (0.1833)
Children at home	0.7290*** (0.1733)	– 0.1526 (0.1691)	0.2069 (0.1719)	0.2521 (0.1963)	0.2154 (0.2032)	0.0605 (0.1963)
Coastal county	– 0.0918 (0.1599)	0.3282* (0.1608)	0.0054 (0.1574)	0.1656 (0.1899)	0.0260 (0.1858)	0.0469 (0.1702)
Constant	0.4883* (0.2310)	– 0.5205* (0.2257)	0.0495 (0.2363)	– 0.7147** (0.2686)	1.2070*** (0.2744)	0.7736** (0.2701)
N	1,486	1,485	1,483	960	1,483	1,483
Pseudo R ²	0.071	0.080	0.081	0.056	0.070	0.127
Log likelihood	– 887.3575	– 935.3561	– 910.6908	– 646.7163	– 716.0545	– 742.3459
Percentage change in odds (%)						
Liberal–other	64.4**	216***	322***	186***	271***	433***
Owner–renter	– 44.7***	– 26.7	– 10	– 19	– 19	– 15
Probability of support (%)						
Liberal–other	56–68	54–28	80–49	67–41	90–64	89–60
Owner–renter	68–79	54–62	80–82	67–71	90–92	89–90

Note. Standard errors are given in parentheses. The housing question reads: “Do you favor or oppose building more housing in your city or community to meet the current need in your part of California? The affordable housing question reads: “If the state ballot had a bond measure to pay for affordable housing projects, would you vote yes or no?” Support probabilities are marginal effects based on a White middle-class female living in a coastal county. Owner–renter prediction assumes the person is liberal, and liberal–other prediction assumes the person is an owner. Probabilities do not include asterisks but have the same significance levels as changes in odds.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

The liberalism coefficients, however, do change, in both size and sign. Recall that the September survey asked about building more housing but did not mention deregulation, and asked about affordable housing by proposing a broad-based fee to pay for it. These distinctions appear to matter. Now liberalism is associated with support for new market-rate development. The odds of liberals supporting more market-rate housing are 65% higher than the odds that others will. This level of support, however, remains much smaller than liberal support for more affordable housing spending, or for other conventionally liberal policies. The odds that a liberal will support a transfer fee for affordable housing are 216% higher than the odds for nonliberals, whereas liberalism is associated with a quadrupling in the odds of supporting DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, a law offering protection for immigrant children), and a quintupling in the odds of believing that immigrants are a net benefit to California. In this way, the September results are consistent with those from May. Whereas liberalism is no longer associated with opposition to new market-rate housing, liberal support for such housing remains well outside (and below) the range of support for stereotypically liberal policies, while support for affordable housing sits comfortably within it.

All of these results are robust to a variety of alterations. The coefficients of interest do not meaningfully change if I replace the binary variable for White with binaries for Black or Hispanic (or some combination thereof), if the income control is linear rather than categorical, if the coastal county dummy is replaced with county fixed effects, or if I control for the median income or housing price in each county.¹⁷ The results are also unchanged I estimate the regressions with standard errors clustered at the county. Lastly, I also show, in the Appendix, that the results do not change if I restrict the sample to people with strong concerns about housing affordability.

All of these regressions, however, compare liberals with nonliberals, and ignore any distinction between conservatives and moderates. The regressions also neglect the possibility that ideology and homeownership might combine to have a unique association with attitudes toward housing: that, for example, the real determinant of opinion might not be liberalism or homeownership, but being a liberal homeowner. To address these possibilities, [Tables 5](#) and [Tables 6](#) show regressions that separately examine homeowners and renters, and that control for both liberalism and conservatism. In these regressions I examine only the survey questions about housing policy, and leave aside the various placebos about national policy.

[Table 5](#) presents results from the May survey. Note that in these regressions, because they include variables for both liberal and conservative, the base group is moderates. As such, the percentage changes in odds reflect the change from moderate to liberal or conservative. The predicted probabilities, however, compare liberals with everyone else, and conservatives to everyone else.

The regressions are not entirely conclusive, perhaps in part because splitting the sample by tenure dramatically reduces the sample size.¹⁸ That caveat notwithstanding, two potential take-aways emerge. First, the main result we saw in [Table 3](#), where both liberalism and ownership were associated with less support for deregulation to allow more housing, appears in this regression to be driven mostly by liberal homeowners. The odds that a liberal owner will support such deregulation are 46% lower than the odds a moderate owner will, whereas the odds a conservative owner will support it are 121% higher. Among renters, neither liberalism nor conservatism is statistically significant (although the sign on liberalism remains negative). Among owners, liberal support is 19 percentage points lower than conservative support. Among renters, it is only 7 percentage points (and, again, insignificant).

Second, owners appear to drive much of the relationship between ideology and attitudes toward affordable housing. Among renters, conservatism had no statistically significant relationship with support for an affordable housing bond, whereas liberalism showed a positive relationship that was statistically significant at the 10% level (again, with a larger sample this might show a stronger result). The odds that a liberal renter would support the bond were about twice as high as those for

Table 5. Housing policy preferences by ideology and tenure, May 2017: Logit regressions.

	Change regulations to build		Affordable housing bond	
	Owner	Renter	Owner	Renter
Liberal	– 0.6104* (0.2389)	– 0.3155 (0.3108)	1.6621*** (0.3118)	0.6702 (0.3636)
Conservative	0.7954** (0.2430)	0.0948 (0.3562)	– 0.5271* (0.2450)	– 0.2649 (0.3573)
	Percent change in odds (%)			
Liberal vs. moderate	– 46	– 27	427	96
Conservative vs. moderate	121	10	– 41	– 23
	Probability of support (%)			
Liberal vs. other	28–41	42–49	84–50	92–85
Conservative vs. other	49–30	49–45	54–65	85–88
Liberal/Conservative difference	– 19	– 7	+30	+7
	Controls			
White	– 0.6044* (0.2514)	– 0.4851* (0.2475)	– 0.7644** (0.2903)	– 0.4160 (0.2881)
BA or higher	– 0.3666 (0.2065)	– 0.7996** (0.2964)	– 0.2169 (0.2365)	0.6175 (0.3699)
Household income <\$20,000	– 0.1403 (0.2294)	0.2196 (0.4427)	– 0.6964** (0.2449)	– 1.2687* (0.5833)
Household income >\$100,000	– 0.1721 (0.4226)	– 0.2774 (0.2847)	0.3741 (0.4592)	0.5486 (0.3437)
Foreign born	0.5073 (0.2999)	1.1780*** (0.3322)	0.7499* (0.3178)	1.0195** (0.3796)
Age 65 or older	– 0.4202 (0.2534)	– 0.3268 (0.3789)	0.1928 (0.2527)	– 0.2514 (0.4164)
Children at home	– 0.1394 (0.2315)	0.6076* (0.2830)	0.0885 (0.2436)	0.5510 (0.2852)
Live 10+ years at home	0.0360 (0.2167)	– 0.5591 (0.2921)	– 0.7484** (0.2412)	– 0.0501 (0.3344)
Male	0.4624* (0.2094)	0.2343 (0.2620)	– 0.3043 (0.2210)	– 0.6363* (0.3191)
Employed	0.0958 (0.2389)	– 0.4636 (0.2632)	– 0.2400 (0.2521)	– 0.2432 (0.3503)
Coastal county	0.0040 (0.2141)	– 0.1051 (0.3039)	– 0.0119 (0.2299)	– 0.4411 (0.2970)
Constant	0.3953 (0.3727)	1.2034* (0.4857)	1.3071** (0.4343)	1.7330*** (0.4438)
N	767	656	774	657
Pseudo R ²	0.101	0.127	0.205	0.143
Log likelihood	– 383.5336	– 414.6594	– 336.0932	– 318.5189

Note. Standard errors are given in parentheses. the changing regulations question reads: “Do you favor or oppose changing California’s environmental regulations and local permitting process as a way to make housing more affordable in your part of California?” The affordable housing question reads: “If the state ballot had a bond measure to pay for affordable housing projects, would you vote yes or no?” Support probabilities are estimated marginal effects based on a native-born White employed middle-class female living in a coastal county.

* $p < .005$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

a moderate renter. The overall liberal–conservative difference, however, in predicted probabilities, was small: about 7 percentage points.

For owners, the story is different. Here, liberalism is associated with a substantial increase in support (a liberal owner has odds of support that are 427% larger than those for a moderate owner) and conservatism with opposition (a conservative owner’s odds of support are 41% lower than those for a moderate owner). Converted to predicted probabilities, these coefficients create a yawning ideological gap: an 84% probability that liberal owners will support the bond, compared with a 54% probability that conservative owners will. Note, however, that the predicted probabilities also show

Table 6. Housing policy preferences by ideology and tenure, September 2017: Logit regressions.

	Build more housing		Affordable fee	
	Owner	Renter	Owner	Renter
Conservative	– 0.0877 (0.2245)	0.5305 (0.2839)	– 0.6358** (0.2461)	– 0.4873 (0.2573)
Liberal	0.6151** (0.2372)	0.5290 (0.2886)	0.8694*** (0.2366)	0.8870*** (0.2608)
Percent change in odds (%)				
Liberal vs. moderate	85	70	138	143
Conservative vs. moderate	– 9	70	– 49	– 39
Probability of support				
Liberal vs. other	70–56%	80–70%	53–32%	55–33%
Conservative vs. other	61–59%	80–71%	30–44%	33–44%
Liberal/Conservative difference	+ 9	0	+ 23	+ 32
Controls				
White	– 0.1511 (0.2132)	– 0.4035 (0.2381)	– 0.0566 (0.2195)	– 0.5129* (0.2202)
Household income >\$100,000	– 0.4248* (0.2104)	– 0.3162 (0.3397)	– 0.0456 (0.2123)	– 0.2512 (0.2979)
Household income <\$20,000	– 0.3672 (0.3066)	0.3216 (0.2677)	0.1016 (0.3869)	– 0.5429* (0.2399)
Foreign born	0.8176*** (0.2454)	0.3102 (0.2913)	0.4786 (0.2561)	0.4026 (0.2552)
Age 65 or older	0.2017 (0.2130)	0.5799 (0.3538)	– 0.0810 (0.2133)	0.2807 (0.2891)
Children at home	0.5170* (0.2307)	0.9184*** (0.2605)	– 0.0521 (0.2560)	– 0.1470 (0.2290)
Live 10+ years at home	0.0737 (0.1870)	0.1651 (0.2414)	0.1155 (0.1987)	0.4475* (0.2178)
Coastal county	– 0.0589 (0.1978)	– 0.1188 (0.2720)	0.2766 (0.2209)	0.3056 (0.2375)
Constant	– 0.0406 (0.2946)	0.3157 (0.3723)	– 0.6557* (0.3105)	– 0.1794 (0.3334)
N	857	629	858	627
Pseudo R ²	0.054	0.067	0.079	0.091
Log likelihood	– 457.1555	– 420.2623	– 440.6071	– 480.3784

Note. Standard errors are given in parentheses. The build more question reads: “Do you favor or oppose building more housing in your city or community to meet the current need in your part of California?” The affordable fee question reads: “The California Legislature is considering legislation to impose a \$75 fee on real estate documents such as deeds and notices, with a cap of \$225 per transaction. It’s expected to generate between \$200 and \$300 million annually for affordable housing projects. Do you favor or oppose this proposal?”

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

that owners of any ideology remain consistently more opposed than renters. The 84% probability that a liberal owner will support an affordable housing bond is essentially equal to the probability that a *conservative* renter will (85%) and notably below the predicted support from liberal renters (92%).

Table 6 presents results from the September survey. The same caveats about sample size apply, but with deregulation no longer salient, liberal–conservative attitudes about building more housing converge dramatically. Liberalism now has a positive and statistically significant coefficient among owners, and a positive coefficient that is statistically significant at the 10% level among renters. The predicted probabilities of liberal support rise dramatically, to 70% among owners and 80% among renters, and the probability associated with conservatism rises as well. Notably, the liberal–conservative difference in probability of support is now only 9 percentage points among owners, and among renters it is zero.

Among both owners and renters, liberalism is associated with increased support for a transfer fee, whereas among owners—but not renters—conservatism is associated with opposition. Note again that all of these results are *within* tenure groups. As was the case in most of [Table 5](#), renters remain consistently more likely than owners to support prohousing policies.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Building more housing is an idea that appears to divide liberals. This article has explored that division. One potential explanation for this division is homeownership, which could cross-pressure liberals and lead them to hold more conservative views in matters of local affairs. The evidence in this article lends support to that idea. Homeownership, even controlling for ideology, is associated with opposition to more housing of any kind, but is not associated with other policy opinions. The latter point is important, as it controls for the possibility that people with conservative views (whether they identify as conservative or not) select into homeownership.

Liberalism, meanwhile, after controlling for tenure, is associated with unambiguous support for funding affordable housing, but ambivalence toward more building overall. Much but not all of this ambivalence appears to stem from the salience of deregulation. When market-rate development is associated with deregulation, liberals—and particularly liberal homeowners—oppose it. When deregulation is not mentioned, liberalism is associated with modest support for more homebuilding, although at levels well below liberal support for affordable housing or for stereotypically liberal national policies.

As discussed in the introduction, how one thinks about these results will depend in part on whether one believes that new market-rate housing advances affordability. Most economists take this idea as given, but among both planners and the public it is a topic of debate. I cannot, in this article, resolve or even do justice to that debate. Readers seeking such a discussion can turn to [Been et al. \(2019\)](#) or the exchange between [Rodrigues-Pose and Storper \(2019\)](#) and [Manville, Lens, and Monkkonen \(2020\)](#).

However, if one believes new market-rate development is an important component of affordability, then my results suggest trouble for politically liberal regions that have supply constraints and high housing costs. Homeownership is often a goal of affordability policy, but the results here suggest it may be an obstacle to it as well. In principle, a liberal electorate could counterbalance tenure-based suspicion of development, but liberals at best do not see more building as a core liberal policy, and at worst associate it with deregulation and oppose it. Overall, the results reinforce [Fischel's \(2002\)](#) homevoting hypothesis, as well as theories of localism—the idea that local politics has its own distinctive ideological flavor (e.g., [Manville & Monkkonen, 2021](#)).

What can be done? Conceivably, a dramatic and sustained expansion of affordable housing programs—which liberals consistently support, and which liberal owners support more than other owners—could skirt this problem. Such an expansion would be welcome, but would also face barriers. Funding is one obvious impediment, but so is regulation. Almost all subsidized housing is multifamily, so dramatically expanding it in expensive coastal areas might well require the same zoning reforms—and trigger the same opposition—as expanding the housing stock more broadly.

To return to the point that concluded [Section 1](#): In principle, liberals could view housing deregulation as part of a larger family of deregulatory policies that advance progressive goals, such as criminal justice reform, loosened immigration restrictions, and—especially—antitrust. After all, homeowner efforts to block new development carry more than a whiff of crony capitalism and tacit collusion. For whatever reason, however, liberals who support markets and deregulation in other arenas often apply a different lens to housing, one that sees stopping change as progressive. Shifting this lens may be a challenging but necessary step for efforts to build more homes in supply-constrained cities.

Notes

1. A note on terminology: Localities have many ways to constrain the housing supply. Whereas some fall under what is legally considered zoning, many do not. For ease of exposition, throughout this article I will broadly refer to regulatory changes that allow more housing as upzoning, zoning reform, or zoning deregulation.
2. One might argue that these cities are not actually liberal, even if they are restrictive. Evidence from Tausanovitch and Warsaw (2014), however, suggests otherwise. These cities, and often their suburbs, are in fact dominated by Democrats, and lean further to the left than other United States jurisdictions do.
3. Recall that housing services refers not to development, but to the sale of housing (including owner occupancy, which in economic terms is an imputed landlord/tenant relationship). Thus homeowners are, in economic terms, producers of housing services, even if they do not physically produce housing (for more, see Meyerhauser and Reinsdorf, 2007).
4. Specifically, residential structures, the vast majority of which are detached single-family homes, represent 45% of all United States physical capital (Vollraith, 2020).
5. The 2014–2018 General Social Survey shows that self-identified liberals are over twice as likely as self-identified conservatives to agree that the government needs to improve the standard of living, needs to help Black people, and should do more to help the disadvantaged more broadly (GSS SDA Data Archive tabulations).
6. The typical stock purchase is rarely as leveraged as the typical home.
7. For example, Zillow Group (2018) reports that the average buyer searches for 4.5 months, then takes an additional 30–45 days to close.
8. More specifically, the hypothesis predicts that homeowners will support regulations that increase home values, and oppose regulations that reduce them. These regulations may or may not directly affect the housing supply.
9. Calculated from GSS data at the Berkeley survey data archive: <https://sda.berkeley.edu/>
10. See Pew Research: <https://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/appendix-a-the-ideological-consistency-scale/>
11. This idea refers, broadly, to a filtering model of housing (see Rosenthal, 2014).
12. A newly built house in any given neighborhood is likely to be more expensive than a similarly sized older house nearby, both because the new house will have more amenities and because older houses can profitably sell for less than their construction costs, whereas new houses cannot.
13. Price changes might be still less salient if they manifest as a slowed rate of increase, rather than as an absolute decline.
14. Some liberals might, of course, value process over outcome, and balk at endorsing deregulation it because they see it as an ideological line that cannot be crossed. Imbroscio (2019), for example, argue that progressives should leave suburban exclusionary zoning intact, in part because undoing it would require zoning deregulation. Deregulating to achieve integration would lend legitimacy to market mechanisms, and thus set the overall progressive movement back, even if in the short term it advanced some progressive goals.
15. PPIC provides weights that correct for sampling error; all of the analysis in this article uses those weights.
16. The single-payer question stands out for its level of nonresponse and *don't know* answers, making its sample size much lower than that for other questions.
17. County fixed effects reduce the sample size, because some small counties have few observations, and perfectly predict the outcome variable. Some specifications variously included controls for each county's median home value, for its Zillow house price index, and for the ratio of its median home value to its median household income. I also interacted ownership with the Zillow index, and liberalism with the Zillow index. None of these variables was statistically significant, and none materially changed the other coefficients.
18. A similar approach that would preserve sample size, but might be harder to interpret, would involve keeping the full sample but interacting ideology and tenure. I do so in regressions not shown here, and the results are essentially the same.

Acknowledgments

I thank Paavo Monkkonen and Matt Kahn, members of the UCLA Lewis Center Housing Initiative, and Adam Seth Levine for helpful comments. Miriam Pinski assisted with data cleaning.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Appendix: Attitudes Toward Housing, Controlling for Beliefs and Experiences

A potential confound in my regressions is unobserved differences in people's perceptions of the housing crisis. Some liberals or homeowners might oppose building more to address affordability not because they oppose development, but because they do not believe affordability is an urgent issue. In this case, the regressions will inappropriately combine people who oppose a particular solution with people who do not see a problem.

I address this confound with additional regressions, using two questions from the May survey and one from the September survey. The first May question read: "How big of a problem is housing affordability in your part of California? Is it a big problem, somewhat of a problem, or not a problem?" The second read: "Does the cost of your housing place a financial strain on you and your family today?" The September question, meanwhile, asked, "Does the cost of housing make you and your family seriously consider moving away from the part of California you live in now, or not?"

I restrict the sample first to respondents who called housing affordability a serious problem, second to people who said housing costs severely strained their budgets, and third to people who considered moving as a result of housing costs. The results, shown in Table A1, are not just robust to the original estimates but actually stronger. (To conserve space I show only the relevant coefficients. Full results are available upon request.)

Table A1. Liberalism, homeownership and housing policy preferences: May 2017: Logit regressions.

	Believe affordability serious problem		Personally strained by housing costs	
	Relax regs to build more	Affordable housing bond	Relax regs to build more	Affordable housing bond
Liberal	-0.9580*** (0.2294)	1.7934*** (0.2456)	-0.5738* (0.2769)	1.4290*** (0.3907)
Homeowner	-0.5721* (0.2789)	-0.3901 (0.2631)	-0.4887 (0.3358)	-1.0278** (0.3218)
N	870	877	616	618
Pseudo R^2	0.142	0.240	0.073	0.313
	Considered moving as a result of housing costs			
	Build more housing	Transfer fee for affordable housing		
Liberal	0.4888 (0.2735)	1.1050*** (0.2633)		
Homeowner	-0.7701** (0.2381)	-0.6516* (0.2586)		
N	611	611		
Pseudo R^2	0.105	0.159		

Notes: Data from PPIC, 2017a and b. Sample in first two equations restricted to respondents who answered yes when asked if housing affordability was a "serious problem" in their part of California. Sample in third and fourth models restricted to respondents who told surveyors that housing costs were a large personal burden for them. Fifth and sixth equations restricted to people who have considered leaving their city, or California, as a result of high housing costs. Control variables not shown, but identical to controls in previous regressions. Output available on request.

Standard errors in parentheses * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.