



**UNIVERSITY OF  
LIMERICK  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH**

**Department of Politics & Public Administration**

**The Same but Different?**

**Irish Public Policy Support for a Homeowner Model of  
Housing Since the 2008 Global Financial Crisis**

**Ben Graham**

**23296895**

**Supervisor: Dr. Conor Little**

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## **Abstract:**

Land and homeownership have been part and parcel of the Irish social contract since at least the 1880s, and this goal has been actively supported since the foundation of the state. Reaching a peak of 81% in 1991, homeownership in Ireland has since declined at each subsequent census despite efforts by policymakers to the contrary. During the 2000s, a rapid expansion of cheap credit led to the development of a property and real-estate bubble in Ireland, which subsequently burst in 2008 and had catastrophic implications for the Irish economy. Central to the development of this bubble was the idea of homeownership, and equally, the debt burden and negative equity experienced following the downturn became central to the experience of the ensuing downturn. This research considers whether this experience has challenged the dominance of the homeowner model of housing provision in Irish policy circles. More specifically, it investigates whether the connection between the homeowner model, real estate, construction, and financial sectors and the Irish experience of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis has challenged the pre-eminence of this tenure type in Irish housing policy. It takes a qualitative single case study approach incorporating insights from punctuated equilibrium theory, multiple streams analysis, and Gramscian hegemonic theory to investigate developments in Irish housing policy between 2008 and 2024. Its main finding is that while substantial reform has occurred since the financial crisis, the homeowner housing model has not been displaced in the Irish context but has been complemented with a more diverse constellation of policy interventions to support other tenure types. With these findings it builds on the existing literature by deepening the understanding of the Irish case, providing a most-likely case approach to studying housing policy change during crisis, and provides a point of comparison for understanding the development of housing policy in a homeowner society following the 2008 GFC.

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## 1: Introduction

Ireland's housing system is widely acknowledged as being 'dysfunctional' (M. Byrne, 2020) with some arguing that it has been for decades (Kitchin et al., 2015; Mansergh, 2024). This has manifested itself in acute availability, affordability, and security of tenure concerns nationally, with particularly severe issues in Dublin (Disch & Slaymaker, 2023). Central to the current crisis is the fallout from the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008, which had a particularly pronounced impact on the Irish economy on the back of the collapse of a property bubble and the financial sector sustaining it (Ó Riain, 2014). Core to this was the deeply embedded preference and policy support for homeownership and a type of asset-based welfare system that has been institutionalised in Ireland for most of the history of the state (Downey, 2014; Norris, 2016). Due to the severity of the crisis, an extensive literature has developed considering the Irish housing system in the years following the GFC crisis (e.g. (M. Byrne, 2020; Downey, 2014; Hearne, 2020; Heffernan et al., 2017; Kitchin et al., 2012; Norris & Byrne, 2018; Priemus & Whitehead, 2014). However, none have considered the extent to which the homeowner bias has persisted in Irish housing policy. This research addresses this question with the overarching conclusion being that despite widespread reform of Irish housing and planning legislation, the fundamentals of the homeowner centric housing system have remained unchanged.

As housing affordability has emerged as a global issue of increasing political salience (Coupe, 2020; Saiz, 2023; Wetzstein, 2017; MacLennan, 2012), this research contributes to a growing literature exploring this trend and is particularly relevant when understanding societies which pursue high levels of homeownership and have been severely blighted by housing issues in recent times. Richard et al. (2015) have claimed that a decline in homeownership has been one of the most enduring legacies of the financial crisis, with a growing literature accounting this

to the financialization, securitization, and assetification of housing and an ontological shift from viewing housing as an investment over a consumption good ( Aalbers, 2017; Arundel & Ronald, 2021; Clapham, 2019; Kemp, 2015; Priemus & Whitehead, 2014) This viewpoint is explicitly embraced by the asset-based approach to welfare which seeks to provide assets which appreciate in value to allow citizens to liquefy them in times of financial insecurity (Groves et al., 2007; Malpass, 2008). However, the financial crisis has demonstrated that the converse is also true, with asset price collapses and negative equity becoming negativity reinforcing circles and a financial hindrance rather than a safeguard (Ronald & Doling, 2012). Despite this, widespread support still persists for a homeownership model of housing amongst citizens (Kohl, 2021), and many of the assumptions of the homeowner model of housing have gone unchallenged (Arundel & Ronald, 2021), but far less work has been conducted on the extent to which public policy continues to support and favour these arrangements. Consequently, that is the question of interest in this work, and to answer it, Ireland is adopted as a case study.

Ireland is illustrative of a homeowner society and has been so for most of its period since independence, (Downey, 2014; Fahey & Norris, 2011; Norris, 2016) with homeownership rates reaching their peak rate of 81% in the early 1990s (S. Kelly, 2021, p. 42) with moderate falls in each subsequent census, reaching a rate of 64% in 2022 (CSO, 2023) with similar trends also observable in other homeowner societies (Arundel & Ronald, 2021; Kemp, 2015; Waldron, 2023). While these trends have evoked concern and criticism of the sustainability of the asset-based approach to welfare in the housing studies and political economy literature (e.g. (Aalbers, 2017; Arundel & Ronald, 2021; Clapham, 2019) the extent to which this general criticism has prompted concrete policy re-orientation is unclear and the focus of this research.

This thesis argues the severity of the GFC in Ireland (Ó Riain, 2014) was of such a magnitude to potentially result in such a policy reimagination with the centrality of the real estate and financial sectors to the Irish case (Honohan, 2010; McCabe, 2011) offering a particularly

credible rationale to anticipate emergent threats to the status quo, prompting the central research question: “Did the severity and centrality of the construction, financial, and real-estate sectors to the GFC undermine public policy support for homeownership as a preferred tenure type?”.

This research builds upon and contributes to the existing literature in a number of ways. First, it presents a qualitative case study that charts the development of a housing system, which is both of use to understand the specifics of the Irish case and for a point of comparison with previous scholarship critiquing the lack of qualitative work on housing systems (Castells, 1983; Kemeny, 1992; Lawrence, 2012). Secondly, it tests the resilience of policy regimes in a context in which a policy equilibrium could be expected to be challenged due to an exceptional event. In particular, housing systems have often been understudied due to their complexity and unique nature, which has rendered comparative research difficult (Kemeny, 1992, Chapter 5) and consequently, few studies have analysed their change over time. However, due to the similarity of Ireland to other homeowner societies, this analysis also serves a comparative purpose and is more widely applicable to understanding the dynamics of policy change in crisis times. Furthermore, as homeownership rates have converged more broadly in recent decades (Conley & Gifford, 2006; Kemeny, 1995; Kurz & Blossfeld, 2004; Stephens, 2020), it also has the potential to analyse the relative importance of tenure dynamics to reactive housing policy in crisis and also acts a benchmark as a high homeownership society. Relatedly, the central impact of crisis is of note to a broader literature concerning state transition in terms of crisis (e.g. (Hemerijck, 2013; MacCarthaigh, 2017; O’Donoghue et al., 2023), with wider applicability to understanding when, and why, dominant policies, structures, and institutions are maintained and when they change. In all, this means that this research helps to elucidate the specific developments in Irish housing policy, the consequences and future of homeownership models

in a wider context, and a wider understanding of how, why, and when dominant and embedded policies are maintained, transformed, or replaced.

To achieve this goal, a number of analytical tools and theories are employed. First, Gramsci's theory of hegemony is used to argue that in Ireland, homeownership represents a dominant ideology (Kemeny, 1992) that was uncontested in Irish policymaking spheres for decades, enjoyed widespread support, and was seen as natural and immutable (S. Kelly, 2021). To determine whether this is still the case, two public policy approaches are used: multiple streams analysis (MSA) and punctuated equilibrium theory (PET), which are both useful for understanding different elements of policy change. Overall, the conclusion reached is that while the centrality of homeownership as a preferred tenure form was initially challenged in the wake of the crisis with reforms towards a more tenure-neutral housing policy, this trend seems to have reversed in recent years. Despite this, substantial reforms have also occurred in the private rental sector, in social housing policy, and in the creation of a cost rental sector, which complicate the picture and point to a renegotiated imperfect hegemonic position of homeownership in the Irish policy mix with a more balanced approach to other tenures that previously existed. Nonetheless, the resilience of homeownership as the most preferred tenure remains evident and is the core conclusion reached.

Having established this paper's focus, goals, and rationale, it will proceed as follows. First, it will evaluate the relevant literature on the ideological underpinning, trends, and arguments in favour of an asset-based approach to welfare, with specific attention paid to the Irish case and the period following the GFC when this approach was challenged. Next, it contextualises the Irish case study by presenting a brief portrait of its content and, in doing so, establishes its applicability to study the question of whether the financial crisis challenged homeownership ideology. Building on this, it draws on existing theoretical scholarship in housing studies and public policy to establish expectations for the Irish case before outlining the policy



developments between 2008 and the present and analysing them using the frameworks introduced. Hereafter, it discusses the implications of the findings presented for both the Irish and international housing literature before concluding by summarising the arguments, findings, and implications for future study.

## **2: Literature Review**

Globally, the homeowner model of housing provision became popular in conjunction with the neoliberal economic reforms of the 1980s (Edgar et al., 2002; Kurz & Blossfeld, 2004; MacLaran & Kelly, 2014; Rolnik, 2014). Proponents of the approach argue that ownership provides a sense of security, consistency, an increased stake in society, and economic stability in providing a stable financial asset to draw on in hard times (Conley & Gifford, 2006; Groves et al., 2007; Malpass, 2008; Saunders, 1990; Sherraden, 1991). Furthermore, the pursuit of homeownership also became associated with the development of an 'Asset Based' welfare approach whereby access to equity in the form of housing provided a robust safety net to citizens, frontloaded housing costs earlier in the life course, and developed a greater sense of self-resilience which rendered traditional welfare state services and transfers obsolete (Conley & Gifford, 2006; Fahey, 2003; Groves et al., 2007; Sherraden, 1991). In this period, the private rental sector was assumed to be in terminal decline and social rental systems were seen to be 'inferior' tenure types (S. Kelly, 2021; Kemeny, 1995) with Right-to-Buy schemes in the UK in Ireland allowing social housing tenants to purchase their homes at significant discounts (Forrest & Murie, 2014; Norris & Redmond, 2007) and deregulation of credit markets allowing enhanced access to mortgages extending access to homeownership to a broader proportion of the population (Downey, 2014).

Ideological support and tenant purchase schemes led to an advance of homeownership in Western economies in the 1980s and 1990s, with these trends observable in both traditional homeowner societies, such as Ireland and Australia, and those where cost-rental approaches were dominant, such as the Netherlands and Germany (Stephens, 2020). However, come the 2000s and in conjunction with a major injection of foreign credit, homeownership rates became increasingly difficult to sustain - particularly in societies such as Ireland and the U.K., where rates began at a high - as real estate value appreciated at a rapid rate and speculative investment exploded with the securitisation of housing assets (Cullen, 2018; Norris & Redmond, 2007). In this period, the homeownership model of welfare began to attract increasing levels of criticism, with questions raised about its equity outcomes and long-term sustainability. (Harloe, 1995; Kemeny, 2005; Kurz & Blossfeld, 2004; Malpass, 2008; Ronald, 2008).

Following the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) in 2008, these concerns proved well-founded as the property, financial, and construction sectors all played a central role in the crisis following decades of unsustainable lending, financial deregulation, securitisation, and subprime mortgage lending practices (Aalbers, 2017; Downey, 2014; Gaiotti, 2013) with homeowner societies such as the United States, Ireland, the UK, Spain, and Iceland particularly exposed to the crisis (López & Rodríguez, 2011; Ó Riain, 2014; Tranøy & Sigurjonsson, 2022). Hereafter, the financialisation, assetification, and tendency to view housing primarily as an asset over a home has come under increasing scrutiny from a variety of quarters, while concern over income and wealth inequality has only grown (Aalbers, 2012; Aalbers & Christophers, 2014; Arundel & Ronald, 2021; Clapham, 2019; Dewilde, 2018; Dewilde & Ronald, 2017; Piketty, 2017, 2020). Concurrently, traditional homeowner societies have seen a continued and consistent decline in homeownership rates (Kemp, 2015; Ronald & Lennartz, 2019; Sirr, 2021b), creating the potential for significant political discontent in the near future due to the abovementioned movement to substitute welfare spending with assets for citizens. On this, Richard et al. (2015)

went as far as to conclude that the decline in homeownership is one of the most enduring legacies of the GFC.

Ireland is particularly exemplary of this trend and has seen homeownership fall from a high of 81% in 1991 to 66% in 2022 (CSO, 2023; S. Kelly, 2021, p. 42), with the average age at which homeownership became the dominant tenure increasing from 26 to 36 in this period (CSO, 2023). Similar to other Anglo-Saxon countries like the United Kingdom, and Australia (Richards, 1990; Saunders, 1990; Vale, 2019) Ireland has a deeply embedded culture of homeownership with a strong connection existing between the Irish struggle for independence and the right to own land and property. (Kitchin et al., 2012; Norris & Redmond, 2007). Since 1991, homeownership rates have fallen in Ireland in each subsequent census (Sirr, 2021b) while the percentage of those in the private rental market has increased from 8.1% in 1991 to 18.8% in 2016, with a growth from 11 to 18.8% occurring between 2006 and 2011 alone (M. Byrne, 2020, p. 14). These trends are similar to those in other countries, such as the UK (Kemp, 2015) with the growth of the private rental sector has been an enduring consequence of the 2008 financial crisis, more generally (M. Byrne, 2020; Kohl, 2021; Richard et al., 2015). Despite this, research to date has failed to definitively identify the underlying policy mechanisms through which this has occurred and preferred to deal with the immediate responses of countries with distressed assets to the financial crisis (M. Byrne, 2016b; López & Rodríguez, 2011; Norris & Byrne, 2018), the problematic nature of affordability pressures that are a consequence of the rise of the PRS and the undersupply of housing (M. Byrne, 2020; Hearne, 2020; Lima et al., 2023), and the global factors undermining traditional homeowner supports (Aalbers, 2017; Clapham, 2019; Jacobs et al., 2022).

The exception to this case in the Irish is the study of policy change undertaken by Umfreville (2021). However, he does not focus on the positionality of homeownership; instead, he is interested in why the Irish housing system seems to remain in perpetual crisis. He concludes

that the Irish system has been in a 'hurtful stalemate' (Sabatier & Weible, 2007) and unable to re-orientate itself to solve the crisis due to disagreement on the nature of the problem at hand. While this presents a starting point for analysis of the problem, Umfreville's analysis does not go into detail about the specific composition of housing policy in Ireland or with tenure dynamics. Although Sirr (2021a) somewhat develops this theme later in the same volume, his contributions generally relate to placing homeownership as a traditionally dominant tenure type and outlining challenges experienced in recent decades (Sirr, 2019) and he does not deal with the extent to which homeownership has guided modern Irish policy but making the point that historically claims of tenure neutrality are fictitious with homeowners receiving disproportionate support (Sirr, 2019, 2021a). Lyons similarly argues that the Irish approach to housing has been unsustainable and cuts during the GFC have severely hampered its capacity to function properly, identifying supply shortages as the main issue for combating affordability pressures but fails to identify the extent to which a focus on homeownership, or other tenure types, has impacted on the policymaking process (Lyons, 2017).

In the literature, policy change in times of crisis can be understood as both a requirement or an opportunity to unsettle the status quo by invoking the auspicious of necessity in order to implement a wide-ranging set of reforms in a condensed, emergency, period (Friedman, 2002; MacCarthaigh, 2017; Mercille, 2017; Wren-Lewis, 2017) with such narratives being pervasive through Europe following the GFC to justify both austerity and welfare state restructuring (Heffernan et al., 2017; Hemerijck, 2013) with Ireland particularly notable in this regard (MacCarthaigh, 2017; Mercille & Murphy, 2015). However, the GFC is not exceptional in this regard, with previous financial and social crises also leading to major policy reinvention and focusing on housing. In particular, several examples are evident. The destruction caused by the Second World War was central to the mass provision of social housing in Europe following the war during the 'golden age of social housing', which lasted until the 1960s (Priemus &

Dieleman, 1999). Similarly, fiscal pressures in Britain precipitated Margaret Thatcher's privatisation of social housing in the United Kingdom (Forrest & Murie, 2014) with similar effects on social housing also evident in Ireland (Norris, 2016; Ó Broin, 2019) in the 1980s, while the Nordic financial crisis in the 1990s also led to a major restructuring of the welfare states (Ó Riain, 2017).

Nonetheless, while an extensive literature considering the Irish housing market since the GFC (e.g. (M. Byrne, 2020; M. Byrne & Norris, 2018, 2022; Downey, 2014; Hearne, 2020; Heffernan et al., 2017; Kitchin et al., 2012, 2015; Lennon & Waldron, 2019; Lima, 2021; Lima et al., 2023; Norris & Byrne, 2015; Priemus & Whitehead, 2014; Waldron, 2023) there is a conspicuous lack of research that considers the particulars of reform in the area of homeownership, with this lacuna notable given the centrality of this element of the Irish housing policy to the subsequent crisis (McCabe, 2011; Norris, 2016; Ó Riain, 2014) and consequently, it is of important to address.

In essence, the existing literature demonstrates that the homeownership model of housing has come under pressure in recent decades - both in Ireland and internationally - and has been questioned on the grounds of security, stability, and sustainability (Arundel & Ronald, 2021; Mulheirn, 2019). However, little scholarship has been dedicated to developing a narrative around the extent to which policymakers have, or have not, sought to maintain high homeownership rates. A dearth of qualitative research has long been identified as a shortcoming of housing studies literature (Castells, 1983; Kemeny, 1995, 2005) and in what follows, that is what will be provided.

### 3: Research Design

In addressing the question at hand, a single case study design is employed to address the previous lack of qualitative research in this area. A single case study approach is applicable to answering this question as it provides an in-depth consideration of one instance of the relationship of note over a period of time that allows for the consideration of factors in a greater degree of detail than would be possible with a quantitative approach or a comparative case study approach which while increasing generalisability, does so at the cost of a more detailed investigation of the factors of note which are of particular interest in this instance (Gerring, 2016).

Ireland presents an ideal case study for the study of housing policy change in relation to homeownership for a number of reasons: its history of homeownership, its suitability as a point of comparison to other homeowner societies, the relationship between the property market and the Irish experience of the 2008 financial crisis, and its orientation as an 'extreme case' that, due to the severity of the crisis, would be expected to be demonstrative of a relationship between financial crisis and housing policy reform if such a relationship existed.

First, in Ireland, the idea of homeownership as a housing ideal has long been embedded in public consciousness. Kitchin et al. (2012) have argued that this association developed during the Land League wars of the 1880s when Irish farmers resisted absentee landlords in efforts to gain ownership of their farms and that a connection between ownership and freedom developed, which was integrated into Irish Republicanism ideology. This stance is reflected in government publications such as the 1969 Report by the Department of Local Government, which described homeownership as the "tenure desired by the majority of the population" and as being "socially and financially" the most sustainable (Department of Local Government, 1969, pp. 27–35). This led to sustained government support for homeowners with the National

Economic & Social Council concluding in 1977 that homeowners received more financial discounts and reductions than social housing tenants (National Economic & Social Council, 1977) with fiscal subsidies of this magnitude leading Norris (2016) to argue that Ireland represented a 'property-based welfare state' demonstrating an early adoption of the asset-based welfare approached popularised in the 1990s and 2000s elsewhere (Groves et al., 2007; Malpass, 2008; Sherraden, 1991). Homeownership in Ireland peaked at 81% in the early 1990s but has been in decline since then, with this issue not being unique to Ireland (S. Kelly, 2021, p. 42). The property boom that occurred in the mid-2000s was largely due to a concerted government effort to allow individuals and investors to buy homes, which both perpetuated the boom and increased unaffordability and ultimately cumulated with the bursting of the bubble in 2008 and the subsequent collapse of the property, financial, and construction sectors which all required major, costly, bailouts from the state (Honohan, 2010; Mansergh, 2024; McCabe, 2011; McDonald & Sheridan, 2008; Norris & Redmond, 2007).

Similar to countries like Spain and the USA, the GFC in Ireland was caused by the development of a major real-estate bubble created by the deregulation and oversupply of cheap credit (M. Byrne, 2020; McCabe, 2011; Norris & Byrne, 2015; Ó Riain, 2017). Consequently, when the bubble burst, the financial sector in Ireland folded as, particularly from 2002 onwards, its lending practices had become increasingly speculative and tied to an assumption of continued appreciation of asset prices leading to progressively riskier lending practices (Ó Riain, 2014). The scale of the collapse of the sector was so severe that Ireland was required to pursue a bailout provided plan jointly sponsored by the International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank, and European Union, with strict austerity conditions conditional on this deal being granted.

In this period, housing asset prices collapsed, with values in Dublin reaching a floor of 55% of 2007 values in 2011, leaving a substantial proportion of the population in negative equity

(Lyons, 2017, p. 133). In 2012, 1/5 of mortgage holders were in arrears (Waldron, 2016) while material deprivation increased from 13 to 30% of the population between 2008 and 2012 with children most impacted (Whelan & Nolan, 2017, p. 102). In this period, harsh austerity budgets were introduced with large tax increases, cuts to public spending, and retrenchment of the state's role in arenas where it was typically highly involved, such as housing (Heffernan et al., 2017). Concurrently, large amounts of public funds coupled with debt were required to recapitalise banks and relieve them of toxic assets, which became the responsibility of the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) (M. Byrne, 2016b).

Consequently, in this period, the prudence of lending and spending practices and the sustainability of an asset-based approach to welfare and economic development became issues of centre stage in Irish policy circles. As a result, it is plausible that public and political resistance to this housing model could (potentially) be expected to develop in these circumstances. Crisis in general can be argued to illicit such a response, however, the centrality of housing assets to the GFC in Ireland makes it particularly probable that a degree of pushback would occur - especially given the small and homogenous nature of the country and the centralisation of policymaking communities (E. A. Byrne, 2013; Leahy, 2009; MacCarthaigh, 2017; Nyberg, 2011).

Additionally, the Irish system is particularly noteworthy as even before the GFC, it was experiencing acute affordability pressures, and its homeowner model was under pressure (Norris & Redmond, 2007; Norris & Winston, 2004). Many of the measures adopted to create an 'asset-based welfare system' (Norris, 2016) were removed in the 1980s to deal with the fiscal crisis experienced at the time and were accompanied by reforms to de-regulate the financial sector (M. Byrne & Norris, 2022). Over the ensuing decades, this led to house price inflation, ultimately creating the bubble and an overly 'hot' construction sector that buoyed price increases (Mansergh, 2024). Reform of the rental sector also began in the 2000s on foot of



declining homeownership while Part V of the 2000 Planning and Development Act was introduced to provide a steady source of social and affordable housing with 20% of a developments stock (or payments in lieu of this) required under this act (Norris, 2016; SIRR, 2019). In essence, the pre-existing price pressures, which Kitchin et al. (2015) claim were a result of a construction sector in crisis for decades, meant that pressure for reform predated the crash and opened up the possibility that a 'big bang event' could lead to more transformative change (Cairney, 2020, Chapter 4; Kingdon, 1984; Studlar & Cairney, 2014)

In all, this means that Ireland represents an exemplary case of a traditional homeowner society with this tenure type having deep roots. It has experienced challenges to this dominance in recent times, with affordability problems pre-dating the current crisis, and the GFC represents a particularly relevant crisis event to study the impact of crisis in this area due to the centrality of real estate, property, and housing to the crisis experienced in Ireland. Consequently, Ireland represents a good case study for understanding the impact of the crisis on policy as it began with a high level of commitment to the policy of interest, high homeownership, which represents the independent variable, and similarly, there is a strong connection between it and the dependent variable, financial crisis, with the GFC in Ireland both being severe and closely tied to the policy in which change is expected leading to a higher expectation it might be both salient in subsequent years and challenged.

In approaching case selection in this way, a most likely case approach has been chosen (Gerring, 2016) as if a financial crisis is to challenge a strong, institutionalised policy commitment such as a homeownership based housing policy, this is most likely to occur in a climate where a major crisis unfolds with this policy central to this crisis, as was the case in Ireland. Ireland also benefits from being a small country with a centralised approach to housing policy, which is less likely to have major regional or localised dynamics such as larger countries that experienced similar housing crises like the United States, United Kingdom, or Spain.

Nonetheless, neither does the experience in Ireland differ too markedly from these countries, making this case study applicable as a point of comparison to similar contexts. Consequently, Ireland represents a strong case study due to the close relationship between the independent and dependent variable of interest, its (greater) ability to reduce the impact of other potential explanations, and its usefulness as a comparative case. In essence, this means that, as a case, Ireland represents an extreme example where if a major policy change in housing were to occur in response to a financial crisis, such a reform would be expected in Ireland, with the section below developing this argument further with support of existing theoretical scholarship from housing studies and political economy.

#### **4: Theoretical Expectations**

Until the work of Jim Kemeny (Kemeny, 1981, 1983, 1992, 1995, 2005; Kemeny et al., 2005) little work had been done on establishing theoretical frameworks to understand housing regimes and welfare arrangements with housing referred to as the 'wobbly pillar' of the welfare state (Torgersen, 1987) and excluded from analysis due to its complexity (e.g. (Wilensky, 1975, p. 9)). Building on the work of Esping-Andersen (1990), Kemeny (Kemeny, 1992, 1995, 2001, 2005) developed a framework for understanding housing systems as dualist or unitary, with dualist systems being polarised by high homeownership rates and a sheltered, residualised, social rental sectors with rents below the private market rate and the Ireland representative of such this model (Punch, 2007). Kemeny further argued that high homeownership rates undermine support for redistributive policies as it frontloads housing expenses earlier on in the life course, reducing the viability of higher taxes to fund social programmes with this also true in the case of Ireland (Kemeny, 1995, 2005).

Although the direction of this relationship has been questioned - with Castles (1998) arguing that instead, individuals opt into homeownership as a hedge against poor social service delivery - the empirical record to date has been clear that the two variables are negatively correlated (Castles, 1998; Conley & Gifford, 2006; Kemeny et al., 2005; Schmidt, 1989). Furthermore, it has also been identified that housing systems with high ownership are more volatile and prone to crisis and pro-cyclically inclined policy that makes policy change in downturns difficult and property prices in these systems are more volatile (M. Byrne, 2016a, 2016b; Mansergh, 2024).

Housing systems are also seen as being highly context dependent, with significant historical contingencies essential to their development (Bengtsson & Ruonavaara, 2010; Conley & Gifford, 2006; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Kemeny, 1995) and while discussion persists about whether they are on a convergent (Harloe, 1995; Léon, 2018; Yunus, 2015) or divergent (Bengtsson et al., 2017; Kemeny & Lowe, 1998) pathway, it is widely held that historical institutions and path-dependency play a core role in their development (Blackwell & Kohl, 2019; Lawson, 2010; Norris, 2016). Due to this path dependency, significant changes often require exceptional indicating events to lead to change. After the Second World War, many European states expanded social housing drastically in order to replace stock destroyed by the war and house returning soldiers (Priemus & Dieleman, 1999) while major fiscal and financial crises in the U.K. and Scandinavia in the 1970s and 1990s respectively resulted in major restructuring of their respective welfare states and housing systems (Forrest & Murie, 2014; Ó Riain, 2017, p. 221). The extent and severity of the banking crisis that occurred in Ireland in 2008 is of a similar magnitude to plausibly expect a similar restructuring. Following years of over-lending to sustain a property asset bubble, the collapse and subsequent bailout of the Irish banking sector was of such a scale to require an emergency national bailout programme overseen by the IMF, EU, and ECB (Ó Riain, 2014) with severe austerity measures contingent on this loan being granted (Heffernan et al., 2017). In this period, unemployment rose to a high

of 15% in 2012, the proportion of the population experiencing material deprivation increased from 13 to 30% (E. Kelly & McGuinness, 2015, p. 51; Whelan & Nolan, 2017, p. 102), and property prices slumped by 55% in Dublin (S. Kelly, 2021, p. 45) while in the years since there has been significant disquiet and debate about the equity of the economic recovery (Hearne, 2020; Ó Broin, 2019; Ó Riain, 2017).

The context outlined above provides a plausible scenario in which a longstanding policy constellation could be challenged. In order to investigate this, two theories of public policy change are particularly relevant alongside the Gramscian theory of hegemony. In investigating policy change, the literature has embraced the stance adopted by Sabatier, which proposes the adoption of multiple approaches when investigating a problem in order to leverage each's strengths and mitigate their weaknesses (Cairney, 2020; Sabatier, 2007, p. 330; Umfreville, 2021). In this vein, the two approaches adopted here - Multiple Streams Analysis (MSA) and Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET) - have been chosen because of their complementary strengths in exploring different areas in the policymaking process.

MSA, developed by Kingdon (1984) argues that in order for longstanding policy to change, 3 independent 'streams' must all move in conjunction with one another to reach a new policy position (Herweg et al., 2023). These streams relate to issue problematisation – whether something is seen as an issue by a wide range of actors, policy solutions – whether a feasible policy intervention can solve the issue, and political climate – if public opinion and political conditions are conducive to implementing the aforementioned policy (Cairney, 2020; Herweg et al., 2023). MSA is useful in this context as the 3 different streams allow for studying the question at hand from 3 different angles. Namely, in following the 2008 GFC, has homeownership as a policy outcome been problematised to the extent that is seen as requiring a policy correction, do viable policy solutions exist for such a correction, and is the political climate hospitable for these policies to be implemented?

MSA has the benefit of being able to identify multiple avenues required in order to lead to policy change. However, it is less able to explain exactly why the social, cultural, and economic conditions exist that prevent that change for doing so. For example, if homeownership is not seen to have been problematised, MSA fails to identify why this was not the case, while the study of the political climate can often miss the underlying assumptions and beliefs that created it. Consequently, PET has also been employed to address these shortcomings.

PET, developed by Baumgartner and Jones (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993), seeks to explain sudden shifts in policy after long periods of stability. To do so, it incorporates complexity theory and claims that destabilising events dislodge policy equilibriums after a critical mass of negative feedback, grievances, and discontent with the status quo accumulate and result in a rapid period of policy reform equivalent to the recalibration required by the build-up of negative energy (Baumgartner et al., 2023, p. 66). To explain this, it adopts a bounded rationality approach to argue that policymakers' attention is limited and can only be focused on a small number of core issues at a time, and when attention is not paid to a particular policy area, the status quo is maintained by a policy image or narrative that defines both the policy problem, and the solution (Baumgartner et al., 2023, p. 72). In doing this, it builds on agenda setting theory (Schattschneider, 2012) to argue that stability is maintained by dominant interest groups which create frames through which issues are understood, obstruct newcomers and criticism, and develop a varying degree of monopoly control over how a given issue is perceived and what solutions are seen as appropriate to address it (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). In times of change, these dominant interests are often displaced and the policy image shifts with a new equilibrium reached dependent on the preferences and degree of focus of the new dominant coalition (Cairney, 2020). Consequently, PET presents an appealing avenue to explore the degree to which attention was paid to homeownership as an 'issue' and the extent

to which the core interest coalition was challenged by the major changes following the 2008 GFC.

Despite the above, it is also important to study the underlying characteristics and assumptions held by all actors in a given social system when investigating change, as learning and policy development are conducted through existing 'lenses' and conditioned by existing beliefs (Cairney, 2020, Chapter 10; Hall, 1993; S. Kelly, 2021).

To deal with this, the Gramscian concept of Hegemony is introduced. Hegemonic theory sees some assumptions and beliefs becoming so embedded into society that they are 'taken as given and go unchallenged'. Put another way, when in equilibrium, hegemonic beliefs go uncontested, taken as given, and crucially, filter opposition to the point where they speak within the terms of the existing hegemonic idea (S. Kelly, 2021; Kemeny, 1992; Sassoon, 1982, p. 95). Kemeny has argued that tenure preferences can become powerfully embedded in political systems while politicians are incentivised to 'stack' one tenure type over others (Kemeny, 1992). Winter has also argued that homeownership ideologies can become highly embedded into societal expectations and become difficult to uproot while has made similar points (Marcuse, 1987; Winter, 1994). Existing scholarship also has pointed to a highly embedded preference and emotive connection between homeownership and prosperity particularly in English speaking countries (Richards, 1990; Saunders, 1990; Vale, 2019) while there has long been an association between land ownership and freedom in the Irish context, harkening back to the Land League Wars of the 1880s (Kitchin et al., 2012) with Norris (2016) has shown that supporting homeownership has been central government policy for generations. Consequently, the perseverance of a hegemonic - or 'dominant ideology' as Kemeny framed it - with respect to housing tenure policy in Ireland could be a powerful countervailing force against reform of the system (Kemeny, 1992, p. 92).

Overall, the above presents reasons to expect both continuity and change in light of the events of the GFC. In section five, below, the reforms implemented between 2008 and 2024 are described before being analysed in section six using the analytical frameworks introduced here.

## **5: Case Study: Policy Developments 2008-2024**

This section outlines the core developments of Irish housing policy between 2008 and 2024. To do this, three ‘periods’ are identified: 2008- late 2014/early 2015, 2015-2020, and 2020-present – with policy reforms in each of these periods discussed around dominant themes and narratives at this time.

The first is the period from 2008 lasted until the beginning of the economic recovery in 2014/15, with housing policy at this time seeking to repair equity and relieve distressed assets from banks while also reforming the regulatory framework to improve building standards following a series of scandals with. This period is also notable for adopting a stated position of tenure neutrality and taking a critical approach to pro-homeowner policies. The second period, from about 2015/2016 until 2020, saw efforts to deal with emerging affordability and availability crises that emerged following the undersupply of new units. Reforms in this era sought to create a more regulated and better functioning private rental sector and centralise urban planning to create a more plan-led approach to development and a tenure-neutral housing system that balanced supports for different tenure types. This period also saw the introduction of a suite of short-term measures to address the immediate crisis situations with rent control, an increased roll-out of rent supplemental schemes, and the re-introduction of a first-time buyer grant all provided. Finally, the period from 2020 to present has begun to defect from the approaches to tenure neutrality outlined in the previous two periods and instead sought to

reinstate a more traditional Irish model of housing based around homeownership and provision of social housing. The continuation of centralisation trends in planning and development is evident in this period, alongside the expansion of demand-side supports to enable homeownership. However, provisions have also been made to expand the Approved Housing Bodies (AHB) sector and develop a Cost Rental Sector while efforts to create a more cohesive PRS have also continued. Nonetheless, both rhetorically and financially, the impetus in this area has been towards a more overt support for a homeowner housing model.

Below, these reforms are described in more detail, and the following section explains them using the theoretical frameworks outlined in the previous section, with this section also serving to contextualise the approach to housing policy before the financial crisis.

## **5.1: Period 1: 2008-2014**

In the years immediately following the GFC and subsequent bailout, the main goals of Irish housing policy was to restore equity and liquidity to the banking sector. The most notable reform was the establishment of the National Asset Management Agency - NAMA - in December 2009 (O’Callaghan, 2016). NAMA was tasked with acquiring toxic assets from Irish banks and mandated to dispose of them at the maximum gain to the taxpayer (M. Byrne, 2016b). As the Irish financial system was undermined by the crisis and lacked credit due to poor international confidence in its stability, Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITS) were legislated for in 2013 with favourable tax arrangements provided for these organisations and an explicit goal to attract foreign investment capital to revive the Irish real-estate market where transactions declined by 90% during the crisis years (Lyons, 2017, p. 133). Restoring equity to the market was of such high importance as at the peak of the crisis, 36.2% of mortgage holders were in negative equity while 1/5 were in arrears (Reddan, 2018; Waldron, 2016), with property



prices falling by 55% in Dublin and 49% nationally (S. Kelly, 2021, p. 45; Lyons, 2017). As housing asset values have historically played such a central role in the Irish welfare system (Norris, 2016) - with about 80% of Irish household wealth held in housing assets (Taylor, 2020) such a pronounced collapse in values had the potential to undermine the foundations of the asset-based approach to welfare with negative equity turning housing from an investment to a liability that would destabilise the economy as a whole with the asset based approach to welfare assuming stable, modest price appreciation (Brenner et al., 2010; Ronald & Doling, 2012).

In this period, a core focus of reform was also on the regulation of financial institutions, with reports by Honohan (2010) Nyberg (2011), & Regling & Watson (2010) on the central role of unregulated finance in the crisis crystallising this as a core issue of public and political concern. Relatedly, the fallout of the Mahon Tribunal, which focused on corruption in the Irish planning process, had a substantial impact on public opinion and undermined public confidence in the 'light-touch' regulatory system that enabled the construction boom during the Celtic Tiger (Norris & Coates, 2014) and wider corruption in society (E. A. Byrne, 2013). These calls were only amplified by the emergence of structural defects in Celtic Tiger era buildings, with the most famous of these being the case of Priory Hall, where 256 residents were required to evacuate in 2011 due to unsafe living conditions caused by inadequate building standards (Ó Broin, 2021).

Consequently, this period saw a number of legislative modifications to the Building Controls Acts (1990-2014), reform of the Residential Tenancies Act (2013) and the passing of the Multi-Unit Development Act (2011) (Ní Fhloinn, 2021) which mandated inspections of completed buildings, improved minimum standards in the private rental market, and established a statutory footing to manage large multi-unit apartment blocks and student accommodation complexes (Ní Fhloinn, 2021). REITs were legislated for as part of the 2013 Finance Act

(MacLaran & Kelly, 2014) while NAMA was established by the National Asset Management Agency Act 2009 (M. Byrne, 2016b)

At the time, a widespread perception emerged that Ireland is overbuilt during the 2000s, with this being represented by the widespread nature of 'ghost estates', which were unfinished or unoccupied housing often built in peripheral counties with little demand (Kitchin et al., 2012; O'Callaghan, 2016). The emergence of this narrative and framing of the sector contributed to an impetus for greater urban, regional, and spatial planning, which developed into formal policy in the second period and is discussed below. A consequence of this perception and financial mismanagement was the near total collapse of the construction sector, with the employed in the sector declining from 236,800 to 83,400 between 2007 and 2012 (Conefrey & McIndoe-Calder, 2018., p. 45) and housing output slumping from 88,211 completions in 2006 to 10,501 in 2014 (Norris & Byrne, 2018, p. 50) with the long-term consequences of this being a build-up of demand coupled with a reduced capacity of the sector to meet it (Mansergh, 2024).

Although this period lacked a formalised government housing plan like future periods had with Rebuilding Ireland (2016) or Housing for All (2021), the government Housing Policy Statement published in 2011 fulfilled the same purpose by orientating housing policy in the years following the financial crisis (Department of the Environment, Community, and Local Government, 2011). Published in June 2011, the Housing Policy Statement established the policy direction that the Fine Gael-Labour coalition government of 2011-2016 pursued while also foreshadowing many of the recommendations made by the review of Section V of the Planning Act, 2000 in 2014 by the Housing Agency and more widely the recommendations of its report (The Housing Agency, 2014). In all, the Housing Policy Document possibly represents the most overt criticism of the homeowner model of housing by a government policy document in the history of the state, describing it as having enjoyed a "high & often

unreasonable value" in government policy and being 'detrimental to Ireland's economic and social goals' (Department of the Environment, Community, and Local Government, 2011; Mansergh, 2024, p. 50). Similarly, this document proposed the review of Part V; however, in many ways, it prejudiced its results by critiquing the role of affordable purchase housing in sustaining house prices and its critiques of homeownership in general. Consequently, the report by the housing commission represented continuity in tone and message to the original circular recommending the discontinuation of affordable housing from part V in favour of exclusive and mandated provision of social housing and a reduction of the requirements from 20 to 10% of the total development housing stock (The Housing Agency, 2014) with NESC arguing this was partly to increase the viability of delivery of some social housing (National Economic & Social Council, 2020) at a time when severe shortages were developing and waiting lists growing (Lyons, 2017, p. 137; National Economic & Social Council, 2020). Elsewhere, both documents commit firmly to a policy of tenure neutrality in the housing sector that is uniquely robust in the Irish context (c.f. (National Economic & Social Council, 1977, 1988; Norris, 2016) and overall are suggestive of the emergence of a more critical appraisal of the assumptions underpinning Irish housing policy.

In all, this period's focus can be summarised as improving construction standards, returning households in negative equity to parity, repairing the financial and economic status of the country, and being critical of the previous governments' relationship with the construction and banking sectors.

## **5.2: Period 2: 2015-2020**

The second policy cycle began in roughly late 2014/ early 2015 and lasted until 2020. It was associated with the beginning of the economy's recovery and the re-emergence of affordability

pressures in housing as real estate prices rebounded in tandem with the economy. In general, policies in this period attempted to control prices in the private rental sector, improve the extent to which urban development was plan based, and centralise authority in the central regulatory agencies and Ministry for Housing to mobilise and restart the construction sector to match undersupply of new units during the period of from 2008 with an estimate a shortfall of 50,000 homes in Dublin alone and requirement for at least 25,000 new homes a year (Government of Ireland, 2016, p. 23)

Rebuilding Ireland, presented in 2016, represents the central government plan for this period and establishes both the objectives and trends that would come to dominate in the years to follow. Rebuilding Ireland specifically commits to a tenure neutral approach while also advocating for the unique benefits of the private rental sector, representing a sharp deviation from the state's stance in the 1980s, where it was seen as a 'forgotten tenure' (O'Brien & Dillon, 1982). It also set out to address homelessness, which had become an issue of pronounced political significance in the runup to the 2016 general election, and set a goal to

“...significantly increase and expedite the delivery of social housing units, boost private housing construction, improve the rental market, and deliver on the commitment to see housing supply, in overall terms, increase to some 25,000 new homes every year by 2020.”

(Government of Ireland, 2016, p. 5)

Nonetheless, Rebuilding Ireland also saw a reintroduction of a first-time buyer's scheme for homebuyers, representing a creeping back to demand-side supports for this tenure type. The introduction of such a scheme - as well as its continuation and subsequent expansion in recent years - is also notable due to a similar scheme being discontinued during the 2000s as it was

seen as largely inflationary and with little benefit to homebuyers (Downey, 2007, p. 62) with the current scheme criticised for similar reasons (Department of Finance, 2022).

Elsewhere, the introduction of Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs), which capped rent increases to 4% per annum in areas where affordability pressures were most severe, can be seen as an effort to respond to an emerging crisis with many of the measures in Rebuilding Ireland - and arguably Irish housing policy more generally - as being reactive to current circumstances instead of proactively trying to avert them (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2024; Kitchin et al., 2012; Mansergh, 2024). Centralisation of powers can also be viewed in this light. Rebuilding Ireland set in motion a trend that has continued in Housing for All of attempting to accelerate the process of development of new properties as in this period, increasing the supply of new units increasingly became a means to an end of government policy and was seen by the government as the way to address affordability problems (Umfreville, 2021). This prompted the Minister for Housing to reverse many of the minimum standards on unit size, lift requirements, and parking space availability in measures introduced in 2015 and 2018, as these measures were seen as a roadblock to new supply (Redmond & Yang, 2021) with these powers granted under the Planning & Development Act, 2015 (Redmond & Yang, 2021). The introduction of the Strategic Housing Development (SHD) framework can also be considered in this family of reforms with large planning applications able to bypass local authorities and apply directly to An Bord Pleanála with an aim to accelerating the planning permission process with this process underpinned in the Planning & Development Housing Act, 2016.

The rapid expansion of rent supplemental schemes to tenants in the private rental market to deal with surplus demand for social housing was also a defining factor in this period. Lyons has argued that through Part V of the 2000 Planning Act, the government effectively privatised the provision of social housing (Lyons, 2017), with social housing stock in decline since the

1980s when a right-to-buy scheme similar to that seen in the U.K. was introduced (Norris, 2007). Byrne & Norris argue that in the 1990s, subsidising the rent of social tenants in private housing transitioned from a short to medium- or long-term approach to dealing with social housing undersupply by accident, with this trend accelerating in the 2000s as part of the Rent Accommodation Scheme (RAS) (M. Byrne & Norris, 2018, p. 9). In 2014, the Housing Assistance Payment - HAP - was introduced on a pilot basis, with it becoming operational on a national scale in 2017. HAP represented the successor to RAS and gave favourable tax incentives for landlords to accept tenants through the scheme (Hearne & Murphy, 2018). It was developed to cope with a growing shortfall in social housing units caused by the collapse of the private housebuilding sector and the withering of local authorities' capacities to develop social housing independently following decades of diminution of this sector and reduced financial autonomy of local authorities (Hearne, 2020; Norris & Shiels, 2007). While minor modifications were made to the Residential Tenancies Act in 2016 to improve tenure security as precarity increased alongside increased demand pressures, modifications were minor and often not enforced, with it suggested that these tweaks were politically motivated with the goal of demonstrating action in the area and the Irish rental market still being one of the least secure in Europe (M. Byrne, 2020; Hearne, 2020; Lima et al., 2023).

Contrastingly, Rebuilding Ireland also set out to develop a National Development Plan, published in 2018, which focused on coordinating new housing delivery. This plan sought to correct the previously 'laissez-faire' approach to development during the Celtic Tiger. (Norris & Coates, 2014) with a more concerted effort to create 'compact growth' (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2018). In all, the NDP belongs to the 'viability' tradition of planning while also seeking to secure compact, efficient growth while maximising the number of units that could be delivered. To achieve this aim, standards for new builds were lowered in both 2015 and 2018; however, questions have been raised about whether this

actually hurt development by making multi-phased development unworkable and resulting in difficulty securing finance for the larger developments that were required under the framework (Renyolds, 2021).

The circumstances and pressures experienced in this phase were very different from those experienced in the first period discussed, leading to a contrasting policy agenda. Efforts to restore economic stability and reboot the real-estate market resulted in the rapid emergence of price pressures as demand shortfalls, particularly in Dublin, became evident. In 2015, the Central Bank introduced new lending rules mandating a 10% deposit and a maximum mortgage of 3.5 the income of applicants' incomes to contain price inflation and avoid the unsustainable lending seen during the boom (Central Bank of Ireland, 2024). These pressures resulted in the government introducing a series of short-term measures that sought to ameliorate issues in the private, social, and home purchase market in the short run and to combat rising homelessness numbers. Coupled with this were measures to accelerate the planning process to meet demand shortages with centralisation of power in the Government and central agencies undertaken in pursuit of this goal. The official housing document of this era, Rebuilding Ireland, committed to a tenure neutral housing policy and introduced supports for all tenure types, including first-time homebuyers. In some ways, this represents a subtle slide back towards support for this tenure type, but overall, this period can be categorised by a policy agenda seeking to address shortcomings across all tenure types.

### **5.3: Period 3: 2020-present**

The third, ongoing, period of housing policy in Ireland following the financial crisis commenced following the 2020 General Election, where housing was a dominant issue (Cunningham & Marsh, 2021; Leahy, 2021) and resulting from Rebuilding Ireland's inability

to arrest the undersupply of units and increasing price pressures (Disch & Slaymaker, 2023; Hearne, 2020; Lima et al., 2023; Ó Broin, 2019). In many ways, this period represents an intensification of the trends observed in Rebuilding Ireland: centralisation, an emphasis on expanding housing supply, and further measures to accelerate the planning and delivery process are all evident, coupled with efforts to eliminate delays such as judicial review cases which have stalled SHDs. Also evident, however, is a major step up in allowances for, and focus on, a homeownership model of housing (M. Byrne, 2021). Although Rebuilding Ireland previously re-introduced a grant for First-Time homebuyers, its successor, Housing for All, majorly expanded supports for homebuyers both financially and in terms of rhetoric with measures including an increase to €30,000 for the first-time-buyer grant and the introduction of a 20% shared equity scheme for first-time-buyers. Consequently, this period can be understood as representing a return to a more orthodox position of homeownership in the Irish housing policy mix. However, extensive supports were also extended to other, non-traditional, areas, such as the Approved Housing Body (AHB) sector and the financing of a nascent Cost Rental sector, with these measures somewhat counterbalancing the trend towards homeowner dominance.

In contrast to Rebuilding Ireland, the four goals presented in Housing Ireland present a far more historical dichotomy between ownership and social housing with increasing homeownership and increasing affordability, ending homelessness and providing social housing, expansion of supply, and ending of dereliction and vacancy the core goals set out in the plan (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021, p. 11) demonstrating a contrast with the focus on the private rental sector in Rebuilding Ireland. This focus on ownership is also represented in the expansion of the first-time-buyer scheme to a new grant cap of €30,000, the development of a shared equity scheme for first-time-buyers, the expansion of local authority financing for homebuyers, and increased mobilisation of state bodies to provide affordable purchase homes to buy, and also to rent. In contrast, although Rent Pressure Zones, which were introduced



under Rebuilding Ireland, were retained and minimum standards for new-builds increased - reversing a trend in the previous period towards lowered building standards - these measures are proportionally far less significant than the supports introduced for home buyers. This shift is also evident in the positioning of the plans, with Rebuilding Ireland setting out a position of tenure neutrality when Housing for All explicitly sets supporting homeownership as a central pillar of the plan with a return to a statutory required 20% contribution by developers from the 10% set out in the Housing Agency Report and the re-introduction of affordable housing to this scheme further indicates a revert to a more orthodox form of homeowner-centred housing policy (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021, p. 19).

Notwithstanding these points, Housing for All also includes many elements that diverge from this trend and are novel editions to the housing policy mix in Ireland. Of particular note in this respect are supports for the development of a cost rental sector with 18,000 units targeted throughout the lifetime of the plan ((Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021, p. 34)). Cost rental is entirely novel to the Irish market, and when combined with further legislative support for Approved Housing Bodies through the (Regulations) of Approved Housing Bodies Act 2019, represents a commitment to substantial growth in non-traditional and non-state-managed affordable rental accommodation, which local authorities have previously crowded out (Mullins et al., 2003).

Also substantial is the enhanced assertiveness of the state in direct provision of housing, which has been absent since the 1980s (Ó Broin, 2019). In several schemes such as Project Tosaigh, the expanded role of the Land Development Agency, increased powers for Local Authorities and increased resources for infrastructure delivery, Housing for All deviates from the trend of privately led development pursued through tax incentives and limited regulation during the Celtic Tiger boom (Norris & Coates, 2014) with the Land Development Agency actively taking proactive action to seek out housing development sites and Project Tosaigh designed to

kickstart planning permission, which had stalled. Both of these initiatives are indicative of the trend identified in Rebuilding Ireland of increasing the speed of planning and development, with the finding by the Housing Commission that ¼ of all SHD plans were subject to judicial review also noted and contributing to this experience (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2024, p. 71).

When considering Housing for All, it is also relevant to consider the recently published Housing Commission Report. The Housing Commission Report was an expert report compiled by request of the Department of Housing, Local Governance and Heritage as part of Housing for All with a wide term of reference considering all elements of the housing sector. In general, its conclusions echo many of those expressed by Lyons, who stated that the current system exists because of the political climate and not because it represents best practice (Lyons, 2017). The Report recommends far more transformative change than currently laid out in government policy, far higher targets than for new unit supply than aimed, and generally concludes that many of the government's current measures stop short of being able to lead to substantial change and predicts a continuation and likely further deterioration of the current affordability issues without major policy realignment.

#### **5.4: Summary**

In all, it cannot be said that homeownership has been displaced as the dominant tenure approach in the Irish context. Although early trends following the financial crisis, such as in the Housing Policy Statement (Department of the Environment, Community, and Local Government, 2011), indicated a move away from a dominant position for homeownership, and commitments in Rebuilding Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2016) pointed towards a movement toward a more tenure-neutral approach to housing, the most recent government plan on housing, Housing for

All (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021) both halts and reverse these trends in favour of a model traditional housing model centred on enabling widespread homeownership through state intervention (Downey, 2014; Norris, 2016).

Nonetheless, the period from 2008-2024 has seen major changes in legislation pertaining to the Irish construction, rental, and financial sectors. Extensive redrawing of regulations has occurred while the PRS has seen a set of measures tasked with making it more viable and secure as a long-term tenure, although it still represents one of the least secured rental sectors in Europe (M. Byrne, 2020) and has been heavily criticised by the Housing Commission as still having significant drawbacks for tenants and landlords alike (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2024). Nonetheless, the adoption of cost rental housing and the reassertion of a commitment to local authority-led social housing in Housing for All, 2021 demonstrates that although secondary, these tenure types are not 'forgotten' as the PRS traditionally was seen as being (O'Brien & Dillon, 1982) and in contrast to previous eras, has seen a large amount of legislative change, formalisation, standardisation, and regulation (Ní Fhloinn, 2021; Norris & Redmond, 2007).

Overall, the trends outlined above suggest that Ireland has returned to a housing provision trend similar to the one adopted following the Second World War. Namely, it is adopting a state-led approach with substantial supports to enable homeownership and notable state backing to enable provision of social and affordable housing for less affluent citizens. However, differences are also evident. In its reforms following the 2008 crisis, centralisation of power into the hands of the Minister and Department of Housing is evident, with planning decisions also increasingly determined by centralised government agencies. Financial support for local authority housing has also remained centralised - undermining one of the main reasons for the success of the original system, which was based upon decentralised local authority-led finance which enabled more nimble development (Norris & Redmond, 2007) and overall, the state,

although playing an enabling role, is less directly involved in the provision of housing, instead acting as an enabler for development.

Having described these trends, the following section seeks to explain them using the frameworks outlined in the theoretical section above.

## **6: Case Study: Analysis**

The previous section described policy developments in the 2008-2024 period which although saw substantial legislative activity, has not fundamentally changed the homeowner model of housing provision in Ireland. This section applies the analytical frameworks introduced in section four to rationalise these developments and assess their congruence with established theory in the field.

First PET is employed to analyse the macro-political reaction to the dominant policy image which favoured homeownership. This section argues that a policy monopoly existed in housing from near the foundation of the state but was challenged, but not displaced, during the crisis. It uses PET to argue that a critical mass of negative momentum had not accumulated behind the homeowner model of housing provision and that more pressing issues during the crisis denied it the critical mass of attention required for a major restructuring. This allowed former interest groups to reassert themselves in the policy community and re-orientate the direction of housing policy on a pre-crisis trajectory in recent years with modifications to the policy mix a consequence of these actors unable to regain the level of dominance they enjoyed before 2008.

Second, MSA is used to argue that although a window for change was opened following the crisis, the opportunity was not taken to problematise the pursuit of homeownership as being

central to the severity of the crisis, no workable policy solution was available at this time, nor was the political climate advantageous to pursue such a strategy if it occurred. This argument stems from the fact that in acting to save the banking sector in 2008, the Fianna Fáil government committed future governments to maintaining this position with subsequent government action constrained by a need to revive the real estate market. Consequently, the government were already committed to one approach to housing and had little space or operational capacity to execute a second until such a time when the window for transformative change had closed.

These assessments are then drawn together to discuss the position of housing as a dominant or hegemonic ideology in Ireland. Overall, the conclusion reached is that in Ireland, the homeowner model now experiences a position of incomplete hegemony insofar as while still dominant, it has been forced to compromise with other arrangements such as an increased role for the PRS, Cost Rental market, Affordable Housing Bodies, and a revitalised social housing sector. Further, the homeowner model of housing has increasingly been questioned in official and academic contributions demonstrating it no longer is 'taken for given' and that, on the whole, while still pre-eminent, the existing policy mix is best described as 'the same but different' to what has come before.

## **6.1: Analysis: PET**

PET argues that significant policy changes only occur after a critical mass of negative tension leads to a sudden and pronounced shift (Baumgartner et al., 2023, p. 66). It posits that policy mostly remains in stasis in localised policy community subsystems with dominant narratives and policy images defining the problem and its solutions in these subsystems, with this process reproducing itself until such a time when a critical mass of attention is amassed to cause a major shift in policy (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). In Ireland, the homeowner model of

housing held a dominant monopoly position and was central to the policy image that has existed for most of the history of the state, with corporate, political, and social actors all buying into the narratives that perpetuated this process and rarely questioned its desirability (Mansergh, 2024; National Economic & Social Council, 1977, 1988; Norris, 2016). This changed following the GFC when the construction, real estate, financial, and media sectors were all found to be culpable for creating the conditions which caused the crisis, with the view of housing as an investment also challenged in its aftermath as the financial and construction sectors were catapulted to the centre of the political agenda (McDonald & Sheridan, 2008; Mercille & Murphy, 2015; Ó Riain, 2014; Ross, 2009). Furthermore, the collapse of Fianna Fáil in the ‘earthquake election’ of 2011 (Gallagher & Marsh, 2011) following 80 years of dominance also contributed to an environment ripe for a major policy reorientation.

Although the 2011 Policy Statement signalled this change might have been underway, the proliferation of other issues and narratives in the system rapidly drained the impetus for reform in this area. PET adopts a bounded rationality approach, which allows for change in only a limited areas at once due to the cognitively taxing nature of policy reconfiguration (Baumgartner et al., 2018, p. 39) and as major reforms were undertaken in restructuring public spending (Heffernan et al., 2017), reforming the public sector (MacCarthaigh, 2017) and regulating and revitalising the real estate and financial sectors (M. Byrne, 2016b), any momentum to displace the homeowner model was lost.

This trend was supported by the media who rowed in behind the Fine Gael-Labour government (2011-2016) austerity plan, which was mandated as part of the bailout deal provided by the IMF, EU, and ECB, with 56% of coverage being supportive of austerity and only 11% critical of it (Mercille & Murphy, 2015, p. 75) and the historically close relationship between the Irish media and property interests led it to a culture of acquiescence in this area, a failure to question the assumptions of the homeowner policy, and a tendency to deflect from it by focusing on

other issues (Mercille & Murphy, 2015; Ross, 2009). This deprived the issue of tenure biases in Irish housing policy the oxygen to accumulate the degree of negative feedback required for a substantial policy shift, with this also resulted from the fact that few immediate positive rewards seemed available for actors in a position to challenge the status quo – especially when compared to those available elsewhere.

Typically, PET assumes that when a policy monopoly is challenged in exceptional circumstances and the policy image is challenged, the newly positioned actors will have a preference different from the status quo (Baumgartner et al., 2023). However, in the Irish case, homeownership was so embedded that most actors, including the new government and the majority of taxpayers who were homeowners themselves, had a vested interest in the system continuing. Furthermore, the government's commitment to restoring health to the banking sector required a recovery of the property sector (M. Byrne, 2016b; Lima et al., 2023; Ó Riain, 2014, 2017), and with the bank bailout of 2008, this policy was 'locked in' early on in the cycle and mostly immutable, with further intervention in the property sector liable to siphon off already extremely stretched organisational resources at a time when other elements took precedence. Consequently, at the time of the crisis, when those actors most ambivalent to the status quo were most empowered to challenge it, PET shows there were no strong incentives for them to do so. As the crisis subsided, however, those who had suffered reputational damage began to reassert themselves in the housing policy subsystem and have been supplemented by new lobbying organisations such as those supporting international investment interests (Lennon & Waldron, 2019; Mansergh, 2024; Renyolds, 2021) and have worked to recreate a new policy image that is representative of their vested interests in the sector and which seeks to re-direct negativity caused by the dysfunctional housing markets to other quarters by creating narratives such as those seen around planning, supply, regulation, capacities, and feasibility (Redmond & Yang, 2021). Overall, this allows PET to explain how the new model of Irish

housing policy that, while favouring homeownership, also supports substantial roles for social housing, Approved Housing Bodies sector, and the cost rental housing.

## **6.2: Analysis: MSA**

MSA, developed by Kingdon (1984) sees policy change as requiring the convergence and movement of three parallel 'streams' related to issue recognition, a viable solution to the problem, and a political climate in which the solution can be reached.

In the early years of the crisis, the Housing Policy Statement clearly demonstrates that the model of housing assetification pursued in the 2000s had been identified as a potential systemic issue that needed at minimum reappraisal (Department of the Environment, Community, and Local Government, 2011). Further, the commentary on speculation (e.g. (Cooper, 2012; McCabe, 2011)), ghost estates (Kitchin et al., 2012; O'Callaghan, 2016), and the attitude toward the financial system overall can all be taken as providing oxygen for questioning the existing policy. Nonetheless, over time, this spotlight was blunted by a focus on other issues of regulation, mass media editorial lines, and deference to the austerity programme (Mercille, 2017; Mercille & Murphy, 2015) alongside emergent narratives surrounding project viability, compact planning, and a focus on undersupply as a driver of the current crisis (Redmond & Yang, 2021; SIRR, 2021a; Umfreville, 2021). The progression of these trends nicely matches the slide from the early criticism of the homeownership model in the immediate aftermath of the crisis, to the ostensibly tenure neutral approach adopted in Rebuilding Ireland, to the drift back to a homeownership model presented in Housing for All.

Notable in this regard is also the political support for each movement, with no political party mounting sustained pressure or focus on the issue of homeownership, with the main opposition party's policy variation representing an ostensibly shared equity approach to homeownership



where the state owns the land and the individual the premises (Sinn Féin, 2024). Although criticism of the existing model has appeared in the academic literature (e.g. (Allen et al., 2020; Healy & Goldrick-Kelly, 2018; Hearne, 2020; Ó Broin, 2019), the lack of a sustained political movement against the existing model is severely detrimental to the creation of an environment where it would be challenged. When considering viable policy solutions, it becomes abundantly clear that the government - particularly in the earlier period of the crisis when the crisis environment was most conducive to policy change - was comprehensively hamstrung in relation to the options it could take to shift policy in the housing sector. This assessment is concurrent with Umfreville's conclusions who, using a phrase coined by Sabatier & Weible, described the position as representing a 'hurtful stalemate' (Sabatier & Weible, 2007; Umfreville, 2021). Ireland's housing sector is amongst the most pro-cyclical in the world, meaning that in times of economic downturn, it contracts far in excess of what is required (Mansergh, 2024), and the reliance on central governance for direct capital funding meant that when austerity is implemented in fiscally tight conditions, government funding for housing contracts substantially. Lyons (2017) reports that along with welfare spending, housing was the most severe victim of government spending cuts associated with the EU-ECB-IMF bailout deal, with Norris (2016) reporting a similar fate to housing spending during the troublesome times in the 1980s. In contrast, spending tends to be countercyclical in countries that operate strong cost-rental and housing organisation-led approaches, such as the Netherlands and Austria. This means that in downturns, public funding is able to sustain the construction sector in difficult times and stimulate the wider economy by providing affordable housing in times when prices are lower and taking a step back when the economy is at capacity (Norris & Byrne, 2018; Van Gent & Hochstenbach, 2020). In contrast, (M. Byrne & Norris, 2018) demonstrates that in Ireland, social and affordable housing actually contributed to the acceleration of asset

prices due to their provision by private developers as Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 further increasing price pressure and buoying an already overheated sector.

As a consequence, when an opportunity existed in which the homeowner model could be best challenged due to the looming questions over its viability and desirability in light of the crisis, the Irish government had no feasible way to finance the development of a counter-cyclical cost-rental approach to displace the previously dominant homeownership model. Furthermore, this was undermined due to the decision to save the banking sector with NAMA's statutory requirement to maximise gains on assets necessary to recoup losses made buying 'bad assets' and to in order to reboot the housing market in general to return the banking sector to health (M. Byrne, 2016b). Lima et al (2023) refer to this process as 'financialization 2.0' - leading on from the loosened credit regulations seen as financialization 1.0 and further see the commitment by the government to salvage the property and banking sectors and reverse the trend of negative equity as requiring a commitment to the existing housing model closing the possibility for a reset of housing policy in this period and, as is argued below, making it politically unviable.

As introduced above, the space for political manoeuvring and questioning of homeownership policy as problematic has narrowed in recent years. Despite the clear affordability problems, narratives around skills, viability, planning, and finance all take precedence in current political discussions over and above overt questioning of the implicit assumption that homeownership is the goal that policy should strive to achieve. Given the lack of viable policy solutions, this is understandable considering a majority of the population of Ireland (63%) remain homeowners, with these citizens also more likely to vote (Cunningham & Marsh, 2021). Meanwhile, the Housing Commission Report found that 81% own or aspire to own their home (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2024, Appendix 1B) making it unsurprising that politicians seek to maintain the dissatisfactory status quo as a transformation of the proportion

to change the tenure dynamics of housing would, at best, be a medium-term goal, and one with no clear political payoff. In this context, MSA shows it is unsurprising that no significant transformation of Irish housing policy occurred in this period as at no stage were all three streams in alignment.

### **6.3: Analysis: Hegemonic Theory**

In the period of 2008-2024, it cannot be said that the hegemony of homeownership went entirely unchallenged. This is most explicitly seen in the 2011 Housing Policy Statement's criticism of the "undue focus" on homeownership (Department of the Environment, Community, and Local Government, 2011) and the recommendation to remove affordable purchase homes from Part V in 2014 (The Housing Agency, 2014). Implicitly, it can also be seen in Rebuilding Ireland, which places far less emphasis on the centrality of homeownership to the desired Irish policy mix and considers the advantages of the PRS (Government of Ireland, 2016, p. 26).

However, it equally cannot be said that homeownership has been 'displaced' and the assertion by Sirr that homeownership is still the preferred tenure type in the policymaking communities in Ireland irrespective of declared tenure neutrality is possibly more true now than when he made it (Sirr, 2019, p. 122). The rehabilitation and reassertion of developers and real estate agents as lobby groups (Lennon & Waldron, 2019) and the development of new, specialised property investment pressure groups such as Property Industry Ireland (PII) has been a strong contributory factor in this regard, while media support for austerity and focus on other narratives of supply, regulation, and viability has also been relevant (e.g. (Hearne, 2020; Redmond & Yang, 2021)). Winter (1994) has argued previously that when homeownership ideology embeds itself, it is very difficult to displace as a societal norm while Saunders (1990)

homeowners develop deep emotional connections to their homes and the tenure type more broadly due to the sense of security it engenders. Furthermore, in other English-speaking countries such as the USA and Australia (Richards, 1990; Troy, 2000; Vale, 2019) homeownership has become closely tied to a semblance of national cohesion with the contributions by Kitchin et al. (2012) and Norris (2016) suggesting a similar postulation exists in Ireland. It is then unsurprising that public support for homeownership still prevails, with 81% aspiring to this tenure type in Ireland (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2024, Appendix 1B), with deep, embodied belief in its preferability as a tenure type clearly visible by senior politicians in Housing for All (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021). Additionally, the lack of overt criticism or differentiation across the political spectrum, as outlined above, also reinforces this, and consequently, it must be concluded that, on the whole, homeownership still occupies a hegemonic position in Irish housing policy. However, as the section which follows argues, this hegemony has been renegotiated as a result of the recent shift in power, and consequently must be considered an incomplete hegemony (Kemeny, 1992).

Norris (2016) has argued for most of Ireland's existence, the state operated a property-based welfare system with state supports for housing, providing far more material gain to citizens than direct transfers (M. Byrne & Norris, 2022). Although this was also coupled with a robust social housing sector, (O'Brien & Dillon, 1982) argued that the PRS was a 'forgotten tenure' in Ireland with few standards or rules, little legislative footing, and general disinterest of policymakers. Recent developments and focus in this area and efforts to improve viability - most explicitly set out in Rebuilding Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2016) and more broadly evident in the sheer volume of legislative activity in this area since the new millennium (see: (Ní Fhloinn, 2021)) means this categorisation is no longer accurate. Furthermore, the (re)-vitalisation of social housing initiatives and local authority-led provision of these housing in

Housing for All (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021), as well as the introduction of robust frameworks to assist the work of Approved Housing Bodies and the introduction of Cost Rental housing also is relevant when considering the role of the homeowner model of housing and muddies the assessment that Housing for All merely was a return to business as before.

Overall, making one overall conclusion on the degree of hegemony homeownership occupies in Ireland is difficult. In many ways, interest groups that were weakened during the financial crisis have re-asserted themselves - with assistance from emergent groups with similar preferences - to propel homeownership back into a dominant position in the Irish housing mix. Nonetheless, their influence is far less complete and secure than in previous times and they must compete with a wide constellation of other viewpoints and methods of housing provision such as those provided by the PRS, Approved Housing Bodies, or cost rental developments leading to a conclusion that the previous hegemonic position occupied by homeowners is now substantially more contested and incomplete as a result. Also evident in this regard is the increasing criticism and scepticism from academic and civil society regarding the homeowner-dominated model of housing (e.g. (Healy & Goldrick-Kelly, 2018; Hearne, 2020; Housing Action Now, 2018; Ó Broin, 2019)) with this form of criticism not expected in a situation where homeownership occupied a pure hegemonic position as, by definition, this would make it go widely unquestioned and considered 'normal' (Kemeny, 1992).

#### **6.4: Analysis: Summary**

In combining PET, MSA, and Hegemonic Theory, a nuanced assessment of the current composition of the current Irish housing policy mix has been developed, with each theory contributing to a different element of the analysis.

PET was used to show that during the crisis, attention was diverted to other policy areas of urgent concern, stifling the opportunity for a punctuation of the longstanding policy equilibrium that supported homeownership. It also was used to elucidate the role of interest and stakeholder preferences in shaping policy, arguing that homeownership in Ireland was so embedded to the extent that few actors had any strong incentives to change the system with locked-in policy commitments in other areas, making such commitments less feasible. In recent years, the reassertion of a more active support for a homeowner model was explained as resulting from the development of new interest groups and the rehabilitation of the reputations of those who were damaged by the crisis, with this new coalition creating a similar, but different, housing policy image. In both elements, the media was seen as crucial first in their unwillingness to question the status quo strongly in the crisis years due to their historically close relationship with the property sector and second in their carrying of other narratives that have been developed in more recent times to supplant more fundamental questioning of the housing system.

MSA allows for an assessment of the different contributing elements that determine whether an existing policy position is challenged, which can be summarised as problematisation, policy solution, and political viability. It was used to show that early in the crisis, homeownership was somewhat problematised and could have reached critical mass and modified. However, at the time, there was no credible policy solution that could have made such a change, nor was the political climate suitable for it given the painful impacts of austerity, capacity constraints, and an embedded preference for homeownership - supported by the media and unquestioned by politicians – meant that the political climate was not conducive to change at this time and instead, saw a slow drift back to a more supportive role for the state in sustaining homeownership.

Hegemonic theory was used to integrate the findings from the two theories and to describe the new position of homeownership in the Irish housing policy mix as representing an incomplete hegemony. It was argued that although a large suite of supports for new homeowners have emerged in they have come alongside more pronounced support and focus on other tenure types and have occurred in a media and social environment that is much more willing to suggest alternatives to the existing approach.

Having assessed the core question of interest, the next section discusses its implications for Ireland and places it in the wider literature before a brief conclusion summates the goals, argument, and findings of this research.

## **7: Discussion**

Integrating the above findings into the wider literature provides a number of pertinent findings. Chief among these is the overall stability of the Irish housing policy mix, supporting a path-dependent model of institutional change and against assertions of policy convergence. However, contrastingly, elements of financialisation, assetification, and macro trends in the Irish housing market are also comparable in an international context.

The lack of transformative change is the most significant finding from the above analysis and this finding is in congruence with arguments for path dependencies and historical contingencies shaping modifications in housing policy (e.g. (Bengtsson et al., 2017; Kemeny, 1995; Lawson, 2010). In Ireland, this has meant that while the PRS and third sector have seen increased support and focus following pressures that developed during the GFC, politicians, government policy, and the public at large still share a strong preference for homeownership (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2024) leading support to Winter's proposition that

once embedded, homeownership is difficult to uproot from the public consciousness (Winter, 1994).

Despite this, the affordability and availability problems in Ireland are anything but unique in an international context (Coupe, 2020; Farha, 2017; Saiz, 2023; Wetzstein, 2017), with the finding of persisting support for homeownership also unremarkable (Kohl, 2021). Equally, Ireland's failure to meet expectations is unremarkable in an international context, with policy failure in housing increasingly common (Kemp, 2015; Stephens, 2020). In particular, Ireland's experience is comparable to the challenges experienced by countries like Spain, the U.K., and the U.S., which were more committed to the asset-based approach to welfare with the approach exceedingly difficult to move away from (Arundel & Ronald, 2021; Ronald & Doling, 2012). However, in general, it is also significant as a sign of the impact of the internationalisation of finance in reducing domestic policymakers' role in regulating and creating policy for their domestic housing markets (Aalbers, 2017; Jacobs et al., 2022).

In many ways, the GFC and internationalisation of finance and investment markets have meant that the only way viable solution for governments seeking re-election is to 'manage' the crisis as the space and capacity does not seem to exist to majorly transform policy with even the acute crisis experienced in Ireland not being able to overcome this inertia. This incentivises the provision of cash transfers such as rent supplements, like HAP, or purchase supports, like shared equity and the first-time buyer's grant. However, in the long term, these policies may actually worsen the problem by causing even further price inflation. As a result, it is unlikely that homeownership - or any existing model of housing - will be successfully challenged in the near future as the state currently lacks the operational capacity and political capital to do so. However, it is possible that in response to this, the state may slowly re-assert itself similar to following the Second World War and, in doing so, take a direct role in providing housing once



again. In Housing for All, there are signs that such a trend may be in its infancy, but predictions about such a trajectory are purely speculative at this stage.

## **8: Conclusions**

This research has addressed the question of whether the experience of the GFC in Ireland challenged the hegemonic position of pro-homeownership and asset-based welfare housing policies. It argued that the centrality of the financial, property, and real-estate sectors in Ireland to the 2008 GFC in Ireland presented a plausible 'big bang' event (Kingdon, 1984) that might be capable of challenging the status quo. Despite this, it also presented arguments for stability in the form of historical contingencies, policy-space constraints, and the embedded nature of homeownership in Irish society. In addressing this question, it integrated the use of Gramscian Hegemonic Theory with the public policy approaches of Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET) and Multiple Streams Analysis (MSA) to provide a multi-factored qualitative perspective on the issue.

Its main conclusion is that while reform has been evident in all elements of the housing system, the fundamental nature of the system has not been transformed. Homeownership, although challenged early in the crisis, remains dominant in Irish housing policy despite the substantial role of the real estate market, construction sector, and financial institutions in the 2008 GFC. Despite this, contemporary housing policy is not identical to the one that came before it. In particular, recent times have seen a major expansion of legislative protections for private renters, major reform of the planning system, stricter lending rules, the development of a cost-rental sector and financial support for Approved Housing Bodies (AHB), meaning that although resilient, the homeowner model has not gone unchallenged during the crisis.

Nonetheless, the perseverance of the status quo must be the core conclusion reached with this supporting the position adopted by the path-dependent school of housing scholars that argue that historical contingencies are by far the most powerful mediator of systemic reform.

To explain these trends, PET, MSA, and Hegemonic theory were employed to argue that while pressures existed to transform the systems, at no point did they reach a critical mass to radically alter national housing policy in the same way other elements of the Irish state were modified. It was argued this was the consequence of numerous trends and assumptions in the system, including the embeddedness of homeownership policy in the Irish context, narrative production around other issues in the housing sector, a lack of state capacity to shift policy during the period where policy change was most likely, and a general lack of perceived urgency within government, media, academia and the public to alter the status quo despite its inherent issues.

In assessing the implications for future research, the central contribution of this research is that while a major crisis may lead to notable policy restructuring, it is not destined to do so. Ireland was adopted as a case study due to its status as an extreme example where if the 2008 GFC would be expected to result in a major policy re-orientation, it would have happened in Ireland due to the heightened saliency of housing policy to the Irish experience of crisis. The absence of such a crisis demonstrates the strength of historical contingencies in shaping modern housing regimes (Bengtsson et al., 2017; Kemeny, 1995; Lawson, 2010).

Despite homeownership not being displaced as a dominant tenure, it is also clear that it has been in decline in Ireland, with the homeowner rate falling in each census since 1991 (CSO, 2023). This presents more serious problems than the lack of displacement of the homeowner model as it demonstrates that, in concurrence with other literature, the Irish model is not delivering on the terms it defines itself on, and there is wide agreement that the entire system exists in perpetual crisis with little prospect of resolution (M. Byrne, 2020; Disch & Slaymaker,

2023; Hearne, 2020; Lima et al., 2023; Umfreville, 2021). Despite the government's active role in the housing sector, nearly all external assessments are uniformly pessimistic about its ability to meet the goals it set itself and end the ongoing crisis without a major policy shift that many of these same sources see as politically untenable (Built Up Skills Ireland, 2024; M. Byrne, 2021; Mansergh, 2024). In light of the above, a pessimistic conclusion must be reached that no short-term solution is available to resolve the highly dysfunctional Irish housing system, and future research in this field would be well-placed to consider whether the same, or similar, dynamics are impacting housing affordability and availability in other contexts to determine the extent to which the Irish case represents the exception or the rule.

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