

When Politics Aligns: The Effect of Party-in-Power Congruence on Fertility in the UK

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Short Abstract

This paper investigates how political context shapes fertility behaviour in the United Kingdom. We argue that alignment between individuals' political identity, and whether one's preferred party wins elections and governs, plays an important role in shaping narratives about the future and, consequently, decisions related to family formation. Using panel data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS, 1991–2019), we examine how alignment between individuals' partisan preferences and the ruling party affects the monthly probability of conception. Applying mixed-effects complementary log–log regression models with standard demographic and socioeconomic controls, we find that Conservative Party supporters are more likely to conceive a child during periods when their party is in power, while no such effect is observed among Labour voters. A difference-in-differences analysis of all general elections between 1991 and 2019 further shows that the 2010 election, which returned the Conservatives to power, was followed by an increase in conception likelihood among Conservative supporters compared to the pre-election period, whereas no comparable effects were found for other elections or the 2016 Brexit referendum, or for Labour voters. These findings suggest that political alignment between citizens and government is one of the factors influencing fertility behaviour. The results contribute to the growing literature on political polarization and demographic decision-making, highlighting the role of subjective expectations regarding the domestic political situation and stability, and identity-based narratives in shaping reproductive behaviour.

1. Introduction

Political changes can have an impact on fertility not only depending on the programs introduced or the direction of public policy, but also due to citizens' subjective perception of whether the right party is in power. Political identity is a factor that differentiates citizens on many different issues, such as ecology, attitudes toward the economy, moral values, and immigration. But with the dominance of two large parties, as is the case in the UK or the US, political polarization can easily intensify. In conditions of political polarization, the fundamental difference in identity lies in the difference in assessment of whether it is good – all things considered – that a given party is in power, or whether it would be better for the main rival party to be in power.

Survey research shows that perceptions of, for example, whether the country's economy is in good shape can vary significantly between voters of different parties, and at the same time, these opinions completely reverse after a change in power (regardless of macroeconomic data). This type of effect was observed, for example, after the recent US elections, where between the summer of 2024 and the beginning of 2025, the percentage of Republican voters who believed that the US was in recession decreased by 25 percentage points (from 67% to 43%) despite no major changes in macroeconomic indicators. An even greater effect can be seen in the question of whether the US is heading in the right direction: Donald Trump's election victory changed the percentage of Republican voters who believed this from around 15% before the election to 71% after his inauguration as president ([Harris Poll, 2025](#)). It can therefore be said that polarization results in a diversity of perceptions of information and scenarios for the future depending on political identity – more broadly, this phenomenon is called cultural cognition (Kahan, Jenkins-Smith & Braman (2011) described this phenomenon in the context of the perception of scientific facts). This means that an individual's existing beliefs and judgments (if they are deeply rooted in the individual's identity) can influence the interpretation of new information, which may lead to a susceptibility to change, e.g., in the assessment of the state of the economy or similar factors, depending on whether the supported party is currently in power.

Political identity and differences in preferences become most apparent during election periods – during election campaigns, politicians try to show voters why it is very important for their party to gain power. In a situation of strong political polarization, political narratives may present the

election victory of political opponents as a catastrophic event, and the victory of "our side" as a great good for the country. People whose party lost the election may, based on polarizing narratives, begin to expect their situation and that of the country to deteriorate in the coming term, while those whose party won will expect the opposite trend. We hypothesize that such beliefs and narratives also influence reproductive decisions – people whose preferred party won the election may be more likely to decide to have a child. We demonstrate this using the example of the United Kingdom.

So far, the literature linking electoral politics and fertility is scarce. The main works include Dahl, Lu, & Mullins, 2022, who showed the demographic effects of Donald Trump's election as US president in 2016, and Comolli & Andersson (2021), who analyzed the rise in support for the far right in Sweden in relation to women's decisions to have children. Spatial analyses linking fertility to voting in the Brexit referendum were presented by Mavropoulos (2024). However, the mechanisms we propose should not be difficult to explain.

In the UK, there have been three changes in the ruling party over the last three decades: in 1997, 2010, and 2024. In addition, the Brexit referendum in 2016 was a particularly polarizing event. Using birth data from the UKHLS longitudinal study, we are able to track the moments when decisions to conceive a child were made with monthly precision and compare the likelihood of these decisions being made by Labour and Conservative voters in different periods, with particular emphasis on the impact of general elections.

Using a logit model predicting the probability of conceiving a child in each month, we were able to show that, regardless of other factors, the probability of deciding to have a child increased among Conservative Party voters after the party won the 2010 election in the two years following the election compared to the same period before the election. Other elections and the Brexit referendum did not have this effect, and we did not examine the 2024 election due to a lack of sufficient data on births. Furthermore, we show that, in general, over the last 35 years, the likelihood of Conservative Party voters deciding to have a child is higher during periods when that party is in power, while this effect is not significant among Labour voters.

2. Theoretical background

In recent years, there has been a growing body of literature exploring the importance of narrative and identity factors in childbearing decisions and in decision theory in general. These factors help explain the micro foundations of the relationship between elections, political identity, and fertility.

Contemporary demographic research emphasizes uncertainty as a factor influencing decisions about having children (Vignoli et al. 2020; Kuhnt, Minkus, Buhr, 2021; Baker, Buber-Ennsner, 2024). Vignoli et al. (2020), Guetto, Bazzani, and Vignoli (2022), and Lappegård et al. (2022) indicate that this factor operates through the mechanism of narratives of the future. At the same time, the importance of narratives is supported by authors of recent works in the general field of decision theory (Johnson, Bilovich, Tuckett, 2023; Tuckett, Nikolic, 2017; Shiller, 2017) also emphasize the importance of narratives. In irreversible decisions with long-term consequences, such as procreative decisions, uncertainty seems to be a more significant factor due to, among other things, the difficulty of predicting even the basic consequences - whether a given decision will ultimately be beneficial or detrimental. At the same time, as Johnson, Bilovich & Tuckett (2023) emphasize, it is precisely in conditions of radical uncertainty in the decision-making process that narratives become important, within which the subject interprets information from the world and tells themselves scenarios of the future (Johnson, Bilovich, Tuckett, 2023). This is because, when there is a high degree of uncertainty, it becomes impossible to assess the possible consequences in a more objective manner. In complex decision-making problems – and reproductive decisions are among them - there is no way to assign probabilities in a meaningful way to be guided by expected utility, and moreover, utility itself does not seem to be a sufficiently clear measure for evaluating decisions with such far-reaching consequences as those concerning having children. When making decisions under conditions of radical uncertainty, as Johnson, Bilovich, and Tuckett (2023) write, we do not in fact try to be guided by any calculated expected utility but rather try to create narratives that integrate our beliefs, values, and the information available to us. These narratives serve to simulate possible future scenarios that differ depending on the decision in question, which are then evaluated affectively to ultimately enable us to choose the one that feels best to us on a basic emotional level.

This mechanism of decision-making in conditions of uncertainty is an important consideration in the field of fertility, as it indicates that the difference between those who decide to have a child and those who do not can, to some extent, be explained by the difference in their narratives about the future. This does not, of course, mean that other factors should be disregarded, but it does open up the field for exploring political factors, among others. It can be expected that narratives about the future are also dependent to some extent on the compatibility of political identity with the current political situation in the country. The explanatory mechanism described in the literature and studied by us, which is the effect of the consistency of political preferences with election results, is the uncertainty that arises in the narrative decision-making process. In this case, it may be felt because a party that the subject does not support, and which is inconsistent with their political identity, has come to power in the country. The narratives created by an individual whose political preferences differ from the election results are likely to be quite different from the narratives of an individual whose political preferences are consistent with the election results.

In theory, such processes should be reinforced by political polarization. Our paper relates to a recent literature which documents rising political polarization in many democracies (Autor et al., 2020, Bertrand and Kamenica, 2018, Boxell et al., 2020, Gentzkow, 2016, Pew, 2020). COVID-19 has highlighted that political polarization extends to health-seeking behaviors, such as social distancing and vaccinations (e.g. Allcott et al., 2020, Chen et al., 2020, Fridman et al., 2021, Grossman et al., 2020). A few papers report a relationship between partisanship and spending on consumer goods (Benhabib and Spiegel, 2019, Gerber and Huber, 2009, Gillitzer and Prasad, 2018), but others have challenged this link (McGrath, 2017, Mian et al., 2021). Further, a group of papers have linked partisanship with financial outcomes, such as tax evasion, stock market trading, corporate credit, and retirement investing (Cookson et al., 2020, Cullen et al., 2021, Dagostino et al., 2020, Kempf and Tsoutsoura, 2020, Meeuwis et al., 2021)

3. Study design and hypotheses

The United Kingdom is characterized by relative political stability – only two major parties have been alternating power for a long time (and only occasionally are there coalition governments). Such a political duopoly may contribute to the strengthening of polarizing sentiments. The main

moments of change in power as a result of elections were in 1997 and 2010 (we do not yet have data on births from 2024 and later). The other general elections took place in the period under study in 1992, 2001, 2005, 2015, 2017, and 2019, but they did not bring about such major changes on the political scene. The UK also experienced another politically polarizing event – the Brexit referendum in 2016. This too could have been perceived by Brexit supporters as an optimistic sign for their future and that of the country, and by supporters of remaining in the EU as a catastrophic event. We want to examine the effects of each of these events on fertility, with the exception of the 1992 election due to the short period before the election, and the 2019 election due to the difficult-to-control impact of the pandemic.

Using the UKHLS database, which is a longitudinal panel study, we can compare the political preferences and moments of conception decisions of individual respondents with the moments of elections. Using LabFam Individual Biographies, we are able to know the date of birth of each respondent's child to within a month. By going back 9 months from that date, we obtain a binary variable – the approximate moment when conception took place. This variable occurs at monthly intervals, and it is on this basis that our explanatory variable is created – the probability of conceiving a child in a given month, in the period from January 1991 to December 2022.

The UKHLS database also contains information about respondents' political preferences (questions about voting in actual elections or questions only about preferences between elections). We extrapolate this information to obtain a variable indicating who respondents support in each month in which they are observed. People can change their political beliefs and switch their support between different parties. We assume that such a change only occurs in the first month after the change is observed (i.e., when the respondent is asked again about their preferences and expresses beliefs different from before).

In our analysis, we only consider respondents who declare their support for the Labour Party or the Conservative Party. Only the Tories and Labour won elections during the period we are interested in. In our opinion, it makes no sense to take into account voters from other, smaller parties, as it can be assumed that they know that their party is unlikely to win the election, so it is not an unpleasant surprise for them. Their vote may rather be a vote of opposition to the

dominance of the two main parties. It is also not always clear that the views of voters from other parties are closer to one of the two main parties. Similarly, we eliminate from the sample respondents who did not vote in the elections or who refrained from revealing their preferences in the survey. Only the Liberal Democrats formed an actual ruling coalition in the UK during the period of interest (the Cameron-Clegg coalition in 2010-2015). However, we decided not to take these voters into account for several reasons. First, this party was never ranked first in the polls and was only ranked second before the 2010 elections (ultimately achieving third place). We do not believe that the voters of this party had similar expectations regarding the election results in the period we studied as the voters of the two main parties. Furthermore, as this party has never been in power, it did not lose power as a result of losing the election, unlike the Tories or Labour. We believe that the feelings of voters whose party lost the election and thus lost power are significantly different from those of voters of smaller parties. Thirdly, during the coalition government, the party lost significant support: from 23% of the vote in 2010 to 7.9% in 2015. Thus, a large proportion of respondents who declared their support for the Liberal Democrats in the 2010 election may have quickly become disappointed with their rule and changed the party they supported, which, however, we are not necessarily able to observe precisely, as we are limited by the frequency with which a given respondent is asked about their political views and vote in elections. Therefore, taking the Liberal Democrats into account only to include the period of the coalition government could distort the analysis, as in reality many of them may have withdrawn their support for this party during that period, thus distorting the results.

In the study, we put forward the following hypotheses:

1. The probability of a decision to have a child is higher, *ceteris paribus*, when a person's preferred party is in power compared to periods when the preferred party is in opposition.
2. General elections changed the probability of deciding to have a child in the short term – they reduced this probability among voters of the losing party and increased it among voters of the winning party compared to the period before the elections.
3. The change in the probability of deciding to have a child was greater in elections that brought about a change in power (1997 and 2010) than in elections that allowed the ruling party to remain in power.

4. The 2016 Brexit referendum resulted in a decrease in the probability of deciding to have a child among those who voted to remain in the EU and an increase in this probability among those who voted to leave, compared to the period before the referendum.

To test these hypotheses, we use a random-effects complementary log-log model, in which the explanatory variable is the monthly probability of conceiving a child. In addition to the main variables of interest, each model includes typical control variables: health, marital status, education, age, age squared, gender, number of children, as well as two variables that we believe may be useful controls in political research: region of residence and declared interest in politics (Table 1).

We test the first hypothesis by creating a binary alignment variable for each citizen observed, which takes the value "1" in those months when the party in line with the respondent's preferences is in power. For Labour voters, this variable takes the value "1" in the period from June 1997 to 2010. The remaining years are "0" – and vice versa for Conservative voters. For Liberal Democrat voters, the variable takes the value "1" for the period 2010-2015 and "0" for the rest of the time. In the model, this variable interacts with the variable representing political preferences. The period analyzed is January 1991 to December 2022.

We test the remaining hypotheses using the same model, using a design based on the classic difference-in-differences and similar to that used by Dahl et al. (2021). We created a variable reflecting the period following a specific election (a binary variable taking the value "1" in each month since the election). This variable captures the potential time effect of changes in reproductive decisions. The second variable we created describes being a voter for the winning party (separately for each election analyzed). For example, for the 2010 election, this variable takes the value "1" if the respondent is a Conservative Party voter, and for Labour voters it takes the value "0" for the entire period considered in the analysis of the 2010 election. This variable captures the potential effect of the baseline difference in the propensity to have children among voters of different parties in one of the periods analyzed. The interaction between these variables is the 'treatment' effect, i.e., the effect of being a voter for the party that won the election. It shows the change in the monthly probability of deciding to have a child among voters of different parties between the period before and after the election – i.e., the effect of the

respondent's preferred party winning or losing the election. As with the general election, we have information on some of the respondents' votes in the Brexit referendum, and we have created similar variables for these observations.

In each case, we compare the two-year periods after the elections to the identical periods before the elections. There is always a certain amount of time between the elections and the formation of the government – two years after the elections is roughly halfway through the term, which means that the effects of the elections themselves should have disappeared. In addition, with monthly data on conceptions, we know that the probability of an event is fundamentally low in a given month, which means that with such a sample size, using a period shorter than two years could make it impossible to show any significant effects. Decisions about having children are such serious life decisions that it would be difficult to expect that some people would wait only for the election results and make their decision about having another child dependent on them. The explanatory mechanism we suggest, linking these decisions to feelings of uncertainty and cognitive processes, suggests that (narratives about the future of the country under the "right" government) suggests that a change in power must be properly "embedded" in an individual's reasoning in order to unconsciously reduce their sense of uncertainty.

Table 1: Variable definition

VARIABLES	DESCRIPTION
Outcome variable	Probability of conceiving a child in a given month
Alignment	Binary variable taking the value of 1 if the ruling party is the respondent's preferred party in a given month
Period after elections	Being in a period after the date of a general election
Electoral win	Being a voter of a party that won a given election

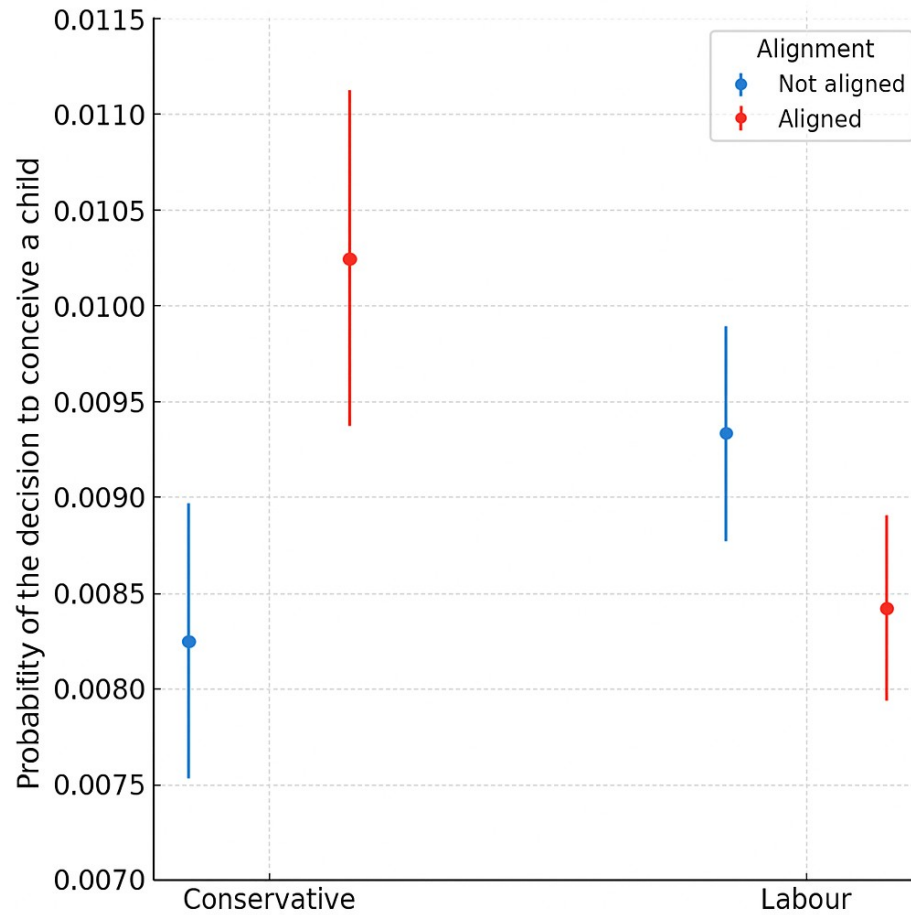
3. Results

3.1. Alignment of political preferences and government

The hypothesis of higher fertility during periods when the preferred party was in power was confirmed. For the entire sample (without distinguishing between voters of different parties), the coefficient for the variable "alignment" is positive and statistically significant.

In order to assess whether the effect of party preference alignment with the government and the likelihood of deciding to conceive differs depending on party preferences, a predictive contrast analysis was performed with values of and . The results indicate that this effect is significantly lower among Labour Party voters than among Conservative Party voters. The difference in effects is -0.00291 (SE = 0.00063, $z = -4.65$, $p < 0.001$), which means that agreement increases the likelihood of a decision to conceive more among Conservative voters. Interpreting this interaction, it can be concluded that the fact that the respondent's preferred party is in power has a different impact depending on the political context – it has a mobilizing effect on the conservative group but does not translate into an increased willingness to conceive in the group identifying with Labour. For Labour voters, however, the alignment effect is much smaller and therefore not always statistically significant.

Fig. 1. Monthly probability of conceiving a child linked to the alignment of political preferences and the ruling party for Conservative and Labour voters.



3.2. Election effects

For the remaining hypotheses, we created separate variables and models for each general election from 1997 to 2019. The regression results suggest the existence of the hypothesized effect only in the case of the 2010 election. The other elections did not produce significant effects. These results mean that hypotheses 2 and 3 are only partially confirmed.

Fig 2. The effect of the 2010 election on fertility decisions among Conservative voters compared to Labour voters.

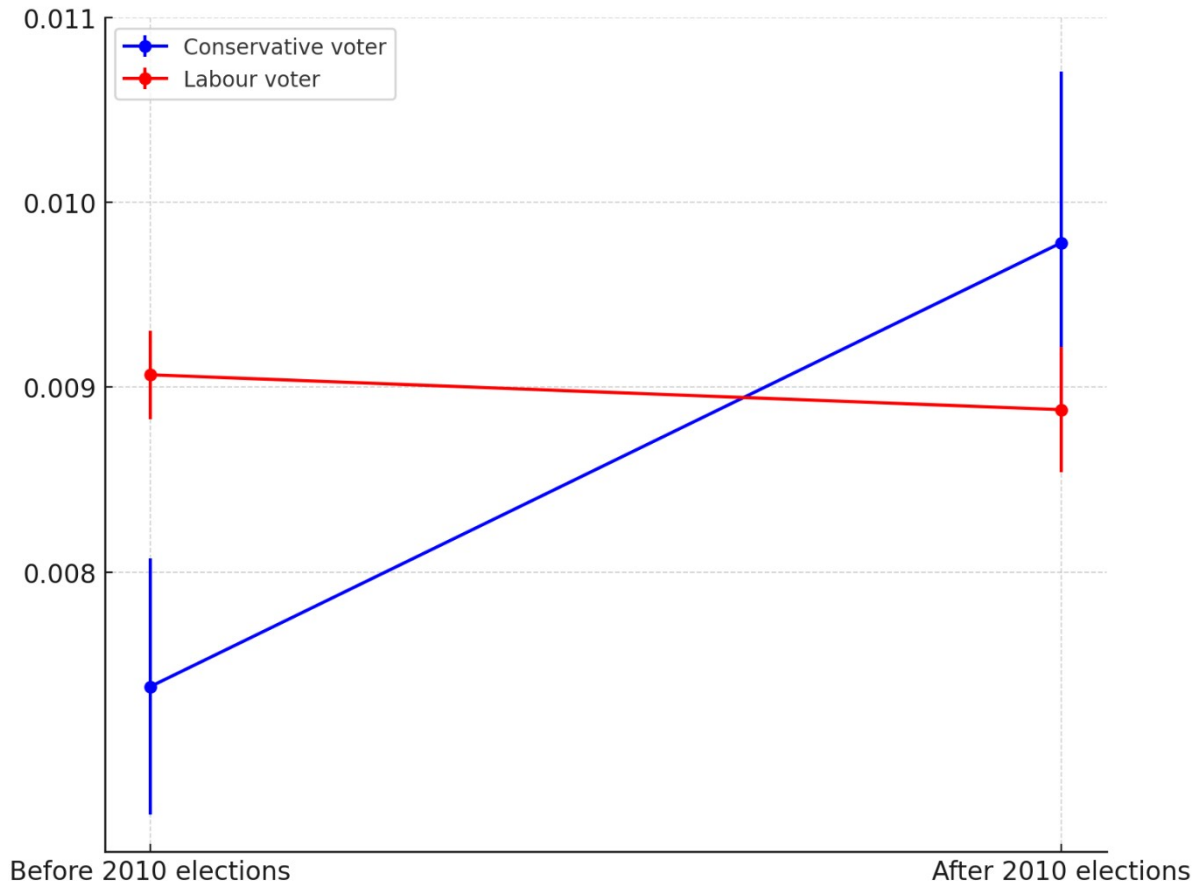


Table 2. Random-effects complementary log–log models.

VARIABLES	Model 1 - alignment	Model 2 - 2010 elections
	Coefficients (robust standard errors in parentheses)	
Alignment	0.173 (0.0630)	
Supported party: Labour	0.082 (0.0575)	
Interaction term: Alignment x Supported party	-0.202 (0.0762)	
Post-election period		-0.103 (0.0522)
Electoral win		-0.208** (0.105)
Interaction term: Post 2010 x Electoral win		0.374 (0.143)
Age	0.121 (0.0281)	0.0912 (0.0288)
Age squared	-0.00402 (0.000410)	-0.00356 (0.000427)
Good health	-0.0231 (0.0445)	-0.0503 (0.0523)
Poor health	-0.0741 (0.110)	-0.129 (0.128)
Health: missing	0.129 (0.0472)	0.120 (0.0559)
Education: medium	0.0209 (0.0544)	0.0578 (0.0610)
Education: high	0.344 (0.0589)	0.406 (0.0687)

Marital status: cohabitation	0.362 (0.0593)	0.373 (0.0676)
Marital status: married	0.391 (0.0486)	0.340 (0.0549)
Sex: female	-0.357*** (0.0436)	-0.369 (0.0492)
parity	0.159 (0.0224)	0.183*** (0.0235)
Region: Midlands	0.0136 (0.188)	0.0125 (0.244)
Region: North	0.0809 (0.193)	-8.37e-05 (0.243)
Region: Scotland	0.0763 (0.181)	0.0283 (0.231)
Region: Wales	-0.0775 (0.182)	-0.0596 (0.231)
Region: South	-0.0484 (0.180)	-0.135 (0.234)
Region: England	0.208 (0.171)	0.217 (0.223)
Interest in politics: not interested	-0.0898 (0.0387)	-0.0581 (0.0449)
Constant	-4.671*** (0.520)	-4.153*** (0.522)
Number of unique observations	1,886	1,806

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

4. Discussion

Although the hypothesis about the importance of the political situation, in particular the election results, was partially confirmed in our analysis, some of the results obtained may raise doubts. We will try to find an explanation for them.

No effects of the Brexit referendum

The Brexit referendum seems to have been one of the most polarizing events in the UK in recent decades. However, the results of the referendum are completely irrelevant both for those who voted for the option that ultimately won and for those who voted to remain in the EU. The number of people in the UKHLS database whose vote in the referendum is known is relatively small. Hence, the size of the effect would also naturally be less statistically significant. Furthermore, it should be noted that the referendum, which took place in July 2016, occurred in the middle of a longer series of political events. First, in 2015, there were elections won by the Conservative Party (this time forming a government without a coalition with the Liberal Democrats), and the next elections took place in 2017. The effects we are trying to observe concern fluctuations in a very low base probability – because it is the probability of conceiving a child in a given month. It may therefore be that, due to the accumulation of political events in such a short period of time, fluctuations in this probability became invisible because the relevant period to which the potential change could be compared disappeared, as did the period of potential impact of this event. In other words, the period before the referendum was also partly the period after the 2015 elections, while the period after the referendum was already partly the period of the 2017 election campaign and, at the same time, of ongoing Brexit negotiations. For people considering decisions about having children, political events may have created, somewhat paradoxically, a kind of constant – political uncertainty was present for a long time, so it ceased to be a variable factor relevant to this decision. Another factor supporting this explanation is the ambiguity of the effects of such a referendum result. For many years after the referendum, negotiations between successive UK governments and the EU continued. The public debate and media coverage constantly raised the issue of various possible Brexit scenarios ("hard vs. soft" Brexit, etc.), and it was not known exactly when the actual exit from the EU would take place (it did not happen until early 2020). It is therefore difficult to expect that couples would consciously refrain from having children in anticipation of the expected effects of Brexit. Similarly, people

who were disappointed with the results of the election and referendum may have become accustomed to living in what they considered an unfavorable political environment, so this factor may have ceased to be as important as it would have been in elections further apart in time.

No effect on other elections

Why did the statistically significant effect occur only for the 2010 election? One may wonder whether this is not a random effect or the result of external confounders, such as the 2008 financial crisis. According to the findings of Dahl et al. (2021), who also compared several US presidential elections, not every election has an effect on fertility, but mainly those that are a positive surprise for the voters of the winning option (Dahl et al., 2021, p. 3). In our understanding, the key seem to be those elections which, in the subjective perception of citizens, are expected to bring about significant changes in the country's functioning. This, in our opinion, explains why elections that did not result in a change of the ruling party did not have a significant effect on the likelihood of deciding to have a child. The conclusion that there was a positive surprise is also supported by the fact that what we were able to show was an increase in the monthly probability of a decision to have a child among voters for the winning party, rather than a decrease among voters whose party lost. This also suggests that the 2008 crisis was not a confounder in this case, as we observe an increase in fertility (we also control for the basic economic indicators of the respondent). The lack of significant effects for the elections between 2015 and 2019 may also have been caused by the aforementioned accumulation of elections (and the Brexit referendum) in a short period of time, making it impossible to clearly define the period before and after the event.

The intention to have a child may remain unfulfilled for a long time

In our study, we equate the moment of birth, set back by nine months, with the moment of deciding to have a child. It is clear that for some couples, this intention is formed much earlier, but despite their efforts, it may not result in pregnancy for some time. Unfortunately, this is a limitation of the data at our disposal. We are unable to observe the exact moment when the intention to have a child is formed. We must assume that the delay in realizing this intention will be equalized between the events studied, i.e., for some people, this intention will be formed before the election and realized only after it, but that this will be a similar percentage of

respondents for each election period studied. Our method has another drawback: it does not take into account pregnancies that did not result in the birth of a child (for any reason). Unfortunately, this is also an unavoidable limitation due to the lack of sufficiently frequent questions about procreative intentions.

5. Summary

Our study shows that election results matter for procreative decisions. We have shown that UK citizens in the period 1991-2022 were more likely to decide to have a child when their preferred party was in power – but this effect is only present among Conservative Party voters. We also showed that the elections themselves are important. The Conservative Party's victory in 2010 contributed to an increase in the likelihood of deciding to have a child among the party's voters in the two years after the election compared to the same period before the election. The results suggest that the 2010 election was rather an exception. No other election or the Brexit referendum had a similar effect. Therefore, it is not possible to speak unequivocally about the impact of increasing political polarization on fertility. More research is needed, not only on new data from the 2024 elections in the UK, but also on data from other countries. Unfortunately, there are few databases that allow for the combination of political preferences at the individual level, periods of preferred party rule, and approximate moments.

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