

HOUSING POLICY IN THE UK: THE TRANSFORMATION OF “THE RIGHT TO BUY” SOCIAL HOUSING POLICY

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Abstract

This paper examines how and why the Right to Buy (RTB) scheme changed drastically in the UK from 1980 to 2016 through the lens of Hall’s model of social learning and Sabatier’s advocacy coalition framework (ACF). This paper argues that changes were made to the Right to Buy scheme from 1980 to 2016 in order to increase the attractiveness of the policy. The study was conducted using a non-positivist approach to research. The findings of this study revealed that the UK government’s decision to reduce the residency requirement from 3 years to 2 years in the RTB scheme in 1984 and to increase the percentage of discounts in the scheme constitutes a first-order policy change as described by Hall. On the other hand, the introduction of the new Right to Acquire in the RTB policy by the Labor party in 1997 constitutes a second-order change. While abolishing the RTB policy in Scotland by the Scottish National Party in July 2016 constitutes a third-order change. Furthermore, the results of this paper showed that the shared core beliefs in the virtues of private ownership between the Conservative party and the “New Labour” that came to power in 1997 in the UK can better be understood through the lens of Sabatier’s ACF.

Keywords: *UK Government, Housing Policy, Right to Buy, Right to Acquire, Advocacy Coalition Framework.*

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Social housing has been an important part of the UK’s housing policy for many decades, both in terms of new build and regeneration, but also in terms of providing adequate, affordable housing for a wide range of UK citizens (Scanlon, Fernández Arrigoitia and Whitehead, 2015:2). This role has been seen to be under threat, especially since the 1980s as public expenditure pressures have grown, liberalization and privatization have become more important, and alternative tenure has become more readily available (Ibid). Over the years, one of the most important social housing policies in the UK is the Right to Buy (RTB) scheme. The

RTB scheme was introduced in the British Housing Act of 1980 as one of the first major reforms introduced by Margaret Thatcher’s government. The policy provided council workers and some housing associations the legal right to buy social housing there were living in with a large discount. The scheme entitles eligible tenants to buy their homes at a minimum discount of 33% after 3 years tenancy to 50% after 20 years (UK Parliament, 2020). The RTB allowed tenants in public-owned social housing known as “Council housing” in the UK to buy their rented accommodation at a heavily subsidized price.

The RTB has been a central element of housing policy in the UK ever since the scheme was created in 1980. The Right to Buy scheme had several objectives. For instance, one of the main objectives of the RTB policy was to allow UK citizens to own affordable public housing. As Sprigings and Smith explained, another objective of the RTB policy was to transfer long-term management and maintenance costs of a significant proportion of public sector housing stock away from government to individual households (Sprigings and Smith, 2012). To qualify for the RTB scheme, an individual must have been a tenant of at least two years standing. The RTB was largely responsible for an increase in the share of home-ownership among households in the UK from 55% in 1979 to over 70 % in the early 2000s, thereby inducing a large-scale change in asset ownership among British households (Disney and Luo, 2014:2). By 1997, over 1, 7000,000 social houses had been sold under the scheme since its introduction in 1980, with the scheme being cited as one of the main reasons for the drastic reduction in the amount of social housing in Britain, which had fallen from 6.5 million units in 1997 to about 2 million units in 2017.

The Right to Buy scheme was seen by scholars, policymakers, and politicians in the UK and other European countries as an innovative and internally- unique policy (Kentish, 2017).

Over the years, the UK has made several changes to improve the Right to Buy scheme since its creation by the Conservative party in 1980. Improvement is a change made on something in order to make it better than before (Macmillan dictionary, 2020). However, despite all the changes made by the UK government to make the RTB scheme better, opponents of the scheme argue that the scheme is a failure and should be halted because it has led to a staggering loss of social homes since those sold off under the policy are not being replaced (Kentish, 2017).

1.2. Aims, Research Question, and Hypothesis

The aim of this study is twofold. (1) to get an in-depth understanding of how and why the RTB scheme changed so drastically from 1980 to 2016. (2) this study aims to add to the body of literature on social housing policy in the UK and the world at large. John W. Creswell explains that the research questions of a study should be a broad attempt for exploring the central phenomenon of the study (2009:129). Therefore, the formulated research question of this study is:

- How and why did the Right to Buy Policy change drastically in the UK from 1980 to 2016?

I argue that changes were made to the Right to Buy scheme from 1980 to 2016 in order to increase the attractiveness of the policy. I will review existing literature on the RTB scheme in the next section to identify key debates on the subject.

2. Literature Review

It is worth mentioning that only a limited number of studies have been conducted on the Right to Buy policy in the UK and most of the studies that have been conducted on the RTB focused on the impact and the future of the policy in the UK. Hence, I will review the existing literature under the two following themes: “Impact of the Right to Buy policy” and “Future of the Right to Buy policy”.

2.1. Impacts of the Right to Buy Policy

A study by Richard Disney and Guan Luo in 2014 looked at the impacts of the Right to Buy policy on social welfare in the UK. Their study revealed that the RTB policy provided low-income households in the UK the right to buy council houses with no right to resale. According to the authors, the RTB policy allows the unrestricted sale of a Right to Buy House in the open market only after a certain period, otherwise, any money discount on the RTB sale must be returned to the local authority (Disney and Luo 2014:57). Another study conducted by Alan Murie in 2016 looked at the impact of the Right to Buy on the private housing market in the UK. His study revealed that just as the RTB policy has transformed state housing or the social rented sector; it has also transformed home-ownership and the private rented sector in the UK. For instance, in some localities in the UK, a vast number of State houses that were purchased under the RTB scheme later become private rented accommodations (Murie, 2016:102).

Moving on to another study conducted by Ian Cole, Stephen Green, Lindsey McCarthy, and Ben Pattison in 2015, the authors looked at the impact of the existing RTB policy and the implications for the proposed extension of the RTB to housing associations in the UK. Housing associations in the UK are private, non-profit-making organizations that provide low-cost “Social housing” to people in need of a home. Housing associations offer similar types of social housing as local councils to people on low income and those who need extra support (Gov. UK, 2020). Ian Cole, Stephen Green, Lindsey McCarthy, and Ben Pattison’s study looked at the implications of the UK government’s proposal to extend the RTB to housing associations by allowing them to sell houses to tenants using RTB discounts. The authors conducted their research by analyzing the existing literature on the Right to Buy policy in the UK. Their study revealed that the impact of the existing RTB policy in the UK was as follows: (1) Sales were higher in the early years of the RTB in smaller, rural district councils and new towns. The rate of sales was lower in large, urban authorities, in particular in inner London, the northwest of England, and more deprived urban areas. (2) RTB sales were highest in areas where owner-occupation was already at high levels and where the initial stock of council housing was relatively small. The rate of resale of RTB property has been higher in London and areas of higher quality and more popular council stock. (3) At first, a relatively high proportion of RTB purchasers were older, reflecting pent-up demand and the larger discounts for longer-term tenants. Also, the authors predicted that one implication of the proposed extension of the Right to Buy policy to housing associations is that the decision by eligible housing association tenants about whether to exercise the Right to Buy will be influenced by a host of factors. For instance, the persistence of low-interest rates may attract more tenants to take on a mortgage in order to fund the purchase (Ian et al., 2015: 47-48).

2.2. Future of the Right to Buy Policy

Another group of studies that have been conducted on the Right to Buy policy focused on the future of the policy in the UK. For instance, Munro and Littlewood conducted a study on the future of the RTB scheme in the UK. The authors used the Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS) to analyze whether there still remains further scope for sales under the Right to Buy policy. The study revealed that there are continuing cohorts of people who express a desire to buy social housing in the UK under the RTB policy (Munro and Littlewood, 1991:55). Their analysis indicates that the motivation to buy is mainly created by the household’s economic circumstances. On the other hand, their analysis also indicates that family characteristics, the

type and perceived quality of the house, and rent levels also exert an independent influence (Ibid). The significance of these findings on policy redevelopment is that decision-makers need to constantly evaluate policy outcomes to redevelop policies based on outcomes. For instance, based on the findings of Munro and Littlewood's study, the UK government could redevelop the RTB policy to better meet the needs of the group of people who are expressing the desire to purchase social housing in the UK under the Right to Buy scheme.

Another study conducted by Kim Mckee in 2010 looks at the future of social housing in Scotland if the Right to Buy policy is discontinued by the current Scottish government. The author argued that ending the RTB policy in Scotland in the future, would likely have a significant, but a mixed impact on the future of the “Social rented sector” in Scotland (Mckee, 2010:7). The social rented sector in the UK consists of those renting their homes from local authorities and housing associations (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2017:7).

According to Mckee, The end of the RTB has implications for community cohesion agendas, for it ultimately limits the opportunity to mix tenures at the local level through low-cost homeownership initiatives.

The findings of the aforementioned studies discussed above indicated that policymakers develop policies generally to help them achieve certain goals or objectives. For instance, the RTB policy was developed in the UK to give citizens the right to own social housing at affordable prices. Similarly, the findings of the literature review above make us to understand that policymakers require several stages in developing policies such as formulation, implementation, evaluation, and termination. Finally, the literature review revealed that policy development can result in unintended consequences which could trigger a redevelopment or termination of the policy. Therefore, decision-makers developing policies need to consider the unintended consequences of any new policy that is being developed.

3. Conceptual Framework and Methodology

This section presents the conceptual framework and the methodological approach that I am using in this study. This paper will apply the concept of “Social learning”, Peter Hall’s “three orders of change” and Sabatier’s “advocacy coalition framework” to the changes that occurred in the Right to Buy scheme from 1980 to 2016. It is worth mentioning that policy change has

been a widely theorized branch of policy studies and scholars have found it difficult to come out with a single theory or concept that fully explains policy change.

3.1. The Concept of Social Learning

To start with, Peter Hall’s 1993 article on policy paradigms and social learning defines social learning as a “deliberate attempt to adjust the goals or techniques of policy in response to past experience and new information (1993:278). He identifies social learning as a means of setting policy agendas and he explained that social learning can make the state to act autonomously through leadership or stealth (Ibid). Sometimes experts are key agents of social learning while sometimes inexpert political actors take over the role of driving policy change. Policy experts include bureaucrats, analysts, and activists in a particular policy subsystem. The process of social learning can allow states, nation-states, subnational governments, or cities to act autonomously. That means they can make changes in a policy before society even focuses on the issue. Hall explains that autonomy can be associated with strong executive leadership or with covert change through incremental adjustment strategies that transform policies over time. The concepts of social learning emphasize the role of ideas in policymaking. The concept suggests that one of the main factors “affecting policy at time -1 is the policy at time -0” (Hall, 1993:276). In other words, the concept of social learning suggests that the interests and ideas that policymakers pursue at any moment in time are shaped by policy legacies or previous policy. I will use the concept of social learning in this paper to explain how some of the changes that were made to the RTB scheme in the UK was an autonomous decision by the state. Likewise, I will use the concept of social learning to explain how the changes that were made to the RTB scheme at any moment in time were shaped by the policy’s legacies.

3.2. Hall’s Three Orders of Change

Peter Hall one of the leading policy scholars of our time explains that he sees three orders of change in policymaking. In the first order of change, instrument settings are adjusted in light of prior experience and new knowledge. The first-order change is the smallest degree of change whereby policymakers adjust only the existing instruments that are out there. For instance, the UK government’s decision to reduce the residency requirement from 3 years to 2 years and to increase the percentage of discounts in the Right to Buy scheme in 1984 constitutes a first-order change. In the second-order change, policy instruments are changed along with the settings. For example, the introduction of the new Right to Acquire in the RTB scheme by the

Labor party in 1997 constitutes a second-order policy change. Finally, Hall explains that in the third-order change, the core policy goals of the subsystem are changed as well as both the instruments and their settings. As an example, the scrapping of the RTB policy in Scotland by the SNP in 2016 constitutes a third-order change.

I decided to do my analysis in this paper using Hall's three orders of change because the concepts better explain the changes that occur in the RTB policy's goals, its instruments, and instrument settings. Most of the changes that occurred in the Right to Buy scheme in the UK from 1980 to 2016 were made on the policy's goals, the policy's instruments, and the policy's instrument settings. Hence, Hall's three orders of change will help us to better understand the changes that were made to the RTB that transformed the policy over time. Additionally, Hall's third-order change will serve as a guide for explanatory accounts on how and why the Right to Buy policy was abolished in Scotland by the SNP in 2016.

3.3. Sabatier's Advocacy Coalition Framework

Sabatier's advocacy coalition framework (ACF) is added to this paper to supplement Hall's model. The ACF is a long-established tool in the policy research tool kit and it is built on belief systems. It uses belief systems as a cornerstone of how policy actors are motivated and organize in their role in policymaking. The ACF assumes that people get involved in politics at least in part to translate their beliefs into public policy. "This ability to map beliefs and policies on the same 'canvas' provides a vehicle for assessing the influence of various actors on public policy over time"(Sabatier,199:132) I will use Sabatier's advocacy coalition framework to explain the changes that David Cameron made to the RTB policy in 2016 as a result of pledges made in the Conservative manifesto 2015. Overall, ACF will deepen the insights into this subset of policymaking.

3.4. Methodology

This study was conducted using a qualitative and a non-positivist approach to research. The study was conducted using qualitative secondary data collected from publicly available documents. The documents were collected electronically from the internet. Although it would have been nice to conduct this study using other sources of data such as primary data from interviews, I decided to use publicly available documents because it is more time and cost-effective than gathering data from other sources such as surveys or in-depth interviews. I

analyze my data using discourse analysis (DA) because DA has been identified by numerous scholars as one of the best methods to study texts or documents, especially texts that deal with power relations (Peräkylä, 2008:336). As aforementioned, the social learning concept, Hall’s three orders of change, and Sabastier’s ACF guided my analysis of how and why drastic changes were made to the UK’s RTB policy from 1980 to 2016.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1. The Housing Act 1980 and The RTB Policy Change in 1984

Immediately after the Conservative Party took office in 1979 with Margaret Thatcher becoming Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the general consent on sales was amended to enable authorities to make sales at the discount promised in the Conservative manifesto. The 1980 Housing Act was created by the new Conservative government. As earlier mentioned, the main plank of the Act was the introduction of the Right to Buy (RTB) policy. The Labor Party at the time opposed the RTB due to controversy over the financial consequences and the overriding of local discretion (Wilson, 1999:7). The main features of the Right to Buy scheme that was created in the 1980 Housing Act were as follows:

- A statutory Right to Buy for most council tenants and tenants of non-charitable housing associations of three years' standing, with exceptions for elderly and disabled tenants and other minor categories.
- Strict statutory procedures on the implementation of the Right to Buy, including powers for the Secretary of State to intervene.
- Discounts on the market value ranging from 33% after 3 years tenancy to 50% after 20 years. A cost floor applied to prevent dwellings built after 1974 from being sold at less than the cost of providing them.
- Right to a mortgage from the local authority, with the Secretary of State given powers to determine the multiples of income and age limits for mortgage qualification.
- Repayments of discount where a resale occurred before 5 years, and pre-exemption right in designated rural areas (UK Parliament, 2020). A pre-exemption right is a contractual right to acquire certain property newly coming into existence before it can be offered to any person or entity.

In 1984, the UK government made some changes to the 1980 Right to Buy scheme. For instance, the government extended the RTB to tenants of properties held on a long lease by public authorities. The residence qualification was reduced from 3 years to 2 years and discounts began at 32 % and increased to 60% after 30 years (Wilson, 1999: 8). Besides, tenants also gained the Right to Buy on shared ownership terms and the government increased the Secretary of State's power to intervene in situations where the landlord was considered to be obstructing the Right to Buy. The above changes made to the RTB by the UK government in 1984 can be seen as an attempt by the government to make the Right to Buy scheme more attractive to potential clients (Murie, 2016).

The decision made by the UK government to reduce the residence qualification in the RTB scheme in 1984 from 3 years to 2 years and to increase discounts to up to 60 % might have been an autonomous decision made by the State. This is because I could not find any information in the media or in my data which shows that the UK government made consultations with the public before making these changes, suggesting that the policy change might have been an autonomous decision made by the government. The concept of social learning helps us to better understand how states or state actors can make autonomous decisions to change policies without societal pressure. Just like the concept of social learning suggests, the main factor affecting policy at time -1 is the policy at time -0 (Hall, 1993:276). The UK government's reduction of the residency qualification of the RTB policy to 2 years in 1984 was shaped by the 3 years residency requirement in the previous RTB scheme in 1980. It was the 3 years residence qualification that was required in 1980 that shaped the government's 2 years residence qualification required in the new Right to Buy policy in 1984. Hence, changes made in a particular policy subsystem are shaped by the previous policy as explained by the concept of social learning. The policy was adjusted to make the process of purchasing RTB housing easier and to make the RTB scheme more attractive to those who were considering buying their own homes under the scheme.

In addition, the UK government's decision to reduce the residency requirement from 3 years to 2 years and to increase the percentage of discounts in the Right to Buy scheme in 1984 constitutes a first-order policy change as Hall explains because the reduction of the number of years required to qualify for the Right to Buy scheme from 3 years to 2 years was just an adjustment of the existing instrument. The goal of the RTB at the time was to give UK citizens the right to own public social housing. The goal remained the same, the residency requirement

to qualify for social housing and the percentage of discounts in the RTB scheme were the same instruments with just a minor adjustment made to the instruments by the UK government.

4.2. The 1997 Election and Changes to the Right to Buy

In 1997, the Labor party won elections in the UK and replaced the Conservative government. The elected Labor government introduced a new Right to Acquire (RTA) in the Right to Buy scheme (Disney and Luo, 2014). The Right to Acquire was given to assured tenants of Housing Association dwellings built with public subsidy after 1997. The new right to acquire gave tenants of housing associations a new right to purchase their homes at a smaller discount than the full discount offered by the RTB scheme. Before the introduction of the RTA in the RTB policy, tenants of Housing Associations did not have the right to own their homes. The introduction of the RTA in the Right to Buy scheme by the Labor party was meant to give assured tenants of housing association dwellings the right to purchase their homes. According to Murie, “the policy change was meant to give more citizens in the UK the opportunity to buy a house” (2016).

By 1997 when the Labor party came to power, Over 1, 7000, 000 social housing had been sold under the Right to Buy scheme. The introduction of the new Right to Acquire in the RTB policy by the Labor party in 1997 constitutes a second-order change as described by Peter Hall in his 1993 model of policy change. It constitutes a second-order change because the Right to Acquire introduced by the Labor party in 1997 to the Right to Buy policy is a new instrument. The main goal of the RTB scheme which was to assist citizens to own affordable public housing remained the same. The new Labor government was still trying to support UK citizens to be able to purchase a home of their own at a discount but this time, using new instruments like the RTA even though the discount level of the RTA was smaller than the full discount offered by the RTB.

A study conducted by Hellwig and McAllister in 2019 revealed that the English parties (The Conservative and the “New Labour” party under Blair) that made changes to the RTB policy in 1997 had some shared core beliefs about the role of the market and the virtue of “an ownership” society in the UK. Both parties believe in the virtues of private ownership, they believe in citizens controlling their wealth in the marketplace rather than surviving on state welfare (Hellwig and McAllister, 2019). This explains why both parties supported the RTB policy in the UK. On the other hand, minority opposition parties like the Greens were against

the RTB and wanted the policy to be abolished in the UK (Ibid). However, the idea of keeping the RTB policy and making the UK a “private ownership” society triumphed over the idea of abolishing the RTB because the New Labour was the governing party and that was the idea that it supported. The shared core beliefs in the virtues of private ownership between the Conservative party and the New Labour that came to power in 1997 can be seen as the major reason why Blair used new instruments like the RTA to make changes to the RTB policy rather than ending the policy in the UK. Sabatier’s advocacy coalition framework helps us to better understand how shared core beliefs can influence policy development. The shared core beliefs between the Conservative party and the New Labour about creating an ownership society in the UK might have influenced the second-order change that was made to the RTB policy in 1997 by the Labour party. As mentioned earlier, the New Labour party could have brought an end to the RTB scheme after winning elections in 1997 since the policy was created by the Conservative party. Instead, the New Labour decided to keep the RTB scheme in place because they believe in a private ownership society like their Conservative counterparts.

4.3. The 2012 Changes to the RTB

Before 2012, critics argue that the Right to Buy should be scrapped in the UK. According to these critics, the policy has led to a staggering loss of social homes because those sold off under the RTB policy are not being replaced (Kentish, 2017). As a result of the growing concern about this impact of the RTB policy, the UK government in 2012 introduced the “One for one strategy” in the Right to Buy scheme. The one-for-one strategy set out the government’s commitment to ensure that every additional home sold under the Right to Buy is replaced by a new home for affordable rent and that additional receipts from sales will be recycled towards the cost of replacement (Ibid).

The UK government introduced the one-for-one strategy in 2012 in order to address the concerns of critics of the RTB policy who had argued that the policy had led to a staggering loss of social homes. The changes to the RTB scheme in 2012 show how past and new information about a particular policy subsystem can lead to policy change as the concept of social learning make us to understand. It was the policy past and the new information that the UK government got from the criticisms of the RTB as a policy that has led to a loss of social homes that made the UK government to make changes in the RTB policy in 2012 by introducing the new one for one strategy into the RTB policy. Overall, the introduction of the

one-for-one strategy in the RTB policy by the UK government in 2012 is a second-order change because the one-for-one is a new instrument used by the UK government to achieve the same policy goals of the RTB scheme.

Besides, in March 2012, the UK government decided to increase the cap on the Right to Buy discounts in England to £75,000 throughout England. Prior to this change, the maximum discounts for the RTB in England in December 2011 ranged from £16,000 in most parts of London to £38,000 in parts of the South East (Parkin and Wilson, 2017:5). The increase in the cap on the RTB discounts was meant to make the RTB policy more attractive to tenants of social housing across England. The UK government believed that the increased discount will allow a greater number of social tenants to exercise their Right to Buy and meet their homeownership aspirations, support social mobility, and will help create and sustain mixed communities (Ibid). The increase in RTB discounts across England to £75,000 by the government is a first-order policy change because the policy goal which was to allow UK citizens to own social homes remained the same with just a minor adjustment of the existing instruments.

4.4. The Extension of Full RTB Discounts to Housing Association Tenants in 2016

In May 2015, David Cameron won elections as Prime Minister of the UK under the conservative party. Polls and commentators had predicted the outcome of the elections as too close to call. After winning the election, Cameron decided to make changes to the RTB policy in 2016 by extending the full right to buy level discounts to tenants of housing associations in England. As aforementioned, before this time, tenants of the housing association could only purchase their homes under the RTA scheme introduced by the Labor party in 1997 at a smaller discount compared to tenants of council housing who enjoyed the full discounts of the RTB policy. Before this policy change occurred, most housing association tenants have long sought for the change. Most of these tenants wanted to be allowed to purchase their homes at the full RTB level discounts. The new change made to the RTB policy in 2016 by the Conservative government was therefore welcomed by these tenants of housing associations (Bate et al., 2018). To be eligible for the new changes made to the RTB scheme by David Cameron in 2016, potential buyers must have been housing association tenants for at least 2 years, the same requirement for council tenants (Milligan, 2016).

According to Cameron's government, the extension of the full RTB discounts to tenants of housing association will benefit 1.3 million housing association tenants in England (Ibid). They explained that the policy change will enable more people to buy a home of their own at Right to Buy level discounts and in return, housing associations would be fully compensated by the government for the cost of the discount (National Housing Federation, 2016:1). As earlier discussed in the literature review section, Ian et al., argued that one future consequence of extending the full RTB discounts to tenants of housing associations is that the persistence of low-interest rates may attract more tenants to take on a mortgage in order to fund the purchase (2015: 47-48). The new changes made to the RTB policy by David Cameron's government in 2016 can best be understood through the lens of Sabatier's "Advocacy coalition framework". Before the election in May 2016, the Conservative Party's manifesto 2015 contained a commitment to "extend the right to buy level discounts to tenants of Housing Associations to enable more people to buy a home of their own" (Phibbs, 2018). At the time, the Conservative Party was in coalition with the Liberal Democrats and both parties supported the idea of extending the full RTB discounts to tenants of housing associations. On the other hand, the Greens' manifesto 2015 opposed the idea of extending the full Right to Buy level discounts to tenants of the Housing Associations. Instead, the Greens manifesto called for the RTB housing policy to be abolished in the UK (BBC, 2015). However, the idea of extending the Right to Buy to tenants of housing associations triumphed over the idea of ending the RTB policy in the UK because the Conservative and their coalition partner (the Liberal Democrats) won the elections and that was the idea that they supported.

The changes made to extend the right to buy level discounts to housing association tenants in 2016 is a fulfillment of the pledge made to voters in the Conservative manifesto 2015. The pledge in the conservative manifesto 2015 shows that extending the full RTB discounts to tenants of housing association was a shared core belief among members of the Conservative party, their coalition partner (the Liberal Democrats), and some of their supporters who voted for them in the 2015 elections. It was this shared core belief to extend the RTB level discounts to housing association tenants that made the Conservative government under David Cameron to make changes to the RTB policy that allowed tenants of housing associations the Right to Buy their homes at full RTB level discounts. As Sabatier explained, shared core beliefs by a group of coalitions like the coalition between the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats in the UK in 2015 can influence the development of policy.

4.5. Right to Buy Policy Scrapped in Scotland

In July 2016, the SNP (Scottish National Party) decided to abolish the Right to Buy policy in Scotland. According to the SNP, the RTB policy was abolished in Scotland to enhance social housing and to protect the investment made in social housing by the government over many generations (BBC, 2016). The SNP scrapped the Right to Buy policy in Scotland to save 15,500 homes in the social sector in the next decades. The RTB policy was scrapped following concerns that the policy had contributed to an acute shortage of social housing in Scotland (BBC, 2016). Senior government officials of the SNP argued that abolishing the RTB policy was a good move because it would allow Scotland to adopt a housing policy that is focused on the supply of well-designed, energy-efficient social rented homes that are truly affordable to people on low incomes. In contrast, as discussed in the literature review section, Mckee 2010 argued that ending the RTB policy in Scotland would have implications for community cohesion has agendas, for it ultimately limits the opportunity to mix tenures at the local level through low-cost homeownership initiatives (2010:7).

The Scottish National Party’s decision to end the RTB policy in Scotland was welcomed by the Scottish Federation of Housing Association (SFHA) because the SFHA and its members had long campaigned for an end to the RTB policy in Scotland. SFHA chief Mary Taylor said, “SFHA welcomes the end of the Right to Buy policy which has contributed to the growing intergenerational inequality in terms of access to affordable quality housing” (BBC, 2016). Though the Right to Buy was abolished in Scotland in 2016, the policy continued to operate in the rest of the UK. Abolishing the RTB policy in Scotland by the Scottish National Party in July 2016 constitutes a third-order change as described by Hall. This is because the government’s goal at the time when the RTB policy was scrapped was not to give families in Scotland the opportunity to own affordable public housing at a discount; the government’s goal had changed.

The third-order change that happened in Scotland in 2016 When SNP scrapped the RTB policy was to put the goal of protecting and enhancing social housing and protecting the investment made in social housing by the government ahead of the goal of giving families in Scotland the opportunity to own affordable public housing at a discount. The goal of protecting and enhancing social housing and protecting the investment made in social housing by the government was moved up. This is a third-order change in the hierarchy of goals as explained by Hall in his 1993 model of policy change. The SNP reprioritize its goals in 2016 when it

decided to scrap the RTB policy in Scotland. The main goal of the RTB which was to give families the right to own social housing in Scotland was canceled by the government. Along with that, the instruments and instrument settings were changed. It was now about adopting a housing policy that is focused on the supply of well-designed, energy-efficient social rented homes that are truly affordable to people on low incomes which constitutes a third-order change.

5. Conclusion

In summation, this paper has offered a solid application of Hall's model of policy change and Sabatier's ACF (Advocacy Coalition Framework) to changes that occurred in the RTB housing policy in the UK from 1980 to 2016. Hall's three orders of change were used to demonstrate what has changed in the RTB policy in the UK from 1980 to 2016 and how it has changed. Contrarily, Sabatier's ACF was used to explain why the RTB housing policy changed. The study was conducted using a non-positivist approach and qualitative secondary data collected from publicly available documents. The paper looked at how and why the RTB housing policy changed drastically in the UK from 1980 to 2016. The results of this study showed that the UK government's decision to reduce the residency requirement from 3 years to 2 years in the RTB scheme in 1984 and to increase the percentage of discounts in the scheme constitutes a first-order policy change as described by Hall.

On the other hand, the introduction of the new Right to Acquire in the RTB policy by the Labor party in 1997 constitutes a second-order change. While abolishing the RTB policy in Scotland by the Scottish National Party in July 2016 constitutes a third-order change. Furthermore, the results of this paper showed that the shared core beliefs in the virtues of private ownership between the Conservative party and the "New Labour" that came to power in 1997 in the UK can better be understood through the lens of Sabatier's advocacy coalition framework (ACF). As this paper suggests, it is possible to argue that Hall's model of policy change and Sabatier's ACF are two policy study tools that can be used to deepen the insights into the changes that occurred in the RTB policy in the UK from 1980 to 2016. Future research on the topic of this paper could focus on evaluating both the positive and the negative effects of the changes that were made to the RTB housing policy from 1980 to 2016 on UK citizens.

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