The Role of Length of Residence for Social Contact Formation in Ethnically Diverse Neighborhoods

… and how to account for selective residential mobility

Stephan Dochow-Sondershaus (Freie Universität Berlin)

SOEP 2022 - 14th International German Socio-Economic Panel User Conference; June 30, 2022

DIW Berlin

Introduction

Previous literature:

- Association between ethnic group composition in geographical contexts and social cohesion indicators
- Famously, Putnam (2007): detrimental short term effect of ethnic diversity
- Typically a negative relationship, particularly on the local level
- Many theoretical accounts for this association

Research gaps:

- Few causal analyses
- Problem of selective residential mobility

Problem of selective residential mobility

Individuals and households are not randomly assigned to neighborhoods with different ethnic composition.

Rather, at any given time point the population of a specific neighborhood is composed of those who...

- ... newly enter the neighborhood
- ... 'survive' in neighborhood

Common way to deal with SRM: Researchers control for individual and neighborhood level variables (often cross-sectional data)

- But: the population is already selective in each cross-section
- Makes association between diversity and cohesion hard to interpret
- Important: Panel data also does not necessarily help!

Research question

Before we lose ourselves in the complexities of selective mobility and potential methodological fixes, **pose a clearly defined causal research question**.

Instead of asking "what is the effect of neighborhood diversity on Y?"...

RQ: What is the effect of *moving to*, and *staying in*, *one specific* diverse neighborhood for a pre-specified *period* on contacts with neighbors of single *individuals*.

- Theoretical and practical motivations for RQ
- Other questions are possible, but require different data
- Helps to come up with an appropriate research design (tailoring data, estimation procedures)

Methods

Basics:

- **SOEP** (yearly 2009 to 2014)
- **Outcomes (2009/2014):** closeness of contacts with neighbors, frequency of visiting neighbors, perception of neighborhood network
- **Diversity:** Percentage of households with African, Asian, Balkan, Eastern European, Turkish and non-European Muslim origin (by Microm)

Data prep and methods:

- Baseline sample of recent in-movers in 2009 (HH who live in neighborhood for max. 3 years)
- Regression model with baseline variables to control for selective in-mobility (SES, neighborhood variables, attitudinal indicators, housing characteristics, etc.)
- Inverse probability weighting (IPW) to adjust for dynamic out-mobility adjust for having children, new job etc.

Causal relations

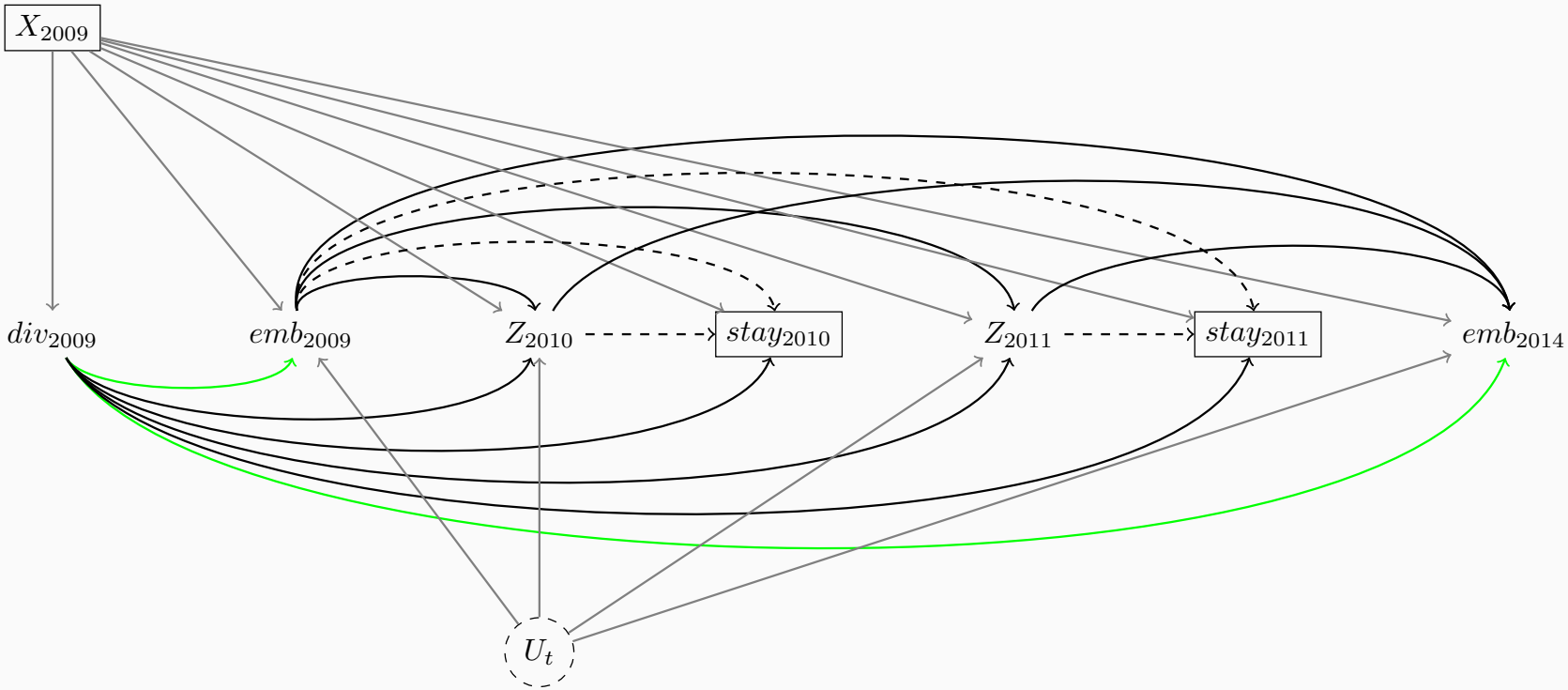

Figure 1: Directed acyclic graph for study design. Arrows show causal effects. Green arrows: effect of interest from diversity in 2009 to embeddedness in 2009 and 2014. Boxes around "stay" illustrate that the sample is conditional upon staying in the baseline neighborhood. Z are time-varying causes of out-mobility. Dashed arrows are erased by weighting the censored sample with inverse probability weights. X2009 are baseline confounders and conditioned on via regression. Ut are possible unmeasured factors that are allowed in my estimation strategy.

Results: closeness of contact with neighbors

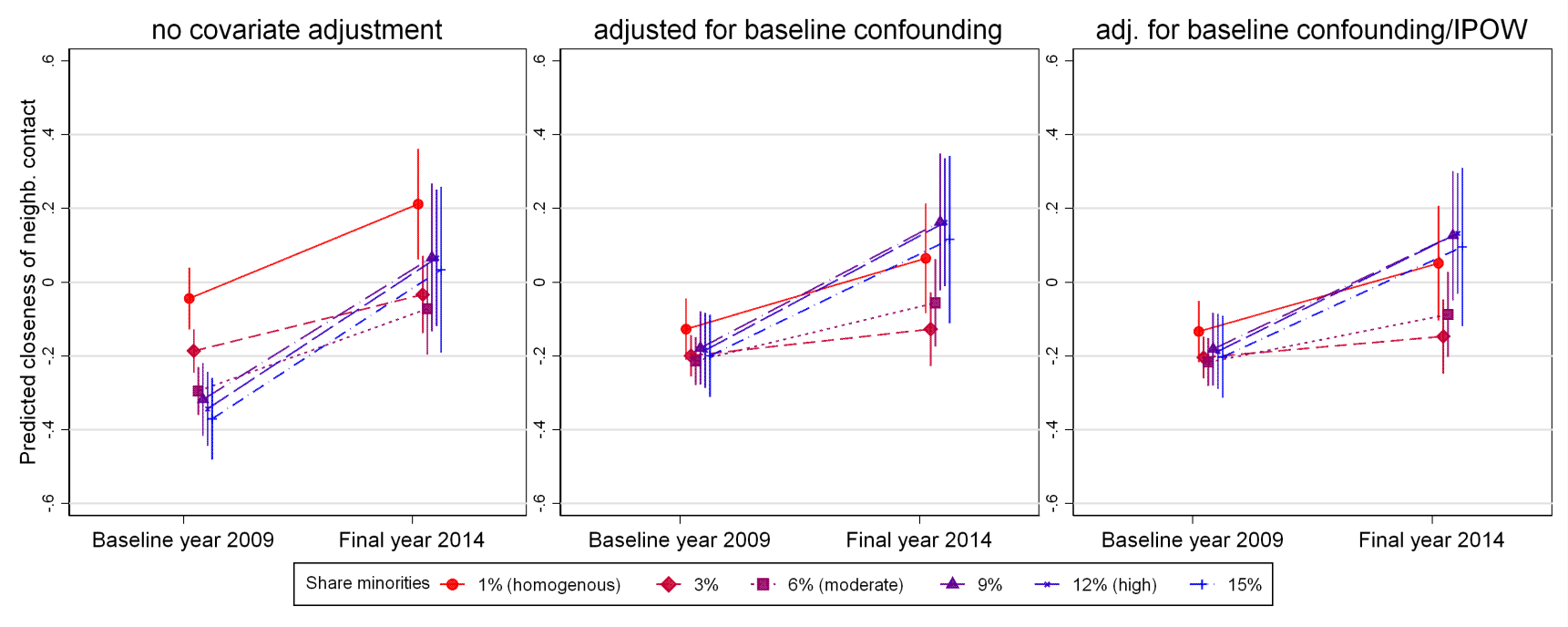

Figure 2: Predicted values of closeness of contact with neighbors. Results from OLS regressions.

Similar findings for a measure of frequency of visiting neighbors!
And, more or less, null effects for perceived neighborhood cohesion.

Conclusion

For research in general:

- Much theoretical work on association between ethnic diversity and social cohesion
- Empirical knowledge lacks behind
- Posing clear research questions can help

For ethnic diversity effects:

- Individuals in ethnically diverse neighborhoods establish contacts with neighbors of similar quality than in less diverse neighborhoods
- … under very specific circumstances

Appendix

Results II: visiting neighbors

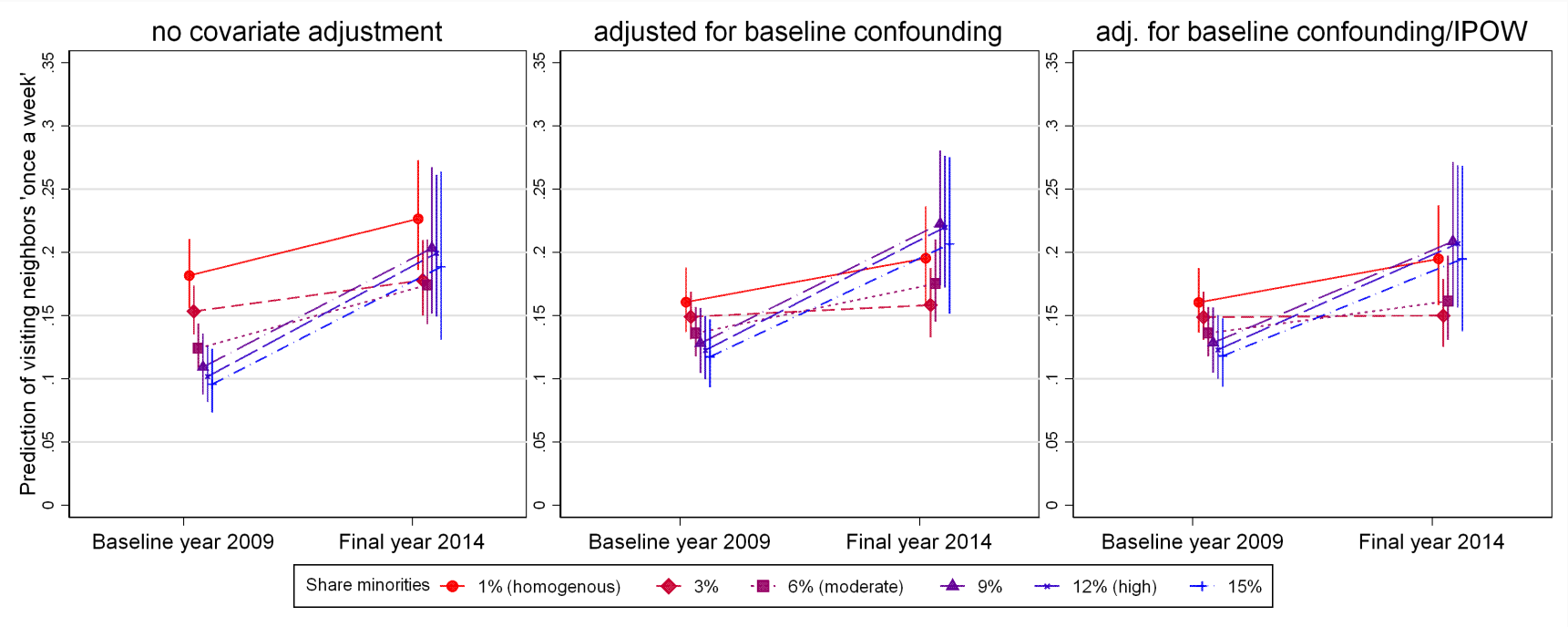

Figure 3: Predicted probabilities of visiting neighbors once a week. Results from ordered logistic regression models.

Results III: perceiving cohesive relations between neighbors

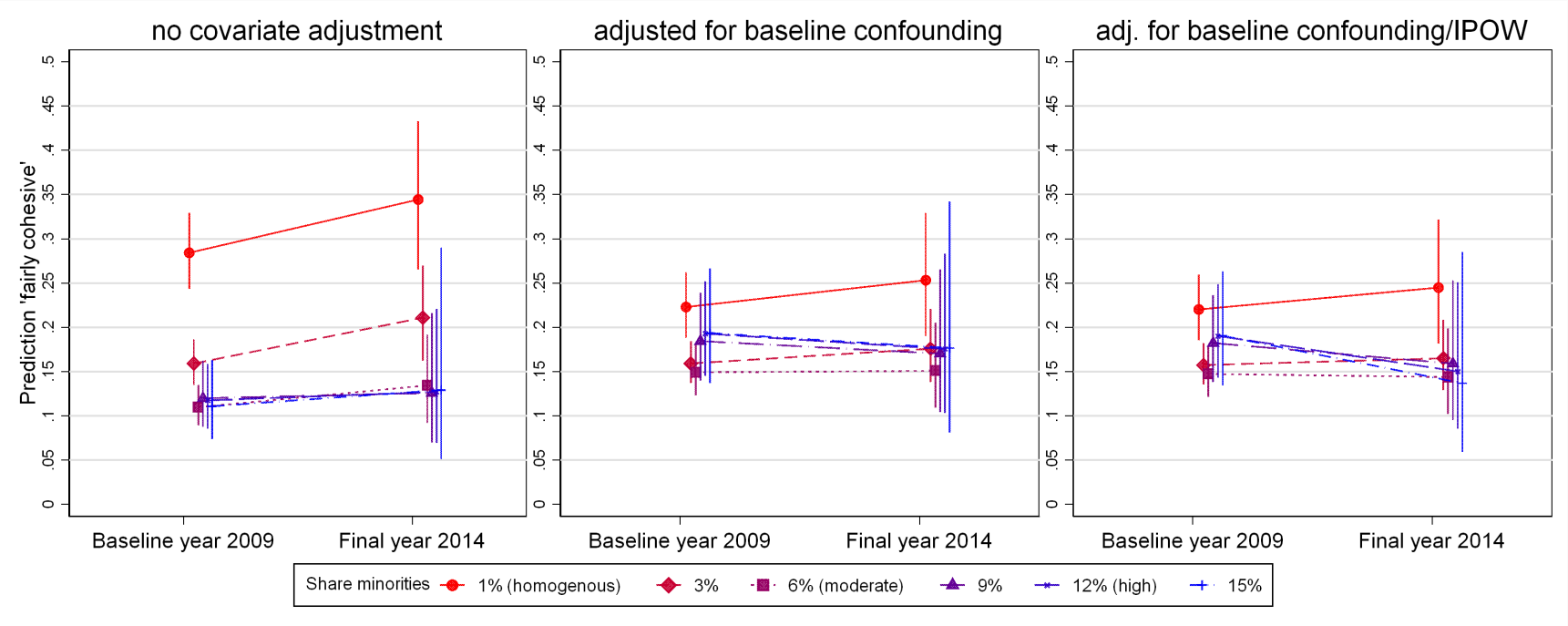

Figure 4: Predicted probabilities of perceiving cohesive relations between neighbors. Results from multinomial logistic regression models.

Outcome variables

Table 1: Measures of social ties in the neighborhood employed in this study.

Dimension of Social Cohesion	**SOEP Item**	**Item responses and value coding**	**Statistical model used**
Perception of closeness of contact with neighbors (subjective assessment of own contacts with neighbors)	"How close is your contact with your neighbors in this building or in this neighborhood?"	-2. Fleeting -1. No contact 0. Moderate 1. Close 2. Very close	OLS linear regression
Visiting neighbors at home (own, intimate contact behavior with neighbors)	"Do you have neighbors who you get along with so well that you visit each other at home?" (yes/no). If reply was "yes": "How often do you visit each other?"	0. no 1. Less than once a month 2. At least once a month 3. At least once a week 4. Almost daily	Ordered logistic regression
Perception of relations among neighbors (assessment of overall neighborhood cohesion beyond own contacts)	"How would you evaluate the relationships among people in this neighborhood? Which statement fits best?"	1. People barely know each other 2. People talk to each other occasionally 3. Fairly strong relations 4. "It varies widely/unable to comment on this"	Multinomial logistic regression

Outcome variables

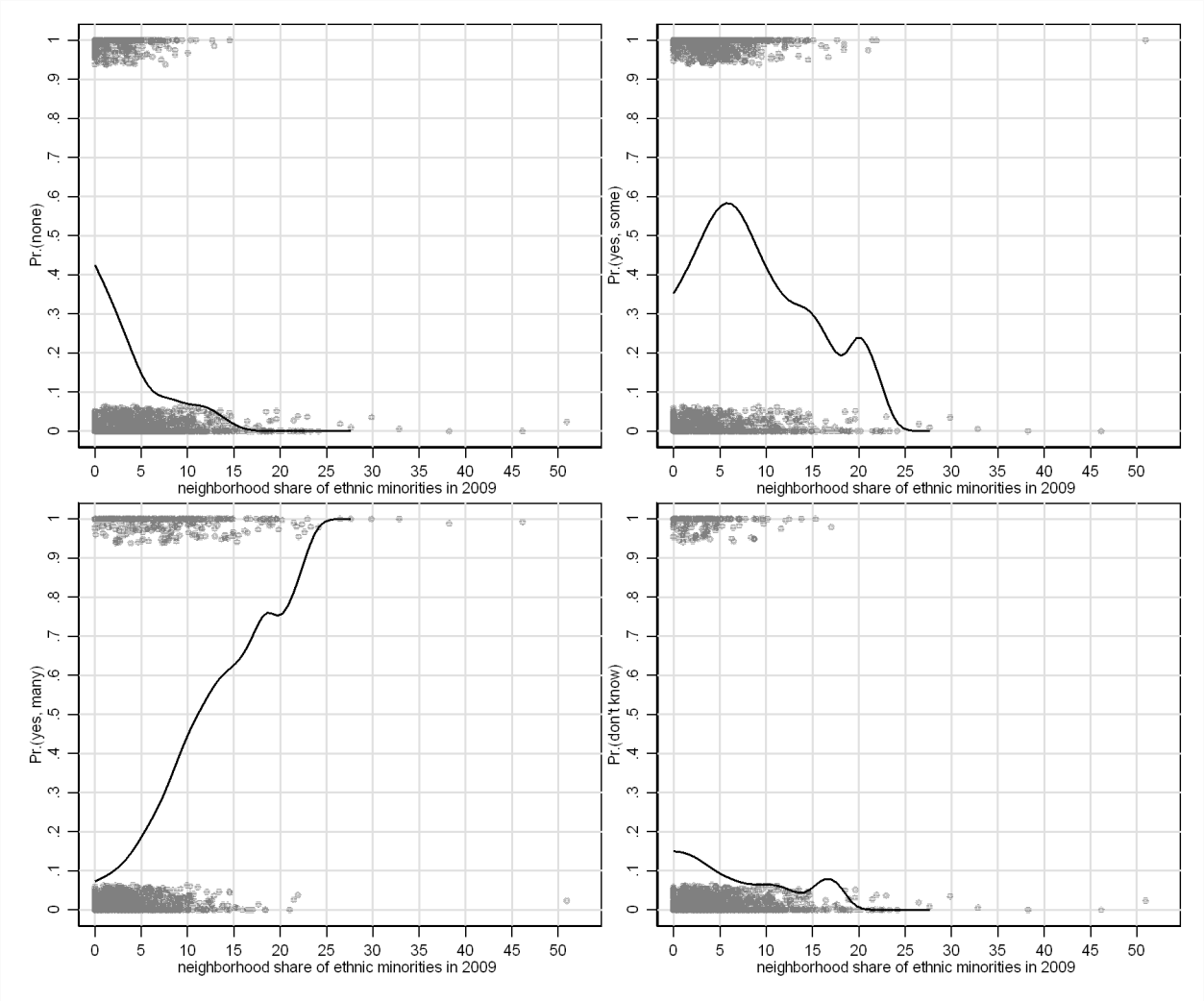

Figure 5: Proportion of responses to four subjective perception categories (y-axis) of ethnic diversity by objective ethnic diversity (x-axis). Black line: local polynomial fit. Gray dots: jittered observations to visualize distribution of objective ethnic composition. Based on the main sample of analysis.