

# Crime Surveys User Conference 2024

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# **Exploring the Individual-Level Effects of Thatcherism on Crime Over the Life-Course: Evidence from Strategically-Paired Cohort Studies**

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# Criminal Careers Research

- One of the largest areas of research in criminology.
- Huge focus on individual-level and familial/community processes.
- BUT has not really fully grappled with larger, institutional influences on offending careers.
- I will report on our recent work exploring that impact of Thatcherism on offending careers in the UK.
- This demonstrates the roles which macro-level political decisions affecting social and economic policies affected individual life-courses and engagement in crime.

# Who was Margaret Thatcher?

- Leader of the Conservative Party 1975-90.
- PM of the UK 1979-90.
- Either “the saviour of the nation”

*OR*

“the Devil incarnate”

depending on your political beliefs!



# Thatcherism - just one example of the 1980s 'New Right'

UK: 'Thatcherism' (1979-1990 – since?).

Australia: Fraser (75-83) and Hawke (83-89).

Canada: Mulroney (84-93).

USA: 'Reaganomics' (1981-89 – since?)

NZ: 'Rogernomics' (1984-90) 'Ruthanasia' (1990-93).  
(Roger Douglas and Ruth Richardson).

# What did 1980s New Right (aka Neo-Liberalism) entail?

Cuts to govt' expenditure. Anti-Post War Consensus/Welfare State.

Economy (reductions in taxes, accepting unemployment, deregulation, privatisation of state assets, economic restructuring, rises in inequality).

Social security (cut, de-indexed, reduced eligibility, discourse around dole cheats, workfare programmes).

Housing (state-owned housing sold to tenants; unequal spatial distribution of sales and of styles of housing).

# Analytic Approach: Pairing Cohorts over time

## Individual-level analyses:

- Two longitudinal cohorts of people born in the UK.
- The oldest born in 1958 (n = 18k), and the younger born in 1970 (n = 17k).
- Interviews with parents, teachers, cohort members themselves.
- Interviews from birth into adult life.
  
- See Farrall, Gray and Jones (*Criminology & Criminal Justice*, forthcoming) for full outline of our analytic approach.

# The Individual-Level Data sets: 'paired' prospective longitudinal studies

Two birth cohorts of people born in the UK

- One group born in March 1958 (so now 60). NCDS. N = 17,733
- One group born in April 1970 (so now 48). BCS70. N = 16,135

National samples. Every child born 1 week in March 1958/April 1970. Interviews every 4-10 years. Interviews with cohort members, parents, teachers, their children.



# The Individual-Level Data sets: 'paired' prospective longitudinal studies

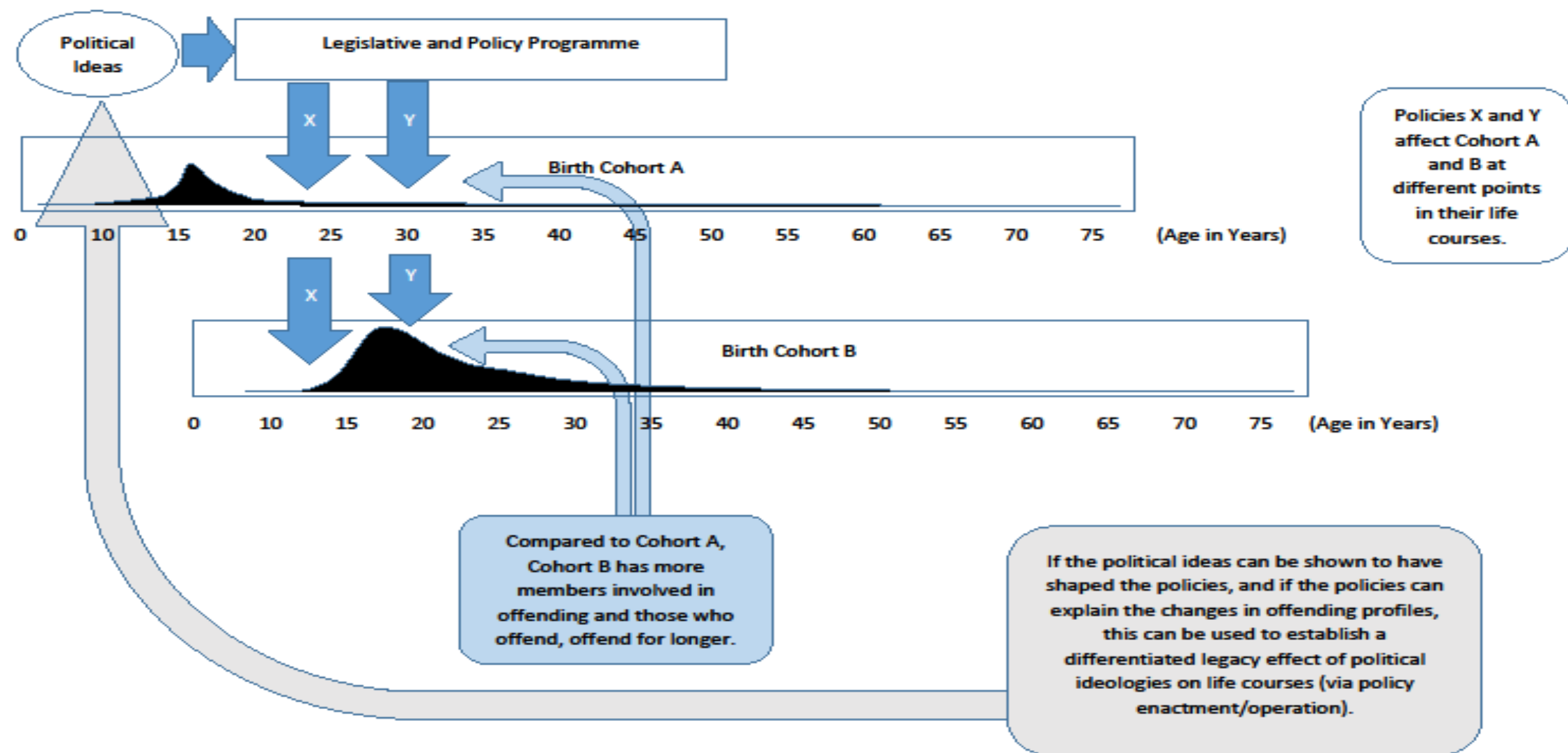
- NCDS: Born 1958, so 21 when Thatcher is first elected. Aged 22-32 during 1980s. Aged 42 at year 2000. Grew up during the 1960s, but came into adulthood in 1980s.

*We treat this cohort as a pre-Thatcher cohort, as they had reached something like adulthood during the 1980s. This is NOT to say that they were unaffected by the period, however.*

- BCS70: Born 1970, so 9 when Thatcher is first elected. Aged 9-19 during the 1980s. Aged 30 at year 2000. Grew up during the 1980s, and reached adulthood in the 1990s.

*We treat this cohort as 'Thatcher's Children'. Life-courses altered for some as a result of the social and economic changes of the 1980s their legacy effects.*

# The Temporal Impact of Ideas and Policies on Life-Courses

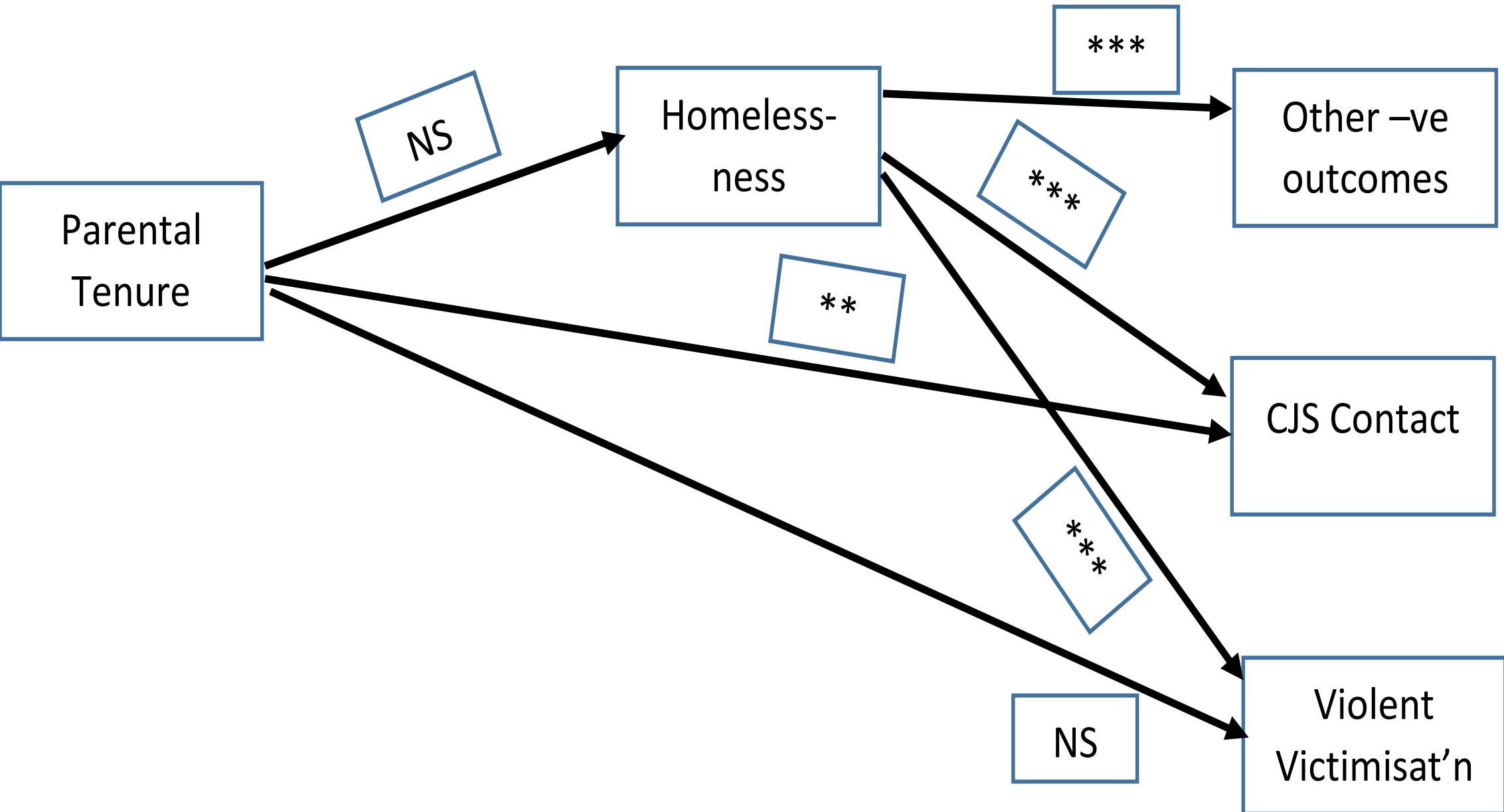


# Housing: Individual-Level Affects

- National-picture (Farrall et al, *BJC* 2016) finds more crime in council housing estates than in privately owned housing. Due to rising unemployment and increases in economic inequality. BCS/CSE&W/BSAS
- Individual-level analyses (Farrall et al, *Geoforum* 2019):
- Research Questions:
  - a: Does *parental* tenure trajectory affect their children's chances of being homeless, and coming in contact with the UK criminal justice system?
  - b: Did this change between cohorts?

NCDS and BCS70

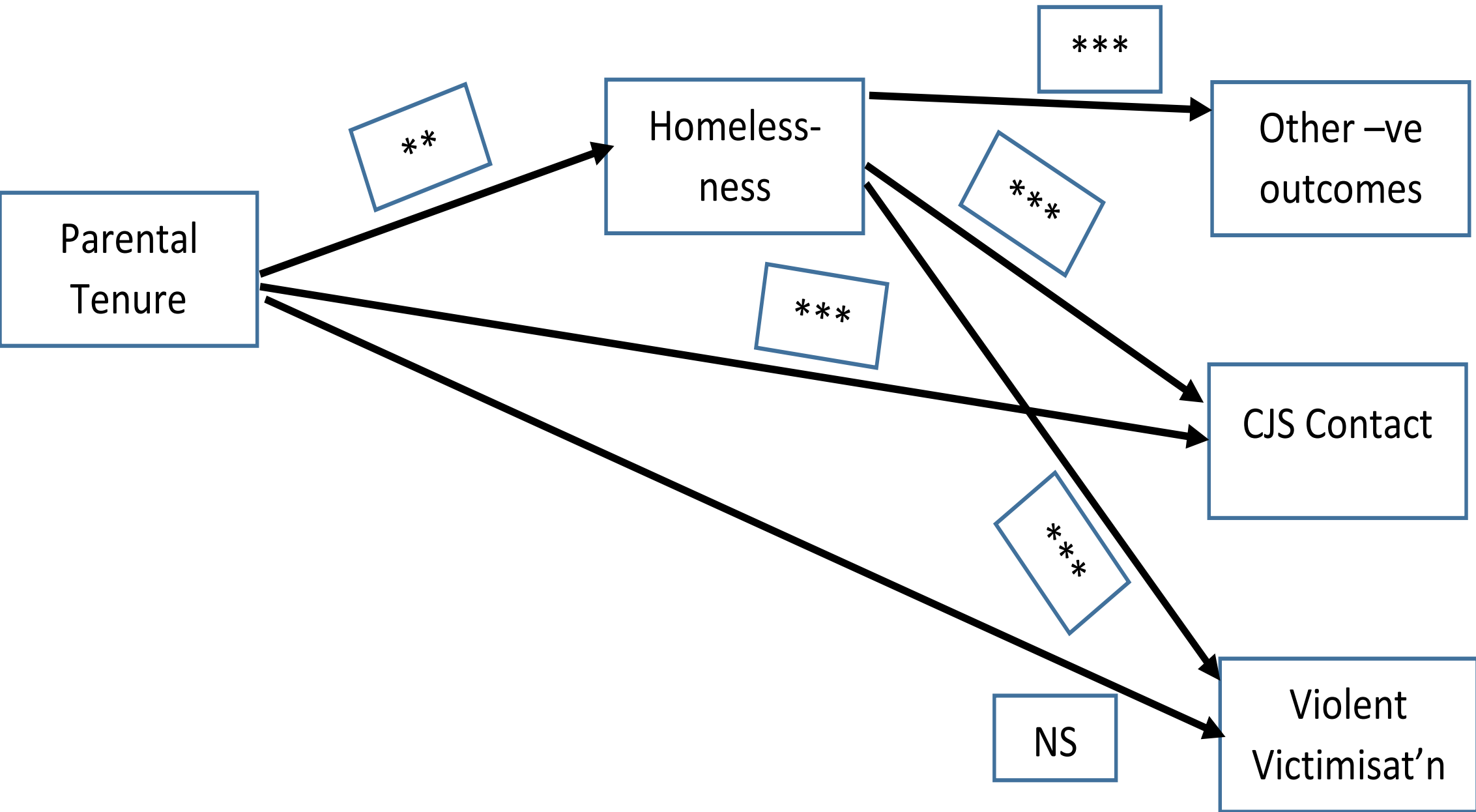
# Summarising the NCDS Parental Tenure, Homelessness and Crime Outcomes



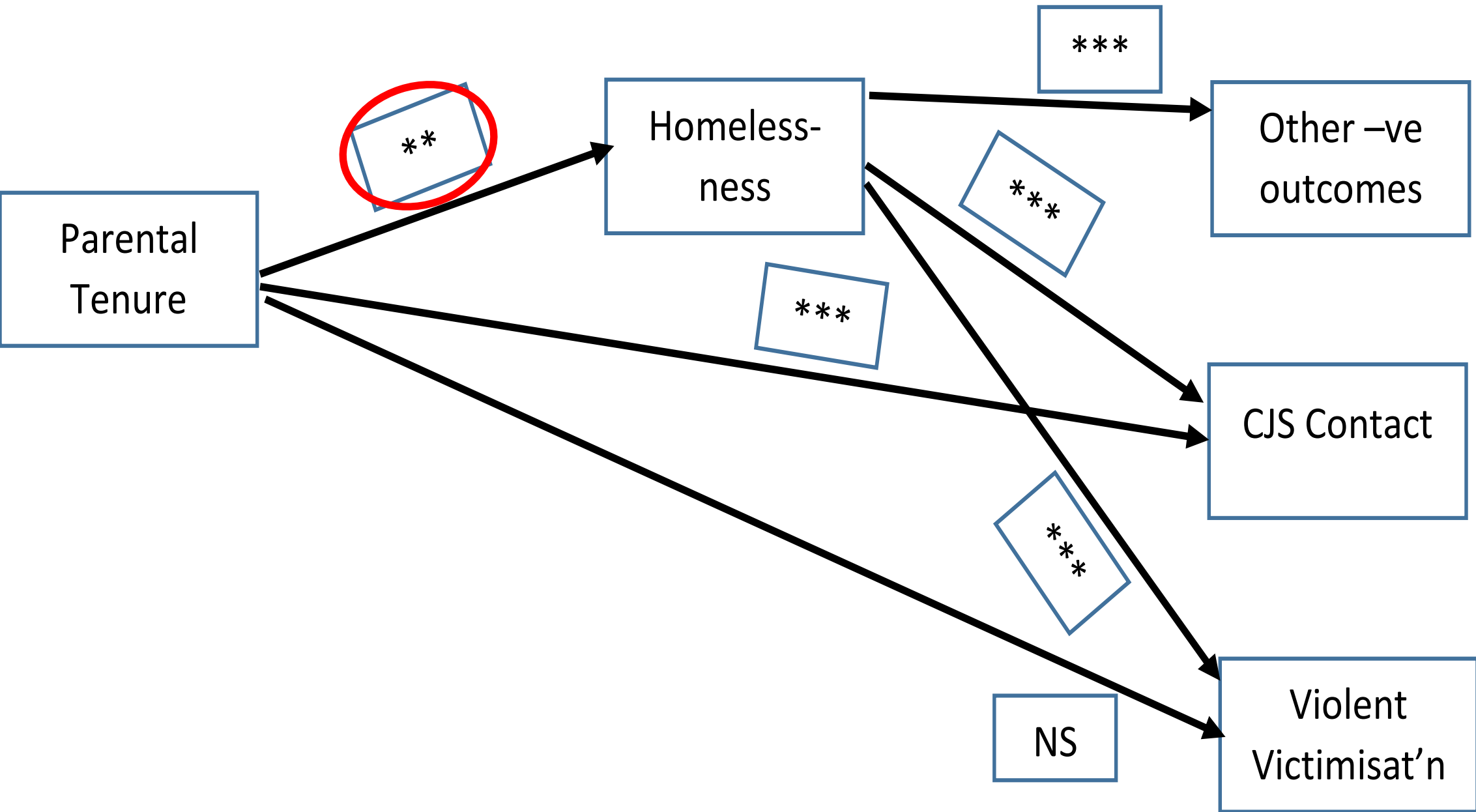
# Headline News for 1958 Births

- Homelessness IS related to:
  - negative life outcomes,
  - contact with the criminal justice system and
  - violent victimisation.
- BUT parental tenure trajectory is NOT related to homelessness.
- (So it didn't matter for your offending career if your parents bought their council house or not IF you were born in 1958).

# Summarising the BCS70 Parental Tenure, Homelessness and Crime Outcomes



# Summarising the BCS70 Parental Tenure, Homelessness and Crime Outcomes



# Headline News for 1970 Births

- SO parental tenure trajectory IS related to homelessness for those born in 1970.
- ... and, again, homeless IS related to:
  - negative life outcomes,
  - contact with the criminal justice system and
  - violent victimisation.
- (So parental tenure trajectory and historical era interact).



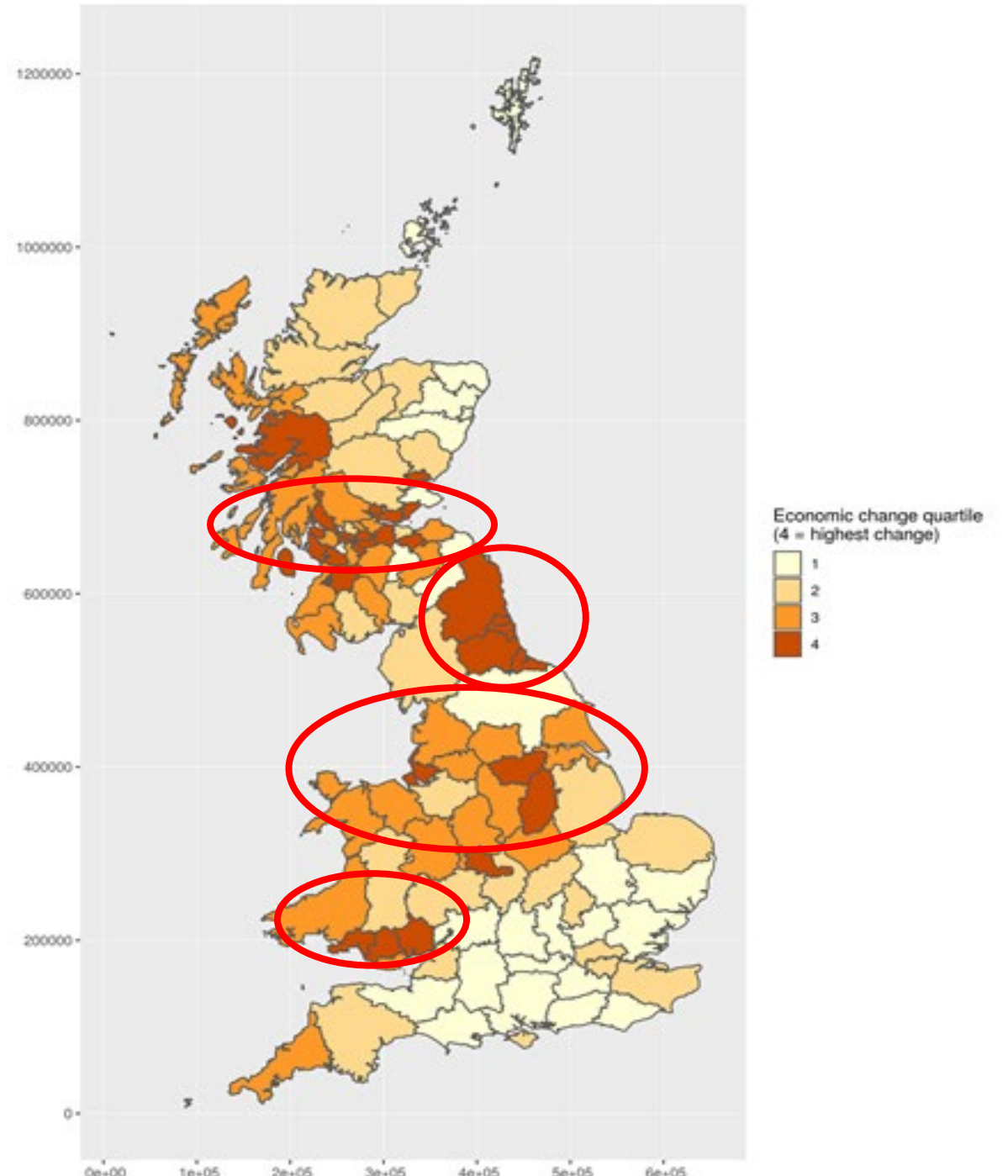
# Economic Restructuring and Truancy and Offending at the Individual Level

- In Farrall, Gray and Jones (*BJC* 2020a) we explored economic restructuring at the county-level and individual children's truancy from school and offending.
- Again, using both the 1958/NCDS and BCS1970 Cohorts.

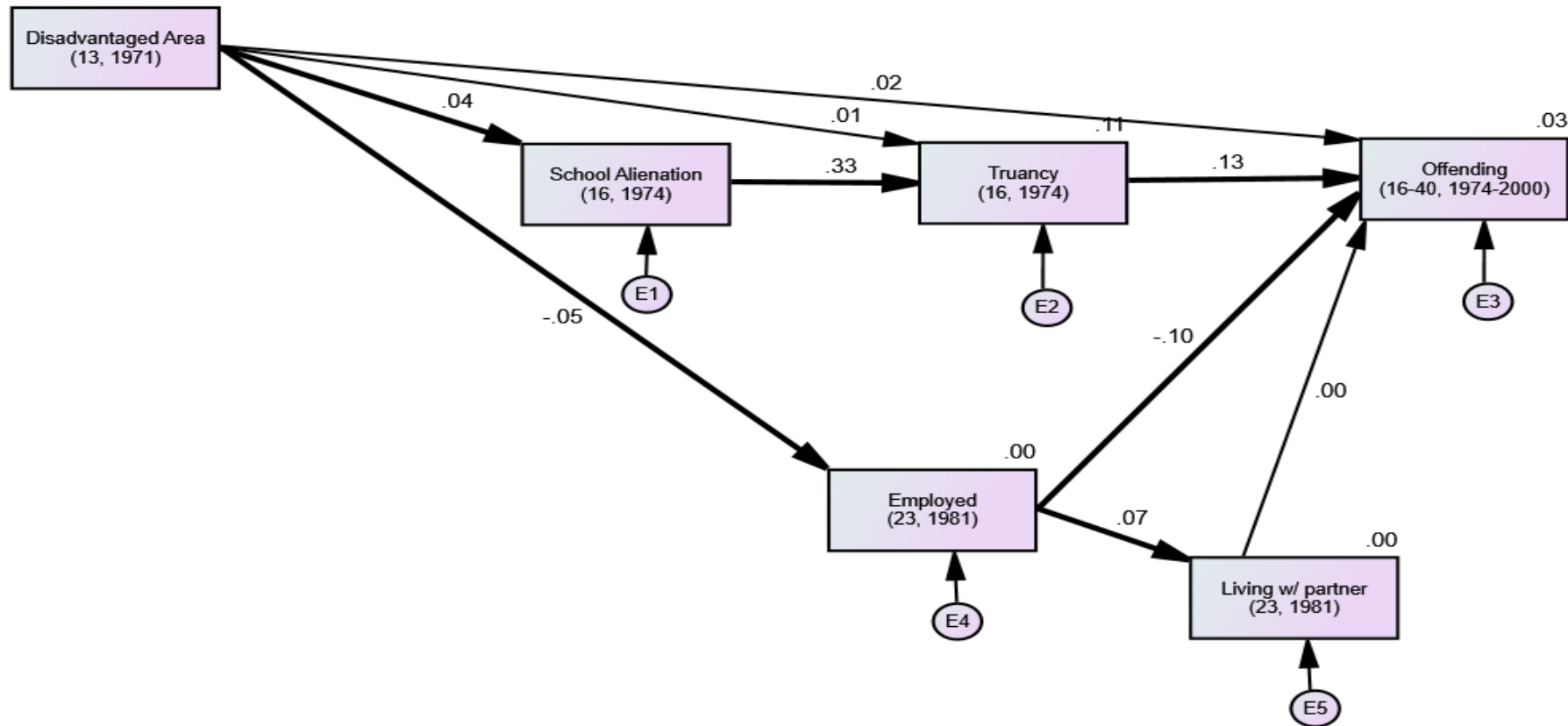
# Which Areas Were Most Effected by Economic Restructuring?

(Darker = greater change).

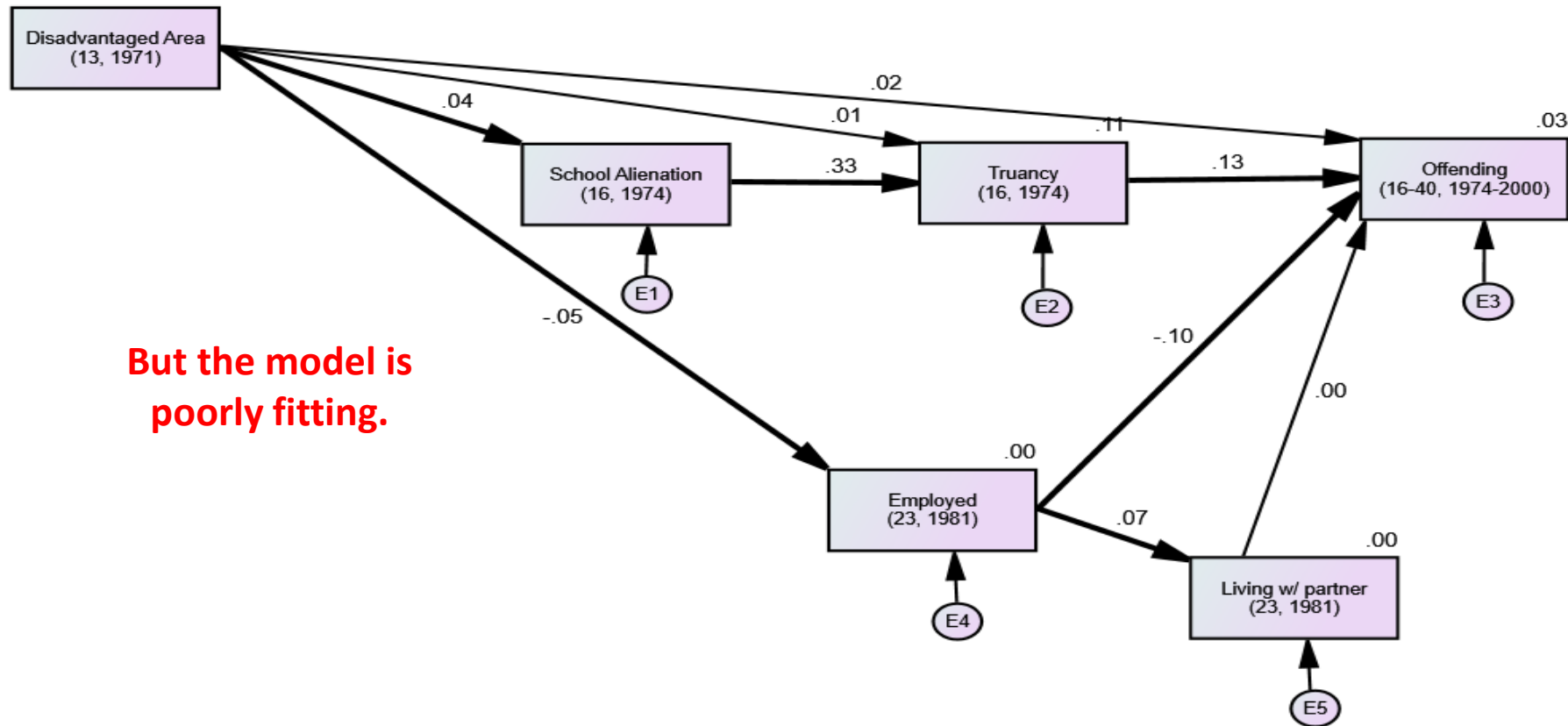
Four Red Circles  
Central Belt Scotland,  
NE Shoulder,  
Central Belt England &  
S Wales.



# Economic Restructuring and Schooling (1958 Cohort)

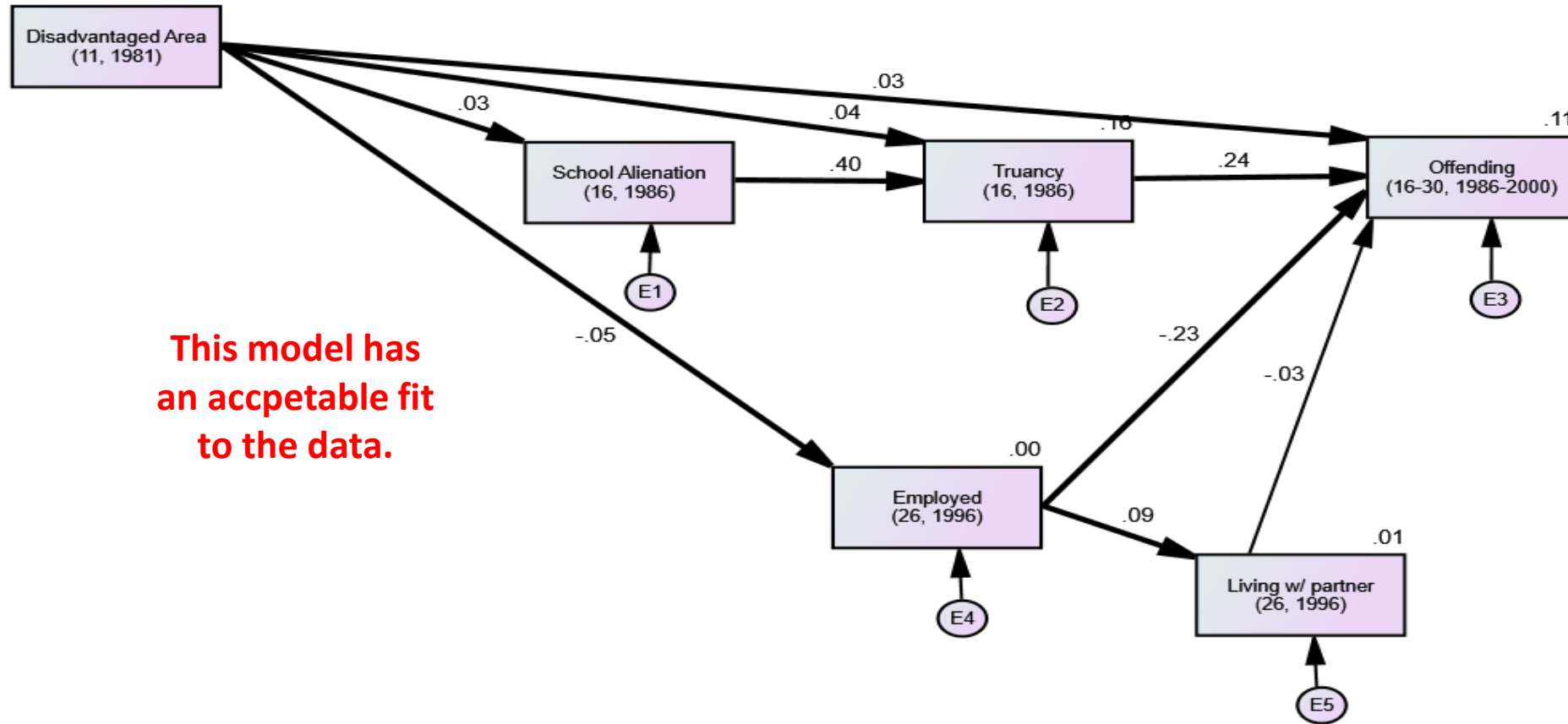


# Economic Restructuring and Schooling (1958 Cohort)



**But the model is poorly fitting.**

# Economic Restructuring and Schooling (1970 Cohort)

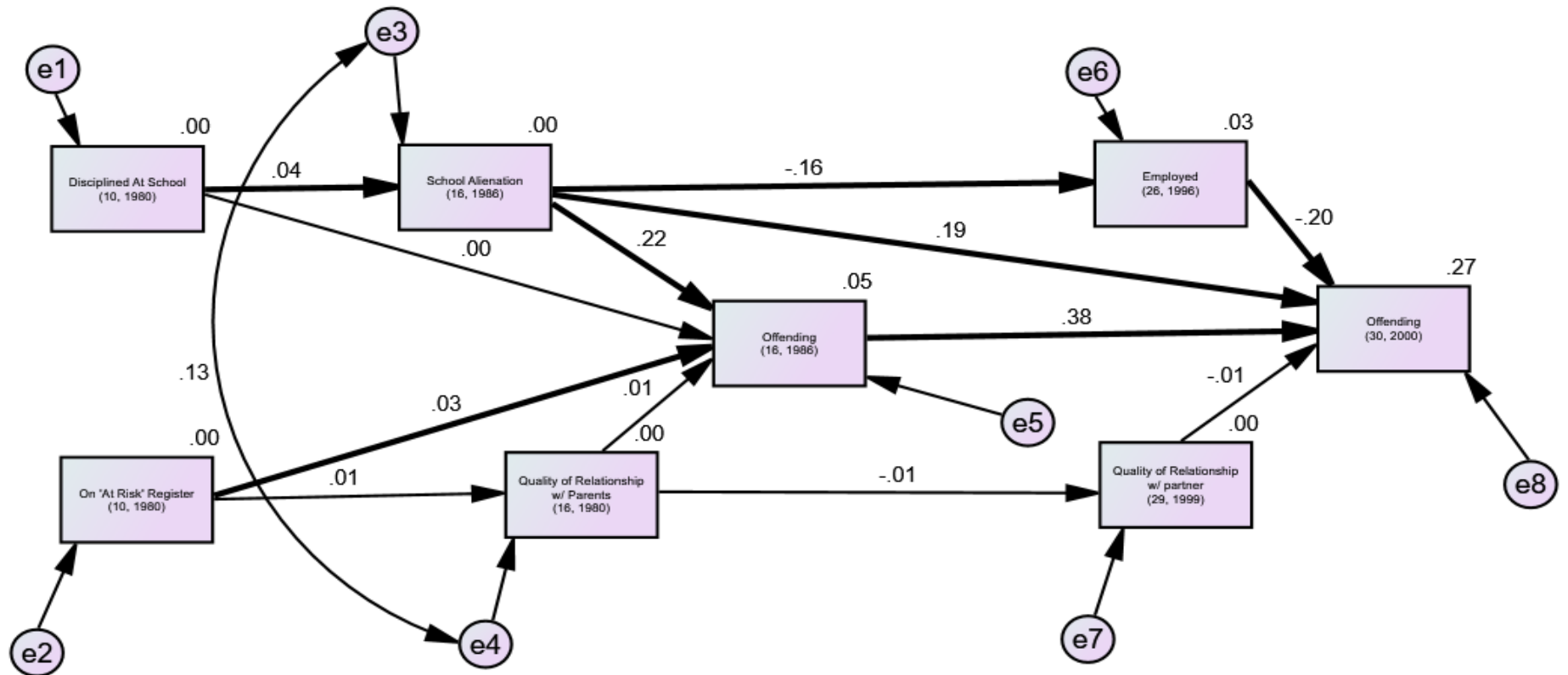


**This model has an acceptable fit to the data.**

# Economic Restructuring and Offending at the Individual Level

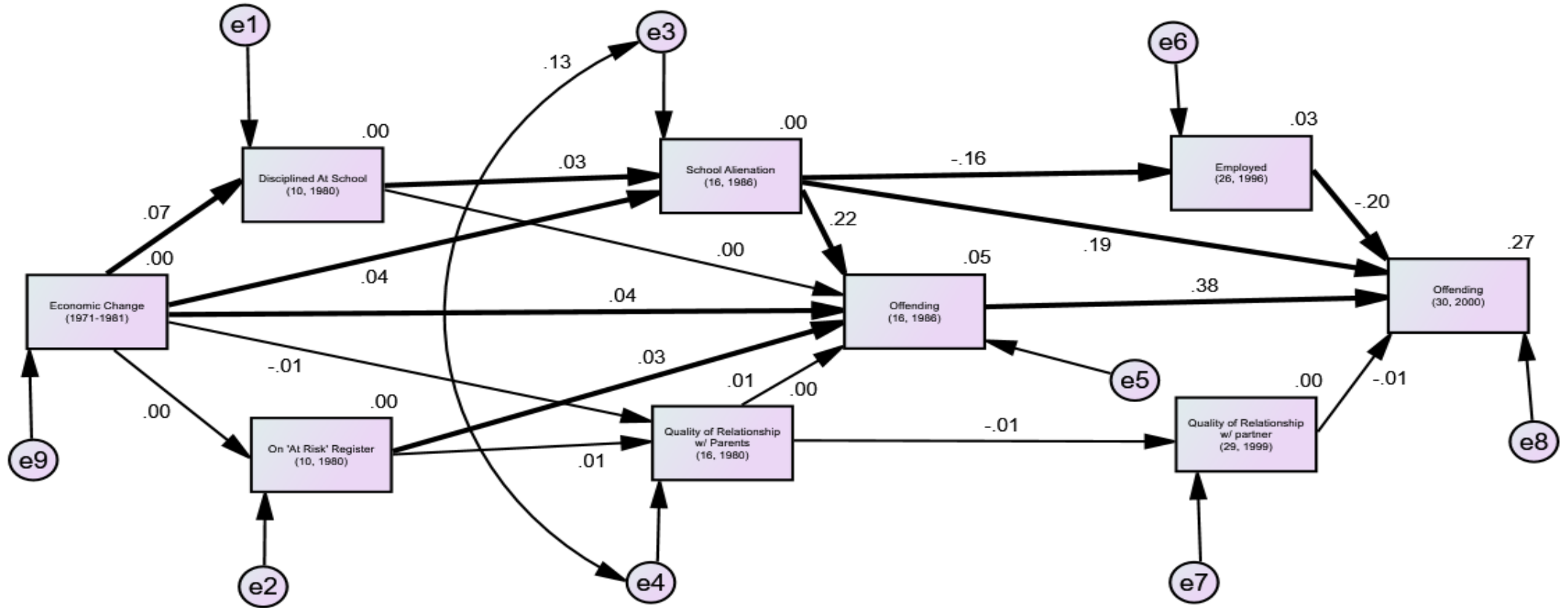
- More recently (Farrall, Gray and Jones, *Politics & Society* 2020b) we have explored individual people's criminal careers, and the relationship of this to economic restructuring.
- 1970 Cohort only (insufficiently similar data in 1958 cohort for meaningful replications).

# Path Diagram of Offending (w/o economic restructuring)



SMC = 27% RMSEA = .011 CFI = .969 bold = statistically significant paths.

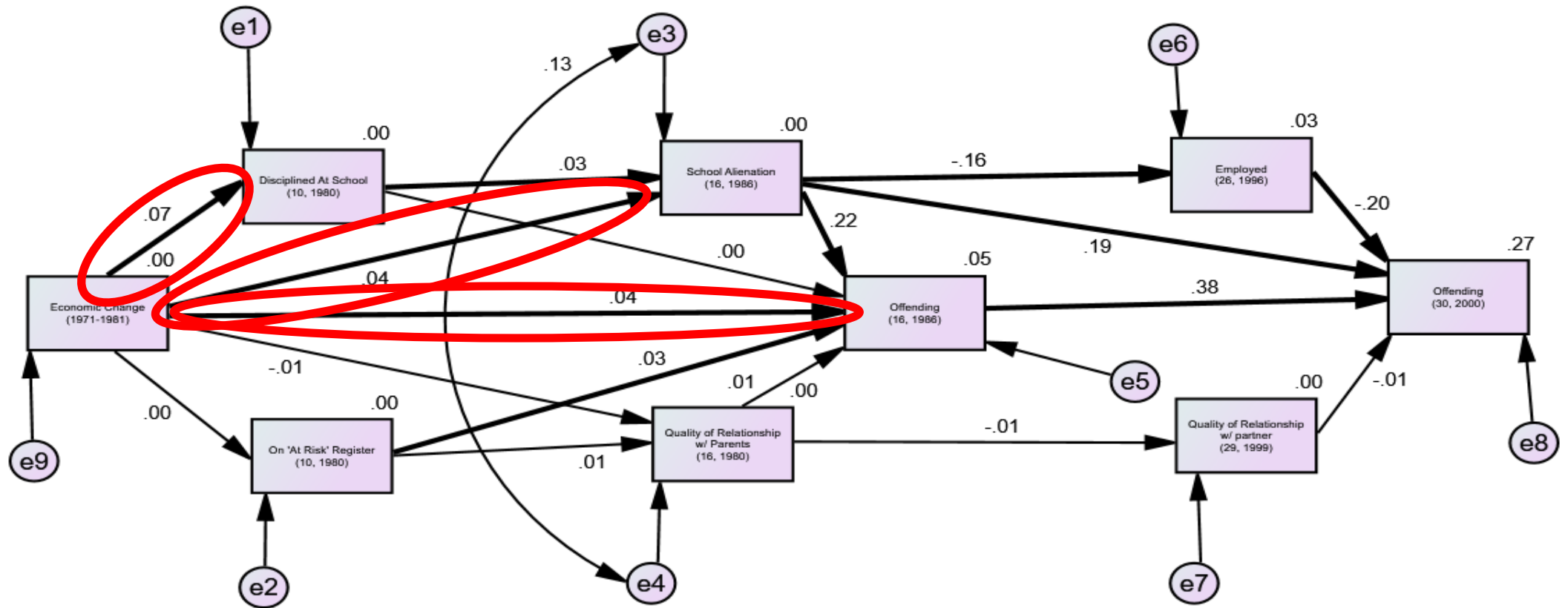
# Path Diagram of Econ Restructuring and Offending



SMC = 27% RMSEA = .012 CFI = .955 bold = statistically significant paths.



# Path Diagram of Econ Restructuring and Offending



SMC = 27% RMSEA = .012 CFI = .955 bold = statistically significant paths.

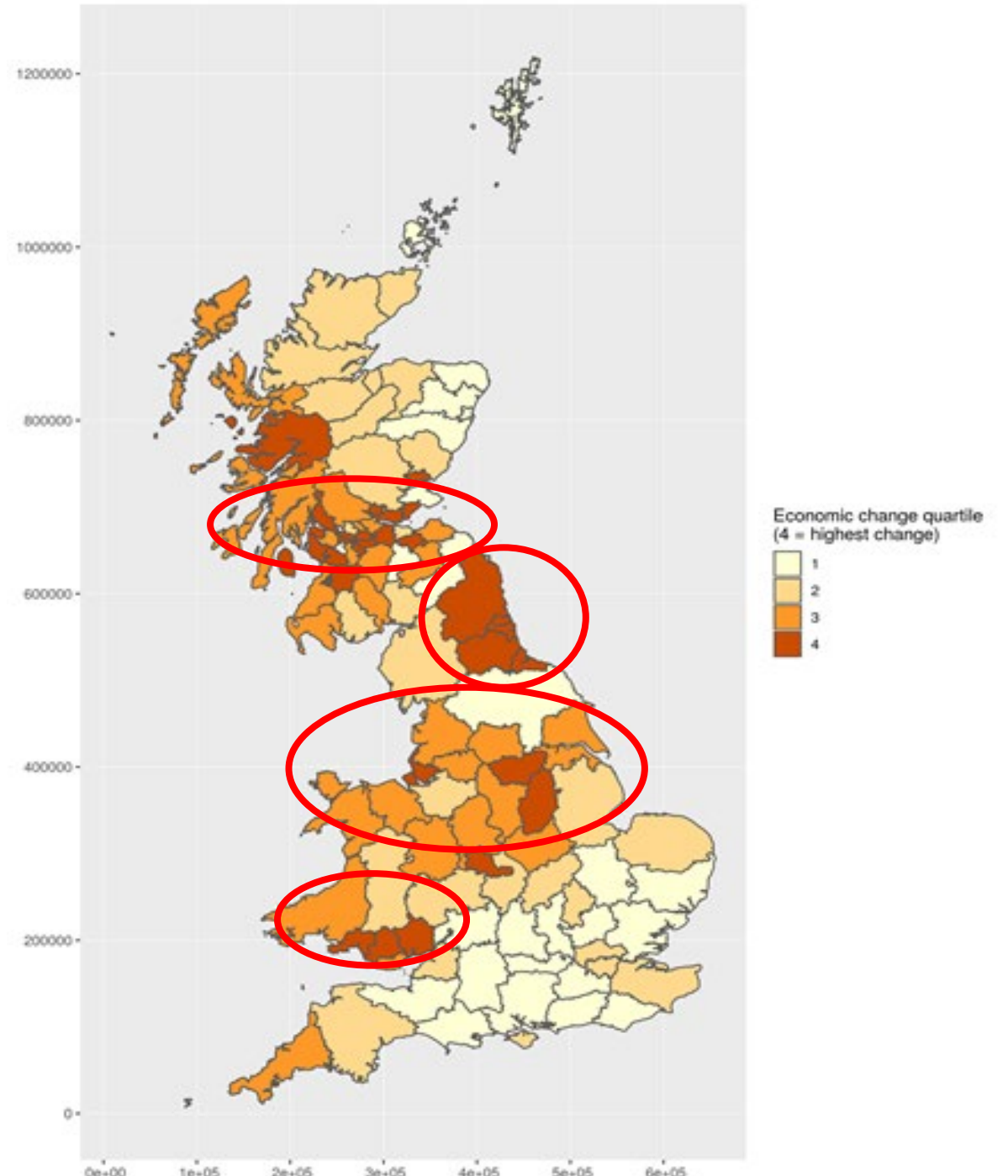
# Economic Restructuring and Offending at the Individual Level

- When we repeated this for the four areas of economic restructuring shown earlier ... (again in Farrall, Gray and Jones, *Politics & Society* 2020b) ...

# Which Areas Were Most Effected by Economic Restructuring?

(Darker = greater change).

Four Red Circles  
Central Belt Scotland,  
NE Shoulder,  
Central Belt England &  
S Wales.



# Economic Restructuring and Offending at the Individual Level

- We found that the model changed (in terms of the SMC) by degree of economic restructuring.

Lowest level: .15 (think Hampshire and Surrey)

Next Lowest: .20 (think Kent and London)

Next highest: .18 (think Lancashire and Derbyshire)

Highest level: .47 (think S Yorks, Nottinghamshire)

Overall SMC: .27

So, the model varies spatially.

# Implications for Criminal Careers Research

- We probably need to move away from the focus on individual-level and familial/community processes and start to theorising larger, macro-level, institutional influences on offending careers. e.g. Neil and Sampson, *AJS* 2021.
- We found both temporal and spatial variations (between cohorts and degrees of economic restructuring by county).
- Our work on Thatcherism suggests impacts; macro-level political decisions affecting social and economic policies affected individual life-courses and engagement in crime (see also Gray et al *BJC* 2022 and Jones et al *EJC* 2022).
- But was Thatcherism/1980s an outlier?
- Are radical social and economic policies more likely to produce detectable impacts than *slow change/evolving reformulation of policies* (Farrall, Hay and Gray, *Exploring Political Legacies* 2020c)?

# References

Farrall, S., Gray, E., Jennings, W. and Hay, C. (2016) *Thatcherite Ideology, Housing Tenure, and Crime: The Socio-Spatial Consequences of the Right to Buy for Domestic Property Crime*, **British Journal of Criminology**, 56(6):1235-1252.

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