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The Changing Austrian Voter

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What was merely a predicted scenario in the mid-eighties is now, fifteen years later, the reality of party competition in Austria: “a development characterised by the fact that the two major parties are nearing the status of medium-sized parties in terms of electoral success and are being forced to leave the growing potential of non-affiliated voters, younger voters and voters with an above-average mobility to third or fourth parties” (Plasser 1987: 273). What emerged in the 1996 European Parliament elections for the first time – a competition between three parties of more or less equal strength – reflected what was to become the reality of Austria’s parliamentary elections in 1999. Long-term changes in the underlying structures of voting behaviour (Müller, Plasser, and Ulram 1995a) and of party competition (Müller, Plasser, and Ulram 1999), which only appeared to come to a halt during the parliamentary elections of 1995 (Plasser, Ulram, and Ogris 1996), have continued to intensify under the surface and have contributed to a political restructuring, the scale of which is unprecedented in Austria. This paper uses more recent theories and models of international electoral research (Bürklin and Klein 1998; Evans 1999; Kitschelt 1995; Falter 2000; Kaase 1999; Norris 1998; Roth 1998) to explain the transformation in Austrian voting behaviour. The first sections outline the changes witnessed in the political competition and cleavages. The following sections give an overview of current trends and patterns in Austrian voting behaviour based on data gathered from representative post-election polls and/or exit polls covering the period from 1979 to 1999.¹

1. The traditional sphere of Austrian party competition

Until the early seventies Austrian voting patterns could be described along the concepts of “camp culture” and “camp affiliation” (Plasser, Ulram, and Grausgruber 1992; Müller, Plasser, and Ulram 1995b). Embedded in specific sub-cultural social milieus – which were characterised by a relative stability of distinct structural features such as socio-cultural orientation – emotional attachment and disciplined partisanship shaped the political behaviour of the regular voter and the party’s group of core voters. The extraordinary stability of deeply rooted party affiliation was based on a conflict pattern that structured Austrian society and which was composed of *three* main cleavages in the fifties and sixties, namely the

¹ These are nation-wide sample surveys of randomly selected voters having taken part in parliamentary elections. The polls were carried out by FESSEL-GfK-Institut. The respective sizes of the samples (N) were 1,746 in 1979, 1,661 in 1983, 2,149 in 1986, 2,229 in 1990, 2,265 in 1994, 2,333 in 1995, and 2,146 in 1999.

denominational cleavage (active Catholic milieu or denominationally affiliated milieu versus laicistic, non-denominational milieu), the welfare state cleavage (expectation that the state should provide and regulate social welfare versus stronger orientation towards the free market based on individual initiative and risk) as well as an – albeit slightly weakened – German-national versus Austrian-national cleavage. These three main cleavages – complemented by traditional tensions between urban and rural areas as well as central and peripheral areas – defined the logics of conflict in post-war Austria as well as the boundaries of the dominant political camps.

It was along the first two cleavages that the dominant political camps formed, representing subcultures with strong emotional, ideological and organisational ties. The SPÖ and ÖVP were both the political expression of the political camps and their organisers; the party-political colonisation of the administration, public economy and education sector expanded the reach of camp-oriented relations and mentalities, which were then duly stabilised through the award of material benefits (Müller 1988). The other relevant parties – namely the Communist Party (KPÖ) and the Freedom Party (FPÖ, and its predecessor VdU and WdU) lacked either this inter-linkage with the state apparatus and/or an adequate organisational network, with the result that they also lacked the internal and external stabilisation factors needed to retain voters' loyalty, even in difficult situations. In fact, during the late fifties and sixties, these parties lost a considerable share of their vote, which had been quite significant in the first years of the Second Republic. While small parties were still capable of capturing some 17 percent of the vote in the elections of 1949 and 1953, this percentage dropped to just above 10 percent in the elections from 1956 to 1966. Conversely, the SPÖ and ÖVP succeeded in increasing their combined share of the vote to almost 90 percent. During this phase, party competition was limited. "Mobile" voter groups comprised:

- younger voters who were not yet completely integrated into a particular political camp;
- a small group of politically disinterested and poorly informed voters who Kienzl pithily described as "political drifting sand" (Kienzl 1964);
- supporters of the small parties;
- various political splinter groups that had broken away from the SPÖ and ÖVP, to be seen, for instance, in the parliamentary elections of 1966.

Accordingly, with the exception of the parliamentary elections of 1970, electoral volatility was – by international standards – quite low (Plasser, Ulram, and Grausgruber 1992). The two traditional parties, in particular, concentrated on mobilising their core voters rather than on intensifying competition between each other. Over time, however, this cleavage structure underwent a number of major changes. As the Austrian nation was built up, the national cleavage disappeared or at least became irrelevant as German-national orientations dwindled to leave an ever smaller and noticeably aged group of voters (Plasser and Ulram 1993). At first, this constituted a crucial problem for the Freedom Party (FPÖ), as a central element of its ideological self-image no longer produced any positive political response in terms of electoral result. Moreover, the remaining German-national sentiments among functionaries even triggered conflicts within the party and thus led to the formation of barriers to appealing to new voter groups. It was only by greatly eliminating this “burden of history”, by replacing the old cadres and manipulating ethnocentric (then, however, Austro-chauvinist) orientations in the nineties that this strategic handicap could be overcome. In a similar, though less dramatic way, it was also the religious secularisation process that undermined the secular–Catholic cleavage. Though the latter retains a structuring function (Jagodzinski 1999), it lost a great deal of political significance in terms of electoral impact due to the strong fall in church affiliation (Plasser and Ulram 1995a). At first, this development weakened the competitive position of the ÖVP. The old conflict configuration “employee versus employer and farmer” was eventually transformed into a conflict between welfare (and state-interventionist) orientations on the one hand and market-related and individualistic orientations on the other. Originally, this was a considerable challenge for the SPÖ, although the problem was mitigated by the fact that its main opponent along the socio-economic cleavage – the ÖVP – was not able to position itself clearly at the free-market pole for a long time due to the interests of a broad clientele, and, more particularly, due to its integration into the social partnership and its strong presence in the public sector of the economy, which was highly oversized up to the eighties.² The consequences of the socio-economic and socio-cultural changes, which have gained momentum since the seventies, are equally grave. The core social groups of the traditional parties are shrinking in number and the traditional social milieus are breaking up, which in turn has led to the disintegration of the old networks of social contacts

² This process was intensified by the extensive absence of a modern and economically strong large-scale private industry, as well as by the considerable support for state-oriented attitudes within the population as a whole and among large parts of the ÖVP’s voters. Even decades later, an analysis carried out by Kitschelt (1995: 184 f.) on the World Value Survey 1990 data revealed only minor differences in the position of SPÖ and ÖVP voters as regards socio-economic factors.

and personal relationships that once guaranteed the social accordance of political attitudes (Plasser, Ulram, and Grausgruber 1992). Ideological interpretation patterns are fading or are no longer adequate to take into account an ever more differentiated social reality. ÖVP and SPÖ are losing some of their sub-cultural anchorage just as the ever-diminishing sub-cultures are losing the political power to integrate and influence. The consequence is an affective and organisational de-structuring of the electorate, accelerated by the rise of the mass media to the role of key player in the political communication process. All in all, this means a fundamental change in the basic parameters of party competition (Donovan and Broughton 1999; Mair 1997; Pennings and Lane 1998).

2. Decline of traditional party affiliation and increased volatility

The decline of traditional party affiliation and the fiercer competition resulting from this for the political parties have, in the meantime, become standard diagnoses in Western European party studies. In contrast to the situation in the eighties, controversies are not stirred up by the question of *whether de-alignment* is taking place but rather *to what extent* the ties of traditional party affiliation have already been loosened. Firstly, sociological literature defines de-alignment as an uncoupling of social class features and voting behaviour. In this context, de-alignment means the loosening of the structural anchorage of the parties in traditional social cleavage configurations. Secondly, de-alignment is defined as the erosion of more long-term, affective identification with one particular political party. In this context, party identification as measured in representative opinion polls is a prominent indicator. Thirdly, de-alignment stands for a general disassociation from the traditional parties and is used as an indicator of far-reaching problems of legitimacy in political competition (Gluchowski and Plasser 1999: 3).

Thus, the initial focus is on methodical problems, which basically revolve around the question of whether or not it makes sense to apply the concept of party identification adopted from US electoral research to the Western European multi-party system. The transferability of the concept of an affective, long-term party identification and the methodical inaccuracy of the measuring instruments (Sinnott 1998) give rise to polemic debate. The estimated degree of the decline of traditional party affiliation is similarly controversial. The fact that in most of the

Western European party systems “*de-alignments of degree*” (Clarke and Stewart 1998) are to be observed, that traditional cleavage configurations are losing their relevance (Inglehart 1997) and that the electoral instability in Western European party systems has clearly increased since the seventies (Franklin, Mackie, and Valen 1992; Ersson and Lane 1998), had become conventional wisdom among party researchers and party strategists by the end of the nineties.

However, the question whether the existing time series and indicators justify the diagnosis of a predetermined “*decline of parties*” is subject to great debate. While Schmitt and Holmberg (1995) come to a differentiated and cautious conclusion based on extensive analyses of the decline of affective party affiliations in Western Europe, in which they refer to “specific developments, by country and by party” (Schmitt and Holmberg 1995: 121), Dalton’s (1998) data rather show a generalised and persistent erosion process that justifies to speak of “*parties without partisans*” at the end of the nineties.

The “*Golden Age of Parties*” (Janda and Colman 1998) was characterised by large shares of regular voters, a marked sense of party loyalty, stable – and in most respects – predictable voting behaviour, intact organisational structures, and working communication between the parties and their voters. Since the sixties far-reaching changes among voters and in terms of competition have made the environment of parties much more complex (Mair, Müller, and Plasser 1999). As early as in the fifties and sixties, the progressing industrialisation and modernisation of production structures led to a decline of the industrial and agricultural sectors. Parties whose main support came from these milieus were forced to aim at broadening their appeal to new groups of voters. While at first it was the ÖVP that was affected by this development, from the late sixties onward the socio-economic structural change also threatened the SPÖ, which mainly relied on groups of voters from the industrial sector. The decline of the share of industrial workers, decreasing class awareness and the erosion of class-specific milieus posed a threat to the SPÖ’s future electoral success. However, the ÖVP, too, was forced on to the defensive by this social transformation. The progressing secularisation of society – the decline in church affiliation, the dwindling number of regular churchgoers, and the undermining of denominational networks and milieus – reduced the influence of denominational affiliations on election results.

Since the early seventies, new issues and conflicts as well as changed attitudes towards values and expectations of post-modern, cognitively mobilised groups of voters have reinforced the competitive pressure on parties (Dalton 1996b; Inglehart 1997; Clark and Rempel 1997). Newly formed Green and libertarian parties intensified the competitive situation and, as a first step, threatened the monopoly of the traditional parties in representing the public. Since the eighties, Austria's political parties have had to face an electorate that is increasingly critical, as well as increased political disenchantment and fluctuating groups of protest voters. The right-wing populist FP has undergone radical change since 1986. It has been injecting polarising topics into public discussion, pooling emotional protest attitudes and anti-party reflexes ever since Mr. Haider's accession to the chairmanship in 1986. As a consequence, the FPÖ is penetrating deep into the core voter groups of the traditional parties. Behind the electoral success of FPÖ, however, lies not only pent-up criticism and the discontent of weary voters, but also conflicts between those who are benefiting from modernisation and those who are losing out, as well as conflicts between those who belong to the sheltered, public sector and those who find themselves in the unsheltered, private sector. Problems which result from the business cycle coupled with increasing economic rationalisation and competitive pressure in the nineties have only intensified these conflicts (Kitschelt 1995).

Finally, the most recent challenge to political parties has been the far-reaching changes in political communication. On the one hand, this affects internal organisational communications between party headquarters and party members, and, on the other, the party elite's ability to communicate externally in media-oriented democracies (Mair, Müller, and Plasser 1999). Ensuring appropriate media presentation of the respective issues, personalising the party image, devising a marketing strategy for successful positioning vis-à-vis one's opponents (Collins and Butler 1996), segmentation of the electorate and precise targeting ensure short-term success in mobilising voters, but – at the same time – weaken long-term party affiliations based on sentiment and interests (Plasser 2000).

The time series presented in Table 1 reflect the degree of erosion of traditional party affiliations. While about three quarters of the Austrian electorate still had a stable affiliation with a political party in the fifties and sixties, only half of the country's voters showed a long-term emotional inclination towards a certain party at the end of the nineties. Compared with the situation in the mid-seventies, the number of voters with a strong party affiliation has halved; the figure was only 16 percent in 1999. Similarly, the proportion of registered party

members has almost halved, as also the general capability of Austria's traditional parties to mobilise voters and to campaign efficiently has in some cases dramatically decreased. Demotivation, a lack of incentives, and an electorate that has become far more critical of political parties in general since the eighties have all demobilised the party supporters.

There are *three* phases of de-alignment to be seen in Austria each of which has specific causes of de-alignment (Müller, Plasser, and Ulram 1999: 209 f.). The first phase covering the period from the late sixties to the end of the seventies may be called *structural* de-alignment. The socio-economic transformation (decline in the size of the farming population as a proportion of total workforce, increased regional and occupational mobility, industrialisation and suburbanisation of formerly rural regions) as well as the modernisation of production structures (decline of the traditional industrial labour force, decline of the retail industry and small

Table 1. Indicators of party loyalty 1954–1999

Year	Party identification (a)	Strong identification (b)	Strong party affiliation (c)	Regular voters (d)	Waverers (e)	Party Changers (f)	Late Deciders (g)	Party members (poll data)	Party members (membership statistics)
1954	73		71						27
1969	75		65					24	27
1972			61	76	8			23	26
1974	65	30	61						26
1979	63		56	66	16	7	9	22	26
1983	61	27	47			10	8		24
1986	60	21	39			16	16	23	23
1990	49	19	34	58	26	17	14	18	20
1994	44	12	31			19	18	15	17
1995	49	13	28	44	44	22	21		
1996	46		31					13	16
1997	47	15	28	46	44				
1998	51	15	25	43	45				
1999	51	16	26	43	46	18	20		
Change	- 22	- 14	- 45	- 33	+ 38	+ 11	+ 11	- 11	- 11

(a) Percentage of respondents with party identification.

(b) Percentage of respondents with strong party identification.

(c) Percentage of respondents stating that they would always vote for the same party, even if not totally satisfied.

(d) Percentage of respondents stating that they always voted for the same party.

(e) Percentage of respondents stating that they occasionally change their voting behaviour.

(f) Percentage of *exit-poll* respondents stating that they voted for a party other than the one supported in the previous election.

(g) Percentage of voters who definitively decided which party to vote for only a few days prior to the election.

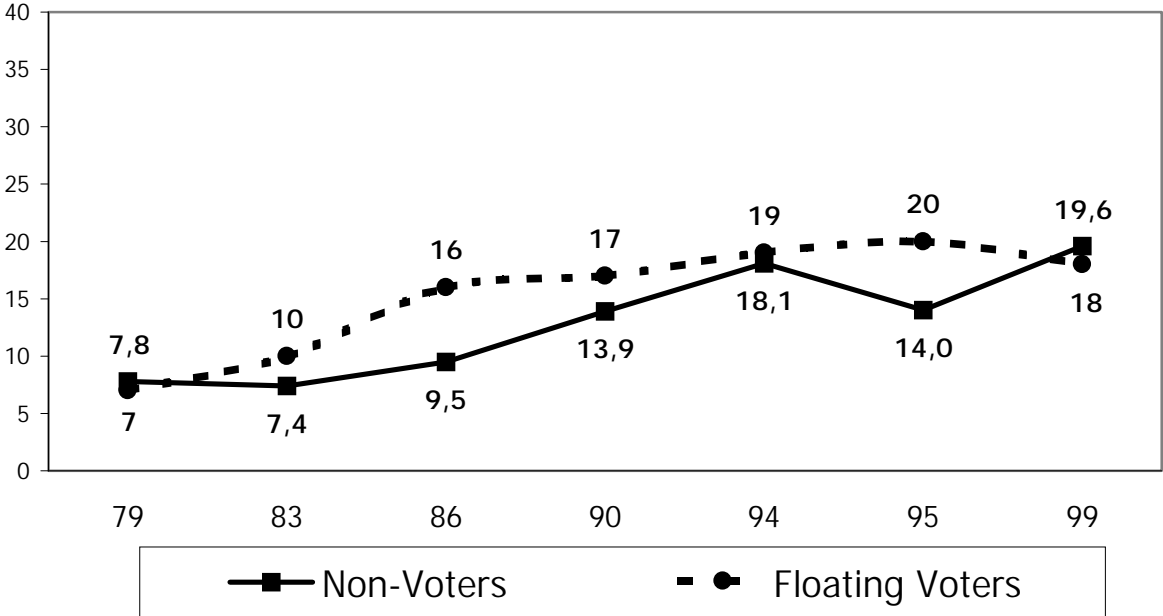
Source: Müller, Plasser, and Ulram (1999) and FESSEL-GfK, exit poll (1999).

business enterprises, increase in the service sector, in the public sector and in the new middle-class emerging from the white-collar labour force) have not only substantially changed the social make-up of the grassroots of the major parties but have also led to a weakening of traditional party loyalties and once stable voter-party affiliations. In this first phase, de-alignment has taken the form of a political secularisation process and has affected voters with only moderate or little party identification. The hard core of voters who identified with a party remained largely unaffected despite a gradual increase in political mobility. The result was a gradual de-alignment of the electorate on the micro-level with voting behaviour remaining stable on the aggregate level. (Gluchowski and Plasser 1999: 13-15).

The second phase of the de-alignment process started in the late seventies and lasted into the mid-eighties. This phase may be called *affective* de-alignment. Particularly in the eighties, Austria saw an increase in general disenchantment with the political parties and a sharp increase in criticism of parties and élites in the form of emotionally charged “anti-political” reflexes and resentment. The readiness to identify with a particular party fell significantly due to a series of political scandals, dissatisfaction with the performance of the governing parties and the development of new cleavages (ecological cleavage). The political culture moved towards a protest culture of voters, which was to determine the third phase of de-alignment in particular. It may be defined as protest-inspired *oppositional* de-alignment. There are two factors causing this development. Firstly, it was the revival of the “Grand Coalition” between SPÖ and ÖVP (in 1987) that led to a further weakening of traditional party loyalties, stimulating oppositional reflexes to an *oversized coalition* and reinforcing the impression that there was no longer any difference between the two ruling parties. The second factor can be attributed to a strategic player – the right-wing populist FPÖ – which deliberately reinforces the latent protest attitude among the electorate, polarising new cleavages within society even more strongly, deliberately bringing explosive issues or topics that arouse resentment (immigration, crime) to a head and practising a general policy of strategic affect management. The consequences of this third phase of de-alignment are not only a progressive decline of traditional party affiliation, increased mobility and the readiness to switch to another party, but also a substantial weakening of the core strata of the electorate of the two governing parties which – although surviving the first phase of de-alignment relatively unscathed – bore the full brunt of the dynamics of erosion.

As the Austrian parties' body of core support wanes, so the proportion of non-affiliated floating voters has steadily increased. While, for instance, only 8 percent of the electorate could be classified as “*split voters*” in 1972, this figure had risen to as high as 46 percent by 1999. Practically one in two voters supported different parties in the parliamentary and *Land* elections. Only 43 percent of those eligible to vote in Austria may be called consistent voters, constantly voting for the same party in all elections they take part in. The share of floating voters has also steadily increased with regard to parliamentary elections. During the parliamentary election of 1979 only 7 percent voted for a party other than the one they had voted for in the parliamentary election of 1975, yet the proportion of floating voters in the 1999 parliamentary election was 18 percent. Over the same period, Austria's traditionally high electoral turnout also fell. Just as party affiliation has waned, so has electoral participation, with abstention as a form of protest becoming an option for dissatisfied voters and those who have become disenchanted with politics in general.

Figure 1. Share of non-voters and floating voters (1979–1999)



At the same time the share of voters who did not decide who to support until the final phase of the election campaign has increased. While only 9 percent belonged to the group of *late*

deciders back in 1979, the equivalent figure was as much as 20 percent in the parliamentary election of 1999. The increasing share of *late deciders* logically raises the mass media's power to influence voters in their coverage, such as of crucial events during the election campaigns and appearances of candidates in TV interviews and studio confrontations and/or their interpretation and evaluation by the mass media (Plasser 2000).

Table 2. Timing of final voting decision (1979–1999)

Percentage of voters who made a definite decision ...	1979	1983	1986	1990	1994	1995	1999
late deciders (shortly before the election)	9	8	16	14	18	21	20
early deciders (at an earlier stage)	91	92	84	86	82	79	80

Source: FESSEL-GfK, representative post-election polls (1979–1983) or exit polls (1979–1999), respectively.

One fifth of the voters who voted in the 1999 elections made their final decision on which party to support as late as in the last days or weeks before the election. This percentage of “*late*” and “*last-minute deciders*” roughly corresponds to the figures of 1995. Voters who opted for the small parties such as the Greens, LIF (and DU) were the ones who left their decision the longest. However, what is of particular interest and typical for the course of the election campaign is the time when the voters of the three major parties made their decision. Among both SPÖ and FPÖ voters the share of late deciders was 15 percent, in the case of the ÖVP it was 18 percent. 12 percent of the ÖVP voters even left their final decision until the last few days prior to the election itself. Voters who switched parties also tended to leave their decision to the last minute: 50 percent of them were late deciders. Three out of ten voters in the 1999 parliamentary elections – as in previous elections – had also considered voting for another party. This applies to six out of ten Green and LIF voters. Among the major parties, the ÖVP has the biggest share of floating voters, with one third of this group having considered voting for FPÖ and almost half of them not decided to vote in favour of the ÖVP until the last few days and weeks of the campaign.

Table 3. The changing proportion of waverers

Percentage of voters who had originally considered voting for a party other than the one actually supported	1986	1990	1994	1995	1999
Share of waverers	30	29	32	34	30

Source: FESSEL-GfK, exit polls (1986–1999).

In total, 18 percent of voters cast their vote in 1999 for a party other than the one supported in the parliamentary elections of 1995. This corresponds to the rate of floating voters of the elections in the nineties. The slight decrease in floating voters from 1995 to 1999 should be viewed against the background of the strong rise in the number of voters who simply stay at home, a phenomenon which had a much stronger effect on the SPÖ than on the ÖVP. Moreover, the general tendency to abstain from voting as a form of protest gives rise to a revision of the image of the apathetic, marginalised non-voter who has turned his back on to politics (Renz 1997; Völker and Völker 1998).

In several respects the socio-demographic composition of the group of floating voters is clearly different from that of the electorate as a whole. On balance, the largest group is made up of persons aged 30 to 44, who account for 44 percent of all waverers; voters with school qualifications and higher education graduates (50 percent) and/or white-collar workers (38 percent) account for a disproportionately large share of floating voters. By contrast, the share of waverers among the older generation of voters and the less well educated was clearly below average. Overall, gender-specific differences among waverers are relatively low, yet detailed analysis reveals quite telling trends: 63 percent of former SPÖ voters switching over to the FPÖ and 57 percent of former ÖVP voters going over to the FPÖ were men.

Floating voters who did not decide which party to vote for until the final phase of the election (*late deciders*), reported exceptionally frequently that they were strongly influenced in their personal decision by the mass media's political coverage of the campaign. 23 percent of the waverers said that statements made by the top candidates on radio and television and the televised debates between the top politicians had strongly influenced their personal voting decision. However, commentaries and analyses in the print media, as well as talking to friends and family, had also strongly influenced one in five floating voters and an even larger share of

late deciders. After all, 5 percent of the waverers interviewed considered that they had been strongly influenced by the opinion polls published in the media. Taking into account the “*third person effect*”, known in communications – according to which people consider third persons to be much more susceptible than themselves – and the fact that interviewees in general tend to play down the impact of the media on their own behaviour, this percentage is quite remarkable. Remarkable, too, is the low importance that the respondents attribute to promotional means of communication in terms of influencing their personal voting decision. However, this is where the “*third person effect*” comes in again and where it is also impossible to use the data to derive any estimates on the impact of the media on the actual outcome of the elections. Finding such evidence would require far more complex research projects. Nevertheless, the data presented confirm the relevance of the manner in which politics are presented by the mass media. At the same time, however, they also point to the often underestimated significance of personal communication and discussion in the voter’s closer social environment. The latter, however, is becoming a less and less reliable guarantee of stable, party-loyal voting behaviour, which requires the provision of consonant messages and signals.

3. Traditional determinants of voting behaviour: Consistency in the face of decreasing relevance

Church affiliation and proximity to trade unions used to be two of the *traditional* determinants in Austria’s voting behaviour. In the past few decades, both have contributed to the extraordinary stability in Austria’s voting behaviour. The vast majority of voters with a strong church affiliation – defined as regular church attendance – support the ÖVP, whereas the majority of trade union members vote for the SPÖ (Plasser and Ulram 1995a: 373). The social modernisation process, however, has not only undermined the social and sub-cultural ties of the traditional parties (SPÖ and ÖVP) but – due to ongoing pluralisation and individualisation – has also weakened formerly binding collective values and interpretation patterns. This development has also had its effect on traditional determinants of Austrian voting behaviour such as denominational church affiliation and trade union membership. Over the past few decades, ties with the church have been loosened, the frequency of church attendance has decreased, and in particular, the strong foothold of ÖVP in denominational milieus has

become increasingly more fragile. While the Catholic milieu is still largely intact in rural regions and villages, it is losing its cohesion in the urbanised centres, its networks are becoming more and more fragile and its socio-political relevance is diminishing. (Müller, Plasser, and Ulram 1995b: 167).

While in the early seventies 35 percent of the voters still belonged to the core group of regular Catholic churchgoers, this percentage had dropped to a mere 19 percent by 1999. Despite this trend, integration into a church still has considerable significance for voting behaviour, “this applies to Austria more than to West Germany for – as opposed to the CDU/CSU – the ÖVP did not succeed in gaining as strong a foothold among the non-denominational and those with no church affiliation. This is the very reason why Austrians who are close to the church and those who are not differ so strongly in their voting behaviour and this is also precisely why the frequency of church attendance determines voting behaviour to a much higher degree in Austria than in the Federal Republic of Germany” (Jagodzinski 1999: 90). 45 percent of ÖVP voters belong to the Catholic core. In 1990 this figure was 49 percent, but at the beginning of the sixties more than two thirds of ÖVP voters had belonged to the group of Catholics who regularly attended church. The religious cleavage can still be seen at the end of the nineties in Austrian voting behaviour and shows only marginal changes over time. The Lijphart index of “*religious voting*” has been at around 40 points in Austria since the eighties. While 59 percent of those who regularly attend Catholic churches voted for ÖVP, only 20 percent among those not close to any church, and 6 percent of the non-denominational did so. On the other hand, SPÖ captured 42 percent of the votes of the non-denominational, 34 percent of those not close to any church and only 20 percent of the votes of the regular Catholic churchgoers. A similar pattern applies to the FPÖ, the Greens, and the Liberal Forum. Thus, the frequency of church attendance continues to be a stable predictor for voting behaviour in favour of ÖVP.

Table 4. Voting behaviour of voters with strong denominational affiliation (1990–1999)

In percent	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Greens	LIF
1990	22	60	10	5	-
1994	20	59	14	5	1
1995	20	59	12	2	2
1999	20	59	13	4	1

Source: FESSEL-GfK, exit polls (1990–1999).

Table 5. Voting behaviour of trade union members (1990–1999)

In percent	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Greens	LIF
1990	62	19	11	4	-
1994	50	19	19	7	5
1995	55	16	18	3	4
1999	49	19	21	6	2

Source: FESSEL-GfK, exit polls (1990–1999).

The second traditional determinant of Austrian voting behaviour – trade union membership – has been subject to stronger changes. In line with church affiliation, trade union affiliation has also weakened. The membership statistics of the ÖGB (Austrian Trade Union Federation) show a persistent decrease in memberships. While in 1990, 25 percent of voters were trade union members, this had fallen to a mere 19 percent by 1999. For the Social Democratic Party, however, affiliation with the trade unions has a similarly stabilising function as an intact church affiliation has for the ÖVP. 61 percent of the SPÖ voters in the parliamentary elections of 1990 were trade union members. Nine years later it was still 57 percent. The “trade union affiliation” predictor, however, has lost much of its ability to shape voting behaviour in the course of the nineties. While in 1990, 62 percent of the trade union members still voted for the SPÖ, four years later this figure had dropped to only 50 percent. In 1999, 49 percent of the trade union members decided to vote for the Social Democrats, but already 21 percent voted for FPÖ, which could double its share of votes among trade union members as compared to the 1990 elections. The penetration of the FPÖ into traditional core voter segments of the Social Democratic Party, as well as the decreasing relevance of the social and denominational core groups in political competition, point to a strong *class de-alignment*, the extent and origins of which will be dealt with in the following section.

4. Erosion of class voting behaviour and new sectoral cleavages

Up to the early eighties, social and occupational circumstances did a good job as predictors of Austrian voting behaviour. In particular the professional status and, in this context, especially the dividing line between mainly manual and non-manual activities, shaped voting behaviour and led to the comparably stable pattern of class voting. Since the eighties the socio-economic and generational changes in conjunction with progressive individualisation and social differentiation contributed to a substantial weakening of class voting. “Throughout Western Europe, social class voting indices are about half as large among the post-war birth cohorts as they are among older groups” (Inglehart 1997: 254 f.). The most prominent indicator for measuring class voting is the Alford index which is calculated on the basis of the difference between the percentage of blue collar worker and white collar workers who vote for a left-of-centre party. While the Alford index for Austrian voting behaviour was still constantly above the average value of Western industrialised democracies in the seventies, the same index has decreased since the eighties and reached a *negative* value in the parliamentary elections of 1999 for the first time.

Table 6. Alford index of class voting (1961–1999)

Period	Mean index value
1961–1970	27.4
1971–1980	28.9
1981–1990	18.3
1990–1999	8.7
1999	-1.0

Source: Nieuwbeerta and De Graaf (1999: 32) and FESSEL-GfK, exit polls (1994–1999).

However, it is not only the strong erosion of class voting – a “*class voting de-alignment*” (Evans 1999) – that is characteristic of the situation in Austria but also the simultaneous re-orientation of the voting behaviour of Austria’s working class. It is no exaggeration to speak of “*blue-collar realignment*” in this respect. Back in 1979, 65 percent of Austria’s blue-collar workers were still voting for the SPÖ, but this figure had fallen to a mere 35 percent by 1999. Within twenty years, the SPÖ’s share of the vote among the working class has fallen by half, the FPÖ’s share, however, has increased tenfold.

Table 7. Voting behaviour of blue-collar workers (1979–1999)

In percent	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ
1979	65	29	4
1983	61	28	3
1986	57	26	10
1990	53	22	21
1994	47	15	29
1995	41	13	34
1999	35	12	47

Source: FESSEL-GfK, representative post-election polls (1979–1983) and exit polls (1986–1999).

Since 1999 the FPÖ has become the predominant blue-collar workers' party by far with a share of 47 percent of the working class vote. Only 35 percent of the blue-collar workers voted for the SPÖ, and a mere 12 percent for the ÖVP. Thus, the voting behaviour of the Austrian working class differs considerably from the blue-collar vote in other Western European democracies. In the 1998 elections to the German Bundestag, for instance, 48 percent of blue-collar workers voted for the SPD and 30 percent for the CDU/CSU (Feist and Hoffmann 1999), whilst in the 1997 general election in Great Britain, 68 percent of blue-collar voters supported Labour and 18 percent the Conservative Party (Norris 1999). Meanwhile, in the 1997 parliamentary elections in France, 50 percent of blue-collar workers voted for left-of-centre parties, and 25 percent for the Front National (Boy and Mayer 2000). At the same time, France provides an example of the above-average attractiveness of radical right-wing populist parties among (predominantly male) voters from the industrial working class (Betz 1994; Betz and Immerfall 1998). Compared with France, however, the reorientation of the voting behaviour of Austrian blue-collar workers is much stronger. In Austria's 1995 parliamentary elections the FPÖ managed to attract more blue-collar voters than the Front National in the elections to the French National Assembly held in the same year. In 1997, 25 percent of French workers voted Front National, whilst, in the Austrian parliamentary elections of 1999, some 50 percent of blue-collar workers voted for the right-wing populist FPÖ.

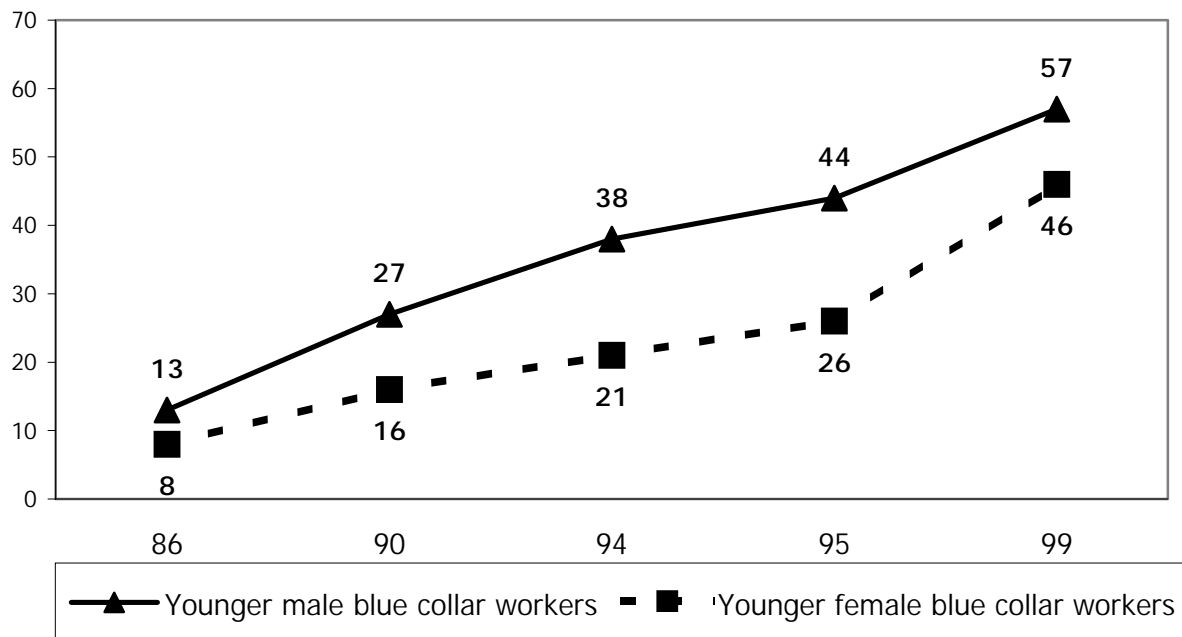
Table 8. Reorientation of the voting behaviour of blue-collar workers in France and Austria

Voted for	FPÖ	Front National
1986	10	11
1988	–	11
1990	21	–
1993	–	15
1994	29	–
1995	34	27
1997	–	25
1999	47	–

Source: Lewis-Beck (2000: 72) and FESSEL-GfK, exit polls (1986–1999).

The reorientation of the voting behaviour of the working class is even stronger among younger voters: 57 percent of male voters below the age of 30 voted for the FPÖ in 1999, as did 46 percent of younger female workers. The traditional workers' party, the SPÖ, managed to attract only 28 percent of younger male and female workers, yet in the 1986 parliamentary elections 55 percent of the younger workers had still voted for the Social Democratic Party, with only 13 percent supporting the Freedom Party (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Trend towards the FPÖ among younger male and female blue-collar workers (1986–1999)



Interesting attempts to explain this long-term *blue-collar realignment* are provided by Flanagan (1987) and Kitschelt (1994; 1995), who deal with the effects of the changes of societal cleavages on voting behaviour. In Flanagan’s model, advanced industrial societies are characterised by three main cleavages.

The first conflict axis represents the traditional cleavage between redistributive welfare policies and free market policies with the lowest possible degree of state intervention. This conflict has been a constitutive element of party competition in elections for decades. The second conflict axis is the cleavage between a policy of economic and technological growth and a policy that is focused on ecology and environmental protection. This cleavage contains a sub-dimension which relates to the conflict between groups with values of duty and acceptance (who basically share materialist values) and groups oriented towards values of personal freedom and development (who have post-materialist life styles) (Dalton 1996a; Inglehart 1997). Flanagan goes further and adds a third conflict axis to the two-dimensional conflict pattern of advanced industrial societies, namely the cleavage between a libertarian *New Left* and an authoritarian *New Right*, which is stirred up by polarising controversial issues such as immigration or the integration of immigrants. According to Flanagan, parts of the traditional blue-collar voters’ segment in particular get caught up in a cross-pressure

situation, which may result in members of the working-class left voting for a party of the New Right. “Cross-pressured voters, for example, may fall on the left side on the Old Politics cleavage because of their working-class occupation and union membership ... but on the right side of the New Politics cleavage because of their authoritarian values” (Flanagan 1987: 1307).

While Flanagan’s model concentrates on the new socio-cultural cleavages, Kitschelt deals with the shift in the main axes of political competition as a consequence of market and work experience in advanced industrial societies. The central issue is the drifting apart of occupational experience in highly interactive, skilled white-collar jobs that entail responsibility from that of blue-collar jobs, which are less interactive, and often require only minor qualifications, but which are subjected to the much higher pressure of international competition and technological rationalisation (Bürklin and Klein 1998: 99-101).

However, this conflict is not only based on different occupational experiences and the interests linked to them but also on different attitudes. Accordingly, individuals in highly interactive, skilled occupations tend to have liberal to libertarian attitudes, whilst persons who are involved in mechanical working processes more often show right-wing authoritarian attitudes and attitude patterns (Arzheimer and Klein 1999). Thus, different market and occupational experiences combined with different attitudes may prompt blue-collar workers to break with the traditional left workers’ party and – provided these parties put up candidates – to turn to a right-wing populist party, which they think articulates their life and occupational experiences more accurately.

The social costs of the rapid economic and technological modernisation process, the feeling of belonging to a group of social losers that is denied promotion and career prospects as well as public esteem and recognition of their work intensify latent protest attitudes as well as diffuse fears of social decline and of being marginalised within the working class. These attitudes and fears are deliberately triggered, intensified and pooled together by the right-wing populist FPÖ, which focuses on structural grievances (privileges, criticism of élites, anti-institutional affects) and directly addresses latent xenophobic sentiment (Plasser, Ulram, and Seeber 1996: 182 f.). Moreover, younger, male blue-collar workers in particular project their personal lifestyle onto the image and appearance of the FPÖ leader, who succeeds in interpreting the signs and symbols of this subculture more sharply and with more determination than the

traditionalistic labour and trade union representatives within the SPÖ. However, it takes concrete market and occupational experiences as well as the pressure of international competition, which has become stiffer and fiercer of late, alienating a large proportion of industrial workers from the representatives of their traditional interest groups, to allow the rise of the right-wing populist FPÖ to become the new workers' party. "Given the sectoral division between competitive and domestic sectors, blue-collar voters, as a whole, should no longer be economically leftist in a pronounced way. At the same time, given that the bulk of blue-collar workers is involved in object- and document-processing, has comparatively little education, and is predominantly male, this occupational group may express above average disposition toward particularist and culturally parochial conceptions of citizenship and authoritarian decision making" (Kitschelt 1995: 9).

Compared with the spectacular reorientation of the voting behaviour of the Austrian working class, the changes in the voting behaviour of white-collar employees are moderate. To a large extent, the SPÖ has managed to stabilise its vote share among white-collar workers. Whilst 40 percent of the white-collar workers voted for the SPÖ in 1986, 36 percent did so in 1999. The ÖVP suffered higher losses among the new white-collar middle class. In 1986, 36 percent of white-collar workers voted for the ÖVP, whereas only 23 percent did so in 1999. The trend towards the FPÖ is comparatively moderate among white-collar workers. In 1986, 13 percent of white-collar workers voted for the FPÖ, compared with 23 percent in 1999, that is four percentage points below the national FPÖ result. The post-materialist Greens and the libertarian Liberal Forum made similarly high gains in the segment of white-collar voters. In 1999, 10 percent of white-collar workers voted for the Greens and 5 percent for the Liberal Forum. At 15 percent, the combined share of these two new-politics parties is significantly below the result of the 1994 elections, in which the two parties together attracted 25 percent of the white-collar vote.

Table 9. Changes in the voting behaviour of selected voter groups: white-collar workers

In percent	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Greens	LIF
1986	40	36	13	7	*
1990	38	27	16	7	*
1994	29	25	22	12	11
1995	32	28	22	7	8
1999	36	23	22	10	5
Changes (1986–1999)	–4	–13	+9	+3	–6

Source: FESSEL-GfK, exit polls (1986–1999).

The lack in social statistics of a clear definition of white-collar workers, a category which also includes employees who de facto perform mainly manual, low-skilled, mechanical jobs, makes sociological interpretations of voting difficult. Differentiating between white-collar workers in managerial positions and white-collar workers without executive or managerial functions reveals interesting differences:

In 1999, for instance, 33 percent of executive employees voted for the SPÖ and 32 percent for the ÖVP. In total, 19 percent of the executive employees lent their support to the FPÖ. The competitive situation as regards the election result among subordinate white-collar workers is a different one: 38 percent of this group voted for the SPÖ, 23 percent for the FPÖ and only 19 percent for the ÖVP. The Greens and the Liberal Forum received 11 and 5 percent respectively of the white-collar votes. In contrast to the situation in the working class segment, the SPÖ was able to maintain its representative lead among white-collar workers. The attractiveness of the ÖVP among the members of the white-collar middle class, however, has diminished considerably. The voting behaviour of civil servants and those working in the public sector is now much more volatile. Public-sector employees tend to vote for the SPÖ or ÖVP depending on the respective budgetary policies and any controversial reform plans proposed during parliamentary elections. The FPÖ's share of this voter segment is below average, whilst that of the Greens is, unsurprisingly, above average.

Table 10. Changes in the voting behaviour of selected voter groups: civil servants, public-sector

In percent	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Greens	LIF
1986	49	33	8	6	*
1990	40	30	14	8	*
1994	35	23	14	18	9
1995	48	20	17	6	6
1999	33	30	20	12	3
Changes (1986–1999)	–16	–3	+12	+6	–6

Source: FESSEL-GfK, exit polls (1986–1999).

The voting behaviour of civil servants and those who work in the public sector relates to a cleavage that has also influenced Austrian voting behaviour since the eighties: the welfare state cleavage, as Dunleavy and Husbands (1985) called this new *sectoral cleavage*. In essence, this cleavage model deals with the fact that those belonging to the *public* and *private* sector are drifting apart in terms of voting behaviour and there is indeed potential for conflicts between the sheltered and the unsheltered production sectors. In their model Dunleavy and Husbands differentiate between three new cleavages in welfare state systems:

1. the cleavage resulting from different market and occupational experiences of employees in the public and the private sectors (*production sector effect*),
2. the cleavage between voters using mainly public services (e.g. housing, public transport) and voters consuming primarily private services at market prices (e.g. a home of one's own, private car as means of transport, private school, etc.), which the authors call the consumer sector conflict (*consumer sector effect*), and
3. the latent conflict between voters who are primarily dependent on welfare transfer payments (e.g. pensions, maternity leave and other welfare payments), and voters who live mainly of sources of private income (e.g. salary from a private enterprise, capital yields, private insurance). The third cleavage is called the *state-dependence effect*. Thus, the model of Dunleavy and Husbands is not only an attempt to explain the decline in class voting, but also a step towards comprehending the reorientation in the voting behaviour of workers in the unsheltered sector.

The first signs of this sectoral cleavage have been visible in Austria since the mid-eighties and they have become more evident due to the collapse of the nationalised industries, the privatisation of state-owned enterprises, and the demonopolisation of sheltered service and utility companies resulting from Austria's accession to the European Union. In the long run, this affected the SPÖ, but even more the ÖVP, which fell back behind the FPÖ in private sector employees electoral support as early as 1994. While in 1986 there was a gap of 19 percentage points between the SPÖ and the FPÖ in the group of private sector employees, the SPÖ was only 5 percent ahead of the FPÖ in 1999. The FPÖ clearly and consistently taps the potential for tension and conflict inherent in the cleavage of public versus private sector. The SPÖ and ÖVP have suffered above-average losses among voters of the private sector since 1986. It was the FPÖ which has benefited from this development, capturing an above-average share of the vote in the private sector (Plasser, Ulram, and Seeber 1996: 190-192).

The cleavage of public versus private sector deepened during the nineties in Austria. This is can be seen from an above-average share of the vote for the FPÖ in the private sector and, conversely, in the tendency towards above-average shares of the vote for the Greens and the Liberal Forum among public-sector employees (particularly in the fields of public services, education and administration). Occupation and sector-specific trends in Austrian voting behaviour can be interpreted only to a limited extent by means of traditional micro-sociological explanations. New cleavage theories such as the "radical model" of Dunleavy and Husbands (1985) or Kitschelt's model of the social positions (1994; 1995) offer realistic perspectives to explain the class de-alignment in Austrian voting behaviour. "In short, the radical model sees voters as a reflection of the political system's ideological interpretation of social division. It is this emphasis on the impact of media and party debate which makes the radical model distinctive within the category of sociological approaches to voting" (Harrop and Miller 1992: 159).

5. Gender and generation realignment

Since the eighties it has been possible to observe a gender-specific differentiation in Austrian voting behaviour. In the course of the nineties this gender gap widened (Hofinger and Ogris 1996). By the late nineties it was perfectly legitimate to speak of the existence of two gender-specific “party systems” in Austria. Since the seventies, the majority of Western European party systems have seen a remarkable gender-specific differentiation of voting behaviour, which has taken place in three phases (Norris 1999). 1. The phase of *traditional* voting behaviour, which was characterised by a clear tendency on the part of women to vote for parties committed to denominational or conservative values. 2. The phase of *convergence* or alignment of the voting behaviour of men and women which led to a clear increase in the attractiveness of the SPÖ to female voters in elections in Austria. 3. The phase of a gender realignment – especially among younger, qualified and self-confident women – in a clear trend towards post-materialist or libertarian parties.

This gender gap is reinforced by a clear distancing on the part of women from newly formed right-wing populist protest parties, whose polarising issues as well as conflict-oriented affect management aimed at arousing negative emotions is particularly strongly disapproved of by younger women. The widening of the gender gap is caused, firstly, by increased educational and qualification opportunities for the younger generation of women, as well as an active and more self-confident role definition with regard to equal rights in personal relationships and at the workplace, and secondly, by specific issue preferences and general outlooks with women placing special emphasis on humanitarian and liberal development values such as ecological and social considerations. This, however, is also happening against the background of a “sudden increase in political awareness” among younger women, as evidenced by their growing interest in politics, increased involvement and active civic self-confidence (political efficacy), as well as by a much higher level of political knowledge than younger men.

From an international perspective, it is US voting behaviour in particular that provides impressive evidence of a gender gap. This gap is widening with time and manifests itself in Congress and presidential elections in the form of different gender-specific majorities for the Republicans (among men) and Democrats (among women) (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 1999; Clark and Rempel 1997; Miller and Merrill 1996). Studies carried out in Great Britain

(Norris 1999) and France (Boy and Nayer 2000) also provide empirical evidence of a gender gap in voting behaviour, while only minor signs of a gender gap could be seen in the 1998 elections to the German Bundestag (Neu and Molitor 1999). In Switzerland it is particularly the right-wing populist SVP that causes a gender-specific polarisation in voting behaviour (Kriesi, Linder, and Klöti 1998). The situation in Austria is different, however, since gender-specific differentiation in voting behaviour has now become a new cleavage.

Table 11. The gender gap in parliamentary elections (1979–1999)

M – W in percent	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Greens	LIF	<i>Gender Gap</i> (points)
1979	–1	0	+1	–	–	2
1983	–1	–1	+2	–1	–	5
1986	–1	–5	+5	–1	–	12
1990	–5	–4	+8	–1	–	18
1994	–2	–5	+11	–4	–2	24
1995	–5	–3	+11	–1	–1	21
1999	–4	–1	+11	–4	–1	21

Source: FESSEL-GfK, representative post-election polls (1979–1983) and exit polls (1986–1999).

The alignment of the voting behaviour of men and women, which took place in the seventies (Hofinger and Ogris 1996), still resulted in minor gender-specific deviations in voting behaviour in the early eighties. If the gender gap is calculated as the sum of the percentage differences in the votes cast by men and by women for the parties represented in parliament, the difference in percentage points was only 2 percent in 1979. In 1983 this gender difference rose to 5 percentage points. It was only in the 1986 parliamentary elections, with the beginning of the strategic and stylistic re-formation of the right-wing populist FPÖ, that the gender gap began to widen. With a gender difference of 24 percentage points, the 1994 parliamentary elections mark the peak of gender-specific differences in Austrian voting behaviour to date. The gender gap of 21 percentage points in the subsequent 1995 and 1999 elections again pointed to striking differences in the voting behaviour of men and women as compared to Western European dimensions.

Not only did the gender gap widen in the nineties, but there were also far-reaching changes concerning the gender-specific party majorities. Since 1994, the FPÖ has been the second-largest party among the male electorate, and since 1999 it has been the predominant party among male voters with – an albeit fluctuating – 32 percent of the vote. Despite considerable gains and a steady upward trend at the polls, the FPÖ, with 21 percent of the vote, still ranks third among female voters behind the SPÖ (35 percent) and the ÖVP (27 percent). The gender-specific attractiveness of the Greens and the Liberal Forum, however, shows a different picture. These two post-materialist/libertarian parties score much better among women than among men. The Greens in particular managed to attract far more female than male voters in 1999.

Table 12. Gender-specific voting behaviour (1986–1999)

In percent		SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Greens	LIF
1986	Men	42	38	13	4	-
	Women	43	43	7	5	-
1990	Men	39	29	20	4	-
	Women	44	33	12	5	-
1994	Men	34	25	29	6	5
	Women	36	30	18	9	6
1995	Men	35	26	27	4	5
	Women	40	29	16	5	6
1999	Men	31	25	32	5	3
	Women	35	27	21	9	4

Source: FESSEL-GfK, exit polls (1986–1999).

Behind the gender-specific differences in voting behaviour, however, there are complex patterns correlating with factors such as age and educational and professional status. A highly concentrated duopoly of the two coalition parties SPÖ and ÖVP among female pensioners contrasts with a wide-ranging multi-party system among younger women with higher education qualifications, in which it is no longer possible to identify a “predominant” party. The voting behaviour of women under 30, among which the FPÖ has become the strongest party with a share of 30 percent, is remarkable. About 25 percent of younger women,

however, voted either for the Greens or for the Liberal Forum. With a share of a mere 15 percent, the ÖVP ranks fourth among younger women behind the Greens.

Table 13. Voting behaviour of women in the 1999 parliamentary elections

In percent	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Greens	LIF
Women	35	27	21	9	4
Female pensioners	45	32	19	2	1
Working women	32	26	22	12	5
Housewives	33	24	22	10	3
Younger women with higher education	28	26	18	16	10
Younger women	25	15	30	19	6
Younger female blue-collar workers	44	13	34	4	1

Source: FESSEL-GfK, exit poll (1999).

When examined in a more differentiated way, the gender gap in Austria actually resembles a branched canyon. The ÖVP's considerable lack of attractiveness to voters – especially to younger, more qualified women – contrasts with the above-average share of the vote held by post-materialist and libertarian parties. A disproportionately high number of SPÖ voters among female pensioners, who now represent 13 percent of the SPÖ vote, contrasts with above-average support for the FPÖ among women under 30 and younger female blue-collar workers, who today make up 11 percent of the entire FPÖ vote. However, younger women also account for 25 percent of the vote of the Greens and the Liberal Forum. The emergence of differentiated voting behaviour by the younger generation of female voters is described as “gender realignment” in international electoral studies, thus focusing on the reorientation of younger women's voting behaviour.

Long-term changes in the voting behaviour trends of working women provide the first evidence of gender realignment. Between 1986 and 1999 support for the SPÖ and ÖVP decreased by 14 and 11 percent respectively. While the SPÖ and ÖVP together managed to capture 83 percent of the vote in 1986, their combined share of the vote was only 58 percent in 1999. In 1986 a mere 7 percent of working class women voted for the FPÖ, while as many

as 22 percent did so in 1999. With a combined share of 21 percent of the votes, post-materialist and libertarian parties scored highest among working women in 1994. In 1999, 12 percent of the electorate voted for the Greens and 5 percent for the Liberal Forum.

Table 14. Changes in the voting behaviour of working women

In percent	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Greens	LIF
1986	46	37	7	7	–
1990	40	34	13	6	–
1994	32	27	17	12	9
1995	35	26	20	7	8
1999	32	26	22	12	4
Changes (1986–1999)	–14	–11	+15	+5	–4

Source: FESSEL-GfK, exit polls (1986–1999).

The voting behaviour of younger men and women provides helpful information on gender and generation-specific reorientation (*gender-generation realignment*). The gender difference here is 29 points, illustrating the extent of the gender gap in this group of voters. However, further notable gender-specific highs and lows, which are not in evidence to such a large degree in any other group of voters, also deserve attention.

Table 15. Gender-Generation-Gap: Differences in the voting behaviour of younger women and men

In percent	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Greens	LIF
Women	26	16	31	20	6
Men	25	19	41	8	3
PPD	+1	–3	–10	+12	+3

PPD = percent point difference.

Source: FESSEL-GfK, exit poll (1999).

In 1999, only 42 percent of younger women voted for either the SPÖ or ÖVP. In 1986, the equivalent figure was as high as 76 percent. With 31 percent of the vote, the FPÖ has not only become the predominant party among younger female voters, but has also gained 11 percent

since 1995. 20 percent of younger women voted for the Greens, who managed to capture the highest share of votes among this group of female voters. Including votes cast for the Liberal Forum, 26 percent of younger women lent their support to a post-materialist or libertarian party. The *gender-generation realignment* (Norris 1999) in the voting behaviour of younger women is obviously a *bidirectional* re-orientation: towards the FPÖ, and at the same time, towards post-materialist or libertarian parties. Both directions have meanwhile become competitive poles, while the two traditional parties SPÖ and – to a greater extent ÖVP – have become far less attractive to young female voters.

However, the voting behaviour of younger men also shows a gender-generation realignment, albeit a one-directional re-orientation towards the FPÖ. With a share of 41 percent, the FPÖ is by far the predominant party in the segment of younger, male voters. Only 8 percent of younger voters voted for the Greens, with a mere 3 percent casting their vote for the Liberal Forum. The gender difference with regard to the Greens (12 points) is more distinct than for the FPÖ (10 points). Just as with younger women, only 44 percent of the votes of younger men vote for the two government or coalition parties, yet in 1986, the SPÖ and ÖVP still managed to attract 75 percent of younger voters between them. The trends in the voting behaviour of the younger generation of voters illustrate the steady increase in generation realignment in Austrian voting behaviour to the detriment of the two traditional parties, the SPÖ and ÖVP (Plasser and Ulram 1999). Among younger men, the FPÖ has become the competitive challenger to the SPÖ and ÖVP, which together lead by a mere 3 percent. Meanwhile, among younger women, the FPÖ, but also the Greens and the Liberal Forum, have forced the two government parties onto the defensive. Only 41 percent of younger women voted for either the SPÖ or ÖVP in 1999.

The steady decline in attractiveness of the traditional parties – SPÖ and ÖVP – among the voters of the younger, up-and-coming generation is clearly confirmed by the trend in the voting behaviour of first-time voters, both male and female. While the SPÖ and ÖVP managed to attract 97 percent of first-time voters in the 1979 parliamentary elections, this figure dropped to a mere 42 percent twenty years later. By contrast, the FPÖ increased its share among first-time voters from 3 percent in 1979 to 38 percent in the 1999 parliamentary elections.

Figure 3. Voting behaviour of the younger generation of male voters (1986–1999)

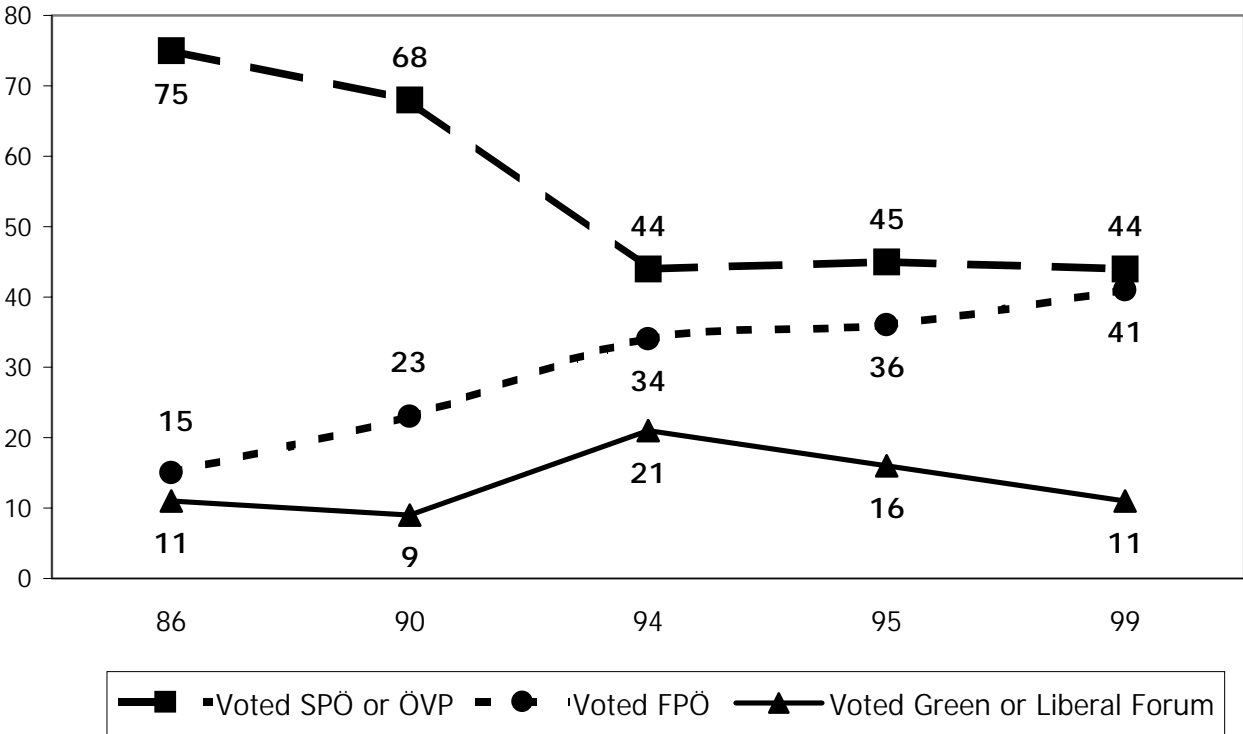
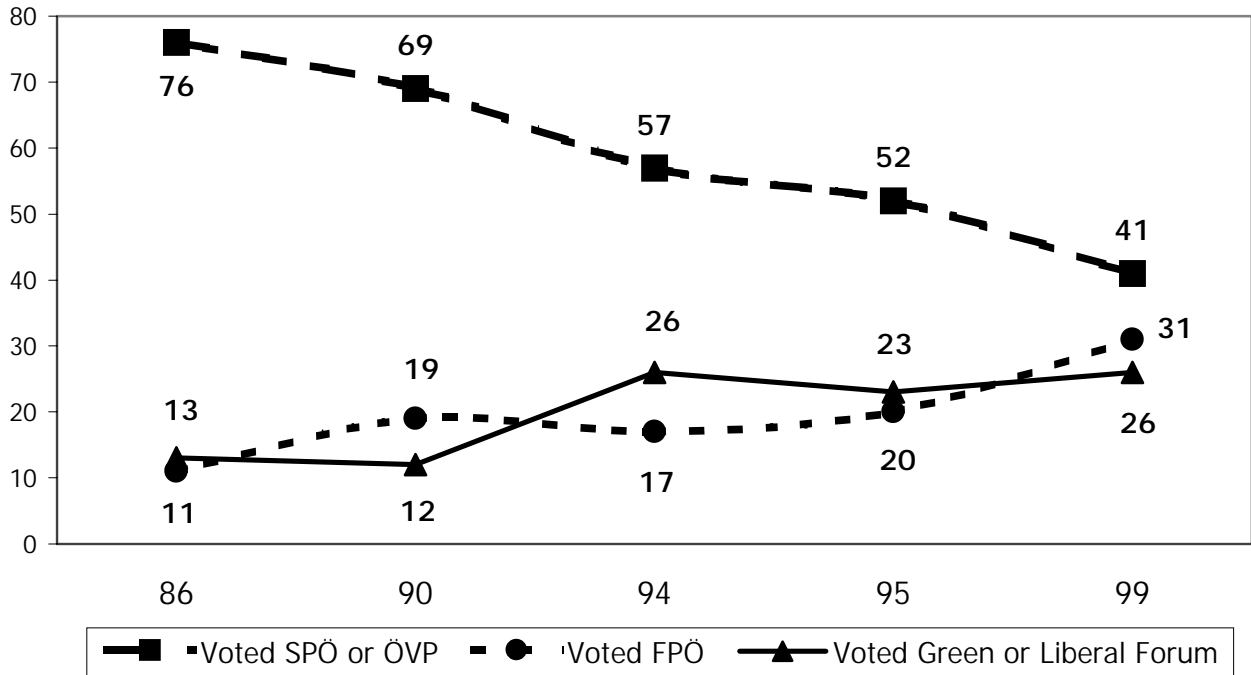


Figure 4. Voting behaviour of the younger generation of female voters (1986–1999)



An interim empirical assessment of the trends and patterns in Austrian voting behaviour in the late nineties defines the key determinants of electoral competition:

1. a *gender-generation realignment*, i.e. a far-reaching re-orientation in the voting behaviour of the younger generation of voters, in which gender combined with age and education have led to new voter coalitions;
2. a *realignment* of the voting behaviour of the Austrian working class to a degree unprecedented in Western Europe;
3. the emergence of new sectoral cleavages, with the *public* versus *private* sector cleavage being of particular relevance to Austrian voting behaviour;
4. a polarisation of values or a new *value cleavage* between a New Right with authoritarian emphasis and the New Left with a predominantly post-materialist/libertarian orientation;
5. the persistent pattern of *negative voting*, i.e. a form of voting behaviour that is primarily motivated by diffuse protest attitudes and generalised discontent, and which is particularly susceptible to the right-wing populist affect management of the FPÖ;
6. signs of a confrontational *issue polarisation*, as has become apparent in the issues of immigration and integration versus exclusion and xenophobic sentiment;
7. a *demobilisation* – albeit moderate by international standards – as can be seen in the decline of electoral turnout; and finally
8. the probable *influence* of a general mood created by the mass media on a voter and party environment that is going through a period of transition.

6. The rise of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ)

With 26.9 percent of the vote and 52 seats, the FPÖ became the second largest party in the Austrian parliament at the 1999 general election (having won the same number of seats but 415 votes more than the ÖVP). The FPÖ is therefore by far the most successful right-wing populist party in Western Europe. Its rise has been consolidated by three long-term trends in Austrian voting behaviour:

- A blue-collar realignment: since 1999 the FPÖ has been the strongest party among blue-collar workers.

- A generation-based realignment: the FPÖ is also the strongest party among voters under 30 years of age.
- A gender realignment: the FPÖ is the strongest party among male voters.

It is perfectly legitimate to speak of a spectacular development as regards the reorientation of voting behaviour among Austrian blue-collar workers. 48 percent of foremen and skilled workers voted for the FPÖ, whilst only 31 percent of them voted for the SPÖ, the traditional blue-collar workers' party. Even among semi-skilled and unskilled workers, the FPÖ has become the strongest party with a share of 45 percent of the vote. Only 40 percent of the members of this group voted for the Social Democrats, with a mere 10 percent supporting the ÖVP. The reorientation in the voting behaviour of Austrian workers has been dramatic. While the SPÖ still enjoyed the support of 57 percent of Austrian workers in 1986, this figure had decreased to a mere 35 percent by 1999. In other words, the Social Democratic Party has lost 22 percentage points in its core group within the last 13 years. Over the same period, the ÖVP's share of the vote among workers was down 50 percent. In 1999, a mere 12 percent of workers voted for the ÖVP, whereas the FPÖ became the strongest party among workers. While in 1986 only ten percent voted for the FPÖ, 47 percent did so in 1999.

Due to strong gains in other professional groups, the proportion of (blue-collar) workers among FPÖ voters has at the same time diminished overall. 27 percent of FPÖ voters now come from the working class, compared with 35 percent in 1995. The rise of the FPÖ to become the predominant workers' party indicates deep changes in the social basis of the Austrian parties. The political reorientation of workers on such a scale is unprecedented in Western Europe. Twenty years ago, four percent of Austrian workers voted for the Freedom Party, yet this had risen to 47 percent by 1999. This means that the FPÖ share of the vote rose more than tenfold during this period. As in the preceding parliamentary elections, the gender-specific composition of the party's vote shows some significant differences. Once again, the structure of the FPÖ's support is predominantly male: 62 percent of FPÖ voters are male. On the other hand, women predominate among Green voters: 63 percent of the Green vote is female. Thus, the Greens have a larger proportion of women among their voters than the Liberal Forum.

Table 16. Voting behaviour of selected voter segments (parliamentary elections 1999)

In percent	Freedom Party (FPÖ)	Social Democrats (SPÖ)	People's Party (ÖVP)
Male Voters	32	31	26
Voters under 30 years	35	25	17
Blue-collar voters	47	35	12
Younger, male blue-collar voters	57	29	10
Younger, male voters	41	25	19
Total	27	33	27

Source: FESSEL-GfK, exit poll (N = 2,200).

In terms of party type, the Freedom Party is a protest-oriented, right-wing populist working-class party. While only about 10 percent of blue-collar workers in Germany voted for a right-wing party at the parliamentary elections in 1998, and 25 percent of French blue-collar workers voted for the Front National in 1997, 47 percent of working class voters in Austria supported the Freedom Party.

Exit poll data provide an insight into the motives of FPÖ voters: the most important reasons given for voting in favour of the FPÖ were a desire for political change and rejection of the ruling Grand Coalition. The anti-immigrants issue (xenophobic sentiment) was of central significance for 15 percent of FPÖ voters, followed by protest and “voting-the-rascals-out” motives (13 percent). Mr. Haider’s image and personality were listed as an important reason by 13 percent of FPÖ voters.

Table 17. Motives of FPÖ Voters

Main reason for voting FPÖ	In percent
1. Time for change, rejection of the Grand Coalition	27
2. Anti-foreigner sentiment, anti-immigration motives	15
3. Protest, “voting the rascals out”, disenchantment with parties	13
4. Image and leadership of Mr Haider	13
5. Positive image of the party, party of the ordinary people	15
6. Special policies (aid to families, flat tax, economic policies)	16

Source: FESSEL-GfK, exit poll (N = 2,200).

The dominant motives to vote for the FPÖ have changed since Mr. Haider positioned the FPÖ as a right-wing populist party back in 1986. Followed by protest and anti-establishment effects at the outset, resentment vis-à-vis foreigners has increasingly been added since the mid-nineties. In 1999, the strongest motive to vote for the FPÖ was the call for a political change and changes in style and policies.

Table 18. Changing reasons to vote for FPÖ (1986–1999)

Main reason for voting FPÖ	1986	1990	1994	1995	1999
In percent					
Time for change, rejection of Grand Coalition	10	7	7	12	27
Foreigner resentment	3	7	12	12	15
Image and leadership of Mr Haider	54	23	17	19	13
Protest, Scandals, Party weariness	16	38	32	20	13

Source: FESSEL-GfK, exit polls (1986–1999).

The early nineties marked the peak of anti-foreigner sentiment. In 1991 approximately two out of three Austrians believed that there were too many foreigners in the country and feared that the influence of foreigners would bring more crime and social free-riders into Austria. Nearly half of the adult population was afraid of foreign competition on the labour market or saw a threat to the Austrian way of life. Five years later, the fears of any threat to traditional way of life and national identity, or to public security, had subsided somewhat. At the same

time, the percentage of respondents who considered that foreigners enriched Austria as a country had increased. There was no change in the assertion that foreigners are mostly employed in the least attractive segments of the labour market (1996: 84 percent) and that the Austrian economy needs immigrant workers (1996: 58 percent). Nevertheless, the negative view on immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe remained unchanged (1996: 52 percent); with greater disapproval in 1996 (72 percent) of an increased influx of immigrants with children than in 1991 (59 percent).

Table 19. Attitudes towards foreigners and immigrants (1990–1996)

In percent		Agree	Disagree
The numerous foreigners constitute a threat to our way of life and our Austrian identity	1991	45	51
	1996	38	59
The numerous foreigners take away jobs from Austrians	1991	49	47
	1996	46	53
Foreign immigration goes hand in hand with crime and the misuse of social benefits	1991	62	35
	1996	56	43
There are already too many foreigners in Austria	1990	67	29
	1991	64	34
	1996	64	34

Source: FESSEL-GfK, general surveys (1990–1996).

During the past few years the FPÖ has mainly been able to mobilise two value clusters of Austrian voters:

1. The “*Welfare State Chauvinists*” cluster (14 % of the total electorate) and
2. The “*New Authoritarian Right*” cluster (10 % of the total electorate).

Welfare state chauvinists feel threatened by the economic and technological development. These are younger, low-skilled blue-collar workers in the private sector, who view the ongoing process of modernisation, the increasing competition at work and the presence of foreign workers and immigrants as a threat to their social and professional status. These “losers in the modernisation processes” feel neglected, so that their response is a diffuse protest and rejection of foreigners. They are a strategically important target group for Mr.

Haider and the FPÖ's professional management of negative emotions. Members of the "Welfare State Chauvinists" cluster represent one fifth of the FPÖ electorate.

Among the "New Authoritarian Right" xenophobic sentiment and preference for law and order policies are joined by a rejection of the egalitarian principles of the welfare state. These voters prefer an authoritarian leadership style and view the democratic system quite critically. In common with the welfare state chauvinists, they share a considerable scepticism towards the European integration and the planned enlargement of the EU. Six out of ten are male blue-collar workers, small shopkeepers or male members of the war-generation. Members of the New Authoritarian Right represent one fourth of the FPÖ electorate or roughly seven percent of the total Austrian electorate.

Table 20. Xenophobic sentiment as decisive voting reason

In percent	1999
Male FPÖ voters older than 60	35
Unskilled, male FPÖ voters	30
Blue-collar workers voting for FPÖ	25
Total FPÖ voters	15

Source: FESSEL-GfK, exit poll (N = 2,200).

Compared with far-right parties like the French Front National or the German Republikaner or DVU, the Austrian Freedom Party lacks programmatic and ideological consistency. With the exception of issues like immigration and the integration of foreign workers, the party platform is a mixture of conservative fiscal policies, government cutbacks and populist social policy proposals. In the field of economic policy in particular, there is a remarkable convergence with some of the policies of the conservative People's Party (ÖVP). Concerning the future of Austria's security policy, the Freedom Party has an outspoken preference for abandoning the status of neutrality and joining NATO in the long run. Contrary to the Social Democrats and the People's Party, the Freedom Party is critical toward the process of European integration and the planned enlargement of the European Union. Overall, the policies of the Freedom Party are characterised by strategic flexibility; it adapts its messages to fluctuating public sentiment.

Within the Austrian electorate there has not been a detectable shift toward far-right positions. The majority of Austrian voters and even a majority of FPÖ voters regard themselves as being somewhere in the political centre.

Table 21. Ideological position of the Austrian electorate

Position themselves as... In percent	far left	left	centre	right	far right
Total electorate	1	16	69	12	1
FPÖ voters	0	6	70	20	3

Source: FESSEL-GfK, general survey 1999 (N = 2,000).

While only a minority of Austrian voters clearly position themselves on the right, the FPÖ as a party is clearly placed on the right wing of the ideological spectrum. 31 percent of the respondents characterise the FPÖ as being on the political “right”, 29 percent even describe the FPÖ as being on the “far right”.

Table 22. Perception of the Freedom Party by the Austrian electorate

Position the FPÖ as ... (In percent)	far left	left	centre	right	far right
Total electorate	4	7	13	31	29
FPÖ voters	3	7	24	40	16

Source: Fessel-GfK, general survey 1999 (N = 2,000).

The situation appears more problematic if a differentiation is made between the electorate and the leadership level of the FPÖ. Some top politicians obviously have an ambivalent attitude toward the Austrian past and the Nazi regime. Unacceptable statements like Mr. Haider’s comment on the “*orderly employment policy*” (“*ordentliche Beschäftigungspolitik*”) of the Third Reich – which led to his forced resignation as governor of Carinthia – or his description of concentration camps as “*punishment camps*” have repeatedly shocked the Austrian as well as the international public. Although Haider publicly apologised for these statements last

November and expressed his regrets at any hurt caused, the ambivalence and questionable choice of words of some FPÖ politicians still remains a problematic issue.

However, in terms of FPÖ attitudes towards the democratic system, the prevailing law and the parliamentary rules of the game, the FPÖ moves within a frame of constitutional consent. The FPÖ accepts the principles of democracy. Instead of trying to limit democracy – as requested by authoritarian right-wing parties – the FPÖ does in fact stand for an increased use of direct democracy procedures such as public initiatives and referenda. In its attempts to be acknowledged as a potential coalition partner in the Austrian government, the FPÖ even removed the focus on its German-national past from its programme and party platform and is now trying to present itself as an “Austrian-national” party of renewal.

In the early nineties the political landscape in Austria changed: immigration and its consequences for the labour market, education and the housing situation in urban areas, economic restructuring and resulting unemployment, the costs and distributive effects of welfare policies, and questions of national independence versus European integration made their way onto the public agenda. Particularly among the lower social and educational groups of the population, these changes were often met with diffuse fears of worsening social conditions and economic prospects, as well as with preoccupations about a loss of traditional socio-cultural identities. The FPÖ redirects its oppositional impetus from political renewal to “*politics of resentment*”, mixing up fears and preoccupations with an ever more aggressive attack against the political class. The dominant issues are immigration and law-and-order politics, the rejection of Austria’s accession to the European Union and the failure of the governing coalition to meet these new challenges.

The party’s neo-populist appeal is combined with a strategy of active issue-management or agenda-setting, often in accordance with the tabloid press, but also by constantly shifting the emphasis between the individual issues according to current circumstances. The attack is directed against the political class at home one day, and against “*the bureaucrats in Brussels*” the next day. One day it focuses on xenophobic sentiments against “the threat from abroad”, the next it moves to resentment towards “*those at the top*”. It is important to note that this strategy also exploits criticism levelled by liberal or left-wing opponents or quality newspapers. Especially ideologically motivated critics can easily be transformed into

“enemies from outside”, which serves the purpose of welding what was a loosely bound group into a more stable voter-coalition (*“us against them”*).

The FPÖ’s rise to become the most successful right-wing populist party in Western Europe at the current time is inseparably linked to structural changes and the symptoms of a breaking down of Austria’s traditional party system. Essential preconditions for the FPÖ’s electoral success are the erosion of traditional party alignment, the dissolution of socio-cultural milieus and orientations linked to them, and the diminishing capability of the major parties of old to integrate and mobilise. The activation of latent anti-party sentiments, a diffuse party-weariness and anti-institutional effects as a reaction to an ever increasing confidence gap prepare the sounding-board for populist arguments and attacks.

An emotionally loaded protest culture among voters is complemented by new socio-economic threats, fears of modernisation and marginalisation, fears of a possible loss of social status, and crises of identity and direction. The rise of the FPÖ is dependent on cyclical issues and problems. Thus, the ups and (short-lived) downs of the party follow the live cycles of certain issues and problems in the public debate (e.g. political scandals, social problems, the development of the immigration issue, crime, intensified conflicts within the SPÖ-ÖVP coalition government).

Much more than in the case of other parties, the electoral success of the FPÖ depends on its media presence and performance. Due to its deficient organisation, its weak anchorage in the social structure, and its extreme dependence on public sentiment and emotion, the FPÖ needs an above-average media response. More than the other parties, the FPÖ must try to influence the media issue agenda in an active way, getting polemic issues on the public agenda, and diverting the public attention to what it defines as problems.

As a result, the FPÖ is a party that is extremely focused on its leader and candidates. The FPÖ virtually presents itself as a *“TV or media-party”*, a symbolic mobilisation agency which tries to capitalise on latent protest attitudes, resentment, and deeply rooted frustration. The success of the FPÖ is inseparably linked to the political communication skills, the populist impression management and the strong rhetoric of its top actor. Faced with an electorate that is in a state of flux and extremely dependent on sentiment, the FPÖ finds itself under constant pressure for mobilisation.

The electoral success of the FPÖ depends on its ability to pursue its proactive issue-management, sharpen criticism, strengthen emotions, mobilise latent resentment and polarise the electorate; all this by demonstrating cool and calculated professionalism. The FPÖ needs the attention of the media for its strategic voter management. Populist actors need public resonance, and the mass media provide a necessary and indispensable sounding-board for neo-populism.

Any explanation of the FPÖ's rise has to focus on the specific characteristics of the Austrian parties and the Austrian system of government. The electoral success of the Freedom Party is based on the following factors:

- 13 years of a Grand Coalition between SPÖ and ÖVP resulted in an “oversized coalition“, an oppositional vacuum that was successfully filled by the FPÖ.
- A de-alignment and the erosion of traditional party loyalties in connection with increasing party weariness, anti-party sentiments, and anti-establishment effects.
- The “colonisation” of the public sector and the state-owned industries by the two governing parties, a system of “Proporz”, cronyism and patronage.
- New cleavages between the public and private sector – unskilled blue-collar workers in particular felt under threat from economic and technological changes.
- An increase in resentment towards foreigners in spite of a restrictive immigration policy, the fear of increasing crime, and, in some cases, worries about Austria's traditional cultural identity, worries that the FPÖ has played on.
- The entry of Austria into the European Union and, above all, the planned enlargement of the EU, which is viewed with extreme scepticism by large sections of the Austrian electorate.
- The image of Joeg Haider, his professional “impression management” and his ability to mobilise protest votes by stirring up deeply rooted resentment and prejudice.
- The growing desire for a general change in Austrian politics, which has been fulfilled by the SPÖ and ÖVP to only a very small degree in the last few years.

The future of right-wing populism in Austria will largely be determined by the fact that the FPÖ is now a partner in the new coalition government. This means that the FPÖ will be under pressure to change its image, style, and policies from that of a confrontational opposition

party to a reliable and competent governing party. At the moment it is still too early to speculate about the consequences of the FPÖ's new role. Will the redesigned policies of the Freedom Party be attractive to de-aligned protest voters? Will Joerg Haider – who resigned as official FPÖ leader end of February 2000 but remained as the strategic power center of the party – support the policies of the coalition government even when large sections of the FPÖ electorate – especially voters from low-income groups – oppose the planned cutbacks? Will the new politics of conflict and the negative reaction of the international public mobilise or demobilise the Freedom Party's grassroots? Only one thing is certain: the future of right-wing populism in Austria is as unclear as the reaction of an unstable, fluctuating, and de-aligned electorate.

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